

Time to let go

Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era

April 2016



HPG

Humanitarian
Policy Group

Team leader and main author: Christina Bennett

Editor and co-author: Matthew Foley

HPG Director and co-author: Sara Pantuliano

Research and data: Scarlett Sturridge

Contributors: Melanie Archer, Veronique Barbelet, Tania Cheung, Sarah Collinson, Sherine El Taraboulsi, Wendy Fenton, Hanna B. Krebs, Simon Levine, Irina Mosel, Eva Svoboda, Caitlin Wake, Barnaby Willitts-King, Steven A. Zyck

Additional support: Hannah Barry, Francesca Iannini, Ruvini Wanigaratne, David White

Design and layout: thomas.matthews communications design; Lucy Peers Graphic Design

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of the project's steering group, who provided strategic guidance on the direction of the report, and its peer reviewers, who dedicated considerable time to providing extensive and insightful comments on the study's drafts: Chukwu Emeka Chikezie (Up! Africa); Clare Dalton (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)); Pascal Daudin (ICRC); Eleanor Davey (University of Manchester); Antonio Donini (Tufts University – Feinstein International Center); Marc DuBois (Independent Consultant); Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh (University College London (UCL)); Juliano Fiori (Save the Children, UK); Kate Half (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)); John Holmes (Ditchley Foundation); Jemilah Mahmood (IFRC); Ishbel Matheson (ODI); Juliana Ruhfus (Al Jazeera); Richard Smith-Bingham (Marsh & McLennan Companies' Global Risk Centre); Fiona Terry (Duke University); Kevin Watkins (ODI).

The views and opinions expressed in this report are the authors' own.

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material from this report for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. As copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the ODI website. This and other HPG reports are available from www.odi.org/hpg.

The opinions expressed herein are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of ODI. © Overseas Development Institute 2016. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0

Cover photo: Palestine refugees at Khan Yunus camp south of Gaza, December 1948 © UN Photo

Table of contents

Acronyms	2
Foreword	3
Executive summary	4
Introduction	7
Time to let go	8
About this report	8
Methodology	9
Chapter 1: The humanitarian landscape: Western origins and parallel narratives	12
Western origins and foundations	12
Parallel narratives	19
Learning from history	23
Chapter 2: Current trends and the case for change	26
The changing character of conflict	28
Climate change and disasters	34
Aid, poverty and protracted crisis	35
New actors and changing patterns of power	36
The increasing role of business	39
New technologies and aid modalities	40
The case for change	42
Chapter 3: Squaring the circle: balancing exceptionalism and inclusivity	46
Humanitarianism: one term, many meanings	46
Humanitarian exceptionalism	48
Principles in practice	50
Squaring the circle	53
Chapter 4: Barriers to change: power, perceptions and perverse incentives	56
Money, power and perceptions	57
Destructive competition	61
Weak governance and accountability	62
Cultural and linguistic barriers	64
Constructing a larger humanitarian tent?	64
Chapter 5: Conclusion: towards a more modern humanitarianism	66
Letting go of power and control	70
Redefining success	72
Remaking humanitarian action	74
Bibliography	76
Endnotes	80

Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRR	disaster risk reduction
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPSMG	Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group
EU	European Union
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCR	High Commissioner for Refugees
HRR	Humanitarian Response Review
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	information and communications technology
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	internally displaced person
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IS	Islamic State
ISC	indirect support cost
L2GP	Local to Global Protection
LRCS	League of Red Cross Societies
LRRD	linking relief, rehabilitation and development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NDRRMC	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODSG	OCHA Donor Support Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
RCSC	Red Cross Society of China
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SCF	Save the Children Fund
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNKRA	UN Korean Reconstruction Agency
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Humanitarian Organisation
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Foreword

This report reflects a growing sense, both from our own research on the ‘changing humanitarian landscape’ and in conversations with colleagues, that the ‘traditional’ humanitarian sector is on the cusp of a decisive moment in its history.

For three-quarters of a century, the stalwarts of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief – Western donors and non-governmental organisations, the Red Cross Movement and UN agencies – have seen themselves as the essential heart of humanitarian action: indispensable players, both as implementing agencies and as the arbiters of the norms and standards governing the conduct of relief. What became increasingly plain as our research progressed was that this centrality and indispensability was, if not an illusion, then at least a very partial picture of the reality of global humanitarian assistance. Northern NGOs, the UN system and the Red Cross are by no means redundant – the billions of dollars still being channelled through them is testament to that – but they are just one part of a much broader universe of assistance made up of a myriad of other actors, with their own distinctive traditions and cultures of care.

Drawing on recent HPG research, this report – a collective effort by the HPG team, as well as the fruit of insights from thinkers and doers in humanitarianism from around the world – reflects on this complexity, and sketches out some of its implications, both for the practical business of emergency assistance and for the principles, ethos and culture that underpin it. If humanitarianism really is the broad church we believe it to be, what does the concept of ‘humanitarian’ even mean? How should we respond to these challenges, and is change desirable or even possible? These are very large questions, and this report cannot provide complete answers. Hopefully, though, it will contribute to a fuller and more constructive debate on the future direction of humanitarian policy and practice.

Sara Pantuliano
Director, Humanitarian Policy Group
April 2016

Executive summary

Despite a decade of system-wide reforms, the sector still falls short in the world's most enduring crises. Perceptions of humanitarian work suggest that the formal, Western 'system' is not doing a good job in the eyes of the people it aims to help.

The decades since the end of the Second World War have seen a significant expansion in the number, type and size of humanitarian organisations and a proliferation of players laying claim to the humanitarian cause. In part as a result, the humanitarian system is saving more lives, caring for more wounded and feeding more hungry people in more places than we could have conceived of even a generation ago. Yet despite this progress, the humanitarian system is struggling to keep pace with the growing demands of more frequent and more enduring humanitarian crises and the changing nature of conflict. 'Non-system' actors – militaries, the private sector, diaspora groups, local NGOs, 'new' or 'rising' donors, regional organisations – are increasingly entering the humanitarian space, and new technologies are changing the way assistance is organised and delivered, and the relationship between aid givers and aid recipients.

As the mismatch between aspiration and achievable results grows, the humanitarian architecture and tools are increasingly being called into question as the right way to address the multi-faceted needs in many of today's emergencies. Despite a decade of system-wide reforms, the sector still falls short in the world's most enduring crises, and perceptions of humanitarian work suggest that the formal, Western 'system' is not doing a good job in the eyes of the people it aims to help. Past responses to changing circumstances and acknowledged problems in humanitarian assistance have tended to be piecemeal and uneven, tweaking the current system rather than challenging the underlying structures and assumptions on which it operates. Given the challenges the system faces, incremental reform may no longer be enough.

Understanding why the formal humanitarian system is organised and managed as it is requires an understanding of its historical evolution, from its roots in the mid-nineteenth century to its institutional growth in the years after the end of the First and, especially, Second World Wars, and its continued evolution and expansion with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a multipolar world. Born during the age of European colonialism and maturing in a period of unprecedented US power and reach, the formal system of UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement and the large international NGOs is the outcome, not of an inevitable and ineluctable process, but of

The humanitarian system is saving more lives, caring for more wounded and feeding more hungry people in more places

a particular period of Western economic and political hegemony. It is, in other words, contingent on the circumstances that created it, and as such neither monolithic nor immutable. Nor does it represent the humanitarian impulse *tout court*: other traditions and cultures express very similar – and frequently very ancient – ideas, even if the particular trajectories these parallel narratives have followed mean that humanitarianism has taken many different forms over time. As such, humanitarian actors habitually labelled ‘new’ may in fact have histories as long as or longer than their Western counterparts. They may also not subscribe to the historically evolved norms and principles that underpin Western humanitarianism.

For some, the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are universally applicable, regardless of context or culture. But like the organisations that claim adherence to them, they were established at a particular historical juncture: they are not necessarily innate or intrinsic to humanitarianism, and for actors outside the tradition that created them they may represent a Western ethos they question or reject, and may not speak to the type of ‘humanitarianism’ they wish to espouse. Adding to this tension has been a push for greater coherence and complementarity between humanitarian and aid interventions to meet development, security and peace objectives and link emergency relief to other forms of intervention. While for some this search for coherence challenges humanitarian principles by subsuming humanitarian action under political and security objectives, the vast majority of humanitarian organisations accept a wider interpretation of their life-saving remit that includes addressing the causes of crises, as well as their effects.

In practice, humanitarian principles often sit uneasily with the reality of crisis situations and require trade-offs in their use. They also sit uneasily with the reality that most organisations engaged in humanitarian assistance, the so-called multi-mandate organisations, both UN agencies and NGOs, combine their humanitarian work with development and human rights or conflict-resolution work. To be effective, crisis response requires differentiated approaches, ranging from those based on a narrow interpretation of what constitutes humanitarian action and humanitarian actors to those based on a more expansive, flexible and coordinated form of relief. It also requires greater honesty about the way the sector frames its intentions, greater transparency about the way it conducts its operations and greater openness to other actors within the humanitarian space.

Despite evidence that local actors and organisations are driving response in many areas, the formal humanitarian system has failed to connect meaningfully with national and local institutions and groups. As currently structured, the incentives for such engagement do not exist: the sector’s power dynamics, culture, financing and incentive structures create compelling reasons to remain closed and centralised and averse to innovation, learning and transformation. This creates unhelpful rivalries and inefficiencies within the formal sector, and erects high barriers – financial, cultural and regulatory – that stand in the way of more constructive and fruitful engagement between those within and outside the current formal system.

Aid theorists point to a persistent performance gap as long as the system remains centralised and bureaucratic, the relationships between donor and implementer, aid provider and recipient remain controlling and asymmetrical, and partnerships and interactions remain transactional and competitive, rather than reciprocal and collective. What is less

In practice, humanitarian principles often sit uneasily with the reality of crisis situations and require trade-offs in their use

The sector’s power dynamics, culture, financing and incentive structures create compelling reasons to remain closed and centralised and averse to innovation, learning and transformation

clear, however, is what a more inclusive, diverse and distributed sector would actually look like, and how precisely it can be achieved.

Acknowledging that there is no single response model would be a significant step towards engaging a wider and more diverse set of actors in crisis response. These would in turn act in a complementary fashion on the basis of their respective operational abilities and the relevance of their activities in relation to the situation on the ground, without being asked to aspire to a more restrictive form of humanitarianism that does not conform to their beliefs or operational models. Effectively addressing people's needs – not ideology – should dictate operational approaches and tools. Accepting that different forms of humanitarianism co-exist would go a long way towards removing the ideological blockages that prevent skilled and capable responders, whether international, governmental or local, from working more cohesively, and with the full extent of capacity, skills and resources, to meet people's needs. Driven by this understanding, the next era of humanitarian action must find more commonality than distinction in approaches to the way the human impacts of crises are addressed. This includes:

- **Letting go of power and control.** A more modern humanitarian action requires letting go of power and control by the formal Western-inspired system and reorienting the sector's view outwards. It should ask, not 'what can I give?', but 'what support can I provide?'. Rather than reforming mandates, this requires mindset change and the development of a more diversified model that accepts greater local autonomy and cedes power and resources to structures and actors currently at the margins of the formal system. This also requires a commitment by UN agencies and large, multi-mandate NGOs to embrace difficult changes in the approach and architecture under which the sector currently operates.
- **Redefining success.** Ensuring the depth and permanence of future reforms means changing the prevailing humanitarian culture and incentives that work against evolution and change, and redefining success so that the longer-term incentives for mutual cooperation in the interests of crisis-affected people outweigh the short-term incentives to compete for resources and visibility. At the heart of the matter are the financial incentives set by the sector's core and emerging donors, which currently drive competition among its key players and enable a powerful few to dominate.
- **Remaking humanitarian action.** Finally, redefining humanitarian action requires acknowledging the specificity of different spheres and approaches, implementing more developmental or solidarist responses where appropriate, while safeguarding independent and neutral humanitarian action in a limited number of situations where it is essential. This would not make one form of humanitarian action less valuable or legitimate than another, but it does require that aid organisations be explicit and upfront about the nature of their aspirations, objectives and operational frameworks, and transparent about delivery lines and methods. Acknowledging that there is no single response model would facilitate the engagement of a wider and more diverse set of actors in crisis response, without asking them to aspire to a more restrictive form of humanitarianism that does not conform to their beliefs or operational models.

Effectively addressing people's needs – not ideology – should dictate operational approaches and tools

Introduction

The formal system faces a crisis of legitimacy, capacity and means, blocked by significant and enduring flaws that prevent it from being effective. This report argues for a new model of humanitarian action, one that requires letting go of the current paradigm.

Throughout its history, the humanitarian sector has innovated, evolved and adapted to the complex challenges that have confronted it. This evolution has, however, been uneven. While there are myriad examples of significant and positive changes in approach, programming, partnerships and tools through individual initiatives and often on the ground, this progress has not been matched by the requisite changes at the systemic level: within the institutions, governance and financial structures and power relations that underpin the sector's operations and culture. Enduring tensions within the 'system' – between people and institutions, voluntarism and enterprise, norms and practice, diversity and control – have prevented the conversion of the commitment and ingenuity of humanitarians into wider effectiveness. An inability to embrace the diversity of values, individuals and organisations involved in humanitarian work has failed to unlock the human and financial resources within them. This has resulted in uneven performance, both within crisis countries and globally (ALNAP, 2015).

At the same time, external changes – the evolving character of conflict and the changing nature of climate risk, the rise of 'new' or 'different' actors and the emergence of new forms of assistance and protection – are challenging the internal workings of the humanitarian 'system' by calling into question its assumptions and culture. Whether welcome or viewed as threatening, thought to be genuinely new or an extension of patterns and trends long under way, the concepts and practices that have underpinned the humanitarian system for decades are no longer as dominant or relevant as they were. And despite improvements in the sector's ability to adapt to changing circumstances – market-based programming and cash assistance, national-level protection regimes, the significant contributions of diaspora communities in complex crises and the increased interest and role of regional organisations in crisis response – the formal system faces a crisis of legitimacy, capacity and means, blocked by significant and enduring flaws that prevent it from being effective. As variations in approaches to humanitarian assistance become more visible with the rise of new global and domestic actors, the formal sector's resistance to accepting and embracing more diverse forms of humanitarianism risks rendering its norms and institutions irrelevant.

◆ **Enduring tensions within the 'system' – between people and institutions, voluntarism and enterprise, norms and practice, diversity and control – have prevented the conversion of the commitment and ingenuity of humanitarians into wider effectiveness**

Time to let go

This report argues for a new model of humanitarian action, one that requires letting go of the current paradigm, which uses its own goods and services to deliver its own solutions, in favour of a diverse, devolved and decentralised model that genuinely recognises and embraces the contributions of new donors and enables the comparative advantages and contributions of local, national and international implementing organisations in service delivery (HLP, 2016). This will require, not the kind of technocratic changes or piecemeal reforms we have seen in the past, but a thorough-going reconceptualisation of the assumptions upon which the current sector is based, and a reshaping of the politics, architecture and incentives that drive it.

The process leading up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit has been successful in catalysing a sector-wide debate on the effectiveness of humanitarian action, generating reflection about the successes and failings of the current system. In doing so, it has generated both the momentum and (some) appetite for change. As such, it may have created the best opportunity in 25 years to rethink the foundations on which the system operates. Drawing on HPG research into the changing humanitarian landscape, this report sets out to help shape the humanitarian policy agenda and drive organisational and operational change. As both a synthesis of HPG's evidence and findings during the past four years and a 'meta-analysis' that aims to draw larger conclusions from this research, the following chapters explore some of the deep-seated dilemmas facing modern humanitarianism, making the case for change and offering suggestions as to how to reorient the sector's gaze outwardly to set a more enabling and pluralistic course for its future.

About this report

The study is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 sets the scene by examining the evolution of the current humanitarian system – both the Western origins of what has come to be known as the formal humanitarian sector and the rich history of the non-Western traditions that have informed and influenced humanitarian action more widely. Chapter 2 describes current global trends affecting the sector and makes the case for change. Chapter 3 describes the enduring tension between the exceptionalism of humanitarian assistance and the strategic and operational need to open up the sector to a more diversified and devolved set of actors embracing different interpretations of what it means to be humanitarian. Chapter 4 investigates the ways of working that create the illusion of exclusivity, and examines how the sector's underlying assumptions, power dynamics and incentives have prevented fundamental change. The final chapter offers suggestions for how to reset key elements of the sector's core attributes to help it regain its legitimacy, capacity and financial security.

This report argues for a new model of humanitarian action, one that requires letting go of the current paradigm, which uses its own goods and services to deliver its own solutions, in favour of a diverse, devolved and decentralised model

Methodology

This report synthesises HPG’s research on ‘The Changing Humanitarian Landscape’ from 2011–15, with an emphasis on the four research streams covered by the 2013–15 Integrated Programme: ‘Zones of Engagement: Regional Action and Humanitarian Response’, ‘A Global History of Modern Humanitarian Action’, ‘Markets and Resilience in Crises and Transitions’ and ‘Opportunities and Challenges for Protection Work’. Taken together, these four projects involved eight field studies, interviews with more than 650 interlocutors, seven roundtable discussions, four conferences and 18 publications, including working papers, case studies and policy briefs. As such, the

report relies heavily on HPG’s own work, but work that also draws on more than 1,000 external sources.

The analysis and conclusions were also guided and facilitated by an internal working group comprising HPG/ODI researchers and communications staff, as well as an external expert steering group made up of members of the HPG Advisory Group, representatives from Western and non-Western organisations involved in humanitarian policy and practice, and professionals from academic institutions, media organisations and private sector companies. Both groups helped to set the report’s direction and reviewed and commented on drafts.

Defining the ‘humanitarian system’

One of the fundamental problems in any discussion of the humanitarian system is that defining who and what it comprises – and even what we mean when we use the term ‘system’ – is fraught with practical and conceptual difficulty. The term ‘implies an internal logic and functional order’ (ALNAP, 2015: 18) that is not present. It also implies that there is shared understanding and usage of the term when, in reality, the absence of a fixed, commonly agreed definition of the humanitarian system and the actors and entities that make it up means that the term is understood and used by donors, the UN, NGOs and ‘affected people’ (another dubious, and under-interrogated, designation) to denote a variety of things. As Walker and Maxwell (2009: 136) put it: ‘Its complexity of origins, multitude of players and ever-varying environment make humanitarianism a challenging system to describe and understand and an even more challenging system to predict’.

The most recent *State of the System* report by ALNAP defines the humanitarian system as ‘the network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian assistance is provided when local and national resources are insufficient to meet the needs of a population in crisis’ (ALNAP, 2015). Borton (2009) proposes a less mechanical and more organic definition which more accurately captures the very unsystematic nature of the humanitarian system, namely a ‘multiplicity of international,

national and locally-based organizations deploying financial, material and human resources to provide assistance and protection to those affected by conflict and natural disasters with the objective of saving lives, reducing suffering and aiding recovery’.

Others have effectively partitioned the system, using narrow definitions to refer to certain aspects of it, such as the definition of the ‘formal international humanitarian system’ given by Slim (2006: 19): ‘the mainly Western-funded humanitarian system which works closely within or in coordination with the international authority of the United Nations and Red Cross movements’. Walker and Maxwell (2009: 2) offer a more holistic definition, describing ‘a system that allows those caught up in a crisis to articulate what they need to alleviate their suffering while allowing others in the human family, who are better off, to provide the resources to meet those needs. It is a people-to-people structure with governments, agencies and aid organizations as the go-betweens’. Or: ‘the international humanitarian sector can be understood or depicted as a partially self-regulating transnational community composed of various non-governmental, private and public governmental and intergovernmental actors’ (Collinson, 2016). Still others reject the existence of anything that could be called a system at all: ‘there is no such thing as the “humanitarian system” there are various actors with inter-dependent relations, but they are hardly all oriented towards the same goals’ (Borton, 2009).

1



A black and white photograph of a large refugee camp, likely in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), showing a dense crowd of people and makeshift shelters. A prominent red diamond-shaped graphic is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title text. The background shows a vast expanse of people and structures, with some individuals in the foreground appearing to be engaged in daily activities.

The humanitarian landscape

Chapter 1

The humanitarian landscape: Western origins and parallel narratives

Humanitarian assistance has a long history, both in the Western tradition and globally. Understanding this history allows us to see that the challenges we face today have been there from the start.

Despite growing awareness of the importance of its past in understanding humanitarianism today, and the emergence of humanitarian history as a distinct field of study, humanitarian practice remains rooted in the present. This lack of deep historical study is both striking and understandable: striking, because many related fields, including international relations and diplomacy, medicine, warfare, law and ethics, have been subject to extensive historical scrutiny; understandable, because the sector's self-image is grounded in a crisis culture that leaves little room for historical reflection. The consequence of this is less a failure to acknowledge and learn from past mistakes – the sector is not as resistant to learning as its critics like to claim, even if it finds it difficult to translate that learning into actual improvements in practice – and more a failure to use historical analysis to critically explore some of the foundational assumptions on which the system rests. As Davey (2014) puts it, bringing a historical perspective to bear ‘can challenge the idea that there are no alternatives to particular practices or concepts by drawing out the conditions under which these practices and concepts emerged’.

Western origins and foundations

The formal humanitarian system as we know it today – comprising the UN agencies, the major international NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement – was born in the nineteenth century and codified in the

twentieth. Although religious ideas of charity towards the disadvantaged are centuries old, as are customary practices related to the acceptable conduct of warfare, the institutional, conceptual and legal roots of the formal humanitarian system are usually traced to the mid-nineteenth century, and specifically the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863 and the promulgation of the Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field the following year (Davey, 2013). Informed by a growing concern for the human impacts of increasingly mechanised conflict, and technological advances that brought those impacts to the much wider notice of publics at home, the Red Cross/Red Crescent provided assistance to combatants in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and other late-nineteenth century conflicts. The period also saw increasing international fundraising and engagement in disaster response, notably following large earthquakes in San Francisco, Kingston in Jamaica and Messina in Italy, as well as the beginnings of international cooperation in medicine and healthcare (Davey, 2013).

