**Humanitarian Diplomacy in Post-World War I**

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# ABSTRACT

Since the end of World War I, Humanitarian Diplomacy has been facing fundamental global challenges of various magnitudes. This scenario has had an impact on not only the UN and its agencies but International NGOs and Consortia, national NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movements. The fundamental global challenges have forced the aforementioned organizations to devise partnership and coordination mechanisms in their operations to protect vulnerable populations and provide humanitarian aid. This study outlines the way humanitarian diplomacy has evolved since the end of World War I. Drawing on reports/research papers, opinions of humanitarian practitioners and academics, it sketches a panorama of the UN; its origins and how it has evolved since World War I. It further explores the United Nations’ role in catering for humanitarian action and the protection of human rights. Furthermore, it highlights the role of food relief in humanitarianism and ends with a discussion on the Bretton wood institutions, their impact on social – economic and infrastructure development and ultimately examines whether they achieved their mandate.

Keywords: humanitarian, Neo-humanitarian, decolonization, humanitarianism, food relief, human rights, humanitarian response/action, global challenges, organization, institution, conflict, International aid, protection, vulnerable populations and human rights

# ABBREVIATIONS

BWI Bretton Wood Institutions

GHAR Global Humanitarian Assistance Report

GHO Global Humanitarian Overview

IBRD International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

ICSID International Centre for Settlement of Investment Dispute

IDA International Development Association

IFC International Finance Cooperation

IMF International Monetary Fund

INGO International Non-Governmental Organization

MIGA Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

OAU Organization of African Unity

OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

ND No date

OECD-DAC Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee

SC Security Council

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

UNFPA United Nations Fund Populations Activities

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNHR United Nations Human Rights

US United States

WB World Bank

# INTRODUCTION

This study sets out to discuss the history of humanitarian diplomacy. We have divided the entire work into two parts. The first part begins with definitions of three key terms in the study of humanitarianism: Humanitarian, Neo-humanitarian and Decolonization. We shall then explore the history of Humanitarian Diplomacy especially post-World War one and spell out the UN’s evolutionary operations to cater for humanitarian action and human rights. In the second segment, we will steer the discussion towards food relief. Our task under this debate will be to explore the role food relief in humanitarianism and internationalization. Special attention will be given to the WFP and the FAO as major players in food relief aid. We will then shift our attention towards the Bretton Wood Institutions. In the closing debate we will attend to the question whether the Bretton Wood Institutions achieved their mandate or not. To answer this question, we will present the broader perspective of what these institutions are and further investigate their mandate. By so doing, we will bring to light the answer to the question posed regarding their mandate and what they achieved.

# 1.1 Definitions: humanitarian, neo- humanitarianism and decolonization

Humanitarian: according to Testuz, (1979) humanitarian “characterises any action beneficent to a human being” (p. 143). This term also encompasses the work of protecting lives and assisting vulnerable populations. It further refers to personnel deployed by humanitarian agencies and NGOs that are fully involved in carrying out humanitarian operations (Glossary of Terms, 2002)

Neo- Humanitarian: Mills (2005) postulates that the conditions and nature of humanitarianism have changed in recent years. He affirms that ideals of neutrality, impartiality and independence have become nothing but a myth. However, he argues that this form of humanitarianism is not outside of the conflict zone but it is embedded within the regions of conflict. Mills further argues that states have changed the scope of humanitarian action by using humanitarian norms and actors for their organizations and actors.

However, we can define Neo – Humanitarian as a novel practice not confined to the traditional way of humanitarianism. However, this practice aims at engagement with state and non-state actors in order to provide security, peace and stability apart from providing protection in in line with fundamental humanitarian principles to vulnerable populations (Du Bois, 2018).

