Rethinking Humanitarianism
Episode 1
COVID-19 and BLM: A New Era for Aid?

HEBA: The world has changed pretty dramatically in the last few months. COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter movement have really shaken things up, and in the aid sector they may dramatically change many of the things that have long been taken for granted.

JEREMY: But it's not clear that this will be a turning point for crisis response. The humanitarian sector has been trying to reform for 15 years, but it still allocates money and power in much the same way as it did when I started this work 20 years ago.

HEBA: So, will this moment fundamentally change how the aid sector does business? In Geneva, Switzerland I'm Heba Aly, director of The New Humanitarian.

JEREMY: And in Washington D.C. I'm Jeremy Konyndyk, senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development. We are your co-hosts for Rethinking Humanitarianism, a new podcast series exploring the future of aid.

HEBA: Jeremy and I have basically been having a friendly debate on this subject for years, I remember when you were heading up the humanitarian aid team for the Obama Administration and tracking you down at conferences and grilling you on these kinds of questions.

JEREMY: I do remember that.

HEBA: Now you're friendly about it, of course, but at the time I'm sure you were thinking: Who is this pesky journalist who won't leave me alone? But it's kind of neat to see that pesky journalist and the former government official now in the same virtual podcast studio.

JEREMY: And those debates have certainly shaped and informed my own views on the humanitarian sector. And part of what led us to doing this podcast was a feeling that there's a gap in that kind of dialogue about the future.

HEBA: So in this episode, our first, we're going to talk about this current rethink happening in the sector. We've often seen in the past that expectations for change fall flat, the distribution of money and power in the sector are pretty resilient actually, and it can be hard to predict what's going to drive big change versus a doubling down of the status quo.

JEREMY: So will this moment trigger a genuine rethink of humanitarianism or, as we've seen in the past, will it just tinker on the margins. Joining us today to talk about all that, and to examine what a global reset might mean for the aid sector, is Danny Sriskandarajah, the CEO of Oxfam Great Britain. Welcome Danny.

DANNY: Hi Jeremy, hi Heba.

JEREMY: So we're really excited to have you on the show today because you're a long time critic of the big powerful NGOs in the big powerful aid industry yet now you're running part of that industry. You've been making some really interesting changes to how Oxfam operates and some changes that maybe give a preview of how big NGOs will operate in the future.

HEBA: And I think it's quite neat to hear from someone who hasn't been a lifetime humanitarian, so to speak, you've had experience in many different corners of the wider, if I can call it, social good world: from your work as the head of Civicus, the civil society network, to your work with the UN Secretary General's panel on humanitarian financing, and really looking at at how money flows through the system. So we are hoping you are ready to tackle some difficult questions.

DANNY: I'm looking forward to the conversation.

JEREMY: Before we dive in, we want to ask you a question that we're going to be putting to every guest on our show as we try to rethink what the humanitarian aid sector could look like. So what is one weird quirk in the humanitarian world that to you just makes absolutely no sense, doesn't seem logical.

DANNY: For me, it's the intermediation that goes on in our system. You know we've got countless different institutions that have evolved sometimes with very good reasons, but today just feel like an overly complex system for moving money or shifting power. And I think we really need a reboot if we're going to make the system better fit for purpose.

HEBA: What I have always found to be kind of immediately strange is: in no other sector in the world would you have the same sets of agencies assessing the needs, responding to those needs, and then reporting back on the quality of their response. Which would anywhere else be considered a conflict of interest, but in the humanitarian sector it's just perfectly normal.

JEREMY: I think the only place in the world where you would see logos on a latrine is in a refugee or IDP camp. I have been in many many of them in my career, as I'm sure both of you have as well, every time you go in you see whether it's a UNICEF logo or Save the Children logo or sometimes because Oxfam does a lot of WASH even an Oxfam logo on a latrine. I can only imagine what the people using that latrine must think of the fact that they have to see an NGO logo every time they do their business. That illogicality flows from the business model, flows from this fact that, as you said Danny, people have to brand down to the camp level on where their money flows in order to kind of claim credit to plant their flag for what they're doing – even if that means putting a sticker on a latrine.

HEBA: You know there have been these long-standing challenges with the sector for decades, among them the ones we've just mentioned, and now the world is just being so shaken up by COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter and there feels like there's some real impetus for change in a

way that we haven't seen in the past. So to your mind, what is the most pertinent, urgent wake-up call that these recent developments have forced? What is the rethink that needs to happen right now?

