

2015

ON THE ROAD TO ISTANBUL

How can the World
Humanitarian Summit
make humanitarian
response more effective?

HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Acronyms

3MDG - Three Millennium Development Goal Fund

AAP - Accountability to Affected Populations

AEI/CS - Accountability, Equity and Inclusion /
Conflict Sensitivity

ALNAP - Active Learning Network for Accountability
and Performance

BBB - Better Business Bureau

CAAP - Commitments on Accountability to
Affected Populations

CERF - Central Emergency Response Fund

CHS - Core Humanitarian Standard

CV - Constituent Voice methodology

CWC - Communication with Communities

DAC - Development Assistance Committee

DFID - Department for International Development

DOA - Description of Action

DRR - Disaster Risk Reduction

ECOSOC - Economic and Social Council

ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States

EDG - Emergency Directors Group

FSC - Forest Stewardship Council

FSP - Fragile States Principles

GHD - Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative

GIS - Geographic Information Systems

GPS - Global Positioning System

HAP - Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International

HAR - Humanitarian Accountability Report

HC - Humanitarian Coordinator

HCT - Humanitarian Country Team

HLSU - Humanitarian Leadership Strengthening Unit

HNO - Humanitarian Needs Overview

HR - Human Resources

IAF - International Accreditation Forum

IAHE - Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

IASC - Inter-Agency Standing Committee

IATI - International Aid Transparency Initiative

ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

IFRC - International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies

IHL - International Humanitarian Law

ILT - Instructor-Led Training

IMO - Information Management Officer

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organisation

IP - Implementing Partner

ISO - International Organization for Standardization

JSI - Joint Standards Initiative

LMMS - Last Mile Mobile Solutions

LRRD - Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

MENA - Middle East and North Africa

MIRA - Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment

MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières
(Doctors Without Borders)

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

OCHA - United Nations Office for the Coordination
of Humanitarian Affairs

ODA - Official Development Assistance

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation
and Development

OPR - Operational Peer Review

PIN - Personal Identification Number

PMR - Periodic Monitoring Report

PSEA - Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

PVO - Private Voluntary Organization

RCRC - The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

SARC - Syrian Arab Red Crescent

SCHR - Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

SDC - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

SEA - Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

SOP - Standard Operating Procedure

SRP - Strategic Response Plan

TA - Transformative Agenda

TI - Transparency International

UN - United Nations

UNGA - United Nations General Assembly

UNIDO - United Nations Industrial Development
Organisation

UNOPS - United Nations Office for Project Services

USAID - United States Agency for
International Development

WASH - Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WFP - World Food Programme

WHO - World Health Organization

WHS - World Humanitarian Summit

Foreword

Ten years ago, I led an UNDAC team to the remote Bageh province of Kashmir, after the devastating earthquake in October 2005. At that time we had no cell phone reception, no social media, no hashtags. Our small team relied on basic maps and most importantly on local people, who knew the terrain and could navigate the rubble strewn streets by sheer instinct. Dialogue with affected people was a necessity to gain insight into their needs, security risks and build trust and acceptance.

Since then, the humanitarian landscape has changed almost beyond recognition. Today's humanitarian crises affect more people and last longer compared to previous decades. In 2015, the United Nations is seeking to provide life-saving assistance and protection to 78.9 million people across 37 countries. This is nearly double the number of people targeted by UN-coordinated appeals just ten years ago. The average duration of a humanitarian appeal is now seven years. We face new challenges as the environment in which we operate becomes increasingly complex. More than eighty per cent of our work is now in countries and regions affected by conflicts, which globally have forced nearly 60 million people from their homes. These trends show no sign of reversing.


We are also presented with opportunities that ten years ago, in the mountains of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, we could not have imagined. Advances in technology and connectivity have empowered people in ways we would never have thought possible. Using tools such as social media, people affected by crisis are now able to voice their concerns, demand what they need, and connect with each other to organise and lead their own responses.

Against this ever-changing landscape, humanitarian action must evolve and adapt. The consultations leading up to next year's World Humanitarian Summit have called for a fundamental shift in the way we work. We need to galvanise diverse partnerships to prepare for and respond to crises in the context of global shifts such as climate change and urbanisation, while at the same time adapting our operations to the highly localised realities and contexts in which crises occur.

We have consistently heard that we need to deliver assistance and protection in ways that not only meet people's basic needs, but uphold their dignity, empower them to make their own choices, and are culturally sensitive and appropriate. This includes both meeting the needs and building on the strengths of those who are most affected in times of crises, including women, youth, older people, and people living with disabilities.

To truly put people at the centre of humanitarian action, we must work together to make some major changes that will help humanitarian actors at all levels – local, national, regional and international – become more innovative, effective and accountable to the people and communities we aim to serve. We all want to ensure the World Humanitarian Summit is worth the climb. To do that, we need ambitious but actionable ideas such as those found in this timely report. Initiatives such as the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) and other perspectives and ideas offered in this report make a valuable contribution towards turning this vision into a reality.

The World Humanitarian Summit is neither the starting point nor the end of our endeavour to make this vision a reality. It is an opportunity for us to take stock of our strengths and our challenges, and to reaffirm our commitment to deliver on our existing agendas for reform and transformation. But it will only be a success if it mobilises us to look beyond our present ways of working and set an ambitious new agenda for a shared and truly global humanitarianism.



Dr. Jemilah Mahmood
Chief of the World Humanitarian Summit secretariat



*Sebastian Cedillos, agricultural technician at FUNDES, a partner of ACT member LWR, inspects a farmer's corn field during a time of drought in El Salvador.
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Introduction

Humanitarian funding has significantly grown over the past 10 years, but so have humanitarian needs. While it is widely accepted that more resources are necessary, humanitarians also recognise that responses ought to be more effective. This requires both process improvement, and a more substantial rethink of how the humanitarian community identifies and responds to needs. We all can play a role in ensuring that those issues are addressed during the World Humanitarian Summit. To achieve this, we need ambitious new proposals as well as the courage to remove often bureaucratic obstacles that have undermined the implementation of past reforms. Taking a quality and accountability approach in this discussion requires humanitarian stakeholders to consider what effectiveness means to communities affected by crisis, not just to donors or humanitarian organisations. This section summarises some of the key areas the CHS Alliance believes to be essential to more effective, accountable humanitarian action and for which we are willing to develop, together with our members, more detailed, actionable proposals.

A consistent, verifiable approach to quality and accountability

As humanitarian response becomes increasingly coordinated and reform agendas mobilise multiple stakeholders, quality and effectiveness need to be unpacked and made actionable in a coherent framework promoting a common language and approach. The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability does just that. It addresses a large proportion of emerging WHS recommendations – not least because it was written with the people affected by crises in mind. Additionally, by incorporating the OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian action as an integral part of the Standard, the nine commitments provide structured guidance for programming that delivers impact.

The CHS Alliance encourages humanitarian organisations, donors and governments to endorse the Core Humanitarian Standard and integrate its principles and nine commitments in their policies and handbooks. Should donors match their reporting requirements to the effectiveness drivers included in the CHS commitments, and systematically acknowledge through their funding that quality assurance processes incur costs in the same way that compliance mechanisms do, then such integration would be widespread.

We know only too well that people management at all levels is central to a humanitarian response. When an organisation doesn't manage its people using the same quality and accountability standard that it expects them to use when interacting with affected communities, it will lose qualified staff, demotivate others, and face issues such as staff turnover and lack of continuity. This is why the CHS Alliance encourages organisations who commit to applying the CHS to also uphold its commitments with regards to their own staff.

Reporting processes that deliver value for money

Aid workers in country programmes often complain about the reporting burden, which they say keeps them in their offices and limits the time they have to engage with communities. The Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative committed to harmonising reporting in 2003, but progress is slow and has been limited. Reporting, evaluation and compliance requirements have continued to grow, though they have, for the most part, only demonstrated limited positive effects on risk management, quality or impact. Today, reporting is compliance rather than results oriented; if effectiveness is truly high on the agenda, this needs to change. The CHS Alliance believes that this could be addressed if donors were to analyse

a sample of their reporting formats and harmonise those parts that overlap – while still satisfying the requirements of their respective parliaments and sensitising parliament members to the positive impact of harmonisation. Could donors also assess the cost and added value of their current compliance and reporting requirements (assessment, reporting audits and evaluations among others)? The results of such could be used to adapt reporting content and frequency, retaining only those elements that deliver proven value or information that is useful to decision makers, in particular those based at country programme level.

Step by step

Innovation has become one of those words organisations feel obliged to use when writing a proposal or a report. In reality, really innovative programmes are few and the best usually are about adopting the most recent technologies or strategies from other sectors for use in humanitarian programmes. Surprisingly, at the same time, process improvement approaches remain underused in the humanitarian sector, maybe because it lacks such a culture, or because humanitarian leadership has often resisted calls to increase the use of metrics, arguing they could be misused. If we want the sector to make progress however, we need to become better at pinpointing strengths and weaknesses, and work together with communities to identify the innovative approaches that can transform the way we work. The Verification Framework of the CHS will allow humanitarian organisations to do this by offering a tool that helps assess the performance of the different elements of their quality assurance system, making it easier to identify and resource areas where the need is greatest.

