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Reevaluating international economic aid after environmental disasters

G20

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Forum: The Group of Twenty

Issue: Reevaluating international economic aid after environmental disasters

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Introduction

Reports on Foreign aid in the aftermath of environmental disasters show that official development assistance in the wake of calamity regularly only covers about three percent of the total estimated economic damages experienced. This concerning statistic is one in a compiling list of failings of international aid providers to properly relieve the impact of disasters, giving reason for The Group of Twenty to be tasked with examining the conduct of the providing and receiving parties of aid as well as the different ways aid is provided all with the intention of improving these aspects.

This report seeks to examine the international community's responses to crises and how they aid regions in causing environmental distress, highlighting its failings and acknowledging its successes. Considering and bringing attention to the different types of aid and disasters to bring the correct solution to the given issue at hand is a critical step the report will address, as well as the nuanced topics that surround this issue, such as corruption and colonial history.

To simplify the issue at hand into a palatable question to start one's research, this topic revolves around: How can the G20 come up with better ways to best bring aid to the multitude of regions in distress from environmental disasters?

Definition of Key Terms

Bilateral Aid

Arrangements between sovereign states in which aid is provided directly from one country to another are often based on diplomatic relationships, and in the case of environmental disasters, these agreements often involve aid going both ways, depending on the distressed party.

Capacity Building

Efforts aimed at improving individuals, organizations, and communities' ability to respond to and manage disasters effectively are often lacking in LEDCs.

Climate Adaptation

Precautions made for expected climate changes aimed at minimizing damage and enhancing resilience. More commonly implemented on a national scale.

Coordination Mechanisms

Systems and processes are established to ensure that various aid-focused organizations and governments work together effectively during disaster response efforts.

Disaster Relief

This refers to assistance to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and after crises. Disaster relief is usually quite basic and provides supplies such as food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid is aid aimed at saving lives, preventing human suffering, and maintaining human quality of life during and after crises. It includes food, water, shelter, and medical care. Compared to disaster relief, it is broader and vaguer, legislation referencing humanitarian aid commonly specifies the exact form of humanitarian aid and how it would be carried out.

Long-term Recovery

Long-term recovery is when the focus is on rebuilding and restoring communities after a disaster, focusing on the development of resilience to future disasters.

Multilateral Aid

Assistance is provided by multiple countries or organizations, often coordinated through IGOs (Inter-Government Organizations) like the United Nations.

General Overview

The effectiveness of international economic aid following environmental disasters is complex and multifaceted; it has been argued for decades how and when to bring aid. Whereas such

aid cannot be denied to have very noble intentions to alleviate suffering, rebuild infrastructure, and spur long-term recovery, the reality on the ground often falls short of these aspirations. This gap between intention and impact is only widened by the fact that intentions are not always to bring aid, and impacts are often felt in the wrong places relative to where post-disaster analyses determine aid was needed.

International aid after disasters became a multilateral collaboration in the aftermath of World War II, during which organizations such as the United Nations and its various specialized agencies were established. Initial efforts were mainly confined to immediate relief, with basic needs such as food, water, and medical supplies being provided to the affected populations. Such an immediate response was rather urgent to tackle the immediate crisis but did not have a far-reaching vision for recovery and development.

With increased knowledge, disaster recovery gradually took the form of a much wider framework of long-term development, reconstruction, capacity building, and disaster risk reduction. This would, therefore, represent an increased realization that effective and sustainable recovery needs much more than just immediate relief efforts themselves but involves strategic investment in the building of resilience, adaptive capacity, and unearthing hidden vulnerabilities.

Today, international aid is a dense landscape of actors, each with its respective roles, priorities, and challenges. Developed nations often provide large sums of financial and technical assistance to the countries affected by disasters. This could be in the form of direct financial aid, technical expertise, or capacity-building programs. However, donors are not always altruistic, and political considerations, strategic interests, and donor fatigue are very much a reality when it comes to how the money is allocated and used. Bodies such as the World Bank, UNDP, and the International Monetary Fund are involved with coordinating and distributing aid. Leveraging their expertise, resources, and global reach are called into play in attempts to deal with the complex aspects of post-disaster recovery. These agencies usually provide technical assistance, financial support, and policy guidance in cooperation with the recipient governments and the local communities. NGOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, and the Red Cross are very often on the ground first to provide urgently needed humanitarian aid, relief in disasters, and post-disaster recovery. In such cases, their nimbleness, local knowledge, and direct contact with the community stand them in good stead, help them respond to pressing needs, and earn the trust of those affected. However, NGOs often face challenges in accessing funds, political complications, and uncertainties about the local relevance of their interventions. Recipient countries are those that get hit by disasters, receive

