

Kalyani Bhat
Northview Middle School
Ankeny, IA
Yemen: Sustainable Agriculture

Yemen- Energizing the Economy Through Coffee

In the words of famous literary author John Steinbeck, “All war is a symptom of man’s failure as a thinking animal.” In the case of Yemen, this quote rings true. The root cause of Yemen’s humanitarian crisis is the civil war brought on by the collapse of the political process that was intended to bring long standing stability to Yemen. A closer exploration of Yemen’s economy might be the key to lay a stronger foundation for the country. Yemen’s economy has been on a downward spiral since the beginning of the civil war in late 2014. There was a brief respite where it seemed that the economy was leveling out, but since the pandemic the economy has plummeted in terms of GDP. The lack of attention towards growing the country’s trade is detrimental to the already unreliable country.

Yemen is located in the Middle East and borders several trade ports including the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea. Yemen is positioned between Oman and Saudi Arabia. The total land area of Yemen is 527,968 sq km and has 1,906 km of coastline and comparatively is four times the size of Alabama and nearly twice the size of Wyoming (“Yemen”, The World Factbook). Yemen itself has historically been divided into two parts: North Yemen, otherwise known as The Kingdom of Yemen, and South Yemen, also called People’s Republic of Southern Yemen. Both countries had united together after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire and British colonization of each region respectively. Due to the unstable nature of the country, the government has spent the last few years in transition in terms of both power and governmental structure. Despite the unification of the two divisions of Yemen, differences in governmental mindset remain. North and South Yemen continue to have warring ideologies when it comes to the stance of how much power the central government should have. This dispute was one of the original foundations of the current civil war which has since been exacerbated by ongoing friction of different groups in Yemen including extremist groups. The Yemeni government resembles a liberal parliamentary democracy that holds religion in importance, specifically Islam (“Yemen”, Britannica School).

Islam is an integral component of life in Yemen. Nearly, 99.1% of the population is Muslim with 65% being Sunnis and 35% being Shia. Yemeni people largely identify as Arabs. The country’s official language is Arabic. A big part of Arabic culture is tribes. (“Yemen,” The World Factbook). Tribes are a vital part of daily life in Yemen. The weak state of the government means tribes play a large role in resolving conflict usually through violence. In terms of familial life, Yemeni families normally live in compounds with extended family. The head of the home is usually the eldest male on account of the intense culture of patriarchy in Yemen. Women in Yemeni society gain social status on the birth of their children especially their males due to the fact the birth of boys is widely celebrated. The main role of the women in the households are running the households which includes cooking and cleaning as well as raising children. Common dishes cooked in Yemen include rice and lamb with the national dish of the country being saltah which resembles a lamb stew. While most women stay in the home, 1/4 of Yemeni women do work outside the home. In rural communities some women do work on the farm (“Yemen”, Britannica School).

Farming is one of the most dominant industries in Yemen. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation has found that the agricultural industry contributes about 15.9% to the country’s real GDP. A report done by the World Factbook has shown that as of 2018, 44.5% of the land in Yemen is dedicated to agricultural use that mainly consist of the production of Khat. Khat is a plant native to Yemen that is commonly used as a stimulant drug in social practices. According to Sam Keily, a reporter for CNN, 90% of Yemeni men and 70% of Yemeni women ingest Khat daily, even 15%-20% of children use the drug frequently. In the article “Starving Yemen’s Drug Problem”, Keiley estimates that virtually 60% of Yemeni farmland is taken up by Khat. These same studies show that Khat is a 12 billion dollar industry in Yemen, which is three times the amount needed for the UN to provide food for the country. Khat can retail for almost

60 dollars per pound. Not only is Khat a growing and fundamental business for the Yemeni, it is also a daily social practice. Afternoons are consumed with people consuming tea and Khat as a way to relax. With the raging social conflict of the country Khat is a form of escape that is slowly draining the country of its natural resources and people.

