

Media and Local Communities in the Context of Humanitarian Aid

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Abstract

The subject of the article is creating the image of local communities in the media in the context of humanitarian aid. The rationale for taking up the topic are extraordinary events and the resulting humanitarian needs as well as the media creating the image of the victims and the need to help them. The information presented by the media is a signpost for donators of humanitarian aid. They make it possible to recognize the needs of the victims and provide them with full-value assistance. The assistance provided enables the local community to readapt, and also draws attention to the situation in a given area.

The article adopted the research goal of defining the role of the media in creating the image of the local community in the context of providing humanitarian aid. The research goal adopted in this way allowed for a hypothesis that the media constitute the basis for creating the image of local communities in need of humanitarian aid. Composing a social view of humanitarian aid beneficiaries appoints the media as an organ that determines the type, direction and volume of humanitarian aid.

The formulated hypothesis was verified thanks to the use of research methods in the form of a case study, desk research and an analysis of the scientific literature.

The article presents the media as a key area in creating the image of humanitarian aid beneficiaries.

Keywords: humanitarian aid, crisis, media, information, community

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of the article is creating the image of local communities in the media in the context of providing humanitarian aid. The rationale for taking up the topic is the ongoing war in Ukraine and the creation of an image of victims of conflicts and natural disasters by various mass media. The public is informed about humanitarian activities via radio or television, but most of all thanks to the popularization of electronic media, via the Internet¹. It is the only medium (the Internet) in which the feedback communication is fast, free and with a very wide range². Creating an image in the media, in the context of providing humanitarian aid, creates an opportunity (or a threat) to perpetuate its positive (or negative) reception. For the modern information society, for which information becomes equivalent or more valuable even than material goods, the media are one of the main sources of knowledge about the ongoing relief efforts during humanitarian actions.

2. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the article is to define the role of the media in creating the image of local communities in the context of providing humanitarian aid. In relation to the adopted goal, the article presents the following research problem: How does the media influence the perception of the need to provide humanitarian aid to local communities?

¹ Landmann T., *Współpraca ze społecznością lokalną, organizacjami pozarządowymi i mediami w pomocy humanitarnej*, Library of the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, Atut Publishing House, Wrocław 2021, p. 118.

² Budzyński W., *Public relations. Wizerunek, Reputacja. Tożsamość*, Poltext, Warszawa 2018, p. 194; Tworzydło D., *Zarządzanie w kryzysie wizerunkowym*, Difin Publishing House, Warszawa 2019, pp. 24-40.

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3. THE SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian aid is “saving and protecting life in the event of natural or man-made natural disasters and disasters”³. It should be mentioned that it is provided immediately and temporarily for the period when this support is needed. Humanitarian aid is designed to restore the free and natural life of the victims. It is a harmonized system of measures protecting against the inability to meet basic needs, such as access to drinking water and food, shelter, hygiene, sanitary and medical facilities.

Organizations that provide humanitarian aid can be divided into governmental and non-governmental. UN agencies include FAO, UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO and others⁴. Humanitarian aid is also handled by the European Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross operating under international agreements. The most famous non-governmental organizations in Poland are the Polish Humanitarian Organization, Caritas Polska and the Polish Red Cross.

Determining the increase or decrease in aid funding may be difficult for the obvious reason that disasters are unpredictable. A noticeable tendency, however, is an increase in financing due to the constantly emerging new crises, as well as an increase in the economic level of States that can afford to offer aid to those in need.

Chart 1 shows an increase in the amounts allocated to humanitarian aid even before the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The growing awareness of the need to provide humanitarian aid (also thanks to the availability of media) translates into an increase in funding.

³ www.gov.pl/web/polskapomoc [Access on 23.06.2022].

⁴ https://www.unic.un.org.pl/pomoc_humanitarna/agendy.php [Access on 24.06.2022].

