

HOW DO THE DIFFICULTIES OF ARMED CONFLICT AFFECT THE PERFORMANCE OF HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS? EVIDENCE FROM TERRORIST ACTS IN THE MOPTI REGION IN MALI

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of humanitarian projects in areas of violent conflict is of a particular nature. Very little research has been done on this phenomenon in the existing literature. This study explores the effects of violence on the work of project managers. Through semi-structured interviews, humanitarian project managers recount their daily lives in the Mopti region of Mali, where armed groups and the government clash to the detriment of the affected civilian population. Insecurity hinders project life cycle activities. The cohabitation of humanitarian managers and security actors does not guarantee the success of projects.

Keywords: engagement, project managers, humanitarian projects, violence

1. INTRODUCTION

From the collective aid of states to the volunteerism sparked by Swiss philanthropist H. Dunant in 1859 (Ryfman, 2016), humanitarian action has been built in a synergy of diverse actors. Whether it is the volunteers of the United Nations or the personnel of corporatist movements, humanitarian action knows a craze of workers. Thus, the Red Cross and Red Crescent had in 2018 more than 18,000 employees for the implementation of humanitarian projects (Benoit-Codet and Bussard, 2018). According to Jugdev and al. (2018), a project is a unique undertaking of a temporary nature. It consists of four stages: definition, planning, execution, and closure. Despite precarious working and living conditions, the humanitarian imperative has always prevailed in the consciousness of all in the theaters of humanitarian projects. This has guaranteed the neutrality and impartiality of these workers (Carbonnier, 2018).

However, the spread of a political crisis in the Arab world in the spring of 2011, coupled with armed violence, challenged the traditional neutrality of humanitarian personnel. Thus, "in 2014, the gruesome staged beheadings of aid workers in Syria were on everyone's mind" (Ryfman, 2016: 101). In response to the recurrence of these acts of violence, research has focused on the link between humanitarian performance and workplace violence (Korff et al., 2015; Fradejas-Garcia, 2019; Grayson, 2016). For these authors, the willingness of humanitarians to serve in these areas of armed conflict is now questionable. It is therefore useful to understand how the recurrence of violence affects the commitment of humanitarian project managers in areas of armed violence.

The literature on the management of humanitarian projects does not address the issue of the cohabitation of violence and humanitarian action. When this topic is addressed, it is related to the attitudes of humanitarian workers in general. By focusing on project managers, this study seeks to fill a gap that could be a hindrance to the professionalization of humanitarian action managers (Brière et al., 2015). To this end, the objective of the study is to analyze the relevance of the presence of these managers in these areas of armed violence. To do this, we first identify the uncertainties that weigh on the achievement of project results due to the violence, then highlight the constraints to adopting unusual strategies in project activities, and finally, identify the causes of the difficulty in maintaining managers in their jobs on a long-term basis.

In this exploratory approach, a literature review will be conducted, considering the implementation of humanitarian projects in general and humanitarian projects in areas of armed violence. This review will lead to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. Second, the research methodology will be