Community-driven M&E

If putting communities affected by crisis at the centre of response is indeed one of the key messages emerging from the WHS consultations, then we should make it a priority to acknowledge them as a key stakeholder in the monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian performance. A good way to make this happen would be to use or adapt the performance indicators contained

within the CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators to monitor the degree of satisfaction of crisis-affected people. The leadership of humanitarian organisations has a key role to play in ensuring these tasks become part of the responsibilities of all project and programme managers, are integrated into routine monitoring activities, and are supported with appropriate resources. In addition, humanitarian organisations also need to better inform crisis-affected communities about the service level and behaviours they can expect from their staff, and set up safe and responsive feedback mechanisms, particularly ones that can effectively deal with complaints that relate to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Making national and local NGOs equal partners

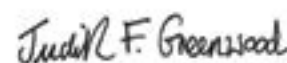
There is a strong discourse in favour of developing the capacity of national and local NGOs to play a bigger role in humanitarian response. International organisations, including INGOs, have invested significant resources in developing national and local capacity, while increasingly relying on this capacity to implement programmes. At the same time, when rapid-onset emergencies take place, international organisations often end up undermining their development by poaching their staff or standing in the way of direct access to funding. National and local organisations are, of course, not a uniform group, and represent a wide variety of capacities, organisational cultures and expertise. This is why the CHS Alliance believes it is so important that humanitarian organisations who work through partners take a long-term approach to planning, prioritising and assessing capacity development efforts. Detailed self-assessments against the CHS offer an effective way to ensure capacity development efforts are directed to the right priorities while assessing the impact of these efforts. Current administrative requirements can be an obstacle for national and local NGOs to access funds. A sensitive way to ensure an increase in direct funding – whether bilateral or multilateral – would be to adapt the level of administrative requirements to the size of the grants, with a system allowing good performers to graduate towards larger grants.

Accountable together

Efforts to improve accountability to affected populations have started at the level of individual organisations. This has led to the critical mass that made this theme central to WHS discussions. Now might be the right moment to also progress on the inclusion of community-focused accountability measures within clusters and improve the transparency of the decision-making process within HCTs or clusters. At the CHS Alliance, we envision a humanitarian response where donors, organisations and all collective forums make the voice of the population their guiding principle by using jointly agreed, country-specific collective accountability and quality standards.

This report discusses the interaction between accountability and effectiveness from different perspectives, and provides suggestions on actions the sector can take to maintain and improve the relevance of its work. The CHS Alliance is committed to contributing to the WHS process by sharing its expertise and insight through collaborative research, the joint development of context-appropriate solutions and through the critical thinking and solid recommendations outlined by contributors to this report.

We wish to take this opportunity to thank all contributors and peer reviewers who have taken the time to share their insights and experience in this publication. We are confident that each chapter contains a wealth of actionable recommendations that can be used by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, and by humanitarian actors across the globe. We hope you enjoy reading it.



Judith Greenwood
Executive Director, CHS Alliance



Robert Glasser
Chair, CHS Alliance Board

Inside her hut, Fatna cooks a meal for her family while cradling her smallest child in a camp for internally displaced persons outside Kubum, in South Darfur.
© ACT Alliance/Paul Jeffrey

01

Accountability: everybody's responsibility

Dayna Brown

Director
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Dayna Brown is a Director at CDA, where she led The Listening Project and co-authored "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid." She leads CDA's research on humanitarian effectiveness and is a member of the WHS Advisory Group on Community Engagement. She managed humanitarian programmes in Kosovo and Indonesia and worked in Washington, DC, for Mercy Corps. Dayna received a Master's degree in Law and Diplomacy from The Fletcher School at Tufts University and a Bachelor's of Business Administration from Texas Christian University.

The author wishes to thank Isabella Jean, Dr. Ahmad Faizal and Dr. Vivien Margaret Walden for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance, CDA or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

As the curtain comes up on the World Humanitarian Summit process, it's clear that accountability is going to be a hot topic in the months ahead. Everyone involved in humanitarian response has a stake in the issue and a part to play – none more so than the people affected by crises themselves. Dayna Brown gets the debate started.

Background and connection to the World Humanitarian Summit

Given the theme of '#reshaping aid' for the first ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, there is more open discussion than ever about the need to listen and be more accountable to people affected by humanitarian crises. Those affected and those funding responses are increasingly demanding more accountability and greater effectiveness. People and organisations in affected communities want to be recognised for the effective roles they play in preventing and responding to crises, and to see a revolution in how outsiders engage with them. However, many in the international humanitarian system also want existing commitments to reform implemented, and are suggesting other 'tweaks' to make humanitarian action more effective. The WHS is thus attempting to bring all of the actors engaged

Humanitarian effectiveness according to the World Humanitarian Summit

The WHS has identified four themes for discussions on how to “make humanitarian action more effective, inclusive, global and, overall, fit for the future”:

- **Humanitarian effectiveness**
- **Reducing vulnerability and managing risk**
- **Transformation through innovation**
- **Serving the needs of people in conflict**

The WHS defines humanitarian effectiveness more broadly than the OECD/DAC criteria and the ALNAP guide to evaluation, taking an approach closer to that of the aid effectiveness agenda. Although it does not offer a definition of humanitarian effectiveness, it does mention several key factors which contribute to it, including coordination, financing, standards, sustainability, context and accountability. The WHS also acknowledges the links to be made with the other WHS themes, as they all contribute to humanitarian effectiveness. It also recognises that people affected by crises should define what effective humanitarian action looks like from their perspective and that one size does not fit all when evaluating effectiveness.

in humanitarian action – including, importantly, more people, government representatives, civil society organisations and businesses from crisis-affected countries – into the process to find a balance between these two aims and to chart a way forward.

Participants in the WHS consultations are openly discussing the objectives and limits of humanitarian action, the appropriate roles of different actors, power dynamics, financing, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Tackling these issues is important not only in terms of improving humanitarian action, but also of being accountable for its effectiveness. Accountability is critically linked to effectiveness for people affected by crises, local organisations engaged in responses and governments who have participated in the regional consultation processes. For instance, in the Middle East and North Africa WHS consultation, people were very concerned about the lack of accountability for violations of international law by both state and non-state actors which have contributed to the many lives lost, and emphasised that “humanitarian aid cannot continue to be a substitute for political action.”¹

Parallel to and in conjunction with the more political WHS process, accountability to affected populations (AAP) has been acknowledged as one of the unmet commitments in the implementation of the 2011 IASC Transformative Agenda.² To date, much of the focus on improving accountability has been at the individual, organisational and project levels (for behaviours, inputs and outputs), rather than at the sectoral and collective levels (for outcomes and impacts), which matter most to people affected by crises. The discussions among those engaged in humanitarian operations are now focusing on the need for collective accountability to ensure that humanitarian needs and priorities are being met and that the dignity of people affected by crises is upheld.³

Those on the frontline, as well as those who work on humanitarian policy, are wrestling with differing interpretations of the goals of humanitarian action; questions about how to measure the effectiveness of achieving these goals; who should be held accountable for reaching those goals; and how best to hold those responsible to account.

To help answer these questions and to introduce the rest of the report, it is important to look at what it means to be effective and accountable in principle, in practice, and in the short and long term. Only then can we explore ways to improve practice in the future and examine the potential role of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

To date, much of the focus on improving accountability has been at the individual, organisational and project levels (for behaviours, inputs and outputs), rather than at the sectoral and collective levels (for outcomes and impacts), which matter most to people affected by crises.

1/ ‘Regional Consultation for Middle East and North Africa, Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis’, World Humanitarian Summit, 2015, p. 5.

2/ See: <http://interagencystandingcommittee.org/node/2803>.

3/ Knox Clarke, P. and Obrecht, A., ‘Good humanitarian action meets the priorities and respects the dignity of crisis-affected people,’ Global Forum Briefing Papers, ALNAP/ODI, 2015, London.

What does being effective and accountable mean?

