

**RESEARCH PAPER**

# The Necessity of Humanitarian Reform

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**ABSTRACT**

**PURPOSE:** With the increasing number of vulnerable people in need of humanitarian assistance due to armed conflict, climate change and natural disasters, it has become important and necessary to reform humanitarian work to contribute towards the improvement of the humanitarian situation around the world.

**METHODOLOGY:** This research paper examines humanitarian actions through using a descriptive analytical method. It seeks to understand and analyse the challenges facing humanitarian work, discover the variables affecting the process of reforming humanitarian systems, and develop those systems in order to increase their effectiveness and efficiency in dealing with these challenges.

**FINDINGS:** This study emphasises the importance of humanitarian agencies' need to focus more on localisation, using developed tools such as the cash assistant programme, linking between relief and development and using the nexus approach.

**VALUE:** Likewise, this paper recommends that the MENA region and Gulf countries work in partnership to create more sustainable developments and decisions to reduce carbon emissions, and to achieve the international goals for a better future.

**LIMITATION:** More research needs to be done on the contribution of the Gulf countries towards a more sustainable future.

**KEYWORDS:** *Humanitarian action; Nexus; Relief and development; Localization; Cash assistant; Climate change; Gulf countries*

## INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian work faces challenges and complications due to the increased numbers of disasters, prolonged conflicts, and the large numbers of refugees and displaced persons; it has become an

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important requirement for the humanitarian system to cope with these conditions. The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul in May 2016, devised a concept of facing humanitarian financing challenges. The idea was to lower the need, activating extra funds through innovative methods, and enhancing the efficiency of humanitarian assistance (Georgieva *et al.*, 2016). This can be done by the combination of humanitarian, development and peace actions, called the ‘nexus’ approach that aligns with the 2030 agenda (United Nations, 2017). This paper examines the main challenges and the importance of reforming humanitarian action in the areas of increasing effectiveness and raising efficiency, by focusing on localisation, using developed tools such as cash programmes, bridging the gap between relief and development, and using the nexus approach. The paper also examines the importance of collaborating to implement sustainable projects and decisions to reduce carbon emissions and face climate change.

## THE HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

Humanitarianism is defined as improving individual lives, reducing suffering and sustaining human dignity (Gibbons *et al.*, 2006). The intervention of humanitarian assistance should be neutral, impartial, independent and humane (CHS, 2014). Quality assistance must be delivered to people to help them survive crises. The assistance should cover people’s basic needs for food, shelter, clean water, sanitation, and health. Aid of poor quality can affect people’s dignity and survival (Schuemer-Cross and Taylor, 2009). For example, if people neglect their hygiene care due to a lack in sanitation, diseases can spread that may impact the whole area. The Sphere Handbook provides minimum standards for response to disasters to guide local and international humanitarian agencies in providing quality aid (McCann and Knudsen, 2018).

The most prominent problem facing humanitarian action is the high record of a forcibly displaced population (refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and other people in need of international protection). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide by mid-2022 was estimated at 103 million (UNHCR, 2022). The numbers have increased significantly due to the Ukraine crisis and the combined effects of conflict, climate change and natural disasters, the cost-of-living crisis, and public health emergencies (OCHA, 2022a). The Global Humanitarian Overview reveals that 339 million people will need emergency assistance in 2023, the highest number ever recorded; this will be 65 million more people than in 2022, a 25% growth (OCHA, 2022b). There are more disasters, influencing more people, and lasting longer today than before.

Humanitarian crises are not the outcome of one factor, but the combination of armed conflict, human vulnerability and natural hazards. Even though development is being made for the most needed people, progress has been unequal (UN, 2019). The next section will elaborate on climate change, and the main challenges facing the globe.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

In recent times, especially after the industrial revolution, a focus has been placed on climate change and global warming, SDG 13; this is due to human activities represented in the increased consumption of natural resources, and higher emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (UN, 2022a).

