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A comparative analysis of two food security and nutrition policies in Yemen between 2018 and 2023: agricultural livelihoods and multisectoral nutrition plan

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ABSTRACT

This article compares two food security and nutrition policies in Yemen, analysing their effectiveness and their ideational and institutional alignment with the United Nations' Human Security approach. The two policies are *Yemen plan of action 2018–2020: Strengthening Resilient Agricultural Livelihoods* and *Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2020–2023*. The qualitative comparison and analysis is based on national and international primary open access sources published between 2019 and 2023. The most relevant findings are classified using a triple analytical prism. First, despite some relevant progress, the ideational factors of the two case studies are partially aligned with the Human Security approach, especially in reference to Sustainable Development Goals coverage. Second, regarding the institutional dimension of the policies, despite the fulfilment of most normative and participation requirements, a problem that still remains is non-compliance with international standards in three areas: national regulations on labour conditions, climate-change considerations in infrastructure construction, and participation of civil society. Third, regarding policy effectiveness, both policies have some limitations related to lack of funding and instability in Yemen exacerbated by violence and COVID-19.

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1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) has tagged the food and nutrition situation in Yemen as one of the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world, 'with the widest cholera outbreak in modern human history and a devastating famine' (United Nations Yemen, 2023). Since 2014, the country has witnessed a political armed conflict that has destabilised the central government, distressed the national economy, and exacerbated poverty (World Food Program, 2019). As in other Arab countries, food insecurity in Yemen is the result of political instability (Ecker, 2014, p. 53). In the post-Cold War world, most wars are 'food wars' where 'food is used as weapon, food systems are destroyed [...] and food insecurity persist[s] as a legacy of conflict' (Messer & Marc, 2006, p. 1). This process is called 'politization and weaponization of food' (Murugani et al., 2021, p. 10), both in terms of mass starvation and theft of food aid by parties in the conflict.

As of February of 2023, according to WHO data, there have been a total of 11,945 confirmed cases of COVID-19, with 2159 deaths in Yemen (World Health Organization, 2023). However, the reality is different:

'Due to the convergence of severe economic instability exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, stifling war, and spiking food prices, the Yemeni people are at the brink of famine with women and children especially malnourished' (Rahmat et al., 2022, p. 1589). A recent study from the Cash Consortium in Yemen, co-led by IOM and the Danish Refugee Council, showed how COVID-19 has worsened living conditions in Yemen. The 571 households surveyed in nine governorates reported suffering from a deteriorating economic situation, with nearly half the respondents reporting that breadwinners lost jobs, and a third reporting reduced income as well as decreased remittances since the start of the pandemic (International Organization for Migration, 2020, p. 6). Between 2014 and 2019, over 150,000 children aged up to 5 years have died from starvation because of the war. This number represents 3% all Yemeni young children (Egel et al., 2021, p. 12).

Despite humanitarian assistance during the 10-year civil war, the situation in Yemen has not improved. The havoc caused by the war has made it almost impossible for the public to access health care, education, clean water, sanitation, and social protection. According to

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the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ‘The 2023 humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen requires US\$ 4.3 billion to reach the 17.3 million most vulnerable people in need of humanitarian support because of protracted conflict, displacement, and economic deterioration, compounded by recurrent natural disasters’ (OCHA, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). The war impedes the effective deployment of international assistance. Even during the cease-fire of 2022, ‘violence against humanitarian personnel and assets remained a major concern’ (ACAPS, 2022a, 2022b). Moreover, the international instability and hyperinflation that started with the war in Ukraine has a direct negative impact on Yemen’s food security because ‘Ukraine and Russia were leading exporters of agricultural products to Yemen and disruptions related to the war [further increased] already-rising food prices and deepened poverty. Before the war, Yemen imported at least 27% of its wheat from Ukraine and 8% from Russia’ (Human Rights Watch, 2023). A study confirms that ‘Fragile states have on average a 10% higher rate of cereal import dependency than nonfragile states. This potentially indicates that fragile states are at a higher risk of violence due to shocks to global food markets’ (Brück et al., 2016, p. 3).

This article aligns with the international literature on food and nutrition policies in Yemen in the last years. While several studies have been conducted to understand the relationship between conflict and hunger, empirical research has labelled the deliberate and calculated creations of food shortage during conflicts to trigger ‘mass starvation as an atrocity crime’ (De Waal, 2018; Marcus, 2003). Not all conflicts have the same negative impact on food insecurity. Gates et al. (2012) stated that an average-gravity conflict increases the proportion of under-nourished population by 3.3%. Empirically, both conflict duration and intensity are key determinants in this regard with aggregate levels of conflict and commensurate proportions of dwindling nutrition (Justino, 2012). Corral et al. (2020) predict that two-thirds of the world’s extreme poor will plunge into deeper socio-economic and political instability due to various levels of conflict and further established a strong correlation between conflict and food insecurity. A comparative perspective of famine situations in Middle East and North African countries and the suggestion of an improved design for effective food policies has been explored by Brück and d’Errico (2019) and Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2019). Gboku and Bebeley studied capacity-building in agricultural research in post-war Sierra Leone, confirming the utility of the ‘Integrated Agricultural Research for Development approach, which recognizes the need for collective