DANNY: I think this moment, as you say, where the challenge of responding to coronavirus and Black Lives Matter have, for me, really sharpened the focus on money and power, and how those flow through our system. Money because we are living through potentially the great reversal when it comes to progress on on poverty and vulnerability, where it's very likely that by the end of the year more people will have died of hunger caused by COVID-19 than the disease itself, and yet the resources that have been made available to address that vulnerability are tiny. And so the very contradiction that we've known has laid at the heart of the international humanitarian system, i.e. that this is relatively small amounts of money that are hardly solving the problem, have been brought to bear now.

I think we are facing arguably the biggest humanitarian emergency that our generation has seen and the response has been you know pitiful. In many ways, and especially if you work for a civil society organisation, many of us are still waiting months on for donor money to flow through the system, to trickle down through the UN and other intermediary institutions, to get to not even just us but to the frontline responders who are better placed than ever before because of the mobility constraints to be able to respond. And then of course power. You know for me at Oxfam in particular, I think one of the great learnings and really important learnings from Haiti for us was about the importance for institutions like ours to be conscious of power, to be aware of how power and the abuse of power works. And I think Black Lives Matter is a wake-up call around building the next generation of institutions that put equality, inclusion, racial justice at their heart particularly in the development or humanitarian sector because, in many ways, many of our institutions have grown out of the colonial project. So we owe it to that legacy to pay sort of double attention, if you will, to how race and power work or interact in our own sector. These are all eternal issues but I think this is the moment where we have to tackle how money flows and how power works in our sector.

JEREMY: I think there's such an interesting convergence right now between these two dimensions: on the one hand we have the traditional business model which does concentrate a lot of the power and the money into the big organisations. And COVID is putting that under strain, for all the reasons that you've just said, that it is really that business model has really struggled to deliver resources to the front lines. My colleague Patrick Saez and I wrote a blog post about that a few a few weeks ago, you're just looking at the scant amounts of money that have reached frontline organisations even as the big traditional organisations have received the bulk of the humanitarian donor funding, and that in turn reinforces these unequal power dynamics. It's very difficult for frontline organisations to have more of a voice, to have more influence, when they don't have access to the resources within the existing business model.

What I find interesting, and what I'm curious for your take on, is this going to change that? Because I had expected, and have written about this as well back in the spring, that you know the limitations of the current crisis, the inability to move people around the world as easily, the

inability to deploy teams because every country is stretched everywhere, so you can't really surge. I thought that might be the thing that forces a rethink and a new approach to how the system is being financed. And instead, I think what we've seen is a doubling down that everyone has kind of retreated to their familiar corners and worked through their familiar systems.

So what's your take on what it would require to begin changing some of that? And, are you optimistic based on what you're seeing that maybe there is some movement in that direction?

DANNY: I'm optimistic from what I'm seeing, certainly from what's happening around the Oxfam confederation. And some of it is just out of necessity, I remember reading very early on in the pandemic about what was happening in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, where we and others wanted to mount a response around public health around hand washing and we couldn't get anyone in because there was sort of such severe lockdown. But it turned out that we had I think about half a dozen Oxfam Jordan staff members who lived near enough to the camp. None of them, I think they worked in IT and admin, but none of them had public health training. But very quickly our colleagues in Amman did some remote training for those folk who then led our response in the camp and, you know, that's again out of necessity. We are becoming hyper local, if you will, and I think there is the journey that all of us are on. I mean to me that was the big message out of the World Humanitarian Summit about the importance of localisation and if ever there was a reminder of the critical importance of having first responders close to where the need is this is it.

I'm also optimistic about the impediments to travel leading to a fundamental rethink about how INGOs where the entire sector work, at Oxfam we've hardly had anyone travel for six months and that's been a great discipline in in terms of asking ourselves: "Do we need to move people in the ways that we have traditionally done?" I'm not saying that every response will necessarily be local because I think one of the value-adds of a network like ours is that ability to build from below but also act beyond borders. That the sort of progress that we need to make towards a more just sustainable world isn't going to happen just through local action alone. I think it's going to need that sort of glue that connects it across in solidarity with others, just at scale, that can then challenge bigger institutions – especially at the global level. But the way that we all do that, the way that we've assumed we've had to do it, I think will change and I hope coronavirus is the sort of tipping point if you will.

