

Ambrella Development Forum 2022 – Key Takeaways

Ambrella Development Forum (ADF) took place on 23 and 24 May 2022 in Bratislava, Slovakia. More than a hundred participants took part in the event in person. Approximately one third of them shared their assessment with organisers via evaluation form. The assessment revealed that by far the most appreciated feature of the Forum was ***the space for networking*** followed by ***inspiration and learning from the content of the panels***.

Content-wise, all elements of the ADF – five panels, three workshops and Welcomes & Opening bloc on 24 May were ranked as very relevant regarding their topics as well as manifesting a high quality regarding their content. Topics of the workshops were also assessed as very relevant, but respondents suggested that there is more space to produce policy-relevant recommendations via workshops and/or other elements.

Each participant left ADF with their personal takeaways. This short summary indicates the opinion of organisers as to what could be **the most important outcomes and conclusions from the event which are relevant for strategy, planning, advocacy and policy action at your national or EU level**.

The changing nature of the development assistance and the humanitarian aid

In the light of the current events, some speakers within Panel 1 on 24 May suggested¹ that in terms of **challenges**, **the traditional approach to humanitarian aid may be insufficient**. **The humanitarian crises now are long-term and often man-made**. Therefore, thinking of **recommendations**, **the course of action may need to become a mixture of humanitarian and development aid** including:

- long-term perspective and creation of the long-term structures
- development assistance elements such as job-creation
- localisation and empowerment of the local organisations
- securing long-term finance of the humanitarian intervention
- notable increase in the overall amount of money in the sector (going beyond the “taxpayer money” and think of the innovative financing instruments including partnership with the private sector)

Also, in the same panel it has been pointed out that the **Russian war against Ukraine** will likely pose another **challenge** in the form of **lasting consequences for the ways we think about and carry out the development and humanitarian work**.

- **Unusual recipients of aid:** In Ukraine the state and the government on all its levels works which makes it different from most of all other humanitarian crises. This goes against basic assumptions of the humanitarian model that has been prevailing in the EU so far. Therefore, the actor is on the stage to which our traditional humanitarian structures are not used to work with. We need to adjust operations to it and the positive as well as negative consequences of this fact.

¹ You can check the included references to panels at the video recordings of panels available at <https://developmentforum.ambrella.org/photo-video/>. The page also includes the separate video interviews with Tanya Cox, Director of CONCORD Europe and European Commissioners’ Michael Köhler, Acting Director of the DG ECHO.

- **Unusual providers of aid:** In the initial phases of the war – and humanitarian efforts – various private initiatives (across the EU) were notably stronger (and faster) than initiatives organised by governments. This also posed a certain attitudinal challenge to traditional humanitarian actors who are used to receiving finances from governments and implementing the aid and relief in cooperation with non-state actors in the recipient country.
- Therefore, in search of **solutions**, we should not perceive EU funds earmarked to EaP countries as “development assistance” only – there are always other purposes behind such funding. For example, the EU’s assistance in Ukraine has since 2014 been a mixture of the development assistance with the reform conditionality. This will continue to be the case also after the war. And it is the case with other EaP countries as well, even though the purposes may differ.

As another major **challenge**, after this war is over, **the entire paradigm (of international order, and by extension of development and humanitarian work) may be changing**. We will not be able to rely on the rule-based international order, because one of the members of the UN Security Council is actively undermining it. In confronting this problem, it will not be enough to “be better at what we do” or “be more flexible”. Instead, a more profound rethinking of the fundamental questions of our work will be in order as a part of the **solution**. Part of it will indeed be **an emphasis on preparedness**, but in our line of work it is chronically difficult to make large donors invest in the unclear notion and activities related to preparedness and predictive capacities as opposed to their preference for the reaction to the clearly unfolding crises and their manifested consequences.

Regarding humanitarian aid, **the sequence of crises and their conjunction** (compounding crisis) poses a major **challenge**. As we have been in the last couple of years walking from one crisis to another, it seems that in addition to looking for the sufficient funding to humanitarian efforts, a part of the **solution** also needs to be a major investment in the area of preparedness for the crises. This is **not only investment in terms of money, but also the infrastructure and capacity to react, including the way we think about the forthcoming humanitarian crises and their potential conjunction**.

Innovations in development and humanitarian work

Speakers in the dedicated panel (Panel 2 on 24 May 2022) reminded us that a **challenge** may be in **the way we think about innovation**. Innovation is a multifaceted concept which needs to be dealt with in the specific context of the intended use. The meaningfulness of innovation to a great degree depends on this context. Some cool innovative ideas will not work in a certain context.² The need for innovation may actually be lower than it seems as a lot of solutions are already available. Civil society sphere is notoriously failing in pooling and sharing information – for obvious reasons such as competition for funds. Also, there is **a bias towards seeing innovations as the “new things”, but the changes in the rules and systems are also to be counted as innovations**. There is another **bias of thinking about innovation in terms of competition as the natural mechanism for their emergence**, while **in reality innovations often come to existence through partnerships**.