action by involving a broad range of stakeholders and multiple knowledge sources that can be used to address complex development challenges along the value chains’ (Gboku & Bebeley, 2016, p. 140). Bounie et al. analyse the positive impact of the introduction of food science and technology in humanitarian response, as they ‘can play a key role in the production of foods for affected populations using local raw materials with context appropriate robust technologies while fulfilling nutritional, microbiological, sensory, cultural, environmental and quality requirements’ (Bounie et al., 2020, p. 368).

Different studies have explained that the devastating impact of the global financial crises of 2007–2008 in an already ailing world is foundational to the current disintegrating economic and socio-political incongruities of neoliberalism (Fraser, 2017; Mezzadri, 2020; Saad-Filho, 2021). Sowers and Weinthal (2021) focus on the humanitarian consequences of the destruction of civilian infrastructure in Yemen, while Elayah et al. (2023) analyse community-based service delivery initiatives to deal with the collapse of public services. The most recent literature discusses the food security implications of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Yemen (Prantner & Al-Naggar, 2022), also focusing on the country’s fiscal and institutional incapacity of managing the situation due to its high dependence on imports of Russian and Ukrainian food products (Abay et al., 2023). This situation is worsened, on one side, by the political conditionality imposed by Gulf oil states for providing Yemen with humanitarian aid (Elayah & Al-Awami, 2024) and, on the other side, by mistrust and tensions between NGOs and the UN ‘over decision-making authority and resource allocation’ (Elayah & Al-Mansouri, 2024). Ecker et al. (2023) confirm that ‘limited collaboration among the public, private, and third sectors (for example, in the form of collective action, multi-stakeholder partnerships) contributes to inefficiencies in food supply chains and food aid delivery’. Elayah and Fentiman (2021, p. 1) conclude 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’.

The policies examined in this study are the *Yemen Plan of Action 2018–2020: Strengthening Resilient Agricultural Livelihoods* and the *Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2020–2023*. The two policies are multilevel key social interventions to promote a holistic and multidimensional approach that combine ‘nutrition-specific interventions’ to eliminate the immediate reasons of malnutrition with ‘nutrition-sensitive interventions’ to eradicate deep, structural, and basic causes

of malnutrition (Bhutta et al., 2008). Furthermore, most of the policies' interventions are agriculture-based, as they focus on the importance of nutrition, with particular emphasis on children, pregnant and lactating women, and women in general, with an additional focus on girls' empowerment and gender issues, under the overall goal of achieving SDGs (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023).

2. Methods and theoretical framework

The article adopts a qualitative methodology to deeply analyse primary and secondary sources containing different types of data. A systematic content analysis of complex and varied data allows their categorisation according to three dimensions of the two food and nutrition policies: ideational, institutional, and effectiveness dimensions. The last dimension, effectiveness, focuses on identifying the most important characteristics of the challenges in policy implementation. The qualitative content analysis consists of the analysis of data using codes derived from the Human Security framework chosen for this study. Content analysis is the 'systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of the characteristics of a message' (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Its methodological advantage is the flexibility it offers in studying different types of sources. Primary sources are official reports, published by Yemeni authorities, and reports and statistics published by UN agencies that offer humanitarian aid in the field, like FAO, UN Development Program (UNDP), Food Security Agriculture Cluster (FSAC), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), World Bank (WB), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP), Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, and by independent analysis-providers and research centres (ACAPS). We found the primary sources in the database of these nine international actors and in the official webpage of the Yemeni Government, where we searched the policies' complete names. We also consulted international academic literature on food security and nutrition policies to complement the analysis. The use of analysis techniques is structured around a double perspective: on one side, the reports and humanitarian papers authored by actors on the field, and on the other side, the most recent specialised literature that strengthens the theoretical framework and the methodology of the analysis.

The next step is the operationalisation of the three analytical categories (ideational, institutional, and effectiveness dimensions), by establishing the necessary criteria to measure the precise indicators. Every indicator

is established as a data collection unit of analysis, that is "a message or a part of a message that can be identified and distinguished from the other units (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 71). The data collection units, which are necessary to concretely measure the indicators, are the paragraphs and key sentences of the above-mentioned documents. In the next paragraphs, we explain the indicators chosen for the analysis of every dimension.

