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STATE-NGO RELATIONS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROCESSES: AN EVALUATION THROUGH THE FEBRUARY 6 EARTHQUAKES[1]

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ABSTRACT

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, or wildfires can profoundly impact human life, infrastructure, and economies, leading to crises that are extremely difficult to repair and may take a long time to recover from, depending on the scale of the disaster. In cases of large-scale disasters, public institutions and organizations may not always be able to address emerging challenges solely with their own resources, particularly during the acute phase. Therefore, alongside public institutions, the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in post-disaster response is of critical importance. NGOs play a key role in disaster management processes by providing rapid and effective interventions, thereby alleviating the burden on the state. However, the collaboration processes between the state and NGOs also bring about certain challenges. To address these issues, it is essential to enhance coordination, reduce bureaucratic obstacles, strengthen mutual trust, and ensure effective pre-disaster planning. A well-functioning state-NGO partnership in disaster management is crucial for developing faster and more efficient solutions during crisis situations. The main objective of this study is to examine and analyze the relationship between the state and non-governmental organizations following natural disasters, discuss the challenges faced, and develop potential solutions. The study is based on data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with NGO representatives as part of a TUBİTAK project, incorporating relevant literature, theory, and research by the authors. The originality of this study lies in the fact that it utilizes interview

[1] This paper was prepared based on interview notes conducted with NGO administrators within the scope of the TÜBİTAK-funded project numbered 323K120, carried out by the authors. We would like to express our gratitude to TÜBİTAK for its valuable support.

notes from NGOs operating in the four provinces most affected by the February 6 earthquakes (Adıyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, and Malatya) within the framework of the TUBİTAK project.

Key Words: Natural Disaster, State, Non-Governmental Organization, Challenge, Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, or wildfires can have devastating impacts on human lives, infrastructure, and economies, depending on their magnitude. In cases of large-scale disasters, the involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) alongside public institutions becomes critically important in post-disaster response efforts. This is because no state possesses the capacity to respond to the destruction caused by a major disaster solely with its own resources. It is also unrealistic to expect states to maintain a constant readiness of human and material resources sufficient for such large-scale emergencies. However, states do possess the capability to incorporate other actors into post-disaster operations in addition to public institutions. This coordination capacity is, in fact, more crucial than the state's own resources. Among the most important actors that states can coordinate in the aftermath of disasters are NGOs, which are flexible and capable of rapid organization.

Due to their familiarity with the local context and their flexible organizational structures, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can provide significant contributions to post-disaster relief efforts. NGOs typically deliver essential services such as food, shelter, medical care, and psychosocial support to populations affected by disasters. However, in the course of carrying out these activities, they may also encounter various challenges.

The difficulty of determining who will be involved in which relief activity, as well as the type and extent of assistance to be provided and to whom, underscores the necessity of pre-disaster planning and coordination. This highlights that post-disaster relief efforts—especially in the case of large-scale disasters—require professional planning and management. Following a major disaster, numerous urgent issues arise, including search and rescue and evacuation challenges; security concerns; disruptions in transportation services; problems related to the procurement, registration, storage, and distribution of humanitarian aid; and temporary shelter needs. Addressing these problems effectively is only possible through coordinated and well-planned collaboration among the state, NGOs, and other relevant actors.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the relationship between the state and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the aftermath of natural disasters, with a particular focus on the February 6 earthquakes, and to discuss the problems encountered while proposing potential solutions. The study is based on relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, and information obtained from interviews conducted by the authors within the scope of a TÜBİTAK-funded project with NGO representatives in Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Malatya, and Adıyaman. The use of interview notes from NGOs that were active in the earthquake zone following the February 6 earthquakes represents the study's original contribution.

1. NATURAL DISASTERS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

This section constitutes the conceptual framework of the study. It provides a brief overview of the concept and types of natural disasters and examines the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in natural disaster contexts.

1.1. Natural Disasters

Natural disasters are catastrophic events caused by environmental processes such as earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. These events often lead to widespread destruction, loss of life, and significant socio-economic impacts, with effects that can persist over an extended period.

Natural disasters, which have shaped the course of human history, have resulted in multidimensional destruction. Originating from geological, meteorological, hydrological, and biological processes, these catastrophes affect millions of people each year. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), more than 200 million people are affected by natural disasters annually (UNDRR, 2020: 18). These disasters occur in various forms.

