

# The Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen

Increasing Difficulties & Continuous Deterioration

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COVER PHOTO: Yemeni Children Looking for Water in Old Sana'a City. Credit: EMAN ALAWAMI.

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## ABSTRACT

Since the conflict in Yemen intensified in March 2015, the humanitarian situation has become worse; lives of millions of Yemenis are at danger, especially children who are suffering a severe acute malnutrition which caused, along with other living conditions, a death of hundreds of them in the last two years. Doing the best to alleviate the Yemeni sufferings, the humanitarian partners face a set of challenges that, beside the direct effects of the war, increase the people's suffering, and disable the humanitarian partners from responding well to the crises. This paper sheds lights on the deteriorating humanitarian situation, and challenges of humanitarian work. It also concludes a set of solutions and recommendations to enhance the humanitarian work, and help alleviating the war's consequences on the Yemeni people.

## INTRODUCTION:

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is considered, by the United Nations, as one of the most catastrophic in the world, as there are a huge number of people in desperate need of humanitarian assistance more than in any other country including Syria<sup>(7)</sup>. This can be anticipated as Yemen is classified as one of the poorest in the world (160 out of 188) according to the human development report<sup>(16)</sup>. Yemen has long suffered from political instability, lack of rule of law, poor governance, human rights abuses, and extreme poverty. Even before the current crisis, Yemen was suffering of a high rate of unemployment, long history of food insecurity, malnutrition, poor health services, and almost half of its population was living below the poverty line. Due to the current war, the affected economy and health sectors have major impact on millions of Yemeni lives, who are now on the brink of death.

It is regrettable that the Yemeni governments, since the achievement of Yemen unity in 1990, have failed to adopt effective sustainable development policies to improve Yemeni lives. On the other hand, the political instabilities and wars witnessed by the Yemeni generations were a big challenge toward development. Since 1990, the Yemeni people have witnessed many wars like the civil war in 1994, the six wars of Sada'a from 2004-2010, and then the political crisis in 2011, which ended, after a long transitional period, with a painful ongoing conflict since late 2014. This long history of wars and political conflicts has become a heavy legacy weighing on the humanitarian situation and making it worse every day.

With the continuous deterioration of the humanitarian situation, the number of people in need of humanitarian aid has reached around 18.8 million, which means nearly 68% of the total population. 2.2 million of them have been internally displaced due to the conflict. Among the 460,000 people who have left Yemen, 280,000 are recorded as refugees in Somalia and other countries, and they are suffering due to a lack of basic life needs like; food, drink, security, etc<sup>(10)</sup>. Although the humanitarian partners in Yemen are paying huge efforts to contain the humanitarian crisis, they found themselves facing a big challenge compared to their potential<sup>(6)</sup>. Since the world has not given enough attention to the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, it could be expected that the situation will only worsen and lead to a new wave of potential refugees.

This paper aims to highlight the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Yemen, and the challenges that the humanitarian partners are facing on the ground while providing the

The many wars and political instabilities that Yemeni people have witnessed played a main role in the current humanitarian catastrophe

\*The humanitarian partners are the INGOs, NNGOs, and UN agencies that is registered at the OCHA Yemen



humanitarian needs to the affected people. In order to reach the complete image of the humanitarian situation, the writers have conducted in-depth interviews with some of the main humanitarian partners, and also depended on a variety of reports available online. Due to the security situation, the authors could not conduct workshops for national and international humanitarian partners to discuss the current relief policies, mechanisms, and the difficulties they are currently facing.

The coming pages cover a detailed description of the humanitarian situation in Yemen, and a realistic description of the current relief policies and mechanisms and the challenges facing the humanitarian partners. In the end, this paper provides a number of solutions and recommendations that aim to strengthen the relief work and facilitate its activities.

