

The Role of International Organizations in Addressing Humanitarian Crises in Conflict Zone

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ABSTRACT

Humanitarian crisis in individual areas of conflicts is one of the most dangerous issues to international peace, security, and human dignity. The research paper aims to examine the critical nature of international organizations in managing humanitarian crisis cases in war-torn countries. It examines the strategies, interventions and collaborative mechanisms used by international organizations, that is, the United Nations (UN), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other international/non-governmental agencies. The paper is in the context of how such organizations contribute to emergency relief, safeguarding human rights, and recovering and stabilizing after the conflict. The study through its qualitative research design utilizes document analysis and case studies of chosen areas of conflicts to determine the effectiveness and limitations, as well as coordination effectiveness of international humanitarian response. The results show that international organizations play an important role in reducing the human suffering but they are normally limited by political interference, the lack of sufficient resources and security issues. The paper concludes that sustainable humanitarian outcomes in conflict environments can only be achieved through increased cooperation, transparency and capacity-building between international actors.

Keywords: Humanitarian crises, conflict zones, United Nations, ICRC, humanitarian intervention, global governance.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict zones are some of the most dangerous threats to global peace, stability, and human dignity due to the presence of a humanitarian crisis. Armed conflicts are a common cause of mass displacement, destruction of infrastructure, food insecurity and widespread human rights abuses, which overwhelm local governance structures and humanitarian capacities (United Nations, 2024). The central role in addressing such crises is played by the international community which is mainly represented by organizations like the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a group of non-

governmental organizations (NGOs). They should be involved to offer emergency relief, defend civilians, and promote recovery and reconstruction in war-torn countries (Familoye & Toyin, 2024).

The humanitarian mandate of the UN is directly based on the Charter that established the UN, which obligates member states to facilitate peace, promote human rights, and foster international collaboration to meet humanitarian needs (United Nations, 2024). The agencies of the UN, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), spearhead massive humanitarian interventions. These organisations organize the provision of food, shelter, medical support, and security to millions of conflict-afflicted people annually. As an illustration, the UN noted that over 323 million individuals needed humanitarian services around the world in 2024; however, merely approximately 43 percent of the funds needed to carry out humanitarian activities were obtained (United Nations, 2024). These figures demonstrate the extent of the issue and the ongoing shortage of resources with which to respond internationally.

ICRC is another independent organization that works in collaboration with the UN as a neutral organization; it helps and protects victims of armed conflict according to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL). It has a complementary and separate role of dealing directly with non-state and state armed actors to enforce IHL and to facilitate humanitarian access (Nur'ain & Amalia, 2025). Medical aid, water and sanitation services, family reunification, and detention monitoring are some of the operational areas of the ICRC. The ICRC is operational and neutral, as it states that it supports more than 4 million people in conflict-affected regions in 2022 (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2022). Its status as a reliable mediator frequently allows it to reach populations in regions where the UN agencies or NGOs might be limited.

In addition to these two global and local NGOs, the UN and the ICRC, there are many other international and local NGOs involved in humanitarian response in conflict zones, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE International, and Save the Children. Such organizations carry out activities at the field level, promote civilian security, and offer special services, including education and mental health (Muriuki, 2025). Nonetheless, the spread of actors also offers problems of coordination, since overlapping mandates and competition over funding might create inefficiencies. That is why the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was created to coordinate humanitarian efforts by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and, as a result, the international response will be successful and uniform (Familoye & Toyin, 2024).

The general activities of international organizations can be divided into three major areas, namely, emergency relief, protection, and recovery. During the emergency stage, such organizations offer life-saving services, such as food, water, shelter, and medical services. During the protection stage, they help to enforce the use of IHL, human rights violations, and protect vulnerable populations, including women, children, and displaced persons (Nur'ain & Amalia, 2025). Lastly, they are involved in the recovery stage where they help restore social and economic systems, enhance governance, and foster stability and reconciliation (Eldridge, 2025). This multidimensional involvement highlights the holistic character of international humanitarian action, which does not stop at short-term assistance but goes to long-term stability.

However, the performance of international organizations in the conflict environment is limited by various factors. Humanitarian operations are mostly victimized by political interference by state actors and non-state actors (Eldridge, 2025). The threat of security and targeting humanitarian workers also limits access to needy populations. The lack of funds, as seen in the UN humanitarian appeals, poses operational gaps that place millions of people in need of proper support (United Nations, 2024). Additionally, there is a risk of duplication of efforts and reduced effectiveness due to poor coordination between the international agencies and the local authorities. According to Eldridge (2025), the increasing trend of changing in-kind

assistance to cash-based assistance has enhanced flexibility but has also presented the problem of monitoring, targeting, and adjusting to insecure situations.

