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**Economic and Social
Council**

Expert report

Special economic, humanitarian
and disaster relief assistance

Содержание

Introduction	3
Special economic and humanitarian relief assistance	4
Defining special economic and humanitarian assistance	4
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	4
International Committee of the Red Cross	5
Recent actions	5
The issues to be considered	8
Conclusion	10
Appendix.....	11
UN key documents	11
Other useful material.....	12
Other useful links.....	12

Introduction

In 2013, about 70 million¹ individuals were in need looking for a humanitarian care worldwide. Today, natural disasters, conflicts and protracted crises have made homeless more than 60 million people around the world.² One should distinguish the crises since each particular disaster requires different measures, individual economic and humanitarian relief and the way it should be delivered.

The International Humanitarian System, which includes a number of international organizations, has been conducting industrious and vital work to solve the growing global humanitarian caseload. The system has not yet developed a standard formula for delivering special economic and humanitarian relief assistance. Every operation in any region is followed by its own particular plan. However, some general practices, such as methods of calculating the number of people in need, typically a subset of ‘people affected’ by an emergency (some of whom can cope without external assistance), are needed but they have not been elaborated yet which makes the humanitarian assistance far from perfect.

“Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory.”³ Although no single organization or state can meet some challenges alone, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of states must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Not only the principles of international co-operation but also International humanitarian law principles are to be observed. These are humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

The role of International Community is to support the efforts of the national governments in dealing with the consequences of humanitarian emergencies, establish coherence while responding to the crises. Increasing needs in the recent years, international community’s collective inability to resolve protracted crises and convergence of various global challenges have severely hindered operational and financial capacity of governments and humanitarian organizations to respond adequately.

This underscores the need to change the way the international development and humanitarian assistance actors collaborate, coordinate and prepare for and respond to humanitarian crisis.

1 OCHA’s annual report data (2013)

2 Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3 Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 1991 46/182.
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations

Special economic and humanitarian relief assistance

Defining special economic and humanitarian assistance

Humanitarian assistance is generally accepted to mean the aid (including food, medicines, shelter and health care) and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.⁴

Special economic relief is aimed at providing disaster-prone countries and strife-torn countries with financial aid.

Donors are the states which provide the affected countries with the humanitarian and special economic relief aid and assistance.

Recipients are the targeted states which population suffers from the political, natural disasters and complex crises.

Affected countries seek relief assistance of other states and international organizations under *the following circumstances*:

- Natural disasters;
- Armed conflict;
- Failures of development or governance;
- Ongoing political crisis;
- Combination thereof.

Over the past 40 years the International community has been deeply concerned about the special economic and humanitarian relief assistance and has been debating on strengthening the capacity of the UN bodies to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations which include disaster preparedness and prevention programs, delivery of supplies to the suffering population, dissemination of relevant information as well as various forms of cooperation between states and international organizations.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

One of the main organizations working towards an effective humanitarian assistance and coordination in helping disaster-prone and strife-torn countries is United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs formed by General Assembly Resolution

⁴ Defining humanitarian assistance (<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/>)

46/182 in 1991.⁵ OCHA is the part of the United Nations Secretariat responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to emergencies. By establishing its regional services, OCHA provides emergency response at short notice and by working with national governments and other regional agencies and international organizations; it also provides tools such as contingency planning, hazard mapping and early warning reports. There are two types of pooled funds managed by OCHA – the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and country-based pooled funds (CBPFs). All OCHA-managed pooled funds enable humanitarian organizations to provide the most urgently needed assistance following various disaster and gaps in delivering help. As well as managing their domestic funds, OCHA receives voluntary contributions from a diverse set of donors. Their generous contributions and constant active support allow OCHA to grow and to develop innovative ways to deal with the challenges facing the global humanitarian community.

For instance, OCHA coordinated humanitarian aid to support 80 million people in 37 countries in 2015.⁶ Its work continues as disasters occur. The achievements are published in the annual reports providing an outlook on all successfully provided responses and remaining obstacles. This underlines the great contribution of OCHA to strengthening the capacity of the International community to respond to the crises situations.

International Committee of the Red Cross

The ICRC is an independent and neutral non-governmental organization. Established in 1863, it is helping people affected by conflict and armed violence and promoting the laws that protect victims of war. The mission of the committee is to take urgent actions in response to emergencies and provide international humanitarian law with due elaboration and implementation to the national law.

Its International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is targeted at bringing the states together urging them to deal with disaster situation in accordance with humanitarian law principles and effective and rapid relief assistance.

