Rethinking Humanitarianism: Adapting to 21st Century Challenges

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
ECHO	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
GHD	Global Humanitarian Donorship
HC	United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
RC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

The modern international humanitarian system, defined as much by similarities and shared values as by differences and competition among its members, is being tested like never before. The cumulative effects of population growth, climate change, increased resource scarcity, rising inequalities, economic and geopolitical shifts, the changing nature of violence, and rapid technological developments are presenting the humanitarian system with four broad challenges:

- an increasing humanitarian caseload;
- the changing nature of crises;
- a renewed assertiveness of host states; and
- finite financial resources.

While the humanitarian system remains a relatively heterogeneous lot, with different actors proposing different solutions, a six-point agenda for adaptation has become apparent. According to this conventional wisdom, the humanitarian system must:

1) anticipate the risks;
2) strengthen local capacities and resilience;
3) develop new partnerships;
4) enlarge the funding base and use it more effectively;
5) enhance coordination, leadership, accountability, and professionalization; and
6) make innovations and leverage new technologies.

This ambitious agenda might well allow the humanitarian system to better face some of tomorrow's challenges, but it is not without tensions. What these tensions have in common is a growing disconnect between the expanding ambitions of the international humanitarian system and some of its fundamental premises: the universality of the undertaking, the integrity of its principles, and the value of increased coherence and coordination.

To resolve some of the deeply rooted tensions inherent in this ambitious agenda, humanitarian actors must undertake a thorough and honest self-examination:

- Are the foundations of the modern humanitarian system truly universal? How can the system adapt to a changing international landscape and open up to actors who did not participate in its development—actors who might have different views and practices?
- Are humanitarian principles always relevant? Is the systematic reference to humanitarian principles undermining them, given a recurrent lack of respect? Could a sparser but more faithful use of principles, adapted to the context, be envisaged?
- Is the quest for ever greater coherence and coordination always a good thing? Could the fragmentation of the system be valued as a strength, given the comparative advantages of its various components?

This exercise in self-reflection may reveal the emergence of a sort of "global welfare system," more ambitious and far-reaching than the traditional understanding of humanitarian action. This new undertaking would benefit from redefining its rules and theoretical foundations to be in tune with its broader objectives. And while this shift might bring more consistency by easing some of the current tensions—especially those linked to the humanitarian principles—humanitarian actors will have to make the hard choice between a global, holistic approach and a more limited, but still badly needed, form of humanitarianism.

Introduction

> Some of the most important organizations presently responsible for preventing, preparing for and responding to the sorts of humanitarian challenges that are anticipated in the future are failing to do so.[1]

This bleak assessment of the humanitarian system in 2007 provided a much needed wake-up call. Five years later, this call has apparently been heard. Humanitarian actors are increasingly aware of the need to adapt to the twenty-first-century challenges, and literature is abundant on the

1 Humanitarian Futures Programme, "Dimensions of Crisis Impacts: Humanitarian Needs by 2015," a report prepared for the UK Department for International Development, January 2007, p. 52, available at www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/dimensions-of-crisis.pdf .

required changes.[2] The question remains, however, whether the measures currently being considered will successfully meet tomorrow's challenges.

The aim of this report is not so much to anticipate the nature and scale of future humanitarian needs; other studies have done that with brio. Instead, it examines the type of responses being considered within the humanitarian system to adapt to this changing world. It aims to generate discussion on some of the unavoidable tensions that such an ambitious undertaking is raising. No single humanitarian actor—or group of actors—will be able to address the numerous challenges ahead alone. The diverse skills and approaches available within, but also outside, the humanitarian system will all need to be associated with the effort, while managing the tensions that such a collective effort inevitably creates.

After sketching out the ill-defined boundaries of the humanitarian system to explain its origins and define the scope of the enterprise, this report focuses on the challenges faced by the system today and identifies the outline of a shared adaptation strategy. The last section reflects upon some of the tensions inherent in this ambitious program and raises key questions about the future of humanitarianism.

Defining the Boundaries of the Humanitarian Enterprise

> The international humanitarian system evolved. It was never designed, and like most products of evolution, it has its anomalies, redundancies, inefficiencies, and components evolved for one task being adapted to another.[3]

If one asks a randomly chosen person to define humanitarian aid, the person is likely to define it as actions aimed to save lives and alleviate suffering, reflecting notions of charity, philanthropy, or altruism shared by most cultures and religions since the dawn of time. If one prods a little further, our random respondent would probably add that humanitarian aid is generally deployed in conflicts and natural disasters around the world.

Yet, as humanitarian aid has become more institutionalized over the years, so has its definition. According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC)—which brings together the main international aid donors—"humanitarian aid is assistance designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies. To be classified as humanitarian, aid should be consistent with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence."[4]

Interestingly, three elements stand out that can further clarify the constitutive characteristics of humanitarian aid:

- As our imaginary interviewee replied, humanitarian aid aims to save lives and alleviate suffering, but (s)he apparently oversaw the less obvious objective of upholding human dignity. In other words, humanitarian aid, through assistance and the growing spectrum of protection activities, aims primarily to tackle the effects on human beings of extraordinary circumstances.
- Humanitarian aid is a short-term endeavor carried out "during and in the aftermath of emergencies." As provocative as it may sound, once the Band-Aid is applied to an open wound, and a minimum follow-up is undertaken to ensure it does not infect, the work of humanitarians is done.
- Finally, humanitarian aid is informed by a set of humanitarian principles that, according to the definition above, distinguishes it from other forms of aid: it should be motivated by the sole aim of helping other humans affected by disasters (humanity), exclusively based on

2 This includes but is not limited to: Edmund Cairns, "Crises in a New World Order: Challenging the Humanitarian Project," Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2012; Lord Paddy Ashdown (Chair), "Humanitarian Emergency Response Review," study commissioned by the UK Department for International Development, London: HERR, March 2011; Feinstein International Center/Humanitarian Futures Programme (FIC/HFP), "Humanitarian Horizons: A Practitioner's Guide to the Future," Medford, MA: 2010; Benedict Dempsey and Amelia B. Kyazze, "At a Crossroads: Humanitarianism for the Next Decade," London: International Save the Children Alliance, 2010; Kirsten Gelsdorf, "Global Challenges and their Impact on International Humanitarian Action," New York: UN OCHA, 2010; Alain Boinet and Benoît Miribel, "Analyses et Propositions sur l'Action Humanitaire dans les Situations de Crise et Post-Crise," study commissioned by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris, 2010; and Tanja Schuemer-Cross and Ben Heaven Taylor, "The Right to Survive: The Humanitarian Challenge for the Twenty-First Century," Oxford, UK: Oxfam International, 2009.

3 Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 2.

4 OECD, *DAC Statistical Reporting Directives*, OECD Doc. DCD/DAC(2010)40/REV1, November 12, 2010, para. 184.

people's needs and without any further discrimination (impartiality), without favoring any side in a conflict or other dispute where aid is deployed (neutrality), and free from any economic, political, or military interests at stake (independence).

While most would agree on these core elements of humanitarian aid, more nuance is needed, as disagreements have always existed on their interpretation and operational implementation.

For instance, there have been many debates on the meaning of the neutrality of humanitarian action, particularly on whether this neutrality implies non-engagement in any type of controversy. Detractors have questioned in particular whether it is morally justified to remain neutral and not to take position when confronting mass atrocities, such as during the Holocaust, the Biafran War, or the Rwandan Genocide.[5] Likewise, it is not entirely correct to assert that humanitarian aid aims to tackle the effects of crises only. Indeed, it is commonly agreed that protection—defined as all activities aimed at ensuring respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law[6]—includes promoting lasting changes in the political and socioeconomic environment in order to diminish the likelihood of recurrence of violations. In other words, protection incidentally addresses causes of human suffering through longer-term actions, such as training of armed forces or groups on international norms and standards, advocating for the enactment of international law in domestic legislation, and strengthening of the domestic justice system.

However, attempts to define humanitarian aid are further complicated by the growing tendency, as noted by Walker and Maxwell, to place "much greater emphasis in humanitarian action on dealing with the underlying causes of crisis, in addition to (or in some cases, rather than) dealing with effects of crises on human populations."[7] In effect, some humanitarian organizations have grown uncomfortable with addressing only the consequences and

International Recognition and Utility of the Humanitarian Principles

The humanitarian principles were first given international recognition by the twentieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 1965, along with three other Red Cross–specific principles: voluntary service, unity, and universality.

UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of December 19, 1991, consecrated the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, while independence was officially recognized only in 2003 in Resolution 58/114. These principles are also mentioned in a number of documents that set standards for the humanitarian sector, such as the 1986 Statutes of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the 2003 Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, and the 2008 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

These principles are central to the humanitarian undertaking and represent a key characteristic of humanitarian aid. However, as Jean Pictet argued in his commentary on the fundamental principles of the Red Cross, they do not all have the same importance.* Humanitarian principles have a hierarchical order and an internal logic or, in other words, different domains of utility. Humanity and impartiality—to which Pictet referred to as "substantive principles"—are at the core of the humanitarian ethos: humanitarian aid must be motivated by the sole aim of helping other humans proportionally to their needs and without any discrimination. Independence and neutrality—referred to by Pictet as "derived principles"—are means that make this ideal possible, especially in situations of conflict. Indeed, independence and neutrality are field-tested tools that make access to populations in need acceptable to the parties to a conflict. They are guarantees that humanitarian aid does not serve ulterior political, economic, or military motives, or aim to benefit the opposing party.

*Jean Pictet, "The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary," Geneva: ICRC, 1979.

5 Philip Gourevitch, "Alms Dealers: Can You Provide Humanitarian Aid Without Facilitating Conflicts?" *The New Yorker*, October 11, 2010, p. 102, and David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002). For an in-depth analysis of ethical questions raised by relief operations following the Rwandan Genocide, see Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 155ff.

6 Sylvie Giossi Caverzasio, ed., *Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards* (Geneva: ICRC, 2001).

7 Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, p. 141 (original emphasis).

not also the root causes of both man-made and natural disasters. The termination of an emergency does not mean that its underlying reasons have ceased to exist. Hence, humanitarian actors have increasingly engaged in longer-term reconstruction and development following humanitarian crises. This shift brought about the emergence in the last decade of a so-called "new humanitarianism"[8] that seeks to address not only symptoms but causes of conflicts by building better societies through humanitarian action, development, good governance, human rights, and, if required, military "humanitarian intervention." Such an approach openly collides with the principles of independence and neutrality, as its proponents acknowledge the need to align with other approaches directed toward the same goals, including political ones. Jean-Hervé Bradol, former president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders), even argued that this "alliance" with political interests for the "greater good" is at odds with the very purpose of humanitarian aid, illustrating the wide diversity of views on what humanitarian aid truly is.[9]

A HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT OF HUMANITARIAN AID

Charity and philanthropy have been embodied for centuries in most cultures and religions, and early examples abound of actions by states and religious institutions or orders to alleviate human suffering in situations of man-made or natural disasters.[10] However, the modern humanitarian system can be traced back to the Battle of Solferino in 1859 that led to the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) by Henri Dunant and, later, of the broader Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (hereafter, the Red Cross Movement). The ICRC is closely related to the birth of international humanitarian law and is also at the origin of the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.[11] In effect, the development of the Red Cross Movement marked the emergence of organized nongovernmental humanitarian action.

International humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) appeared throughout the twentieth century and, as noted by Elizabeth Ferris, "all of the major international NGOs—from CARE International to Oxfam—first started out by providing assistance in times of war."[12] Save the Children was created in 1919 to pressure the British government to lift its blockade against Germany and Austria-Hungary; the Second World War prompted the creation of Oxfam and CARE; the Biafran War in Nigeria in the late 1960s saw the birth of the "without borders" movement, best illustrated by the French organization MSF; and successive Cold War conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s triggered the creation of a new generation of NGOs such as Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger) in France, Merlin in the United Kingdom, and GOAL in Ireland.[13]

The picture would not be complete without mentioning the entrance after the Second World War of a new major player on the then nascent humanitarian scene: the United Nations (UN) and its different agencies. Reflecting to some extent the development of NGOs, three of the five UN agencies having a humanitarian mandate were created out of concerns for people affected by the scourge of conflict or oppression: the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF, 1946) was originally created to respond to the needs of Europe's war-affected children, while the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA, 1950) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1951) were established for refugees fleeing conflict and persecution.[14]

By contrast, until the 1980s, disaster response remained mostly the responsibility of the affected

8 Fiona Fox, "New Humanitarianism: Does it Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?" *Disasters* 25, No. 4 (December 2001): 275-289; Joanna Macrae, ed., "The New Humanitarianisms: A Review of Trends in Global Humanitarian Action," London: Overseas Development Institute, April 2002.

9 Jean-Hervé Bradol, "The Sacrificial International Order and Humanitarian Action," in *In the Shadows of "Just Wars": Violence, Politics and Humanitarian Action*, edited by Fabrice Weissman (London: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2004), p. 21.

10 Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, p. 13ff.

11 See the text box on page 3 of this report.

12 Elizabeth G. Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011), p. 99.

13 See Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, p. 117ff., and Philippe Ryfman, "Non-Governmental Organizations: An Indispensable Player of Humanitarian Aid," *International Review of the Red Cross* 89, No. 865 (March 2007): 21-45.

14 The two other UN agencies with a humanitarian mandate are OCHA (technically, an office of the UN Secretariat), whose predecessor, the UN Disaster Relief Organization, was created in 1972 for disaster response, and the World Food Programme, which was established in 1961 to deliver food aid in emergencies regardless of their nature. For further details on the development of the UN humanitarian system, see Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, p. 33ff.

state, often supported by direct bilateral aid from other governments, despite early attempts to internationalize the system through the creation of the League of the Red Cross in 1919 and of the League of Nations' International Relief Union in 1927.[15] According to Paul Harvey, this central role of the affected state in disaster response "was a function of the connections between relief and the wider sphere of development aid assistance, which has largely been constructed as a 'state-centered' endeavour."[16] This changed with the end of the Cold War, which saw a marked preference among donor states to channel their funding through international organizations and NGOs, due in part to a growing distrust in the capacities of receiving states to efficiently handle foreign aid. This shift in attitude by donor governments contributed to the boom of the nongovernmental humanitarian sector, which has become increasingly involved in disaster relief assistance.

In a nutshell, the modern international humanitarian system, characterized by the growing involvement of international organizations and NGOs, is a compilation of largely Western governmental and individual initiatives over more than a century that were created primarily in reaction to conflict. Natural disaster relief took a more central stage in the last two decades as donor governments changed their aid policy and started channeling funding through international and nongovernmental relief organizations, rather than through bilateral aid. Newly available funding in turn prompted the proliferation of new NGOs joining what can now be described as a multibillion-dollar humanitarian enterprise, whose financial weight has been multiplied by ten in the last twenty years.[17]

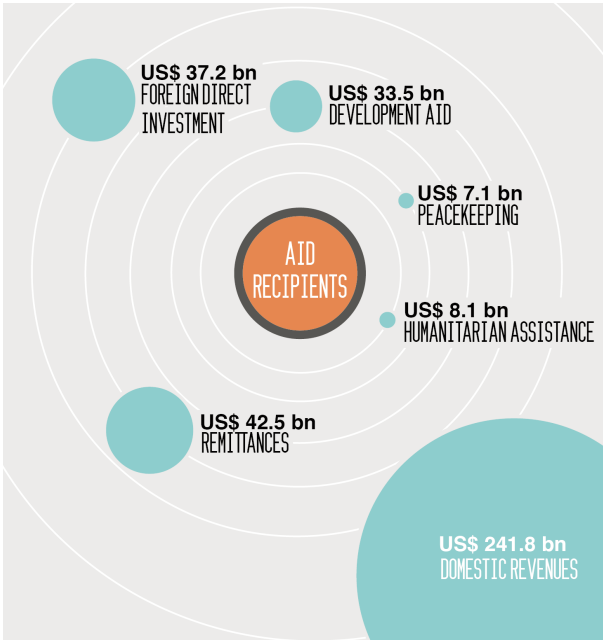
MAPPING THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

At the frontline of crisis response are the affected communities themselves—supported by local civil-society organizations, including religious institutions—and local and national authorities, including the national military. Nonstate armed groups can also play a role in emergency relief when they exercise some degree of control over a population.

It is difficult to quantify the share of local and national response to a given crisis in the overall humanitarian response. In part this is because there is no consistent and systematic financial reporting of local and national response, but it is also because some elements, such as local coping mechanisms, are unquantifiable. Yet, the following chart borrowed from the 2011 Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (GHA Report) gives an idea of the relatively marginal importance of formal humanitarian assistance compared to the large array of other sources of relief funds (figure 1).[18] It represents total funding flows to the top twenty recipient countries in 2009 and illustrates how the $8.1 billion of humanitarian assistance is dwarfed by other flows that also indirectly contribute to emergency relief, such as remittances from diasporas and domestic revenues of the affected states.

The international humanitarian system complements the initial emergency response put in place at local and national level, and generally comes in after it. The traditional elements of the modern

Figure 1. Formal humanitarian assistance in perspective



15 The League of the Red Cross later became the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

16 Paul Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected States in Disaster Response," London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009, p. 5.

17 Michaël Neuman, "The Shared Interests Which Make Humanitarianism Possible," *Humanitarian Aid on the Move,* Newsletter No. 9 (March 2012): 2-4.

18 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2011," Somerset, UK: 2011, available at www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/report/gha-report-2011 . Development Initiatives is an organization that monitors development and humanitarian funding flows in order to improve aid effectiveness.

humanitarian system are the following:

- Donor governments, along with the European Commission's humanitarian aid department (ECHO). Traditional donor governments are mostly Western and are gathered within the OECD-DAC, representing the bulk of global humanitarian funding. Although nontraditional donors—notably Middle Eastern countries—are playing an increasingly significant role, as we shall see later in this paper, the politics of humanitarian action remain shaped mostly by OECD-DAC members.
- United Nations agencies and offices and other intergovernmental organizations (such as the International Organization for Migration). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) plays a key role in coordinating the various operational components of the humanitarian system. UN agencies are gathered in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), chaired by the head of OCHA in its capacity as emergency relief coordinator, in which the Red Cross Movement and some NGO platforms are also represented as standing invitees.
- The constitutive entities of the Red Cross Movement—the ICRC, the IFRC, and the galaxy of 187 National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies.
- International humanitarian NGOs, which are as diverse as they are numerous. A team of researchers recently counted 4,400 NGOs carrying out humanitarian activities on an ongoing basis,[19] which does not take into account the thousands of smaller development NGOs that engage in relief activities when a disaster strikes or those established in reaction to a particular event.[20]

Beyond these traditional actors of the international humanitarian system, other actors—often referred to as "nontraditional" actors—increasingly contribute to international relief activities: foreign militaries, private military and security companies, corporations, private foundations, diasporas, etc. It is arguable that these actors have always contributed to relief operations but were placed outside of the system by its main protagonists, as the latter continuously attempted to better define themselves. As John Borton writes, "a striking feature of the humanitarian system…is the continuing lack of clarity as to what the 'humanitarian system' actually consists of and where its boundaries lie."[21]

It might be useful here to think about the humanitarian galaxy as made up of two different systems. On the one hand, as depicted in figure 2 below, there is what could be called the formal, or institutional, humanitarian system. The formal system—the focus of the present paper—consists of mostly Western actors whose raison d'être is humanitarian and who are linked together by established codes, shared principles and jargon, and common mechanisms and procedures. Over the last two decades, the formal system has become increasingly institutionalized and centralized under UN leadership for the sake of improved coherence and coordination.[22] On the other hand, there is an informal humanitarian system, constituted by the affected communities and so-called nontraditional actors coming to their succor, and driven by different modes of action and objectives, be they charitable, economic, or political. Some of these actors—such as small national NGOs and the national authorities of the host state—are increasingly being integrated into the formal humanitarian system, which has grown more aware of the need to better work with them, as discussed later in this report.

