

ISRAELI HUMANITARIAN AID IN LATIN AMERICAN COMPARATIVE STUDY: MEXICO-2017 AND BRAZIL-2019

ANA LUCÍA GUTIÉRREZ GONZÁLEZ
Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel)
analucia.gutierrez@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract: Israel is leader in rescue missions around the world, while Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most disaster-prone region. This thesis compares and analyses 2 Israeli humanitarian missions sent to Mexico and Brazil in 2017 and 2019, respectively. With this analysis we were able to answer our main question: Is it convenient for Israel to send humanitarian missions on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries and what are the implications in diasporic relations settings? This research was conducted with a qualitative approach based on case studies. Data was collected by observation and in-depth interviews with 3 experts on the field. With all the collected information we built an evaluation matrix to work as a guide or checklist for future Israeli humanitarian missions in Latin America. Our analysis shows that both cases did not follow the same patterns for execution, and as well did not bring out the same outcomes. Throughout the whole research ask ourselves if it is convenient for Israel to send humanitarian aid on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries. The answer in short is yes, but it is worth exploring the long version by reading this research. We conclude that Israel is a global leader in humanitarian missions, which does not mean that is not necessary for the missions to follow a protocol to protect the receiving countries, the reputation of the helping country and the relations between the parties involved.

Keywords: Israeli humanitarian aid, humanitarian aid, natural disasters, Latin America, Israel.

INTRODUCTION

According to a report published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is the second most disaster-prone region in the world, some 152 million people have been affected by 1,205 disasters between 2000 and 2019. 2017, an earthquake in Mexico. 2019, a dam collapsed in Brazil. These two countries not only share location, culture, history and natural disasters, they have received help from the international

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community, and more specifically, from Israel. The international community sending help to a third world country after a natural, or man-made disaster is not uncommon, it is encouraged. Usually that aid is sent by neighbor countries and/or from countries that the affected nations are in good relations with. It does seem unusual that Israel, a tiny country in the Middle East would bother to cross the Atlantic in order to send help to these two (and even more) Latin American countries after a natural disaster that might or might not be too much for them to handle on their own. Truth be told, Israel is always looking to help, whether it is a neighbor country, or a state in the other side of the world.

According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance (2021), humanitarian aid is intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after a man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards. In every case, we are talking about large wicked problems that test the capacity and capability of communities and nations, to prepare for, respond to, and rapidly recover from (Altay, Green 2006). Sending humanitarian aid is not an easy task, the needs of the affected population have to be presumed by whom is sending the help (Wood et al. 1995). Organizing an assistance relies on gathering standard emergency supplies such as: telecommunication equipment, shelter, housing, storage, water supply, equipment and much more (Pan American Health Organization 2001); not to mention the hard task to coordinate and reach collaboration among several aid organizations. Despite the struggle, most of the countries are always willing to send a mission, especially if the state in need is an ally or a neighbor. Sending help can be considered a strategy to strengthen/build strong diplomatic relations. Reading that the United States of America has humanitarian operations in Latin American countries is very common (WTOP 2020; Wolfowitz 2021; KFF 2020; ReliefWeb 2020), the US is always looking for ways to strengthen its relations with the other half of the continent. Hearing that Israel is sending a group of rescuers to help in an emergency in Guatemala (Times of Israel.com 2018) might sound uncommon, though. We wonder, why would a Middle East small country send help all across the world to Latin America? Nowadays, humanitarian aid is under



international scrutiny (Pantuliano et al. 2011; The New Humanitarian 2007). Some countries will use the humanitarian excuse to intervene in an international conflict just as some other states will actually lend a hand to a government in need after a natural disaster. The purpose of this research is to analyze the assistance provided by Israel to Latin American countries after a natural disaster.

The main goal of this research is to analyze and compare two cases of humanitarian aid sent from Israel to Latin American countries, Mexico and Brazil, in 2017 and 2019 respectively. It is important to add that Israel holds very good diplomatic relations, as well as a strong constituted diaspora within different Latin American countries, but for the purpose of this research, we are only focusing in the two most recent humanitarian missions organised by Israel in LatAm. These two countries also happen to host some of the biggest diaspora groups of the Jewish community, which gives us room to analyse how these humanitarian missions affected them. On one hand, the retrieved information will help us understand why Israel sends humanitarian aid to Latin America, on the other side, with this information we will develop a matrix that will evaluate if sending help across the globe is convenient or not. The scope for this evaluation matrix will contemplate aspects such as: humanitarian principles, social media reaction, humanitarian operations, etc. In the long term, this model could also help the Israeli government to decide when, where and if to send help to Latin America. By last, the present research aims to contribute to the academic literature with three important outcomes: an evaluation matrix, a deep analysis of the Israeli humanitarian aid in Latin American countries and a research agenda.

The importance of this research relies on understanding and analyzing if the assistance provided by Israel to Latin American countries is convenient or not, while at the same time building an evaluation matrix for future operations. The present study will help shed a light into the intricacies of the decision process of Israeli humanitarian aid missions sent to Latin America. Since there are no previous researches on Israeli humanitarian aid sent to Latin American countries, we believe that conducting this study is relevant to continue strengthening and



understanding relations among both parties while identifying the reasons why Israel sends international humanitarian missions. By last, we expect this research to reinforce and improve the assistance provided by Israel, and hope that it will open the door for future researches on the collaboration between the governmental aid operations and the NGOs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While conducting this research, we have discovered that researches on Israeli humanitarian aid in Latin America are scarce. The findings are dominated mostly by researches on Israeli humanitarian aid in Palestine, with occasionally researches on their different operations in Africa. The current literature review is built under six main concepts: humanitarian aid, disasters, Israeli humanitarian assistances in Latin America, Latin American countries and natural disasters, social media in humanitarian aid and public opinion. These concepts will help shape and complete the necessary data to understand and answer the main research question for this proposal: Is it convenient for Israel to send humanitarian aid on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries?