In principle

Accountability and effectiveness **mean different things to different people** and are measured in different ways. Those who fund and provide humanitarian assistance often define and measure effectiveness and accountability based on different assumptions and expectations than those in communities affected by crises. Those responding are often focused on measuring what happened – what assistance people received, if it was appropriate, whether it was on time, etc. – while those in communities are equally concerned with how assistance was provided.⁴

Definitions and expectations are **shaped by the cultural and political contexts** in which humanitarian action takes place, as well as by local, national and international power dynamics and funding streams. For instance, in the Spanish-speaking accountability-related thematic meetings for the WHS, it was noted that “the Spanish term normally used for accountability, ‘rendición de cuentas,’ does not accurately reflect the English meaning of the word and focuses the attention on accounting rather than balancing power relations and engaging in meaningful dialogue.”⁵ In the Philippines, accountability was not easy to translate into local languages and the “western, service-delivery, and consumer-oriented language of feedback and complaints mechanisms that many international agencies use” to be accountable did not fit well with the cultural norm of owing a debt of gratitude to those who provide help.⁶

HAP’s (now the CHS Alliance) conception of accountability touched on several drivers of effectiveness for crisis-affected communities: **access to information; meaningful participation; opportunities to complain and give feedback; to receive a response; programme adaptation; and continuous improvement.** These elements of good programming have been expanded on in the new CHS, which aims to be the benchmark by which the quality, accountability and effectiveness of humanitarian action,

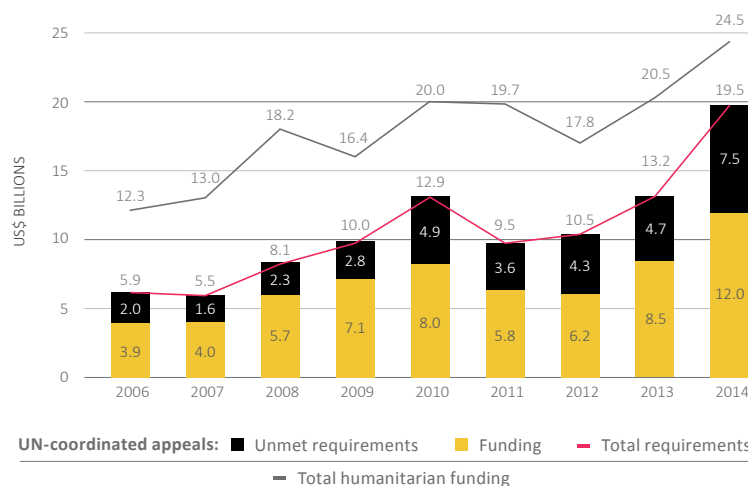
primarily from the perspective of those affected by crises, is measured. But for many in crisis-affected communities, accountability is still quite a foreign concept and not something they have often experienced (lack of accountability is often both a cause and an effect of many of the crises in the world today).

Being effective and accountable requires knowing **who is responsible to whom and for what**, and this differs from context to context and from community to community. Determining responsibilities and lines of accountability is often confusing to both those affected by and those responding to humanitarian crises, particularly when relationships, institutions and lives are stressed, broken or lost. In these contexts, being accountable is primarily seen as a responsibility of those who hold power – which in some humanitarian contexts has mainly fallen on UN agencies and the international NGOs that have the most resources. The CHS, which has been developed by a range of humanitarian actors, defines accountability as “the process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power.”⁷ The Nine Commitments in the CHS are meant to be applicable both to international and national actors, whose roles and responsibilities are increasingly acknowledged in humanitarian contexts.

Accountability and effectiveness mean different things to different people and are measured in different ways.

Being accountable is about **taking responsibility** for actions (and inaction), results, behaviours, successes, failures, mistakes, and for learning (not just gathering) lessons. Accountability does not flow only ‘upwards’ to donors or ‘downwards’ to communities, but rather in all directions between people and organisations who have a relationship to one another. Being accountable is something that every person and organisation engaged in and affected by humanitarian action can and should take responsibility for and be committed to, although this is certainly challenging in many contexts. Rachel Scott of the OECD offers a similar definition of accountability to the CHS that can be applied by any actor in any context: “Accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for decisions and actions, including the responsibility to report, explain and be answerable for the resulting consequences.”⁸

Figure 1.1: Humanitarian funding and UN-coordinated appeals, 2006-2014



Even though humanitarian funding has doubled in less than a decade, it struggles to keep up with humanitarian needs as identified through UN-coordinated appeals.

Adapted from: Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Reports 2012-2015.

4/ See: WHS Stakeholder Analyses Reports; Anderson, M., Brown, D. and Jean, I., ‘Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid’, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Cambridge, MA, 2012; and (forthcoming) State of the Humanitarian System report (2015 edition), ALNAP/ODI, London.
 5/ ‘Regional Consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean, Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis’, World Humanitarian Summit, 2015, p.8.
 6/ Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J., and Routley, S., ‘Who’s Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response’, Briefing Paper, Plan International, 2015, p.3.
 7/ CHS Guidance Notes, p.51.
 8/ Scott, R., ‘Imagining More Effective Humanitarian Aid: A Donor Perspective’, OECD, Paris, 2014, p.20.



*Petros Abyio grows apples in Boshe-Igira, Ethiopia.
Church of Sweden supports several projects in rural
Ethiopia to improve poor people's abilities to support
themselves and their families
© Magnus Aronson / Church of Sweden*



Accountability does not flow only 'upwards' to donors or 'downwards' to communities, but rather in all directions between people and organisations who have a relationship to one another.

In other words, **accountability is a key driver of effectiveness.** In the eyes of those most affected by crises, humanitarian actors that are present, transparent, accessible and responsive aren't simply more accountable – they are also more effective.⁹ Donors also believe that agencies that are accountable for how their money is spent are more effective. The ALNAP issue paper on accountability for the WHS suggests that “recognising accountability and effectiveness as two separate types of humanitarian responsibility is useful for supporting a better understanding of how these responsibilities support one another.”¹⁰

The CHS defines **effectiveness as “the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives”**.¹¹ ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System report in 2012 looked at effectiveness in the same way and as just one criterion with which to measure the performance of the international

humanitarian system. The biggest challenge in defining and measuring humanitarian effectiveness is that there are wide-ranging views on the objectives of humanitarian action. In recent years, most humanitarian actors have expanded their goals to include reducing risks and vulnerabilities, strengthening capacities and resilience, supporting recovery, and addressing chronic poverty and vulnerability. This broadening of mandates, combined with the weakness or absence of non-humanitarian actors in many places, has increased the expectations of humanitarians from many people in crisis-affected communities. This in turn has often fuelled their disappointment and frustration over the perceived lack of effectiveness of humanitarian actors in addressing their wide-ranging needs and priorities.

The Nine Commitments in the CHS essentially lay out the objectives for which all actors engaged in humanitarian action can be held accountable. While framed from the perspective of what affected communities should expect, the CHS commitments are still largely about **operational effectiveness** issues, rather than the strategic and political decisions that so often drive humanitarian responses. The emphasis from crisis-affected people engaged in the WHS process on protection, and their demands for **those who violate international humanitarian, human rights**

and refugee laws to be held accountable, are a reminder that crisis-affected people have other expectations beyond having their immediate needs met more effectively.¹² For many local people, this is what effective international action looks like and is an area in which international and national actors need to be more accountable. As an IDP in the Democratic Republic of Congo noted: “Aid does not have an impact if the government does not respect its commitments to its people.”¹³

The principle of **'Do No Harm' requires accountability for actions that exacerbate existing tensions or create more problems,** and also for decisions not taken that could have prevented harm from being done. As Lars Peter Nissen notes in chapter 3, the 'black box' of decision-making makes it challenging to hold those who make decisions accountable and to ensure that decision-makers learn from their mistakes so that less harm is done in the future. People in crisis-affected communities are becoming increasingly vocal in their demands for accountability and humanitarian effectiveness to be more broadly defined. They want to see accountability for harm that has been done; for lives lost unnecessarily; and for political inaction which has left people more vulnerable, prolonged crises, and increased the need for protection and humanitarian action.

9/ See: Anderson, M., Brown, D. and Jean, I., 'Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid', CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Cambridge, MA, 2012; Featherstone, A., 'Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?', Christian Aid, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, London, 2013; and Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J., and Routley, S., 'Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response', Plan International, 2015.
10/ Obrecht, A. with Knox-Clarke, P., El-Houhene, M., and Noyes, A., 'WHS Effectiveness Theme Focal Issue Paper 5: Accountability', ALNAP, London, 2015, p.6.
11/ CHS Guidance Notes and Indicators. See: <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/resources/chs-guidance-notes-and-indicators>.
12/ See: WHS Stakeholder Analyses; and Knox Clarke, P. and Obrecht, A., 'Good humanitarian action meets the priorities and respects the dignity of crisis-affected people', Global Forum Briefing Papers, ALNAP/ODI, London, 2015.
13/ OCHA, 'Humanitarian Effectiveness Study', forthcoming, 2015.

As the founder of the Dalia Association, the first Palestinian community foundation, notes: "Accountability cannot be achieved without honest, critical, constructive discussion about what is really happening. We must tell the whole, complex, discomfiting truth, even if it leads us to conclude that 'aid' isn't as helpful as we want to believe it is."¹⁴ Commitment 3 of the CHS starts to address this by stating that: "Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action." However, being accountable for effectiveness more broadly defined will require commitments and action not just from humanitarians, but also from political, economic and development actors.

