Abstract

Increasingly, we hear that the humanitarian system has exhausted its potential and is over the abyss. The volume of funds, the number of humanitarian organizations and the number of rescued people are growing year after year. Nevertheless, the gap between needs and real humanitarian assistance is steadily increasing. Traditional humanitarian actors have been unsuccessfully looking for ways to repair the system that once worked well. Attempts at financial and institutional reform fail, and the debate on humanitarian principles annoys the main actors. This work shows that the traditional humanitarian system is only a part of the larger ecosystem of humanitarian assistance, and analyzes the external influences it fails to cope with in the last decade, and why minor repairs and corrections are not enough and a new system architecture is needed. The author identifies new humanitarian actors with whom the traditional system does not count and points to spontaneous volunteers as a group with dynamic potential and ability to create a parallel system to professional disaster and emergency managers. Since it is an undervalued and overlooked actor, the author refines the definition of spontaneous volunteering. Using the case studies of the Cajun Navy in Louisiana (U.S.) and the confessions of medical rescuers in the Ukraine during periods of riots and armed conflict, the author concludes that the traditional system, despite the need for reform, has its place in specific crisis situations, together with its traditional actors and humanitarian (ethical) principles. On the contrary, it loses its effectiveness and flexibility in situations outside the conflict zone and when confronting the activism of spontaneous volunteers. Particular attention is paid to the situation of armed conflict, when spontaneous volunteers create combat units or directly engage in professional army units.

Keywords: humanitarian system, humanitarianism, humanitarian principles, spontaneous volunteers, emergency relief, disaster response