According to the Critical Theory of International Relations, ideas have a double significance. They are accepted and uncontested subjective meanings of long duration, and they could also be competing collective images that depict contrasting realities (Cox, 1981, 1983). In this article, ideas are intended as the constitutive principles and indisputable normative goals established by international actors that inspire food-security and nutrition policies in the XXI century; they are 'concepts of what is right and what is convenient, what is appropriate and what is useful' (Barbé, 2020, p. 374). The explored ideas are values and normative goals established by the Human Security approach, the SDGs of UN Agenda 2030 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023), and international global goals established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Scaling Up Nutrition Platform.

In line with the liberalist paradigm of International Relations (Onuf, 2002), the term 'international institution' refers to either the normative structure (the set of norms and rules that regulate the conduct of actors) or 'the place of international authority', that is, the international organisations 'legitimizing, for example, the actions of states' (Barbé, 2021, p. 22). Under this perspective, first, the article explores the Yemeni legislation, the normative acts adopted by international actors like FAO and World Bank, and the significant legislative gaps between national and the international standards. Second, it examines the complex network of actors involved, the leading actors, the use of a long-term communication strategy, the mechanisms for transparency and accountability, and the presence of a national or international normative framework for implementation.

The analysis of the third dimension focuses on policy implementation and major ground-level challenges and impediments. It is structured on four indicators – type of action, use of new technologies, the policy's effectiveness in terms of the assistance provided, and major obstacles in policy implementation. Type of action is classified into two categories: 'emergency support' in the immediate term or action for 'restoration and diversification' in the mid-to-long term. Technology use can be related to 'climate-smart' technologies, 'sanitation', or both. Effectiveness is measured in terms of assistance provided to the population, calculated as the number of

people assisted divided by the total target. The possible obstacles in the implementation of the policies are of four types: local administrative bans, gender-gap related problems, violence against international workers and the press, and limitations related to different internal or external causes, like COVID-19, the lack of funding, or the civil war.

The limitation of the methodology is that the information is fragmented, incomplete and, sometimes, not up to date. Also, information is published by different actors in their own databases, as mentioned above. Thus, there are inherent biases, gaps, or inaccuracies in the data. This can be related to the fact that ‘collaborations [among NGOs and UN agencies] are often ad hoc, limited to peer-to-peer partnerships, and constrained by a siloed mentality’ (Ecker et al., 2023, p. 1).

Thus, the authors of this study spent a considerable amount of time reviewing and collating the scattered data to conclude the analysis and reduce the risk of bias. An example is the registration of COVID-19 cases during 2020 by WHO, where only 11,945 confirmed cases and 2159 deaths were reported (World Health Organization, 2023), which does not reflect the actual situation witnessed by people. In reality, ‘The number of lives lost to COVID-19 in Yemen is sadly unknown but haunting images of mass grave sites tell their own story’. Moreover, ‘2020 was also a challenging year for humanitarian organizations in Yemen. Around 98 per cent of people in need—17.8 million – are living in hard-to-reach areas, mainly designated as such due to bureaucracy-related factors like permit denials and movement blockages’ (International Organization for Migration, 2020, p. 2). Another example is the lack of data related to the financial efficiency of the first policy for 2020 (FSAC, 2020). Despite these limitations, the results offer a comprehensive comparison of two recent policies, clearly revealing their major strong and weak points. This research makes two other contributions. First, it is an interesting case study of the challenges faced in managing the complex interactions among poverty, climate change, food security, and war in Yemen in ways that align with normative frameworks such as human security and SDGs. Second, the article explores the evolving connections between emergency response activities and capacity building efforts.

As mentioned before, the analysis is conducted through a triple analytical prism that embraces the ideational, institutional, and efficiency dimensions of the policies. The ideational and institutional framework is the human security approach. The UNDP Human development report of 1994 defines it as ‘safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression

as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, jobs, or communities’ (UNDP, 1994, p. 23). Human security and human development constitute an indivisible pairing: ‘Human security can be seen as the “rear-guard” of human development [... they] observe human condition from different ends of a continuum, summarized by Amartya Sen as “expansion with equity” (human development) and “downturn with security” (human security)’ (UNDP, 2009, p. 20).

The human security approach is the product of deepening and widening the concept of security by critical security studies in the post-cold war context (Buzan et al., 1998). As Rothschild (1995) affirms, ‘The expansion of the scope of the security concept beyond survival and physical threats is inspired by the liberal tradition in which the freedom of an individual from fear and want has been regarded as a collective good serving the best interests of the community’ (quoted in Väyrynen, 2022, p. 314). The three human security pillars are freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. Together, they constitute a powerful approach for the following four reasons: 1) The possibility of passing ‘from coordination to integration’ as the human security approach ‘calls for integrated actions among a network of stakeholders to ensure lasting responses to the most difficult deficits in peace and development’ while dealing with the structural and multidimensional causes and consequences of new threats. The seven dimensions of the human security approach are as follows: economic, environmental, food, health, political, personal, and community security. 2) Partnerships under the human security umbrella combine the expertise and resources of a wide range of actors like UN agencies, governmental actors, the market sector, and the local communities. 3) As stated by the principle called ‘localization and leaving no one behind’, human security promotes consultation, participation, and collaboration of local communities in policy design and execution. Due to the peculiarity of every socio-political (sub)national context, the international community’s agenda must always adapt to reality, adopting a twin-track approach to include the target population’s considerations and needs. 4) ‘Prevention is the core objective of human security. It addresses the root causes of vulnerabilities, focuses attention on emerging risks and emphasizes early action. It strengthens local capacities to build resilience and promotes solutions that enhance social cohesion and advance respect for human rights and dignity’ (UN Trust Fund for Human Security, 2023).

