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The Effects of Humanitarian Aid on the Advancement of Livelihood under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Courtney J. Keeney

Abstract

Humanitarian aid continues to be under close scrutiny as the international community analyzes its effects on the receiving populations in the developing world. Although aid should not be stopped completely, there are areas where it can be improved. In theory, aid should increase economic capabilities as it sustains populations and advances their quality of life. On the systemic level, data supports that there are more efficient ways to allocate aid to benefit recipient states rather than donor states. The allocation of aid is partly determined by individual political interests of donor nations and the promotion of their foreign policies. Logistics and the dispersal of aid in the receiving country can be highly politicized when the government oversees the process. Human rights are often forgotten in the allocation of aid on the ground as each country

and situation is not considered under its unique circumstances. The current United States administration—despite claims for having reformed US foreign aid—has not positively impacted the current crises in Venezuela; their history of foreign policy is being repeated. The following sections will seek to answer the question: Does humanitarian aid from the US in Latin America advance an adequate standard of living under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Introduction

There are many viable components involved in the analysis of the system of humanitarian aid—whether it be economics, foreign policy, or distribution and logistics. Does the dispersal of humanitarian aid in Latin America advance an adequate standard of living under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? The first answer that comes to mind is yes, of course it does, but the answer is not so simple. In theory, aid is meant to help those in need, specifically in this case, developing countries in which their governments are unable to meet those needs. It is continually made obvious that aid agencies and donor countries have other

interests in mind, however. Humanitarian aid has regularly been used to advance political interests since the system was created in the 1960s. More specifically, advancing western foreign policy such as the promotion of democracy as a stipulation for the amount of aid given and for choosing which state receives it highlights the intersection of humanitarian aid and political goals. The situation is further complicated by an underlying theme of fabricated economic dependency on donor countries.

The humanitarian aid system applies the same human rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to each unique state and circumstance regardless of individual culture (Gomez). The reality of the world today is that human rights are as unique as the countries that adopt and enforce them. This is often forgotten by the aid agencies that distribute and allocate the aid directly to the citizens or to their governments. The logistics process is usually overlooked; one does not take into consideration the unique culture and circumstances of the recipient countries. Although populations are receiving aid, they can still feel marginalized because they see the true intentions of aid agencies and governments. The people in need are the ones directly involved but often least cared about, such as the citizens affected by the current Venezuelan crisis. Humanitarian aid fills the basic needs of affected populations, but at the same time it can cause more civil and political instability and thereby hinder the advancement of an adequate standard of living under Article 25 of the UDHR.

US Sets Precedent for Humanitarian Aid in Latin America

Does the promotion of democracy through foreign policy, specifically humanitarian aid, advance an adequate standard of living under Article 25 of the UDHR? The promotion of democracy has

been historically used by the United States in its foreign policy to give other states the financial assistance they need while advocating for their own national interests. This section will examine a similar research question while investigating it through a historical and political perspective.

This section will inspect the outcomes of the US being the most influential actor in foreign policy throughout the first decade of giving financial assistance during the 1950s, and will investigate later how they have retained that influence. The true intentions of the State Department of the United States are questionable, and its actions have contributed to political and civil strife during the 1950s and the 1960s in Latin America (Taffet, 4-10).

The concept of foreign aid was formed after the end of World War II with the purpose of supporting reconstruction and development. The United States was the leader of this initiative and gave the largest amount of aid to rebuild war-torn Europe. Even though World War II was over, the Cold War fueled interest in the allocation of aid, especially by the two rivals of the US and the Soviet Union. They engaged in a competition to provide the best humanitarian assistance to states that supported their particular political interests. The United States supported the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia, in particular, to develop their economies. Although Latin America received the second least amount of aid out of these regions, the US managed to leave lasting political impacts even here from the 1950s to the 1960s (Taffet, 15-16).

