Cuthman Lecture prepared for November 2020

Responding to Complex Emergencies
OR
You too can share the Nobel Peace Prize

By Dr Roger Williamson[1]

I am going to tell you tonight about

- Complex emergencies and why they are so hard to solve;
- That there is something we should and could be doing about them;
- The Nobel Peace Prize, and this year's winner the World Food Programme;
- Christian Aid and the World Food Programme's work in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Nigeria, and
- how you share in the Nobel Peace Prize.

What is a Complex Emergency?

Since World War II, the international community has developed a range of institutions to respond to the major global challenges. For example, we have heard a lot recently about the World Health Organisation in connection with COVID.

Here is one definition from the **World Health Organization**

> "Complex emergencies are situations of disrupted livelihoods and threats to life produced by warfare, civil disturbance and large-scale movements of people in which any emergency response has to be conducted in a difficult political and security environment."

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In other words, you have to address a lot of factors at the same time to fix it.

Most of these crises are in Africa and the Middle East. In any one year, there will be a number of such crises.

So what does the World Food Programme do?

According to its website, the WFP is:

> *"The leading humanitarian organisation saving lives and changing lives… as an emergency provider, one that gets things done at scale in the most difficult environments."*

In 2019 it helped 97 million people in 88 countries.

It can provide 15 billion meal rations a year – that is 15 thousand million meals – costing about 50p each.

It was set up in 1961 as a joint undertaking of the United Nations and the FAO – the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

It has a record now, over 6 decades, of fighting famine, responding to emergencies and working to end hunger.

Some of its achievements are:

- In the 1980s in the Ethiopia Famine delivering 2 million tons of aid;
- In the early 1990s, large scale aid to former Yugoslavia during the wars – the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II;
- In 1994, a response to the genocide in Rwanda;
- In 1998 providing food for 19 million people affected by floods in Bangladesh.
- In 2004 it responded to the Asian Tsunami;
- In 2011 it responded to the Syrian conflict, in 2013 was active in South Sudan and in 2014, helped 3 million people affected by Ebola in West Africa.

They were even in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest humanitarian agency in the world. Over time, the work of the WFP has evolved.

It has moved from being primarily a provider of food to implementing broader hunger solutions. This also requires ensuring that the gender dimensions are taken into full account and consulting widely. Women are often the food producers, look after feeding the family and will generally spend money more wisely on the needs of children.

The World Food Programme and the Nobel Peace Prize

Having said all this, I hope you agree that the WFP is a worthy recipient of this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

The citation gave three reasons:

- For its "efforts to combat hunger";
- Its "contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict areas"; and
- "acting as a driving force to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict".

The awarding Committee also stressed the connection between places of conflict and the additional impact of the coronavirus, which make the situation even more complex – they listed Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan and Burkina Faso.

In such contexts they said: "Until the day we have a medical vaccine, food is the best vaccine against chaos".

The Nobel Peace Prize

For over 100 years, and since 1901, and nearly every year, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to individuals or organisations who have made an outstanding contribution to peace.

The Committee don't always get it right and sometimes it causes controversy, but the list of winners is imaginative and inspiring.

Individual winners include heads of state like Nelson Mandela and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (former President of Liberia), and religious and community leaders like the Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and Mother Teresa.

The story of Alfred Nobel is itself interesting. His family firm was a major producer of explosives, and faced bankruptcy at the close of the Crimean War at the end of the 1850s. Nobel was a great pioneer and entrepreneur – but it was a dangerous business. His brother was killed in an explosion in one of the firm's labs. Nobel was instrumental in the commercial development of nitroglycerin and dynamite. Useful in mining, building roads and tunnels, but sadly also in war. That's why the Peace Prize was set up.

So far this talk has been all about international organisations and great leaders for peace.

Does this mean there is nothing we can or should do? The scale of the tasks is daunting, complex emergencies are **complex** – and often far away. Does that let us off the hook?

Why we can and should give to good causes.

The Christian tradition is full of inspiring examples of giving.

In the book of Isaiah, in the Jewish scriptures – our Old Testament - we read:

> *"Is not this the fast that I choose,*
> *To loose the bonds of injustice,*
> *…. to share your bread with the hungry?" (Isaiah 58: 6-7 NRSV).*

Jesus was a poor person, with a particular concern for the poor and marginalized. St Paul made a collection for the poor church in Jerusalem in the book of Acts.

In the New Testament book of James we read:

> *"If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself , if it has no works, is dead". (James 2:15-17 NRSV)*

St Basil the Great who lived from about 330-379 was Bishop of Caesarea. He set up a type of miniature new town, with a hospital, doctors and lodgings for travellers and the poor. He was very outspoken:

> *"When a man strips another of his clothes, he is called a thief. Should not a man who has the power to clothe the naked but does not do so be called the same? The bread in your larder belongs to the hungry. --- You do injustice to every man whom you could help but do not."*

Irenaeus of Lyons argued that "the glory of God is the human being fully alive", The martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador made this even more radical. He said: "The glory of God is the **poor** person fully alive" - or in Latin, in case the Prime Minister has tuned in – "Gloria Dei, pauper vivens" (Romero, Lecture in Leuven).

