

Opportunity knocks: why non-Western donors enter humanitarianism and how to make the best of it

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Abstract

Non-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia, China, Brazil, and Turkey have all started to take part in global humanitarian action. Their engagement raises a number of fundamental questions: how will the diversification of government donors affect humanitarian activities and principles; and how will it affect the people and governments of crisis-affected countries or humanitarian organizations? This article finds that the rise of non-Western donors involves both risks, such as normative conflicts, and great potential, such as increased access and more resources. It also finds that non-Western humanitarian engagement has become too substantial to ignore and that opportunities can only be seized and risks mitigated if traditional actors actively engage with non-Western donors on a level playing field.



From the days of Solferino in 1859 to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, humanitarianism has been dominated by the norms and interests of governments and organizations from the West – despite its claim for universality. Those days are now over. International food assistance, for example, is no longer exclusively shaped

by Europe, North America, and Japan. States such as India and Brazil support the World Food Programme (WFP)'s school feeding programmes, a form of intervention that Western donors would like to see abolished as it fails to reach the most vulnerable. In addition, Saudi Arabia's cash contribution of 500 million US dollars to the WFP in 2008 allowed the organization to step up its cash-based programming, which is generally considered an important innovation in humanitarian assistance.

While these examples only provide anecdotal evidence, they must be understood in the context of an increasingly multi-polar world. Voices from Latin America, Africa, and Asia confidently demand their own space as aid providers,¹ whereas economic decline, crippling debt, and domestic political discourses increasingly contest the leading role of Europe and North America in foreign assistance. Therefore, donors and humanitarian organizations can no longer ignore non-Western donors.²

The growing prominence of non-Western donors raises important questions for the future of humanitarian action:³ will the diversification of government donors change the international humanitarian architecture, the organizations involved, the kinds of actions undertaken, or the humanitarian principles? Can we expect a further regionalization of humanitarian action under the leadership of regional powers? What role will the peoples and governments of crisis-affected states play in the future?

These questions are fundamental and – apart from some celebration over new sources of income – most traditional humanitarian actors are anxiously observing the rise of non-Western donors. They fear the loss of shared principles and hard-won standards.⁴ So far, however, most humanitarians have neither systematically analysed nor strategically addressed the motivations for and possible implications of the rise of non-Western donors. This lack of knowledge and strategy keeps traditional actors on the defensive as they react to instead of influence new developments. Yet a thorough analysis of the humanitarian behaviour of non-Western donors and the implications for the current humanitarian system could prompt long-standing humanitarian actors to change tack and go on the offensive. This would mean actively shaping the contours of a diversified humanitarian system

1 The outcome document of the recent 2011 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, for example, states that the 'nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to South-South co-operation differ from those that apply to North-South co-operation'. High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 'Busan Partnership for Development Effectiveness', 29 November–1 December 2011, available at: http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/images/stories/hlf4/OUTCOME_DOCUMENT_-_FINAL_EN.pdf (last visited December 2011).

2 This article purposely refrains from giving estimates on the total financial volume of non-Western donor contributions because available statistics are incomplete.

3 For this article, we use the definition of humanitarian action given by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC), thus encompassing assistance and protection activities 'designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies'. OECD/DAC, *DAC Statistical Reporting Directives*, 2010, p. 38, available at: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/28/62/38429349.pdf (last visited December 2011).

4 Personal conversations with several representatives of established donors in 2010 and 2011.

while anticipating possible negative effects. It could also allow traditional actors to seize the opportunity for a truly universal humanitarianism – the great promise underlying the rise of non-Western donors.

This article summarizes the findings of a two-year research project on non-Western humanitarian giving.⁵ Although non-Western donors cannot and should not be treated as a monolithic block, our research has found some common behavioural patterns. The article focuses on non-Western conceptions of humanitarianism, motivations for providing funds, aid modalities, and modes of co-operation with others. On the basis of our research findings, we then suggest ways forward to achieve a truly universal humanitarianism by seizing anticipated opportunities and addressing emerging risks for humanitarian action.

Conceptions of humanitarianism

Despite their increasing humanitarian engagement, few non-Western donors have official policies that define their understanding of humanitarianism and guide their actions. Yet an analysis of government reports, public statements, and conversations with government representatives and other experts reveals the stance that non-Western donors take on the language, principles, and scope of humanitarian action.

