

EXPANDING THE HUMANITARIAN SPACE:

Challenge for Global Philanthropy

“Humanitarian Interventions Today: New Issues, New Ideas, New Players”

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Humanitarian Intervention

The world looks and feels very different today – more uncertain, insecure, and troubled - than one decade ago. We are inundated daily with news reports of humanitarian “hot spots” around the world. Conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Liberia are unprecedented in character, depicted as “new wars.” September 11 reminds us that terrorism can reach into even the wealthiest and safest societies. There are also the continuing crises of poverty and troubled political transitions. A “third wave” of HIV/AIDS is now exerting devastating social impact. In sub-Saharan Africa, infection with the HIV virus (some 30 million HIV positive) moves in 5-10 years into full-blown AIDS (already 15 million deaths) that exerts profound social consequences – killing people, tearing apart families and communities, crippling social services, slowing economies, and weakening democracies.

Humanitarian intervention is ultimately based upon human empathy, the capacity of every human being for sympathizing with the plight of others. Humanitarianism is based on a basic human impulse to extend a helping hand to people in distress. Covenants and laws and clear divisions of labor crafted over the past 150 years to guide humanitarian intervention, however, are breaking down. The “humanitarian space” is shrinking. Innocent civilians are not simply collateral damage but often targets of intentional violence. Humanitarian relief workers no longer enjoy the protection of neutrality. Many have and are being killed, including the recent murder of United Nations staff in Iraq. The neutrality of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is disregarded by combatants and militaries and increasingly politicized by governments and international organs. In the battle against human suffering, health workers (like relief workers) are exposed to unacceptable risk. Caring for AIDS victims carries higher risk for contracting the HIV virus. In Africa, many health systems are being decimated by the loss of health workers to AIDS. We should recall that it was frontline health workers in medical facilities who absorbed the lethal burden of the SARS virus.

How are the contours of the humanitarian space changing? What will it look like in the future? The ultimate shape of that space is being contested by public policies and action on-the-ground. It will be determined, in part, by new issues, new ideas, and new players. Steadfast and unchanged, I hope, will be the basic values of humanitarianism and the fundamental principles of humanitarian action.

Human Security

One such new idea is human security. I had the privilege of serving as one of the twelve members of an independent Commission on Human Security co-chaired by

Madame Sadako Ogata and Professor Amartya Sen. The Commission's report, *Human Security Now*, articulated four basic principles. First, human security is people-centered, prioritizing security according to the perspective and agency of people, not of states. Human security does not replace state security but complements state action to protect its citizens in a borderless world. Human security also strengthens the more established concepts of human development and human rights. Second, the concept is comprehensive, promoting freedom from both violence and poverty. A mother is not consoled if her child is killed by bacteria rather than a bullet. One type of insecurity may generate another. Poorly appreciated, for example, is that catastrophic illness not only causes human suffering but the cost of emergency medical care can precipitate a financial crisis, leading a vicious spiral of impoverishment. Poorly recognized is that even in the United States, as many as a quarter of personal bankruptcies are due to catastrophic illness. Third, the strategy for human security is protection from above and empowerment from below. These are complementary and synergistic.

Finally and most importantly, human security is interdependent. My security ultimately depends on your security. I am unable to achieve my own security at the expense of your insecurity. In the Commission research conducted at Harvard, we examined the relationship between poverty and terrorism. Violence and conflict, including epidemics, retard and setback economic development; poverty is worsened. Claims of the reverse -- that poverty directly causes terrorism -- is not supported by evidence. Poverty, however, can breed a festering environment for sympathizers or foot-soldiers of extremism. An interesting recent study examined commonalities among all suicide bombers. Only a minority were Muslims; all were well-organized, not random individual acts; and all depended on a popular base of sympathy for their cause. Importantly, all lived in environments of human insecurity, alienation, and a loss of control living in occupied territories.

Global Alliances and Philanthropy

The Commission called for a global alliance to carry forward the human security agenda, based on the three pillars of social action – government, business, and civil society. At this time, these three legs of a stool are rather shaky. Government is essential for providing human security; no other institution can assume this responsibility. Yet government everywhere is being “downsized”; many humanitarian crises are associated with “failed states”; and governments are in a crisis of deteriorating multilateral cooperation, challenging even harmony within the UN. Business generates societal and personal wealth, but its conduct depends upon political stability and physical security. The corporate sector is also experiencing a crisis of governance, which hopefully will be transient. Civil society expands popular participation. NGOs are challenged by transparency, accountability, and social effectiveness as they attempt to operationalize their mission while securing requisite funding.

An important driver of global action is what I call “private social action for public good” -- for humanitarianism, for human security. Business generates private wealth that can be invested for social good, supporting action by civil society and strengthening the

performance of government. The creativity of social investing, therefore, is an important factor in shaping the new humanitarian space.

Philanthropic players are expanding and diversifying. Established foundations and international non-governmental organizations continue to evolve and pursue worthy activities. Annual giving by the American public approximates \$200 billion, 2-3 percent for international work. To these established activities, new and generous philanthropists have joined – Gates, Turner, Hewlett, and Packard. More than 200 billionaires in the United States have benefited from the global economy, and some are giving back to advance global social good. In the US, diaspora philanthropy, contributing back to countries of origin, is growing among Hispanic and Asian groups. In the late 1990s, one quarter of the Silicon Valley start-ups were owned by Asians. My Harvard colleague, Devesh Kapur, has reported that diaspora remittances may be approaching as much as \$70-100 billion annually, nearly twice the volume of official foreign aid flowing from richer to poorer countries.

Private social investing could spark innovations in humanitarianism and human security -- through one or a combination of strategies. Social investing can be devoted entirely to charity, e.g. feeding the hungry. Strategic philanthropy can attempt to address the root cause of social problems with sustainable solutions, e.g. teaching the poor how to fish. Strategic philanthropy can also engage the public through education to promote public policies and public action.

Humanitarian Values

Essential for guiding these social investments are the basic values of humanitarianism. Even as contexts, issues, and players change, these basic principles of humanitarianism must remain steadfast. Fortunately, these principles are deeply rooted in human history. Some scientists, indeed, claim that “empathy” is genetically-based, selected in human evolution for the survival of the species. Instinctive empathetic behavior improves the prospect that individuals and collectives will survive against adversity. Cicero, a Roman philosopher of the first century BC, spoke of two ethical obligations. The first is to desist from committing injustice and also to act to correct injustice. The second is that while our moral obligations are stronger to our dearest and nearest, we also have obligations to distant strangers as members of a common humanity.

For its principled humanitarianism, I would like to congratulate the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), this year’s Hilton prize winner. In your work to heal the suffering of torture victims, you have demonstrated that humanity can speak to abuse, truth can speak to power. I also congratulate the Jurors for their wise selection, and the Hilton Foundation for a prize that exemplifies strategic philanthropy that engages the public through education, promotion, demonstration, and reward for outstanding humanitarian achievement. Both the IRCT and the Hilton Foundation are actively contributing to expanding, shaping, and invigorating the humanitarian space in our changing world.