Yemen conflict: 'Fragile’ hopes rise, as violence decreases and life-saving humanitarian funding surges

There are “small signs” of hope for Yemeni civilians caught up in fighting, following a reduction in violence, coupled with a 20 per cent increase in funding for the UN’s humanitarian response. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, together with relief chief Mark Lowcock, told members there was “cause for optimism” but still a long way to go, to decisively end more than four years of fighting between the Saudi-led coalition supporting the southern-based, internationally-recognized Government, and Houthis who control the capital, Sana’a, and other key areas.

Mr. Griffiths said the signs are “fragile, and in need of our diligent care and attention”. He highlighted the initiative from the Houthis, formally known as Ansar Allah, “to suspend all drones and ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, and the reduction of violence that followed the announcement.” Airstrikes had “reduced considerably across Yemen”, he said, since the beginning of this month. “This is a very recent and inevitably fragile gain, but it’s a step in the right direction.” He also noted the “tenuous calm” in the seat of Government in Aden, in the south, where fighting has calmed down between formerly allied Government forces and separatists. He called on a full agreement to be signed soon so law and order – and services – can be restored to the region. Noting also the breakthrough in detainee releases and the renewed access to fuel ships entering the key port city of Hudaydah, he said they were “positive indications” adding: “By the time we meet again, I hope Mr. (Security Council) President, that we shall have more clarity, more certainty and more reason to hope.”

An interview with FAO Representative in Yemen

*UNIC Sana’a conducted recently an interview with Dr. Hussein Gadain, FAO Representative in Yemen on the role played by the organization in the field of food and food security.*

**Q1:** What in your opinion are the major Food Security and agriculture challenges in Yemen?

**Mr. Gadain:** Conflict and insecurity remain the main drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition that have pushed the most vulnerable households to the brink of famine. It has led to a significant loss of income and disrupted livelihoods, huge population displacement, restricted access, shrinking importation and steady decline of the Yemeni Rial, which deepens the currency and economic crisis. Millions are malnourished, including pregnant and lactating women and 400,000 children. Stunting and wasting levels remain stubbornly high for children under five with, with recent surveys recording 46.4 and 16.4 percent respectively. In the absence of Humanitarian Food Assistance, 67 percent (20.1 million people) of the population would be experiencing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity and would require urgent assistance to save their lives and livelihoods.
**Q2:** How is FAO working to tackle issues these issues?

*Mr. Gadain:* FAO assistance in Yemen is shaped by the 2018-2020 Plan of Action. The overall goal of the three-year Plan of Action is to contribute towards improving food security and nutrition as well as strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households while restoring the county’s agriculture sector. It is centred on three pillars.

**Q3:** What are some of success FAO has had in recent years from which we can draw on lessons learnt to inform the future?

*Mr. Gadain:* There many successful programmes that FAO has implemented in the past few years that can be replicated and scaled out to have even greater impact. Apart from good lessons we have learned from helping families to resuscitate local food production, I will mention just a few; Food Security Information for Action: FAO has been working to improve the country’s ability to monitor emerging threats such as poor weather, crop pests and diseases, soaring prices of agriculture inputs, to ensure that appropriate and timely livelihood support, or action can be taken. Availability of reliable and timely data from Integrated Food Security Phase Classification – supported in country by this project - also means that partners can respond better faster in times of crises. Agriculture value chain development: Agriculture creates jobs at each stage of the value chain and particularly includes those most vulnerable - especially women, youth and internally displace people. Through various donor funded projects, FAO has in recent years made a huge impact in the dairy sector. Supporting other value chains such as fish processing, honey production and coffee production is crucial in reducing poverty and equipping families with the tools they need to earn a living even in the face of the conflict-induced crisis. Resolving Water Resource Conflicts: The unavailability of water for agricultural practices is the most limiting factor for food security. For several years now a combination of factors such as climate change, population growth among others, has resulted in an imbalance between supply and demand in the water sector across the country.

Emergency support to the most vulnerable rural and peri-urban households (across famine-risk districts).
Support to the sustainable restoration and diversification of agricultural livelihoods and agri-food systems (across districts where access is secured).
Improved coordination of; planning, programming and support for food security, nutrition and agricultural livelihoods.

