

# EDA WORKING PAPER



## **Yemen:**

# Immediate-To-Short Term Actions to Improve the Humanitarian Situation

**Dr Saskia van Genugten**

Senior Research Fellow, Emirates Diplomatic Academy

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Emirates Diplomatic Academy  
Hamdan Bin Mohammed Street  
Al Hosn Palace District  
P.O. Box 35567  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
<http://eda.ac.ae/>  
[research@eda.ac.ae](mailto:research@eda.ac.ae)

## Abstract

Due to the limited progress made towards a peaceful solution to the conflict in Yemen, the humanitarian outlook for Yemen remains dire. The dreadful situation partly reflects Yemen's long-term weaknesses, which include an excessively steep population growth, poor job prospects, poor water management, inaccessible territory and long standing historical grievances. To that unfortunate base, the current war has added layers of increased insecurity, severe damage to strategic infrastructure and public institutions, the loss of livelihoods as well as difficulties to obtain or finance much-needed vital commodities, including food, fuel and medicines. Predominantly caused by human interventions in the past five years, these areas provide opportunities for more immediate to short-term actions to improve Yemen's humanitarian situation. This paper looks into ways to improve the humanitarian situation in Yemen in the immediate to short term with regard to food insecurity, basic services, the spread of communicable diseases and internal displacement. It argues for solutions with regard to access and distribution of vital goods throughout Yemen, stabilisation of Yemen's financial system and ensuring indiscriminate basic service provision and for scaling up assistance and living up to aid pledges.



### **Dr. Saskia van Genugten**

**Senior Research Fellow, Emirates Diplomatic Academy in Abu Dhabi.**

Dr. Saskia van Genugten is a Senior Research Fellow in the Middle East and North Africa Peace and Security Programme at the Emirates Diplomatic Academy. Previously, she served as a Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Senate of the Netherlands, as Political Affairs Officer at the UN Support Mission in Libya, and as a manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers. Dr. Van Genugten holds a PhD from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She is the author of *Western relations with Libya: 1911-2011* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and several articles on European and Middle East Affairs.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the limited progress made towards a peaceful solution to the conflict in Yemen, the humanitarian outlook for Yemen remains dire. This is evidenced in the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) for Yemen, as published in December 2017 by the UN's Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA), which predicts a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. During an international fundraising conference held in Geneva in April 2018, donations reached more than US\$2 billion. Pledges will support the 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) and this year includes the provision of large funds from countries that previously provided their aid predominantly bilaterally. The 2018 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) requires US\$2.96 billion.

During his humanitarian appeal for 2018, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, estimated that around twenty million people living in Yemen are in need of humanitarian assistance. Seven to eight million of them risk starvation.<sup>1</sup> The dreadful situation partly reflects Yemen's long-term weaknesses, which include an excessively steep population growth, poor job prospects, poor water management, inaccessible territory and long standing historical grievances. To that unfortunate base, the current war has added layers of increased insecurity, severe damage to strategic infrastructure and public institutions, the loss of livelihoods as well as difficulties to obtain or finance much-needed vital commodities, including food, fuel and medicines.

This EDA Working Paper analyses the causes and dynamics behind the current negative spiral of humanitarian suffering in Yemen and assesses whether there are any realistic, immediate-to-short-term responses available to break (parts of) this negative spiral. It starts with an overview of the current humanitarian challenges in Yemen and identifies which of the many humanitarian challenges are believed to be caused or exacerbated by the current conflict rather than by long-term weaknesses. In doing so, it examines four key challenges:

1. Increased food and water insecurity and the risk of famine;
2. Collapsing public institutions and disruption of basic services;
3. Spread of communicable diseases such as cholera and diphtheria; and
4. Displacements related to the conflict.

Subsequently, it looks at the potential actions that could be taken by international actors to ease the humanitarian distress of Yemeni civilians. For pragmatic reasons, this Insight focuses on actions that might realistically be acceptable to internal and external stakeholders able to make a difference on the ground. While there might be others, three potential areas for impactful action are identified:

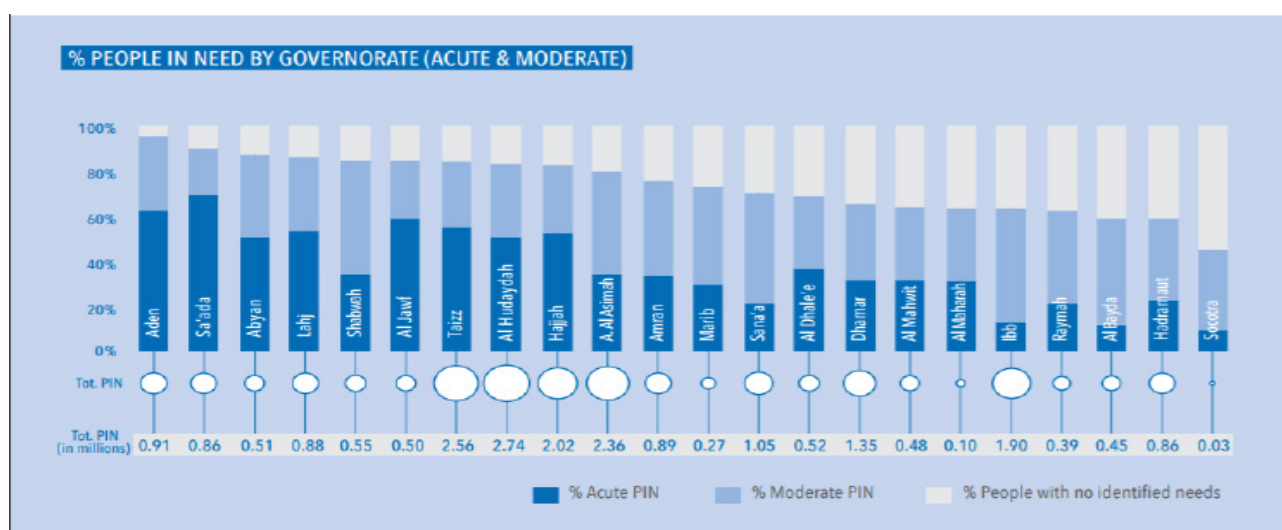
1. Increasing access to vital commodities;
2. Macroeconomic stabilisation and the payment of salaries of public service workers;
3. Living up to aid pledges and further scaling up aid provisions.

## 2. Humanitarian Challenges Attributed to the Current Conflict

Insecurity and bureaucratic barriers have hampered the collection of local data needed to create a truly accurate picture of the current humanitarian situation in the different governorates of Yemen. As per the practices of OCHA, the UN Country Team for Yemen, together with local partners, gathers relevant statistics as best as possible and captures these findings in a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). Based on that overview, the international humanitarian community drafts an annual Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP), which gets updated throughout the year as the situation evolves.

