

WORKSHOP REPORT

**INTERNATIONAL  
HUMANITARIAN NGOs  
AND EMERGENCY AID**

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TURKKIZIL  
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### **About Istanbul Policy Center**

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Istanbul, August 2015  
Pınar Akpınar and Bülent Aras

## WORKSHOP PROGRAM

**Venue:** Ramada Hotel, Istanbul

**Date:** March 6, 2015

**09:00-09:10** *Opening Remarks* - Fuat Keyman,  
Director of Istanbul Policy Center and Professor at  
Sabancı University

**09:45-10:45** *Panel 1 – International Humanitarian  
NGOs and Emergency Aid Activities*

**Chair:** Bülent Aras, *Coordinator of Program on Conflict  
Resolution and Mediation at Istanbul Policy Center and  
Professor at Sabancı University*

David Lewis, *Head of Department of Social Policy at  
London School of Economics – “Humanitarian NGOs  
and Civil Society”*

Pınar Akpınar, *Research Fellow, Conflict Resolution and  
Mediation Program, Istanbul Policy Center – “Turkish  
Humanitarian NGOs and Peacebuilding”*

### **Coffee Break**

**11:15-12:45** *Panel 2 – Disaster Management and  
Response*

**Chair:** Fuat Keyman, *Director of Istanbul Policy Center*

Wendy Fenton, *Coordinator of the Humanitarian  
Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute  
– “Disaster Risk Reduction”*

Meryem Aslan, *Senior Advisor at OXFAM Turkey –  
“Emergency Aid after Natural Disaster”*

Arne Strand, *Deputy Director and Research Director  
at CHR. Michelsen Institute – “Emergency Aid after  
Conflict”*

### **Lunch: 13:00-14:30**

**15:00-16:00** *Panel 3 – The Distribution of Aid and  
Access*

**Chair:** Onur Sazak, *Research and Academic Affairs  
Manager at Istanbul Policy Center*

Ira Haavisto, *Director at HUMLOG Institute – “Access  
of Emergency Aid”*

Anthony Beresford, *Director for the suite of Masters  
Programmes within the Logistics and Operations  
Management Section at Cardiff University – “Emer-  
gency Aid Access and Distribution”*

### **Coffee Break**

**16:30-18:00** *Panel 4 – Turkish Humanitarian NGOs  
Emergency Aid Activities*

**Chair:** Pınar Akpınar, *Research Fellow, Istanbul  
Policy Center*

H. Ece Yılmaztürk, *Disaster Preparedness Unit  
Manager (Turkish Red Crescent)*

İzzet Şahin, *Board Member and Diplomacy Coordi-  
nator at IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation*

Ali Karayılan, *General Director of Deniz Feneri  
Foundation*

## WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

The role of international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in peacebuilding has been on the political and scholarly agendas for the last two decades. However, the role of NGOs still needs to be discussed in line with the emergence of new trends and actors in the field. Recent years have also witnessed Turkey's emergence as an influential actor in the field of humanitarian aid in which Turkish humanitarian NGOs play a substantial role.

In order to take the discussion further, the workshop on *International Humanitarian NGOs and Emergency Aid* was held on March 6, 2015 in Istanbul under the auspices of Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) and with the financial support of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). It was the first of a series of two workshops organized as part of the *Project on Turkey's International Humanitarian NGOs and Peacebuilding: Health and Emergency Aid*.

The workshop aimed to shed light on how Turkish humanitarian NGOs contribute to Turkey's peacebuilding activities with a specific focus on their emergency aid activities. A series of four panels was convened during the workshop with the purpose of drawing attention to the topics of *International Humanitarian NGOs and Emergency Aid Activities, Disaster Management and Response, The Distribution of Aid and Access, and Turkish Humanitarian NGOs Emergency Aid Activities*.

This report summarizes the key points highlighted during the workshop by the participants. These points are sorted in a way to identify the role of international humanitarian NGOs in emergency aid, as well as the role played by Turkish NGOs within the overall field. The report concludes with recommendations for actors in the area of emergency aid.

## EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN NGOS

There are three broad sectors of organizations in the international system including the government, the private sector, and NGOs or the third sector that exists on the basis of a value driven enterprise. An international humanitarian NGO may be defined as a non-governmental organization that conducts international humanitarian activities to relieve natural or manmade disasters. As also underpinned by David Lewis, Head of the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics, during the workshop, it is yet to be determined whether NGOs are a force for good or a necessary force of evil dealing with the problems that are left over from the other two sectors.

In the world of development and humanitarian work, NGOs have come to the forefront in the last few decades. Back in the 1980s, they were not considered to be important actors in development and humanitarian work. Nowadays, NGOs have almost overtaken the world of development. International humanitarian NGOs may be either fully independent or in cooperation with the government. NGOs that are in cooperation with the government receive funding and often take the government's agenda into consideration on particular issues. Humanitarian NGOs tend to balance three main roles such as providing services, doing advocacy and campaigning, and building partnerships. The following section will dwell on some of the challenges faced by humanitarian NGOs during their activities on emergency aid.

## CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN NGOS

International humanitarian NGOs are faced with several challenges during their activities in the field. The implementation process on the ground could create unexpected obstacles that NGOs have difficulties overcoming in a timely manner. These obstacles in a way portray some of the weaknesses of humanitarian NGOs, which may include poor coordination, lack of good local knowledge, lack of effective ways of working with state institutions, and the inability to build sustainable relationships with governments. Examples of such were witnessed in Afghanistan and Haiti.

As underlined by Lewis, one of the most important challenges encountered by humanitarian NGOs is facing false accusations from local governments who often use NGOs as “scapegoats” for their own failures. Scapegoating has become a widespread phenomenon in conflict-prone states. Such accusations negatively affect the reputation of NGOs among local communities and slow down the implementation of certain tasks. Thus, scapegoating has become one of the greatest challenges of humanitarian NGOs today.

Another challenge is the misuse of aid delivered by humanitarian NGOs, which is often used by local governments for their political agendas. In certain cases, aid can even contribute to the suppression of locals and the violation of human rights by the government. As such, local governments, there is the risk of manipulation of international donors by local governments in order to receive aid on a regular basis and allocate the funds according to their plans.

A similar challenge is created by donors, who may be providing funds to implement their agendas in particular regions or conflicts. Therefore, NGOs have to organize their activities in accordance with the requirements and policies of donors. Hence, NGOs face a heavy burden to satisfy these requirements in order to ensure the stability of the financial flow. As a result, the actual needs of the people on the ground become secondary, which makes the humanitarian work ineffective and unsuccessful.

The politicization, militarization, and privatization of humanitarian aid creates obstacles for the successful implementation of projects. Particularly, the conditionality of the international donors places NGOs in a vulnerable position since conditions attached to aid shift the attention from the concrete problems on the ground to the enforcement of external values and prin-

ciples. As a result, NGOs face serious dilemmas while trying to fulfill donors’ conditions and simultaneously preserving the “humanitarian” principles.

Another important challenge of humanitarian NGOs is the issue of security and the protection of their staff members in the field. Members of NGOs are regularly targeted and put into life threatening situations. Sometimes they also face abduction for ransom or are killed for publicity. The terrorization of NGO workers in the field creates an unsafe environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid and services, which subsequently affects the delivery of aid to the final beneficiaries.

Similarly, humanitarian NGO workers may sometimes need to communicate with the members of militia groups that are labeled as “terrorist organizations” by some countries. As a result, humanitarian workers become increasingly threatened both by the anti-terrorism laws in their home countries such as the U.S. Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001), which prohibits U.S. citizens from communicating with terrorists. However, this is sometimes unavoidable for NGO workers since terrorist groups may be gatekeepers in conflict zones.