HEBA: I heard you once talk about the sexual abuse scandal in the same kind of language, which is: "We got forced into the journey, it just so happened to be the right journey." And I would agree with that and maybe the reason that in the past reforms never became reality is because the system wasn't optimal, but it was still working. And now it's gotten to the point where, from my point of view, the system is just not viable anymore. No matter which way you cut it.

So you talked about the money: Financially we're about to see huge cuts likely to overseas development assistance and yet the needs are going to be skyrocketing. So you're going to

have huge shortages operationally. You've just talked about how complicated it is and Jeremy was talking about how do you surge when the crisis is everywhere. And then ethically, all of the questions on power that are now unavoidable. So for me it's gotten to the point where it's no longer an option, it is an inevitability. And yet I wrote a piece, I think it was in June, so kind of a couple months into the pandemic, to look at how COVID was going to transform humanitarianism because at the beginning that was the feeling, right? There would be a before and after COVID, and everything was going to change, nothing would ever be the same. And then you started looking at the reality and, in fact, so one hypothesis was this was going to transform the business model because donors would be looking to fund the agile small organisations that are on the ground and yet we saw, as Jeremy mentioned, all of the money continuing to go to, in fact going *even more* to the big actors, that this was going to be the heyday for locally led humanitarian response. And yet, from the interviews that I did, local actors felt like nothing had really changed for them.

And so I just wonder, how you see the kind of force of the status quo and how representative your experience of this change actually happening on the ground is more broadly.

DANNY: Well, again, I am optimistic and in some ways it feels a bit like what I presume the Asian tsunami of 2004 felt like for the sector, but with different implications if you look for example at what happened in 2005/6, certainly the INGO sector, is huge amounts of new income comes through a small set of actors, who then scaled up rapidly. And it was a sort of proof of concept of the need or the importance of that sort of international system to deliver aid and expertise.

In some ways I think this will be a greater disruption, it won't be perfect but it'll lead us towards further localisation and further investment in capacity closer to the ground. And in some ways I'm sanguine about it, because for me the job at hand, I've been 18 months here at Oxfam, I'm clear about what our mission is going to be, which is to try to lead by example here. As, you say, I think Haiti was a really important lesson for us around the nature of our organisation and we've made some changes. But we want to go further in terms of shifting power and shifting resources and that's it's already been difficult, difficult before COVID, but in some ways we are committed to this journey of trying to fundamentally change the nature of our own sort of Oxfam system, if you will, and it comes back to the point I was trying to make about 1942, which is we predate the aid system and in some ways our aspiration is to become a global network that can last long after the aid system is wound up. And that it's going to be painful because we are, for example, over the next few years going to be changing our sort of operational footprint where we're drawing from direct operational activity in several countries, but in others we are going to be increasing our our unrestricted investments so that we can offer safe, quality, holistic programming in some of the most fragile contexts in the world. And we're also diversifying our own network.

Oxfam was founded in Great Britain as we expanded into international confederation we became a network of affiliates. Those affiliates happen to be only in the Global North. In recent years Oxfam has increased its Southern presence, there have been Oxfams in South Africa, in

Mexico, and Brazil. Our ambition now is to diversify that network further so, again if you look at us in a few years time, I hope we really will resemble that sort of next-gen social justice network that will still do operational things that will be able to scale or surge, as you say Jeremy, but doesn't do so in a way that limits the ability of local actors to have sort of self-determination, if you will.

JEREMY: I'm really interested and intrigued by this idea of the future of the big INGO model being as a global social justice network with an operational component to it, as opposed to the big sort of operational component standalones that we see now in most NGOs. For Oxfam moving in that direction partly, I think it's your own organisational history and culture, but partly also it's been prompted by this this funding crisis and reputational crisis that Oxfam has been through over the past few years. It's kind of necessitating some change. For organizations that haven't faced that do you think they have an incentive to go in the same direction? Or if that is the future or a future for international NGOs, what's the forcing function that's going to lead people there?