With its vast resources being depleted rapidly, competition for the precious liquid has heighten tensions and resulted in several conflicts. FAO works with various Water User Associations to promote better water resource management and reduce local conflicts over water resources.

**Q4:** What is agriculture outlook for next season and what actions are being put in place?

*Mr. Gadain:* Yemen is considered semi-arid to arid in climate, rainfall rises from less than 50mm along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts to a maximum of 500-800mm in the western highlands. About 51% of the cultivated area is grown under rainfall. There are two rainy seasons in Yemen, the first spring season starts on March-May, and the second main summer season starts on July-September. During the spring season, legumes and vegetables are mainly at the same time farmers prepare the land to grow staple grain crops (Sorghum, millet, barley and maize) in the northern, central and southern highlands while in the lowlands, red sea and Tihammah plains where rainfall is low sorghum and millet is mainly grown as feeds for animals. 2019 rainfall estimates is above average cumulatively however, the conflict has impeded optimal cultivation for the farmers. To help mitigate the catastrophic effect of the current crisis, FAO support local food production through provision of emergency staple crop and vegetable kits, provision of postharvest equipment for cereals, animal feed, poultry production kits, emergency fishing gear and equipment, livestock production as well as protection inputs and services for the most vulnerable and food insecure HHs, and creating opportunities for rural income
generation. In addition, FAO lead in the effective, timely and coherent coordination of all food security and agriculture related responses in the country through co-leading the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) and food security information and early warning information generation. Many government bodies and stakeholders has benefited from institutional capacity building for early warning and action and establishment of the early warning system. In this regard, FAO has provided and installed whether stations to monitor and report rainfall and climate conditions and alert the farmers on what actions they should undertake.

Q5: What would you think it will take to see Yemen become Food Secure?

Mr. Gadain: There are several actions that can have an immediate impact. Increasing local food production, rehabilitating agriculture infrastructure and irrigation systems, strengthening of value chains and creation of on/off-farm employment opportunities and income-generating activities are among the key intervention that if scaled up, can build resilient livelihoods and help communities become self-reliant.

Failure to find a peaceful solution to the conflict will only aggravate the country’s food security fragility. There can be no food security without peace, and no lasting peace without food security. An end to the protracted conflict would pave the way for recovery, and bolster food security and sustainable development in the region.

Dr. Hussein Gadain

FAO Representative

Appointed: 16 July 2019.

Professional experience

Mr. Gadain started his career in 1990 as Civil Engineer for the AGIB Group & Howard Humphreys Joint Venture in Khartoum, Sudan. In 1991, he joined the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resources in Wad Medani, Sudan as Research Irrigation Engineer. From 1994 to 1998, he worked for the Water Resource Engineering Programme (WREP) at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, as Research Assistant and as Researcher from 1998 to 2001.

From 2001 to 2006, he served in various senior capacities under the United States Geological Survey/Earth Resources Observations & Science project, supporting USAID FEWSNET. Here he helped the Greater Horn of Africa (10 countries), to respond to agrometeorological hazards and mitigate their impacts on the region’s food security.

Mr. Gadain joined FAO in 2006 as Water Coordinator, Somalia Water and Land Information Management Project (SWALIM) project based in Nairobi, Kenya. From 2013 to May 2016, he has been serving as Chief Technical Advisor for the SWALIM project.

Mr. Gadain was appointed as FAO Representative in Egypt in May 2016, a position held until being appointed as FAO Representative in Yemen in July 2019.

Academic background

Mr. Gadain, a national of Sudan, holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil and Hydraulic Engineering (First Class) from the Sudan University of Science and Technology, Khartoum, Sudan; a Master of Science degree and a Ph.D. in Water Resources Engineering from the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
Message on International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

This year marks the 27th anniversary of the declaration by the United Nations General Assembly of 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. It is a time to reflect on the great inroads that have been made to end the scourge of poverty. There has been a massive drop in global extreme poverty rates -- from 36 per cent in 1990 to 8.6 per cent in 2018 -- vastly increasing the economic and social opportunities for so many across the world.

Despite the rapid decline of extreme poverty by more than 1 billion people in the past three decades, approximately 700 million people still live on less than US $1.90 per day. However, the international poverty line does not fully describe how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) tries to capture how people experience poverty in their daily lives. For instance, MPI indicators examine whether a household has access to drinking water, sanitation facilities or electricity or whether a household member has completed five years of schooling. The MPI data shows that 1.3 billion people around the world are in fact multidimensionally poor. The MPI also starkly highlights that there are poor people living outside of poor countries, outside of poor regions and outside of poor households.