The Eisenhower administration set in motion the conditions of financial assistance while beginning the formation of the Alliance for Progress program. Although on the surface, the assistance looks good, the intentions behind it were questionable. Initially, the administration felt that international organizations and private banks should be the leaders in order to promote economic growth in Latin America and the developing world. The United States and other state

governments should not be held responsible for sharing their wealth and resources with countries that were not as fortunate; aid would take the form of pushing Latin America to create a positive investment climate so that businesses would want to invest in their countries (Taffet, 13-15).

Coming out of WWII as the world hegemon, the US was intent on keeping that position while staving off the communist enemy from reaching the US and its neighbors in Central and South America. The US government declared Latin America to be the largest threat to US foreign policy as it is the closest region geographically and the most heavily influenced by communism. The Eisenhower administration stated in a 1953 National Security Council policy paper that their goal was to ensure that Latin America supported the US and the UN to protect against a communist invasion and erase any anti-US movements. Their main goal was not to lift those countries out of poverty and develop their economies; it was to make sure all their own political interests were met so that they might remain the world hegemon (Taffet, 15-20).

Although the United States was providing financial assistance to Latin America, Latin Americans noticed the true intentions of the US government. This was made apparent to the US evidently for the first time with Vice President Richard Nixon's trip around Latin America in 1958. The trip began with peaceful, anti-American protests led by students in Argentina and Uruguay. Then, the situation turned more violent when Nixon traveled to Peru and Venezuela. He was faced with students chanting "Death to Nixon," rocks were thrown at him, and his car was attacked with metal pipes. Nixon and his wife escaped to the US embassy in Venezuela, where they awaited their dramatic rescue by Eisenhower. Out of anger and spite, Eisenhower orchestrated an extensive rescue through naval vessels that he named Operation Poor Richard that made Venezuelans and the rest of Latin America see it as an effort to carry out "big-stick

diplomacy.” In response, the rest of Latin America, especially the Caribbean, furthered the anti-US sentiment as they believed that the US exploited all classes at some point and only cared about business while maintaining an imperialistic attitude lingering from the recent decolonization (Taffet, 16-17).

After Eisenhower, the Kennedy administration took over with the intent to mend relations with Latin America while implementing the Alliance for Progress program. Kennedy seemed to have better intentions to contribute to the development of Latin America, but he also desired to combat anti-Americanism (Taffet, 27-30). He was insistent on motivating the rest of Latin America to join the United States to turn against Castro and defeat his communist revolution in Cuba. Kennedy worked hard to sell the program to Latin America, but he continued to fail to listen to the needs of the people, and the governments of Latin America could see right through the initiatives and continued to distrust the US. Kennedy’s main reason for strongly advocating for the program was to seek revenge against Cuba as he saw the Bay of Pigs incident as an attack on his honor. Also, if Cuba continued to gain power and become the first communist nation in the Western Hemisphere, it would result in the appearance of the US losing the Cold War (Taffet, 26-27). The United States had to make the program seem like it belonged to Latin America, while still maintaining complete control. In August 1961, the Kennedy administration held a meeting in Punta del Este, Uruguay for all Latin American leaders to gather in order to create and sign a document that publicly announced that they would reform their societies to line up with the Alliance for Progress program. Although the leaders seemed to be on board, they were still hesitant in trusting the United States after the Bay of Pigs invasion and the following anti-communism efforts. Latin America saw the United States as a larger threat compared to Cuba, although they did worry about the effects of Castro and communism on their nations. As

the program went into further stages of implementation, it was clear that Latin American countries and the United States had different ideas of how the program would operate (Taffet, 29-33). Although Kennedy tried to consider the wants and needs of Latin American governments, he still had to sell the program and ideas to Congress to receive funding. Therefore, he also had to please the interests of Congress, and this resulted ultimately in a failure of the Alliance for Progress (Taffet, 23-25).

Kennedy still tried to gain the support of Latin Americans by giving more aid to countries that seemed willing to cooperate and support the US anti-Cuban movement. His government tried to buy out Chile, Brazil, and Colombia in particular while leaving Central American countries with little assistance. The US thought that their money would help, but this just created more distrust within Latin America directed at the US (Taffet, 32-35).