any form of aid, and engage international partners in responding to disasters through recovery. Their ability to absorb and utilize aid effectively is tied to factors such as governance, institutional strength, and existing infrastructure.

Despite the best efforts and intentions of all concerned, the evaluation of how effective international economic aid is in the event of natural disasters is always immensely difficult. There are multiple causes for this complication: first, accurate and realistic figures relating to the allocation and usage of aid are often extremely challenging to obtain. Logistical challenges in collecting data, especially during the period right after any disaster, make the job rather tricky and, at times, impossible. All this is exacerbated by political sensitivities and a lack of standardized reporting mechanisms. Without comprehensive, reliable data, it's very hard to have an understanding of the actual impact of the aid, let alone how to do it better. The understanding of the impact of long-term assistance is elaborate and complex as it needs to be assessed as a part of the linking cause in the recovery process. Measuring financial contributions or structural projects would, therefore, not be sufficient. Any gaze into effectiveness in aid would have to be multi-dimensional, with concerns on economic development, social well-being, and environmental sustainability, strengthening local institutions' effectiveness in coordination with donor governments, NGOs, and recipient governments is what makes all the difference in making aid work. Competing agendas and bureaucracy have too often stood in the way of effective coordination. The result is that there is a waste of time and resources without any concentration on the local priorities. It can be used as a political tool, which may lead to biases and undermine the efficiency of aid. The donating countries may favor those nations where some strategic alliances or relationships coincide with their political interests. This may lead to unequal distribution of aid whereby countries with high needs but no political leverage in the international arena are not considered. Sometimes, such funds disappear or are utilized for purposes other than those for which they were meant, thus delaying recovery and creating a lack of confidence among members of the general public. This can include corruption from high-ranking members of the government to mid- and lower-ranking civil servants, down to local contractors, who, through these acts of diversion, make such assistance even less effective by moving resources from where the needs are imperative.

Recovery in Haiti has been slow and uneven despite billions of dollars in aid, amid allegations of corruption and mismanagement, since the 2010 earthquake ravaged the country. This was further characterized by the absence of coordination, bureaucratic inefficiency, and capture of underlying vulnerabilities that predisposed Haiti to that particular disaster.

While Japan is a country that had more substantial infrastructure, with greater economic capacity to allow for a very fast process of recovery after the tsunami that befell in 2011, it brought once more an important lesson for more realistic DRR strategies underpinned by long-term planning. The response to the tsunami brought crystal clear preparedness through investment in the early warning system, resilient infrastructure, and community-based disaster risk reduction programs. T

The poor and sluggish response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017, besides being further exacerbated by the ongoing economic crisis, has left US territories vulnerable and raised several questions concerning mechanisms of disaster aid. These have challenged the necessity for much more equitable and responsive disaster aid systems to be directed towards the most deprived communities and those at-risk populations.

The challenges inherent in assessing international economic aid for environmental disasters show an urgent need to upgrade both the system and process as part of ensuring proper utilization towards recovery, resilience, and sustainable development. To this end, mechanisms for the collection of data should be developed to ensure proper, correct, and transparent assessment. It would include investing in data infrastructure, training data collectors, and developing standardized protocols for the collection of data. Recognizing the fact that mere financial indicators cannot satisfactorily measure the contribution of aid to economic development, social well-being, and environmentally sustainable development, developing a multidimensional framework incorporating various indicators, from the reduction of poverty and increase of access to essential services via protection of the environment to strengthening of social cohesion, would mean a lot. That collaboration among all stakeholders involved in the delivery from donor governments, multilateral organizations, and NGOs to recipient governments further improved in effectively delivering aid and its impact evaluation. This would involve well-spelled-out roles and responsibilities, a free flow of information, and sharing in the planning and implementation of programs on aid. Sharing information openly about how the apportioning, utilization, and derived benefits from the aid will create trust and accountability-that is spending, publishing comprehensive reports on spending, independent auditing, and engaging civil society organizations and the local communities in ensuring that the assistance provided does indeed meet their needs and priorities.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
October 24, 1945	The formation of the United Nations marks the start of modern multilateral cooperation.