HUMANITARIAN AID

Defining what humanitarianism is might be a tough challenge, according to Barnett, Weiss (2008) this field is experiencing two different trends, one of a golden era and the other descending into a new dark age, both combined are causing the humanitarian community to engage in a soul-search project on what they do. We can find as many successful cases as situations that did not go as expected. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance (2021), humanitarian aid is intended to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after a man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards. In every case, we are talking about large wicked problems that test the capacity and capability of communities and nations, to

prepare for, respond to, and rapidly recover from (Altay, Green 2006).

Rysaback-Smith (2015) makes a comparison between the before and after of humanitarian actions. The author defines it as the act of providing material assistance to people in need, but she also clarifies that the impartial, independent and neutral provision we knew is in danger. The author finished his research on history and principles of humanitarian action claiming that today both armed conflict and natural disasters affect an ever-increasing number of people. On this same note, Kaneberg and Hertz (2018) indicate that the last two decades have been fundamental for deepening the concept of humanitarian logistic, the growing interest in this area of study is justified by the numerous humanitarian challenges that society has faced in recent years (Dubey et al. 2015). As well, there is evidence that the efficiency of humanitarian aid in reducing refugee flows and contributing to save lives in emergencies is relatively low (Alda, Cuesta 2019). The following principles, as challenging as this field can be, are meant to accompany the different projects and actions under humanitarian purposes: humanity: human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, neutrality: humanitarian aid must not favor any side in an armed conflict or other dispute, impartiality: humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination and independence: autonomy of the humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military, and more. These principals were officially established by the UN General Assembly in 1991 and 2004 (United Nations) and reiterated by the ICRC (1996). By last, a very important principle to keep in mind while studying humanitarian missions is “do no harm”. According to Oxfam Novib Academy, the Do-No-Harm approach is the understand of the impact of aid on an existing conflict and its interaction within a particular context, with the goal to limit or prevent unintended negative effects (Oxfam Novib Academy 2018).



NATURAL DISASTERS

Disasters are classified by crossing factors such as (i) causes (physical, anthropogenic or mixed); ii) consequences (lives, properties and environment); iii) systemic stability (whether an emergency situation or a state of public calamity is declared, for instance) (Carvalho, Damacena 2013). On the other hand, according to Altay, Green (2006) disasters can be separated into two groups: manmade (terror attacks, armed conflict, and industry accidents) and natural (hurricanes, earthquakes, heat waves, floods, etc.). Disaster is also defined as a “disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its priorities and goals” (Van Wassenhove 2006). In this line, according to Lindell and Prater (2003) and Zorn (2018) natural phenomena usually destroys geographic areas and affects the local community, which usually occurs in the same regions, in the same degree of intensity. This definition fits with the chosen cases for the research.

This research covers an earthquake and a rupture of a dam in Mexico and Brazil respectively. While we can automatically classify the earthquake as a natural disaster, the rupture of a dam proposes mixed conclusions. On one hand, based on Carvalho, Damacena (2013) it is considered an anthropogenic disaster, or a man-made disaster. On the other hand, according to Brazilian Decree 7.257/10, in item II, article 2, this disaster is a result of adverse natural or man-made events. For the purpose of focusing more on the international aid activities rather than the disaster itself, we will consider both as natural disasters.

Natural disasters are becoming more and more common, in the same level they are devastating and have an impact in a larger number of people. According to Cardona (2002), a natural disaster is a situation or social process that occurs after a natural phenomenon, that given the population vulnerability can cause long term effects, therefore it requires an immediate response by the authorities. It is not always possible to predict a disaster, however, that predictability plays an important role in responding to that event (Chang et al. 2007). It is important to highlight that these can be separated into two groups within itself: slow onset, refers to events that form and move slowly

(e.g., hurricanes/cyclones), and rapid-onset, refers to events that arise suddenly and their occurrence cannot be predicted in advance (e.g., earthquakes) (Coppola 2006). According to CRED (2018), 1.3 million people lost their lives and 4.4 billion people were injured or became homeless due to natural disasters between 1998 and 2017. On the other hand, according to the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT 2017), 4.2 billion people (i.e., more than half of the world's population) were potentially exposed to natural disasters in 2017.

ISRAELI HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCES IN LATIN AMERICA

As we mentioned earlier, scientific research regarding Israeli humanitarian assistance operations in Latin America is almost nonexistent. According to the IDF's Humanitarian Aid Trough the Year website (2021), the Israeli army has been sending humanitarian aid teams since 1953, starting with Greece, just five years after the creation of the Israel state. On their website, the IDF indicate they value human life and help those in need, regardless of their location. This can be observed through chart 1, that sums up the 27 humanitarian missions lead by Israel.

One very particular term that accompanies Israel passion to help as much as they can to countries in distress is *Tikkun Olam*, which in Hebrew means "to repair the world". According to Spokoiny (2018), in modern America this term is understood as the idea that Jews are meant to make the world better, and this is done through charity, kindness and political action, and why not, humanitarian missions. Israeli NGO world is wide, and their help is spread around the world. According to Israel21c (2021), these are the main six humanitarian aid organizations in Israel that have grown the most in the past years. "Latet", started in 1996, aimed to relieve food insecurity in Israel. Now has over 27,000 volunteers and is an umbrella organization for 180 local associations.