One of the difficulties in defining the humanitarian system—an exercise usually carried out by members of the formal humanitarian system—is that it virtually encompasses anybody extending a helping hand to people affected by crises. Another difficulty is linked to the long-standing antagonism and increasing overlaps between humanitarianism

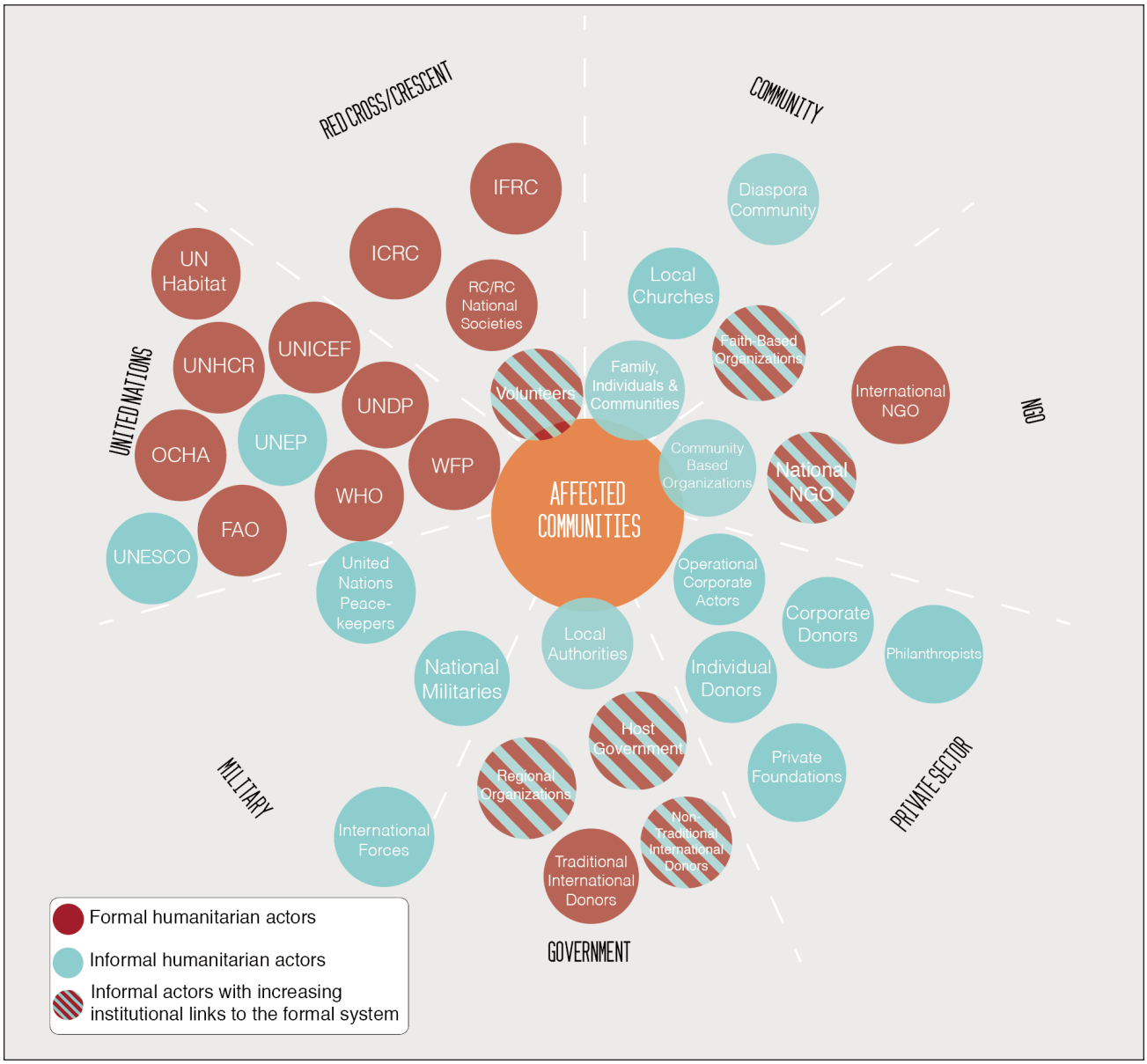
19 ALNAP, "The State of the Humanitarian System: 2012 Edition," London: Overseas Development Institute, July 2012, p. 28. It is worth noting that the NGO sector remains dominated by five "mega" Western NGOs (Catholic Relief Services, MSF, Oxfam International, International Save the Children Alliance, and Word Vision International) that account together for 38 percent of total annual spending by NGOs.

20 For instance, relatively conservative estimates put at 1,000 to 2,000 the number of humanitarian agencies involved to varying degrees in the response to the January 2010 Haiti earthquake alone. See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti Following the 12 January 2010 Earthquake," Geneva, July 2010, p. 8.

21 John Borton, "Future of the Humanitarian System: Impact of Internal Changes," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009, p. 4.

22 See the text box on page 8 of this report.

Figure 2. Map of the humanitarian galaxy



and development. Borton argues that:

> "It has long been the case that most of the agencies that are referred to as 'humanitarian agencies' and seen as comprising the 'Humanitarian System' also function as 'development' agencies.…Consequently, the drawing of lines *around* the system necessarily requires drawing lines *through* organisations."[23]

The increasing overlap between these two activities, concomitant with the tendency to increasingly address the underlying causes of crises in addition to their effects, has long been creating tensions within the humanitarian system. Indeed, development actors' collaboration with governments and local authorities to strengthen their capacity to care for their constituency is often presented as at odds with humanitarian action, because it may cause a loss of independence and neutrality, especially in situations of conflict.

23 Borton, "Future of the Humanitarian System," p. 6 (original emphasis).

Coordination and "Centralization" of the Humanitarian System

Over the last two decades, efforts have been underway to improve the coherence and coordination of the humanitarian system in response to the constant expansion of the sector and the proliferation of actors. UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991 entrusted the world body with this task by creating the position of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), which bears three main responsibilities:

- coordinating the humanitarian assistance of the UN system and liaising with governments and NGOs;
- chairing the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a high-level coordination platform for UN organizations, NGOs, and the Red Cross Movement; and
- administering the Consolidated Appeal Process to coordinate funding appeals.

In 1992, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which became OCHA in 1998, was established to serve as the coordination secretariat under the leadership of the ERC.

In 2005, the Darfur crisis and the Indian Ocean Tsunami led the ERC to launch a new "humanitarian reform." This reform focused on improving coordination by sector through the creation of "clusters," enhancing the predictability and flexibility of humanitarian funding with the creation of pooled funding mechanisms (e.g., the Central Emergency Response Fund, or CERF) and strengthening the role of humanitarian coordinators (HCs) at country level.

In December 2011, the IASC adopted its "Transformative Agenda 2012," which focuses on the areas of leadership, coordination, and accountability. It proposes developing an interagency rapid response mechanism, giving "empowered leadership" to HCs in critical emergencies, reviewing the functioning of clusters to make them leaner and better adapted to the context, and enhancing strategic planning and mutual accountability among the different humanitarian actors involved in the response.

These multiple reforms have undoubtedly improved the coherence of the international humanitarian system but also increasingly centralized the system under UN leadership. Indeed, despite attempts to entrust actors outside of the UN system with leadership and coordination functions, HCs are overwhelmingly coming from within the UN system; most clusters are headed by UN agencies, and pooled-funding mechanisms are administered by UN entities.

Today's Challenges and Their Implications

The international humanitarian system has evolved, somewhat organically, and has continuously adapted to the challenges of the time. It grew to maturity in a century characterized by the two World Wars, the Cold War, colonization and decolonization, the increasing dominance of the West, the advancement of human rights, the imposition of free-market capitalism as the dominant economic model, and a strong belief in the capacity of humans to domesticate forces of nature through scientific and technological developments. The humanitarian system is a byproduct of the environment in which it has evolved. As the world is becoming increasingly globalized and interconnected, different global trends are shaping the international order and raising a new set of challenges—but also opportunities—that no one nation can address in isolation.

- **The world population is growing and becoming increasingly urban.** Recent estimates forecast the world population reaching ten billion by the end of the century.[24] However, this growth is uneven. While most developing nations' populations grow and become disproportionately young—a trend referred to as the "youth bulge"—the population of developed countries tends to stagnate, if not shrink, as it grows increasingly old. On both sides of the North-South divide, however, the world population has become mostly urban, with "virtually all of the expected growth in the world population…concentrated in the urban areas of the less developed regions."[25]
- **Climate change and environmental degradation increase stress on the world population.** Global warming is happening now and is bound to continue, worsening preexisting environmental degradation—notably deforestation and deserti-

24 Justin Gillis and Celia Dugger, "U.N. Forecasts 10.1 Billion People by Century's End," *New York Times*, May 3, 2011.
25 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2009 Revision," New York: 2010, p. 4.

fication—linked to human activities like industrialization and intensive agriculture. Climate change results in more frequent and intense extreme-weather events, such as floods, tropical storms, and droughts,[26] while it aggravates the stress on vital resources like water and food, even as the population is growing and demanding more resources.[27]

- **Global inequalities are rising.** As global poverty is progressively retreating,[28] economic and social disparities are becoming more acute, both between countries and within countries. Since 1960, the difference in average per capita GDP between the twenty richest countries and the twenty poorest has doubled,[29] while studies show that inequalities have risen within both developed and developing countries.[30] Whole swaths of the world population and, for that matter, virtually entire populations of some of the least developed nations remain excluded from education, public health, and access to basic commodities like food and water. The threats this creates for social peace and international security prompted the World Economic Forum to qualify economic disparity as one of the two cross-cutting global risks that "can exacerbate both the likelihood and impact of other risks."[31]
- **The world's economic and geopolitical landscape is changing.** In the last decade, economic influence has started to move from Western countries to emerging powers. The so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) have grown from one-sixth of the world economy to almost a quarter and are likely to match G7 countries' share of GDP by 2040–2050.[32] This shift of economic power is accompanied by changes in the political balance of power. Increasingly, traditional Western powers (including the United States) must cope with the new assertiveness of the Global South. These changes prompted some analysts to suggest that, instead of a G8 or G20, world affairs will be run by the G-Zero, where no single power or group of states will be able to impose its will on the rest of the world.[33]
- **The nature of conflicts and violence is changing.** Recent studies show that the number of recurring conflicts is increasing.[34] Years, if not decades, of low-intensity but protracted violence place a heavy toll on governance and institutions in states commonly qualified as "failed" or "fragile." Globalization has also nurtured new forms of violence by international terrorist networks and transnational criminal organizations, which further complicate the situation in some of these "ungoverned" areas. "The remaining forms of conflict and violence do not fit neatly either into 'war' or 'peace', or into 'criminal violence' or 'political violence', " challenging states and systems of global governance to adapt their approaches to address new forms of fragility and threats.[35]
- **The pace of technological development is unprecedented.** The development and spread of technologies, notably of information and communication technologies (ICT), during the last decade has been phenomenal: the world has never been so interconnected, and the diffusion of information has never been so immediate. However, technological developments can also have unintended consequences and present the international community with new challenges—such as cybercrime and the diversion of technologies to terrorist ends.

These underlying global trends have a number of implications for humanitarian aid and the humanitarian system, which can be grouped into four broad challenges.

26 Although scientists fall short of drawing a clear causal connection between climate change and these types of disasters, their predictions of increased frequency and severity tend to be confirmed in practice. According to the International Disaster Database (www.emdat.be) of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), University of Louvain, Belgium, the annual average of recorded disasters has already doubled during the last two decades, from approximately 200 to 400.

27 Some studies estimate that 350 to 600 million Africans could suffer increased water scarcity if global temperature levels were to rise by only 2 degrees Celsius. Leslie C. Erway Morinière, Richard Taylor, Mohamed Hamza, and Tom Downing, "Climate Change and its Humanitarian Impact," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009, p. 25.

28 "Global Poverty – A Fall to Cheer," *The Economist*, March 3, 2012, pp. 81-82.