The World Food Programme has reported that 20.1 million people in Yemen were in need of some form of humanitarian aid with nearly half of the country's population being food insecure. Currently, nearly 5 million people in Yemen are on the threshold of food deprivation. These pockets of food deprivation are the highest reported in the last few years ("Yemen: A Brief Background"). Before, only 50,000 people were in severe food insecurity situations. Not only are the number of food insecure people skyrocketing, but the rate of child malnutrition is at an all time high. Recent studies done by the World Food Programme communicates how dire the situation is: virtually one-third of the families in Yemen have an imbalance of nutrition in their diets. Foods like vegetables, dairy, fruit, and meat are lacking in many diets of Yemeni families. Due to ongoing social and economic conflict, 56% of Yemen's population are categorized at an IPC level of 3 which means they are facing crisis levels of food insecurity. The problem is continuing to escalate as hundreds of thousands of Yemeni people are moving out of level 3 IPC hunger to level 4 which is emergency level ("IPC Alert on Yemen"). The uptake of severity of the issue has increased in a matter of months. There was a short period of time where food insecurity trends were going stagnant, but since the pandemic it has violently escalated. COVID-19 has also been a large factor of pressure on an already stressed Yemeni economy. A report done by the World Food Bank has outlined the fact that as of 2020 the real GDP growth of Yemen is -5.0. GDP is the measure of gross domestic products and is often seen as a measure of a country's economic success. A negative GDP growth rate is indicative of a recession, a time of heavy job loss and lack of productivity. In layman's terms, the economy is failing, taking the country down with it.

A promising solution to the failing economy of Yemen is to focus on the coffee industry. Focus and growth building of the coffee industry is a multi-stepped process that begins with regulating how coffee is being produced and sold. Anda Greeney, the owner of Al Mokha, a business dedicated to selling Yemeni coffee, outlines the overlook and inconsistencies many coffee farmers in Yemen are making in his paper "Creating Political Stability in Yemen through Importing Yemeni Coffee to the United States: A Country and Market Analysis". The largest oversights being careless cherry picking from the coffee wielding plant *Coffea Arabica*, unhealthy storing conditions of said cherries, and ineffective ways of trade due to a lack of policy that benefits homegrown farmers. A board that creates set requirements for the production and distribution both domestically and internationally of coffee would not only create a consistent production of coffee but raise the quality of coffee overall. Greeney described his experience taste testing imported Yemeni coffee in America and the comment that resonates the most is the amount of flaws he could taste in the beans themselves. Many of the flaws described were a direct effect of the lack of attention towards detail throughout the agricultural industry of Yemen. If the Yemeni government were to implement a coffee regulation board many advances in the field could be made. An advance made could include a coffee bean grading system which would streamline the distribution of beans that were of good and consistent quality. Not only could changes in agricultural efficiency be made but also the standards surrounding the coffee trade. Greeney briefly touched on the application of Fairtrade. While he believed it relied too heavily on foreign intervention and the organization of farmers which he believed was too "Westernized" for Yemen, this may not necessarily be the case.

Fairtrade is essentially a movement that works with farming co-operatives, business, and governments to make trade more fair so that producers can have secure and sustainable livelihoods ("What Fairtrade Does"). To put it simply, Fairtrade helps to establish standards that focus on social, economic, and environmental growth that protects the working rights of the producers. Fairtrade works directly with farmers and focuses on issues affecting specific environments. For example, they helped to establish a Women's School of Leadership in West Africa after learning about the intense lack of educational opportunities holding the country back. Considering the social conflict of Yemen, if a coffee regulation board were to implement a partnership with Fairtrade, homegrown solutions would be much more feasible. Not only would farmers be educated in sustainable agricultural practices but the working conditions and rights of producers would be renovated in ways that would alter the policy revolving around the supply chain in Yemen. One of the biggest problems about previous attempts to restore Yemen's stability was the fact that it required too much foreign intervention and was

not able to be upheld. Creating a coffee regulation board that opened up a partnership with Fairtrade would allow for stability to be brought to Yemen's economy by the Yemeni people.