The MPI results show that children suffer poverty more intensely than adults and are more likely to be deprived in all 10 of the MPI indicators, lacking essentials such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education. Even more staggering, worldwide, one in three children is multidimensionally poor, compared to one in six adults. That means that nearly half of the people living in multidimensional poverty -- 663 million -- are children, with the youngest children bearing the greatest burden.

Therefore, the theme for this year’s International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is pertinent as it focuses on “Acting Together to Empower Children, their Families and Communities to End Poverty”. Effective policies and strategies to prevent and eradicate child poverty must consider families and communities as the nucleus of action to break cycles of intergenerational poverty. Protecting the human rights of children is also fundamental -- including the right to be protected against all forms of abuse and violence.

In this respect, 2019 also marks the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child -- a landmark human rights treaty which protects the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child regardless of their race, gender, religion or abilities.

Today, I would like to particularly recognize and commend the UNICEF’s vital work to save children’s lives; to defend their rights; and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will continue to be a close partner of UNICEF -- particularly as we work together to eradicate poverty in all its forms, everywhere by the year 2030.
The representative of the UNICEF in Yemen Sara Beysolow Nyanti (2nd R) speaks at a press conference in Sanaa, Yemen, on Oct. 23, 2019. More than 5,000 Yemeni children have been killed or injured since the war erupted between the Saudi-backed exiled Yemeni government and Iran-allied Houthi rebels in March 2015, the representative of the UNICEF in Yemen said.

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"The escalating conflict has forced nearly half a million Yemeni children out of school," Sara Beysolow Nyanti told reporters at a press conference following a ceremony in the capital Sanaa to mark the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

"The situation of Yemeni children are very miserable," he said, calling on all Yemeni parties to immediately end the war and move toward peace.

The UNICEF would release updated statistics of the Yemeni child victims of the war in November, Nyanti noted.

An estimated 2 million children in Yemen are currently suffering from acute malnutrition, including 360,000 under five years old, according to recent UNICEF reports.

In the world's worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen, 24.1 million people, or nearly 80 per cent of the population, require some form of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Yemen is suffering a long-running civil war between the government and Houthi rebels, which humanitarians said has brought the country to the brink of famine.
UNFPA Receives Urgent Lifesaving Support from the Yemen Humanitarian Fund

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund welcomed the generous contribution of US$3 million from the Yemen Humanitarian Fund to assist the most vulnerable women and girls with lifesaving reproductive health and protection services.

“The funding will help UNFPA to continue its support to 47 health facilities, 10 women safe spaces and two psychological care centres in severely conflict affected areas of Yemen. These facilities were facing closure due to the lack of funding towards UNFPA’s response in Yemen. This support will reach more than 120,000 women and girls in the next four months; enabling pregnant women with complications to deliver safely and for the most vulnerable women and those faced with violence to obtain the care and support they require.

“Every form of assistance we provide now can mean the difference between life and death for hundreds of thousands of women and girls in Yemen. This funding comes as a lifeline of support when UNFPA is being forced to discontinue reproductive health and protection services affecting one million women and girls,” stated Nestor Owomuhangi, UNFPA’s Acting Representative to Yemen.

UNFPA is the sole provider of lifesaving reproductive health medicines in Yemen and leads coordination and provision of protection services across the country. To keep reaching the most vulnerable women and girls, UNFPA requires US$68.2 million over the next three months out of the US$110.5 million appealed for its response in 2019. To date, only 38 per cent of funding has been received.

United States Announces $25 Million to Support Emergency Cash Transfer Program in Yemen

This week, the United States announced $25 million in additional aid to support the people of Yemen through the UNICEF-implemented Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) program. This funding complements more than $2.2 billion in U.S. humanitarian assistance since 2015 and will help 1.5 million Yemeni households – approximately 9 million people – access basic goods and services on the local economy.

The ECT program is based on Yemen’s Social Welfare Fund (SWF), which provided critical support to vulnerable households throughout Yemen before the start of the conflict. The United States has supported the implementation of the ECT program since its launch in 2017 to prevent vulnerable populations from descending further into poverty and to maintain this social protection mechanism. U.S. funding will ensure beneficiary households receive uninterrupted assistance through June 2020.

