

Humanitarian aid and war economies: The case of Yemen

Moosa Elayah and Matilda Fenttiman

Moosa Elayah is an assistant professor in International Development, Peacebuilding and Conflict Studies at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (Qatar) and may be reached at moosa.elayah@dohainstitute.edu.qa. Matilda Fenttiman is a researcher at the Centre for Governance and Peacebuilding and may be reached at matilda.fenttiman@hotmail.com.

Abstract

Although humanitarian aid (HA) is desperately needed in Yemen to cope with the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, few studies have analyzed the effect of these grants. This article provides such an analysis using 34 interviews of NGO directors and staff members in Yemen. The interviews were conducted in an open format, to enable interviewees to express all their ideas on the HA situation in Yemen, not just ones that solely fit into the frame and questions of this study. Our empirical analysis indicates that the ability of local NGOs to use and deliver supplies to those suffering is severely constrained. This is mainly due to looting by conflicting factions, corruption, and the absence of the international deterrent that obliges the conflicting parties to preserve human rights. Furthermore, this study indicates that HA is being used as a weapon of war for power and financial gain, and thus is a contributing factor in the continuation of the conflict. This means it is important that international donors explore alternative solutions to effectively deliver and distribute HA in fragile states.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2020a) estimated that in 2020, some 167.6 million people around the world (around 1 in 45 people globally) would require humanitarian aid (HA) and the Armed Conflict Survey (2019) suggests that this is primarily because of the increasing number of people affected by conflict. This has been the case in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen, where the number of people suffering from famine reached 20 million between 2017 and 2018,¹ the highest figure since World War II. The international community primarily focused on providing humanitarian relief to “save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity”, such efforts have grown significantly since World War II.² In 2019, \$28.9 billion of HA was distributed around the world with countries experiencing conflict receiving the largest share, led by Syria and Yemen who received 42%.³ Despite the high volume of HA donated, the number of vulnerable people around the world has risen. This has led to an increase in an existing funding gap from around \$2.5 billion in 2009 to around \$13 billion in 2019.⁴ It has also led to much skepticism and cynicism internationally, as humanitarian organizations have often failed to achieve their goals or help endangered civilians and aid workers alike.⁵ Humanitarian aid is argued to have become an accessible commodity, providing cash for factions in conflicts in fragile states and the creation of war economies, sometimes leading to the financing of the combat operations and front lines in conflicts.⁶

This article provides an investigation into the relationship between HA distribution and the survival of war

¹ Webb et al. (2018).

² OECD (2012:4).

³ Global Initiatives (2019).

⁴ OCHA (2020b).

⁵ Findley (2018).

⁶ Findley (2018); Martínez and Eng (2016); Narang (2015); Terry (2011).

economies, an important factor in prolonging conflict, with a case study of Yemen. The current body of research is limited and often inconclusive, and there is currently no general consensus on the effectiveness of these HA distributions in conflict.⁷ Given the amount of money donated to many conflicted countries like Yemen and the cost of conflict on lives around the country, the importance of understanding the extent to which HA influences conflict and the consequential impact on vulnerable recipients is recognized,⁸ as is its role in enabling war economies to thrive in countries experiencing conflict.⁹ Our analysis expands on the existing literature to offer empirical data regarding the role of local and international NGO-humanitarian organizations in prolonging the conflict and exploring the impact of HA on war economies in the context of Yemen. The next section considers the concepts, theories and critiques of HA in conflict. It discusses whether theoretically HA is able to have its desired effect in conflict environments. This is followed by an evaluation of the Yemeni war and its impact on HA. Third, after discussing the research methods, the findings of local NGOs are presented and discussed. Finally, a concluding section reflects on the contribution of the findings to existing theory.

Humanitarian aid is desperately needed in Yemen to cope with the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. However, empirical analysis indicates that the ability of local NGOs to use and deliver supplies to those suffering is severely constrained. Through looting and partisan distribution, humanitarian aid is being used as a weapon of war for power and financial gain. International donors, therefore, need to explore alternative solutions to effectively deliver and distribute aid in fragile states. Whilst not without challenges, cash aid rather than food aid may provide advantages.

Humanitarian aid, conflict, and peacebuilding: definition, theories and critiques

HA refers to the international humanitarian relief provided as a result of man-made or natural disasters when national coping mechanisms are overwhelmed.¹⁰ This type of aid usually provides short-term relief until long-term solutions are put in place by the local government. It is supplied by a wide variety of actors, ranging from national and international NGOs to multilateral agencies who give aid to the recipient country, such as the World Bank and the IMF, or through development agencies of the UN, such as the World Food Program.¹¹ In 1864 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) became the world's first official international humanitarian organization aimed at providing HA to civilian and military victims of conflict.¹² HA today provides relief to an array of disasters, but originally it was almost exclusively supplied to conflict areas. Before World War I, the work of the ICRC was largely a private affair but when the Treaty of Versailles led to the formation of the League of Nations (later renamed the UN) to protect vulnerable populations and encourage peace, states became increasingly involved in humanitarian action. However, the modern concept and system of HA, characterized by humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, only become commonplace when these basic principles were established by the UN General Assembly in 1991.¹³

Over the past three decades, there have been radical advances in medicine, delivery systems and logistical capacities that have enabled HA to become more efficient. Despite the progress, the new global environment has also presented many dangers and challenges. War economies have formed in various locations around the world, preventing HA from reaching those in need and exacerbating the humanitarian crises.¹⁴ The term “war economy” has

⁷ Examples are Narang (2011); Lischer (2005); Martínez and Eng (2016).

