

Humanitarian Action of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in Jayapura During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The issue of humanitarianism in international relations is a vital topic to probe deeper. Activist groups, individuals, and institutionalized groups or organizations, such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), have been carrying out humanitarian actions in Papua. UNICEF has been around for a long time in Papua, running several programs, including children's education program in Papua. However, education in Papua remains relatively low due to high rates of illiteracy and school dropouts, and poor literacy. This research explains that international organizations working in the humanitarian field can carry out the basic principles of humanitarianism, specifically, how UNICEF's programs adhere to these principles during the Covid-19 era. Direct interviews and secondary data collection were conducted in this qualitative descriptive research. The results show that UNICEF, as an international humanitarian organization, managed to uphold four basic principles in carrying out its role, particularly in improving the quality of education in Jayapura City. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has posed such obstacles to UNICEF related to donors, program implementation, and personnel that the practiced humanitarian principles became blurred and somewhat questionable. While the best practice promotes faithful adherence to the basic principles of humanity, it is undeniable that almost all organizations cannot exist without assistance from third parties which would ignore the principle of impartiality.

Keywords: Covid-19, education, humanitarianism, Jayapura, UNICEF

Abstrak

Isu humanitarisme dalam hubungan internasional menjadi salah satu topik penting yang bisa dikaji lebih lanjut. Aksi humaniter bukan saja dilakukan oleh kelompok aktivis dan perorangan namun juga dilakukan oleh kelompok organisasi yang sudah terlembaga seperti salah satunya United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) yang bertempat di Provinsi Papua. UNICEF di Papua telah berdiri cukup lama dan menjalankan beberapa program salah satunya adalah program pendidikan anak di Papua. Secara keseluruhan pendidikan di Papua masih cukup rendah karena ditemukan kasus seperti angka buta huruf yang tinggi, putus sekolah, dan minimnya literasi. Penelitian ini kemudian menjelaskan tentang organisasi internasional yang bergerak dibidang kemanusiaan mampu menjalankan prinsip dasar humanitarisme. Lebih spesifik, penelitian ini akan melihat bagaimana UNICEF dalam menjalankan programnya tetap berpegang teguh pada

prinsip tersebut terutama dalam masa Covid-19. Metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, digunakan dengan melakukan wawancara langsung kepada kepala UNICEF. Penelitian ini juga menggunakan sumber sekunder. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan UNICEF sebagai organisasi kemanusiaan internasional dalam menjalankan perannya berupaya memegang teguh empat prinsip dasar tersebut. Terutama untuk membantu meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di Papua khususnya kota Jayapura. Namun, dalam menjalankan perannya terutama pada masa Covid-19, organisasi ini berhadapan dengan beberapa kendala sehingga prinsip humanitarianisme yang selayaknya dipegang oleh UNICEF menjadi kabur dan dipertanyakan lagi. Kendala yang dihadapi seperti donator, pelaksanaan program saat Covid-19, dan personil. Idealnya, setiap organisasi kemanusiaan harus mengacu pada prinsip dasar kemanusiaan, namun, tidak bisa dipungkiri bahwa hampir seluruh organisasi tidak bisa berdiri tanpa adanya bantuan dari pihak ketiga yang mana itu akan mengabaikan prinsip imparisialitas.

Kata kunci: Covid-19, humanitarianisme, Jayapura, pendidikan, UNICEF.

INTRODUCTION

Non-state actors have existed in many countries in the world, including Indonesia. UNICEF, among many non-state actors, is invited by Indonesia to cooperate with humanity and focus on fulfilling children's rights in the country. The first UNICEF encounter with Indonesia was in 1948, during the drought crisis in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (Ibeng, 2022), which rendered children suffering from hunger and drought. Since then, UNICEF has been present in Indonesia.

There have been crucial development co-produced by UNICEF and Indonesia, ranging from providing relief and aid for children who are victims of plague and diseases to improving the quality of children's education. UNICEF also pays attention to one of Indonesia's easternmost, Papua Province. According to Badan Pusat Statistik, the level of education in Papua Province is still far from the standardized threshold set by the Central Government (Razaki, 2021) due to two contributing factors; low access to education and high level of school dropouts (Razaki, 2021).

