



Daoshah Jaber, 35, a displaced widow, cooks lentils for her children in Almanjorah camp, Abs, Hajjah (October 2017). Photo: Ahmed Alfadeel/Oxfam

MISSILES AND FOOD

Yemen's man-made food security crisis

The current high levels of food insecurity in Yemen and the threat of famine are the results of more than two-and-a-half years of war, and have added to the already high levels existing pre-war. The economic crisis and loss of livelihoods has left people without the means to purchase what is available in the market. This situation has been made dramatically worse by the closure of key entry points for commercial imports, which is also affecting the availability of fuel and clean water. This is a deadly combination, especially for the most vulnerable in society, including women and children.

SUMMARY

The current dramatic levels of food insecurity in Yemen and the threat of famine are the results of over two-and-a-half years of war, adding to the already high levels existing pre-war. Yet, this food crisis is entirely man-made. Yemen imports around 90% of its food. Inspection mechanisms, congestion at ports and a destroyed infrastructure are hurdles that have caused a rise in food prices. At the same time, the economic crisis, the decline of the private sector and the non-payment of salaries in the public sector, as well as the loss of livelihoods has left people without the means to purchase what is available in the market. Significant delays in food imports and marked up prices have increased the cost for food to the extent that it is out of reach for most of the population, even though food has been readily available in large quantities in the markets. Yet, the lack of the most basic financial means and high food prices have combined to create a real threat for 17.8 million of the 27 million population of Yemen.

In less than three years since the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, the number of people who are food insecure in Yemen has risen from 11 million to nearly 18 million. The recent obstruction of food imports on which Yemen is heavily dependent has further exacerbated the crisis, with the result that two-thirds of Yemen's population do not know where their next meal is coming from. This is a deadly combination, especially for the most vulnerable in society, including women and children.

The recent blockade, which has cut off large parts of Yemen from commercial imports, including fuel and food, has made far worse the already dire circumstances under which most people in Yemen live. Without immediate action to comprehensively tackle the world's largest food crisis, Yemen risks becoming one of the worst famines in 2018.

THE CURRENT BLOCKADE

On 4 November 2017, Houthi forces fired a ballistic missile towards the airport of Riyadh. In response to this incident, Saudi Arabia announced two days later the closure of all of Yemen's air, sea and land ports, locking in 27 million people and locking out 500,000MT of food and fuel, and 1,476MT of aid.¹ The sea ports of Aden, Mokha and Mukalla, and the land port with Saudi Arabia, al-Wadi'a, were re-opened 10 days later, as was the airport of Aden (the land port with Oman, Shafer, had reportedly not been closed), and the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition made clear that all imports should be re-routed to those ports.² The ports of Hodeidah and Saleef and the airport at Sana'a remained closed until 23 November, when they were reopened for a limited humanitarian assistance. Given that around 80% of all of Yemen's imports flow through Hodeidah and Saleef, and about two-thirds of Yemen's population live in the areas directly served by these two ports, the continued closure of the ports puts an enormous strain on the availability of food in the market and significantly increases the risk of large-scale famine in Yemen. This is a scenario that Oxfam has warned of repeatedly in the past.³

After more than two weeks, the full closure of ports in the northern territories was partially eased with the re-opening of Sana'a airport and Hodeidah port for humanitarian imports. However, 16 days of having part of the country cut off from all imports had already had a devastating impact on the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Food prices have skyrocketed, moving staple food out of reach of even more people. Relief agencies and the private sector face financial burdens due to the delays of ships anchoring outside of Hodeidah in deep water; costs amounting to more than US\$10,000 per ship per day. These additional costs will be eventually borne by Yemeni consumers, who are already poor and financially stretched. Relief agencies are revising their programming and stepping up their support in order to respond adequately to the additional financial challenges that people face, even though this means that funding will run out more quickly.

Food stocks in Yemen are expected to run out by March 2018 without the full resumption of port access. According to the Food Security and Agricultural Cluster, existing stocks of wheat (grain and flour) and sugar will last for three months, and stocks for rice will last for six-and-a-half months from November 2017 at estimated monthly requirements. These three commodities account for the primary calorie intake of the Yemeni population.⁴ It remains to be seen whether the 22 November decision to allow relief shipments will enable more food to arrive, but even in the best-case scenario humanitarian organizations can supply only a fraction of the food provided by commercial importers. The World Food Program (WFP)⁵ warns that even two weeks into the effective blockade, the damage to the economy and food availability in the market was already so high that it would take Yemen months to recover to a pre-blockade level.