⁸ De Torrenté (2020); Carbonnier (2015); Ballentine and Nitzschke (2005).

⁹ De Montclos (2009).

¹⁰ United Nations (2020).

¹¹ Moyo and Mafuso (2017).

¹² Paulmann (2013).

¹³ Barnett (2011).

¹⁴ Pugh et al. (2005).

been used to “conceptualise the sustainability of an intractable conflict through the expropriation and exploitation of a country’s resources by warring parties”.¹⁵ The custodians of war economies are often rebel movements aiming to take control of strategic locations that have commercial value, or political elites aiming to advance their political and business interests. In many cases, these war economies have caused governance systems to weaken and have resulted in their collapse, leading to long-term issues that result in the recurrence of conflict. These include political instability, malnutrition, a loss of infrastructure and a decline in the working population who are often already struggling to afford basic necessities.¹⁶ Boyce (2008) argues that this was the case in Cambodia, where natural resources such as timber and rubber were a large source of funding for armed groups. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the world's largest opium producer and center for arms dealing, armed groups benefit from million-dollar trade revenues annually, smuggling these commodities into Pakistan from Dubai.¹⁷ Armed groups tend to oppose intervention from humanitarian organizations as it may alter their power within the conflict. This was the case in a besieged city in Syria where food was used as a weapon of war by the Assad regime.¹⁸ Humanitarian organizations operating in the Arab World have also been attacked. In these countries, humanitarianism is traditionally built on Islamic values of philanthropy, kinship obligations and zakat (charitable giving) and there are concerns about the western influence ruining local traditional values and culture.¹⁹ This was thought to be the reason for the Baghdad bombing, in August 2003, now known as “the UN’s 9/11”, which killed the Undersecretary-General Sergio Viera de Mello and 21 other UN employees.²⁰

Despite the increasing need for HA in conflict areas, there is growing concern about the unintended consequences thereof. Narang (2014) in a statistical analysis of civil wars since 1945 found that increasing HA to have been negatively correlated with the resolution of civil war. Similarly, with peripheral insurgencies the tendency for HA to prolong war was high, as was the case during the 1994 Rwandan Civil War. The government and many actors in the West accused the UNHCR and other aid agencies of indirectly fueling the conflict by supporting Hutu war criminals who were in conflict with the state.²¹ Bosnia suffered similar afflictions only a few years later, when humanitarian organizations identified that the safe zones designated to provide relief supplies actually prolonged the conflict and led to the death of nearly 20,000 people.²² Further support is provided by Barber (1997) and Cooley and Ron (2002), while Wood and Sullivan (2015) argue that HA creates incentives for armed forces to target aid recipients with violence. Looted HA can be used to their advantage or sold on the black market. A connection has also been made between the concentrations of displaced populations, which receive high amounts of HA, and an increase in conflict, terrorism, and instability.²³

A useful contribution by Lischer (2003) warns that rather than simply disregarding HA’s importance, it is important to use “deductive reasoning” and “extended examples” to identify the conditions under which HA will increase conflict and lead to war economies. Firstly, the level of politicization of groups is important since a highly politicized group may view HA as a resource to further their political and military advantage. Secondly, how the state responds to the conflict is relevant, as aid is likely to be exploited when the state is unable to maintain political order within the country, allowing militants to use HA as a weapon of war. Thus, even though HA may be donated with impartial and neutral intent, the effects of the aid may have political or military repercussions. Consequently, donors

¹⁵ Naidoo 2000:1).

¹⁶ Pugh et al. (2005).

¹⁷ DeLozier (2019).

¹⁸ Donini (2004).

¹⁹ Hyder (2007).

²⁰ Benthall (2003).

²¹ Gourevitch and Andrews (1999).

²² Woodward (1995).

²³ Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006); Lischer (2005); Milton et al. (2013).

have been reflecting on their work and striving to find solutions to how they can effectively balance security and humanitarian objectives in conflict zones.²⁴

The War in Yemen and its impact on humanitarian aid

Yemen has had a long history of violence, but the current war episode born of the Arab Spring is at the root of the social and political issues that are happening today. The war has had a profound impact on the Yemeni people and the resulting humanitarian crisis has become the worst in the world. The OCHA (2019) reported that 24.1 million people (79% of the population) were in desperate need of HA; 7.4 million of them being children and 14.3 million in acute need. There have been 17,000 civilian casualties since 2015, some 1,843 of which being children, and more than 3.3 million Yemenis have been displaced. The destruction of infrastructure and basic services has left 17.8 million people without access to clean water or sanitation, and 19.7 million people without access to healthcare, as only 51% of medical facilities are functioning.²⁵ However, the biggest struggle for the Yemeni population is food insecurity and malnutrition. Currently, 7.4 million people are struggling to find food and 3.2 million require treatment for malnutrition, including 2 million children under 5. The UN Human Rights Council stated that “Indiscriminate attacks against civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, water facilities, food transport, farms and marketplaces, as well as the use of blockade and siege-like warfare, impeding humanitarian access, and similar measures have exacerbated the disastrous humanitarian situation in the country”.²⁶

The Yemeni Spring lasted till February 2012 when Hadi took over from Saleh as president for a two-year transitional period. However, there were still high levels of corruption and unemployment, and as policies were purposefully implemented to constrain the Houthi economy, food insecurity rose. Violence continued among jihadists, with Saleh’s security personnel and the separatist movement forming in the South.²⁷ The Houthi movement, which is formed mainly of Yemen’s Shia Zaidi Muslim minority, took over the Sanaa province and the surrounding areas. Many Sunnis supported the Houthis as the rebels seized the capital. The Houthis have since been able to launch missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia, maintain their presence in Sana’a and siege Taiz. Forces from al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Group took control of territory in the south and carried out lethal attacks in Aden.²⁸ The violence has continued, and many humanitarian organizations have established themselves in Yemen to provide HA to vulnerable people as the situation is now catastrophic due to the lengthy duration of this conflict.²⁹

