

# Reforming the OIC's Humanitarian and Relief Efforts Strengthening Institutional Resilience and Triple Nexus Integration

Volkdal, Christina Plesner

*Document Version*

Final published version

*Publication date:*

2025

*License*

Unspecified

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Volkdal, C. P. (2025). Reforming the OIC's Humanitarian and Relief Efforts: Strengthening Institutional Resilience and Triple Nexus Integration . Centre for Business and Development Studies. Centre for Business and Development Studies. Policy Brief No. March 2025/2

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# Reforming the OIC's Humanitarian and Relief Efforts: Strengthening Institutional Resilience and Triple Nexus Integration

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Christina Plesner Volkdal

## Introduction

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) plays a critical role in addressing humanitarian crises across its 57 member states, many of which face protracted conflicts, climate-related disasters, and forced displacement. As the second-largest intergovernmental organization after the United Nations, the OIC operates within a complex geopolitical landscape that requires coordinated and adaptive humanitarian responses. Despite its extensive reach and potential influence, the OIC's humanitarian and relief efforts remain constrained by fragmented institutional structures, limited financial sustainability, and challenges in integrating humanitarian assistance with long-term development and peacebuilding efforts.

This policy paper critically examines the institutional and operational constraints that impede the OIC's ability to deliver sustainable and effective humanitarian interventions. Drawing on comparative insights from the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the paper identifies structural inefficiencies and proposes targeted institutional and policy reforms to enhance coordination, financial sustainability, and the integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches.

The paper further explores key thematic areas, including institutional resilience, disaster preparedness, Triple Nexus integration, localization, digital transformation, and financial sustainability. Through a critical assessment of

these issues, this paper provides an evidence-based foundation for discussing potential reforms that could strengthen the OIC's humanitarian architecture.

## 1. Strengthening Institutional Coordination for Effective Humanitarian Response

The OIC's humanitarian coordination remains fragmented, lacking a centralized operational hub comparable to the AU's Humanitarian Agency or ASEAN's AHA Centre. This absence of structured coordination mechanisms limits inter-agency synergy and crisis response effectiveness.

The OIC plays a vital role in addressing humanitarian crises in Muslim-majority states. However, its fragmented governance structure, lack of centralized coordination, and reliance on voluntary funding have hampered its effectiveness. Unlike the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which have established structured humanitarian coordination bodies such as the AU Humanitarian Agency and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre), the OIC lacks an operational hub for emergency response and resilience-building (Cakmak, 2021; Svoboda et al., 2015).

Beyond the establishment of a centralized humanitarian coordination unit, the OIC must institutionalize cross-regional coordination mechanisms to enhance inter-agency synergy. This entails harmonizing mandates across Islamic humanitarian organizations, strengthening

interoperability with international humanitarian actors, and creating standardized operating procedures for response mechanisms to ensure coherence and efficiency in crisis management, such as an OIC Humanitarian Operations Centre (OIC-HOC) under the Islamic Cooperation Humanitarian Affairs Department (ICHAD). This body would function as the primary mechanism for overseeing crisis response, fostering inter-agency coordination, and streamlining aid delivery in line with international best practices. Strengthening regional engagement through field offices and integrating Regional Humanitarian Hubs (RHUs) would allow the OIC to improve response efficiency and align with localized needs, similar to AU's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (AU, 2020). To improve institutional coordination, the OIC must establish an OIC Humanitarian Operations Centre (OIC-HOC) to centralize emergency response, foster inter-agency collaboration, and integrate regional humanitarian hubs to ensure localized response effectiveness.

## 2. Expanding Capacity for Disaster Preparedness and Response - Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies

The OIC remains predominantly reactive in its crisis response approach due to the absence of a structured Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) framework. Without proactive risk mitigation strategies such as early warning systems and pre-positioned supply hubs, disaster response efforts are often delayed and inefficient. Also, the OIC's ability to effectively manage humanitarian crises is hindered by the absence of pre-coordinated logistics and supply chains. Learning from ASEAN's DELSA model, the OIC should establish regional supply hubs in high-risk areas to ensure the rapid deployment of emergency relief. Additionally, investing in early warning systems and disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies, similar to AU's African Risk Capacity (ARC), can enhance preparedness and mitigate crisis impacts (AU, 2020).