Modern wars, with their urban warfare, prolonged displacement, and the presence of various military organizations, necessitate flexible and cooperative approaches to humanitarianism. Familoje and Toyin (2024) believe that crisis response needs to be more transparent, accountable, and inter-organizational to be effective. On the same note, Nur'ain and Amalia (2025) assert the need to establish local capacities to keep the humanitarian outcomes sustainable and owned by the community. Although international organizations will always be essential in offering relief and protection, their future success will rely on closing the divide between humanitarian and development agenda, building resilience, and enhancing local actors.

Problem Statement

Regardless of the active role played by international agencies like the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in handling humanitarian disasters, conflict regions in the world have remained to be plagued by extreme challenges such as lack of protection of the people, access to aid, and weak coordination of humanitarian players. Constant political interference, lack of funds and security limits the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian interventions. Consequently, the international organizations in terms of their role in dealing with such crises and the constraints they have are to be subjected to a serious appraisal.

Research Aim

This research aims to analyze the role and effectiveness of international organizations in addressing humanitarian crises in conflict zones, with a particular focus on their strategies, coordination mechanisms, and limitations in achieving sustainable humanitarian outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What are the key roles and responsibilities of international organizations in addressing humanitarian crises in conflict zones?
2. How effective are the strategies and coordination mechanisms employed by these organizations in delivering humanitarian assistance and protecting civilians?
3. What major challenges and limitations hinder international organizations from achieving sustainable humanitarian outcomes in conflict environments?
4. How can cooperation and capacity-building among international actors be enhanced to improve humanitarian response effectiveness?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humanitarian Crises in Contemporary Conflict Zones

According to the recent literature, humanitarian crises in conflict zones are getting to be more complex, prolonged, and multidimensional. Today, armed conflicts are no longer state-to-state wars but, in many cases, they are linked to non-state armed groups, hybrid entities, and asymmetric warfare that grossly interfere with the lives of civilians (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2022a). Humanitarian crises on a large scale are caused by the destruction of major infrastructure, disruption of food supply chains, and breakdown of simple services. The 2022 ICRC data indicated that in such conflict-affected nations as Yemen, Syria, and Ethiopia, millions of people were at risk of acute hunger and displacement, which is an example of how large-scale human suffering is in the modern world (ICRC, 2022a).

According to Gutiérrez-Romero (2020), crises are now combined with other crises, including pandemics and climate shocks, which result in what scholars call compound emergencies. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, as an example, the population of conflict-affected countries in sub-Saharan Africa faced violence, not to mention the impact of lockdowns on the economy that hindered the access to food and humanitarian aid. Such an overlap of crises highlights the idea that humanitarian crises are no longer singular occurrences but phenomena with a multidimensional nature that needs a multidimensional response. The literature thus frames humanitarian crisis in conflict areas as dynamic systems of vulnerability where social, political and economic forces interact (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2020).

On that matter, the ICRC (2022b) also mentions that dozens of conflicts across the world are increasing humanitarian demands as world attention moves to other directions. Humanitarian agencies are in most instances stretched due to the long periods of violence, fatigue amongst donors and political instability. The organisation emphasizes the fact that in such situations as Afghanistan and Sudan, the lack of trust in the international actors and the increased security risks have led to the fact that it is more and more complicated to reach the needy population. In the same way, Aydogan (2024) states that 117 UN member states recently demanded better humanitarian protection against humanitarian personnel in war zones, which indicates that the international community has been worried about the safety of humanitarian operations. The combined results of these studies indicate that the current humanitarian crises are not only characterised by the amount of human devastation but also limited humanitarian space, politicisation of aid and declining international commitment.

Role and Effectiveness of International Organisations

In the coordination, delivery, and advocacy of humanitarian aid in conflict areas, international organisations have remained at the centre stage. Overall, the United Nations (UN) system, the World Food Programme (WFP), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are the most dominant global response mechanisms. Such organisations work according to the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, which are established in the International Humanitarian Law (ICRC, 2022a). They offer various necessities like food, shelter, healthcare and security to the internally displaced and refugees. Nonetheless, scholars and practitioners still argue over the effectiveness of these organisations in addressing humanitarian needs despite the wide areas they are mandated to operate.