The expansion of specifically European humanitarianism went hand in hand with the consolidation of European colonial control in Africa and Asia. Many of the techniques of assistance practiced today, including famine relief and cash assistance, were pioneered in the colonies. In colonial India, for instance, the British drew up a set of regulations and procedures designed to identify and



.....
Above: Representatives of the Norwegian and Argentinian Diplomatic Corps and the ICRC visit a Red Cross central hospital in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). © Spanish Red Cross.

control – and only secondarily to assist – famine victims (Simonow, 2015). In the French empire, efforts tended to focus more prominently on medical relief and disease control in the shape of ‘the good white doctor’, the emblem of a ‘civilising mission’ that, like its British colonial cousin, legitimised itself through the supposed benefits Western control brought with it (Davey, 2012).

The formal architecture of the humanitarian system as configured today began to take shape in the aftermath of the First World War with the establishment of the League of Nations and the creation of the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR). Initially set up to coordinate assistance to Russian refugees, HCR also secured official international recognition of a travel document for refugees and played a central role in the development of a draft treaty on refugees’ rights (Davey, 2013: 8). There were also steps to coordinate and institutionalise humanitarianism with the creation of the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), now the International Federation, and the Save the Children Fund (SCF). In many ways SCF was prototypical of the non-governmental organisations that would follow, using the media as a fund-raising tool, including film and newspaper advertising; engaging in advocacy as well as practical material assistance, often on a very large scale; and channelling funds through partner organisations working with children in Europe and the Balkans.¹

The shifts that followed the Second World War marked a continuation of these trends, rather than a radical break with the past. The most obvious institutional development was the establishment of the United Nations and its constituent humanitarian elements, most of which in one shape or form still structure the bulk of international humanitarian assistance today. Key normative changes included the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as the four Geneva Conventions of

◆
Many of the techniques of assistance practiced today, including famine relief and cash assistance, were pioneered in the colonies

1949 and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the key legal document defining refugee status, the rights of refugees and states' obligations towards them. The post-war period also continued the general expansion of humanitarian action undertaken by this consolidating system, both in size and geographic scope. Hundreds of NGOs were established, a large proportion of them in the United States and Western Europe, and the target of assistance shifted from Europeans affected by the Second World War to citizens of the decolonising global South, or at least that non-communist part of it accessible to Western agencies.

The intersection of Cold War geopolitics and decolonisation had a profound impact on the development of the major Western NGOs. As Davey (2013: 11) puts it: 'The skills, material and money wielded by Northern organisations were called upon to supplement those of the newly established Southern governments, many of whom were struggling with inadequate resources and infrastructure after the rapid withdrawal of the colonial powers'. The opening up of such a broad new theatre of action in the post-colonial world stimulated a significant increase in non-governmental humanitarian action. At the same time, the geopolitical competition between the superpowers for the allegiance of these same newly-independent states led some NGOs into a close relationship with their home governments, particularly in countries of strategic interest; in Vietnam, for instance, US NGOs such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and CARE were explicitly part of the US government's political and military effort in the country. CRS in particular had close ties with the US-backed regime in South Vietnam, and channelled food aid to a US-supported militia group (Jackson and Davey, 2014). Likewise, 20 years later, assistance for Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan would be channelled to *mujahideen* groups fighting the Soviet occupation – a sobering reminder that the manipulation and politicisation of assistance in countries of strategic interest like Afghanistan is not as new as some contemporary commentary would like to suggest (Collinson and Elhawary, 2012). Nor for that matter is the related idea of using aid as a way of winning local support: during Algeria's independence war the French provided services in rural areas thought to be sympathetic to the nationalist cause, and in Malaya in the 1950s British troops provided medical care and built infrastructure as part of their counter-insurgency campaign against the Malayan Communist Party (Jackson and Davey, 2014).

Aid and the Cold War: the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA)

The United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA) was established in 1951 as a dedicated fund for South Korea following the partition of the country in 1945 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. It was part of a longer-standing US programme of aid to South Korea, which at its peak in 1957 accounted for \$380 million. UNKRA, which lasted only five years beyond the end of war (it operated from 1950–58), illustrates well the links between official assistance and strategic interest: as Barnett puts it, 'the willingness of states to become more involved in the organization and delivery of relief owed not only to a newfound passion for compassion but also to a belief that their political, economic, and strategic interests were at stake' (Barnett, 2011: 107, cited in Davey, 2013: 9).

◆ **Geopolitical competition between the superpowers for the allegiance of the newly-independent states led some NGOs into a close relationship with their home governments**

Below: A Korean nurse trainee helps a patient to use artificial legs at the UNKRA-sponsored Amputee Center, Tongnae, Republic of Korea, September 1954. © UN Photo. Overleaf: Vietnamese refugees about to be rescued after spending eight days at sea, May 1984. © Phil Eggman





The Cold War period also saw one of the formative experiences in the evolution of modern humanitarianism, albeit in a context less inflected by Cold War pressures: the secessionist war in Biafra in 1967–70, which was instrumental in the formation of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), with its insistence on *témoignage* ('bearing witness') and rejection of the ICRC's tradition of discretion (Davey, 2013). In the French humanitarian discourse in particular, the relief effort in Biafra, undertaken despite the opposition of the Nigerian government, constituted a 'foundational moment' in the birth of *sans-frontiérisme* (Davey, 2012), albeit a controversial one: the humanitarian effort was co-opted by the Biafran leadership as part of its extensive and well-organised campaign for international recognition, and provided resources for the secessionists' war effort (Davey, 2013).

The external context for humanitarian action changed again with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of what came to be known euphemistically as 'complex emergencies': humanitarian crises involving a considerable breakdown of authority, extensive violence and civilian casualties and mass population displacement. Unlike previously, where aside from the ICRC humanitarian assistance had largely been delivered outside the conflict zone, usually to refugees in flight from the fighting, humanitarian action was increasingly taking place within conflicts. New access initiatives, most prominently Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) in 1989, led by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), saw the UN directly engaging with belligerents other than recognised governments, and in conflict zones in the absence of a formal peace agreement: 'With direct financial and political support from Western governments, it became possible for UN agencies and NGOs to extend their presence into active conflicts in ways that had been more or less impossible at the height of the Cold War' (Collinson and Elhawary, 2012: 6). In parallel, the UN embarked on a thoroughgoing restructuring of its institutional arrangements with the creation, through General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991, of many of the key planks of today's humanitarian architecture. NGOs were also becoming increasingly prominent players as private contributions grew and donor governments channelled a greater proportion of their humanitarian assistance through the non-governmental sector (Borton, 1993).

The post-Cold War period also confronted humanitarian agencies with some unpalatable truths about the world in which they worked, nowhere more so than in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The realisation that refugee camps in neighbouring Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of Congo) had been used as recruiting grounds for the *génocidaires* prompted what amounted to an existential crisis, out of which emerged the first comprehensive evaluation of collective emergency operations – the *Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda* – and a spate of initiatives designed to improve accountability and standards within the aid sector, notably the Sphere Project's *Handbook of Minimum Standards* and the *Humanitarian Charter*. More fundamentally, the Great Lakes crisis exposed the limits of the West's rhetorical commitment to humanitarian intervention. Lacking any compelling strategic interest in Rwanda, and chastened by the debacle of the US withdrawal from Somalia in March 1994, the UN and other outside actors failed to take decisive action, and the genocide was only brought to an end by the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in July 1994. A similar lack of resolve would attend the Bosnian Serb army massacre of thousands of men and boys in the UN-designated 'safe area' of Srebrenica in Bosnia in July 1995.



◆
The post-Cold War period also confronted humanitarian agencies with some unpalatable truths about the world in which they worked

.....
Above: Rwandan refugees in camps outside Goma, then Zaire © UN Photo/John Isaac



Prompted by the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, the subsequent decade saw a radical reappraisal of the role of military intervention in the protection of Western interests, and the role of humanitarian assistance in furthering the political, military and strategic interests of the Western powers. Faced with what was deemed a direct threat to the safety of their citizens and societies, Western governments abandoned the reluctance to intervene that had marked the responses to Rwanda and Srebrenica to mount large-scale invasions, first of Afghanistan and, more controversially, Iraq. While both succeeded in their primary aim – toppling the Taliban and Saddam Hussein’s regime – the widely criticised absence of a cogent plan for what to do next has left both countries extremely unstable and, in the case of Iraq, opened up a new front in the war with Islamic extremism. The interplay between humanitarian assistance and Western states’ aims in these two countries, and the

West’s counter-terror effort more broadly, was also deeply unsettling for Western aid agencies working in these very difficult contexts (Donini, 2011).

For all the global attention to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the introspection their involvement in them generated within the aid community, the next round of structural reforms was triggered by crises elsewhere, in Darfur and in countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. The coordination, capacity and leadership failures evident in the responses to those emergencies, coupled with the critical findings of a Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) commissioned by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator in 2005, triggered a series of reforms aimed at improving coordination, leadership and funding in crises. This included the Cluster Approach, which organised each sector of aid activity under a designated lead agency; a strengthened humanitarian coordinator system to improve the strategic

direction of the response; and an enhanced Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as well as country-level pooled funds to ensure more timely and predictable funding (Stoddard et al., 2007). While an evaluation of the Cluster Approach in 2007 found that it had improved efforts to address programming gaps, it cautioned that clusters had become overly process-driven and allied with persistent weaknesses in other problem areas the humanitarian reform process was intended to address. Another reform initiative, the Transformative Agenda, aimed to pick up where the previous reforms had left off. Initiated in 2011 following the Haiti earthquake the previous year, the Transformative Agenda introduced a new designation – the Level 3 Emergency – to denote major crises and mobilise a faster, system-wide response.² To date, the Level 3 designation has been applied to six crises, in Syria, the Philippines (the Typhoon Haiyan response), the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Iraq and Yemen. It appears to have improved the response by speeding up the deployment of humanitarian coordinators and emergency surge staff, triggering automatic CERF allocations and driving donor and media attention. In 2014, responses to Level 3 emergencies – with the exception of Syria – were consistently better funded than protracted crises with comparable funding needs. Overall, however, the Transformative Agenda itself ‘led to little or no change in areas such as the humanitarian country team’s collective leadership, accountability to affected populations, security and protection’ (Krueger et al., 2016).

Below: Palestine refugees at Khan Yunus camp south of Gaza, December 1948 © UN Photo



◆
The urge to respond to the suffering of others has a long history alongside the well-known Western one

Parallel narratives

Although the ‘humanitarian system’ as described above, and the formal institutions that comprise, define and delimit it, is heavily Westernised, charity and the urge to respond to the suffering of others have a long history alongside the well-known Western one. One of the best known perhaps is the charitable giving enshrined in the Islamic precepts of *zakat* and *wakf* (Schaeublin, 2014, in Davey and Svoboda (eds), 2014); other related concepts, such as *an-najda* and *al-is’af* (help, rescue), originate from ‘an Arab moral code that encouraged generosity towards the needy, particularly through providing water, food and shelter in a hostile natural environment’ (Moussa, 2014). Today, the accepted Arabic term in referring to humanitarianism is *insaniya*, which also covers ‘charitable giving, relief and emergency assistance, development work and human rights advocacy’ (Moussa, 2014: 25). The Jewish *heqdesb* (similar to the Islamic *waqf*) was designed to benefit both the religious institution itself and the poor (Cohen, 2005), and the Egyptian Geniza – a collection of hundreds of thousands of Jewish manuscript fragments – frequently mentions the religious obligation to help the needy (Cohen, 2005: 243). Cultures of care, maintenance and hospitality can also be found in pre-colonial societies in Africa (Labonte and Charles, forthcoming 2016).

Other traditions and cultures express very similar – and frequently very ancient – ideas. In China, the word ‘humanitarian’, *rendao*, makes its first explicit appearance in Confucius more than two millennia ago. Likewise, Japanese humanitarian thinking has been shaped by a ‘constellation of religious beliefs, cultural traditions and philosophical thought processes’, notably Shintoism, Confucianism and Zen Buddhism, alongside ‘a moral duty to other less fortunate members of one’s social group’ (Yeophantong, 2014: 9). A sense of community solidarity and duty also underpins understandings of humanitarianism in South-east Asia, though unlike China and Japan, where the primary responsibility to act historically lay with elites and states, assistance is ‘couched in more horizontal terms, based on personal relationships and religious beliefs’ (*ibid.*: 14). This shift in emphasis highlights the nuanced nature and various meanings different cultures attach to humanitarianism: the point of distinction is not simply between the Western and non-Western traditions, but within these non-Western cultures as well.

These differing cultural and religious traditions have informed state-led systems of organised relief. Rulers in pre-colonial India had a duty to provide for their subjects in times of scarcity, including distributing food and providing grants and public works, and the sharing of wealth with the poor seems to have been common practice, embedded within traditions of indigenous philanthropy drawn from Buddhism and Islam (Simonow, 2015). Ancient Chinese texts record the state’s responsibility as the preeminent humanitarian benefactor, alongside charitable activities by China’s Confucian-trained elite (Krebs, 2014). Imperial administrators introduced a range of measures to prevent and mitigate disasters, including flood controls and hydro-engineering projects, as well as food aid in the form of grain loans (Yeophantong, 2014). In Ottoman Palestine *zakat* was both a private obligation and a form of public provision governed by legislation (Schaeublin, 2014, in Davey and Svoboda (eds), 2014).

Alongside these indigenous traditions, the expansion of Western power and ideas into the non-Western world during the nineteenth century saw the emergence of civil society organisations aligned with the Western institution



of the Red Cross and the emerging body of international humanitarian law. National societies were founded in the Ottoman Empire, Japan and Egypt, among others. The Japanese National Society (founded in 1877) worked in conflicts including the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), and provided international relief assistance following the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. In China, the Shanghai International Red Cross Committee, formed by a group of political and business leaders to help Chinese civilians caught up in the Russo-Japanese War, became the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) following its admission to the ICRC in 1912 (Reeves, 2014). During the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), what became the Shanghai International Committee of the RCSC established hospitals and camps, and raised funds for the relief of refugees displaced by the war. The organisation also provided humanitarian assistance in the wake of natural disasters in China and abroad (Yeophantong, 2014). In the Arab world, Red Crescent societies were established to provide medical care for sick and wounded soldiers, before expanding their mandates to include charitable and development work in peacetime. As Moussa (2014: 13) explains: ‘The policies, practice and rhetoric of these organisations oscillated between the religious and the secular, universalism and nationalist loyalties, while their mandates were often influenced by broader political considerations and ties of nationalism’.

The appeal of the Western model of humanitarian assistance exemplified by the Red Cross tradition was in tension with the repudiation of Western ideas as ‘imperialist’. With the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, for example, ‘communist orthodoxy and a pervasive distrust of ideas deemed “Western” (and consequently labelled “bourgeois” and laden with imperialist intent) came to dominate mainstream modes of thinking’ (Yeophantong, 2014). The activities of the Chinese Red Cross Society were closely regulated, and the Chinese government refused offers of international assistance in the wake of major disasters including the Tangshan Earthquake in 1976. As Yeophantong (2014) explains: ‘Such scepticism towards humanitarian ideas subsided by the 1980s, in part due to the political transition that was underway in the country, with the country’s leadership shifting to the more progressive Deng Xiaoping’. Humanitarianism re-emerged in intellectual discourse as part of a wider re-evaluation of Marxism–Leninism in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, and Chinese understandings of humanitarianism ‘finally began to lose some of the historical burden of its Western capitalist connotations’ (Krebs, 2014: 15).

Similar anti-Western sentiment has influenced approaches to humanitarian action in the Middle East. For good historical reasons derived from the region’s bruising experience of colonial rule and subsequent Western interventions, its Islamic organisations may well not place the same value as their secular Western counterparts do, at least rhetorically, on principles of neutrality and impartiality, preferring instead to frame their assistance in terms of solidarity with fellow Muslims in places such as Palestine and Somalia (Moussa, 2014). Likewise, the legacy of colonialism in South-east Asia has contributed to the region’s strong aversion to external humanitarian intervention and the development of a humanitarian culture more concerned with natural disasters than political crises and conflict (Yeophantong, 2014).

The appeal of the Western model of humanitarian assistance exemplified by the Red Cross tradition was in tension with the repudiation of Western ideas as ‘imperialist’

Humanitarianism in the Middle East and North Africa: the case of Amir Abd al-Qadir

Remembered today as a leading opponent of the French conquest of Algeria and symbolic father of the nation, the life of Amir Abd al-Qadir bin Muhyi al-Din al-Jaza'iri (1808–1883) serves as a useful reminder that the humanitarian impulse both predates and can be fully independent of the organisations and frameworks that structure it today (Woerner-Powell, 2014). In the face of increasingly brutal French military tactics, including scorched earth campaigns, collective punishment and the killing of civilians, Abd al-Qadir sought to make his armed followers more humane in their practice of war, insisting on the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and taking great pains to treat his prisoners well; one German captive referred to his 'great tolerance and freedom from prejudice with regard to those with beliefs which differed from his own'. Drawing on Islamic legal tradition, he also

insisted that warfare was subject to legal limitations: 'Where the legal scholars and pious forebears disagreed... Abd al-Qadir noted that the merciful option was preferable "as there is no gainsaying benevolence"' (Woerner-Powell, 2011). Following the establishment of the French colonial state in Algeria Abd al-Qadir eventually settled in Damascus. There, he was instrumental in protecting thousands of Christians during sectarian riots in the city in July 1860, earning him widespread praise for the 'service he had rendered to the cause of humanity'. In each case, as Woerner-Powell (2014: 15) puts it: 'we see him comport himself in a manner closer to the ideals of humanitarianism than did his contemporaries. This is the case despite the fact that those contemporaries drank more deeply from the intellectual mainsprings of the modern humanitarian tradition as a formal phenomenon'.



.....
Above: Painting by Jean Baptiste Huysman of Amir
Abd al-Qadir protecting Christians during the Druze/
Christian strife of 1860.

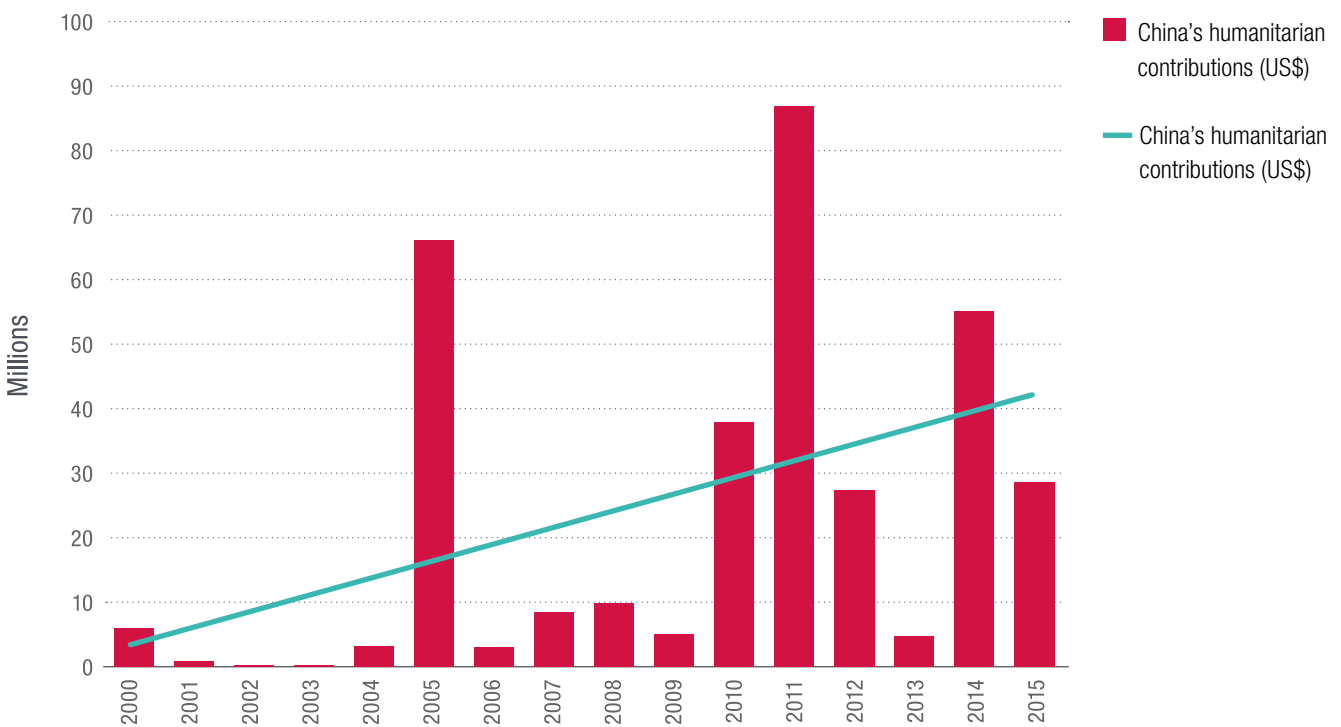
The 'Chinese Way'

Although domestic disaster relief in China dates back centuries, the country is a relatively new actor in the international humanitarian field. Even so, it has become progressively enmeshed within the international community, joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, gradually increasing its contributions to the World Food Programme (WFP) and contributing to humanitarian funding in response to specific disasters including the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 and the earthquake in Nepal in 2015 (see Figure 1). China remains outside the informal and formal governance structures shaping contemporary humanitarian action: it is not a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) or the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Donor Support Group (ODSG), it is not part of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative (Teitt, 2014) and its contributions to international humanitarian action, while growing, have not done justice to the country's economic and political power (GHA, 2013). It has, however, exerted influence in other ways. China's political and diplomatic leverage proved instrumental in securing the Sudanese government's consent to intervention during the Darfur conflict in 2003, and the country is the largest peacekeeping contributor among the five Permanent Members of the UN Security Council.

