



HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS THINK TANK

HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM RESILIENCE & CRISIS-SOCIETIES' ENGAGEMENT: PHILOSOPHICAL ENTRENCHMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC CHALLENGES IN PERSPECTIVES OF HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE

BY COSTANTINOS BERHUTESFA COSTANTINOS

*PhD Professor of Public Policy, School of Graduate Studies,
AAU Trustee, Africa Humanitarian Action*

MARCH 2014



Save the Children



SUMMARY

It is easy to follow the current global trend to advocate humanitarianism as a desirable form of relief paradigm. Nor is it difficult to make normative judgments about how nations should behave if humanitarianism is to grow into a positive agent of change. Nevertheless, it is not so easy to conceptualise it as a working process, which is balanced against strategy, to determine what makes for real, as opposed to vacuously formal process. As a way of contributing to the overcoming of these difficulties, we may theorise humanitarianism as the dynamic interaction of strategy and process. It is possible to see humanitarianism as the playing out of objective and critical standards, rules and concepts of economic, social and political conduct in the goals and activities of all participants, those of public officials who make and administer the rules as well as those of ordinary citizens. The issue here is not simply one of application of rules to particular activities. Nor is it one of dissolving agent-catered strategies of humanitarianism into objective principles and norms. It is rather the production or articulation of process elements and forms within and through the strategic (and non-strategic) activities of various participants. Highlighting the reciprocally constitutive and regulative enunciation of approach and course of action, we shift the centre of analysis away from the two as separate formations that enter only external relations with each other. This shift of analytical focus serves to emphasise the critical point that the task of broadly structuring humanitarianism as a social system is more important than that of promoting it within the specific programme. The making of broadly inclusive humanitarianism should consist of an articulation of process and agency, which can be sustained in its system by any agency or government operating it.

HUMANITARIANISM AS DYNAMISM OF STRATEGY & PROCESS

Analytical limitations

Current discussions and analyses of humanitarianism are generally marked by several limitations that underwrite the confusion stemming from the lack of crises societies participation and partnership in humanitarian action.

- The tendency to narrow action is juxtaposed to the lack of attention given to problems of articulation or production of humanitarianism within local priorities, rather than simply as formal or abstract possibilities.
- There is a nearly exclusive concern in certain institutional perspectives on humanitarianism within the generic attributes and characteristics of social, economic, cultural and political organisations.
- It is further marked by the consequent neglect of analysis in terms of specific strategies and performances of organisations in confronting complex emergencies and developing humanitarian programmes where organisations neglect formulation of specific strategies in their addressal of humanitarian crises.

Moreover, ambiguity as to whether beneficiaries are agent or object of engaging in humanitarian operations as opposed to donor and state driven programmes. Finally, a third set of limitations arise from the inadequate treatment of the role of transnational agencies and companies, as well as from the relations between global and indigenous aspects of humanitarianism.

Who are the humanitarians?

Participants in and around the humanitarian network generally constitute an intersection of institutions and groups with specific aims and strategies. These may include indigenous governments that preside over formal humanitarian programmes, political organisations not affiliated with the state, opposition groups and intellectuals that operate outside official government channels. In some cases, these may also include a free, though constitutionally and legally not very well protected, press; local non-state organisations involved in promoting humanitarianism at the grassroots level as well as in civic, humanitarian and relief work; professional associations; and multilateral and bilateral agencies and private international aid groups, which collectively exert far-reaching external influence.

Generally, the greater degree of diversity of participants actively involved, the greater the variation. Uncertainty and complexity of forms of agency and activity possible notwithstanding, the more open and free the humanitarian programme is, it is likely to be in

its formal as well as informal aspects. Admittedly, the appealing actors typically have their own primary *functions* quite apart from their role in promoting humanitarianism. Every one of the players is geared toward specific interests, concerns and activities beyond or outside the ends of democratic reform. Even if they are expressly committed to promoting reform, it is always possible for participants to lose themselves in the specifics and *forget* the process as a whole. Yet a particular actor in pursuit of a limited objective within the global network, as a condition of maintaining coherence and effectiveness and enlisting cooperation from other participants, will have to modulate its agency and intentions.

This has to come in such a way that the actor's complex, differential play in alternative institutional practices and in varying forms and contexts of activity is possible. Each actor must formulate its own project in a spiral form that to some degree allows the project to *escalate* or to open into other objectives and activities within the reform network. To restate the basic point, the paper addresses the extent and nature of openness of humanitarianism that are conditioned by the breadth of the range of available participants and the degree of uncertainty and complexity that characterises their agency and functional relations.

