

**CORRUPTION IN THE HUMANITARIAN AID CONTEXT
A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

NGOs - Non-governmental organizations

CSOs - Civil society organizations

UNRWA - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

UN - United Nations

DRC - The Democratic Republic of Congo

UNCAC - United Nations Convention against Corruption

UK - The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

IDP - Internally displaced people

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

WHO - World Health Organization

EU - European Union

MEP - Member of the European Parliament

IOs - International Organizations

CPI - Corruption Perception Index

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to highlight the complex nature of corruption in a humanitarian emergency context, and its impact on the lives of the people suffering from natural catastrophes and armed-conflict. The role of civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations and governmental agencies in the response to these emergency situations is crucial in safeguarding and guaranteeing basic human dignity and rights. Therefore the less prone an entity is to corrupt practices, the better the service provided to the beneficiaries, who in turn are more likely to see their situation improved.

INTRODUCTION:

I'd like to start by posing a simple question: have you ever had to pay under the table for a document in a governmental bureau to be issued? If your answer to that question was no, congratulations, either you never needed any official documents or you come from outer space. Of course, this may seem like an overgeneralization, however it is a sad reality in many communities, even so that two thirds of the 180 countries evaluated by Transparency International¹ scored less than 50 out of 100 in the CPI. The numbers are astounding but nothing that is not already in our orbits of passive knowledge. In truth, everyday there are news on tv channels about the latest corruption scandal. As such, the question I posed comes from my own personal experience, where for 2 years I lived as a migrant in irregular visa conditions only because I refused to pay the bribe needed in order to miraculously find the documents I had not once, not twice but thrice brought to the official bureau. This was a risk I had to take in order to fight corruption, but a small price compared to the much more pervasive and harmful consequences, especially when it comes to human rights, that is “paid” by people in disaster zones. In this essay, I will be highlighting exactly that - the impact caused by the wrongful misuse of humanitarian aid, and its consequences on the communities most in need.

Following the footsteps of the UN Convention against Corruption² (UNCAC), we shall understand corruption as a fluid concept³, encompassing all its various forms, such as: bribery, embezzlement, kickbacks, nepotism, amongst others. Its basic tenet is the abuse of power for one's personal or collective gain (e.g. for a political party's benefit or to fund militias). In recent national news, corruption has involved prominent political figures, such as the Gold Visa case⁴, “operação marquês⁵”, and one that led to the resignation of Portugal's former Prime-Minister and the 2024

¹ Transparency International, ‘CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2023’ (January 2024) [Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\) 2023](#) accessed 03 May 2024.

²United Nations Convention Against Corruption (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003) https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN_Convention_Against_Corruption.pdf accessed 3 May 2024

³ High-level political conference for the signature of the United Nations Conventions against Corruption, ‘Convention against Corruption: Q&A - fact-sheet 2’ https://www.un.org/webcast/merida/pdfs/03-89373_factsheet2.pdf accessed 03 May 2024.

⁴Termination of the Portuguese Golden Visa (GFDL, 19 February 2023) <https://gfdl.legal/termination-of-the-portuguese-golden-visa/> accessed 4 May 2024.

⁵ António Costa, ‘Operação Marques: PS deve tirar conclusões mas só no fim do processo, diz Costa’ (RTP, 2 May 2024) https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/politica/operacao-marques-ps-deve-tirar-conclusoes-mas-so-no-fim-do-processo-diz-costa_n1316827 accessed 4 May 2024.

general elections, “operação influencer⁶”. In the CPLP area, 2016 marked Brazil with “operation car-wash⁷” where government officials, including the current President of Brazil Luís Inácio da Silva, and Petrobrás (a State-owned Petrol Company) were investigated for charges of obtaining illicit campaign funds (the sentences were later annulled on grounds of partiality from the judge and lack of jurisdiction). Moreover, the “Isabel dos Santos case⁸” and the “500 million case⁹” in Angola, both permeated by judicial controversy, are examples of the difficulty in investigating and obtaining proof of corruption. The cases are many and go far beyond the flashy news that fills entire hours of broadcasting services. However, there is a side to the story that is mostly left behind as it is often not considered news-worthy or, as most put it, not as “entertaining”.

