**Aid cuts and challenges in International Cooperation.**

The modern system of international cooperation began to take shape in the 1960s, during the era of decolonization and newly gained independence for many nations. Through their Official Development Assistance (ODA), developed countries started providing financial, technical, and operational support to less-developed nations in their journey toward modernization.

Initially centered on "economic growth," the focus of international aid expanded in the 1970s to include broader socio-economic goals. A complex multilateral development cooperation system emerged, aiming to address global challenges such as poverty, hunger, child mortality, and disease control. It also gave impulse to progress in areas like peace and security, protection, education, health, gender, rural development, environmental sustainability, and social and economic reforms. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 provided a holistic framework integrating social, economic, and environmental dimensions and enabling more systematic tracking of progress.

Humanitarian assistance—which we can define as the provision of principled, neutral, needs based, impartial and independent life-saving support to civilian populations affected by conflict, economic shocks, or natural disasters—also became a critical component of ODA. Since the 1970s, such assistance has grown exponentially. Hundreds of millions of people in crisis situations have been helped, and millions of lives rescued and saved through complex and often dangerous humanitarian interventions in areas affected by economic downturns, violence, or disasters.

However, a significant transformation appears to be underway today, potentially ushering in a new era for international cooperation. Despite growing global humanitarian needs, international aid flows are being severely reduced. After a decade of steady increases, global ODA began to decline in 2023. In 2025, most donor countries—starting with the United States and several major European and Asian nations—implemented drastic and unexpected cuts, in the order of 40% for the US and other European countries. However, being the US the single largest contributor to global ODA and to humanitarian operations, the relative impact of US cuts is much larger.

The immediate effect of such drastic and unplanned cuts has been dramatic. Many development and humanitarian programs around the world are today critically underfunded. Abrupt cuts are disrupting essential services which will lead to increased mortality and morbidity among the world’s most vulnerable populations. Millions of people—particularly women, children, and the elderly—across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and parts of Europe will lose access to crucial assistance. Countries facing humanitarian crises will no longer be able to sustain key programs in health, food security, childcare, and disease control. The lack of essential services will also drive more internal displacement, affect urban centers and spark new migration flows. Rising poverty and hunger will fuel more social unrest and political instability, exacerbating existing crises and potentially igniting new ones—thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence, poverty, and underdevelopment.

Although there are no official metrics yet to quantify the full impact of the 2025 funding cuts, it is evident that the decisions made in donor capitals will have long-lasting consequences on what increasingly appears to be a massive, unfolding, man-made humanitarian crisis.

For the mid and long term, if the current trends of sustained reductions in aid budgets continue, the world might be facing a profound reshaping of the international cooperation system. While new opportunities may arise, such as efforts to increase efficiency, what we may be witnessing is a deeper structural shift—from a relatively principled although imperfect multilateral aid system committed to promote human development, to an increasingly fragmented, politically driven, and transactional cooperation system, aligned with donor-country interests. This is a transformation bearing far-reaching implications which calls for serious reflection and debate at national and international levels.