Most significantly though, the new blockade has increased fuel prices by between 15% and 60%,⁶ and in Sana'a and Aden by more than 100% at the time of writing.⁷ This has had a devastating impact on the transportation of food throughout the country, on healthcare, and on the availability of clean water. With fuel stocks for only slightly more than one week,⁸ vital functions in the country are at risk. With the re-opening of Aden port, some replenishments can reach the country again, but they will not be enough to consistently cover all needs. As a result, transporting food to markets, especially in rural areas, is an immense challenge,⁹ and transport for people to these markets is also getting more expensive. This will have disastrous consequences for a population that had already been struggling to pay for the absolute minimum. Thus, amid limited access, Amnesty International warned that the closure of borders appeared 'to amount to collective punishment of Yemen's civilians'.¹⁰

Yemen is heavily reliant on commercial food imports. If full access for all commercial shipments to the country is not granted immediately, the likelihood of famine in Yemen will increase significantly, as humanitarian shipments alone cannot sufficiently serve the market. Humanitarian food imports for survival cover only about 20% of the country's monthly needs in food imports.¹¹ Hence, the full re-opening to commercial imports of Hodeidah port, through which about 80% of all of Yemen's imports have been entering the country, is vital for the survival of Yemenis. This includes desperately needed imports of fuel: between 90% and 97% of Yemen's fuel needs to be imported. Fuel is absolutely critical for the country's water supply, as water

pumps are fuel or diesel operated and water needs to be trucked to communities. Due to blocking commercial imports from entering the country's biggest port, Yemen will soon not only face a food crisis, but also a water crisis.

This paper demonstrates the severe effects of the war and the food crisis in Yemen; a crisis that is entirely man-made, in which the international community is complicit through its inaction and lack of concern towards the people of Yemen.

1 ON THE BRINK OF FAMINE

At the end of 2017, Yemen faces the world's largest food security emergency.¹² More than two-and-a-half years after the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, the effects of war, destruction, malnutrition and disease have left 21.7 million people in need of humanitarian or protection assistance; of these, 10.8 million are in acute need.¹³ In less than six months, the number of people in need has risen by one million; 16 million people do not have access to clean water and sanitation,¹⁴ and 17.8 million Yemenis – 66% of the population – do not know where their next meal is coming from. The number of Yemenis who are severely food insecure and facing a high risk of starvation now stands at 8.4 million.¹⁵ In IPC phases,¹⁶ this is the equivalent to phase 4 (emergency); that is, one step away from famine (IPC phase 5). Nothing has been done to prevent Yemen from spiralling into an even deeper food crisis. If nothing is done immediately, thousands of people will die, even before famine is declared. The likelihood of famine has intensified significantly since Yemen's borders were closed by the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition in November 2017. This is largely due to Yemen's dependency on food and fuel imports.

Box 1: Food security explained

Food insecurity describes a situation in which people do not have 'secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.'¹⁷

As the Middle East's poorest country, Yemen struggled with food insecurity in some areas long before the escalation of the conflict in March 2015, and had a national global acute malnutrition (GAM) rate of 12.7% as of August 2014.¹⁸ GAM rates indicate the nutritional status of a population and are used to determine the severity of a humanitarian crisis. By the end of 2017, GAM rates in Yemen had increased significantly as a result of the war. In five governorates,¹⁹ GAM rates rose above the global emergency threshold of 15% according to the Nutrition Cluster,²⁰ and in some locations within these governorates, even doubled, reaching 31%.²¹ Even more worrying, severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rates have peaked. An estimated 15% of children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children suffering from SAM, which constitutes an increase by a staggering 200% since 2014.²² Rates of stunting have risen to 47%.²³

Box 2: The impact of food insecurity

The result of a highly food insecure population is not just 8.4 million people being one step away from famine. Prevailing high levels of food insecurity over a long period of time have rendered the Yemeni population much more vulnerable to disease. In a recent report, Oxfam showed that areas with high levels of food insecurity in Yemen have also been hit particularly hard by the cholera outbreak.²⁴ More than 900,000 people are suspected of having contracted cholera since the end of April 2017 and more than 2,000 people have died as a result of the largest cholera outbreak in recorded history. While much attention has been paid to the cholera crisis, the underlying impact of food insecurity tends to be overlooked. A nearly collapsed health system is struggling to care for patients suffering from the various effects of prolonged malnutrition. As the food crisis worsens, humanitarian agencies fear another upsurge of cholera cases, as well as the outbreak of other diseases.

