

THE WAY FOR NEW HUMANITARIANISM

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 Analysis

Societies, institutions, and states are obliged to transform. While the world is witnessing rapid transformations in many fields, there is a significant issue in how all these changes and transformations will result in international humanitarian aid and the vision of the international civil society. It is possible to categorize the actors in the humanitarian aid sector in two groups, "formal" and "informal" actors. Formal actors include international organizations such as the United Nations, the Red Crescent, and the Red Cross. Those in the non-formal category include local, national and other international non-governmental organizations.

When humanitarian actors in both categories make emergency interventions in regions facing wars, disasters, and chronic humanitarian crises as their short term goals, they also aim to create more permanent effects such as "ending

poverty, protecting the planet and contributing to the prosperous and peaceful life of people" in the long run. However, the dimensions of recent humanitarian crises have increased and changed so much that these institutions' traditional understanding and methods used in managing crises have become inadequate. Far from achieving sustainable long-term results, even in emergency response, humanitarian aid providers have failed to respond to needs.

One of the main reasons for this lies in the changing nature of humanitarian crises. Previous conflicts were generally experienced at state-state or organization-state level. But today, most crises are triggered by civil actors as a reaction to their country's political instability and economic problems. Disasters - ranging from climate change, economic crises, migration, cross-border terror threats, pandemics, up to discrimination, combined with socio-economic

problems, not to mention the structure of today's humanitarian crises - have also transformed. We have witnessed how a local crisis in a country like Syria can turn into a "xenophobia" crisis in a European country thousands of kilometers away, and this can trigger different social problems in the latter.

The humanitarian dramas that have occupied the world agenda for the last 30 years have mostly been unchanged. Although humanitarian aid providers manage to increase their funds and the number of people they reach, the solution to the problems becomes more challenging with each passing day. Right now the number of people in urgent need worldwide is estimated at 235 million. This means that 1 in every 33 people needs humanitarian aid and protection. However, this figure was 1 in 45 people in 2020.

The already existing vulnerabilities of societies have worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic. This vulnerability calls for the vision of building resilient societies as it brings about negative medium and long-term consequences such as violence, poverty, inequality, displacement, as well as environmental and political degradation.

Places desperate for help are in vulnerable regions where people suffer from low income, chronic or acute crises. The vast majority of aid for fragile communities is used for the emergency needs of displaced people, food security, and health programs. While the humanitarian aid system is helpful for acute crises, the same is not true for chronic problems. In other words, chronic poverty is too complex to be resolved with social conflict-laden material and in-kind aid, and resources need to be used properly.

For example, even though people survive hunger thanks to projects that fight food insecurity, protection cannot be provided against the next food crisis. Chronic food crises continue as long as droughts, floods or poverty, wrong social policies, lack of agricultural education, and social conflicts due to climate change fallouts are not resolved. Thus, humanitarian aid funds that are supposed to be used for development are instead channeled into emergency aid projects.

Preventing this is possible by providing some measures and structural changes. This essay shall touch upon two important issues;

- Strengthening local institutions,
- Changes in financing methods.

In this respect, the World Humanitarian Summit, which was held in Istanbul in 2016 as the first humanitarian summit, was an important milestone in this search for change. At the event, common goals of the humanitarian aid system were reminded again and the steps to be taken for change were listed as follows:

- Political leadership to prevent and end conflicts
- Ensuring human safety
- Not leaving anyone behind, not discriminating against people
- Preventing people from needing help
- Investing in humanity.

Strengthening Local Institutions

Although the importance of local actors was recognized in UN resolutions (46/182) in 1991, documents such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Disaster Relief and the Code of Conduct for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (1994) as well as Principles for Good Humanitarian Donation (2007) showed that local actors are not sufficiently involved in the practice.

Calls for local actors to play a greater role to improve humanitarian aid efficiency and overcoming inequalities have been on the agenda for some time. Despite their vital role in humanitarian projects, local actors are known to receive only 0.2%¹ of international humanitarian funds, potentially not receiving enough attention in international development projects. Considering the cost of international organizations in the delivery of aid, transportation and technical expenses, it seems a more reasonable option for local institutions to play a greater role as aid distributors.

As the number of donor states increases, the pressure on non-governmental organizations is also increasing. Due to political interventions, the range of action of civil society is narrowed. Sometimes there is shrinkage due to financial insufficiencies, and sometimes legal and political obstacles are created. In order for these local actors to become effective, strengthening needs in seven dimensions have been identified²:

- 1 Financing
- 2 Partnership
- 3 Capacity
- 4 Participation
- 5 Coordination
- 6 Visibility
- 7 Policy

Factors such as coordination and capacity in eliminating crises, pre-crisis precautionary power for less damage, and the ability to create social consensus to end crises are the issues that the humanitarian aid sector is weak at and needs to be strengthened. The most important need for this maneuverability, which should be in the fight against crises, is to have enough information to make the right analysis. One of the methods of this might be to build the humanitarian sector in the form of “clustering”.

