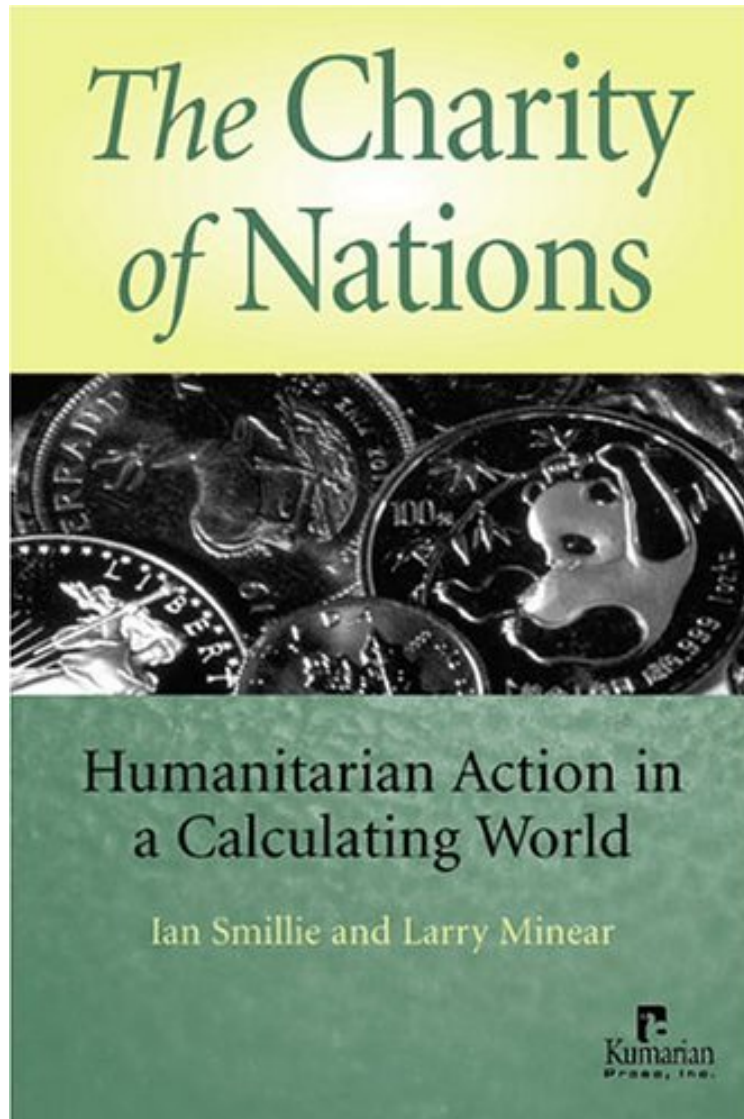


[Library ebook] The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World

The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World

Ian Smillie, Larry Minear

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Ian Smillie, Larry Minear : The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World:

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Challenges for CharityBy Friederike KnabeCharity has been a part of human society since the beginning of civilization. It was a simple and easily understood concept: those who have

more give some of their wealth to those who have less. Humanitarianism describes this personal level of voluntary aid to lessen the suffering of others, be that as a result of systemic poverty or of natural or man-made disasters. Unless the humanitarian crisis is close to home, the individual's commitment to help is channeled through a myriad of aid organizations operating in the affected region or country. Complementing the work of international agencies (UN, Red Cross, NGOs) is the CHARITY OF NATIONS: governments directly engaged with the other players in the "humanitarian enterprise". However, governments do not operate selflessly. While, their main responsibility is for the well being of their citizens, they may be very reluctant to have "outsiders" interfere in their affairs. In the donor countries foreign policy interests always intrude on their humanitarian response to emergencies. As a result the simple concept of charity has become highly complex in modern times. Smillie and Minear present a thorough and substantial analysis of the multifaceted issues that drive humanitarian assistance. They reflect on the changes in the relief, aid and emergency "business" since the Cold War. They discuss in some depth the new approach used since 9/11: increasingly, humanitarian demands are being balanced with security concerns. Other novel trends, they explain, are the increasing commercialization of aid delivery and the difficult relationships between military personnel and aid agencies. The definition of aid agencies as "an extension of security forces", promoted by the US administration in Afghanistan and Iraq, has exposed humanitarian aid workers to more dangers than ever before. For many, it has put into question the NGOs' claim for neutrality as they operate among the different sides of the conflict and the essential non-political character of humanitarian aid in all circumstances. On the other hand, aid agencies have not only become executing agents for official government aid programs, they also rely on the increased security maintained by the military in crisis countries. The authors offer detailed case studies of humanitarian crises, such as Sierra Leone, East Timor and Afghanistan, to exemplify the range of responses by the international players. They expose the wide ranging difficulties experienced in each scenario. Summarizing the divergence between assertions and practical applications, they identify systemic problems in the humanitarian enterprise as it is currently implemented. All players, whether governments, UN agencies or NGOs, they each have their own approaches and perspectives, the authors state. They even vary in their definition of the commonly accepted humanitarian principles. For the recipient governments this multitude of actors is highly confusing. Such confusion, among other reasons, is leading to mistrust and antipathy. Often it seems that, in particular, the local NGOs are overlooked by the international actors. Those groups, though, "for all their weaknesses offer the best long-term hope, also in terms of prevention", assert the authors. Three levels of emergencies are being distinguished, with the first level receiving extensive attention and support worldwide, such as Afghanistan, Iraq or the very recent Asian emergency following the tsunami. The second level is treated with a modest, often lingering response and describes most of the "traditional" humanitarian crises. The third level can also be termed "the forgotten" disaster or emergency. Many African crises, whether as a result of natural or man-made disasters, fall into this last category. Unless the country is strategically important to donor countries or attracts media attention, or is just "lucky", very little humanitarian assistance and support will be forthcoming. The authors observe that non-government international aid agencies, themselves dependent on donor contributions in their home country, are also limited in the range and level of support they can offer unless the emergency moves into the media limelight, which the authors term "the CNN moment". One can name the Ethiopia famine in the 1980s as one such example. The authors criticize the weaknesses of the international humanitarian system that allows such uneven response to human disasters. The right to humanitarian assistance should be consistently and equally applied across the globe. They argue in favour of a new humanitarian crisis management system with a "strengthened multilateral core" and agreed upon guidelines and principles. Such a system would move towards a new way of financing the response to humanitarian crisis as well as the fundamental next steps of reconstruction and development. They stress that monitoring effectiveness and accountability will have to become essential components of future aid delivery. Smillie's and Minear's study, based on years of research and field work by the authors and the "Humanitarianism and War Project", extensive interviews with many players from diverse relevant agencies, represents a major contribution to the necessary debate on "Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World", the subtitle of the book. Despite the difficult and at times technical subject matter, it is written in clear language that is accessible to the interested non-specialist reader. The book is a must for all those engaged at any level with international humanitarian action, policy makers and practitioners. Those concerned with improved systems for sharing resources and expertise between the richer and the poorer countries will find the proposals for increased accountability and monitoring the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance thought provoking and compelling. Detailed notes, relevant statistics and a selected bibliography assist the further research. [Friederike Knabe]