Geological Disasters; Geological disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and landslides are caused by tectonic activities. For instance, earthquakes occur due to the movement of tectonic plates along fault lines, releasing energy that results in ground shaking. These types of disasters can lead to significant loss of life and substantial damage to infrastructure (Schuller, 2012: 37).

Meteorological Disasters; Meteorological disasters include hurricanes, tornadoes, and severe storms, which are typically triggered by changes in atmospheric pressure and temperature (Vigdor, 2008: 36).

Hydrological Disasters; Floods and tsunamis fall under the category of hydrological disasters. Floods typically result from heavy rainfall, river overflow, or dam failures, whereas tsunamis are triggered by underwater earthquakes or volcanic eruptions (Gökçekuş et al., 2018: 8-9).

Biological Disasters; Biological disasters, such as pandemics and invasions, involve the spread of diseases or invasive species. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is not a typical natural disaster, it qualifies as a biological disaster due to its global impact (Patel vd. 2021: 49).

Natural disasters often result in significant loss of life and property. The destruction of human settlements brings about various challenges. If the post-disaster process is not well managed, it is likely to lead to widespread displacement, public health crises, economic instability, environmental degradation, and increased social inequalities.

1.2. The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Natural Disasters

Non-Governmental Organizations are entities that operate independently from state institutions and typically have a legal basis as non-profit organizations. NGOs vary significantly in size, scope, and mission, ranging from small community-based groups to large international organizations. They engage in a variety of fields, including humanitarian aid, environmental protection, human rights advocacy, education, health, and economic development (Salamon, 1994: 109). The United Nations (UN) defines NGOs as 'organized, non-profit, voluntary citizen groups operating at local, national, or international levels (United Nations, 2025).

Although NGOs often carry out many of their activities in cooperation with governments, they may sometimes face restrictions and opposition from public institutions. In some authoritarian regimes, governments impose legal constraints on NGOs, limit their funding, and may even criminalize their activities (Kaldor, 2003: 133). For NGOs to fulfill their democratic functions and contribute to the development of democracy within a country, they undoubtedly need the freedom to operate independently from the state. The attitude of the state toward NGOs is one

of the key determinants of the extent to which NGOs can contribute to democracy and the resolution of social issues.

There are three approaches in the literature that explain the structure of civil society. The first is Larry Diamond's approach, which defines civil society as a sphere separate from the state and established through the free will of citizens. The second perspective, proposed by Ernest Gellner, characterizes civil society as a structure that fills the existing gap between the family/individual and the state. This approach views civil society as a system composed of intermediary institutions such as trade unions, political parties, religious groups, pressure groups, and associations. The third approach is associated with John Keane, who shares a left-liberal perspective. According to this view, civil society consists of organizations formed by members outside the state that exert pressure and oversight on state institutions, thereby preserving and transforming their identities (Talas, 2011: 390).

It is well recognized that NGOs provide valuable contributions such as ensuring transparency in governance, offering alternative policy options to the government, developing comprehensive and collaborative approaches to local disaster planning and resilience building, and enabling communities to articulate their actual needs and priorities (Çakı, 2020: 4).

The concepts of social assistance, solidarity, and civil society are inseparable from the human element. Humans are the primary actors in issues of assistance and solidarity. These practices are observed in social activities that occur between individuals and communities. Civil society, in turn, constitutes the structures that organize and systematize these social activities. In this sense, there is a mutually reinforcing and nurturing relationship between assistance, solidarity, and civil society (Ok Şehitoğlu, 2023: 339).

NGOs are independent, non-profit entities that can play a vital role in addressing socio-economic, environmental, and humanitarian issues beyond the reach of the state and private sector. In developed societies, NGOs are valued for their contributions to strengthening social solidarity, promoting sustainable development, protecting human rights, and resolving crises. Moreover, they influence government accountability. In this regard, the prevalence and effectiveness of NGOs are considered key indicators of a society's level of development.

In recent years, the effectiveness and significance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been increasingly recognized. Governments, international organizations, and the private sector have been collaborating with NGOs to implement solution-oriented projects and acknowledge their role in addressing social issues. These organizations play a vital role in processes of social transformation and recovery, contributing significantly to overall societal well-being. In communities affected economically, socially, or psychologically by disasters, NGOs fulfill critical functions. The presence of NGOs that specialize in humanitarian assistance is particularly important in post-disaster efforts. In Türkiye, organizations such as AKUT, the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılay), UMKE, IHH, Beşir Association, and Ahbap are among the key NGOs actively involved in post-disaster operations..