29 Shanza Khan and Adil Najam, "The Future of Globalization and its Humanitarian Impacts," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009, p. 14.

30 World Economic Forum, "Global Risks 2011," sixth edition, Geneva: 2011, p. 10.

31 Ibid.

32 US National Intelligence Council, "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World," Washington, DC: 2008, p. 7.

33 Ian Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2012).

34 J. Joseph Hewitt, "Trends in Global Conflict, 1946-2009," *Peace and Conflict 2012* (University of Maryland, 2012), pp. 25-30.

35 World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development*, (Washington, DC: 2011), p. 2.

AN INCREASING HUMANITARIAN CASELOAD

The converging effects of climate change, population growth, and rising inequalities point to an increase in the humanitarian caseload, as more people are more vulnerable to a growing number of disasters. Oxfam estimated in 2009 that, by 2015, there could be a 50 percent increase in the average number of people affected annually by climate-related disasters compared to the decade 1998–2007, bringing the total to 375 million people per year.[36] It concluded that, given the current capacity of the international humanitarian system, the world would be overwhelmed.

This estimate remains a crude projection, as the authors of the study admit. Yet, it reflects a trend—the increased frequency, severity, and scale of both slow- and rapid-onset disasters due partly to climate change—that is likely to considerably increase the number of vulnerable people in need of humanitarian assistance. It is not only the absolute number of people who will be directly affected by tomorrow's disasters that is worrisome; it is also their increasing vulnerability to such shocks, which are compounded by other underlying factors such as population growth in poor countries, the concentration of people in badly planned urban centers, resource scarcity, and commodity price volatility. As the French think tank Groupe URD has shown in a recent study on "unintentional risks," crises rarely depend on one factor only but usually take place due to the increased "contact" between people and multiple risks, compounded by socioeconomic and infrastructural vulnerabilities.[37] For instance, as the Sahel is hit in 2012 by its third severe food and nutrition crisis in less than a decade, the deteriorating resilience of populations to droughts cannot be explained only by the increased frequency of this climatic phenomenon—there is also a complex web of interrelated factors such as endemic poverty, weak governance, booming population growth, and increasing food prices.[38]

Although major natural hazards do not discriminate between the poor and the rich, "poorer communities suffer a disproportionate share of disaster loss."[39] The increased vulnerability to natural disasters due to poverty was made clear in the aftermath to the 2010 earthquakes in Chile and Haiti. Although the quake in Chile scored higher on the Richter scale, it killed far fewer: 562 people died in Chile, while more than 200,000 died in Haiti. This disproportionate share of loss is particularly true of slow-onset processes such as droughts. Wealthier people or countries have resources to better cope with such events that can have a disastrous humanitarian impact on people living in extreme poverty or amid protracted conflicts, as illustrated by the 2011 famine in Somalia.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF CRISES

Beyond the expected increase of the humanitarian caseload, the nature of the environment in which crises occur and the nature of crises themselves are changing. As the world grows increasingly urban, so does the likelihood that natural hazards or conflicts occur in complex urban environments for which humanitarian actors are ill-equipped.[40] This was illustrated by the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the floods that submerged Bangkok in October and November 2011, and the conflict in Syria in 2012, where major battles took place in the cities of Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus.

The nature of violence itself is also changing. As noted above, the boundaries between war and peace, or between criminal violence and political violence, are increasingly blurred. Some countries, although not formally in conflict, are affected by levels of criminal violence and human suffering that are akin to those of a civil war. In Mexico, the five-year-old "drug war" launched by the government against drug cartels has resulted in the death of more than 47,000 people, according to official accounts,[41] making it tempting to draw a parallel with conflicts in Somalia or Afghanistan. If the humanitarian impact of this type of violence is

36 Tanja Schuemer-Cross and Ben Heaven Taylor, "The Right to Survive," p. 25.

37 Francois Grünewald, Blanche Renaudin, Camille Raillon, Hugues Maury, Jean Gadrey, and Karine Hettrich, "Mapping of Future Unintentional Risks: Examples of Risk and Community Vulnerability," Plaisians, France: Groupe URD, September 2010.

38 Peter Gubbels, "Escaping the Hunger Cycle: Pathways to Resilience in the Sahel," Sahel Working Group, September 2011, available at www.groundswellinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/Pathways-to-Resilience-in-the-Sahel.pdf .

39 UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), "Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate: Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow – Summary and Recommendations," Geneva: 2009, p. 4.

40 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disaster Report 2010: Focus on Urban Risk* (Geneva, 2010).

41 "Mexico Drug War has Claimed 47,500 Victims in Five Years," *The Telegraph*, January 12, 2012.

similar to the impact of "traditional" conflicts, with its cortege of displacement, shattered families, and loss of life, it nevertheless forces humanitarian actors to rethink their approach vis-à-vis the different parties. The popular uprisings that have engulfed North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 and 2012—in particular the all-out repression and ensuing conflicts in Libya and Syria—might become an increasingly common form of violence in the years to come, as they found their roots in a complex blend of rising poverty, constrained access to vital resources (such as food), socioeconomic inequality, and political oppression. While this type of violence is not new—revolutions and popular uprisings are a recurrent feature of history books—they represent an additional challenge for humanitarian actors on whom lay unprecedented expectations to be present and do something.

These different types of violence and the recurrence of conflicts in "fragile" or "failed" states have led the international community to new approaches, such as the "stabilization" approach that now largely informs efforts to address these crises. Although there is no commonly agreed definition, "stabilization" can be described as a political approach that "encompasses a combination of military, humanitarian, political and economic instruments to render 'stability' to areas affected by armed conflict and complex emergencies."[42] These different instruments are brought together in the service of a higher political goal: to support the legitimate government in a given country in establishing a lasting peace by addressing the causes of the conflict through security, good governance, rule of law, sustainable economy, and the delivery of basic services.[43] If such an overarching objective is highly desirable, the risks of "politicization" and "militarization" of humanitarian aid are hotly debated. Within the United Nations—which has used the term stabilization in the titles of two UN peace operations (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti) and institutionalized an "integrated" approach to peacekeeping and peacebuilding that is akin to stabilization—this approach raises particular difficulties for humanitarian agencies that are expected to comply with the broader political objectives of the organization.[44]

THE RENEWED ASSERTIVENESS OF HOST STATES

Humanitarian actors have always had to deal with issues relating to the national sovereignty of host states, particularly in conflict situations where the internal threats posed by insurgent groups often create hostility toward what is perceived as external interference. As a matter of fact, UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 recognized the centrality of host states when it stated that "the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected," and "humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country."[45] Yet, what the respect of sovereignty actually means in practice—especially in terms of host states' control of international actors' actions within their territory—has evolved over time. Or, as Barnett and Weiss have put it, "the meaning of sovereignty has varied from one historical era to another, and these variations matter greatly for what humanitarian actors can and therefore should do."[46]

The development of human rights and humanitarian law during the twentieth century has progressively transformed the Westphalian understanding of absolute sovereignty by imposing obligations on states toward individuals under their jurisdiction, culminating with the creation of the International Criminal Court and the coining of the "responsibility to protect" concept. This normative transformation coincided with the increasing reluctance of the main donor governments to fund development and humanitarian activities through direct bilateral funding to affected states. "An international model of humanitarian assistance took shape in which it was implicitly assumed that governments were either too weak or too corrupt to

42 Sarah Collinson, Samir Elhawary, and Robert Muggah, "States of Fragility: Stabilisation and its Implications for Humanitarian Action," *Disasters* 34, Supplement 3 (October 2010): 275-296, p. 276.

43 United States Institute of Peace, *Guiding Principles for Stabilization and Reconstruction* (Washington, DC, 2009).

44 Victoria Metcalfe, Alison Giffen, and Samir Elhawary, "UN Integration and Humanitarian Space: An Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group," London: Overseas Development Institute, December 2011.

45 UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (December 19, 1991), UN Doc. A/RES/46/182, para. 3.

46 Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested: Where Angels Fear to Tread* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 23.

manage large volumes of humanitarian aid."[47] This new funding model increasingly circumvented host governments when it came to the use of aid and its delivery to the population, arguably decreasing the capacity of government institutions to care for their citizens.

While the alteration of absolute state sovereignty continues today, current geopolitical changes are, in parallel, giving more leeway to host countries to more assertively call for respect of their sovereignty. Traditional powers that used to set the agenda—and the norms regulating international affairs—are progressively ceding ground to emerging powers wary of breaches of their sovereignty such as Brazil, China, India, and Turkey. Human rights and humanitarian ideals have entered the mainstream of the international community's values, and the idea that states have responsibilities toward their own population is broadly accepted. Yet, paradoxically, recent years have also seen a reassertion of the sovereignty argument in a number of violent contexts, such as those in Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Pakistan, where national governments play on shifting political power to resist pressure (usually coming from major donors) to open up to humanitarian aid.

The renewed assertiveness of host states is reflected—and reinforced—by recent trends in the development aid sector, which saw the adoption of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. This declaration puts the recipient government back at the center of development aid, emphasizing national ownership of development strategies and alignment of donors. These policy developments have not yet been fully reflected in humanitarian policy and practice, where "the state-avoiding model of international assistance largely remains in place."[48] Yet, as Randolph Kent, director of the Humanitarian Futures Programme at King's College, stated: "Governments in some of the most vulnerable regions of the world are becoming increasingly reluctant to have traditional humanitarian actors behave as they've done in the past."[49] As developing countries have more resources to care for their populations and develop better governance structures, they are determined to ensure greater coordination and control over the aid that flows in. This change is illustrated by the current mushrooming of "humanitarian affairs" and "emergency relief" departments within national governments and regional intergovernmental organizations such as the League of Arab States (LAS), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).[50]

These transformations present opportunities, as improved involvement of emerging powers in the design and functioning of the system will increase its legitimacy and help reduce the perception of Western-dominance. On the other hand, in conflict situations, current global economic and geopolitical changes give more leeway to host governments, who may be implicated in the conflict, to undermine the delivery of principled humanitarian aid.

THE FINANCING OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The year 2010 saw the largest annual humanitarian response on record, with an estimated $16.7 billion from governmental and individual donors.[51] In other words, the formal international humanitarian system is better funded than ever before. Yet, this positive assertion masks other underlying trends that raise questions for the future of humanitarian financing.