Human security process openness

Uncertainty and complexity notwithstanding, there are countervailing currents and pressures within the intersection of participating organisations and groups, which tend to work against or limit humanitarian openness. These forces of process closure manifest themselves in the structure of the network of participants and in participants' activities, which may be or may not be transparent to the consciousness of the actors that channel them. At the structural level, a certain hierarchy of agency and activity is evident within the network of humanitarian programme participants, such that some actors assume primary positions relative to others that are by comparison limited players. For example, indigenous governments are involved more commandingly and directly in running humanitarian programmes than local non-state actors. Certain international agencies, notably the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and bilateral aid (EU, USAID, DFID...), range their activities and influence across the network extensively while others are localised.

As global 'authorities' with massive financial and technical capacity and institutional resources at their command, they are major players with whom indigenous actors and other recipients of its assistance must cooperate or come to terms with. This hierarchy of agency effectively places some participants in the reform network in positions of subordination. It also places limits on the range of agents and forms of practice, which can be networked through international support. Thus, although their legally recognised existence and growth

are crucial for humanitarianism, local groups tend to be neglected or marginalised, often, forced into the background (or underground) of the formal process, or into partial or total exclusion. Disaster prone nations, on the other hand, while they have to reckon with external aid conditionality, are often the source of global laws and policies.

It is also ironic that it is on this basis that the agency and activities of civic groups are *regulated*, or their participation in determining the rules of the game is allowed or disallowed. In some cases, this ends up in narrowness within the structure of global and local regimens whereby humanitarian programmes create participants and participants create humanitarian programmes in self-enclosed, formalistic, reciprocally constrictive articulation. In short, the uncertain and, potentially at least, open institutional and intellectual environment in which humanitarianism has to operate is generally counter-balanced by a significant degree of stratification of organised actors and by relatively settled relations of power and authority into which the actors enter.

Structural constraints on humanitarianism

Structural constraints of humanitarianism are reinforced by specific, more or less conscious, uncertainty and complexity reducing activities of key participants in humanitarian action. As a hiatus from being self-reliant and aid-dependent during which competing claims contest over humanitarian programmes, they may be characterised by rules and forms of engagement that are *in constant flux* and may lead to *any number of unpredictable alternative outcomes*. At the same time, the hiatus is marked by aspiring actors that seek to get their hands quickly on the flux of crises events, often succeeding in immediately securing themselves in and projecting to control of humanitarian action.

There is a strong incentive for crises regimes, connected to real or imagined threats of violent opposition to their 'leadership' of humanitarian action, to engage in activities which short-cut or pre-empt the development of an open and level playing field for engaging crises societies. These activities include the reduction of an entire complex environment to a specific programme, with all the pre-emptions, displacements and substitutions of agency and activity this implies as well as the effects of process closure it contains. The truncating of the protracted and complex passage from partisan intentions to effective and open process involve the use of public media and institutions available to the governing elite to villainize civic groups with the aim of excluding them partially with the flux of events turning overly 'orderly' quickly through the *diktat* of the governing elite.

In engaging in uncertainty, reducing activities which short-cut the full emergence of open and transparent processes, regimes often enlist the support of outside participants, notably Western governments and international agencies. External players may support

humanitarianism through a variety of mechanisms, including the use of the instrument of aid conditionality. The range of supportive measures they take may even be expanding beyond efforts aimed at government renovation into broader areas of political reform, including support of press freedom. Nevertheless, international agencies also worry about political instability, civil strife and economic disorder. In addition, the proliferation of varied aid conditionality tied to specific policies and sectors are a source of contention. Such measures as economic adjustment programmes, governance reforms, administrative codes to be followed, human rights, environmental regulations to be adhered often outpace the development of coherent humanitarian standards, rules and concepts. Local humanitarian programmes have generally not matched global action; with all the multiplicity of not very well coordinated programmes, it is rather difficult to maintain a sense of direction.

THE DOMAIN OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Ideological influences

Beyond the sphere of political agency, possibilities and problems of the openness of humanitarian programmes can be grasped in terms of the related domain of humanitarian principles. Ideological elements and constructs might be seen as the very constitutive structure of process openness and closure. Humanitarian programmes will commonly be characterised by a number of idiosyncratic or shared elements, including concepts and rules of governance, national and cultural values, traditions of political discourse and modes of representation of specific interests. These elements, or complexes of elements, will tend to assume varying forms and to enter into shifting relations of competition, cooperation and hegemony. Generally, the broader the range of ideological elements at play in a humanitarian programme, and the more varied and uncertain their relations, the greater the possibilities of process openness and transparency that exist.