Based on the triple analytical dimension adopted for this study, three research questions are set.

1: Are the two food and nutrition policies completely aligned with the human security framework, SDGs and international standards? Do they have a multidimensional, multisectoral, multilevel approach, with a balance between short- and long-term objectives?

2: Which actors lead the implementation? Does Yemeni legislation on food security and nutrition align with international standards?

3: Do the policies achieve their objectives? Which are the most relevant obstacles and constraints for their implementation? Over the last 5 years, have new limiting or impeding factors emerged?

The structure of this article is as follows. The next two sections, [Sections 2](#) and [3](#), offer a textual descriptive analysis of the two food security and nutrition policies in terms of objectives, actors involved, organisation, coordination, and evaluation. The objective is to provide all the information necessary for the comparative analysis conducted in [Section 4](#), which shows the comparative results in terms of ideational, institutional, and effectiveness-related factors. Finally, [Section 5](#) answers the research questions based on the analysis of the previous section and concludes the paper.

3. Results

3.1. Yemen plan of action 2018–2020: strengthening resilient agricultural livelihoods

Just 3 months after the beginning of the war in 2014, Yemen's condition had to be declared as a system-wide 'Level 3 humanitarian emergency' (OCHA, 2015). The crisis has attracted several emergency activities from the FAO and the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) partners who focused their efforts on different areas based on agricultural inputs (cereal and vegetable seeds, livestock and poultry, animal feed, veterinary supplies, and fishing gears), cash-based transfers, and training (FAO, 2018a, p. 4; FSAC, 2018, 2019, 2020). Moreover, the Yemeni government also approved the legal national framework for planning and organising emergency and recovery support to Yemen's agricultural sector, and for addressing the effects of climate change and other natural phenomena, such as plant and animal epidemics (Republic of Yemen, 2019). This framework, called the *Global Agriculture and Food Security Program*, legitimates FAO's operations in Yemen through food security and nutrition and agricultural livelihood programmes and projects. This three-year project, estimated at USD 228.5 million, aims to enhance the food security and nutrition of 9.1 million

deprived people in 1.3 million households (FAO, 2018a, p. 2). The specific objectives are as follows.

- (1) Respond to the urgent food security and nutrition and income-generating needs of all affected rural and peri-urban households in Yemen, in line with SDGs of UN Agenda 2030 (UN Department of economic and social affairs, 2023).
- (2) Ensure that the appropriate agricultural livelihood restoration and resilience strengthening interventions are directed towards the vulnerable rural and peri-urban communities with adequate attention to the needs of women and girls.
- (3) Re-establish and strengthen the capacity of all levels of government and non-governmental agricultural, livestock, and fisheries suppliers to lend a strong base to agricultural livelihood and resilience strengthening interventions (Republic of Yemen, 2019, p. 12).

The implementation process is supported by three pillars, divided into 21 key intervention areas. These areas will be managed in the short term and further expanded to long term as the programmes and projects are rolled out, aiming to restore and stabilise Yemen's agricultural sector in the areas under review (FAO, 2018a, p. 2). The key elements of the three pillars of the plan are as follows.

Pillar 1 - Emergency support to the most vulnerable rural and peri-urban households with eight short-term key intervention areas targeted at approximately 1.17 million vulnerable rural and peri-urban households. This included cash-based transfers; crop, livestock and fisheries production; value addition and income generation, among others. There was also surveillance and control of transboundary plants and animal pests and diseases, as well as desert locust management. Pillar 1 also fulfils FAO's Strategic Objective 5: 'Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises' (FAO, 2018a, p. 20).

Pillar 2 - Sustainable restoration and diversification of agricultural livelihoods and agri-food systems in accessible districts. Pillar 2 was FAO's tool for enhancing and restoring agricultural and fisheries production to their original states across all districts through the government and its development partners. With nine longer-term key intervention areas indirectly targeting 135,200 food insecure and poor rural and peri-urban households, this pillar aimed to introduce model climate-smart technologies and practices and capacity development measures for each agroecological zone. For example, the goal of achieving the sustainable use of limited

water resources and degraded lands with an improved crop, livestock, fisheries, and forestry productivity beyond the three-year span of the Plan. Pillar 2 is aligned with FAO's Strategic Objective 2: 'Increase and improve the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner'; Strategic Objective 3: 'Reduce rural poverty'; and Strategic Objective 4: 'Enable more inclusive and effective agricultural and food systems' (FAO, 2018a, p. 30).