First, when talking about humanitarianism, traditional and non-Western actors speak different languages. Traditional actors share a basic understanding of humanitarian action as activities ‘designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies’.⁶ By contrast, for many non-Western donors, the term ‘humanitarian’ encompasses all forms of selfless help to people in need, including religious charity, development co-operation, and assistance in times of disaster. In China and India, for example, officials often refer to ‘disaster assistance’ to differentiate short-term from long-term aid. Furthermore, the terminology that representatives of non-Western donors use often depends on their exposure to the international humanitarian discourse. Whereas Indian officials in Geneva or New York naturally refer to humanitarian principles, officials in New Delhi speak instead about the ‘non-political’ nature of aid when referring to impartiality. Moreover, they understand ‘principles’ as a reference to the Paris declaration for aid effectiveness, which they oppose as a Western-driven agenda.⁷ Such semantic and interpretive differences are a potential

5 The outputs of the project were a mapping study on non-Western donorship and in-depth case studies on India and Saudi Arabia that positioned a country’s humanitarian engagement in its overall foreign policy. The studies were conducted in mixed teams, including one researcher from the respective country. A study on Brazil is underway, and further case studies are planned pending funding. For more information on the project, see: <http://www.gppi.net/?id=1819> (last visited December 2011).

6 OECD/DAC, above note 3, p. 38.

7 Drawn from several interviews with Indian foreign affairs officials conducted in 2010. For the complete analysis see Claudia Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, *India’s Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance*, Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) Research Paper No. 13, 2011, p. 8, available at: http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/media/pub/2011/meier-murthy_2011_india-growing-involvement-humanitarian-assistance_gppi.pdf (last visited December 2011).

source of misunderstanding between traditional humanitarian actors and non-Western donors.

Second, the norms underpinning humanitarian action of non-Western donors are a blend of a commitment to traditional humanitarian principles, principles of South–South co-operation, and, at times, religious norms. Even if not always articulated in the same way, the principles of impartiality and neutrality in particular are widely accepted among emerging donors and are not perceived as a Western construct.⁸ Non-Western government officials refer to them as universally valid, primarily because they are internationally agreed in the UN General Assembly resolution on humanitarian co-ordination.⁹ This behaviour is contrary to the dominant narrative among Western donor representatives, who expect their non-Western counterparts to call in question the humanitarian principles.

Yet respect for the sovereignty of the disaster-affected state is also an important norm informing non-Western humanitarian action. Sovereignty is seen as part of a distinct South–South co-operation approach that looks to promote an equal relationship between the governments that provide aid and those that receive it. Accordingly, the Brazilian government frames its engagement as ‘humanitarian co-operation’ instead of ‘humanitarian assistance’.¹⁰ In practice, this means that the affected government is seen as the most appropriate entity for defining the need for assistance, rather than outsiders assessing the needs of the affected population. One consequence of this approach is that non-Western donors rarely fund protection activities. The norms of sovereignty and impartiality may clash in internal armed conflict situations if the affected government is unwilling or unable to assist and protect its population. Therefore India tends either to refrain from financing assistance in situations of armed conflict (with the exception of its strategically important backyard, South Asia) or to fund multilaterally (as in the case of the occupied Palestinian territories).¹¹ However, there is no general pattern for how non-Western donors deal with the sovereignty–impartiality trade-off.

The humanitarian imperative of compassion with and support for the suffering can be traced back to all of the world’s major religions.¹² Religious norms therefore shape humanitarianism in the West as well as in other parts of the world. The Saudi Public Campaigns, a popular nationwide public–private fundraising

8 This article cannot assess how non-Western donors’ commitment to humanitarian principles on paper is translating to aid practice on the ground, as this would require extensive research in crisis-affected countries. However, the question of how practice follows principles remains equally unanswered for many Western-based and multilateral humanitarian organizations.

9 UNGA Res. A/RES/46/182, 19 December 1991, first agreed in 1991 and since then reconfirmed yearly in the General Assembly, refers to the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality.

10 Ministry of External Relations, Brazil, *International Humanitarian Cooperation: Report 2006–2010*, 2011.

11 In 2008 and 2009, India provided a total of US\$ 3 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as core contributions and in response to the Gaza appeal. See C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 20.

