



Prioritizing the Locals: A Response to the Ongoing Humanitarian Aid Crisis in Yemen

Discussion Paper of the Brussels International Center's *Humanitarian Aid Response Plan: Biometric Technology and Civilian Security* webinar on 8 October, 2020

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DISCUSSION

On 8 October 2020 the Brussels International Center hosted an event with international, local and field-based experts to discuss the humanitarian situation in Yemen. The underlying notion of the conversation was concerning the significance of local involvement in the work of humanitarian aid organizations. Specifically, that international partners who are working throughout Yemen must prioritize the involvement of local actors in order to provide the most vulnerable populations with the necessary

aid, in an efficient and effective manner. Collaboration with local partners provides multiple advantages, such as the vital local knowledge as well as a network to access more remote areas of the country. Conversely, there are also challenges for humanitarian aid organizations that attempt to operate in Yemen. These challenges need to be considered and ultimately addressed in order to attempt to improve the operational environment of aid workers and organizations that are working to deliver humanitarian aid to nearly 25 million

people. Many of the conflict, bureaucratic and logistical challenges are not unique to Yemen, and exist in many humanitarian crisis contexts, but are further exacerbated by the complex environment in Yemen. The unique tribal structure, and their individual priorities, complicate the operational environment and the relationships that aid organizations must develop with locals in order to ensure aid is received by vulnerable populations. Blockades from the conflict actors are also obstacles that humanitarian aid organizations have had to manage.

By working to promote a greater dialogue between humanitarian groups at all levels, the conversation cannot simply be directed towards the amount of aid that is needed, or how best it can be delivered. Fundamentally, the humanitarian aid crisis will continue until the parties to the conflict reach an agreement and are able to uphold a long-term ceasefire. The conflict, now in its sixth year, is the primary cause of the aid crisis in Yemen which has catalyzed multiple other drivers of the conflict such as the economic crisis, the lack of imports into the country, the volatile security landscape and the decrease in funding for humanitarian organizations working in Yemen.

International donors have been reluctant to continue to fund efforts in Yemen, as the operating environment for aid workers is so challenging. In turn the aid organizations face unfortunate circumstances where they need to prioritize their efforts, meaning that not all those who need aid will receive adequate amounts of assistance. This is where further collaboration and continued evaluation of the needs of civilians is necessary. Local partners can play a key role in identifying areas with the greatest level of needs, and hopefully work to ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive proper amounts of aid.

As millions of Yemenis continue to rely on humanitarian assistance or are forced to leave their home for their own safety, humanitarian aid organizations at a local, national, and

international level must focus on the sustainability of their aid efforts. The reliance on aid that has been developed over the past six years of conflict will not dissolve when the conflict ends. Rather than continuing to fuel reliance on aid, small efforts have been made and must continue to be pursued to prioritize long term, sustainable livelihood projects that will contribute to the wellbeing of Yemenis.

Local initiatives, particularly those that are led by women, should be supported by the international community in their efforts throughout Yemen. There are various types of programs that international and local aid organizations participate in to distribute aid. Cash assistance and biometrics are some examples of these programs, both of which have their shortcomings. Cash assistance programs can be mismanaged and, again, develop dependency on aid, instead of building livelihoods, but biometric technology has not yet been properly supported by conflict actors throughout the country. Ultimately, there is no ideal aid mechanism that can be used, and therefore a more tailored and individualized approach to the aid projects in Yemen should be undertaken.

In recent years, the aid that has been given to Yemen has been restricted by certain actors. Donors have stipulated that their contributions must be delivered to certain groups, or must go to serve specific purposes in Yemen, which creates a dangerous, and biased setting for aid workers. This type of aid donation puts aid organizations in a challenging position, especially as humanitarian funding for 2020 decreased dramatically in Yemen. First and foremost, when donors support international aid organizations in Yemen, they cannot influence the work that these organizations undertake for their own agenda. Aid organizations are subsequently tasked with working through a complex supply chain, through regional and local channels, which cannot be impeded by the stipulations of aid donations.

The recommendations from this webinar covered a broad spectrum of ideas from the different

speakers, advocating for stronger support to local organizations as well as the need to bring conflict actors to the table. The humanitarian aid crisis will not be solved until the conflict has ended. Consequently, the role for all actors working on humanitarian aid, including donors, is to continue to work towards an end to the conflict. Until a lasting ceasefire is reached, and conflict actors are able to negotiate peacefully, humanitarian aid organizations (both local and international) must be granted unimpeded access to all areas where humanitarian aid is needed.

Further collaboration between local and international actors is necessary for the most vulnerable populations to receive aid. Humanitarian aid response only works to mitigate the impacts of the conflict, and to assist those who have been most affected by the ongoing war. Continued support for humanitarian aid efforts in Yemen is vital, but the ultimate goal is to enable the population of Yemen to live in peace, independently, and without the need for humanitarian aid.

BIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Towards the International Community:

- > The ongoing humanitarian aid crisis in Yemen is directly linked to the conflict. The international community must work to promote an end to the conflict by working with the parties to the conflict to negotiate peace deals and ceasefires.
- > The international community must condemn all actions that are impeding aid workers from accessing humanitarian aid routes, in order to ensure effective and efficient delivery of aid to vulnerable populations.
- > Promote greater collaboration between local and international actors in Yemen. Local actors, working in the humanitarian sector and to promote the livelihoods of Yemenis should be prioritized when developing aid response plans.

Towards International Aid Agencies Operating in Yemen :

- > Collaboration with local organizations is the only way to ensure that the aid is being delivered to those who need it most, in some of the most remote regions of Yemen. Aid organizations should prioritize local organizations as partners in their aid distribution.
- > Aid response plans must be developed on an individualized basis, as one aid delivery system may be more effective in specific, but not all contexts.
- > Recognize the important role of women, and women-led organizations in Yemen. Women, and the initiatives they lead are the forefront of humanitarian aid delivery throughout the country.

Towards Aid Donors:

- > Fulfill the promises and delivery of pledges to aid donations. The humanitarian aid crisis in Yemen is experiencing a decrease in funding, which ultimately is impacting the lives of millions of civilians.
- > Aid donations should remain impartial. Aid donations that are given with stipulations or specifications of where and who they should be targeted towards hinder the delivery of aid to the most vulnerable populations.

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