"MASHAV" started in 1957 by the Israeli Foreign Ministry with the goal of sharing technologies and advancements to the developing worlds. Today has made a positive impact in worldwide

Chart 1. *Israeli humanitarian missions around the world*

Israeli humanitarian missions around the world			
Year	Country	Region	Assisted disaster
1953	Greece	Europe	Earthquake
1975	Cambodia	Asia	War refugees
1985	Mexico	Latin America	Earthquake
1988	Armenia	Asia	Earthquake
1989	Romania	Europe	Riots casualties
1992	Croatia	Europe	War casualties
1994	Argentina	Latin America	Terrorist attack
1994	Congo	Africa	War casualties
1998	Kenya	Africa	Car bomb
1999	Macedonia	Europe	War refugees
1999	Turkey	Europe-Asia	Earthquake
1999	Greece	Europe	Earthquake
2001	India	Asia	Earthquake
2004	Egypt	Middle East	Truck explosion
2004	Sri Lanka	Asia	Earthquake & tsunami
2005	USA	America	Hurricane
2006	Kenya	Africa	Collapsed building
2010	Haiti	Latin America	Earthquake
2010	Colombia	Latin America	Flooding
2011	Japan	Asia	Earthquake
2011	Turkey	Europe-Asia	Earthquake
2012	Bulgaria	Europe	Terrorist attack
2012	Ghana	Africa	Department store collapsed
2013	Philippines	Asia	Typhoon
2015	Nepal	Asia	Earthquake
2016-2018	Syria	Middle East	War casualties
2017	Mexico	Latin America	Earthquake
2019	Brazil	Latin America	Collapsed dam
2019	Albania	Europe	Earthquake

communities. “Save a Child’s Heart” started in 1995 by Dr. Ami Cohen looking to improve pediatric care for children with serious heart defects who cannot get sufficient medical care in

their own countries. Nowadays, they have treated over 5,000 children from more than 60 countries and trained over 125 medical professionals. “IsraAid” was founded in 2001 by Shachar Zahavi, Mully Dor and Meira Aboulafia as an informal coalition of small humanitarian aid NGOs to respond to disasters around the world. Since its creation their workers have responded to crisis in more than 50 countries. “Israeli Flying Aid”, started in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina when they deployed search-and-rescue teams, scoured hundreds of houses and worked to treat the trauma of other first responders. Nearly two decades later, they have carried out many humanitarian aid missions in Chad, Syria, Nepal, Haiti and many other countries during times of war or natural disaster.

By last, “Magen David Adom” created in response to Arab Riots in 1930 by seven Israeli doctors, they started with one-room emergency medical hut and a vehicle to transfer patients. Nowadays they are celebrating over 90 years of saving lives, with over 30,000 active employees and volunteers in 169 stations.

LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES AND NATURAL DISASTERS

The International aid network contains primary actors coordinating the aid provided from outside the country affected by a natural or manmade disaster (Kapucu 2011; Jahre et al. 2007). According to Fink, Redaelli (2009) international aid can be divided into two categories, Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and humanitarian assistance. The former is to address poverty in developing nations while the latter provides rapid assistance and distress relief to populations in need of support after a disaster. For this research we are solely focusing on the second category.

According to Strömberg (2007), nowadays, disaster fatalities are, on average, higher in low-income countries and non-democratic countries. There could be many reasons for this; for example, perhaps low-income countries are more exposed to natural hazards, or perhaps fatalities in nondemocratic countries are higher only because these countries are also poor. On

this same note, Alda, Cuesta (2019) indicate that the efficiency of aid is higher in middle-income countries than in low-income countries both in lives saved and in refugee flows. Another point to be considered is the culture of a country or region. Developed countries are better prepared than developing countries (de Moura et al. 2020), therefore, Latin American countries that experience a natural disaster might be more exposed to need international help. Given that Latin American countries are more exposed to natural disaster, Lancaster (2000) recommend funding simple education and awareness measures, this will help the developing countries to prepare for disaster and position themselves to reduce the long-term economic impacts that follow a disaster.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN HUMANITARIAN AID

An important aspect to consider when analyzing international humanitarian aid is the role of social media. According to Wattal (et al. 2010), social media platforms can create replication mechanisms with cycles of information distribution. As well, these platforms provide aid workers, disaster affected communities and anyone with access to the Internet the opportunity to communicate, through different options such as: photo, video, articles, etc., what is happening during emergencies (Cheong, Lee 2011; Jung, Park 2014).

Now, social media is still a privilege for many citizens, especially those living in developing and underdeveloped countries, where social media has limited access and is in many ways part of an 'elite' information source (Sommerfeldt 2015). In the same note, it is important to highlight that there is little research on the role of social media during disaster, especially in developing and underdeveloped countries, where the internet reach is skewed and highly uneven (Graham 2014). A review conducted by Abdulhamid (et al. 2020) shows that previous studies tended to cluster around three broad themes: information sharing, situational awareness for decision making and collaboration among citizens, emergency management organizations, aid agencies as well as digital volunteers. On this same note, Jung



and Moro (2014) identified social media users during emergencies as individuals, communities, private and public organizations as well as media outlets.

PUBLIC OPINION ON INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AID

Public opinion has an effect in who provides the humanitarian aid and in who receives it, therefore it is also important to analyze it and monitor it. Following this idea, Mosley (1985), Stern (1998) and Milner, Tingley (2013) claim that public opinion can affect humanitarian aid quantity and quality. Governments can use humanitarian aid to influence other states (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith 2007) and improve foreigners' images of one's country (Goldsmith, Horiuchi, Wood 2014), therefore, shaping international public opinion. Einarsdóttir and Gunnlaugsson (2016) reinforce the previous statement by claiming that deciding how to distribute foreign aid is influenced by a myriad of factors, ranging from altruism, ethical considerations to national self-interest. Public opinion can include factors such as: general trust (Bayram 2017), religion (Paxton, Knack 2012; Wood 2015), media consumption (Cheng, Smyth 2015; Paxton, Knack 2012), and confidence in multilateral organisations (Diven, Constantelos 2009; Wood 2015), these have been proved to also be related to support for international humanitarian aid. Even though public opinion can influence the decision or management of humanitarian missions, the allocation of foreign aid is highly political, although it is often framed as a purely ethical endeavor (Einarsdóttir, Gunnlaugsson 2016). On this last point, there is research that indicates that ethical considerations can affect the public support for foreign aid (Henson, Lindstrom 2013; van Heerde, Hudson, 2009; Wood 2015).