According to Yemen's 2018 HNO, published in December 2017, the situation is deteriorating, with Yemenis 'increasingly exhausting their coping mechanisms'. An estimated 22.2 million out of 29.3 million people living in Yemen are in need of humanitarian or protection assistance, of whom 11.3 million are believed to be in acute need of assistance. This is an increase of 1 million individuals since June 2017.<sup>2</sup> The most critical humanitarian issues listed in the latest HNO are the protection of civilians, the collapse of basic services and institutions, basic survival needs with regard to food and health, the loss of livelihoods and the collapsing private sector. The current situation, in the words of the coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs, is 'brutal on civilians'.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: Percentage of Estimated People in Need by Governorate in Yemen**



Source: HNO 2018.

While Yemen has long been dependent on international assistance, the escalation of the conflict between the legitimate Yemeni government, supported by the Saudi-led Coalition, and the Iran-backed Houthi rebels, has greatly exacerbated pre-existing problems. The main humanitarian challenges that have been directly linked to the current conflict, other than the death of civilians due to military operations, include:

- Increased food and water insecurity and the risk of famine;
- Collapsing public institutions and disruption of basic services;
- Spread of communicable diseases such as cholera and diphtheria; and
- Displacement of people due to fighting and insecurity.

While the next section assesses these different issues in turn, they should not be regarded as entirely separate, as they are actually strongly interlinked. Indeed, the conflict has caused several 'chains of troubles', in which one problem has led to the next and tends to be intertwined with other problems.

For example, import restrictions on food, fuel and medicines have caused shortages as well as price inflation. These food shortages and the difficulties faced in transporting imported commodities further inland due to insecurity and fuel shortages, have increased malnutrition rates, which consequently has rendered the population more vulnerable to disease.

In another example of such a chain effect, it can be observed that the ongoing conflict deprives the state of income from exports (and import taxes). As a consequence, foreign reserves have dwindled and the local currency has depreciated, making imported commodities more expensive for local communities. The lack of state funds has also left large numbers of public sector workers unsalaried, which has eroded disposable incomes and has caused understaffing and severe disruptions of basic services, including in the education, health care and sanitation sectors. With the garbage not being collected, water can get contaminated and (infectious) diseases are more likely to spread. Fallen ill, with health care institutions not functioning, civilians struggle to seek care.

## 2.1. Increased Scarcity of Food, Fuel and Other Vital Commodities

At the end of 2017, global media attention for the humanitarian situation in Yemen increased, focusing predominantly on the looming famine. With graphic footage, the situation is widely described as the largest current man-made food security crisis in the world. According to the statistics of the World Food Programme (WFP), 17.8 million people in Yemen are currently food insecure, which accounts for 60 percent of the population. Of those, 8.4 million individuals risk starvation, with an estimated 462,000 children suffering from 'severe acute malnutrition' - a growth in numbers of almost 200 percent since 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Food insecurity has long been a problem in Yemen and it will not be solved any time soon. To the contrary, adverse climate change effects are likely to further increase water and food scarcity, and Yemen is expected to suffer more droughts and flash floods in the future.<sup>5</sup> Even before the war, Yemen was the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula, with 4.5 million Yemenis classified as 'severely food insecure' in 2014.<sup>6</sup> Water scarcity is more serious in the highlands and interiors than in Yemen's coastal areas. Already back in 2010, some experts predicted that Sana'a, Yemen's capital, could run out of viable water supplies by 2017.<sup>7</sup>

Many of Yemen's weaknesses can only be tackled in the long term. However, the current severity of Yemen's food insecurity is driven by constraints in the supply and distribution of food, as well as price inflation. Wrecked infrastructure, insecurity, non-cooperative local authorities and people's diminishing purchasing power are at the heart of the problem, which is not limited to food items, but also extends to medicines, fuel and other basic items.

Where trade continues, it is increasingly making use of overland routes entering Yemen via Oman and Saudi Arabia, with transactions being made through long-established informal financing channels. According to some analysts, these land routes partially substitute for access through airports and seaports, with commodities continuing to flow across Yemen with ease, including fuel, food, medicines, hard currency – and smuggled weapons.<sup>8</sup> Some humanitarian agencies, as well as more commercial traders, have successfully rerouted their goods via these overland routes. Some have set up offices and rented warehouses in Oman's Salalah area, using the Shahen border crossing, however, with an average truck time to Sana'a of three days, the solution is far from ideal. From Saudi Arabia, the Alwadhah crossing is used at times, but as it is controlled by Coalition forces, the crossing is unlikely to serve the northern governorates under Houthi control.

Away from state supervision and regulation, these alternative routes have created a dynamic in which local authorities increasingly benefit, at the expense of any central state authorities.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, controlling and levying taxes over entry points, crossings and market spaces, have become lucrative sources of income for local actors. At the same time, it provides such groups with greater leverage towards both the Houthis and the legitimate government of Yemen. Local groups seem to have divided up the territory, with checkpoint fees along these routes inflating basic goods prices by 10-15 percent. Water trucking is also still widely available, but due to the high dependency upon the cost of fuel, prices have increased significantly.

The (non)-availability and increase in the price of fuel compounds the (non)-availability and increase in prices of food, water and other basic items. Despite crude petroleum accounting for 35 percent of Yemen's export basket in 2015, the country remains dependent on imported refined fuels.<sup>10</sup> Fuel, diesel, in particular, is necessary to transport food supplies throughout the country, to operate Yemen's water pumps, to generate electricity and to power public transportation. By November 2017, the price of fuel, compared to pre-crisis levels, had increased by 77 percent for diesel and 83 percent for petrol.<sup>11</sup>

While the supply chain of other basic items tends to operate on a wholesaler system, petrol and diesel are most of the time directly supplied from port arrivals.<sup>12</sup> According to the latest WFP Market Watch bulletin (when the research for the paper was done in November 2017), cooking gas, diesel and petrol were only sparsely available throughout Yemen.<sup>13</sup> While some cooking gas is imported, domestic manufacturers are currently providing the majority of the supply. They mainly operate in Marib and from there, the gas is able to reach vendors across the north west, central west, and south west of the country.

Findings of an inter-agency study published in December 2017 by the Cash and Market Working Group for Yemen, showed that market mechanisms for the supply of food were operating at reduced capacity, but were nonetheless still functioning. The conclusion of that study was that much of the current food insecurity is caused by price inflation and decreased purchasing power.<sup>14</sup> The WFP expected that, with no change in the political situation, the situation would get worse. According to their statistics, of the 333 Yemeni districts, 107 of them risk sliding into famine in 2018.<sup>15</sup> The threat of famine is particularly high in those governorates that witness active fighting and airstrikes, including Taizz, Sa'ada, Marib, Hajja, Shabwa, and the western coastal areas.