First, the humanitarian system needs more resources because it has to face a likely increase of the humanitarian caseload, as discussed previously. Oxfam estimated that, in order to maintain current levels of humanitarian response to the projected 375 million people mentioned above, the world will have to spend around $25 billion per year compared to the record-high $16.7 billion in 2010.[52] The system is also demanding more resources

47 Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government," p. 1.
48 Ibid.
49 Randolph Kent, "Humanitarian Sector Needs a Radical Rethink," AlertNet, January 25, 2012, available at www.trust.org/alertnet/blogs/alertnet-aidwatch/humanitarian-sector-needs-a-radical-rethink/ .
50 ALNAP, "State of the Humanitarian System, 2012 Edition," p. 27.
51 Development Initiatives, "GHA Report 2011," p. 6.
52 Schuemer-Cross and Taylor, "The Right to Survive," p. 93.

because it has substantially expanded its activities. Major humanitarian agencies no longer limit themselves to traditional relief activities like food assistance, health, nutrition, sanitation, and shelter; they increasingly engage in protection activities, human rights advocacy, disaster risk reduction, peacebuilding programs, and the like. This is further compounded by the fact that humanitarian assistance is also more expensive now than before, not least due to the substantial increases in food and oil prices over the last few years.

Second, global humanitarian funding is still dominated by "traditional" humanitarian donors: mostly developed Western member states of the OECD-DAC, which provided $11.8 billion of the estimated $12.4 billion of global governmental sources in 2010. However, this financial dominance might change due to several factors. The progressive shift of economic power described above might well undermine the sustainability of this source of funding, which has been aggravated by budget cuts and austerity measures to cope with the effects of the global economic crisis. The ability of traditional donors to contribute to humanitarian assistance in the long run might be further constrained by demographic trends. The smaller size of the working-age population in traditional donor countries is likely to reduce the tax base and put strains on national budgets, while aging populations mean that precious resources for foreign aid are likely to be diverted to domestic health and geriatric care.[53] These projections tend to be confirmed if one looks more closely at the 2010 record-high humanitarian response, which actually masked reduced expenditure levels of eight OECD-DAC members for the third consecutive year.[54]

The shift in economic power means that formerly lower-income countries now have the financial capacity—and growing political will—to extend a helping hand to populations abroad that are affected by crises. Indeed, the last decade saw the emergence of new donor governments, who are not members of the OECD-DAC, that increasingly contribute to foreign aid, such as Brazil, China, India, Turkey, and the Gulf states. Given their growing economic weight, this trend is set to continue. Yet, several studies showed that non-DAC donors still tend to favor bilateral channels that fall outside of international donor coordination mechanisms. Their support therefore does not benefit the formal humanitarian system and creates risks of duplication of efforts and gaps in service.[55] Although emerging powers' contributions to pooled funding mechanisms and international agencies have increased in recent years, the challenge for the humanitarian system remains to convince them that fully joining the existing coordination and funding mechanisms is in their interest.

A Six-Point Agenda for Adaptation

Actors in the international humanitarian system are well aware of these challenges. In recent years, a number of research projects and studies emanating from within the system have strived to identify the challenges ahead and the measures needed to successfully meet them.[56] Although diverging views exist in the formal humanitarian system, some common denominators can be identified. In mainstream humanitarian thinking, the recipe for adaptation consists of six active ingredients:

1) Anticipate the risks
2) Strengthen local capacities and resilience
3) Develop new partnerships
4) Enlarge the funding base and use it more effectively
5) Enhance coordination, leadership, accountability, and professionalization
6) Make innovations and leverage new technologies

1. ANTICIPATE THE RISKS

Given the changing nature of crises and a growing humanitarian caseload, the best way to tackle the effects of disasters and crises with finite resources

53 Carl Haub, "Demographic Trends and their Humanitarian Impacts," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, November 2009, p. 8.

54 Development Initiatives, "GHA Report 2011," p. 6.

55 Andrea Binder, Claudia Meier, and Julia Steets, "Humanitarian Assistance: Truly Universal? A Mapping Study of Non-Western Donors," Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, August 2010, p. 25; Adele Harmer and Ellen Martin, eds., "Diversity in Donorship: Field Lessons," London: Overseas Development Institute, March 2010, p. 5; Alain Robyns and Véronique de Geoffroy, "Les Bailleurs Emergents de l'Aide Humanitaire: Le Cas des Pays du Golfe," Plaisians, France: Groupe URD, November 2009, pp. 16-18.

56 See footnote 2 above.

might well be to anticipate them by identifying their causes, in order to prevent their worst effects. In other words, "Humanitarian organizations have to be increasingly aware of the root causes of vulnerability and, moreover, of the continual interface between myriad factors on different temporal planes influencing both slow-onset and rapid-onset risks."[57] With regard to rapid-onset hazards like floods and earthquakes, recent studies show that disaster-related mortality and asset destruction is concentrated in small areas exposed to infrequent but extreme hazards.[58] Exposure of populations to rapid-onset hazards is often exacerbated by a number of factors, such as unplanned urbanization of flood-prone areas or deforestation of hill slopes amenable to landslides. Even if all hazards cannot be systematically anticipated, their likelihood in certain geographic areas and potential impact on populations can be fairly well estimated with modern knowledge and technologies. This is also true of slow-onset hazards such as droughts and protracted conflict or violence. In all likelihood, acute humanitarian needs will increasingly result from the conjunction of slow-onset processes with pre-existing poverty, an absence of social safety nets, a scarcity of vital resources, and market disruption or economic shocks, in addition to the direct effects of massive, rapid-onset catastrophes such as earthquakes.

Anticipation has two facets. First, further refining early-warning systems and mainstreaming their use will allow the authorities, communities, and humanitarian actors to foresee the occurrence of disasters in advance and to be better prepared to deploy a timely response, provided the necessary funding is made available. Second, humanitarian actors have to better understand and identify the "myriad factors" influencing vulnerability and demanding life-saving assistance. As Groupe URD has stressed, "the evaluation of vulnerabilities is the first and perhaps most important step towards the development of societies which are more resilient to future unintentional risks."[59] While this is the primary responsibility of states, it also requires a fundamental shift in the way humanitarian actors work by incorporating analysis and monitoring capacities of vulnerabilities and their causes into their strategic and operational decision-making processes. A better understanding of the causes of vulnerability will allow for the development of indicators and triggers for action, and facilitate a move from a shock-driven approach—that is, in reaction to a highly visible shock—to a genuinely needs-driven one.

2. STRENGTHEN LOCAL CAPACITIES AND RESILIENCE

The same reasons that underpin the need to better anticipate risks led most humanitarian actors to embrace the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) agenda—which took preeminence with the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005—and to strive to better link relief, rehabilitation, and development activities, a process commonly referred to as LRRD. These two concepts indicate that the best way to address future humanitarian needs is to enable both the authorities and the population to prepare for disasters and to cope with their effects. This requires enhancing the capacities of national and local authorities to take care of their population and strengthening the resilience of affected communities.

States have the responsibility "first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on [their] territory."[60] Humanitarian actors have to overcome their state-avoiding reflexes and work with governments to build relevant institutions and mechanisms to reduce risks and deliver an appropriate humanitarian response to their population. Such a shift toward a more collaborative approach is all the more necessary as host states are increasingly resistant to what they perceive as external interferences. While capacity-building efforts should be straightforward when states are willing to care for their population, this will be more challenging when this will is absent or is limited to a segment of the population. Humanitarian actors will therefore need to carefully look at a state's capacities and desire to respond before determining their role. They will need to adapt their approach from full-

57 FIC/HFP, "Humanitarian Horizons," p. 26.
58 UNISDR, "Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate," p. 3.
59 Grünewald et al., "Mapping of Future Unintentional Risks," p. 49.
60 UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, para. 4.

fledged alignment with governmental strategies and support of the state's institutions to advocacy and support of civil society, depending on the circumstances.[61]

Regardless of the will and capacities of states to care for their populations, humanitarian actors also need to better engage local communities by listening to their concerns and encouraging their participation in humanitarian programming. By doing so, humanitarian actors can help build, in a concerted manner, local communities' capacity to withstand and react to crises. Relief agencies must work better with their development counterparts to strengthen the resilience of local populations to shocks in the longer term and avoid costly relapses into crises. Building the population's resilience also implies empowering civil society organizations, which are usually the first responders to a disaster. Although international humanitarian agencies are aware of the shortcomings and improvements have been made in recent years, the modern international humanitarian system still tends to sideline these important actors, not least in coordination fora, favoring a top-down approach that sometimes undermines local capacities altogether.[62]

3. DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS

The increasing humanitarian caseload and changing nature of crises raise fears that the humanitarian system, constrained as it is by finite resources, will not be able to face these growing needs. Better anticipating threats and operating in new environments, such as urban areas, requires skills, means, and knowledge that are not readily available within the system. Humanitarian actors must learn how to better work with experts in different fields, such as meteorologists, economists, or demographers, if they want to adapt successfully to tomorrow's crises.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian system has already opened up, more or less willingly, to a number of "nontraditional" actors playing an increasing role in emergency relief or in the environment where humanitarians operate. New partnerships must be developed with these "nontraditional" actors: national militaries, private military and security companies, corporations, religious institutions, and diaspora communities. Partnerships will allow additional human and technical expertise to be mobilized and expand the coverage of humanitarian response. In the same vein, developing partnerships is a condition for strengthening the resilience of affected populations, as it is key to empowering and enhancing the capacities of community-based organizations to prevent and respond to crises.

While increased involvement of other actors in humanitarian efforts is badly needed, it is also fraught with risks. Military forces or corporations might have unique means or specific skills to contribute to relief operations, but they have a limited understanding of the specific environment of crises and of humanitarian practices and standards developed and tested over decades of field activities. Arguably, active engagement with new partners will allow for maximizing the response while avoiding the undermining of existing humanitarian principles, standards, and processes.

4. ENLARGE THE FUNDING BASE AND USE IT MORE EFFECTIVELY

The funding conundrum—namely, doing more with finite resources—can be resolved by following two parallel and complementary tracks: more efficiently disbursing existing funding and looking for nontraditional sources in addition to traditional ones.

The former track requires efforts from both operational humanitarian actors that disburse the money and traditional donors. There are ways to make the money more readily available, distributed transparently, and in accordance with assessed needs through further development and improvement of pooled funding mechanisms such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) administered by OCHA. Although widely acclaimed since its restructuring in 2005 as part of the broader reform of the humanitarian system, CERF still suffers from a number of shortcomings—for example, its inability to directly fund NGO projects creates an additional bureaucratic layer and delays in disbursing funds. In consequence, NGOs also advocate to maintain

61 Edmund Cairns, "Crises in a New World Order," p. 19.
62 ALNAP, "The State of the Humanitarian System: Assessing Performance and Progress," London: Overseas Development Institute, January 2010, pp. 37-39.

channels of funding other than UN-administered pooled mechanisms, such as the recent Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA), an NGO consortium that makes pooled funds readily available to its members in case of emergency.[63] Improvements do not necessarily require more generosity from traditional donors, but increased political will to fully comply with the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) principles to which they signed up.[64] For instance, a reduction in earmarking would allow better allocation of funds on the basis of need only and contribute to more predictable, flexible, and timely funding, in line with the GHD principles.