This has to do with the consequences of corruption in real life. We often talk about the general loss of public funds in its enormous quantities, but we don't pay half the attention we should to the indirect victims of these crimes, either citizens of a certain region that will have less access to public parks, or doctors and teachers that are underpaid (some examples). The consequences of corruption span from political, to social, environmental and economical issues, and can affect an entire country's population. It is estimated that corruption costs the global economy over 3.6 trillion dollars each year¹⁰.

We must also understand corruption as an indirect form of human rights violation. These violations are felt deeper in countries that already face financial difficulties, non-democratic regimes and flawed

⁶ Operação Influencer: Um guia para perceber a investigação que abalou o regime: os nomes, os números e os factos (CNN Portugal, 18 November 2023) <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/crise-politica/antonio-costa/operacao-influencer-um-guia-para-perceber-a-investigacao-que-abalou-o-regime-os-nomes-os-numeros-e-os-factos/20231118/654e68acd34e65afa2f77116> accessed 3 May 2024.

⁷ Advogado de Lula vai ao juiz do Supremo Tribunal Federal (Público, 22 June 2023) <https://www.publico.pt/2023/06/22/mundo/noticia/advogado-lula-vai-juiz-supremo-tribunal-federal-2054247> accessed 3 May 2024.

Brazil, ‘Criminal proceedings against former president Lula da Silva violated’ (OHCHR, 2022) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/04/brazil-criminal-proceedings-against-former-president-lula-da-silva-violated> accessed 3 May 2024.

⁸ Isabel dos Santos acusada de 11 crimes no processo Sonangol (Jornal de Negócios, 15 January 2024) <https://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/mundo/africa/angola/detalhe/isabel-dos-santos-acusada-de-11-crimes-no-processo-sonangol> accessed 3 May 2024.

⁹ Angola: Caso 500 milhões: as consequências que ainda se desconhecem (Voa Portugues, 13 April 2024) <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/angola-caso-500-milh%C3%B5es-as-consequ%C3%Aancias-que-ainda-se-desconhecem/7568845.html> accessed 3 May 2024.

¹⁰UN urges global action to combat trafficking of women and girls (United Nations, 19 December 2018) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027971> accessed 3 May 2024.

democracies, which are also, in turn, the most marred by corruption. These are also countries that are more vulnerable to natural disasters and conflict and are therefore the recipients of an enormous influx of humanitarian aid.

As such, humanitarian aid is at the heart of life-saving operations in disaster zones, war and conflict-ridden communities. These situations require rapid response to cover medical needs, such as equipment and medicine, but also food, hygiene and shelter - the minimum to guarantee human dignity. The organizations working on the ground and the fragile government facilities that provide these services and goods are mostly financed from international aid, leading to an influx of money and goods to zones that are ill-prepared to handle and be accountable for all the money that is being brought.

The needs that exist in these places torn by natural disasters, armed conflicts and authoritarian regimes are tremendous. It is estimated that around 74 million people¹¹ in East and Southern Africa face food insecurity in the near future, in Gaza that number reaches 95% of its population¹² (that are facing full-blown famine). Moreover, the May floods that affected Burundi, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania left more than 350 thousand people¹³ internally displaced and having to rely on shelters and humanitarian support. This is only a small glimpse of the real people that see their basic human dignity stripped away by climate change phenomena and man-made disasters. This is particularly staggering in women and children's lives¹⁴, as it puts a strain on their living conditions, access to menstrual health and hygiene products, nutrition and education and make these populations at higher risk of abuse and violence, as they face unsafe situations when gathering water, food and other supplies.

¹¹Food Security Update, page 8 (World Bank, updated 30 May 2024) <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-CVI-May-30-2024.pdf> accessed 3 May 2024 (1st version) and updated on 1 November 2024.

¹²Food Security Update, page 11 (World Bank, updated 30 May 2024) <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/40ebbf38f5a6b68bfc11e5273e1405d4-0090012022/related/Food-Security-Update-CVI-May-30-2024.pdf> accessed 3 May 2024 (1st version) and updated on 1 November 2024.