Despite growing convergence with international norms and practices, disagreements with Western donor countries often surface. China has been criticised for a state-centric and infrastructure-based approach to aid-giving, there is a perception that the country's foreign aid programme is closely linked to its pursuit of natural resources in Africa or Latin America, and its government-to-government provision of aid tends to bypass a wider range of civil society actors. These differences have been compounded by concerns around the country's growing economic power and military capabilities and intentions. China's involvement in new institutions such as the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank fuels suspicions that the country is seeking to challenge existing global arrangements.

Chinese engagement in international humanitarian action is likely to continue the 'Chinese way', which may mean that it acts more unpredictably and irregularly than other countries. China is showing increasing interest in being involved in global humanitarian action, and is seeking a more influential role in the new humanitarian landscape.³ Finding ways to accommodate China, rather than forcing existing norms upon it, will be instrumental in overcoming potential barriers when engaging with the country.

Figure 1: China's humanitarian contributions



Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service (2015) Trend Analysis – China, <https://fts.unocha.org>.

Right: Wood engraving entitled 'Giving out Corn to the People during a Season of Scarcity' © Robert Sears, Pictorial History of China and India: Comprising a Description of Those Countries and Their Inhabitants



Learning from history

Understanding the complex historical context within which humanitarian assistance has evolved enables us to see that the tensions and challenges the humanitarian enterprise faces today have been present from the start: they are not new phenomena, and approaching them as if they were makes our understanding of them incomplete, narrows the scope of analysis and limits the chances of progress. A sense of the history of the sector is also a useful corrective against the tendency to see the present moment as somehow a special or unique crossroads in time.

Greater historical understanding also allows for a more sophisticated and sympathetic engagement, both with the cultures and contexts within which humanitarian aid is delivered, and with traditions of humanitarianism outside the Western narrative. As Borton and Davey put it: 'Perceptions of the humanitarian landscape are changing rapidly as a wide range of national and local actors participate in the sector, each with their own past informing and shaping their particular perspective. Adopting a historical approach to this trend indicates the need for more nuanced understanding and for recognizing how this may influence the way actors, incorrectly labelled as "new", are approached' (Borton and Davey, 2015). If these other traditions are given the recognition they deserve, then large parts of the current way the West conducts its humanitarian business – the charity model, the near-monopoly of the UN agencies, the compulsion to create parallel structures, the reluctance to properly engage with and respect local authorities and cultures, the tendency to privilege international technical expertise over local knowledge and capacities, with 'exogenous "solutions" meeting endogenous "challenges" and "needs"' (Davey, 2014) – comes into question. Building a historical consciousness should, in other words, encourage the kind of humility Western humanitarian assistance is often accused of lacking.

◆
Understanding the complex historical context within which humanitarian assistance has evolved enables us to see that the tensions and challenges the humanitarian enterprise faces today have been present from the start

2





**Current
trends and
the case for
change**

Chapter 2

Current trends and the case for change

The humanitarian system is struggling to keep pace with the demands of increasingly complex crises. Reforms to structures and processes over the past decade have failed to match the scale of the humanitarian challenge.



The photos in this chapter capture the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, photographed by Guillaume Binet on assignment for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in 2015. In July, he documented the siege of Aden as the Saudi-led coalition fought to cut the supply lines of the Houthi forces controlling the city. In October, Binet travelled to the north, deep into the Houthi heartland, where he witnessed MSF's work in clinics and hospitals amidst widespread destruction and civilian suffering.



The last 75 years have seen a significant expansion in the number, type and size of humanitarian organisations and a proliferation of players laying claim to the humanitarian cause, including militaries, multinational corporations and private companies. Today, the ‘humanitarian sector’ is a crowded and competitive field, comprising 4,500 known relief organisations (and probably thousands more) (see Figure 2), with tens of thousands of international and national aid workers (hundreds of thousands, if ancillary staff – drivers, cleaners, food baggers – are counted) (Walker and Russ, 2010; ALNAP, 2015). This includes growing numbers of new and emerging donors and diaspora groups. As regional organisations and national governments take increasing ownership and effective control over disaster response, local organisations within these countries are, more than ever, critical elements of response.

In part thanks to this expansion, humanitarian assistance today is saving more lives, caring for more wounded and feeding more hungry people in more places than we could have conceived of even a generation ago. Mortality, disease and malnutrition in conflicts and disasters have decreased, while clean water, sanitation, education and shelter is available for tens of millions of people caught up in emergencies every year. In the last 50 years, calamitous famines have been eliminated, and large ones reduced almost to vanishing point (Howe and Devereux, 2004, quoted in De Waal, 2015 and see Figure 3).

Despite this progress, the humanitarian system is struggling to keep pace with the growing demands being placed on it. Humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent and more complex, lasting longer and affecting more people. The global humanitarian appeal for 2016 is more than \$20bn, targeting almost 90m people: four times what it was a decade ago, for more than twice as many people (OCHA, 2015a). Forced displacement due to conflict and natural disaster is increasing, reaching 60m by the end of 2014, a figure unmatched since the end of the Second World War

Figure 2: An expanding sector
Response organisations vs. OCHA appeals (2000–2015)



Figure 3: Famine
Global death toll from great famines (1870s–2010)

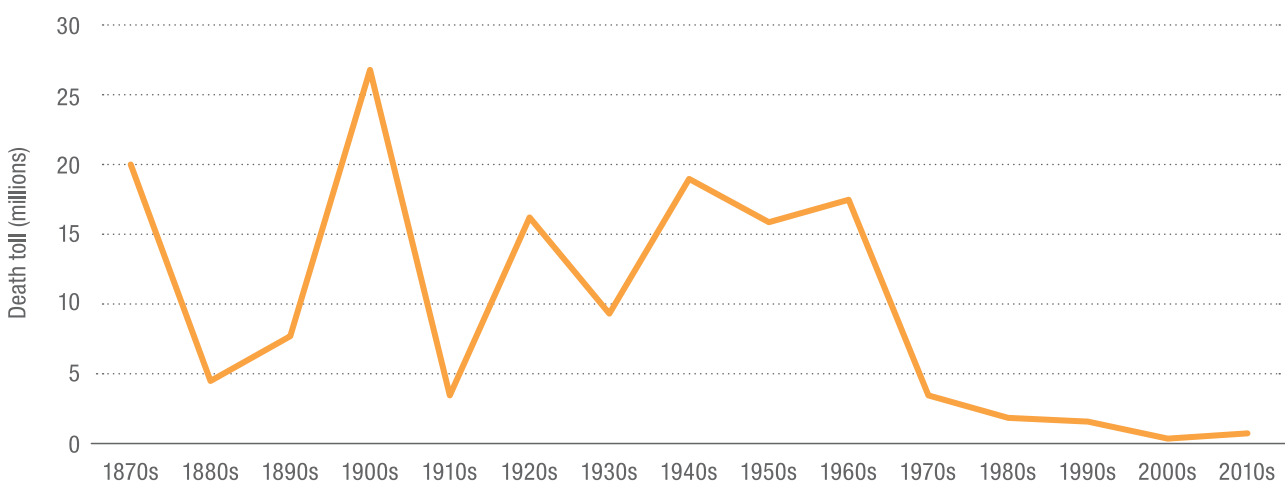


Figure 2 source: OCHA data, compiled on the basis of information provided by donors and recipient organisations. The number of response organisations may not be wholly representative due to under-reporting, but the dramatic increase in their numbers suggests that the upward trend is correct. Source: FTS: <https://fts.unocha.org>. Figure 3 source: De Waal, A. (2015) 'Armed Conflict and the Challenge of Hunger: Is an End in Sight?' in K. Grebmer et al. (2015) *Global Hunger Index*, International Food Policy Research Institute, <http://www.ifpri.org>.

(Crawford et al., 2015). In 2014, natural disasters in more than 100 countries affected over 140m people and caused \$110bn-worth of damage (OCHA, 2015b). Given the increasing persistence and complexity of political crises, population growth, rapid urbanisation, high levels of poverty and the uncertain impacts of climate change, the pressures facing a system already creaking under the strain of multiple emergencies are only likely to get worse. While some argue that the answer is simply more money – that the system is ‘broke, not broken’ (O’Brien, 2015) – assuming that business as usual will be enough is a dangerous proposition. Here, we sketch out some of the key external challenges facing humanitarian action, and make the case for more fundamental and far-reaching change.

The changing character of conflict

The conduct of war looks very different from 1945, when the humanitarian sector came of age, or indeed from the 1990s, when many of the components of the current, formal humanitarian system were developed. Warfare has mutated, from primarily ‘classic’ international armed conflicts at the beginning of the twentieth century to a complex array of internal or cross-border confrontations, many involving regional and world powers, by the century’s end. Today’s conflicts are as much driven by identity politics as by geopolitics, and are played out as much within communities as on the frontlines. Beyond armed conflict, the humanitarian consequences of other situations of violence will also increase in coming years. The phenomenon of drug-related violent crime in Latin America, which kills thousands of people each year, is just one dramatic example (see Figure 4).

Today’s conflicts are as much driven by identity politics as by geopolitics, and are played out as much within communities as on the frontlines

Below: The village of Al’Asha, north-west of Sana’a, October 2015 © Guillaume Binet/MSF



Figure 4: Conflict snapshot

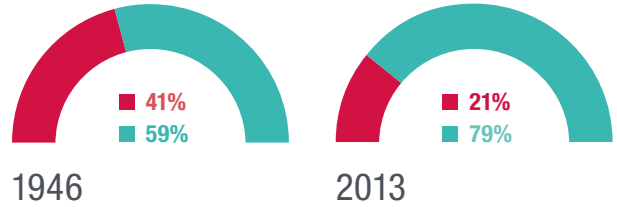
Conflict has become more protracted

Average length of conflict (years)



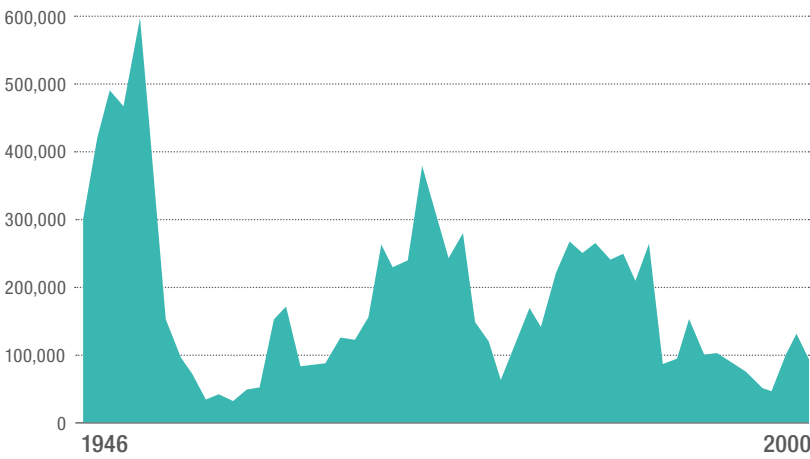
Conflicts are less intense

■ War ■ Minor conflict



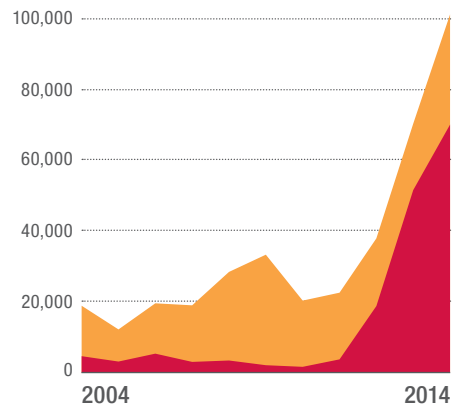
Conflict has become less deadly

Battle-related deaths



However, violence in the Middle East is reversing this trend

■ Total ■ Middle East



Interstate conflicts are now rare

Worldwide, 2013



In 2015, the top 10 recipient countries of humanitarian funding were affected by conflict

- 1 Syria
- 2 South Sudan
- 3 Yemen
- 4 Sudan
- 5 Iraq
- 6 DRC
- 7 Somalia
- 8 Occupied Palestinian Territories
- 9 CAR
- 10 Afghanistan

Organised crime and drug-related violence are major problems, particularly in Latin America

Despite only holding 8% of the world population, Latin America accounts for:



Sources: UCDP/PRIO (2015) 'Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015, 1946–2014', <http://www.pcr.uu.se>. 'Minor conflicts' are conflicts with 25 to 999 battle-related deaths in a given year, 'wars' are conflicts with more than 999 battle-related deaths. PRIO/UCDP (2009) 'The Battle Deaths Dataset version 3.0', <https://www.prio.org>. Denny, E. and B. F. Walter, 'Explaining High Murder Rates in Latin America: It's Not Drugs', *Political Violence @ a Glance*, 30 August 2012; Pierre Salama, 'Homicidios, ¿es ineluctable la violencia en América Latina?', *Frontera norte*, 25:49, 2013.0.

Figure 5: The new tools of war

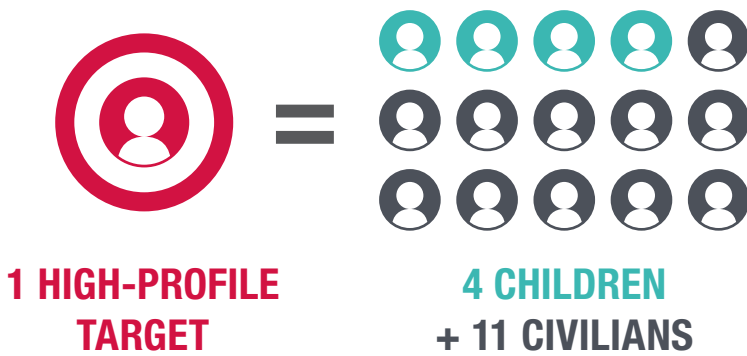
More and more drones are used during conflicts

In the last six years, drone strikes have increased 9-fold in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, compared to the previous 8 years



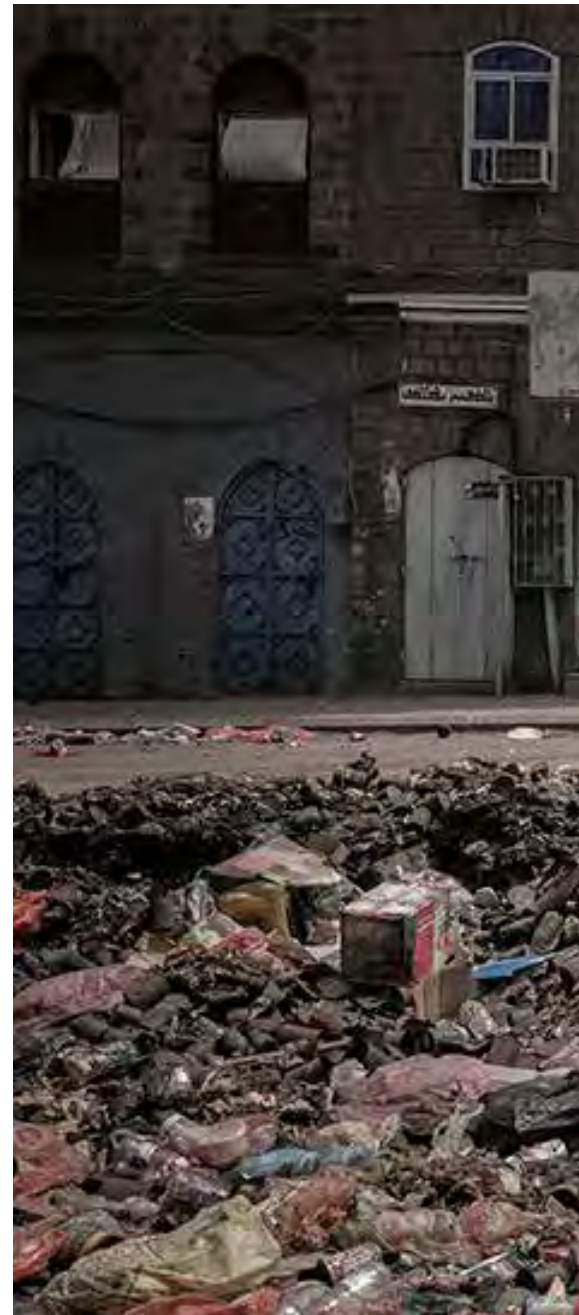
Civilians – even children – are the main casualties of drone strikes

In the last 10 years* in Pakistan, for every 1 high-profile target killed in a drone attack at least 4 children and 11 civilians are killed



* Data from 2004–2015.

Within this context, militant non-state armed actors such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Islamic State (see Figure 4) have become increasingly prominent. These groups control vast territories in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, and are bound together, not by citizenship, but through transnational grassroots networks of kin, tribe and religious ideology. Some, notably Islamic State, have global reach, power and authority derived from cause and ideology, as opposed to the sovereignty and assumed legitimacy of a nation state (Mohamedou, 2015). There have also been clear changes in the contours of the battlefield. For example, the increased use of remotely controlled weapons or weapons systems, including drones and automated weapons, may portend fully autonomous weapons systems in the future (see Figure 5). Cyber warfare, involving remote and large-scale attacks against airports, hospitals, transportation systems, dams or nuclear power plants, is now technically possible, pointing to a more remote and anonymous form of warfare and – potentially – a more disengaged approach to delivering assistance.



Above: Looking for water in Crater, Aden, July 2015 © Guillaume Binet/MSF

Figure 5 source: Serle, J. (2015) 'Monthly Updates on the Covert War. Almost 2,500 Now Killed by Covert US Drone Strikes since Obama Inauguration Six Years Ago: The Bureau's Report for January 2015', Bureau of Investigative Journalism, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com>; Pitch Interactive, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', <http://drones.pitchinteractive.com>. Data from 2004–2015.



Aid and Islamic State

The surge in violence between armed groups and government forces has resulted in an estimated 3.2m IDPs across Iraq and left nearly 8.6m in need of humanitarian assistance. Although the frontlines in Iraq are shifting on a near-daily basis and it is hard to know exactly where IS has control, the United Nations estimates that 3.6m people are living in areas in IS hands. Taking Syria and Iraq together, an estimated 10m are living under IS rule. Although IS' rhetoric and actions are clearly anti-Western, the group may not be automatically opposed to working with humanitarian actors – as long as certain terms are agreed, such as no international labelling of relief transport or goods,

no international staff involvement, and assistance is given in a way that serves the group's wider aims. IS is capitalising on its role as a conduit for aid distributions to project the image of a group that is not only engaged in an armed struggle, but also providing for people living under its control. IS shares videos depicting distributions of food and medical supplies. Food distributions appear to be organised, with registration points and queues for delivery; some bags are branded 'IS Department of Relief', though reports from the ground have been unable to find anyone who had received support from the 'Department' (Svoboda and Redvers, 2015).

Civilians caught up in conflict are being explicitly involved and targeted – troubling recent examples include the bombing of hospitals in Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, which have now killed hundreds of thousands of people (UCDP, 2015), may be single-handedly reversing the long and steady decline in civilian deaths since the Second World War. Although belligerents today – both states and armed non-state actors – are subject to a wide array of limitations and obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and other legal frameworks (see Figure 6), effective protection where it really matters – within communities on the ground in conflict – remains as elusive as ever. While it would be wrong to assume that there ever was a time when compliance with IHL and the protection of civilians was particularly good, let alone perfect, continued civilian suffering in conflicts in Syria, CAR, Libya, South Sudan and Yemen is a sobering reminder of the international community’s continued failure to translate legal obligations and norms around the conduct of war into tangible benefits for civilians (Svoboda and Gillard, 2015).

Especially since the 9/11 attacks, critics have argued that IHL, a legal framework drafted 70 years ago, is anachronistic and needs overhauling to reflect an era of warfare where conventional armies face loosely organised armed groups, often without distinguishing signs such as uniforms and a clear chain of command.⁴ However, even if framing a new set of conventions were remotely plausible politically, doing so would not address the underlying problem with the Geneva Conventions as they stand today: no matter how adequate a particular law might be in theory, it can never fulfil its purpose if it is routinely and deliberately flouted and ignored. The fact that states were unable to agree on a new mechanism for strengthening compliance with IHL during the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December 2015, after four years of negotiations, offers little prospect that this situation will change, at least in the foreseeable future.

In the absence of an effective legal regime, civilians are often the first line of response and defence when it comes to their own safety and livelihoods, challenging the common tendency to assume that ‘protection’ is the domain of international responders or peacekeepers. Community-based research by the Local to Global Protection (L2GP) initiative in Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, for instance, demonstrates how vulnerable people take the lead in activities to protect themselves and their communities. People are not passive in the face of IHL violations and threats to their safety: they make arrangements with belligerents, work on preventing violence against their communities, document violations, train communities in where to find refuge during attacks and teach armed groups the basics of IHL. Local understandings of protection may vary substantially from the concept commonly used by international humanitarian agencies: in L2GP’s research, ‘customary law and local values and traditions mattered at least as much as formal rights. Psychological and spiritual needs and threats were often considered as important as physical survival’ (South et al., 2012).