Although not all Latin American countries were under communist rule, they still saw one another as a united region that would always support each other first. The United States and the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations failed to realize that Latin Americans were very aware of their own situation and were wary of the US situation and intentions. They felt that the US was attempting to push imperialistic views masquerading as pro-democracy onto Latin Americans. Latin Americans also feared that if they let the US get too involved, they would invade and create a situation similar to colonization. The negative consequences of colonization were fresh in the minds of the developing world, while imperialism and control still represented worthwhile goals in the United States and developed world (Taffet, 37-40). US intentions were

always clear as they caused more harm than good among the governments and the civilians of Latin America.

Development Assistance Committee and Tied Aid

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was established on July 23, 1961 during the same period of decolonization and emphasized a new focus on development along with the use of humanitarian aid as a means to advance foreign policy. The purpose of the OECD is a commitment to promote democracy and a free market economy in order to stimulate economic progress and world trade. The DAC was instituted as a global assembly open to all states to create a dialogue about concerns of humanitarian aid, development, and poverty reduction in the developing world. The Committee is headed by the thirty largest state donors including international organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) that participate as observers. The DAC has committed to being inclusive by listening to the needs of developing nations while having a mandate that proclaims their purpose to:

“...promote development, co-operation and other policies so as to contribute to sustainable development, including pro-poor economic growth, poverty reduction, improvement of living standards in developing countries, and a future in which no country will depend on aid.” (“Development Assistance Committee”)

Does humanitarian aid advance an adequate standard of living according to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in recipient countries? It is imperative to answer this

question from an economic standpoint, particularly on a macro level, to understand the system of developmental aid. This question will be contemplated according to the precepts of international political economy while also focusing on the United States' economic contributions to aid since the US is the largest donor based on dollar amount. Humanitarian or developmental aid has numerous economic benefits for the recipient countries and the donor countries, and the aid system will continue to exist if it is producing benefits. On the other hand, while donor countries see advantages in allocating aid, these benefits bring an abundance of negative implications for the recipients. Aid is supposed to be helpful, not harmful, as its goal is to sustain local economies. Therefore, humanitarian aid is not advancing the standard of living in the developing world to its full capacity.

There are certain areas of macroeconomics that have a positive correlation with human rights in recipient countries. A general study conducted in 1998 concluded that thirty-nine of forty-nine Least Developed Countries (LDCs) having received increasing developmental aid, also experienced increasing civil freedoms (Meyer, 115). More aid is given to LDCs now with the goal of increasing civil freedoms, rather than to recently industrialized countries of the developing world. The United States gives out its aid based on certain requirements in the form of tiers. The first tier mainly goes to Africa and Asia, and the second tier is largely reserved for Central and South America. More aid is given to LDCs now rather than to recently industrialized countries of the developing world. The US has also transformed its structure to include more grants and soft loans, which takes off a large amount of debt and future debt from recipient countries (Meyer, 118).

Another positive aspect of macroeconomics when one considers the macro-structure of humanitarian aid is through the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act (FAA). The FAA has many

responsibilities, including in the economic sector, and it focuses on alleviating poverty, promoting sustainable economic growth, and increasing opportunities for those living in poverty. These objectives promote the improved standards of living which fall under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and which focus on second-generation human rights, in other words, on socio-economic human rights. Along with promoting these economic rights, the FAA also encourages the United States to invest more in the private sphere than in public projects or aid. Moreover, the FAA furthers its support of human rights by not giving assistance to countries that violate human rights and the FAA's goals (Meyer, 127).

