

Morals of Aid

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In an earlier article we discussed some aspects of humanitarian and emergency aid, with particular reference to the devastating floods currently affecting Pakistan. We underlined that it is a *human right* to receive aid when a natural or man-made disaster strikes. Disasters strike unfairly or, it rains on righteous and unrighteous alike. We don't receive aid according to how good or bad we are, because it is a right for any human being in need to receive help. The contrary, to look away and avoid giving of our abundance, is morally wrong, and it can also be legally wrong. This is clearly spelt out in maritime law, for example, where a ship has a duty to help sailors on another ship facing shipwreck. Failing to help is a crime. To help is a *moral duty* for all of us.

When major disasters strike, governments, international and local organizations, rich and poor individuals respond positively and try to do what they can to help. But we usually complain about the aid coming late and that it being too little; so also this time.

Yet, recent figures show that the local and international community has responded very positively and the United Nations has received promises for more money than what they initially had asked for in 'first aid', but then the number of affected people has also doubled. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have already promised \$ 3 billion to begin rebuilding the washed away infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, railroads, electricity lines, and so on.

Let us underline yet again that we all have the right to aid in case of a disaster or emergency, such as flood, earthquake, draught, war, violent conflict, or any other calamity leaving us paralyzed and helpless. I wish that we would also define as disaster *extreme poverty* and other slow, multiple and chronic emergencies that affect a large percentage of people in developing countries at any given time. In Pakistan, the number of people constantly living in extreme poverty probably outnumbers those even the number of people affected by the current sudden disaster. The majority of victims are always women and children. I wonder if we would have allowed extreme poverty the way we do now if those affected had been 'more important people'?

This leads us from sudden disasters, and humanitarian and emergency aid, to transition aid and development aid. The reasons for why we need aid vary, and sometimes, but not always, disaster preparedness and social welfare can prevent people from becoming totally dependent on help from others. If governments and communities had invested in disaster preparedness programmes and invested in help to the poor, the affects of disasters would have been much reduced. However, it is precisely a characteristic of developing countries, including Pakistan, that they do not find that they can invest in preparedness and early warning systems, not even in plans and action programmes for response if disasters happen, although I believe things are getting better, especially after the South Asia Tsunami in 2004 and the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. The many powerful United Nations organizations and other large international and local non-governmental organizations must share responsibility for today's shortcoming and do much better in future – so that the number of people affected by disaster and poverty can be dramatically reduced.

I fail to understand why the UN and the large international NGOs do not have emergency funds to tap into. Why do they have to wait until the member countries donate more funds, knowing full well that bureaucracies move slowly? We hope disasters don't, yet, we know they will happen, so it doesn't take too much imagination to realize that funds must be set aside the same way as we buy health insurance. Sooner or later the funds will be needed.

What are the many international organizations there to do if they cannot help governments and local organizations with this?

They have a moral and legal duty to fulfill their mandates. If they cannot do that, we have to get rid of them and establish new organizations that can help those who need help. After the current flood disaster in Pakistan is over, I believe the United Nations and the large NGOs should be scrutinized, and I believe there will be more shortcomings than what we should accept. And then, in future, we should also develop better emergency units in government offices, at all administrative levels, civil society organizations, interest organizations, labour unions, political parties, schools, hospitals, and so on. These are the organizations that have to handle catastrophes, chronic poverty and development. We all have a moral duty to support all good forces that make improvement become reality.

The media is essential in all progress, without which we do not get the required positive and critical information disseminated and analyzed. The media is a watchdog for development and actions, not least in disasters.

In Pakistan, the freedom of the media is high, and I believe the local as well as international media has done a good job in the current crisis. Shortcomings are always easy to point out, such as the fact that the tribal areas are not accessible to the media, and some of those areas have been hard hit by the floods, and earlier, by the military operations.

As regards the international media, I believe their reporting is generally good, but I do not like that they sometimes become fundraisers for the UN and other humanitarian aid organizations. That also leads to victims of disasters being used in 'marketing' of the disaster and in the direct 'begging' for help. That is morally and ethically wrong and falls outside the role of the media.