If we talk about citizens and how they build their opinion on international humanitarian aid, McDonnell (et al. 2003) claims that most people have little knowledge of foreign aid and developmental processes, and many do not distinguish between development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. On this note, there is recent research on how and when public opinion



affects international relations (Baum 2012; Dukhong 2013; Whang 2011), hence the importance of understanding what did the recipients of Israeli aid think.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The main objective of this research has been to compare and analyze two cases of humanitarian aid sent from Israel to Latin American countries in 2017 (Mexico) and 2019 (Brazil). With this analysis we were able to answer our main question: Is it convenient for Israel to send humanitarian aid on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries and what are the implications in diasporic relations settings?

For the first step we have gathered information on both countries, including: background, natural disaster management, relations with Israel, information about the disaster, social media reaction, local and international public opinion and current status. This data was cross-referenced with interviews' results. Once all the information was gathered on both sides, it was analyzed and used to build an evaluation matrix for future humanitarian actions conducted by the Israeli government. We have chosen to build an evaluation matrix, because it is a method often used by international humanitarian organizations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and WFP (World Food Programme). According to USAID (2015), an evaluation matrix is an essential tool for planning and organizing an evaluation, it defines it as a simple table with one row for each evaluation question and columns that address evaluation design issues. On the other hand, WFP (2020), defines an evaluation matrix as a tool to help plan the conduct of the evaluation, plus it ensures that all data collected is analyzed and triangulated.

Building an evaluation matrix requires quality information, the following questions helped us to filter it, gather it and organize it in an efficient way to compare and analyze both Israeli humanitarian missions in Mexico and Brazil. *a)* How does Israel decide when to send help to a country in Latin America?; *b)* What are the main reasons and interests that lead Israel to send



help? (Humanitarian? Political? etc.); *c*) How did the media, from both sides, report the humanitarian action?; *d*) What role does the social media play during and after the aid has been sent?; *e*) Do all of the chosen cases share the same pattern of decision process?; *f*) Who is involved in the decision-making process?

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology

The research is conducted with a qualitative approach since we can benefit from its open-ended, exploratory stance to gain understanding of the reasons behind a phenomenon, rather than proving or disproving a hypothesis (Taguchi 2018). In the same note, the aim of using a qualitative approach is to examine the meanings, perceptions, experiences and understanding of those involved in an event (Feldman 1995) or in this case, of those involved in humanitarian aid sent after a disaster.

Within the qualitative approach, we have chosen to conduct this research based on case studies. This method is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in real-life context (Crowe et al. 2011). Stake (1995) has characterised three main types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. For this research, we will focus in the collective one, which involves studying multiple cases simultaneously in an attempt to generate a broader appreciation of a particular case. Later on, the gathered information will be cross-referenced with the outcomes of the in-depth interviews.

Data collection and analysis

Firstly, retrieving relevant documents and content analysis. Given the lack of journals, books, or any valuable scientific sources regarding Israeli humanitarian aid in Latin American countries, the largest source of information will be local (Israeli and Latin American) platforms that are available online. This

source was selected as the main one for our research due to its relevance, accessibility (due pandemic impediment of traveling) and ease of searching. It is important to add that the documents have been retrieved in English and Spanish from its direct source, and Portuguese and Hebrew throughout a third-party translation service.

Later, we applied in-depth interviews, these involved the posing of open-ended questions and follow-up probes designed to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Patton 1998) regarding the Israeli humanitarian aid in the two chosen Latin American countries. Since the author is fluent in Spanish and English, the interviews were conducted in any of those languages, depending on the expert's preference.

For the interviewees we spoke with three different profiles. It is worth mentioning that all of the interviews were held in zoom. Profile 1: a local volunteer (Mexico) directly involved in receiving, coordinating and managing Israeli humanitarian aid. Profile 2: an Israeli expert in humanitarian aid involved in at least 1 of the chosen cases; involved in coordinating, sending and managing the Israeli humanitarian aid to the chosen countries; involved in the decision-making process of how/when to send Israeli help at least 1 of these countries. Profile 3: an IDF representative involved in both of the chosen cases; involved in coordinating, sending and managing the Israeli humanitarian aid to the chosen countries; involved in the decision-making process of how/when to send Israeli help in both of these countries.

By last, as part of the discoveries, we found some caricatures relevant to the research. For a proper understanding we applied a semiotic analysis. Semiotics is particularly relevant for studying digital texts and meaning-producing events as the exchange of any messages whatever and of the systems of signs which underlie them (Sebeok, 1985).

FINDINGS

This chapter summarises the primary findings of the research for each of the study cases. It starts by presenting each country and the relevant information to compare them and analyze them. Later on, we will find the evaluation matrix built with the gathered information.

Mexico, 2017

Background: people have been living in Mexico for a very long time – for about 25,000 years. Among the greatest of the early civilizations were the Maya, builders of the city of Chichén Itzá, founded in A.D 455. Today, Mexico City, the capital of the country, is one of the largest cities in the world. Mexico remained under Spanish control until a long struggle ended in Mexico's declaration of independence in 1821. Most of Mexico's people today are mestizos – people who have both Indian and Spanish ancestors. About 90 percent of Mexicans are Roman Catholic (Scholastic 2021). Nowadays, with a population of almost 130 million, a rich cultural history and diversity, and abundant natural resources, Mexico is among the 15 largest economies in the world and the second largest economy in Latin America (World Bank 2021). According to COFACE (2021), Mexico's strengths are: geographic proximity to the U.S. economy, membership of USMCA and many other agreements, substantial industrial base, free-floating exchange rate, adequate foreign exchange reserves and large population and relatively low labor cost, but as any country, it also has weaknesses, such as: High dependence on the U.S. economy, high income disparities and rising criminality, high corruption level, weaknesses in transport, health and education, narrow tax base, with tax revenues representing 21 per cent of GDP, oil sector and PEMEX undermined by years of underinvestment and high informality in job market.

