

Humanitarian aid hit by Covid-19**Boris Martin • Rédacteur en chef**

The entire world has, to say the least, been “gripped” by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the “little” humanitarian world has not escaped. It was undoubtedly less surprised by this explosion, even though it is still trying to measure all the related direct and collateral damage. This is what this entire issue is about, since the resulting emergency led us to review our publication programme.

Should irony be mentioned in such a serious crisis? In February 2016, we dedicated our very first issue to the Ebola epidemic that raged in West Africa in 2014 and 2015¹. Learning the lessons from this crisis (which was to continue into early 2016, before gaining new ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018), all the authors converged to warn of the emerging expectations. The epidemiologists Michael Edelstein and David L. Heymann declared that “these questions need urgent answers before the emergence of the next global health crisis”. Jean-François Delfraissy (the current President of France’s Scientific Council on Covid-19) and Benoît Miribel (Co-founder of the *Humanitarian Alternatives* review) warned that: “The issue of the responsibility of governments and ministries that are confronted with public health challenges must be closely examined so that political leaders have incentive and are encouraged to take measures to protect the populations under their responsibility. The health risk of countries lacking health systems is also of concern for developed countries since they can at any time be exposed to emerging or re-emerging pathogens”. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) broke new ground by including “disease X” in its list of pathologies likely to represent an international threat – alongside Ebola, Zika and two coronaviruses, MERS and SARS. The WHO stated that this pathology was “included on the list not to terrify us, but to ensure that the global health community builds the resilience and capacity needed to tackle all threats – not just the predictable ones”. Since 31 December, when the first cases of an infectious disease were detected in China, 188 countries worldwide have been affected by Covid-19, with more than 13,000,000 confirmed cases and more than 570 000 deaths (at 14 July)². Almost half the global population were in varying degrees of lockdown before the disease started to ease.

While incorporating the global time and evolution constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, this special issue of our review aims to understand both the existing and still-emerging

¹ *Humanitarian Alternatives*, “Ebola: the end of the nightmare?”, Inaugural issue, February 2016, <http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/category/focus-en/ebola-the-end-of-the-nightmare>

² Johns Hopkins University tracker, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

challenges of Covid-19 in the humanitarian field, especially those which may arise between now and the publication of a second special issue in November. Firstly, it is important to understand the origins and causes of this pandemic and the lessons to be learned from past pandemics (including those which had no lasting effects), where humanitarian workers have often been on the frontline. Then, what needs to be encouraged must be highlighted, which is a necessary international solidarity, beyond the closed national doors that this crisis has all too often created.

We needed to understand how Covid-19 fits into the long list of past and current epidemics and what the epidemiological knowledge, accumulated over the course of such epidemics, can be used to develop and the lessons from humanitarian interventions in epidemic situations. The texts by Jean Freney, Stéphanie Maltais and François Grünewald look at this and the interview with Robert Sebbag continues the discussion on our website* by reflecting on the parallel with the HIV/AIDS pandemic³.

We will also see what role non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been able to play in their respective countries and abroad despite their own constraints such as personnel in lockdown, reduced transport, etc. and what lessons they have already learned from this crisis. The article by Chloé Cébron, Shelley-Rose Hyppolite and Nadja Pollaert from Doctors of the World Canada addresses this by highlighting the necessary community work. Meanwhile, the article by Miriam Kasztura and Françoise Duroch from *Médecins Sans Frontières* Switzerland reflects on the moral challenges faced by the MSF teams. Michiel Hofman's article addresses a largely under-determined issue (the impact of Covid-19 in war zones), just as Dominique Kerouedan does for asylum seekers in France (also on our website⁴).

Essential to understanding and managing this crisis, the analysis by researchers obviously had a place in this dossier. Whether related to gaining a better understanding of the "reception" and the representations of the pandemic in Africa, as presented by anthropologists Yannick Jaffré, Fatoumata Hane and Hélène Kane, or evaluating the humanitarian issues and the available tools as in the article by Karl Blanchet and Alex Odlum from the Centre for Education and Research in Humanitarian Action (CERAH).

These differing insights had to be put into perspective. The article by Norah Niland exploring the "war metaphor" used broadly in this unprecedented crisis, and that by Anna Khakke questioning its political and humanitarian nature are signs of the more global considerations that we will have to draw from this pandemic.

³ Robert Sebbag, « Il y a eu une véritable solidarité de la peur » (only available in French) : <http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/fr/2020/06/12/il-y-a-eu-une-veritable-solidarite-de-la-peur>

⁴ Dominique Kerouedan, « La demande d'asile dans le contexte de l'état d'urgence sanitaire en période d'épidémie de la Covid-19 en France » (only available in French), <http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/fr/2020/06/17/la-demande-dasile-dans-le-contexte-de-letat-durgence-sanitaire-en-periode-depidemie-de-covid-19-en-france>

While they close this dossier, these contributions do not exhaust the collateral, yet vital subjects, which fuel it. From the now obvious links between this pandemic and the environment discussed by Jean-François Mattei to the criticism of neoliberalism outlined by Alain Caillé and Bertrand Livinec and the possible reactivation of aid localisation foreseen by Martin Viélajus and Jean-Martial Bonis-Charanle, we measure the disaster that this “corona” virus has unleashed. As if it had decided to surround humanity in its own inconsistencies, from which it really needs to escape.

* Faced with the wealth of reactions caused by this crisis, we have opened our website – even more broadly than usual – to contributions that could not find their place in the limited space of this publication. On our website the reader will therefore find an abundance of texts, interviews and bibliographic resources relating to the impact of Covid-19 in the humanitarian field. Others will be added regularly until our second issue dedicated to the same topic, next November.

Reproduction prohibited without the agreement of the review Humanitarian Alternatives. To quote this article:

Boris Martin, “Humanitarian aid hit by Covid-19”, *Humanitarian Alternatives*, n°15, July 2020, p.1-5,
<http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2020/07/23/humanitarian-aid-hit-by-covid-19/>

ISBN of the article (PDF): 978-2-37704-659-1