DANNY: I think there's a structural forcing function that you see if you look at other parts of the global economy so I often look at other international entities especially in the corporate world and see how they've evolved you know take a Coca-Cola, for example, founded in Atlanta, operated through direct country operations in much of the Global South, but increasingly operates through franchises. Or if you look at the PWCs or the Mckinseys of the world, tremendous growth in Southern entities that have come in as equal members of the network, if you will. And so one forcing function in some ways I think is that the world is changing around us just as sort of economic and geopolitical balances are shifting. I hope so too will the sort of civil society landscape in terms of where money and power is held and that has to happen. I think the other is around donor behaviour and forcing some of the institutions to modernise. And, of course, the third factor, which you know I celebrate, and it's to your point Heba about the Black Lives Matter movement, which is that people taking power calling out bad behaviour and neocolonial behaviours. We need that because that's the sort of check against the sort of complacency that I think sometimes we're guilty or we have been guilty of.

HEBA: So can you walk us through what it looks like to try to change an organisation from the inside the way you're doing? Because I talk about rethinking humanitarianism all the time and I feel like people are looking at me thinking: "We get the vision, but we have no idea how to make it a reality." And it feels so far removed from the current state of play to say, "we're going to withdraw from 18 countries." I mean that's huge. So how did you get there and I suppose what pushback did you get along the way? This must not have been smooth sailing.

DANNY: Yeah it hasn't been, but it's been better in some ways than I had expected. I mean right from even before, when I applied for this role I said, "look you've had a safeguarding crisis that you need to address, but really your fundamental challenge is you need to reimagine what you're for and how you add value in the rest of the 21st century." I didn't even think I'd get an interview, and yet here I am. And that's I think because the Oxfam GB board realised that this sort of fundamental change was the best way to respond. If I think about conversations with my

confederation colleagues when we come together as a network, the last 18 months have been far more cohesive and productive than I had expected because I think in our case, maybe we're unusual, we really do share this sort of drive towards reform and modernisation, because the platform has been burning in some ways for us and we want to we need to show that we are modernising and adapting and learning from the past.

But the other bit that's been really important for us is we are multi-mandate, or very broad, we're not a single issue organisation. And so for us, it's been about thinking: well we don't want to retreat into becoming a single issue organisation. There are plenty of others who do a great job in their own areas of specialism, but how do we retain a focus and show clear value-add. And for us that journey has led us to think about fragile contexts and the most difficult operational environment. So those countries we're going to be investing more in are the Yemens of the world, or the Syrias of the world, the DRCs of the world, where I think local capacity is weak definitionally.

In some ways, if you're talking about a fragile context where INGOs can and do add value. And where I think for me the sort of penny dropped was when I visited Yemen last year, where I saw almost the Oxfam aspiration work potentially at its best. Because we were there delivering humanitarian programmes in the North and the South and in hugely difficult contexts with all sorts of challenges, but delivering life-saving work at the same time. You know to me I encountered these examples of protection work that colleagues were doing often with local partners so it wasn't just about piping water or building the toilets with the logos, Jeremy, but it was also about making sure that we are taking protection seriously and that we are taking civil society strengthening seriously. And then the third bit of the sort of Oxfam puzzle, if you will, or the Oxfam offer, is you know back in the UK we're taking the UK government to court to challenge the legality of arms sales to the Saudi regime because of the humanitarian impact in yemen of those of those weapons and ammunitions. And if you take that together you get the sort of the role that we can play: that we are there to do the sort of human interventions and the sort of holistic way, but above country we're also adding value in terms of standing up and speaking out. It's always full of all sorts of tensions and to your point however, not everyone has exactly the same vision but I think in Oxfam again maybe we're unusual. The stars have aligned broadly enough around a certain vision which I do think we we share and we're committed to trying trying out

JEREMY: And I imagine part of the challenge there for you as a CEO is that you have to do all these things you have to move towards a big compelling vision for the future of the organisation, but you also have a change management process. You have to keep the lights on you, have to meet your payroll every month, you have to do the day-to-day business of running a big bureaucracy. So, how do you decide when you're close enough to that vision or you've gotten there? And how do you approach those trade-offs, of the deeper transformation with the day-to-day practicalities of the organisation?