Natural disasters management in Mexico: Mexico city's area is very vulnerable to earthquakes because of the very soft and wet underground (Vidale 2017), this amplifies shaking like



marmalade on a plate. This means that it has the ability to transform dirt into dense liquid. Just 32 years before the earthquake studied in this research, Mexico suffered a similar one, causing the fall of the older, less solid structures. The best way to prevent earthquake devastation is fixing the old buildings and improving new constructions, but that is not possible in just a few years, that's why in 2000 (Banco Mundial 2000) Mexico, along with the World Bank, launched a Natural Disaster Management Project. Its main goal is to help reduce human, economic and financial costs of natural disasters in Mexico by *a*) providing resources for rapid recovery following natural disasters within a framework of sound budget management; and *b*) reducing the likelihood that natural forces will result in loss of life and infrastructure damage by supporting policy and institutional reforms aimed at reducing vulnerability and risk and improving government capacity for analyzing natural disaster risk.

Relations with Israel: diplomatic relations between Mexico and Israel started on July 1st, 1952, and by 2005, it was 100 years since a Jewish community was established in Mexico, mainly in Mexico DF, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana and Cancun with around 52,000 people (López, Jensen 2013). Israel is Mexico's first commercial partner in the Middle East, while Mexico is the second Latin American commercial partner of Israel. Since 2000, between both countries there is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). According to Lior Yafe (2021), commercial attaché of Israel in Mexico, throughout these years, Israel has built a mutual beneficial relation with Mexico by sharing their knowledge and experience in agriculture, cybersecurity, telecommunication and fintech.

September 2017: on September 19, 2017, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck central Mexico, collapsing buildings and houses (USAID 2017). The epicenter of the earthquake was located approximately 34 miles south-southwest of the city of Puebla and 75 miles from the capital of Mexico City. The Government of Mexico and international media reported that the earthquake had resulted in at least 250 deaths, injured an estimated 1,900 people, and damaged more than 20,000 buildings. At the moment of the earthquake, the Mexican president was flying to Oaxaca but immediately returned to Mexico City and



declared the city in emergency, as well ordered the evacuation of damaged hospitals (Rawlinson et al. 2017). Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, declared three days of national mourning to honor the victims of this natural disaster (Huber et al. 2017).

Social media reaction on September 2017: when international disaster occurs, the social media reports are not stranger to happen. The humanitarian aid sent by the Israeli government to the Mexican population did not go unnoticed but its citizens on social media. El Universal (2017) reported two particular cases. The kids in the affected areas where the Israeli unit was operating send them thanking and supporting letters, the soldiers made public posts thanking them back. Many social media users, especially women, highlighted the physical appearance of the Israeli soldiers, leading to trending posts across social media platforms.

International, Israeli and Mexican community opinion/reaction on September 2017: in response of the earthquake, USAID deployed a DART, including 67 USAR specialists and 5 canines. The Government of Israel has deployed a 70-member team, comprising USAR specialists and military personnel, to Mexico to provide emergency assistance, international media reports. In addition, the Government of Japan has announced the deployment of a USAR team, comprising approximately 70 personnel, to support search-and-rescue operations in Mexico, according to international media. The governments of El Salvador and Panama have also deployed dozens of USAR specialists (USAID 2017). World Vision staff coordinate with other response agencies to provide aid to affected children and families (Huber et al. 2017). As well, Israel received a request for assistance (Blackburn 2017), and in response, a team of the IDF Search and Rescue Unity was sent. At the same time, IsraAID, an Israeli nonprofit aid organization, sent an emergency response team with psychosocial, water, sanitation and hygiene specialists. On the other hand, Volunteers from ZAKA Mexico, an organization recently established with the advice of Israel's ZAKA international Rescue Unit also rushed to help the recovery actions.

Current status: as the Covid-19 is still relevant in, almost, every country around the world, Mexico is not the exception. Until mid-August (Secretaría de Salud 2021) they have over 3,101,266 confirmed cases and 248,380 dead people because of the pandemic. The regulations to prevent spreading the virus are very similar to other countries: people with diabetes, high pressure, obesity and illness alike are meant to stay home. Social distance of at least a meter and a half is mandatory, as well as wearing a mask and frequently washing hands. Updated information can be found in their specialised website: Covid-19 México.

Brazil, 2019

Background: With 212.6 million citizens, Brazil is a presidential republic that plays an important role on an international and regional scale. According to Euler Hermes (2021) despite its diversified economy, its growing middle class and its robust foreign direct investment inflows, Brazil is vulnerable to global commodity prices, high production costs, high taxation and large fiscal deficit with an increasing public debt. Brazil is the world's ninth largest economy, despite its recession six years ago. Ever since, the Brazilian economy had been experiencing a slow but steady recovery until the pandemic hit (Santander Trade 2021). According to World Bank (2021), an emerging recovery in demand, both domestic and external, and a pick-up in commodity prices are expected to push GDP growth to 5.3 percent in 2021. According to Santander Trade (2021), Brazil has abundant natural resources and a relatively diversified economy. The country is the world's largest producer of coffee, sugar cane and oranges, and is one of the world's largest producers of soy. With forests covering half of the country and the world's largest rainforest, Brazil is the world's fourth largest exporter of timber. Additionally, Brazil is home to the world's largest commercial livestock herd. The country also attracts many multi-national groups in the food and bio-fuels industries.

Natural disasters management in Brazil: between 2008 and 2011, an assessment of four natural disasters that occurred in

Brazil estimated a loss of 9 billion dollars (World Bank 2012). This impact has been mostly on houses, especially those owned by low-income segments of the population that lived in hills, rivers shores and other vulnerable areas. Impacts on infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, and commerce were also evaluated. For this reason, as a first step, in August 2011, the Brazilian government launched the National Plan for Disaster Risk Management, holding an 11 billion dollars investment, of which 83 per cent will fund construction works aimed to mitigate the effects of natural disasters (World Bank 2012). The researchers expect this will lead to a cultural change and improvement in natural disaster costs.

Relations with Israel: Brazil played an important role during the General Assembly of the United Nations that approved Resolution 181, in 1947, under the presidency of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Oswaldo Aranha, paving the way for the creation of the State of Israel in May 14, 1948. Between March 31 and April 3, 2019, the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil made an official visit to Israel (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2019), this act opened a new chapter in the history of both countries' relations. The two leaders affirmed that the partnership between Brazil and Israel is founded on common values of freedom, democracy, market economy, justice and peace, and their common determination to seek prosperity for their peoples. In this context, Israel reiterated its strong support for Brazil's membership of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Recently, in March 7, 2021 (Ministério das Relações Exteriores 2021), it was released a joint Brazil-Israel Declaration after the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Araujo, visited Israel invited by his Israeli pair. In this declaration they reaffirmed the excellent relations of friendship and cooperation between both countries.

