

PERSON-IN-COMMUNITY: EXPLORING THE CONCEPTUAL GAP BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AID AND DEVELOPMENT AID

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Abstract

This paper is a contribution towards criticizing humanitarian aid as an authentic approach to aid and to community development. It exposes the poverty of humanitarian aid as an authentic approach to development by showing that it fails to regard the value of person-in-community as the basis for development. The paper observes the conceptual gap between humanitarian aid and development aid (real aid), noting that the transition from one to the other is incomplete without a proper understanding of the direction to go; and the fear that development aid could also go the way of humanitarian aid if the gap is not filled. It therefore, proposes to bridge this gap by exploring the value of personalist philosophies as a basis for aid and development. The paper exploits the weaknesses of humanitarian aid towards community development by pointing to the nature of community as interaction of persons, by showing that community becomes valued when the value of individuals that make it up is regarded and by pointing that authentic development is rooted in human value. Specifically, this paper proposes a conception of development rooted in person-in-community as central to authentic aid and community development.

Keywords: Person, community, humanitarian aid, development aid

Introduction

Communities all over the world have developed at varying paces and with different levels of success in dealing with the basic problems associated with development. While the First world (capitalist) and Second world (communist) countries are largely more organised in terms of furthering development indices, the Third world (Spiritualist/Animist) and Fourth world (now identified by some scholars as the poor and downtrodden within third world countries or nations struggling to maintain their ancestral identity) are largely lost as to where to take off from or what to concentrate

on. The reality of these late bloomers (third and fourth world) has resulted in, not only poorly developed economies, but lack of coordinated development efforts, poor institutions and endemic corruption. Invariably, this often occasions a lot of crises manifesting in war, hunger, strife, socio-economic hardships, stagnation and a recurring humanitarian crisis on many fronts (Gotan, 2015). Within the international community therefore, aid has become an established way of reaching out to the developing world to help mitigate the effects of these myriad crises on developing peoples.

Aid, sometimes christened 'humanitarian aid', has been established in international relations as an intervention towards both alleviating the plight of people in crisis situations and assisting development of more lasting structures of development. Many actors and aid organisations have established policies and strategies for intervention to aid people in need with religion recognised as an indispensable partner for aid and development (Gotan, 2015). However, the reality of aid policies is typically reflected in the aid dependency that is associated with almost all developing countries. Subedi (2017) identified foreign aid dependency as the financial reliance of Third world countries on developed countries to fulfil their resources gap. He identified forms of this aid to include transfer of, "finance, commodities and other goods, technical cooperation and debt relief." The fact of aid dependency has therefore become the basis of contemporary criticism of aid-policy and aid as a strategy for the development of peoples.

This paper explores Gotan's (2012) idea that the search for common good is the path towards real development. It approaches the critique of aid and aid dependency from a conceptual viewpoint. It argues that the idea of aid as represented by extant international humanitarian aid policies is flawed in its intent, that a conceptual gap exists between the idea of 'humanitarian aid' and 'development aid' (or even 'Real aid' as described by Action Aid) and that this gap can be filled by personalist philosophies in order to arrive at a conceptual understanding that could lead to 'real development'. The paper therefore aims at showing that the conceptual understanding of humanitarian aid is deficient by observing the gaps in policy and practice; that the shift from humanitarian aid to development aid needs to be appreciated conceptually and that the conceptual gap can be bridged by personalists philosophies. The methodology necessitated by this research is therefore a theoretico-analytical one, relying on the availability of critical tools of analysis to identify gaps and how to fill them.