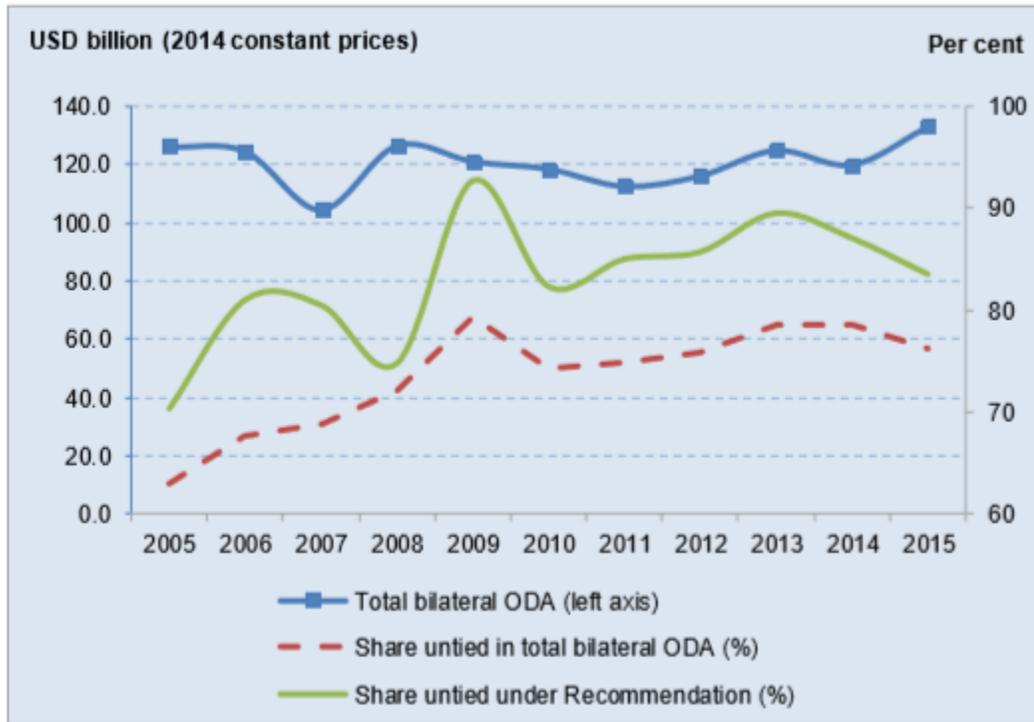
In addition to the FAA, the United States has contributed to the advancement of human rights through its developmental aid programs. Although the US is accused of giving primarily tied aid or not overseeing where the aid goes, it also invests in sustainable, long-term projects abroad. The US aims to promote socio-economic rights through investment in training teachers and medical professionals, creating employment opportunities, promoting small local businesses, and organizing labor forces (Meyer). When one considers the example of Latin America, one can see the emphasis on promoting second-generation rights that fund civic education and leadership training. There is a direct correlation of increasing Direct Foreign Investment (DFI) and economic aid and improvement in second-generation rights. Overall, Direct Foreign Investment and other forms of investment have positive correlations with increased economic development and an improvement in human rights (Meyer, 127).

To address the negative aspects of developmental assistance, it is important first to look globally at the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The DAC consists of thirty members of the largest donor countries in the world, including the United States, Japan, New Zealand, and

members of the European Union. These countries give out developmental aid as well as directly investing in recipient economies (FDI). In 2016, there was globally 2.3 billion USD of FDI, while globally there was 152.513 billion USD of developmental aid (The World Bank). There is currently a huge gap between aid and FDI, and it continues to grow, which is an issue since investing is more effective for a sustainable solution (The World Bank).

These statistics make up a large aspect of humanitarian aid which is called tied aid. The United States and DAC members give sizable portions of their aid on the condition that a percentage of the aid given is spent on products and corporations of the donor markets, thus cycling the aid back into their own economies. In 2015, the DAC members gave 132.834 million USD total aid and 23.8% of it was tied. Although 76.2% is unrestricted, the Development Assistance Committee strives for aid to be completely untied (The World Bank). The United States has dramatically decreased its tied aid since the 1960s, but 45% of their aid is still tied, which makes them one of the largest culprits globally (The World Bank). Along with circulating the aid back into the US economy, tied aid indirectly subsidizes purchases by the governments of the Least Developed Countries, which benefit US businesses and corporations. This is taking much-needed money out of local economies in the developing world and putting it back into a developed nation that is not in need of assistance. Although the DAC proclaims itself to be committed to mitigate the reliance of LDCs on humanitarian aid, tied aid is actually perpetuating reliance and therefore undermining the DAC's explicit goals.