Low access to education in Papua is observed from the gross enrollment rate (GER) and net enrollment rates (NER) ratio. For example, in 2016, Papua

provincial and Indonesia national GER of elementary school was 89 and 106, respectively, while the provincial and national NER was 72 and 94, respectively (Utama et al., 2018; Kelen, 2021). Meanwhile, the dropout rate in Papua Province is the second highest in Indonesia. Approximately 11.89% of students aged 7-24 are school dropouts (Utama et al., 2018; Kelen, 2021).

The numbers above show the severity of the education problem in Papua Province. To make things worse, the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia in 2020 has put more weight on the education sector. As a result, the Papua Provincial Education, Library and Archives Office predicted that in 2021, 21% of students in Papua would drop out of school, and Razaki (2021) estimated a 27% increase in illiteracy rate in the province (Razaki, 2021).

Evidently, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, education in Papua Province did not experience significant progress. While UNICEF assisted in improving the quality of education for children in Papua through a literacy program, it may seem not significantly fruitful because children's education level remains underperforming, and the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced this drawback.

This paper observes how UNICEF's humanitarian action improved the quality of education in Papua Province, especially Jayapura City, based on the basic principles of humanitarianism. Through this paper, the authors encourage readers to see why UNICEF, in carrying out humanitarian actions, faced several obstacles to such an extent that applying humanitarian principles is no longer a priority.

Conceptual Framework

Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism is a concept that has been around for a long time. For example, after World War erupted, a humanitarian group named Doctors Without Borders organization or Médecins Sans Frontières was founded in 1971 with the spirit of activism to help victims of war, epidemics, and victims of natural disasters (Redfield, 2013). Humanitarianism-related activities are then known as humanitarian actions carried out by individuals, groups, or organizations that have gained legitimacy. In line with this research, humanitarian action is carried out based on helping fellow human beings affected by the disaster.

Suryanti (2021) stated that humanitarian action is a motion carried out by a group of humanitarian activists to help victims of war, victims of natural disasters, and other victims who need help. Henry Dunnant first coined the concept of humanitarianism through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), formed to help victims of war. Then, he developed the idea of humanitarianism with several principles that all activists must hold.

These principles are the fundamental principles of humanity. The

first principle is society, meaning that all humanitarian- actions are carried out purely based on humanity to help humans. Second, neutrality means all humanitarian actions are carried out purely without discriminating against ethnicity, group, race, and religion. The third is impartiality, in which all humanitarian actions are carried out without any inherent interests from certain political groups. Lastly, independent standing means that all human actions are carried out without taking support from certain groups. All humanitarian groups should ideally carry out these four basic humanitarian principles for humanitarian purposes only. Otherwise, humanitarian organizations will tend to move pragmatically.

In this research, the concept of humanitarianism is sought after to analyze why some UNICEF's programs for the Papua region are only partially successful and whether political elements have influenced the consideration in taking humanitarian actions. It is crucial to see whether the humanitarian organization operates based on humanitarian principles or solely on programs' implementations. Regarding political elements, it is essential to understand whether the humanitarian organization carries out its role based on an agreement with a third party, for example, the donor. It is due to the potential dependence of humanitarian organizations on third parties or institutions that provide funding for their activities.

International Organization

The concept of the international organization began to develop with the increasing national interests of countries

that encouraged them to establish connections and interdependence with other countries. As these countries realize that international interaction is a powerful tool to actualize their interests, they build international organizations as a forum for countries to discover common interests and create world peace.

Based on the theory, international organizations can be explained as a structure consisting of countries as their members and stipulating agreements to pursue common interests. In line with this, Schechter defines the international organization as an entity formed based on international agreements contained in multilateral agreements and accompanied by specific criteria (Schechter, 2010). In addition, Teuku May Rudy defines international organizations as a form of cooperation that crosses national borders, establishes a comprehensible standard organizational structure, and carries out duties and functions in a sustainable and institutionalized manner. Furthermore, it has to achieve mutually-agreed interests between fellow governments in a country or fellow non-governmental groups in a different country (Rudy, 1998). In other words, synthesizing from these experts, international organizations are formed by mutual agreements from their members and realize common interests with a reciprocal nature.

The characteristics of international organizations described above involve countries and a pattern of cooperation, holding regular meetings, having staff workers, having a clear and complete organizational structure, and carrying out tasks and functions on an ongoing basis. Meanwhile, Rudy classifies international organizations based on

their scope, role, and authority. First, the scope of administrative activities divides international organizations into two: International Governmental Organizations (IGO) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) (Rudy, 1998). Second, based on the regions, there are global levels of international organizations and regional international organizations (Rudy, 1998). Third, based on the activities, international organizations may focus on different sectors that include but are not limited to the economy, environment, mining, humanity, international trade, and society (Rudy, 1998). In this case, UNICEF is one of the international organizations under the United Nations, comprising multiple sovereign states, aiming to fulfill children's rights worldwide.