NGOs have been present in Yemen since the 1920s, but the number has boomed over the past three decades. However, access restrictions have been a financial burden for NGOs. In gaining access to Yemen, Oxfam (2017) reported that ships are having to anchor outside of Hodeida, costing over \$10,000 per ship daily. Furthermore, the constant fighting and air strikes make it dangerous for humanitarian workers trying to reach vulnerable people. Between January and September 2019, OCHA (2019) claimed that there were 825 attacks on health workers and medical facilities, including 171 deaths. In the current climate, it seems that no amount of aid will offset the societal collapse, high food prices and consequently the amount of suffering that the war has produced.

Sample and methods

To get a better idea of the situation in Yemen and the experiences of the NGOs, semi-structured interviews were held between 15 June 2020 and 30 July 2020 with Yemeni NGO directors and staff members, focusing on programming

²⁴ Terry (2011); Anderson (1999).

²⁵ Hashim et. al. (2021); Sowers and Weinthal (2021); Elayah, and Verkoren (2020); Alterman (2018); Mohamed et al. (2017); Elayah and Abu-Osba (2017); Elayah and Abu-Osba (2018).

²⁶ Action Against Hunger (2019).

²⁷ DeLozier (2019).

²⁸ Lackner (2019).

²⁹ OCHA, (2019).

and external relations. There are around 14,500 officially registered NGOs but only 200 are currently active and out of these 34 were approached.³⁰ We focused only on NGOs that work in the domains of HA (n=20), development and gender (n=10), and those that are primarily welfare-oriented (n=4). For geographical division, we selected NGOs that cover all the areas of Yemen: “South” being legitimate government Hadi forces and southern secession forces-controlled areas (n=7); “North” being Houthis-controlled areas (n=14); “West” being legitimate government forces, Southern secession forces, and Ex-President Saleh forces-controlled areas (n=3); “Middle” being legitimate government forces, Southern secession forces, and Ex-President Saleh forces-controlled areas (n=3); and “East” being legitimate government forces and Islah forces (Muslim Brotherhood) part-controlled areas (n=7). We chose the largest number of NGOs in the North because it represents the largest population weight and is subject to the largest siege by the Saudi coalition forces, because of the tight control of the al-Houthi group over this region of Yemen. Appendix A gives a full overview of the selected NGOs and the conducted interviews in the different areas of Yemen, a summary of the interview guide and restrictions encountered.

The interview data from NGOs has been handled in a similar way to written sources and we have considered that personal opinions may prevent the research from being completely unbiased. Since the paper does not start with a specific hypothesis, it is of utmost importance to be open to all comments made in interviews and to ensure that ideas which one personally doesn't share are not discredited (or attached a low weight). We used an open format for interviewing to prevent interviewees from being restricted to voicing ideas that solely fit into the frame and questions of this study.

Analyzing and presenting the findings

Not surprisingly, the interviews found that the conflict in Yemen has seriously hindered both the delivery and distribution of aid. Many respondents emphasized that the warring parties are exploiting and plundering HA in Yemen. They highlighted that HA is currently part of the equation for the continuity of the war because it has not reached the targets, but rather that it is controlled by armed entities outside of the state.³¹ It seems that international donations have also been a source of funding for the warring parties because they have provided both sides with arms. Bibbo (2020) reports that in February 2019, \$2.6bn in donations were made at a special one-day UN conference to “ease the humanitarian crisis” in Yemen, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE being the largest donors at \$500 million each. However, over half of the money raised was pledged by countries that are either fighting in the Civil War or selling arms to those undertaking the fighting, which raises the question of the political motives of the actors involved. A quarter of the donations were paid into the Yemeni Social Welfare Fund but the location of the remainder is unknown. It appears that the fight for power is a driving factor for conflict in Yemen, but this is jeopardizing the lives of millions of people as a result. The UN claims that HA becoming a weapon of war highlights a collective failure and collective responsibility of all actors involved. The political unrest has been driven by the efforts of various entities, both governmental and non-governmental, who have enabled the war economies to thrive.³² This point was made by the majority of the participating NGOs.

Some blame can be attributed to the Saleh regime. Between 2011 and 2015, there were numerous lethal attacks killing thousands of Yemenis. While Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) took responsibility for a vast number of attacks, it is probable that Saleh supported some of them to discredit the traditional regime, gain international support and prove that he was the only one that could keep the conflict under control.³³ The situation has not improved during Hadi's presidency, as policies continue to benefit business lobbies with ties to the

³⁰ Elayah (2021); NDC-NWO (2016).

³¹ Personal communication (interviews), majority of the participation NGOs, June 17-July 30, 2020

³² UNHRC (2020).