Like the activities to which they are often tied more or less closely, transition to humanitarian constructs tend to be unsettled and, at times, unsettling. Particularly at these initial stages of the crises, they are more likely to be uncertain rather than stable structures of ideas and values. This has the effect of opening up the entire humanitarian process of freeing it from simple domination by any one organised actor or coalition of actors. Yet global ideological elements and relations take shape and come into play within a hierarchy of global and local agencies and groups. *A determinate order of institutions, powers, interests and activities operates through complexes of humanitarian programme ideas and values, filling out, specifying, anchoring and, often short-cutting their formal content or meaning.* In addition, this may impose ideological as well as practical limits on the extent to which and how democratic reform processes can be opened up or broadened. Thus, the fact

that humanitarian actors often do not efficiently realise the potential of the ideas and goals they promote, and that their intervention is not proportional to its impact, raises the issue of whether the ideas in question may be fundamentally constrained at their conception by the very technocratic structures that ground their articulation.

The supply of ideas of humanitarianism may be artificially deflated by particular strategies and mechanisms used by incumbent governments to manage entire reform processes. Conceptual possibilities may be left unrealised, or sub-optimally realised, insofar as governing elite are preoccupied with filling out those spaces of uncertainty in humanitarian thought, discourse and action that alternative groups would occupy in the course of their own engagement. In the sphere of humanitarian principles, openness is also concerned in part with allowing free expression of diverse ideas and beliefs and permitting the unrestricted taking of positions by citizens on specific issues. It has to do with creating conditions for the existence of the broadest possible range of opinions: are all ideas and values allowed to contend? Are there laws or unwritten *codes*, which prevent or hinder intellectual and cultural freedom? Do the views and perspectives of opposition groups have a significant and legitimate place in democratic projects and processes? Is good faith criticism of a particular strategy construed as negation of humanitarianism?

Questions such as these are important in examining and assessing the ideological basis for humanitarianism. Nevertheless, as important as it is, this is only one context or level of analysis of the breadth and depth on the terrain of humanitarian principles. There is another level of analysis, concerned with the extent and nature of openness of distinct ideological constructs, with modes of articulation of given sets of ideas and values and of representations of specific issues relative to others. The concern here is not so much the number and diversity of ideas, values and opinions allowed to gain currency during humanitarian action, but rather the modes of their competitive and cooperative articulation. For example,

- Does humanitarianism enter national processes as an external principle, constructing and deploying its concepts in sterile abstraction from national beliefs and values? Does it come into play in total opposition to, or in cooperation with national values and sentiments?
- In the struggle for the establishment of rules of economic and political engagement in crises states, should equating the articulation of global agenda with the production of broad-based concepts, norms and goals govern their 'leadership' of humanitarian action?

- Do humanitarian programmes signify change in terms of the transformation of the immediate stuff of national policies into an activity mediated and guided by objective and critical standards, rules and principles?

In light of these questions, it is possible to draw a conceptual distinction between two levels of articulating humanitarian principles and to note the implications of their relations for process openness. There are first, representations of specific interests, identities, needs, wishes, goals, claims, demands and so on, all of which are different for different individuals, groups and communities. These are to be distinguished from a second level of production and circulation of humanitarian principles where broad-based concepts, principles and rules take shape and come into play. For convenience, humanitarians can designate ideological elements at the former level of particular representations or contents, and those at the latter level of general forms. Particular representations have to do with ideologically loaded articulations of interests, needs and activities, which may appear or become so immediate as to be taken for spontaneous realities.

General forms and particular representations of humanitarianism

General forms of humanitarianism refer to systemic categories and institutional mechanisms; they objectively, mediate and generalise particular representations. In examining or assessing the ideological possibilities and problems of the humanitarianism process, general forms and particular representations need to be addressed in terms of the relation between the universal and particular, even as they retain their distinct conceptual status. For the two levels of principle formation, tend to incorporate each other in a more or less uncertain and complex process, as well as constitute relatively autonomous coherence internally. The breadth and depth of universal forms cannot be grasped or judged simply by their own worth, i.e., by their 'theoretical correctness' or the rigor of their formal construction. Our understanding should not overlook how particular representations inform universal concepts and rules; rather, we have to conceptualise the relation between the two levels of production of humanitarian principles and their implications for programme openness.

One way is to think of the universal against the particular in terms of concrete instances and abstract systems. A system of democratic concepts, principles, rules and procedures provides objective standards to which every instance of representation of interests, needs, demands, and intentions and so on must conform. In this light, humanitarianism appears as a process in which a global structural model of humanitarian principles is applied to local contexts. It is seen as the extension of the ideological and institutional contents of the model toward projects of democratic reform. This conceptualisation may not be entirely

mistaken, but it is far from satisfactory. Generic humanitarian intervention forms are not simply 'pure' humanitarian principles devoid of practical content; and particular constructs are not merely points of "application" of systemic democratic elements, which are wholly external to them, and in whose articulation they have no role to play.