Another challenge of humanitarian NGOs is the difficulty of gaining legitimacy by earning the trust of local actors. Humanitarian NGOs generally operate based on values such as humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. These principles envision that humanitarian NGOs respond to the needs of the people regardless of their religion, ethnicity, race, gender, or political affiliation. Otherwise, aid may become a source of conflict, instigating more harm than good.

Participants discussed the case of Afghanistan where Islamic and Western NGOs were in competition rather than in cooperation with one another. The division between the two was obvious and clear, which eventually created a division within the local community as well. Most importantly, the NGO members did not communicate with each other and did not discuss any common issues. Each NGO tried to implement their projects separately and gain recognition of the local people. The Afghan example demonstrates that aid can generate conflict even within the NGO community. NGOs that represent certain religious or political values create barriers that can separate people into camps and further fuel conflict.

Finally, bureaucratic procedures often pose a challenge to humanitarian NGOs. Bureaucracy is often an obstacle imposed by governments both in conflict zones, which often face the problem of corruption, and in aid-giving countries, which may have strict requirements in terms of reporting and monitoring. In this respect, bureaucracy often slows down the work of NGOs.



## DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSE

The attention of the international community is often focused on major disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados, and the like. As also underscored by Wendy Fenton, Coordinator of the Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute, and Meryem Aslan during the workshop, the small and medium-scale disasters have the largest negative effect on people. Every day, communities face environmental, social, economic, or political risks. The international community has been developing certain frameworks of action in order to tackle these risks. The framework of reducing disaster risks is implemented through systematic efforts of analysis and management of causal factors of disasters including lessening vulnerability of people and property, the wise management of land and environment, and preparedness for the unexpected disaster events.

NGOs on the ground play a vital role in identifying disaster risks and developing certain strategies and capacity skills for disaster preparedness. Disaster preparedness activities are vital in helping to minimize the hazardous effects of emergencies and contribute to rapid recovery. Activities may take various forms depending on existing disaster threats. However, disproportionate allocation of funds can lead to insufficient preparedness for disaster risks.

As also underpinned by Aslan, between 1999 and 2011, only 0.5 per cent of international aid had been allocated for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Humanitarian aid was directed toward remedying the consequences of disasters rather than working toward preventing such disasters in the future. National organizations within aid-receiving countries received only 0.1 percent of all funds. International donors do not fully trust local NGOs or government organizations because they believe that those organizations are more corrupt, less respectful of humanitarian principles, less gender sensitive, and not able to properly allocate funds in comparison to international organizations. As also underlined by H. Ece Yılmaztürk, Disaster Preparedness Unit Manager at Turkish Red Crescent, there needs to be more work done on disaster risk reduction. As such, Hyogo Framework for Action stands out as an important contribution to such efforts.

Studies show, however, that even big international organizations have been incapable of providing proper support at the time of disasters. For instance, after the 2010 earthquake 12,000 international organizations

gathered in Haiti. But even 2-3 years after the disaster, there were still 1.5 million people who were homeless, which is indicative of the flows of the current international system of aid. Participants emphasized that in order to improve the current system, issues such as the lack of accountability and the lack of communication/mediation skills must be addressed in a timely manner. They argued that the lack of accountability is the source of the vicious circle of blame and accusations that stems from international donors, NGOs, or aid recipient countries. In addition, communication and mediation skills are necessary to build stronger networks in order to find more appropriate ways to implement the procedures, as well as to gain the confidence and trust of the local population.

Another important element that needs to be taken into consideration during emergency aid is gathering accurate information regarding the situation on the ground. As also underlined by Ali Karayılan, General Director of the Deniz Feneri Foundation, coordinating through local partner NGOs can be effective in terms of ensuring efficiency. For instance, being familiar with local eating habits is important in delivering the right kind of food.

## DISTRIBUTION OF AID AND ACCESS

Humanitarian logistics is defined as the control of the cost efficient flow of goods and material related information. The movement of goods, information, and financial goods constitutes the backbone of supply chain management. As also underlined during the workshop by Anthony Beresford, Director for the Suite of Masters Programmes within the Logistics and Operations Management Section at Cardiff University, the main challenge of supply chain management is defining the demand and portraying the actual needs of the people. A needs assessment activity must be done by a person or organization that is truly familiar with the region and the people.