³³ Koehler-Derrick (2011); Boutton (2016).

government. Policies aimed at increasing share of the import market and prioritizing small business circles with close relations with government officials that regularly commit humanitarian violations.³⁴ The Hadi government, supported by the Islamic Reform Party (a Muslim Brotherhood wing in Yemen), has not implemented a clear policy to guide the expenses of its forces and the extravagant spending of its officials, as a result, in 2014 it spent an estimated \$12.12 billion. This did not appear to be cast in local development projects, social welfare payments, or job creation.³⁵ Rather, a number of Hadi government officials have been involved in selling oil derivatives outside the framework of the official state institutions and contracting with fake energy companies to plunder billions of dollars in revenue from electricity, oil, and gas, as well as selling oil and gas facilities and equipment to Dubai from Marib, Shabwa, and Hadramout.³⁶ The government has also signed deals to sell the currency, the consequences of which are the collapse of the local currency and increasing poverty levels.³⁷

Senior military leaders who are against the Houthis gained millions of dollars through statements in the names of fake soldiers in Marib and other Yemeni regions. The soldiers' wage allocations are reportedly not reaching those already on the battlefield. Instead, anti-Houthi military and security personnel are registered on more than one military list with two separate salaries from two different sources.³⁸ There are many examples of this in the southern governorates such as Aden, where Emirati-backed and sponsored security agencies related to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), are receiving their salaries on a separate list from the Yemeni Ministry of Interior of the Hadi government.³⁹ Lackner (2019) argues that corruption and nepotism have become extensive as the Yemeni ruling elite have been weakening the power of the people through a mixture of co-optation, repression and divide-and-conquer tactics, worsening the already catastrophic humanitarian crisis. It has been suggested that Saleh was very corrupt during his time as President after a UN (2015) report revealed that he is alleged to have amassed assets between \$32 billion and \$60 billion...located in at least 20 countries. It is thought that corruption is still an issue with the Hadi government. Although a figure has not been released, one of our interviewees, a Yemeni economist, suggested that Hadi's corruption amounts to around \$14 billion.⁴⁰ DeLozier (2019) reports that the UN claims corruption is worsening the humanitarian crisis by preventing the importation of commercial goods and artificially raising prices, meaning basic food and medical supplies are too expensive for the majority of the population. High prices have made HA a valuable commodity and a target for armed groups who, the interviewees claimed, are diverting it on a large scale to the war effort. They distribute it to those who are loyal to them or sell it on the black market, which is thought to be controlled by a cartel with close ties to the senior Houthi official Mohammed Ali al-Houthi.⁴¹

A secessionist organization, the STC, formed by a faction of al-Hirak (Southern Yemen Movement) claims to rule most of Southern Yemen; its 26 members include the governors of five southern governorates and two government ministers. Currently, they control the port of Aden with many respondents claiming that the STC is stealing food aid coming directly from the UAE and using it to either feed the families of its soldiers or selling it on the black market. Mohammed and Elayah (2018) claim that the STC also has control of many NGOs throughout the southern governorates. On the surface, these NGOs work with international donors to provide humanitarian assistance to groups suffering from the conflicts, but in the reality, they mainly work for the benefit of the STC, providing

³⁴ DeLozier (2019); Zimmerman (2015).

³⁵ SCSS (2018).

³⁶ Eaton et al. (2019); Hill et al. (2013).

³⁷ CMWG Yemen (2020).

³⁸ Brehony (2020).

³⁹ Personal communication (interviews), majority of the participation NGOs, June 17-July 30, 2020

⁴⁰ SCSS (2018).

⁴¹ DeLozier (2019).

nutritional support for its combatants and increasing its political and military legitimacy at local levels.⁴² The Central Bank of Yemen announced that forces loyal to the STC, which declared self-rule in Aden on 26 April 2020, had looted 64 billion riyals, printed in Russia for Yemen.⁴³ Currently, the STC controls the port of Aden's income, taxes, and other revenues in the southern governorates, which are estimated to be valued at millions of dollars.⁴⁴ An interviewee added that the STC depends more on the support of rich southern Yemeni merchants, who are in the Gulf states, America, and Europe; their support is estimated to worth billions of riyals.⁴⁵

All 34 of the interviewees felt that the warring parties in Yemen cared little about the victims of the war and so did not let the HA reach the affected victims in an easy or smooth way. Most estimated that only 10% to 20% of the aid reached the intended vulnerable people.⁴⁶ NGOs use field research to collect data about vulnerable people,⁴⁷ but they are obliged (forced) by Houthis (for example) or neighborhood representatives, to add false names during data collection.⁴⁸ A large amount of HA goes to those who are not vulnerable, such as high-ranking officials who register false names and add non-vulnerable people. Many respondents, especially those NGOs operating in Houthi-controlled areas, argued that the war economy began from the moment the militia stockpiled the HA, to finance its wars and enrich its loyalists. The Houthi group also used oil revenues, extortion and levies imposed on citizens and merchants.⁴⁹ Their control of the ports has resulted in Yemen turning into a black hole for HA.⁵⁰

One of the interviewees argued that the "Al-Houthi group has more benefits than the other warring parties in Yemen in terms of economic affairs, and it can be easily observed how the group translates this through its dealings with agreements that seek to achieve peace in Yemen and its refusal to adhere to everything that would stop the war or support any political solution".⁵¹ The Houthi group took control of the cash reserves of the Republic of Yemen of around \$5.1 billion and receives revenues in the form of taxes from the local provinces under its control in excess of \$1.7 billion annually. Merchants, companies, hospitals and factories have been forced to pay exorbitant sums of money in the form of royalties.⁵² They also founded 1,500 NGOs in cities under their control between 2014 and 2018 to loot and sell HA. Fuel sold on the black market remains one of the Houthi's most important sources of revenue amounting to \$1.14 billion. This fuel, in the form of crude oil and gas, is thought to be stolen from Iran and listed as coming from the UAE or Oman on falsified paperwork so that it can be imported through Hodeida without detection.⁵³

Ports are an essential means of delivering aid and goods to Yemen, with around 90% of food in Yemen being imported.⁵⁴ Despite this, OCHA (2019) reports that the Saudi-led coalition is enforcing both restrictions on HA supplies and a commercial blockade on air and sea paths into Yemen. The coalition has claimed that the blockades are necessary to prevent the smuggling of weapons, but it has meant that food imports have dropped by 30% over the past year.⁵⁵ The result has been less food and higher prices and millions close to famine. In addition, bridges linking Yemen's main port at Hodeida with the main capital city of Sana'a have been bombed by coalition forces. Vehicles loaded with HA for one-third of the Yemeni population are having to take alternate routes, increasing journey times,

⁴² Personal communication (interview), East-based NGO, July 6, 2020. Also see Orkaby (2020).