If general forms are seen as pre-given standards to which every instance of representation of particular interests must conform, the effect will restrict humanitarian openness; for that will mean pushing ideas and values produced in the plenitude of social experience to the background and accord primacy to a mere system of abstract categories generated by politicians, activists and intellectuals. It must also be noted here that the conceptual and institutional mechanisms of humanitarianism cannot 'come alive' in local contexts merely as generic forms. They make themselves felt only to the extent individuals, groups and communities address through them their felt needs and concerns and the circumstances they face. Alternative ways of looking at the relation between general forms and particular contents would give precedence to the latter over the former. Within this perspective, specific organisations and groups appear to have more leeway, articulating systems of abstract categories according to their particular interests and intentions. Humanitarianism as a system of universal concepts and practices will necessarily be instantiated in contexts, but only in line with the specific aims and strategies of particular agents, rather than within a simple application of its concepts in their pre-given abstract form. Instead of being applied to local contexts, global forms or models of humanitarianism provide ideological materials for engaging crises states and societies in global contexts.

This perspective has merits.

It can work as a corrective to the view of humanitarianism as a mere extension of a system of abstract categories to concrete instances. However, the issue here is not one of simply giving primacy to specific contents over general forms. The concepts and principles of humanitarianism may allow particular interests and intentions to permeate them, yet should take shape through such particularities as distinct, relatively autonomous articulations. It is important to recognise here that there are various ways of connecting particular interests and goals to global concepts and principles of humanitarianism, but these may be restrictive of humanitarian openness and transparency. In some cases, to tie humanitarianism to specific intentions and constructs is not to appreciate to the systems' inherent breadth and complexity; it is, rather, to operate at levels and within forms of knowledge that encompass only a limited part of the systems' full range.

In addition, governments managing humanitarian action may use strategies of interest articulation or identity construction that in effect displace or distort the generic forms that provide the standards for their humanitarianism efforts. They may operate the formal concepts and rules of humanitarianism in such a way as to maximise their openness and

transparency, however, the opposite is not uncommon: a 'theoretically' open and free process may, in actuality, be dominated and narrowed by particular agenda of assignable participants. The relation between explicit general forms and particular representations in the humanitarian action can best be grasped as their dynamic, mutually constitutive or regulative articulation. It is well to recognise that the former do not have effective generality or objectivity of their own, independent of particular elements and contents. If they were wholly independent, the forms would be vacuous and practically irrelevant. Moreover, specific representations are not passive external targets of application of generic forms of humanitarianism but in part constitutive of them. In other words, neither one nor the other level of humanitarianism has elements, features and functions that it owes entirely to itself. Articulation and structuring of elements occur, or should occur, continually across the two levels. Thus, humanitarianism here entails conceptualisation in global categories that are invested with varying local meanings that are themselves in part actualisations of trends in international political (and development) thought. The openness, transparency and complexity of humanitarianism will depend on the extent to which and how global and local levels or dimensions are articulated with each other. This means that the attempt to subsume humanitarianism by some particular agenda or ideological intention must, therefore, limit rather than enhance openness of humanitarian action. If what explicit general forms signify is no particular humanitarian strategy but the very process of humanitarianism itself, then any particular intention must, to the extent it is humanitarian, allow general forms to work themselves out through it. Conversely, humanitarian strategies must take on generic elements, dimensions and functions.

In order to have significant constitutive or regulative effects on the plenitude of particular representations, the humanitarian process itself must be allowed to attain coherence and integrity even as it comes into play in varied contexts of activity. While it may be tied to the initiatives and leadership of assignable organisations or groups in its emergence and development, it nonetheless gains currency as a relatively autonomous system that other, in which competing organisations can also participate and operate. As a set of distinctly general categories of humanitarian thought, discourse and practice, humanitarian programmes take the diversity of particular political ideas and activities into themselves and make them a vital part of their conceptual and institutional economy. It mediates and channels specific actors and their activities by means of an objectification and generalisation that works on and through them.

