

COMPLEX EMERGENCIES AND THE CRISIS OF DEVELOPMENTALISM

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Summary

Using complex emergencies and the humanitarian response to them as its point of reference, this paper provides a critique of relief, development and the linking -debate. Rather than being autonomous, relief is a developmental idea. Development concepts have proven incapable of understanding permanent emergency. They also underestimate the extent of the North's institutional accommodation with unresolved political crisis in the South. Beginning with nonmandated NGO operations, there has been a growing acknowledgment of the inevitability of working in conflict situations. Moreover, accompanying the growth in emergency spending, the number of policy instruments available to donors has increased. Aid is now integrated with the dynamics of violence to an unprecedented extent. Greater donor flexibility in the face of systemic crisis has also contributed to a weakening of the principle of collective responsibility in the North. A new political consensus is required to tackle the problem of complex emergencies.

INTRODUCTION: THE PATTERN OF WORLD-HISTORIC CHANGE

The background to this paper lies in the historic shifts taking place in the global economy and their wide ranging social and political implications. Very important is the process of regionalisation and the formation of linked but contending North American, West European and East Asian economic blocs. There is a lurking fear that this development is having the unintended effect of locking out and marginalising nonbloc areas of the world economy (Oman, 1994). In parts of Africa, the Middle East, East Europe and the former Soviet Union, a systemic economic crisis has emerged which has rolled back the modest development gains of past decades (Sideri, 1993). Income disparities between the richest and poorest countries has grown ever wider (UNDP, 1992). Consequently the number of international economic migrants has steadily increased to an estimated sixty million today (Pellerin, 1993). Myrdal's (1957) dictum of 'circular and-cumulative causation' million people (UN, 1993). Apart from Haiti, it is significant that all are in the Africa-Eurasia zone.

As external causes have ceased to explain, the character of internal war had also begun to change. The previous ideologically driven nationalist or socialist wars of liberation have been superseded. Emerging in their place are resource wars that lack political reciprocity or a clear social programme (Duffield, 1991). In response to systemic crisis, proactive and nonconventional socio-economic formations have emerged. These are often ethnically structured and of a predatory or fundamentalist nature. Rather than a temporary occurrence, violence has become an important adjunct of economic and political survival in landscapes increasingly lacking alternatives (Keen, 1994). More recent has been the emergence of ethno-nationalism and internal war within and on the periphery of the former Soviet empire (Schierup, 1993). In the past, political violence was usually linked to a process of state formation. Some commentators now argue that the world has entered a phase of insecurity associated with state disintegration (Kaldor, 1993; Suhrke, 1993).

The UN and the international aid apparatus were shaped in a more certain world. They are now strained to the limit in the face of unprecedented levels of abject poverty, political insecurity, conflict, state disintegration and population displacement. These unanticipated developments point to the heart of what is a complex emergency. They also encapsulate the crisis of developmentalism.

COMPLEX EMERGENCIES AND THE CRISIS OF DEVELOPMENTALISM

Developmentalism rests on the assumption of the universality of linear forms of social progress (Norgaard, 1994). Development is a normative process of becoming: a series of interconnecting movements leading from poverty-and vulnerability to security and well-being. It is part of the myth of modernity. That is, the certainty that shared progress is the normal-and long-term direction *of* all social change. For several decades the modernist paradigm has dominated the international aid apparatus. Simultaneously; however, this apparatus has been powerless and uncomprehending in the face of growing systemic crisis and political fragmentation. A trend that is the antithesis of the developmental worldview. The stage has now been reached where transcending-the developmental crisis is the main challenge for progressive aid policy. Understanding complex emergencies is central to this task.