Research Methods

Researchers select qualitative research to analyze this topic. Qualitative research is a part of social sciences that fundamentally focuses on human observation in a particular area (Moleong, 2018). William in Moleong states that qualitative research includes collecting data in a natural setting using natural methods carried out by scientific researchers (Deda, Buiney, Suryanti, 2022). In brief, a qualitative research method is a series of processes conducted by a researcher to collect data and describe the results of observations in scientific writing. Leaning towards explanatory research, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with non-state actors or UNICEF staff in Papua Province to understand the role of UNICEF in improving children's education in Papua Province.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conditions of Education System in Papua

In Indonesia, education is the right of every citizen, as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution Article 31 Paragraph 1. To realize this, the government of Indonesia established the nine-year compulsory education program, which was later extended to 12 years. This mandatory education program will run well if supported by sufficient schools, educational facilities, and infrastructure. However, in remote areas like Papua, implementing education often faces multiple obstacles.

The main problems in implementing education in Papua are the lack of school buildings, educational support infrastructure, and teaching staff (Riyanti, 2022). The lack of school buildings, especially in the interior of Papua, has resulted in long distances for children or students to attend schools. Even worse, Papua's interior areas, mainly consisting of central highlands, hills, and mountains with steep slopes, have made the long journey difficult for students. Remarkably, the community's villages in the valley are isolated from development points where school buildings can be found.

The insufficient number of teachers or educators has been a long-standing problem in the education system in Papua. According to the Regional Education Statistics, the teacher-student ratio in Papua from elementary to secondary levels in 2020 was ideal, namely 1:16, meaning one teacher teaches about 16 students (Indonesia, 2022). However, in reality, not all teachers are always at school. Moreover,

the absence of decent housing for teachers, limited access to infrastructure, and security disturbances like local conflicts (Ramdan, 2022) have made many educators leave their place of work in Papua. All these factors collectively lead to inefficient, dysfunctional basic service facilities, including education.

In addition, public awareness of education in Papua remains low because many Papuan people still do not support their children to go to school. As a result, some school-aged children in Nduga, Puncak, and Puncak Jaya do not attend school. Consequently, many children in Papua become illiterate. The 2020 data from Badan Pusat Statistik reported that 90.36% of Papuans aged 15-24 years and 73.89% of Papuans aged 25 years and over were still illiterate. Meanwhile, according to UNICEF, 30% of students in Papua do not complete elementary school and junior high school. In addition, about 50% of primary school students and 73% of junior high school students choose to drop out in remote areas.

Based on the results of interviews with UNICEF Papua, education in Papua requires serious attention (Ramdan, 2022). It is reinforced by the fact that many students in Jayapura cannot read, and teachers are rarely present due to various factors like difficult access and late wages. These have led to a high rate of young student dropouts and declining life capacities.

The Impact of Covid-19 on the Implementation of Education in Papua.

The airborne Coronavirus has forced the government to create policies to limit individual interactions. This dramatically hampers the learning process in education, especially in

eastern Indonesia. As a result, the conventional face-to-face teaching and learning process must adapt and switch to different approaches, including online media.

While online learning may theoretically be the best solution to social restriction, in Indonesia, sufficient facilities and infrastructure do not support this practice. Obstacles that arose during the online learning process occurred in all regions of Indonesia, including Papua. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Papua had suffered from deficient education, as evidenced by the high illiteracy and low school enrollment rates. The Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying online learning policy have multiplied the existing problems with education in Papua. The main issue is about the limited internet connection in 64% of all Papua regions, and limited technology apparatus and knowledge to operate the technology have made distance learning (Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh or PJJ) almost impossible to carry out. Accordingly, the free internet quota provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture to all students in Indonesia to support distance learning is ultimately useless in most Papua regions (Yusuf, 2020).

Students in Papua feel the repercussions of failed online learning processes in terms of reduced learning frequency, study time, and education quality. Another negative impact of online learning is evident in practicum activities. Due to social restrictions, all practicum schedules are canceled and switched to theoretical learning in the classroom. Again, it was a loss for students. Based on data from the Papua Provincial Office of Education, Libraries, and Archives, the dropout rate in 2021

was estimated to increase to 21%, a significant figure from the previous year (Kelen, 2021). The more unfortunate implication of a disrupted learning process hits students' literacy levels. After the pandemic, some primary-level students in Papua even forgot how to write and count due to the prolonged interruption of learning.