Overall, the development of non-governmental organizations in Türkiye is progressing in a positive direction. These organizations play a significant role in processes of social change and improvement, contributing to Türkiye's goals of democratization and social development. However, with increased support, collaboration, and regulatory reforms, civil society can be further strengthened and its effectiveness enhanced.

First, NGOs in Türkiye play a major role in the fields of social assistance and humanitarian aid. Especially during natural disasters, refugee crises, and other emergencies, NGOs respond

rapidly by conducting aid activities and attempting to meet the urgent needs of the population. In this way, it is evident that civil society, alongside the state, contributes to processes of social solidarity and mutual support.

Second, civil society organizations in Türkiye also play an important role in the promotion of democracy and human rights. NGOs focusing on issues such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, fair trial, and gender equality work to hold the government accountable, advocate for policy reforms, and protect human rights. These organizations form a vital force in strengthening democratic values and defending the rights of various segments of society.

Finally, the development of NGOs in Türkiye is supported by the increasing participation and leadership of youth and women. In conclusion, the advancement of civil society organizations in Türkiye plays a critical role in addressing societal challenges, strengthening democracy, and advocating for human rights. Enhancing and supporting the effectiveness of these organizations will contribute significantly to Türkiye's democratic and sustainable development goals (Duruel, 2023: 5).

In Türkiye, there are 107,417 registered NGOs. Among them, those operating in the field of social policy constitute approximately 7.84% of associations and nearly 79% of foundations. However, the proportion of NGOs that possess the actual capacity to deliver humanitarian aid is significantly lower. Nevertheless, during disaster periods, the surge in volunteer mobilization leads to the involvement of NGOs that either do not typically engage in humanitarian aid or have been largely inactive in such efforts. As a result, the density of NGO presence becomes particularly apparent in disaster response contexts. This was also the case during the earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, when, according to official reports, nearly 2,000 NGOs participated on the ground as part of the humanitarian response effort (Taşçı, 2023: 7).

2. THE EARTHQUAKES OF FEBRUARY 6, 2023

On February 6, 2023, two powerful earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 struck the Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye, nine hours apart, affecting 11 provinces across the country. These provinces—Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Malatya, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, and Elazığ—are home to nearly 15 million people. A total of 53,537 people lost their lives, and 107,204 others were injured. According to data from the Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 39,361 buildings collapsed during the earthquakes, including 13,889 in Hatay, 7,490 in Kahramanmaraş, 6,187 in Adıyaman, 5,651 in Malatya, and 4,126 in Gaziantep. Furthermore, over 400,000 buildings, comprising more than 900,000 independent units, became uninhabitable due to the extent of the damage sustained (SBB, 2024)

The fact that the earthquake occurred during the winter season, coupled with the damage sustained by transportation routes and the presence of cold and snowy weather conditions, significantly hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid—particularly during the first two days following the disaster. The vast geographical area affected by the earthquakes posed serious challenges to both search and rescue operations and the coordination of humanitarian assistance. Due to the widespread scale of destruction, non-governmental organizations assumed critical responsibilities in areas where public institutions were unable to provide adequate support. Notably, NGOs played a key role in the distribution of humanitarian aid and food assistance, managing to reach even remote villages.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, an exceptional level of state–society solidarity was observed, with public institutions, NGOs, and citizens from all regions of Türkiye mobilizing aid to the disaster-stricken areas in a highly coordinated and determined manner. Despite these commendable efforts, significant challenges emerged in both search and rescue operations and the provision of humanitarian assistance. One of the key issues stemmed from the lack of effective coordination between public institutions and NGOs, which resulted in the suboptimal utilization of existing resources and operational capacities.

3. STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES IN STATE–CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS IN THE AFTERMATH OF NATURAL DISASTERS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FEBRUARY 6, 2023 EARTHQUAKES IN TÜRKIYE

In the aftermath of disasters, support is provided to affected populations primarily by public institutions (including government agencies and municipalities), as well as by civil society organizations, the private sector, individual volunteers, and international entities. While the initial focus of these efforts is on search and rescue operations, over time, the assistance transitions toward humanitarian aid. At this stage, the role of non-governmental organizations becomes increasingly significant.

