

Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes and Civil Society

Observation Notes II

14 April 2023



Over two months have elapsed since the earthquakes of February 6, 2023, which inflicted substantial damage across 11 provinces in Türkiye. Civil society organizations (CSOs) persist in their diversified endeavors, initiated in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. As the Third Sector Foundation of Türkiye (TUSEV), we are committed to compiling post-earthquake trends and developments within the civil society sector in the second installment of our Observation Notes, initially published in February, while offering our recommendations for CSOs to effectively maintain their operations in the short, medium, and long term.

General Observations

Despite the passage of two months since the earthquake, the field continues to exhibit a pressing demand for essential resources such as shelter, water, and hygiene. Additionally, the provision of vital equipment for individuals with special needs remains a critical concern.

Addressing the necessities of those who relocated to various provinces following the earthquake, in tandem with catering to the needs of individuals residing within the earthquake-stricken region, continues to be a crucial matter.

Resuming production in the affected provinces to the greatest extent possible and increasing support in this area are among the prominent issues contributing to the reconstruction of life in the region.

Swift removal of debris and expeditious reconstruction of demolished structures necessitate meticulous planning and close monitoring, as they continue to be pressing matters requiring attention.

It is noteworthy that legal regulations concerning civil society have been relaxed through decisions and decrees specific to the post-earthquake period. Two significant examples include the Foundations Council's decision dated February 13, 2023, and the Presidential Decree No. 128 dated March 3, 2023, which enable foundations and associations to engage in disaster-related activities regardless of their purpose and field of work.

Civil Society Organizations

CSOs working in the humanitarian aid sector continue their efforts in providing and coordinating essential needs. Additionally, they are diversifying their activities to address more complex problems that have become evident over the past two months. Ensuring that interventions are gender-sensitive remains crucial, and prioritizing community-based protection interventions is also a key focus.

CSOs working in specific focus areas (such as education, children, health, disability, human rights, women's rights, LGBTI+ rights, migrant rights, animal rights, etc.) continue to identify the needs of the communities they serve and devise solutions accordingly. They utilize their expertise in the field by producing and disseminating knowledge, organizing workshops, and other methods. CSOs conducting monitoring activities in the earthquake region publish detailed reports on needs. Furthermore, CSOs engaged in mapping the needs within their fields of work are also noticeable.

Protection and intervention efforts are observed to be concentrated primarily in the city centers affected by the earthquake. Some CSOs working on the field have shifted their focus from city centers to districts, towns, and villages, concentrating on the needs of individuals who cannot access support mechanisms in the centers.

Professionals and CSOs working in the field strongly emphasize the necessity of addressing the construction of new settlements with a holistic, human, and environment-centered approach rather than solely focusing on housing construction. CSOs are making urgent calls for action centered on this issue.

CSOs are observed to be making efforts to incorporate areas not previously within their scope of work but identified as needed in the earthquake region. For instance, many CSOs that had not previously worked in the field of psychosocial support are planning to allocate some of their resources to this area in response to the emerging needs in the earthquake region. CSOs wishing to work in this field are holding meetings to evaluate opportunities for collaboration and joint action.

Preventing the increase in school dropouts and early and forced marriages following disasters like earthquakes are among the issues emphasized and prioritized by CSOs working in the field. The creation of safe spaces for women and girls and safe learning environments for school-aged children and adolescents in the region are urgently needed.

One of the most significant potential areas of collaboration for CSOs is sharing spaces allocated for social activities in the container cities being established. The importance of CSOs collaborating during the process of obtaining permissions required to operate in these areas is emphasized, and discussions are held to facilitate such collaboration.

Networks, platforms, and monitoring committees, established to coordinate efforts in specialized areas emerging after the earthquake, draw attention to human rights violations affecting children, women, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTI+ community, and migrants in the earthquake region, conveying their urgent demands regarding access to fundamental rights to relevant ministries and public institutions.

CSOs, networks, and platforms operating in the field continue to call for volunteers to support their work. As the reconstruction of life in the region is expected to be a long-term process, the need for volunteers persists.

Strengthening and supporting local CSOs remains crucial in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process. Moreover, it has been noted that collaboration between local CSOs and those from outside the earthquake-affected region, as well as effective coordination among their professional and volunteer teams based on specific needs, is a crucial aspect to consider.

Rights-based organizations are initiating efforts to monitor human rights and ensure the effective, fair, and dignified delivery of humanitarian aid. Legal departments of CSOs, professional chambers, and bar associations provide expert support for legal processes related to citizens in the earthquake region (evidence collection, litigation, and monitoring processes).

Individual and corporate giving will continue to be of great importance for CSOs in the upcoming period. Therefore, establishing open communication in line with the principles of transparency and accountability is becoming increasingly important. The expansion of regular giving is crucial.

Boosting the capabilities of organizations that have evolved in terms of financial and operational capacities to aid the region in the aftermath of earthquakes is increasingly becoming a prominent concern.

Individuals

Individuals continue to participate in volunteer-based activities, but the CSOs' calls for volunteers in the field indicate that participation is not as intense as it was in the initial days after the earthquake.

Taking into account and addressing the requirements of volunteers on the ground, such as providing shelter, ensuring hygiene, and offering well-being support, continues to be a vital concern.