Recent actions

The tendencies in the humanitarian and economic supply system prove to be positive. However, further development is needed. The brief overview of the recent responses to some of the most devastating natural, political and complex disaster crises shows our

⁵ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 1991 46/182. Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations

⁶ See the OCHA annual report “2015 Year in Review”

partial inability to cope with them properly and the necessity to strengthen the capacity of the humanitarian actors' assistance and develop coherence in coordinating and providing relief.

a) Philippines. Typhoon Haiyan struck the central islands of the Philippines (where it is known as Typhoon Yolanda) on 8 November 2013. One of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded, it killed over 6,000 people and displaced about 4 million. Roads, electricity and communications were cut off in a number of areas, which subsequently delayed access to many in need of help. About a million homes were damaged in the storm, about half of those completely demolished, and millions of people saw their income sources lost or disrupted.⁷

Humanitarian response:

- 1) Nearly \$1 billion in funding was mobilized for the response (including major donor governments and private sources);
- 2) Despite the difficulties the Typhoon had created, the response was able to reach all affected areas;
- 3) Stated requirements for food assistance, WASH [Water, Sanitation and Hygiene], coordination and logistics were relatively well covered;
- 4) Most needs assessments were undertaken in close coordination with local authorities and in a timely fashion.

Weak points:

- 1) Relief program leadership didn't manage to coordinate strategies for the transition to long-term objectives;
- 2) Contributions for early recovery and livelihoods were far below the request (29% funded⁸);
- 3) Deficits appeared in longer-term housing assistance and other aspects of recovery.

b) Mali. Fighting by insurgent groups in the north of Mali beginning in January 2012 caused several hundred thousand people to flee.⁹ Armed groups acted savagely towards civilians at checkpoints and pillaged private houses, hospitals, schools, aid agencies and government buildings. The violence took many donors and aid actors by surprise. As a response to the crisis, the financial flows to Mali increased drastically within a short period of time. New presidential elections were held.

7 The ALNAP [The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action] report. The state of the humanitarian system, 2015 EDITION

8 Ibid.

9 The URD [Union for the Republic and Democracy] Evaluation Report. The difficult handling of a complex crisis in Northern Mali

Humanitarian response:

- 1) Some agencies managed to bring in new personnel and mechanisms and launch a comprehensive humanitarian response;
- 2) Aid actors perceived the funding levels in 2012–2013 as largely sufficient;
- 3) Peaceful presidential and legislative elections later in the year brought hope to many people displaced; many have started to think of a future beyond their displacement.

Weak points:

- 1) Most part of the country yet remains contested and highly insecure today;
- 2) There are still gaps in delivering protection, education and WASH due to insecurity in the north of the country;
- 3) The response lacked a comprehensive, cross-sector picture of humanitarian needs and priorities.

c) *Syria*. The protracted conflict in Syria, which began gradually in March 2011, has escalated into a great act of violence, resulted in a quarter of a million deaths, over 7 million people displaced, and more than 12 million people in need of humanitarian aid.¹⁰ UN agencies and a few NGOs [non-governmental organizations] have provided aid from Damascus, mainly through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, while other NGOs and diaspora groups deliver cross-border aid from the neighboring countries of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Humanitarian response:

- 1) With \$5.5 billion raised through the Syria SRP [Strategic Response Plan] over three years¹¹, the crisis has brought in a historic volume of financial contributions.

Weak points:

- 1) The humanitarian community is unable to determine whether people receive the most relevant and appropriate aid due to the small number of primary information sources available.
- 2) People from most heavily contested districts weren't able to receive any humanitarian aid until the Security Council endorsed the aid operations in 2014;
- 3) Due to restrictions imposed by the government and other armed actors received information has been neither impartial nor more or less sufficient to monitor the situation;
- 4) Shifting frontlines, administrative and bureaucratic hurdles keep humanitarian access extremely low and don't allow establishing regular assistance.

10 The ALNAP [The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action] report. The state of the humanitarian system, 2015 EDITION

11 Ibid.

These are only 3 of many more crises the work on which is still going on. The UN, especially Secretary General himself through his reports, as well as Economic and Social Council and General Assembly through their resolutions, encourage the Member States and other relief actors to continue working in the disaster-prone regions in order to strengthen “their capacity to build resilience, mitigate disaster risks and prepare for and respond to disasters”.¹²

The issues to be considered

The root causes of armed conflicts, inter alia, are known to be various political reasons. The fact that more and more actors are getting involved into civil wars and destabilizing situation in various secure and insecure places, makes crises protracted and bringing about peace agreements and settlements hard to accomplish. Everyone has a stake in showing their own influence to and reaching their own interests. Nowadays, global community is seeking for dedication to humanity of the state governments, especially of those whose territories are said to be conflict-affected and instable. In his report “One humanity – Shared responsibility” for the World Humanitarian Summit,¹³ The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon emphasizes that, as well as in the field of humanitarian assistance, “the primary responsibility for conflict prevention and resolution lies with Member States and the Security Council. Global leaders need to take far greater ownership of political solutions to existing conflicts and to preventing new ones, working nationally, regionally and through their membership in the United Nations”.¹⁴ However, state leaders must look beyond national borders and interests and work towards establishing common long-standing humanity all together. Obviously, financial, human and diplomatic resources are required as much as compassion, shift from perpetual crisis management (it refers to specific actions taken only during disaster periods in particular areas) towards managing prevention of conflicts, and observance of the international humanitarian law. In this matter, global leaders tend to recognize that humanitarian action cannot be a substitute for political action. A number of summits have been held to find the best way to mobilize those resources and support implementing those measures and principles on different levels. Involving civil society, sharing best practices, and investing in inclusive and peaceful societies were noted as important factors of successfully delivered special

12 Economic and Social Council resolution 2014/13 adopted on June 25, 2014. Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, point 4

13 World Humanitarian Summit 2016, Istanbul, May 23-24

14 Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit on the 2 February 2016. One humanity: shared responsibility

economic and humanitarian relief assistance in the resolution 2014/13 of Economic and Social Council and the basis of stakeholders' ideas. The main issue, which is yet to be solved, is how to transform the ideas into actions.