Already before the crisis, the Yemeni government and humanitarian agencies resorted to cash and market-based interventions in the form of unconditional cash transfers to prop up disposable incomes. Transfers made through the Social Welfare Fund benefitted around 7.9 million citizens directly and indirectly. The onset of the conflict saw the Social Welfare Fund be discontinued and humanitarian agencies have substituted the transfers partly with emergency cash (unrestricted) and restricted vouchers for food and other basic items.<sup>16</sup> There is a large appetite amongst Yemen's humanitarian community to scale up such interventions.

## 2.2. Collapsing Public Institutions and Disruption of Basic Services

Before the conflict, Yemen's government depended for about three quarters of its revenue on the oil and gas industry, which was good for around 90 percent of Yemen's exports. However, Yemen's ageing oil fields were already in bad shape and production had been declining since 2001, while international companies hardly consider Yemen a lucrative place for operations. At the same time, given the soaring population growth in Yemen, domestic demand for energy has climbed rapidly and ever less of the industry was generating exports and related foreign reserves.

As a result of this steady decline in state income and the subsequent imbalance between revenues and necessary spending, Yemen has long suffered structural fiscal deficits, has struggled to service its international debt and has seen international reserves dwindle. With less foreign currency available, financing vital imports is a recurrent issue and a balance of payments crisis has never been far off. In the years prior to the current conflict, Gulf neighbours regularly mitigated economic shocks in Yemen through donations of oil as well as through cash injections.

The current crisis has exacerbated these pre-existing weaknesses, while adding additional layers of politicisation to the issues at stake, at times making economic policies and measures into instruments of conflict. Oil and gas revenues have literally dried up since the onset of the crisis, depriving the central government of funds that in the past helped mitigate regional and local grievances. Due to the conflict, the Central Bank foreign exchange reserves dropped from US\$4.7 billion in late 2014 to less than US\$1 billion in September 2016, while the public budget deficit has grown by more than 50 percent to US\$2.2 billion.<sup>17</sup> The lack of funds has also triggered a banking and liquidity crisis, which makes it hard for Yemenis and humanitarian responders alike to transfer money and get cash.

### Food security: Main challenges

- Supply disruptions due to import restrictions.
- Transportation issues due to insecurity, lack of fuel and local bureaucracies.
- Diminishing purchasing power of population due to inflation and lack of salary.
- Difficulties making financial transactions due to liquidity problems and bureaucracy.

The duplication of financial institutions and the accompanying confusion has further increased corruption and mismanagement, which in turn has contributed to the depreciation of the national currency. In 2016, the legitimate government relocated the Yemeni Central Bank from Sana'a to Aden, following claims that the Houthi rebels had looted the country's reserves in order to pay militias fighting on their side. With a rival branch in Sana'a, the Central Bank, which is supposed to be a neutral and independent entity, has been placed at the centre of the political conflict. Similarly, Yemen now knows two Ministries of Finance and the governorates of Marib and Hadramawt have set up their own local central banks, making them less dependent on Aden or Sana'a.<sup>18</sup>

With the assistance of the US, the Aden branch of the Central Bank has been able to obtain a Swift code, meaning the bank can make and receive international financial transfers via the global payments system. But for the moment, the new Central Bank branch in Aden remains underequipped, lacks technically competent employees and as a result has insufficient financial and operational capacity to function properly. In early 2018, Saudi Arabia sent US\$2 billion in foreign reserves assistance, but this could not prevent the Aden branch to cease transactions for several days due to liquidity problems.

#### Public Institutions: Main challenges

- Lack of state income, due to economic collapse and localisation of tax receipts.
- Exhaustion of foreign reserves and depreciation of the local currency.
- Inability to pay salaries of civil servants in critical sectors such as health care, education and waste management.
- Negative effects of politicisation of institutions designed to be neutral, including the Central Bank.
- Insecurity and damage to public sector buildings and infrastructure.

With the conflicting authorities and the overall confusion, financial trade services offered earlier by the Central Bank and Yemen's nascent banking system, are now predominantly managed through private and informal *hawala* channels, which are used for money transfers as well as for critical food and energy imports. That said, already before the conflict, Yemenis tended to prefer a cash-based economy and exchange money over distance through the *hawala* system. According to a recent study, only about 5 percent of the population has an actual bank account, while only an estimated 40 percent of GDP is processed through formal banking institutions.<sup>19</sup>

Humanitarian and commercial agencies alike are having difficulties transferring money due to the liquidity crisis associated with the suboptimal functioning of the banking system. The fact that banks and post offices are struggling with liquidity problems and are often difficult to reach due to security risks and travel costs, has made exchange offices and financial service providers such as Al Kuraimi more popular.

Causing further upheaval in the financial system has been the August 2017 decision of the Central Bank in Aden to float the Yemeni Riyal (YER), letting go of the long-standing peg to the dollar.<sup>20</sup> Already back in April 2016, the Central Bank had devalued the dollar exchange rate from the pre-crisis 215 YER to the dollar, to 250 YER to the dollar. Trading at market prices, the currency saw a depreciation from 390 YER/dollar in October 2017 to 419 YER/dollar in November 2017.<sup>21</sup> This depreciation of the YER has significantly increased the local price

of imported goods, further eroding the purchasing power of Yemenis. The market exchange rate varies slightly, but according to November 2016 statistics from the WFP, is highest in the governorates of Laheg, Sana'a City, Al Mahra, Aden and Sa'ada.<sup>22</sup>

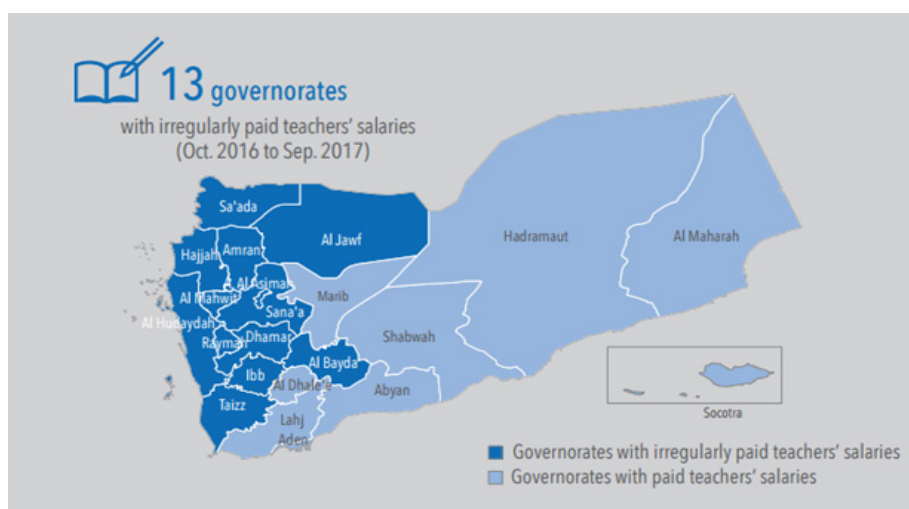
As a further indication of politicisation of financial instruments, in November 2017, the US Treasury Department designated a network of individuals and entities involved in a large-scale fake Yemeni currency printing scheme.<sup>23</sup> The discovered counterfeit scheme was 'potentially worth hundreds of millions of dollars' and was benefitting the Iranian Al-Quds force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The circulation of such numbers of fake YER will also have negatively influenced the inflation rate, as well as the exchange rate.

