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Inter-Agency Task Force on
Social and Solidarity Economy

A Regional SSE Practice from Turkey

Opportunities and Challenges to Scale up

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Abstract

The values and principles of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) are perfectly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, SSE has a huge potential to achieve greater social and ecological sustainability. However, there is no one-fits-all solution to realize the transformative potential of SSE. In this context, learning from different experiences and adjusting them is crucial. The aim of this paper is to introduce and assess a regional SSE practice example from Izmir region in Turkey and to discuss the potential and limitations of this experience. The Izmir Agriculture Model has been developed by Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) to support the agricultural cooperatives in order to ensure that small-scale family businesses in rural areas continue their production. IMM has adopted the contractual production model that is based on the provision of a purchase guarantee for the products of the agricultural cooperatives. The model provides a good example of how the SSE can play a key role in rural development while contributing towards multiple SDGs at the same time. Yet, the lack of monitoring and evaluation hinders institutionalisation of this practice. In addition, insufficient support from the government poses the main limitation to replicate it in other places.

Keywords

Agriculture, agricultural cooperatives, rural development, municipality, collaboration

Bio

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, societies are confronted with an accumulation of crises. The current environmental crisis is accompanied by an economic crisis, a crisis of values, a crisis in politics and a social crisis. This instability has served to underline the shortcomings of our current development system. Following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis the need for an alternate or complementary development paradigm has become apparent more than ever.

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is an alternative development paradigm that seeks to change the whole social and economic system. It set standards for human rights and dignity, and even further, fights against global poverty and promote of a sustainable world. SSE is a reaction of society against the marketization of all domains of society (Utting 2016).

SSE is a viable solution to re-balancing economic, social and environmental objectives. The principles of SSE based on a common ethos that priorities the welfare of people and planet over profits and blind growth (Kawano 2018). Consequently, SSE has a potentially important role to in reorienting economies toward greater social and ecological sustainability (UNRISD 2016).

The activities of SSE organisations and enterprises are often associated with local context. They produce and exchange not only to supply basic needs but also local economic development as income and profits boost local demand and investment. In recent years, the positive effects of SSE activity on environmental and social sustainability have been studied and reported by various case studies (UNRISD 2016).

SSE is strongly committed to collective ownership and management and cooperatives are the backbone of the SSE in many countries. Cooperatives have been contributing to sustainable development and social inclusion for more than 100 years across the world, and they have accumulated tremendous experience in this regard.

In the last couple of years, we have witnessed to a new cooperative movement characterised by the collaboration between local authorities and cooperatives. Some cities like New York City, Madison, Richmond, Cleveland and Cincinnati from USA have become prominent with their worker cooperatives. They support worker cooperative development aimed at low-income communities and communities of coloured people. In Preston UK, City Council has committed to an alternative approach to economic development by supporting cooperatives (Sheffield 2017). The successful collaboration examples are not limited by those cited above (REScoop MECISE n.d.).

Within this context, this study aims to identify one of these successful collaboration with the intention to give it visibility and learn from it for future collaborations. The paper describes and analyses the rural agricultural development model of the Izmir region in Turkey, namely the Izmir Agriculture Model (IAM). The collaboration between Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) and agricultural cooperatives has generated significant achievements in regards to attaining SDGs. To avoid overstating the success of the model, a critical approach has been adopted.

The paper is organised as follows. The methodology is described in the second section. The third section explains the background of IAM. Section 4 gives an extensive assessment of IAM and is divided in four subsections. Section 4.1 assess the model with regard to SDGs. Section 4.2 takes a closer look at the success factors of the model, section 4.3 identifies the challenges which local authorities have while Section 4.4 presents insights on scaling-up the model. The last section summarizes the paper and gives a short overview of future possibilities and opportunities.

2. Methodology

Since there is no one-fits-all solution to realize the transformative potential of SSE, it is crucial to learn from different implementation experiences and improve existing practices accordingly.

Given this motivation, the aim of the study is to present a description and analysis of the rural agricultural development model of the Izmir region in Turkey, with respect to its contributions to SDGs.