Decolonization: refers to the Geo-political transformation in power and control that took place between 1954 – 1955 in Asia and 1960 – 1980s in Africa. In the course of this period, Countries started achieving independence from colonial powers – mainly European nations (Module 2, nd). Decolonization is also described as the process that took place when territories achieved self-determination through Geo-political integration with independent states, (The UN today, 2008)

# 1.2 The UN – Historical background

To discuss the role of the UN in Humanitarian Diplomacy in the post-world war I era; it is necessary to highlight the historical background of this organisation. Essentially, the chatter of the United Nations was singed in San Francisco in June 1945 by 51 countries. This ceremony saw the establishment of the UN which supplanted the League of Nations. Unlike the League of Nations, the UN however, was a more complex and ambitious establishment. The UN was formed with a mission to go beyond the achievements of the League of Nation; to achieve stability in international relations and to systematise the promotion of change (Righter, 1995, as cited in Potter, Binns, Jennifer & Smith, 2008).

As mentioned above, the UN was born out of the failed League of Nations. However, some look at the UN simply as a revised League, no doubt improved in some respects and possibly weaker in others (Goodrich, 1947). Although the League of Nations was deemed ineffective and a failure in its operations by some professionals, scholars like Goodrich maintain that many internationalists see this judgement both as “unfair and unjust” (p. 7).

The dissolution of the League of Nations paved way for the transfer of its properties and assets to the UN on August 1st 1946. This transfer took place at a ceremony in Geneva. Apparently, this meant that a promising experiment in international cooperation formerly came to a close (Goodrich, 1947). However, the League’s failure as some scholars judge it, is far more complex than conventionally understood (Wilson, 2016).

Today the UN is a complex network of institutions with overlapping functions. However, these interconnected institutions retain the original broad based purposes, including commitment to equal rights for people of all nations, to rid the world of the scourge of war and to promote social and economic progress for all peoples (Potter et al 2008). With this background, at our disposal, let us now spell out the role played by the UN in Humanitarian Diplomacy in the post-world war I period.

# 1.2 The UN in the interwar era

In the last decades, the UN has done a lot of effective works such as the reforms it orchestrated like the creation of the post high commissioner for refugees. Apart from that, the UN was instrumental in expanding the high commissioner’s mandate which was limited to Russian refugees to the world over now. Through a combination of diplomacy, negotiation and partnership, this office expanded its activities to the rest of the world in the interest of protecting refugees and their rights, (Module 2, nd)

Another dimension in which the UN contributed to Humanitarian Diplomacy is in the aftermath of the death of Dr Fridtjof Nansen in 1930. We see the creation of Nansen International Office for Refugees. This office operated as an independent office with the objective of promoting rights of refugees. This project culminated into the development of a draft of 1933 treaty on refugee rights, (Skran, 1995, as cited in the Module 2, nd)

Furthermore, the UN played a significant role in the field of health in bringing about partnership and complementarity. The interwar period marked a landmark characterised by a paradigm shift from treatises and conventions between states to the establishment of international organisations such as the league of Red Cross Societies in 1919 (Module 2, nd).

# 1.3 The UN and Humanitarianism

To discuss the UN vis-à-vis humanitarianism, let us begin by highlighting the main drivers of humanitarian needs. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (2018) “conflict continues to feature as a main contributor to humanitarian need” (p. 10). For example in 2017 alone, conflicts coupled with disasters left an estimated 201 million people in need of international humanitarian aid (GHAR, 2018).

Apart from that, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (OCHA) estimated that 136 million people needed humanitarian aid and protection in 2018 (UNFPA, 2018). Such a scenario paints a very grim picture about the future of the succeeding generations.

Furthermore, projections of the GHAR (2019), reveal that countries affected by conflict are likely to lag behind on most of the human development indicators. This includes, access to essential basic services, levels of poverty, malnutrition and social rights. In addition to that, global forecasts suggest that economic decline in these countries will continue to affect people’s resilience and subsequently limit the capacity of their leadership to provide for them (GHO, 2016)

However, in the face of all these global challenges the UN’s concern from its inception has always been concerned with human development through the securing of global security (GHO, 2016). Furthermore, the UN’s commitment to humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations will continue to grow even more, as long as disasters both man-made and natural will continue to threaten humanity, (OCHA, 2016).