In practice

These different conceptions of humanitarian action, effectiveness and accountability have had significant effects on practice. People affected by crises see close personal engagement between humanitarian staff and communities as central to accountability. Humanitarian agencies, on the other hand, have concentrated on strengthening accountability through formal **policies, frameworks and procedures**. Significant investments have been made and many international and national NGOs now provide information to affected communities, have put feedback and complaints response mechanisms in place, and employ staff dedicated to ensuring accountability. A few donors and UN agencies have also increased staff and funding to support accountability to affected populations. However, despite this progress, communities and staff are still not always clear on who is responsible for what, and how to fulfill their

HAP's experience, among others, showed that most international humanitarian agencies prefer voluntary efforts to improve accountability, while many national and local organisations and governments would like to see more regulations and certification against standards and objectives.

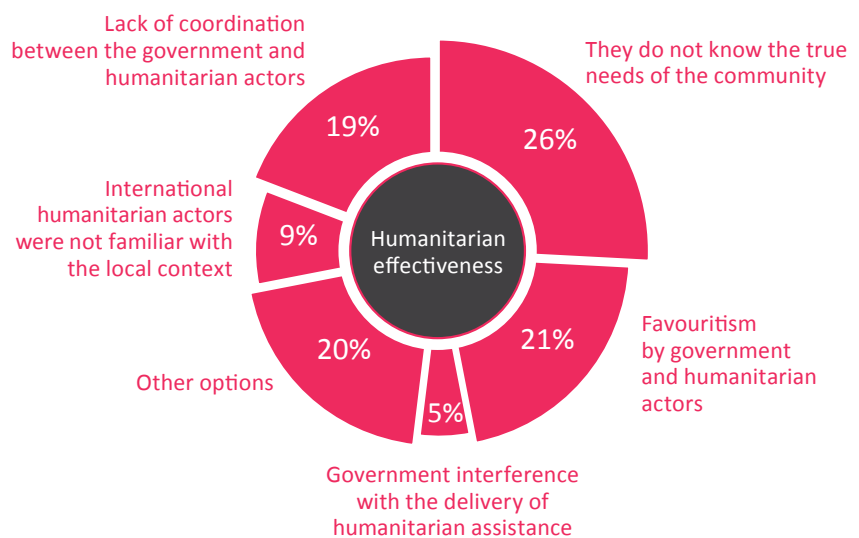
responsibilities and hold others to account. Despite assurances, some are fearful of complaining or seeking redress for fear of losing assistance.¹⁵

Over the last 20 years, different initiatives have also been developed to help humanitarian agencies be more accountable through improved **communications and information provision; listening to and consulting with affected communities; facilitating participation; and establishing feedback, complaints and response mechanisms**.¹⁶ HAP's experience, among others, showed that most international humanitarian agencies prefer **voluntary efforts** to improve accountability, while many national and local organisations and governments would like to see more **regulation against standards and objectives**. With regards to certification, which remains a voluntary effort, national organisations tend to be more interested than international ones, possibly because they see it as a way to demonstrate professionalism to donors and partners. Chapter 8 of this report describes some of the positive impacts certification has had within other sectors, but the complex contexts and underlying power dynamics in the humanitarian system have made it challenging for affected communities to

The need and demand for respectful, competent staff who are close to communities, understand the culture, have good communication skills, act impartially, and can facilitate dialogue and collaboration is not new, but continues to be raised.

hold agencies accountable, much less to demand some sort of certification. Chapter 3 examines more of a 'middle way' approach, using independent sources of feedback and external verification to ensure that standards such as the CHS are lived up to in practice. It is interesting to note that all of these approaches and initiatives have been led and driven by those involved in providing aid, rather than those who are receiving it. As the CHS is rolled out and tested, the hope must be that agencies and governments will 'open the black box' and involve those affected by crises in the process of deciding how to be accountable for living up to its Commitments.

Figure 1.2: What are the obstacles faced by humanitarian actors in meeting the needs of communities?



In the WHS Southern African community survey respondents highlighted a lack of contextual understanding and coordination as the main obstacles to meeting the needs of communities.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for Eastern and Southern Africa, 2014, p.66.

14/ <http://www.noralestermurad.com/israel-devastated-gaza-but-aid-helps-keep-it-that-way>, accessed on 6 May 2015.

15/ See: ALNAP-CDA case studies, findings and guidance on the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms; and Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J., and Routley, S., 'Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response', Briefing Paper, Plan International, 2015.

16/ For more discussion on the terms, approaches and initiatives see: Brown, D., and Donini, A., 'Rhetoric or Reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action', ALNAP Study, ALNAP/ODI, London, 2014.

*"I don't know why, but the building of toilets was not integrated in the reconstruction plan for the two rooms for the winter. So now we are doing that on our own." ACT Alliance supported the Water Alliance in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, to build 50 toilets.
© ACT/Dimitry Motinov*



Even with significant investments in improving accountability, one of the biggest practical challenges has been demonstrating accountability **beyond the project and organisational levels – i.e. within clusters, across the humanitarian system, and in broad strategies and decisions.** There has been some recent progress, particularly in the Philippines, on collective efforts to improve accountability and effectiveness. The Pamati Kita project is a promising example of several international agencies working together to provide information, collectively responding to feedback and advocating for policy changes to address local people's priorities.¹⁷ But this was in a large-scale response to a natural disaster in an enabling environment for civic engagement, unlike most humanitarian contexts, and the government and local organisations were not very engaged in the effort. Going forward, the CHS offers a common framework that could be used to collectively measure the effectiveness of all actors engaged in a response, based on the roles they play and what is appropriate and relevant in each context. But that will require leadership, flexibility, capacity and resources, not just from international actors but also from local actors, as was noted in the evaluation of Pamati Kita and other collective efforts.

Lastly, people from affected communities emphasise that accountability and effectiveness depend on good relationships. The need and demand for **respectful, competent staff** who are close to communities, understand the culture, have good communication skills, act impartially, and can facilitate dialogue and collaboration is

not new, but continues to be raised. The second and third highest ranked improvements needed in the humanitarian system by aid recipients in the latest State of the Humanitarian System report were "be more respectful of our customs" and "listen to us more".¹⁸

In chapters 5 and 11, Dr. Kamel Mohanna and Jonathan Potter argue persuasively that frontline staff and volunteers – who primarily come from crisis-affected communities and countries – need to be empowered to listen and to respond to concerns as they arise; to know what to do with issues that are beyond their responsibility; to understand what is expected of them and their organisations in order to be accountable; and to be well supported. It is the responsibility of any government body or organisation engaged in humanitarian action to find, train, support and, most importantly, value those who are interacting on a daily basis with those affected by crises. In many cases, these are local and national staff working for international, national and local organisations, as well as the government, who will be there long after the last international humanitarians leave.

In the short and long term

People affected by crises emphasise the importance of **connecting humanitarian and development programmes and processes** to improve accountability and

effectiveness.¹⁹ While both sectors start by looking at rights and responsibilities, development actors typically work towards improving citizen-state relationships, governance and social accountability, by **holding governments accountable.** This is in contrast to what has largely been a focus on accountability at project and organisational levels in humanitarian contexts where many actors either have to work around or avoid engaging with governments. In many instances, governments have created hostile environments for civic engagement and limited options for holding them accountable. But even in these contexts, there is often more that can be done to broaden social accountability. In chapter 7, Simon Richards describes HAP's work to improve accountability for effective service delivery in the health sector within the challenging context of Myanmar. This also provides a useful example of international and local organisations building from their experiences of promoting accountability during the humanitarian response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

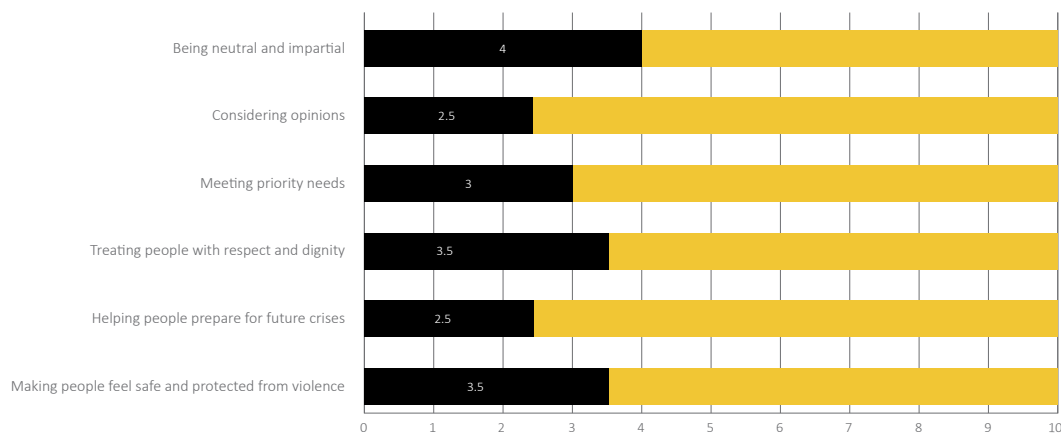
Research on the impacts of efforts to improve accountability in humanitarian programmes in Myanmar and Kenya has provided **evidence of "increased empowerment and self-esteem among project participants."** It also noted "greater willingness of groups to demand accountability from other duty-bearers, such as schools, local authorities and even

17/ Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J., and Routley, S., 'Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response', Plan International, 2015.