12 See for example, Michael Barnett *et al.*, ‘Religion and humanitarianism: floating boundaries in a globalizing world’, Conference Report, Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2009, available at: <http://www.humanitarianforum.org/data/files/resources/752/en/Geneva-Review-30.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

instrument,¹³ are the equivalent of traditional donations for humanitarian or development projects during the Christmas period. The campaigns build on the Muslim tradition of *sadaqa*¹⁴ and are launched for major natural disasters and conflicts in other Muslim countries or when disasters hit the home countries of large migrant worker communities.¹⁵ Funds collected through the campaigns are mostly used for humanitarian assistance, but also for religious purposes – such as rebuilding mosques – or long-term reconstruction. Moreover, many young Saudis welcome voluntary humanitarian action in the name of Islam as a meaningful pastime and alternative to social apathy and consumerism.¹⁶ However, while religious considerations are a motor for humanitarian funding, the Saudi leadership emphasizes that its assistance is given ‘on the basis of humanitarian principles and regardless of nationality, race or religion’.¹⁷

Third, in terms of scope, non-Western donors have a strong preference for funding assistance in natural disaster situations and specific sectors, predominantly food and health. For example, nineteen out of twenty-four emergencies that Brazil provided humanitarian funding to, and all twelve crises that India was active in, were in response to natural disasters or epidemics.¹⁸ In addition to the sovereignty–impartiality trade-off, the reactive nature of non-Western aid bureaucracies helps explain this preference. In the absence of a policy, authorities fund assistance on an ad hoc basis, following appeals from national governments or alerts from their ambassadors in a crisis-affected country.¹⁹ Large-scale sudden-onset disasters are more likely to be on the radar of decision-makers, and affected governments tend to approach donors for assistance in natural disasters rather than in armed conflicts.

Food assistance, on the other hand, resonates with societies that have been – or still are – struggling with malnutrition themselves. Brazil aims to support other countries with the ‘zero hunger’ programme after its own good experiences with the combination of short-term and long-term food security interventions for

13 For a more in-depth discussion of the different public fundraising instruments in Saudi Arabia, see Khalid Al-Yahya and Nathalie Fustier, *Saudi Arabia as a Humanitarian Donor: High Potential, Little Institutionalization*, GPPi Research Paper No. 14, pp. 14–15, available in Arabic and English at: http://www.gppi.net/approach/research/truly_universal/saudi_arabia_and_humanitarian_assistance/ (last visited December 2011).

14 *Sadaqa* is a form of giving to the poor in Islam. Contrary to the *zakat*, the (religious) obligation to give 2.5% of one’s possessions to those in need, *sadaqa* is voluntary.

15 For a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, pp. 14–15 and 26–27.

16 Nora Derbal, ‘Actors of the institutionalized philanthropic field in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: the benevolent woman and the youth activist’, paper presented at the 2nd World Conference on Humanitarian Studies, Boston, MA, 2011.

17 Andrea Binder, Claudia Meier, and Julia Steets, *Humanitarian Assistance: Truly Universal? A Mapping Study of Non-Western Donors*, GPPi Research Paper No. 12, 2010, p. 19, available at: http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/media/pub/2010/Binder_Meier_Steets_2010_Truly_Universal_-_Mapping_Study_GPPi_RP_12.pdf (last visited December 2011).

18 Ministry of External Relations, Brazil, above note 10, pp. 12–31.

19 Interviews with Indian and Saudi officials conducted in 2011. For the full analyses see C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, pp. 11–12, and K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, pp. 11–13.

the Brazilian population.²⁰ The country identified food assistance as a clear niche for its humanitarian efforts, focusing a majority of its funding in this area. While many non-Western donors have a narrow sectoral scope, they have a broad temporal scope. They fund intertwined short- and long-term humanitarian and development projects without a second thought, and criticize Western donors for separating the two. Brazil even introduced sustainability as an additional humanitarian principle, so that the state's contributions can also address the root causes of disasters.²¹

Motivations for funding humanitarian action

Traditional donors tend to portray their contributions to humanitarian action as motivated purely by a desire to help the needy according to the principles of impartiality, independence, and neutrality.²² Yet, as in any other area of foreign policy, interests such as national security or regional stability also influence the humanitarian behaviour of traditional donors. Likewise, non-Western donors have both a genuine desire and strong interest-based motives to be participating in humanitarian action. Rapid economic growth of the past years has given emerging powers new opportunities to contribute to global public goods and thereby establish their countries' leadership – on the world stage, in their own region, vis-à-vis disaster-affected countries, and domestically. Humanitarian donorship is a soft-power instrument that, as many non-Western donors are increasingly starting to discover, is an ideal tool for staking a claim in this way.

Globally, states such as China, India, Brazil, and Turkey are all still in the process of defining their roles and cementing their influence. Engagement in humanitarian assistance is one way to 'project an image of "responsible statehood"'²³ in return for increased political weight in multilateral organizations.²⁴ Contributions to UN organizations are usually met with significant public recognition. When Brazil pledged US\$ 7.5 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in 2011, it was lauded as 'a country with growing global influence – a country of

20 See for example, World Food Programme (WFP), 'Brazil and WFP launch Centre of Excellence Against Hunger', 2011, available at: <http://www.wfp.org/stories/brazil-and-wfp-launch-centre-excellence-against-hunger> (last visited December 2011).