But a more efficient use of existing funds might not be enough to face increased needs. As shown earlier, the amounts contributed to the formal international humanitarian system remain marginal compared to the overall contributions to disaster relief made through remittances, direct foreign assistance, and domestic revenues of affected states. The GHA Report acknowledges that global humanitarian assistance far exceeds the $16.7 billion reported for 2010. By way of example, it mentions the $6.2 billion spent over the last five years by the Indian government in its own country that dwarfs the $315 million received from donors.[65] India and other emerging powers are increasingly capable and willing to deliver aid, not only to their own population but also to affected populations abroad. Humanitarian actors are well aware of this and must develop outreach to emerging donors, an effort that is largely underway.

5. ENHANCE COORDINATION, LEADERSHIP, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

Given the expansion of the humanitarian system and its increasing diversity, coordination and leadership are crucial to facing tomorrow's challenges efficiently. In the last two decades, there were considerable efforts to bring more coherence and better coordination within the humanitarian system under the leadership of the UN.[66] Although successive reforms have brought some noticeable improvements to the humanitarian system overall, there are widely shared views that some shortcomings and weaknesses still need to be corrected.

More competent and experienced leadership within the UN is central to this task, due to the dominant coordinating role of the world body. This applies both at the management level—notably, for the complex position of humanitarian coordinator (HC) that is often combined with the more political function of resident coordinator (RC)—and at the technical level, within the global and country-level clusters. At the management level, a number of recent evaluations revealed rather poor performances of HCs, not least because they come, more often than not, from the position of RC and therefore have no, or limited, previous humanitarian experience.[67] However, the need for enhanced leadership does not concern only the UN but also the NGO sector, which, in absolute numbers, employs more than half the staff in the humanitarian system and delivers the majority of aid.[68] The functioning of "clusters" also needs to be improved to make them less bureaucratic and process-driven, more inclusive of national and local actors, and more participatory.

As humanitarian needs increase, so does the pressure on humanitarian organizations to be accountable to the populations they help, as well as to donor governments and individuals. Accountability to affected populations is key to ensuring that aid is adapted to their needs and contributes to strengthening their resilience. It requires mainstreaming participatory approaches in both the programming and implementation of field activities, so that affected local communities can contribute to designing programs sensitive to their needs, but also channel their complaints in case their needs are not being met properly. At the other end of the spectrum, humanitarians are expected to be accountable to donor states and taxpayers and justify that increasingly scarce resources are used to the best effect.

63 Sean Lowrie and Marieke Hounjet, "The Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies: A New Initiative of NGO Collaboration," *Humanitarian Exchange*, No. 50 (April 2011): 26-28.

64 The GHD initiative, which now gathers thirty-seven donor governments, has developed a set of twenty-three principles adopted in 2003 that aim to make humanitarian aid more principled, predictable, and effective. For more information, see www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org .

65 Development Initiatives, "GHA Report 2011," p. 6.

66 See the text box on page 8 of this report.

67 Ashdown, "Humanitarian Emergency Response Review," pp. 19-21; Dempsey and Kyazze, "At a Crossroads," p. 20.

68 Dempsey and Kyazze, "At a Crossroads," p. 21.

The Transformative Agenda recently adopted by the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is an attempt to improve the performance of the humanitarian system in the key areas of leadership, coordination, and accountability.[69] But beyond such efforts, there is a growing thrust toward professionalization of the humanitarian system as a whole—professionalization of individuals working in the system but also of the organizations themselves. Over the last few decades, a number of quality standards and guidelines were adopted to professionalize the sector, such as the Sphere Project, the Quality COMPAS, and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership.[70] Yet, some envisage that, just as lawyers, doctors, or architects have brought consistency to their profession by creating professional bodies, the humanitarian system should work toward establishing certification and accreditation mechanisms and, eventually, its own international professional association.[71]

6. MAKE INNOVATIONS AND LEVERAGE NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The ability of humanitarian actors to face the challenge presented by an increasing caseload and the changing nature of crises will also depend on their capacity to innovate and better harness new technologies, in particular ICTs. The development and spread of ICTs, in particular mobile phone technologies, opens new opportunities to quickly raise funds directly from the population of wealthier nations,[72] to interact with and engage communities living in the most remote and insecure areas,[73] and to deliver assistance or protection in ways not thought about before.[74] Similarly, the continued improvement of weather-forecasting technologies, climate science, and satellite imagery will contribute to improving early-warning systems, so that actors can better anticipate and prepare for future hazards.

However, using technological developments to the best effect requires investment in research and development and taking risks in innovation, to which humanitarian actors and donors are usually averse. "Traditional donors remain very project-based in their grant making and humanitarian organizations project-based in their culture, preventing the large-scale, necessary changes in how aid is conceived and delivered for tomorrow's world."[75]

Underlying this six-point agenda, there is broad agreement that if it is to appropriately adapt to tomorrow's challenges, the humanitarian sector must do so while safeguarding its deontological foundations. In order to save lives, reduce suffering, and preserve human dignity, humanitarian actors must act within an ethical framework that makes this task possible. They should be motivated by the sole aim of helping other humans—as opposed to, for instance, making profit—and should do so based on an objective assessment of needs and without any further discriminations. Independence and neutrality of organizations is believed to enable respect for the principles of humanity and impartiality, particularly in conflict situations.[76]

Yet, humanitarian principles are challenged on several fronts, and by some of the very changes required within the system itself, as described above. The rapprochement of development, human rights, and humanitarian agendas deemed necessary to address causes of crises, mitigate their effects, and hence better cope with a growing humanitarian caseload questions the ability of humanitarian actors to remain neutral and independent. Indeed, working with national

69 "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012," adopted by the IASC Principals in December 2011, available at www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87 .

70 More information available at www.sphereproject.org; www.compasqualite.org; and www.hapinternational.org .

71 Peter Walker and Catherine Russ, "Professionalising the Humanitarian Sector: A Scoping Study," report commissioned by Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance, April 2010.

72 For instance, less than a week after the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the American Red Cross had raised $22 million via text messages. See Stephanie Strom, "Boon for Red Cross via Texting," *New York Times*, January 19, 2010, p. 1.

73 The Danish Refugee Council is developing a project using Internet-based social networks and text messages on mobile phones to enable beneficiary participation in its assistance program in Somalia, increasing downward accountability and limiting risks of diversion of assistance by armed groups. See Danish Refugee Council, "Piloting Accountability Systems for Humanitarian Aid in Somalia," concept paper submitted to the Humanitarian Innovation Fund, 2011, available at www.humanitarianinnovation.org/projects/drc-somalia .

74 Different projects using mobile phone technology to deliver cash through "electronic vouchers" have been developed in Kenya, Somalia, and Syria. See Paul Harvey et al., "Food Aid and Food Assistance in Emergency and Transitional Contexts: A Review of Current Thinking," London: Overseas Development Institute, June 2010, p. 37.

75 FIC/HFP, "Humanitarian Horizons," p. 43.

76 See the text box on the importance of humanitarian principles on page 3 of this report .

governments in the longer term by providing support to nationally developed strategies challenges the autonomy of humanitarian organizations. Likewise, principled humanitarian action is put to the test by mainstreaming integrated approaches that subordinate aid to broader political objectives of stabilization, peace, or statebuilding.

Despite these tensions, upholding humanitarian principles remains an absolute priority for a number of humanitarian actors, who claim this can be achieved through a number of concrete actions or practical arrangements. For instance, the humanitarian system should redouble efforts to listen to non-Western voices about their interpretation of humanitarian principles, in an effort to make them genuinely universal. Within the UN system, a nuanced approach to integration is defended by humanitarian actors, notably OCHA, to allow different degrees of humanitarian agencies' structural integration into UN missions depending on the context, presumably preserving the integrity of humanitarian principles.[77] Yet, some more radical observers question whether humanitarian principles should go through a "transformative reinterpretation" in order to better adapt to a changing humanitarian system.[78] This last approach acknowledges that some of the tensions within this agenda for adaptation are too deep to be ignored and require profound changes—the subject of the next section.

Managing Tensions: Key Questions for the Future of Humanitarianism

None of the ingredients of the coping strategy described above are entirely new. Concepts, such as anticipation and prevention, resilience of populations, or partnership with nontraditional actors, have already been debated at length within the last decade.[79] What is new, however, is that these different ingredients have firmly entered the mainstream of humanitarian thinking today, and an increasing number of initiatives and measures are undertaken to put them into practice.

This adaptation agenda is ambitious. While it may well enable the humanitarian system to better face tomorrow's challenges, it also creates a number of tensions, big and small, that humanitarian actors will have to deal with. For instance, how should humanitarian actors reconcile an increasingly institutionalized coordination system and calls for greater professionalization—which tend to further insulate the system—with the need to develop new partnerships and be more inclusive? In the same vein, efforts by donors and organizations for a more effective use of funding often excludes smaller local NGOs and other potential partners, as donors tend to favor consortia and to privilege the biggest organizations that have the technical and financial means to comply with demanding reporting mechanisms.[80] Likewise, the quest for higher quality standards, which is high on the professionalization agenda, arguably inhibits the ability to think outside the box and innovate by setting some practices that all "professional" actors are expected to respect.

What all these tensions have in common is a growing disconnect between the ambitions of the formal humanitarian system and some of its fundamental premises: the universality of the undertaking, the integrity of its principles, and the value of coherence and coordination.

- The formal, international humanitarian system sees itself as the depository of universal humanitarian values. Yet, it remains widely perceived in the Global South as a Western undertaking, and it is sometimes resented for being a sort of Trojan horse to impose Western values or political agendas.
- The humanitarian system wants to address underlying causes of crises in addition to, or even rather than, the symptoms. This shift calls for new modes of operation that collide with the widely accepted principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence that, for many, are the essence of the humanitarian undertaking.
- Although the humanitarian system acknowledges

77 UN OCHA, "Policy Instruction: OCHA's Structural Relationships Within an Integrated UN Presence," reviewed May 1, 2009.

78 FIC/HFP, "Humanitarian Horizons," p. 27.

79 See, for instance, Feinstein International Center, "Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future," Medford, MA: August 2004.

80 Pierre Salignon, "Economie International de l'Assistance Humanitaire : Tentative de Photographie Globale," *Revue Humanitaire* 30, 2011, p. 3, available at http://humanitaire.revues.org/index1147.html .

the need to be more inclusive and develop partnerships, the trend toward greater coordination and professionalization might act as a barrier or disincentive to those outside of the system, and alienate those insiders who fear abandoning their comparative advantages in the process. In either case, it risks forsaking opportunities to leverage complementary approaches and skills at a time when collective efforts are needed.