The term complex emergency emerged in Africa in the late 1980s. It gained wider currency with the Gulf War. For the UN a complex emergency is a major humanitarian crisis of a multicausal nature that requires a system wide response. Commonly, a long-term combination of political, conflict and peacekeeping factors are also involved (UN, 1993:23). Apart from a new peacekeeping element, this is not an original or apt conception. In many respects, this multicausal model has become interchangeable with an earlier category of man made emergency. Both multicausal and man made emergencies are usually defined in opposition to implicitly monocausal natural disasters.

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF AID FLOW

One notable effect of the collapse of the Cold War has been the decline in strategic importance of the West's former Third World allies (Griffin, 1991). Even before the end of the 1980s, total development aid had begun to stagnate and decline. Reflecting the systemic crisis, however, the reverse is the case with emergency spending (Borton, 1993). This has been increasing noticeably since the 1980s. UN agency, EU, bilateral donor and NGO budgets graphically illustrate this point. For Britain's Overseas Development Administration, for example, the proportion of its aid budget spent on relief has increased from 2% in the early 1980s to 11 % in 1991-92. Similar figures for UNICEF are from 7% in 1987 to 23% in 1993 (UNICEF, nd). EU's spending on external humanitarian relief increased more than five times between 1990 and 1993. That is, from 114.3 million to 605 million ECUs (Commission, 1994).

General figures are more difficult to come by (Borton, 1993). A probable underestimate is that around \$4 billion, or about 7% of total overseas development assistance (ODA) is spent on relief expenditure. One also has to bear in mind the escalating cost of UN peacekeeping. This is \$3.2 billion a year and rising (Elliot, 1994).

Second, since relief work has never been taken seriously, the extent to which donor policy has already effected a *de facto* accommodation with permanent emergency has largely been missed. Instead of trying to link relief to a hypothetical state of development, it better to examine this actually existing accommodation.

ACCOMMODATION WITH PERMANENT EMERGENCY

The accommodation with protracted crisis is a contradictory structure. At one level the aid apparatus has been plunged into a period of unprecedented institutional change and policy flux. Complex emergencies have become a forcing house of changing North-South relations. Simultaneously, however, they have elicited a limited relief response. The quality of aid has been reduced, the pattern of intervention is uneven, military humanitarianism has a dismal history, and so on. This suggests that appeasing Northern constituencies rather than tackling-the crisis may be the main impact of so-called humanitarian intervention.

The systemic crisis and the substitution of relief for development leads to the following proposition. Despite the short-term nature of relief activity and its origins in natural disaster, it has come to play an unexpected role in North-South relations. In the post-Cold War era humanitarian aid is the North's principal means of political crisis management in a now marginal South.

Initial attempts to analyze the accommodation with permanent emergency argued the historic importance of the formation of donor/NGO safety-nets during the latter part of the 1980s (Duffield, 1992). The following is a brief but more comprehensive appraisal.

(a) The Cold War Era: Neutrality and the Acceptance of Conflict

The period between Biafra in the late 1960s and Ethiopia in the mid 1980s was an important phase of development. During this time, the UN was constrained by sovereignty and limited by its mandate to working with recognised governments. In cases of internal war, except for the ICRC, this often meant that the humanitarian needs of peoples in contested areas were not met.

Some NGOs attempted to fill the humanitarian deficit in contested areas. Typically, new NGOs or NGO consortia, often church based, emerged in relation to controversial cross-border or cross-line type programmes (Davis, 1975). The illicit nature of these activities reinforced an earlier tradition that humanitarian relief must be neutral. That is, to eschew politics and only provide externally monitored, basic relief items (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994). To have engaged in wider development activities could have been construed as political solidarity. It would have compounded the problem of legitimacy at a time when sovereignty was paramount. While deploring conflict, concerned NGOs had little choice but to take the historic step of developing nonmandated programmes in war situations. In contrast, during the Cold War the UN seldom intervened in a political crisis without an agreed cease-fire (Goulding, 1993).