January 2019: on January 25, 2019, three dumps collapsed in Brumandinho, in the state of Minas Gerais (Business, Human Rights Resource Centre 2019), it left 7 dead people and around 150 missing ones (La Vanguardia 2019). A similar disaster had occurred three years earlier. On November 5, 2015, what was known until then as "the worst environmental disaster in



Brazil” (Phillips 2016; Branco, Ponso 2017) took place in the same mining region of Brazil. One day after the 2019 disaster, on January 26, Jair Bolsonaro, president of Brazil, flew above the area and through his twitter said: our biggest worry is to look after the victims of this tragedy (Rincón 2019). Three days after the dams collapsed, 136 Israeli soldiers arrived to reinforce the rescue operation after the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered the support. They brought Israeli technology and intelligence. By then, the dead toll had increased to 65 and over 300 missing people (Blanco 2019)

Social media reaction on January 2019: while most media would be covering the arrival of the Israeli delegation to help in Brazil, as well as the different local organizations coordinating their participation, Carlos Latuff, a Brazilian political cartoonist, had a different welcoming idea. Latuff’s work has to do mostly with anti-Western sentiment, anti-capitalism and opposition to U.S. military intervention. Carlos is known for his caricatures comparing Israel to Nazism and has been accused of being antisemitic by the Simon Wiesenthal Center and similar authorities. In this occasion, Carlos Latuff published an anti-Semitic caricature portraying IDF soldiers as murderers with blood on their hands (annex 1). You can read the captions in the caricature how the soldiers apologised with Bolsonaro for the delay in their arrival because they were busy killing Palestinians. Immediately after this, Uri Fink, an Israeli comic book artist and member of the Israeli Cartoon Project, answered back. Fink has published many comic books during the 90’s and is now editor of the monthly “Zbeng! Magazine” that features his work and other Israeli cartoonists’ creations. Uri said to different media platforms that Carlos Latuff was a disgrace for the profession (Hacohen 2019; Eichner 2019), adding as well that the online smear campaign against Israel does nothing but poison the discourse and distance peace. As a true cartoonist, Fink also published a cartoon (annex 2) with a caricature of the Brazilian artist holding a BDS sign while preventing an IDF soldier from saving a little girl covered in mud from the broken dam (Eichner 2019).

International, Israeli and Brazilian community opinion/reaction on January 2019: the only foreign search and rescue



delegation to assist Brazil with the dam collapse was the Israeli team (Zitun 2019). When talking about the Brazilian community reaction regarding the help sent by the Israeli government, we have conflicted opinions. On one side, according to Rabbi Nissim Katri, of the Chabad House in Belo Horizonte, people were sympathetic, asking for selfies and grateful for the Israel army help (Times of Israel 2019). On the other hand, as stated in the previous section, Brazilian cartoon artist, Carlos Latuff, welcomed the Israeli delegation with an anti-Semitic caricature portraying IDF soldiers as murderers with blood on their hands (Eichner 2019); as well, the Israeli team earned criticism because their help represented a diversion from its conflict with the Palestinians (Times of Israel 2019). Despite the population being grateful with the help, it was pointed out by the head of the Brazilian rescue team that the technology brought by the Israeli team was not suitable for the disaster (Hacohen 2019). The Israeli team brought heat sensors, but under the mud and water, all the bodies were cold, so the technology was of no help. This caused a media reaction regarding the effectiveness of the help.

Current status: according to a study directed by Agora (Schultz 2021) on the current situation on Brazil, the tension that before the pandemic was focused on the executive and legislative powers has spread to the federal, state and municipal levels. As well, Bolsonaro's captive voters remain active on social media but they don't have enough strength to maintain the clan's political state. Supporting this study, according to BCW Global (2021), Brazil was rated with a risk score of 81 points out of 100, meaning a high political risk classification. If we focus in Brazil's current state in the middle of the pandemic, it has become the second country in the world in terms of deaths due to Covid-19 and eight in terms of per capita deaths. In the same subject, vaccination efforts have accelerated recently, with almost 70 per cent of the population having received its first dose by end of September 2021, though still just 40 per cent are fully vaccinated.



In-depth interviews' results

Through the research we conducted three interviews that helped us to validate and strengthen the gathered information. In the following lines we will summarise the main subjects that came up during these interviews.

Profile 1. This interviewee was part of the Mexican team that worked along the Israeli team in the earthquake of 2017. She is currently the director of strategic partnerships for the Mexican NGO involved in the study case. The interview was conducted in Spanish and the transcription, along with the signed consent form, can be requested to the author at any given time. The themes from this interview have been summed up as it follows: *a)* regarding the Israeli humanitarian mission: Mexican population reaction about Israeli help was good. They were commenting on how handsome the soldiers were and thanking them in public. Mexico does not have antisemitism issues, so that was not a problem. The media reaction was also good, although since the Israeli team work with Cadena Mexico NGO, the latter took all the attention. There was a lot of local disorganization about how to approach the disaster, and it became an obstacle for the Israeli team; *b)* regarding how sending international help works: it is necessary that the government will declare a state of emergency, only then international NGOs can come in. Sometimes this declaration is done too late. Coordination is very hard, especially because there is a lot of corruption in customs and sometimes the materials do not arrive complete or on time, it is a latent situation in developing countries; *c)* regarding failed humanitarian missions: in humanitarian aid there are a lot of failed missions. There was a failed mission of Cadena Mexico NGO in Indonesia. Part of the team was Israeli, and the NGO symbol is a star of David, all of these brought antisemitism issues that made the mission harder than necessary.