Attempting to ease these tensions requires raising hard questions that affect some of the fundamentals of the humanitarian system at three different levels: global, theoretical, and operational.

RETHINKING THE GLOBAL FRAMEWORK: IS HUMANITARIANISM UNIVERSAL?

The underlying values of humanitarianism—the humanitarian ethic—are deemed to be universal. Indeed, notions of charity and solidarity with fellow human beings are well rooted in most cultures and religious beliefs. Our brief historical snapshot of humanitarian action demonstrated, however, that the formal international humanitarian system and its principles, organizational architecture, and standards have their origins in Western Europe and North America and, culturally, in the Western value system. Humanitarian action was born and matured at a time when the West was dominating the international scene. Yet, as discussed above, this dominance of the West is increasingly challenged. It is questionable whether this "culturally-tainted" modern humanitarian system will remain acceptable to increasingly assertive emerging powers, which may see it as a relic of a soon-to-be-past era.

Observation of international humanitarian action today reveals an obvious change: so-called "non-DAC," "non-Western," or "nontraditional" donors and operational actors are playing an increasing role in global humanitarian relief. The response to the famine that hit Somalia in 2011 is quite illustrative in this respect. $350 million were pledged to fund the relief operations in Somalia during an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in August 2011, while tens of millions of dollars were contributed by Middle East countries such as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The OIC created a coordination office in Mogadishu bringing together some twenty-seven organizations,[81] and Islamic charities operated in non-governmental areas where only a few, if any, traditional agencies were present due to security constraints. The fact remains that this relief operation was conducted mostly in parallel to the formal, UN-led, coordination system.

Actors from the formal humanitarian system are aware of this state of affairs and in recent years have multiplied initiatives to engage and reach out to nontraditional donors and organizations. This seems to be bearing fruit, as early signs point to a more genuinely universal system: nontraditional donors increasingly contribute to multilateral funding channels; humanitarian departments have been created in a number of countries and regional organizations from the Global South; and increasing numbers of partnerships and platforms have been established to promote a continued dialogue between traditional and nontraditional actors.[82] Still, nontraditional donors have little opportunity to influence the functioning of the formal humanitarian system as they are hardly represented in decision fora other than the UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In addition, increased engagement in emergency relief by actors from the Global South is no guarantee that they see it as regulated by the same rules. For instance, the relief coordination system envisioned within ASEAN in the 2005 Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response sees ASEAN member states' militaries as an integral part of the multilateral association's response capacities rather than a "last resort," as encouraged in the 1994 Oslo Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief.[83]

81 Integrated Regional Information Network, "Arab and Muslim Aid and the West – 'Two China Elephants'," October 19, 2011, available at www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?indepthid=91&reportid=94010 .

82 For example, since 2004 the Humanitarian Forum has been bringing together Western and Muslim humanitarian organizations (www.humanitarianforum.org); in New York in 2011 Sweden and Brazil launched an initiative called "Dialogue on Humanitarian Partnership" that brings together representatives of traditional and emerging donors to debate on a set of humanitarian issues; and in November 2011 UN OCHA and the OIC's Humanitarian Affairs Department signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen their collaboration.

83 The principle of last resort means that "foreign military and civil defence assets should be requested only where there is no comparative civilian alternative and only the use of military or civil defence assets can meet a critical humanitarian need. The military or civil defence asset must therefore be unique in capability and availability." Paragraph 5 of the 1994 Oslo "Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief," updated in November 2006 (Revision 1.1, November 2007).

The tendency within the humanitarian system remains to engage nontraditional states and organizations according to the system's own rules and value system—a body of standards and processes akin to the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, which every newcomer is expected to fully embrace if it is to join the community. As noted by Antonio Donini, the increasing institutionalization and standardization of humanitarian aid create "greater difficulties for entities that do not conform to the canon or are rooted in other traditions to emerge and be counted."[84] Rather, the humanitarian system should show more flexibility in some of these standards and processes and "make an effort to meet these organizations [nontraditional actors] on their own terms, listen attentively to their interpretation of humanitarian affairs and, importantly, speak their language."[85] Given the current shifting lines in international politics and the growing assertiveness and capacities of emerging powers and host states, the humanitarian system might well have to rethink how it resonates in the Global South and be more receptive to others' points of view, including their interpretation of humanitarian principles.[86] Indeed, it might otherwise face the risk of becoming increasingly sidelined and obsolete in relief operations favoring national capacities, neighboring countries, and regional organizations.

RETHINKING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ARE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES ALWAYS RELEVANT?

The debate is rife within the humanitarian system about how to reconcile an approach that intends to address the underlying causes of crises while also respecting the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence. Indeed, addressing underlying causes of crises requires adopting a developmental approach of longer-term engagement with national governments, local authorities, and affected communities to build their capacities and strengthen their resilience to shocks. Working closely with governmental authorities and in line with nationally developed strategies and policies in contexts regularly struck by droughts or rapid-onset disasters is crucial if one wants to strengthen the resilience of the populations and their capacity to withstand future disasters. However, working in line with a government's policies in a country where a civil war is raging is taking the risk that assistance will not be provided impartially to populations in need that are under the control of or sympathetic to an insurgent group. Generally, in intrastate conflicts, the government is itself a party to the hostilities and, more often than not, is also at the origin of some of the population's suffering. Allegations of violations of humanitarian law by the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and allied militias are a case in point in this respect.[87] Some argue that, in such cases, respect for humanitarian principles—notably, neutrality and independence as tools for impartial access to the communities most in need—should take precedence over the need to align with the officially recognized authorities.

Neutrality and independence do not mean that humanitarian agencies should not seek the consent of the host state and engage with it to build its capacity to comply with international law and assume its responsibilities toward its population. Indeed, as we saw before, protection activities often imply working with governments to promote lasting changes in the normative, institutional, and socioeconomic environment through training of armed and security forces on humanitarian or human rights law and strengthening of the justice system for greater accountability. However, these principles imply that the same should be true with nonstate armed groups having de facto control over a given population. By way of example, the collaboration of UN agencies and NGOs with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, through the signature of an action plan in 2009, convinced this insurgent group to better comply with its obligation to protect children in armed conflict by issuing a policy of non-recruitment of children, setting sanctions for noncompliance, and registering children associated with the group with

84 Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalised World," *Disasters* 34 (2010): 220-237, p. 227.

85 Abdul Haq Amiri, "The Humanitarian Challenge in the Middle East," *Humanitarian Exchange*, No. 51 (July 2011): 2-4, p. 3.

86 Edmund Cairns, "Crises in a New World Order: Challenging the Humanitarian Project," pp. 21-22.

87 Human Rights Watch, "You Don't Know Who to Blame – War Crimes in Somalia," New York: August 2011; Mark Bradbury, "State Building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, September 2010; and Ken Menkhaus, "Stabilisation and Humanitarian Access in a Collapsed State: The Somali Case," *Disasters* 34, Supplement 3 (October 2010): 320-341.

a view to their demobilization.[88]

This reasoning brings us to examine with a contextual lens the tension between addressing the causes of crises and upholding humanitarian principles. The stakes in peacetime and wartime are arguably not the same. This raises the question of whether a distinction between conflict situations and natural disaster situations might have some relevance—however imperfect the distinction is, given that many natural disasters occur in situations of conflict or protracted violence. The brief historical overview in the first part of this report showed that the modern humanitarian system was built—hence, institutionalized and codified—mostly in reaction to the effects of war. Reflecting this, humanitarian principles were crafted mostly to operate in conflicts. While humanity and impartiality can be seen as ideals, principles of neutrality and independence are not ends, but field-tested tools developed over the years to obtain access to people affected by conflicts.[89] Given this logic, is a strict respect for humanitarian principles as necessary in a pure natural disaster relief operation in peacetime as it is in a conflict situation? Could a more nuanced and pragmatic relationship with humanitarian principles in the context of natural disasters, and less dogmatism in the way principles are systematically called upon, be a way to reconcile the intractable tension between the necessity for a more developmental and holistic approach, and traditional humanitarian modes of action?

The underlying question raised here is not whether humanitarian principles are still relevant today, but whether they are equally relevant in all situations. Humanitarian principles were elevated to a sacrosanct status, and it seems that, for many, all relief activity must be branded as impartial, neutral, and independent regardless of the context and, more importantly, of the ability or capacity to respect them in practice. Yet, as argued by Rony Brauman, speaking about MSF's cooperation with the Pakistani military following the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods, humanitarian principles are valid as long as they serve the purpose of saving lives: "In natural disasters, however, there's no apparent reason not to cooperate with [the military]."[90] Indeed, there are situations where humanitarian principles are arguably less needed—or potentially counterproductive, as suggested by Brauman, by inhibiting necessary cooperation with a government or its security forces.[91] Down the road, one might legitimately question whether such an unconditional and systematic claim to abide by humanitarian principles in every situation is not more damaging for the sector as a whole than calling for their respect and abiding by them only in situations where it really matters.

The distinction between conflict and natural disasters that occur in peacetime has existed for decades within the Red Cross Movement, where the ICRC mostly deals with situations of conflict while the IFRC covers emergencies linked to natural disasters in support of the national society concerned.[92] Although not perfect, this recognition of the different nature of conflict and peacetime disaster allowed these different agencies to accommodate humanitarian principles accordingly: the ICRC remains firmly entrenched in a principled humanitarian action and stays at arm's length of the UN-led coordination system, while the IFRC joined the UN coordination system without unreasonably jeopardizing its access to populations in the contexts where it works. Could a similar arrangement be considered within the broader humanitarian system, together with a reinterpretation of principles of engagement according to the context? This might allow for the development of an understanding of humanitarian principles better adapted to the context, which, as suggested by Harvey, could even be informed by the

88 United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, UN Doc. A/65/820-S/2011/250, April 23, 2011, p. 5.

89 See the text box on page 3 of this report. In this regard, Barnett and Weiss document an early example of a principled humanitarian approach when, in order to access the Belgian population and deliver food during World War II, Herbert Hoover's Commission for Relief in Belgium had to convince the British that relief would go to the civilian population only and the Germans that it would not advantage the war effort of the Allies. "Toward that end, [Hoover] got the combatants to recognize the CRB's political neutrality and operational independence," Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, p. 42.

90 Rony Brauman, "Médecins Sans Frontières or the Unabashed Policy of 'Going It Alone'," Paris: MSF-CRASH, April 2011, p. 10, available at www.msf-crash.org/drive/f78d-rb-2011-unabashed-policy-of-going-it-alone(fr-p.11).pdf .

91 See also Dirk Salomons, "The Perils of Dunantism," paper presented at the World Conference of Humanitarian Studies, Tufts University, Medford, MA, June 2-5, 2012, now awaiting publication.