WOMEN, THE FIRST TO SKIP MEALS

Yemeni women face one of the world's greatest gender-based disparities, according to a worldwide study on the gender gap.²⁵ This imbalance clearly holds in terms of food security and nutrition, where women in Yemen suffer disproportionately. Women are often the first to skip meals or eat smaller portions so that the family ration goes further. Early marriage, already a dire problem in Yemen, has increased again since the escalation of the conflict. Girls as young as eight or 10 years old are married off to reduce the number of family members to feed, but also as a source of income in order to feed the rest of the family and pay off debts.²⁶

Higher levels of education are strongly correlated with higher nutritional status, yet only 29% of women in Yemen are literate, compared with 70% of men.²⁷ Consequently, one-quarter of Yemeni women between the ages of 15 and 49 are acutely malnourished. Malnourished women are in turn at increased risk of giving birth to malnourished babies,²⁸ indicating the correlation between gender inequality and malnutrition.

2 WHY IS FAMINE LOOMING?

Yemen's food crisis is a direct, man-made result of the war. Imposed difficulties in importing food; the destruction of civilian infrastructure; a cash crisis; an entire year of unpaid public salaries; periods of siege and de facto blockades had left Yemenis without the means and processes to access basic staple food, even before the closure of key entry points for food in early November 2017. Furthermore, the effects of the war have led to an increase in basic food prices of up to an average 30%,²⁹ due to the costly delays of importing goods through Hodeidah port and the imposition of road taxes throughout the country. At the same time, the population has less and less access to cash and paid work. This has led to a vicious cycle as increasing numbers of people descend into food insecurity.

Case study

Khaled has two malnourished children, Ahmed, three-years-old and Hassan, one-year-old.

'It is nearly a year since we have been far from home and a stable life. I found myself displaced and jobless, unable to buy the food I used to buy for my family before. Now, I can barely afford anything with some work for two or three days only, over the course of two weeks. I couldn't afford to buy potatoes, vegetables, milk or even rice after being displaced and having lost my job. I had to take my sons to a health centre in al-Nashma in which they received malnutrition therapy.'

Khaled, 38 years, internally displaced person from the Usaifirah neighborhood in Taiz city. He was displaced in February 2017 and moved to al-Ma'after district.

NEAR TOTAL DEPENDENCE ON FOOD IMPORTS

As a food-deficient country, Yemen has always relied on importing food. Even before the crisis, 90% of Yemen's food was imported, including 90% of wheat and 100% of rice, which are the country's staple foods. The escalation of the conflict has caused major disruption to the food pipeline to and within the country through the imposition of inspection mechanisms, the partial destruction of infrastructure and dramatically increased costs due to delays and road taxes.

With the escalation of the conflict, the control over ports and entry points into Yemen means control over three crucial elements entering Yemen: revenues, fuel and food imports. Shortly after the escalation of the conflict in 2015, the Houthi/Saleh alliance had brought under their control Sana'a airport, the sea ports of Hodeidah, Saleef and Mokha, and the land ports with Saudi Arabia, al-Tuwal (in Hajjah governorate) and al-Wadi'a (in Hadramawt). Based on figures from the Yemen Customs Authority in 2013, these ports together account for 61% of customs revenue. By October 2017, the Hadi-government had regained control over Mokha and al-Wadi'a. It also controls Aden port (al-Mualla and the Aden Free Zone), the land port with Oman, Shahren, and the port of Mukalla. These ports together accounted for 40% of customs revenue pre-war. The Houthi/Saleh alliance still controls Hodeidah and Saleef sea ports and Sana'a airport (the latter has been closed since August 2016 for all commercial flights) which accounted for 47% of customs revenue. Al-Tuwal, which used to be the most important land port with one-third of Yemeni exports passing through it, is no longer operating due to destruction by airstrikes and ongoing clashes.³⁰

The vast majority of food is imported through the sea ports of Hodeidah, Saleef, and Aden. The former two ports received around 85% of all wheat grain imports in 2016. The total storage capacity of Hodeidah port equals 62% of the country's total storage capacity. The port's milling capacity accounts for 51% of the national capacity. Given the infrastructure at the different ports and partial destruction as a result of the war, none of the sea or land ports can substitute for another: the closure of any of these entry points has a direct negative impact on the availability of food in the country.³¹ This also means that while Aden port is indispensable for food imports into Yemen, it cannot substitute for the ports of Hodeidah and Saleef. In addition, the physical storage and milling capacity in Hodeidah cannot be relocated: with the closure of the port, the majority of Yemen's total capacity to store and mill wheat grain cannot be used and over 60% of the country's wheat imports are no longer entering the country.