Alongside these challenges are positive trends. The UN in conjunction with local, national, regional and international actors has continued to respond to humanitarian needs around the globe. Furthermore, the UN contributes towards the international humanitarian system in playing a fundamental role in providing assistance and protection in times of conflict especially when local systems are depleted by crisis and when resources or technical knowledge are insufficient (OCHA, 2016).

Over the last many years, we have seen that there has been growing funding for the various UN programmes in its mandate to provide humanitarian aid and protection to vulnerable populations. An overview of humanitarian action in terms of funding and support to vulnerable people is well presented in the UNFPA (2018) report which paints the humanitarian landscape as follows: 1) 16 million people were reached in 58 countries affected by severe emergencies, 2) a total of 10.8 million people in 53 countries were reached with sexual and reproductive health, 3) 3.9 million people were reached with basic services and information specifically on Gender based violence in 51 countries and 4) a total of 1.5 million adolescents were reached in 36 countries, with adolescent sexual and reproductive health services.

# 1.4 The UN and Human Rights

In our attempt to highlight the UN’s achievements in championing Humanitarian action and Human rights, we need to refer to two fundamental bodies of human rights Law: the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which were adopted by the General Assembly of 1945 and 1948 respectively (The UN Today, 2008). However, we need to investigate more in order to discover whether the UN has evolved well enough to cater for humanitarianism and human rights?

To answer this question, let us begin by examining the proclamations in the preamble of the General Assembly, of the UN charter. According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (1948) we find these inspiring words, “whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law” (p. 1). We can see that the predominant guiding principle of the founding fathers of the UN was to establish an international framework that could prevent armed conflicts by promoting international peace and security and cooperation among nation states (Steinerte and Wallace, 2009).

History shows that the UN has used its agencies in achieving its objective of ensuring that human rights are protected. Furthermore, the UN employs Security Council in accordance with chapters VI and VII of the Charter to help protect vulnerable populations from atrocities such as, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity to mention but a few. Through this wing (SC), the UN has also spearheaded international cooperation with relevant regional organisations to bring about the need to respect human rights (UNHR, 2011).

Apparently the UN has strived to spear head this cause since its inauguration. Furthermore, there are different epochs through which the UN has evolved in its mandate to cater for Humanitarian action and protection of Human rights (OCHA, 2016).

We can affirm at this juncture, that the UN has evolved well in its mission to maintain global peace and the protection of human rights, despite its past mistakes. Reindorp, (2011) puts it well in his view on the efforts made by the UN in maintain global peace, when he says, “during the 1990s, the UN’s activities in relation to conflict and humanitarian crisis were radically transformed. The end of the Cold War led to a surge of optimism about the possibilities of international cooperation in countering threats to international peace” (p. 29).

In addition to that, after the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War, seemingly, this war confirmed the re-launch of the UN as the guarantor of world peace through a systematic coordination of collective security (Righter, 1995 as cited in Reindorp, 2011). These events are among a few in the history of the UN that point to the capacity of this organisation to adapt to different and changing tests of time.

# 1.6 The Cold War

The cold war resulted in a sharp rise in the number of displaced people and refugees especially across the continents of Africa and Asia to be specific. The implication of this was that the western world came to perceive assistance to refugees as a central objective in their foreign policy towards newly independent states (Module, 2: nd).

Although the ending of the Cold War vividly increased the willingness of governments to work through the United Nations and other international channels to resolve conflicts and maintain peace around the globe many new threats emerged in the post-Cold War era. These new threats were beyond the control of nation-states, including major super-powers. One of the greatest threats in this regard was the prevalence of intra-national and cross border conflicts (Yilmaz, 2008)

Furthermore, this scenario brought into focus the need for humanitarian action. Humanitarian needs during and after the Cold War were perceived more explicitly through the lenses of global poverty and inequality (Davey, Borton and Foley, 2013)

This scenario presented a situation where foreign policy and aid took centre stage in succeeding discussions by western governments. Furthermore, discourses on development came to prominence and leaders of less developed countries made the claim that the suffering caused by underdevelopment was as great as relief and infrastructure reconstruction. The consequence of this was a shift towards attention on international humanitarian assistance than anything else (Module 2, nd).