In the cluster-style system, local institutions are in contact with national institutions. National institutions are also in dialogue with international institutions. In this system, which is expanding

and resembling a circle connected to each other, each institution has the opportunity to use the information and equipment in its possession. The problem of not fully understanding local needs may also have been largely avoided.

In this system, international organizations utilize local or national NGOs as a kind of subcontractor and avoid making a serious initiative in aid. However, they can play a significant role in detecting provincial administration needs.

At this point, the first main duty of international aid organizations will be to support local NGOs for their structural maturation, to offer training programs, to develop principles-based practices, and then to divide their jurisdiction in the operational arena.

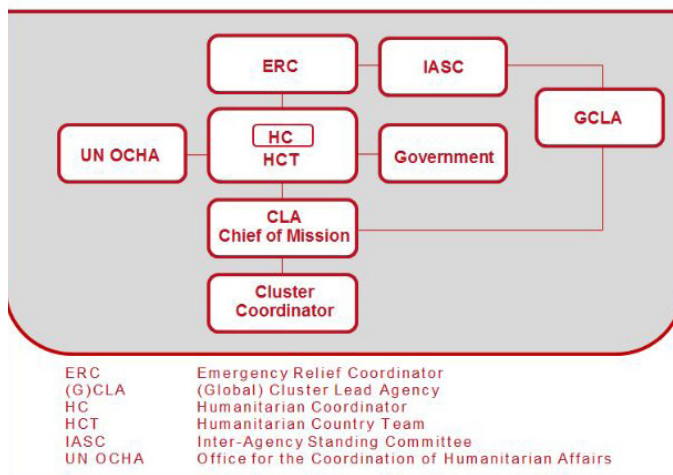
New Financing Methods

Is more help the best help? Increasing financial resources is of course important for the humanitarian aid sector, but whether or not it is used effectively and efficiently is one of the most important topics of discussion. With the COVID-19 pandemic, human circulation decreases. Hence money and resources are transferred through technological facilities. The fact that we can deliver aid through wire transfers sheds hope in prioritizing local finance.

The humanitarian aid sector, which uses most of its in-kind aid in cash, faces a serious problem here. Only 18% of all humanitarian aid in 2019, or \$ 5.6 billion, have been spent in cash. This shows that the remaining 80% of aid was purchased and distributed in kind. In this sense, it should be seriously discussed to what extent do these in-kind aids act as a basic tool in ensuring human development.

Understandably, emergency humanitarian victims will be given food, fuel, shelter, and clothing as the first step. However, as mentioned earlier, the current nature and duration of crises are longer. Far from reaching the goal of “saving people from needing help” due to the insistence on the standard understanding of assistance, the humanitarian aid sector is gradually moving away from such goal. The risk of global poverty is constantly on the agenda, as a large part of

Coordination Architecture in the Cluster Approach



the resources is not allocated to long-term investments given the focus on emergency aid. 94% of the aid funds are still mostly spent on in-kind aid such as food, shelter and health supplies.

In a survey conducted in five Middle Eastern countries in need of humanitarian aid, beneficiaries stated that the aid they received was not suitable for their needs and they had to sell those aids in exchange for their own needs. Almost 80% of aid beneficiaries said that they prefer cash aid rather than in-kind aid. 84% of economists believe cash payments will increase the welfare of beneficiaries more than in-kind benefits. In addition, non-in-kind assistance should be prioritized in terms of humanitarian aid provisions. People who do not have the opportunity to receive aids from governments should be provided with services such as quality education and proper health care.

Instead of sending food to save people from hunger in a drought-stricken town, making long-term investments to encourage agricultural production or educating people on potential professions while providing them with small capital seems vital for long-term results. It is clear that more funds are needed to combat

human development and vulnerability. But without structural changes, the expected benefit of this fund may be limited. For this reason, fair participation of local powers in human development processes along with cash aid needs to be urgently discussed.

Most of the future humanitarian problems and crises will take place due to political imbalances, new waves of nationalism, natural disasters due to climate change, the politicization of humanitarian crises, new pandemics, and forced migration. The politicization of crises will in some way make it easier for humanitarian actors to form alliances.

Despite the prominent role of northern countries in the humanitarian aid sector, new solutions are being discussed within the framework of the South-South alliance that has been imagined since the 1970s. For the realization of this alliance, which can be defined as the ideal union, it is inevitable for institutions in the countries of both hemispheres to undergo a visionary change. The fact that these searches have started is promising for the humanitarian aid sector and the millions of people in need who will benefit from it.

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Endnotes

¹ Global Humanitarian Overview 2020, OCHA, Geneva, 2020.

² Van Brabant, K. and Patel, S. Localisation in Practice. Emerging Indicators & Practical Implications, Global Mentoring Initiative, 2018.