The two open land ports of al-Wadi'a and Shahren are not a viable alternative. Between 2014 and 2016, only 0.06% of wheat grain and 2.68% of rice was imported via land ports. Given that importers are located in the sea ports, and importing via land means getting clearance from a number of transit countries, goods transported through the land ports adds to costs and makes goods a lot more expensive. Only already milled wheat flour is brought in in slightly larger quantities via land ports: 16.59% through Shahren and 0.64% via al-Wadi'a. However, of the three staple commodities (wheat grain, rice and flour), imports entering Yemen via land amounted to only 1.16% of the

total imports of those commodities between 2014 and 2016, with the rest coming through sea ports.³²

Hodeidah – a deliberate bottleneck

One of the most alarming features of Yemen's humanitarian crisis has been that while Hodeidah port is the most important entry point for food coming in to Yemen, it has also become the most contentious. A number of restrictions, hurdles and mechanisms have been introduced since the onset of the Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition involvement in the war in an apparent attempt to stop what is seen by the coalition as the smuggling of weapons by the Houthis. These restrictions, hurdles and mechanisms have created delays of weeks or months before goods can be offloaded. This has vastly increased the cost of importing food into the country. Imposed inspection and clearance mechanisms increase the costs of goods and slow down transportation significantly. Vessels destined for Hodeidah and the nearby port Saleef are required to send their shipping manifests to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM). UNVIM decides on whether an inspection is needed, and if so, the vessel has to meet inspectors in Djibouti. Although the clearance process for UNVIM is officially supposed to take only 36.5 hours, in reality, it can take from four days to several weeks, as UNVIM clearance is not effective until the Saudi- and Emirati-led Coalition gives approval.³³ This is an extra step not provided for by the establishment of UNVIM, and begs the question of the point of UNVIM, with the Coalition imposing their own search measures.

For all container ships to Hodeidah, subsequent screening takes place in a transit port (Oman, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, or Djibouti), which takes from one week to two months. Ships have 7 to 10 days' free allowance, after which port authorities charge fees. Liners pass these fees on to the consignment owner. Since January 2017, the Coalition has restricted these transshipments to King Abdullah port in Jeddah only, increasing delays significantly and discouraging trade to Hodeidah port. To facilitate inspection, the Coalition has also restricted the quantity to be shipped to Hodeidah to 700 containers per vessel only, although Hodeidah port could handle 1,700 containers per vessel. This has further reduced the quantity of food entering the country.³⁴

After leaving the transit port, vessels move to a holding area in international waters while waiting for the Coalition's permission to enter Yemeni waters. Demurrage costs apply for this time which can take from two days to two weeks; costs that add up to what the end-consumers have to pay. There have been instances when the Coalition has not provided a response to UNVIM, meaning that in turn UNVIM could not clear ships. Approval from Yemeni authorities to then enter Yemeni waters and dock and berth took one to three days before the conflict, but increased to three to four days for Hodeidah. Subsequent unloading at Hodeidah port, previously a matter of two to four days, now takes seven to 10 days, due to the destruction of all five cranes at the port. Vessels need to come with their own cranes which are smaller and slower. It thus takes an average of eight weeks to two months for a vessel arriving near Yemeni waters to unload its cargo at Hodeidah port.

After discharging, cargo is then sold and transferred to customers such as wholesalers and agents in Yemen. Purchasing options for them are much

more limited compared with before the crisis, however, as the majority of importers only accept cash or a direct deposit to the importer's bank account before the cargo's delivery (because traders can no longer receive credit notes from banks due to the liquidity and banking crisis).³⁵ Given the delays and extra costs, shipping costs of wheat for importers have thus increased by almost 60–75% and for rice by 100% compared with before the war. Onward transportation has also significantly increased, by 35–45% for a container, and by 100% per tonne.³⁶ Not only have the costs of transport skyrocketed, but transportation times over land have also increased dramatically. The severely damaged infrastructure due to the conflict is further hampering an effective distribution of food throughout the country. Coalition airstrikes have destroyed roads and bridges, and the authorities in Sana'a and Aden have proven unable to maintain and repair the road network. Checkpoints along the routes further complicate transport and add to the costs of products due to fees at the checkpoints. Areas of active conflict prevent passage across some of the most direct routes of the country, from ports to key locations, because of safety concerns or an inability to cross frontlines.³⁷