The state's financial woes have left their mark on public service delivery. Yemen's public institutions and basic service delivery have long been suboptimal due to a reliance on a pool of poorly trained and poorly paid civil servants, working through outdated procedures. For example, with regard to schools, before the crisis already 500 schools were judged to be unsafe and not-suitable for learning.<sup>24</sup> Now, the loss of state income, as well as the politicisation due to conflict, has created a situation in which those in charge of Yemen's public finances cannot – or at times are unwilling – to finance state expenses across the country.

This includes covering the operational costs of public services, and since more than a year, has caused disruptions in the salary payments of public sector employees. According to the available reports, more than one million public servants have not been paid for over a year. Unpaid teachers, health care workers, sanitation workers and other civil servants are no longer showing up to work. In combination with damage done to infrastructure and overall insecurity, the humanitarian agencies estimate that the conflict has put some two million children out of school. Only around 50 percent of public health care facilities are said to function, while expensive private sector health services (where they exist) are most of the time beyond the means of the ordinary Yemeni citizen. With sanitation workers no longer showing up for their duties, the streets have become filled with garbage.

The non-payment of salaries does not only affect the provision of state services, but also significantly decreases the disposable income of these workers' households, which is believed to impact on between 10 to 15 million citizens, close to 50 percent of the Yemeni population.<sup>25</sup> The drop in disposable income has greatly increased the population's vulnerability to food insecurity.

For the moment, trying to cope with the emergency situation, several humanitarian agencies are providing incentives to health care staff to show up for work, but the scale of these interventions is small and obviously should not be part of the budgetary expenses of humanitarian agencies.<sup>26</sup> Figure 2 provides an indication of the regional spread of the problem, showing the regions that are experiencing irregularly paid teacher salaries.

**Figure 2: (Non-)Payment of Teachers' Salaries**

Source: HNO 2018, Education Cluster (situation in September 2017)

### 2.3. Spread of Communicable Diseases

The lack of nutrition, clean drinking water and health care services has made Yemenis vulnerable to infectious diseases. In October 2016, Yemen's Ministry of Public Health and Population (MoPHP) confirmed a cholera outbreak in Sana'a. In May 2017, the MoPHP declared a state of emergency. By then, the disease had reached more or less all governorates and districts. In December 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the number of suspected cholera cases had surpassed one million.<sup>27</sup> Hardest hit have been the northern governorates of Hodeidah, Amanat Al Asimah, Hajjah and Amran, which together accounted for more than 40 percent of all the suspected cases.<sup>28</sup>

Reacting to the outbreak, the Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) clusters of Yemen's humanitarian community presented a joint cholera response plan, outlining emergency health, WASH and communications interventions.<sup>29</sup> The interventions included emergency operations centres in Aden and Sana'a, more than 300 oral hydration points, chlorinated water supplies and water storage disinfection. Indicating the effectiveness of such a response, the WHO stated that 99.7 per cent of the people who became sick with suspected cholera and who could access health services, survived.<sup>30</sup>

The already overstretched and in many parts dysfunctional public sector has taken another blow due to the recent cholera outbreak. While at the end of 2017 the cholera infection rate was slowing down, the risk factors remain and to avert a resurgence of the outbreak in 2018, an estimated 11.3 million people in 168 districts require emergency preparedness and preventative care, according to OCHA.

Another indication that severe health risks remain is the outbreak of diphtheria that was detected in November 2017. Already overwhelmed with cholera cases, this has put an additional burden on those health care facilities that are still functioning. By 21 December 2017, 333 suspected cases of diphtheria and 35 deaths had been reported, with half of the suspected cases

being children between the ages of 5 and 14. Nearly 70 percent of all suspected cases are in Ibb governorate, though by December 2017, the disease had shown up in 20 governorates.<sup>31</sup>

Diphtheria is a disease eradicated from most countries and the last case in Yemen had been recorded in 1992. The fact that it is an 'old' disease, has meant that Yemen does not have a lot of expertise in treating the disease, antitoxins are not readily available and need to be imported. The MoPHP, WHO and UNICEF have formed a taskforce to lead the efforts to control the outbreak. The WHO warned that the risk of further transmission at the national level is very high, and 'there is a risk for further spread of the disease to neighboring countries with low vaccination coverage'.<sup>32</sup>

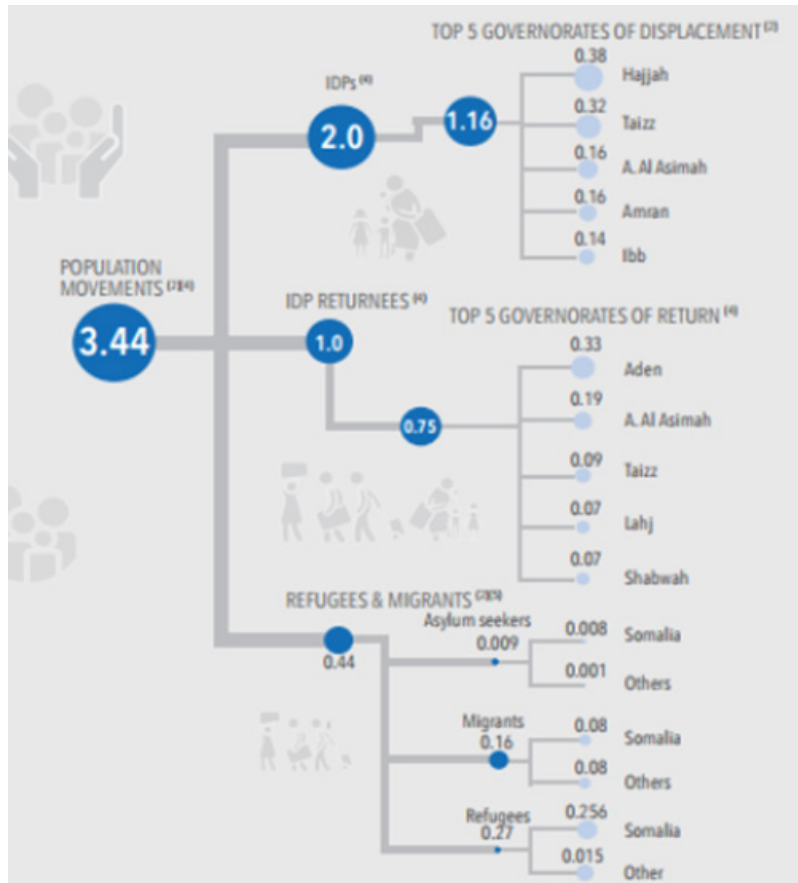
### **Spread of Disease: Main challenges**

- Vulnerable population due to malnutrition and dehydration
- Cessation of public sanitation works that caused contaminated water and created infection-prone environment.
- Lack of functioning health care facilities, due to unsalaried staff and scarcity of medicines, vaccines, fuel for electricity and transport.