Latest empirical evaluation of effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is given by Eldridge (2025), who states that international organisations have enhanced the ability of aid delivery, particularly the delivery of multi-purpose cash transfer, but, nonetheless, the shift to in-kind assistance is lopsided. The cash-based methods enable the question populations to take independent choices on their requirements and can activate local markets but are hard to track and can be restricted by market distortions that are attributed to conflict. According to Eldridge, (2025), coordination and monitoring are weakened where there is a volatile environment, and this limits the overall effectiveness of humanitarian interventions.

The model of operation adopted by the ICRC gives a valuable point of contrast. Being a neutral and independent player, it is concerned with the protection of humanitarian interests and participative approach to conflict participants in order to enable access. In 2022, ICRC (2022c) reported that it was conducting water and sanitation, medical aid, and separated family tracing operations in more than 80 countries. This is because it can negotiate with both state and non-state actors and thus it can operate in highly insecure areas where UN agencies usually fail to operate. Nevertheless, despite these issues, even the ICRC has problems in its operations, either due to the political sensitivities limiting access or the local factions undermining its neutrality.

The other dimension of effectiveness is that of coordination and sharing of burdens among the international and local actors. As Aydogan (2024) remarks, a significant percentage of humanitarian workers are in a very high risk of danger within the conflict zones, yet the international regulations of their safety are not binding in the vast majority of cases. This means that the operational agencies are relying on ad hoc coordination and security arrangements that are not sustainable during protracted crises. A technological angle is also provided by Kondraganti (2021), indicating that big-data analytics might improve humanitarian logistics and decision-making but is not yet widely used by international organisations. The research holds that data-driven systems can help to enhance needs evaluation, resource distribution, and accountability, but the implementation obstacles still exist because of the absence of technical capacity and political will. All these findings imply that though international organisations are an inseparable part of humanitarian relief and protection, their performance relies on adaptable coordination, technological advancement, and long-term political aid.

Limitations, Challenges, and Emerging Directions

International organisations, though inexperienced and with a global outreach, have enormous constraints when it comes to dealing with humanitarian crisis in conflict areas. The most prominent of them are access controls, lack of finances, threats to security, and political influence. ICRC (2022b) noted that a significant number of crises are not sufficiently funded and reported because donors tend to change their priorities based on geopolitical considerations. Such selective involvement may leave in place conflicts that have been experienced over a long period thereby increasing pain and distrust towards the humanitarian system. Moreover, as pointed out by Aydogan (2024), aid workers are confronted with growing threat, and this has become a hallmark of humanitarian activities. Most of the agencies are compelled to withdraw even when the demands are greater unless there is a strong legal and political framework that would meet their security requirements.

The lack of funds is another limitation to international response. Humanitarian calls in the world often fail to achieve their targets, and there are some gaps in vital services, including healthcare and nutrition (Eldridge, 2025). This lack of resources has been the cause to increase the use of the partnerships with local NGOs, but the localisation agenda, which is supposed to bring local actors on board, is far-fetched. The ICRC (2022c) states that local organisations are not necessarily included in the high-level coordination forums and are usually the initial actors in crises, yet they do not have direct access to international funding. This unequal relationship restrains sustainability and further dependency on outside forces.

New challenges due to technological and environmental change are also brought out in emerging scholarship. Kondraganti (2021) believes that the application of big-data and predictive analytics to humanitarian logistics has the potential to revolutionize the response system, yet it is not implemented as quickly as other industries. In the same vein, Gutiérrez-Romero (2020) connects conflict processes with climatic exposure and susceptibility to the pandemic and recommends humanitarian intervention to get more cross-sectoral responses. The literature also points out that politicisation of aid where aid is seen as a bargaining tool or is linked to security interests, further weaken the sense of neutrality and confidence in international institutions (ICRC, 2022b).