Humanitarian aid and the growing critique

Understanding the concept, thrust, principles and policies of humanitarian aid is necessary towards appreciating the direction aids have been taking over the past

three decades or more. Humanitarian aid is often understood to be aid provided by governments and the international community of nations/donors towards mitigating the effects of humanitarian crises occasioned by both man-made and natural causes (Pusterla & Pusterla, 2021). This is often presented as a moral obligation which humans owe to humans, hence humanitarian. The European consensus on humanitarian aid sees it as, “a fundamental expression of the universal value of solidarity between people and a moral imperative” (European Commission, 2007). Similarly, former prime minister of Britain, Tony Blair, while calling for more aid to Africa, once remarked that Africa is “a scar on the conscience of the world,”; thus, capturing the moral angle of aid, perhaps, more pointedly. This understanding of aid, as expressive of international cooperation towards promoting human value and dignity and as an indication of universal cooperation runs quite consistently through policy documents and aid analysis literature (cf. Smock, 1996; Carbonnier, 2015; Crowfort & Pert, 2015; Slim, 2015 and Pusterla & Pusterla, 2021). It has found clear expression within the international community in the moral principle known as Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Coyne, 2013). Gotan (2012) opined that this moral responsibility is the reason why the church in Nigeria partners with the state in order to further the common good.

While it is easy to appreciate the sacrifice of donors towards aid and the impact aid has within crisis situations, it is often taken for granted that the donors/benefactors are typically giving from an excess, that the recipients ought to do more on their own condition while being grateful to their benefactors and that there is a genuine concern for the beneficiaries of aid from the donors, aid organisations and aid workers. These assumptions have contributed towards the wide acceptance of humanitarian organisations and their work across different kinds of borders. Yet the same assumptions are increasingly being questioned, resulting in a body of studies that questions the motif of help, the impact of aid on development and the benefits accrued to aid organisations worldwide. Carbonnier (2015) for instance questions the moral angle of concepts like 'humanitarian bombing' as applied to the 1999 NATO airstrikes in Kosovo, or the 'humanitarian assistance' offered to communities of the Faryab and Baghdis provinces in Afghanistan in return for intelligence to track down anti-government forces. Similarly, the fact that the international budget for humanitarian aid keeps multiplying geometrically compared to the budget for Official development assistance (ODA) has alerted many to the lopsided concentration on relief rather than development, leading to dependency (Lensink & White, 1999; Harvey & Lind, 2005; Carbonnier, 2015; Kabonga, 2017).

Presently, international cooperation towards humanitarian aid is reducing, with countries and donors outdoing each other in direct aid intervention. This reality has caused both the proliferation of aid organisations and the bilaterisation of aid. With so many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in offering

humanitarian assistance within the same crisis areas, interests often overlap and sometimes conflict. Also, donors seek increasing influence among communities where donated funds are utilised, causing a reduction in international cooperation towards aid and promoting bilateral relationships between aid donors and communities. The United Nations' High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) sees bilaterisation of aid as a problem. It observes that official donors now demand increased proximity to humanitarian operations and decision making, seeking to increasingly scrutinise and control the humanitarian actions they fund (Macrae, 2002). Moreover, the motivation for humanitarian action is also under scrutiny. Efe (2018) asserted that donor countries usually want something from the assistance they give; some self-interested reasons include gaining access to the community's resources, attracting the recipients into the donor's sphere of influence and influencing political outcomes in the recipient community. The interest of aid organisations in crisis relief sometimes seems to conflict with the need for the integral development which guarantees less crisis situations arising.

Humanitarian aid seems to breed a dependency that does not consider need. By concentrating funds on an 'abstract public', donor agencies fail to appreciate the personal nature of needs.

This attempted systematisation of giving has largely happened from above, through state and sector-structuration, whilst private impulses to give have largely been spontaneous and governed by a visibility of need, feelings of relationality (to a dependent or family member, for instance) or concerns over 'worthiness'; all of which demand a concrete beneficiary – the opposite of the 'abstract' public that NGOs tend to fundraise for. This divergence in giving highlights the challenges of attempting to translate and transplant charity practices and approaches across different international contexts (Field, 2015, p. 437).