Climate change is the variable that has occurred in the layers of the atmosphere that affect temperature, drought, tropical cyclones, hurricanes, floods, and other changes that are measured over decades or longer periods (EPA, 2022).

Statistics show that the global temperature in 2021 was 1.5° Fahrenheit (0.85° Celsius) above the average and the sixth warmest year on NASA's baseline record (NASA, 2022). Rising global average temperature will affect changes in weather patterns. However, the global impacts of climate change are wide-ranging and unprecedented in scale, from changing weather patterns that threaten food production by affecting agriculture and livestock, to rising sea levels that increase the risk of catastrophic floods and other extreme weather events. This affects the most vulnerable people, conflicting societies and those who are not equipped to face the effects of climate change (IRIN News, 2015).

The threats resulting from climate change have now gone beyond the scope of environmental security, social and human security, and have become linked to security in all its aspects and a country's internal stability. Statistics show that climate change had a direct effect on 23.7 million internally displaced people worldwide in 2021. More than 94% were the result of weather-related risks, such as storms, floods, and droughts (IDMC, 2022).

Since 1994, the United Nations has annually brought together 197 countries to attend the largest and most important global climate summit, known as the Conference of the Parties (COP). During these meetings, countries discuss various topics about climate change to set legally binding limits on emissions. For example, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement implemented in 2015, where all countries agreed to voluntarily deliver pledges that set out how they will lower their emissions and adapt to climate change, and limit global warming (UN, 2022b).

The Middle East and North African region (MENA) are among the most affected yet least prepared for climate change, with 60% of the region's population living in highly water-stressed areas. In 2020, 98% of energy production in MENA was from fossil fuels; however, most MENA countries have pledged to reduce emissions (Belhaj, 2022).

This year the 27th Annual Summit (COP27) hosted in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, concluded with an historic decision that moves from negotiation and planning to implementation of all the commitments that have been made. The agreement established "a loss and damage" fund for vulnerable countries that have been affected by the climate crisis (AlJazeera, 2022). The funding will be raised from the developed countries that caused the climate change with their historical

greenhouse gas emissions, and given to the countries that contribute the least to climate change yet are the most vulnerable to its impact (AlJazeera, 2022).

Next year's summit (COP28) will be held in the United Arab Emirates, a promising event for the country in 2023 (The National, 2022). It is known that the main income of the Gulf countries is from the energy sector, including the production and distribution of oil and gas that constitutes the economic and social lifeline of the gulf countries. However, they are facing major challenges, such as global pressure to impose renewable energy sources as an alternative to fossil energy sources, reduction of the competitiveness of its products and services, not to mention the necessity to slow down its economic cycle in order to reduce the volume of its emissions. They also need to allocate additional funds to initiate initiatives to reduce emissions (Al-Sayyad, 2016).

Simultaneously, research shows that the Gulf countries are highly vulnerable to climate change. If they do not change their carbon emissions, it will negatively affect them in many ways, including higher temperatures, land desertification or drifts, rise in sea level and temperatures that harm marine life, more storms, and the extremes of drought or high rainfall leading to floods (Shapland, 2021).

In recent years, the Gulf countries have sought to change their laws, investments, and orientation towards preserving the environment. The world's largest oil producing companies, such as Qatar Energy, Saudi Aramco, and Abu Dhabi's ADNOC, are pressing ahead with efforts to reduce emissions and boost investments in petrochemical products used in fertilisers, plastics, rubber and other polymers (DW, 2021).

The State of Qatar has created the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, and took the initiative to make a contribution of US\$100 million to support small island states and least developed countries to deal with climate change. They also started to improve hydrocarbon processing efficiency, launched a rationalisation programme to reduce electricity and water consumption, and established a solar power plant with a capacity of 800 megawatts (The New Arab, 2021).

Saudi Arabia set up initiatives including the launch of a regional fund to pump investments of more than US\$10 billion to finance technical solutions to reduce carbon emissions, increasing the percentage of renewable energy in electricity generation to 50% by 2030. They also implemented the largest reforestation programme by planting 50 billion trees (Saudi Vision 2030, 2021).