## **2.4. Displacement due to Fighting and Insecurity**

Yemen is home to a complex mix of movements of people, including migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and, since the onset of the conflict, a large number of internally displaced people (IDPs). Figure 3 provides a recent estimation of the breakdown of these movements, as per the numbers of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Together they co-lead the Task Force Population Movements (TFPM) of the humanitarian protection cluster in Yemen.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Population Movements Due to Conflict (2017 estimates)



Source: HNO 2018

Already before the conflict in Yemen intensified, the country served as a popular transit hub for people leaving the Horn of Africa in search of better economic opportunities and more security in, amongst other destinations, the Gulf countries. The total number of the non-Yemeni asylum-seeker, refugee and migrant population in Yemen was estimated to be just over 435,000 individuals in 2017. While the interest in Yemen as a transit hub has dropped, the conflict has not stopped the arrival of asylum-seekers from neighbouring countries, with the share of unaccompanied minors from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia growing.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, UNHCR estimates that around 190,000 individuals registered as refugees have left Yemen due to the conflict and have settled in neighbouring countries. Relatively small numbers of Yemenis have themselves left and settled mainly in Saudi Arabia and Djibouti.

At the same time, the conflict has seen for example Somali refugees that were living in Yemen, return in significant numbers to Somalia.<sup>34</sup> Acknowledging the limited prospects for integration or resettlement, UNHCR and IOM have invested in a joint Assisted Spontaneous Return programme for Somali refugees, who make up more than 90 percent of the asylum-seekers and refugees in

Yemen.<sup>35</sup> Those making use of the programme, are assisted with documentation, transportation, a cash grant and other subsistence allowances.

According to the HNO for 2018, an estimated 170,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants are in need of humanitarian assistance, with more than 17,000 of them in acute need.<sup>36</sup> The needs are derived mainly from a deterioration of circumstances due to conflict. In the northern governorates under Houthi control, registration and refugee status determination have stopped, with those being left undocumented at risk of arrest. In the south, registration processes continue, but the increased economic difficulties have made refugees more vulnerable. In addition, tension has been reported with the local population, which at times perceives the foreigners as potential mercenaries or sources of diseases. Refugee women and children are at the same time seen as at risk of exploitation and abuse.

While the conflict has altered the dynamics with regard to refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa, the largest impact has been on the stream of internally displaced people. As per the numbers of the 2018 HNO, more than 10 per cent of the total population of Yemen has been affected and around 2 million persons currently remain internally displaced, in particular those that were living close to the areas with severe and ongoing fighting, such as Taizz, Hajjah, Sa'ada and Amanat Al Asimah. In early 2018, fighting along the western coastal areas generated a new wave of displacements. With a safe return home for many not currently a viable option, emergency shelter and access to essential household items, including food, are believed to be the greatest immediate needs for IDPs.

The protracted nature of the crisis is straining the coping mechanisms of both the IDPs and their host communities.<sup>37</sup> Most of the IDP communities are hosted by extended family or friends, while others stay in rented accommodation or reside in collective centers. While the traditional support mechanism works well for temporary displacements, the long-term stays are raising intra-communal tensions and eroding local social cohesion. Most of the aid and assistance targeted to help IDP communities goes directly to the IDPs, whereas a more conflict-sensitive approach might want to take the host communities and the effects on social cohesion more into account.

#### **Displacement: Main challenges**

- Providing emergency shelter and access to vital commodities.
- Lowering or containing social tensions between displaced people and host communities.
- Ensuring a continuation of regular registration and documentation processes for asylum-seekers and refugees.



### 3. Immediate-To-Short Term Actions for Humanitarian Relief

Whilst severe and sustained humanitarian challenges already existed in Yemen, the deterioration in the areas outlined above is strongly associated with the ongoing war. The issues of food insecurity, the collapse of public institutions and the spread of infectious diseases all come with their own specificities and difficulties to tackle. However, the main challenges in one area are heavily interlinked with those in others. As a result, solutions in one area can also be expected to bring positive change in other areas. For example, paying salaries to health care workers would not only increase basic service provision and help contain cholera and diphtheria, but would also raise the disposable income of households and their ability to buy food and other vital commodities, making them less vulnerable to hunger and disease.

Therefore, the most efficient approach to generating positive chain affects in the immediate-to-short term seems to be to concentrate on these interlinkages and take actions that work towards:

1. Enabling and improving access and distribution of vital commodities throughout Yemen;
2. Stabilising Yemen's financial system and ensuring indiscriminate basic service provision; and
3. Scaling up assistance and living up to aid pledges.

Table 1 shows how actions in these three areas link to the main challenges with regard to food security, stabilising the financial system and the spread of communicable diseases.

**Table 1: Summary of main challenges and suggested solutions**

	ENABLING AND ENHANCING ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION OF VITAL COMMODITIES	STABILIZING YEMEN'S FINANCIAL SYSTEM AND BASIC SERVICE PROVISION	SCALING UP ASSISTANCE AND LIVING UP TO AID PLEDGES
<b>Food security: Main challenges</b>			
Supply Disruptions due to import restrictions.			
Transportation issues due to insecurity, lack of fuel and local bureaucracies.			
Diminishing purchasing power of population due to inflation and lack of salary.			
Difficulties making financial transactions due to liquidity problems and bureaucracies			
<b>Public Institutions: Main challenges</b>			
Exhaustion of foreign reserves and depreciation of the local currency.			
Inability to pay salaries of civil servants in critical sectors such as health care, education and waste management.			
Lack of state income, due to economic collapse and localization of tax receipts			
Negative effects of politicisation of institutions designed to be neutral, including the Central Bank.			
Insecurity and damage to public service buildings and infrastructure.			
<b>Spread of disease: Main challenges</b>			
Vulnerable population due to malnutrition and dehydration			
Cessation of public sanitation works contaminated water and created infection-prone environment.			
Lack of functioning health care facilities, due to unsalaried staff and scarcity of medicines, vaccines, fuel for electricity and transport.			
<b>Displacement: Main challenges</b>			
Providing emergency shelter and access to vital commodities.			
Lowering or containing social tensions between displaced people and host communities.			
Ensuring a continuation of regular registration and documentation processes.			