Pillar 3 - Improved national level planning, programming, and support for food security, nutrition, and agricultural livelihoods. Pillar 3 comprised four key intervention areas aimed at institutional strengthening including government networks and information and integrated communication systems for the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster. 'Pillar 3 contributes to FAO Strategic Objective 1 - "Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition"; Strategic Objective 5 - "Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises"' (FAO, 2018a, p. 40). The coordination of the key interventions within the FSAC-FAO framework and its co-leading World Food Program aimed to bring together all multisectoral stakeholders to ensure effective leadership and accountability in the Level 3 humanitarian operation. Strategic partnerships are established with governmental agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector, United Nations agencies, development partners, and the Red Cross (FAO, 2018b, pp. 61–63).

The financial needs were covered by 89% in 2018 and 72% in 2019, with an average of 80.5%. No data is available for 2020 (FSAC, 2020). Despite this 17% drop in funding, the coverage of emergency food assistance operations increased from 88% in 2018 to 95% in 2019 (FSAC, 2018, 2019), 7.4 out of 8.4 million people attended in 2018, and 11.7 out of 12.3 million in 2019. As for 2020, the only available data relates to the people attended; the context of civil war combined with the pandemic caused the percentage of effectiveness to drop to 42%, with only 5.69 million people served out of a total of 13.5 million (FSAC, 2020). The final score of food emergency assistance coverage between 2018 and 2020 is 75%. Regarding the ratio of long-term livelihoods in the policy, the available data for 2018 and 2019 show that only 8% and 7.4%, respectively, of total livelihood interventions have a long-term perspective (FSAC, 2018, 2019). Due to the obstacles represented by COVID-19, the national economic collapse, and the civil war (FAO, 2022), the emergency support offered in the framework of the policy to the agricultural sector covers all the key-interventions areas but has not accomplished the objectives in terms of effectiveness and long-term approach for agricultural resilience

(World Food Program, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration (2020, pp. 6–7), the 'pandemic amplified underlying vulnerabilities across Yemen, compounding the impact of an ongoing economic crisis and prolonged conflict by further reducing access to livelihoods, incomes, remittances and access to basic services. [...] The response to COVID-19 in Yemen has been severely hampered by operational restrictions, along with a lack of suppression measures and community level adaptive behaviours. These challenges, in addition to fuel and funding shortages, often affected the delivery of medical and personal protective equipment throughout the country, as well as efforts to scale up surveillance and testing, and improve health service provision'.

3.2. Yemen multisectoral nutrition action plan 2020–2023

Prior to the onset of the civil war, the nutrition situation was so alarming that in 2012, Yemen enrolled with *Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement*, a country-driven initiative launched by the United Nations Secretary General in 2010, with the objective of eradicating all forms of malnutrition before 2030. The initiative is composed of 65 states, 'more than 4,000 civil society organizations, some 1,400 businesses, 5 UN agencies and a group of international donors and foundations'. These actors work together through four networks: SUN Civil Society Network, SUN Business Network, United Nations Nutrition, and SUN Donor Network (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2024). Upon membership, Yemen became committed to its principles and took steps to address the nutrition situation accordingly, by forming a requisite governance structure, stakeholder engagements, a legal framework, contextual and situational analyses, an advocacy strategy, and a monitoring and evaluation system. The original SUN process, however, did not embrace a national multisectoral nutrition strategy with corresponding nutrition-specific objectives like eradication of acute and chronic child malnutrition. In 2019, it still exceeds the World Health Organization's 15% threshold, 5 out of 22 governorates and almost one-third of all districts presented life-threatening stages of acute malnutrition (OCHA, 2019).

The quest for a more effective strategy to improve the food security situation led to the adoption of *Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2020–2023*, as a roadmap of government programmes and projects aimed at reducing malnutrition using a multisectoral and multi-stakeholder strategy, based on Yemen's *Common Results Framework* for enhancing nutrition outcomes (Republic of Yemen, 2020a). The programme

elucidates the principal reasoning behind the overall goals, specific objectives, programme of activities and associated indicators entrenched in the *Common Results Framework* as well as the various phases of the project. The overarching objects of the policy are '1. Increase access to and utilisation of essential maternal and child health and nutrition services. 2. Increase coordinated nutrition-sensitive action across relevant sectors. 3. Strengthen government leadership, national policies, and capacities' (Republic of Yemen, 2020b, p. 1). These objectives are in line with the four strategic objectives of *Scaling Up Nutrition 3.0 Movement Strategy 2021–2025*: strengthen multilevel policy and advocacy environments to achieve SDGs; streamline national priorities into one common strategy; build and reinforce national power of action; and ensure multilevel, transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance mechanisms (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2023).