This ushered in an opportunity for the UNHCR to expand its resources, capacity, mandate and geo – humanitarian scope. However, the UNHCR had one basic challenge to overcome. It needed to revise and review its legal framework that aided its operations. Hence, the UNHCR’s response to global crises underwent radical changes. The UNHCR was prompted to increase its efforts and begin to go beyond Europe in providing Humanitarian assistance such as the assistance of Hungarian refugees who had fled from the Soviet military action against the popular uprising in Budapest in the year 1956 (Module 2, nd).

Another remarkable effort the UNHCR made was the revision of the definition of Refugee status in mid 1960s. The majority of refugees being assisted by UNHCR were not covered by UN refugee convention. This anomaly was rectified by the revision of the definition of Refugee status which reflected the global nature of refugee problems, (Module 2, nd)

Today, inter-state wars have declined and low politics have gained greater importance in international affairs. There is now increased international cooperation in conjunction with the international community. According to Yilmaz (2008), the spread of market economy and rapid expansion of foreign investment, developing countries though cautious about foreign investment are likely to do better in the future. All this has been made possible the by the efforts of the UN in its mandate to restore world security and order.

# 1.7 The short comings of the UN

To begin this discussion we need to attend to a very important question in our investigation. Has the UN evolved enough to cater for Humanitarianism and Human Rights? (Module 2, nd) To say yes without pointing out the challenges and pitfalls of the UN in its past operations and interventions, would do no justice to this debate. Hence, we need a fairly objective approach to answer the above question. To do this we cite the Rwandan Genocide as a good example in our search for answers in this debate. We will tackle this question in two ways: 1) we analyse the efforts the UN made in dealing with the Genocide 2) we highlight the pitfalls of the UN in its operations (Adelman, 1996).

First of all, we realise that the enormity of the Genocide in Rwanda provoked a searching inquiry that demanded members of the international community, collectively and individually to look into the role they played in stopping this most heinous atrocity, (Adelman, 1996).

Secondly, we can affirm that poor coordination coupled with procrastination and bad decisions by UN member states contributed hugely to the mistakes in the Rwandan Genocide. Adelman (1996) further tells us that “when the events came to a head on 6th April, the UN collectively failed to respond… the Secretary General, travelling at a brisk pace through Europe, misread the nature of the conflict” (p. 300). This challenge was exacerbated by the understaffed and overstretched department of peace-keeping operations (Ibid, 300)

On the other hand Borton et al, (1994), are sympathetic towards the UN and rather affirm a lack of collective responsibility. They are quick to mention that it is not only the UN that did not perform well in its intervention but the international community as well.

Another major event that exposed the weakness of the UN and almost discredits its authority is the war of 2003 when the US supported by the UK declared war with Iraq without the endorsement of the UN. This move made by these two countries, the US and the UK, brought about a global debate about the UN’s authority and its role in the future (Potter et al 2008). The two events in the history of the UN compromised both its credibility and authority in maintaining global peace and humanitarian capabilities. Let us now turn to the role played by food relief in humanitarianism.

# 2.0 The Role played by Food Relief in humanitarianism

In the past decades, food security crisis remained a crucial context for humanitarian action globally, (Module 2, nd). The FAO and the WFP are key partners in the process of providing relief food in humanitarian crises. Furthermore, Food relief makes up a large component of humanitarian appeals and forms a significant tool in providing security and responding to food security crises around the globe (Harvey et al, 2010).