Humanitarian Agency

Agency refers to the full range of significant participants and their activities and relations to

humanitarian policy formulation and management. Participants include potential, as well as actual, domestic and international actors: state actors, non-state actors, the international community, businesses and individuals. Stakeholders in State constantly create undercurrents that determine the scope and nature of agency with their specific needs, imperatives and causes for interaction in an exercise that is prognostically dominated by certain stakeholders. The basic point here is that the extent and nature of recoveries in a post humanitarian situation are conditioned by the breadth of the range of available participants and the degree of uncertainty and complexity that characterised their agency and functional relations. The state actors dominate the process, because, in reality, while a rich associational life characterises many crises societies, but the richness of such forms of associational life does not imply the presence of a strong civil society as concealed here. The kinds of associations prevalent in the context of authoritarian or hegemonic regimes tend to reflect the weak character of the State rather than a strong civil society (Costantinos, 1996).

Informal associations are characterised by fragmentation and disengagement from the state institutions. While such associations exist, they have not developed more structures that are formal and have not openly presented themselves in the public area (Chazan, et al., 1999:17). The weakness of the state meant that few incentives existed to form autonomous organisations to engage with the state; rather, the 'exit' option prevailed as individuals preferred to remain outside the reach of state institutions (UNDP, 2006). At the structural level, a certain hierarchy of agency and activity is evident within the network of participants of humanitarian governance, such that some actors assume a primary position relative to others that are by comparison relegated to be limited players. This characterises the 'enabling environment' for good governance that is modulated and, at times, mediated by a number of distinctive and shared additional elements. This includes concepts and rules of government, national and cultural values, traditions of political discourse and arguments, and modes of representation of specific individual interests, needs and issues (Costantinos, 1996).

These elements, or complexes of elements, will tend to assume varying forms and enter into shifting relations of competition, cooperation and hegemony during the exercise of recoveries in a post humanitarian situation. Generally, the broader the range of ideological elements at play and the more varied and uncertain their relations, the greater are the possibilities of process openness and transparency that can exist. Nevertheless, many questions linger that need to be addressed in recoveries in a post humanitarian situation (Costantinos 1997: c, 11-13). Do these processes enter local processes as external humanitarian principles, constructing and deploying its concepts in sterile abstraction from the immediacies of indigenous traditions, beliefs, and values? Does this construct add value to traditional 'humanitarian' and 'development' projects and programmes, and how does

the humanitarian governance construct base its assumptions on historically rooted in community knowledge and experience?

More specifically, does it have the necessary tools to record community responses on what has been the impact of ecosystem, socio-economic and political changes on livelihoods? What are the demographic, socio-economic, cultural, and political responses (*adaptive strategies*) of communities to these changes? Are there differential responses between men and women? What informs these responses – traditional or contemporary knowledge and practices, or the integration of the two? Is it internal and external technological innovations? Have these responses led (or do they have the potential to lead) to sustainable livelihoods? What kinds of interventions (communication and outreach strategies, technological innovation, etc.) are needed to enhance humanitarian governance community responses so that they lead to sustainable outcomes?

Questions on indigenous knowledge in pursuit of adaptive strategies

What is the process by which communities and external change agents integrate contemporary and indigenous knowledge in pursuit of adaptive strategies that lead to sustainable livelihoods? What economic, ecological, social, cultural, political environments contribute to the evolution of successful adaptive strategies (*best practice*)? To what extent does this environment impact positively or negatively on poverty alleviation, employment generation, and social cohesion? What indicators can be used to measure progress? What role can external agents play in developing indicators and reinforcing adaptive strategies? Moreover, what kinds of policy changes are needed to support the evolution or enhancement of adaptive strategies that lead to sustainable livelihoods? In the case of rural communities, which in particular are 'out of reach,' do ideas addressing humanitarian situation come into play in total opposition to, or in cooperation with, historic values and sentiments? Two intellectual traditions provide the theoretical framework within which the discussion is going on: Marxist perspective and a political interactive framework (Oyugi, 2000:5-6).

The Marxist inspired discourse seeks to understand the configuration of social forces in the context of the always-impending social transformation of society based on the balance of such forces. Some of the critical issues raised in this discourse include, among others: the historical and class role of civil society in social transformation and its relationship to the forces of production and the state (Ibid). The political interaction perspective on the other hand presumes that the state-society relationship is central to understanding the political dynamic of Africa. It is a synthesis of conventional analysis of African Politics, which attempts to deconstruct the contentions of previous sociological

and anthropological analyses and re-interprets them within the problematic of the state-society nexus. Characteristically it eschews a pre-determination of the locus of power in any of the public or private spheres. Otherwise, known as the political choice framework, it derives its theoretical leitmotif from the recognition of multiple factors at work on the African political scene and by tracing their diverse dynamics over a period of time. The neo-liberal orthodoxy's offshoots of this tradition have tended to treat civil society as if it were a replacement of class analysis. In order to un-pack some of the supererogatory aggregation of class categories, they have striven to expose a broader range of social relationships, strategic options and behaviour patterns within and among classes and, by that token, succeeded to mitigate the theoretical effect of structural determinism which usually accompanies class analysis (UNECA, 1998:11-14 & Costantinos 1997c:11-13).