Hence, truckers have to resort to networks of rural roads that are not built for heavy transport, and to use alternative routes for destroyed bridges.³⁸ The journey from Hodeidah to Sana'a now takes 12–18 hours, depending on the season, checkpoints and the intensity of conflict along the road, compared with 8–10 hours before the conflict. These restrictions are crucial factors increasing humanitarian need over the past year, and restrictions by all parties to the conflict mean that food is being used as a weapon of war in Yemen.³⁹

LIMITED LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

Agricultural activities that have employed more than half of the population have considerably declined because of higher costs (particularly fuel), insecurity and the reduced availability of materials. The country's total cereal production in 2016 was around 37% below the previous five years' average and 11% lower than the harvest in 2015. Around 40% of all farming households have witnessed a decline in cereal production.⁴⁰ As a result, more than half of all households have had to buy food on credit, and around 80% of Yemenis are in debt. Up to 60% of all households have resorted to negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing portions of food or skipping meals altogether.⁴¹

Local food production accounts for 25% at most of available food in Yemen, and for less than 10% of staple foods. Wheat is the main staple, but the share of domestic wheat production in total food consumption is estimated to be only between 5 and 10 percent.⁴² Despite the rather limited contribution to the overall food needs of the country, at least 60% of Yemeni households rely on the agricultural sector as a main source of income. It provides employment for over half of the country's labour force; not least since 65% of Yemen's population live in rural areas. The conflict has had a major negative impact on their livelihoods, as cereal production had fallen significantly in 2016 by 48% and livestock production by 45% compared with pre-crisis levels. Of households engaged in agriculture, a shocking 85% lack key inputs

such as seeds, fertilisers or fuel to run water pumps for irrigation.⁴³ The rise in fuel prices in particular has increased irrigation and water costs. Due to the high prices, farmers see themselves forced to abandon their farms – a scenario that was already happening in 2015 when the conflict escalated. Around 40% of farmers abandoned their farmland, adding to the loss of livelihoods.⁴⁴ With the fuel shortages since the closure of ports, this development is likely to be repeated, but with even more dire consequences. Other reasons for farmers to abandon their land have been airstrikes, particularly in the governorate of Sa'dah.

The fishing sector is the most important source of income and food security in coastal areas. Yet, 21% of fishing communities are considered poor and 71% are considered very poor. The conflict has had a severe impact on fishers because of their limited access to the sea, high fuel prices for boats and generators, the disruption of fish exports, and the destruction of fishing equipment.⁴⁵ Only about 50% of all fishermen are still able to work.⁴⁶ This work has become increasingly dangerous with the war, as Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition attacks have repeatedly hit fishing boats off Yemen's coast, killing dozens of fishermen.⁴⁷

The decline of the already small domestic production of food has thus had a double impact, particularly on the rural population: Not only could less food be produced, but a substantial proportion of the population have significant cuts in their already meagre income. This has meant less money to buy food in markets where prices have increased. With the closure of some ports, the situation could be exacerbated by less food reaching markets.

Low levels of food production contribute to Yemen's reliance on imports, and in turn to its food insecurity. After an initial drastic decline of food imports after the escalation of the crisis in 2015, commercial importers had improved their ability to supply the market by mid-2016. A bigger problem has thus not been the supply of markets with goods from outside the country, but access to markets and affordability of products, as rising food prices put goods out of reach for the bulk of the population.

INCREASED PRICES AND NO SALARIES

Commodities that are imported via the two land ports and the sea ports in government-controlled territory are subject to multiple taxation when entering Yemen and subsequently when passing into Houthi/Saleh-controlled territory. This significantly increases food prices, as do the fees at numerous checkpoints throughout the country and on both sides of the frontline. As with other goods, food has become a commodity in a war economy that has unfolded over the course of the conflict. Taxation at road blocks and checkpoints has become an important source of revenue for numerous militias on both sides of the conflict. Traders estimate that these taxes account for ten to fifteen percent mark-ups in prices for consumers.⁴⁸

Between March 2015 and April 2017, prices for wheat grain increased by 31%, for wheat flour by 32%, and for rice by a staggering 85%.⁴⁹ The devaluation of the Yemeni Riyal, which has witnessed an approximate 84% rate increase from 215 YER/USD in 2014 to 396 YER/USD by the end of

Case study: The impact of the war on farmers

'I had a sheep farm in Sa'dah but it was bombed by airstrikes. We tried to slaughter the sheep before they died of the results of the airstrike. In Islam, meat is only halal if sheep are slaughtered from their necks while still alive, but when we cut them open their insides were coal black and the meat was inedible.'