⁴³ Reuters (2020).

⁴⁴ Personal communication (interview), South-based NGO, July 22, 2020.

⁴⁵ Personal communication (interview), South-based NGO, July 8, 2020.

⁴⁶ Personal communication (interview), West-based NGO, June 15, 2020.

⁴⁷ Especially by using multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA).

⁴⁸ Personal communication (interviews), majority of the participation NGOs, June 17-July 30, 2020.

⁴⁹ Personal communication (interviews), majority of the participation NGOs, June 17-July 30, 2020.

⁵⁰ Personal communication (interview), North-based NGO, June 22, 2020.

⁵¹ Personal communication (interview), Middle-based NGO, July 9, 2020.

⁵² Zachary and Robinson (2020).

⁵³ Mohammed and Elayah (2018).

⁵⁴ DeLozier (2019).

⁵⁵ Personal communication (interview), South-based NGO, July 7, 2020

elevating delivery costs, and making it impossible to reach some of the worst affected areas.

While Amnesty International (2017) claimed the blockade amounted to the collective punishment of Yemen's civilians, the interviewees and OCHA (2019) report, the long and questionable inspection systems enable the warring parties to loot HA coming into the country.⁵⁶ Second, as many interviewees stated, the Houthi rebels are using the blockade as a way to gain power within the region. According to HA officials and documents that Associated Press obtained, the blockades are "a strong-arm tactic to force the agency (UN) to give them greater control over the massive humanitarian campaign, along with a cut of billions of dollars in foreign assistance".⁵⁷ Furthermore, the blockades have increased diesel prices. Between March and April 2019 prices increased by over 60% in Sana'a City and 45-55% in the governorates of Al Hudaydah and Raymah.⁵⁸ This has had a disastrous effect on the availability of supplies, leading to a knock-on effect on prices.⁵⁹ Rural areas are suffering. Transporting food and people to the markets is very costly and this is having a devastating impact on the population, which is already struggling to pay for the bare minimum. It is thought that the Houthi groups are intentionally creating an artificial fuel scarcity to increase prices on the black market.⁶⁰

Restrictions to access by the blockade has been a financial burden for the international NGOs. Last year 86% of cases, where UN staff were denied access to vulnerable communities, were the result of administrative restrictions on movement where permission from authorities was required. The other 14% of incidents were due to hostilities and military operations. The U.S. Trump administration decided in March 2020 to freeze spending on various HA programs.⁶¹ NGOs, however, want to continue with HA supplies due to the extent of the humanitarian crisis. Oxfam (2017) announced that they are revising their approach and stepping up their support in order to overcome the financial challenges, even though their funding will run out faster. Furthermore, delivering aid in conflict settings is extremely challenging.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Our analysis of HA in Yemen supports the view that it is a significant source of funding for armed groups, and consequently that it plays a huge part in allowing the war economy in Yemen to thrive. Warring groups are often looting HA to distribute it based on partisanship and to sell it on the black market to finance the war effort. They have also attempted to block HA to try and gain control over the humanitarian campaign and receive a cut of the billions of dollars given in foreign assistance. In many cases HA is distributed through local NGOs that were established by the groups to attract international funds. Others were pre-politicized NGOs that channeled funds to specific regions or particular groups for political and military advantage. It is clear from our analysis that the ability of NGOs to use HA effectively and deliver it to those who deserve it is very limited. NGO's actions can end up expanding the war economy rather than reducing the effects of war on the poor. Distrust in international bodies and in local and international NGOs has become extremely high among those affected by the war.

Many studies have argued that providing humanitarian assistance during the war as HA can still have a net positive effect on populations even if war is prolonged.⁶² It can alleviate suffering and rebuild failed states. This implies that HA is an ethical necessity that enhances local security and supports civil actors in strengthening the pillars of stability. The results of this study suggest that this is more difficult than expected and that donors need to seek alternative

⁵⁶ Fink (2017).

⁵⁷ Bibbo (2020).

⁵⁸ FEWSN (2019).

⁵⁹ Tandon and Vishwanath (2020).

⁶⁰ DeLozier (2019).

⁶¹ Lackner (2019).

⁶² Examples include: Narang (2014); Berman et. al. (2011); Collier and Hoeffler (2002); and de Ree and Nillesen (2009)

solutions in fragile states. One means of restoring donor confidence and dealing with some of the issues is to provide cash aid rather than food aid. When NGOs are unable to distribute food aid successfully, some of the funds could be transferred to cash. This could be more traceable, efficient, and transparent. There are, of course, challenges in adopting cash transfers that will require further study, such as how transferable the practices in stable countries are into countries in conflict. Yemen would make a useful case study if this policy were adopted.