Non-governmental organizations possess several advantages in post-disaster relief efforts due to their in-depth understanding of societal dynamics, close relationships with certain social groups, and their distance from the formal structure of state bureaucracy. These advantages should be taken into account by public authorities at every stage of disaster preparedness and response planning.

Disaster management is a multidimensional process that encompasses preparedness, response, recovery, and reconstruction phases (Drabek & McEntire, 2003: 97). Within this framework, state–NGO collaboration plays a critical role; however, in countries where centralized governance prevails, significant challenges often arise in the functioning of this relationship (Diamond, 1999: 45). During the earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, various issues between the state and NGOs emerged in Türkiye. The most prominent of these included problems related to coordination, logistics, and the failure of public authorities to effectively recognize NGOs as legitimate counterparts.

3.1. Challenges in Coordination

Effective coordination in disaster response is of critical importance. However, natural disasters often exacerbate pre-existing coordination challenges or give rise to new ones, such as fragmented communication, overlapping roles, and competition for resources. These issues diminish operational efficiency and, in turn, worsen the conditions of the affected populations.

The involvement of multiple stakeholders—such as local and national public institutions, international organizations, and national and local NGOs—often complicates coordination efforts (Zoraster, 2014: 347). The participation of various organizations can lead to overlapping roles and responsibilities, resulting in inefficiencies and resource wastage. The absence of clearly defined roles and mandates may cause several organizations to concentrate on the same geographic areas or types of aid, leaving other critical needs unmet (Kapucu, 2006: 210). Ineffective coordination can ultimately undermine the overall effectiveness of response efforts. One of the main causes of poor coordination is the failure to establish an effective communication network.

During disaster periods, the lack of adequate information sharing and collaboration between government institutions and NGOs significantly reduces the overall effectiveness of response efforts. One of the most critical challenges following major disasters is determining *who* will deliver *what type* of aid, *to where*, *in what quantity*, and *by what means*. One of the primary responsibilities of the state—tasked with managing post-disaster processes—is to pre-plan these elements by integrating all relevant actors into the process.

NGO representatives interviewed in the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes reported experiencing substantial coordination deficiencies, notably their exclusion from recognition as legitimate interlocutors by governmental authorities. They further indicated that they were systematically omitted from coordination meetings convened by AFAD, the designated coordinating agency, which consequently impeded the effective execution of their relief activities. The fundamental cause of this issue lies in the prior exclusion of NGOs from disaster preparedness planning and the failure of public institutions to acknowledge them as competent and integral actors within the emergency response framework. Moreover, the lack of designated operational zones for the distribution of aid channeled through NGOs, coupled with inadequate support in navigating bureaucratic procedures, significantly constrained the efficacy of their interventions.

3.2. Logistical Challenges in Disaster Response

Damaged infrastructure, including roads, airports, and ports, often constitutes one of the most critical challenges for NGOs operating in disaster-affected areas, as it significantly hinders the delivery of essential supplies (Kovács & Spens, 2009: 96). Moreover, the absence of pre-established supply chains and limited access to local resources further exacerbate the logistical difficulties (Kapucu et al., 2012: 278). For instance, in the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes, the western and southern roads of Malatya were rendered inaccessible due to destruction, and adverse weather conditions prevented air transportation. These factors led to severe logistical disruptions during the initial two days following the disaster. Additionally, aid materials sent to NGOs from other provinces were, in some cases, withheld by public institutions for various reasons. While the centralized collection and distribution of aid materials by public authorities is crucial for effective disaster response management, the coordination of incoming aid supplies faced significant challenges during the post-earthquake period.

The absence of a registry documenting the type and quantity of humanitarian assistance that NGOs are capable of providing in the aftermath of a disaster constitutes a significant logistical challenge. Furthermore, the lack of prior planning regarding the areas of specialization and potential operational capacities of NGOs has complicated post-disaster response efforts. Failure to incorporate such information into pre-disaster preparedness strategies has led to inefficiencies in mobilizing and coordinating NGO activities during critical phases of emergency response.