Although demands and needs would be properly defined utilizing supply chain management, demands and needs are not constant. They fluctuate and scarce up very quickly. Therefore, the information regarding new sets of needs and demands has to reach the suppliers in a timely manner. In return, suppliers have to act accordingly and promptly supply the requested products. The speed of the process in the supply chain is highly important. If the speed is slow, humanitarian assistance could arrive late and negatively affect the operation on the ground. In some cases, there could be a need or demand for products that do not exist in the stocks or in the market. Therefore, the suppliers have to invent those products, which could take some time. As highlighted by Ira Haavisto, Director at HUMLOG Institute, in the case of the Ebola Crisis the suppliers faced a similar problem. There was a need for special gloves that can be attached to clothing; however, these gloves did not exist on the market. As a result, they were innovated and produced specifically for the Ebola Crisis.

Another important issue is cost efficiency. Suppliers must make sure that they produce enough quality products while spending the minimal amount of resources and reaching as many people as possible. If the activities are not cost efficient, donors might question the allocation of funds and cut the funding. Moreover, supply chain management must consider the sustainability aspect of humanitarian assistance. The decision on how aid will be delivered has long-term impacts. For instance, it matters how, when, and in which form the goods will be delivered. Sometimes, suppliers hurry to deliver the goods immediately, and long-term objectives become a secondary priority. In these cases, new issues start to arise. For example, in Afghanistan suppliers distributed water in small bottles. After awhile, those small bottles piled up because there was no waste

management system such as recycling. In order to avoid similar outcomes, suppliers must take into consideration the sustainability aspect of the assistance.

It is very difficult to be cost efficient, rapid, and sustainable, as well as to deliver quality products, at the same time. Even the largest NGO does not have the capacity to launch an effective response at the time of emergency. Therefore, suppliers choose to focus on one aspect of the equation at a time. However, if the supplier has good planning skills then it is possible to achieve at least some of the aspects together. Different suppliers could collaborate and cooperate to deliver an organized service and assistance during the crisis. Mutual dependency builds stronger ties within the humanitarian NGO community that has a positive effect on the process of aid delivery.

During emergencies, logistics constitute the largest cost both financially and temporally. Even if the organizations prepare quality products in a timely manner, transportation issues might cause a delay. Road, bridge, or railway routes can be damaged or destroyed, which can cause the delay or deficit of goods. For instance, in Rwanda, 60-ton trucks could only be filled with 45 tons due to the damages done to roads and bridges. The condition of transportation routes is significant both during and after a humanitarian crisis.

Cooperation between suppliers and neighboring countries, as well as different institutions, is significant during crisis. If goods are sent to a region with low IT capability or existing rivalries, it will be difficult to keep track of the exact location of goods at any particular moment. At the same time, if non-state actors like rivalry groups have power over transit or main routes then the goods could be seized without reaching the main beneficiaries.

Participants also underlined that military involvement is highly absolutely necessary to ensure the safe delivery of goods. Airdrops can be used as well, but they are not sustainable or cost inefficient. For instance, the current crisis in Syria has produced nearly three million refugees who are in desperate need. Since the region is highly dangerous, military actors have to take part in the process of aid delivery. Many actors have criticized the cooperation between NGOs and military institutions. However, when there is an ongoing armed conflict, military involvement is a requirement for ensuring the safety of NGO members and people on the ground.

## TURKISH HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EMERGENCY AID ACTIVITIES

Turkish humanitarian NGOs have become increasingly visible in the world of international aid in recent years. As Lewis also underpinned during the workshop, the entrance of new actors such as Turkish NGOs into the humanitarian scene creates an opportunity for change, for reinventing, and for challenging the ways in which the humanitarian sector goes about doing its work. However, there is also a strong danger that new NGOs may simply repeat the mistakes and old problems.