Unfortunately most of us Christians and most churches fall far, far short of this standard. We can neither deny the radical tradition in our faith, nor live like that. But there are still things we can do – actions in our connected world, which will make a difference as far afield as Africa.

Now, that was a word primarily to the Christians listening, but you can find similar teaching in other world religions and secular traditions.

Secular philosopher Peter Singer has written an important book arguing for ***The Life You Can Save***. In short, the argument of his book is that if we can save lives, we should – and careful giving is a way to save lives.

But private generosity will never be enough. As the former Director of Christian Aid, Charles Elliott said nearly 35 years ago, in his book *Comfortable Compassion* we can't get rid of the absolute poverty of a billion people just by aided projects – we need to change the structures which make and keep people poor.

This is a real challenge.

There are three lessons to draw from what Charles Elliott says:

1) If you support projects in the Third World, they have to be well chosen for maximum impact, at both an individual and structural level.

2) The major development NGOs are right to have a strong campaigning presence as Oxfam, Christian Aid and others do.
3) The Global South needs a strong voice in our UK and world institutions. We need an electorate which is well informed on development issues to speak out on retrograde steps like winding up the Department for International Development and taking it back into the Foreign Office.

The connected world is a vulnerable world

It is easy to feel a sense of powerlessness. That nothing we can do makes a difference. That the forces against us are too strong. And here I am talking to myself as well.

We now know that the connected world is a vulnerable world.

COVID and climate change, just to mention the Cs, and, according to the World Bank absolute poverty is rising again for the first time since 1998.

But it is simply not true that all change is negative.

In my lifetime:

- The life expectancy of Indians has doubled;
- The dictatorships of Latin and Central America have gone;
- Apartheid has been abolished and
- The Cold War has ended.

"Let mercy use technology"

This is the striking quotation from Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama. Is it possible for our technology to be a factor for good and not evil?

Clearly it is.

But just suppose we invented the most powerful communication technology ever – what would we use it for?

Well we did. It's called the worldwide web,

And we use it for cat videos.

Now I like a good cat video, but I get more excited at the prospect of actually doing good as well. Can mercy use technology? Let's take a tough case.

The Democratic Republic of Congo

As an example of a complex emergency in a connected world, I now want to talk about the Democratic Republic of Congo, and its problems. I could equally well have chosen Northern Nigeria, or Yemen or the Rohingya crisis.

We live in a connected, vulnerable world – but what possible connection do we have with the Democratic Republic of Congo?

It is a country which should be hugely wealthy because of its rich supplies of all kinds of valuable minerals.

If you have a mobile phone, you are connected to the Congo in all likelihood. Because your mobile phone contains coltan, a mineral from the DRC.

The DRC exports large amounts of mineral resources, gets very little tax revenue and the poor hardly get any benefit from it.

I talked to an African friend recently who told me that the Congo River could supply the whole region with hydro electricity – but if you go to the East of the country and look over to Rwanda, Kigali is lit up, but the DRC side is in virtual darkness.

The country was exploited by the Belgians, has never been well ruled and is still affected by conflict. The country is about the size of Western Europe – the biggest in sub-Saharan Africa. The population was 84 million in 2018.

According to the World Bank

- 72% of the population live on less than $1.90 (about £1.70) per day;
- The country is expecting this year to be one of recession;
- 43% of the children are malnourished;
- Only 43% of the population have access to clean drinking water;
- Only 20% of the population have access to sanitation. (World Bank website, DRC at a glance)

There are numerous conflicts in the country – particularly in the East, where the UN has a major peacekeeping force of 18,000 troops. (UN data) Much of the problem goes back to the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Hutus who took part in the genocide fled to DRC from Rwanda and rival Tutsi armed groups were formed. From 1998-2003 there was a major war with the involvement of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe on the DRC government side and Rwanda and Uganda backing rebel forces. Up to 3 million people were killed. The March 23 Movement (M23) allegedly backed by Rwanda is still fighting the DRC government.

In October UNICEF said that children in the DRC are suffering "unrelenting violence".

This is certainly a complex emergency. So what can we do about this?

In 1859 Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, was disgusted by the carnage at the Battle of Solferino in Italy. As a result of the encounter with the dead and wounded in this battle, he had an idea. Even if we cannot stop war completely, can we at least mark out some rules about not committing war crimes? Can we get access to prisoners of war and so on? This has led over the next century and a half to international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. The work of the World Food Programme in conflict areas follows this tradition. Even if we cannot stop the wars in Congo, can we at least provide food for civilians?

In the meantime, we have to hope that the UN and the international community are finding some political and diplomatic solutions.

In the meantime, I am relying on the UN Peacekeepers to do their job.

In the meantime, the hungry and vulnerable need to be fed.

Global connections

We live in a world where you can get a fresh pineapple from Costa Rica to your dinner table at a reasonable price. You have probably done it. One name for the process is Steyning Co-op – so a supermarket – another is globalization.

There are whole other talks to be given on making sure that the pineapple picker gets a fair wage, and on the downsides of supermarkets – and a short answer is the Fair Trade mark - but that is not tonight's theme.