DANNY: Yeah, that I'm grappling with that as we speak. We are in the middle of a very difficult and painful change process in Oxfam GB, where we've unfortunately had to reduce several

hundred posts here in Oxfam in the UK. That's never easy because these are amazing colleagues who are deeply passionate about our mission. But in some ways in order to keep the lights on today, and to give ourselves the best chance of thriving in the future, I think we have to change. In our case, it's also about shifting resources to other parts of the network so that we don't become so, or we don't remain, so sort of heavy in the North, in the global North. I think it's also about being clear about the sort of the journey that we're on and to me that's as important, to be clear with our supporters as it is with ourselves.

I don't know about other other contexts, but in the UK if you look at the proportion of people who've said they donate to international development charities, that proportion has fallen from 30 odd percent five years ago to 19 late last year, and that's before COVID. And so we're in an environment in which trust in charities and NGOs has fallen. Where there is a very competitive market and in the UK, and I suspect elsewhere as well, the interest and support for international development is falling. And so, again, one of the value-adds of INGO networks like ours, who can bring unrestricted income to the picture, is that we can inspire people who are our supporters to volunteer their time, donate their clothes to our shops in the UK, or donate money to us. And part of this is also about refreshing the offer, if you will. Because again there's lots of evidence to suggest that particularly for international development, donors are a bit tired of the sort of the story of "broken Africa" or the messaging of helpless people. We need to refresh that as well, and so there is a complex set of challenges there as well around organisational sustainability. And one other sort of anecdote that comes back to the sort of the value-add of organisations or networks like ours,

I remember early on in my tenure going to see Filippo Grandi the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. UNHCR is a massive player and often organisations like Oxfam are sub-contractors, but Filippo was very clear he said, "look in some ways I'm jealous of Oxfam because you guys have unrestricted income, you have a massive supporter base who you can mobilise, to not just raise money but to campaign on the issues that you know that matter to you, and you should play to those strengths." This is soon after I'd arrived at Oxfam and was trying to find where's the source of the confidence for organisations like this ,and I think part of that has to be about what we can bring. Which is not just unrestricted money, not just this ability to spend restricted money, but it's also this idea that we are a network of people committed to these issues.

HEBA: You keep coming back to that social justice network, and I think that's probably an under explained part of the rethink that I think this moment is demanding. And by that I mean, if you look at the big crises that have just faced the world, the answer was not bags of rice and tarpaulin, right? In the face of COVID what people needed was equal access to hospitals. And we saw that your social class affected how hard you were hit in the face of the Black Lives Matter movement, which if it had happened anywhere else in the world would have been considered on the verge of a humanitarian crisis in terms of what was happening on the streets and the protests and the police reactions and so on. Again, the need there was social justice, it wasn't service delivery. I was just giving an interview about the state of the humanitarian system and you know there's this question around relevance and it says: "How well is humanitarian aid performing on this question of relevance?" and then you have to ask yourself what are the

biggest needs today and to what extent is humanitarianism responding to them? And then you end up in a social justice place and not in a humanitarian aid delivery place, and yet that completely transforms the traditional conception of humanitarianism. So how does that work you? For all these humanitarians that have whose very identity is shaped around the idea that they are objective, apolitical, neutral et cetera, suddenly being thrust into all of these issues that for you are very fundamental and core to the way it has to work.

DANNY: Let me say it before I go on to answer that neutrality and independence and those core humanitarian principles are hugely important and we do need especially in this day and age to protect them. Because there is value of having those sorts of actors. But from where I sit at Oxfam, I often end up going back to 1942. Back to those eight people who started the Oxford committee, and they did two things but by implication they did a third thing as well which to me is really important, as relevant today as it was in 1942. They raised money and transferred it to the Greek Red Cross by the way. Oxfam didn't have staff, didn't have professional humanitarian workers for many years after that. So they just transferred it to the local act of the Greek Red Cross to deliver the the food relief, and then they set about writing letters to the Churchill government to stop the policy of blockading Nazi occupied bits of Europe that were causing the famine in the first place. So they were campaigning. They did both of those things, but in that they also did the third thing which is, in the deep dark days of the second world war they were building civil society in Britain. They were social capital bridging, capital building this value of civic action, people, involuntary action.