18/ (Forthcoming), ALNAP/ODI, London.

19/ See: Knox Clarke, P. and Obrecht, A., 'Good humanitarian action is consistent with longer term political, economic and social processes', Global Forum Briefing Papers, ALNAP/ODI, London, 2015

Figure 1.3: Report card: aid agencies in the Middle East



Average scores of respondents from the five countries (Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) where WHS focus group discussions took place.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for the Middle East and North Africa: Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis, 2015.

private companies.”²⁰ While there is a need for more evidence to determine which approaches are most effective at sustaining accountability practices,²¹ there is some evidence and agreement in principle that greater accountability will lead to greater effectiveness in the short and long term.²²

However, people in affected communities continue to say that while they give input and make suggestions to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action, they **rarely see changes made or receive a response**. In other words, accountability still remains weak. As an IDP in a camp in Rakhine State in Myanmar told me: “All organisations come to us and listen but nothing changes.” A UN staff member acknowledged the lack of accountability, saying that: “We have to listen and record, but we need to listen and make something happen.” Unfortunately, the focus on accountability systems and procedures, rather than on dialogue and relationships which are important to affected communities, has often lead to the ‘projectisation’ and ‘proceduralisation’ of accountability.²³

Similarly, in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan, community members and Barangay leaders asked for humanitarian responders to consult with them better, suggesting that

meaningful dialogue would ensure more appropriate aid, better targeting of the most vulnerable, and less wasting of resources than many of the more technological feedback-gathering approaches used by aid agencies.²⁴ Unfortunately, the failure to close the feedback loop between those providing humanitarian aid and affected communities after feedback was given has **affected the levels of trust in the international community**. This is not a new lesson, as noted in several chapters in this report and many previous reports, and is one which needs to be learned if we are to see greater accountability and effective humanitarian action.

As noted in several of the following chapters, while practice has improved, there have been significant challenges in getting accountability prioritised alongside competing priorities in most humanitarian responses. The ‘report card’ from affected communities on aid agencies in the Middle East shows low scores for effectiveness and critical means of demonstrating accountability (i.e. considering beneficiaries’ opinions and treating people with respect and dignity).²⁵ Most of the well-intentioned individual and collective efforts are **simply not ‘adding up’ to the level of effectiveness**

The focus on accountability systems and procedures, rather than on dialogue and relationships which are important to affected communities, has often lead to the ‘projectisation’ and ‘proceduralisation’ of accountability.

or accountability that is expected or desired by affected communities (and indeed by many humanitarians).

As has been discussed in countless forums and reports, the incentive structures in the humanitarian system have not significantly changed and affected people are still not able to fully demand accountability. There has not yet been a shift to a more accountable culture in the international humanitarian system, dominated as it is by large international agencies which are slow to change, protective of their turf and often in competition with one another. So, what will it take to really change the status quo?

20/ Featherstone, A., ‘Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?’, Christian Aid and Save the Children for the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, London, 2013, p.13.


21/ Brown, D., and Donini, A., ‘Rhetoric or Reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action’, ALNAP Study, ALNAP/ODI, London, 2014; and ‘2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report’, HAP, Geneva.

22/ Featherstone, A., ‘Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?’, Christian Aid, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, London, 2013.

23/ See: Anderson, M., Brown, D. and Jean, I., ‘Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid’, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Cambridge, MA, 2012; and Brown, D., and Donini, A., ‘Rhetoric or Reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action’, ALNAP Study, ALNAP/ODI, London, 2014.

24/ See: Buchanan-Smith, M., Ong, J., and Routley, S., ‘Who’s Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response’, Plan International, 2015.

25/ http://www.irinnews.org/report/101197/what-refugees-really-think-of-aid-agencies#VQFza_mjPku, accessed on 11 May 2015.



At the lagoon of Alegria, Usulután, El Salvador, water levels frequently drop dramatically in times of drought, a phenomenon which is becoming more severe.
© ACT Alliance / Sean Hawkey

Moving forward and the role of the CHS

To put the principles into practice, it is important for those engaged in humanitarian action to **be accountable for effectiveness as defined by those most affected by crises**. Humanitarian actors should hold themselves accountable to the priorities defined by crisis-affected communities and institutions. When expectations go beyond what humanitarian actors can do or reasonably be held responsible for, they should communicate this and work to ensure that those who should be accountable for meeting those obligations or demands are able to do so. This will require clarifying objectives, roles and responsibilities upfront, as well as greater understanding of and support for local capacities and existing accountability mechanisms. It also implies a shift in defining and measuring effectiveness and accountability from a supply-driven to a demand-driven approach.

Matthew Serventy (chapter 10) also suggests that asking people in affected communities for their indicators of effectiveness could help to establish **common goals and benchmarks** in each humanitarian context to which all actors can be held accountable. Rachel Scott, while not necessarily advocating for effectiveness

It is important for those engaged in humanitarian action to be accountable for effectiveness as defined by those most affected by crises.

to be defined by affected communities alone, has suggested that “a common framework of humanitarian effectiveness would mean that each actor would be held accountable for their contribution to the same characteristics of effectiveness – based on what they can control, what they can influence, and where they advocate – no matter who was assessing them.”²⁶

In WHS consultations, participants from affected communities in particular have suggested that international humanitarian actors need to focus more on **advocacy** for political action or for systemic changes that will enable more effective action and improved accountability. This may put humanitarian actors in an uncomfortable or untenable position of holding their own or others’ governments responsible – in some cases ‘biting the hand that feeds them’. For others, taking political or other actions may be necessary to uphold and strengthen the use of **humanitarian principles**. The decisions on what roles humanitarian actors will play and

whether to engage politically will be based on the context and goals of different humanitarian actors, as Jérémie Labbé discusses in more depth in chapter 2 on the role of humanitarian principles in driving effectiveness.

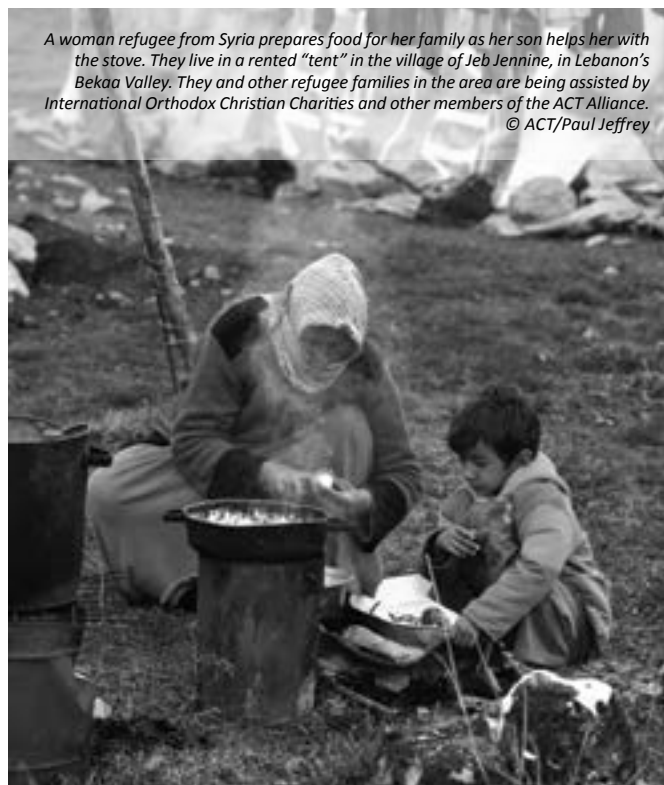
To **shift from a supply- to a demand-driven approach** to accountability, it is important to have more **open discussions and negotiations on roles, responsibilities and the means by which various actors can be held accountable for decisions made and actions taken**. Current roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability have largely been defined by those providing aid – and this will need to change. In chapter 3, Lars Peter Nissen discusses how being accountable for the most complex aspects of humanitarian action – that is, the use (and abuse) of power, who makes decisions and who influences them, and where decisions are made – is harder than being accountable for targeting

Participants from affected communities in particular have suggested that international humanitarian actors need to focus more on advocacy for political action or for systemic changes.

26/ Scott, R., ‘Imagining More Effective Humanitarian Aid: A Donor Perspective’, OECD, Paris, 2014, p.14.



Displaced Syrian families from the town of Nawa register to receive aid in Daraa, Syria. Fighting in the area displaced all of the town's 40,000 families and they are now receiving aid through distributions.
© International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)



A woman refugee from Syria prepares food for her family as her son helps her with the stove. They live in a rented "tent" in the village of Jeb Jennine, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. They and other refugee families in the area are being assisted by International Orthodox Christian Charities and other members of the ACT Alliance.
© ACT/Paul Jeffrey

mistakes or other micro-level issues which are the focus of most of the current accountability frameworks designed by aid agencies.²⁷

Connecting to and strengthening existing mechanisms and systems will enable people to hold their governments and other duty-bearers and service providers to account in the future. This requires breaking down some of the bureaucratic silos and philosophical divides that exist between humanitarian and development actors so that investments made in improving accountability during humanitarian responses are not lost when the crisis ends. Nicolas Seris and Roslyn Hees (chapter 9) highlight practical examples from Transparency International's work on addressing corruption and improving accountability in Kenya, where the lines are often blurred between humanitarian and development efforts and where making connections to existing systems may be easier.

