CHARITABLE WORK IN A DEVELOPING REGION: WHY HUMANITARIAN WORK IS MOSTLY IN THE HANDS OF FOREIGN ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Humanitarian work in Africa is mostly in the hands of foreign humanitarian actors. This paper looks at a number of factors contributing towards this situation and possible ways that Africa as a developing continent can use to avert this situation. Most humanitarian organizations are linked to the West, particularly the United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Denmark, Germany and Norway. Humanitarian organizations are organizations that offer humanitarian aid in humanitarian crises and they can be inter-governmental organizations or international private and voluntary organizations. In most humanitarian situations in Africa, Western humanitarian bodies are more active. The United Nations, as an inter-governmental body, is also responsive to Africa's humanitarian crises with its subsidiary bodies like UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and FAO. The existence of foreign humanitarian organizations in Africa's humanitarian industry indicates the existence of various gaps and weaknesses in the social, economic and political fabrics of Africa. Therefore, this paper discusses the main reasons why the African humanitarian industry is in foreign hands and provides recommendations on the way forward for the developing continent.

KEY TERMS: *humanitarian work, foreign organizations, underdevelopment, dependency.*

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INTRODUCTION

It is common sight that almost every year is characterised by humanitarian calamities of one sort or another. These disasters are both natural (such as droughts and floods) and manmade (such as wars). In almost all instances, foreign humanitarian organisations intervene with various forms of assistance. The main objective of foreign organisations which provide humanitarian assistance is to save lives, relieve human suffering, and maintain human dignity during a crisis or a disaster. It is important however to note that other schools of thought argue that their goal is to maintain political power over African countries. Humanitarian organisations also work to reduce the vulnerability of affected people and improve their resilience towards disasters.

It has been argued by Andrews (2009) that humanitarian work in Africa is mostly in the hands of foreign organisations due to a number of factors, chief among them being, the high incidence of poverty in Africa, lack of urgent African response systems to disasters or crises, the governance crisis in Africa, lack of resources and the colonial legacy. Humanitarian work is action or work designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations (Mckintosh, 2000). It is guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Humanitarian work is usually carried out in different ways but primarily through the provision of humanitarian aid. According to Rieff (2002) humanitarian aid is aid offered to alleviate human suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of crises or disasters.

Curtis (2001) defines humanitarian organisations as organisations that offer humanitarian assistance to people affected by disasters or crises. Africa has been receiving humanitarian assistance from foreign organisations since colonial times. Most of these foreign humanitarian organisations get their funding and resources from the international donor community that comprise of foundations that are found in the more economically developed countries together with governments of developed countries (Andrews, 2009). Some of these countries include the United States of America, Sweden, The United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, and Australia among others. Foreign humanitarian organizations include USAID (United States Aid for International Development), the United Nations' associate arms, the International Federation of the Red Cross, Action Aid, CIDA, DANIDA, Catholic Relief Services, Doctors without Borders among others.

The scope of humanitarian work in Africa

The dependency theory best explains why most humanitarian work in Africa is in the hands of foreign organisations. The theory is based on the notion that resources flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped states to a 'core' of wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expense of the former (Sachs, 2005). It is a central contention of the dependency theory that poor states are impoverished and rich ones enriched by the way poor states are integrated into the world system. The wealthy states then offer humanitarian aid to cover up for the imbalance in trade to the 'periphery', which comprise of all third world countries. This aid is offered to create a dependency syndrome in African states, thus foreign humanitarian organisations are seen as tools of the 'core' countries working to create a dependency syndrome among African states. This has been argued by several scholars like Andrews (2009) as augmenting neo-colonialism in Africa. Curtis (2001) argues that most foreign humanitarian organisations are operating in Africa to further Western foreign policy objectives. She argues that aid provided by most of these organisations is 'tied' aid or conditional aid and these organisations are given funding by the 'core' countries in order to further the interests of those countries, for instance, working towards regime change in African states or the promulgation of new laws and practices, for instance, the adoption or legalisation of homosexuality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the days of colonialism, western countries have always had an obligation to support former colonial territories in times of disasters or crises and in terms of development (Curtis, 2001). A very good example is that of the United Kingdom. Soon after its former colonies gained independence, it formed the Commonwealth which incorporates all its former colonies. It also supports several humanitarian organisations that work in its former colonies with funding and other resources. This is also the case with the other European countries. They even coordinated their efforts through the European Union Commission to assist African countries in times of humanitarian need and they do so by funding various organisations humanitarian organizations. In addition to the support given to international organisations, local humanitarian organisation in many African communities rely on funding and support from foreign governments, organisations and foundations.