UNICEF's Efforts in Overcoming Education Problems in Papua

In recent years, children's education in Indonesia has shown a substantial increase in quality. However, significant disparities remain in various social groups across all geographic areas. Indonesia's vast territory and highly diverse geography have contributed to an unproportionate children population and inequality in education. Children occupy one-third of Indonesia's population, accounting for around 85 million, residing in more than 17,000 islands stretching at a distance of no less than 5,000 km from west to east. It makes Indonesia a country with the fourth-largest number of children in the world.

To address children's challenges in Indonesia, UNICEF has focused on the most marginalized and socially excluded groups. As a form of support for Indonesia, UNICEF initiates programs to realize children's rights according to the United Nations Convention (UN) on the Rights of the Child and are incorporated into the National Medium Term Development Plan (Rencana Panjang Jangka Menengah Nasional). UNICEF's primary goal is to protect the rights of every child in Indonesia. As a trusted partner of the government, civil society, and the private sector, UNICEF is committed to doing everything in its power to help children survive, thrive,

and realize their potential.

Focusing on the most vulnerable children, UNICEF works in fostering communities and government in Indonesia to conduct research, offer advice on policies and programs, and provide practical support to ensure that the planning, funding, and delivery of essential services are equitable to the 80 million children in Indonesia. In addition, UNICEF promotes fair service, which means that a newborn anywhere in Indonesia can get care with the same level of access and quality as a baby in the capital city.

To overcome these challenges and find a collective solution with each partner, including children and youth issues, UNICEF is committed to accommodating children at the highest risk and needing help. To support UNICEF's headquarters in Jakarta, UNICEF has several other branches across Indonesia, including in Aceh, East Java, South Sulawesi, Maluku, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and West Papua. Those branches are committed to ensuring that laws, decisions, and provision of services in Indonesia can accommodate every child's right to protection, education, and health regardless of their residing location (UNICEF, 2022). In addition, each office branch has its role in addressing existing issues and providing any service needed while considering the relatively high gap in public services.

UNICEF establishes classifications for each child and youth they help. The classifications are children and youth from underprivileged families, those with disabilities, those living in remote and backward areas of Indonesia, and those dropping out of school, the most at-risk ones. Teenage students in junior high schools in Indonesia are generally 13-15

years of age. Those from poor households are five times more likely to drop out of school than those in upper-middle-class settlements or wealthy families.

Disparities between students in Papua and any other provinces in Indonesia are evident. For example, the number of children not in school (ATS) in relatively prosperous Yogyakarta Province is around 1.3%. In comparison, other regions range from about 21% in Papua to 21.82% in West Papua and 27.38% in the easternmost and lagging provinces in the country (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023).

Fostering children's abilities is imperative and must be done from their early life stages. However, access to early childhood education services, known as Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD) in Indonesia, still has to be improved through different measures, including the "One Village, One PAUD" program. Regardless of this effort, the national PAUD gross enrollment rate (GER) in 2021 was 30%, while in Papua Province was only 17% (APK-APM, 2021). In addition, many rooms remain to improve the quality of PAUD services.

UNICEF has been working to improve the education level of young Papuans for decades. However, extra attention is needed during this pandemic to keep up with the ongoing progress. Before the pandemic, UNICEF provided training to teaching staff by visiting school locations and gathering teachers at surrounding schools to provide learning materials collectively. At the outbreak of the pandemic, all training activities were carried out electronically, and the materials in the form of videos were distributed via flash drives or Zoom platform. Besides using electronic media, UNICEF continued providing materials

on a smaller scale. Prioritizing schools in rural and remote locations, UNICEF teachers visited these locations and provided relevant materials for teachers. Every week, assistance was also carried out continuously to ensure that the materials were received, understood, and implemented correctly (Ramdan, 2021).

Based on the interview results, the biggest challenge for UNICEF Papua during the pandemic was that the team could not visit all schools in Papua regions. To address this limitation, UNICEF gathered the teachers in locations easily accessible and conducted training and assistance in those locations directly to observe which educators needed more support for pedagogical skills.