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a crucial but underdeveloped aspect of the OIC's humanitarian framework. The lack of proactive measures means that the organization is often reactive rather than preventative in its responses to disasters (OIC & SESRIC, 2023). To systematically embed Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) into its humanitarian strategy, the OIC should develop a regional DRR framework aligned with international mechanisms such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Emphasizing anticipatory action, early warning system development, and pre-coordinated disaster logistics hubs, this approach will enable the OIC to move from reactive humanitarian responses to proactive risk mitigation.

- Develop a regional DRR strategy aligned with international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.
- Establish a risk forecasting and mapping system to anticipate humanitarian needs and deploy preemptive action (FAO, 2021).
- Strengthen community-based DRR programs, incorporating traditional knowledge with modern risk management approaches (Hilhorst, 2018).

A key limitation in the OIC's humanitarian operations is the limited technical expertise and operational capacity within its member states. Capacity development is critical for improving long-term sustainability and response effectiveness. To achieve this, the OIC should:

- Establish an OIC Humanitarian Training Academy in collaboration with universities and humanitarian agencies to train professionals in crisis management, supply chain logistics, and peacebuilding (Schmidt, 2024).
- Develop standardized guidelines and frameworks to improve coordination among member states, ensuring uniform and efficient humanitarian responses (ILO, 2024).

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- Promote knowledge-sharing initiatives, including regional exchange programs and joint simulations, to foster best practices among humanitarian actors (Volkdal, 2024).

To institutionalize proactive crisis management, the OIC should develop a regional DRR strategy aligned with the Sendai Framework, establish risk forecasting and mapping systems, and strengthen community-based DRR programs that integrate traditional knowledge with modern risk management approaches.

### 3. Bridging the Humanitarian-Development Divide through the Triple Nexus

The OIC's humanitarian and development efforts remain institutionally fragmented, preventing a seamless transition from relief aid to sustainable development and peacebuilding, unlike the African Union's Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees, and Displaced Persons Division (HARDPD), which structurally integrates humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding mandates. To address these deficiencies, the OIC must formalize a Triple Nexus framework that operationalizes cross-sector coordination, aligns development financing with humanitarian needs, and institutionalizes peacebuilding components in crisis response strategies. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR have operationalized this approach to ensure that displaced populations transition from emergency assistance to self-reliance (Schmidt, 2024). However, the OIC's relief and development efforts remain largely fragmented, with humanitarian interventions managed separately from its development financing through the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) (COMCEC, 2023).

Key Barriers to Triple Nexus Implementation in the OIC:

- **Fragmented Institutional Mandates:** Unlike the AU's Humanitarian Affairs, Refugees, and Displaced Persons Division (HARDPD),

which integrates humanitarian aid with regional peacebuilding efforts, the OIC's ICHAD (Islamic Cooperation Humanitarian Affairs Department) lacks a defined Triple Nexus framework (AU, 2021).

- **Volatile Funding Mechanisms:** The African Risk Capacity (ARC) provides the AU with pre-arranged funding to sustain humanitarian-development interventions. In contrast, the OIC's reliance on voluntary state contributions prevents multi-year, development-focused programming (AU, 2020).
- **Limited Local Integration:** ASEAN's AHA Centre collaborates directly with national disaster agencies, ensuring a localized response model. The OIC, however, lacks a structured mechanism for engaging local civil society organizations (CSOs) (Cakmak, 2021).

To address these gaps, the OIC must:

- **Create a Joint Humanitarian-Development Platform:** This entity should facilitate collaboration between OIC's humanitarian and development agencies, ensuring that relief aid transitions into livelihood restoration programs.
- **Establish a Multi-Year Humanitarian Investment Fund:** Modeled after ASEAN's DELSA (Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN), this fund should ensure predictable financing for long-term resilience projects (Cook, 2021).
- **Enhance Peacebuilding Components in Crisis Response:** Drawing from UNDP's crisis governance model, the OIC should develop post-conflict stabilization programs to address the root causes of displacement (Hilhorst, 2018).

Without integrating the Triple Nexus, OIC-led humanitarian interventions will continue to be short-term and reactive rather than sustainable and resilience-driven. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed structural model for the OIC's centralized

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humanitarian coordination mechanism, detailing its operational linkages with regional and international partners.

To operationalize the Triple Nexus, the OIC should establish a Joint Humanitarian-Development

Platform to align relief and development programming, develop a Multi-Year Humanitarian Investment Fund, and enhance post-conflict stabilization initiatives to address the root causes of displacement.