In some ways I think COVID and 2020 have huge parallels to that moment. We are living in an era where we have unconscionable levels of suffering, of unnecessary death, and livelihoods being ruined which we can do something about. We have to, and we have an obligation to take action, but we know that as you say bags of rice ain't going to do it. And so we have to go and challenge the systems and structures that are driving poverty and justice and inequality. And again I take huge pride in some ways of working for an organisation that has stood up, who published a report calling out the excessive profits being made by the world's largest companies that have had almost windfalls from COVID. Now if you take Amazon for example, the share price and the value of the shareholdings have skyrocketed. And yet we're struggling to feed people who are going hungry. You know Jeff Bezos could pay every single Amazon worker a hundred thousand dollar bonus, and still have more money than he did at the start of the pandemic. So you know, I'm proud to be part of an organisation that stands up and talks about those sorts of things, or stands up and talks about the need for a people's vaccine that's free for everyone on the planet and not hogged by the richest countries in the world. I'm proud of an organisation that challenges policies on debt and challenges governments and private sector lenders.

HEBA: But is that the future of humanitarianism?

DANNY: No, I don't know about that. I think the future of Oxfam is about to try to do both of those things and connect the dots along the way, while also making sure which bits of our system are best placed to do so. In Indonesia, or in Kenya, or in South Africa, or in Mexico we

don't need much help or resourcing from external to get on with the job, but it's really important that in all of those places we have a sort of member of the network. And if you take Turkey, for example, Oxfam Turkey by the way is KEDV an amazing women's rights organization that's been around for many decades that has chosen to join the Oxfam confederation, and that's our future. That we become this global network who can deploy when needed, surge when needed, but also challenge and speak truth to power at scale. I'm not being naive enough to say that everyone needs to be like that, because you know the ICRC should not necessarily change overnight to become a debt campaigning organisation.

JEREMY: I think that's a fairly safe bet. I think it's an interesting parallel, what you related about the comment from Filippo, that the conditions that come on the funding you get really define the space that an organisation has available to it, so Oxfam in part can do some of those things because you've traditionally had a large private donor base. You're not principally dependent on big institutional donors or exclusively dependent on big institutional donors for your resources. I think that probably is a message for foreign organisations whether NGO or UN that both diversifying your funding base, which is not an easy thing to do, opens up this kind of opportunity. But I think it's also a message to the donor community to be more intentional about the conditions and the expectations that they're placing on their partners. Coming from a donor background myself I think the donors probably aren't intentional enough about that. I think they would like to see organisations change in certain ways, but maybe don't do enough to recognise the ways their own funding, their own kind of conditions, either enable or impede that kind of change.

DANNY: Look when I was a member of the UN High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, that was certainly one of my takeaways from that experience. That donors do have a huge responsibility here. They're not the only actors that have to change their behaviours, but I think donors do. And part of it is if you broaden the scope to the development sector more generally, I think institutional and private foundation donors or philanthropy need to be clear about when they see civil society as a means and when they see it as an end and whether they see it as both. It's because you know if we are simply implementing partners for humanitarian aid, for a long-term development project, competing with, say, private sector contractors, it's not particularly interesting and it doesn't speak to the power and value of civil society. But if you see a strong, resilient, independent, vocal civil society as an end in itself, and you're committed to that strengthening project, you might behave differently, you might do different. You might fund differently with more unrestricted or core resourcing. You might you know build into that flexibility and again COVID response so much of our of colleagues early days in this COVID response was spent talking to donors about repurposing existing grants. And in some cases that was relatively easy to do because donors understood and said, "go on just get on with it deliver, deliver." But in some other cases it was more difficult because you have to go through the bureaucratic imaginations of a system that's been built on conditionality.

JEREMY: To that point there was a report, I think in the New York Times that USAID's COVID funding was delayed pretty significantly because they were arguing amongst themselves over branding requirements. We get in our own way sometimes.

HEBA: And this is, maybe just to conclude Danny, like the thing that I keep struggling with in my mind you know you're talking about this incremental approach that you're trying to take within Oxfam but it also depends on so many other players for it to have the kind of wide scale impact that I think many people believe this moment demands in terms of transformation. Just after George Floyd's death we we hosted a discussion at The New Humanitarian and had a number of Black American activists there who you know were basically talking the language of revolution, "we have to tear it all down, this whole system is is corrupt, it is colonial and there's no way of fixing it. We just have to start over." I'm struck because we're about to publish a series of um commentaries on the future of aid and we had asked you to submit one. And there was a line in it that really struck me, which is that we don't have to wait, how did you put it? We don't have to wait for the systematic overhaul to start doing better. And yet that's really hard. So what advice would you give to others that are kind of thinking about this on the way forward? Keeping in mind that there are all those people that are kind of ready to burn the whole thing down.

