Prace poglądowe - Reviews

WHY DO WE HELP?
EVALUATION OF VOLUNTEERING, CHARITY AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE – PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Dlaczego Pomagamy?
Ocena Wolontariatu, Instytucji Charytatywnych oraz Wsparcia Humanitarnego – doświadczenia własne

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Streszczenie

Pomimo że pomoc charytatywna jest praktykowana od lat w ramach obowiązku religijnego, współcześnie można dostrzec wzrost liczby organizacji charytatywnych i organizacji wsparcia humanitarnego. Wraz z pojawieniem się coraz większej ilości organizacji pozarządowych, w tym międzynarodowych, chrześcijańskich organizacji, itp. nastąpiła potrzeba ustanowienia różnego rodzaju dyrektyw oraz zasad porządkujących ich działalność i zakres odpowiedzialności. Jednakże zanim zostanie rozpoczęta praca nad ustanowieniem zakresu działań dla każdej aktywności nakierowanej na pomaganie innym, musimy zadać sobie pytanie: dlaczego pomagamy?

Celem tego artykułu jest zdefiniowanie kwestii etycznych oraz kluczowych punktów, które muszą być wzięte pod uwagę w procesie podejmowania decyzji dotyczących zapewnienia wsparcia innym. Rozpatrzone zostaną również potencjalne motywacje kryjące się za pomaganiem innym wraz z filozoficzną rozprawą na temat idei pomagania oraz mechanizmów pomocy. Następnie zostaną wyjaśnione i ocenione strategie radzenia sobie oraz wsparcie społeczne narażonej grupy ludzi w celu zidentyfikowania potencjalnych błędów popełnianych przez różne agencje i wolontariuszy. W podsumowaniu zostanie zaprezentowana potrzeba prowadzenia dyskusji z narażonej populacji, aby możliwe było stworzenie lepszych stosunków oraz zmniejszenie podatności.

Celem tego artykułu nie jest umniejszanie niczyjej pracy ani krytyka całej sieci organizacji charytatywnych i pozarządowych. Zawarte w nim treści dowodzą, że można odnotować znaczny wzrost liczby różnych organizacji oraz, że odpowiedzialność owych organizacji wobec różnych udziałowców, przede wszystkim narażonej populacji, jest ograniczona. Prawdopodobnie artykuł ten nie będzie przydatny dla specjalistów pracujących w tej dziedzinie, jednakże przedstawia kwestie, które powinny zostać wzięte pod uwagę przez wolontariuszy i ludzi rozpoczynających działalność charytatywną.

Artykuł zawiera informacje oparte na osobistych doświadczeniach oraz etycznych rozważaniach uzyskanych w wyniku konwersacji ze specjalistami z tej dziedziny, lecz niekoniecznie potwierdzonych w literaturze akademickiej.

Słowa kluczowe: pomoc, wolontariat, organizacje charytatywne, wsparcie humanitarne

Summary

Even though the charitable help has been practice for ages due to religious obligation, nowadays there is a high increase in charity organisations and humanitarian assistance organisations. This high prevalence of various NGOs, INGOs, Christian organisations, etc., there was the need for establishing various directives and rules to ensure that each actor is held account-able for their actions. However, before we start establishing frameworks for each activity directed to helping others, we need to ask ourselves: why do we help?

The purpose of this review is to identify the ethical issues and crucial points that need to be included in the decision-making process of bringing assistance to others. To start with, the possible motivation behind helping others in addition to the some-what philosophical elaboration on the whole idea of help and mechanisms of helping will be explored. Then, coping strategies and social support of the affected groups of people will be explained and evaluated in order to identify the possible mistakes made by various agencies and volunteers. In conclusion, the need for engaging into the dialogue with affected population in order to build a better relationship and diminish vulnerability and increase capacities will be presented.

The purpose of the review is not denounce nobody's work or criticize entire network of charities and nongovernmental organisation. This review identifies that there is a high increase in various organizations and limited accountability to some stakeholders, mainly affected population. This review probably will not be useful for the professionals working in this area, however it presents the issues that should be taken into account by volunteers and new people to the field.

This review contains information based on personal experience and ethical consideration brought up with conversations with specialist in the field, but not necessarily confirmed in academic literature.

Key words: help, volunteering, charity, humanitarian assistance

Nowadays there is a noticeable increase in charity organization, humanitarian assistance agencies and volunteering options. The humanity has identified the most vulnerable sections of the society and collectively agreed that those most in need should be helped. On most occasions help is understood as bringing assistance in form of an intervention that is supposed to significantly improve the situation. However, as the circumstances are never straightforward and population living in poorer areas, affected by conflict, disaster or suffering from protracted complex situation have a whole complexity of needs that have to be addressed. Solely the desire to alleviate the suffering is insufficient in order to change anything. Therefore, in each action destined to help others need to be carefully planned and there are some issues that have to be taken into consideration.