21 Ministry of External Relations, Brazil, above note 10, p. 11.

22 Refer, for example, to the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative (<http://www.goodhumanitarianonorship.org/>) or national policies such as the humanitarian policy of the UK Department for International Development (<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/humanitarian-policy.pdf>), or the 'Twelve Basic Rules' of German humanitarian aid (http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/HumanitaereHilfe/Grundregeln_node.html) (all last visited December 2011).

23 Miwa Hirono, *China's State-centric Post-disaster Assistance: An Alternative Perspective to the Concept of Humanitarianism*, forthcoming, p. 3.

24 Andrea Binder and Bjoern Conrad, *China's Potential Role in Humanitarian Assistance*, GPPi Policy Paper No. 5, pp. 11–12, available at: http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/gppi/Binder_Conrad_2009_CHN_in_Hum_Assis.pdf (last visited December 2011); C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 32.

the future'.²⁵ Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, conveys a different message to the international audience. After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, many religious charities in the country were suspected of funding terrorist activities. To challenge this negative image, the Saudi leadership not only tightened the control over charitable organizations but also increased its contributions to multilateral organizations, in an attempt to portray the country as a 'humanitarian kingdom'.²⁶

Regionally, China, India, Brazil, and Turkey try to dispel neighbours' fear of their rising power while increasing their immediate zone of influence.²⁷ Take, for example, the Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's trip to famine-affected Mogadishu during the 2011 Horn of Africa crisis. The much publicized visit was followed by a record contribution of US\$ 49 million to the UN humanitarian appeal for the Horn of Africa, making Turkey the sixth largest government donor in 2011 for this crisis.²⁸ The engagement intended to demonstrate that 'Turkish foreign policy is anchored in moral authority, not military and economic clout'.²⁹ Or consider India, which spent more than 75% of its humanitarian assistance in only five South Asian neighbouring countries in the past decade³⁰ in a clear attempt to keep the region stable and exert its regional influence by peaceful means.

With regards to disaster-affected countries, non-Western donors are often motivated to provide aid to improve bilateral relations. Funding humanitarian assistance can help strengthen bilateral ties as emerging powers are developing diplomatic networks outside their traditional zones of influence. For India, building 'friendly relations' is an explicit goal of humanitarian action.³¹ The aim of its medical missions in Afghanistan, for instance, is portrayed as an effort to create 'a positive humanitarian image of Indian doctors' in the country.³² This strategy seems to bear fruit: in a recent survey, Afghan citizens perceived India as one of the largest donors – even ahead of the United Kingdom, which funds far more development and humanitarian aid in absolute financial terms.³³

25 UNRWA, 'Brazil contributes US\$ 960,000 and announces a further donation of US\$ 7.5 million to UNRWA', Press Release, 2011, available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=1193> (last visited December 2011).

26 For example, in the official *Al Hayat* newspaper. See K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, p. 9.

27 A. Binder and B. Conrad, above note 24, pp. 11–12; C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 32.

28 Financial Tracking Service, 'Table B: Somalia 2011: total humanitarian assistance per donor', 2011, available at: http://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/OCHA_R24_E15940.PDF (last visited December 2011).

29 Abdirahman Aynte, 'Understanding Erdogan's historic visit to Somalia', 2011, available at: http://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2011/aug/20012/understanding_erdogan_s_historic_visit_to_somalia.aspx (last visited December 2011).

30 According to data from the annual reports of the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2000 to 2010. For a detailed analysis, see C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7.

31 See, for example, the Indian Embassy in Havana, which describes India's humanitarian assistance to Haiti as a 'symbol of friendship'. Embassy of India, 'India-Haiti bilateral relations', 2011, available at: <http://www.indembassyhavana.org/?q=en/node/26> (last visited December 2011).

