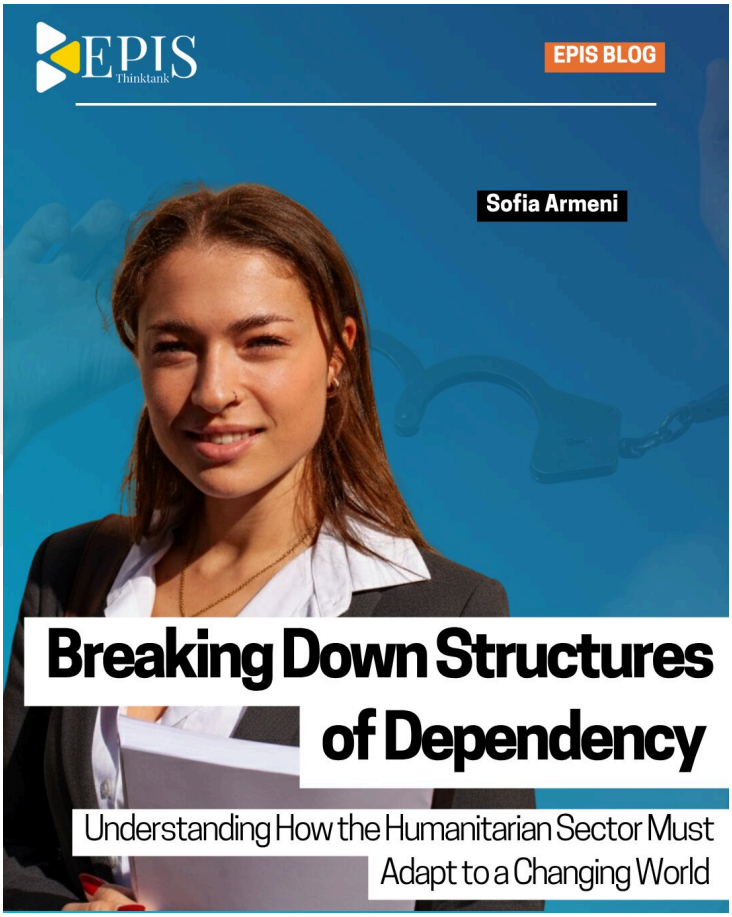
Breaking Down Structures of Dependency

25 MAY 2026

Sofia Armeni



The Humanitarian Congress in Berlin: Breaking Down Structures of Dependency

The Humanitarian Congress in Berlin opened engaging debates, with the participation of key actors in the humanitarian sector, such as the CEO of The New Humanitarian Dr. Tamman Aloudat, General Coordinator of Medecins Du Monde in Ukraine Sandrine Chopin, and Head of the Legal Division of the ICRC Dr. Cordula Droege. The overarching theme of the event was how the humanitarian sector has changed throughout the years,

contextualising its development in light of changing norms, shifting powers, and the increasing digitalisation of modern society.

Dependency in Humanitarian Aid

One major event that stood out was the restructuring of USAID and its consequences on the humanitarian sector, given that the U.S. has historically been the biggest donor. The reduction of USAID operations by the Trump administration has created massive gaps in the sector, which has historically strongly relied on U.S. funding. As a consequence, many field operations had to close and crucial funding made transportation and the delivery of crucial goods extremely difficult, posing serious obstacles to the allocation of valuable resources. Although this loss has and will keep having a negative impact on humanitarian aid, it sheds light on the urgency to change the system and dismantle the relationship of dependency between NGOs and the U.S. as well as between NGOs and aid recipients. The dependency link that creates a high level of reliance between these three actors (recipients, NGOs, and single donors) should be minimised in order to avoid a domino effect once stakeholders decide to cut funds.

Building a More Adaptive and Locally Driven Humanitarian System

Several speakers described the humanitarian sector as a living, active, and dynamic ecosystem that continuously adapts, rather than a static, structured framework. As global crises evolve, humanitarian actors must continuously adapt in order to respond effectively to emergencies. Mahmood Hamada, Laura Rodriguez, and Modi Baburu, discussed what steps have to be taken in order to prevent a situation like this from happening again. First, the funding system must be changed. Pool funds would allow for more diversification in the funding process and reduce reliance on one single actor. Additionally, a flexible funding design, stepping away from rigid portfolios to a more dynamic and adaptive approach, would avoid wasting funds on issues that are no longer as pressing as other problems. As mentioned before, the humanitarian system must be dynamic and adaptive.

Secondly, to break dependency mechanisms, it is crucial that IOs don't replace local sectors or clusters. Humanitarian aid should be used as a tool to strengthen and empower local sectors such as the local healthcare system, not as a way to replace it. Doing the opposite would cause deep structural issues that would result in a crisis once the mandate of international organisations is over. Locals must become active participants rather than mere recipients of aid. This concept has been discussed in existing literature and already applied. However, it needs to be implemented further in order to strengthen the autonomy and resilience of countries receiving aid. As Dr. Hassan Zahid sharply pointed out, top-down approaches are the best way to burn resources, which should be discussed instead with local actors, who are experiencing crises first-hand.

A Multipolar Future for Humanitarian Action

Having said that, relationships between stakeholders will inevitably have to shift, especially after the reduction of U.S. humanitarian funding. Despite

the many ideas advanced, namely pool funds and local participation, it is impossible to ignore the fact that a substantial portion of funding has been dissolved, and this gap will somehow have to be bridged. This raises the question of whether a new country will take a leading role in humanitarian aid or whether the system will become multipolar and permanently move away from reliance on major single donors.

EPIS