¹³ Eastern Africa Heavy Rains and Flooding Flash Update (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 3 May 2024) <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/kenya/eastern-africa-heavy-rains-and-flooding-flash-update-1-3-may-2024> accessed 4 May 2024.

¹⁴ Marie Chêne, 'Gender and Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance' (Transparency International, 3 December 2009) <https://www.u4.no/publications/gender-and-corruption-in-humanitarian-assistance.pdf> accessed 3 May 2024.

Every year, we see countries and people donating and supporting these communities, either directly or through the government and organizations. In 2022 alone, the UK spent more than 12 billion pounds¹⁵ on development assistance, and the EU has since adopted a 1.8 billion euros budget for 2024 humanitarian aid and setting up rescEU stockpiles of goods and equipment as well as setting up medical hubs as a response to the Ukrainian-Russian war¹⁶. Recently, Portugal pledged 10 million euros to UNRWA¹⁷ to support the on-going efforts in humanitarian relief for palestinians. All these numbers show a huge concern that governments and its citizens have for social issues. Moreover, most of these situations have grown on to create a dependency on international support as it sometimes shifts the focus from emergency and humanitarian care to the development of strong institutions and long-term assistance. This major rush of cash and goods puts organizations and government services under a lot of pressure to deliver them to the beneficiaries in a timely and organized manner.

¹⁵ Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2022 (UK Government, 2022) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-final-uk-aid-spend-2022/statistics-on-international-development-final-uk-aid-spend-2022> accessed 4 May 2024.

¹⁶ European Commission, 'European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - Ukraine' (20 February 2024) https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/europe/ukraine_en accessed 2 May 2024.

¹⁷ Portugal apoia com dez milhões de euros agência da ONU para os refugiados palestinianos (Portugal.gov, 21 March 2024) <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/comunicacao/noticia?i=portugal-apoia-com-dez-milhoes-de-euros-agencia-da-onu-para-os-refugiados-palestinianos> accessed 4 May 2024.

ARGUMENTATION:

The characteristics imbued in humanitarian relief aid provide risks of mishandling of funds and opportunities for corruption. As pointed out by Gretta Fenner and Mirella Mahlstein¹⁸, the amount of financial aid given and the urgent nature of assistance that needs to be provided, may make it more enticing for corrupt practices to happen as there is less notice on the actual accounts and amounts distributed and used. It may also give space to over budgeting and spending, and incorrect assessments of the real needs, as well as private procurement and lack of transparency in order to overcome hurdles and speed up processes. Fenner and Mahlstein¹⁹ also link corruption to a lack of coordination between humanitarian actors as there is a complex web that links the private and public donors to the international organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies and from that to local NGOs, government institutions and lastly the communities and beneficiaries. This can also lead to a certain business-competition mindset in local NGOs that search and compete for the same funding²⁰, having to draft budgets and funding proposals that lack research depth. The authors also highlight the complexity of the social and political fabric that can “reinforce inequalities and disparities in wealth and power at the local level²¹” in humanitarian action. An example of this can be seen through the perception that local communities and beneficiaries have of humanitarian workers, specifically foreign officials, that may receive higher salaries and have better living conditions²². The perception of these communities create a subjective stance on corruption that sees these situations as profligate management of funds, which should have been instead used to provide critical medical assistance, for example. This highlights once again, the complex nature of corruption and its own “umbrella-like” definition.

¹⁸ Gretta Fenner and Mirella Mahlstein, Corruption in Natural Disaster Situations (Basel Institute on Governance, 2009) <https://baselgovernance.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/Corruption%20in%20natural%20disaster%20situations.pdf> accessed 5 May 2024.

¹⁹ Ibid (18).

²⁰ Nick Nocita, ‘Where that Used Teddy Bear Really Goes: Corruption and Inefficiency in Humanitarian Aid’ (Harvard International Review, 30 December 2019) <https://hir.harvard.edu/where-that-used-teddy-bear-really-goes-corruption-and-inefficiency-in-humanitarian-aid/> accessed 3 May 2024.