Continued civilian suffering in conflicts in Syria, CAR, Libya, South Sudan and Yemen is a sobering reminder of the international community’s continued failure to translate legal obligations and norms around the conduct of war into tangible benefits for civilians

Since 2010, deaths due to conflicts in the Middle East have increased by

4,200%

70%

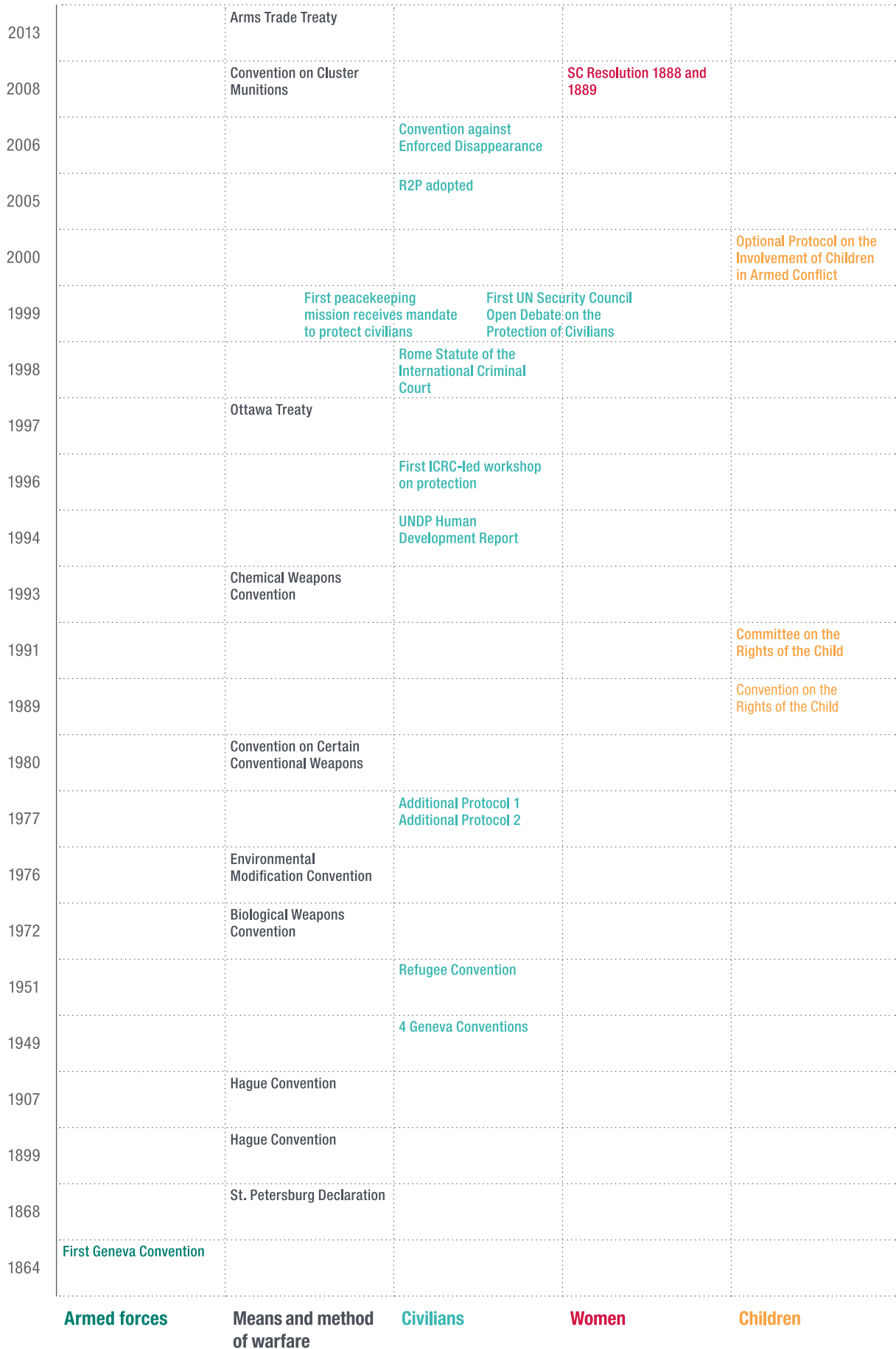
of battle-related deaths occurred in the Middle East in 2014

Since 2010, displacement in Syria, Iraq and Palestine has increased by

345%

Source: UCDP (2015) ‘UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2015, 1989–2014, <http://www.pcr.uu.se>; UNHCR, ‘Population Statistics – Time Series’, <http://popstats.unhcr.org>. Between 2010 and 2014, displacement in these three countries had increased from 3,608,561 to 16,054,851. These figures include asylum-seekers, IDPs, persons in IDP-like situations, others of concern, refugees (including refugee-like situations) and stateless persons.

Figure 6: IHL: legal framework and compliance mechanisms



Climate change and disasters

The frequency, severity and impact of natural disasters have all increased significantly since 1945, claiming an average of 300 deaths each day and causing an estimated \$1 trillion-worth of damage between 2001 and 2010 (EMDAT, 2001–2010). The number of people exposed to potential hazards has also increased, a trend exacerbated by the high concentration of population growth in areas most at risk, for instance coastal zones exposed to floods, cyclones and tidal waves. Rapid and unplanned urbanisation may magnify disasters’ destructive effects: cities, especially in low- and middle-income countries, are predominantly located along coasts and rivers to facilitate trade, but this also increases their exposure to hydrometeorological shocks and stresses; poor migrants moving to cities in search of work find themselves living on cheaper but more hazardous land (according to UNHABITAT, a third of all urban citizens make their homes in informal settlements with poor services, weak regulation and non-existent planning); urban sprawl degrades natural protective systems; and dense settlement patterns in urban areas mean that small disturbances can ‘snowball into major disasters and unforeseen, concatenate events’ (Bahadur and Tanner, 2014, cited in Mosel et al., 2016). Climate change may well increase the frequency and severity of certain types of disasters, and climatic changes are likely to have a significant impact on people’s vulnerability and ability to cope: ‘The risk environment is changing and the speed and scale of these changes may be greater than in the recent past. There is also a large degree of uncertainty about future climate change risks and their impacts: climate change may generate new threats which regions and populations have no experience of’ (Twigg, 2015: 13).

Climate change may well increase the frequency and severity of certain types of disasters, and climatic changes are likely to have a significant impact on people’s vulnerability and ability to cope

Figure 7: The incidence and severity of disasters 2001–2010

Disasters caused nearly a trillion dollars’ worth of damage

 **1,000,000,000,000**

A staggering number of people lost their homes and 1.1 million lives were lost over the course of the decade



28 MILLION

lost their homes, equivalent to the population of Australia



300 LIVES

on average were claimed each day by disasters

Source: EM-DAT (2015) ‘The International Disaster Database’, <http://www.emdat.be>; World Bank (2015) ‘Population, Total’, <http://data.worldbank.org>.

Aid, poverty and protracted crisis

In 2013, 78% of humanitarian funding went to countries with high levels of poverty, low government spending and limited domestic capacity. It is expected that, by 2030, two-thirds of the world's poor will be living in fragile and conflict-affected states, where the record of and prospects for poverty reduction are weakest (Chandy et al., 2013, cited in Bennett, 2015). In addition to massive human suffering, these crises are undermining sustainable development: the World Bank estimates regional losses from the conflict in Syria at close to \$35bn (Ianchovichina, 2014, cited in Carpenter and Bennett, 2015).

These trends have contributed to so-called 'protracted crises',⁵ where extreme, widespread and unpredictable needs exist alongside long-term structural vulnerabilities, and 'emergency' needs persist over multiple years. In 2014, more than 90% of countries with annual humanitarian appeals had had such appeals for three or more years, and 60% for more than eight years, including long-running relief programmes in Somalia, Sudan, the DRC (see Figure 8), Ethiopia and northern Kenya (Swithern, 2014). According to the United Nations, protracted crises affect an estimated 366m people worldwide (FAO, 2015). Protractedness is also a prominent feature of forced displacement: fewer than one in 40 refugee crises are resolved within three years, most last for decades and most people in displacement can expect to be there for years (Crawford et al., 2015).⁶

In the absence of adequate government support, and where there are major barriers to increasing development funding and activities in protracted crises, humanitarian activities – and aspirations – have, by default, expanded into recovery and basic service provision, including long-term health, nutrition and education, food assistance, livelihoods support and social protection measures. Beyond the strain this puts on humanitarian funding, there is a mismatch between humanitarian mandates and coordination structures and the long-term strategies needed to respond to protracted crises. This increasing involvement in a wider remit risks diluting the resources available to humanitarian action, while simultaneously failing to sufficiently address the challenges posed by long-term development issues.



Annual international humanitarian response from governments in 2014:

\$18.68 billion

Global military expenditure in 2014:

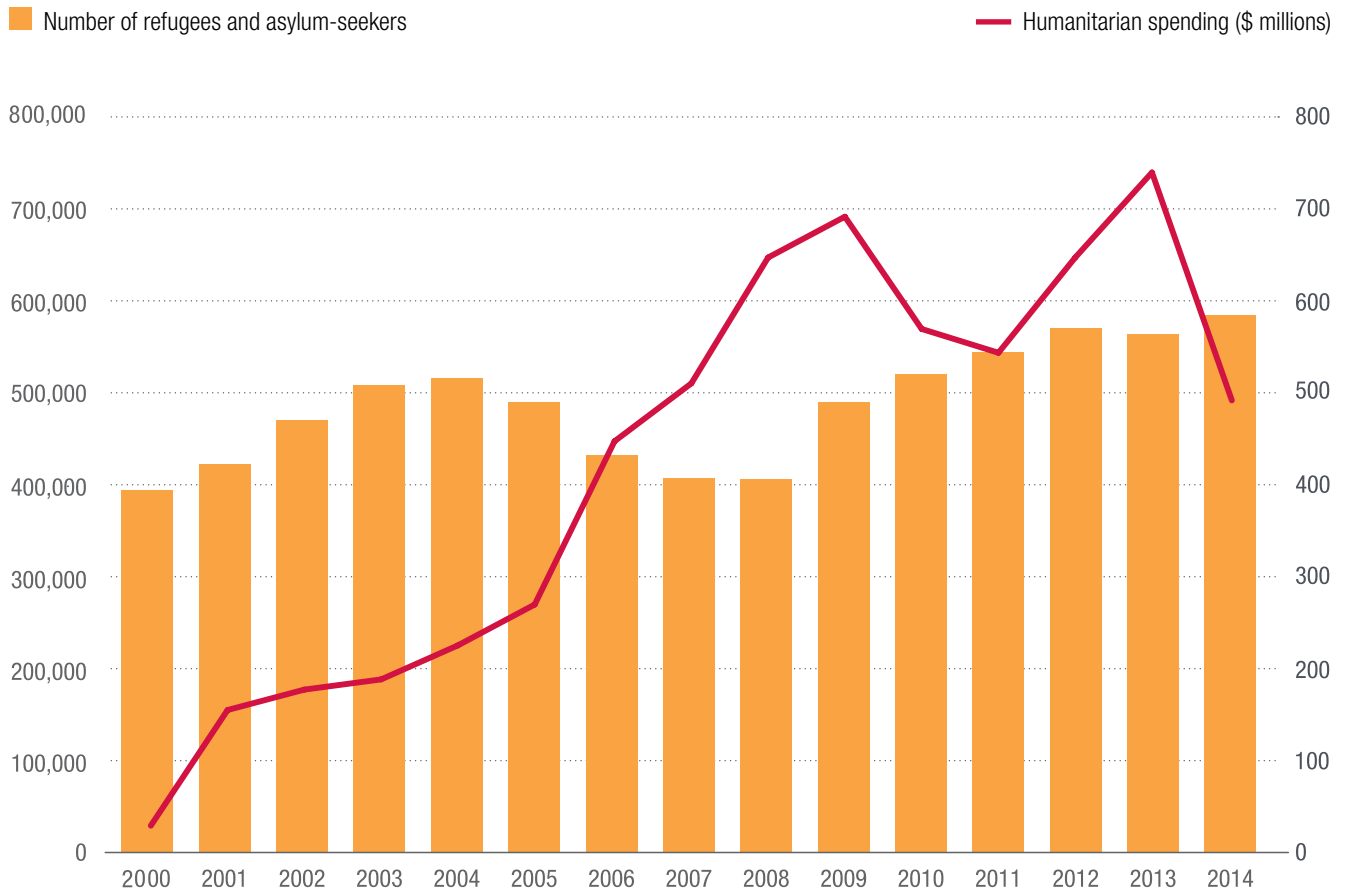
\$1,711 billion

Source: GHA (2015c) International Humanitarian Response, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org>. SIPRI (2015) SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <http://www.sipri.org>

In 2014, more than 90% of countries with annual humanitarian appeals had had such appeals for three or more years, and 60% for more than eight years

Left: Displaced people in Khamir, north of Sana'a, October 2015 © Guillaume Binet/MSF

Figure 8: 15 years of needs and aid in the DRC
Humanitarian need vs. aid in the Democratic Republic of Congo



Sources: FTS (2016) 'Congo, Democratic Republic of the: Funding Received 2016', <https://fts.unocha.org>; UNHCR (2016) 'Displacement Database', <http://popstats.unhcr.org>.

New actors and changing patterns of power

As the distribution of global power shifts towards a more multipolar world, states such as China and Turkey, regional organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and diaspora networks are becoming more visible players on the global stage, often driven by different concerns and travelling in new and perhaps uncomfortable directions (Davey, 2014). Non-Western donors, particularly middle-income countries but also co-religionists and diasporas, are becoming more prominent. In 2014 Turkey became the world's fourth largest humanitarian donor;⁷ \$57bn in *zakat* is estimated to have been used

for humanitarian assistance in Indonesia following the Indian Ocean tsunami, and remittances from the Somali diaspora play a vital role in supporting people affected by drought and armed conflict: the \$1.3bn of remittances transferred to Somalia annually far exceeds international aid (GHA, 2015a; Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). To put these figures in perspective, the UN's most recent global annual appeal was around \$22bn. While data on the scale of funding being channelled outside of the UN's financial tracking mechanism is sorely lacking (and should be improved), it is likely that, in monetary terms at least, the 'formal' system accounts for only a small slice of a very much larger pie.

Remittances in crises

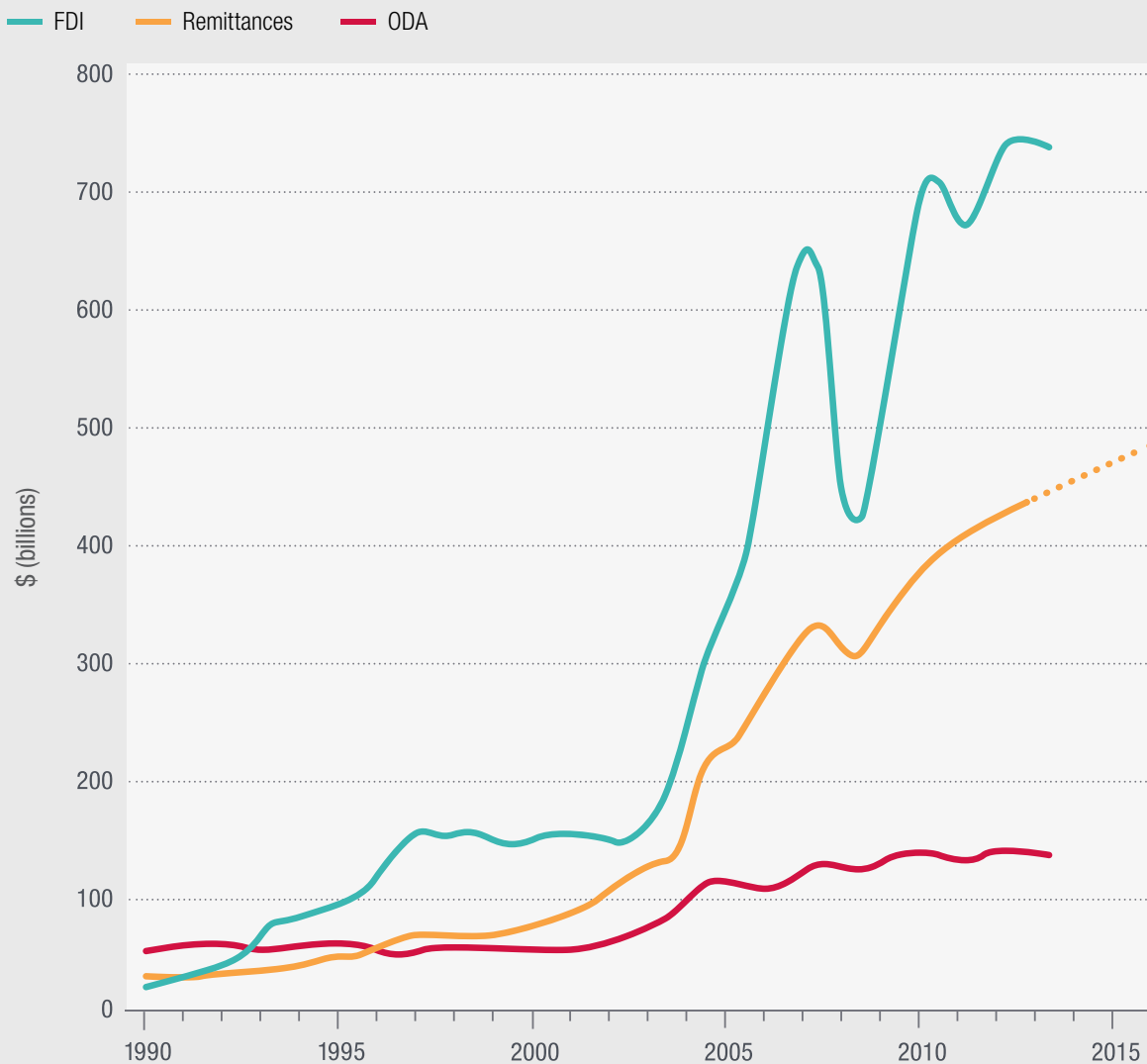
Remittances constitute a significant and growing source of funds for developing countries: in 2014, an estimated \$436bn in remittances was transferred to developing countries (World Bank, 2015a). Remittances for the top 20 humanitarian assistance-receiving countries have tripled since 2000, totalling \$66.7bn in 2013 and making remittances the largest form of international financial inflow to these countries (GHA, 2015a: 107). According to the World Bank (2015a), remittances are more stable than private debt and portfolio equity flows, and less volatile than official aid.

While there is widespread recognition that remittances account for a growing proportion of international aid transfers, they can be hard to monitor, not least because the significant transfers made through remittance mechanisms outside formal financial

institutions, including trust-based money transfer systems such as *hawala*, are not reflected in official statistics (UNRIC, 2014). Remittances also tend to be concentrated in large, middle-income countries with large diasporas: the top four recipient countries of remittances in 2014 were India, China, the Philippines and Mexico, none of which is of high humanitarian concern outside of periodic natural disasters. The potential impact of remittances in the context of humanitarian aid is also limited by regulations against money laundering and terrorist financing (World Bank, 2015a). Although new technologies are beginning to reduce the costs associated with remittances, transaction fees remain high. Fees for remittances to Africa – which at 12% to send \$200 are nearly twice as high as the global average – are a particular barrier (Watkins and Quattri, 2014).

Figure 9: Remittances, ODA and private capital

Remittance flows are larger than development aid, and more reliable than foreign investment



Source: World Bank Group (2015) 'Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook. Special Topic: Financing for Development', Migration and Development Brief, April, www.worldbank.org.



Non-Western states also increasingly want to be seen to deal with their own political and humanitarian crises – partly in line with their own responsibilities, and partly because they are sceptical about the effectiveness and intentions of the international humanitarian community (ALNAP, 2010). This trend is only likely to grow as more middle-income countries bolster their domestic preparedness and response capacities (IFRC, 2013). Affected governments (and armed non-state groups such as the Taliban and Al-Shabaab (Jackson, 2014)) are increasingly setting the terms under which aid is delivered, with host states actively blocking, restricting or controlling humanitarian response on their territory. Examples include India’s rejection of international assistance following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Mozambique’s successful handling of floods in 2007 – notable in itself, but especially so given that international agencies had led the response to a previous flood disaster just six years earlier (Twig, 2015: 303) – and the government-led response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. This more muscular and assertive approach to domestic response suggests that the traditional interventionist role of Northern agencies is no longer routinely accepted, and in some cases – Sudan is a notable example – they are being placed under significant political and security scrutiny (McGoldrick, 2011).

Many of these same states, including the Arab Gulf countries, have developed humanitarian strategies for responding to crises within their regions and beyond. Turkey’s extensive involvement in Somalia is indicative of a state moving beyond a role as donor and involving public institutions directly in delivering assistance and supporting early recovery (Ali, 2011). More recently, Saudi Arabia’s establishment of the King Salman Center for Relief

Young fighter at a checkpoint in Aden, July 2015
© Guillaume Binet/MSF

and Humanitarian Works signals a key power's desire, not only to finance aid and manage relief programmes, but also to engage in a more hands-on way in responding to humanitarian emergencies like those in Yemen and Syria (IINA, 2015). Similar patterns are emerging within regional organisations: the role played by ASEAN in enabling aid agencies' access to Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Labbé, Fan and Kemp, 2013; Fan and Krebs, 2014) has been well-documented, but it is far from the only instance. The African Union (AU) has made strides, particularly in policy-making, displacement and disaster risk reduction (DRR), and has developed a humanitarian policy framework of its own (Zyck, 2013).

The increasing role of business

The private sector is increasingly recognised as a major player in humanitarian crises, particularly disasters, providing funds, aid materials and technical and professional expertise. Formerly viewed as primarily a source of aid financing and particular in-kind materials (e.g. pharmaceuticals), businesses have increasingly engaged in building humanitarian capacity (e.g. for logistics), developing new approaches and supporting innovations in programming. Examples include Google's Person Finder, a new tool for disaster survivors to check on the wellbeing of friends and relatives, the IKEA Foundation's partnership with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to develop new shelter options, micro-insurance schemes and the involvement of dozens of banks and mobile phone companies in humanitarian cash transfer programmes (see Zyck and Kent, 2014; Zyck and Armstrong, 2014; Bailey, 2014; Burke and Fan, 2014). Private sector involvement is most likely in disaster- and epidemic-affected (rather than conflict-affected) countries, though local and national businesses have engaged in conflict-related crises such as Yemen (El Taraboulsi, 2016; Zyck and Kent, 2014). Many private firms have focused their attention on the immediate aftermath of high-profile disasters in the hope of maximising the public relations impact of their assistance, rather than addressing protracted crises or the post-relief (i.e. recovery and reconstruction) phases (Brown, 2015). They are also likely to remain focused on middle-income countries such as Kenya and the Philippines.

