Looking Good, but Doing Bad? Local Perceptions of Two Humanitarian NGOs in The Eastern DRC

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Overview

- Background
  - On the DRC
  - On this research project;
- Literature Review
- Quantitative Outcomes
- Qualitative Outcomes
- Explanation
Background

- Mobutu‘s kleptocratic rule
- Rwandan Refugee Crisis (1994 Goma)
- “Africa‘s First World War“
- 5.4 Million War-related Victims (1998-2007 IRC)
  - Rwandan genocide 500 000 to 1 000 000
- 2003 Peace Agreement
- 2006 Elections: Parliament & Joseph Kabila President
- 2011 Elections: Kabila „reelected“ and violence
Background

- Violence continues, especially in the East

- Visits there since 2001
  - Worked with the IRC and Malteser
    - Health care work
    - Mortality survey
    - Gender-based violence
  - Priests were scathing in their criticism of the IRC
Literature

- Perception research has become increasingly common, but rarely about specific organizations or one or more specific population groups.
- Some negative perceptions are normal, even useful:
  - Health priorities
  - Food aid
- So which perceptions are the most dangerous or debilitating?
  - (Hidden) Political and Economic Aims
Methods / Research Design

- Exploratory research
- Partly based on Agenda 2015
- Qualitative (How?) with some quantitative data (What?)

Shortcomings:
- Purposive instead of random sampling;
- Focus groups and Interviews:
  - Do not generalize!
Methods / Research Design

- Four groups:
  - Congolese Staff-members of Malteser and IRC
  - Beneficiary Population:
    - Patients
    - Local Health Committee Members
    - Non-patients
  - Local Health System Staff:
    - Provincial Health Inspection
    - Health Zone Office
    - Health Facility Staff
  - Local Authorities:
    - Church Officials
    - Local Government
    - Traditional Leaders
    - Civil Society Organization Staff Members
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malteser</th>
<th>IRC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receive health assistance from organization?</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience positive?</td>
<td>&gt; 95 %</td>
<td>&gt; 95 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come to help?</td>
<td>90 %</td>
<td>92 %</td>
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## Hidden Political and Economic Aims?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malteser</th>
<th>IRC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Population</td>
<td>Mostly No</td>
<td>Mostly No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Health System Staff</td>
<td>Mostly No (even more than local population)</td>
<td>Mostly Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authorities</td>
<td>Generally No (Nindja)</td>
<td>Yes, in particular close to Bukavu</td>
</tr>
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Qualitative Analysis: Differences among Health Zones

- Arrival & American
- Bashi Staff & Barega Staff
- “Operation Retour“
- Insecurity and 4-wheel drives
- Kanyonya
- Irregularity of medical supplies
- Humanitarian aid addresses consequences not root causes
Explanation

- Needs matter most:
  - Just like needs, all perceptions are local
  - Position determines perception
  - Professionalism builds more trust than referring to the principles

- Humanitarian action addresses effects not causes
- Always incidents, events, etc.
- Communication as expectation management
Role of donor governments is rarely noticed
Conclusion

- Perceptions differ considerably, just as needs differ considerably.

- Population does not talk about the humanitarian principles, but it appreciates:
  - Organizations that come to help – humanity
  - Needs based aid – impartiality
  - Critical about taking sides – neutrality
  - Checks who you work with – independence
Overview

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- Questions
Research Questions

- What can/should humanitarian organizations do to understand the diversity of local actors (e.g., their perceptions, interests, strategies, and power) better?
- How can they use this insight to respond in a more accountable manner to the local context and needs of target groups? And what about other groups?
- What are the opportunity costs of doing so?
Three narratives

- Humanitarian action is a tough job, but it gets done
- Humanitarian action addresses effects not causes
  - Access
  - Role of donors
- Humanitarian action as an exchange