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Help as a gift giving

There are various motivations and various ways of helping others [1]. One of the best recollection of possible reasons for helping others as well as phi-losophical considerations for helping can be found in Garret Keizer's book "Help: The Original Human Dilemma" [2]. One of the most common are the fe-elings of empathy and urge to help others who are less fortunate. Some people decide to help because of the sense of religious obligation, others feel that they have a obligation to repay the moral debt i.e. "repay the favour". Basing on the various research, but also on common sense, there might be extinguished two types of motivations: altruistic (helping to substantially improve somebody's life conditions) and selfish (to feel better that a good deed has been done). It is not unimportant what kind of motivation pushes people to help others, as the motivation can cloud the jud-gement and influence the improper assessment of the context. It should always be the main objective to prioritise the affected population needs, not do whatever the helper thinks they need.

For example, let's reflect on the exemplary story that is based on the true events, but for the sake of the argument will be altered. The story happened in the centre for single mothers. Single mothers are clearly a vulnerable section of the society and because of their actual situation, they have limited access to various amenities and entertainments. Therefore, the workers in the centre decided to enrich their cultural interaction and organised the movie evening in the cinema. The conditions that needed to be fulfilled in order to participate in the event are unknown, anyway, nobody showed up.

Probably most of the people who would hear the story are appalled by the behaviour of the mothers, because something had been done for them and they did not appreciate it. However, this situation clearly shows the contradiction in the motivations of the workers and actual needs of the mothers. Probably, nobody engaged in the conversation with

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the mothers. Just because the workers identified the cultural outings as lacking in the lives of the mothers, maybe it was not what they truly needed and actually wanted. Supposedly, the workers engaged in the conversation with the mothers, but they chose the movie the mothers did not wanted to see. Or the time was inconvenient. Or maybe they just wanted to do something else during they free time – read a book, watch TV, do their nails, go for a drink.

Lastly, the lack of appreciation should not be a surprise, but it clearly indicates that the workers did what they did for being appreciated, for their selfish feeling of good by helping others. If that was a case, surely their motivation was of selfish kind. The help, the "gift" has not been given in order to meet single mothers' expectations and needs, but so the workers could say, that they did something for the mothers. And when the mothers did not interacted positively with their view of the act of helping, the blame was on mothers for being ungrateful. Maybe this situation is not supported by evidence, maybe it never happened, however everybody could name at least one similar situation, where the help has not been appreciated. But, instead of calling the person in need "ungrateful", we should have asked ourselves: "why do we help?" and see to what extent our personal motivations affected the situation.

Furthermore, in anthropological perspective on humanitarian assistance and charity work there is the idea of the help as a gift giving. The precursor of the idea of social contract in a gift giving was Mauss (1970) in his essay *The Gift* [3]. He argued that by engaging in the process of gift-giving, there is a "compelling sense of indebtedness" that is "cultivated between giver and receiver" [4]. This sense of indebtedness forces the receiver to engage in the whole ritual of gift giving, where the both primary giver and receiver interchangeably engage in receiving and giving the gifts.

What has been also suggested by Mauss is that actors were never truly "independent or detached from exchanges" and never could simply "withdraw [from the exchange] at any time without consequence". In simpler words, during exchanging the gifts, special bond is created out of expectations. Receiver feels obliged to repay the "debt" in a form of another gift-giving process. There are certain expectations of the receiver to accept the gift to not to offend the giver. However, when the giver gives inappropriate gift the receiver might find it difficult to engage in exchange and accept the gift.

The same process might be attributed to the idea of helping. The helper feel the need to provide assistance to the person in need, however in order to receive gratitude the help must be appropriate for the person that is being helped. Also, the helper must accept that he entered the process of exchange and honour that the person might have a need to repay the debt. The realisation of this phenomenon will be helpful in building the relationship between those two actors.

However, what is the most dangerous in process of providing assistance is this sense of superiority of the helper over the affected population. As the affected population usually lacks capacity for dealing with their situation and they are in need of external help, there is a tendency of treating this affected population as "helpless victims" [5]. This perceptions is strengthen by disengagement from the activities carried out by charity or humanitarian actors, by not inviting them for problem-solving discussions or asking for advice the group representatives. Whether the affected population survived the disaster, conflict, is living in exile or simply lacks some commodities necessary for living with dignity, they have a social structure in place and already employed some actions to increase their capacities and capabilities. That brings us to the issues regarding the coping strategies that will be discussed in the next part.