With increasing global food insecurity triggered by extreme natural disasters and the persistence of conflict in places like Darfur in 2003 to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, Chile and China in 2010, food relief remains a huge component of humanitarian response (Harvey et al 2010). However, it is good to learn that the nature of food relief has evolved over the past decades and so has the response towards food crises globally. We can identify three major trends in food relief: 1) emergency relief, which accounts for a large percentage of overall food aid 2) support for local and regional procurement of food aid which has continued to grow and 3) non OECD-DAC governments which are becoming increasingly significant funders of food aid (Harvey et al 2010).

Key donors have moved from in-kind food aid to local and regional procurement. Apart from that, there is an increase in facilities such as cash transfers, social protection and hunger safety nets. A good example of hunger safety nets is the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme (HSNP) in Ethiopia and the Hunger Safety Net programme in Kenya (Harvey et al 2010). These programmes are now playing an important role in the whole scenario of humanitarian action and internationalization, (Module 2, nd).

The global Humanitarian community has developed an extensive experiential base for responding effectively to food insecurity associated with protracted emergencies, though it is less able to deal with slow onset crises particularly those that are silent and complex. As cases such as the December 2004 tsunami, vividly illustrate; humanitarian agencies can respond with impressive skill when they have resources to do so. (The State of Food and Agriculture, 2006).

In the recent past, we have also seen the increasing level of good coordination systems among organisations in providing food relief. The WFP being the dominant player in emergency food aid, has created partnership with other INGOs and national NGOs in dealing with emergence food relief crises (The State of Food and Agriculture, 2006).

Another part food relief plays in global humanitarianism and internationalization is in the area of intervention. For example the WFP’s interventions in complex emergencies to be specific are wide ranging. This includes distributions of full or partial food rations to affected regions. Furthermore, the WFP is active in support for supplementary feeding programmes apart from programmes such as food for work to support agricultural production, social or transport infrastructure, environmental recovery and support for demobilization activities (Guarnieri 2003).

# 2.1 The Bretton Wood Institutions

As we begin this discourse on this topic we would like to affirm that the BWI did make an impact on the global economy and humanitarianism, despite the huge challenges these institutions had to contend with. We will outline the reasons for this position in the unfolding of this paper. However, let us begin first by reviewing the historical background of the Bretton Wood Institutions. In July 1944 representatives from 45 countries convened in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to plan the terms of Post war international economic Cooperation (Todaro and Smith, 2011).

This conference convened in the wake of economic devastation of the great depression in the 1930s, followed by the ravages of the Second World War which had led to the collapse of the financial markets and a decline in international trade. This scenario led to the creation of two financial institutions: the IMF and the WB. The WB constitutes five identifiable financial institutions: the IBRD, IDA, FC MIGA and ICSID, each with specific function and mission (Potter et al 2008). These institutions were to help rebuild international properties/goods, capital markets and to restore the war tone economies of Europe (Todaro and Smith, 2011).

Apparently, the BWI have come a long way since the end of the cold war especially in terms of the way they give support to countries in the complex transition from destructive conflicts. However, it is evident that major changes are always necessary for peace to take root in most countries recovering from long periods of war. Owing to the fact that countries in transition had low levels of development, it became clear that economic reconstruction had to go beyond the rehabilitation of basic services and infrastructure. Apart from that, more effort was needed because there was need to create basic macro-and microeconomic policy, instructional and regulatory frameworks necessary for dealing with large fiscal and external imbalances and debt arrears. While it remains true that development organisations and NGOs contribute to reconstruction of countries coming out of war, the BWI performed fundamental functions in this cause (Castillo, 2010).

Essentially the WB stated a commitment to work with NGOs to foster local empowerment and accountability of official institutions (Potter et al 2008). There are three levels at which this collaboration occurs: 1) NGO collaboration in WB financed projects, 2) invited consultation in policy discussions and 3) Confrontation over projects and controversial policies (Nelson, 2002 as cited in Potter et al 2008).

