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The Future of Disasters in a Globalizing World

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Dependency and Interdependency in Disasters and Globalization

Civilization exists by geological consent, subject to change without notice – Will Durant

In short, just when we thought that global warming was threatening us, it turns out that we are almost certainly dangerously close to the end of the warm period that has been the climatological precondition for the whole of 'world history'. This has nothing whatsoever to do with human agency and would overwhelm our species with sublime indifference to our religious beliefs, metaphysical speculations and secular ideologies of progress. – Paul Monk

This paper discusses two characteristics that disasters and a globalizing world (a term that will be used interchangeably with globalization in this paper) have in common and four propositions that stem from that brief discussion.

The discussion begins with the first characteristic that disasters and globalization have in common: both terms denote dependency.

The term “disaster” as properly understood and in the context of the discussion at hand refers to the overwhelming of a societal unit, whether it is a village, city, province, country or global region, by a (natural hazard) event to such a degree that there is a need for outside assistance. The outside assistance, even in cases when the societal unit is smaller than a country, is most often in the form of international disaster relief, also known as humanitarian assistance. In most cases, and for the sake of this discussion, we are interested in sovereign states and the instances when a natural hazard event overwhelms a country to such an extent that an appeal for international assistance is issued through formal channels or other means.

In the case of natural disasters, the dependency is manifest in the relationship between the sovereign state impacted by the natural hazard event, which will become the beneficiary, and the one or more sovereign states responding to the distressed state’s situation, the benefactor states. The impacted sovereign state enters into a dependency relationship with one or more benefactor states out of necessity. The very definition of Third World countries or lesser developed countries (LDCs) manifests dependency. The most blatant

manifestation of the Third World countries' dependency is a disaster declaration. The most blatant manifestation of the First World countries' recognition of the dependency of the Third World countries is humanitarian assistance¹.

Manifestations of dependency, no matter the causal force, evoke notions of victims and benefactors. Manifestations of dependency caused by natural hazard events conjure up images of victims suffering from the wrath of god or gods (recent hurricanes and earthquakes exemplify this behavior) to international agencies hosting donor conferences to sign up pledges.

Globalization encompasses dependency in the sense that First World countries need Third World country markets, and increasingly First World countries need Third World country services, particularly professional services (such as engineers and data processing), as well as their products. The most blatant objective of globalization from a First World country perspective is to gain market dominance – a dependency by others on its marketed products and services. The most blatant objective of globalization from a LDC country perspective is to make a First World country dependent on its products and services capacity.

The second thing that disasters and globalization have in common is interdependency.

¹ The term disaster is often misused, but the term disaster reduction when applied to sovereign states and by extension to countries has an important connotation. Following a natural hazard event, if the emergency situation beginning with humanitarian assistance can be managed by a sovereign state so that a disaster declaration and the accompanying appeal for international assistance is not needed because of the capacity of the country to respond to the emergency, then a form of dependency has been avoided.

The term “globalization” in the context of the discussion at hand refers to a mutual dependency – interdependency – whereby commerce between countries by both public and private sector groups comes about through relationships that manifest a shared dependency by both parties. Commerce and trade are the relevant examples of this interdependency, as will be examined below.

In the case of globalization, and as an example of common interaction, a country with investment and market development information, knowledge, and expertise seeks a country with production and transformation information, knowledge, and expertise. The production and transformation information in this modern era of development and trade refers not only to the traditional role of Third World countries in supplying raw materials as products but now also supplying elaborated products that represent the Third World countries’ growing capacity to add value to basic services and raw materials.

The investment and market development or IMD country seeks a relationship with the production and transformation or PT country for a number of reasons, and is willing to enter into a relationship of interdependency. The seeking of the interdependent relationship is often mutual and is often tied directly to IMD international development assistance and PT national development plans. The IMD country can maximize the use of its investment and market development skills and resources by using the production and transformation capacity of another country. Indeed much of the history of modern economic development following the Second World War is about the First World countries with expanding and maturing investment and market development capacity, and

inefficient or uncompetitive production and transformation capacity, interacting with Third World countries that seek to broaden and expand their production and transformation capacity and thereby provide broader and more substantial opportunities for their citizen. The First World countries need the Third World countries as much as the latter needs the former for obvious reasons.

As countries and the groups they form seek and obtain ever greater interdependency through the interconnectivity of globalization, are we not headed to a situation where dependency tends to disappear? If two countries are mutually dependent for investment, production, transformation and market development, what does one make of risk management and humanitarian assistance? It is in the demonstrable best interest of each country to hope for, if not support, risk reduction to natural hazard events of the related country so that the investment, production, transformation and market access activities proceed unimpeded if not grow, expand and dominate. And such concern for protecting and nurturing investment, production, transformation and market development can eclipse the view of humanitarian assistance as the driving force for responding to a country's plight following a natural hazard event. The response is merely acting in one's own best interest given the interdependency.²

Development actions in the globalizing world seek to create interdependency while also addressing dependency. For example the relationship between the public and private

² Taken from the world of globalization, there are ample examples of concern for a country's risk related to its credit rating, indebtedness, currency value, stock market, unemployment rate and so on. Manifestation for such concerns abound in actions that sovereign states and their respective groups make daily through their agreements, pacts, treaties, and councils.

sector is seen as critical to build the capacity of LDCs to improve the livelihoods, health and education of the poor and to catalyze the achievement of the UN millennium development goals.