It is easier to receive international aid for relatively short-term disasters than for long-term development projects and programmes. About \$ 6 billion was mobilized and has been spent by the Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority, ERRA, after the earthquake in 2005, and as far as I can judge, most of it wisely.

It is more difficult to receive aid for long-term development, say for the next 5-10-20 or 50 years. The magnitude of the current disaster requires many ERRA-budgets, perhaps 5 times as many, or even more. Is Pakistan going to be able to mobilize that kind of funds from domestic and foreign sources? Will it be possible to keep focus on Pakistan's flood victims for many years? Will structural changes within Pakistan and internationally be implemented so that we get better preparedness in future, and a generally better economic and development situation for the country's poor people?

The short answer is 'no'. The longer answer is: It depends on the efforts made by all of us, and indeed the initiatives to improve the United Nations and other international organizations. In principle, I support UN organizations. However, in recent years, I have become disillusioned. I believe that the UN's role must be more clearly defined and their role made more limited, more in line with their actual results, and they are quite limited unlike what we often think. In addition, we need more interest organizations and movements, such as those we have seen in fields like environmental issues, women's issues, human rights, and other fields. In many cases, it must be realized that the UN agencies have not done a good job in making the rich countries admit that it is morally wrong not to share resources with the developing countries to a greater extent than what is the case today.

The rich countries development aid is on average only somewhere in the range of 0.5% of the countries' GDP. Well, my home country Norway has this year reached 1.1%, but even that is

not much, especially if we add that Norway's trade with developing countries is very limited. In spite of the fact that many aid projects have been good, the overall impact of aid is limited. Besides, aid doesn't actively contribute to structural change, and that is required if we want poor people to get out of poverty. On national level as well as international level, it is a moral duty to work for change.

The rich countries, and the rich people in the poor countries, can no longer defend a system, which only marginally and slowly improves the conditions for poor people. In a world with 8 billion people, there are 2 billion who live at a poverty level, which is unacceptable. We know it. We see it. But we don't change it, neither through aid, trade, or, better regulations and laws. The human rights have far-reaching requirements, which are never fulfilled, such as the right to education, health, livelihood, and so on. Some new organizations, such as the World Trade Organization, WTO, is probably a direct hindrance to change in many fields, and also the World Bank system and the 1940s ideology and structures it advocates, which the UN organizations and the bilateral agencies also succumb to.

Some years ago, the German moral philosopher *Thomas Pogge* wrote a book entitled 'World Poverty and Human Rights'. He argues that to rid the world of poverty is the most important human rights task in our time. He likens the injustice in our world today to the utterly immoral crime of the nazis before and during World War II. He says that the rich countries are colluding with the rich in the poor countries in such a way that the result is the worst human rights crimes that have ever taken place in history. But Professor Pogge gives us hope, too; he says that the politicians in the Western countries, with politicians and leaders everywhere, can change the economic and international human rights order. He says that through structural change, greater equality between North and South and within countries, the oppressed will gain a better life; also the oppressor, whose human dignity will be restored, will have gotten rid of a very heavy burden.

Let us pull out books and documents that have begun to gather dust, such as the International Declaration of Human Rights, from which I shall quote Article 25, Number 1. It states that 'everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood beyond his control'.

There is not yet a broad moral foundation and movement for ending poverty in the world. The politicians are often not answerable to the voters in their countries, and influential people don't have a moral demand for change. But still, everybody wants to do what is right, or so I believe. People's response and empathy to disasters like the current one in Pakistan gives hope. Could it also lead to a broader movement for change, more and better aid, and structural change between and within countries, we would all be able to live happier lives.

In Pakistan, due to the enormity of the current disaster and the great inequality that exists within the country, I find it particularly important that we all consider how we can contribute to more moral humanitarian and development aid, which includes massive transfers from the rich to the poor, within the country and internationally.

This time, I hope we will consider these issues more seriously than in less dramatic disasters so that we can avoid economic setback for the country, unrest, decade-long suffering and old and new poverty. Perhaps this is what is required of me, and all of us, to work and pray for, starting today in this holy month of Ramazan?

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