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) intend to add massive investments in renewable energy. They are also committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and are working to establish new projects in the field of solar energy production and green hydrogen, with a view to exporting it. This promotes the global transition towards low carbon energy sources (Wright, 2022).

In 1985, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) pledged to work together to adopt policies and principles for environmental protection by setting environmental action strategies for the GCC countries. These policies included a number of pillars, most notably to develop the rules, legislation and standards necessary to protect the environment and work to unify and rationalise the use of natural resources and preserve wildlife (GCC, n.d.). However there has been little to no solid implementation of working together as a Gulf region.

Therefore, there is an urgency to work jointly rather than separately to implement sustainable projects and decisions to reduce carbon emissions, and to achieve their stated and international goals by going beyond their green pledges through stronger policies and greater co-operation with MENA countries.

This all shows that prevention is more necessary than ever. The next section will elaborate on the importance of an humanitarian response, development and peace for a better future.

## **HUMANITARIAN REFORM**

In collaboration with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Emergency Relief Coordinator began the Humanitarian Reform process in 2005. This aimed to enhance the efficacy of the humanitarian response via better co-operation, responsibility, and accountability. The global level emergency response has been reinforced on all humanitarian aid providers. However, there are some challenges facing the leadership to place the best co-ordination methods at several levels and secure clear accountabilities (IASC, 2022).

In May 2016 in Istanbul, the first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) was held. There was a total of 9,000 participants from 173 Countries, including Heads of State, non-governmental corporations, and private sector delegates. For the first time on this scale, the UN met with these numerous stakeholders to discuss the serious challenges that are causing massive suffering (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016). The discussion led to the forming of a nexus approach to prevent, reduce and end humanitarian needs.

The main outcome of the 2016 WHS was to enhance collaboration between humanitarian and development pillars. The actors agreed to work more closely together to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and pledge to ‘reach the furthest behind first’ and ‘leave no-one behind’ (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). Humanitarian reform became very important; there were many solutions discussed in the WHS, one of them was localisation.

## **LOCALISATION AND HUMANITARIAN REFORM**

In line with WHS aims to better serve vulnerable people, aid providers should involve local responders to improve and provide efficient assistance. Localisation is a method of delegating local responders to react in a crisis, and co-ordinate with aid providers. They are also involved with providing support in programme design, budget planning, needs assessment, and other parts of the project phase. Supporting localisation is a policy pledge that requires capacities and investment. Localising aid also brings the potential to help bridge humanitarian action and development programming (OECD, 2017).

Normally when a crisis occurs, donors and international NGOs do not have a good understanding of the local capacity. Working with local humanitarian responders is of great advantage, especially knowing that they have better knowledge of the crisis environment. However, monitoring the project is necessary for a better outcome, to ensure quality and equality aid is provided to people in need (OECD, 2017).

Competition between national and international NGOs in granting funds can create challenges for local responders. This is because local responders' existence is overlooked and undermined to enhance the participation of the funders. The debate touches on historical and current inequalities where lack of progress in some areas is a result of a 'racist' attitude (Wall and Hedlund, 2016).

However, local actors focus on context analysis and project inception to help with community participation that supports a triple nexus programme for an efficient humanitarian response (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2019). A flexible development project opens many opportunities for humanitarian efficiency gains; increasing local staff training will help develop their skills and enable them to be more self-reliant for the future. Parties should be transparent with each other throughout the project cycle. Language barriers should be resolved to allow equal access to all local humanitarian responders (OECD, 2017). Localisation can be a solution for humanitarian reform, but it is not enough to reach efficiency. Using cash assistance may further assist reform.