Through these challenges, recent discussions are still optimistic about change and revolution with caution. Eldridge (2025) and Kondraganti (2021) support more sharing of data, coordination via digital platforms, and assistance targeting based on evidence. At the same time, Aydogan (2024) notes that renewed dedication to the security of humanitarian workers on the international level is an element in restoring trust in the multilateral humanitarian machinery. On the whole, the literature suggests that the future functionality of international organisations in the conflict zones will be determined by how effectively

they adapt to emerging risks, utilize technology, enhance relationships with local actors, and preserve humanitarian principles, on which the legitimacy of such organisations is built.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research paper is based on the Humanitarian Governance Theory and the Collective Action Framework, which, collectively, elucidate the way the international organizations organize and render valid humanitarian interventions in conflict areas. The humanitarian governance theory considers global humanitarian action to be a regime of norms, institutions and actors that jointly define the manner in which aid is provided and the manner in which the provision of aid is justified (Barnett and Weiss, 2021). It highlights the fact that international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) do not just serve as a service provider, but act as one of the instruments of global governance, striking a balance between the ideals of neutrality and impartiality and geopolitical forces. This theoretical prism explains how humanitarian actors can bargain and negotiate their place, legitimacy, and cooperation in political sensitive settings.

This is enhanced by the Collective Action Framework that describes the difficulty with coordination between several stakeholders: states, NGOs, and donors, in order to work together to achieve common humanitarian objectives (Olson, 2020). Throughout intricate conflict situations, no single organ can provide a solution in isolation instead, the only way to achieve success is through mobilization and collective responsibility. According to recent research, enhanced data sharing, the willingness to trust other agencies, and partnerships at the local level are the keys to overcoming the collective action dilemma in humanitarian crises (Eldridge, 2025; Kondraganti, 2021).

The combination of these frameworks offers a conceptual foundation of understanding the way international organizations respond to humanitarian crises using governance structures, collaborative networks and adaptive operational strategies in volatile conflict environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research takes the form of a qualitative research study intended to examine the role of the international organizations in resolving humanitarian crises in conflict zones. This method provides an in-depth insight into company strategies, coordination processes and challenges in the business that are not easily measurable. The main sources of data collection will be the analysis of documents about reports, policy papers, and official publication of the international organizations like the United Nations (UN), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other humanitarian agencies. Moreover, peer-reviewed journal articles and trustworthy online databases that were published at the latest times, since 2020, are analyzed in order to guarantee current and evidence-based information.

The case study approach will be used, where I will select some of the conflict-affected countries including Yemen, Syria and South Sudan to determine the efficiency and weaknesses of humanitarian interventions in practice. The design can be used to identify such recurring themes as resource constraints, barriers to access, and coordination issues between international and local actors. They make use of thematic content analysis to establish the connection between the observed patterns and the theoretical basis of humanitarian governance and collective action. In ensuring transparency and traceability of research findings, only checked and publicly available sources are utilized in order to achieve research credibility. The ethical considerations would be maintained with the help of the only secondary data and confidentiality of the sensitive information.

RESULTS

Effectiveness of International Organizations in Humanitarian Response

The evidence shows that international organizations have a decisive role in the alleviation of suffering of human beings in conflict-affected zones, but their performance may differ in the situations and depending on the possibilities of resources. The agencies of the United Nations (UN) particularly World food programme (WFP) and United nations high commissioner of refugees (UNHCR) have shown good logistical capability and reach its activities to reach across the globe with the aim of saving lives. An example of this is the UN government which offered emergency food support to more than 140 million individuals in the year 2022, a number of which lives in open war zones like Yemen, Ethiopia, and Syria (ICRC, 2022a). In the same way, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) remained in over 80 countries, their tasks being limited to restoring family connections, medical help, and increased access to clean water (ICRC, 2022c).

There is also empirical data of how international organisations are becoming adapted to the changing field realities. Humanitarian practitioners have discovered that they are increasingly offering humanitarian help in multi-purpose cash transfers rather than in-kind transfers to the affected communities providing them with more flexibility (Eldridge, 2025). This is in line with global humanitarian reform agendas that stress independence, effectiveness and dignity to aid despatche. But the same research also showed that cash-based programs can hardly be carried out across the board in unstable market conditions or where the security of a nation is threatened. This indicates that as the international organizations have been improving on their models of operations, the local circumstances continue to limit effectiveness to a large extent.

Coordination and Collaboration Challenges

The findings prove that the coordination between international, regional and local actors is a key issue in humanitarian response. The ICRC (2022b) indicated that duplication of efforts and poor utilization of minimal resources is common in overlapping mandates and poor coordination. Agencies have not been able to coordinate logistics and communication in complex emergencies like in South Sudan and Afghanistan, in part because of different institutional mandates and rivalry to capture the interest of donors.