**Figure: Triple Nexus Framework in OIC Humanitarian Efforts**

Triple Nexus Framework in OIC Humanitarian Efforts



**4. Strengthening Localization and Partnerships**

The OIC’s humanitarian framework remains largely state-centric, with insufficient engagement of local civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots actors (Cakmak, 2021). Without structured mechanisms for systematic integration of local responders, response efforts often fail to align with community-specific needs, limiting their effectiveness and sustainability. Unlike ASEAN’s AHA Centre, which collaborates closely with National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs), the OIC lacks structured mechanisms for systematically integrating local responders (ASEAN, 2020).

To enhance localization, the OIC should:

- Establish formal partnerships with CSOs and local NGOs, ensuring that humanitarian responses are community-driven.
- Implement direct funding mechanisms for grassroots actors, enabling localized and culturally relevant interventions (SESRIC, 2023).
- Develop a regional humanitarian response framework, modeled on AU’s Kampala Convention, to empower member states with crisis-specific solutions (AU, 2021).

To ensure more responsive and community-driven humanitarian interventions, the OIC must establish formal partnerships with CSOs and local NGOs, implement direct funding mechanisms for grassroots actors, and develop a regional humanitarian response framework modeled on AU’s Kampala Convention. These measures will enhance local ownership and resilience.

## 5. Enhancing Humanitarian Diplomacy and Global Partnerships

The OIC's humanitarian diplomacy remains a crucial yet underutilized mechanism for enhancing its global influence in crisis response. Humanitarian diplomacy involves advocating for crisis-affected populations, negotiating access for aid delivery, and mobilizing international resources (Minear, 2002). Unlike ASEAN and the AU, which have embedded humanitarian diplomacy within regional peace and security frameworks, the OIC has yet to establish a dedicated humanitarian diplomacy strategy aligned with its Islamic solidarity principles (Cakmak, 2021). Despite its strategic geopolitical positioning, the OIC has yet to leverage humanitarian diplomacy effectively to advocate for crisis-affected populations, negotiate access to humanitarian aid, or mobilize global resources. Its current approach remains fragmented and lacks institutionalized mechanisms for engagement.

A stronger humanitarian diplomacy framework would enable the OIC to:

- **Strengthen Multilateral Engagement:** The OIC should institutionalize formal partnerships with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the World Bank, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to align response strategies with global best practices (Roberts, 2020).
- **Expand Advocacy for Conflict-Affected Populations:** The OIC has played a role in advocating for Rohingya refugees and Palestinian humanitarian aid, yet its diplomatic engagement in crises such as Sudan and Afghanistan remains limited (Ali & Sultan, 2023). Establishing an OIC Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs would enhance advocacy efforts and improve access to high-level negotiations.

- **Institutionalize a Humanitarian Coordination Forum:** Drawing from the ASEAN Regional Forum's approach, the OIC should convene an annual humanitarian summit, bringing together international donors, civil society actors, and regional bodies to coordinate interventions and funding commitments (ASEAN, 2020).

A strategic expansion of humanitarian diplomacy will not only enhance the OIC's crisis response effectiveness but also solidify its role as a key player in global humanitarian governance. To strengthen its humanitarian diplomacy, the OIC should institutionalize formal partnerships with global humanitarian actors, establish an OIC Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs to enhance crisis advocacy, and convene an annual humanitarian summit to coordinate interventions and funding commitments.

## 6. Developing a Digital Humanitarian Infrastructure

The OIC has not fully utilized digital innovations to enhance humanitarian response effectiveness. Unlike leading international humanitarian agencies that leverage real-time data, blockchain for aid distribution, and AI-driven early warning systems, the OIC lacks a centralized digital platform to coordinate these efforts.

Technological innovation is reshaping humanitarian assistance, enabling real-time disaster tracking, needs assessment, and digital cash transfer programs. The World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR have leveraged blockchain technology to ensure transparent and efficient aid distribution, yet the OIC has yet to establish a digital humanitarian infrastructure (WFP, 2022).

Key Digital Innovation Strategies for the OIC:

- **Launch an OIC Digital Humanitarian Platform:** This system should centralize crisis mapping, data collection,

and impact tracking, similar to the UNHCR Operational Data Portal (Roberts, 2020).

- Adopt Blockchain for Aid Delivery: Islamic financial mechanisms such as zakat and waqf could be distributed via blockchain-enabled smart contracts, ensuring corruption-free transactions (Blockchain for Social Impact Coalition, 2023).
- Expand AI and Mobile-Based Data Collection: Leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) and mobile technology will enhance early warning systems and humanitarian needs assessments, particularly in conflict-affected regions (World Bank, 2023).