### CONTINUOUS DETERIORATION:

The continuous deterioration in the Yemeni economy during the last decades has exacerbated the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The Yemeni GDP per capita, which averaged at \$1,219 between 2005 and 2014, is described as the lowest among those of the Middle East and South Africa countries<sup>(15)</sup>. The current war brought about more damage to the economy, where the GDP shrank by 34.6% in 2016. And the inflation rate increased by 30% in 2015<sup>(17)</sup>. No doubt that the continuous collapse of the Yemeni economy worsens the people's lives, and negatively affects their chance to maintain the basic needs of life like food and drink.

Millions of Yemenis are suffering everyday to maintain the basic needs of life like food and drink

Starting on March 26th, 2015, the humanitarian situation in Yemen took turn for the worse. The armed conflict escalation by all parties to the conflict has led the death and injury of thousands of people, including many civilians. Till May 2016, more than 6,000 people had lost their lives and around 31,000 were wounded<sup>(3)</sup>. By December 2016, the figures increased to 7,000 dead and 38,000 wounded due to the ongoing conflict<sup>(5)</sup>. Finding a peaceful political solution to the conflict will help put an end to the rising figures of victims, including civilians.

### AN AGONIZING REALITY:

A year after the outbreak of the conflict, number of the people in need of humanitarian aid increased from 15.9 million by the late 2014 to approx. 18.8 million, nearly 68% of the total population<sup>(2)</sup>. Approx. 2.2 millions fled their houses and became internally displaced in the search for safety, security and to meet some other basic needs for them and their family members<sup>(10)</sup>. Sixty four per cent of them moved to communities who themselves were already classified as in crisis or in emergency, 49% of the IDPs are in severe need for food<sup>(8)</sup>, and 17% are living in collective centres or spontaneous settlements, where they get exposed to harassments by the authorities and host communities. Moreover, IDPs facing higher risks of child recruitment, and under age marriage<sup>(4)</sup>. Nearly 32% of the girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage because their vulnerable families cannot afford to raise them<sup>(11)</sup>.

32% of the girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage.

Even before the crisis, Yemen imported 90% of its staple food. However, the imports restrictions to Yemen, imposed by the collation, companied with air strikes on critical infrastructure like seaports, hampering commercial imports. The limited amount of goods in

the market led to increased prices to a level that people cannot afford, especially that most people have lost their incomes following the bombing of factories or the closure of other places of employment. The public sector on its part is unable to pay salaries to 1.2 million of its employees and their 6.9 million dependents – nearly 25 per cent of the population – since September 2016<sup>(9)</sup>. Moreover, the social welfare fund has stopped paying cash subsidies to 1.5 million poor people since the early of 2015<sup>(17)</sup>.

The 22% increasing in the basic food commodities prices in 2016, compared to prices in 2015<sup>(9)</sup>, help to explain how worse the people's lives in Yemen are. Comparing to the prices prior to the war, many towns have witnessed an astronomical prices. For example, in Taiz city prices have increased by 56% in late 2015. This could be due to the increasing in the fuel prices, which passed 100% all over Yemen<sup>(4)</sup>, and the devaluation of the Yemeni Rial. In 2016, the value of the US dollar in the national market has increased by an average of 28% in compared to the previous year<sup>(14)</sup>. This inflation in the basic goods prices led to a high rates of acute malnutrition which found to have passed the emergency levels in four governorates, and passed the critical levels in other seven governorates. The number of people who are food insecure has increased by 3 million in the last 7 months to reach more than 17 million of the total population, 7 million of them are considered to be in dire need of food<sup>(1)</sup>. In addition, there are 2.1 million children who suffer from acute malnutrition<sup>(9)</sup>. For example, the malnutrition rates have reached 31% among children under 5 years in Al-Hodaidah city<sup>(13)</sup>.