As they and others highlight in the following chapters, to respond to the demands for greater accountability and effectiveness, those affected by and responding to crises need to be able to **talk about power more openly**: who has it; how responsibly it is used and to what ends; the checks and balances on its use; and ultimately how it can be shared. As the WHS consultations and this report highlight, this requires innovation and new ways of listening and working. Humanitarians could benefit from better links to development and

peace-building actors, who often have more experience with actor-mapping, power analysis, systems analysis, problem-solving, facilitation, conflict management and other tools and skills vital to understanding and working with various actors in complex contexts. This may require a shift in orientation that goes beyond just meeting needs to ensuring that rights are respected as well.

Some practical steps to be more accountable and effective, and to support the implementation of the commitments in the CHS include:

- **Assessing what local accountability systems or practices exist and are effective** in each context, according to those who are using them. This would enable humanitarian actors to strengthen existing structures to ensure the needs and priorities of people are met now and in the future. All actors, particularly donors, aid agencies and governments could include accountability analyses in their assessments and strategies – not just for humanitarian programmes, but also for disaster risk reduction, resilience and long-term development plans. This does not imply that all actors do their own analyses, but rather that they ensure the analysis is done and that they use it when determining strategies and ways to ensure accountability.
- Making **analysis of community feedback and perceptions, and communicating responses and actions a standing**

To respond to the demands for greater accountability and effectiveness, those affected by and responding to crises need to be able to talk about power more openly: who has it; how responsibly it is used and to what ends; the checks and balances on its use; and ultimately how it can be shared.

agenda item for community, staff, organisation, partner, cluster, coordination and other meetings. This could be feedback gathered by individual agencies, or through collective mechanisms or independent bodies. Chapters 4 (Nick van Praag) and 12 (Jessica Alexander) both discuss the need for more perceptual data and information to improve decision-making, effectiveness and accountability.

- Clarifying **lines of responsibility and accountability** in each person's job description and in programme plans. This is for the benefit not only of supervisors and funders, but also of peers, partners and, most importantly, those affected by crises and their actions.

27/ Darcy, Alexander and Kiani, 'Humanitarian Accountability Report 2013', HAP, p.5



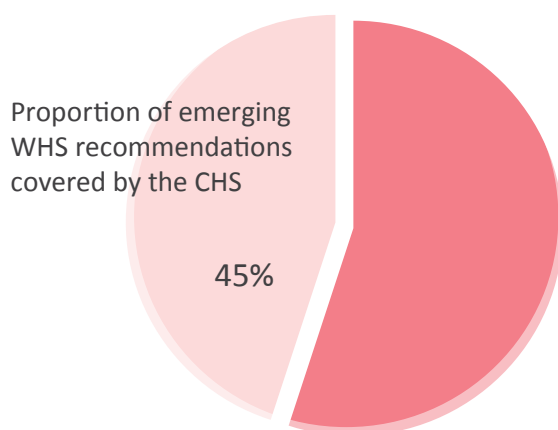
Jonathan Potter (chapter 11) and others note that it is important to have more leadership and prioritisation by managers in particular, in order to make more progress on being accountable.

- **Simplifying reporting and other requirements** so that staff can spend

more time listening openly to, engaging in meaningful ways with, and being accountable to affected communities and one another. The CHS offers a framework that could be used as a benchmark to evaluate the effectiveness of various programming and reporting requirements. It provides a common language and

signposts that agencies can follow to improve individual and collective effectiveness and accountability as defined by those affected by crises. As with anything new, the CHS needs to be tested and evaluated, particularly by those most affected by crises and responses.

Figure 1.4: Overlap between the CHS and emerging WHS recommendations.



Considering the broad consensus on the content of the CHS, and its overlap with the 267 recommendations of the June 2015 ALNAP Global Forum (an official WHS event), Robert Glasser, Chair of the CHS Alliance, called for the CHS to be endorsed at the World Humanitarian Summit as a key framework to orient, assess and measure the quality, effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian assistance. For more details, see figure 8.2 in chapter 8.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability



- **Thinking beyond the current crisis** about how better accountability can improve not only humanitarian effectiveness, but development effectiveness too. Some practical ways to break down the barriers between humanitarian and development actors include: development of community- and country-based strategies that are driven by and accountable to people from crisis-affected communities; joint analysis and reflection on feedback from communities; joint planning cells, such as those some donors and agencies have established to focus on resilience; and advocacy for policy and strategy changes that respond to needs, priorities and capacities.

Conclusion

Accountability is not going to be improved through more 'tweaking' with technical or procedural fixes. It requires a change in mindset to acknowledge that each and every person affected by and engaged in humanitarian crises has different roles and responsibilities to play, and that they need to be accountable to one another as well as to the collective goals. It isn't easy to **be accountable for the results and effectiveness** of humanitarian action to the extent demanded by those affected by crises. But being accountable from the micro to the macro level is essential if we are to support those most affected to prevent, manage and recover from crises more effectively in the future.

Accountability is not going to be improved through more 'tweaking' with technical or procedural fixes. It requires a change in mind set to acknowledge that each and every person affected by and engaged in humanitarian crises has different roles and responsibilities to play, and that they need to be accountable to one another as well as to the collective goals.

02

How do humanitarian principles support humanitarian effectiveness?

Jérémie Labbé

Head, Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action
International Committee of the Red Cross

Jérémie Labbé is head of a project entitled “Principles Guiding Humanitarian Action” at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since July 2014. Prior to this, he worked for the International Peace Institute (IPI) in New York, where he developed a new programme on humanitarian affairs. His work has focused on the adaptation of the international humanitarian system to a changing world, the relevance of humanitarian principles, protection of civilians and international humanitarian law, and the relation between humanitarian action and UN integration. Before joining IPI in 2010, he spent several years with the ICRC, both in its headquarters in Geneva and in different field missions in India, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and Iraq.

The author wishes to thank Anike Doherty, Antonio Donini and Fiona Terry for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance, the ICRC or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

Humanitarian principles aren't just an ethical compass for aid delivery in complex and dangerous environments, argues ICRC's Jérémie Labbé, they provide a pragmatic operational framework that contributes to humanitarian effectiveness too.

Effectiveness is commonly understood as the capacity to produce a desired result, to achieve the objectives set out or to solve the targeted problem. Naturally, humanitarian actors have always been concerned with ensuring that the effectiveness of their action benefits communities affected by conflicts or disasters. In the last two decades in particular, they have developed a number of professional and technical standards – including the recently adopted Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) – aimed at improving the quality of their response and thus their overall effectiveness. While these normative developments have arguably contributed to improvements,¹ a key question remains: How do the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality,

1/ The 2012 report *The State of the Humanitarian System*, which is a system-level analysis and evaluation of the performance of international humanitarian assistance, noted that “most [humanitarian] interventions were found to be effective or partially effective in terms of achievements against projected goals or international standards”. Taylor, G. et al., *The State of the Humanitarian System*. 2012 Ed. London: ALNAP. p.11.

neutrality and independence (the principles “at the core of all humanitarian work” in the words of the CHS²) support humanitarian effectiveness?

While this chapter aims to give elements of the answer to this question, a number of limitations should first be highlighted. In terms of methodology, this chapter draws mostly on a desk-based review of the literature, as opposed to evidence-based field research. It also draws heavily on an internal study of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) conducted in seven field delegations in 2013-2014.³ The explicit aim of this study was to better understand how the ICRC applies humanitarian principles in practice and the challenges it faces in doing so, rather than to explore the causal link between principles and effectiveness. Therefore, the scope of this chapter is not so much to provide quantitative or measurable evidence as to contribute qualitative elements to the discussion, based on ICRC’s understanding and interpretation of the principles, and its concrete operational experience.

Another methodological difficulty concerns the lack of consensus around the definition of humanitarian effectiveness. The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) process (to which this report is a contribution) has brought the concept of humanitarian effectiveness under the spotlight by selecting it as one of the four themes around which to structure its discussions.⁴ Yet, as noted by Dayna Brown in the first chapter, there is neither a clear definition of the concept nor a clear list of its components. Alongside considerations of timeliness, coverage of needs and quality of aid, this chapter will consider four broad criteria as parameters of humanitarian effectiveness, drawing on the initial scoping paper produced for the WHS on this particular topic.⁵ These are:

- Better understanding what affected communities need, and what local and national actors are already doing to address these needs;
- Improving the accountability of the response, not only in relation to the affected communities, but towards donors and affected governments as well;
- Enhancing the complementarity of the different actors responding to crises, both within the so-called international humanitarian system and outside of it (e.g. militaries, private sector actors, diaspora groups, local civil society organisations, religious institutions, etc.); and
- Better tailoring the response to the specific conditions of a given crisis, be it a sudden- or slow-onset natural disaster, an ongoing or protracted conflict, or a situation of chronic vulnerability in a fragile state.

