

What will be the role of international humanitarian actors in the aid system of the future?

Introduction

In a context where humanitarian needs are growing exponentially, numerous changes are disrupting the humanitarian system, heralding major transformations for the coming years. The increase in forced displacement, the greater involvement of national actors in responses and the growing importance of certain issues such as climate change and innovative aid mechanisms are likely to have a significant effect on humanitarian aid. Due to these changes, humanitarian action needs to be redirected towards new operational fields, via a more effective global response that distinguishes between crises of a different nature. As a result, we need to think about how the capacity and organization of the international aid sector should evolve. And we also need to look at the interaction between different humanitarian actors in the medium and long term.

A lot of ideas have emerged from the discussions taking place on these issues in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit. This event, the first of its kind, aims to establish the foundations of a renewed global humanitarian system, through an innovative and very broadly consultative process. The preparations are currently focused on five action areas: dignity, safety, resilience, partnerships and finance. The ideas that emerge will be included in a report to be drafted by the United Nations Secretary-General at the beginning of 2016, and this will then be presented in Istanbul in May 2016 in order to establish concrete commitments for the future.

The 3rd National Humanitarian Conference, for its part, will be held in Paris on 23 February. It is being organised by the Crisis and Support Centre of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development in collaboration with humanitarian NGOs, and it will bring together the main French humanitarian actors and a number of international partners (United Nations agencies, the Red Cross movement, the European Union, donors, stakeholders from crisis-affected countries, etc.). The aim of the event will be to analyse the impact of the changes taking place in the aid system, to provide feedback on the ideas that have emerged from the preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit and to make concrete proposals before the meeting in Istanbul.

How should humanitarian and development aid be coordinated in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?

In 2014, conflicts produced a record 60 million refugees and IDPs. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the international community has neither the capacity nor the resources necessary for all the victims of countries affected by conflicts, who represent 93% of the poorest people in the world. Many of these conflicts¹ have continued for a long time or are recurring, and a large proportion of the countries concerned are unable to find a way out. What is more, insecurity sometimes makes access difficult, if not impossible, for international aid organisations. Climate change has contributed to certain of these conflicts and displacements, and there is a real risk that the current migration crisis leads to considerable social disruption in the long term².

¹ E.g. the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan.

² *Dérèglements et crises humanitaires : Comprendre et Agir*, International Conference Report, MAEDI, IRIS, ACF, Care France, November 2015, 23 p.

<http://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CR-Conf%C3%A9rence-ClimatEtCrises.pdf>

And yet, it is in these complex contexts that the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September 2015 will have to be addressed. The goals include ending hunger and malnutrition and ending poverty in all its forms by 2030. As a result, the international community as a whole will have to orient its aid towards vulnerable populations in order to increase access to basic services and resources, and support communities affected by conflicts and climatic disasters or hosting displaced populations. In order to reach these goals, development actors (multilateral agencies, donors, and NGOs) will obviously have to work alongside humanitarian agencies in the most difficult contexts.

Lastly, the emergence of humanitarian situations in the global “North”, notably due to the migration crisis, means that new areas of intervention and collaboration have appeared between organisations from the aid and social sectors.

These situations and goals call into question the usual operational and financial approaches of relief and development aid. As a result, responses will have to improve links between the short, medium and long term, forcing development actors to consider their role in relation to fragile situations. Innovative mechanisms will be needed to help those affected by crises in their own countries and in host countries.

How can humanitarian and development actors work in a complementary manner? What links can be established between humanitarian action that is faithful to its principles and development practices. What changes will need to be made to funding mechanisms for long-term commitments?

Localisation – towards a paradigm shift?

In certain countries, the public authorities are organising themselves and giving themselves the means to take action in the event of disasters in order to fulfil their responsibility to “take care of the victims of natural disasters and similar emergency situations occurring on (their) territory”, as mentioned in several United Nations resolutions³.

For their part, civil society organisations (grassroots organisations, local authorities, religious communities, NGOs, etc.) and economic stakeholders at the national level are organizing themselves and, in certain areas, have become essential players in humanitarian responses. Their geographical and cultural proximity as well as their low structural costs are major assets. They are often the first to act in the early stages of an emergency⁴, and in contexts where there is insecurity they are often alone in being able to deliver humanitarian aid.

And yet, for the time being, the aid system remains primarily organized around international actors⁵: local NGOs want more responsibility and direct access to funding⁶, while the public authorities of affected countries (at the national level, but also at the local, and notably municipal, levels) demand that their central role in the response and the coordination of aid should be respected⁷.

³ Mentioned for the first time in A/RES/43/131 (1988)

⁴ *World Disasters Report: Focus on local actors, the key to humanitarian effectiveness*, IFRC, October 2015, 270 p. http://ifrc-media.org/interactive/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1293600-World-Disasters-Report-2015_en.pdf

⁵ *Localising humanitarianism: improving effectiveness through inclusive action*, Steven A. Zyck, Hanna B. Krebs, Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI, July 2015, 11 P.

<http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9720.pdf>

⁶ See, for example, the demands of national NGOs in Charter4change <http://charter4change.org/> and *Le ton monte entre les ONG locales et internationales*, IRIN, 26 October 2015. <http://www.irinnews.org/fr/report/102154/le-ton-monte-entre-les-ong-locales-et-internationales>

⁷ Philippines, Nepal, Haiti, 2004 tsunami.

International organisations can make a positive contribution to this re-localisation process which will necessarily have a major impact on current practices.

What kind of operational partnerships should be put in place between national and international actors? On what basis can this partnership be established (notably in terms of respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles? How can we ensure that they respond effectively to the needs of affected populations? What implications will this have on funding in terms of direct access for Southern NGOs, accountability mechanisms and capacity building? What direct cooperation needs to be established between local, national and international authorities in crisis and disaster situations?

Innovation in the aid sector: an opportunity for real transformation?

Interesting tools have recently been developed such as cash transfer and the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It is now broadly accepted that cash transfer programmes can effectively help people affected by crises by meeting needs in an integrated manner⁸ (access to basic consumer goods and shelter, reconstruction aid and livelihoods support), while preserving their dignity.

In addition, the development of new Information and Communication Technologies has changed the usual aid channels and created new ways to support victims and to get involved in international solidarity. These innovations allow direct exchanges between populations and donors, making it easier for aid to be delivered from individual to individual without the involvement of a third-party organization.

The question is therefore to know how organisations, donors and governments can use these innovations the most effectively and whether these developments can help to bring about a profound transformation of the humanitarian system in the long term so that it becomes more effective, to the benefit of crisis-affected populations.

What role can private organisations involved in cash transfer programmes (banks, credit institutions, telephone companies) play in the aid system? How can corporate social responsibility help to bring innovation to the humanitarian sector? What is the current situation and what are the perspectives for the future for new forms of individual mobilization in support of humanitarian action (diasporas, crowdfunding, etc.)? How do coordination mechanisms need to change in the long term to adapt to these new realities?

⁸ *Doing cash differently: how cash transfers can transform humanitarian aid*, Report of the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, Center for Global Development, ODI, September 2015, 44 p.
<http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9828.pdf>