

Emergencies and Affected Peoples: Philosophy, Policy and Practice
Conference Outcomes from 4 July 2014
#emaaffected ppl
Submission to the World Humanitarian Summit Open Consultation Period

Emergencies and Affected Peoples: Philosophy, Policy and Practice, a conference for theorists and practitioners working on or toward improving the lives of those people affected by an emergency (conflict, war, humanitarian or natural disaster) was held in July 2014 at the University of Birmingham (UK). The purpose of this conference was to stimulate debate on the topic in an attempt to improve the lives of those affected.

Philosophers, academics and theorists work on global issues that affect people – but in silos (or stovepipes). In an attempt to go some way to correcting this isolated approach, Emergencies and Affected Peoples created a platform for the convergence of theoretical and practical problems and thus created space for reflection and learning. Those academics who work with or even converse with practitioners, often find it rewarding and consider it to be of great benefit to the outcomes of their work. Likewise, practitioners are often caught in bureaucratic cycles with crises creating unrealistic time frames for completing work, let alone providing time to research new trends in theory. The goal of both groups of professionals, however, is to aid those affected by real-world issues, in this case those affected by emergencies, broadly defined.

The conference was arranged as a series of panels, each on a different topic. These were:

- *The Agency of Affected People* which included conference papers on Agency and LGBT Struggles in Conflict Areas as well as a presentation on the need for respect in humanitarian action.
- *A Way Forward for Communities* focused on recovery. Our practitioner suggested ways of improving the recovery of children affected by disaster and our academic offered analysis of the ethics and use of cash transfers in post-disaster recovery.
- *Long-term Implications of Refugee Situations* touched upon both the issue of masculinities and gender norms in camps as well as the idea of citizenship in refugee situations.
- *Rebuilding and Reconstructing* was our final panel. Our practitioner offered economic stabilization lessons learned from the Haitian earthquake recovery while our academic practitioner suggested that disaster rights are necessary.

By the end of the day's panels and presentations it became clear that there is indeed a common goal: saving and improving the lives of those affected by an emergency. Opinions surrounding how we view the issues and what we think will help most are as disparate as the fields and professions of those in attendance. However, and once again, every one of us attempts to assist those struggling with the effects of conflict, war, humanitarian emergency or natural disaster.

Submitting to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS)

We (the conference organizers) decided to submit to the WHS because the outcomes from this conference are too important not to share with those in a position to make real changes. The WHS Open Consultation period is an opportunity to utilise interdisciplinarity, reach a larger audience with our discussions, and, ultimately, help alleviate the suffering of those affected by emergencies.

Moreover, we had an alternative angle when it came to addressing assistance to affected peoples. We were asking practitioners and academics the same question, in the same room, at the same time

to see how their approach survived the scrutiny of their fellow panellists (experts that they did not otherwise routinely engage with) and the broader group discussion and questioning. This dialogic approach was different to other conferences because we intended there to be methodological and theoretical conflict but also fruitful debate, making for a greater opportunity to learn lessons from each other.

Also, and perhaps most importantly, a conference that focuses on those affected does not respect their struggle if it doesn't recognize the huge need, and the corresponding requirement, to act. Those affected are usually the ones responding in the immediacy of an emergency. This means that the voices of those affected by an emergency count double, and so we have double the opportunity to create policy change. For the purpose of this conference and report, the affected people include any individuals directly impacted – economically, socially, physically, emotionally or psychologically – by an emergency situation.

Just as the study of disasters is context and scenario specific, the scope and size of the impact an emergency has on an affected person is specific to that person. Accordingly, there are no overriding rules or obvious changes to be made to policy because such things are scenario specific and must be judged case-by-case. Instead, we offer trends coming out of the conference which should be considered, addressed and integrated into all future planning for those affected by an emergency.

Analysis of Trends

It is to the analysis of these trends to which we now turn. There are two trends and several points within each which will, eventually, lead us to conference outcomes in the form of recommendations. We submit these recommendations to the WHS venture of developing policy to tackle humanitarian needs in our ever-changing world.

1. Hurdles to helping those affected

The first trend identified at the conference was that there are common hurdles to the effective provision of assistance to those affected by emergencies, namely corruption and accountability.

Corruption

Corruption is the syphoning of funds and supplies away from those affected by a disaster. Addressing and squashing corruption was identified as the top priority in the fight to support those affected by an emergency. Looking at corruption in general (i.e. non-disaster specific situations) it is higher in those places where human rights violations are high. Further, corruption is immoral in itself because it deprives the intended person access to basic goods and is in essence stealing.