Coping Strategies of the Affected Population

There has been various studies describing coping strategies that people employ in order to deal with the stressors [6,7,8]. Coping strategies can be defined as the responses to "unexpected and inexperienced crises which require the rapid *invention* of radically novel means to survive" [6]. As it was mentioned before, most communities have already established coping strategies in place set up to help with the survival. They are ready to employ new roles and learn new tasks. Most importantly, some of them need to be occupied by some activities in order to deal with the adverse situation.

For example in situation of exile, women might find it easier to find an employment as a childminder or housemaids. Therefore, displaced families might experience the power shift inside the family, when mother is becoming the breadwinner and father has to stay at home and take care of the family [9].However, even though "women routinely display remarkable resilience and fortitude by adopting new roles and taking on new responsibilities", the common perception, of both humanitarian actors and wider public, is that they are "intrinsically weak and vulnerable" which in return leads to "the perceptible absence of women from decision-making bodies" [9]. Another method is by associating them with childbearing and childminding, what in return puts them at the same level of vulnerability [9]. This type of exclusion can be clearly seen in the abovementioned story of mothers and the movie evening. If they have not been excluded from the process of decision-making and the evening plans included their opinion and needs, there is a high probability that the evening would have been a success. Mothers need for the particular kind of entertainment would have been included and the workers would fulfil their desire for helping.

Another great example of the coping strategies of vulnerable sections of the population has been shown in the research conducted in the camps for internally

displaced persons (IDPs) inJinja region,Uganda. It showed that the local population, before even assistance arrived, established complex community structures and already identified the most vulnerable sections of the group that are in the most need for assistance. Others, who had limited access to established structures, "had greater difficulty thinking strategically about personal security and liberty or about community or public participation"[10] and were willing to actively participate in activities established by humanitarian actors. The research concludes that not each scenario for interaction with the community is uniform in all context, however being aware of various mechanisms that might be present inside the vulnerable community is crucial in establishing positive interactions.

Conclusion and Discussion

Taking under consideration all of the abovementioned issues, one conclusion can be clearly made: in order to help others, we need to talk to them about their needs. If the agencies aim is to improve the current situation of the vulnerable population, the people need to be included in the decision-making processto inform various actors, including policy makers, about their needs, but also about their capabilities that they can contribute in the rehabilitation process. Various actors have various motivations and various goal to achieve. However, not always somebody else's goals are our own goals. What we might consider help, others might view as an exploitation.

Of course, not always every demand can be fulfilled. There are many factors influencing charity and humanitarian programmes and project, money and politics to name the most important. Each organisation is accountable to their donors and they might only carry out the programmes that they receives the fund for. Politics will also affect the "type" of people that "can" be helped and allowed activities, as it was the case in humanitarian stabilisation intervention in Kosovo, where particular sections of community were neglected and ignored or Somalia, where the intervention not only did not help in any way, but left the society more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse [11, 12].

Somalia is also a great example of the conflict between the expectations of Western people and Somalis of how should they be helped and how this various expectations can lead to cultural tensions. Basically, the plan of humanitarian actors was to provide the land for the people to cultivate. However, most of the people were reluctant to this idea, as they always has been herders and they could not see themselves as farmers. They were not participated in the farming courses and did not want to live on the farms, what created the tension and the feeling of disrespect. Furthermore, people actually claimed that there is nothing worse for the community then the delivery of the supplies by humanitarian actors: without the outside help, the community is united in helping themselves and trying to overcome the obstacles. Once the truck with supplies arrives, everybody fights, because they want as much for themselves as possible.

In the abovementioned scenarios, either some section of the community or even the entire communities were excluded from the decision-making process. The coping strategies of particular people and the internal community structures were not taken into consideration, causing the resentment. Also, there is a tendency among the "helping agents" to look down on people they are helping and either viewing them as "helpless victims" or incapable to make an informed decisions regarding their future.Every culture has already established structures of leadership and self-governance, and they usually know what they need. Even if the people lack expertise in some area, it does not mean they lack the capability to comprehend the importance of particular action – but they need to be engaged in the discussion.

Therefore, it should be the upmost priority in every action with the object of helping others to engage the people in decision-making process. Knowledge is a treasure and the more the affected population engage in the various activities, the more they will be able to do once the outside help stops flowing. There are various coping strategies that can be employed in the situation of distress and it should be the main goal to reinforce the positive aspects of those strategies instead of insisting on passivity. Finally, the motivation of the organisation as well as each individual with the mission to help others should be taken into consideration and whether it is going to be enabler or disabler in the cooperation on the community level. Once this main issues are considered and addressed, there is a higher probability of the success of the organisation and of the community.

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