Private sector contributions can be substantial: in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, for instance, the private sector contributed funds, services and in-kind materials worth an estimated \$800m (Brown, 2015). To put that into context, total humanitarian funding was \$865m.⁸ While such figures are not directly comparable, the fact that private and public contributions were of similar orders of magnitude points to the potential of the private sector in emergency response. The Kenyans for Kenya initiative, involving a bank, a mobile network operator and the Kenya Red Cross Society, raised \$7.5m, mainly from businesses, to support the response to the 2011–12 drought and famine (Drummond and Crawford, 2014). Such models are gaining traction, with chambers of commerce, industry associations, regional organisations, UN agencies and others striving to bring businesses together to tackle humanitarian challenges, rather than employing one-to-one partnerships between a single aid agency and major multilateral firm.

These trends are significant well beyond the few areas where they have been introduced. Large, networked collaborations have implementation capacity and strong relations with national and subnational public institutions. Government leaders are likely to increasingly view businesses and business

networks as preferred partners – responsible for direct implementation – rather than primarily as enablers for external aid agencies (Brown, 2015). Such an outcome, while a source of anxiety for some in the humanitarian community, can point to a new division of labour – one in which aid agencies fill gaps where local actors, whether public institutions, local NGOs, civil society groups or businesses, lack the ability to respond.

Below: Wounded soldiers being brought to the hospital in Aden, July 2015 © Guillaume Binet/MSF



New technologies and aid modalities

The emergence of new technologies offers an opportunity for real change, both in the techniques of assistance and in the relationship between aid giver and recipient, recasting aid beneficiaries, not as helpless victims, but as active agents in their own survival and the primary source of help in their communities. The pace of change has been extremely rapid: the international humanitarian response to the Indian Ocean tsunami was widely criticised for its failure to communicate adequately with affected people and national and local actors; six years later, the Haiti earthquake response marked ‘the first large-scale application of new technologies to enable dialogue between relief agencies and crisis-affected people, including crowd-sourcing and projects combining mobile phone, digital and radio technologies’ (Chapelier and Shah, 2013).

The digital divide is shrinking. Mobile phone subscriptions have increased by

800%

in the top 20 recipient countries of international humanitarian aid.

Sources: ITU (2015) ‘ICT Facts and Figures – The world in 2015: end-2015 estimates for key ICT indicators’. List of top 20 recipients as highlighted by Development Initiatives (2015) Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015.

Crowd sourcing and social media are making possible more direct feedback and ‘ground-truthing’ on the appropriateness and effectiveness of humanitarian projects and facilitating support between diaspora groups and their communities back home. The dramatic increase over the last decade in the use of mobile phones and the internet, particularly in crisis-affected countries, now means that news gets out of places where international organisations have no or only limited physical presence, and communications technology and social media have significantly amplified the voice of affected communities. New mobile technologies are enabling ‘auto assessment’ by crisis-affected people, potentially making them much more active agents in identifying needs and formulating responses.

Changes in technology, combined with growing access to financial services, urbanisation and the spread of government social safety nets, are also creating opportunities for humanitarian support to reach people in new ways. During the 2011 famine in Somalia, for example, aid agencies used remittance companies to provide cash transfers to more than 1.5m people. In Lebanon more than a million refugees use smart card vouchers to buy goods at local shops, and in the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines half a million people received cash through the government’s social protection programme (High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, 2015). Given that

cash currently accounts for only an estimated 6% of humanitarian aid, there is significant scope for expanding its use, with potentially transformative implications for the delivery of assistance. The pace of change means that direct assistance through cash will one day almost certainly become the default choice for meeting both urgent and longer-term food and other household needs. Cash used in local markets often provides goods and services to crisis-affected people more cheaply and more conveniently, while the mass distribution of aid items – from food to agricultural tools – can undermine markets and retard recovery.

Because cash programming requires greater attention to understanding the broader economy in which needs are created and met, its increasing use has prompted humanitarian agencies to look much more widely and deeply at places experiencing crisis. In order to decide whether to deliver cash or in-kind aid, and what and how much to give people, humanitarian agencies have also realised that they need to understand markets – to know how far the necessary goods and services can be made available through the market, to know the comparative cost-efficiency of meeting needs in-kind or through cash and to understand the wider impacts that interventions may have on prices and on markets in general. This has led to the development and use of tools and communities of practice specifically geared to helping humanitarians understand and monitor markets.

The High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers

Convened by DFID in 2015, the High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, made up of global thinkers from the humanitarian, development, financial, business, academic and technological sectors, examined the transformative potential of cash transfers for humanitarian response and the humanitarian system. Its 12 recommendations include calls for more unconditional cash transfers, better contingency planning and preparedness, better tracking of the volume of aid given as cash, improved coordination within the existing system and more robust data security, privacy systems and compliance with financial regulations (High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers, 2015). The Panel concluded that more extensive use of cash would:

‘Align the humanitarian system better with what people need, rather than what humanitarian organisations are mandated and equipped to provide; increase the transparency of humanitarian aid, including by showing how much aid actually reaches the target population; increase accountability of humanitarian aid, both to affected populations and to the tax-paying public in donor countries; reduce the costs of delivering humanitarian aid and so make limited budgets go further; support local markets, jobs and incomes of local producers; increase support for humanitarian aid from local populations; increase the speed and flexibility of humanitarian response; increase financial inclusion by linking people with payment systems; and most importantly, provide affected populations with choice and more control over their own lives’.



The case for change

Taken together, developments in humanitarian response over the past five decades or so have been substantial, and humanitarian actors should be rightly proud of their enormous capacity to reflect, rethink and innovate. Indeed, adaptation and change have long been part of the humanitarian character and culture: Philippe Ryfman argues that every decade since the Second World War has produced a shift in humanitarian action (Ryfman, 2008, in Davey, 2012). According to Clarke and Ramalingam (2008: 69), ‘the speed and scale of changes in the external world force humanitarian organisations to make continuous changes in order to remain effective in fulfilling their mandate’.

If anything, it sometimes feels as though the system is changing *too* quickly, embracing new techniques, tools and approaches at the expense of tackling more tenacious and persistent problems, leaving the foundational architecture and ethos of the formal humanitarian system largely unchanged. A decade of piecemeal reforms between 2005 and 2015 have essentially tinkered with the current system, rather than challenging the underlying structures and assumptions on which it operates. The system’s answer to the coordination,

◆ If anything, it sometimes feels as though the system is changing *too* quickly, embracing new techniques, tools and approaches at the expense of tackling more tenacious and persistent problems, leaving the foundational architecture and ethos of the formal humanitarian system largely unchanged



Each emergency highlights the same problems and flaws, while improvements to system-wide performance remain flat and uneven

Left: The Khormaksar district in Aden, Yemen, July 2015
© Guillaume Binet/MSF

humanitarian psyche. However, conducting lessons learned exercises has to an extent come to be an end in itself, while ‘the need for a probing analysis of why lessons identified so often fail to become lessons learned has somehow been ignored’ (DuBois et al., 2015: 2). In effect, each emergency highlights the same problems and flaws, while improvements to system-wide performance remain flat and uneven (Terry, 2002; Barnett and Ramalingam, 2010). The recent Ebola crisis in West Africa, where lessons from past crises and established humanitarian good practice did little to prevent response failures that may have contributed to the spread of the disease, is just the latest example (DuBois et al., 2015).


Taken together, the changes in the humanitarian landscape outlined here call the established procedures and architecture of the formal humanitarian sector into question. The need to find consensus and build bridges – both within the international aid system and outside it – has been reiterated during the consultations accompanying the World Humanitarian Summit. However, considering the growing number and contribution of a diverse set of actors, the acknowledged importance of local and regional approaches to crises and the need for more integrated solutions to protracted crises, the question arises to what extent consensus is either achievable or desirable (Simonow, 2013). As conflicting ideas start to enter the discourse, agreement on contested issues and full integration into a centralised system is less and less likely. This demands genuine and continuous dialogue to try to strengthen understanding of commonalities and divergences in approaches, including in relation to the principles that inform the humanitarian engagement of traditional and rising global actors. Greater awareness of these differences could become a useful pathway to greater cooperation and coordination. To foster understanding, the mutual perceptions of traditional and rising global actors need to be revised (Simonow, 2013). Traditional humanitarian actors have to be open to divergent ideas, conceptualisations and approaches, and at the same time examine more critically their own understandings of, and track record in, humanitarian action.

capacity and leadership failures in Darfur and the Indian Ocean tsunami response was to try to improve what was already there by building on the structures established by the UN under General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The subsequent Transformative Agenda, initiated in 2011, represents yet another attempt to address persistent problems related to timeliness, leadership, coordination and accountability by tacking additional protocols and tools onto the 46/182 architecture. The result has been a rearranging of the deck chairs, rather than the construction of a more seaworthy ship better equipped to navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Across its history, the humanitarian community has come to recognise the value of learning from its mistakes.⁹ The sector conducts numerous lessons learned exercises, including research studies, evaluations and after-action reviews, and countless documents reside on ReliefWeb and in the grey literature of humanitarian organisations. Self-reflection and self-criticism are ingrained in the

3





Squaring the circle

Chapter 3

Squaring the circle: balancing exceptionalism and inclusivity

The humanitarian principles sit uneasily with the reality of crisis situations, are often inconsistently applied by those who espouse them and are increasingly rejected by those outside the traditional system.



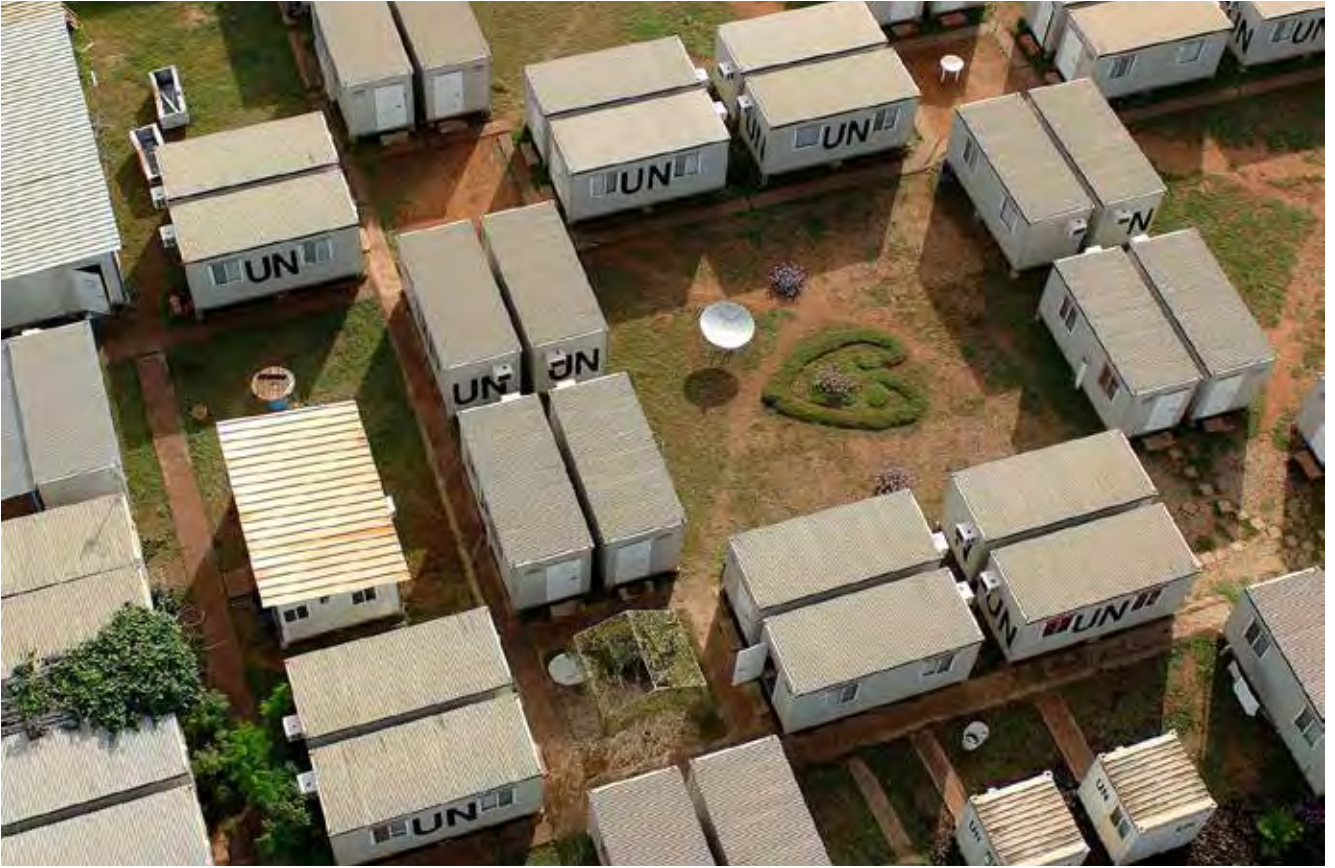
The photos in this chapter, taken between 2006 and 2010 by Tim McKulka, capture life in Southern Sudan (now South Sudan). During the turbulent years before independence, the country saw extensive – and at times competing – political, development, security and humanitarian agendas.



The crisis of legitimacy we believe confronts the humanitarian system stems, in part, from changes in the nature of humanitarian emergencies, and the actors that respond to them. But it is also a function of changes in the ‘authorising environment’ (Moore, 1995) of humanitarian assistance, where the norms and values of the traditional system no longer represent the interests of a larger and more diverse set of stakeholders. At issue are the humanitarian principles, which define humanitarian action and distinguish it from development activities and other types of assistance. Some would say there are good reasons for this: maintaining humanitarian action as separate and distinct helps to preserve the speed of the response and ensure that humanitarian priorities are not sidelined. Others argue that, by relentlessly guarding their principles, humanitarians perpetuate artificial divisions that prevent them from recognising their own limitations and looking for capacity, understanding and expertise outside of the sector (Levine and Sharp, 2015). For others the principles may represent an ethos they question or reject, and may not speak to the type of ‘humanitarianism’ they wish to espouse. The failure to resolve these tensions – to square the circle between exceptionalism and inclusivity – is a major impediment to the sector’s wider effectiveness.

Humanitarianism: one term, many meanings

The terminology and concepts of humanitarianism have always had a number of meanings, requiring a range of terms applied to a spectrum of different agendas. This is true of cultures of caring right across the world (Davies, 2012; Yeophantong, 2014; Moussa, 2014). As discussed earlier, the



◆
At issue are the humanitarian principles, which define humanitarian action and distinguish it from development activities and other types of assistance

practical expressions of these cultures of caring – providing food or shelter, treating the sick and the injured, working to minimise harm – exist globally.

The broadest usage of ‘humanitarian’ refers to activities motivated by the desire to help others, and emphasises altruistic motives rather than the specifics of their manifestation. The Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues defined humanitarianism as ‘a basic orientation towards the interests and welfare of people’. This ‘broad church’ humanitarianism is among the oldest continuing usages of the word, and the one that is most likely to resonate with the general public (ICHI, 1988: 12).

A second, more circumscribed usage differentiates humanitarian action from development work, with the former corresponding to emergency assistance and the latter to programmes aiming at longer-term change. The working definition of ‘humanitarian aid’ used by the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), for instance, is ‘an intervention to help people who are victims of a natural disaster or conflict meet their basic needs and rights’. The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative proposes a slightly broader definition, in which ‘the objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations’.

Finally, an even narrower usage of the term describes only action in keeping with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. In this view, assistance that is not aligned with humanitarian principles may well play an important role, but cannot be called ‘humanitarian’; it is simply ‘relief’. It was only in the 1990s that relief work came to be articulated as

.....
Above: UNMIS residential compound at the mission headquarters, Juba, Central Equatoria State, Southern Sudan, August 2008 © Tim McKulka



◆ **This sense of humanitarian exceptionalism has been challenged by the push for greater levels of coherence and complementarity between relief/humanitarian and other types of aid interventions to meet development, security and peace objectives**

.....
 Above: A wounded man receives treatment at Malakal Teaching Hospital, Malakal, Upper Nile State, Southern Sudan, December 2006. Overleaf: A young cattle herder watches as UN Military Observers try to free their vehicles from the mud, Chukudum, Eastern Equatoria State, Southern Sudan, April 2007
 © Tim McKulka

requiring a principled ‘humanitarian’ framework by a much larger number of organisations than had previously been the case. This is not to suggest that concepts like humanity and impartiality were the preserve of a minority until this time, but rather that they were often described and conceived differently. Recognising this historical process helps to place in perspective some of the current concerns around the relevance of humanitarian principles.

Humanitarian exceptionalism

At the core of the tension between a more restrictive and a more expansive understanding of humanitarian action is the concept of ‘humanitarian exceptionalism’, derived from a historical and operational separation that sets humanitarian action apart from other forms of aid. It is defined by a unique normative framework in the form of IHL, and guided by a set of principles designed to preserve the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian action, thereby in theory ensuring the operating space required for the safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance. Endorsed by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 1965, the seven ‘fundamental principles’ represented the culmination of decades of practice. While three of the seven (unity, universality and voluntarism) are particular to the structure of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the other four (humanity, impartiality, independence and (in part) neutrality) have also been affirmed by the UN and by states. States decisively adopted these principles as the operational basis for humanitarian action in General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991, and they have been reinforced by the UN General Assembly every year since. In 1994, the wider humanitarian system adopted them as part of the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*.¹⁰

As both an ethical and a pragmatic framework to facilitate engagement in conflict zones, the principles are intended to distinguish humanitarian action from political and security objectives (Egeland et al., 2011).

Humanitarian exceptionalism also reflects a belief that humanitarian work is *sui generis*: distinct from other forms of aid, and something that only humanitarians can do and understand. The humanitarian imperative requires urgent response and direct action to deliver immediate, life-saving assistance based on need and independent of a state's objectives or strictures. Development cooperation, by contrast, seeks longer-term solutions to poverty and societal transformation, and works largely through governments and state institutions.

This sense of humanitarian exceptionalism has been challenged by the push for greater levels of coherence and complementarity between relief/humanitarian and other types of aid interventions to meet development, security and peace objectives (Collinson and Elhawary, 2012). The search for coherence has divided the humanitarian community. On the one hand, there are those who feel that efforts by donors to link political, security, state-

building, development and humanitarian objectives and activities threaten humanitarian principles and ways of working by subsuming humanitarian action under political and security objectives. Proponents of this position argue that maintaining humanitarian action as separate and distinct helps to ensure that humanitarian priorities are not downplayed or forgotten. On the other, the vast majority of humanitarian organisations accept a wider interpretation of their life-saving remit that includes addressing the causes of crises (chronic poverty, increased vulnerability, loss of livelihoods) as well as their effects (war, disease, hunger, displacement). Many NGOs, particularly local ones, adopt a more 'solidarist' approach, which combines material support with alignment with movements dedicated to removing the structural causes of suffering and poverty, and active engagement in improving rights (Gordon and Donini, 2016). Only in very specific cases (the tsunami in Japan or Typhoon Haiyan, for example) does emergency response not include addressing chronic problems (Levine and Sharp, 2015). In this view, exceptionalism and an uncompromising position on principles prevent humanitarians from looking for capacity, understanding and expertise outside of the sector (Levine and Sharp, 2015).





Principles in practice

Despite different interpretations within the traditional humanitarian sector of what counts as humanitarian action, and how it is to be distinguished from development activities and other types of intervention, humanitarian principles are still used as a sort of ‘Maginot Line’ (Barnett, 2005) that defines humanitarian action and aims to protect it from politics. In practice, however, the principles often sit uneasily with the reality of crisis situations and require trade-offs in their use. They also sit uneasily with the reality that most organisations engaged in humanitarian assistance, the so-called multi-mandate organisations, combine their humanitarian work with development and human rights or conflict-resolution work, and as such are also concerned with political and societal change, even if most of these organisations still feel compelled to define their work in crisis-affected areas with reference to the principles (Hilhorst and Pereboom, 2016). Even the ICRC, the midwife of the principles and the custodian of the Geneva Conventions, recognises that strict adherence to all of the principles is neither feasible nor desirable in all conflict settings (Labbé, 2015). Likewise, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), a fierce proponent of the operational utility of the principles and a zealous defender of the independence of human action, concedes that, in many access negotiations, principles may have to be sacrificed to the broader objectives and effectiveness of the aid operation (Magone et al., 2011, cited in Dijkzeul and Hilhost, 2016).

Within the formal humanitarian system, organisations regularly champion the merits of humanitarian principles, believing that aid that is impartial, neutral and independent is more likely to be acceptable to armed groups or belligerents. However, this stated commitment to humanitarian principles has rarely been matched by adequate attention to how humanitarian agencies should apply them in their work. Within the traditional humanitarian sector, impartiality and humanity represent the essence of the humanitarian philosophy and cannot be compromised; independence is a problematic

.....
 Above: UNMIS troops from Zambia patrol the Abyei Area in the wake of the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the borders of Abyei, July 2009. Overleaf: Displaced residents of Abyei being treated at a mobile clinic, Malual Aleu, Abyei Area, May 2008 © Tim McKulka

◆
Even the ICRC, the midwife of the principles and the custodian of the Geneva Conventions, recognises that strict adherence to all of the principles is neither feasible nor desirable in all conflict settings



proposition for agencies reliant on donor government funds rather than private donations and (especially at the operational level) is seldom adhered to in practice by multi-mandate organisations; and there are deeply divergent views around neutrality.

