

Money's Dominant Influence on Humanitarianism

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Hurricane Katrina in the US and Hurricane Stanley in Guatemala struck within weeks of each other and despite causing a similar level of destruction (each were responsible for about 1,000 human deaths), Katrina received 3,105 references in UK papers in the following few months, whereas Stanley received a mere 34.

But this phenomenon is not unique to the hurricane example. The CARMA Report analysed 2,000 articles across nine countries and found that there is “no link between the scale of a disaster and the media interest it attracts. It is ‘Western self-interest’ which is the precondition for significant coverage of a humanitarian crisis.” As journalist Brian Stewart said in 1990, “In international relations, if it does not affect the US it scarcely

exists.” And this discrepancy is not coincidental with the discrepancy in GDP between the US (\$19 trillion) compared to Guatemala (\$75 billion); wealth in the US is an inherent part of how it exerts influence on global systems of power, including the media.

Wealth, as an inherent part of both American political interests as well as large media outlets, has a constructive effect on the humanitarian sector whereby it disproportionately favors the West and this is problematic because it is distancing humanitarianism away from the areas with highest need, as in the contemporary cases of Yemen or the Democratic Republic of Congo.