December 10, 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the UN General Assembly.

June 5-16, 1972

Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

March 20, 1987

The Brundtland Report, titled "Our Common Future," is published introducing the concept of sustainable development.

June 3-14, 1992

The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro resulted in the adoption of Agenda 21, a plan for sustainable development that includes strategies for disaster management.

January 1, 1994

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction is launched by the UN.

October 13, 1999

The UN General Assembly declares the International Day for Disaster Reduction.

September 2000

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are established, focusing on reducing poverty and improving global health, which includes addressing the impacts of environmental disasters.

January 18, 2005

The Hyogo Framework for Action is adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Japan, emphasizing the need for a global approach to disaster risk reduction.

September 4-6, 2016

The G20 Hangzhou Summit introduces the "G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda," emphasizing sustainable development and disaster risk reduction.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations

An inter-governmental organization with by far the broadest spectrum of mission focuses. They have maintained involvement in this issue, with multiple different committees taking active roles in facilitating international aid.

Relief Organizations

An assorted collection of relief-focused NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, Doctors Without Borders, Save the Children, Red CrossHabitat for Humanity, International Direct Relief, GlobalGiving, The Salvation Army, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Samaritan's Purse. All have a history of international coordination as well as government correspondence, making them useful to evaluate when looking at how aid is brought to crisis zones.

The Group of Twenty

The G20 has been involved in disaster relief and risk reduction in several ways through initiatives and working groups. G20 established the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group to assist its member countries in building and implementing their national policies on reducing disaster risks. It engages in the enhancement of disaster resilience by ensuring coordination in these processes. The G20 strives to integrate disaster risk reduction into financing and policy decisions. This approach guarantees the consideration of disaster preparedness and response within broader economic and development strategies. The G20 calls for increased international and regional cooperation in reducing disaster risks, including forming partnerships among member countries and with international organizations to share best practices and resources. Recent G20 Ministerial Declarations have reaffirmed commitments to reducing vulnerabilities and addressing inequalities in disaster response. These declarations outline the need for accessible and inclusive disaster relief. The G20 calls for the application of effective nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches in disaster risk reduction policies. This approach will be purposed to make use of natural systems for the mitigation of disasters. On the whole, the involvement of the G20 in disaster relief involves the building of resilience, cooperation, and integration of risk reduction in national and international policies. Their work is very important in the response and challenge brought about by natural disasters.

Possible Solutions

This issue is not something one solution can bring to a close. The matter of reevaluation means finding the problems and only then addressing solutions to the conclusion of the evaluation. Therefore, this report can not offer solutions and simply seeks to bring attention to a few key areas that need attention, intending to stimulate more analysis from the members of the Group of Twenty. Areas in need of attention include the corrupt misuse of relief funds from various nations' private sectors' involvement in government (see the United Nations Corruption Index for more information per country), the lack of long-term economic stability ensured by current forms of aid brought by NGOs (see major involved parties term two of this report) and the UN and the lack of attention brought to the reasons for the inability of a nation to deal with a said crisis, for example, the north-western storms faced by the territories along the north sea are of the comparable destructive capability to those of the storms in southeast asia yet do to a large difference in preparedness the effects are entirely different, and only one of the two regions can regularly evade crisis. Looking into these things and entertaining branching theories and ideas is the only way to improve the current situation and properly reevaluate international economic aid after environmental disasters.

Further Reading

A crash course on foreign aid and its fundamentals is by far the best to gain a quick understanding and learn how the politics behind this topic truly work. This video is a **Must Watch** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAvA_cOeeOI

The UN's perspective and open conversation on their plans for helping natural disaster sufferers recover.

<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/economic-recovery-after-natural-disasters>

A thorough report on Foreign aid shortcomings. Lengthy and hyper-detailed reports on specific incidents, check out more of this professor's work.

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