Courting Catastrophe Project Report 05


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Adapting to Changing Needs? New Models for Humanitarian Aid in an Uncertain World

Due to hazardous events caused by climate change, there is increasing need for humanitarian assistance to the disaster-stricken victims and areas. A seminar was organized and held in March 2016, by IDS and Noragric to explore the drivers of change in the humanitarian sector. These changes include climate change, conflict and demographic change. Although there is much talk about a new model for humanitarian assistance, the argument was made, drawing on quantitative analysis of humanitarian crises over the past decade, that there are already four distinct approaches to humanitarian work emerging, and that what is needed is a global system that can apply the appropriate approach for relevant contexts.

The seminar drew on the research and discussion paper led by Ben Ramalingam for the Montreax XIII Good Humanitarian Donorship Conference: http://www.alnap.org/resource/19246.

Speaker:

- Ben Ramalingam, IDS, Leader of the Digital and Technology Cluster and Chair of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund.

Climate change, Vulnerability and Risks

Global vulnerability and risk are increasing due to climate change, rising inequalities and state fragility and conflict. Disasters occur from complex interactions of actors and factors. There are three examples of growing vulnerability to disasters:

- **Flood exposure**
  In 2010, 69.4 million people were affected by floods as compared to 1970 where 32.4 million people were exposed to floods.

- **Cyclone exposure**
  In 1970, 65.9 million people were exposed to cyclones and in 2009, the number rose to 122.5 million people.

- **Food crisis in the Sahel**
  Three food crises have occurred in the Sahel in the last ten years, and yet in the past, they used to strike only once in a decade.
Below is a diagram showing the complex interactions between actors and factors that lead to disasters.

Figure 1: Diagram showing the complex interactions between actors and factors that lead to disasters

Unfortunately, the most vulnerable groups of people in society usually experience extreme impacts, even when only hit by ordinary events.

Several scenarios show how climate change has widespread impacts in different parts of the world. Ramalingam used examples in the table below to exhibit how climate change affects different sectors in various countries:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGRICULTURE</td>
<td>“Mongolian herdsmen face starvation”</td>
<td>March 14, 2000, BBC World News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATER</td>
<td>“Drought returns to haunt Ethiopia”</td>
<td>May 19, 2008, Reuters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOURISM</td>
<td>Alpine resorts feel heat during record warm spell”</td>
<td>December 08, 2006, CNN World News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSPORTATION</td>
<td>“Flash flooding causes train to derail”</td>
<td>July 30, 2001, Chicago Sun Times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Ramalingam, the "most effective responses offer development benefits in the short term and reduce vulnerabilities over the longer term." The international humanitarian response and remittances are increasing and the non-OECD DAC (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee) donors are on the rise. In addition to the above, governments, the private sector, southern Non-government Organizations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organizations and the Military are carrying out large-scale activities to ensure development and vulnerability decrease. Ramalingam stressed that the level of increasing requirements is as high as the unmet needs as compared to the funding provided in the past ten years. Concentration of humanitarian spend is at an all-time high. The graph below shows escalating unmet needs as compared to the requirements and funding between the years 2005-2014.
Models for Humanitarian Assistance

There are various models of humanitarian aid. Ramalingam elaborated four models for humanitarian response to disasters caused by the ever-changing climate.

1. The Comprehensive Model

The response model comprehensive took greater shape in the 1980s as compared to the recent years. It is characterized by responses to disasters in low-income countries, which have limited state capacity and whose disaster-hit population is vulnerable.

Under this model, the international humanitarian system plays the “substituting role” regarding managing and delivering assistance to disaster-stricken areas. Ramalingam stressed that this model encourages the global spend as the local capability to spend on
response to disasters is very low. A good recent example of the comprehensive model is the international response after the Earthquake in Haiti in 2010.

Furthermore, this model is criticized for failing to adapt to context because it is more supply-driven rather than needs oriented. In addition, it mainly involves limited engagement with local and national actors.

2. The Constrained Model

This model was developed after the cold war. It relates to violent political crises where resilient social contract is missing. The constrained model is usually used in areas where intruding political interests limit humanitarian space. It is therefore difficult to provide international humanitarian assistance to politically unstable areas, particularly accessing and protecting the most vulnerable groups during disasters.

Examples of states where the constrained model was and/ or is used are Syria, Somalia and Kosovo. Such areas usually include governments and/ or other ruling parties “that may be actively involved in creating humanitarian needs through acts of violence against citizens” (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014:28).

According to Ramalingam, only 25% of the official global spend is used on humanitarian assistance under this model.

3. The Collaborative Model

The collaborative model mostly works in low to middle-income countries with internal growing capacity to respond to disasters. The international humanitarian agencies only fill in gaps where the local actors are unable to respond. Thus, both the national governments and international agencies work hand in hand to respond to disasters.

Ramalingam stressed that this model is becoming more popular, because states usually take greater ownership of disaster response. He added that only 15% of the official international humanitarian spend is channeled through this model.

However, even though the collaboration model is based on the notion that both the international system and local governments work hand in hand regarding management, coordination and delivery of response, the international system is reported to prefer having more control over delivery and are most likely unwilling to work as equal partners (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014).

4. The Consultative Model

The consultative model works in middle and high income countries with strong social contract. Here, the national governments have more intervention after disasters have occurred than the international humanitarian system. External assistance is thus only
restricted to filling specified roles. Examples include the Chile earthquake in 2010 and the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in 2011. According to Ramalingam, only 5% of the official humanitarian spend goes to the consultative model.

Below is a bar chart showing the resource allocation across the above four mentioned models.

**Figure 3: A chart showing the resource allocations across the humanitarian aid models**

![Chart showing resource allocations across humanitarian aid models](image)

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**Is the humanitarian aid system broken?**

Depending on how and what angle the humanitarian aid system is looked at, it is both broken and vice versa. It is broken in terms of being under strain and not being flexible. It has limitations and it is not able to adapt to, completely depending on the circumstances.
on the ground. Furthermore, delivering aid does not mean increasing provision of aid, but what model is used to deliver this aid.

Ramalingam gave the following examples to show the perennial challenges of the humanitarian aid system:

- There is a tendency for the system to default to a comprehensive model.
- It is difficult for the system to move between models.
- Within models, the system also finds it difficult to be flexible.
- How well does this match the landscape of changing needs?

On the other hand, the humanitarian aid system is also considered as only being challenged and not broken. Despite the lack of flexibility, the system is considered to be moving forward. In cases of extreme disasters and their difficult aftermath, people’s lives are saved and there is improvement in their destroyed livelihoods.

**Appropriate humanitarian assistance model?**

According to Ramalingam, an appropriate humanitarian assistance model should have a flexible system that encourages adaptation to changing needs within dynamic contexts. There is need for more collaborative approach towards provision of humanitarian support and decrease in the use of the comprehensive model. The consultative model will remain erratic, but this maybe challenging for low and middle-income countries, as protection has remained a fundamental challenge.

**References**