DANNY: I'm not going to bet on whether change is more likely to come from within or without, because I think we you know each of us, each institution needs to work out, or each person needs to work out, where they might fit. How best are they placed to contribute to the project? And it might be that in some cases taking power, a radical rethink, entirely new institutions that work in different ways, with different incentives, might be exactly what we need. But on the other hand, I happen to work for one of the larger bits of an institution in this ecosystem, and I think that's the responsibility that we have, which is those of us who are within the system need to transform and to change as best as we can. And that's the journey that we're on. It's going to be very difficult, to your point earlier Jeremy, to know when and how we've been successful with the product. Especially because this is going to be ongoing. But it has to happen.

I keep coming back to, "what's civil society for?" And yes, we are there to as a force of compassion, as an actor to get things done when states and markets have failed, but we also have these other roles that are really important and in some ways even more important today than they were say a few years ago because of democratic decline, of closing civic space, collusion between political and corporate elites, and the rise of nationalism. So I think each of us, each institute, particularly in civil society, have to work out what's our role in this picture and be bold and be brave about where we want to add value. Again I've been spending all of this time talking about Oxfam, which is a peculiar and in some ways an outlier on the rest of civil society right? The vast majority of civil society is informal, it's small, it's networked in a different way, it works through different processes. I think we need to celebrate that diversity and sort of build off it, if you will, but it can't come at the cost of what we started, where we started this conversation, which is a sort of sub-optimal landscape where we just have too many people, doing too many things, that confuse and sort of block progress. It comes back to your fundamental question: is this a tipping point, is this a turning point? I certainly hope so and we will do, and I hope I will do, as much to make it that as I can.

JEREMY: Danny, thanks so much for joining us, for this conversation today it's been really really insightful. We want to end on a question we're going to put to every guest, which is: what is your million dollar, wave magic wand idea for the humanitarian sector? What would be the kind of big, radical, maybe unimaginable idea or shift that you think could have a hugely meaningful impact on the work that we do?

DANNY: Can it be billions or trillions?

HEBA: I think you can go to town.

DANNY: A global fund for social protection. I think there's been increasing talk about universal basic income, about social protection flaws, and I think you know one of the lessons, I hope, from COVID is that we do need to get serious about what we as humans offer each other as a basic minimum and we need to fund it. And it won't cost much.

HEBA: Just billions and trillions.

DANNY: But far less than we've been spending on fiscal interventions to prop up airline industries or whole other sectors in recent months.

HEBA: So Jeremy, when you're back in government one day you can keep that in mind.

JEREMY: I'm sure I'll have trillions at my discretion.

HEBA: Danny thank you very much for joining us, it's been a great conversation.

DANNY: Thank you both very much.

HEBA: This was the first episode of Rethinking Humanitarianism, a podcast series exploring the future of crisis response brought to you by The New Humanitarian and the Center for Global Development. If you've got any thoughts on Danny's million or trillion dollar idea, or anything else you heard today, do get in touch with us. You can tweet your comments @CGDev and @newhumanitarian with the hashtag #rethinkinghumanitarianism. Or if you're feeling a bit more adventurous, record an audio note and send it by email to rhpodcast@thenewhumanitarian.org and then we can actually play it on the next episode.

JEREMY: And in that next episode we're going to be looking at how we got to this point. If the humanitarian sector is a kind of flawed superhero, then we will be exploring the Marvel style origin story. The Rethinking Humanitarianism series is hosted on The New Humanitarian's podcast channel so make sure you get all of the future episodes by searching for The New Humanitarian on your favorite podcasting platform if you like what you're hearing please review it please share it send us some feedback

HEBA: As you probably figured by now, Jeremy and I are both kind of wonky and love this topic to death, so if you're interested in more you can head to thenewhumanitarian.org where we've got a whole series of articles on rethinking humanitarianism or check out cgdev.org where Jeremy and his team have been doing a whole whack of research on humanitarian reform.

JEREMY: Thanks so much for listening in on the Rethinking Humanitarian... and the Rethinking Humanitarianism podcast, please join us next time.

HEBA: And we'll figure out how to say humanitarianism without stumbling.

JEREMY: Every single time.