In the 1980s and 1990s, project collaboration between NGOs and the WB grew rapidly principally due to the fact that many governments’ service delivery capacity was shrinking (Potter et al 2008). However, this move was met with challenges. Woods (2000) postulates that if NGOs collaboration with International financial Institutions is indeed to enhance the principles of good governance and democracy in recipient countries, it seems evident that the democratic credentials of the NGO will also need to be proven.

Today it has tended to be the larger scale service oriented NGOs and those that enjoy collaborative relation with governments that are more likely to enjoy financial projects. Smaller scale empowerment oriented NGOs that see development as a process of social transformation or oppose mainstream policies and actions (Melana 2000) are less likely to be funded (Potter et al 2008)

According to Melana (2000), the biggest challenge facing national NGOs is that the WB lends to governments not NGOs and as a result working with the Bank ultimately implies working with the government. This scenario poses challenges for the NGOs in the sense that humanitarian action and fulfilment of objectives depends on NGO-State relations. Yet NGO-State relations vary from country to country, regime to regime and NGO to NGO (Potter et al 2008: 305). Working with the WB also means operating within the confines of predetermined and time-bound project cycle during which it is the borrowing government and not the WB that owns and manages the projects and maintains working relations with the NGOs. This predetermined and time-bound project frameworks and rigid procedures usually impede NGO’s ability to innovate and fulfil their humanitarian obligations (Potter et al 2008).

With this background let us now review their impact on the global market, development and humanitarian scene

# 2.2 The impact of Bretton Wood Institutions on global development

Malena (2000) begins by questioning two things: 1) the real extent and nature of NGO involvement in Bank financial projects and 2) the purpose and impact of that involvement. The understanding of the nature of this relationship between NGOs and the Bretton Wood institutions is vital for considering the impacts of such collaboration on local empowerment, development and democracy (Potter et al 2008).

Furthermore, working with the World Bank entails that NGOs have to operate within the confines of a predetermined and time-bound project cycle. During this period it is apparently the borrowing government not the World Bank that owns and manages the project. This situation hampers NGOs’ innovation and ability to implement its humanitarian projects (Malena 2000).

Though the BWIs have received a dismal judgment on their performance; we can still give these institutions a credit. In the post-cold war record on conflict resolution, economic reconstruction involved much more than rebuilding physical and human infrastructure. These institutions pushed for structural reform policies and the design of an appropriate institutional, legal and regulatory framework in order to create market friendly economies and reactive broad based economic growth. From this perspective, the BWIs have played a significant role in the construction of countries emerging out of war (Castillo, 2010). That said we can now give a bird’s eye view of this entire discourse.

# CONCLUSION

To conclude this study, it is very significant to realise that the UN has evolved with challenges in its mandate to cater for humanitarian action and the fostering of human rights. Furthermore, it is evident that the UN has definitely expanded its mission globally in the face of fundamental global challenges. In the first part of this essay, we began by defining the three key terms in the history of humanitarianism: Humanitarian, Neo-humanitarian and Decolonization. We then explored the history of humanitarianism in the post-world war I, in relation to the way the UN has evolved to cater for humanitarianism and human rights. Under this discussion, we attempted to examine the question on how well the UN has evolved to cater for human rights. We further spelled out the weaknesses of the UN in the history of its operations. In the second part of this discourse we tackled food relief and its role in humanitarianism and internationalization. In this discussion we used significant documents, reports and papers to investigate this aspect. In this exposition, basing our findings on reports and other documents we came to the conclusion that food relief has played a huge role in intervention programmes orchestrated by the WFP, the FAO and the UN and its agencies. Towards the end of this discussion, we brought into focus the Bretton Wood Institutions. Our task in this discussion was to investigate the impact made by these institutions on global humanitarianism. In this study, we have come to conclude that the BWI had a mandate to improve economies of countries coming out of war. Furthermore, the phenomenon of humanitarianism took centre stage in forging foreign policies of many countries and ultimately humanitarianism received as much attention as human and infrastructure development.

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