References

- Action Against Hunger. 2019. Hunger Used as A Weapon Of War In Yemen, Experts Say. [online] Available at: <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/story/hunger-used-weapon-war-yemen-experts-say> [Accessed 11 June 2020].
- Alterman, J.B., 2018. Aid and conflict: Pitfalls in Yemen. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).
- Amnesty International. 2017. Yemen: USA, UK And France Risk Complicity In Collective Punishment Of Civilians. [online] Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/yemen-usa-uk-and-france-risk-complicity-in-collective-punishment-of-civilians/> [Accessed 8 June 2020].
- Anderson, P., 2019. Beyond Syria's war economy: Trade, migration and state formation across Eurasia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10(1), pp.75-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1879366518814657>
- Anderson, M.B., 1999. Do no harm: how aid can support peace--or war. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Armed Conflict Survey. 2019. Humanitarian Aid as a Weapon of War. 5(1), pp.14-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23740973.2019.1603967>
- Barber, B., 1997. Feeding refugees, or war? The dilemma of humanitarian aid. *Foreign Affairs*, pp.8-14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20048117>
- Barnett, M., 2011. *Empire of humanity: A history of humanitarianism*. Cornell University Press.
- Ballentine, K. and Nitzschke, H., 2005. The political economy of civil war and conflict transformation. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, p.3.
- Benthall, J., 2003. Humanitarianism and Islam after 11 September. *Humanitarian Action and the "Global War on Terror": A Review of Trends and Issues*, HPG Report, 14.
- Berman, E., Callen, M., Felter, J.H. and Shapiro, J.N., 2011. Do working men rebel? Insurgency and unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 55(4), pp.496-528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002710393920>
- Bibbo, B., 2020. UN Raises \$2.6Bn In Donations for Yemen Humanitarian Aid. [online] Aljazeera.com. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/raises-26bn-donations-yemen-humanitarian-aid-190226161139569.html> [Accessed 10 April 2020].
- Boutton, A., 2016. Of terrorism and revenue: Why foreign aid exacerbates terrorism in personalist regimes. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894216674970>
- Boyce, J.K., 2008. Post-conflict recovery: resource mobilization and peacebuilding. PERI Working Papers, p.129.
- Brehony, N., 2020. War in Yemen: No End In Sight As The State Disintegrates. *Asian Affairs*, 51(3), pp.510-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1812263>
- Carbonnier, G., 2015. *Humanitarian economics: War, disaster and the global aid market*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190491543.003.0006>
- Paul, C. and Anke, H., 2002. Aid, Policy, and Peace: Reducing the Risk of Conflict. *Defense and Peace Economics*, 13(6), pp.435-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242690214335>
- Cooley, A. and Ron, J., 2002. The NGO scramble: Organizational insecurity and the political economy of transnational action. *International security*, 27(1), pp.5-39. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228802320231217>
- CMWG Yemen. 2020. Yemen's Currency Crisis and the Corresponding Impacts on Markets - Analysis and Correlation. Report available at: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/yemen_currency_crisis_and_correlation_with_markets_final_23102020.pdf

- DeLozier, E., 2019. In Damning Report, UN Panel Details War Economy in Yemen. [online] The Washington Institute. Available at: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/in-damning-report-un-panel-details-war-economy-in-yemen> [Accessed 31 March 2020].
- Donini, A., 2004. Western Aid Agencies don't have a humanitarian monopoly. *Humanitarian Affairs Review*, pp.12-15.
- De Montclos, M.P., 2009. Humanitarian aid and the Biafra war: lessons not learned. *Africa Development*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v34i1.57357>
- De Ree, J. and Nillesen, E., 2009. Aiding violence or peace? The impact of foreign aid on the risk of civil conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Development Economics*, 88(2), pp.301-313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2008.03.005>
- De Torrenté, N., 2013. The relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian aid: Reflections about the relationship between providers and recipients. *social research*, 80(2), pp.607-634.
- Eaton, T., Cheng, C., Mansour, R., Salisbury, P., Yazigi, J. and Khatib, L., 2019. *Conflict Economies in the Middle East and North Africa*. Royal Institute of International Affairs.
- Elayah, M. and Verkoren, W., 2020. Civil society during war: the case of Yemen. *Peacebuilding*, 8(4), pp.476-498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1686797>
- Elayah, M. and Abu-Osba, B., 2017. Geneva Conference (2017) for Relieving Yemen: between the hopes and the complex reality. Awam Center for Peacebuilding and Development and Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen.
- Elayah, M., and Abu-Osba, B. 2018. Humanitarian and Relief Assistance between the Hammer of the Lords of Poverty and the Anvil of the Warlords in Yemen. (in Arabic). Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen and Centre for Governance and Peace-building Yemen.
- Elayah, M. 2021. The War in Yemen and the Role of NGOs in Relieving the Displaced People. In Alkhluat, G., (ed). *Forced Migration in Arab Countries: Problems and Issues*. Arab Center for Studies and Research, Doha.
- FEWSN (Famine Early Warning Systems Network). 2019. Sharp Increases in Fuel Prices and Humanitarian Access Constraints Drive Increased Concern In Northern Yemen. Yemen Key Message Update. USAID, pp.1-2.
- Findley, M.G., 2018. Does foreign aid build peace?. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 21, pp.359-384. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041916-015516>
- Fink, M.D., 2017. Naval blockade and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 64(2), pp.291-307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40802-017-0092-3>
- Gourevitch, P. and Andrews, C., 1999. We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda. *Canadian Medical Association. Journal*, 160(4), p.537.
- Hashim, H.T., Miranda, A.V., Babar, M.S., Essar, M.Y., Hussain, H., Ahmad, S., Tazyeen, S., Abujledan, H.M., ALSanabani, N.T., Khan, H. and Ramadhan, M.A., 2021. Yemen's triple emergency: Food crisis amid a civil war and COVID-19 pandemic. *Public Health in Practice*, 2, p.100082. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2021.100082>
- Hill, G., Salisbury, P., Northedge, L. and Kinninmont, J., 2013. *Yemen: corruption, capital flight and global drivers of conflict*. Chatham House.
- Hyder, M., 2007. *Humanitarianism and the Muslim World*. [online] Available at: <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/52> [Accessed 8 June 2020].
- Kim, J. Y. (2017, April 11). Rethinking Development Finance. Speech presented in UK, London. Available at: www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2017/04/11/speech-byworld-bank-group-president-jim-yong-kim-rethinking-development-finance. <https://doi.org/10.1596/31099>
- Koehler-Derrick, G., 2011. A false foundation? AQAP, Tribes and ungoverned spaces in Yemen. Military Academy West Point Ny Combating Terrorism Center.
- Lackner, H., 2019. *Yemen in Crisis: Road to war*. London: Verso Books.
- Lischer, S.K., 2003. Collateral damage: Humanitarian assistance as a cause of conflict. *International Security*, 28(1), pp.79-109. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803322427983>
- Lischer, S.K., 2005. *Dangerous sanctuaries: Refugee camps, civil war, and the dilemmas of humanitarian aid*. Cornell University Press.