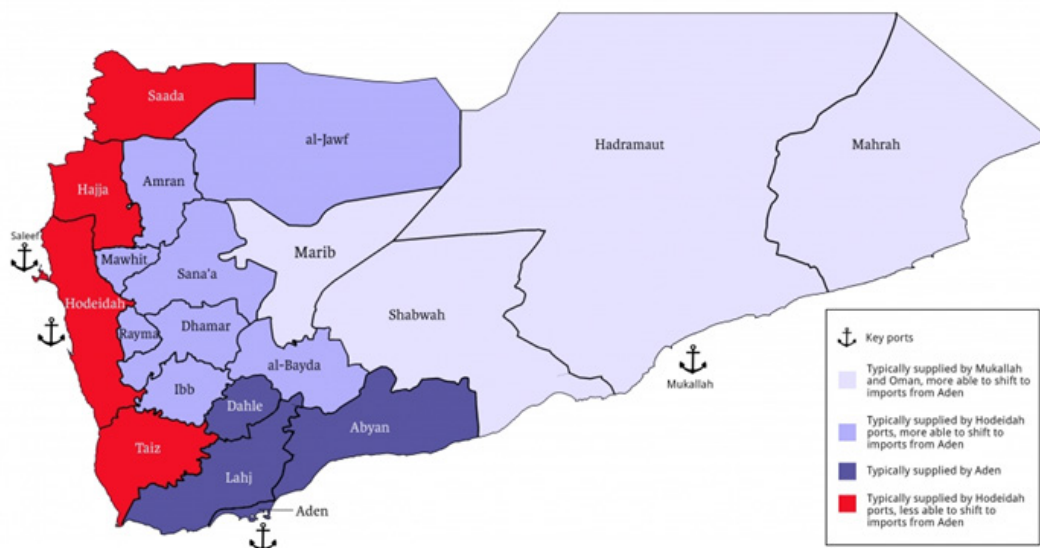


### 3.1. Enabling and Enhancing Access and Distribution of Vital Commodities

One of the causal chains that has led to the current humanitarian predicament starts with the often suboptimal supply of imported goods throughout the country. The more effective remedies thus lie in the realm of access and distribution of vital commodities - food, fuel and medicines to start with. As most of these goods are imported, their availability and restocking is highly dependent on the smooth functioning of sea, air and land access routes to Yemen, as well as further transportation inland.

As per Figure 4, the port of Hodeidah tends to supply vendors in governorates in the north and along the west coast, while the port of Aden primarily services the governorates of Aden, Abyan, Lahj, Al Dhale'e, and southern Taizz. The east of Yemen is more likely to be supplied through Al Mukallah port and via land routes from Oman.

**Figure 4: Ports That (Can) Supply Yemeni Governorates**



Source: FEWS.net

The most difficult form of access at the moment is through Yemen's sea ports, in particular the Red Sea port of Hodeidah. As Yemen's largest port, some 70 percent of all Yemeni imports used to enter via Hodeidah, according to the most up-to-date statistics (November 2016). This included the majority of commercial cargo, as well as 70 to 80 percent of humanitarian assistance.<sup>38</sup> With regard to air traffic, Sana'a airport was another key entry point for commercial imports, while the airport was also frequently used by those Yemenis able to afford travelling abroad for medical assistance.

As Hodeidah and Sana'a for the moment remain under the control of the Houthi rebels, these strategic entry points have become flash points for the conflict between the Iran-backed Houthis and those groups working together with the legitimate government forces and the Saudi-led Coalition forces. In August 2016, the Government of Yemen and its Coalition partners banned passenger flights from using the Houthi controlled airport, while the airports in Aden and Seyoun are mostly non-accessible for people living in the north.

Initially, in order to enforce the arms embargo established by UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015), the Government of Yemen and its Coalition partners insisted on checking all commercial vessels entering the ports controlled by the Houthis. This policy was based on an understandable concern that commercial shipments could carry illegal cargo, but also that imported fuel could be used for dual purposes. At the same time, there was – and still is – a concern that goods entering Hodeidah are boosting the Houthis' finances through the accumulation of tariffs and taxes.

However, the time it took to check all vessels sailing to Houthi controlled ports had a significant impact on Yemen, a highly import-dependent country. With pressure from the international community, to facilitate commercial shipping, the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) was designed and became operational in May 2016 (see Box 1). Despite UNVIM, security concerns remain and have resulted in further blockades and import restrictions. At the end of 2017, the situation further escalated as missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled territory towards targets within Saudi Arabia, which led to a full closure of all access points controlled by the government and Coalition forces.

### **Box 1: The role of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM)<sup>39</sup>**

In August 2015, the Government of Yemen formally requested the UN Secretary-General to establish UNVIM, which finally began its operations in May 2016. The objective of UNVIM is to facilitate commercial shipping into ports in the hands of non-government forces, while enforcing the arms embargo as per UNSCR 2216 (2015).

UNVIM's Head Office is in Djibouti, with monitors and inspectors based also in Dubai, Jeddah and Salalah. Shipping companies need to notify UNVIM of all planned deliveries to the ports of Hodeidah, Saleef and Ras Isa. After reviewing information about the shipment, UNVIM either clears vessels to proceed, or flags them for inspection.

UNVIM will notify the vessel, as well as the Yemeni government about the review results within 48 hours. In case UNVIM establishes 'reasonable grounds' that a shipment might contain items in violation of the UN arms embargo, an inspection will take place, either in international waters, or a vessel is requested to reroute to Djibouti for inspection.

UNVIM was widely seen as a pragmatic solution, with potential to be a model for addressing future situations in which a rigorous implementation of an arms embargo could interfere with commercial shipments vital for the survival of the civilian population.