Figure 1. Total bilateral ODA commitments and shares untied



Source OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS)

(Sedemund, 4)

Not only does tied aid increase the United States' economy, it also increases US foreign investments through Multinational Corporations (MNCs). The amount of tied aid and the amount of MNCs in the developing world is directly related. The increase in MNCs abroad increases the demand for American products and companies by normalizing them. This in turn creates new markets and new sales for the United States; in short, this trend creates more market competition making it even more difficult for the developing world to compete. Since aid and investment in MNCs are given in self-interest and are given primarily to advance US security interests, it is very difficult to achieve any developmental goals in third world countries (Meyer, 124).

On a macroeconomic scale, humanitarian aid has many positive and negative effects on the developing world. Investments and even developmental aid are always beneficial to the economies and markets of donor countries. The way that developmental aid is structured is beneficial in certain aspects for the advancement of second-generation socio-economic human rights, but in other ways it is hard to tell how it is benefiting the recipients. This is just one of the many perspectives to determine if developmental aid advances the human right of a decent standard of living.

Logistics and Human Rights

The foreign aid process does not stop with the donors and the amount of assistance they give; the distribution process once that aid reaches the recipient country is often overlooked.

Humanitarian logistics can be summed up as the process of planning and implementing the distribution of goods and materials in an efficient manner, ultimately to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable persons. One of the many ways that logistics in humanitarian aid can be complicated is at the systemic level: a lack of resources. This can mean a lack of literal supplies and food aid to be distributed, since non-profit organizations rely heavily on contributions from its member states whose donations continue to dwindle. They also tend not to have a sufficient number of staff working in all areas, which slows down distribution as well. This results in a lack of communication on all levels. Sometimes, there are multiple actors from different areas involved in the process, and their different agendas can conflict with each other and get lost in communication as well. Communication and logistics go hand in hand at every step, from the

background to the work on the ground and, in turn, to the proper distribution of the donated resources within the state (Gomez).

Sometimes, organizations lack the resources to distribute within the state, so they give the aid to the governments to let them handle the distribution process, but it is an imperfect solution that creates an uneven distribution. When the aid is given to a state's government instead of to the civilians themselves, resources can be diminished between the time when the government receives them and its initiative to hand them out. Many of the receiving members of aid have problems with rampant corruption within their governments for multiple reasons. There are some instances—such as currently in Venezuela—in the way that their government is blocking foreign aid partly because of lack of trust and unwanted involvement of American foreign policy. When this type of environment is created, it helps generate famine, poverty, and rising rates of disease amongst civilian populations.¹ When civilians become increasingly hungry, poor, and sick, they get desperate and start protesting and demonstrating against their governments. There are certain aspects of this environment evident today in the state of Venezuela under the Maduro administration. The United States and its media continually use the blocking of aid from Venezuela as a political strategy to encourage international economic and humanitarian sanctions to further their agenda. Failed humanitarian aid is one factor of Venezuela's increased instability on its way to becoming a failed state (Gomez).

Governments and aid agencies believe that the populations they are serving are helpless in all areas and therefore easily fooled. They give them free food and supplies and expect them to be blind to everything else that is going on. Since they are helping them, agencies and NGOs think that citizens have no right to question their intentions; it should be enough that their actions are good. Citizens feel guilty for addressing these issues since they are being helped, but they are

not easily fooled. They are the ones in the middle of all the civil unrest and crisis that lead to the need for aid. Although they may also be lacking an education, they have lived through real experiences that make them deserve to be heard (Gomez).

