

Transforming Humanitarian Aid: A Refined Approach

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Prime Ministry
Undersecretary

Mukesh Kapila
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of Manchester

Kani Torun
Founder of Doctors Worldwide and
Former Turkish Ambassador
to Somalia

TRTWORLD
forum
2017

CONFERENCE REPORT

Transforming Humanitarian Aid: A Refined Approach

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PUBLISHER

TRT WORLD RESEARCH CENTRE
DECEMBER 2017

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Transforming Humanitarian Aid: A Refined Approach

This is a report on a public session titled “Transforming Humanitarian Aid: A Refined Approach”, held as part of the TRT World Forum 2017. The views, themes and discussion points expressed in this conference report are those of speakers and participants present at the TRT World Forum 2017, and do not reflect the official view of TRT World Research Centre.



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- What strategies and policies can break the cycle of dependency that humanitarian aid creates?
 - What roles will global institutions, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals framework, play in promoting sustainable development?
 - How have former aid recipient countries gone on to change international aid models?
 - What long-term social and economic approaches would be best suited to help rebuild Syria and assist the return of refugees?

Summary

This session dealt with transforming the conventional humanitarian aid system towards a more refined assistance approach. It kicked off with two fundamental questions posted to the panellists: 1) Why is humanitarian aid necessary? 2) Where does it go and who decides where it goes? The session involved serious debate on the most effective ways to distribute humanitarian aid. Each panellist was questioned on whether or not the distribution of aid is fair and equitable, and whether we need proper political will to move it forward.

Fuat Oktay crystallises the refugee crises by presenting statistics of refugees around the world. He noted that Turkey hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees providing them housing, protection, health care and education. Oktay pointed out that providing humanitarian aid alone would not solve the problem unless the international community addresses the root causes of the conflict. First, he addressed the solution by putting more pressure on the actors who create, promote or foster those root causes. Second, the international community should adopt a holistic and systematic approach to respond to the humanitarian needs of the people.

The question of political raised remarkable arguments, often veering into the philosophical roots and solutions of the problem. Mukesh Kapila was adamant that political will needs to be informed by the humanistic tenet of altruism, and suggested several challenges to the current humanitarian system. The challenges included, but were not limited to censorship of international aid agencies' appeals, the provision of the majority of international humanitarian assistance by a few countries, the majority of global aid being funneled into particular countries while ignoring others, aid not going to the beneficiary directly and there being no accountability and transparency. Kani Torun, a Turkish lawmaker and former ambassador to Somalia, pointed out that humanitarian aid itself is a painkiller, and not the actual solution. He suggested a need for long-term development, such as commerce and investment in the disaster-ridden regions that would eventually lead them to turn the corner. Richard Falk noted that the fundamental issue of humanitarian aid was realism (national interest), which governs the political will of the aid donor countries - thus signalling that humanitarian aid is an instrument of foreign policy. However, Kapila rebuffed the notion of realism by stating that this competition-based realism politics has got the world where it is today and that global community can no longer afford to tolerate such status quo, but rather the global community should transform it.

Considerable attention was given to the nature of providing sustainable development with a holistic outlook of the world. Panellists agreed that humanitarian aid should not create a dependent and welfare society and that international organisations and corporations should invest to foster development and prevent aid dependency. Panellists also discussed influence by the vested interests of significant players in the global agenda in much of the current discourse relating to humanitarian aid. It has been suggested that veto power should be restricted at the UN Security Council when dealing with humanitarian aid, often in lieu of mixed political motivations. To prevent this, one panellist suggested the reform of the UN Security Council. In conclusion, all panellists agreed on an urgent need to return to the basics of true humanitarianism and altruism and attempted to find durable solutions to the current problems of the aid system.

Panellist

C. Kani Torun

**Founder of Doctors
Worldwide and Former
Turkish Ambassador to
Somalia**

Former Turkish Ambassador to Somalia and Founder of Doctors Worldwide, Kani Torun, stated that Humanitarian aid is just a painkiller; therefore solving a problem needs long-term development, commerce and investment.



Introduction

Humanitarian aid is an important tool to stabilise and rehabilitate conflict-ridden societies. However, aid remains limited and unsustainable in the long-term without innovatively maximising its usage. This session aims to explore new methods through which resources could be efficiently used to reduce the dependency of aid recipients and transform them into self-sufficient social actors. Recipients may become part of the global community of donors in the future. In this respect, finding long-term solutions for humanitarian challenges was examined and debated in this session, with a particular focus on the Syrian crisis. The session constituted the fourth of a series panels that form part of TRT World Forum 2017: Inspiring Change in an Age of Uncertainty.