The structure and composition of the *Action Plan* present a clear-cut policy direction and multisectoral approach to obtain the convergence and involvement of multiple sectors and actors in addressing the situation. The actors are drawn from various ministries such as the Ministry of Public Health and Population, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Ministry of Fish Wealth, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Water and Environment. They are complemented by UNICEF, World Food Program, World Health Organization, FAO, as well as other humanitarian agencies (Republic of Yemen, 2020a, p. x).

The policy seeks to promote social and behavioural changes through strategic communication regarding general health and nutrition, hygiene, maternal and child malnutrition, root causes of malnutrition, social protection, women's rights and empowerment, and the importance of girls' education. Problems associated with early marriage and the connection of birth spacing with malnutrition are also highlighted (Republic of Yemen, 2020c, p. 31). The policy adopts a multisectoral approach that embraces the humanitarian perspective of the UN 2030 Agenda, focusing on SDG1 (eradicate poverty), SDG2 (eradicate hunger and malnutrition), and SDG3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) (Republic of Yemen, 2020b, pp. 3–4).

The SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound) approach of the Advocacy plan is rooted in the perspective of social and behavioural change, together with a persuasive communication strategy. It contains a proposition of facts and values that inspire the policy, targeted at a decentralised audience that includes Yemeni family members, pregnant and lactating women, adolescent girls, and school

students, using opinion leaders, religious leaders, community health workers, and teachers to promote the understanding and adoption of good nutrition practices that support ecological enhancement (Republic of Yemen, 2020b, pp. 3–4).

Regarding the policy's implementation, the lack of resources affects the creation of most SUN networks in Yemen. *UN Nutrition* is the only one out of six present, while networks related to business and civil society are 'in progress'. There is no development in other areas such as academia, donors, youth, media, and parliamentary groups; this is the second priority established for the development of the policy. The creation of a subnational nutrition coordination mechanism, with annual plans of action, is also 'in progress'. 'In conflict-affected countries, the SUN Movement is often not recognized as a natural ally to ensure a continuum of care between humanitarian service providers, the Government and development partners. In Yemen, it is actively involved in building strong links and alignment between all stakeholders' (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2021). To sum up, direct violence associated with the civil war and humanitarian emergency, institutional delays, like the creation of networks for stakeholder participation, and particularly lack of funding are the major limitations to the policy effectiveness.

4. Discussion

This section compares the two policies in terms of different variables chosen for comparison in each of the three analytical dimensions. The intended ideas are human security long-term approach, objectives, design, and alignment with SDGs and international standards; by institutions, we mean the actors involved, leading agency, international framework for implementation, mechanisms for transparency and accountability, and communication strategy. The implementation is analysed by four indicators: type of action, use of new technologies, the effectiveness in terms of assistance provided, and the major obstacles in the implementation of the two policies. *Yemen Plan of Action 2018–2020* is referred to as FP1 (food policy one), and *Yemen Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan 2020–2023* is FP2.

Concerning their scope, the policies' names are indicative of their objectives. FP1 is designed to offer emergency and recovery support to the agricultural sector, improve food security and nutrition, and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable rural and peri-urban households. FP2 is more nutrition oriented. The multidimensional approach of both policies allows them to have a positive interrelated impact on the seven dimensions

of human security: food, health, environmental, economic, political, personal, and community security. This is in contrast with the short duration of the policies of 3 years.

FP2 employs an inclusive twin-track approach to face the dynamics of the crisis in different regions of Yemen, listening to petitions of the population involved. FP1, instead, is target-specific for selected governorates recorded as a Level 3 of humanitarian emergency responses. Regarding the design, FP1 is geographically designed and targeted at specific social and economic sectors. Whereas, FP2 is more nutrition and people oriented as it is aimed at reducing all forms of malnutrition and undernutrition among vulnerable populations.

Considering alignment with SDGs, the fundamental goal of FP1 is SDG2 (end hunger), while it contributes also to SDG1 (end of poverty); SDG5 (gender equality); SDG6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG12 (Responsible consumption and production); SDG14 (life below water); and SDG15 (life on land) (FAO, 2018a, p. 20; Republic of Yemen, 2019, p. 4). On the other side, FP2 is aligned with 'Yemen's developmental and humanitarian frameworks and targets, such as the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG2 eradicate hunger and malnutrition; SDG3, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; and significantly SDG1, eradicate poverty by 2030' (Republic of Yemen, 2020c, p. 8). The analysis shows that the second policy has a much narrower coverage of SDGs (17.64%) compared to the first one (41.17%). Regarding the alignment with the common standards proposed by international actors, data show that FP1 has a 100% coverage of the five FAO's strategic objectives (FAO, 2018a, pp. 20, 30, 40). FP2 also shows a complete alignment with the four objectives elaborated in the *Scaling Up Nutrition Movement Strategy 3.0 for 2021–2025* (Scaling Up Nutrition, 2023).