Mohammed, internally displaced in Amran

October 2017, has further exacerbated the payment crisis that Yemenis face when trying to buy food.⁵⁰

While prices for all commodities are constantly rising, the conflict has had a devastating impact on people's livelihoods. Eight million people are thought to have lost their income due to the closure of private companies, the need of people to flee their homes, and the suspension of the Social Welfare Fund for two years. Seventy-eight percent of all households are already estimated to be in a worse economic situation than before the war. With more people living in poverty, economic activity has been reduced significantly, and substantial parts of the public sector that used to be one of the largest employers in the country, have come to a halt due to the non-payment of salaries for more than a year.⁵¹ Approximately 1.2 million civil servants – more than one-third of all public-sector workers – have not or only partially received their salaries since August 2016. Around seven million Yemenis depend on these public wages, based on the average size of a Yemeni family. The private sector has reduced its operating hours by half since 2015, laid off about 55% of its employees, and around 26% of private sector businesses have closed.⁵² Having no money has dramatically reduced the accessibility of food in the market for those people, even though food has been readily available, and has led to negative coping mechanisms, indicating that affordability is one of the main factors driving hunger in Yemen.

Yemen's often praised social fabric has prevented large-scale humanitarian disasters in Yemen many times in the past. It is considered shameful to show suffering or ask for help. Supporting family members without an income goes without question. But more than thirty months of war and nearly a year and a half without public salaries have stretched the social support network to breaking point. People resort to negative coping mechanisms and sell assets, skip meals and reduce clean water purchases, and are increasingly in debt. More than 50% of all households have had to buy food on credit at some point, and 80% of all people in Yemen are estimated to be in debt.⁵³ As these coping mechanisms are increasingly exhausted, people rely on relatives. Up to 50 people can depend on a single salary, as a national Oxfam employee reports.⁵⁴ But that is already a heavy burden when no emergency happens, no medication is needed, and prices do not increase. People have nothing left.

DANGERS OF BUYING FOOD AND INACCESSIBILITY OF MARKETS

The repeated targeting of markets by airstrikes of the Saudi- and Emirati-led Coalition, and the indiscriminate shelling of civilians by Houthi forces have turned even the simple activity of buying food into a life-threatening endeavour, especially in areas close to frontlines and active fighting. Airstrikes have targeted public and private infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, residential areas and even markets over the past two and a half years.⁵⁵ An airstrike at a market at the entrance of Sa'dah city on 1 November killed at least 26 people.⁵⁶ Airstrikes targeting markets such as al-Mashnaq in Sa'dah province in June 2017, killed at least 25 people,⁵⁷ and two airstrikes on a market in the village of Mastaba in Hajjah killed 97 people

Case study: The loss of livelihoods

'I used to make enough money when I was farming my land in Sa'dah, but now I have lost my land as well as my house. My brother is still in Sa'dah.

Compared to us here in the camp, people back there including my brother are living in even worse conditions. They can't walk in groups or even light a torch during the night. The airstrikes are bombing every move; people are literally living underground.'

Hussein, al-Manjoura IDP camp, Amran.

in March 2016.⁵⁸ In other parts of the country, such as Taiz, indiscriminate shelling by Houthi forces frequently kill civilians. Anti-personal landmines around Taiz city make the route from villages to the market in the city into a life-threatening journey.

Around 65% of Yemen's population live in rural areas.⁵⁹ Over 70% of them rely on local markets for their daily food requirements, yet it is estimated that more than 50% of rural households do not have a market in their area. For 40% of rural households, the nearest market is 6 to 20 km away, and for another 20%, the nearest market is more than 20 km away. The significantly increased fuel prices make transport to local markets much more expensive for a large majority of the rural population, while active fighting further impacts their ability to reach local markets. Restricted physical access to markets is thus one of the major obstacles for rural communities, particularly in areas close to active fighting,⁶⁰ and has a negative impact on their food security, especially given that they have little if any alternative to cover their basic food needs.