In short, even when donor countries are distributing aid, human rights remain a concern.

Oftentimes, the dispersal of aid is seen to be addressing human rights, and this can cloud judgments during the process. Although human rights are said to be universal, that is an ideal world, whereas in the real world, human rights are still determined culturally. That is not necessarily a positive or negative thing; it is just the current reality. Humanitarian aid and its dispersal are universally the same process, but even logistics should be conducted with each individual culture in mind. As this case study in Colombia shows, the citizens of San Carlos were affected by the lack of connection and care from the government and agencies. Colombia is very family oriented, whether family is defined by blood or not. It makes sense that Colombians would feel offended by the lack of care put into the aid that they were receiving. Although they were grateful, they could see past the actions and to the true intentions of the project, and intentions meant more to them than anything.

Oftentimes, humanitarian aid is not closely monitored once it enters the country of its destination. Logistics and the processes involved in its distribution affect directly the populations in need where individual cultures are not taken into consideration. Although aid agencies try to create a system to fit every country and situation, each one is different and has its own idea of how to define and protect human rights. Humanitarian aid is a good deed, but the intentions behind it do not always have the impact that donors expect. That discrepancy is drawing more attention in the international community to the need to address intentions and the enforcement process.

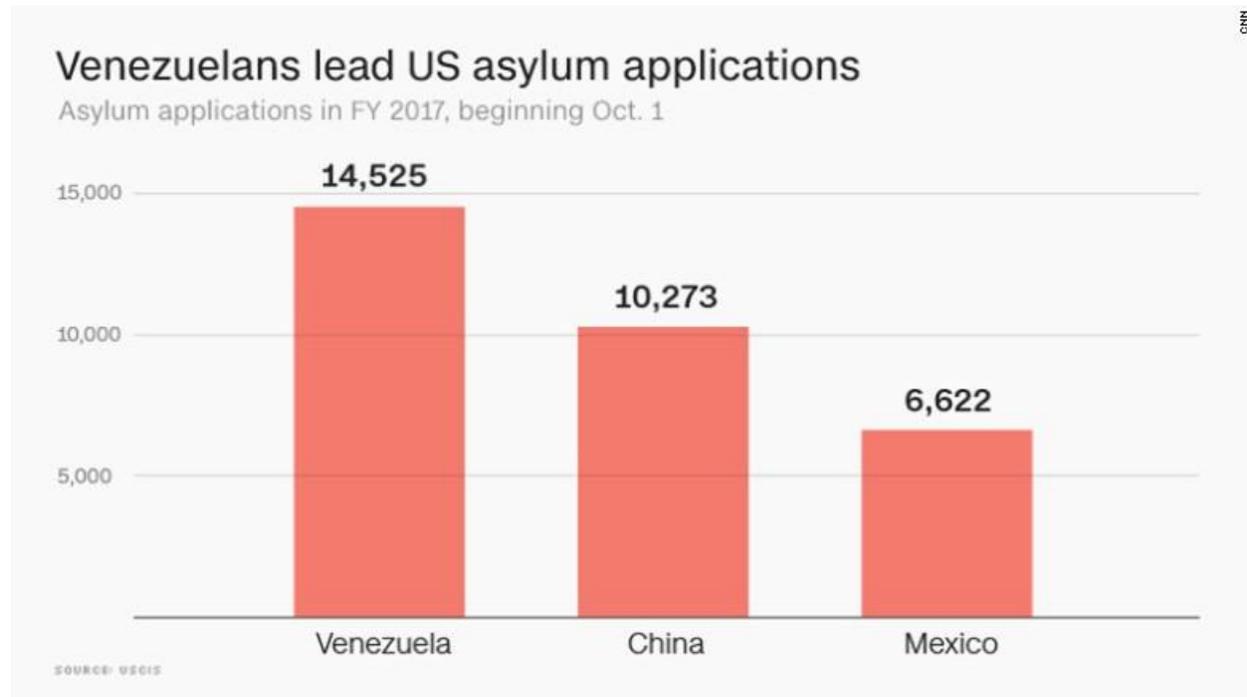
Trump's Foreign Policy in Latin America

Although the budget and pledges for humanitarian aid for Latin America have dramatically shifted from 2016 to 2018 under the Trump administration, the precedent set by Eisenhower and Kennedy of furthering political agendas while maintaining complete control continues to be reflected in decision-making. The needs of the people currently living in Latin America that could be partially met through aid are continuously ignored as Central and South America are undergoing some of the most violent conflicts in the world.ⁱⁱ The United States has focused on the elimination of the War on Drugs and self-proclaimed socialist governments in the region are moving toward authoritarian rule. The American media highlight the corruption in these countries and how they are a threat to US security while ignoring the human rights abuses inflicted on their citizens. History has repeated itself again as the US is concerned with how government corruption might affect them while ignoring its current effects on human rights in Latin America. Instead of focusing on the livelihood of individuals, the current administration is mainly interested in the flow of migration from Latin America to the United States. Whether threatening more border security and military intervention or vowing to revoke citizenship and expulse asylum seekers, there is a desire only to focus on national security while sending people back to potentially life-threatening conditions (Wiseman, 259-77).

US-Venezuela Relations

In the United States and beyond, international focus has shifted recently from the violence and corruption in Central America to that of the crisis in Venezuela. This is of high importance

especially to the US because Venezuela is now for the first time the “number one country of origin” of asylum seekers.