Regarding the institutional dimension, the policies involve a plurality of multilevel actors: the government and relevant ministries, NGOs, and consultants, working together with UN agencies like FAO, United Nations Development Program, World Food Program, and World Bank. They strengthen the multilateral and multidimensional human security approach by reinforcing SDG16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG17 (partnerships for the goals).

While FP1 is directly led and implemented by the United Nations agencies, FP2 is led by the National Steering Committee and the UN Movement Secretariat, with supportive technical assistance from Maximizing the Quality of Scaling Up Nutrition Plus (2020). So, FP2 is a state-led policy, while FP1 is UN-led and more aligned with the human security approach, in

terms of inclusive partnership for goals. This difference is also evident in mechanisms established for implementation: while the first policy is completed as an FAO project, the second is executed as a project framed in the Yemen *Common Results Framework* that we analysed before.

The strategic management procedure of FP2 follows the *Common Results Framework* for enhancing nutrition outcomes and the *Nutrition Monitoring and Evaluation Plan* (M&E) for ensuring accountability. The coordination of the key interventions of FP1, done within the Food security and Agriculture Cluster, FAO, and its co-lead World Food Program, brings together all stakeholders, to provide transparency and ensure an effective response at the district, regional, and national levels.

Finally, both policies embark on a *Social Behavior Change Communication Strategy* to disseminate food and nutrition messages to sensitise targeted decentralised populations on the root causes of food insecurity, improved general health and nutrition, hygiene, and maternal and child malnutrition to help achieve the necessary preventive and curative goals. This is in line with the *Yemen National Strategy for Social and Behavior Change in Nutrition 2018–2021* (Republic of Yemen, 2018).

The comparison continues with the analysis of the effectiveness and the major challenges in the implementation of policies. FP1 is supported by three pillars of short-to-long-term 21 intervention areas to provide emergency support to the most vulnerable households. On the other hand, FP2 supports the restoration and diversification of agricultural livelihoods. The first policy also uses climate-smart technologies to strengthen resilience in each agroecological zone, in combination with sanitation techniques that are focused on a specific dimension of SDG13 (elimination of plagues), interrelated with SDG6 (clean water and sanitation). This specific dimension of SDG13 is also covered by the second policy, as it is aligned with the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) goals.

Regarding effectiveness, FP1 scores an average of 75%, with a 50% drop in 2020 due to COVID-19. During the last semester of 2020, humanitarian personnel observed high food needs among internally displaced persons in the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* and malnutrition analysis for Yemen, 'which can be likely attributed to the impact COVID-19 [had] on livelihoods and access to goods' (International Organization for Migration, 2020, p. 17). FP2 registers the same fall in 2021 due to a lack of funding and episodes of direct violence against the international assistance and the press. COVID-19, lack

of financial resources, and violent attacks against the personnel have a strong negative impact on effective implementation. Concerning other obstacles and limitations, a common problem is the various bans and bureaucratic impediments instituted by the Houthis to limit travel without permit in the most affected areas of the country: there is a strong correlation between gender and access as female aid workers needed to be accompanied by males (Poggi Astudillo, 2019, p. 8), especially in Al Hudaydah, Hajjah, and Sada Governorates. Besides, the gender gap is a common problem that causes lack of access to education, mobility restrictions, obstacles to participation in the labour force, politics, and decision-making for women. Structural violence rooted in Yemeni society, exacerbated by the civil war and the humanitarian catastrophe, is the root cause of this obstacle. Furthermore, 'the onerous internal travel permissions and the need to notify the emergency operations centre in Riyadh', together with the absence of international personnel in most governorates, is a phenomenon called 'bunkerization' (gap of presence, lack of information, jeopardisation) of the evaluation system of the policies (OCHA, 2022, p. 15). This has a negative impact on the institutional mechanisms for transparency and accountability.

The strongest drawback for the second policy is the lack of funding. As a result, aid is provided on a bimonthly basis rather than a monthly one. 'Reduction in humanitarian assistance in 2022, due to funding shortfalls and a challenging operational environment, has also led to increased levels of vulnerability for those who rely on it' (OCHA, 2023c, p. 56). The situation is so critical that, at the beginning of 2022, 'two-thirds of major UN aid programmes had been reduced or closed. [...] Further cuts are on the horizon unless additional funding is forthcoming' (OCHA, 2023d). Fundraising is the priority for stakeholders and leading actors of FP2; the lack of resources is the reason for the failure of some objectives. Moreover, the first policy is the most affected by the COVID-19 situation; its effectiveness dropped from 95% in 2019 to 42% in 2020, with 5.69 million people served out of a total of 13.5 million. The pandemic also entails a widespread lack of project data (FSAC, 2020).