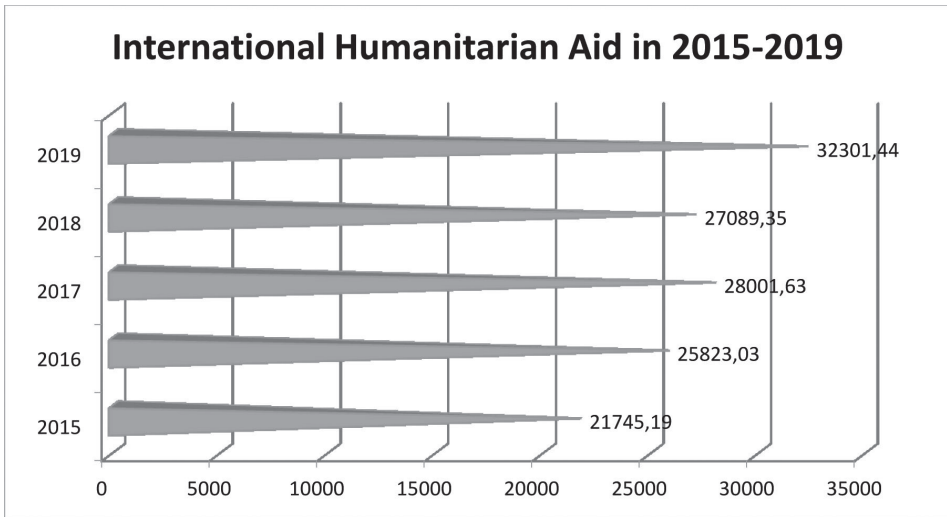


Chart 1. International humanitarian aid in 2015-2019 (amounts in million USD)

Source: Landmann T., *Współpraca ze społecznością lokalną, organizacjami pozarządowymi i mediami w pomocy humanitarnej*, Library of the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, Oficyna Wydawnicza Atut Wrocław 2021, p. 94.

According to the Supreme Audit Office, in 2017-2019, Poland allocated PLN 380.8 million for humanitarian aid⁵.

Bringing humanitarian aid requires a correlation between the beneficiaries and donators. There are many actors in humanitarian supply chains with flows (materials, finance, information) between them. Providing humanitarian aid is their common goal and its implementation requires a lot of commitment on many levels⁶.

Figure 1 presents the multitude of entities that are involved in the relationship between the flow of funds for the beneficiaries.

⁵ www.nik.gov.pl/aktualności/pomoc-humanitarna [Access on 23.06.2022]

⁶ Pępkowska B., *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania pomocy humanitarnej*, Library of the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, Atut Publishing House, Wrocław 2021, pp. 169-170.

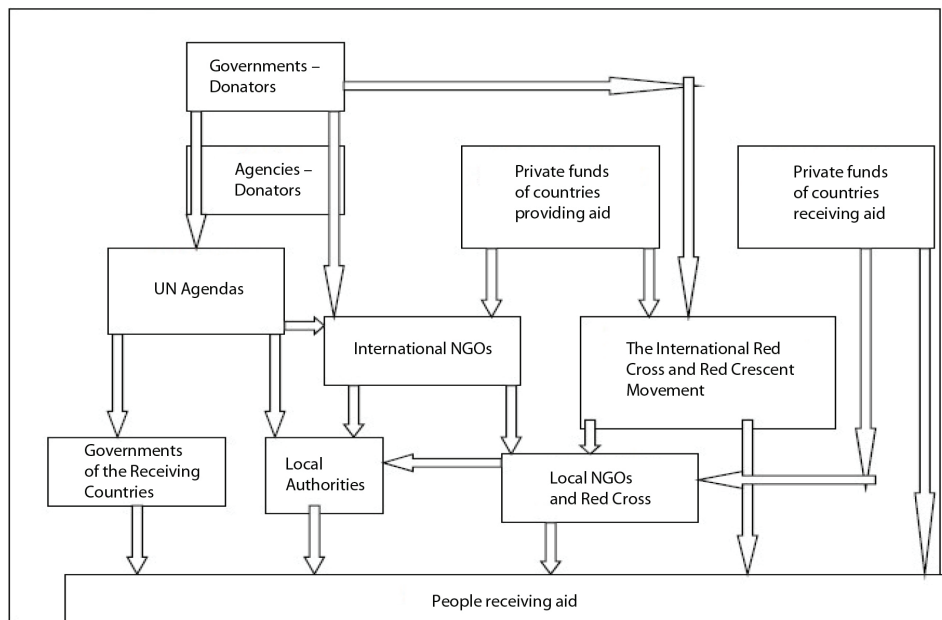


Fig. 1. Flow of funds in the international aid system

Source: Tanguy J., *The Sinews of Humanitarian Assistance: Funding Policies, Practices, and Pitfalls*, [in:] Cahill K. M. (ed.), *Basic of International Humanitarian Missions*, The Center for International Health and Cooperation, New York 2003, p 206, quoted according to: Skowrońska A., *Rola pomocy humanitarnej w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Azymut Publishing House, Gdańsk 2016, p. 18.