An example to highlight the elements of dependency and interdependency set in the context of sovereign states and countries is as follows. Sovereign states deal in dependency in both theory and practice. When a disaster declaration occurs, the beneficiary and benefactor country examines their dependency relationship and make requests and interventions, respectively, based on an analysis and actions appropriate to that relationship. Sovereign states acting as benefactors may lay aside elements of their political relationship with the afflicted country in determining appropriate action.

On the other hand, a benefactor country and a beneficiary country may analyze the disaster situation and act on the basis of their interdependency as manifested in their trade and commerce without regard for dependency issues. It may be easier for two countries to establish and grow a relationship of interdependency than it is for two sovereign states to relate in a dependency relationship³. Trade may flourish between certain sectors of two countries even as the respective sovereign states lack a common view of how humanitarian assistance is to take place.

³ Using the terms sovereign state and country casts light on the observation that companies, not countries, carry out trade. In this case sovereign states may set trade limits and conditions, and countries as understood to include the private sector and commerce may trade inside (and outside) formal agreements or the lack thereof. The relationship of Cuba and the United States of America comes to mind in this regard taking into account agricultural product trade, remittances, and disaster assistance.

With this example in mind, it is time to look at the future of disasters in the context of a globalizing world.

The future of disasters is bounded by:

- A relationship between sovereign states on issues and instances of natural disasters that is indistinguishable from issues and actions on resolving underdevelopment problems,
- The influence of international assistance in the context of sovereign states (dependency) and countries (interdependency) on the disaster relief and development agendas, and
- The varying roles played by government at different levels of intervention with several possible intervention scenarios.

What is the future of disasters?

It is well to note some factors that should be remembered, without going into detail as to their origin or function, that condition actions by governments. These are:

1. Nations are sovereign states and the actions between governments at whatever level are within the prerogative of those states,
2. Governmental actions exist side by side with those of the private sector with varying degrees of coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and control between the two,
3. The private sector may well depend on public infrastructure for significant if not critical components for its functioning, but it generally focuses its development and

thus its natural hazard risk management actions on the infrastructure that it owns and operates,

4. The international development community, including international financial institutions, development assistance agencies, and humanitarian assistance groups, develops infrastructure inside and outside the context of public infrastructure development. In some cases the development community as well as governments addresses natural hazard risk management as a separate rather than as an integral part of their mainstream development efforts,
5. Governments, no matter their form, as well as the private sector and the international development community, are constrained by limited resources that force the choosing between options to develop infrastructure,
6. Until recently and due mostly to the catastrophic results of natural hazard events prompting often repeated disaster declarations by the same national, provincial, and municipal governments, there has been little discussion and less action at the international level on defining acceptable levels of risk and investing in risk reduction actions beginning with the levels of risk associated with life safety, and
7. In the past 40 odd years of the modern development period, a great deal of the natural hazard vulnerability of populations and their economic and social infrastructure has been increased by development decisions or has been created where no vulnerability existed before.

Consider the following four propositions:

1. Disaster assistance for some LDCs will look more and more like development assistance in structure and content because some First World countries will be responding to those LDC countries' needs, not primarily on the basis of a concern for the population, but rather on the basis of mutual economic development concerns and shared goals in the context of globalization and their interdependence;
2. In the absence of an economic development relationship through globalization, disaster assistance will continue where certain sovereign states will take on disaster assistance with a markedly increased connotation of caring for certain disaster prone countries (repeated disaster declarations and international interventions) as wards of the world community – something harkening back to a situation of post World War II trust territories;
3. Several scenarios are increasingly probable regarding international disaster assistance as two concurrent and possibly parallel streams involving sovereign states on the one hand, and countries on the other. International disaster assistance between sovereign states at varying levels of government may take place following a formal declaration of a disaster. This assistance will typically include restoring civil order and disaster relief focusing on the care and feeding of affected populations. At the same time disaster assistance will take place between countries. The private sector from a benefactor country through a presence involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or private industrial, manufacturing, commercial service companies including those with ongoing

- operations in the affected country, will attend to basic human needs of the beneficiary country, beginning with its employees, partners or members of the same religious faith, but expanding its actions to include the general population according to its areas of interest; and
4. Taking into account the first three propositions, the fourth proposition is that the evolving discussion of disaster-development linkages will necessarily reveal an ever more complex intertwining of sovereign state and country interests – an intertwining of dependency and interdependency interests. Post-disaster assistance, and indeed pre-event emergency preparedness and risk management (mitigation and prevention) will be linked increasingly to economic and social development so that such ex-ante and ex-post interventions will be indistinguishable from the development agenda, if not dictate the country's development agenda. Themes of governance, civil society, visibility, transparency, responsibility, and accountability, and the role of uniformed services (military and other public sector services), channeling assistance through non-governmental channels, and programming and execution of risk reduction (mitigation) measures through traditional or stand alone actions and institutions will be at the fore.