This session dealt with transforming the conventional humanitarian aid system towards a more refined assistance approach. It kicked off with three fundamental questions posted to the panellists: 1) Why is humanitarian aid necessary? 2) Where does it go and who decides where it goes? and 3) What strategies and policies can break the cycle of aid dependency that humanitarian aid creates? The session involved a serious debate between the panellists and the participants. The panellists engaged in a lively discussion on the most effective ways to distribute humanitarian aid. Each were questioned on whether or not the distribution of aid was fair and equitable, and whether we need proper, political will to move it forward.

Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy



In this session, Turkey's humanitarian assistance to the conflict-ridden regions, such as Syria, was discussed. It has been mentioned that 65 to 66 million people have forcibly been displaced globally and nearly 40 million of them are internally displaced persons (IDPs) while 20 to 20.5 million are refugees and nearly 3 million are asylum seekers. 55% of those refugees are from Syria, Sudan and Afghanistan and major refugee hosting countries are Turkey ranking the first with three and a half million people, Pakistan with 1.4 and Lebanon with 1.1 million. Furthermore, Turkey ranks the second largest humanitarian donor country after United States of America and most generous nation in the world by devoting 0.75% of its GNI (Gross National Income) to humanitarian assistance. Ankara also hosts the largest Syrian Refugees with 3.5 million. Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq follow Turkey in terms of hosting Syrian refugees. Moreover, another success story of Turkey's humanitarian aid is

its intervention in Somalia's worst famine in 2011. Turkish state institutions, governmental agencies and NGOs have provided immediate assistance to the Horn of African country after devastating famine struck most of its regions leaving thousands of people dead. Dr. Fuat Oktay, Undersecretary of Turkish Prime Ministry who was also a panellist, noted that whenever disaster happens in the world Turkey does not wait to see the affected people's religion, ethnicity or geography but rather it immediately acts to save the lives of those at risk therefore, Turkey has a very dynamic system to move forward and start providing humanitarian aid.

Many of the discussions surrounding the provision of humanitarian assistance have called for immediate, unconditional policy and Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy throughout the world, especially in countries like Syria and Somalia was referenced by panellists. Participants have also praised the Turkish model of humanitarian assistance. However, other countries such as Pakistan and Iran who have been providing the emergency aid and hosted many refugees for decades yet received little international attention were also mentioned.

“Turkey does not wait to see the affected people’s religion, ethnicity or geography but rather it immediately acts to save the lives of those at risk.” Dr Fuat Oktay



Professor at University of Manchester, Mukesh Kapila, questioned the existing current political and humanitarian aid system deemed a failure by him.

Challenges of the Current Humanitarian Aid System

The current humanitarian system is trying to respond to the end results such as hunger, famine, poverty, conflicts, wars, terror and so on. But when we look at the root causes they are different. Unless the world addresses those root causes, no matter how much humanitarian aid is provided, the problem will continue to exist. To ease the problem, humanitarian actors have to put pressure on those who create the root causes. The international community has to first address these root causes by pressuring actors who create, promote or foster them. The current humanitarian domain is also creating an aid dependent and welfare society. To prevent this while delivering relief assistance, the donors have to be investing internationally into the field by promoting corporate social responsibility so that refugees and forcibly displaced people can work in those investments and businesses.

Furthermore, five main problems of the current humanitarian system were discussed in detail, mostly by professor Kapila. First, the appeals from the international system, whether it is the UN or other agencies, are all censored according to Professor Kapila. Therefore, when an organisation appeals it appeals for what it thinks it has the capacity to do, which does not reflect a total embodiment of the humanitarian needs. For example, if United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says it can look after so many refugees it will appeal for that, but the number of people displaced worldwide is much greater than that. The global community only knows that the humanitarian needs are based on the numbers given and collected by the aid agencies who calculate them on the basis of their capabilities to implement; not genuine needs. The overarching question is who bears witness to these unknown needs?

Secondly, the global humanitarian system does not belong to the entire world. For instance, more than 9 out of every 10 government dollars given to humanitarian assistance comes from just 20 countries, such as Turkey, the US and UK. According to Kapila, “with five governments contributing two-third of all the humanitarian assistance in the world, how can someone talk of a humanitarian world system? Is everyone on the same boat when the burden of humanitarian need is just being satisfied by only a few people? What has happened to the 190 other countries that should also be shouldering their share of the burden? These nations cannot claim that it is because they are poor or they are not as developed as the other donor countries.”

Thirdly, humanitarian practice is something that happens by chance. This is because fifty-four percent of international humanitarian funding only goes to a few countries, such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Kapila argues, it is a fact that these nations “need aid desperately” and no one wants to divert funds “away from them, but what about the 90 other countries who also have their own share of misfortune and misery to endure?”

The fourth issue is that not all suffering is equally inevitable. In 2016, for example, 99% of Burundi’s humanitarian appeal was funded while only 4% of Gambia’s appeal was met. This is an indication that the world has forgotten about many other humanitarian situations. Therefore, how can we say that the world has a system where everyone is in the same boat?