The main research questions which are explored in the study are threefold:

1. In what way and on what basis do local governments and cooperatives collaborate? What can they offer each other mutually beneficial?
2. What are the necessary conditions for a collaboration to effectively serve as a means for achieving SDGs? What are the key success factors?
3. How can this regional practice be scaled up at a national level? What are the opportunities and limitations of it?

The study covers Izmir region and the collaboration of IMM and the agriculture cooperatives. Although there are other municipalities which support cooperatives, IAM deserves an extensive examination due to its unique features such as the focus of agriculture, the degree of integrity and the level of institutionalization. Furthermore, several novelties are introduced for first time by IAM such as contractual purchasing from cooperatives and the establishment of the Department of Agricultural Services. Hence IAM is chosen as a case study and explored in depth.

The research follows a qualitative method since the main objective is to get insight in how the collaboration between local authority and cooperatives works. The research mainly explanatory to understand the dynamics and the process of the collaboration.

The study was carried out in two stages. The first stage designed in order to explain the background of the model. It was based on literature and provided an overview of the previous situation of the agriculture and cooperatives in Izmir before the implementation of IAM. In other words, it takes a closer look at the foundations of IAM.

The second stage of the study consisted of the case study, which compromise the main research method. In this stage, semi-structured interview technique was used as a method of data collection. To make a critical assessment of the implementation of IAM, two interviews were conducted with the experts from IMM Department of Agricultural Services. We interviewed with Ertuğrul Tugay, head of the Department of Agricultural Services and Ahmet Tomar manager of the Agricultural Projects Bureau at November 22, 2018. The interviews are recorded and the notes are send back to the interviewees to make sure the data is correct.

3. Background of IAM

Located in western part of the Anatolian Peninsula on the shores of the Aegean, Izmir is the third largest city in Turkey with a population over 4 million (TURKSTATa n.d.). With fertile lands and a favourable climate for agriculture Izmir has always been one of the most important agri-food centre of the country.

28.5% of the city consist of agricultural lands. From the total 3,444,237 decares of agricultural lands, 41.4% is arable field, 28.3% is devoted to olive groves. Remaining farm lands are used for other agricultural purposes such as fruit and vegetable production or vineyards (ICC n.d.). Today, despite its small share in the gross domestic product (4.94%), agriculture employs 9.9% of the working population of the city (IZTO n.d.; TURKSTATb n.d.). Besides, 28.4% of the total population lives in rural area.

The agricultural sector is dominated by small sized family businesses at the brink of subsistence or semi-subsistence. Average farm sizes with 37 decares are below the Turkey's (61 decares) and the EU averages (167 decares) (ICE n.d.).

The agriculture of the region faces with serious problems in every aspect of the production and most of these problems are in common in other places of Turkey. The main issues can be listed as follows:

- The prevalence of small and fragmented family businesses, the negative economies of scale and low yield
- Market conditions (concentration, the dominance of middleman and traders)
- Under-educated, not sufficiently trained farmers
- Inadequacies in organization practices
- High input costs due to important dependency and insufficient input utilization
- Low profit rates and the need for external financing as a result increased financing costs
- Youth who are unwilling to work as farmers

As a result, small-scale family business suffers from the vicious cycle of “high input cost-low productivity-low prices-low income”. One possible way for small farmers to break this vicious cycle is to become cooperative members. However, agricultural cooperatives generally do not overcome production, marketing and finance issues because of their small-scaled production capacity (Ministry of Customs and Trade Directorate General of Cooperatives 2012). As a consequence, they need support to survive in the competitive environment of agri-food industry.

IMM is the first local government recognising the need and the opportunity of SSE and builds an agricultural rural development model to give appropriate support. In fact, IAM is designed so that it gives the initial impetus to existing cooperatives in the sector. At the beginning, IAM is limited by contractual purchases from cooperatives. The contractual production model is based on the provision of a purchase guarantee for the product of the manufacturer, which in turn has improved the production infrastructure and techniques of the cooperatives, and increased their productive capacities.