The result of all these is that humanitarian aid has a crisis of its own. Aid organisations increasingly deal with chronic emergencies, leading them to remain in communities for longer periods of time, during which time their activities overlap with and sometimes interrupt, interfere with or even scuttle development programmes. The reality is that the presence of aid organisations in many communities causes dependency which in turn leads to exploitation of aid organisations and their efforts in the community. The circle is therefore completed with poor development causing crises which attracts aids that are exploited and result in underdevelopment and recurrent crises. “With aid's help, corruption fosters corruption, nations quickly descend into a vicious cycle of aid. Foreign aid props up

corrupt governments – providing them with freely usable cash. These corrupt governments interfere with the rule of law, the establishment of transparent civil institutions and the protection of civil liberties, making both domestic and foreign investment in poor countries unattractive.” Aiding thus turns to abetting (Moyo, 2009, p. 58; see also Dunn, 2013).

As a result of the growing critique of humanitarian aid above, the effectiveness of aid as a strategy for development is trusted less and less. This distrust of humanitarian aid has informed many communities to look towards alternative sources of catering for needs of the community with the alternative of real development becoming the clear option. Consequently, over the last two decades, more developing countries have limited their aid dependency considerably. Action Aid (2011) notes that in Ghana, aid dependency fell from 47% to 27% over the preceding decade, Mozambique from 74% to 58% and Vietnam from 22% to 13%, while Rwanda's aid dependency fell from 85% in 2000 to 45% in 2010. The critique of humanitarian aid, as currently practiced, is complete with the call for a shift from humanitarian aid to more investment in development aid or what Action Aid calls 'real aid'.

Development aid (Real Aid): a conceptual gap

The reality check humanitarian aid currently faces is scandalous in its relation to both donors and benefiting communities at the same time. While calls for changing the narrative are in order, there is the small matter of where to go from here. It appears that it is the task of aid organisations and humanitarian actors to correct the poor image of humanitarian aid/humanitarian action; but this is far from the reality. Already, there are discussions on humanitarian aid as a failure towards development because of its stop-gap approach; yet these discussions place blame in the approach of aid agencies as well as on the exploitation of aid by benefiting communities (Harvey & Lind, 2013). The suggestion of development aid (real aid) as the way to go seems to imply that there is no stop-gap approach to development that is sustainable. This, perhaps, may be a reality-check that could lead to a better outcome. In order to appreciate the conceptual gap between humanitarian aid and real aid or development aid, we need to properly conceptualise development/real aid.

What do we really mean by development aid or real aid? How is it different in its approach to aid from its predecessors like Official Development Aid (ODA) and humanitarian aid? What is presently being presented as the alternative to the humanitarian aid crisis? What should a new approach focus on? This paper may not sufficiently answer all or any of the questions above. However, if aids should do better than abetting underdevelopment, aid ought to be geared towards development, and answering these questions could help towards proper conceptualisation of the direction successor(s) of humanitarian aid need to focus on.

For over the last half century, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has spearheaded cooperation towards development assistance to many countries. OECD has also provided the yardstick for conceptualisation, documentation and assessing the impact of development efforts globally. It defines Official Development Aid (ODA), “as government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries” (OECD, 2022). This understanding of ODA is “deliberately open to interpretation, although mostly in marginal cases. Consequently, there has always been a debate about the appropriateness and credibility of the ODA concept. This debate has recently intensified and ODA measurement has been questioned with respect to development intention and budgetary effort” (Hynes & Scott, 2013, p. 2). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) working paper on aid understands Development Aid (DA) as, “(A)id expended in a manner that is anticipated to promote development, whether achieved through economic growth or other means” (Minoiu & Reddy, 2009). By this it implies that expenditure that is worthwhile is only that expenditure that is expected to promote development. Also, the document understands multilateral aid as geared more towards development than bilateral aid which is determined by strategic factors as described above. However, like the definition of ODA, Development Aid has also come under scrutiny because of the intentions of its actors, its budgetary concentration and the exploitation of aid by aid agencies, governments and the 'benefiting' communities.