²¹ Ibid (18), page 244.

²² Pete Ewins, Paul Harvey, Kevin Savage and Alex Jacobs, *The Role of Humanitarian Aid in Addressing Corruption*, page 9 (Overseas Development Institute, July 2006) <https://media.odi.org/documents/874.pdf> accessed 4 May 2024.

Furthermore, there is sometimes a sense that local actors are more prone to corruption, and so private donors prefer to fund international agencies instead - although this view relies more on subjective preferences as the complexity of such operations and subcontracting that exists can also be a good ground for abuse of power.²³ Moreover, long-term operations can lead to donor fatigue and reduce interest in accountability and management neglect.²⁴

Another concern that arises is the use of these emergency funds delivered to national banks in war and conflict zones, that are controlled by authoritarian regimes, militias, or political parties following coup d'etats, and that in turn seized the money for their own benefit. This has happened in Afghanistan as UN funds were deposited on private banks after being shipped, and later converted to afghani by currency auctions from Taliban controlled banks²⁵. Moreover, a case study on Liberia²⁶ on the perception of corruption by the disaster-affected people showed that the majority of them felt there was irregular and mismanagement of food and medicine distribution in IDP camps all linked to corruption, diminishing people's trust in the authorities. Some examples of corrupt practices in these Liberian camps included extortion, sex-favors, falsified documents and diversion of basic goods.

These examples show only a percentage of corrupt practices that occur in emergency situations and affect communities and beneficiaries of humanitarian support. There are many other “creative” ways that abuse of power can take place in these situations. However, in regards to the consequences of corruption in this context, we can aggregate the impacts in 6 dimensions:²⁷ impact on economic development, on the poor/inequality, on public service delivery, state legitimacy, stability/fragility,

²³ Ibid (22), page 12.

²⁴ Ibid (22), Table 2. Corruption Risks in Different Types of Emergencies, page 18.

²⁵ Cash Shipments to Afghanistan: The UN Has Purchased and Transported More than \$2.9 Billion to Afghanistan to Implement Humanitarian Assistance (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, January 2024) <https://www.sigarmil/pdf/evaluations/SIGAR-24-12-IP.pdf> accessed 4 May 2024.

²⁶ Kevin Savage with Mulbah S. Jackollie, D. Maxim Kumeh and Edwin Dorbor, *Corruption Perceptions and Risks in Humanitarian Assistance: A Liberia Case Study*, page 13 (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, April 2007) <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2014-11/Corruption%20Perceptions%20and%20Risks%20in%20Humanitarian%20Assistance.%20A%20Liberia%20Case%20Study.pdf> accessed 3 May 2024.

²⁷ Jesper Johnsen, ‘Cost of Corruption in Developing Countries – How Effectively Is Aid Being Spent?’, pages 10-11 (Directorate-General for External Policies, 7 April 2015) [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/549042/EXPO_STU\(2015\)549042_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/549042/EXPO_STU(2015)549042_EN.pdf) accessed 3 May 2024.

and on the environment. These dimensions can be summarized in one major consequence: impact on basic human rights, something that is felt most deeply by the indirect victims of corruption in emergency contexts, namely, the communities already frail from disaster and war.

As such, the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid are the victims of natural disasters, war, and armed-conflict, among others. They are communities that are already in vulnerable situations and in need of external assistance, be it local or international. As mentioned earlier, these destabilized situations leave many people internally displaced, with no access to safe drinking water, food, shelter, hygiene, education or other means of survival, except the support that government agencies and civil society give. Therefore, humanitarian aid is critical in these situations, but can leave a bitter after-taste when situations of corruption emerge in these already troubled contexts, as it only deepens the fragile condition of the beneficiaries of aid.

