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Qatar's Humanitarian Diplomacy

Compassion as Statecraft

In an era where humanitarian action increasingly shapes global perceptions, Qatar has emerged as one of the most visible and consistent donors in the international arena. For a state with a small geographic size and limited military capacity but vast economic resources, humanitarian diplomacy offers an alternative form of influence—a means to project soft power, build legitimacy, and contribute to global society through compassion.



Referring to the use of humanitarian action to advance diplomatic objectives, secure access during crises, and shape international perceptions, humanitarian diplomacy has historically been dominated by Western institutions, particularly the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. However, in recent years, non-Western actors like Qatar have increasingly become influential humanitarian actors. What sets Qatar apart in this competitive domain is not merely the scale of its assistance but the way it weaves aid into a broader narrative of solidarity, moral responsibility, and diplomacy.

Rooted in the Qatar National Vision 2030, this orientation towards humanitarian action reflects Qatar’s broader ambition to couple national development with global responsibility through compassion-driven diplomacy. Through its humanitarian engagement, Qatar projects an image of a small but globally conscious state—capable of mediating conflicts, mobilizing aid, and shaping discourse in international forums.

Building a Humanitarian Architecture

The foundations of Qatar’s humanitarian system have evolved over the past two decades, collectively defined by central actors such as Qatar Charity (QC), the Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS), the Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, and the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD).

These institutions are formally independent yet closely aligned with national foreign policy priorities. Their combined portfolios span over 60 countries

and multiple sectors, including emergency relief, education, health, livelihoods, and infrastructure. In 2023, QC’s operations reached more than 10 million people worldwide with an intervention volume of USD 328 million (QC 2023: 11), while QRCS assisted 6.5 million beneficiaries in 29 countries, focusing on health and disaster response (QRCS 2023: 9). EAA has enrolled over 12.3 million out-of-school children through its global “Educate A Child” initiative (EAA 2024: 6), and QFFD disbursed over USD 500 million in relief and development financing across 62 countries (QFFD 2023: 11). This institutional coordination reflects not only administrative efficiency but also a deliberate projection of values—solidarity, generosity, and moral responsibility grounded in Arab-Islamic ethics. Humanitarianism, in this sense, becomes an expression of culture and identity as much as a tool of diplomacy.

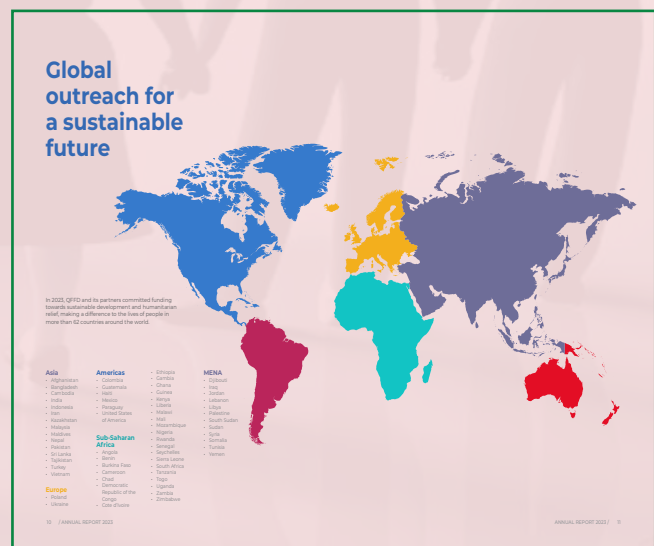


Figure1: Global Distribution, Source: QFFD (2023: 10-11). <https://exsjwzu9tz6.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/QFFD-AnnRpt23.pdf>



From Regional Crises to Global Engagement

Qatar’s humanitarian diplomacy first gained prominence during the Arab Spring, when it became a central donor in conflict-affected countries such as Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Gaza, among others. In these volatile contexts, aid served both as a stabilizing force and a way for Qatar to position itself as a credible and independent actor amid regional polarization.

In Gaza, Qatar’s assistance is highly visible and symbolically charged. Established in 2012 by His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Qatar Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza has overseen projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars, from housing and hospitals to power infrastructure (MOFA, n.d.). Beyond reconstruction, Qatar’s institutions continue to deliver health, education, and psychosocial support through partnerships with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the World Health Organization (WHO), and other agencies. These efforts underline Doha’s enduring

commitment to Palestinian resilience and regional stability—what scholars describe as a form of “moral diplomacy.”

In Syria, Qatar has contributed more than USD 2 billion in humanitarian aid since 2011, supporting refugees and internally displaced communities through initiatives like QFFD’s QUEST program and EAA’s education projects (QNA, 2022). By working with UN partners such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program (WFP), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Qatar embeds its regional assistance within multilateral humanitarian frameworks, reinforcing its reputation as a responsible global actor (QFFD 2023). In Somalia, Qatar’s humanitarian diplomacy extends into East Africa. QC, QRCS, and QFFD have implemented programs in water security, food distribution, and health services that reach millions of Somalis annually. These interventions have not only improved livelihoods but also strengthened Qatar’s presence in the Horn of Africa, where development cooperation often complements its





Balancing Principle and Power

While Qatar’s humanitarian diplomacy has elevated its international profile, it has not been without controversy. While some critics have accused Doha of politicizing aid or aligning with specific actors in conflict zones, these debates also reveal how humanitarian diplomacy itself has become a site of geopolitical contestation—a way for small states to assert influence through legitimacy and peaceful means rather than force.

Qatar has sought to address such critiques through institutional reforms and transparency measures. The establishment of the Regulatory Authority for Charitable Activities (RACA) followed regional tensions and centralized oversight of NGOs to ensure compliance with international standards. This step was both a governance reform and a diplomatic signal: Qatar’s humanitarian system operates within the norms of global accountability, not outside them. By aligning cultural authenticity with international best practices, Qatar has crafted a distinctive humanitarian model that bridges moral conviction with diplomatic pragmatism (balancing values and interests).

At its core, Qatar’s humanitarian diplomacy

embodies the idea that aid can be both altruistic and strategic. Its interventions are grounded in the Islamic principle of ta’āwun (cooperation) and the cultural value of karam (generosity), yet they simultaneously advance soft power by cultivating trust and moral authority.

Looking Ahead: Towards a Plural Humanitarian Order

Qatar’s experience illustrates a shifting humanitarian landscape—one that is increasingly multipolar and culturally plural. Its model of centralized coordination, cultural legitimacy, and strategic multilateralism offers lessons for small states seeking influence through cooperation rather than coercion. Rooted in the Qatar National Vision 2030, Qatar’s humanitarian diplomacy advances both foreign policy and a broader vision of compassion, cooperation, and sustainability. Its continued credibility, however, will hinge on transparency, diversified partnerships—especially South–South collaborations—and the integration of sustainability and climate resilience. As global crises intensify, Qatar shows that influence can stem not from power, but from moral responsibility and a sustained commitment to human solidarity.