(d) The Gulf War: Military Humanitarianism and Donor Agencies

Rather than pushing accommodation in a new direction, the Gulf War built on earlier trends. Importantly, it threw the limitations of the existing interface into contrast. UN agencies and NGOs did badly in the humanitarian crisis arising from the conflict (UN, 1991). Moreover, the specific conditions of the war had shown the limitations of negotiated access. The principle of using military personnel to protect a UN mandated relief operation was established (Roberts, 1993). Following Kurdistan, ad hoc variants have appeared in Bosnia and Somalia. Importantly, however, in relation to the first two, protection has also incorporated a policy of internalising or containing refugee flows (Douglas Stafford, 1993).

Of equal significance were UN agency and donor developments. Concerning improving coordination within UN integrated programmes, in 1992 the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was established. The DHA has restated the centrality of the UN/NGO relation. Through consolidated appeals, it has also attempted to put emergency funding on a more secure base. As for donors, the EU and some bilateral governments were persuaded to establish their own operational emergency capacity. This was a result of both the poor performance of NGOs and the increasing donor time and expenditure devoted to relief (Pooley, 1991). Apart from the EU, several governments, including the UK's, have become humanitarian agents (ODA, 1991). This has further increased the number of policy instruments available to donors.

(e) **The Current Period: The Normalisation of Violence**

Military humanitarianism has already begun to wane: The immense political difficulties encountered in Bosnia and Somalia has prompted caution. Rather than a blue print for a New World Order, it is probable that military protection for humanitarian programmes will remain exceptional: Protection, however, is not an intrinsic feature of the accommodation. A trend of greater significance has been a continuing operational evolution of UN negotiated access.

Post-Cold War optimism has disappeared. Within UN negotiated access operations the emphasis has been on further separating politics from humanitarian relief. The chief policy instrument for this has been the development of formal rule-based physical security and delivery systems. NGOs affiliate based on agreed neutrality and codes of conduct. The operational core of negotiated access is the collective UN/NGO distribution plan. Such plans are usually drawn up on a weekly or monthly basis by the lead UN agency. They are cleared in advance with the warring parties and aid is delivered according to set times and corridors. This type of formal system is presently running in Angola, Bosnia and South Sudan (Duffield, 1994b). While having military protection and the internalisation of displacement as appendages, Bosnia, for example, is essentially a negotiated access programme.

Compared to the late 1980s, mandated negotiated access is now more sophisticated. One consequence is that humanitarian assistance has become closely integrated with the dynamics of violence. It is increasingly common for UN.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR A NEW POLITICAL CONSENSUS

Rather than a debatable resumption of sustainable development, more realistically the structure of accommodation will continue to evolve and consolidate. Since many of its features are based on ad hoc institutional arrangements and UN resolutions, the main direction will be increasing formalization.

To a large extent this has already occurred in relation to contractual relations and general codes of conduct (Miner and Weiss, 1993). From an institutional perspective, to overcome the short-termism that has compromised relief in the past, changes in funding, management structures and personnel regimes are underway. Emergency programming is increasingly being seen as a long-term issue: relief is being professionalised. Progressive policy has begun to slowly move away from supporting transitory populations to attempting to work with indigenous structures in the thrall of protracted crisis. More controversially, it is possible that integrated relief programmes will take on a formal quasi-governmental function in a few locations.

Relief alone, however, will not eradicate permanent emergency in the South. Apart from serious questions of adequacy and appropriateness, the present accommodation leaves untouched the global dimensions of the systemic crisis sketched above. Indeed, the

international predominance of free market ideology suggests that regional polarisation will continue to grow. Making- lasting in-roads will depend on whether a new political consensus can be built by aid agencies, religious bodies, NGOs and donors. Such a consensus would need to re-establish a sense of collective international responsibility for poverty and violence in a now marginal South. Never before has there been such a need for sustained public action and an unflinching support for international mandates.

This consensus should be linked, moreover, to a new ethics of working in protracted political crisis. In this respect, the notion of neutrality requires thorough critique: Solidarity rather than neutrality has to be the guiding hand.

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