* Probes the reasons behind governmental and nongovernmental responses to urgent human need* Will be one of the most important and influential assessments of humanitarianism in a decade* Up-to-date field research, extensive interviews with practitioners and donor government officials, and over sixty collective years of work in humanitarian and development issues* Accessibly written for the concerned international public, undergraduate and graduate students, practitioners, and analysts troubled by the direction of today's humanitarian actionThe charitable impulse has a history rooted in ethics. But much of what passes for humanitarianism today is a commercial enterprise, manipulated

by market forces of supply and demand. And since the launch of the "war on terror," national security interests and political objectives have increasingly come into play. The Charity of Nations probes the reasons behind governmental and nongovernmental responses to urgent human need. It explains why some crises get the lions share of attention and resources, while others are essentially forgotten. Vibrantly contrasting cases of Afghanistan, East Timor, and Sierra Leone, among others, illustrate how foreign policy and domestic politics have shaped what has become the business of humanitarianism. The authors call for a revamped humanitarian structure--one that eliminates the ambiguities and confusion that exist today. They argue for a shift away from rampant political and commercial intrusions, and a rededication to multilateralism, genuine accountability, and trust.

"Well researched, well documented, and challenging for all actors involved in humanitarian action...Scrutinizes today's humanitarian action and the motivation of its donors. The authors make a case for a better-coordinated multilateral approach to support a more effective and principled humanitarian response." "Ian Smillie is Canadas most knowledgeable expert on foreign aid. In The Charity of Nations, he joins Larry Minear to produce a donors guide to spending our dollars...Government decision makers and international nongovernmental organizations should pay heed, since the immensity and urgency of current conditions demand we do things differently. Smillie and Minear have a formula." "I hope [this] becomes a standard reference in the current discussion of the humanitarian enterprise. We would all be very much the better for it." "Much more than an indictment of a humanitarian apparatus that allows 'forgotten emergencies.' This is a timely, important, and highly readable book." "Offers an insightful analysis of the complexities of the humanitarian enterprise. The authors' grasp of the topic is impressive." From the Publisher Unique Features: *Probes the reasons behind governmental and nongovernmental responses to urgent human need *Will be one of the most important and influential assessments of humanitarianism in a decade *Up-to-date field research, extensive interviews with practitioners and donor government officials, and over sixty collective years of work in humanitarian and development issues *Accessibly written for the concerned international public, undergraduate and graduate students, practitioners, and analysts troubled by the direction of todays humanitarian action About the Author Ian Smillie is an Ottawa-based development consultant and writer. He has lived and worked widely in Africa and Asia, and his knowledge of Bangladesh spans more than three decades. Author of several books on international development, he was a founder of the Canadian development organization, Inter Pares, and was Executive Director of CUSO. In addition to his other work, he is associated with the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and serves as Research Coordinator on Partnership Africa Canada's 'Diamonds and Human Security Project'. He is a participant in the intergovernmental 'Kimberley Process,' which has developed a global certification system for rough diamonds. Larry Minear directed Tufts Universitys Humanitarianism and War Project. He has worked on humanitarian and development issues since 1972. A posting in the Southern Sudan was followed by advocacy work in Washington, D.C. on behalf of Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief. Over the years he has served as a consultant to governments, UN agencies, NGOs, and the Red Cross movement. Since co-founding the Humanitarianism and War Project in 1991, he has conducted and coordinated research on many humanitarian crises and written extensively for specialized and general audience. His most recent book, The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World (Kumarian Press, 2004) probes the reasons behind governmental and nongovernmental responses to urgent human need.