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Yemen, Conflict

A Crisis in Yemen: Political Conflict

Down in the subtropical deserts of Western Asia lies Yemen, a country with mountainous lands and intricate city architecture that is considered home to about 31,154,867 people. It is also considered home to a rich variety of flowers with vivid colors and plants with distinctive patterns (AFS). After Saudi Arabia, Yemen is the second-largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, with 214,287 square miles of land. Yemen is bordered by two bodies of water, from the south lies the Gulf of Aden, and from the right lies the Red Sea. Yemen is under a republic government system with a community made up of a majority of Muslims. (US Department of State). Although its geographical features are a great part of the country, Yemen is substantially unstable and currently struggling to maintain its population.

Since the most practiced religion is Islam, Yemenis follow the ethics of hospitality and generosity. There is an overarching attribute that the majority of Yemenis value when it comes to family— support. Extended families often live close by and help one another with raising their children (AFS-USA). The average family size in Yemen is 7.5 members (Taylor et al). The majority of Yemenis live in rural areas, about 62% of the population of Yemen is rural, where the families are larger. The average family living in a rural area lives under the shared roof of a straw hut or makeshift house. Concerning the family's diet, if they have access to food, it consists of goat meat, legumes, chicken, and pastries. Some families may eat based on the food aid provided by organizations such as the Islamic Relief USA and the World Food Program.

The majority of the working people in Yemen have a job within the agricultural sector, though being difficult work, the average annual income is only about \$2,213 (Fanack). In addition to low average income, most of the Yemeni children are not attending any educational system. This is caused by a lack of access to schools and money. UNICEF reports that more than 2,500 schools in Yemen are not in use, and political attacks make up for two-thirds of school damage. Even if a person has access to education, it is almost always inadequate due to a lack of resources. To approach the issue, UNICEF, along with other programs and foundations, has worked towards providing children with education. So far, UNICEF has provided over 500,000 children with some form of education. Additionally, 54% of Yemenis also don't have access to electricity or telephones, and with underdeveloped infrastructure and poor road access, all factors make communication and transportation difficult.

Being cornered by Saudi Arabia in the north and by Oman in the east, Yemen is perceived as vulnerable and is the target of multiple political conflicts. Beginning in September 2014, Yemen has been fighting the Yemen Civil War. Starting back in 2011, things started to get tense when former president Ali Abdullah Saleh handed his political power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Hadi was not ready for the weight of taking up Saleh's position and struggled to support the issues ongoing in Yemen, such as food insecurity, corruption, and attacks from militant Islamic movements. The Houthi movement, an Islamic political movement that previously rebelled against Saleh in his term, saw Hadi's weakness as an opportunity to close in on the governmental system. Yemen is known to have shifting alliances, and after Saleh handed over his power, he sided with the Houthi Movement. Saudi Arabia was against the alliance,

and targeted the Houthi rebels, further supplementing the issue. But it was later on when Saleh shifted from that alliance and publicly announced he would no longer support them. Just days after his announcement, Saleh was killed on December 4th, 2017. The country spiraled into fear, which left them severely unstable (BBC News). The Houthis used violence with arsenals like missiles and weapons to control the country. The rebel group recruited children to fight, including children as young as 7. From 2020 to 2021, it was reported that more than 2,000 children have died fighting for the Houthi movement.

The political conflict is tightly correlated to the slow production of the food market in Yemen. This further contributes to the instability of the country. Yemen is known for having a condensed population, making it harder to feed and support so many people. Out of about 137,143,680 acres, only about 3,706,580 acres are cultivated. The massive production of qat, a stimulant drug, takes up 166,557 hectares of land and 38% of total water use (Sci Dev Net, 2017). This is a significant amount of land and water which could go towards producing more fulfilling crops rather than producing something that is essentially futile. The climate and weather of Yemen are arid and mountainous, and the land consists mostly of deserts with hot and humid weather conditions. These factors are not ideal when it comes to agriculture. Because of this, only 3% of the land is arable, causing low food production and distribution in Yemen. Due to the civil war, along with other effects that came with it, it has been estimated that there will be a total of almost 377,000 deaths by the end of 2021, 70% of which will be children (UNDP, 2021). The major cause of death in these children will be famine and malnutrition, which impacts children the most because they are in the early stages of development.

Urban city centers are targets of this conflict, Sanaa especially. Because Sanaa is the hub of action in Yemen, it is targeted by rebels and the people living in the city are harmed by such. While the attacks of the political conflict are mostly targeted to urban areas, the entirety of Yemen feels the impact. Additionally, women and children are also targets of abuse, and oftentimes children are left with scattered families and little care. The marginalized groups within Yemen are discriminated against and find it hard to get access to any sort of humanitarian aid that may be available. The Muhamasheen, a community of unclear origin, were struggling against discrimination before the political conflict, making it hard to access education, housing, and job opportunities. But the rising conflict has made it harder for the Muhamasheen to access humanitarian aid, and struggle to find safe shelter due to discrimination.

With climate change becoming an increasing concern, Yemen is susceptible to its impacts. Overgrazing and deforestation are two environmental issues that Yemen struggles with because the arable land is often overworked due to desperate attempts in producing food. The deterioration of their water supply has dried out land and increased salinity, causing soil erosion and making farming difficult. Yemen's air quality, through World Health Organization's standards, is deemed unsafe due to pollution resulting from an increase in human interference (IAMAT).

The present status of the conflict in Yemen is severe, and trends show that there is little improvement in the conditions of the country due to intensified warfare. Famine, extreme rates of poverty, and a deteriorating economy have all contributed to this trend because they weaken the country. Although the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is severe, it is not too late to get the country back on its feet, and so can be done through practical agriculture and prioritizing awareness.

First, locally focused projects and plans should be initiated that promote the communities within Yemen. Because each community is different with its own set of needs, localized plans can conform to what is necessary for that community, rather than implementing a "one size fits all" plan that may not benefit

everybody. These projects can consist of ways that improve water sources, educational systems, farming systems, or job opportunities. To approach this, the different communities and neighborhoods of Yemen need to be recognized and mapped out. The majority of areas struggle with famine, therefore practical agricultural systems could be introduced. Small gardens or plots of land can be dedicated to producing foods with high nutrients. Seeds, soil conditioners, and fertilizers should be handed out to communities. Water would be necessary for farm growth, therefore communities should lower, or eliminate, the growth of qat which is the major crop grown in Yemen that uses the majority of water available yet it's a drug that doesn't benefit nutrient needs. The entire community can have access to these gardens so everybody participates in ensuring production. Organizations, supranational or non-profit, can manage and lead these projects. Making these projects common and available throughout Yemen can be one way to help Yemen stabilize because it would enhance food security and decrease rates of famine. This would essentially allow for a healthier country that can defend itself.

Secondly, awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen needs to be heightened, not just by organizations or governments, but by citizens. Most outside countries' citizens are not as aware of how prevalent the issue in Yemen is, and by increasing that awareness more action can be taken. With the increase of technology, the use of social media can spread awareness about the issue. Advertisements and ads that provide brief, easy-to-follow information about the issue could allow people to understand the context of the crisis. Commonly used apps, such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, can help with putting out these advertisements. To help a country that is in such a position as Yemen, other countries need to get involved. Being in such a poor state, those countries with more resources and economic strength should provide aid and relief to Yemen.

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