

Humanitarian and development aid in the times of economic crisis; times of great need and reduced resources.

Fernando Almansa, Warsaw 7th December 2012 (PAH Conference)

1. Humanitarian and development aid (looking backwards, looking forward)
2. in the times of economic crisis
3. times of great need
4. and reduced resources
5. Challenges and ways forward.

1.- Humanitarian and development aid

The origins of Humanitarianism: It is important to start by remembering that the origins of modern Humanitarianism are rooted in war.

No need to remind how the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was born in 1863, inspired on the ideas of Henry Dunant after his experience and thoughts during the Battle of Solferino and how linked the Geneva Conventions (1864) are to the war. The central pillar of modern Humanitarianism is the International Humanitarian Law built around the war and its consequences.

Therefore when we talk about humanitarianism in times of economic crisis, we need to look backwards and think that humanitarianism has always been linked to social, political and economical crisis. The point is that we are now confronting a new context a new type of crisis and a new model of humanitarianism; which has changed a lot and will continue changing drastically in the following years.

The origins of Development Cooperation: Development cooperation as such is much younger than Humanitarian Aid, the birth of the UN and the development of all its agencies in the decades of the 50s and 60s and the later agreement on the so well known UN commitment for the 0,7% of GNP to support development programmes made in 1970 by the UN general Assembly, are at the foundations of what today is a natural feature of our States and societies: "Development cooperation and Humanitarian Aid"

The decades of the 80s and 90's were "enthusiastic" periods for the International cooperation sector. A blooming of NGOs and agencies, was taking place in many countries around the world, with a certain leadership of Europe.

Development theories, research, and professional practice were developed intensively across the world, during that period of time.

The ending of the independence map of Africa with the latest processes taking place in Namibia and the emerging powers of Asia and all the rich knowledge of social and economic development in countries like India and Bangladesh were completing an extraordinary debate and richness of knowledge and good practice to the development sector.

The end of several violent conflicts in Latin America and the democratization of several countries after years of dictatorship. The end of the dominance of the Soviet Union and the creation of a new Europe more open to the world, were also important inputs for the transformation of the development cooperation that started around half a century ago in the terms we know them.

The creation of the Human Development Index, the setting of the Development millennium Goals, etc.etc. etc. all happened in a relatively short period of time. It is important to take all this into account if we want to have a clear perspective of where we are now.

How the Soviet Union model of cooperation with countries like Mozambique, Ethiopia, or Cuba is still present in the life of those countries?, how the radical and brutal neo liberalism model that has transform some countries is reshaping cooperation etc.? are fundamental questions to reflect upon, before being to categorical of what should be done now, in this so called economic crisis?.

Is it an economic crisis at all, or is it something else when we look at the Cooperation (Humanitarian and development) sector.

Before looking forward, I do not want to forget the importance of social movements across the world, from the 80s to our current times, claiming for a more fair world, in terms of more just and fairer world ('80s). More peaceful and secure (90's); and more sustainable and respectful with our environment, (last decade).

The great Lakes crisis of middle nineties, The Balkans' war, the Iraq invasion, the Arabic spring revolutions, have created worldwide movements that are interconnecting how development, humanitarianism, war, democratization and environmental issues are interconnected; or more that, all these issues are different faces of a single reality.

So before entering into the current "economic crisis" let us have a look to the evolution itself, particularly of the Humanitarian sector, so that we can understand better in which context this crisis is taking place and therefore what could be the best way to confront them.

Looking forward: some trends in Humanitarianism:

Let us have a view to the humanitarian landscape and key trends that might change completely the understanding we currently have on humanitarianism:

1. Trend: more humanitarian crises due to natural disasters and technological disasters. Climate change is a key factor on the increase of natural disasters
2. Trend: More responses in urban context and gradually a reduction in the number of crises responded in rural environments.
3. Trend: more inter-linkages between Humanitarian Responses and Development. Disaster Risk Reduction is a key approach that is putting more emphasis in the full cycle of the humanitarian crises and not only in the response phase.
4. Trend: Number of armed conflicts in the world are reducing despite the impact of current conflicts might be of unprecedented consequences and not foreseeable in its evolution
5. Trend: More local, national and regional responses over international responses. Civil Protection and other national bodies are taking a greater role in Humanitarian responses and preparedness. As well as some national NGOs.
6. Trend: Humanitarian Responders are frequently victims too of the Disasters or armed conflicts

7. Increasing professionalism of Humanitarianism and increasing complexity of its management. (sometimes confusing professionalism with empty rhetoric)
8. Humanitarianism is moving from a “male dominated approach” to a female dominated approach. More women than men are trained and are entering in the humanitarian sector, replacing the old image of a “masculine humanitarianism”.
9. The entrance of new cultural approaches in humanitarianism, is questioning the traditional western, Christian value based humanitarianism.
10. Finally an increasing lack of respect for IHL and International Law in general. (Latest news of reaction of Israel, after the UN resolution of Palestine is a recent indicator of this)

So, we could conclude that we are confronting a new humanitarianism, more culturally diverse, more nationally centered, more related to natural disasters, more “female” and more vulnerable in its actors.