- Martínez, J.C. and Eng, B., 2016. The unintended consequences of emergency food aid: neutrality, sovereignty and politics in the Syrian civil war, 2012-15. *International Affairs*, 92(1), pp.153-173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12502>
- Milton, D., Spencer, M. and Findley, M., 2013. Radicalism of the hopeless: Refugee flows and transnational terrorism. *International Interactions*, 39(5), pp.621-645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2013.834256>
- Narang, N., 2011. Aiding and abetting: how international humanitarian assistance can inadvertently prolong conflict and how combatants respond (Doctoral dissertation, UC San Diego).
- Narang, N., 2014. Humanitarian assistance and the duration of peace after civil war. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(2), pp.446-460. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381613001382>
- Narang, N., 2015. Assisting uncertainty: how humanitarian aid can inadvertently prolong civil war. *International Studies Quarterly*, 59(1), pp.184-195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12151>
- Mohammed, H., and Elayah, M. 2018. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Peacebuilding after Yemen's Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh (Sanaa: Centre for Governance and Peace-building-Yemen). Available at: <https://www.kpsrl.org/publication/civil-society-and-peacebuilding-in-yemen-after-ali-abdullah-saleh>.
- Moyo, L. and Tsakata Mafuso, L., 2017. The effectiveness of foreign aid on economic development in developing countries: A case of Zimbabwe (1980-2000). *Journal of Social Sciences*, 52(1-3), pp.173-187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2017.1305554>
- Naidoo, S., 2000. The role of war economies in understanding contemporary conflicts. *Global Dialogue*, 5, p. 25.
- NDC-NOW (2016) Database of the LNGOs and INGOs in Yemen. Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, available in this website: <http://www.ndc-nwo.ruhosting.nl/wordpress/database-of-the-Ingos-in-yemen/>
- OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). (2019). Humanitarian Needs Overview (Yemen). Relief Web. Available at Yemen: 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview [EN/AR] - Yemen. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-2019-humanitarian-needs-overview-enar>.
- OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2020a. Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. United Nations-Coordinated Support to People Affected by Disaster and Conflict. Geneva: OCHA, pp.4-85. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO-2020_v9.1.pdf.
- OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2020b. Yemen Situation Report, 11 Nov 2020. Available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/yemen/>.
- OECD. 2012. Towards Better Humanitarian Donorship. 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews. Paris: OECD, p.4.
- Oxfam, 2017. Missiles and Food: Yemen's Man-Made Food Security Crisis. Policy Papers. Oxford: Oxfam, pp.2-13.
- Orkaby, A., 2020. Yemen: What Everyone Needs to Know. Oxford University Press.
- Paulmann, J., 2013. Conjunctures in the history of international humanitarian aid during the twentieth century. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4(2), pp.215-238. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2013.0016>
- Pugh, M.C., Cooper, N., Pugh, M. and Goodhand, J., 2004. War economies in a regional context: challenges of transformation. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Reuters. 2020. Separatists in south Yemen seize convoy with billions of riyals for central bank. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-cenbank-idUSKBN23L0EE>.
- Salehyan, I. and Gleditsch, K.S., 2006. Refugees and the spread of civil war. *International organization*, pp.335-366. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818306060103>
- SCSS (Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies). 2018. A new way from the usual approach: fighting corruption in Yemen. A report issued by the Sana'a Center for Studies.
- Sowers, J. and Weinthal, E., 2021. Humanitarian challenges and the targeting of civilian infrastructure in the Yemen war. *International Affairs*, 97(1), pp.157-177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa166>
- Tandon, S. and Vishwanath, T., 2020. The evolution of poor food access over the course of the conflict in Yemen. *World Development*, 130, p.104922. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.104922>
- Terry, F., 2011. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan: reasserting the neutrality of humanitarian action. *Int'l Rev. Red Cross*, 93, p.173. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383111000026>

United Nations (UN). 2020. Deliver Humanitarian Aid [online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/deliver-humanitarian-aid/> [Accessed 5 April 2020].