There are a total of 310 cooperatives operating for agricultural purposes, consisting of 163 agricultural development cooperatives, 100 irrigation cooperatives and 47 sea food cooperatives in Izmir. Number of the members of these cooperatives is approximately 41.160. Within the growers' associations which are another type of organisation, there are 26 associations and 2.746 members on the basis of various productions (ICE n.d.).

In 2008, IMM started purchasing milk from Tire Dairy Cooperative through School Milk project. The School Milk project was the milestone of IAM. Through this project, IMM has purchased milk from the cooperative in a regular basis and distributed in 250 schools for 20,000 students every week in five years. The School Milk was a strong social project, supports both urban and rural sustainability by contributing healthy diet of children and improving production capacities of small rural farmers. The project gained such a success that the Government has adopted and the project turned into a nationwide project.

Tire Dairy Cooperative, which was making a limited amount of production with only 500 members when School Milk Project first began, has made an important leap with the project. It increased its production capacity and member count, became the biggest cooperative in the country in its field. FAO named Tire Milk Cooperative an “Example Model of Rural Development”. Today, the cooperative plays a crucial role in the livestock sector in Turkey.

Although IAM based on a contractual purchasing relationship between IMM and cooperatives at the beginning, it has evolved and broadened over the years; its scope has expanded exponentially. Application process and results of IAM will be the topic of next section.

4. An Extensive Assessment for IAM

Although IAM's scope has been expanded and varied, its aim has not changed. Quoting from Mr. Ertuğrul Tugay, head of the Department of Agricultural Services:

“Our main concern is to make rural life and rural production sustainable. Therefore, we should ensure to continuation of small family businesses’ production in rural Izmir. If we improve their well-being by giving them suitable production opportunities, they will not migrate to cities. What we have to do is to offer supports which create value added in agricultural products. And our target is small producers who are organized in cooperatives. We prefer to work with cooperatives in order to be efficient in resource use and also to reach more farmers.”

IAM is adopted a bottom-up approach; instead of giving priority to the opinions of experts and technocrats in developing plans and projects, it takes a participatory practice. In this way, it reduces the ‘planning arrogance’ and encourages local people involvement. In fact, when realising a participatory rural development, farmers must be in a central position in agricultural projects and strategies.

“Working together with people in the field for the sustainability of this work brought us to where we are today. As IMM, we did not develop and implement projects by ourselves. It is not our way. We have always listened and acted with the stakeholders at all stages.”

However, getting the rural population’s approval for new developments and getting their active involvement has not been easy. As a first step of collaboration, the priority is given to build trust-based relationship among IMM, farmers and cooperatives. For this aim, instead of working on a single project base, continuity has been brought in relationships.

“When working with country people, it is very hard to teach them new things. We have made pilot practices in most of our work, so that people can take up new methods. We have been by their sides in all stages of these changes to help them adapt. We have kept all our promises. For instance, may seem not important, but we are always being on time for the appointments... We are always in the field. We visit the farmers on a regular basis for both listening them and providing advice on how to improve the quality of their products.”

In the selection of farmers to be supported no discrimination has been made, political interests have not influenced the decisions. While IAM was being executed, the supports have given according to certain criteria to ensure objectivity. These criteria have been genuinely designed to support cooperative members and small producers which survive on agricultural income. The farmers who met the conditions mentioned below have benefited from the supports.

- Being registered to Chamber of Agriculture
- Owners of small scale business (<10 bovines, 50 ovine, 25 decares of land)
- Rural residency
- Having enough manpower
- Accepting a two-year cooperation with IMM
- Not being employed in somewhere else
- Having perfect attendance to education programmes
- Preferably being a member of cooperative

IAM has two dimensions. First of them is supporting the production via purchases (milk, cheese, saplings, flowers, olive oil, honey etc.) from cooperatives. Purchased products are distributed as social aid to people in need and also are used to supply the needs of IMM. The second dimension of IAM relates to the supports such as soil tests, fertilizing advices, education and training, soil efficiency analysis, distributions of quality seeds and saplings and providing access to necessary equipment and machinery.

4.1 Achievements of IAM

The mainstream development economics suggests that there are trade-offs among development goals. However, the goals are integrated and indivisible in nature and SDGs have been articulated on this perspective. IAM provides evidence that the various goals can be addressed with a single holistic programme.