92 This separation of tasks was institutionalized in the 1997 Seville Agreement, which gives clear leading roles to each agency depending on the operational context. See "Agreement on the Organization of the International Activities on the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement," available at www.redcross.int/en/history/fullsevilleagreement.asp .

development principles of national ownership and alignment, where relevant.[93] The distinction between natural disasters and conflict is not clear-cut, however, and even if such an arrangement were adopted, both the principled and the more comprehensive approach, often combining development and human rights advocacy, will continue to coexist. This brings us to explore another layer of analysis: the operational framework.

RETHINKING THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK: THE VALUE OF "CONCERTED FRAGMENTATION"

Better-trained and more professional leadership, enhanced decision-making tools, and structural arrangements such as limiting the "double hat" position of UN humanitarian and resident coordinators are often presented as ways to reconcile existing tensions between humanitarianism and development, and between humanitarian objectives and broader stabilization objectives.[94] If a reinterpretation of humanitarian principles according to the context might contribute to alleviating these tensions, as discussed above, they will nevertheless continue to exist, in particular in situations of conflict. The fact is that different agencies within the humanitarian system have different conceptions of and approaches to what humanitarianism entails: from the traditional "Dunantist" organizations that stick to a neutral and independent approach to humanitarianism (best represented by the ICRC) to the "solidarist" agencies that embrace a broader agenda of change and ambition to tackle the root causes of conflicts.[95] This observation prompted some researchers from the Feinstein International Center to question "whether the assortment of agencies and individuals that comprise the humanitarian enterprise can—or should—maintain the fiction that they are all part of the same movement, functioning as parts of a common apparatus."[96] Will better leadership and cosmetic structural arrangements help to maintain such a fiction?

The tension between the tendency to increasingly address underlying causes of crises and respect for humanitarian principles has been accentuated in the last decade—particularly following 9/11 and the ensuing Global War on Terror—by mainstreaming "whole-of-government" approaches, which paralleled efforts to better coordinate the humanitarian system. The 2005 humanitarian reform, embraced by most humanitarian actors,[97] succeeded in better bringing the international humanitarian system under the overall leadership of the UN. However, although there is still a strong commitment to coherence and coordination within the humanitarian community, there is a growing unease about the collision course of the humanitarian-coordination agenda and the integration agenda.[98] A number of NGOs are increasingly reluctant to participate in UN-led coordination fora in integrated missions, out of fear that the broader peacebuilding or statebuilding objectives of the organization might conflict with principled humanitarian action. For instance, the integrated nature of the UN Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) prompted several humanitarian organizations to withdraw from the UN-led coordination system, due to fears of being perceived as part of the coalition.[99]

The fact remains that some actors are still deeply convinced about a broader agenda of change that is at odds with humanitarian principles, while others, more opportunist, embrace this agenda to ensure continued access to funding in an increasingly competitive humanitarian environment. For example, participants at a roundtable organized by the UNHCR and the Overseas Development Institute in 2011 noted that a number of humanitarian actors characterized their activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as "stabilization" activities in order to access funding.[100]

93 Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government," p. 21ff.

94 Dempsey and Kyazze, "At a Crossroads," p. 22.

95 Antonio Donini et al., "The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise – Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Final Report," Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, March 2008, p. 11.

96 Ibid., p. 4.

97 With the notable exception of a few humanitarian organizations, like the ICRC and MSF, that feared losing some autonomy and being too closely associated with the UN, which they view as an inherently political organization.

98 Metcalfe, Giffen, and Elhawary, "UN Integration and Humanitarian Space;" and Marit Glad, "A Partnership at Risk? The UN-NGO Relationship in Light of UN Integration," Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, December 2011.

99 Metcalfe, Giffen, and Elhawary, "UN Integration and Humanitarian Space," p. 28.

100 Humanitarian Policy Group, "Better Protected? Stabilization Strategies and the Protection of Civilians," Summary of a roundtable co-organized by the Humanitarian Policy Group of ODI and the UNHCR in Geneva on March 25, 2011, p. 7, available at www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4e4b798d2.pdf .

The point here is not to judge whether there is a better approach between the principled one and the pragmatist or "solidarist" one, but rather to acknowledge that both exist and will continue to exist. As a matter of fact, the "fragmentation" of the system is becoming more pronounced as nontraditional actors such as Islamic charities, who are bringing yet another value system, are becoming more prominent in international relief. While the multiplicity of actors poses risks in terms of coordination and coherence of the overall response, each actor has comparative advantages and might prove to be complementary depending on the circumstances. For example, the OIC and Islamic charities operating in Somalia have been able to deliver aid where traditional agencies could not, in part due to their Muslim identity and their lack of connection to the UN or the African Union's troops, perceived by parts of the Somali population as biased.

One could argue that, particularly in extremely polarized and volatile situations of conflict, diversity or "fragmentation" can be a strength rather than a weakness. Although the coordination and coherence agenda is certainly laudable, if it results in further centralization, standardization, and institutionalization, it might have a number of unintended consequences. First, the drive toward increased institutionalization can exclude some key actors, like local authorities and NGOs, when it does not undermine local capacities altogether, by creating parallel structures impervious to the existing ones.[101] Second, by further assimilating all actors in a fictional "common apparatus," this can negatively affect the ability of parts of the system to operate in areas where their specific identity gives them a unique advantage, to the detriment of the affected populations. While coordination is certainly required, it should be developed with a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach. The IASC Transformative Agenda addresses the first concern expressed above by recognizing that clusters should not be activated systematically but based on the determination of the needs, taking into account existing local structures and platforms. Regarding the second concern, this paper argues that in particularly volatile conflict situations the existing UN-led coordination system might have to consider disengaging from the operational theater and privilege coordination and information-sharing at the strategic level. However, for all its positive aspects, the IASC Transformative Agenda promotes further centralization of the coordination system in particular through the promotion of concepts such as "empowered leadership" and "mutual accountability."

Building on the observation of the Feinstein International Center's researchers, there are contexts where stressing the existence of different movements and apparatuses, different skills and sensibilities, and different objectives and agendas might help to maximize the comparative advantages of these different actors, provided they are also aware of and acknowledge their own limitations. As François Grünewald, Director of Groupe URD, recently pointed out during the French National Humanitarian Conference in November 2011, "one has to accept in a strategic manner the degree of incoherence necessary to face chaos."[102] Fragmentation and diversity can be an asset at the operational level, in contexts that are by nature complex and chaotic, and where some form of "concerted" or "coordinated" fragmentation could be privileged.

Conclusion

As the former aid worker and scholar Hugo Slim pointed out, "deep down, it seems that many people inside the humanitarian community expect the international humanitarian system to be a global emergency service that is as fair and effective as the combined ambulance, police, and fire services of a modern state."[103] Indeed, the adaptation strategy described above is ambitious to say the least. It reflects the intent of the international humanitarian community to be present on several fronts. On the one hand it attempts to deliver short-term life-saving services as well as longer-term programming

101 Andréanne Martel, "Does Humanitarian Coordination Exclude Local Actors and Weaken their Capacity?," *Humanitarian Aid on the Move*, Newsletter No. 9 (March 2012): 14-18. This trend has already been noted in the evaluation of the cluster approach commissioned by the IASC: Groupe URD/GPPi, "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 – Synthesis Report," Berlin/Plaisians, April 2010.

102 French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Actes de la Conférence Nationale Humanitaire," Paris, November 16, 2012, author's own translation, available at www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/Les_Actes_de_la_CNH_-_16_novembre_2011_cle886ba2.pdf .

103 Hugo Slim, "Global Welfare: A Realistic Expectation for the International Humanitarian System?" *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action 2005* (December 2006): 9-34, p. 17.

aimed at strengthening local capacities and resilience. On the other, it also seeks to protect people's rights and promote justice through public advocacy when required, while contributing to peace and state reconstruction. Several observers have warned about the dangers of stretching the boundaries of humanitarianism too far, which would likely "make it more difficult to succor those who need it during times of need,"[104] or "increase [humanitariansm's] manipulation by political powers as the traditional values and principles on which it stands become eroded."[105] Despite the dangers it represents, this expansion of humanitarianism is not a distant possibility but reflects the current state of the system: humanitarian actors are already engaged in disaster risk reduction, development programs, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and human rights advocacy.

If some of the deeply rooted tensions inherent in this ambitious agenda are to be resolved, the humanitarian system must undertake a thorough and honest self-examination, starting with a series of difficult questions:

- Is the modern humanitarian system and its foundations truly universal? How can it adapt to a changing international landscape and open up to actors who did not participate in its development and might have different values and practices?
- Are the humanitarian principles always relevant? Is the systematic reference to humanitarian principles undermining them, given a recurrent lack of respect? Could a sparser but more faithful use of principles, adapted to the context, be envisaged?
- Is the quest for ever-greater coherence and coordination of the different parts of the system always good? Could the fragmentation of the system be valued as a strength, given the comparative advantages of its various components?

Down the road, this therapeutic exercise will confirm a broadly known but uneasy truth, that there is not one but several humanitarianisms. These different brands of humanitarianism are sometimes antagonistic, although all are certainly needed. Addressing underlying causes of vulnerability to disasters or protracted violence is undoubtedly necessary, but it often requires firmly stepping into the political realm and siding with national and international political actors who are willing and able to bring about the required change. On the other hand, a narrower, principled approach that attempts to stay away from any political influence and controversy—while acknowledging it does not operate in a political vacuum and, hence, that it has to strike compromises with political actors[106]—will not cure the illness. However, experience shows that it is sometimes the only way to have genuinely impartial access to the affected population. While these complementary approaches are arguably all required to address the challenges of the twenty-first century, some of the entrenched dilemmas and contradictions within the humanitarian system might have detrimental effects on the ability of humanitarian actors to address some of the most acute needs of populations.

Instead of maintaining the fiction of a common and coherent humanitarian apparatus, one might have to acknowledge the relevance, as well as the constraints and limitations, of different types of activities that all attempt to promote human welfare. As envisioned with perspicacity by John Borton, what is taking shape now might well be the emergence of a global social-protection approach that has much broader objectives than traditional humanitarianism.[107] This global welfare system, an important aspect of which would remain emergency response, might have to progressively redefine its own rules and theoretical foundations in tune with its objectives, which could very well be a blend of humanitarian principles with development and human rights principles. Such a shift might bring better consistency to the undertaking by easing some of the current tensions—especially those linked to the humanitarian principles—while forcing humanitarian actors to make the hard choice between a global holistic approach or a more limited and narrow, but still badly needed, form of humanitarianism.

104 Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, p. 11.

105 Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, p. 245.

106 Claire Magone, Michael Neuman, and Fabrice Weissman, eds., *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

107 Borton, "Future of the Humanitarian System," p. 52.

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