Profile 2. This interviewee was part of the Israeli team that was sent to Mexico because of the earthquake of 2017. The interviewee was in charge to determine the need of establishing a temporary hospital in the affected area. The interview was conducted in English and the transcription, along with the signed consent form, can be requested to the author at any given time.



The discoveries from this interview have been summed up as it follows: *a)* regarding the Israeli humanitarian mission: there was a need to check if implementing a field hospital was necessary, turns out it was not. There was no medical unit from the Israeli side, just the rescue unit. The medical team was supporting the rescue unit on the field. The Mexican community was so grateful for the help, it became embarrassing for the Israeli team. The mission can be considered a success not only by going and doing the intervention, but also for how the relationship between both countries got stronger; *b)* regarding how sending international help works: there is the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), which is the one responsible to coordinate an intervention in case of a disaster. In Israel there are 2 or 3 UNDAC representatives that will determine if we send help, in case UNDAC asks for it. To be part of UNDAC there is an accreditation process and Israel was one of the first countries to pass it. In the case of Mexico, the help was sent because the Israeli ambassador asked for it after getting the local authorities' permission, even though, many aid delegations came without approval. The interviewee also added that coming to help without the proper tools is the same as cause harm, so it is better not to come.

Profile 3. This interviewee was part of the Israeli team that was sent to Mexico because of the earthquake of 2017 and to Brazil because of the dam in 2019. The interviewee was in charge of the rescue team sent to both countries. The interview was conducted in English and the transcription, along with the signed consent form, can be requested to the author at any given time. The discoveries from this interview have been summed up as it follows: *a)* regarding the Israeli humanitarian mission: in the case of Mexico, the reviews were very good, both the community and the press were very grateful for the help. There was a sense of success. In the case of Brazil, the interviewee claims the population reaction was good, but from the Israeli media side they received critics wondering if it was good to send a delegation. On the other hand, Brazilian media seemed to be happy with the help; *b)* regarding how sending international help works: from his experience, it is a coordination between the IDF and the government. When asked if it is only the Prime



Minister's decision, the answer was that is the PM with a security council.

Evaluation matrix

Both humanitarian missions are important and significant for the recipient countries and for Israel. All the gathered information in the previous pages has enabled us to build a matrix that is meant to work as a guide or checklist for future Israeli humanitarian missions in Latin America, and maybe, the world. The matrix is divided in five sections: Humanitarian aid principles, Efficiency of help, Help request, Disaster and Relations with Israel before the disaster. Each of the former has their own divisions and justifications, which we will be explaining in the following lines.

a) Humanitarian aid principles. Throughout our literature review we considered four main humanitarian aid principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. For the evaluation matrix it was decided to add to this section the do-no harm principle. As a way of refreshing the concepts, we will explain them again. Humanity: human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, neutrality: humanitarian aid must not favor any side in an armed conflict or other dispute, impartiality: humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination and independence: autonomy of the humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military, and more (United Nations 1991, 2004; ICRC 1996). And the Do-No-Harm approach is the understanding of the impact of aid on an existing conflict and its interaction within a particular context, with the goal to limit or prevent unintended negative effects (Oxfam Novib Academy 2018).

b) Efficiency of help. According to Alda, Cuesta (2019), the efficiency of aid is higher in middle-income countries than in low-income countries. According to Asia Power Watch (Canuto 2021) Brazil remains as an upper-middle income country given their economy. On the same note, Mexico (Pascual Gómez 2019) has been a middle-income country for over four

decades, and is now one of the leading emerging economies in the world.

c) Help request. Throughout the interviews we have been able to establish at least three types of processes for requesting and sending international humanitarian aid. We have included this section because it is important to follow a process when coordinating international missions. As we discussed in the interviews, the two first options: through consulate and/or through UNDAC are the most adequate because they adjust to international parameters while working within local government regulations.

d) Disaster. On chart 1 we could identify the most common disasters where Israel sent a delegation. All these missions have given Israel the experience to provide the utmost best assistance in case of a disaster. Sadly, not all disasters are the same, and the Israeli background is not always the most adequate. We considered this section important for two reasons. Firstly, if a country does not have experience handling certain disaster, their aid might break the do-no-harm principle, and secondly, if a country sends a humanitarian mission without previous experience, it could end up in a waste of money and human resources. Especially if it is the only country sending help, like it was in the Brazilian case.

e) Relations with Israel before the disaster. Even though Israel is prone to send help whenever a disaster occurs, it is important to prioritise the countries which it has good relations with. We considered the presence of an embassy in both countries, the existence of free-trade agreements and public endorsement towards Israel from the receiving country as main points to evaluate their relationship. As we can see in the following chart, we have applied the mentioned evaluation sections to both of the studied cases. We observe that only Mexico complies with all the requirements for a successful humanitarian mission. In the case of Brazil, Israel was lacking experience with this particular case of humanitarian mission, and as well did not follow protocol on how to request help. The goal of this matrix is to help deciding when is convenient to send help. If the sending country does not count with the experience in managing the disaster, it probably does not count with the adequate human

Chart 2. *Evaluation matrix.*

Evaluation matrix			
Countries		Mexico	Brazil
Humanitarian aid principles	Humanity	X	X
	Neutrality	X	X
	Impartiality	X	X
	Independence	X	-
	Do-no-harm	X	-
Efficiency of help	Middle-income country	X	X
	Low-income country	-	-
Help request	Through the consulate	X	-
	Through international humanitarian aid channels (UNDAC)	X	-
	Directly, without evaluation	-	X
Disaster	Type of disaster	earthquake	dam rupture
	Israeli experience on the type of disaster	X	-
Relations with Israel before the disaster	Embassies in both countries	X	X
	Free-trade agreements	X	X
	Public endorsement to Israel	X	X

and material resources to help, like it was in the Brazil case. As well, if the giving country does not follow protocol, it could arise unnecessary critics and judgment, just in like the Brazil case, when antisemitic comments were published in the local media.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A very important aspect to highlight before diving into the analysis of the results of this research is how the global north is, most of the time, willing to send humanitarian aid when the global south is in need. Within this, we can also notice how the states will try and help their diaspora in the global south. In this case, Mexico and Brazil host a significant number of Jewish citizens, 40,000 and 91,500 respectively. There is definitely room for a specialised research on how Israel helps its diaspora when in need. As mentioned in the research question section, we

established some open-ended questions to help us gather information and shape our research while answering if it is convenient for Israel to send humanitarian aid on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries and what are the implications in diasporic relations settings. In this section we will analyze all the gathered information, and discuss the main results. From the gathered information we know there are different mechanisms to request and provide international humanitarian aid. Despite the variety of options, there are international entities to regulate them and enforce the do-no-harm principle of humanitarian aid. Even though that in the decision-process of sending a humanitarian mission we see the government involved, it is not a personal decision but a team decision that should always involve international organisations and local authorities. All of this, in order to provide the best possible assistance, while administering the resources in the best way.