By incorporating digital tools, the OIC can significantly improve the efficiency, transparency, and impact of its humanitarian programs. To bridge this gap, the OIC must develop an OIC Digital Humanitarian Platform, adopt blockchain technology for transparent aid distribution, and expand AI-driven analytics to strengthen early warning systems and data-driven crisis response mechanisms.

## 7. Leveraging Digital Innovations for Humanitarian Response

The integration of technology and digital tools into humanitarian efforts is essential for improving response efficiency and transparency. However, the OIC has yet to fully utilize digital innovations in its humanitarian operations (Plesner Volkdal, 2024). The following initiatives should be prioritized:

- Develop an OIC Digital Humanitarian Platform to centralize data collection, crisis mapping, and real-time response coordination.
- Utilize blockchain technology for aid distribution, ensuring transparency and reducing corruption in fund allocations (Roberts, 2020).

- Expand the use of mobile technology and AI-driven analytics to track displaced populations and facilitate efficient aid delivery (AU, 2021).

## 8. Enhancing Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Action

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises, yet the OIC's current humanitarian strategies do not systematically integrate gender-responsive policies. The lack of representation of women in leadership roles further hinders gender-sensitive decision-making and program implementation. Gender considerations are often overlooked in the OIC's humanitarian strategies, despite the fact that women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises (Cakmak, 2021). To foster more inclusive humanitarian responses, the OIC should:

- Integrate gender-responsive policies into its humanitarian action plans, ensuring that aid interventions address the specific needs of women, children, and marginalized groups (FAO, 2021).
- Increase the representation of women in leadership roles within OIC humanitarian institutions to improve gender-sensitive decision-making (COMCEC, 2023).
- Strengthen partnerships with women-led organizations at the community level to enhance grassroots response mechanisms (Hilhorst, 2018).

To promote inclusivity, the OIC should integrate gender-responsive policies into its humanitarian action plans, increase the representation of women in leadership roles, and strengthen partnerships with women-led organizations at the community level to enhance grassroots response mechanisms.

## 9. Improving Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

A lack of standardized monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms undermines the OIC's ability to assess the effectiveness of its humanitarian interventions. Unlike the AU and ASEAN, which implement structured assessment frameworks, the OIC lacks a centralized Humanitarian Effectiveness Index (HEI) to measure impact (OIC & SESRIC, 2023).

To address this, the OIC should:

- Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure humanitarian effectiveness across response, recovery, and resilience phases.
- Develop real-time impact assessment tools, following UNHCR's Operational Data Portal, to track aid distribution and ensure accountability (Roberts, 2020).
- Institutionalize independent audits and third-party evaluations, ensuring transparency and reducing inefficiencies in humanitarian operations (ILO, 2024).

To enhance transparency and efficiency, the OIC should establish key performance indicators (KPIs) for humanitarian effectiveness, develop real-time impact assessment tools, and institutionalize independent audits and third-party evaluations.

## 10. Enhancing Financial Sustainability Through Structured Humanitarian Funding

The OIC's dependence on voluntary contributions from member states leads to financial unpredictability and aid politicization, limiting its ability to sustain long-term humanitarian programming.

This contrasts with the AU's African Risk Capacity (ARC), which pools resources through pre-arranged

funding mechanisms, and ASEAN's Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN (DELSA), which ensures pre-positioned relief stockpiles (Cook, 2021; AU, 2021). To mitigate these constraints, the OIC should develop an OIC Humanitarian Trust Fund (OIC-HTF) based on Islamic financial instruments such as zakat, waqf, and sukuk (COMCEC, 2023).

An integrated risk financing mechanism is also essential. Drawing from the AU's ARC model, the OIC should establish a contingency fund that pre-allocates resources for crisis response. This approach would reduce dependency on politically driven donations and ensure predictable, needs-based funding. Additionally, leveraging private sector engagement through partnerships with Islamic financial institutions and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives would broaden the OIC's donor base (Ali et al., 2022).