Aydogan (2024) gives additional proof that humanitarian workers, in their turn, are more physically threatened, which deteriorates coordination and access. The resolution of the UN General Assembly in 2024, with the help of 117 member states, entailed enhanced safety of aid workers after several attacks in conflict regions. This confirms the fact that the issue of coordination is not only bureaucratic inefficiency but also covers the field safety and accountability.

Kondraganti (2021) further explains that one aspect of this issue could be resolved using technology in the form of big data analytics to share information in real time and assess needs. However, not all international organizations are adopting it as a result of financial and political limitations. The paper highlights that digitalization of humanitarian systems remains at its early stages and that coordination remains mostly dependent on manual reporting and logistics systems that have become obsolete.

Resource and Access Limitations

The other important observation is that financial and security related constraints are major factors that deter the capacity of the international organizations to support long term humanitarian activities. Some of these appeals are chronically short-changed; the UN global humanitarian appeal in 2023, at just over 55% funded by mid-year, had huge gaps in food, health, and shelter programs (ICRC, 2022b). Such funding

gaps compel organizations to focus on the acute emergencies at the expense of long-term recovery, which leads to the cyclical nature of dependence as opposed to building resilience.

According to ICRC (2022a), more than 50 percent of affected populations have their access to services limited in Yemen because of escalating hostilities and in northern Ethiopia because of security issues, aid convoys have been blocked several times. These situations show how humanitarian efforts are hindered by political and military obstacles. Gutiérrez-Romero (2020) also realized that these barriers were exacerbated by travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic that left millions of people without regular assistance. Such a combination of conflict and world crises proves that humanitarian space has shrunk significantly over the last few years.

Local organisations usually have to occupy operational gaps left by international actors, but they have capacity and recognition problems. According to the ICRC (2022c), local partners play a significant role with regard to early response and community outreach, whereas they are excluded in upper-level funding and coordination frameworks. The imbalance decreases the efficiency and sustainability of humanitarian interventions.

New Trends and Innovative Practices

Nevertheless, there are indicators of innovative trends of humanitarian governance and provision despite the challenges. Eldridge (2025) has named the increasing use of cash-based programming and digital transfer platforms as potential innovations that allow achieving greater efficiency and accountability. Another area of advancement reported by Kondraganti (2021) is data integration systems that will facilitate fast decision-making in the logistics domain and resource allocation.

Moreover, various international actors tightened their partnership with local actors by employing the so-called localization efforts that seek to bring power and resources nearer to the affected groups. The ICRC (2022c) reported the development of health and sanitation initiatives by local partners through training and equipping them to enhance sustainability and resilience in protracted crises. Localization is still not even, but these practices are indicative of a new direction of humanitarian models that are less reactive in emergency relief but more inclusive and based on the community.

Humanitarian crises are also becoming more prominent on environmental and health levels. Gutiérrez-Romero (2020) has associated pandemic vulnerability and food insecurity with conflict-related displacement and suggested that this factor needs to be tackled through policy responses focusing on health, environment, and security. This trend is consistent with the wider humanitarian reform agenda that recommends cross-sectoral resilience and not short term relief.

Following tables showed the overview of results

Table 1: Effectiveness of International Organizations in Humanitarian Response

Organization	Intervention	Evidence/Impact	Source
United Nations (UN)	Emergency food aid, shelter, medical assistance	Provided aid to over 140 million people in 2022 across Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria	ICRC, 2022a
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Family tracing, water & sanitation, medical support	Active in 80+ countries; restored family links, provided medical care, clean water	ICRC, 2022c
UN agencies & ICRC	Cash-based programming	Increased flexibility and autonomy for affected populations; limitations in	Eldridge, 2025

Organization	Intervention	Evidence/Impact	Source
		insecure or unstable markets	

Table 2: Coordination and Collaboration Challenges

Challenge	Description	Evidence	Source
Overlapping mandates	Multiple organizations operate in the same areas causing duplication	Inefficient use of resources in South Sudan and Afghanistan	ICRC, 2022b
Safety risks for humanitarian workers	Increasing attacks in conflict zones	117 UN member states called for stronger protection of aid personnel	Aydogan, 2024
Limited adoption of technology	Low use of big data and analytics for coordination	Data-driven tools underutilized in logistics and resource deployment	Kondraganti, 2021