## **CASH ASSISTANCE AS A TOOL FOR EFFICIENCY**

Cash-based interventions remain an essential role in many UNHCR refugee operations, giving the agencies and people more flexibility to choose and honour their dignity. It is seen as a cost-effective tool that addresses multiple needs in and after emergencies (UNHCR, 2012). It also ensures that vulnerable people can meet their basic needs without depending on negative coping strategies. Cash assistance is provided to give access to food, water, health care, help in livelihoods, enable their return and reintegration. This can be achieved by different delivery mechanisms, such as prepaid cards, direct cash, voucher and mobile money (OCHA, 2019).

Cash assistance is useful in camps and rural areas, but local markets should be capable of meeting the demands of the people. The use of new technology offers additional opportunities, such as transferring money faster via mobile phones in insecure environments (UNHCR, 2012).

From a gender view, cash or vouchers can provide additional safety for women as they are easier to hide and carry. Local people should be included in discussions in the designing phase of a cash assistance programme and the mode of distribution (Georgieva *et al.*, 2016). Two-way communication is essential between the agencies and people in need to get their suggestions and complaints through a feedback mechanism that is provided 24 hours a day (OCHA, 2019).

Cash assistance has been applied in many countries, such as Turkey, the Philippines and Yemen. For example, the Turkish Red Crescent adapted cash assistance for more than six years with Syrian refugees, and it received positive feedback (Turkish Red Crescent, 2018). However, only 6% of all humanitarian aid is currently provided through cash or vouchers, although it is more efficient than 'in-kind' aid (ODI, 2015).

Most government donors have laws that avoid transferring funds directly to local or national organisations (Derzsi-Horvath *et al.*, 2017). At times, however, donors overcome this constraint to meet people's needs or to donate to pooled funds (Knox Clarke, 2018). For donors to provide more

predictable funding they need reliable and transparent data on the exactly what is needed, and the outcomes of their funding. Donors and aid organisations should work together to offer vulnerable people an appropriate form of assistance that will save their dignity and give them more flexibility (Georgieva *et al.*, 2016). These trends indicate that real improvement to humanitarian effectiveness cannot be achieved by relying on one international system. Therefore, bridging the gap between relief and development is essential.

## BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

The humanitarian and development worlds must agree to work constructively together to best serve vulnerable people in an effective manner. This will build better international assistance with a more harmonious alignment (Georgieva *et al.*, 2016).

Humanitarian emergencies become extended when governments fail to provide a resolution or when natural disasters such as floods and droughts happen, driving local capacities to deteriorate. In these circumstances, development programmes decrease, the economy collapses, and emergency alerts occur. In these cases, humanitarian agencies interfere to provide aid to affected people in the short-term. What frequently starts as a short-term humanitarian emergency turns into a long-term development task. Therefore, using development solutions in a disaster helps to put a longer-term objective for economic development that decreases displacement and dependency on aid organisations (Georgieva *et al.*, 2016). A barrier would be the significant amount of time and resources needed for effective involvement (Humphries, 2013). Tactics to tackle the gaps can be decentralising planning, and analysis, forming joint humanitarian and development agencies (Hinds, 2015). There are developed inter-linkages between humanitarian, development, and peace-making; this is the nexus approach to provide both effective humanitarian relief and sustainable long-term development action.

## THE NEXUS APPROACH

The nexus approach is an approach or framework that considers security and diplomatic measures. It sets the most vulnerable people at the centre of the system, considers both their current and long-term needs, and improves chances for peace (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). It concentrates on the work required to clearly address people's vulnerability before, during and after crises. It also challenges the current state of the aid system that is overburdened and works with little co-ordination between project-based development and humanitarian interventions, causing an ineffective outcome for the needs of vulnerable people. These attempts should emphasise and strengthen existing local capacities. The nexus method approaches aid, but the localisation agenda is about how it should be delivered (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019).

After the WHS in 2016, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, put sustainable peace at the top of his agenda (UN News, 2017), progressing towards the UN vision of preventing conflict and integrating development, human rights, and peace and security approaches (UN, 2017).