Webb, P., Stordalen, G.A., Singh, S., Wijesinha-Bettoni, R., Shetty, P. and Lartey, A., 2018. Hunger and malnutrition in the 21st century. *BMJ* 2018, p. 361. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.k2238>

Wood, R.M. and Sullivan, C., 2015. Doing harm by doing good? The negative externalities of humanitarian aid provision during civil conflict. *The Journal of Politics*, 77(3), pp.736-748. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681239>

Woodward, S.L., 1995. *Balkan tragedy: Chaos and dissolution after the Cold War*. Brookings Institution Press.

Zachary, L. and Kali R. 2020. Yemen in Crisis: Yemen's internal divisions and a Saudi-led military intervention have spawned an escalating political, military, and humanitarian crisis. a report published by Council on Foreign Relation, accessed 30-July 2020, in the following link <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/yemen-crisis>.

Zimmerman, K., 2015. A new model for defeating al Qaeda in Yemen. American Enterprise Institute.

Appendix A: Overview of the selected NGOs and the conducted interviews in the different areas of Yemen and interview guide and restrictions.

The interview guide includes qualitative questions such as: What is your approach to the crisis? How do you reach vulnerable people? Do you see where your aid goes? Do you know how many of your supplies reach the people who need them? Would you say that food has become a weapon of war? Has the blockade on Yemeni ports affected your work and worsened the crisis? Has your NGO made progress in Yemen? What do you think the biggest challenges are in reaching the Yemeni people? Were you active before the conflict and has this changed? Would you say the attempts made by your organization to alleviate suffering are contrary to the political interests of the Yemeni government?

The restrictions for fieldwork are brought to the fore. Options for interviewing NGO representatives face-to-face in Yemen are severely limited due to widespread violence in the country. The cities of north-Yemen are currently off-limits, which also applies to the Southern governorates. It was, however, possible, to work with “third interviewers” who were based in these areas and as a result we conducted (n=21 out of n=34) interviews in person (see Table A1). Otherwise, interviews were carried out via phone/Skype, although this was troublesome because the electricity supply was unreliable in the entire country.

Table A1: Interviews undertaken

	<i>Key Issue(s)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Armed/ Political control</i>	<i>Area*</i>	<i>Interview Situation</i>	<i>Interview date (2020)</i>	<i>Gender of interviewee</i>
1	Humanitarian Aid	Sana’a City	Houthi	N	In person	June 17	F
2	Humanitarian Aid	Aden	Houthi	N	In person	June 22	F
3	Humanitarian Aid	Al-Mahrah	Hadi Forces	E	Skype	July 20	M
4	Humanitarian Aid	Aden	Southern Forces	S	In person	June 15	F
5	Humanitarian Aid	Taiz	Hadi Forces	S	In person	July 3	F
6	Humanitarian Aid	Sana’a City	Houthi	N	In person	July 24	M

	<i>Key Issue(s)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Armed/ Political control</i>	<i>Area*</i>	<i>Interview Situation</i>	<i>Interview date (2020)</i>	<i>Gender of interviewee</i>
7	Humanitarian Aid	Sana'a	Houthi	N	In person	July 7	M
8	Humanitarian Aid	Sana'a City	Houthi	N	Phone call	July 23	F
9	Humanitarian Aid	Maarb	Hadi Forces + Islah Forces	E	Phone call	July 23	F
10	Humanitarian Aid	Shabwah	Hadi Forces	E	In person	July 6	M
11	Humanitarian Aid	Taiz	Hadi Forces	S	In person	July 7	F
12	Humanitarian Aid	Sana'a City	Houthi	N	In person	July 22	F
13	Humanitarian Aid	Sana'a City	Houthi	N	In person	July 22	M
14	Humanitarian Aid	Hajjah	Houthi	W	Phone call	July 8	F
15	Humanitarian Aid	Taiz	Hadi Forces	M	In person	July 8	M
16	Humanitarian Aid	Lahj	Hadi Forces + Southern Movement	S	In person	July 8	F
17	Humanitarian Aid	Hadramout	Hadi Forces	E	In person	July 26	M
18	Humanitarian Aid	Maarb	Hadi Forces + Islah Forces	E	In Person	July 25	M
19	Humanitarian Aid	Dhamar	Houthi	N	In person	July 30	F
20	Humanitarian Aid	Al Mahwit	Houthi	N	Phone call	July 30	M
21	Development and Gender	Abyan	Southern Movement	S	Phone call	July 29	M
22	Development and Gender	Amran	Houthi	N	In person	July 15	M
23	Development and Gender	Taiz	Hadi Forces	M	In person	July 9	F

	<i>Key Issue(s)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Armed/ Political control</i>	<i>Area*</i>	<i>Interview Situation</i>	<i>Interview date (2020)</i>	<i>Gender of interviewee</i>
24	Development and Gender Development, Human Rights	Sana'a City	Houthi	N	In person	July 15	F
25	Development and Gender	Lahij	Southern Movement	S	In person	July 22	M
26	Development and Gender	Hadramaut	Hadi Forces	E	Phone call	July 14	F
27	Development and Gender	Amran	Houthi	N	Phone call	July 13	F
28	Development and Gender	Raymah	Houthi	W	Phone call	June 15	M
29	Development and Gender	Shabwah	Hadi Forces	E	Phone call	June 18	F
30	Development and Gender	Ibb	Houthi	M	In person	July 3	M
31	Welfare-Oriented	Aden	Southern Movement	S	In person	July 27	F
32	Welfare-Oriented	Al Hudaydah	Ex-President Saleh forces	W	Phone call	June 28	F
33	Welfare-Oriented	Sa'dah	Houthi	N	Phone call	June 20	M
34	Welfare-Oriented	Dhamar	Houthi	N	In person	July 11	F

Note: N= North S=South W=West E=East and M=Middle of Yemen.