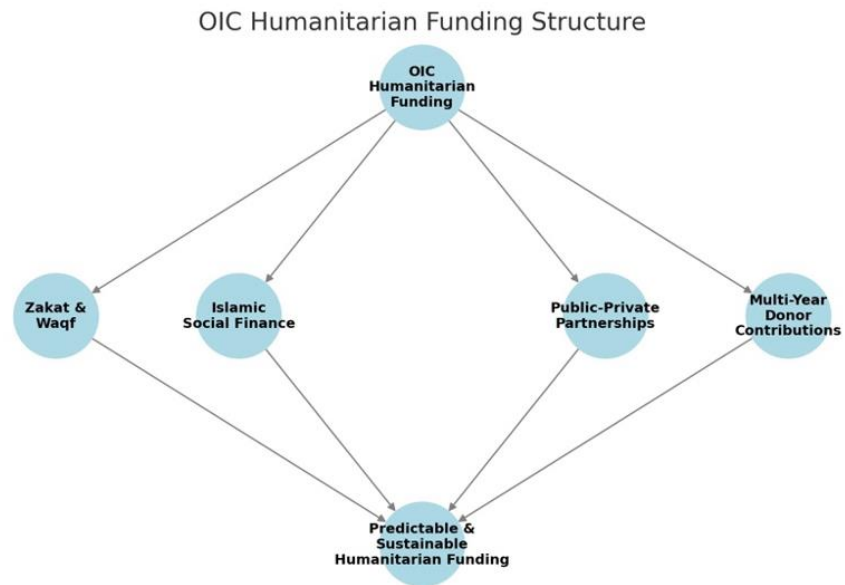
Recent disruptions in global humanitarian financing, including the withdrawal of USAID funding, underscore the need for financial diversification. The OIC must mitigate dependency on voluntary contributions by developing an integrated risk financing mechanism modeled on the AU's African Risk Capacity (ARC) and ASEAN's DELSA, ensuring sustainable and apolitical humanitarian funding sources.

To address financial instability, the OIC must develop an OIC Humanitarian Trust Fund (OIC-HTF) leveraging Islamic financial instruments such as zakat, waqf, and sukuk, while also establishing a contingency fund modeled on the AU's African Risk Capacity (ARC) to mitigate funding disruptions.

Figure 3 presents a proposed financial framework for the OIC's humanitarian funding structure, highlighting the integration of Islamic social finance instruments such as zakat, waqf, and sukuk to establish a sustainable funding pool for long-term humanitarian programming.



**Figure: OIC Humanitarian Funding Structure**



**Conclusion**

The OIC's humanitarian and relief efforts must undergo significant institutional and operational transformation to meet the growing challenges faced by its member states. This policy paper has highlighted critical gaps in the organization's existing framework, including fragmented governance, inconsistent coordination mechanisms, reliance on voluntary funding, and the limited integration of development and peacebuilding strategies. Without addressing these structural weaknesses, the OIC risks remaining a reactive actor rather than a proactive force in global humanitarian response.

To enhance its effectiveness, the OIC must establish a centralized humanitarian coordination unit, similar to the AU and ASEAN models, to improve inter-agency collaboration and crisis management. Strengthening disaster preparedness through regional risk reduction strategies and pre-coordinated logistics networks would enable the organization to move beyond emergency response and build long-term resilience. Furthermore, adopting a Triple Nexus approach—integrating humanitarian action, development programs, and peacebuilding—would ensure more sustainable outcomes for crisis-affected populations.

Financial sustainability remains a major challenge, necessitating the creation of an OIC Humanitarian Trust Fund (OIC-HTF) that leverages Islamic social finance mechanisms such as zakat and waqf to provide predictable and needs-based funding. Additionally, embracing technological innovations, including digital humanitarian platforms and blockchain-based aid distribution, could improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

Finally, strengthening localization efforts through direct engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs), grassroots responders, and women-led organizations is crucial for ensuring culturally and contextually relevant humanitarian responses. The OIC’s ability to implement these reforms will determine its future role as a humanitarian actor capable of addressing contemporary crises with greater coherence, agility, and long-term impact.

Implementing these structural and policy transformations will enable the OIC to evolve from a reactive humanitarian actor into a globally recognized leader in crisis management. Institutionalizing the Triple Nexus framework, establishing a sustainable financing model, and

operationalizing cross-sector coordination mechanisms will enhance the OIC's ability to deliver humanitarian assistance that is coherent, adaptive, and resilient in the face of complex global crises.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christina Plesner Volkdal is a PhD Fellow at Copenhagen Business School, affiliated with the Department of Management, Society, and Communication. Her research centers on the Triple Nexus, an innovative intervention approach that bridges humanitarian operations, development programs, and peacebuilding efforts. With a background in the UN, particularly in humanitarian coordination, and an approach as a participant observer, she leverages first-hand experiences to offer profound insights, enriching her contributions to the field.

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