Another step needed to be taken in order to stabilize the economy through coffee is to increase the demand for Yemeni coffee by signifying the importance of coffee beans themselves. Part of increasing the demand of Yemeni coffee is marketing the originality of the coffee itself. An unrecognized fact that even coffee aficionados are in the dark about is the origin of mocha. Mocha coffee beans originate from Al-Mukha, Yemen, a port city along the coast of the Red Sea. The first step towards increasing the international demand of coffee from Yemen is acknowledging the importance of the coffee itself. Creating a geographical indication (GI) of Yemeni coffee would essentially be like trademarking the coffee as Yemen's. GIs are a sign that signifies that products have a specific geographical origin and that the product has a quality or reputation that is a direct effect of its origin ("Geographical Indication"). Geographical indication protects the usage rights of the product names. The demand for Yemeni coffee has significantly diminished, in the 1950s Yemen was exporting three times the amount of coffee they are currently producing ("Greeney"). While many organizations including the USAID blame the lack of production on the water crisis in Yemen, that is simply not the truth. The production of Khat has increased over the years, the crop itself is water intensive meaning that while shortage of water is an issue it is not the issue obstructing the growth of crops including those of which the coffee trade depends.

The larger overlooking issue being the lack of interest in Yemen or its products. When people think of Yemen, they think "Third world country riddled with war and disease"; the intricate and riveting world of coffee in Yemen is ignored and pushed aside. Placing a GI on the country's ownership of coffee would draw international attention towards the deep and enriching history of the coffee and the coffee connoisseurs themselves will be lining up to taste the coffee with brewing interest. Placing a GI on the coffee is no easy feat; it involves a heavy application and proofing process along with a registration process where the country has to prove that the product is regionally specific. But, GIs are not usually a controversial practice. Over the years, it has become more acceptable internationally and more countries are starting to adhere to the rules surrounding GIs. That being said, there are some examples of when GIs become disputed between countries. Specifically the case of champagne between France and Russia. France had established Champagne as a Appellation of Original Control (AOC) which is a system nearly identical to GIs and is regarded as a branch of geographical indication. Trouble arose when Russia signed a law in 2021 that allowed for Russian sparkling to be sold in the world market under the champagne which made it so France wineries could no longer sell their sparkling wine under the name Champagne ("France"). But, as long as Yemen categorizes their mocha under a GI and not something like an AOC the problem is very unlikely to occur. Essentially, if Yemen were to put a GI on their products, specifically mocha coffee beans, the recognition and international market for Yemeni coffee would intensify.

The third and final part of rebuilding the economy of Yemen through coffee is reorganizing the flow of funds to the agricultural sector. Recently, Columbia Law School released a paper detailing how to protect the growing industry of coffee and a strategy to consider in the case of Yemen is establishing a national coffee fund. The original strategy outlined by Columbia Law School was to create a Global Coffee Fund, Yemen is realistically not at that level, yet. But a National Coffee Fund paired with a National Sustainability Plan would incentivize the use of sustainable practices for farmers. Currently, farm subsidies in Yemen are directed towards Khat farming which is bringing in more money but in the long-run if farm subsidies were to be redistributed towards the coffee sector the growth of the industry would be boosted. Part of growing the coffee business is to upkeep it, a sustainability plan would not only save agricultural land which is quickly shrinking in Yemen but it would also be more beneficial towards the environment. If these sustainability plans were to be developed and supported by multi-stakeholders with connections to Yemen the plan would be more inclusive and transparent to the farmers of Yemen.

The sustainability plan should focus on implementing plans that include adaptable climate change strategies, plans that focus on strengthening the farming strategies of different ranges of farms that focus on create profit for producers, plans that protect farm rights especially of small farmers, plans that support a producers global market opportunities, and plans that give financial support to poor farmers during times of low income. A national coffee fund would be able to financially

support many actions needed outlined above as well as create incentives for farmers to not only be sustainable but to abide by a national coffee regulation group that was outlined further up. If Yemen were to take into consideration a combination of solutions listed above, the stabilization of the country's economy would be possible without needing to wait for the end of the civil war ("Ensuring").

