

## **Transition from Dependency to Self-Reliance. Relationship Between Humanitarian and Development Interventions; Sustainable Change and Peace**

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Whether and to what extent the new government in Afghanistan will gain local and international legitimacy depends on performance and policies of the rulers. One of the main areas of policy making that the new government is concerned with is operation of organizations who offer humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan. A challenging issue in this regard is the fact that most of the organizations operating in the fields of humanitarian and development assistance are either themselves foreign organizations or receive funding from foreign sources. For the same reason, certain preconditions must be met before they can initiate operations within the host countries. They need to make sure that they are able to carry out their work independently; that they are able to monitor and evaluate their work accordingly. The political aspects of foreign assistance are specifically challenging.

Reducing dependency on foreign interventions seems to be the priority of the current government. However, in order to reach self-reliance, you need something more than a firm aspiration to fight and expel foreigners. Policymakers need to make proper decisions to address public issues, such as unemployment. Foreign organizations and their local associates – especially those working in development field – face serious challenges in the field as their programs do not necessarily correspond with local needs and culture. They also face constant technical issues in financing.

Currently, most development organizations and programs stopped working or became isolated. In contrast, humanitarian organizations continue working promising to expand their operations. Recently Taliban officials received humanitarian aid, including nutrition, from a number of countries including Pakistan, Bahrein, Qatar, United Arab Emirate, and Turkmenistan.<sup>1</sup> They hope that such humanitarian aid to some extent relieve the immediate needs of the population. Humanitarian assistance/intervention is viewed as apolitical, hence welcomed. But organizations who lead development programs because of the political aspects of their intervention either are banned or they themselves stopped operating in the country. Donor countries and organizations have a distinct approach towards humanitarian and development assistance. Humanitarian assistance typically addresses immediate needs emanating from natural or artificial crises while development assistance typically targets long-term goals i.e. long term reforms.<sup>2</sup> From this point of view, in order to be able to initiate development assistance in a given country/community they make sure that certain level of readiness for institutional engagement, known as institutional capacity, is in place.<sup>3</sup> The so-called institutional capacity is generally measured through examining the ability and willingness of the host country to adopt internationally accepted development goals. For example, if you respect human rights, you will be considered as eligible to receive development

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan Receive Humanitarian Aid from 5 Countries, Anadolu Agency, September 9, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/afghanistan-receives-humanitarian-aid-from-5-countries/2360499>

<sup>2</sup> Eliza Anyangwe, Is it time to rethink the divide between humanitarian and development funding?, The Guardian, December 4, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/dec/04/funding-humanitarian-assistance-development-aid>

<sup>3</sup> Róisín Hinds, "Relationship between Humanitarian and Development Aid," GSDRC, August 2, 2016, <https://gsdrc.org/publications/relationship-between-humanitarian-and-development-aid/>.

aid through human rights related project and programs. Otherwise, donors will focus on humanitarian aid. They will not bother themselves with issues considered to be too sensitive or too political.

The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator after meeting with Taliban officials in Kabul, highlighted certain preconditions that must be met before humanitarian interventions:

*“They [humanitarian agencies] need independence of assessment, delivery and monitoring of assistance. They need security and safety of national and international humanitarian workers- both male and female, and of their families. They need the freedom to hire without interference, guarantees that humanitarian facilities will not be occupied or used for military purposes, and [they need] access to people in need, wherever they are.”<sup>4</sup>*

He also emphasized that women of Afghanistan should have freedom of work, education and movement. The Taliban promised to facilitate humanitarian operations.