On another note, colonisers of most African countries did little or nothing at all to develop strong systems and institutions that can tackle development and humanitarian issues in their former colonies (Brautigam and Knack, 2004). This means that despite the genuine efforts by Africa states, it is difficult for them to tackle development

and humanitarian issues unless they develop their own systems. Africa`s history after independence also makes it difficult for leaders to have the will to support the needs of their people, particularly in times of humanitarian disasters because most African states have poor governance arrangements (Ong`ayo, 2010).

Brautigam and Knack (2004) argued that most Africa governments are characterised by corruption, conflicts and political power struggles. This drains budgets and resources of such countries to an extent of failing to respond to humanitarian disasters or crises and many at times these governments will be responsible for sparking man-made humanitarian crises in those countries (Curtis, 2001). This then prompts foreign organisations to chip in and save the affected populations which will be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. A very good example is the Tokwe-Mukorsi flood disaster that Zimbabwe encountered in 2014. Munhende (2014) reported that not much was done by the government of Zimbabwe because of the lack of political will and the channeling of funds and resources meant for the disaster victims towards political endeavors.

As if that is not enough, colonial masters in Africa are always on the lookout for other opportunities to further exploit their former colonies (Moyo, 2009). It is surprising to note that these former colonial masters have given themselves the task of policing their former colonies. They have always strived to oversee the politics of their former colonies and they are the ones that are on the forefront in determining and identifying issues of human rights abuses in these countries (Ong`ayo, 2010). This has made these countries more active in humanitarian crises in their former colonies so as to be on the lookout for opportunities of further exploitation.

A very good example of poor governance and its effects in the humanitarian industry is that of the Rwandan Genocide. In 1994, the Rwandan genocide unfolded before the world's eyes and with it, several hundred thousand people were murdered in the heart of Africa (Farrell, 2013). At this time, there was lack of an African response and even a response from the Rwandan government and this prompted foreign humanitarian organisations to intervene in Rwanda (Brautigam and Knack, 2004). Rather, it was the Hutu majority government that perpetrated the genocide by the mass slaughter of the Tutsi and foreign humanitarian organizations had to intervene (Farrell, 2013).

To make matter worse, African countries are poor and underdeveloped. According to Rieff (2002) and Wengwe (2006), these countries have little or no resources to respond to humanitarian crises and disasters and they seek humanitarian assistance from foreign organisations. Sachs (2005) contends that African countries are in a poverty trap (they are poor only because they started poor) from which they cannot emerge without an aid-financed big push involving investments and actions to address all constraints to development after which they will have a take-off into self-sustained growth where aid will no longer be needed. Some of the constraints to development include humanitarian disasters and crises and thus, aid is needed to cater for these problems as this will assist African countries to develop on the other hand (Curtis, 2001). Africa often faces more humanitarian problems than it can handle. This obviously calls for outside assistance. Very good examples include the Ebola pandemic where foreign organisations took centre stage in containing the spread of Ebola after the affected governments had no more resources to extend towards such efforts.

Africa has also been prone to a vast number of deadly pandemics and crises (Vinck, 2013). The high incidence of tropical diseases and various other diseases which spread due to poverty and underdevelopment, might be the reason why most humanitarian work is in the hands of foreign organisations in Africa. There is even a high HIV and AIDS prevalence rate in Africa as compared to other continents and these rates are very high in Sub-Saharan Africa (Curtis, 2001). Diseases like malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, dysentery and Ebola are mostly found in Africa. If their spread is unabated by foreign intervention, they can spread overseas and thus they will require more funding and resources to abate them unlike when they are controlled before they spread. In this instance, foreign organisations work to contain such infections in Africa to reduce their spread. Africa also happens to have little technical expertise to deal with such pandemics. Western countries have enormous technological advancements, they have excellent medical laboratories, and thus they have the capacity to offer humanitarian assistance to Africa before, during and after crises.

There have also been numerous civil wars in Africa and these have brought untold suffering to Africans. Due to political instability, religious extremism and ethnocentrism in Africa, there have been various civil wars, bombings and the abduction of people (Kriger, 2011). There have been civil wars in Libya, Egypt, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Rwanda, D.R.C, Somalia and Angola in the past two decades and this prompted foreign organisations to come in and offer humanitarian assistance in the protection of vulnerable communities. According to Brautigam and Knack (2004) these civil wars have led to the exodus of people into neighbouring states in search of asylum, hence bringing about the impending problem of refugees. Most refugees in Africa are protected and looked after by foreign humanitarian organisations particularly the United Nations and its arms, the UNHCR, UNICEF and WHO.