If we want to talk about reasons to send help, it is easy to imply that sending human and material resources in case of a disaster will definitely improve diplomatic relations between the giver and receiver country. This is translated later on with better free-trade agreements, cultural exchange agreements, and more. Another reason to point out, as mentioned earlier in this section, is states helping their diaspora, and even if we do not know each victim affected by the natural disaster, sending help to a country that hosts your people, is always a good move. Humanitarian missions where there is, in this case, a Jewish community can be considered as a strategy to improve and strengthen diasporic relations.

On the other hand, if the mission is considered successful, by the international arena, it will enhance the giver country's reputation. This can help to build better relations with other countries, collaboration opportunities, and in general a more globalised world where countries can co-exist in peace. For the Jewish/Israelis living whether in Mexico or Brazil, having Israel sending help can also improve their status in their home country and on the other hand, increase their chance to migrate to Israel. This is another point to consider on the implications for diasporic relations.



There is evidence that Israel does not follow one path when deciding to send a humanitarian mission to a country in need. In the case of Mexico, it was through UNDAC and diplomatic channels. While in the Brazilian case, the process of sending help was managed directly between both national leaders, Jair Bolsonaro as the president of Brazil and Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister of Israel. As we saw in the evaluation matrix, sending help without previous evaluation and process can endanger the mission. Humanitarian missions should not be sent, or not sent, based on political preferences. Even though the mission sent to Brazil did not endanger the political relationship between both countries, it did bring unnecessary antisemitic reaction that affected the Jewish diaspora status in the recipient country.

The media and social media always play an important role when reporting and reacting on main events, and these humanitarian missions were not an exception. Both cases got the media attention, although they did not both get positive feedback. In the case of Mexico, we can see throughout all the research that the reports were good, reaching out to the point of the population itself producing content for social media. Mexicans were grateful for the help and tried every possible way to show it to the Israeli delegation since day 1 until they left the country.

In the case of Brazil, it was not all good reports. Even though the affected population was grateful for the help as well as the Brazilian government, the media was not entirely happy to receive an Israeli delegation to collaborate in the disaster. There were antisemitic manifestations that came up and did not go unnoticed. This does not mean that the mission failed, but gives room to assume that the help was unwanted, considering that the only international operation that came to help was the Israeli.

Throughout this whole research we have been asking ourselves a main question that we will now divide in two. Firstly: is it convenient for Israel to send humanitarian aid on every disaster that occurs in Latin American countries? The short answer is yes, because building bridges between Israel and Latin America will always be a good international relations strategy. The long answer is explained in the previous pages with concise and

objective information on how the disasters happened and how Israel was involved.

Secondly: what are the implications in diasporic relations settings? Even though we have identified them throughout this research, we would like to highlight three main ones: first, the right kind of help can improve the chances of the Jewish community in the diaspora to migrate/move back to Israel; second, sending a humanitarian mission to a country that is going through a natural disaster and is hosting a Jewish community needs to follow up a correct decision making process, like the one suggested in the evaluation matrix, to avoid antisemitic reactions from the recipient population; and lastly, as long as Israel remains sending humanitarian missions to countries in need, it will continue to grow the feeling of pride for Israel that every Jew in the diaspora feels. Even though we can conclude that Israel is a global leader in humanitarian missions, this does not mean that is not necessary for the missions to follow a protocol to protect the receiving countries, the reputation of the helping country and the relations between the parties involved.

Every research has its limitations, in this case regarding timing of study because we conducted this research during Covid-19. This had a direct effect in reaching out to people involved in humanitarian aid, since most of them were on the field. On the other hand, it was not possible to travel to the chosen countries to retrieve information, but we overcame that obstacle by conducting interviews and meetings online. By last, even though we translated data from Hebrew to English, the fact that the author does not speak the former fluently, posed a limitation when gathering relevant information and it could pose some level of bias despite using professional translators.

Since there are no previous researches on Israeli humanitarian aid sent to Latin American countries, we believe this study is relevant to continue strengthening relations among both parties, as well to reinforce and improve the assistance provided by Israel. This research aims to contribute to the academic literature with three important outcomes: an evaluation matrix, an analysis of the Israeli humanitarian aid in Latin American countries and a research agenda.



Regarding the evaluation matrix, we expect that further research will add more evaluation parameters that will improve the evaluation system of previous and future humanitarian actions. In a more ambitious level, we expect the evaluation matrix to be part of the decision-making process that the Israeli authorities go through when having to send humanitarian missions.

There is a lack of literature on Israeli humanitarian aid in Latin American countries, therefore we expect this research to be an inspiration for other researchers to explore the subject and come up with study cases. Studying the Israeli-Latin America relationship should not be conducted solely from a political, economic or social point of view, it should include humanitarian actions that have repercussions or are influenced by the previously mentioned factors.

By last, this research hopes to set an agenda, and that from now on, Latin America starts being on the spotlight for researchers, universities, the government and NGO's. Latin America is a big region in need of exploration and with a lot of knowledge and experience to share on how to manage humanitarian missions coming from the global north, especially when that help is directly related to the diaspora and economic/social stability.



ANNEXES

Annex 1



Annex 2



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