As evidenced by the Liberian case²⁸, many people in the IDP camps were deprived of food and medicine, basic human needs that were already donated to them, and therefore theirs for the taking, all due to corruption practices that lowered their human dignity by establishing further obstacles to these goods. In 2016, news arose of fraud in aid distribution in Syria, with USAID receiving more than 116 complaints of abuse²⁹. During the Sri Lanka 2004 tsunami, a reported 500 million dollars³⁰ of funds by foreign aid agencies were “missing”, and reports on Sierra Leone Ebola funds management show that payments exceeding 11 billion leone³¹ were made without any supporting documents to explain these expenses. Therefore it is up to us to speculate on the usage and final destination of these aid funds, as there is no accountability on whether or not the population actually received the help needed to improve their lives through these funds. We must not forget the thousands of private pledges and crowd-funding initiatives to support these disaster stricken

²⁸ Ibid (26).

²⁹ Louisa Loveluck, ‘Suspecting Fraud, US Suspends Some Syrian Aid Programs’ (The Washington Post, 26 July 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/suspecting-fraud-us-suspends-some-syrian-aid-programs/2016/07/26/9ad4c600-5285-11e6-88eb-7dda4e2f2aec_story.html accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁰ ‘Sri Lanka Tsunami Aid “Missing.”’ (The New Humanitarian, 28 December 2007) <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/76025/sri-lanka-tsunami-aid-%E2%80%9Cmissing%E2%80%9D-says-anti-corruption-group> accessed 5 May 2024.

³¹ Audit Service Sierra Leone, *Report on the Audit of the Management of the Ebola Funds* (May to October 2014) https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/other_resources/assl-report-on-ebola-funds-management-may-oct-2014.pdf accessed 5 May 2024.

communities that are fraudulent, corrupt and clever ways to pocket money at the expense of a few photographs from disaster stricken communities.

Furthermore, in these contexts (and not only) women are at a higher risk of falling victim to sexual violence, either be it as a form of repression and vengeance during riots and ethnic conflicts, or exploitation by humanitarian workers. Many reports have contributed to a growing awareness of these risks, such as the WHO workers case in Beni, the DRC, during the Ebola Epidemic³², or the hiring of sex workers by Oxfam in Haiti³³. It is not a recent problem, as peacekeeping operations have long been marred by a predatory sexual culture, as was seen in Kosovo³⁴ and Bosnia³⁵, where UN personnel were accused of operating a sex trafficking ring.

These are just some examples of how the basic human dignity of the people most affected by natural phenomena and man-made conflicts are further at risk when it comes to corruption in humanitarian contexts, be it the violation of human rights such as liberty and equality (for where there is bribery in humanitarian crisis, there is no freedom to receive equal care), sexual determination (through sex-for-food, and sexual favor practices), adequate and basic human living conditions (with improper use of funds, and personal allocation of shelters/aid by humanitarian workers preferring family members), and outright property (if the goods are allocated for the refugees and IDPs, can't it be considered theft to use them for personal gain?).

Fortunately, we see that the international community has come to notice these violations, and are reinforcing guidelines and transparency standards to curb these situations, such as the International

³² Mukesh Kapila, *Circles of Impunity: Why Sexual Violence by Humanitarians and Peacekeepers Keeps Happening* (ReliefWeb, 11 October 2021)

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/circles-impunity-why-sexual-violence-humanitarians-and-peacekeepers-keeps-happening> accessed 5 May 2024.

Independent Commission, *Final Report of the Independent Commission on the Review of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation During the Response to the 10th Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic in the Provinces of North Kivu and Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)* (World Health Organization, 27 September 2021)

https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ethics/ic-final-report-28092021-en-version.pdf?sfvrsn=fef409a0_9&download=true accessed 5 May 2024.

³³ Damien Gayle, 'Timeline: The Oxfam Sexual Exploitation Scandal in Haiti' (The Guardian, 15 June 2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/15/timeline-oxfam-sexual-exploitation-scandal-in-haiti> accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁴ Ian Traynor, 'Nato force 'feeds Kosovo sex trade' (The Guardian, 7 May 2004) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/07/balkans> accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Bosnia: A Decade of Discrimination* (Vol. 14, No. 9 (D), November 2002) https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/06/14/bosnia_1102.pdf accessed 5 May 2024.