32 Indian Ministry of External Affairs, *Outcome Budget 2010–2011*, 2010, p. 47, available at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/meaxpsite/budget/MEAOutcomeENG2010-11.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

33 Mohammad Osman Tariq *et al.*, *Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People*, Asia Foundation, 2011, pp. 5 and 67, available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/TAF2011AGSurvey.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

Finally, as in established donor countries, humanitarian donorship in non-Western countries is a function of domestic politics. Therefore, media attention is instrumental in shaping the country's engagement and, at least in some cases, minority politics also direct the discourse. Saudi Arabia and neighbouring Gulf states use their humanitarian engagement to appease expatriate worker populations from disaster-prone countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, or the Philippines who often face miserable working conditions.³⁴ The Indian government tries to conciliate the Tamil community by funding humanitarian assistance efforts in predominantly Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. There, the influence of federal entities also becomes apparent: in 2008 and 2009, the government of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu provided in-kind assistance of total of US\$ 5 million to the operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Sri Lanka.³⁵

Channels for humanitarian funding and aid modalities

Donors can channel humanitarian in-kind or cash contributions through multi-lateral humanitarian organizations and humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or they can directly support the affected governments and populations. They can do so transparently or confidentially; and they can ask for accountability in return or ignore the whereabouts of their donations. The different options allow for varying degrees of independence of humanitarian agencies and receiving governments, of accountability, and of donor influence.

First, emerging donors provide much assistance in kind,³⁶ because it allows them to re-use surplus production of food or medical products. Surplus disposal – long (and in individual cases still) practised by the West – is today seen critically, and most established humanitarian actors push for direct cash contributions. However, some emerging donors seem to catch up quickly with current good practice. Brazil, one of the world's largest agricultural producers, has recently committed to procure more food assistance locally, instead of shipping it from Brazil.³⁷

Second, in line with the normative framework of non-Western giving – the emphasis on sovereignty and the desire to build 'friendly relationships' – and internal decision-making structures, non-Western donors currently provide a large

34 The Saudi Campaign for Sri Lanka and Indonesia after the tsunami of 2004 raised US\$ 86 million, more than the Gaza 2009 and Lebanon 2006 campaigns combined (US\$ 64 million): see K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, p. 14.

35 Indian Ministry of External Affairs, *Annual Report 2008–2009*, 2009, p. 15, available at: <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=500415091> (last visited December 2011).

36 These contributions are difficult to quantify to compare them with cash contributions. However, they still make up a large part. India, for example, provided all but two contributions to the South Asian region between 2000 and 2010 in kind, including fortified biscuits to the WFP in Afghanistan and in-kind goods to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the ICRC in Sri Lanka.

37 Gilberto Carvalho, Brazilian Minister of State, in Ministry of External Relations, Brazil, above note 10, p. 38.

part of their humanitarian assistance directly to the affected government. In India, the regional desks in the Ministry of External Affairs make most decisions on humanitarian action.³⁸ In the absence of a formal humanitarian policy, officials react to requests from disaster-affected states and often provide funding directly to their counterparts in these countries. In Saudi Arabia, the ambassadors in disaster- or conflict-affected countries often bring humanitarian issues to the attention of the Royal Court, the innermost circle of Saudi politics, where decisions on humanitarian action are taken.³⁹ However, there is also a marked trend towards multilateral giving, particularly to UN agencies. Between 2005 and 2010, the reported multilateral contributions of major non-Western donors increased on average three times more than overall contributions.⁴⁰ So far, however, multilateral funding remains linked to specific emergencies; few international organizations receive support for their annual budgets from any non-Western donor.

Why and when non-Western donors opt for multilateral rather than bilateral channels remains unclear. Yet our research indicates that the decision for multilateral giving is a function of a successful outreach strategy of the international organization, the desire for international visibility, the wish to avoid political instrumentalization of aid in internal armed conflicts, and a strategy to help the recipient country to save face. For example, when India offered assistance to Pakistan after the 2010 floods, Pakistan accepted the offer under the condition that India channelled the US\$ 25 million through UN organizations.⁴¹

To varying degrees, some non-Western donors also fund domestic organizations for their humanitarian activities abroad. Especially in the Gulf region, but also in China, national Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations become increasingly active when disasters strike in neighbouring countries. Owing to increasing activities abroad, government funding to the Saudi Red Crescent, for example, went from US\$ 150 million per year in 2008 to US\$ 433 million in 2010.⁴² In addition, in response to the Pakistan floods 2010, the state-owned Saudi Fund for Development became active for the first time in a disaster-affected country as a funder for multilateral and local initiatives.⁴³

Third, most non-Western donors do not track their contributions internally, let alone ask for reports from recipient organizations on what contributions were used for. This leaves the door open to inefficient use of resources or even misuse. A puzzling example is Saudi Arabia. It has started to demand very high reporting standards when providing funds to multilateral organizations, but not for bilateral, government-to-government contributions.