As disasters are declarations of dependency, the future of such declarations is of some interest and concern. Disasters are not the events themselves – hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, drought, landslides, volcanic eruptions and the like – and the consequences of

these events impacting populations and their economic and social infrastructure will be central to dealing with LDCs.

But what happens if the victims have a different relationship with the benefactors, a relationship where actually the traditional benefactors are dependent on the victims – at least on the products and services they supply – in order to carry out their functions/commitments/economic endeavors, even to the extent that the benefactors would be hard pressed to play that role were it not for the profits generated from the supply of goods and services from the victims?

In the future international intervention in post-event emergency situations may actually become more, not less, prevalent. This will take place as IMD countries, and particularly the private sector entities mentioned before, find it in their best interest to assist the impacted segments of populations of PT countries and their social and economic infrastructure.

Looking from the Americas' perspective, natural hazard risk management can be summarized in the following way. The focus on the local level and traditional disaster event driven preparedness and response actions has received political and international support using private (particularly NGO) and public (particularly municipal government) counterparts. This support now includes not only humanitarian assistance but risk management. And this support is now being complemented by actions taken by international private sector entities that have commercial and trade relations between the

benefactor and beneficiary countries, between the First World and the LDCs. These relations can have local but often national scale impacts on the LDCs. What ever the call for a focus on sector driven vulnerability reduction actions, it has been subsumed by traditional sector development planning and finance processes where overriding issues of infrastructure gaps, privatization, modernization and competitiveness have forced an overriding focus on risk and on using cost-benefit ratios to determine the type and extent of investment acceptable.

National and regional efforts in disaster risk reduction are characterized by two parallel trends. One is at the regional and national levels to create disaster management plans that focus on natural hazard events and emergency preparedness and response including rehabilitation actions at the municipal level. The other has focused on regional and global pronouncements citing the need for broad vulnerability reduction.

While there have been calls for climate change adaptation international financing, in reality there already exists international natural hazard risk financing whereby sectors, communities and governments that reduce their risk to natural hazard events can access investment capital whereby the IMD country carries on actions that are deemed necessary to achieve acceptable risk⁴.

⁴ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to explore what are actual levels of acceptable risk. Suffice to say at this point that privatization (ownership and/or operations) of traditional public services such as water and sanitation, local (road, bus and mass transit) and sub-national (roads, trains, air transport) transportation, electrical and natural gas energy, and telecommunications has brought varying responses to the risk management issue, usually driven by the profit motive, where investments and capacity building may or may not be made to lessen risk.

Insurance is an example of perhaps the most evolved interdependency of the globalization. The issue at hand is that insurance is customarily acquired to reduce the risk of the IMD country's interests and not necessarily the PT country's interests. The primary risk to be avoided is financial loss but physical and economic (local and national economy impact) losses may also be addressed. In other words, the IMD country recognizes the risk of its activities in the PT country and mitigates against that risk but perhaps not often addressing the broader PT country's risk.

The further evolution of international natural hazard risk evaluations will focus on the intervener-intervened relationship in three ways:

- The natural hazard event as impacting the physical assets including human resources in the PT country,
- The natural hazard event as impacting financial flows as in the case of assuring that the PT country can supply the product or service that is related to the IMD country's interests, and
- The natural hazard event as impacting the broader economic and social well-being of the PT country including issues of governance, civil unrest, and sovereign state alliances.

From the propositions stated above, it can be noted that in the future risk analysis will evolve from a focus on hazard and vulnerability assessments into a risk analysis of discrete populations, geographical areas and infrastructure components emphasizing the balance of humanitarian assistance needs and victims on the one hand and the

interdependency of IMD and PT countries on the other. In other words, what is the interdependency of countries tied together by different sets of concerns - humanitarian assistance with its drivers and global economic activity with its drivers. Risk analysis will go beyond using sovereign states as units of analysis although the analysis itself will recognize the role of sovereign states⁵.

Societies are entering an era where living with a global market economy – the interdependency of IMD countries and PT countries – will be more and more starkly juxtaposed with living with a global market society – the continuing dependency of victims on benefactors without addressing the underlying causes of the victim's vulnerability.

It is now apparent that natural hazard events requiring international assistance will reveal not only a dependency of one sovereign state on another for humanitarian assistance, but also the shared risks of two or more countries because of their interdependency. The focus of development approaches and strategies, to say nothing of policies programs and projects, of both LDCs and First World countries will be reconfigured to a great degree by risk management issues for which natural hazard events will play a dominant role.

⁵ Several international NGOs including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the UK's DIFD are preparing and implementing vulnerability assessments at the community level as an increasingly integral part of their humanitarian assistance and/or development work. Risk analysis, but what is more often vulnerability analysis, is underway at the global level including the World Bank's Hotspots Report, the UNDP's Risk Index, the World Economic Forum's risk rankings, HABITAT's City Development Index, and as a regional example, the Inter-American Development Bank's Risk Indicators. Quite naturally vulnerability and risk assessments, whether carried out by international, national or local public or private sector entities are designed, implemented and used for their particular purposes, thus there are many variations and many uses to which they are put.