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Humanitarian Assistance and Intervention

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a snapshot of many of the most important issues facing humanitarian actors, researchers of humanitarianism, and affected populations. It has provided an overview of the history of modern humanitarian action, showing the major organizing principles and forces that have shaped the contemporary sector. It has also highlighted some of the difficulties encountered by those engaged in providing humanitarian assistance, from navigating difficult ethical terrain to negotiating the core humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality, and even humanity itself. It has considered the various types of actors, the funding they rely on to carry out their work, and the wider political economy implications that humanitarian assistance poses in terms of foreign relations, foreign policy, and aid economies. While linked in many ways to the wider field of development studies, humanitarian studies has a dynamics of its own. Its importance in the coming years looks set to increase. It is therefore a fertile area of study both in its own right and in relation to wider development questions.

VIDEO RESOURCES

Humanitarian assistance in numbers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEZ7uRYvQaQ>

Time 1:45

Explore the findings of our 2016 Global Humanitarian Assistance report. This annual report is a leading resource for understanding financing for humanitarian crises globally. Following the new Sustainable Development Goals and World Humanitarian Summit, our report this year begins to set

a baseline for measuring progress on the implementation of global commitments to invest in humanity in the years to come.

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Understanding ODA loans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l96lQeNC4s0>

Time 34:55

Rob Tew, DI's Head of Technical Development, to look at how changes in measurement from the DAC are likely to lead to an increase in concessional loans as a proportion of official development assistance (ODA) from donors, and the implications of this for developing countries.

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Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief Audiobook

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1baYvY1gAh4>

Time 2:26

Britannia's Embrace offers the first historical analysis of the origins of this modern humanitarian norm in the long nineteenth century. At a time when Britons were reshaping their own political culture, this charitable endeavour became constitutive of what it meant to be liberal on the global stage. Like British anti-slavery, its sister movement, campaigning on behalf of foreign refugees seemed to give purpose to the growing empire and the resources of empire gave it greater strength. By the dawn of the twentieth century, British efforts on behalf of persecuted foreigners declined precipitously, but its legacies in law and in modern humanitarian politics would be long-lasting. In telling this story, Britannia's Embrace puts refugee relief front and center in histories of human rights and international law and of studies of Britain in the world. In so doing, it describes the dynamic relationship between law, resources, and moral storytelling that remains critical to humanitarianism today.

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What is a Multinational Corporation?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGg9K1wymWk>

Time 1:56

A multinational corporation is a business that has its facilities and other assets in at least one country other than its home country. Such companies have offices and/or factories in different countries and usually have a centralized head office where they co-ordinate global management. Generally, any company or group that derives a quarter of its revenue from operations outside of its home country is considered a multinational corporation. There are four categories of multinational corporations: (1) a multinational, decentralized corporation with strong home country presence, (2) a global, centralized corporation that acquires cost advantage through centralized production wherever cheaper resources are available, (3) an international company that builds on the parent corporation's technology or R&D, or (4) a transnational enterprise that combines the previous three approaches. According to UN data, some 35,000 companies have direct investment in foreign countries, and the largest 100 of them control about 40 per cent of world trade.

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History and Humanitarianism: Understanding humanitarian action—past, present and future

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jp7K0KWUeVw>

Time 12:04

The latest film from the Arts and Humanities Research Council looks at how arts and humanities academics are working with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva to help refresh understanding on how principled humanitarian action is delivered, both in the past and today. The ICRC is an impartial, neutral, and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance and protection.

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Making it as international development and humanitarian aid professional

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn5JGSDSGLQ>

Time 14:37

Stephen speaks about recent changes in the non-profit sector, and how we can work to provide better humanitarian aid.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is humanitarian assistance? Explain it briefly.
2. What does it mean that humanitarian assistance is provided in response to human-made or natural disasters?
3. Who is the father of modern humanitarianism, and did he do? Explain briefly.
4. What does liberal humanitarianism stand for?
5. Describe proxy wars.
6. Is the Catholic Relief Services an example of humanitarian organizations?
7. What is the ethical dilemma facing humanitarianism?