In North Africa, Sudan split into two countries, Sudan and South Sudan. This happened after heavy fighting and close to a million people lost their lives in the civil war. To make matters worse, after becoming a recognized state, South Sudan has, on its own, plunged into a civil war and thousands of people are fleeing the war and pouring into Uganda everyday through the Romoromo Boarder area (Kazungu, 2017). There are reports that civilians are being killed in indiscriminate attacks and it is believed that in 2016 alone, almost one million South

Sudanese fled the country. Kazungu (2017) highlighted that the Ugandan government, where most of these refugees are seeking refuge, has no adequate resources to cater for these high numbers of refugees and they are being assisted by foreign and international humanitarian organizations. Even the foreign humanitarian organizations have failed to secure enough resources to assist these refugees and there has been no notable resolution from the African Union on how these refugees should be contained. If foreign organizations stop assisting these refugees, they will suffer greatly because government and continental efforts are scanty.

According to Curtis (2001), the changing nature of conflict in Africa has contributed to a new definition of security where underdevelopment is considered a threat to international security because it can fuel drug trafficking, the spread of terrorism and increased refugee flows into the developed world. This is mainly attributable to globalization, which has intensified global interconnectedness. This 'repackaging' of security as a development and humanitarian concern means that enhancing security involves changing the behaviour of populations within countries. As outlined by Curtis (2001), domestic practices in African countries are increasingly seen as potential security threats. This has led to a situation where aspects of these practices such as domestic policies, human rights, and the status of women, poverty and psychosocial well-being are open to monitoring by developed countries, thus calling for the involvement of foreign humanitarian organisations.

There is also a high incidence of foreign organisations in Africa's humanitarian industry because of the vulnerability of the African continent to weather-related natural disasters. With the problem of climate change, Africa is now facing more droughts, floods and famine. This is also coupled by the lack of advanced and sophisticated technology in Africa, which affects how Africans respond in times of such weather-related natural disasters (Vinck, 2013). There are few early warning systems and no enough machinery and funding to assist vulnerable communities when such disasters strike. According to Vinck (2013), when cyclone Katrina menaced the USA, there was little intervention from foreign humanitarian organisations because the state had the capacity to assist its citizens. In Africa, where governments have limited capacity, foreign organisations are at times the only helping hand that vulnerable communities have.

According to Akonor (2008), foreign aid partly comes to Africa because of the fact that Africa is drowning in poverty and the West itself feels having a moral obligation to help Africa. The argument is that Western Countries which are in most cases providers or supporters or humanitarian work in Africa feel that it is morally correct to help Africa by supporting it's humanitarian work as a measure to correct the inequality between Africa and the developed world in International trade. Some humanitarian organizations intervene in Africa because of religious motives. They feel like they have a responsibility to assist and serve the poor as commanded by their religious teachings.

Nonetheless, despite the vast number of foreign organisations in Africa's humanitarian sector and the humanitarian assistance they offer, these organisations have faced various challenges, which primarily have to do with politics (Brautigam and Knack, 2004). They have been seen as agents of Western imperialism and in many countries, they have been given stringent laws and at times African governments have shut them down. In the Zimbabwean context, these organisations have been seen as working towards regime change and they have been accused of supporting opposition politics (Kriger, 2011). Though they face such problems, these foreign humanitarian organisations will always be needed in Africa and they might continue to increase because of Africa's vulnerability to disasters and crises principally due to its underdevelopment.

DISCUSSION

From the above section, it is clear that most of the humanitarian work in Africa is in the hands of foreign organisations, this is because of the high prevalence of natural disasters, poor governance, the colonial legacy, scarcity of resources, and the lack of political will by African governments to address the challenges they encounter.

Crisp (2014), however, opines that Africa is not a poor continent as others might argue, but poor governance and the poor implementation of policies by governments makes it difficult for the continent to be progressive, thus leaving gaps which need to be filled, and they can only be filled by foreign humanitarian actors. In a related issue, in 2017, there was severe flooding in the Southern parts of Zimbabwe and thousands of people were displaced. Many people lost their lives and infrastructure was destroyed. The Air Force of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe National Army were the primary responders and they managed to save many people from the floods. However, the government failed to support these people with food and proper shelter and this prompted the Red Cross Society and the United Nations with its subsidiary bodies, to chip in. Government ministers roamed around the affected areas with the UN country representative who offered a lot of support for the flood victims in the form of food and the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure. Most of the work in assisting the flood victims was in the hands of foreign humanitarian organisations. The government's Civil Protection Unit (CPU), which is more like America's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responded late and this was attributed to poor planning and lack of preparedness by the government.