Individual giving practices are becoming more diverse. Individuals residing abroad are progressively turning to crowdfunding platforms as a means to offer assistance to the earthquake-stricken region. Additionally, they also view organizations offering grants to Turkish CSOs as feasible avenues for support.

People are actively engaging in solidarity networks created to bolster local producers within the impacted area.

During this time, solidarity networks connecting neighborhoods function as vibrant communication channels, facilitating assistance for the earthquake-affected area through civil initiatives in addition to neighborhood mukhtars' offices. These communication groups strive to safely obtain and distribute essential supplies to the earthquake-stricken region. Simultaneously, voluntary search and rescue teams are being established across various neighborhoods and districts.

The number of structures formed by individuals using their own resources and expertise to meet the in-kind needs of the region is observed to be increasing. Groups consisting of individuals working primarily in the food and beverage sector come together to address the daily nutritional needs of the region, carrying out food distribution and establishing soup kitchens through long-term planning.

Experts across disciplines such as design, architecture, and anthropology collaborate in a concerted effort to reconstruct and revitalize devastated living spaces, employing transparent, participatory processes that facilitate the generation of innovative and effective solutions. Open-source guides and manuals are being made available.

Prominent individuals are discernibly leveraging their communication channels to shed light on the persistent needs within the earthquake-stricken region and to expedite the provision of resources and assistance to alleviate these pressing concerns.

International Philanthropy and Grantmaking Organisations

The establishment of new grant programs is currently underway, aimed at providing support to local civil society organizations, as well as fostering their participation in endeavors aimed at rebuilding the fabric of life within the earthquake-affected region. Moreover, support programs are being introduced to activists who seek to carry out their initiatives within the region.

Diaspora giving continues to play a pivotal role in supporting CSOs that are engaged in post-earthquake activities in Türkiye. Furthermore, organizations that provide financial support to Türkiye from abroad are diversifying their fundraising efforts through various means such as charity bazaars (kermes), solidarity concerts, and the like.

International philanthropy organizations are able to support organizations in Türkiye directly through grants, as well as through previously affiliated entities, thereby channeling their support effectively.

The significance of grantmaking organizations' agility and ability to make prompt decisions, as well as their capacity to augment resources, remains paramount for the organizations operating in the field, as well as in addressing the requirements at hand. In this regard, it has been observed that there is an increased focus on planning for medium to long-term support beyond the initial emergency needs, directed towards fulfilling the long-term requirements.

Among international philanthropy organizations, two distinct approaches are being adopted when it comes to extending support: those who prefer to channel their aid quickly towards emergency needs and those who opt to provide aid in the long term when the requirements become more diversified.

The significance of national and international grantmaking organizations' planning for and evaluating potential collaborations in implementing mid to long-term rehabilitation efforts cannot be overstated. Nonetheless, it is often highlighted that during the planning phase of the assistance to be allocated towards the earthquake-affected region, it is crucial to prioritize the determination of local requirements by the local stakeholders and to ensure that the receiving organization has a significant role in the planning process.

Private Sector Organizations

Private sector organizations continue to share their resources towards meeting the post-earthquake requirements. Some companies are looking to establish container cities in consultation with public institutions.

Amidst private sector organizations, some have established direct links with CSOs to address post-earthquake requirements and share their resources and capabilities. Giving scholarships to students is one of the methods that stand out in such collaborations.

The number of organizations initiating employment programs for those affected by the earthquake has begun to rise.

Institutions operating particularly in the fields of culture, art, and entertainment organize events under various themes to provide regular support to civil society organizations operating in earthquake-stricken areas.

Recommendations

The continued operation of civil society organizations in their areas of expertise and strengthening their capacities to work more effectively is of great importance not only during this period but also in the medium and long term. As a result of our monitoring activities, we believe that the following recommendations should be considered and implemented by all relevant stakeholders, including relevant public institutions:

- The experiences during this process have once again revealed the constraints of the legislation to which CSOs are subject, particularly the law on aid collection. While efforts were made to address these constraints during the specified period through the issuance of circulars and decisions, the pressing need for a comprehensive legal framework fostering an enabling environment for civil society, yielding lasting and solution-focused outcomes, persists. Legislation concerning CSOs should be formulated with a dynamic, adaptive, and progressive approach.

■ Regulatory measures that incentivize individuals to engage with CSOs ought to be put into effect. Mechanisms aimed at enhancing the relationship between individuals and CSOs, encompassing volunteering and giving, should be instituted, and incentives provided to promote regular and impact-driven individual donations.

■ The execution of programs designed to support CSOs operating locally in the earthquake-impacted region and its periphery remains vital for the sustainability of reconstruction efforts. Grantmaking organizations, international philanthropy institutions, and private sector entities should prioritize a participatory approach and practical methodologies when planning their support in this sphere, implementing adaptable and long-term projects tailored to local needs. Ensuring the inclusion of those affected by the earthquake in addressing the necessities within the disaster area is also a crucial aspect requiring prioritization.

■ Effective collaboration founded on equitable partnership should be established between public administration and specialized CSOs, devoid of discrimination, with respect to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations affected by the earthquake.

■ Assisting CSOs that have experienced financial and operational growth during this period, in accordance with their needs, and reinforcing their capacities have emerged as important matters. In this context, it is essential to bolster the institutional capacities of CSOs operating in the earthquake zone and those undertaking activities targeting the affected area by facilitating access to the required support.