38 C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, pp. 9–11.

39 K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, pp. 11–12.

40 Based on Financial Tracking System data, the combined contributions of Brazil, China, India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates to multilateral institutions (pooled funds, UNHCR, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and WFP) increased by 640% per year on average, whereas their overall humanitarian funding increased by 250%. See UN OCHA's Financial Tracking System data at: <http://fts.unocha.org/> (last visited December 2011).

41 Interviews with Indian officials: see C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 17.

42 Data from the Saudi Ministry of Finance, 2011: see K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, p. 14.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

During the Pakistan 2010 flood response, these conditionalities prohibited an agreement over a significant US\$ 100 million contribution to different UN organizations because they failed to meet the requirements from the Saudi Fund for Development.⁴⁴

The aid channels and modalities of non-Western donors differ from country to country and from crisis to crisis. However, there is a certain tendency towards in-kind over cash contributions, bilateral over multilateral channels, and hands-off over highly transparent giving. This tendency suggests that non-Western donors may be closer to the needs voiced by affected governments than their Western counterparts. It also implies that traditional humanitarian organizations have a hard time engaging with non-Western donors, who focus their humanitarian engagement on governments. In addition, the hands-off approach of non-Western donors points to the risks for impartial humanitarian assistance that come with government involvement in situations of armed conflict or the absence of accountability mechanisms. However, as the examples above show, there are also signs of convergence, with non-Western donors adapting their humanitarian practice to well-established good practices.

Modes of co-operation and co-ordination

How do non-Western donors co-operate and co-ordinate with traditional humanitarian donors and operational agencies? Although Brazil and South Korea joined the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, and the latter intends to align all of its assistance to UN-led international appeals, so far most non-Western donors are absent from existing global donor co-ordination fora;⁴⁵ the global option seems fairly unattractive to them. Instead, regional co-operation on humanitarian issues is flourishing as regional organizations become increasingly involved in humanitarian co-ordination. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)⁴⁶ established a humanitarian department in 2008, and opened an office in Mogadishu in 2011 to co-ordinate the relief efforts of its members. In the same year, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) opened a co-ordination centre for regional humanitarian assistance in Jakarta. Other regional organizations on the African and South American continents are also moving in the direction of regional co-ordination.⁴⁷

44 Interviews with Saudi Fund for Development and UN officials, 2010. For a detailed analysis see K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, pp. 18–19.

45 A. Binder, C. Meier, and J. Steets, above note 17, pp. 5–7.

46 Formerly, the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

47 The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for instance, is currently working on a humanitarian policy and has also approved a contribution of US\$ 3 million to the Sahel 2012 response. See <http://reliefweb.int/node/477513> (last visited December 2011).

Ways forward

Non-Western donors and traditional donors are driven by the same two key motivations: first, both have a genuine desire to assist people in need and express international solidarity through principled humanitarian assistance. Second, a good portion of self-interest motivates their humanitarian engagement: the desire to establish their own country as a benevolent, yet influential global player, to promote national security through regional stability, to be responsive to domestic demands, and to be visible for their good deeds.

The resulting humanitarian behaviour is, however, quite different: non-Western donors prefer the regional over the global both for giving and for organizing aid; they may at times prioritize sovereignty over humanitarian principles and tend to focus their aid on a very limited number of sectors; and they prefer to offer support after natural disasters rather than during conflicts. This divergent behaviour, along with the different language that non-Western donors use when speaking about humanitarian action, is the main reason for traditional humanitarians' wariness of the rise of non-Western humanitarian activity.

And yet, if humanitarian organizations and established donors want an international system that is fit to address the humanitarian needs of tomorrow, there is no way around a dialogue with and – in the medium term – active involvement of non-Western donors. Humanitarian needs are likely to increase, the capacity of traditional donors is limited by the financial and economic crises of the past years, and the engagement of non-Western donors is too substantial to ignore.

Some representatives of established donors and humanitarian organizations counter this argument by saying that they have tried to approach non-Western donors but have been, with a few exceptions,⁴⁸ unsuccessful. Our analysis shows, however, that past co-operation efforts were not successful because they were built on the assumption that non-Western donors would join the existing humanitarian architecture as a new source of funding without changing the parameters of humanitarian action. It would be strategically wiser to offer non-Western donors and recipient countries a say in shaping a common system because it is unlikely that non-Western donors will join the humanitarian debate otherwise. This, in turn, will hinder common progress to high-quality humanitarian assistance and may undermine the universality of the humanitarian endeavour in the long run.