According to Akonor (2008), Western governments feel a sense of responsibility towards Africa and this may be partly because most of their wealth comes from Africa. These countries exploit Africa of its resources and the only way that they can appease Africans is by providing humanitarian aid during humanitarian crises. This best explains why foreign humanitarian actors are more active in Africa's humanitarian industry. Most African countries have shifted their focus in international trade and business towards China. In other terms, China is exploiting Africa of its resources and of late, China has also entered the African humanitarian industry. Chinese foundations have started helping Africans in times of distress and this is partly because China benefits a lot from exploiting Africa and hence, it offers aid as appeasement.

Whilst scholars like Akonor (2008) believe that Western governments and organisations have a sense of responsibility and obligation towards Africa, it is important to note that African leaders in most cases blame Western governments for all of the challenges they will be facing (Mills, 2010). It is clear that by blaming Western governments for Africa`s problems, they are implying that the solutions to these problems are supposed to come from the West. This is a clear indication that there is a feeling of inferiority that is felt by African leaders in comparison to the West. There is therefore lack of motivation to innovation and desire to devise resolutions to save Africa from its irritabilities, rather, to most African leaders, blaming the West is their scapegoat for improving the conditions in their own countries. Most African diplomats continually blame sanctions from the West as responsible for the problems they encounter, but is China not moving forward despite having sanctions? How about Iran, Russia and North Korea? Africans need to take responsibility of their situations and act accordingly if they are to move from dependency to independence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the issues discussed above, Africa needs to stand up and face its own problems. Africa, as expressed earlier, faces a myriad of challenges stretching from natural disasters to civil wars. If African states cultivate a way of handling their own problems, then they can be able to fight off their reliance on other countries. Some of the ways that African states can focus on can include developing and maintaining unity throughout the continent, fighting against tribalism and ethnocentrism, population control and the improvement of governance since most administrations are ineffectual and corrupt. You will notice that Africa is one of the richest continents in as far as natural resources are concerned, but the people of Africa do not benefit much from these resources because the resources are politicised and, in most States, they benefit those in power to the detriment of the common man.

If sound governance structures are set, African States will become more and more competent and thus, they will realize sound development. Politics has always been a major determinant of the socio-economic state of any country the world over. Most African leaders focus more on holding on to power and whatever they do, they do it to expedite their political mileage and thereby digressing from development, which is the very thing that their countries need. This will affect all the sectors of a nation and thereby channel more resources towards political matters whilst the general populace is left in social and economic doldrums, thus inciting the intervention of foreign humanitarian organisations. In other terms, Africa needs to mature politically if it is to record any notable progress. Look at countries with well-established political systems that are characterised by democracy and the rule of law, they are far ahead in as far as development is concerned. A very good example in Africa is South Africa. In the eyes of other people, it is no longer in the developing world because the economy of South Africa is somewhat devoid of politics and the country's leaders are more focussed on development than political expediency. The issue here is on bad politics and good politics.

On another more important note, African leaders need to develop an African Development Organisation that all African countries have to support and subscribe to. This African Development Organisation should be part of the African Union, but it should be focussed on fostering political, economic and social development in all African States. This African Development Organisation should not be politically skewed and it should have arms like those of the United Nations. This is so because the United Nations has been instrumental in humanitarian crises in Africa, but it is more in the hands of the developed world (look at the UN Security Council). Africa will never be independent of the dictates of the developed world unless it develops its own mechanisms for its own development. Look at the European Union, if a European country faces a crisis, the EU or organisations funded by the EU chip in and rarely would you see an American, Asian or African organisation in action. Africa can also be able to take such a position.

While it is an undeniable fact that the work being done by humanitarian actors in African countries is critical for its development and the resilience and survival of people, NGOs have to look for sustainable funding options and not entirely depend on Western donor funds. One way of doing this is by creating for-profit business units or arms within organisations. Profits from these business units can then be channeled back towards organisational mandates.

CONCLUSION

Africa's humanitarian industry is dominated by foreign organisations because of the various factors discussed above which include Africa's vulnerability to disasters, governance problems, underdevelopment, neo-colonialism, the lack of funding in Africa and at times for security reasons. Despite being labelled as agents of imperialism, these foreign organisations are relevant in the African context and their intervention is always needed because Africa cannot stand up on its own to protect its people from crises and disasters due to underdevelopment. It can only stand up if it changes its priorities towards development rather than politics. Africa has to solve its own problems and structures have to be put in place for that to be possible.

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