Operationally, corruption results in the delivery of funds and supplies being severely delayed and, in some cases, depletes available funds and supplies. Broadly speaking, corruption inhibits quick recovery. Without adequate food, water, shelter and access to basic goods, a community of affected people will not be able to recover from the disaster.

Corruption also hinders effective response. Many times money given to foreign governments in support of those affected is diverted as bribes and perks for those in power. This is criminal and

immoral, of course, but it also means that those affected are not receiving effective response. Emergency response is meant to be timely, focused and attentive to particular needs. Meanwhile, unconditional cash transfers directly to affected individuals, while not without its problems, stands as a possible alternative to the provision of money direct to governments.¹

Corruption also calls into question the ability of a national government to appropriately administer disaster response and recovery. Disaster response is the priority of a national government. Corruption, we suggest, undermines a government's ability to deliver on its duty to provide those things necessary for life to its citizens.

It was noted that an earthquake, flood, fuel line explosion, etc., on its own, does not make a disaster. But rather, a disaster occurs when the event impacts people. Indeed, the recognition that disasters are social incidents (i.e. they affect people rather than just land) help us to understand what methods would be most effective in restoring normality to affected communities and what strategies are likely to hinder progress. Our focus, then, is to raise awareness of societal issues that occur post-disaster.

And so, because corruption is one of the biggest hurdles to the effective provision of assistance to affected people, because it delays response operations and inhibits quick recovery, because it is a crime and because it undermines the foundation on which a government rules, we recommend that rooting out corruption be a pressing concern of the WHS.

Accountability

The second hurdle to the effective delivery of support and assistance to those affected by an emergency is accountability. Accountability is not just about finding someone or something to blame for problems but also helps us to understand who is in a position to assist us when an emergency situation occurs. Those affected rely on governments, aid agencies and often each other in terrible situations. Accountability issues span from the macro – international organization/national government – level, to the mid- neighbourhood and community - level, to the micro – family - level. With this, and of course, there are operational and theoretical issues associated with a lack of accountability.

It is difficult to hold anyone to account for their misguided or malicious actions during a disaster response. Governments, even democratic ones, hold most of the power and the process of removing them from office can be long and ineffective. Still at the macro-level and, actually, more difficult, is our ability to hold NGOs to account. Humanitarian assistance is very often delivered by non-profit organizations, charities, religious groups, and NGOs and their work is to be commended. However, if their policies or actions cause further harm to those already affected by an emergency there is no voting them out of office or legal streamlined course of action.

Those affected by the Haitian earthquake are such an example. Ordinary Haitians blame certain peacekeeping regiments from the United Nations for bringing cholera to the island. The legal battle for damages or indeed just to hold the peacekeepers and UN accountable has been diverted to private courts even if the private courts do not have any jurisdiction to affect change. Even if it did

¹ This was discussed in Panel 2. See Appendix 1 for an outline of panel topics and panellists.

have jurisdiction, procedures for requesting or working within international governance structures involve long and bureaucratic processes. *Our primary recommendation having to do with accountability is thus to create a straightforward, quick, political and legal system within international bodies in which those affected can hold non-state response agencies to account.*

Further as to operational issues associated with accountability, it is difficult to break cycles of aid dependency. Aid dependency is often a result of poverty or structural inequalities that exist before an emergency. Those affected by an emergency situation are then further burdened by the question of what to do after the (literal and metaphorical) dust settles. There are layers of responsibility in emergency response and for each of those layers come a question of accountability. Assistance is an obvious necessity in many emergency situations. But assistance can reinforce historical societal inequalities and bolster the seemingly necessary paternalistic policies in a given community. Likewise, altruism, assistance meant to help those thought to be unable to help themselves, can strip those affected of their agency.

When a disaster hits an already disadvantaged community (consider the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans) there is a very good chance that the inequalities present before the disaster will remain if not get worse. Assistance can actually reinforce inequality. For example, by portraying communities as helpless and in need of a saviour we disempower those affected. We suggest instead that social change is bolstered at the community level rather than us saving from above.² Likewise, in communities with pre-existing social and economic inequalities, disasters disproportionately affect those that are already worse off.³ This is because things as simple as insurance, individual financial buffers and safety net provisions are unavailable to those with low incomes from the start. Accountable assistance considers whether or not certain strategies will undermine progress within minority groups and considers relevant alternatives.