This is not to suggest that time-honoured humanitarian principles and decades of efforts to professionalize humanitarian assistance should just be dropped. Rather, there should be a respectful debate – between traditional organizations and non-Western donors just as between Western and non-Western donors – on a mutually agreeable approach to humanitarian action that reaps the fruit of a more universal system while addressing potentially fundamental disagreements in

48 The WFP was already reaching out to non-Western donors ten years ago, and was able to secure steadier funding and in-kind contributions than others. UN OCHA has not sought contributions from any of these donors until very recently, but has now become very active and vocal: see, for example, IRIN, 'A bigger role for Asia in humanitarian response', 12 October 2011, available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=93939> (last visited December 2011).

principle and practice. Among donors, the initiative of the governments of Brazil and Sweden to establish a new platform for dialogue among representatives of selected non-Western and traditional donors and recipient countries in New York in early 2011 is thus a step in the right direction.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, approaching non-Western donors on equal footing does yield two important risks. First, it might allow national sovereignty to become a normative element of humanitarianism. The resulting bilateral government-to-government contributions – often with no mechanism to ensure that the money is spent on the right cause – and possible restraint in situations that are particularly threatening for civilian populations could amount to a serious threat to principled humanitarian action.

Second, although few non-Western donors are completely new to humanitarian action,⁵⁰ their decision-makers are not experienced enough in this area and are only slowly learning about internationally developed standards. For example, one of the camps in Northern Yemen sponsored by the United Arab Emirates has air-conditioned tents but inhabitants do not get clean water. In addition, women living in peripheral areas of the camp have difficulty accessing food because it is cooked centrally and they are not allowed to move that far in public.⁵¹ Without dialogue, non-Western donors may systematically repeat the errors that traditional donors made in the past, including the focus on in-kind aid, or the lack of co-ordination with other actors.

On the other hand, co-operation with non-Western donors promises at least three important gains for the affected populations and the international humanitarian system. First, working together improves the status of humanitarianism and deflects criticism that humanitarianism is the henchman of Western imperialistic dominance, which frequently hampers access in places such as Afghanistan, Somalia, or Burma. In November 2011, for instance, when the Al Shabaab militia in Somalia banned several UN organizations and Western NGOs from operating in the territory under their control, the NGO Islamic Relief was still able to work in Mogadishu: the organization's Muslim background allowed it to reach people in need.⁵² Similarly, when several Western NGOs were forced to leave the Sudanese province of Darfur, Mercy Malaysia continued working in this region.⁵³ And when cyclone Nargis hit Burma in 2008, the Indian government provided assistance to communities in the delta long before Western aid agencies were even allowed to enter the country; indeed, the Indian government publicly put the government under pressure to accept international aid.⁵⁴

49 Personal conversations with UN OCHA staff and representatives of non-Western and Western donors in New York, 2011.

50 The Indian army, for example, supplied relief materials to civilians in the besieged city of Jaffna in 1987 during the Sri Lankan civil war. See C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 4.

51 Direct observations of a GPPi evaluator in Northern Yemen, 2010.

52 Jehangir Malik, 'Somalia famine: our agency is able to deliver aid', in *The Guardian*, 29 July 2011, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jul/29/somalia-famine-islamic-relief-response?INTCMP=ILCNETXT3487> (last visited December 2011).

53 Personal conversation with former Mercy Malaysia staff.

54 C. Meier and C. S. R. Murthy, above note 7, p. 39.

Second, both established donors and organizations can learn from non-Western donors how to take host governments more seriously, particularly in natural disaster settings. Time and again, evaluations find that the general trend is to sideline affected governments, weakening future disaster preparedness and response.⁵⁵

The third possible gain from partnering with non-Western donors ultimately concerns money. With the financial crisis and excessive national debt, established donors are facing times of austerity, resulting in the cutback of development and humanitarian spending, as the unusual 5% decrease of the UN's biannual budget for 2012–2013 already indicates.⁵⁶ For the next decades, experts anticipate a more equal distribution of economic wealth across the globe.⁵⁷ These trends will make additional contributions invaluable, in particular because of the potential increases in costs of humanitarian assistance owing to a growing number of natural and urban disasters.

We must keep in mind, however, that systematic normative clashes and failures represent risks, while increased access and resources represent opportunities, not realities. However, if the established humanitarian actors continue to ignore the non-Western elephant in the room, the opportunities may well be lost and the risks may become realities. Therefore, established donors and humanitarian agencies should approach non-Western donors on the same level. To engage non-Western donors meaningfully, the traditional humanitarian actors should start small, addressing practical rather than normative issues first to build trust over time. They could do this in four steps.