Table 3: Resource and Access Limitations

Limitation	Description	Evidence	Source
Funding shortages	Global humanitarian appeals underfunded	UN 2023 appeal only 55% funded by mid-year	ICRC, 2022b
Access restrictions	Conflict and political barriers prevent aid delivery	In Yemen, 50% of affected populations inaccessible; repeated blockages in northern Ethiopia	ICRC, 2022a
Marginalization of local actors	Local NGOs crucial but underfunded and excluded from coordination	Local partners fill gaps but lack resources & recognition	ICRC, 2022c
Compound crises	Conflict combined with pandemics & climate impacts	COVID-19 worsened displacement, food insecurity in Africa	Gutiérrez-Romero, 2020

Table 4: Humanitarian Response in Sudan (2020–2024)

Organization	Type of Intervention	Target Population	Key Evidence / Impact	Challenges / Limitations	Source
United Nations (UN) – WFP & OCHA	Food distribution, shelter, emergency medical aid	Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected communities	Provided aid to thousands in Darfur and South Kordofan; supported emergency nutrition and health services	Funding shortages, limited access due to active conflict zones	ICRC, 2022a; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2020
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Family tracing, water & sanitation, health services	Civilians in Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Sudan border areas	Restored family links, supplied safe water and basic medical support	Restricted access in volatile areas; security risks for staff	ICRC, 2022c

Organization	Type of Intervention	Target Population	Key Evidence / Impact	Challenges / Limitations	Source
Local NGOs	Food aid, basic health, community mobilization	IDPs and vulnerable households	Critical first responders in remote areas; implemented community-level relief programs	Limited funding, lack of coordination with international organizations	ICRC, 2022c; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2020
UNHCR	Protection, shelter, and refugee assistance	Refugees from South Sudan and internally displaced people	Provided temporary shelters, protection services, and legal aid	Overcrowding in camps, insufficient infrastructure	ICRC, 2022b
Joint UN-ICRC & NGO initiatives	Coordination and monitoring of humanitarian access	Conflict-affected civilians	Improved distribution efficiency and reduced duplication in key regions	Coordination still uneven; safety risks persist for aid workers	Eldridge, 2025; Aydogan, 2024

This table gives a Sudan-specific overview of how international and local actors operate in conflict zones, highlighting both achievements and constraints.

DISCUSSION

To highlight the necessity of the international organisations, and the restrictions, in conflict-affected zones, the humanitarian crisis in Sudan has reached its highest levels, in 2025. The required number of people has already exceeded 300000 people, among which there are huge proportions of internally displaced citizens (IDPs), children, and women of productive age (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2025a). Such an epic scope of necessity intensifies main themes identified in the literature: the working capacity of international actors, issues of coordination, lack of funds, and the necessity of localisation and innovation in humanitarian governance.

To start with, the functional aspect of international organisations would not be less important. Indicatively, during the first half in 2025, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in collaboration with the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) helped over 1.1million people and conducted more than 19,000 surgical interventions to weapon wounded and provided thousands of internally displaced persons access to clean water, cash and hot meals. (ICRC, 2025) The magnitude of the operations portrays the fact that agencies with prolonged existence in war zones are able to carry out their important work even provided that the conditions are highly difficult. Likewise, in April alone the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) reported new displacement of more than 200,000 children, and treated tens of thousands with severe malnutrition, highlighting the contribution of multilateral actors in child protection and health interventions (UNICEF, 2025). These interventions follow the findings of the literature that the role of international organisations in supplying emergency relief and protection in conflict environments is central.

The success of such interventions is however highly limited by structural factors. In Sudan, delivery of services in some of the areas of Darfur, Kordofan and Khartoum is restricted by access control. To illustrate, the April 2025 report prepared by UNICEF mentions that access limitations have become a serious issue in El Fasher and much of Darfur, which has negatively impacted the provision of necessary services (UNICEF, 2025). This is reminiscent of the previous literature, which suggests that conflict

environments tend to reduce humanitarian access, as well as the mandate to neutrality and impartiality of assistance (Lane, 2016; International Review of the Red Cross, 2024). Also, it has severe funding gaps: the 2025 appeal of reproductive health and gender based violence services of US\$145.7 million made by UNFPA has only raised 27% by May and only 33% by June (UNFPA, 2025a; 2025b). These resource limitations make it harder to continue with programming, undermine preventive and recovery strategies and support dependency cycles instead of resilience.