IMM has collaborated with 45 cooperatives in total and reached to 37.6% of the Izmirian farmers. Perhaps the most striking fact is that IAM has attained to this impactful and positive results despite using only a negligible portion of IMM budget. For instance, the agricultural supports' share in 2016 total budget (4,485 million TL) was only 1.97% (IMM 2018). This extensive effect could not be realized if IAM was built on collaboration with individual farmers only.

Direct impacts of the IAM's on the region's agriculture and situation of cooperatives with regard to SDGs are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Direct Impacts and Contributions to SDGs by IAM (IMM, 2018)

IAM Achievements	SDGs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While the agriculture sector in Turkey grew by 3.1 percent between the years 2004 - 2017, it grew by 7.5 percent in Izmir. - Over the last 10 years, milk production in Turkey has increased by 150 percent, 240 percent in Izmir. - In the last 10 years, the number of cooperative members in Izmir has increased by 161 percent and the number of employees in cooperatives has increased by 616 percent. - The cooperative membership rate in Izmir (28%) increased above the Turkey's average rate (13%). - The total turnovers of the contracted cooperatives increased by 658 percent in the 2007-2016 period. - Supported cooperatives have grown by 225 percent in terms of the total product range. - BAYCIKOOP one of the supported cooperatives has started to export flowers to the Netherlands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDG 1 No Poverty SDG 2 Zero Hunger SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Source: IMM, 2018.

The expected result of SSE activities is the improvement participants' well-being in SSE organizations and enterprises. However, the benefits of SSE extend beyond that to the communities in which they live. In our case study, the spillover effects (positive externalities) expand way further than the local context.

Tire Dairy Cooperative president explained these spillover effects as:

“Tire youth don’t migrate anymore. Young people feel safe thanks to Tire Dairy Cooperative, earn their living and want to continue their family business (dairy cow farming). Some members gone from 8 cows to 78 in 10 years. They grew and progressed. That is the solution for problems of small farmers” (Aydınlık 2017).

Table 2, presents a summary for the spillover effects.

Table 2. IAM’s Spillover Effects and Contributions to SDGs

IAM Achievements	SDGs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural-urban migration has stopped. The population of 19 districts of Izmir, defined as "rural", increased by 1.59 percent in 2016 compared to the previous year. While 29.14 percent of Izmir population lived in rural areas 10 years ago, this ratio increased to 30.70 percent in 2016. - New businesses other than cooperatives, have flourished in supported locations. In Bayındır, supported with flower purchasing, 314 new businesses have established in the last five years. - Farmers have started to adopt sustainable practices as a result of other supports such as soil analysis, fertilising suggestions, trainings of IMM. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 125.000 households and 131.000 children between 1-5 years have been distributed two litres of milk per week. - In addition, 6.500 refugee children have included to the distribution plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDG 2 Zero Hunger SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women’s employment was supported by the cooperatives. - Women who are given oyster mushroom raising education started a women cooperative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDG 5 Gender Equality

Source: IMM, 2018.

IAM has vitalized the agricultural cooperative business in Izmir. It has contributed to the change of negative perceptions about cooperatives to a certain extent. Today, the collaborator cooperatives and their brands are known in a wide area and even beyond Izmir. Besides, they are commonly trusted by public. At present conditions, it cannot be said that cooperatives are started to be seen as a crucial component of rural development. Nevertheless, they are considered, at least in some quarters, as a sustainable business model which contribute to the community.

4.2 Enabling Success Factors

The success factors are a combination of applicable legal requirements, and circumstances as well as decisions of local authorities. The key factors are summarized below:

4.2.1 Legal Context of the Implementation

Two main legal regulations enable IMM to imply IAM. First of them is the Turkish Public Procurement Law (2002). Article 3 (Exceptions) of the Law permits procurements of municipalities directly from agricultural cooperatives without public bidding. The second one is the new the Metropolitan Municipality Law (2004) that expanded the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities. By this law, the villages and municipalities of towns within metropolitans were converted to districts. Since in this legal context the rural-urban distinction had been almost eliminated, metropolitan municipalities are allowed to support agriculture.