However, as we shall be discussing, humanitarian effectiveness is a relative concept, as it is intimately linked to the various ways in which different humanitarian actors understand the objectives of humanitarian action, which also explains fluctuating interpretations of humanitarian principles.

Based on these premises, this chapter will review some of the systemic challenges to the principles, outlining how they and the boundaries of humanitarian action are interpreted differently, and how this impacts on the very understanding of humanitarian effectiveness. Finally, it will focus on ICRC’s understanding of these principles and demonstrate how, for this organisation, humanitarian principles are indispensable, but not necessarily sufficient to deliver humanitarian effectiveness. But first, here is a brief overview of how humanitarian principles came to be crystallised as the ethical and normative framework governing humanitarian action and how they are commonly understood.

Humanitarian principles: What are we talking about?

The progressive crystallisation of humanitarian principles

Besides international humanitarian law, which recognises that “[a]n impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services”,⁶ humanitarian principles were first formalised by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement in 1965 through the adoption of its seven Fundamental Principles.⁷ The ‘master-narrative’ developed by the ICRC and the RCRC Movement⁸ – itself the result and crystallisation of a century of humanitarian ethics and action – has deeply influenced the wider humanitarian system that broadly adopted the first four Fundamental Principles as the guiding principles of humanitarian action: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Beyond international humanitarian law and the RCRC Movement, the humanitarian principles were endorsed in the 1990s, notably through UN Resolution 46/182 in 1991 that set the guiding principles and the institutional foundations of the formal, UN-led, international humanitarian system.⁹ A few years later, at the instigation of the RCRC Movement, NGOs adopted these principles as part of the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*.¹⁰ Since then, the central role of humanitarian principles in the normative framework governing humanitarian action has been progressively consolidated:

2/ The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. 2014. p.8. Available at: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf. [Accessed: 22 May 2015].

3/ ‘Snapshot of ICRC application of Fundamental Principles’ (internal study). ICRC. 2014.

4/ The World Humanitarian Summit, a two-year consultation process initiated by the UN Secretary-General in 2013, has selected four broad themes to guide and structure its discussions: 1) humanitarian effectiveness; 2) reducing vulnerabilities and managing risks; 3) transformation through innovation; and 4) serving the needs of people in conflict. For more information, see: <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/>. [Accessed: 23 June 2015].

5/ Available at: <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e1e025da702cc19576cde7eb925ab11ad611d890?vid=489272&disposition=inline&op=view> [Accessed: 30 April 2015].

6/ Article 3, common to the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (we emphasise). The 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions further state that states should facilitate relief that is “humanitarian and impartial in character” (article 70 (1) API and article 18 (2) APII), thus recognising that humanitarian aid is expected to respect the principle of impartiality.

7/ The seven Fundamental Principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality were adopted at the 20th International Conference of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in 1965 in Vienna, and included in the Preamble of the Statutes of the RCRC Movement.

8/ The historian Katherine Davies refers to the influence of the ICRC and the broader RCRC Movement “as embodying a ‘master-narrative’ (...), not because all definitions of humanitarian goals and principles directly and transparently follow the Red Cross mandate or humanitarian law, but rather because of the predominance of the ICRC in crystallizing norms of humanitarianism.” Davies, K. (2012) “Continuity, change and contest – Meanings of ‘humanitarian’ from the ‘Religion of Humanity’ to the Kosovo war”. HPG Working Papers. London: Overseas Development Institute. p.1.

9/ UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 adopted the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, while independence was not officially recognised until 2003 in Resolution 58/114. Resolution 46/182 also recognised the principle of sovereignty and the primary responsibility of states to take care of victims of crises. Finally, it also established the institutional foundations for the coordination of humanitarian action under a UN umbrella, with the creation of the position of Emergency Relief Coordinator (Head of OCHA) and of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), a high-level coordination platform for UN organisations and other humanitarian actors (the latter being standing invitees).

10/ The Code of Conduct was adopted in 1994 and is available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/code-of-conduct/code-english.pdf>. [Accessed: 27 May 2015].

Humanity	Neutrality	Impartiality	Independence
Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.	Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.	Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.	Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regards to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

- Since Resolution 46/182, states reiterate their commitment to humanitarian principles on an annual basis through resolutions of the UN General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian assistance (ECOSOC).¹¹ Some states have gone further and integrated these principles into intergovernmental and regional policy instruments – such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative,¹² the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid¹³ and the Humanitarian Policy of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)¹⁴ – and even in legally binding regional treaties, including the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union¹⁵ and the African Union’s Kampala Convention on IDPs.¹⁶
- Beyond the Code of Conduct, international and national NGOs have developed and adopted other general and institutional policy documents referring to the principles, such as the SPHERE Humanitarian Charter and, more recently, the CHS. While all these texts do not necessarily refer to all humanitarian principles (the Code of Conduct omits neutrality for instance), the principles remain a recurrent subject in NGOs’ public communications and debate.¹⁷
- Increasingly, so-called ‘non-traditional’ organisations (i.e. humanitarian organisations from non-Western countries that have been either recently created

Paradoxically, despite their broad recognition as principles guiding humanitarian action as demonstrated above, these principles remain contested in both theory and practice, even within the humanitarian sector.

or whose existence has only recently been ‘noticed’ by the formal international humanitarian system) are using the language of the principles. Some of these, for instance in the Muslim world, have done so by developing their own codes of conduct inspired by Islamic precepts in a manner mostly compatible with the principles.¹⁸

- Finally, in the context of the WHS, the importance of humanitarian principles was reaffirmed throughout the consultations, including in the various co-Chairs’ summary of the regional consultations.¹⁹

Definition and understanding of humanitarian principles

Broadly speaking, the humanitarian principles set the ethical goals of humanitarian action and provide an operational framework and tools that distinguish it from other forms of aid.

Humanitarian action should be motivated by the sole aim of helping other human beings affected by conflicts or disasters (humanity); exclusively based on people’s needs and without discrimination (impartiality); without favouring any side in a conflict or engaging in controversies where aid is deployed (neutrality); and free from any economic, political or military interest at stake (independence). While the definition of humanitarian principles provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is widely referred to and recognised (see box above), these principles are subject to multiple interpretations within the humanitarian system and inconsistent application. Paradoxically, despite their broad recognition as principles guiding humanitarian action as demonstrated above, these principles remain contested in both theory and practice, even within the humanitarian sector.

Systemic challenges to humanitarian principles

Some principles under attack

Even as humanitarian principles were being formally adopted during the 1990s, they rapidly came under fire for not providing an adequate and politically astute enough framework to

11/ For instance, ECOSOC resolution E/RES/2014/13, adopted on 25 June 2014, reaffirms the four humanitarian principles in its second paragraph.

12/ See: <http://www.ghdinitiative.org>. [Accessed: 27 May 2015].

13/ Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/media/publications/consensus_en.pdf. [Accessed: 27 May 2015].

14/ Available at: http://www.westafricagateway.org/files/Common%20Humanitarian%20Policy_0.pdf. [Accessed: 27 May 2015].

15/ Article 214 of the TFUE states that: “Humanitarian aid operations shall be conducted in compliance with the principles of international law and with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination,” omitting the principle of independence.

16/ Article 5(8) of the African Union’s Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), adopted on 23 October 2009.

17/ See, for instance, the recent joint statement on humanitarian principles endorsed by 38 NGOs and presented in the context of the WHS process: <https://icvnetwork.org/system/files/versions/Joint%20Statement%20on%20humanitarian%20principles%20endorsed%20by%2038%20humanitarian%20NGOs%20as%20a%20common%20contribution%20to%20the%20World%20Humanitarian%20Summit%20consultations%20as%20of%2013th%20February.%5B1%5D%20copy.pdf>. [Accessed: 28 May 2015].

18/ See, for instance, the Islamic Charter of the Work of Goodness: <http://www.cordoue.ch/arouas-blog/item/190-islamic-charter-of-the-work-of-goodness>. [Accessed: 23 June 2015]. For more details on the process leading to the development of these codes of conduct, see: Mohamed, A. S. and Ofteringer, R. (2015) “‘Rahmatan lil-alamin’ (a mercy to all creation) – Islamic voices in the debate on humanitarian principles”. International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 97, No. 897-898 (forthcoming).

19/ For instance, one of the key conclusions of the co-Chairs’ summary of the North and South-East Asia WHS Regional Consultation held in Tokyo on 23-24 July 2014 is that “[a]ccountability to affected people, as well as observance of the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence, are fundamental to effective humanitarian action.” See co-Chairs’ summary (p.2), available at: <https://www.worldhumanitarianissummit.org/bitcache/45f8935b00311af7b4af0e6c5a9c2ee2fa452331?vid=490805&disposition=inline&op=view>. [Accessed: 29 May 2015].