Humanitarianism is becoming a complex professional sector, but in essence Humanitarianism is about helping and assisting people in need for the only reason of humankind. In this regard any human being is entitled and morally obliged to be humanitarian, but being a professional humanitarian is something else and there are limits to the genuine spontaneous humanitarianism that every human being should be able to develop.

Professional Humanitarianism is a serious job, a respectful profession that should be accompanied by all the formal elements of any profession: adequate education and training, codes of conducts, contractual duties (moral and legal) and professional standards. In this regard it is essential to clearly define who are the legitimate humanitarian actors and what are the controls that should be in place to avoid unprofessional humanitarianism, which will damage the services that victims are entitled to received as universal rights.

Humanitarianism cannot be seen as part of the liberalized world: a free market were everyone can compete and enter without any rule of engagement. Everyone is invited and should contribute but not everyone could be leading or in the implementing front-line, unless they are fully knowledgeable of humanitarian delicacy and complexities.

In this regard, new sources of funding, as it is the involvement of private sector could not be done outside the professional framework in which humanitarianism needs to operate.

There are global responsibilities, as we are talking about Universal rights: the right to receive and provide assistance.

Therefore the right should be protected in its concept, and in its practice and in the achievements of its practice.

A global responsibility should be assumed and therefore the question of what to do should be accompanied by the question of why we do it and how we do it.

Humanitarian actors should abide with international Humanitarian Law and the more universal Code of Conduct of Humanitarian action.

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2..-Times of economic crisis

As I have already exposed the evolution of Humanitarianism and development in the last decades has been shaped through different processes. Economic growth in many parts of the world was also a supportive instrument for the evolution and implementation of this cooperation as such. The current crisis is modifying this instrument, but let us talk a bit about the type of crisis we are confronting.

I am not sure we should call this crisis an economic one. "Stricto sensu". Economics is about the management of resources of a community, in several aspects. In this case we are talking about the global community, and particularly Europe.

I think this is a social-cultural value centered crisis. This is important as depending of our understanding of the crisis, different approaches will be used, and we may succeed or not depending on the certainty of our diagnosis and approach.

Essentially what we are experiencing is a financial crisis, due to the abusive implementation of inadequate and immoral policies, backed legally and in many cases supported by the so call world leaders, including our own European governments. The abuse of a neo-liberal economic model, based on over passed theories of capitalism and free markets, the lack of protection of basic Human rights and principles, the acceptance of speculative economy as a key pillar of economic development. The confusion between economic-financial growth with development. The ignorance of the constraints of natural resources and the "no return" point that we have already crossed in term of climate change, has brought us to the so called economic crisis.

It is unbelievable, that the very simple paradigms postulated by Adam Smith in a preindustrial era, are still evoked by some politicians and false thinkers as valid postulate in a post industrial, globalised, mega-urbanized world.

We have to talk about fundamental value crisis. And allow me to say it clearly and loud, a crisis that could be called "the crisis of human collective stupidity".

I think it is important to make this point, as otherwise my speech today would have been simply about how to raise funds or how to use them more efficiently. That's important and we might talk about this, but for me the key point and my key concern, is to understand the nature of this crisis, and see how Humanitarianism and Development cooperation could be part of the solution to the crisis; and at the same time secure that Humanitarian and development cooperation will not be radically affected by this crisis of "human collective stupidity".

So if we want to confront this crisis, for sure the solution is not about cutting funds which essentially are oriented to be part of the solution:

- to create a fairer world,
- to promote solidarity over "self interest"
- to invest in social development and not on speculative financial growth.

Humanitarian and development cooperation are part of the solution, investing in a more fair and secure world, protecting environment, reducing vulnerability to reduce impact of disasters on populations, all this is part of a new world.

When Humanitarian Aid and Development cooperation are seen as another expenditure budget line, that should be reduced to control national deficit, simply there is not understanding of what the problem is about, there is not vision of why this solidarity and cooperation movement exists, there is no connection with the origins of humanitarianism, as said before: humankind trying to overcome the horror of the war, poverty and suffering.

What we are confronting today, is simply a terrible lack of moral leadership, a lack of true human sensitivity.

We are in front of limited leaders representing lobbies of interest and protecting micro-realities, rather than open, visionary, illuminating leaders having sustainable proposals for our world.

In all this context the new proposals of “Die Gemeinwohl Ökonomie” (“The Economy of Common Good) developed by Christian Felber, and other emerging economic proposals are worth to be taken into account seriously.

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3.- Times of great needs.

