



NTNU – Trondheim
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Department of Geography

Examination paper for GEOG3516 - Humanitarianism: Theory and Practice

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Examination period: Autumn 2015, from 23rd November (08:00)
to 27th November (Before 16:00)

Credits: 7.5
Grades to be announced on: 18th December 2014

Other information: Please read the instructions on page 2.

Language: English
Number of pages: 3
Number of pages enclosed: 1

Home exam GEOG 3516 Humanitarianism: theory and practice autumn 2015

The exam question will be made available on GEOG 3516's It's learning page under the folder 'Exam' at 08.00 on the 23rd November.

The exam should be submitted before 16.00 on the 27th November.

When submitting the document, please do the following:

- To maintain anonymity of each candidate, please send an email with your exam paper attached as a pdf-file to Rita Hokseggen at the Department of Geography: rita.hokseggen@svt.ntnu.no.
- On the first page of the document: Write your candidate number and the number of words (and please remember to insert page numbers in the document)
- When saving the document, give it the following name: "GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]"
- When sending the document write the following in the subject line: "GEOG3516 Home exam, [your candidate number]"

Rita will save the document and delete your email so that no-one can trace your name attached to the document

It will not be acceptable to submit the exam paper too late. If you should have any problems in meeting the deadline, you must get in touch with the department, but generally late submissions will not be accepted.

The exam paper should be between 3500 words and 4500 words, references, figures and tables come in addition.

Remember to refer to sources and literature used according to academically accepted standards. You can, for example, follow the guidelines distributed on the It's learning pages for this course

During the exam, you cannot receive any supervision from staff in the department, but if you have questions regarding the question of the exam and formalities, we will try to answer collectively by making responses available on It's learning.

I may not be available on email in the last hours before the submission deadline so any questions should come before this last day. If there are any last minute issues regarding the submission, please contact Rita Hokseggen (phone 91774 566).

Good luck with your writing!

Exam paper GEOG 3516 Humanitarianism: Theory and Practice, autumn 2015

The attached article by Jonathan Corpus Ong illustrates some of the dilemmas that humanitarians face in planning and implementing humanitarian assistance. Reaching those who need it the most, making sure no harm is made on the ground and responding to demands from funders may not always go together in the implementation of humanitarian assistance. To meet different demands, different ethical positions and principles may have to be followed. In other words different humanitarian principles may clash during implementation. In this paper, describe what different ethical positions and principles humanitarian actors can make use of in relating to different stakeholders (such as people affected by conflict/disaster, governments, funders) and explain what the potential consequences will be when these different positions and principles are being adopted. You can select one or more of the particular themes from the course to exemplify (for example, complex emergencies, forced migration, camps, disasters, recovery etc.). Based on the readings of the course and the tensions you have identified in the exam-paper, can you see strategies for overcoming tensions between theory and practice in humanitarianism?

Attachment:

Ong, J.C. 2015. Does humanitarian aid mend communities or break them? *The Guardian*.

<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/27/impact-communities-distribution-aid-typhoon-haiyan-philippines>, accessed 16.11.2015

Does humanitarian aid mend communities or break them?

The unequal distribution of aid following typhoon Haiyan has caused social divisions and feelings of resentment among some Filipinos

Jonathan Corpus Ong

Jonathan Corpus Ong is a sociologist and humanitarian consultant, working on ethics. Follow him @jonathan_c_ong

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“Look at my house - it’s like a pigsty! My neighbours are lucky. They get to live as human beings, while this – this is for pigs.” In Cando’s community, where shanties display identical wooden walls and shiny white iron roofs, his house sticks out, looking askew and incomplete. His walls are sheets of corrugated iron tied together with a plastic tarpaulin as a makeshift roof, making the interiors stifflingly hot.

Cando was excluded from relief distribution due to his small family size. Targeting - the practice among humanitarian agencies of prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable - is common, but what impact is it having on those who are excluded?

When responding to huge disasters such as super typhoon Haiyan, which killed more than 8,000 people and displaced more than 4 million in central Philippines, humanitarian agencies operate with their own resource limitations and targets. So agencies entering a village will, typically, distribute goods only to the most vulnerable families in the area. For example, families with five or more children, or with a person with a disability, are more likely to be included in distributions than smaller-sized families or families with members working overseas. The assumption is automatically made that these families are better-resourced and as a result they are less likely to receive aid.

But the unfortunate result of this process seems to be social division, especially within tight-knit communities. As part of the Pamati Kita project, we spent several months interviewing people in some of the disaster-affected villages affected by Haiyan, and we were struck by how the excluded families felt resentful and ashamed by this process.

In our interviews, excluded people express bitterness even if they were often unsure who they should be angry at. Should it be the agency creating these selective criteria, governmental officials producing aid lists or neighbours who have received more from humanitarian workers?

Our respondents’ experiences suggest that selective relief distributions spark status anxiety. Intensified by traditional Filipino village relations where neighbours are regarded as extended family and people’s sense of dignity (*pagkatao*) is defined by their status in the community, status differences marked by small luxuries hit the have-nots hard. We met people who have had to borrow money from relatives or others in the community and incur debts in the process just to keep up with their neighbours’ vegetable gardens.

This neighbour envy can lead to feedback channels such as SMS hotlines being used to squeal on neighbours perceived to be undeserving of humanitarian aid and some agencies use this feedback to “correct” their future distribution lists. People suddenly cut off from aid then feel the need to conduct witch-hunts in retaliation to try and figure out which neighbour reported them to agencies, setting off paranoia within friendship groups.

Because neighbours size up each other’s access to humanitarian relief, some strategically withdraw from the community, keeping their relief stories secret so as to avoid incurring the envy of their friends.

In other Filipino communities, affected peoples organise among themselves and negotiate with humanitarians and government officials to eschew lists and instead redistribute relief evenly to all residents, even if it means that each family receives fewer relief goods.

Although humanitarians learned early on that many communities expressed a preference for agency distributions where “everyone gets a little something”, some agencies were unable to act on this feedback due to the high pressure to meet their committed targets. At the same time, a few agencies instituted different practices of having aid workers embedded within local communities in order to immediately resolve disputes and respond quickly to issues. The question remains as to whether targeting procedures are incompatible within the Filipino cultural context.

What is clear is that being excluded from humanitarian aid creates more than just an economic burden of having to find alternative means to secure shelter or a source of livelihood. It also leaves a deep emotional imprint in people that may manifest as shame and jealousy in neighbourly interactions. While humanitarians aim to serve the needs of the most vulnerable, each community is irreversibly transformed as their actions cause new material inequalities that are lived and felt in everyday life.

Although need has traditionally been the “north star” that guides humanitarian activities, we find that in the case of Haiyan, this value conflicts with other indicators of good performance, such as a community’s increased sense of solidarity in the wake of humanitarian projects.

So what should you do? Well, when discussing the hidden injuries of humanitarian relief, it is important to emphasise the importance of community consultations to understand local customs and preferences, especially as Filipino village cultures traditionally emphasise values of neighbourly cooperation and mutual obligation to care for each other.

Yes, of course disaster calls for an urgent response. But humanitarians must also pay attention to local sensitivities. After all, community wellbeing after disaster depends not only on addressing people’s material needs. It also depends on maintaining the affected people’s social connections with their neighbours, their village and with the wider world.

Dr Jonathan Corpus Ong is a sociologist and humanitarian consultant, working on disasters and ICTs. You can follow him @jonathan_c_ong

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