UNICEF has also taken multivarious approaches during the pandemic. In the pre-pandemic period, the team provided support in their areas of assignment without leaving the posts. They would go directly to the field for regular monitoring, which usually occurred twice weekly. During the pandemic, the training was conducted online via the Zoom platform in several small units. Then the assistant team would follow the teachers to each student's house to monitor the activities. It was found that not all teachers and students understand how to use electronic media. Therefore, UNICEF trainers who followed the teachers to students' locations ensured this door-to-door system's teaching and learning process could run well. All activities included in accompanying teachers and students in learning were ensured to parallel with the guidelines provided by the government of Indonesia.

In addressing the unprecedented repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic,

UNICEF in Papua sought the most strategic measures. Several schools that were difficult to access had to find alternative ways of receiving support. For example, to keep the learning system running effectively, the UNICEF team assisted the teachers by asking teacher representatives to gather in an easily accessible place where learning modules were distributed. Teachers were trained to use the Zoom platform as a learning media. For classes or schools that still faced challenges implementing online learning through Zoom properly, UNICEF trainers distributed the materials manually.

UNICEF's Humanitarian Action in the Papua Region

As explained in the conceptual framework section, UNICEF is a humanitarian organization that managed to run programs on humanitarian grounds based on human rights (HAM) during the Covid-19 pandemic. In line with what was conveyed by Suryanti & Sinaga, human rights are the fundamental aspect owned by every human being (Suryanti & Sinaga, 2022). When facing several obstacles in supporting children's education in Papua during the Covid-19 pandemic, UNICEF may find it difficult to fully apply the basic principles of humanitarianism, especially neutrality, and impartiality. It was evident from the challenges which ultimately changed all UNICEF's initial plans to facilitate the process of accompanying teachers and the teaching and learning process in the Papua Region. To promote an efficient learning process, UNICEF first screened and selected schools that would be the target of their programs because it was unlikely to carry out these programs in all schools in

Papua. Based on some considerations, UNICEF prioritized schools that most needed regular assistance as their target.

Another issue is regarding organizational development. The biggest problem faced by all international and local humanitarian organizations is how to ensure the sustainable development of their organization. All organizations worldwide cannot stand alone and carry out their programs without financial assistance from third parties. Therefore, securing funding sources is managed by multiple efforts, but mainly through keeping on track with the donors and third-party assistance on which these humanitarian organizations depend. This condition shows that organizations, including UNICEF, face one of many problems in applying the basic principles of humanitarian because dependence on funding donors violates the principle of impartiality. It is not uncommon that humanitarian organizations are ridden by the blanket interests of their third party who provides donors.

Thus, almost all humanitarian organizations can no longer carry out the basic principles of humanitarianism but rather play a very pragmatic role in carrying out their mandates and programs. This political agenda has posed a severe dilemma for every humanitarian organization in carrying out humanitarian actions. It is evident in several examples of cases in Indonesia. Several countries, such as Japan, have helped UNICEF Indonesia to help children in Papua. The United Nations for High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an organization working in the humanitarian field for refugee problems, cannot be separated from funding matters. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) engaged in migrant

affairs, migrant workers, asylum seekers, and refugees is inseparable from Australia as the third party providing funds for IOM programs (Suryanti, 2021; Suryanti, 2022). It should be noted that these organizations will continue to use the big umbrella of the spirit of activism to help humanity maintain humanity as the first principle of humanitarianism. Therefore, the author argues that these issues and interests may have faded the principles of neutrality and impartiality that humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF, should uphold.

CONCLUSION

UNICEF, a humanitarian organization, has undoubtedly prioritized the spirit of humanitarian activism to help human beings, especially children. In practice, UNICEF may have faced severe challenges in carrying out programs based on the basic principles of humanity developed by Hendry Dunnant. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced UNICEF to develop new strategies and mechanisms for program implementation to adapt to social restrictions in education sectors. However, several basic principles, such as neutrality and impartiality, may only be partially enforced by UNICEF. For example, it is evident from educational programs for children, especially in Jayapura, that they could not cover all target groups because UNICEF must prioritize schools that need the most assistance. While this practice may have helped the students and schools at the target location to continue learning despite the pandemic, it also violates the principle of neutrality. In addition, UNICEF still depends on funding from the third party, demonstrating a violation of the impartiality principle because these

donors may have blanketed interests when providing financial assistance. These interests were evident from implementing programs initiated by humanitarian organizations. These

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findings are expected to encourage the readers to reflect and assess whether it is justifiable to infuse political elements in humanitarian actions.

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