The inspiration for the spiritual dimensions comes from shared values, vision, resources of the community, demanding common tasks that build a community, and the momentum for radical citizen participation (Rene, et al., 1995 & Titti & Singh, 1996). Furthermore, it is grounded on the realism of what it means to be human means shared values, and primacy of partnership between the human communities (Spretnak 1996:33-34 & Paulos, 2003). The concept of humanitarian governance construct as it is envisaged today aims to renew these ideas of a collaborative political processes involving the society as a whole by at last giving due recognition to the role of local populations (Fowler, 1989, 12). Nevertheless, this raises additional questions: in the struggle over the establishment of humanitarian governance and rules of engagement, do leading stakeholders equate the articulation of their ideas and agenda with the production of broad-based concepts, norms and goals which should govern the direction of recoveries in a post humanitarian situation at all levels? How does this construct add value to traditional participatory paradigms and whole arenas of multi-track communications? Do humanitarian processes signify change in terms of the transformation of the immediate stuff of stakeholder-specific partisan agendas into a new kind of co-evolutionary activity - an activity mediated and guided by objective and critical policy analysis, formulation and management of standards, rules and principles of humanitarian governance?

In light of the above questions, it is possible to draw a conceptual distinction between the two levels of articulation of humanitarian principles in humanitarian governance policy analysis, formulation and management process and to note the implications of their relations for process openness. There are first representations of specific interests, identities, needs, wishes, goals, claims, and demands in humanitarian governance policy formulation and management, as well as differences in different individuals, groups and communities. These are to be distinguished from a second level of production and circulation of collective humanitarian principles where broad-based concepts, principles and

rules take shape and come into play in the analysis, formulation and management of policies in recovery projects of post humanitarian situation.

The main issue in state-citizen relations in the humanitarianism is whether state institutions have the capacity and the will to relate to citizens and citizens groups based on mutual respect, autonomy, equality and trust. Because the humanitarian governance construct adds value to traditional participatory paradigms by bringing the whole arena of civic education, it brings the process to a higher moral ground (Fowler, et al., 1989, 12-22). The evidence for this assertion is the virtual absence of civic education training as a key component of many 'participatory' programmes. It is fundamental to the humanitarian governance construct that civic education - learning about and appreciating one's rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities as a citizen and the immediate rules, laws and governance structures within which one exercises citizenship - is the first and fundamental step in humanitarian action (Costantinos 1997c:11-13).

Beyond the sphere of agency, possibilities and problems of humanitarian action can be grasped in terms of the related domain of humanitarian principles. Ideological elements and constructs might be seen as the very constitutive structure of process openness and closure. Such transitions will commonly be characterised by a number of distinctive and shared additional elements, including concepts and rules of government, national and cultural values, traditions of political discourse and arguments, and modes of representation of specific interests, needs and issues. These elements, or complexes of elements, will tend to assume varying forms and to enter into shifting relations of competition, cooperation and hegemony during political reform. Generally, the broader the ranges of ideological elements at play in a humanitarian governance and the more varied and uncertain their relations, the greater the possibilities of process openness and transparency.

Like humanitarian organisations and the activities to which they are often tied more or less closely, transitional society constructs tend to be unsettled and, at times, unsettling. Particularly at the initial stages of the crisis, they are more likely to be uncertain rather than stable structures of ideas and values. This has the effect of opening up the reform process, of freeing the process from simple domination by any one organised actor or coalition of actors. Humanitarian principles relates to complexes of ideas, beliefs, goals and issues that can come into cooperative play or competitive contestation in humanitarian action. It includes alternative definitions of societal vulnerabilities as well as varying solutions offered for them (Costantinos, 1997c:11-13). "Humanitarian governance" as a specific field of action should apply to decisions concerning collective or individual measures, made through organisations and affecting social groups that lack access to expression (Costantinos 1997c:11-13 & Fowler, 1992:5).

Engagement of crises societies – discussion on process and strategy

Micro-policy management, as closely linked as it is with macro-policy, demands a multi-stakeholder, multi-track communications strategy that constantly informs stakeholders in recoveries in a humanitarian situation of their policy choices and options. One can analyse humanitarian governance as a dynamic interaction of strategy and process. The dynamics of interplay between process and strategy in a livelihood system, where assets change hands spontaneously, is dependent upon the specific social agency and political ideology under which this interplay takes place. There is no such thing as social capital development that is based on perfect order devoid of a normal element of social cohesion, often serving as an important impetus for positive social change, unless one assumes an absolute zero-sum human interaction. Hence, as a way of contributing to the overcoming of these difficulties, one may theorise humanitarianism as the dynamic interaction of strategy and process.