Due to the lack of data, the international media is unable to report much on the Yemeni war. Information and awareness-raising among the international community could exert political pressure on governments to formulate an international response commensurate with the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe. Diffuse violence against the international press is worsening this situation. During 2022, journalists reported more than 30 cases of 'arbitrary

detention, enforced disappearance, inhuman treatment, and torture [...] The Ansar Allah group "Houthis" is still arbitrarily detaining four journalists. The four journalists are facing the death penalty after being unfairly tried in the Specialized Criminal Court in Sanaa in April 2020. The journalist Waheed Al-Sufi has been forcibly disappeared since 2015' (OCHA, 2023b). Moreover, the humanitarian access in the country registers 'extreme access constraints', that are worsened by floods during 2022 which destroyed the fragile Yemeni infrastructure and by 'the spread of anti-humanitarian social media campaigns and misinformation' (ACAPS, 2022a, p. 13). To sum up, episodes of direct violence against the international assistance and press engenders an important lack of available data.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis performed in this study, the following answers were found to the research questions.

1: Are the food and nutrition policies completely aligned with the Human Security framework, SDGs, and international standards? Do they have a multidimensional, multisectoral, multilevel approach, with a balance between short- and long-term objectives?

The policies are aligned with the long-term human security approach: they differ in their priority (agricultural resilience or nutrition), combining a target-specific approach (policy one), designed for specific economic and geographic sectors affected by humanitarian emergency with a twin-track approach (policy two). In addition, the alignment with international standards of actors such as FAO and Scaling Up Nutrition is complete (100%). On the other hand, the policies have a low coverage of the SDGs, with a final average of less than 30%.

2: Which actors lead the implementation? Does Yemeni legislation on food security and nutrition align with the international standards?

The case studies, despite some unspecified delays in the second policy, have a framework for the cooperation of multilevel, multinational, and multisectoral stakeholders. They establish mechanisms for transparency and accountability and have a structured communication strategy to promote long-term social and behavioural change. The first policy is executed as an FAO-led project, while the second is a state-led policy executed with the Yemen *Common Results Framework*. In this sense, we can affirm that both policies have a good institutional design, both intended as normatively structured with legitimate actors involved.

3: Do policies achieve their objectives? Which are the most relevant obstacles and constraints for their implementation? Over the last 5 years, have new limiting or impeding factors emerged?

This question is related to the implementation of the policies and the major obstacles. The action of FP2 is aimed at restoration and diversification in the mid-long term, while in case of FP1 most actions are for food emergency support in the immediate-short term. Furthermore, policies adopt new technologies for short-term benefits (sanitation) and long-term goals (climate sustainability). Moreover, the study shows different results in terms of effectiveness in the assistance to the population target and registers a huge drop between the periods 2018–2020 (FP1: 75%) and 2021 (FP2: 50%). Multiple causes are identified in COVID-19 situation for 2020, lack of funding starting from 2021 and, since the end of the truce in October 2022, violence caused by civil war, together with anti-humanitarian campaigns and misinformation. Finally, both policies have obstacles and limitations that affect their effectiveness, like administrative bans imposed by local authorities, the gender-gap, and violence against humanitarian workers and the international press. Also, intense floods and anti-humanitarian campaigns make the situation more difficult at present. As mentioned above, the biggest impediment to policy effectiveness is the lack of funding that has affected two-thirds of humanitarian missions in Yemen in 2022 and is still the cause of new undesired stops in 2023, according to OCHA (2023d). Moreover, lack of data and transparency affects both policies. This phenomenon has different causes: COVID-19 for the first policy, and lack of funding or delays in implementation in case of the second policy.

To conclude, despite some relevant progress, the ideational factors of food security and nutrition policies in Yemen over the past 5 years are not fully aligned with the human security approach, especially in reference to SDG coverage, which remains low. About the policies' institutional dimension, although most normative and participation requirements are fulfilled, a lingering problem is that the national regulations do not comply with international standards on labour conditions, climate-change considerations in infrastructure construction, and participation of civil society. Finally, the efficiency of the policies is affected by different obstacles and limitations related to the catastrophic internal situation of Yemen and the volatile international contemporary system.

Further research could explore food security and nutrition in Yemen and other countries included in the *Integrated Food Security Phase Classification* (IPC) in three related fields. First, peace research can centre attention on the correlation between positive peace and effective, holistic, and long-term food security and nutrition policies. Second, the focus of conflict studies

could be on the correlation between violent conflict and contexts of acute/severe food insecurity and malnutrition, and on their multidimensional consequences. Another field of future research could be the causes and consequences of violence against aid workers, international assistance personnel, and journalists, as well as the consequences of the weaponisation of food. Finally, humanitarian studies could analyse the impact of climate change and related environmental security threats, like plagues, on agriculture and internally displaced persons in chronic complex emergency countries.

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