Aid Transparency Initiative³⁶ that seeks to increase the transparency of the management of funds by stakeholders, the Global Reporting Initiative³⁷ that provides common directives on anti-corruption standards and how to report corruption practices in organizations. There has been an increasing insistence, and rightly so, for International and National NGOs, that work with humanitarian aid, to adhere to the highest criterion, such as the Sustainable development goals, setting up of accountability mechanisms, internal and external audits, and so on. All to ensure that the “claimed” beneficiaries are actually receiving the help they need through the aid received.

Moreover, organizations have also started to implement risk assessment³⁸ of subcontracting parties and private partners, and internal audit mechanisms to supervise their own work and be accountable to donors and beneficiaries. They also adopt ever so more the use of workshops and staff training on exploitation and anti-corruption standards. To fulfill these initiatives, we need effective whistleblowing-protection measures, not only at a national and international level (such as the Whistleblowing directive from the EU) but also internally, as NGOs should set up anonymous complaint mechanisms for their personnel and beneficiaries, and with guarantees of no-reprisal.

However, we have also seen political trends to undermine the role of civil society, such as the controversial Hungarian³⁹, Polish and Russian NGO laws that affected the public image of NGOs that received foreign aid. And the 2022 Qatargate scandal⁴⁰ that involved money laundering through two NGOs for MEPs just added fuel to this already growing fire. The ones actually affected by all this? Countless beneficiaries of real NGOs that face unjust backlash over something that does not even involve them.

³⁶ International Aid Transparency Initiative, *About the LATI Standard* <https://iatistandard.org/en/about/> accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁷ Global Reporting Initiative, Home <https://www.globalreporting.org/> accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁸ Gabriela Camacho, Transparency Standards for Nongovernment Actors in Humanitarian Crises (27 June 2023) <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/transparency-standards-for-non-government-actors-in-humanitarian-crises> accessed 5 May 2024.

³⁹ Lydia Gall, ‘Hungary’s Scrapping of NGO Law Insufficient to Protect Civil Society’ (HRW, 23 April 2021) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/23/hungarys-scrapping-ngo-law-insufficient-protect-civil-society> accessed 3 May 2024.

⁴⁰ ‘Qatargate: One Year On, EU Cash for Influence Scandal Still Far From Over’ (DW, 3 November 2023) <https://www.dw.com/en/qatargate-one-year-on-eu-cash-for-influence-scandal-still-far-from-over/a-6767051> accessed 5 May 2024.

CONCLUSION:

Humanitarian service and aid is crucial for people in harsh living conditions. Many are displaced due to continuous persecution by armed groups or due to flash-floods, tsunamis and droughts. These people have seen their livelihoods taken from them, sometimes in a very traumatic way. They are pushed to the brink of starvation and death and left to their own devices if not for the human awareness that exists around the world and that leads people to give a hand when it is needed. This human awareness that supports humanitarian work comes from our own self perspective of human dignity and the respect to our rights that we understand to deserve and therefore see it as a universal right - for the one in front of me is the same as I.

As noted, the support that is raised to combat these situations can be of tremendous amounts, and the influx of cash and goods to NGOs, CSOs, IOs and government agencies can be the stirring pot for abuse of power, as the time-frame to provide aid is so limited that certain guidelines are pushed to the side to make way for the “train of support”. It is not long before it becomes noticeable that the people who were supposed to see their living conditions improved, are still on the same status quo due to the mismanagement of funds, fraud, embezzlement and other corrupt practices.

These situations have become so noticeable that stronger guidelines are being put into place by mostly IOs that are the first recipients of funds and are entrusted with their management, and who in turn require local partners and agencies to follow these standards (sometimes at a higher cost for small NGOs that lack the human resources for that). This appears as a difficult point to balance, as on one hand these anti-corruption guidelines aim to curb corruption and increase the trust of donors and beneficiaries, but on the other hand they may be difficult to follow through in emergency situations where speed, simplicity and flexibility are cornerstones.

Therefore, I believe the center of balance that holds these two sometimes contradicting requirements in place must be the respect for human dignity and basic human rights. This must be the core of any humanitarian expense and funding, but also the benchmark for flexible exceptional clauses when dealing with emergencies. The improvement of the human rights of beneficiaries is the aim of any organization and government and should be the guide in any action and activity it undertakes.

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