Similarly, among the possible **recommendations**, Panel 2 reminded us that **innovation is best realised through the local actors with the support from the international ones**. If we take localization seriously, **donors also need to implement core funding** (as opposed to the currently dominant project funding). They should also **allow the space for smaller amounts of funding for innovative smaller-scale projects (“pilot activities”) to facilitate innovation**.

² For example, delivering food by drones to the people in hard-to-reach places will not work in Syria or Ukraine as drones are considered a military technology.

Development finance

The conference echoed the appeals that while it is understandable that war in Ukraine is capable of causing greater concerns and interest among the Europeans than the crisis elsewhere – where actually more people suffer than in Ukraine – **EU must resist the temptation to prioritise Ukraine by means of resigning on development and humanitarian efforts in other parts of the world.** This would, among other things, ***play into the hands of the Russian propaganda which uses the argument of European selfishness and racism in third world countries now***, suggesting that pending hunger crises in some parts of the world are direct consequences of the EU's animosity towards the Russian Federation.

It has been stated that **so far, the humanitarian efforts related to the war in Ukraine have not been financed at the expense of other crises around the world.** But, the conjunction of crises – like it may be the case now with the war and reconstruction in Ukraine, or surge in food prices around the world, particularly the Global South – will **at certain point in time exhaust the reserves EU can spend on unexpected humanitarian crises.** Reshuffling the EU budget will not be possible or sufficient to secure the required additional funds. ***Politicians will have to think of the new model for financing humanitarian aid in these extraordinary situations.*** [Solutions](#) to this problem may include 1) more contributions from member states, 2) innovative ways of financing humanitarian needs (such as private sector resources), or, perhaps also 3) special tax to finance these needs – as it seems that people of EU might be willing to pay it.

The Summary of ADF Workshops

Workshop 1: Development Finance Facing the Mega-Crisis	Workshop 2: Humanitarian Aid Logistics and Humanitarian Access	Workshop 3: Innovations and Adaptability in Humanitarian Assistance
<p>The most important insight from Workshop I was that CSOs need to advocate incessantly on issues of the quantity as well as quality of ODA both with governments and the public. (Issues of quality and quantity of ODA have often been tied through the problem of ODA inflation and redirecting existing ODA funds to fighting the manifestations of the emergent crises through activities which qualify as development assistance only as borderline cases, or not at all. (A notorious example was the problem with the excess vaccines donated by the donor countries to the Global South.)</p> <p>Workshop participants mostly identified as suitable advocacy opportunities the events and initiatives related to the forthcoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU.</p> <p>As a promising strategy, they pointed out the need to enlighten the public about the interconnectedness between various crises that afflict the world today as well as the argument that strengthening through ODA the resilience of the countries outside EU is in the interest of peoples of the EU.</p> <p>Participants warned against the possibility that recent economic developments – which could be perceived by the many citizens of the EU as the effective decline in their quality of life – might effectively work against the above-mentioned advocacy strategies.</p>	<p>The topic of the workshop quickly and spontaneously gravitated towards the issues related to the experience with providing humanitarian aid to the territory of Ukraine as a consequence of the recent Russian aggression. The most pressing was the problem with establishing the mechanisms of the delivery (transport routes).</p> <p>Participants concluded that the biggest problem was bureaucracy and the lack of flexibility on the side of authorities in both donor and recipient countries. While on both sides the urgency of the distribution of humanitarian aid was acknowledged, the state actors – particularly customs, local governments and armed forces – often had their own aligned preferences, such as compliance with the existing rules and procedures or the fight against corruption and other potential economic crimes. In general, authorities were unwilling to give up control over the processes of aid delivery to the detriment of the quality and speed of such delivery.</p> <p>Some CSOs complained that in some cases the process became dominated by the authorities to the extent that they lost the control over what was the final destination of aid. Therefore, the bureaucratic rigidity also limited the efficiency of the required localisation of the aid distribution which was acknowledged as the inevitable component by participating CSOs.</p> <p>In the consequent discussions, participants identified a number of measures – largely related to the transport, storing and distribution of the material aid. These included humanitarian corridors and mechanisms giving precedence to actors transporting aid while crossing the border from both sides.</p>	<p>The ideas about the wide range of possible innovations in humanitarian assistance were generated and discussed in the workshop. These were spontaneously brought up by participants with no specific prescribed focus.</p> <p>The most frequently mentioned <u>areas of innovations</u> focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making sure that the highest possible number of people requiring the aid were reached by the humanitarian intervention ▪ Increasing the effectiveness of aid by digital means (both for obtaining information needed for execution of the aid as well as for informing the involved actors, primarily the aid recipients) ▪ Localisation: involving local actors and spontaneously emerged new “non-traditional” actors and initiatives (i.e. groups which were not traditional humanitarian organisations, but took over their role) in the effective mechanism of the aid delivery <p>The <u>challenges on adoption of the identified innovations</u> were discussed as well. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limitations regarding the scalability and replicability if innovations in different contexts ▪ Possible damaging effect of the inflation of innovations, particularly the potential downsides of implementation of the large amount of novel digital solutions at the same time in the unfolding crisis ▪ Potential troubles with reaching out to new “non-traditional” humanitarian actors and making sure that they adapt into their work traditional humanitarian principles