Given the strategic importance of Yemen's key access points, and given the current stage of the conflict, any realistic and workable solution to increase vital imports reaching Yemen will need to take into account the concerns of the Government of Yemen and the Saudi-led Coalition. This means that solutions need to be able to combine increased access with more robust security guarantees. General options that could be considered in this regard include:

- **Improving the flow of commercial goods and humanitarian aid through Hodeidah port by strengthening security guarantees.** A full and unrestricted reopening of the port under the current circumstances, for commercial and humanitarian shipments, could probably only be achieved if the legitimate government would take back control over the port, or by placing the port authority under UN jurisdiction and thereby changing the UN's humanitarian mission into one that involves peace-keeping forces on the ground. Both these options seem unlikely in the short term. Partial solutions could be found instead by increasing the robustness of security guarantees through UNVIM, by minimising delays for ships that have passed UNVIM inspection, as well as repairing damage done by the war, such as replacing the port's damaged mobile cranes.
- **Facilitating humanitarian access to Hodeidah port and rerouting commercial trade via alternative ports.** The Government of Yemen and its allies in the Coalition could increase efforts to facilitate humanitarian shipments into Hodeidah to alleviate the plight of civilians in the northern governorates. When considering alternative options, the most important factors to be considered include the location of the majority of the (affected) population, port capacities, infrastructure, transportation costs and the security in areas of arrival and transit. Shipping could for example be diverted to other Yemeni ports, the southern port of Aden in particular, though at the risk of congestion and with the caveat that the most affected governorates are actually located in the north. International actors on the ground could help minimise delays for clearances, in particular for perishable goods. Funding could also be provided for the chartering of ships that could dock in any of Yemen's smaller ports. However, with this option, a clear understanding needs to be in place between the authorities and the humanitarian entities operating these ships, as an increase in smaller ships could be considered as suspicious and pose challenges to the control of cargo.
- **Assist the humanitarian community with alternative access options by land and air.** In case blockades remain in place, or to increase the shipments, international donors could directly sponsor and facilitate humanitarian airlifts of food, medicines and other basic commodities. The use of Sana'a airport for emergency cargo could be expanded (and controlled passenger flights could be reconsidered). Other options include facilitating overland routes, including providing for mobile storage units and potentially creating secured land corridors to increase speed, security and control over smuggling activities.

- **Assisting civilians and humanitarian agencies with access to fuel.** Many of the current problems for the Yemeni civilian population are caused by the scarcity of fuel. The scarcity of fuel affects for example transport and travel, electricity generation and the functioning of water pumps. The non-availability of this vital commodity is predominantly linked to restocking delays and price inflation. International actors could help increase the availability of fuel either by directly increasing the supply, or through subsidies or fuel vouchers. If necessary due to security concerns for dual usage of fuel, petrol and diesel could be sold directly to (civilian and humanitarian) end users. Donors can also explore the possibilities with regard to the use of renewable energy sources, including solar power.
- **Increase the mobility of civilians to enable them to reach marketplaces.** Related to the non-availability of fuel and the higher costs of public transportation due to these higher fuel prices as well as insecurity, many civilians in more rural areas are food-insecure because they have difficulties getting to the market places where food items are sold. With transportation options reduced, going on foot is their remaining option, which is often shunned due to the risk of robbery, theft and clashes.
- **Encourage local production and local import substitutes.** Fishing activities are providing nutritious, local sources of food and such activities should be encouraged, including in the coastal areas of Hajjah, Taizz and Hodeidah. This can be facilitated with the general protection of productive assets, including boats. Similarly, animal production and agricultural livelihoods could be supported by the provision of agricultural inputs, veterinary drugs, vaccines, and much needed fuel. This encouragement could go together with a widespread awareness campaign of the disadvantages of producing and using qat, a crop often favoured due to its high market value (but known for its detrimental effects on a community's well-being).
- **Strengthen communication and coordination with the international humanitarian community active on the ground.** In general, they could keep in closer communications with the coordinating bodies of the international humanitarian community, for example with regard to logistics constraints and to thinking through smart solutions.

### 3.2. Stabilising the Financial System and Ensuring Indiscriminate Service Delivery

A second set of interlinked problems that is causing hardship to the Yemeni population relates to the decrease of state income, the currency depreciation and inflation rates, the cessation of basic services due to underfinancing and the deterioration of purchasing power.

While forces in Sana'a battle to take back control over vital financial institutions such as the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance from the Houthis, there are several actions related to stabilising the financial system that the international community, in cooperation with local authorities, can take to help alleviate the suffering of ordinary Yemenis in the meantime. These include:

- **Providing financial assistance directed at the payment of salaries of public sector workers.** This might well be the area in which the most tangible quick wins can be made. The payment of salaries should see the resumption of basic services, including those that bolster health care and waste management. At the same time, it will enhance citizens' disposable income, making them less food insecure. To minimise the risk of corruption and mismanagement, payments could be made directly to employees, or with the assistance of humanitarian agencies that are currently heavily involved in keeping Yemen's basic services afloat. International donors could for example consider a system of financial or in-kind support for employees working together with respected humanitarian agencies.
- **Providing technical assistance to ensure a better functioning of the Central Bank.** While a lack of national income due to the conflict is one reason the financial system in Yemen is collapsing, another one is the lack of capacity and expertise. Especially if the wish is to activate the Central Bank branch in Aden, international donors should consider seconding economists to Yemen and offering technical assistance and the relevant expertise to set up proper banking, finance and investment practices.
- **Increasing liquidity in the financial system through cash injections or unfreezing assets.** The easiest way to get money into the system is by direct cash injections into the Central Bank. Saudi Arabia pledged to inject US\$2 billion into the Aden branch of the central bank to help stabilise the local currency and to support the country's devastated economy.<sup>40</sup> The other easy option to increase liquidity in Yemen's financial system is the unfreezing of Yemeni central bank funds, as was recently done by the Trump Administration, in a move that reversed the Obama Administration's strategy to force the parties to the negotiation table.<sup>41</sup>
- **Expanding cash-based assistance for essential goods to increase purchasing power and liquidity.** While a functioning banking system would be the ideal-type of outcome, the reality is that not many ordinary Yemenis make use of banking services, due to a scarcity of banks as well as a deep-rooted preference for a cash-economy. The population also seems unfamiliar with the concept of mobile money and prepaid smart cards, fearing risks of disrupted phone services and theft. While attitudes can change, in the immediate term, multi-purpose cash grants targeting food, cooking gas, hygiene items and water trucking would be the most suitable mechanism of cash-based assistance, according to a recent study.<sup>42</sup> In communities hosting many IDPs, such assistance should be provided in a conflict-sensitive manner and contributing to the easing of intra-communal tensions. In addition, safeguards should be built in to ensure that money is used for essential items, and not for qat, for example – a concern Yemeni women expressed in case the money was disbursed to the male head of households.
- **Setting up emergency provisions for health care, education and waste management services.** In the meantime, international donors and forces on the ground can help establish emergency services, including mobile health centers, invest in garbage collection and set up education-in-emergency facilities. Given the scope of the damage done to these institutions,

rebuilding will take years and will require major financial and capacity-building investments from donors and humanitarian agencies. Ideally, the emergency facilities (and for example, approaches to education) will already sow the seeds for longer term recovery.