**Figure 1: The combination of Nexus**

*Source:* Constructed by author

According to Oxfam and other NGOs, the nexus approach is not something new. There are long-running efforts in the humanitarian and development fields, for example, ‘disaster risk reduction’ (DRR) and ‘resilience agenda’. However, the nexus goes further than just a conceptual approach; it is a shift in the aid system that alters how aid is financed and planned. It is important to verify the right mix between humanitarian, development and peace pillars, and how they are integrated (Figure 1 shows the combination of Nexus approach) (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019).

There is some implication with the nexus approach around principle and purpose. Development and peace-making are very much political; to re-form and create a long-term social revolution for the people, country dynamics need to change (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). A high level of state participation in humanitarian intervention can risk neutrality, resulting in more vulnerable groups being neglected. It can be difficult to operate impartially in areas of insecurity associated with occupations of armed groups; this can lead to large numbers of people in need not able to access assistance (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). Political factors can limit nexus ambitions; in Syria, for example, it is difficult to engage in a long-term development process with the current political regime preventing the delivery of assistance to some areas. Also, most donors do not want to invest in an infrastructure with this kind of situation as it is seen to be helping the regime, which can inflame the crisis. The development factor can be a barrier to effectively apply the nexus approach (Redvers and Parker, 2019).

Coherence of humanitarian, development and peace is not easy and it is not adaptable in every circumstance. To be able to adapt the nexus approach it is important to acknowledge the root causes of the conflict to avoid further violence and to easily adapt a nexus approach. Analysis should cover all aspects from designing to delivering the programme, taking into consideration political



consequences help to intervene and get access from the regime. Also, the programme must include gender equality, conflict sensitive issues and protection methods. Aid organisations must work together and share information to provide the best equality and quality in humanitarian aid (Lamber *et al.*, 2018).

A nexus application will need to avoid exacerbating security risks faced by associates with contested authority holders (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). Moreover, workers in a nexus programme need to be open to new ideas, flexible in sharing their knowledge with each other, and capable of learning new skills from different technical areas.

Therefore, to adapt nexus, it is essential to have a good relationship with different local partners who understand the situation and have strong communication with the community. Engaging with local leadership can strengthen the trust with communities and support the programme in a crisis and politicised context. Furthermore, working with local and national aid providers can reduce replication and strengthen coherence among the nexus (Fabre, 2017). This can be achieved by collaboration with a donor's short-term programme of 6-12 months shifting to long-term goals of more than 10 years; this would cover the humanitarian, development and peace spectra. The approach should cover the bigger picture of the whole initiation of a country, and engagement with national and local capacities, resources and structures. This would enable organisations to be equipped and ready to consult and respond to the affected people immediately in time of crisis (Fabre, 2017), in addition to empowering women and girls by education and leadership to enhance the response and engage in economic development.

The nexus approach has been implemented in various regions around the world. One example is the MINKA fund that was launched by the French government's Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in 2017 to support peace and resilience projects in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, Central African Republic, and parts of the Middle East. The fund reached €200 million by 2019, and is processed alongside humanitarian and diplomatic actors. The MINKA fund is considered a nexus approach because it provides aid to a range of people with different poverty and vulnerability levels, as well as providing emergency and long-term support (AFD, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

In light of the foregoing considerations, this study intended to provide a deep discussion of the challenges facing humanitarian action at a time when there are more disasters, climate change affects more people, and crises are lasting longer today than before. Therefore, it advocated for the full implementation of humanitarian reform to deliver better outcomes to crisis affected populations, focusing on the value of localisation and working with local actors, encouraging humanitarian agencies to reconcile the humanitarian and development to provide both effective humanitarian relief and sustainable medium- and long-term development action, keeping in mind climate change in all humanitarian interventions.

It is incumbent on all humanitarian actors to focus on effectiveness and efficiency to meet the increasingly complex humanitarian needs that will be the ultimate test for the humanitarian reform process.

This paper also encouraged the MENA region and the Gulf countries to work together in implementing sustainable projects to reduce carbon emissions and to face the challenges.

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