As highlighted by Pınar Akpınar, Research Fellow at Istanbul Policy Center, the emergence of Turkish humanitarian NGOs has been triggered by a series of events in the international arena such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, border conflicts following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bosnia/Kosovo crisis, Chechen war, and Palestinian war.<sup>1</sup> IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, one of the oldest and most active Turkish humanitarian NGOs, started its activities in 1992 with the outbreak of the Bosnian War. Initially, it was organized by a group of voluntary youth who came together to help the refugees coming from Bosnia to Turkey, as well as those still in Bosnia. In addition to international triggers, domestic factors such as the 1980 military coup, series of massive earthquakes in 1999, EU accession process, and the country's overall economic prosperity contributed to the development of the humanitarian sector in Turkey. Particularly, the 1999 earthquake in Turkey played a significant role in the emergence and progress of Turkish humanitarian NGOs.

Turkish humanitarian NGOs mainly operate in areas requiring emergency assistance and medical relief, building infrastructure, and investing in social and human capital. Activities related to emergency assistance and medical relief usually take place in the initial phase of the crisis. These activities include rescue operations, delivering food and clothing, drilling water wells, building temporary tent hospitals, and providing medications and relevant equipment. With respect to medical relief, cataract surgeries have become a trademark of Turkish aid. These surgeries provide concrete and positive results in the short-term. Surgeries help patients and their companions return to their normal lives. They also help in building trust between grassroots organizations and Turkish NGOs.

Building infrastructure such as schools, cultural centers, hospitals, roads, houses, and religious centers is an important feature of the activities of Turkish NGOs and contributes to the process of post-conflict reconstruction and transition into everyday life in conflict zones. The Turkish peacebuilding model considers development as a pre-requisite for sustainable peace. Therefore, NGOs and state institutions frequently use this approach in conflict zones. Finally, the third cluster focuses on providing educational opportunities inside and outside Turkey. Young people are offered different scholarships to study at universities, vocational schools, and so on.

Turkish humanitarian NGOs are flexible, they do not attach conditionality for future funds, and they pursue an advocacy role. It is important to underline that religion also plays an important role in their approach to aid. For example, donations increase significantly during the holy month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Adha. During the workshop some participants agreed that an emphasis on religion could put the neutrality of Turkish Humanitarian NGOs under question. In addition, cooperation between the Turkish government and Turkish humanitarian NGOs raises concerns regarding the politicization of aid. Another challenge for Turkish humanitarian NGOs is the fact that they are involved in too many activities, which limits their expertise in a certain field. Therefore, the sustainability of the results might be limited as well.

<sup>1</sup> Parts of the presentation made by Pınar Akpınar during this workshop has been later on published as, Bülent Aras and Pınar Akpınar, "The Role of HNGOs in Turkey's Peacebuilding," *International Peacekeeping* 22, no.3, 2015: 230-247.

## TURKISH HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

In recent years, the Syrian crisis has been a “test-case” for Turkish humanitarianism, both for NGOs and the state. As underlined by İzzet Şahin, Board Member and Diplomacy Coordinator at IHH, the Syrian case has been completely different from all other experiences for Turkish humanitarian NGOs despite their previous engagements in war-driven zones in the past such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. One of the reasons for this is the large number of people affected by the crisis, which has reached about seven million people inside Syria and four million outside. In addition, it is very unlikely that the current situation will change in the near future. Furthermore, the parties to the conflict are quite fractured, including the regime, the opposition, the Islamic State, and Kurds. As such, the problem has changed from a political into an ethnic conflict. As a result, the complex nature of the conflict makes it particularly difficult to address.