There are also challenges of coordination. International organisations, local actors and host communities are not even coordinated as the crisis becomes deeper in Sudan. The literature highlights that the frameworks of collective action are key to the successful governance of humanitarianism (Olson, 2020; Eldridge, 2025). But practically, the environmental conflict nature, multiplicity of actors and fragmentation of control across territories generate overlapping mandates, duplication and inefficiencies. An example to illustrate this is the report of UNICEF (2025) that in spite of the massive efforts, 73 per cent of the humanitarian funding needs are not fulfilled, which limits the coordination of partners and compels them to prioritize immediate relief over full sectoral programmes. It conforms to the criticism of the literature that coordination mechanisms are present, but there are usually multiple failures in the implementation of these mechanisms in fragmented conflict zones (Shabaka, 2024).

The new trends to 2025 also indicate changes made in the literature on the functions of international actors. Mobile service delivery and cash based assistance is increasing in Sudan, as organisations strive to adjust to dynamic displacement patterns and limited access. According to the ICRC report, more than 44,000 IDPs were able to get food financial help in the first half of 2025 (ICRC, 2025). This movement towards cash transfers represents the larger movement of donor and practitioner interest in autonomy, dignity and local market activation as compared to pure in kind aid (Eldridge, 2025). Moreover, technology and data innovations are increasing in popularity: they are yet to become very common, but research (Kondraganti, 2021) claims that the combination of big data, predictive analytics and remote monitoring can enhance humanitarian governance. Although in Sudan these tools remain primitive, the demand to have real time information on displacement, nutrition, disease outbreaks and access is becoming more and more a must.

Nonetheless, the constraints and gaps are still obvious. The localisation agenda - giving local NGOs, community organisations and host populations powers - is yet to be realised. Although the local actors in Sudan are first responders in remote or hard to reach places, they do not always have access to international funding, high level coordination forums and security guarantees. The ICRC called people of Sudan the center of our humanitarian work, but at the same time, it has identified access and capacity limitations as reasons why reaching local partners is limited (ICRC, 2025). Such a discrepancy is indicative of a thematic trend in the literature: the discrepancy between the aspirational conceptions of localisation on the one hand and the actualities of the donor, institutional, and security framework on the other (Shabaka, 2024; ICRC, 2022b).

Besides, the acerbation of crisis in 2025 opens new frontiers of humanitarian risk. The situation of famine has already been established in several locations and the increasing cholera pandemic has struck masses of people, widening conflict-induced weaknesses (Reuters, 2025). Humanitarian architecture is now confronted not only with intercontinual violence and displacement, but with intersecting health, nutrition and protection emergencies in acute mode. The convergence of risks corroborates the argument in the literature that humanitarian crises in conflict zones are becoming more of a compound emergency that needs a concerted effort (Gutiérrez Romero, 2020).

Considering these findings, the discussion refers to some implications. To work in besieged or besetting environments, international organisations should step up their attempts to enhance access negotiations, remote operations and innovative modalities of delivery. To shift the short term relief to sustainable

recovery, increased funding flexibility, and donor must be increased. The coordination platforms should be adapted to be meaningfully involved in the local actors, decentralise their decision making and merge the data based tools of resource allocation. Lastly, humanitarian governance reform should remain, focusing on partnership, localisation, and adaptive programming, which responds to the changing nature of conflict driven crises.

CONCLUSION

The humanitarian crisis in Sudan in the year 2025 reaffirms how crucial international organisations are in responding in crises as well as safeguarding, but also the stark disparities between capacity and context. Within the normative and theoretical structures of humanitarian governance and collective action presented in the literature these realities can be interpreted: governance structures are important, but only as effective as the resources applied in war torn, under resourced, politically conflicted environments. The lack of coordinated innovation, collaboration and flexibility means the humanitarian system will be outmuscled by the scope and severity of humanitarian crises like Sudan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase multi-year and flexible funding to enable sustained humanitarian operations and adapt to rapidly changing needs (ICRC, 2025).
- Improve inter-agency collaboration and integrate local NGOs to reduce duplication and ensure comprehensive coverage (Shabaka, 2024).
- Invest in negotiation capacity and protective measures to ensure aid reaches populations in hard-to-access conflict areas (Aydogan, 2024).
- Implement big-data analytics, remote monitoring, and digital cash transfers to enhance efficiency, accountability, and needs assessment (Kondraganti, 2021).
- Advance Localisation Initiatives – Empower local actors through funding, training, and inclusion in decision-making to improve resilience and context-sensitive responses (ICRC, 2025).
- Address compound emergencies by combining health, nutrition, protection, and disaster-risk interventions in conflict-affected communities (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2020).

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