There is a wonderful passage from Martin Luther King on how we are all interdependent. Through our coffee, tea and cocoa we are in touch with half the world before we finish breakfast. That gives you an idea of our food supply chain. But there are other supply chains.

The one I am talking about is the "compassion-even-in-conflict" supply chain which can provide food to children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is a project is run by Christian Aid and the World Food Programme. By contributing on line, with your phone containing Coltan **from** the DRC, you can save lives **in** the DRC.

As you see, we can use your technology and contacts for compassion or cat videos. As you know, I like a good cat video – but what I like more is a project with maximum impact.

Making positive change is hard work. There are so many priorities – the environment, poverty in this country and even more so in the Global South, housing and mental health. Twenty years ago, when I was Christian Aid's Policy and Campaigns Director, Christian Aid was then - and still is - among the organisations at the cutting edge of compassion and campaigning. The Jubilee 2000 movement put 70,000 people on the streets of Birmingham during the G8 meeting of rich countries. The government at the time was responsive. I remember going to Downing Street with other campaigning groups to meet Gordon Brown. As soon as I went in to Number 11, I saw the mantelpiece was piled high with Christian Aid postcards calling for debt relief. His mother was a Christian Aid supporter and sent him one. The postcards were designed like luggage labels for him to go with to the IMF and World Bank meetings – I said "I see you've got enough luggage labels". "Yes," he said "Keep them coming". This popular action gave him public support for what he wanted to do anyway. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the International Development minister were all pushing in the same direction – for really substantial debt relief for the poorest countries – and it happened.

Things move on and technology changes.

We have recently seen the power of social media –

- Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion have spread like wildfire through social media;
- There is hardly a teenager anywhere – especially girls – who doesn't know about Greta Thunberg and the climate disaster;
- And Marcus Rashford, the footballer, challenging the government on free school meals – all show the power of social media to organize and push for change.

We are all learning – we have learnt e-mailing, facebook, zoom and so on. (Although we also have to think about the digital divide and the epidemic of loneliness among the old. This can be a new form of exclusion.)

But we can all learn to contribute and campaign even in small ways –

Choose an issue which concerns you;

Get informed about it;

Stick with it;

Move with the technology;

Expect setbacks;

Recover and have another go.

We need compassion, commitment, communication and campaigning.

Multipliers and complex emergencies

I recently received a wonderful mailing from Christian Aid in which they told me about a joint project with the World Food Programme to feed people in conflict affected areas of DRC and Nigeria, two of the countries with the highest number of the poorest people in Africa.

If I send even £10 to Christian Aid, the WFP will multiply it up with an additional £670. My £10 has become £680 by the time it reaches the poor children in Africa. £100 becomes £6,800, and so on.

It sounds too good to be true.

I got caught in a scam recently, and had the irritation of having to change my bank card, so I appreciate why people are cautious. The connected world does make you vulnerable.

So, of course, I have checked this project out.

I am in close contact with the staff member, Jack Merrington, at Christian Aid who is in charge of the project. In any case, cheques payable to Christian Aid sent to the Christian Aid headquarters will be definitely be paid into their bank account.

But how can we ensure that the money we give to NGOs is effective in working towards justice?

Why is this project a good example?

The partnership between the World Food Programme and Christian Aid is not just good because of multiplying the money by 67. The WFP has a global network and the support of governments. It is part of the UN. It has just won the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize.

Why does it choose to work through a non-governmental organization? Christian Aid has worked in the DRC since the 1970s and has a grassroots network of partners in community groups and churches. These are partners who can really be trusted to use the money wisely and get it to the people who need it most.

The project benefits from the professionalism of both organisations.

It is on a large scale and aims to reach a third of a million people. It is about feeding people immediately and a sustainable food supply for the future.

It has a balance of immediate food aid and long-term community support in developing food security.

We can use our technology to give, and to spread the word, to friends, family and contacts. You can give on line or by cheque or charity cheque. We will make the details available.

What I want to encourage us in, is being intelligent actors using technology for good, not just passive consumers of entertainment. I also know that being ON all the time is a recipe for burn out and that entertainment can be necessary and fun.

Particularly at a time like this, when it is easy to feel we can't change anything anyway, to be depressed and disempowered, it is important to get good news. And this project is certainly good news.

There are lives we can save – and we can do it even in lockdown. The trick is to be – as Jesus said – "as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves". We can sort out the scams from the gold dust.

Of course I would like some people listening tonight to donate, but even more importantly I would like us all to get new insights and new courage to be active users of technology and media, not only passive consumers.

We need compassion and campaigning. We need emergency relief and structural change.

The Christian Aid-World Food Programme partnership is waiting – and you too can share in the work of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize.

For further information and how to donate

You can donate on-line at http://caid.org.uk/wfp before the end of November.

Or send a cheque or charity cheque to: Christian Aid (FAO Jack Merrington), 35 Lower Marsh, Waterloo, London SE1 7RL with a cover note saying that the donation is for the Christian Aid- World Food Programme partnership.

Further information about the project is available via http://caid.org.uk/wfp-report Many thanks to those who have already donated.