ANSWER KEY: REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Humanitarian assistance and the associated subject of humanitarian intervention are often seen as being related to, though still distinct from, development practice. This chapter will consider the points of continuity and disjuncture between humanitarian assistance and intervention, on the one hand, and development, on the other, suggesting that there is much that we can borrow from the study of development that may inform our understanding of humanitarian action. Humanitarian assistance is sometimes referred to as “development on steroids,” referring to the fact that it focuses on short-term, rapidly provided assistance to relieve immediate suffering. Humanitarian assistance is also sometimes hailed as being “apolitical” in that it tries to relieve human suffering but for the most part does not try to address the underlying structural causes of that suffering or to provide more systemic support to prevent recurrence of suffering. That, of course, is an oversimplification, since the dividing lines between humanitarian and development assistance are blurred. (p. 540)
2. Humanitarian assistance can be provided in response to human-made or natural disasters. Natural disasters are often categorized as either of slow onset (drought, leading to famine, for instance) in that they develop over several years, progressively eroding people’s asset bases, or sudden onset (storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions), whereby people experience a shock to their livelihoods with little or no warning. Even where these hazards are unavoidable, their impact on human populations is in part a function of the governance system in place, particularly the extent to which preparedness and response are effectively managed. Conflict, of course, is a human-made disaster that can be either sudden or slowly escalating. Very often conflict and natural disasters occur simultaneously, creating what are called complex political emergencies (CPEs) that can take an enormous toll on the ability of local communities to survive. As we shall see in this chapter, however, whether caused by nature or people, all disasters and their responses are also affected by political factors—by political choices, funding priorities, state-society relations, and other dynamics involving power. (p. 540)
3. Swiss businessman Henri Dunant is the father of modern humanitarianism. Observing the injured soldiers in the battlefield at Solferino, he tried to organize relief for the troops, mobilizing villagers to help care for the wounded and even successfully appealing for the release of several Austrian doctors who had been captured to assist in the effort. After his return to Geneva, Dunant organized a group of prominent members of the elite Genevois society to establish the Permanent International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Soldiers, which later became the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Over the past 150 years, the ICRC has led the way in responding to the needs of those affected by war and disaster. While today it responds to the needs of both combatants and civilians, at first the focus of this work was on responding to the needs of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. (p. 541)
4. This refers to a period that started from the end of the Cold War and tended to address new needs in the verge of the collapse of bipolar ideological system. In this period the lines between relief and development work became more blurred and NGOs in some cases became like “mini-states” providing assistance that ideally states should have provided themselves. At the same time, the post-Cold War era has seen a rise in what has come to be seen as humanitarian intervention—military intervention motivated or justified at least in part with reference to humanitarian objectives of saving lives or relieving suffering. In 2001 the principle of the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) was introduced. This principle asserts that a state’s authority and legitimacy come not from its control over a geographic area but rather from its commitment to ensure that its citizens’ basic rights are safeguarded. The age of liberal humanitarianism has also seen a dramatic

expansion in the number of humanitarian organizations working in the sector and in the number of individuals employed in it. (pp. 543–544)

5. The proxy wars by which the United States and Soviet Union fought their Cold War led to bitter conflicts in such diverse places as Angola, Ethiopia, Somalia, Afghanistan, and throughout Central America. These conflicts brought both non-governmental actors and intergovernmental humanitarian response to new areas. Although most NGOs attempted to stake a claim to being non-political, their assistance had great geopolitical significance, and both superpowers sought to use humanitarian assistance as a tool to promote their interests, and conversely to cast humanitarian suffering as a by-product of their opponent's influence (p. 542).
6. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) was founded in 1943 to respond to the needs of World War II survivors in Europe. CRS has been one of the primary recipients of US government funding. Long guided by a passionate faith-based and anti-Communist agenda, CRS used US and other funding to gradually expand in the post-World War II era to become one of the largest global relief organizations. Today, the organization works in 101 countries. Its 2014 Annual Report indicates that 62 per cent of its total income was derived from US public sources. In the first half of 2016, CRS received over \$216 million from the US for humanitarian emergency, the third largest recipient of US government funds (after the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme) (fts.unocha.org). CRS represents a category of faith-based NGOs that “see their humanitarian programmes as straddling the church and the secular world, combining social and religious goals” (Stoddard, 2003). While CRS is overtly a faith-based organization, even some of the more professedly secular organizations have roots in religious precepts and traditions. Thus, despite the CRS profile as religious it also falls into the category that Stoddard describes as being “Wilsonian” in that it has consistently worked closely with US funding on relief and development work that aligns with the foreign policy objectives of the US government. This can be seen, for instance, in the fact that CRS has continued to work in Afghanistan with USAID funding long after most other major NGOs departed over concerns about their inability to operate safely as independent aid actors. (p. 545)
7. Humanitarianism is facing unescapable ethical dilemmas. At its most basic, the goal of humanitarian action is to save lives, but this imperative is muddled by several subsidiary goals—to do no harm (not to let aid contribute, even indirectly, to the suffering of people) and to try to steer a course of ethical decision-making as successfully as possible. This is no easy task; one might say that the work of a humanitarian practitioner is 90 per cent concerned with trying to make judgment calls about prioritization of aid, forms of response, and ways of managing information in which there is no perfect solution. This is done usually with limited information, limited resources, and restricted authority or mandate. Humanitarian workers often feel that no solution is cost-free, and that they are therefore condemned to try to find the “least-worst” option among a range of less than ideal possible actions (p. 547).