The presented Figure shows groups of beneficiaries (accepting aid), donors (financing entities) and implementing entities. The globalization process and the processes of improved information flow are related to the penetration of management systems and the emergence of new interrelating correlations⁷.

The unique role of the media in information creation continues to grow today. The power that the media wields in creating information becomes a tool for positive (and negative) reasons for popularizing the topic of humanitarian aid. The media is a very important bridge between the donor community and those in need of humanitarian aid.

⁷ Ścibiorek Z., *Zmiany w organizacji – moda czy konieczność?*, Adam Marszałek Publishing House, Toruń 2007, p. 26.

The PWN Encyclopaedia defines the mass media as: *devices and institutions through which content is sent to a large and diverse audience [...]*⁸. One of the functions of the media is an opinion-forming role, which may influence the opinion of the recipients of the message, including the willingness to grant a subsidy and its amount for the population affected by disasters or crises.

When considering the area of humanitarian aid, the basic legal conditions should be indicated. Agnieszka Skowrońska in „The role of humanitarian aid in international relations” divides into three groups the legal provisions regulating the provision of humanitarian aid - the humanitarian imperative, international humanitarian law and the human rights system and UN documents⁹.

The humanitarian imperative is enshrined in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief: *“The right to receive and provide humanitarian aid is a fundamental humanitarian principle that should be enjoyed by all nationals of all countries. As members of the international community, we see it as our duty to provide humanitarian aid wherever it is needed. It follows that unfettered access to the affected population is essential for the performance of this task. The main goal of our actions in the aftermath of the disaster is to alleviate the suffering of people least resistant to the stress it caused. Our humanitarian aid is not a biased or political action and should not be considered as such.”*¹⁰

International humanitarian law of armed conflicts requires participants to abide by the principles of humanitarianism. This obligation rests with each of the parties to international relations¹¹.

The last group are UN documents and the human rights system. The catalogue of human rights has a measurable impact on the problem of humanitarian aid and provides instructions for states as parties to a conflict, and is also a guide for organizations providing humanitarian aid. The basic acts include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Convention

⁸ www.encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/srodki-masowego-przekazu [Access on 23.06.2022].

⁹ Skowrońska A., *Rola pomocy humanitarnej w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Azymut Publishing House, Gdańsk 2016, p. 55.

¹⁰ http://pah.org.pl/Kodeks_postepowania, p. 1 [Access on 23.06.2022].

¹¹ Falkowski Z., *Międzynarodowe Prawo Humanitarne Konfliktów Zbrojnych*, Military Center for Civic Education, Warszawa 2014, p. 17.

on the Rights of the Child, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention against Torture. The principles of observing Human Rights pave the way for the treatment of people in armed conflicts, and the consequences of non-compliance with them make it necessary to provide humanitarian aid to the victims.

4. MEDIA SHOWING THE LOCAL COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMANITARIAN AID

The opinion-forming role of the media in the information society seems to be the key to the amount of aid offered to local communities affected by natural disasters or armed conflicts. The mass media become a link and inform the society about those in need of help. These are not only basic data informing about the place, time and type of damage, but also a narrative about the community in need of help, popularizing the type of expected help and also about deciding who becomes in need and to what extent. Information in the media business is a commodity, and if it ceases to bring profit (viewership), it is replaced with another news. This is how the so-called forgotten crises, i.e. crises which still have negative consequences in a given area and which receive aid in a much smaller amount than at the beginning of the occurrence of these effects.