Yemen's economy is vastly underdeveloped and unreliable. The current social state of the country significantly exacerbated the problem and has not allowed for any change to be made to the economy. Previous attempts to fix the issue have been unsuccessful due to the unrealistic expectations placed on the country. Yemen needs a national coffee regulation group that focuses on bringing the originality of their coffee to the national stage as well as implementing a national coffee fund that stimulates a national sustainability plan. The only way for the country to create a keep up a strong foundation is to allow the people to dictate how they go about fixing their industry, foreign intervention will never be able to provide the same level success as the country's own people. The most successful strategy to solve the country's food insecurity problem is to fix the state of the country. The economy is the strongest way to do so. The way towards fixing the hunger of the people is fixing the bank account of the government that leads them.

Works Cited

- Fairtrade Foundation. "WHAT FAIRTRADE DOES." *Fairtrade Foundation*, edited by Fairtrade Foundation, www.fairtrade.org.uk/what-is-fairtrade/what-fairtrade-does/. Accessed 3 Mar. 2022.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "Geographical Indications." *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, edited by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, www.fao.org/geographical-indications/en. Accessed 3 Mar. 2022.
- "Geographical Indications." *WIPO*, World Intellectual Property Organization, [www.wipo.int/geo_indications/en/#:~:text=A%20geographical%20indication%20\(GI\)%20is,originating%20in%20a%20given%20place](http://www.wipo.int/geo_indications/en/#:~:text=A%20geographical%20indication%20(GI)%20is,originating%20in%20a%20given%20place). Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.
- Greeney, Anda. *Creating Political Stability in Yemen through Importing Yemeni Coffee to the United States: A Country and Market Anal.* Harvard, MA thesis. *Al Mokha*, scholar.harvard.edu/files/andagreeney/files/creating-political-stability-in-yemen-through-importing-yemeni-coffee-to-the-united-states.pdf. Accessed 15 Feb. 2022.
- Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. "IPC Alert on Yemen." *IPC*, edited by Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, July 2020, www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/ipc-alerts/issue-24/en/. Accessed 28 Feb. 2022.
- Jeffrey D. Sachs, Kaitlin Y. Cordes, James Rising, Perrine Toledano & Nicolas Maennling, *Ensuring Economic Viability and Sustainability of Coffee Production*. PhD dissertation. *Columbia Law School*, scholarship.law.columbia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=sustainable_investment_staffpubs. Accessed 6 Mar. 2022.
- Kelly, Sam. "Starving Yemen's drug problem." *CNN* [Atlanta], 21 May 2019. *CNN*, www.cnn.com/2019/05/21/middleeast/yemen-khat-kiley/index.html. Accessed 17 Feb. 2022.
- NPR. "France And Russia Are In A Tussle Over Who Gets To Call Champagne ... 'Champagne.'" *NPR*, edited by NPR, 3 Sept. 2021, www.npr.org/2021/09/03/1031324658/france-and-russia-are-in-a-tussle-over-who-gets-to-call-champagne-champagne. Accessed 6 Mar. 2022.
- United Nations Foundation. "YEMEN: A BRIEF BACKGROUND" ["YEMEN: A BRIEF BACKGROUND"]. *YEMEN: A BRIEF BACKGROUND*. *United Nations Foundation*,

[unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/peace-human-rights-and-humanitarian-response/yemen-a-brief-background/](https://www.unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/peace-human-rights-and-humanitarian-response/yemen-a-brief-background/).

Accessed 3 Feb. 2022.

"Yemen." *Britannica School*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 19 Jan. 2021. school.eb.com/levels/high/article/Yemen/110511.

Accessed 2 Feb. 2022.

"Yemen." *The World Factbook*, edited by CIA, CIA, 24 Jan. 2022,

www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/yemen/#introduction. Accessed 7 Feb. 2022.