Like other sectors, the health sector suffers everyday for several reasons including: the destruction of many health facilities, the shortage of medicines, the displacement of a lot of the medical sector's personnel, the scarcity and lack of operational capabilities of the medical facilities, the inability of the authorities to pay salaries to public servants for months in a row. According to the United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Yemen, around 45% of the health facilities are either no longer working or partially working<sup>(4)</sup>. These damages have caused around 14.7 million people to miss out on access to health care services<sup>(10)</sup>. Moreover, the amount of medicine entering Yemen has also decreased by more than 70% by the mid of 2016<sup>(4)</sup>; despite the fact that the demand for medicines has increased due to the conflict and displacement of a large number of people. Moreover, it is reported that the health sector received the least amount of aid, with only 18% of the total needs until June 2016<sup>(4)</sup>.

#### HUMANITARIAN WORK AT ACTION:

Through our in-depth interviews with some of the humanitarian partners, we came to realize the difficulties that impede the relief work on the ground. This part of the paper will highlight the main difficulties that need to be addressed in order to improve the response to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

#### Aid Deficiency:

Although the continuous deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the large number of people in need of humanitarian assistant, funds allocated to the relief work in Yemen is much

Yemen people are suffering of not only the war but also of the negative consequences of the economic deterioration.

less than what is required. The allocated fund for the 2015 and 2016 responses was only 56% and 58% respectively of the real need<sup>(6)(5)</sup>. This challenge reflects clearly that the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen has not gained the required attention. This lack of attention is particularly disconcerting given the increasing rates of malnutrition and the expected threat of famine during 2017<sup>(1)</sup>.

### **Economical Hardships:**

The lack of cash flow in the local market, which markedly increased after moving the central bank of Yemen from Sana'a city to Aden, make local public and private banks to face difficulties providing enough cash to the humanitarian partners, which makes it very difficult to transfer cash into and within the country in order to provide aid to the affected families. In addition to this, providing enough amounts of food to the affected people is challenging due to the continuous inflation in the basic commodities prices.

### **Coordination Deficiency:**

The OCHA plays a good role in coordinating the relief work in Yemen. However, according to some of the INGOs we have interviewed, suspending the INGOs forum in Yemen has brought about a big gap in coordinating the relief work. The discussions we had with the humanitarian partners led us to understand that the cooperation between the public sector and the international and local organizations is very weak, at a time it should be strong and strategic. The collapsing public sector due to the war and conflicting loyalties among its leaders is the reason behind its weak role in coordinating the relief work. Definitely, this weak coordination among the humanitarian partners in all sectors is reflects negatively on their response to the humanitarian crisis.

There is a crucial need to strengthen the coordination among the humanitarian partners in all sectors.

### **Public Relief Policies:**

According to majority of the humanitarian partners we have interviewed – the public sector has a very weak role that sometimes even hinders relief work the relief. The high bureaucracy and the weak coordination between the public sector's institutions complicate the process of on issuing the needed permissions to transfer the humanitarian aid throughout Yemen. In spite of difficulty to getting the needed permissions, many local authorities do not acknowledge the permits issued in Sana'a. In addition, restrictions on workshops, data collection and information sharing activities are imposed sometimes<sup>(9)</sup>. Since the departure of almost all the international embassies, no longer political pressure is imposed on the public sector to facilitate the relief work.

### **Security Issues:**

The armed groups, under the control of the parties to the conflict or other tribe leaders, routinely impose restrictions on moving people, goods and humanitarian assistant to the affected areas. Many cities have been subjected to the blockade for long periods of time which led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Moreover, the clashes that occur in populated areas make the delivery of humanitarian aid to people affected extremely difficult.

\* INGOs forum in Yemen used to play an important role in coordinating the efforts of the INGOs within it.

\*\* Being representatives of their donor countries, embassies used to push the government to facilitate the mission of NNGOs & INGOs in Yemen.