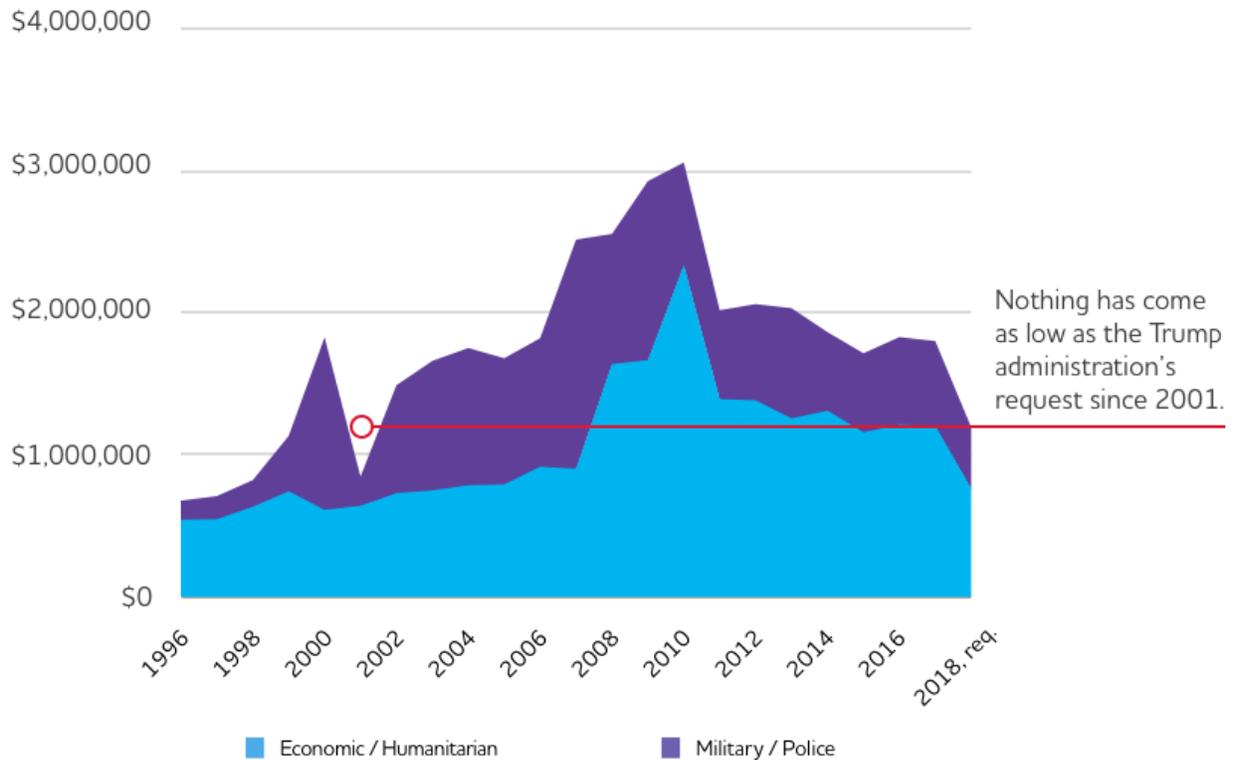


(Brocchetto, Marilia, Sandoval, Polo, and Timm-Garcia, Jaide.)

The United States has had close, mixed relations with Venezuela since it became the top oil producer in the world. The two countries have both tried to maintain friendly relations for the mutually beneficial oil industry while harboring dissenting political agendas. Beginning in 1999 under the Chavez regime, tensions continued to escalate between the US and Venezuela until the crux of the election of President Nicolas Maduro. Previous US administrations have voiced their concerns over the increasingly authoritarian regimes in Venezuela and have switched from fighting communism to deterring corrupt socialism: examples are the United Socialist Party of Venezuela that began with Hugo Chavez and continues with Maduro who endorses Marxist, Bolivarianist, and Chavismo ideologies. The Trump administration continues to threaten

military involvement and finally enforced economic sanctions after Maduro proceeded to block all US humanitarian aid and intervention. The US request for funding for Latin America and the Caribbean are, moreover, as low as the requests in 2001 (De la Fuente).

U.S. Assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean



(Isacson, Adam)

Economic sanctions and a 35% budget cut from 2016 for Latin America contributes to prolonging the political, economic, and humanitarian crises within Venezuela, and these crises could very well spill over to neighboring Brazil and Colombia (Isacson). Venezuela continues to experience food shortages, starvation, and a current inflation rate of almost 9,000%. With 80% of the population opposed to the current administration, protestors are constantly in the streets, blocked from reaching the city center by military forces firing at protestors with tear gas

containers and bolivar coins. The Venezuelan bolivar has so little value that they are using coins instead of bullets, and the tear gas containers are one of the few products that are made in Venezuela. Even though it appears that the protestors are not making any progress, they are faithfully protesting in the streets of Caracas, the world's most violent city, where their lives could be easily taken away (Al Jazeera).