I would like to comment briefly on this point. Mainly to confirm that this is one of the greatest evidences of our current and near future world: “worldwide human needs will continue growing in the following years”

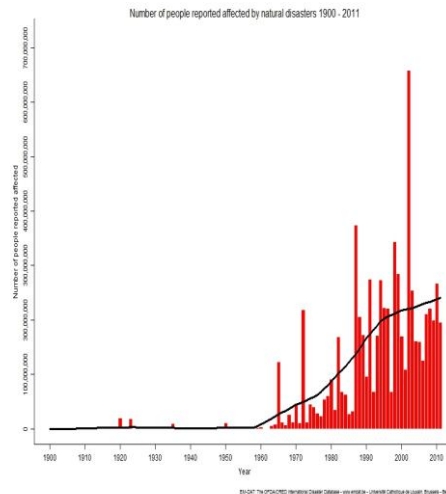
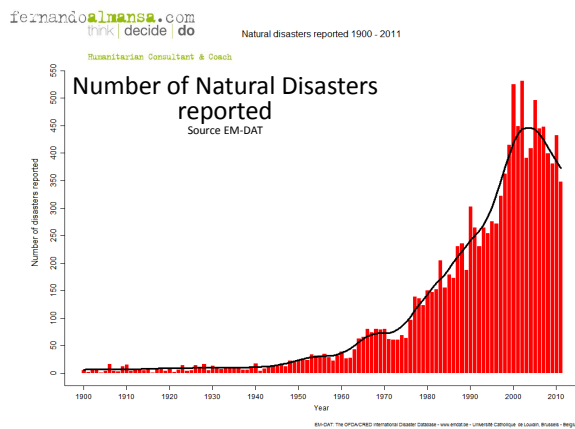
With a population of seven thousand million across the planet and a continued projection of growth.

With more stress on natural resources

With more natural disasters taking place as a consequence of climate change

With more scarcity on water, more concentration of cultivable land in big agro-industry companies, growing deforestation of the planet (see case of Mozambique), etc.. People in need will increase significantly over the following decades.

Just to take a couple of figures, number of natural disasters and number of people affected by them, have increased exponentially in the last decades, (see graphs) this trend will continue



If our global system does not react to this, transforming the current socio-economic model, and increasing resources and professionalism in Humanitarian and development cooperation, the situation will lead to an apocalyptic result.

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4.- Reduced resources

This is a paradoxical issue. More than ever in history, humanitarian and development cooperation count on the highest level of resources, particularly on:

- Knowledge and management tools
- Qualified staff
- Access to information and communication
- Logistics
- Funding
- Networking and Coordination capacities
- Legal tools

So when we talk about reduced resources, we in fact are talking about access to financial resources, in a period of budgets' cuts. Of course this is not a minor aspect as it conditions all other assets, but it is important to look at it as one factor and not all.

In any case I think it is important to recognize that the main impact of budgets' cuts is at field level. In the last three months I have seen personally how Development and Humanitarian projects were closed before reaching their impact in El Salvador, Cuba or Mozambique, the only reason: Finance crisis at home country of donors.

This is important to say it clearly and not to lose direction.

Frequently I heard how the crisis is affecting UN agencies, official state Aid agencies or NGOs, "De facto" where the crisis is impacting in its most brutal

way is on the field, on the communities that were engaging in projects or receiving humanitarian aid and this is suddenly cut off.

The argument given by some “Eurocrats” or some of our politicians: “reducing deficit is the highest priority!” is really unacceptable from a moral point of view, when this is affecting directly the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the world.

Nevertheless some measures should be considering in order to reduce the perverse effects of these cuts:

- 1- Maintaining priorities based on most urgent needs
- 2- More selective use of funding tools, prioritizing those tools which have highest transparency, creates less dependency, and are more targeted to the most urgent needs and strategic development projects.
- 3- Readdressing budgets lines of cooperation that cannot prove its impact or which has been traditionally diverted to other purposes with minimal accountability, (e.g.: business support, supposed cultural activities which are sometimes maintaining status quo with no impact etc), and putting the available resources on effective cooperation lines.
- 4- Reducing unnecessary staff and budget lines that some agencies still maintain as a matter of routine. More focus on budget allocation should be done
- 5- International agencies and specially UN agencies to adjust their staff benefits to the reality and more aligned with INGOs. The same applies to ECHO and some national agencies where privileges of staff are not cut off in the same way as other areas of European or national budgets.
- 6- Increase coordination among donors to avoid duplication or gaps of funding
- 7- Increase flexibility on use of funds, under strict accountability, to avoid rigid budgets that cannot reach the most vulnerable populations.
- 8- Transfer any supposed cooperation budget of military intervention to reputed development and humanitarian agencies.
- 9- Eliminate double counting of military service provided on logistical support to humanitarian interventions

In summary, better focus, more accountability, more efficiency.

6. Challenges and ways forward.

As said we are confronting times of increasing needs, with limited financial resources, and in an ethical-financial crisis; **our challenge is to regenerate the urgency and sense of Humanity and use the available resources in a more efficient way and directly oriented to the central mandate of Humanitarianism and development cooperation: protecting life, dignity and rights of most vulnerable human beings across the planet.**

We need to make sure that Government and donors do understand that maintaining a good level of investment in Development cooperation, Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian cooperation is not only necessary in moral terms but it is also part of the solution to the current problems.

A more human world where solidarity values are above self-centered interest will be the only way to get out of this crisis.