3.3. The Inadequate Recognition of NGOs as Effective Stakeholders by Public Institutions

NGO representatives interviewed from the provinces most severely affected by the February 6 earthquakes—namely Malatya, Hatay, Adıyaman, and Kahramanmaraş—consistently reported a lack of formal recognition as legitimate interlocutors by public institutions during the post-disaster response phase. Furthermore, some noted instances where their activities were either hindered or delayed. These actors also emphasized the minimal support received from governmental bodies throughout their operational efforts, often necessitating the resolution of

emergent challenges through their own organizational resources. It is posited that the systematic inclusion of NGOs in pre-disaster planning processes, including the assessment of their capacities, and the subsequent integration of these capacities into post-disaster response frameworks, would yield considerable operational benefits in the field.

3.4. Distrust and Competition

Interviews conducted with NGO leaders indicate that, in the aftermath of the earthquake, they perceived a significant lack of trust from public institutions regarding the activities they undertook, which in turn adversely impacted their motivation. This phenomenon may primarily stem from the tendency of public agencies to consider NGO operations as beyond their regulatory oversight, coupled with a concern that the successful implementation of NGO initiatives could potentially harm the public sector's institutional image. Furthermore, NGO leaders reported that the strict bureaucratic procedures implemented by the state during the post-disaster relief distribution and response processes hindered their operational flexibility.

4. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in disaster management is indispensable across the entire disaster management cycle, encompassing pre-disaster preparedness, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery phases. The systematic integration of NGOs into pre-disaster planning and capacity-building initiatives substantially enhances community resilience and preparedness. Moreover, NGO engagement during and following disaster events significantly improves the effectiveness and efficiency of search and rescue operations as well as acute-phase humanitarian assistance. Accordingly, to optimize state-NGO collaboration in post-disaster settings, it is imperative to establish a coherent and comprehensive coordination framework, institutionalize NGO participation in training and strategic planning processes, develop regionally distributed logistical hubs to facilitate timely response, and implement rigorous mechanisms for the documentation and accountability of relief efforts.

4.1. Establishment of an Effective Coordination Mechanism

Effective state-NGO collaboration necessitates the development of comprehensive coordination mechanisms at the national level prior to the occurrence of disasters. This is imperative because the precise allocation and delivery of appropriate resources—in correct quantities, to the designated recipients, within the required timeframe, by appropriate methods, and at the accurate locations—can only be ensured through a robust and well-structured coordination framework.

The establishment of centralized coordination platforms and standardized protocols serves to enhance inter-stakeholder collaboration. The adoption of the cluster approach, as advocated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has been empirically shown to effectively harmonize humanitarian efforts and reduce redundancies (OCHA, 2012: 33).

To effectively integrate NGOs into pre-disaster planning processes, it is imperative to delineate their mandates alongside those of public agencies and to systematically document their operational capacities. The planning framework must explicitly designate which NGOs will be engaged in specific relief activities during and following the disaster, as well as identify the respective coordination authorities overseeing these interventions. Coordination between NGOs and governmental bodies can be optimally facilitated through the Departments of Civil Society Relations operating under the Governorates. Moreover, the Disaster Emergency Action

Plan should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of NGOs to ensure operational clarity and accountability.

4.2. Pre-Disaster Training and Planning Activities

A fundamental factor underpinning the effectiveness of disaster response and post-disaster relief operations is the implementation of comprehensive pre-disaster training and planning activities. Pre-disaster preparedness measures, such as the strategic stockpiling of essential resources and the formulation of detailed emergency response plans, have been shown to substantially reduce response times. Furthermore, systematic training drills and simulation exercises for NGO personnel serve to significantly enhance operational readiness and capacity (IFRC, 2015: 72).

The allocation of specific humanitarian activities to NGOs in the pre-disaster phase should be systematically determined according to their operational capacities and expertise. For example, not all NGOs are equipped with the technical proficiency required for search and rescue operations, whereas others may be primarily specialized in delivering humanitarian assistance. Consequently, it is imperative to establish in advance the precise responsibilities of each organization—such as food distribution, water provision, and the scope of involvement in search and rescue missions—and to formally accredit the relevant NGOs within their designated functional domains.

The vast majority of NGO representatives interviewed in relation to the February 6 earthquakes reported their non-involvement in pre-disaster training and planning activities. They further indicated a lack of awareness regarding the scope and provisions of the Disaster Emergency Action Plan, and stated that no governmental authorities had engaged with them on these issues.