- **Investing in conflict-sensitive education and life-style changing awareness.** While not a purely humanitarian intervention, to enhance Yemen's chances of undergoing a successful transition from war to peace, large investments are needed in education. Deprived from the daily routine of schooling, Yemen's youth is more susceptible to joining armed groups, while tolerance-promoting vocational skills training programs, as well as awareness campaigns with regard to what a productive life entails, can create alternatives for (ex)-combatants and unemployed youth. In addition, promoting education amongst girls will have a decelerating effect on the unsustainable population growth.

### 3.3. Living Up to (and Increasing) Aid Pledges

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) estimated that for 2017, the total humanitarian funding for Yemen settled at US\$1.99 billion. This included funds donors channeled multilaterally through the Yemen Humanitarian Funds (YHF), in order to execute the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP), as well as funds disbursed bilaterally. Of these funds, according to the OCHA website, US\$1.66 billion went towards the YHF, with the top donors being Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden.<sup>45</sup> With regard to the US\$0.6 billion in bilateral aid recorded by OCHA, the UAE tops the donor list, followed by Saudi Arabia, the US, Germany, the EU and Turkey.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Box 2: The exception: Marib's unexpected development**

The city of Marib has seen an unexpected development in the past three years: inhabitants claim that the local situation is currently better than it was before the war broke out. The example indicates on the one hand the fact that Yemen is fragmenting, with governorates and local entities taking their fate in their own hands. On the other hand, it underlines the importance of good governance.

In Marib, some years ago considered a dangerous backwater and extremist stronghold, the popular governor Sheikh Sultan al-Aradah has reduced the presence of Al-Qaeda, ensured the payment of local salaries and created a more business-friendly environment.<sup>43</sup> Over the course of the war, displaced people flocked to the city - many with entrepreneurial skills. Banks opened up in the city and business started booming, partially helped by the presence of a functioning powerplant near the city. Seeing the positive change, wealthy expats have started to return. In 2016, Marib set up its own 'central bank' branch and is hosting a popular university.<sup>44</sup>

While many problems and tensions remain in Marib, its development over the past years is remarkable and lessons could potentially be learned about the importance of (good) local governance in Yemen.

For the 2017 response plan, partners involved in drafting the plan decided to include only life-saving or protection assistance to address the most acute needs identified in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The total funds requested had settled at US\$2.3 billion, with the largest sums reserved to alleviate the situation with regard to food security and health-related issues. Closing the year at US\$1.66 billion, the 2017 plan was 70.1 percent funded, leaving a gap of US\$691.5 million.<sup>47</sup>

In December, OCHA published the new Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2018. The new Response Plan estimated the costs at US\$2.96 billion. The key issues mentioned in this year's HNO include basic survival needs, protection of civilians, essential services and infrastructure, livelihoods and the challenges derived from a collapsing commercial sector.

In early January 2018, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, approved the largest-ever allocation by the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to strengthen the response in Yemen. Lowcock expressed the hope that the allocated US\$50 million, which will be dedicated to the most vulnerable people in 27 high-priority districts at risk of famine, as well as in areas where conflict has recently escalated, 'will encourage other donors to provide rapid, generous funding for the coordinated response in Yemen'.<sup>48</sup>

Scaling up aid distribution to Yemen is therefore an option to create immediate-to-short term impact to alleviate the suffering of Yemeni civilians. Donations can either be made generally through the multilaterally pooled funds administered by the UN, or individual donors can earmark their funds for specific projects, or they can scale up bilateral aid – which provides more visibility, but potentially at the cost of coordination with other donors' efforts. The pledging conference held in April 2018 in Geneva showed an increase of the multilateral funds made available by individual donors.

International actors, in particular those engaged in the conflict, could potentially minimise bureaucratic hindrances for humanitarian assistance, for example by facilitating necessary local permissions for the movement of cargo or by negotiating humanitarian access with local entities. Countries that have direct or indirect leverage over local authorities can, on an ad hoc basis, influence the successful channeling of humanitarian assistance or the passage of lawful commercial goods. For this to happen, there should be solid communication lines with humanitarian agencies, in order for problems to be flagged.

At the same time, aid effectiveness remains a serious issue in Yemen, with the donor community often flagging the lack of capacity of Yemeni authorities to absorb aid. This lack of capacity is partly linked to Yemen's dysfunctional civil service and fear of corruption, mismanagement and politicisation of aid money.<sup>49</sup> The scaling up of aid therefore should go hand-in-hand with attempts to enhance the accountability and capacity of local authorities – thereby also targeting the longer-term challenges Yemen is facing. This could for example mean strengthening local Yemeni co-ownership over implementation processes and humanitarian campaign and hiring Yemenis as local staff without falling into the politicisation trap.



## 4. Conclusion

Long-term, all-encompassing solutions for Yemen's humanitarian predicament are currently unavailable. For such solutions to be viable, the security situation will need to improve immensely and parties to the conflict will need to agree on a sustainable political settlement that works for all. Any settlement or decisive victory currently appears far off.<sup>50</sup>

The ultimate ask of the humanitarian community remains for the international community to bring the parties back to the negotiating table to seek a lasting and inclusive process toward peace.<sup>51</sup> As one analyst recently pointed out, neutral humanitarian organisations can actually play a role as mediators working towards such a political settlement. In Yemen, this would not be the first time this happened as in the 1960s, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were instrumental in encouraging the northern tribes to participate in peace negotiations.<sup>52</sup>

That said, even if there were to be a lasting conclusion to the current war, Yemen would still struggle with all the weaknesses that have long made it dependent on international assistance. These include among other things a young and growing population, strong historical divisions and grievances, a steady depletion of energy reserves, a potential increase in water and food scarcity, unsustainable fiscal and external balances, weak local governance and limited absorption capacity.

To truly start tackling Yemen's more long-term problems, a lot of the currently collapsing systems will need to be rebuilt, often from scratch. This will demand years of dedication, both from local authorities as well as from international actors that have a stake in a more stable Yemen.

When merely focusing on immediate-to-short term actions that can be taken within the current context and situation on the ground, there seem to be several areas in which international actors, in particular those involved with the conflict, can make a real difference. If international actors find the political will to do so, they could quickly make a difference and stave off a looming famine, contain the outbreak of infectious diseases and oversee the resumption of vital basic services, including health care, education, waste management and financial services.

Even though at times limited in scope, these solutions can be found in actions that aim at enabling and improving access and distribution of vital commodities throughout the country, stabilising Yemen's financial system and ensuring indiscriminate basic service provision, and scaling up assistance and living up to aid pledges. Payment of civil service salaries and preventing public services from collapsing further is vital.

The political will to take any such steps will most likely go hand in hand with the provision of increased security guarantees to ensure that they will not lead to increased security risks.



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