The fight against crisis situations puts the state system to the test, which is unaccustomed to working in an emergency and to increased involvement in humanitarian aid. T. Landmann lists the 4 phases of crisis management and the related tasks of the media:

Tab. 1 The basic tasks of the media in various phases of crisis management in terms of involvement in humanitarian crises

| Crisis management phases | Sample media tasks |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. The prevention phase | Educating the society about potential humanitarian crises and building social responsibility and solidarity in the face of such crises |
| 2. The preparation phase | Informing the society about the symptoms of a humanitarian crisis, as well as providing information about the actions of participants responsible for crisis situations |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 3. The reaction phase | Coverage of events from places affected by a humanitarian crisis, cooperation with public services working on the scene of the crisis, informing victims of their rights and obligations, and informing the international community about the activities of humanitarian aid sponsors |
| 4. The reconstruction phase | Informing the population about possible forms of obtaining aid, reporting on the state's activities in restoring the damaged critical infrastructure, as well as monitoring whether the activities of the state and other participants in humanitarian activities were legally and financially appropriate (as part of the control function) |

Source: Landmann T., *Współpraca ze społecznością lokalną, organizacjami pozarządowymi i mediami w pomocy humanitarnej*, Library of the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, Atut Publishing House, Wrocław 2021, p. 120.

The tasks of the media in the table show a number of functions that become an invaluable foundation for creating information, opinions and controlling the incoming trends, including in relation to the orientation of humanitarian aid.

It should be mentioned that the help provided also has an impact on the local community. Whether these are negative or positive effects - it is up to individual assessment - but it undoubtedly changes the environment and the situation of people in need.

Apart from providing material aid, the organizations should support the local economy as much as possible. This can be support for manufacturing companies (e.g. food) or service providers depending on the capabilities and needs. Emerging humanitarian villages benefit local communities that can offer humanitarian services.

The messages emitted by the media, through the developing technology, guarantee universal access to information. The media becomes full participants in the social world¹². The evolution of the way of life by society and the adaptation of information

¹² Furmanek M., *Spoleczne aspekty oddziaływań technologii informacyjnych*, [in:] Juszczak M., *Edukacja medialna w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2003, p. 46; Crumbly J., Carter L., *Social media and humanitarian Logistics: The impact of task-technology fit on new service development*, "Procedia Engineering", 107 (2015), pp. 412-416.

as a common good have changed the sociological approach to living in modern existential conditions¹³.

The influence of the media can also be considered in the context of the CNN effect - the influence of media coverage on political activities¹⁴. This effect and the overall functioning of the media can be both an obstacle and a positive influence on the political decisions made. The popularity of information carried by the media is undoubtedly increased by the speed and volume of aid provided by donors. The media has the power to choose crises. Janina Ochojska emphasizes that sudden, unexpected and shocking crises are the most popular among the leading newspapers. On the other hand, difficult, incomprehensible, slowly developing crises are not popularized by the mass media¹⁵. Then the local population has to deal with the spreading crisis on their own, without the help of donors.

5. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Humanitarian aid and the media creating the image of the community that need it most not only positively influence the stabilization of a difficult situation, but at the same time can prolong an ongoing conflict. The reasons for such situations may be, for example, private goals of maintaining a monopoly on information. They can exacerbate the crisis situation as well as find a peaceful solution. Based on the presented analysis of the scientific literature, it can be concluded that the creation by the media of local communities affected by the crisis creates conditions enabling the use of popularity in the broad sense not only to popularize the provision of aid, but also as an opportunity to obtain financial benefits from the service sector for aid beneficiaries. Building the image of people in need becomes, next to aid, an investment developing the local industry. Through the activities of humanitarian aid organizations, the local community can resume its own economic activity.

¹³ Ścibiorek Z., *Ludzie – cenny kapitał organizacji*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń, 2004, p. 205; Ścibiorek Z., *Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Personnel*, [in:] Ścibiorek Z., Pawęska M. (eds.), *Personnel in terms of current and future challenges*, The Library of the International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, The International University of Logistics and Transport in Wrocław, Wrocław 2022, pp. 22-24.

¹⁴ Livingstone S., *Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, Research Paper R-18, Harvard 1997, p. 2.

¹⁵ Ochojska J., *Zapomniane kryzysy humanitarne*, "Znak", (2011)/1 – <https://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6682011janina-ochajska-okonskazapomniane-kryzysy-humanitarne/>

The article attempts to indicate that image creation by the media turns out to be a signpost for the donors. The dominance of the created media information remains the determinant of the direction of donation. Media messages reaching the recipients show the image of the community in need of humanitarian aid. The media not only creates an image, but also sets trends in the type of services and assistance offered.

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