4.3. Establishment of Regional-Level Relief Distribution Warehouses

The procurement and availability of essential relief materials during disaster events are critical determinants of the affected population's survival prospects. The efficient, accurate, and timely delivery of these necessary supplies is contingent upon a rigorous analysis and evaluation of the factors influencing the optimal selection of disaster warehouse locations. The strategic siting of such warehouses holds paramount importance for the effectiveness and sustainability of disaster logistics operations, given that storage functions are as vital as operational activities within the logistics framework. The sustainability of disaster logistics and management hinges on the judicious and efficient allocation of available resources across the pre-disaster, response, and recovery phases, in alignment with clearly defined objectives. Moreover, due to the intrinsic link between ecological disruptions and the occurrence of natural disasters, the disaster logistics architecture must be integrated with a sustainable humanitarian supply chain system (Ergün et al., 2020: 158). Accordingly, it is essential to establish warehouses at the regional level that are capable of serving geographically proximate provinces. These facilities should maintain a continuous inventory of fundamental search and rescue equipment, blankets, tents, heating devices, and other critical supplies, with pre-established logistical plans specifying the transport routes and destination zones for efficient deployment.

4.4. Documentation and Registration of Delivered Aid

Accurate documentation of the quantity, type, and recipients of aid is of paramount importance, especially during the acute phase following a disaster. The February 6 earthquakes revealed recurrent issues wherein certain individuals accumulated aid supplies exceeding their actual needs, while others faced shortages of essential goods. For example, reports indicated that a single household possessed approximately 1,500 loaves of bread. To mitigate such

inefficiencies, it is essential to develop an integrated software system accessible to both NGOs and governmental agencies. NGOs that have been pre-accredited and assigned specific roles would be provided with secure login credentials, enabling them to systematically record detailed information regarding aid distribution, including recipient identities, aid quantities, and types. This platform would facilitate real-time oversight by humanitarian organizations, thereby preventing duplication of assistance and promoting equitable allocation of resources.

5. CONCLUSION

Natural disasters compel the implementation of complex, multidimensional planning processes that necessitate robust coordination mechanisms. Although preventing the occurrence of such disasters is beyond current capabilities, it is possible to minimize their detrimental effects. This underscores the imperative for societies to adopt a holistic approach to disaster preparedness. Crucially, the active engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), alongside governmental bodies and other relevant actors, in the preparedness phase is essential to optimize resource utilization and enhance overall capacity.

Civil society denotes the realm wherein individuals collectively organize autonomously from the state and private spheres, such as the family, to advocate for shared interests and values. Within this domain, institutionalized entities—non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—engage in a wide array of activities encompassing social, economic, cultural, and humanitarian concerns. The interactions between the state and NGOs are of critical significance for the sustenance of a democratic and resilient societal framework. Disaster contexts serve to elucidate the nature of these state-NGO relations by exposing the degree to which the state values NGOs and incorporates them into disaster preparedness and response mechanisms. The February 6 earthquakes have notably accentuated the contours and deficiencies of state-NGO relations in Türkiye.

Based on data collected through face-to-face interviews with NGO leaders in the provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Adıyaman, and Hatay within the scope of a TÜBİTAK-funded project, the challenges encountered between the state and NGOs during the February 6 earthquakes were examined. These challenges were categorized under the themes of coordination, logistics, the lack of recognition of NGOs as effective interlocutors by public institutions, mistrust, and competition. Subsequently, solution proposals were developed grounded in the insights obtained from these interviews.

A significant proportion of NGO representatives emphasized that they were not included in pre-disaster planning activities, experienced severe coordination challenges especially during the critical first week, were unable to find appropriate counterparts within public institutions while conducting relief operations, and had to resolve encountered problems using their own resources. Despite these adversities, NGOs demonstrated considerable effectiveness in alleviating the state's burden and addressing the needs of the affected populations in the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes. Notably, NGOs organized at the national level did not face shortages of relief materials or human resources and continued humanitarian assistance activities for an extended period following the disaster. To maximize the utilization of NGOs' capacities and capabilities in future disasters, it is imperative to first incorporate NGOs into pre-disaster training and planning processes, assign roles based on their capacities and resources, and above all, recognize NGOs as legitimate and effective interlocutors by public authorities.

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