The reality is that these conceptions of aid and similar ones suffer from the basic manner of assessing need, structuring aid and involving the needy. The biggest problem seems to be the distance between the owner of the money and the persons in need, such that something is lost of the empathy of giving. Many times, what aid actually reaches the benefiting communities/persons is just a little fraction of the donations committed to their course (Efe, 2018).

Action aid, in conceptualising Real Aid (RA), concentrates on empowerment and independence. It describes real aid as, “the kind of aid that helps support dramatic decreases in aid dependence... that's aid which empowers poor women and men to realise their rights and reduces inequality” (Action Aid, 2011, p. 8). Drawing from the critique of humanitarian aid, RA developed to avoid certain pitfalls; it is not tied to exports from donor countries, technical assistance, policy conditions or excessive administrative costs. However, it still presents aid as relief rather than development, and hence this paper will attempt to make a case for development rather than relief. In a country like Nigeria, with sharp social gradients, the 'fear of empowerment' (a situation where the relieved person turns oppressor) is real.

In its recommendations, Action Aid probably glossed on the direction aid conceptualisation and action could take, namely; development participation. While

counting the gains of RA, it notes that areas to consolidate on include areas of cooperation between donors and recipients of aid. This is an area where the concept of development or real aid could benefit from new inroads in developmental studies. Below, this paper shall attempt to explore the conceptual space left by the critique of aid above, by introducing insights from development studies.

Person-in-community: A genuine path to aiding development

The notion of person-in-community is borne from many personalist philosophies. While it is possible to run a thread through the thoughts of similar thinkers in order to explain the notion, the value of such a rich concept is best appreciated when we explore the nuances each brings. I shall approach this presentation by first providing an overview of personalist thought that contribute to the present rendering of person-in-community, then I shall use the critique of aid to introduce the value of this notion to development studies, finally I shall propose person-in-community as a concept that can bridge the gap of aid crisis.

Personalism emphasises the importance, value, dignity and autonomy of the person as irreducible and inviolable in relation with others. It describes a wide range of doctrines which are so diverse that the only thing common among some is the word 'person' (Lazaro & Sganzerla, 2019). Person-in-community places value on interaction with others-as-persons as the source of value, respect and growth within community. In development, this requires that humans be treated as an end in themselves and not as a means to serve the pursuit of interests or other ends. Therefore, a good place to start should be with linking the needy to the society they each belong, thus countering the concentration of current aid efforts on the condition rather than on the person.

Similar philosophies in dialogue

Ubuntu: At a CBC interview (One Hour) in 2008, The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously described Ubuntu as the notion that 'a person is a person through other persons, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably with yours' (Jolley, 2011). Ubuntu as a practice is found in many African societies and refers to the varied expressions of cultural solidarity which tap from fundamental life values to promote justice, responsibility, relatedness, reciprocity and love. Different cultures have unique ways of expressing this reality of togetherness. Kanu (2020) expresses the concept of *Igwebuike* as a worldview that describes belongingness. Ubuntu fosters community, care, interdependability, sharing and trust.

It emphasises that people's identities are continuously developing in the context of their reciprocal relationships with others, and thereby, through supporting and nurturing others, one's own identity and life quality are enhanced (Mayaka & Truell, 2021, p. 3).

Ubuntu therefore underscores the point that the person is in community with other persons and only so is the person's true being realised. Therefore, reciprocity is emphasised where interaction with others creates mutual benefitting, growing and community. With Ubuntu, the interest is never on the particular individual but the community of individuals and the world, the human environment. Ubuntu fosters inclusivity within a community, responsibility to others and to the wellbeing of the environment to ensure success for the present and future generations (Mbendera, 2020).