Several multi-mandate organisations openly renounce neutrality and seek to address emergency needs while also campaigning for the rights of those affected to be respected and for action to address the reasons why they are in crisis in the first place, as part of a rights-based approach to poverty, suffering and injustice. Oxfam, for example, accepts the principles of independence and impartiality as guiding its humanitarian work, but explicitly rejects neutrality, at least as it is defined by the ICRC: ‘Impartial advocacy does not mean saying that every party to violence is always equally to blame. Nor is Oxfam neutral in the sense of avoiding anything that could be construed as a policy controversy. We take a stand on the causes of humanitarian need, and propose policy changes to solve them’ (Oxfam, 2013). Neutrality has also been much less prominent within the Nordic humanitarian tradition, where ‘development aid, human rights and support for national liberation movements, as well as Third World solidarity more generally, have all been explicitly motivated by humanitarian concerns and widely understood as a basic form of humanitarian assistance’ (Marklund, 2016). Outside the sector, the universality of the principles

is challenged – either rejected outright by those who perceive them as representing Western values and interventions in their societies, or adapted to fit a more contextual interpretation of their meaning (OIC, 2012). As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto (2013) note, framing humanitarian action exclusively in terms of the principles articulated by the ICRC is fraught with Northern bias and ‘fails to recognize that claims of impartial, apolitical universality can equally be interpreted and understood to be partial, politicized neo-imperialism’. If this framework is upheld without an open debate, humanitarianism will continue to be seen as a label for a social practice entailing an intervention by the developed world in the developing world (Hopgood and Vinjamuri, 2012).

The shift in geopolitics over the last 10–20 years means that we are starting to see the emergence of serious resistance to a set of secular norms exported, first by empire, then by the League of Nations and then via the United Nations and Western states. Some of these transformations are already under way. Humanitarian donors such as Brazil, Turkey – host of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 – and Saudi Arabia are beginning to integrate international solidarity as part of their foreign policy. In China, Confucian conceptions of the state as primary guarantor of the welfare of its people mean that ‘the independence of humanitarian agencies from governments is not considered to be necessary, desirable or even possible’



.....
 Previous page: Displaced people travel near
 the border of South Darfur and Northern Bahr el
 Ghazal States, Southern Sudan, March 2008
 © Tim McKulka

(Gordon and Donini, 2016). Likewise, Cuba’s practice of ‘health diplomacy’ in the form of a cadre of emergency doctors deployed to crisis zones around the world ‘has been shaped by 60 years of socialist ideology and an underlying philosophy of solidarity with the poor and vulnerable’ which by definition precludes neutrality and independence (Dahrendorf, 2015).

States outside the Western humanitarian tradition are defining humanitarian response in their own terms (Bernard, 2011; Gordon and Donini, 2016). Their conceptions of ‘humanitarianism’ and the modalities chosen to provide aid reflect a humanitarian approach different from that of established organisations and donors, and more concerned with South–South solidarity and respect for the sovereignty of the recipient state. In practical terms, this is reflected in a tendency to direct a large proportion of assistance via their own parastatal agencies or bilaterally through national governments (GHA, 2015). These donors may also have different understandings of what ‘counts’ as humanitarian aid (Roepstorff, 2016), and may be less concerned with the definitional and organisational distinctions Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors erect, rightly or wrongly, between their ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ assistance. Countries such as India and Brazil also challenge the hierarchical structures of current international aid regimes discursively by using terms like ‘partner’, rather than ‘recipient’ or ‘donor’ (Ibid.).

Squaring the circle

Traditional humanitarian actors such as the ICRC recognise the need for a debate on renegotiating, or redefining, the principles and values underpinning humanitarian action (McGoldrick, 2011), while at the same time being clear about the continued importance, in specific circumstances, of genuinely neutral and independent humanitarian action. The key is to be clear about what different organisations can bring, and what principles they do or do not uphold. A fuller recognition of the ‘complex heterogeneity’ of the various existing forms of humanitarianism, as they are understood across the South as well as the North, may help in reconceptualising humanitarianism beyond the current understanding(s) of the term in the formal humanitarian sector, and in accepting the legitimacy of other humanitarianisms beyond the traditional, Northern-based form (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016).

Laying claim to humanitarian principles does not mean ignoring the complex political realities of conflict or the political implications and effects of assistance in conflict zones (Labbé, 2015). There will always be conflict situations where ‘classic’ humanitarian principles need to be observed in the letter as well as in the spirit, and humanitarian exceptionalism rigorously applied, in order to be able to obtain access and reach people in need. Squaring the circle involves acknowledging that crisis response requires differentiated approaches, ranging from a narrow interpretation of what constitutes humanitarian action and humanitarian actors to a more expansive, flexible and integrated form of relief. It also requires greater honesty about the way the sector frames its intentions and articulates its ethics, and greater transparency about the way it conducts its operations.

◆
Squaring the circle involves acknowledging that crisis response requires differentiated approaches, ranging from a narrow interpretation of what constitutes humanitarian action and humanitarian actors to a more expansive, flexible and integrated form of relief

4





Barriers to change

Men attend a meeting with researchers in an informal refugee settlement on the outskirts of Zahlé, February 2016
© Jacob Russell

Chapter 4

Barriers to change: power, perceptions and perverse incentives

Despite local actors and organisations driving significant areas of response, there is still a disconnect between national and local institutions and groups and the formal humanitarian system. The barriers to closer engagement – financial, cultural and regulatory – are high.



Listen Learn Act gathers feedback from affected people on the relevance, effectiveness and outcomes of humanitarian assistance and supports organisations to actively respond to the voices of affected people. The project's work in Lebanon with Syrian refugees is featured in the photos in this chapter, and is funded by the European Union and jointly implemented by DanChurchAid, Save the Children Denmark and Ground Truth. Local partners include: Save the Children Lebanon, CARE and the Development for People and Nature Association.



Local NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs), national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, national and subnational government institutions, diaspora networks, the private sector, the military and others have, for decades and even centuries, contributed to relief and assistance outside of – and alongside – the ‘traditional system’. Yet despite this history, and evidence that local actors and organisations are driving significant areas of response, there is still a disconnect between national and local institutions and groups and the formal humanitarian system’s processes, structures and decision-making. Numerous lessons learned papers (e.g. Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti, 2013; Featherstone, 2014) have failed to drive progress on this issue.

In part, this is due to high barriers – financial, cultural and regulatory – to more constructive and fruitful engagement between those within and outside the current formal system. For example, the proportion of international humanitarian funding going directly from donors to local NGOs in crisis-affected countries or to Southern-based NGOs is negligible (less than 1%, according to some measures (GHA, 2015)). Diaspora groups, even where capable, accountable and operating in hard-to-reach areas, still cannot access humanitarian funding from government donors and the UN system (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). National government management of humanitarian response – or at least coordination – remains far lower than many governments would like, and non-Western donors, particularly outside the DAC, have found it difficult to engage with traditional humanitarian agencies, whether due to the jargon they use, their different approaches or concerns about one another’s political motives (Barakat and Zyck, 2010). For similar reasons, businesses have also found it difficult to work with the traditional humanitarian system (Zyck and Kent, 2014).

Enduring power imbalances and the structures that underpin them perpetuate paternalism and drive a preoccupation with growth, competition and market share that, when taken together, create powerful disincentives to diversification, devolution and systemic change. The result is a tendency to exclude those who do not act like organisations within the formal system, and to sideline the new approaches that many of these actors can offer. Rather than fostering a diversity of approaches and exploring areas of complementarity, the effect has been to protect the interests of the agencies and governments that make up ‘the system’ by promoting a particular set of principles, best practices and standards that those deemed to be ‘outside’ had very little hand in creating, and with which those who did have at best an elastic relationship themselves. This instinct to maintain momentum behind existing practices is reinforced by numerous individual features, rather than any one driver. Several of the most important of these contributing factors are outlined below.

Money, power and perceptions

Despite efforts to diversify the humanitarian funding base and develop new financing mechanisms, and despite the entry of some significant emerging players,¹¹ the international humanitarian sector remains dominated by five government donors¹² and the European Union (EU), which together disburse more than two-thirds of funds channelled through the formal system. In 2014, 83% of humanitarian funding reported to the Financial Tracking Service¹³ came from government donors in Europe and North America (GHA, 2015).

◆
Enduring power imbalances and the structures that underpin them perpetuate paternalism and drive a preoccupation with growth, competition and market share that create powerful disincentives against diversification, devolution and systemic change

Below: An informal refugee settlement on the outskirts of Zahlé, February 2016
© Jacob Russell/Panos



The concentration of funding among a small number of major donors leaves the sector highly vulnerable to the political interests of the countries that donate the money. As a result, coverage is inevitably selective: ‘aid dollars flow to areas of political importance to the donor group while leaving other areas and activities critically under-funded’, and humanitarian assistance ‘emits more readily from governments to countries that are in their backyards and/or where they perceive national security interests at stake’ (Stoddard, 2004). The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, which is supposed to ‘encourage and stimulate principled donor behaviour and, by extension, improved humanitarian action’, only perpetuates this relationship by limiting its members to the ‘largest donors and supporting the role of the United Nations and associated IASC organisations in the coordination of the overall system’ (GHD, 2015).

The concentration of funding *sources* within the formal system is reflected in a parallel concentration of funding *recipients*. Between 2009 and 2013, OECD-DAC and FTS data indicates that UN agencies and NGOs received an estimated 81% of international humanitarian assistance from OECD-DAC governments (GHA, 2015). While limiting the number of recipients has the benefit of reducing donor transaction costs (Poole, 2013), it also means that the major humanitarian players constitute a highly centralised and exclusive group. Indeed, the funding attracted by UN agencies and large INGOs is so disproportionately large compared with medium-sized and small international NGOs, as well as national and local organisations, that, when taken together with their donors, they can justifiably be called an oligopoly (Collinson and Elhawary, 2012). They collectively command considerable power and resources in numerous crisis contexts. In many countries with weak or absent government and limited empirical sovereignty, such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Somalia and South Sudan, the aid system can be seen as exercising a separate and exclusive non-state or ‘petty’ sovereignty, with aid agencies representing a relatively powerful and well-resourced group of interconnected international actors able to operate to a large extent separately from and sometimes in opposition to the state and other national organisations and power-holders (Duffield, 2007). Several humanitarian organisations have annual budgets that compare with those of some states.¹⁴

UN agencies and NGOs received an estimated 81% of international humanitarian assistance from OECD-DAC governments

Right: Aisha Kamil, 6, from Aleppo province, Syria, sits on the step of the shelter she lives in, in an informal refugee settlement on the outskirts of Zahlé, February 2016 © Jacob Russell/Panos





Above: Jazia Ahmed, 60, from Aleppo province, Syria, in an informal settlement on the outskirts of Zahlé, February 2016 © Jacob Russell/Panos

As the volume of resources circulating around the system has grown, so the quest for these resources has to some extent become an objective in itself (Cunningham, 2014). UN and NGO fundraising, marketing and partnership teams – as well as field-based programme managers and country directors – are responsible for ensuring adequate financing of their operations, and their success or failure is at least partly assessed on the basis of how much money they bring in for their organisation. Likewise, organisations’ senior leaders are answerable to their boards of directors for growing, or at least maintaining, funding. This so-called ‘corporatisation’ of the aid sector certainly does not suggest that individuals working for aid organisations are primarily self-serving, but it does suggest that the quest for institutional growth can impel organisations to pursue funds even where others may be better placed to engage, and might be equally or more deserving of resources.

It is also dangerous for the more established aid agencies to consider opening up the system to local NGOs, businesses, diaspora groups, national governments or others who could serve as competition for funding. Other potential channels and sources simply do not figure in the financial architecture of the formal system. In effect, global financing of humanitarian action is bifurcated: on the one hand, the quantifiable, trackable funding passing through the UN and the main international NGOs, and on the other an unknown, but probably much larger, flow of money from organisations, groups and individuals operating largely independently of, and more or less invisible to, the financial tracking and accounting mechanisms of the formal system. From a purely financial perspective if nothing else, this is a missed opportunity to tap into hundreds of billions of dollars of potential funding at a time when there is broad acknowledgement that the humanitarian sector needs significantly more resources to address global need (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, 2016).

Where such organisations are encouraged to enter the humanitarian sphere, it is often under the umbrella of traditional, international agencies (e.g. sub-contracting of local NGOs or modest partnerships with private businesses). Current funding structures, which often mean short-term funding earmarked for specific activities, and performance frameworks designed to reward outputs, and not outcomes, mean that aid agencies have little incentive to genuinely hand over responsibility to other actors, or engage in genuine medium- or long-term initiatives to prepare local partners to drive forward a response.

Beyond funding, an underlying and enduring problem of power and perception drives a reluctance to fund national and local organisations. Such dynamics prioritise international standards and solutions over national, local and community ones and often characterise ‘the local’ as inadequate, corrupt and unable to deliver to the same standard – all of which in turn reinforces the formal humanitarian system’s sense of its own distinctiveness and importance (British Red Cross, 2015; DuBois et al., 2015).

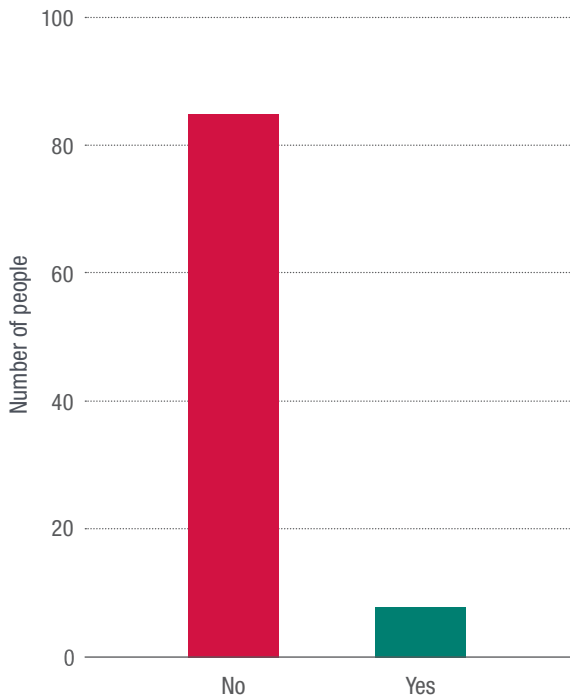
Such unhelpful (and often untested) perceptions also limit downward accountability. While the ‘rhetoric for accountability and for shifting power to affected people is strong in the sector’ and has featured prominently in preparations for the WHS, practice ‘continues to lag behind’ because ‘actors outside the traditional power structures of the humanitarian system have little real influence over humanitarian financing and programming’ (ALNAP, 2015). Recent initiatives such as the Ground Truth project – which uses customer satisfaction techniques associated with the commercial world to communicate what affected people think about the humanitarian assistance they receive – provide information that can be used to improve accountability and effectiveness (CHS Alliance, 2015). However, the potential long-term effect of such initiatives on humanitarian financing and programming is unclear while humanitarian assistance is still largely determined by what goods and services can be supplied, rather than what people actually need or want.

Right: Members of a local committee formed to represent beneficiaries to NGOs and aid providers speak at a meeting with researchers in the neighbourhood of Qobbeh in Tripoli, February 2016 © Jacob Russell/Panos

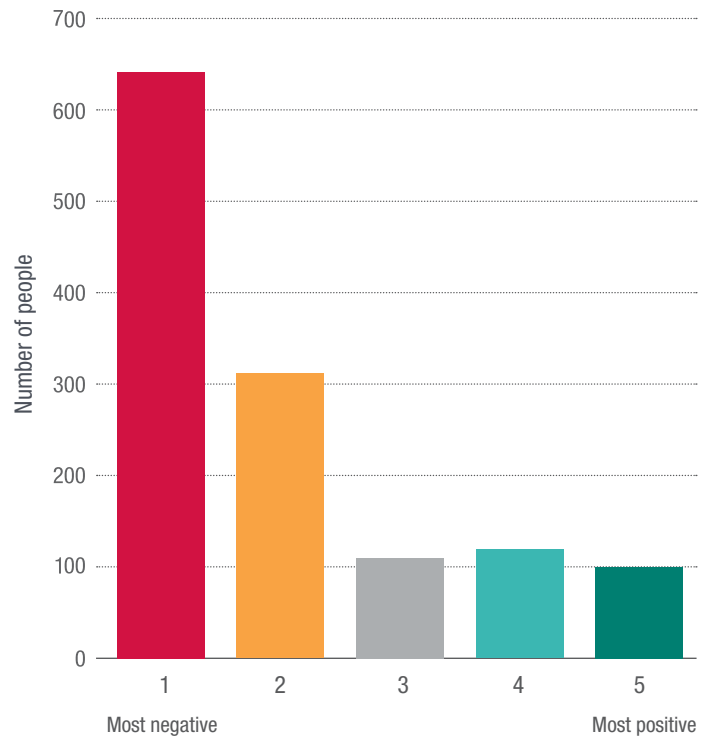


Figure 10: Beneficiary perceptions of humanitarian response in recent emergencies

Ebola: Were your family's needs met?



Nepal: Are your main problems being addressed?



Note: Perceptions data is from Ground Truth Solutions. They represent the earliest data on response perceptions. Source: Ground Truth Solutions.

Destructive competition

Competition between and among many of the key players in the humanitarian system for funds, public profile and market share also makes meaningful collaboration difficult (Cooley and Ron, 2002; IRIN, 2015). For some, this is due to high levels of organisational insecurity among NGOs, competitive pressures and financial uncertainty as UN agencies and NGOs compete to raise money and secure donor contracts. Rather than improving efficiency and performance, this competition, and agencies' tacit preoccupation with organisational survival, can lead to self-interested action, dissuading organisations from pooling resources, sharing information or coordinating activities (Cooley and Ron, 2002).

Such 'destructive competition' (*ibid.*) also discourages NGOs, among others, from specialising and seeking complementary roles. Although the complexity of humanitarian crises calls for highly differentiated organisations with specialised skills, agencies are encouraged to expand their activities, sometimes irrespective of their relevance and technical expertise. This was at play in West Africa, where major donors compelled many NGOs to build and operate Ebola emergency treatment centres despite their lack of logistical or health experience or expertise (DuBois et al., 2015).

Rather than improving efficiency and performance, this competition, and agencies' tacit preoccupation with organisational survival, can lead to self-interested action

The recent rise of formal and informal consortia of international and national NGOs has helped to generate a greater sense of collaboration. For example, the African Centre for Humanitarian Action has served as an interlocutor between a number of African NGOs and the AU, and has helped to inform the policies of a number of bilateral donors on behalf of African NGOs. The Asian Disaster Response and Risk Reduction Network worked to influence the Asian Ministerial Conference on disaster risk reduction and helped to coordinate the responses to the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake. Ambitious global NGO networks, such as the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA)/START Network and the Global Southern NGO Network, have been set up to help enhance the role, position and contribution of NGOs in humanitarian action, and to negotiate more favourable financial relationships with donors, UN agencies and large NGOs. However, such efforts have failed to gain traction or attract the levels of financial support needed to secure their future.

Weak governance and accountability

The concentrated financial flows and shared interests among a core group of UN agencies and NGOs make it appear that the system is relatively centralised. In reality, however, it lacks a formalised or centralised authority structure (Collinson, 2011; Harvey et al., 2010). Instead, humanitarian organisations are free to regulate themselves, resulting in a complex and highly dynamic and dispersed form of networks-based governance that lacks any explicit or overarching rules-based ‘regime’. The fact that the humanitarian system is not really a system at all, in the sense of an organised, cohesive structure with a clear hierarchy and leadership, is one of the things that makes it so distinctive. However, what might look like

vibrant and creative diversity to professionals within the system may well look more like anarchic disorganisation to those less steeped in the traditions of Western humanitarian culture. It is little wonder that local NGOs, diaspora groups, private firms and even some national governments balk at this level of fragmentation, and question the time and resources needed to engage with the vast array of regional, national, sub-national and sectoral coordination forums. Humanitarian coordinators (HCs) could perhaps play a role here, but they are not present in every country, and generally have very little operational control over UN agencies or NGOs. The HC, like OCHA, can serve as a periodic convener, but cannot direct agencies to engage with a particular type of stakeholder in a particular way, even on potentially tricky and sensitive issues such as access negotiations.

At the same time, while the humanitarian system appears fragmented and leaderless within many regions and countries, the consolidation – or, rather, the perceived consolidation – of high-level decision-making, for example in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), has also posed a challenge. Representatives of regional organisations and non-DAC donors see the IASC, rightly or wrongly, as a fundamental decision-making body from which they have been excluded. It thus serves to convey a key implicit message to newly acknowledged actors that they may be invited to play a role, but will be kept at the periphery in a Western-led system.

Accountability requirements from donors and implementing agencies have also contributed to the closed nature of the humanitarian system. While justified by the need to properly account for taxpayers’ money (and usually required in domestic legislation) complex processes and procedures and anti-corruption and counter-terrorism concerns have contributed to the

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee: a clash of perceptions

On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the IASC Principals, HPG conducted a short review of the IASC Principals mechanism and IASC membership overall. From the research, it was clear that the IASC is seen as important and relevant by its members as the only forum bringing together the entirety of the formal sector – UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGOs – with which to bring a unified voice to important policy and operational dilemmas and global legitimacy and authority. This view is not, however, shared by NGOs or regional and Southern actors, who felt that such collective policy and advocacy does not represent the diversity of perspectives of humanitarian actors

and has little bearing on a large number of humanitarian actors, including local communities, affected country governments, civil society organisations and the private sector. Interviewees from Southern and regional organisations were highly critical of the exclusive nature of the IASC’s membership and felt that there was a deliberate intention to sideline and exclude them. The OIC’s long-standing push to join the IASC was ultimately rebuffed, which many in the OIC and other regional organisations interpreted as a sign that the IASC and the broader ‘traditional’ system were resistant to change, insular and overly protective of their own interests (Pantuliano, Bennett and Fan, 2014).

exclusion of potential operational partners, particularly national governments and local NGOs. NGO implementing partners may be required to provide years of audited financial statements and demonstrate that they have managed large sums of money. While understandable, such policies make it difficult for donors to collaborate with newer organisations, small organisations or organisations based in countries where legal registration is complex and costly. Calls for proposals commonly require agencies to submit track records of past projects and institutional policies on everything from staff security to gender mainstreaming, disability, financial accountability, the protection of civilians and environmental and social responsibility. These accumulated expectations mean that only the largest and wealthiest organisations with the most complex bureaucracies can be part of the mainstream system and qualify to receive large-scale bilateral and multilateral funding. In Yemen, for example, such requirements mean that UN agencies have found it difficult to work with national NGOs, despite the fact that most international NGOs in the country have limited operations and coverage.