The United States remains one of the largest donors of humanitarian assistance to the Yemen crisis; however, no amount of humanitarian or development assistance will end this conflict and the suffering of millions. An enduring solution to the Yemen conflict will only come through a comprehensive political agreement. This funding will ensure that when the parties reach an agreement, Yemeni institutions stand ready to support their citizens as they work toward a secure and prosperous future for their country.
“When I was carried through the hospital doors last June, nobody thought I would live to tell this story,” remembers Adba Saleh Mubarak. “The nurses took one look at me and motioned my daughter to take me away. They thought I was dead,” she recalls. Her daughter, however, insisted that the nurses take a closer look, and thanks to medical treatment, Adba recovered from an acute case of cholera.

While the disease is endemic in Yemen, the last few years have seen infections spike to a scale not witnessed in living memory. The destruction of water infrastructure due to the conflict, plus aquifer depletion, are largely to blame. With freshwater extremely scarce and sewage disposal systems in disrepair, more and more people are using water of dubious quality. A still visibly frail Adba suspects she contracted cholera from water from Sana’a’s wastewater treatment plant. The overwhelmed plant is spewing poorly treated wastewater into the canal that runs through the Bani Al Harith District, where Adba lives with her daughter and three grandchildren. Many people here – mainly women and children - use this unsafe water to grow vegetables for their own consumption and to sell in the capital’s markets.

“This area used to be our own little Garden of Eden. We grew all sorts of vegetables,” Adba remembers. She learned the hard way about the risks of bacterial-laden water or food and now avoids contact with it. Yet, even though farmers and families have been warned about the dangers of using water from the canal, the supplies of this precious resource are too hard to come by – and the need for food too great – so these warnings often go ignored.

Seeing this problem, FAO partnered with Japan to install small-scale wastewater treatment facilities that can produce safe water for irrigation. The treatment plants use the power of gravity to cycle the water through the various stages of cleaning; this means that the facilities are both cost effective and easy to manage. The rigorous 26-day treatment process involves sedimentation, filtration and aeration that utilizes direct sunlight to kill the microbes and ensure treated water meets the standards required for use in agriculture. At optimum working capacity, each plant can treat 150 cubic meters of wastewater per day.

The vast majority of water in Yemen – as much as 90 percent – goes towards irrigation. To improve water use efficiency, the FAO-Japan project is also rolling out modern drip irrigation systems on an estimated 75 hectares of cultivated land. This system ensures the sustainable and responsible use of treated water for farming.

Through already established Water Users’ Associations, the project is also intensifying public awareness campaigns regarding safe water use in agriculture, food processing and preparation. Farmers are being educated on the perils of untreated wastewater on human and animal health. The campaigns also focus on the environmental dangers that contaminated water poses to the soil and ecology.

Rania Ahmad Handhal, head of the Women Sector in Ahdaq Water Users’ Association and a participant in the awareness raising effort, says women are particularly at risk. She herself also contracted and recovered from cholera last year. “Getting cholera, however, strengthened my resolve to continue raising awareness among women in our village because they are the ones who farm and use water more extensively than the men,” she says.

Every day Rania tirelessly goes from door to door talking to women about cholera and how to avoid it. “I do my best in trying to save the lives of my people. I am very optimistic and hopeful that with better information and projects such as this one, we can beat cholera and women can earn much more from growing and selling vegetables,” she concludes with a smile.
UN Secretary General's Message on
UNITED NATIONS DAY

United Nations Day highlights the enduring ideals of the Charter, which entered into force on this date 74 years ago.

Amid stormy global seas, the Charter remains our shared moral anchor.

At this time of turbo-charged change, the United Nations remains focused on the real problems of real people.

We are working for a fair globalization and bold climate action.

We are pushing for human rights and gender equality -- and saying “no” to hatred of any kind.

And we are striving to maintain peace -- while bringing life-saving aid to millions caught up in armed conflict.

The United Nations itself is becoming ever more agile and accountable as we enhance support to countries.

Next year marks the Organization’s 75th anniversary. This milestone is a critical moment to shape our future, together.

I invite you to join the conversation.

Together, let us advance the well-being of “we the peoples”.

Thank you.