Conclusion

Although this is a dismal portrayal of the humanitarian aid system, such aid is still imperative to economic development, and there are tangible solutions to improve the outcomes generated by the intentions of donor countries. Overall, there is a need for states' intentions to line up with their actions and proclaimed purposes. This is a systemic change that is only possible through a change of mindset. The original purpose of humanitarian aid is to address human rights issues by developing vulnerable economies and sustaining livelihoods. This central purpose has been forgotten amid foreign policy agendas and the further development of already developed states. The underlying objectives are not lost upon the affected populations who receive the donated aid. Governments of the developed world need to reinstate respect for unique human rights by considering each situation individually in the context of their cultural environment. A dramatic systematic change and shift in mindset is not possible, so acknowledging small successes as contributing to overall change is crucial in the developmental field in order to hinder further divisions. As the leaders of the humanitarian assistance world, Development Assistance Committee members and observing international organizations have the ability to be the most effective actors to promote these changes to create a global change for the future of development.

ⁱ “The state has to recover its legitimacy face-to-face with the victims and in front of the communities, assuming effective commitments of reparation and, particularly, providing necessary guarantees so that those to whom the war returned strangers from their own land can recover their dignity, their assets and its full rights as citizens ... “
(Gomez)

ⁱⁱ “Venezuela: The world’s worst performing-economy”. *YouTube*, uploaded by Al Jazeera English, 27 February 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljXBooe9U3A&t=93s>.

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