We must indeed consider that choice is burdened and layered by politics, work, family, and historical facts. Choices such as settle or return, rebuild or relocate, receive cash or assistance in-kind are not clear cut. For example, many outside the situation would argue that the idea of returning to affected communities, ones like the Lower Ninth Ward, is ridiculous. An area that is below sea level, has been destroyed by storms that are likely to occur again, and cannot be guaranteed safe with the help of levees seems preposterous. However, for those communities with years and years of familial and cultural ties to the area, there really is no other option. Settling in a new city will not only bring hardship in the way of finding new jobs, finding affordable housing, navigating government and social systems, but it will also remove any ties that made for a decent life. *A paper delivered at the Emergencies and Affected People conference offered ways to make conscious decisions about aid delivery that do not reinforce inequality and brake cycles of aid dependency.*⁴ *We recommend such conscientious decision-making.*

² Discussed in Panel 1

³ Discussed in Panel 4

⁴ Discussed in Panel 4

2. Making sense of who is affected

The development of policy for improving the safety and prosperity of those affected by emergencies is a daunting task. The second trend identified at the Emergencies and Affected People conference is the realization that we need to better articulate just *who* is affected by a disaster. Do we offer one individual assistance and not another? What if the help we are offering is not the help that a certain individual needs? Do we consider the agency of the individual when we look at groups?

At all levels of governance, we tackle this work by labelling and putting individuals into manageable groups. We identify women's groups and offer assistance based on women-in-disaster-type needs; we try to provide extra assistance and right past wrongs carried out against those in a lower social class or minority groups; we group lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered and queers under one heading so as to deliver them assistance which considers their security, freedom and independence.

In no way would we suggest that this is a bad approach to the delivery of aid to those affected by emergency situations. However, in order to make sense of *who* it is that is affected we should consider that these labels and groupings can raise as many issues as they solve. For example, labels in and of themselves can be a hindrance to personal autonomy. One presenter argued that the distinction (and the associated label) between internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees is morally arbitrary.⁵ IDPs and refugees can be facing the same danger with the same logistical hurdles and psychological traumas. One, however, has crossed an international boundary and thus receives the 'refugee' label. This entitles the individual to a vast array of international support and protection.

Another issue associated with grouping affected individuals in order to streamline the delivery of assistance is that groups often overlap. Intersectionality must therefore be used as a mechanism for making sense of who is affected. For example, a female, bisexual Christian in the Middle East fleeing her home due to conflict is a very difficult person to label. The concern, then, is that the conflicting personal needs are not addressed because assistance is difficult to deliver to the individual. Groups are easier.

Again, this is not a criticism of the current aid structures. Instead, it allows us to offer a recommendation. Labelling those affected is not always the most productive way of delivering assistance. *Instead, aid should be tailored to the individual when the requirements associated with different groups overlap.* This does not require the development of separate aid packages to each individual. Instead, assistance should come in component parts which fit together like puzzle pieces, complimenting other components where possible. A puzzle board approach to aid delivery will not require new or different international aid structures and assistance – just how it is packaged. This will also empower the individual to take control of their own recovery while supporting all of their needs.

3. Making sense of who is responsible

The third and final trend identified at the conference is that we must all accept that we are each responsible for improving policy for those affected by emergency situations. Global burden sharing,

⁵ Discussed in Panel 3

joined-up, interdisciplinary planning is the only way forward. Until we realize this and integrate our responsibilities into national policies we will fail those affected by emergencies.

But with this, and in order to understand our responsibilities, we recommend a response framework with ethics, not just human rights, at its core. Using an ethics based framework for the delivery of assistance to those affected we will, at a minimum, be better prepared to fight corruption and deliver timely and appropriate aid to those affected.

This can and should include an ethical education for civil servants, aid workers and individuals. Civil servants, the makers and enforcers of post-emergency policy, and aid workers, those who deliver the fruits of post-emergency policy, should be required to learn about ethics as a discipline. This is not to say that there should be ethical requirements integrated into each policy process or delivery. Instead, through exposure to ethical concepts and the subsequent development of a personal ethic we can expect that civil servants and aid workers will deliver assistance that is more ethical and therefore more supportive of the needs of those affected.

Further, ethics should be integrated into disaster, first-aid, and emergency training for any individual enrolled in a course or learning about how to act in an emergency. Those affected are often the first responders and so they need to understand that any and all actions have ethical implications. Only through exposure to what ethical practice actually is can we expect individuals to understand and integrate ethics into their own responses. This will also help to drive and manage expectations of the kind of assistance to expect from civil servants and aid workers.