Fifth, the channeling system of the humanitarian assistance is ineffective. The vast part of the money does not go to the beneficiary directly; instead it goes first to large global organisations, such as the UN agencies and other international NGOs. Then they pass it to implementing partners, who may be other UN agencies or smaller NGOs, who then contract with local partners, thus leaving no room for accountability or transparency. With regard to this point, Dr. Kani Torun pointed out that during his tenure as Turkish ambassador to Somalia, Turkey has avoided this inefficiency pitfall by directly partnering with local Somali authorities and organisations to reach out to the most vulnerable communities as well as target beneficiaries.

Besides recognising these challenges, discussion also highlighted common factors behind the ineffectiveness of the prevailing humanitarian assistance system. These include aid corruption and mismanagement among the actors, the issue of aid dependency and the lack of necessary political will of the aid donors.



Prime Minister Undersecretary, Fuat Oktay, pointed out that Turkey hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees, providing them with housing, protection, health care and education.

The Question of Aid Dependency

The issue of creating an aid dependent or welfare society while providing humanitarian assistance has received great deal of attention from the panellists. Particularly, the current global humanitarian domain is embedded in creating an aid dependency circle due to its failure in adequately addressing development. Dr. Kani Torun, Founder of Doctors Worldwide and Former Turkish Ambassador to Somalia, stated that humanitarian aid is a painkiller that only eases the pain for some time and there is no treatment in it. Therefore, long-term development commerce and investment are the tools that will turn the corner for the disaster-ridden communities. Otherwise, the humanitarian aid dependence will be a vicious cycle for many communities and for countries.

“Humanitarian aid is a painkiller which just eases the pain for some time and there is no treatment in it. So, for long-term development commerce and investment are the tools that will turn the corner for the disaster-ridden communities.” Dr. Kani Torun

In this context, Turkey’s humanitarian and development projects across the world, especially in Somalia were mentioned as an example. The country has been in a civil strife for over two decades and most of its crucial state institutions were destroyed. Turkey did not only provide emergency relief to Somalia but also worked on development, peacebuilding, state building and security. Another example that humanitarian is not a solution is the fact that international community has been providing aid to Palestinians but it could not solve the Israel-Palestine conflict. So, if the world focuses on just humanitarian aid for Palestinians and does not address the illegal occupation of Israel that does not solve problems. For this reason, it is imperative to go beyond the provision of humanitarian to avoid creating dependent societies. The global community should invest in the conflict fields by promoting the corporate social responsibility so that refugees and forcibly displaced people can work in those investments and businesses. In this regard, panellists stressed the need that the world should move from compassion to mutual partnership. Professor Richard Falk contended that the US Marshall Plan provided to Europe after the end of World War II is considered a typical development aid not humanitarian assistance. It has improved the economy of Europe until it joined the global economy. Likewise, the international community’s focus, when dealing with disaster stricken-communities, should be development and the mutual partnership and commerce while still providing humanitarian assistance.



Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University, Richard Falk, accentuated that humanitarian aid has become a foreign policy instrument.

Aid Corruption

The mismanagement of humanitarian aid was briefly discussed in the session and proved to be one of the challenges of providing timely and effective assistance. Corruption or manipulation of aid funds is embedded in a process that does not really inspire a sense that aid is about altruism. It gives the sense that aid is mixed up with all kinds of other things including trying to take advantage of it as a way of gaining personal wealth. Therefore, there are mixed motivations that are very much at odds with each other. One thing the TRT World Forum represents is raising altruistic consciousness in the world. Therefore, the global community needs to convince more and more people that altruism, empathy, and self-interest are not at odds.

In relation to curbing corruption in aid, Turkey's aid delivery approach, in places like Syria and Somalia, was referenced in the discussion. One success story of Turkey's aid system is directly engaging with Somali authorities and the local Somali NGOs to better reach beneficiaries instead of working with UN agencies and other NGOs.

Conclusion: The Way Forward

For a more refined approach to humanitarian aid that would find durable solutions for humanitarian challenges, the speakers have put forward two primary suggestions namely; the use of veto power and reforming of major UN institutions including the Security Council.

a. VETO Power in Humanitarian Context

One of the recommendations in transforming the current humanitarian domain was to refrain from the use of veto power in the humanitarian contexts. There are many situations where a humanitarian policy is blocked by political conflict and it is a test of the sincerity of governments. For this reason, the five powers that hold veto right in the UN Security Council should agree that in humanitarian contexts they would not invoke their right of veto.

b. Reforming the UN Institutions

In an effort to transform the current humanitarian context, an alternative for a refined approach was proposed. That is redesigning the United Nations agencies such as the UNHCR, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), UN Security Council and so on so forth. Dr. Oktay believes this will lead the world to a more interrelated and integrated humanitarian system. In this regard, Turkey has advocated a model regarding the reform of the UN Security Council which is “world is bigger than five.”