4.2.2 Current Circumstances

Izmir's unique agricultural potential and the existence of agricultural cooperatives created favourable initial conditions for IAM as explained in Section 3. These circumstances form a foundation on which IAM could be built. Relying on existing cooperatives indicates the emphasis on bottom-up practices. IMM gives a high value of independence of cooperatives and for that reason, it has never intervened cooperatives' management when supporting them. Although all these significant achievements can be attributed to IMM, the credit should also be given to the interaction between the IMM and the cooperatives. The achievement is a consequence of the collaboration of local government and agricultural cooperatives as mentioned before. Without those cooperatives the IMM could not reach the small farmers to this extent.

4.2.3 Execution Success Factors

Even though IAM has emerged from mostly given conditions, it has been improved during the years. It has been institutionalised through different practices:

- Agriculture requires a holistic and integrated approach and IMM's perspective and implementations are aligned with this requirement. To give some examples, the village roads has been improved in order to make easier the access to markets, collective agricultural machinery parks have been established to minimise the costs.
- The Department of Agricultural Services has been established with the aim of effective project management. Effective benefits realization requires an ongoing commitment to, and focus on system's development and implementation. The department with its experienced experts gave a momentum to IAM and increased its benefits.
- As mentioned in Section 4, the priority is given to build trust-based relationships among the stakeholders. While selecting of farmers to be supported no discrimination has been made, the decisions have not been influenced by political interests. As a result, strong collaborative networks across region have emerged.
- Education has been an inseparable part of IAM experience. Sustainable production techniques have been introduced to the farming culture of the region. Working with different partners such as universities and NGOs has promoted better practices.
- Continuity of local governance has a significant role in the success. Aziz Kocaoğlu has served as the mayor of IMM, during the entire application period. In fact, IAM's success is mostly attributed to the Mayor. Interviews that we have conducted confirm that the mayor's attitude and political will are decisive for the scope and quality of the services delivered. In this context, the interviewees stated their concern about a change in the local government in the face of approaching local elections.

It can be resulted that IAM has not remained limited with contractual purchase relation, it has addressed to the entire phases of agricultural production process of the collaborator cooperatives.

4.3 Major Challenges Faced by Local Administrations

The lack of a legal clarity regarding the distribution of authority between the ministries and municipalities on agricultural projects poses a major obstacle for the IMM. Besides, as an opposition party municipality, IMM suffers from the conflict between central government and opposition local authorities.

The tension became apparent when the Government banned the School Milk Project on the grounds that exceeding legal scope authority of the administration, in 2012. Although there were no clear legal or administrative restrictions in the front of distributing milk in the schools, the Government took that decision. In response the prohibition, IMM restructured its milk project and has started distributing to 1-5 year children.

The Government's approach towards IMM has other negative effects. For instance, governmental agencies have failed to cooperate with IMM probably due to the pressure from the Government. During our interview Mr. Tugay explained his concerns:

“For example, we would like to work with Izmir Regional Forestry Department but they did not accept it. Despite the fact that we committed to finance a project related to fight with chestnut cancer, they refused our offer. There are plenty of examples like that.”

Another pressure comes from urbanization. Turkey and Izmir are in a rapid urban development process. Agricultural lands are under pressure of urban development and industrial settlements on them. And the municipalities in Turkey have not full control on the land use decisions.

Other than the external challenges which described above, IMM faces some internal constraints. One of this constraints is the lack of systematic data about IAM. The available data is not sufficient to measure the whole impact of IAM. A database covering statistics on the entire project would allow to quantify the results of the efforts.

4.4 Some Insights on Scaling-up

It is stated that there are two types of scaling-up; vertical and horizontal (WHO 2010). Horizontal scaling-up can be realized through expansion/replication and diversification. While IAM was gaining success in regional expansion, the same success could not be repeated in replication and diversification.