As well as ring-fencing the system, bureaucratic requirements make emergency preparedness and response less cost-effective. Wary of financing local NGOs, donors often provide funds to UN agencies or international NGOs, which then – after taking a share themselves – pass the money along to local NGO partners and sub-contractors, which themselves apply institutional overheads.¹⁵ According to one donor representative, at least 20% of funding for education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is being lost as a result of donors’ reluctance to work directly with local NGOs and their tendency to provide aid via UN agencies and their INGO implementing partners.¹⁶

◆ As well as ring-fencing the system, bureaucratic requirements make emergency preparedness and response less cost-effective

Below: Researchers conduct a meeting with residents in the neighbourhood of Qobbeh in Tripoli, Lebanon, February 2016 © Jacob Russell/Panos



Cultural and linguistic barriers

The culture and terminology of humanitarian assistance can also be confusing for those unfamiliar with them, who may feel excluded or, as the military and the private sector have experienced, find themselves being casually chastised for using a term incorrectly or for injecting their own fields' terminology ('command and control', 'return on investment') (Zyck and Armstrong, 2014). There is a strong tendency to draft documents and hold meetings in English regardless of the local language. In the Haiti earthquake response, for example, cluster meetings were mainly conducted in English in a country of French- and Creole-speakers. Although over time French became the lingua franca of the response, some meetings continued to be conducted in English into 2011, a year after the earthquake, if even one foreigner present did not feel sufficiently confident in French (Levine et al., 2012). The sector is also burdened with an increasingly voluminous lexicon of terms with very distinct meanings, from 'humanitarianism' itself to 'protection', 'cluster' and 'resilience', alongside hundreds of acronyms. These terms and concepts, along with a retinue of anecdotes, are increasingly available only to those who have completed certain Western degree programmes focused on humanitarian affairs or development studies at a small handful of universities. The cultural assimilation and professional connections that such education offers mean that graduates enjoy privileged access to jobs and opportunities – and that those without such qualifications may find themselves at a disadvantage.

Constructing a larger humanitarian tent?

In arguing against financial, functional and cultural exclusivity, there is an implicit Western-centric bias: that those operating 'outside' formal humanitarian structures are keen to subscribe to existing structures and processes, and that closer and more strategic engagement is a matter of making room for national and local organisations within an enlarged 'humanitarian tent'. In fact, recent crises suggest that the tent, instead of being enlarged, is being pitched elsewhere. For example, the lack of a single, easily accessible entry point for new actors, particularly at the national or subnational levels, means that many prefer to establish parallel systems, rather than navigate the web of international actors with partial responsibility for portions of the humanitarian response. This tactic has been adopted by private firms interested in responding to Ebola in West Africa, for example in the Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group (EPSMG) in Sierra Leone, and in the Philippines, with the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). Likewise, 'new' donors from the Gulf and elsewhere have opted to forego traditional coordination mechanisms in favour of home-grown organisations, structures and funding streams which they deem to be more trustworthy and legitimate (Barakat and Zyck, 2008).

Alongside the tendency to view indigenous solutions to crises as inferior to international ones, there is a contradictory tendency within the sector to assume that a local response will always be a more effective one, when in reality there may be many contexts when the very attributes that may make local organisations more effective – context, connectedness and capacity – can work against them, for example in conflict situations, where local actors may be viewed as partisan because they are accessing only one part of a population (BRC, 2015). In many contexts, international actors can and do bring speed, scale, logistical and technical advantages and expertise, surge capacity and funding and, often, a more dispassionate approach.

◆ Alongside the tendency to view indigenous solutions to crises as inferior to international ones, there is a contradictory tendency within the sector to assume that a local response will always be a more effective one

However, this is context- and role-specific: in practice, local, national and international actors each offer advantages under different conditions and in different contexts: ‘The question is not “who do we need more” or “what type of actor is best”; rather, humanitarian actors – including national authorities, donors, intergovernmental entities and implementing organisations – must consider what arrangement of complementary actors is best suited to the context in question’ (Zyck and Krebs, 2015). This points to the need for strategic alliances among international, national and local responders that build understanding of separate but interlinked roles without extensive need for renegotiating relationships and working arrangements each time a crisis strikes. Building such relationships based on the principle of ‘subsidiarity’,¹⁷ which would put more power and decision-making in the hands of organisations closer to affected communities, would be a step in the right direction, although maintaining some form

of robust specialist emergency response capacity internationally will also be necessary to support these local efforts when the situation demands.

Aid theorists point to a large and persistent performance gap as long as the expectation that the humanitarian sector is equipped to address highly uncertain and complex crises is trumped by a system that remains centralised and bureaucratic; while the relationships between donor and implementer, aid provider and recipient remain controlling and asymmetrical; and while partnerships and interactions remain transactional and competitive, rather than reciprocal and collective (Seybolt, 2009). What is less clear, however, is what a more inclusive, diverse and distributed sector would actually look like, and how precisely it can be achieved. The next phase of HPG’s research will aim to deconstruct the assumptions, incentives and institutions of the current system more carefully, and reimagine a more effective humanitarian architecture.



.....
Above: An informal refugee settlement on the outskirts of Zahlé in the Bekaa Valley, February 2016 © Jacob Russell/Panos

5





Conclusion

Chapter 5

Conclusion:

towards a more modern humanitarianism

Reconstituting the legitimacy of the humanitarian sector, for itself and in the eyes of people in crisis, and reimagining the next, more modern era of humanitarian action, requires letting go of some of the structures and behaviours that have prevented it from evolving, innovating and meeting the demands of the modern day.



In May 2015, boats carrying hundreds of Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar and Bangladeshi migrants were left adrift in the Andaman sea, abandoned by traffickers and turned away by Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. Many were rescued by fishermen in Aceh, Indonesia, who have since sought to support them. These photos, taken for The Geutanyoe Foundation, a local humanitarian organisation based in Aceh, show the local response to the crisis.



The central contention of this paper is that the formal humanitarian sector is suffering a crisis of legitimacy, not only because it often lacks the capacity and funds to respond to the volume and complexity of humanitarian needs, but also because the ‘authorising environment’ has changed: the norms and values of the system no longer represent the interests of today’s humanitarian stakeholders, and are no longer able to instil a sense of relevance and trust in aid recipients. Efforts to recapture this legitimacy have focused on improving the mechanics of response and the system already in place, rather than tackling more fundamental assumptions, power dynamics and incentives. Despite a decade of system-wide reforms, the sector still falls short in the world’s most enduring crisis responses, and perceptions of humanitarian work in recent crises suggest that the formal, Western ‘system’ is not doing a good job in the eyes of the people it aims to help.

The history of humanitarian action – both Western and non-Western – suggests that differing notions of ‘humanitarianism’ have played out across regions and cultures; Chinese humanitarianism, for instance, has served to legitimise the empire and then the state, Arab humanitarianism has deep roots in religious obligation and contemporary Cuban humanitarianism draws upon a socialist ideology and a political culture that stresses the importance of solidarity with the poor. Even so, the practical expression of humanitarianism, i.e. caring for the sick and wounded, providing food and shelter for those in need and minimising harm in current and future crises, has been present across time and tradition. It has only been in the last century that

a more formal and institutionalised humanitarianism has taken shape, reflecting Western interpretations of voluntarism and charity and Western ideas of how assistance should be done. The formal humanitarian architecture, and the norms and principles that underpin it, have altered very little since their beginnings during the First and Second World Wars, despite major geopolitical, financial and technological changes.

Outside the sector, the universality of humanitarian principles is challenged by those who see them as vectors of Western values and vehicles for unwelcome Western intervention. Inside the sector, the principles have divided humanitarians between those who feel that effective assistance rests on its exceptionalism through strict adherence to neutrality and impartiality, and those who accept a wider interpretation of their life-saving remit that includes addressing the causes of crises as well as their effects. These differences sit most uneasily with the so-called multi-mandate organisations, which combine emergency response with development and human rights or conflict-resolution work, and are hence concerned both with impartial assistance and with political and societal change. While some would say such distinctions are necessary to limit political influence, others point to the role they play in perpetuating architectural, funding and cultural divides within and among different organisations, and between different forms of aid, preventing comprehensive responses to the majority of the world's protracted crises. The fact that many organisations pick and choose when and which humanitarian principles apply, while claiming to be abiding by all of them all of the time, reinforces the perception that the humanitarian system is operating to a double standard and undermines trust in the aid endeavour.

Humanitarianism's crisis of legitimacy is also a result of the sector's functional and cultural exclusivity. Asymmetrical power dynamics perpetuate paternalism and drive a preoccupation with growth, competition and market share, creating powerful disincentives against diversification, devolution and systemic change. The result is a tendency to exclude those who do not act like organisations within the formal system, and to sideline the new approaches that many of these actors can offer. Despite the ingenuity and dedication of frontline aid workers, who work tirelessly and often at great personal risk for the communities they are trying to help, these enduring, but outdated, assumptions compel organisations to be self-interested and competitive, rather than collaborative and complementary. While local actors and organisations are driving response in many areas, the formal humanitarian system has failed to meaningfully connect with national and local institutions and groups. As currently structured, the incentives for such engagement do not exist, and the barriers to a more constructive relationship are high.

Current efforts to 'localise' response aim to 'enlarge the tent' and bring 'them' into 'our' ways of working, when it increasingly appears that the humanitarian tent is being pitched elsewhere. Others assume that local response is a more effective response, when there needs to be a more honest and realistic assessment about the strengths and limitations of localisation, and a more explicit recognition of the complexities that such engagement involves. Enabling more local responses to crises requires reorienting the formal system's approaches, models and incentives around a more devolved and distributed way of working, while maintaining a core international capacity to respond when necessary.

The fact that many organisations pick and choose when and which humanitarian principles apply, while claiming to be abiding by all of them all of the time, reinforces the perception that the humanitarian system is operating to a double standard and undermines trust in the aid endeavour



Reconstituting the legitimacy of the humanitarian sector, for itself and in the eyes of people in crisis, and reimagining the next, more modern era of humanitarian action, requires letting go of some of the structures and behaviours that have prevented it from evolving, innovating and meeting the demands of the modern day. Some initial ways forward include:

Letting go of power and control

A more modern humanitarian action requires letting go of power and control by the formal Western-inspired system and reorienting the sector's view outwards, asking, not 'what can I give?', but 'what support can I offer?'. Rather than mandate reform, as some have suggested (ALNAP, 2015), this requires a *mindset reform* and the development of a more diversified model that accepts greater local autonomy and cedes power and resources to structures and actors currently at the margins of the formal system. This also requires a commitment by UN agencies and large, multi-mandate NGOs to embrace difficult changes in the approach and architecture under which the sector currently operates.

Reform the IASC

The IASC should lead this mindset shift by enlarging its membership to include non-traditional organisations in order to counter perceptions of the humanitarian sector as a Western-led club. It should also reform its structures and practices to decentralise leadership, policy development and strategic-level decision-making to actors and institutions closer to crises, ideally at the regional level.

Above: Rohingya women at Bayeun Camp, Aceh, May 2015 © Carlos Sardiña Galache/ The Geutanyoe Foundation

Reconstituting the legitimacy of the humanitarian sector, for itself and in the eyes of people in crisis, requires letting go of some of the structures and behaviours that have prevented it from evolving, innovating and meeting the demands of the modern day

Recast the role of large humanitarian organisations based on the principle of ‘subsidiarity’

UN agencies and large multi-mandate NGOs should reorient their strategic priorities away from direct implementation and service delivery and towards a more enabling function that incubates and funds national and local organisations in preparedness, assessment and service delivery functions. This requires changing funding models and incentive structures to reward collaboration, collective effort and positive outcomes for communities. It also requires a significant increase in investment in local organisations’ capacity strengthening and skills development, as well as reorienting partnerships from transactional arrangements to longer-term and strategic alliances. The executive boards of these organisations should help drive this shift through longer-term and more flexible funding and by establishing targets and monitoring performance towards this goal.

Large humanitarian agencies and organisations also need to establish and more clearly articulate their strategic advantages and distinctive competences *vis-à-vis* smaller, more specialised local actors. This might include strengthening critical common services (e.g. needs assessments, information and data management, policy development, advocacy and logistics) and retaining an international standing capacity for emergency response to support speed and scale as a provider of last resort when needed.

UN agencies and large multi-mandate NGOs should reorient their strategic priorities away from direct implementation and service delivery and towards a more enabling function that incubates and funds national and local organisations in preparedness, assessment and service delivery functions



Left: Taufik, a fisherman and volunteer with the Geutanyoe Foundation, gives a drawing lesson to a Rohingya refugee child, Aceh, Indonesia, June 2015
© Muhammad Arafat/The Geutanyoe Foundation



◆
Ensuring the depth and permanence of future reforms means casting off those assumptions, power dynamics, biases and vested interests that work against evolution and change

.....
Above: Bangladeshi migrants at Kuala Langsa Port Camp, Aceh, May 2015 © Carlos Sardiña Galache/ The Geutanyoe Foundation

Redefining success

Ensuring the depth and permanence of future reforms means casting off those assumptions, power dynamics, biases and vested interests that work against evolution and change, and redefining success so that incentives for mutual cooperation in the interests of crisis-affected people outweigh the short-term incentives to compete for resources and visibility. At the heart of the matter are the behaviours and financial incentives of the sector's core donors.

Incentivise shared responsibility and independent financing

Governments and humanitarian organisations should explore the development of a humanitarian funding instrument reserved for responses in sudden-onset emergencies and short-term responses to acute spikes in protracted crises. Such an instrument should offer diversity of donorship and predictable and flexible funds, while promoting humanitarian action as a universal endeavour, shared responsibility and impartial tool. UN Assessed Contributions, a more inclusive CERF, the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s mechanism of negotiated core contributions, negotiated replenishment (as used for the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) are all models that could be explored. The Education in Emergencies platform, which aims to bring humanitarian and development activities, institutions and funds together around a common strategy and common source of funds, is one initiative to watch. A mixture of models and instruments might be necessary.

Incentivise localised response

Donors should reduce barriers to financing local NGOs and diaspora networks and strive to ensure that they lead and inform responses wherever possible, and much more meaningfully than they do at present. Bilateral and key multilateral donors should set ambitious targets for providing a significant share of their humanitarian aid directly to local NGOs, CSOs and diaspora groups. This policy-level decision should be accompanied by clear processes and standards to enable local actors to qualify as full partners for donors, including a commitment by donors to resolve the legislative hurdles (e.g. on counter-terror financing) that make it more difficult for local actors to receive funds, and develop good practice for identifying, monitoring and strengthening local partners. Interim arrangements should include partnership models, where international NGOs provide the fiduciary management structure, acting as trustees for interventions by local NGOs, building on tested practices in ongoing crises.

Below: A malnourished Rohingya child receives nourishment from Indonesian nurses at Bayeun Camp, Aceh, May 2015 © Carlos Sardiña Galache/The Geutanyoe Foundation



Incentivise collaborative competition and collective performance

Donors should reset funding requirements and key performance indicators to promote collective – as well as individual – performance, by rewarding organisations’ ability to work more effectively together, take calculated risks and innovate and institutionalise lessons identified in evaluation exercises into policies and practice. OCHA’s *Leaving No One Behind* study on humanitarian effectiveness calls for a monitoring and accountability framework to promote and measure collective progress in terms of system or crisis-level, versus organisational or individual, outcomes. Such a mechanism should be further explored.

◆ **Reconstituting humanitarian action involves acknowledging that humanitarian response in protracted crises and in emergencies that combine conflict, disaster and endemic poverty requires a departure from ideal types in favour of a more honest and ethical response to people's needs**

Right: A government health worker treats a newly arrived refugee at Kuala Langsa camp, Aceh, May 2015 © Muhammad Arafat/The Geutanyoe Foundation. Overleaf: An Acehese man plays traditional rapai pasee drums in honour of 'Rohingya guests' prior to a concert by Member of Parliament and famous local singer Rafly in Lhokseumawe, Aceh, June 2015 © Carlos Sardiña Galache/The Geutanyoe Foundation

Remaking humanitarian action

Finally, reconstituting humanitarian action involves acknowledging that humanitarian response in protracted crises and in emergencies that combine conflict, disaster and endemic poverty requires a departure from ideal types in favour of a more honest and ethical response to people's needs. This requires promoting integrated responses where possible while safeguarding the specificity of independent and neutral humanitarian action in the limited number of situations where it is essential.

Promote more complementary and rationalised crisis response

Most of today's crises require a collective approach to crisis management that increases complementarity between humanitarian and other aid organisations, and aligns strategies, performance management frameworks and monitoring accordingly. Such complementarity also requires that humanitarian and development teams develop a better mutual understanding of their respective principles, approaches, processes and tools, work together more regularly and systematically at country level to develop joint vulnerability and risk analysis, prioritise activities and set and monitor common country-level objectives (Carpenter and Bennett, 2015). Where crises and needs are to some degree predictable, they can be met more effectively and more cost-effectively by using permanent structures and institutions. In this regard, social protection, cash transfer programmes and risk financing, as well as measures outside of the humanitarian and development sector, such as microfinance and micro-insurance, can contribute to making communities more resilient to future crises (WEF, 2016).



Re-establish what it means to be 'humanitarian'

At the same time, there will be situations where a narrower form of emergency response, based on the 'classic' humanitarian principles, governed by IHL and suited to a limited range of circumstances and players, will be necessary.

This form of 'humanitarian action' will be critical in contexts where the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian work will derive from the ability of specialised actors such as the ICRC to uphold independent and neutral conduct, and who are both knowledgeable about IHL and legitimate



in the eyes of warring parties when negotiating on the basis of IHL. The role of these specialised organisations is also critical to working with states in the pursuit of a new mechanism for strengthening compliance with IHL, and to ensuring that all aid organisations, irrespective of their mandates and operational approaches, understand its core tenets and implications.

Distinguishing this form of humanitarianism from wider interpretations embracing a solidarist, more developmental or more integrated perspective would not imply that one is less valuable or legitimate than the other, but it does require that aid organisations be explicit and upfront about the nature of their aspirations, objectives and operational frameworks, and transparent about delivery lines and methods.

To be effective, crisis response requires differentiated approaches, ranging from one based on a narrow interpretation of what constitutes humanitarian action and humanitarian actors to one based on a more expansive, flexible and coordinated form of relief. Accepting that different forms of emergency response co-exist would go a long way towards removing the ideological blockages that prevent skilled and capable responders, whether international, governmental or local, from working more cohesively and with the full extent of capacity, skills and resources, to meet – and potentially resolve – people’s needs. Effectively addressing people’s needs – not ideology – should dictate operational approaches and tools. Driven by this understanding, the next era of humanitarian action must find more commonality than difference in approaches to the way the human impacts of crises are addressed.

◆
**Effectively addressing
people’s needs – not
ideology – should dictate
operational approaches
and tools**

Bibliography

A

Ali, A. (2011) 'Turkey's Foray into Africa: A New Humanitarian Power?', *Insight Turkey* 13(4).

ALNAP (2010) *The State of the Humanitarian System Report: Assessing Performance and Progress – A Pilot Study*. London: ALNAP.

ALNAP (2015) *The State of The Humanitarian System Report 2015*. London: ALNAP.

B

Bahadur, A. and T. Tanner (2014) 'Transformational Resilience Thinking: Putting People, Power and Politics at the Heart of Urban Climate Resilience', *Urban Climate* 7: 1-134, March.

Bailey, S. (2014) *Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Role of Business and the Private Sector – Haiti Case Study*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Barakat, S. and S. Zyck (2010) *Gulf State Assistance to Conflict-affected Environments*, Centre for the Study of Global Governance.

Barbelet, V. (2015) *Central African Republic: Addressing the Protection Crisis*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Barnett, M. (2005) 'Humanitarianism Transformed', *Perspectives on Politics* 3(4).

Barnett, M. (2011) *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism*. London: Cornell University Press.

Barnett, M. and B. Ramalingam (2010) 'The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?: Background Notes'. London: ODI.

Bennett, C. (2015) *The Development Agency of the Future: Fit for Protracted Crises?* London: ODI.

Bernard, V. (2011) 'Editorial: The Future of Humanitarian Action', *International Review of the Red Cross* 93(884).

Borton, J. (1993) 'Recent Trends in the International Relief System', *Disasters* 17(3).

Borton, J. (2009) *Future of the Humanitarian System: Impacts of Internal Changes*, Feinstein International Center, HFP, King's College London, Tufts University.

Borton, J. and E. Davey (2015) 'History and Practitioners: The Use of History by Humanitarians and Potential Benefits of History

to the Humanitarian Sector', in P. D. Pinto and B. Taithe (eds), *The Impact of History?: Histories at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.

British Red Cross (BRC) (2015) 'World Humanitarian Summit – Conversations That Matter. Humanitarian Response within the Constraints of Armed Conflict', draft summary of discussion.

Brown, S. (2015) 'The Private Sector: Stepping Up', *Humanitarian Exchange*, 63. <http://www.odihpn.org>.

Buchanan-Smith, M. and P. Fabbri (2005) *Linking, Relief, Rehabilitation and Development – A Review of the Debate*, Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

Buchanan-Smith, M. and S. Maxwell (1994) 'Linking Relief and Development: An Introduction and Overview', *IDS Bulletin* 25(4).

