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Lending Hands to Someone is Better than Giving a Dole

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–*Aditya Choppa*

Those who are happiest are those who do the most for others. According to Dalai Lama, our prime purpose in life is to help others. Helping each other is what makes us humans special. Compassion and altruism are the basic components of humanness. Even the most hard-hearted person might have helped someone in need at some point of time. Helping others is the fundamental characteristic of humans, but different people do it in different ways. Some tend to donate money to charitable organisations, some people give money to the poor directly, some people volunteer to do social work, while some create work for others. It is important to understand which type of help is most beneficial to humankind. As a Chinese proverb says, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." This essay gives examples of alternative ways of helping people that are more helpful than just donating money.

Recently, Chennai experienced one of the worst floods in over 100 years. Life had come to a standstill. The repercussions were such that almost all aspects of life were affected in the city, from public transport, railways, flights to electricity supply. In such crisis, help poured in from different corners of the world. Many contributed to flood relief fund. But this help couldn't reach the Chennai residents in time as the transportation facilities were derailed. This money could be only used for rehabilitation. But the helping nature of the locals, the various business entities in Chennai and initiatives by tech companies helped immensely in avoiding a major disaster. Individuals opened their houses while schools, movie theatres and marriage halls welcomed families and persons who needed a safe and dry shelter. Facebook initiated a Safety Check feature for Chennai floods, BSNL gave users in Chennai free local and STD calls, Paytm gave residents of Chennai a Rs 30 recharge to help them stay connected during floods, Ola joined hands - and resources - with the Chennai fire department to help residents reach their homes safely and Zomato launched 'Meal for flood relief' wherein people could order free meals for flood victims. Chennai floods made

people united and take efforts to combat the disaster. Clearly, the helping hand lent by individuals and different companies helped the Chennai flood victims more than the money donated to the flood relief fund.

This principle can be seen in our day-to-day life too. Many of us tend to give money or food to beggars. This doesn't really help them to get out of poverty. In India, begging is quite often carried out in organized gangs. Beggars have also been known to deliberately maim and disfigure themselves to get more money. In these circumstances, real help would be, to provide some source of livelihood to them, rather than giving them money which incentivises them to continue their lifestyle. It would be more compassionate to buy an item from a street hawker, even if we don't require it, to provide him livelihood. Many of us tend to donate money to different welfare organisations, orphanages, old-age homes, NGOs etc. But some of them could be just scams, while some organisations may waste money on managerial duties instead of actually helping the needy. It would be much more useful if we give clothes, blankets, food or time to these organisations depending on the need. Instead of giving money, it would be much more useful if one can lend his/ her expertise to help others. For example, a teacher can provide free tuitions for the poor, a doctor can volunteer some time in a week at a free clinic, a lawyer can provide his legal services to the poor and a software engineer can help in decreasing digital divide. In this way, one can ensure that their contribution directly benefits the people in need.

In democratic states, the governments have a tendency to provide a number of freebies, especially during election year. Loans are waived, electricity is subsidized, water is subsidized, free television and laptops are given and so on. But the need of the hour - better governance, timely public services, corruption free state, good public infrastructure, good business environment, reliable law and order etc - are not provided. If there are no irrigation canals, the subsidized fertilizers are of no use to a farmer in drought years. If there are constant power cuts, the subsidized electricity doesn't help the industries in the area. Providing free education without increasing the number of quality teachers doesn't solve the problems of education. Clearly, doling out money instead of providing good governance is not a step in the right direction.

Even in international relations, the utility of rendering a helping hand rather than giving aid in money can be recognized. America has been giving billions of dollars in aid to Pakistan to keep a lid on the Taliban issue. Much of the American money is not making its way to frontline Pakistani units. Money has been diverted to help finance weapons designed to counter India, not Al Qaeda or the Taliban. This is an illustration of how aid money can be wrongly utilized and in fact can be counter-productive to the intended purpose. In contrast, India's aid to Africa is quite productive as it contributes by supporting human resource development, building Pan African e-network which now connects 48 African countries, increasing foreign direct investment, sending peacekeeping forces etc. Clearly, there is larger scope for misuse of financial aid than the aid provided in

kind. Projects like developing roads, developing human resources, constructing dams, providing medical services in countries like Afghanistan will not only ensure that aid has reached the deserving people, but it will also increase the goodwill towards the country providing aid. This principle can be used in Climate Change negotiations too. More than the money given for the less developed countries to counter climate change, giving them technology that enables development at lower carbon emissions will help them more. This has to be recognized and focus should be on transfer of technology rather than on increasing money for Green Climate Fund (GCF).

It is not that money and financial resources are unimportant, in fact they are essential part for success of most of the humanitarian efforts. While a major disaster during the Chennai floods was averted due to the helping nature of the locals, the rehabilitation was possible because of the money donated by philanthropic people. While some of the beggars are part of an organized gang, there are a lot of people languishing in poverty who do need financial assistance. Social security net for the poor is essential even in developed countries. Many under-developed and developing countries do need aid money, so that the help received can be utilised in accordance to the needs at ground level. Clearly, money is intrinsic part of most of the help being given, but one should recognize that there is much more to helping others than just providing money. Doling out money should not become the de facto method of helping others. There are many more valuable ways in which one can help others. Giving financial help is just one of the ways.

Helping others should be the primary motivation of any human being. The help need not always be in the form of donating money. Rendering a helping hand through offering services or expertise is much more valuable. Moreover, one should recognize the kind of help that is required. Different circumstances require different kinds of help. In the example of Chennai floods, the most appropriate help at that time was to provide shelter and food, which could be arranged at a short notice, thanks to the helping nature of Chennaites. In most circumstances, one should help people help themselves. As Henry Ford has said, "Time and money spent in helping men to do more for themselves is far better than mere giving".