This experience could be replicated in other regions of Turkey which have similar backgrounds. The necessary initial condition for the replication is the existence of agricultural activities and agricultural cooperatives. Yet, no metropolitan municipality has taken the action to implement similar programmes in spite of suitable conditions. One possible explanation might be the deterrence of ambiguity in legal regulations. Other municipalities may be discouraged due to this ambiguity. Another possibility is the negative attitudes of municipal administrations towards cooperatives.

A similar failure can be observed in diversification. Although the success could be multiplied by diversification this chance has not been used properly. IMM has taken steps to promote cooperative alliances and networks but these trials have yielded no results. The potential mutual benefits were not sufficient to convince the cooperatives to collaborate with each other. Cooperatives in Turkey confine themselves to conventional practices. They are not willing to step out of line because of the dominant cooperative culture in Turkey.

As cooperative enterprises scale-up some trade-offs among economic, social and environmental sustainability come out (Utting 2015). For instance, the increase of the maize silage production of Tire Dairy Cooperative has become a significant environmental burden. Another issue arises from rapid expansion is the deviation from cooperative principles and values. It is well known that the core values and cooperatives' SDGs contribution potential are closely linked. Due to the

rapid growth experienced in recent years, some small producer members of cooperatives based on family labour have started to employ non-member workers. Cooperatives have to take into account the working and living conditions of non-member workers. Otherwise, the core values of the cooperative model might be eroded and that in turn it weakens SSE's potential.

Regarding vertical scaling-up, the major challenge is the state support and facilitating legislation. Local authorities' programmes can be more efficacious if they are supported by government. Governments should take care of managerial autonomy of cooperatives. Otherwise government intervention fosters dependency and the distinction between cooperatives and public sector becomes blurry. In Turkey, there are several examples of this kind of intervention. Hence the possibilities should be cautiously considered to avoid similar results.

5. Conclusion

The achievement of the SDGs depends, more than ever, on the ability of local and regional governments to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable local development. Municipalities are potential catalysts for sustainable local development in Turkey. They should increase their action and impact, take up their leadership role, and enable a bottom up movement.

To tackle this challenge, they need partners. At the same time, vision is needed to make sure that the solutions implemented are more than merely addressing the symptoms of the problem, but are also focussing on its roots, fostering a systematic change. Cooperatives are promising potential partners. They represent the exact same stakeholders as the city, namely the citizens, and are a bridge between the local government and its citizens. And as they are non-profit oriented, they foster a new culture of entrepreneurship. However, this collaboration is far from reaching its full potential. There is a need to explore ways to improve collaboration and learn from the successful collaborations which already exist.

In this study, we critically analysed a collaboration project between the metropolitan municipality and cooperatives, namely IAM. IAM is a unique experience in the field of SSE in Turkey. The model provides a good example of how the SSE can play a key role in rural development while contributing towards multiple SDGs at the same time. And IAM example supplies solid evidence that local government is a key player in institutionalising and enabling SSE. It is quite natural, given the fact that SSE organisations and enterprises are grounded in communities, villages, towns, cities and municipalities.

IAM is the first example of its kind with its design and coverage. In spite of negligible budget, it has produced strong results in terms of SDGs implementation. Besides, the collaboration between the municipality and the cooperatives in Izmir has made a meaningful progress in advocating cooperatives. The cooperatives have gained respect in the public eye and the municipality has played a decisive role in this successful development. The results have drawn attention to the possibilities of SSE in regional development. This kind of collaboration would be the first step in establishing a regional SSE.

In spite of encouraging results, the model is still far from creating an ecosystem. To give an example the cooperatives are not positioned along the entire supply chain and that means the for-profit enterprises appropriate the bulk of supply.

To create an ecosystem for SSE requires state support and favourable legislation. At this point the question arises to whether it is possible to harmonise national, regional and local priorities and actions. Specifically speaking for Turkey, SSE is definitely not a priority for the Government. However, the capital accumulation model of Turkey in the past 16 years has resulted in an unsustainable economic conjuncture devoid of productive power and decent job creation. The current macroeconomic environment might force that cooperatives are considered as an alternative. Examples from different geographies verify that when conventional crisis management fails, radical ideas become common sense. Turkey might follow the same path as crisis worsens.

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