**Weak Capacity of NNGOs:**

By the end of 2015, the total number of the registered humanitarian partners, by the OCHA, reached only 103 organizations. Nine of them are UN agencies, 25 are International NGOs, and 69 are National NGOs<sup>(6)</sup>. Although this number has increased to 120 as of 31 December 2016<sup>(9)</sup>, most of the NNGOs have a weak ability to work on the ground, since there is a lack of organizational, skills, human, and infrastructural capacities. These weak capacities are the reason behind is the inability of many NNGOs to work during conflict. And this is actually considered as one of the difficulty the relief work in Yemen is facing. Because of this, many of the INGOs we met are directly delivering the humanitarian aid to the affected people, and this takes time and efforts.

NNGOs in Yemen have limited response to the humanitarian crisis due to a lack in their organizational, and financial capacities.

**TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION:**

Putting an end to the conflict is a necessary step to alleviate the suffering of million Yemenis. However it needs apolitical compromise among the parties to the conflict. And to respond to the humanitarian crisis more practically, this paper recommends two technical solutions to be considered by the international community, the humanitarian partners in Yemen, and the parties to the conflict.

**First Solution: A single window to all dealings with humanitarian partners.**

Considering the reality of the humanitarian situation in Yemen, this paper finds out that the coordination among the humanitarian partners – Public Sector, INGOs, and NNGOs – is weak and needs to be improved to enhance their response to the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the public sector plays a very weak role, which negatively reflects on delivering the humanitarian aid to the affected people at the appropriate time and place. Therefore, to overcome the main difficulties facing the humanitarian partners this paper highly recommends formulating an entity which should include members from the public sector, under the control of the parties to the conflict, the INGOs, and NNGOs. This solution might face some challenges being implemented, but with enough support by the international community it will become a reality. This entity – whatever is the shape - is expected to work side by side with the humanitarian partners to enhance the coordination among them, and facilitate their job on the ground. Being supported by the Yemeni authority and the international community within the international human rights laws and agreements and include members from all parties with passion to help people, this entity will be able and more authorized to deal with the difficulties facing the relief work.

**Advantages of this solution:**

- Enhance the role of the public sector to respond to the humanitarian crisis.
- Improve the coordination and cooperation level between the public sector and INGOs, and NNGOs.
- It will be able to bring the lights to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, and achieve better world's response to the Yemeni catastrophe.
- Through the given authority and independency, the entity will be able to put some pressure on the local and regional parties to facilitate transferring the humanitarian aid through the

Yemeni borders and throughout Yemen.

- Based on the reality of people suffering, this entity might indirectly influence the parties to the conflict to reach an agreement.

**Recommendations to implement this solution:**

- The suggested entity should include members from the public sector under the control of the parties to the conflict, INGOs, and NNGOs.
- The suggested entity should be authorized by the government and supported by the international community.
- Members of this entity should be selected upon their good experience in helping people.
- Members should tend to the interests of the affected people to own ideologies.

**Second Solution: Urgent Treatments.**

Until the council gets formulated, the paper recommends the humanitarian partners, the international community and the parties to the conflict to consider the following recommendations that aim to improve the relief work in Yemen and alleviate the Yemeni suffering:

**To the Public Sector:**

- Facilitating the relief work through issuing the needed permissions on time.
- To conduct continuous evaluation for the humanitarian needs in Yemen and provide feedback to the INGOs and NNGOs in Yemen.
- To order its local authorities to facilitate the relief work in the areas under their control.
- To provide cash fluidity in the local market to help deliver humanitarian aid.

**To the International Community:**

- To put pressure on the Arab alliance forces to facilitate transferring commodities and medicines through the Yemeni borders.
- To put pressure on the warring parties to bring fight to outside the populated areas.
- To practice some pressure to stop arm sales to the Saudi-led coalition.
- Increase the amount of aid to achieve better response to the Yemeni humanitarian crisis.

**To the INGOs and NNGOs:**

- The local NGOs should work harder on improving their internal capacity to be able to respond well to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.
- Both INGOs and NNGOs should pay more efforts to attract the international community's attention to the situation in Yemen.



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