Box 3: Livelihoods in remote rural areas

In remote areas of the province of Hajjah, people do not have food stores and rely entirely on weekly or fortnightly markets to which they need to travel to cover their food needs for the entire week or two weeks. In this mountainous part of the country, agricultural activities are not possible and people depend on government salaries and livestock production.⁶¹ Yet, 54% of those keeping livestock face difficulties around livestock disease control, limited access to veterinary inputs and animal feed, and are in need of emergency asset protection and safeguarding.⁶² Given the severe challenges to keeping livestock under the current circumstances, combined with the non-payment and intermittent payment of government salaries for 16 months, people in Hajjah are left with nothing but the hope for some support from humanitarian agencies.

3 WHAT IF WE CONTINUE LIKE THIS ...

The food crisis in Yemen has been catastrophic and has deteriorated at an ever-increasing speed over the past year. This situation has been dramatically exacerbated with the closure of key entry points for commercial imports. Immediate and comprehensive action by all actors to the conflict and by the international community is needed to protect the civilian population from the effects of the war and to undertake all necessary measures to alleviate the food crisis. But this is at best an interim measure. What Yemen's civilians need is an end to the conflict, which can be the only lasting solution to the crisis. Without renewed momentum towards a peace deal which is inclusive of women, civil society, youth and minorities, and which begins with an immediate, nationwide ceasefire, people will continue to suffer, to starve and to die. Without action, we will see one of the worst famines in Yemen in 2018, and people starving to death under the eyes of the international community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the parties in the conflict in Yemen:

- Protect all civilians from the effects of the war, including ending attacks which directly target civilians or civilian installations, those which do not distinguish between military targets and civilians and civilian objects, and those which have a disproportionate impact on civilians or civilian objects, including civilian infrastructure and markets;
- Fully re-open all sea, land and air ports immediately for humanitarian and commercial imports and without any further restrictions imposed;
- Rehabilitate and repair Yemen's infrastructure, all port facilities, including installing all five cranes at Hodeidah port; and the road network, to enable quicker and safer transportation of food from all entry points to all parts of the country to restore the pre-conflict capacity to address the food insecurity situation;
- Ensure unimpeded access to all people in need. All barriers to access for humanitarian personnel should be lifted and all sides of the conflict should ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel and their equipment;
- Ensure that commercial food transportation throughout the country is not obstructed;
- Reconvene comprehensive and inclusive peace talks that prioritize the alleviation of civilian suffering, end the bloodshed and facilitate humanitarian assistance; create a meaningful space for the participation of women, civil society, youth and minority groups at all levels of the peace process, and commit to an immediate ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

To donors and the international community:

- Urge the immediate re-opening of all ports in Yemen – both sea and air ports – to ensure the sufficient importation of food and other vital commodities;
- Recognizing its importance in the food security pipeline, ensure the installation of additional cranes in Hodeidah port to restore pre-conflict capacity, and ensure viable transportation routes from the port of Aden to other parts of the country;
- Provide sufficient funding to ensure that the current and increasing humanitarian needs of Yemenis are met in 2017 and 2018;
- Come to Yemen to engage with all actors on the ground in order to gain first hand understanding of the situation, build meaningful interventions and long-term engagement, and facilitate the operational environment for INGOs;
- Increase pressure on warring parties and their international allies to return to negotiations to set up a peace process, and to impose an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire across the country;
- Ensure access of humanitarian and commercial goods to and within the country, and ensure that all points of access are kept open and accessible. Funding and logistics such as cargo planes and storage

capacities need to be provided to enable the shipment of sufficient quantities of humanitarian goods into Yemen;

- Use all available channels of communication with national actors to facilitate the transportation of humanitarian goods within the country without delay and ensure its safe and unhindered access to people in need;
- Identify modalities to pay the salaries of civil servants.

To the UN:

- Assess the impact of the blockade on the food security pipeline and identify the support that will be needed to recover to pre-blockade and pre-conflict capacity to address the immediate threat of starvation and the longer-term food insecurity situation faced by civilians;
- Increase the coordination capacity between UN agencies and INGOs to support the international response and its readjustment to the new crisis;
- Conduct negotiations on humanitarian access challenges, including specifically on removing any and all impediments such as the lack of cranes in Hodeidah and the closure of Sana'a airport.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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