The Syrian case has also been a challenge for Turkish humanitarian NGOs in the sense that it has blurred the line between the local and the international. A considerable amount of humanitarian work targeting Syrians takes place within Turkey’s own borders. Turkey currently hosts about two million Syrian refugees, which makes it the largest refugee hosting country in the world according to a recent report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>2</sup>

A number of Turkish NGOs are currently active in and around Syria. Among these, IHH operates mainly from its coordination centers in Reyhanlı and Kilis. These centers are used for coordinating aid within the IHH, as well as with other Turkish and international NGOs, to conduct trainings and exchange information. In Syria, IHH has tent camps, orphanages, guesthouses, and container camps. Additionally, it provides mobile kitchens and a bakery in Reyhanlı that produces 170 thousand loaves of bread daily.

Similarly, Turkish Red Crescent is currently delivering food aid to 238,000 Syrian refugees. As argued by Yılmaztürk, one of the innovations that the organization has brought into the Turkish aid spectrum is the “e-card” system. Instead of delivering cooked meals to refugees, the Turkish Red Crescent distributes e-cards, which are topped up every month and can be used to buy necessary ingredients from local supermarkets.

This also has a positive psychological impact on refugees, allowing them to gain agency and integrate into everyday life. Turkish Red Crescent also provides refugees with psychological support to help them recover psychologically from conflict situations.

Deniz Feneri is another NGO that has been active during the Syrian crisis. So far, it has delivered about 55 million Turkish liras worth of aid to Syrians, including cash and in-kind aid such as prefabricated houses, food, coal, heaters, and miscellaneous goods.

As underpinned by Şahin, cross-bordering aids have turned into an important discussion during the Syrian crisis. According to international humanitarian law and the UN policy on delivering aid to cross-border areas, NGOs need to seek the permission of the official government to be able to operate in a country. As such, NGOs as well as the UN face the dilemma of having to seek permission from the government of Bashar Assad in Syria. Consequently, it took the UN years to start crossing the border into Syria. As also put forth by Aslan, cross-border operations have also raised the issue of militarization, polarization, and politicization of humanitarian aid, which is still a problem that needs to be addressed.

Despite the rather independent attitude of Turkish NGOs in the past, there is now increasing cooperation between Turkish humanitarian NGOs and their Western counterparts. Particularly, the Syrian crisis has been a catalyst for such cooperation. For instance, IHH has cooperated with more than 100 donor NGOs so far during the Syrian crisis. Turkish NGOs are also cooperating with UN bodies, the OIC, and the Humanitarian Forum, a London based organization that brings together humanitarian NGOs from Western and non-Western countries in order to enhance cooperation and eradicate prejudices.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed in the Syrian crisis is the loss of cultural heritage as a result of attacks on historical and cultural sites during the conflict. As highlighted by Saadet Güner, Head of Friends of Cultural Heritage (FOCUH), preserving the cultural heritage of the refugees in Turkey and elsewhere is also an important task. As examples of such work, Turkish Red Crescent opened cultural centers in refugee camps in order to promote the continuation of Syrian cultural activities such as cooking Syrian food and making handicrafts.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, “World at War,” *Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2014*, 2015.

## CONCLUSION

The following recommendations made during the *International Humanitarian NGOs and Emergency Aid Workshop* need to be taken into consideration in order to ensure the efficiency of international emergency aid:

Coordination and cooperation among different actors such as locals, governments, military, and other NGOs should be enhanced;

Accurate information about the situation on the ground should be gathered;

NGOs should be selective and careful in choosing the right partners to work with on the ground;

Safety and security of the personnel should be a priority;

Impartiality should be preserved while working with the beneficiaries;

Investing in disaster preparedness and risk reduction should be increased;

Communication/mediation skills should be improved in order to ensure legitimacy on the ground;

International donors should focus their attention on people's needs rather than on political gains;

Top-down approaches to implementing change are ineffective. In order to bring about positive "change" factors, culture, religion, and the lifestyle of communities on the ground have to be taken into consideration.

This report aimed to draw on several debates that were emphasized during the workshop and are tied to discussions in the field of humanitarian aid. The report analyzed the role of international humanitarian NGOs, with a specific focus on Turkish humanitarian NGOs. As this report also suggests, despite certain criticisms, humanitarian NGOs have come to the fore as crucial actors in the field of emergency aid.





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