It is easy to follow the current trend within the international community and advocate the participatory approaches and desirable tools to promoting humanitarian governance. Nor is it difficult to make normative judgments about how practitioners and donors should behave if humanitarian governance is to result in sustainable citizen participation in decision-making. However, it is not so easy to conceptualise a participatory multi-stakeholder system, within which humanitarian governance strategies are grounded, as working processes, which are balanced against strategies, to determine what makes for a real, as opposed to prescribed processes. This is particularly the case where “the giver” strata (the State, donors, Non-Governmental organizations) tend to view the relations of their particular agenda with their broader roles and responsibilities as relatively simple and direct, unproblematically reducing the latter to the former (Costantinos, 1996).

It is possible to see the engagement of crises societies as the playing out of objective and critical standards, rules, and concepts of political conduct in the goals and activities of all participants. The issue here is not simply one “application” of rules to particular activities. Nor is it one of dissolving agent-catered strategies into “objective” principles and norms. It is rather the production or articulation of self-development process elements and forms within and through the *strategic (and non-strategic) activities* of various participants. Highlighting the mutually constitutive and regulative articulation of strategy and process, we shift the centre of analysis away from the two as separate formations that enter only externally in relation with each other. This shift of analytical focus serves to emphasise the critical point that the task of broadly structuring humanitarian governance as a self-empowering change mechanism is more important than that of promoting it within the specific programme design of a particular agency’s “participatory development” agenda.

The latter, which manifests in a variety of efforts ranging from humanitarian governance to community diagnostics to implementing community-based programmes, is or should be only a second-order concern compared to the former, which is primarily a strategic tool adopted by communities and individuals to enhance their adaptive strategies that are important in the transition to a more fulfilled livelihood. Thus, we can observe that external promoters or supporters of humanitarian projects often do not efficiently realise in practice that the potential of the ideas and goals they promote raises the issue of whether the ideas in question may be fundamentally constrained at conception. Further, that the volume of intervention is not proportional to its impact raises issues of implementation by the very institutions that ground their articulation.

While the explicit concepts of capacity building for humanitarianism that current international initiatives operate may be consistent with goals of 'empowerment' of indigenous communities and of enhancing local institutional and human capacities, the initiatives tend to work towards these goals in narrow technocratic and managerial terms. Such initiatives seem to equate technocratic rationality and capacity with the totality of institutional purposefulness and strength.

RESEARCH AND INTROSPECTION ON HUMANITARIANISM

Regional actors and international dynamics generate many humanitarian situations. In this context, the African Union and regional organisations should play a leading role on the continent and should not defer their responsibilities to extra-regional players. One of the mechanisms is the development of effective early warning systems. Indeed, many researchers have delved into the challenges of complex emergencies and equally stressed the need for devising comprehensive and sustainable strategies that address the root causes of the crises and assist victims to re-adjust and re-construct their societies by using mechanisms that are internationally and locally accepted in cultural, legal and moral terms in resolving humanitarians (Costantinos, 1996).

Complex emergencies that have implications for political governance, gender, human security, child soldiers and vulnerabilities of the elderly need to generate debate on elections, democratisation, constitutionalism, decentralisation and devolution of power, respect for human rights and sustainable development are fundamental pre-requisites to preventing and resolving crises. Understanding current humanitarian situations and arriving at durable solutions requires serious knowledge and analyses of the historical roots and evolution of the humanitarians (OSSREA, 2004).

This line of research is central and it demands more systematic and rigorous conceptualisation and study. From a theoretical perspective, humanitarian culture best

predicts the prospects for the consolidation of humanitarian principles and sustainable livelihoods, rather than the likelihood that social movements can arise and that the humanitarian tradition can occur. As the building blocks of humanitarian principles, certain combinations of political institutions must be extant or emergent if humanitarianism is to occur. These illustrative features operate at different level of analysis and each has its own statistical requirements. The power of a given set of factors to explain humanitarian governance, the responsiveness of hypotheses to experiential scrutiny, and the potential of the approach to generate policy propositions and trajectories, however, lead to an imperative for any study to adopt “an innovative human and institutional approach.”