In addition to the ethics of response, we must also accept that as a society of people is responsible for the political communities in which we live. The effective delivery of assistance to affected individuals may require us to think beyond our pre-conceptions and think beyond sovereignty. One point made at the conference was that graduated sovereignty will help IDPs and refugees return/settle. This is because graduated sovereignty will help to equalize the treatment of both groups, something which is morally required and practically not the case.⁶

Also, and as argued previously in this report, labelling groups may hinder response effectiveness. We as a society are responsible for the delivery of *effective* assistance, not just assistance. *It may, therefore, be necessary to consider whether using labels for groups (e.g. LGBTQ) or for political policies (i.e. democratic governance) as indicators of success are actually appropriate.* So, one panellist argued that many aid policies measure the number of LGBTQ people assisted in the aftermath of a disaster. This assistance, it is assumed, will automatically improve the lives and livelihoods of LGBTQ individuals, regardless of the individual assistance that may be required or the scope of the problems each person is facing. From this we can see that simply saying, ‘we have assisted x number of LGBTQ individuals and therefore we have been successful supporting LGBTQ rights’ is insufficient. Instead, success should be measured when those affected think there has been success.⁷

⁶ Discussed in Panel 3

⁷ Discussed in Panel 1

Conclusion

All disasters are local but individuals belong to a complex web of identities and groups. With this in mind, and as members of that global, interlinked community, we must focus our attentions on what we can do to support people affected by emergencies, whether conflict, humanitarian disaster, war or natural disaster. Our interdisciplinary panel and audience was uniquely positioned to offer interlinked ideas and suggestions for a way forward in the development of assistance frameworks.

Particular recommendations have been made (and highlighted) throughout this report.

1. Corruption is one of the biggest hurdles to the effective provision of assistance to affected people. It delays response operations and inhibits quick recovery; it is a crime and it undermines the foundation on which a government rules. We recommend that rooting out corruption be a prime focus of the World Humanitarian Summit.
2. Moreover, we suggest investigating the possibility of unconditional cash transfers, especially in low-income countries.
3. Create a straightforward, quick, political and legal system within international bodies in which those affected can hold non-state response agencies to account.
4. In order to make sense of *who* it is that is affected we should consider that these labels and groupings can raise as many issues as they solve.
5. A framework for assistance must ensure constant discussion with those affected in order to understand what they want and need.
6. We recommend a response framework with ethics, not just human rights, at its core.

There are some other recommendations that came out of the conference which we think are important to mention. These recommendations focus particularly on frameworks developed for the delivery of assistance and require preparedness is at the core of all planning.

7. A framework for assistance must ensure the fostering of networks because:
 - a. Networks are the only connection migrant/refugee families will have.
 - b. Globalization is a reality.
 - c. Networks connect beyond political boundaries and across labelled groups.
8. A framework for assistance must provide individuals with clear options which support personal agency. Options like:
 - a. Settle or return
 - b. Rebuild or relocate
 - c. Cash or assistance in-kind.

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Appendix 1: Conference Organisers

Lauren Traczykowski, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham

Sarah-Louise Johnson, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham

Emma Roberts, MA Student, University of Birmingham

Tony Kemp, MA Student, University of Birmingham

Ruth Wareham, PhD Candidate, University of Birmingham

Appendix 2: Conference Agenda

Welcome

Lauren Traczykowski

Keynote Speaker

Professor David Alexander, University College London
Institute for Risk and Disaster Reduction

Panel 1: The Agency of Affected People

Chair: Sarah-Louise Johnson

Speaker 1:

Nour Abu-Assab, The Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration
Power, Agency and LGBT Struggles in Conflict Areas

Speaker 2:

Alasdair Gordon-Gibson, University of St Andrews
Co-ordination, Co-operation, and Comprehension: the need for respect and awareness in humanitarian action

Panel 2: A Way Forward for Communities

Chair: Tony Kemp

Speaker 1:

Daniela Casula, Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti
Child Victims of Trauma: a return to normality

Speaker 2:

Dr Scott Wisor, University of Birmingham
Complex Systems and Simple Interventions

Panel 3: Long Term Implications of Refugee Situations

Chair: Emma Roberts

Speaker 1:

Nof Nasser-Eddin, The Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration
Negotiating Masculinities: the case of Iraqi refugees in Jordan

Speaker 2:

David Korpela, University of Turku & Finn Church Aid
Daniel Weyermann, University of Turku
Refugee Camps: ethical and practical challenges

Panel 4: Rebuilding and Reconstruction

Chair: Ruth Wareham

Speaker 1:

Elizabeth Brake, Arizona State University

Rebuilding and Restoration after Disaster: a case for Disaster Rights?

Speaker 2:

Adrian Powney, British Red Cross

Livelihoods: the Recovery Operation and Economic Stabilisation following the Haiti Earthquake