Burke, J. and L. Fan (2014) *Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Role of Business and the Private Sector – Indonesia Case Study*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

C

Carpenter, S. and C. Bennett (2015) *Managing Crises Together: Towards Coherence and Complementarity in Recurrent and Protracted Crises*. London: ODI.

Chandy, L., N. Ledlie and V. Penciakova (2013) *The Final Countdown: Prospects for Ending Extreme Poverty by 2030*, <http://www.brookings.edu>.

Chapelier, C. and A. Shah (2013) *Improving Communication between Humanitarian Aid Agencies and Crisis-affected People: Lessons from the Infoasaid Project*, Network Paper 74, <http://www.odihpn.org>.

CHS Alliance (2015) *On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective? Humanitarian Accountability Report*. Geneva: CHS Alliance.

Clarke, P. and B. Ramalingam (2008) 'Organisational Change in the Humanitarian Sector', *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action*. London: ALNAP.

Cohen, M. (2005) 'Introduction: Poverty and Charity in Past Times', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35.3.

Collinson, S. (2011) *The Role of Networks in the International Humanitarian System*, Report Commissioned by the Office of UN Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). London: ODI.

Collinson, S. (forthcoming) *Constructive Deconstruction: Reforming the Global Humanitarian Architecture: A Literature Review*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Collinson, S. and S. Elhawary (2012) *Humanitarian Space: A Review of Trends and Issues*, HPG Policy Brief 46. London: ODI.

Collinson, S., S. Elhawary and R. Muggah (2010) *State of Fragility: Stabilisation and its Implications for Humanitarian Action*. London: ODI.

Cooley, A. and J. Ron (2002) 'The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action', *International Security* 27(1).

Core Humanitarian Standard (2015) 'The Standard > History'. <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org>.

Crawford, N. Et al. (2015) *Protracted Displacement: Uncertain Paths to Self-reliance in Exile*. HPG Commissioned Report. London: ODI.

Cunningham, O. (2012) 'The Humanitarian Aid Regime in the Republic of NGOs', *Josef Korbel Journal of Advanced International Studies* 4, <https://www.du.edu>.

D

Dahrendorf, N. (2015) 'Policy Brief: Can Revolutionary Medicine Revolutionise the Humanitarian System?'

Davey, E. (2012) *Beyond the 'French Doctors': The Evolution and Interpretation of Humanitarian Action in France*. HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Davey, E. (2013) *A History of the Humanitarian System: Western Origins and Foundations*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Davey, E. (2014) 'Humanitarian History in a Complex World', *HPG Policy Brief* 59. London: ODI.

Davey, E. and E. Svoboda (2014) *Histories of Humanitarian Action in the Middle East and North Africa*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Davies, S. (1996) *Adaptable Livelihoods: Coping with Food Insecurity in the Malian Sahel*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Davies, K. (2012) *Continuity, Change and Contest: Meanings of 'Humanitarian' from the 'Religion of Humanity' to the Kosovo War*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Denny, E. and B. Walter (2012) 'Explaining High Murder Rates in Latin America: It's Not Drugs', *Political Violence @ a Glance*.

Development Initiatives (2008) *Good Humanitarian Donorship Indirect Support Cost Study: Final Report*. Taunton, Somerset: Development Initiatives.

De Waal, A. (2015) 'Armed Conflict and the Challenge of Hunger: Is an End in Sight?', in K. Grebmer et al., *2015 Global Hunger Index*, International Food Policy Research Institute, <http://www.ifpri.org>.

DFID (2011) *Humanitarian Emergency Response Review 2011*. London: DFID.

Dijkzeul, D. and D. Hilhorst (2016) 'Instrumentalisation of Aid in Humanitarian Crises: Obstacle or Precondition for Cooperation?', in V. Heins et al. (eds), *Humanitarianism and Challenges of Cooperation*. London: Routledge.

Donini, A. (2011) 'Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan: An Uphill Battle', *Humanitarian Exchange* 49, <http://odihpn.org>.

Drummond, J. and N. Crawford (2014) *Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Role of Business and the Private Sector: Kenya Case Study*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

DuBois, M. et al. (2015) *The Ebola Response in West Africa: Exposing the Politics and Culture of International Aid*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Duffield, M. (2007) *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

E

Egeland, J., A. Harmer and A. Stoddard (2011) *To Stay and Deliver: Good Practice for Humanitarians in Complex Security Environments*. Independent Study Commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). New York: OCHA.

El Taraboulsi, S. (forthcoming) *Zones of Engagement: Final Report*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

EMDAT (2001–2010): http://www.emdat.be/advanced_search/index.html.

EPSMG (2014) 'Ebola Private Sector Mobilisation Group', <https://www.epsmg.com/resource-library.aspx>.

F

Fan, L. (2013) *Disaster as Opportunity: Building Back Better in Aceh, Myanmar and Haiti*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Fan, L. and H. Krebs (2014) *Regional Organisations and Humanitarian Action: The Case of ASEAN*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

FAO (2015) 'State of Food Insecurity in the World in Brief', <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4671e.pdf>.

Featherstone, A. (2014) *Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response*. London: ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Tearfund.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. and J. Pacitto (2013) *Writing the 'Other' into Humanitarian Discourse: Framing Theory and Practice in South–South Humanitarian Responses to Forced Displacement*, Working Paper 93. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.

FTS (n.d.) <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencies§ion=CE&Year=2000>.

FTS (2015) 'Donor Country Profile, by Year', <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=Profile-donorCountrylist>.

FTS (2016) 'Congo, Democratic Republic of the: Funding Received 2016', <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emerg-emergencyCountryDetails&cc=cod>

G

GHA (Global Humanitarian Assistance) (2013) *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2013*. Taunton, Somerset: Development Initiatives.

GHA (Global Humanitarian Assistance) (2015a) *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015*. Taunton, Somerset: Development Initiatives.

GHA (2015b) *Think Piece: Humanitarian Financing*. Taunton, Somerset: Development Initiatives.

Global Humanitarian Assistance (2015c) 'International Humanitarian Response', <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/data-guides/datastore>.

Gordon, S. and A. Donini (2016) 'Romancing Principles and Human Rights: Are Humanitarian Principles Salvageable?', *Review of the Red Cross*, 1–33.

Ground Truth Solutions, <http://groundtruthsolutions.org>.

H

Harmer, A. and J. Macrae (2004) *Beyond the Continuum: The Changing Role of Aid Policy in Protracted Crises*, HPG Report. London: HPG.

Harvey, P. et al. (2010) *The State of the Humanitarian System Report: Assessing Performance and Progress – A Pilot Study*. London: ALNAP.

High Level Panel on Humanitarian Cash Transfers (2015) *Doing Cash Differently: How Cash Transfers Can Transform Humanitarian Aid*. London: ODI.

High Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing (2016) *Too Important To Fail: Addressing the Humanitarian Financing Gap*, Report for the World Humanitarian Summit.

Hilhorst, D. and E. Pereboom (2016) 'Multi-Mandate Organisations in Humanitarian Aid' in Z. Sezgin and D. Dijkzeul (eds), *The New Humanitarians in International Practice*. London: Routledge.

Hopgood, S. and L. Vinjamuri (2012) 'Faith in Markets' in M. Barnett and J. Gross Stein (eds) *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howe, P. and S. Devereux (2004) 'Famine Intensity and Magnitude Scales: A Proposal for an Instrumental Definition of Famine', *Disasters*, 28(4).

I

Ianchovichina, E. (2014) 'The Economic Impact of the Syrian War and the Spread of ISIS: Who Loses & How Much?', *Voices and Views: Middle East and North Africa*, World Bank blog, <http://blogs.worldbank.org>.

IASC (2010) *Key Messages: The IASC Transformative Agenda*, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/9573>.

ICRC (n.d.) 'Customary IHL Data Base', <https://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/home>.

IFRC (2013) *World Disasters Report 2013: Technology and the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Action*. Geneva: IFRC.

IINA (2015) 'King Salman Center Is Addition to World Humanitarian Work: UN Official', <http://iinanews.org>.

ICHI (1988) *Winning the Human Race? Report of the International Commission on International Humanitarian Issues*. London: Zed Books.

IRIN (2015) 'Gloves Off between Local and International NGOs', 22 October, <http://www.irinnews.org>.

ITU (2015) 'ICT Facts and Figures – The World in 2015: End-2015 Estimates for Key ICT Indicators', <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx>.

J

Jackson, A. (2014) *Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Non-state Actors: Key Lessons from Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia*, HPG Briefing Paper. London: ODI.

Jackson, A. and E. Davey (2014) *From the Spanish Civil War to Afghanistan: Historical and Contemporary Reflections on Humanitarian Engagement with Non-state Armed Groups*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

K

Krebs H. (2014) *Responsibility, Legitimacy, Morality: Chinese Humanitarianism in Historical Perspective*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Krueger, S. et al. (2016) *IASC Transformative Agenda: A Review of Reviews and Their Follow-up*. Berlin: GPPI.

L

Labbé, J. (2015) 'How Do Humanitarian Principles Support Humanitarian Effectiveness?' in *On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective? Humanitarian Accountability Report*, CHS Alliance, <http://chsalliance.org>.

Labbé, J., L. Fan and W. Kemp (2013) *Cooperation from Crisis? Regional Responses to Humanitarian Emergencies*. New York: International Peace Institute.

Labonte, M. and I. Charles (forthcoming 2016) 'The Evolution of Rights-Based Humanitarianism in Sierra Leone' in *The History of Humanitarianism: Africa*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Lautze, S. (1997) *Saving Lives and Livelihoods: the Fundamentals of a Livelihoods Strategy*. Somerville MA: Tufts University.

Levine, S. et al. (2012) *Avoiding Reality: Land, Institutions and Humanitarian Action in Post-earthquake Haiti*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

Levine, S. and K. Sharp (2015) *Topic Guide: Anticipating and Responding to Shocks: Livelihoods and Humanitarian Responses*, <http://www.evidenceondemand.info>.

M

Magone, C., M. Neuman and F. Weissman (2011) *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience*. London: MSF and C. Hurst & Co.

Marklund, C. (2016) *Neutrality and Solidarity in Nordic Humanitarian Action*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

McGoldrick, C. (2011) 'The Future of Humanitarian Action: An ICRC Perspective', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 93 (884).

Mohamedou, M. (2014) *ISIS and the Deceptive Rebooting of Al Qaeda*, GCSP Policy Paper, <http://gcsp.ch>.

Moore, M. (1995) *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mosel, I. et al., (2016) *Urbanisation: Consequences and Opportunities for the Netherlands' Directorate-General for International Cooperation*. London: ODI.

Moussa, J. (2014) *Ancient Origins, Modern Actors: Defining Arabic Meanings of Humanitarianism*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

N

Norwegian Refugee Council (2015) *Annual Report 2014*, http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9202488.pdf.

O

O'Brien, S. (2015) 'Remarks to the High-Level Discussion on the Future of Humanitarian Financing', New York, 26 September, <http://reliefweb.int>.

OCHA (2015a) *Global Humanitarian Overview 2016*, <http://www.unocha.org/stateofaid>.

OCHA (2015b) *World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2014*, <http://www.unocha.org>.

OCHA (2015c) *Financial Tracking Service: Trend Analysis – China*, <https://fts.unocha.org>.

OCHA (2016) *Leaving No One Behind: Humanitarian Effectiveness in the Age of the Sustainable Development Goals*. New York: UNOCHA.

O'Callaghan, S. and L. Leach (2012) *Principles in Action in Lebanon*. London: British Red Cross.

OIC (2012) 'Statement by Ambassador Atta El Mana'an Bakhit Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', Brussels, 4 December.

Otto, R. and L. Weingärtner (2013) 'Linking Relief and Development: More Than Old Solutions for Old Problems?', Channel Research on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Oxfam (2013) *Oxfam's Role in Humanitarian Action*, Oxfam Policy Compendium Note, <https://www.oxfam.org>.

Oxfam (2015) *Ebola and the Private Sector Bolstering the Response and West African Economies*. Oxford: Oxfam.

P

Pantuliano, S., C. Bennett and L. Fan (2014) *Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee*, unpublished paper.

Poole, L. (2013) *Funding at the Short End: Investing in National NGOs' Response Capacity*. London: CAFOD.

PRIO/UCDP (2009) 'The Battle Deaths Dataset Version 3.0', October, <https://www.prio.org>.

R

Ramalingam, B., B. Gray and G. Cerruti (2013) *Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-based Humanitarian Responses*. London: Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam GB, TearFund and ActionAid.

Reeves, C. (2014) 'The Red Cross Society of China: Past, Present, and Future', in J. Ryan, L. Chen and T. Saich (eds), *Philanthropy for Health in China*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Roepstorff, K. (2016) 'India as Humanitarian Actor: Convergences and Divergences with DAC Donor Principles and Practices', in Z. Sezgin and D. Dijkzeul (eds) *The New Humanitarians in International Practice: Emerging Actors and Contested Principles*. Oxford: Routledge.

Ryfman, P. (2008) *Une histoire de l'humanitaire*. Paris: La Découverte.

S

Salama, P. (2013) 'Homicidios, ¿es ineluctable la violencia en América Latina?', *Frontera norte*, 25:49.

Schaeublin, E. (2014) 'Zakat Practice in the Islamic Tradition and Its Recent History in the Context of Palestine', in E. Davey and E. Svoboda (eds) *Histories of Humanitarian Action in the Middle East and North Africa*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.

- Serle, J.** (2015) 'Monthly Updates on the Covert War', Bureau of Investigative Journalism, January, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com>.
- Seybolt, T.** (2009) 'Harmonizing the Humanitarian Aid Network: Adaptive Change in a Complex System', *International Studies Quarterly*, 53(4).
- Simonow, J.** (2013) 'Conference Report – Advancing Humanitarian Action: Engaging with Rising Global Actors To Develop New Strategic Partnerships', Wilton Park, 21–22 October.
- Simonow, J.** (2015) *Understanding Humanitarian Action in South Asia: Responses to Famine and Displacement in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Slim, H.** (2006) 'Global Welfare: A Realistic Expectation for the International Humanitarian System?', *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action*. London: King's College.
- South, A. et al.**, (2012) *Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe*, Network Paper 72, <http://odihpn.org>.
- Steets, J.** (2011) *Donor Strategies for Addressing the Transition Gap and Linking Humanitarian and Development Assistance*. Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute.
- Stoddard, A. et al.** (2007) *Cluster Approach Evaluation Final*. London: ODI.
- Svoboda, E. and E. Gillard** (2015) *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Bridging the Gap between Law and Reality*, HPG Policy Brief 64. London: HPG.
- Svoboda, E. and S. Pantuliano** (2015) *International and Local/Diaspora Actors in the Syria Response*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Svoboda, E. and L. Redvers** (2015) *Aid and the Islamic State*, IRIN/HPG Crisis Brief.
- Svoboda, E. et al.** (2015) *Islamic Humanitarianism? The Evolving Role of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation in Somalia and Beyond*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Swithern, S.** (2014) *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014*. London: Development Initiatives, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org>.
- T**
- Teitt, S.** (2014) *China and the International Humanitarian Order*, AP R2P Brief 4 (8). Brisbane, Queensland: University of Queensland.
- Terry, F.** (2002) *Condemned To Repeat: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Troilo, P.** (2015) 'Inside the Takedowns of AusAID and CIDA', DevEx, 19 January, <https://www.devex.com>.
- Twigg, J.** (2015) *Disaster Risk Reduction*, Good Practice Review 9. London: ODI.
- U**
- UCDP** (2015) 'UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2015, 1989–2014', <http://www.pcr.uu.se>.
- UCDP/PRIO** (2015) 'Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015, 1946–2014', <http://www.pcr.uu.se>.
- UNHCR** (2016) Displacement database, http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern.
- United Nations Secretariat** (2009) *Discussion Note: Strengthening the System-wide Funding Architecture of Operational Activities of the United Nations for Development*. New York: United Nations Secretariat.
- UNRIC** (2014) 'Remittances – A High-cost Lifeline to Developing Countries', <https://www.unric.org>.
- US Chamber of Commerce Foundation** (2015) *Changing the Game: How Business Innovations Reduce the Impact of Disasters*. Washington DC: US Chamber of Commerce Foundation.
- W**
- Walker, P. and D. Maxwell** (2009) *Shaping the Humanitarian World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Walker, P. and C. Russ, C.** (2010) *Professionalising the Humanitarian Sector: A Scoping Study*. London: Elrha.
- Watkins, K. and M. Quattri** (2014) *Lost in Intermediation: How Excessive Charges Undermine the Benefits of Remittances for Africa*. London: ODI
- Westrope, C. and E. Poisson** (2013) 'Using GIS as a Planning and Coordination Tool in Refugee Camps in South Sudan', *Humanitarian Exchange*, 57. London: ODI.
- Wike, R.** (2012) 'Does Humanitarian Aid Improve America's Image?', Pew Global Attitudes Project, <http://www.pewglobal.org>.
- Woerner-Powell, T.** (2011) 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, Migration, and the Rule of Law: "A Reply to Certain Persons of Distinction"', *Studia Islamica*, 2:91.
- Woerner-Powell, T.** (2014) 'An Anecdotal Prehistory of Humanitarian Action in the Middle East and North Africa' in E. Davey and W. Svoboda (eds) *Histories of Humanitarian Action in the Middle East and North Africa*. HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- World Bank** (2015a) *Migration and Development Brief 24*, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org>.
- World Bank** (2015b) 'Press Release: Remittances Growth To Slow Sharply in 2015, as Europe and Russia Stay Weak; Pick Up Expected Next Year', <http://www.worldbank.org>.
- World Bank Group** (2015) *Migration and Remittances: Recent Developments and Outlook Special Topic: Financing for Development*, Migration and Development Brief, <https://siteresources.worldbank.org>.
- World Economic Forum** (2016) *Insight Report: The Global Risks Report 2016*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- Y**
- Yeophantong, P.** (2014) *Understanding Humanitarian Action in East and Southeast Asia: A Historical Perspective*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Z**
- Zyck, S.** (2013) *The Growing Role of Regional Organisations in Humanitarian Action*, HPG Policy Brief 54. London: ODI.
- Zyck, S. A. and J. Armstrong** (2014) *Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Role of Business and the Private Sector – Jordan case study*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Zyck, S. A. and R. Kent** (2014) *Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Role of Business and the Private Sector – Final Report*, HPG Working Paper. London: ODI.
- Zyck, S. A. with H. Krebs** (2015) *Localising Humanitarianism: Improving Effectiveness through Inclusive Action*. London: ODI and the British Red Cross.

Endnotes

- 1 See <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/about-us/history>.
- 2 See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>.
- 3 See http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2015-10/22/content_22257566.htm.
- 4 Several governments have argued that IHL does not apply in situations where the enemy commits acts of terrorism. After 9/11 the United States questioned the applicability of the Geneva Conventions in its conflict with Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and the UK has voiced similar concerns: see <http://www.heritage.org/research/projects/enemy-detention/armed-conflict-and-the-geneva-conventions> and <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/apr/03/politics.terrorism>.
- 5 In 2010, FAO and WFP, as part of their *State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010* report, defined protracted crises as countries reporting a food crisis for eight years or more, receiving more than 10% of foreign assistance as humanitarian relief, and being on the list of Low-Income Food-Deficit Countries. UNHCR defines protracted displacement as situations in which refugees have been in exile for five years or more since their initial displacement, and in which immediate prospects for solutions are bleak.
- 6 Displacement is also increasingly an urban and dispersed phenomenon, with settled camps – the classic site of humanitarian interventions – becoming the exception, rather than the rule. Recent research by HPG estimates that six in ten refugees are living in towns or cities, and over half of all refugees are in private accommodation, not planned camps (Crawford et al., 2015).
- 7 Turkey spent \$1.6 billion supporting refugees in 2014. However, this was applied domestically and covered the cost of hosting (health, education). Turkey is therefore not included in GHA's list of international humanitarian donors.
- 8 See <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=emergencyDetails&appealID=1043>.
- 9 A select list of recent improvements includes the establishment of People in Aid (1997), the Sphere Project (1996) and Handbook (1998), the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) (1997), the Core Humanitarian Standard (2015) and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP, 1997).
- 10 Individually, some states have integrated these principles as part of wider intergovernmental and regional frameworks, including the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the Humanitarian Policy of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). They have also been incorporated in legally binding regional treaties, including the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the African Union's Kampala Convention on IDPs (Labbé, 2015).
- 11 Driven by conflicts in the region, total contributions from Middle Eastern donors increased by 120% in 2013, notably from Saudi Arabia (\$755m) and the United Arab Emirates (\$375m).
- 12 The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and Japan.
- 13 The UN's Financial Tracking System is based on voluntary reporting, and does not capture funds channelled from and to actors outside of the formal system, for example through diaspora organisations and via *zakat*.
- 14 In 2010 World Vision raised \$2.61bn in cash and gifts-in-kind, and its total expenditures were \$2.48bn; UNHCR's annual budget reached \$3bn in 2010; and Oxfam's total expenditures exceeded \$842m in 2009–10. For comparison, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and the Central African Republic have estimated annual government budget revenues of \$1bn or less (Collinson and Elhawary, 2012).
- 15 While many donors have limits and guidelines on UN and NGO indirect support costs (ISCs), research by Development Initiatives (2008) and others shows that many implementing agencies calculate ISCs very differently, making it difficult to accurately assess what percentage of aid funding is spent on items aside from implementation.
- 16 Interview with a donor representative, 2014.
- 17 The principle of subsidiarity implies that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralised competent authority. Political decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority.

The **Humanitarian Policy Group** is one of the world's leading teams of independent researchers and information professionals working on humanitarian issues. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high-quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

Humanitarian Policy Group
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300
Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399
Email: hpgadmin@odi.org

Website: <http://www.odi.org/hpg>
Twitter: @hpg_odi
Facebook: HumanitarianPolicyGroup

www.odi.org/hpg/remake-aid



HPG

**Humanitarian
Policy Group**