First, traditional humanitarian organizations and donors could engage non-Western donors in a knowledge-sharing exercise. As an example, while non-Western donors could learn about standards and processes, established actors could learn about effective disaster management in urban or heavily populated areas. For instance, the Saudi Red Crescent has a long history of dealing with medical support to massive population influxes in the annual pilgrimages to Mecca.⁵⁸ Chinese rescue teams likewise have a lot of experience in responding to natural disasters in urban areas, some of it with technology that is potentially better placed to interface with the infrastructure of developing countries. Traditional organizations could engage non-Western donors individually in their area of specialization: Save the Children and UNICEF, for example, could exchange knowledge on children in emergencies. Explicitly decoupling these discussions from fundraising efforts or the assessment of non-Western donors' engagement in specific crises would help to take some of the

55 See, for example, Riccardo Polastro *et al.*, 'Inter-Agency real time evaluation of the humanitarian response to Pakistan's 2010 flood crisis', DARA, March 2011, available at: <http://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Final-Report-RTE-Pakistan-2011.pdf>; or Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), 'Consolidated lessons and recommendations from the TEC synthesis report and TEC thematic evaluations', January 2007, available at: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/5600.aspx> (both last visited December 2011).

56 UN News, 'Ban welcomes approval of UN budget for next two years', 24 December 2011, available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40837&Cr=general> (last visited December 2011).

57 OECD, *Perspectives on Global Development 2010: Shifting Wealth*, 2010, p. 15.

58 K. Al-Yahya and N. Fustier, above note 13, p. 29.

politics out of the interaction. Over time, this would build the trust necessary for further engagement.

As a second step, Western and non-Western donors could issue joint statements in certain situations, for example demanding unimpeded access for humanitarian workers. These joint statements could satisfy the desire of non-Western donors to be visible on the global stage and help stress the universality of the humanitarian cause.

Third, non-Western donors and traditional humanitarian actors should work together where no normative tensions arise. Collective activities could range from triangular partnerships (non-Western donor, Western donor, humanitarian organization) to co-ordination of activities and ‘co-branding’ of common initiatives. This might occur, for example, after natural disasters that are in the respective donor’s sphere of interest and that have an impact on a sector in which the non-Western donor is active (such as food assistance or health). It might also occur at times other than emergencies, through common events. Once working relationships are established, such co-operation should be expanded to other areas, in which growing regionalization of the humanitarian system also suggests a more regional division of tasks. At the global level, this new, larger group of donors should have a discussion about who is funding what kind of humanitarian action and in which context, to ensure that their activities correspond to needs. If current trends continue, we may soon witness a shift of funding away from humanitarian action in armed conflicts and towards assistance in natural disasters; non-Western donors generally prioritize the latter while avoiding the former because of the possible tension between sovereignty and humanitarian principles. Also, as the relative amount of funding from non-Western donors increases, assistance activities may receive more attention than protection activities. If this trend continues, traditional donors should refocus their aid if it is compatible with their interests: for example, by offering more funding for protection activities in armed conflict and less for in-kind food assistance. Working together would also presuppose that Western donors are able to fund organizations that originate in non-Western countries and that traditional humanitarian agencies will partner with them. Today, bureaucratic regulations hinder such co-operation because many established donors, including the European Commission, can only fund organizations that fall within their purview. Co-operation between Western and non-Western organizations also often fails, owing to a lack of mutual understanding.

Fourth and finally, non-Western and those traditional actors that provide or fund principled humanitarian assistance should engage in an exchange on remaining normative issues. The sovereignty–impartiality trade-off is probably the most contentious issue facing non-Western and traditional actors. Working together will itself solve some tensions through practical co-operation, since the humanitarian principles are not only justifiable on normative grounds but simply make operational sense. The usefulness of a principled approach will certainly become clearer to non-Western donors once they increase their level of operational engagement. In parallel, humanitarian organizations – particularly the ICRC – should involve non-Western donors in a discussion on how they engage

in protection activities while fully respecting the sovereignty of the affected government. The combination of hands-on co-operation and normative exchange will most likely reduce the number of instances where non-Western donors prioritize sovereignty over impartiality of aid.

Either way, given the multipolarization of the international system, the changing distribution of global economic wealth, the regionalization of the humanitarian system, and growing humanitarian needs, better co-operation between non-Western and Western donors and organizations is no longer a matter of goodwill and respect towards other traditions of humanitarianism. Rather, it has become a necessity. States and humanitarian organizations owe it to affected populations to move into unchartered waters and to co-operate with non-Western donors to ensure that all available resources are used for the benefit of those in most dire need.