Similarly, the European Union (EU), suggests that it is ready to cooperate with Taliban but that does not mean that the EU is recognizing Taliban’s government.<sup>5</sup> Forming an inclusive government, recognizing the right of people to elect their political leaders, protection of human rights including the rights of women, youth and minorities, commitment to fight terrorism and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorists, abiding by the international rules including the international humanitarian law, are some of the preconditions set by the donor community (including the US, the EU, France, Italy, Norway, Germany, NATO and the UK) to continue supporting Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

Although different operational, technical and political considerations separate humanitarian and development interventions, both type of interventions follow the general policy of international assistance of the donor community. So, to what extent distinguishing between them makes sense? Of course the current government based on its mission and aspiration (such as reviving the local economy or encouraging humanitarian and development cooperation between Islamic countries), may discriminate between various organizations and programs banning or facilitating their operations. But imposing indiscriminate ban on operation of the so called development organizations would limit the possibilities of constructive interaction with developing actors while furthering vulnerabilities of the population towards foreign interventions. Also if foreign donors insist on imposing their policies on the host country, they will not be able to enter a constructive interaction with the local people. Such approaches create insurmountable gap between humanitarian aid and development assistance.

One of the suitable approaches to enter a constructive interaction with humanitarian and development organizations/ programs is the “Common Ground Approach” introduced and applied by Search for Common Ground. The approach emphasizes that “differences and disagreements – and for that matter conflict, are inevitable, but we can still avoid violent confrontations through seeking common solutions”.

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<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan, Press Conference (7 September 2021), United Nations, September 8, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYGVx0vEvDU>

<sup>5</sup> EU will talk to the Taliban but will not recognise government: Borrell, Euronews, September 3, 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/09/03/eu-will-talk-to-the-taliban-but-will-not-recognise-government-borrell>

<sup>6</sup> The International Community Has Announced Five Conditions for Its Future Assistance to Afghanistan, Accessed on September 16, 2021, <https://8am.af/the-international-community-has-announced-five-conditions-for-its-future-assistance-to-afghanistan/>

Instead to ignoring conflict/ disagreement, the Common Ground Approach suggests that we better recognize conflict/ disagreement and search for common ground. From this perspective, the government, for example, may label human rights as an unacceptable foreign intervention project and reject it, but still it needs to be sensitive towards social norms and the middle ground in society. Otherwise in the campaign against foreign interventions the government could undermine the middle ground of society. In this middle area, immediate livelihood concerns and what could be considered as long-term development concerns are linked together. This middle ground stretches out its boundaries as the society itself. Ignoring the middle ground of the society, either by the local government or by international actors, may have negative implications and consequences, including continued dependency on international aid, exodus of the people, and violent reactions. In order to revive the local economy, get rid of dependency on foreign aid and regulate transactions with development organizations, it is advisable that both the new government and development organizations recognize the middle ground of society, where people live and work. This is especially important for governments/ actors who seek reform and adjustments. Failing to recognize the middle ground of society, increases vulnerabilities of the people pushing them towards unhealthy conflicts and confrontations. Let's remember that operation of humanitarian organizations is more relevant in fragile situations. To the extent government fails to interact with the middle ground of society, it becomes dependent on foreign aid and interventions and peoples' capabilities for managing their needs decreases.

The Common Ground Approach, highlights the requirements of constructive interaction between various stakeholders. Currently Search-Afghanistan work on series of projects aimed at supporting youth participation in peacebuilding processes, enhancing justice for women and children. In order to make sure that implementation of these projects do not undermine local norms and culture, first of all Search consults with the local people who may have related – not necessarily similar, concerns in the project area. Accordingly, project implementers – who are themselves local people, amend project objectives and activities and seek common solutions to locally identified problems. If one opposes such projects on the ground that they are political foreign funded interventions, and do not bother himself to consider the underlying concepts and enter into dialogue, it is less likely that a constructive interaction ever take place. Similarly, if development organizations- through their so called capacity building schemes, ignore and undermine the middle ground of the host society, they will not be able to enter a meaningful interaction with the local government and people. By applying the Common Ground Approach, we might be able to see the differences and talk through disagreements in search of common solutions in the middle ground of society. From this perspective, identifying/working on the humanitarian aspects of development assistance and vice versa is of practical interest. Sustainable change, peace, and justice are concepts and ideals that only could be realized through meaningful constructive interaction with the living society.