Another topic for discussion lies in the field of getting prepared to face events and integrating disaster risk reduction in response preparedness. This involves not only monitoring current situation but also making nations and communities resilient to disasters by preparing recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases ahead of a disaster. Although best practices have already been accepted,¹⁵ the UN is still concerned about the fact that as well as some theoretical technical elements, the issue requires actions of states and regional organizations to contribute to it. The crucial point is known to be partnership in coherent and integrated mobilization of funds and efforts.

Some disasters can result from several different hazards or, more often, from a complex combination of both natural and man-made causes and different issues of vulnerability. Complex emergencies remain a particular challenge and a prominent source of human suffering. Analysis of operations in Northern Mali shows that the context of the crisis is dual. Though humanitarian action and special economic funding made it possible to avoid any major food crisis during recent years, international efforts to resolve political and security crisis and its humanitarian repercussions didn't succeed in producing any sustainable effects. The achievement of peace dividends¹⁶ is still far from simple and it requires more time than a lot of organizations think. So the main problem that rises with the complexity of emergencies is whether the international community is ready to provide the significant investment in a post-crisis context.

Funding still remains one of the most vexed questions. Aforementioned funds run by OCHA come from the voluntary contributions of more than 126 countries and private-sector donors.¹⁷ They receive voluntary contributions year-round to provide immediate funding to UN agencies and other NGO's for life-saving humanitarian action anywhere in the world and pool the contributions to specific emergencies. The world today spends around US\$ 25 billion to provide life-saving assistance to 125 million people devastated by wars and natural disasters.¹⁸ This is a lot of money, but not out of reach for a world producing trillions of US\$ of annual GDP. Closing the humanitarian financing gap would mean no one having to die for the lack of money or live without dignity. It would be a victory for humanity at a time when it is much needed.

15 See The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

16 money that a government originally planned to spend on its military that becomes available for other things when a situation changes (such as when a war ends)

17 See the II/B/ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

18 See the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary General, 2016: chapter 4. Improve delivery: a Grand Bargain on efficiency.

Conclusion

All the issues, given above, have been discussed during numerous summits and conferences on special economic and humanitarian relief assistance, which are held all over the world on a regular basis. The main principles of delivering the assistance have been fully respected. Yet, Economic and Social Council is facing a challenge to bring all humanitarian actors to work together and observe the principles of sufficiency, shared responsibility of all humanitarian actors and particularly Member states of the UN.

At some point it arguably becomes necessary to take a step back from the system that has evolved, and consider how it might look and function differently if it were designed to achieve the best possible humanitarian outcomes.¹⁹ On the contrary, it is essential “to promote the further development and dissemination of instruments, such as standards, codes, operational guides and other guidance instruments, to support coordinated action in disaster preparedness and response and facilitate information sharing on lessons learned and best practices for policy practice and post-disaster reconstruction programmes”.²⁰

In other words, Economic and Social Council is called upon to establish and ensure one can provide a right to develop regardless of nationality, social status, territory, and disaster and damages.

¹⁹ The ALNAP [The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action] report. The state of the humanitarian system, 2015 EDITION

²⁰ The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

Appendix

UN key documents

Reports of the Secretary-General:

1. Report of the Secretary-General published on 23 June 1983 for the 38th session of General Assembly: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR and for the 2nd regular session of 1983 of Economic and Social Council: SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE. Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations;
2. Report of the Secretary-General published on 29 April 2014 for the 69th session of General Assembly: SPECIAL ECONOMIC AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE: OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR and for the Substantive session of 2014 of the Economic and Social Council: SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE. Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations;
3. Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit on the 2 February 2016. Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. One humanity: shared responsibility;
4. General Assembly resolutions:
5. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 1981 36/225. Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to natural disasters and other disaster situations;
6. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 1991 46/182. Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations;
7. Economic and Social Council resolution:
8. Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 25 June 2014 [on a proposal considered in plenary meeting (E/2014/L.18)] 2014/13. Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations;

Other useful material

1. The ALNAP [The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action] report. The state of the humanitarian system, 2015 EDITION;
2. Coherence in Conflict: Bringing humanitarian and development aid streams together. DANIDA [Danish International Development Agency], 2015
3. High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing Report to the Secretary General, 2016;
4. The URD [Union for the Republic and Democracy] Evaluation Report. The difficult handling of a complex crisis in Northern Mali;
5. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

Other useful links

1. UN web-site <http://www.un.org/>
2. ECOSOC web-site <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc>
3. General Assembly web-site <http://www.un.org/en/ga/>
4. OCHA web-site <http://www.unocha.org/>
5. International Committee of the Red Cross web-site <https://www.icrc.org/>
6. World Humanitarian Summit web-site <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/>

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