Therefore, when it comes to aiding development, Ubuntu considers the larger context of the problem rather than the need of particular needy people. “Ubuntu differs from charity and humanitarian approaches which focus on alleviating the extremes of hardship after the event, rather than equipping people to transcend the conditions of hardship as a matter of course ... Ubuntu predicts that life faces ongoing challenges, disaster and loss, and that people need communal coping mechanisms to minimise damage” (Mayaka & Truell, 2021).

Wojtyla's Participation:Karol Wojtyla's philosophical anthropology emphasises how action reveals and expresses the person at the same time, explaining why action is the basis for interpersonal understanding. His description of person as characterised by action provides a basis for seeing authentic self-giving as the basis for relating within the society in a manner that drives inclusion and promotes mutual growth temporally as well as spiritually. Wojtyla (1979) holds that human experience of anything outside the self also includes and is associated with the experience of self. He asserted,

Actions, which man performs in all his different social involvements and as a member of different social groups or communities, are essentially the actions of the person. Their social or communal nature is rooted in the nature of the person and not vice versa. And yet, to grasp the personal nature of human actions it is absolutely necessary to consider the consequences of the fact that they may be performed “together with others” (Wojtyla, 1979, p. 176).

Wojtyla describes acting together with others in terms of the notion of *participation*. Participation denotes that the person, while acting 'together with others', remains transcendent; meaning that the person is not absorbed and conditioned by social interdependence, but retains his freedom of choice and direction. This transcendent autonomy, Wojtyla holds, is 'the basis as well as the condition of participation.' To act with others while not being subsumed in the collective means that the person retains the value of his action while sharing in the realisation and results of communal acting. Hence, the good of the person is not overtly separate from the good of the

community because the good of the community is the sum of the value of the persons, whose acting together guarantees the future for all. Simpson (2001, p. 84) sums it well saying,

participation is understood as the sharing of each in the making of decisions, in determining common life together. It is, in short, what participation is in The Acting Person, namely the joint exercise and realization of the structure of self – determination. It is tied to the further principle of subsidiarity.

In order to aid development adequately therefore, the needy must not be isolated from the community in which they live. Authentic development for Wojtyla consists not in aiding the needy or empowering the poor. Rather, it consists in aiding the needy community to develop the necessary network of appreciating the value of all in order to build a reliable socio-interdependent commonwealth. Here, aiding development can only mean facilitating strategies and institutions that place the value of each person-in-community in all decisions and development efforts. Aiding development requires building the social capital of interdependentness.

Aid for person-in-community

Since aid is usually directed to a crisis situation, it usually is directed towards saving rather than giving life. Because of this preoccupation, aids tend to ignore those in the community who are not suffering or in need. This in itself creates a rift in the community that furthers poor development and sabotages the efforts of all aid, real or not. In fact, aid that considers the condition of persons rather than the person-in-community, commonly descends as favours done to someone below from someone above. It segregates in the community by isolating the needy from the not-so-needy, challenges the equality and deservedness of the needy and, often, fails to consult the needy adequately regarding their real needs, real preferences and real aspirations. Therefore, rather than real aid, we ought to talk about real people. People in crisis situations do not only depend on aid, they also depend on one another (Harvey & Lind, 2005).

The insights of Ubuntu and Participation provide a way to conceptualise genuine aid efforts of the future. 'Real aid' needs to be development aid, seen as aid for a community to overcome the barriers to communality, cooperation and interdependentness. Only aid which respects person-to-person value exchange can be geared towards authentic and genuine development. The role of the community must therefore be a central and controlling focus of the activities of aid organisations in a manner that makes the community's aspirations and interrelatedness the source of aid information, aid initiatives and aid interventions.

Conclusion

We have shown that current aid practices leave a lot to be desired. That the critique of current practice is real and that there is a conceptual gap to be filled before we do things differently. There is still the problem of translation, where understanding the problem does not directly lead to the solution. The task of this paper, though complete, is therefore not comprehensive. While the discussion may persist for a while, the concentration on the person needs to persist all the more because in the end, it is human relations that count towards humanitarianism.

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