Hence, the hypothesis in capacity building is that the possibility, constitution and result of the development of humanitarianism culture that would enhance engagement of crises societies depends on the design and configuration of political institutions in state and civil society. The key research question becomes, *is the characterisation of institutions in civil society and the state conducive to humanitarianism?* Humanitarians have identified capacity-building targets at various levels: women’s civic education policies and programmes; institutions and coordination; and human capacity aimed at strengthening civic engagement, which should be linked with human rights groups and official humanitarian institutions. It is a fundamental recommendation that civic education - learning about and appreciating one's rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities as a citizen and the immediate rules, laws and governance structures within which one exercises citizenship is a fundamental step in developing participation and instilling rights-based approach.

Without it, humanitarians will make no significant headway with their new paradigms and strategies or with the pendulous lurch towards good humanitarian governance. At this level, humanitarians must aim to increase the capacity of civic education and human rights institutions to perform effectively their functions as they relate to civic education and human rights promotion. Inter-institutional consultation and coordination mechanisms between all institutions concerned, including those in the areas of civil rights, will be targeted for capacity building to strengthen the development of civic education messages, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This will promote commitment and support for civic education activities by all stakeholders.

The strategies and mechanisms for humanitarianism need more research to identify those that have worked and those that have failed. The role of African Diaspora in generating and sustaining humanitarians as well as resolving them is little understood. Hence, it requires systematic research. The urgent need for comprehensive and systematic research and policy interface on issues of humanitarian emergencies entails that the participants maintain active communication on the major issues of research and issues requiring policy

intervention. ■

REFERENCES

- Chazan, N., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, (Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Reiner, 1999) p. 7
- Costantinos, BT. & Yilkal Fisseha, *Regulating Charities and Societies in Africa: A Compassionate Discourse*, (FDRE Proclamation No. 621/2009: *Proclamation on the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies*, (Addis Ababa, AAU, 2011)
- Costantinos, BT., *Political transitions in Africa*, (Washington DC. & Abekuta, ALF/GCA, 1996)
- Costantinos, BT., *Strategic approaches to building capacity for humanitarianism in Africa*, (Concept Note, International Advisory Group on capacity building, IIDEA, Stockholm, 1997c)
- Fowler, A. and Rick J. *The Role of Southern CSOs in Development Cooperation (Occasional Paper Series No. 2 INTRAC*, Oxford, U.K., 1989)
- Fowler, A. with Piers Campbell and Brian Pratt, *Institutional Development and CSOs in Africa: Policy Perspectives for European Development Agencies* (INTRAC, Oxfam, U.K pp 19-20, 22, 1992)
- OSSREA, *The International Conference on African Conflicts: Management, Resolution, Post-Conflict Recovery and Development*, (OSSREA, UNCC, Addis Ababa, 29 Nov – 1 Dec, 2004)
- Oyugi, E., *Civil Society and Popular Participation in Development*, (in Costantinos, BT., UNECA, 2000:5-6)
- Rene, J.K.; Singh, N., and Titi, V., *Participatory Research for Sustainable Livelihoods in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands: A guide Book for Field Projects on Adaptive Strategies*, (Winnipeg, IISD, 1995)
- Spretnak, C., *State of grace – the recovery of meaning in the postmodern age*. (Harper, San Francisco, 1996).
- Titti and Singh, *Adaptive Strategies in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands*, (Winnipeg, IISD pp. 23–34; 1996)
- The Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards*, 2011 edition of the Sphere Handbook: WHAT IS NEW? <http://www.sphereproject.org/silo/files/what-is-new-in-the-sphere-handbook-2011-edition-v2.pdf>, Accessed August 21 2013)
- UNDP, *Capacity Development Strategies: Let the Evidence Speak*, (UNDP Report, Madrid, 2006)
- UNDP, *The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*, (Executive Board Note – New York, 1998)
- UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1997. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- UNECA, *Popular Participation in Political Consensus Building*, (Proceedings of the workshop on the African Center for Civil Society, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1998)

HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM RESILIENCE & CRISIS-SOCIETIES' ENGAGEMENT: Philosophical entrenchment and diagnostic challenges in perspectives of Humanitarian Governance

By Costantinos Berhutesfa Costantinos, PhD Professor of Public Policy, School of Graduate Studies, AAU Trustee, Africa Humanitarian Action

HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS THINK TANK

Directed by Michel Maietta, Associated Research Fellow at IRIS, Head of the Humanitarian Affairs Unit at Save the Children

maietta@iris-france.org

© IRIS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

FRENCH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND STRATEGIC AFFAIRS (IRIS)

2 bis rue Mercœur

75011 PARIS / France

T. + 33 (0) 1 53 27 60 60

F. + 33 (0) 1 53 27 60 70

iris@iris-france.org

www.iris-france.org