Two women from Kanzhipo Village, Jinzhong Town, China, received relief materials.
© ACT/Amity Foundation



Explaining in such polarised contexts that one does not take sides and that aid is provided solely on the basis of need, including to 'the enemy', inevitably arouses suspicion and raises questions about the perceived neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors.

political polarisation. Conflicts exacerbate radicalisation, suspicion and hatred, and the mere idea of assisting all those affected without discrimination, in line with the principles of humanity and impartiality, is instinctively regarded as unacceptable. Explaining in such polarised contexts that one does not take sides and that aid is provided solely on the basis of need, including to 'the enemy', inevitably arouses suspicion and raises questions about the perceived neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors.²³ These difficulties inherent to conflict were further aggravated in the post 9/11 context of the 'Global War on Terror' in which the dominant 'with us or against us' political discourse contributed to an environment in which groups designated as terrorists were 'evil' and populations sympathetic to their cause were considered not worthy of assistance and protection. This posed new challenges to the very principle of humanity.

Diverging interpretation and inconsistent application

These 'attacks' on humanitarian principles resonate within the so-called humanitarian system itself, which is as much defined by its differences as by its commonalities. Indeed, the humanitarian system is composed of a wide variety of actors that have different institutional mandates, ambitions and objectives. A minority are single-mandate agencies focused mainly on addressing acute humanitarian needs, while most humanitarian actors are multi-mandate agencies engaged in development, human rights, social justice, peace-building or other transformative activities beyond humanitarian action.

respond to the complexity of crises, especially conflicts. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail the developments of the international community's response to crises in the last two decades, it is important to briefly present some of its main features, as it explains why humanitarian principles have been the subject of recurrent criticisms. Joanna Macrae noted as early as 2002 that: "The 1990s saw the concept of humanitarianism transformed, from a distinctive but narrow framework designed to mitigate the impact of war, into an organising principle for international relations, led largely by the West."²⁰ Indeed, in the post-Cold War era and in response to state collapse and mass atrocities in Somalia, the Balkans and Rwanda, the international community, including through the UN, has vastly expanded its toolbox to respond to and manage crises. This includes peacekeeping missions, peace-enforcement operations, peace- and state-building approaches, and also humanitarian action, which is expected to espouse these broader legitimate political objectives. This led one influential scholar and long-time observer of humanitarian action to criticise organisations such as the ICRC that "still maintains an apolitical veneer (...) and is

unwilling publicly to admit that its principles should be adapted to political exigencies."²¹ On the moral front, the application of humanitarian principles – especially neutrality – has been criticised for putting victims and their tormentors on an equal footing. Humanitarian principles are seen in some quarters as helping fuel conflicts by justifying the provision of aid to all sides without distinction, regardless of their moral rights or wrongs, and the refusal to join efforts with political actors better equipped to address the root causes of conflict and put an end to the suffering of civilians. This trend was further compounded in the 2000s with the generalisation of 'stabilisation', 'whole-of-government' and, in the UN jargon, 'integrated' approaches that "encompass a combination of military, humanitarian, political and economic instruments to render 'stability' to areas affected by armed conflicts and complex emergencies."²²

Principles are also under attack because of the nature of the environments humanitarians operate in, which are typically characterised by chaos, destruction and, as far as conflicts are concerned, radicalisation and

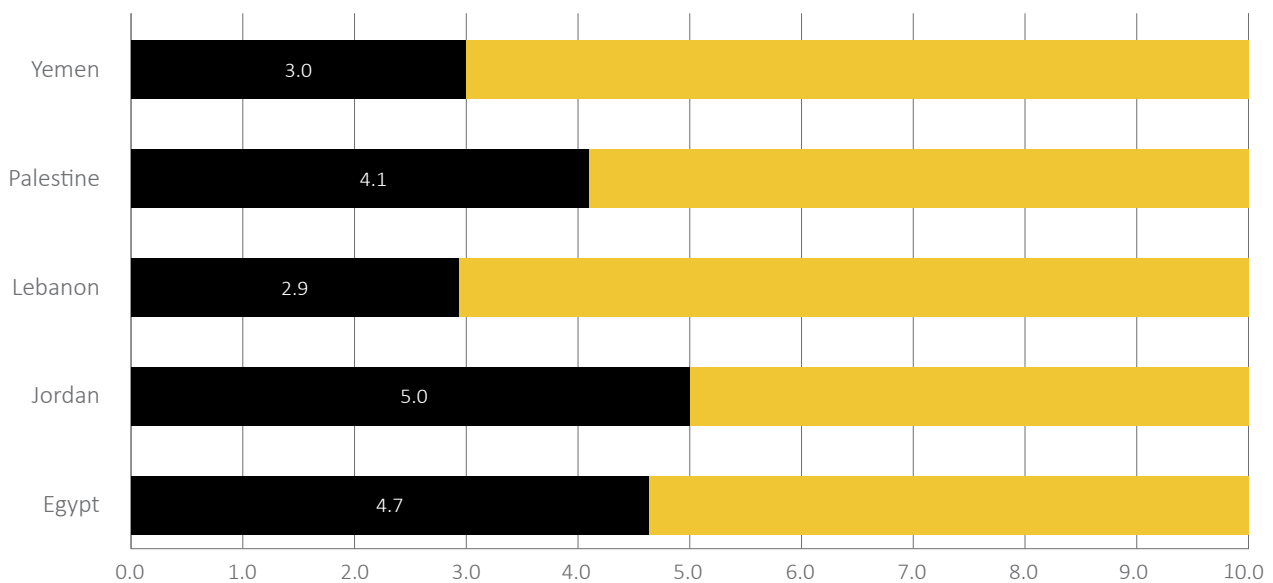
20/ Macrae, J. in 'The new humanitarianisms: a review of trends in global humanitarian action'. HPG Report 11. April 2002. London: Overseas Development Institute. p.7.

21/ Weiss, T. G. (1999) 'Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action'. Ethics and International Affairs (13). p.3.

22/ Collinson, S., Elhawary, S. and Muggah, R. (2010) 'States of Fragility: Stabilisation and its Implications for Humanitarian Action'. Disasters (34:3). October 2010. p.276.

23/ For a more in-depth discussion on the challenges to the principles posed by the very nature of conflicts, see: Labbé, J. and Daudin, P. (2015) "Operationalizing Humanitarian Principles: Reflections on the ICRC Experience". International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 97, No. 897-898 (forthcoming).

Figure 2.1: Average degree to which affected people think aid groups are neutral and impartial (0=low, 10=high)



The Middle East and North Africa WHS consultation highlighted a perceived lack of respect for neutrality and impartiality by aid organisations.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, WHS Regional Consultation for the Middle East and North Africa: Preparatory Stakeholder Analysis, 2015, p. 10.

Although all are arguably driven by the principle of humanity, the philosophy and ethics underlying their work differ substantially. Some organisations are driven by deontological ethics – that is, ethics that considers the moral good of a particular action and not necessarily its wider consequences, as noted by Hugo Slim.²⁴ Others are driven by consequentialist ethics, which considers that the morality of an action must be measured by its broader consequences. To take a concrete example, pure deontologists would consider healing a wounded fighter intrinsically good, while consequentialists would be more inclined to consider the risk of the fighter returning to the battlefield, and their act inadvertently prolonging the conflict.

Other scholars classify humanitarian organisations within four distinct groups characterised by distinct ambitions and goals, and different degrees of respect for humanitarian principles: the ‘principle-centered’ Dunantists who adhere closely to humanitarian principles and have a relatively narrow understanding of humanitarian action (as envisioned by Henry Dunant, the founder of the ICRC); the ‘pragmatists’ or ‘Wilsonians’

who espouse a more consequentialist approach to humanitarian action and show less reluctance to align with states’ political agendas if they consider it serves their broader mission; the ‘solidarists’ who have a much broader vision of humanitarian action as encompassing human rights and social transformation and are, at times, openly partisan; and the ‘faith-based’ actors who are driven mostly by religious precepts, although in practice they cut across the three other groups.²⁵

These different categories are somewhat artificial and, in reality, few organisations would fall squarely into one group or another. Nonetheless, they show the diversity of brands of humanitarianism, representing different ambitions, objectives and degrees of respect for humanitarian principles. While most have a common understanding of humanity and impartiality (although the interpretation of these principles may vary between deontologists and consequentialists), the principles of independence and neutrality are subject to a much broader range of perspectives. Oxfam, for example, which engages in humanitarian action but also promotes a human rights-based approach,

This results in widely inconsistent application of these principles by organisations that profess support for all of them in theory, but pick and choose which ones to apply in practice.

openly acknowledges that abstaining from engaging in political or ideological controversies, as prescribed by the principle of neutrality, runs counter in many contexts to its commitment to campaign on human rights or socio-economic inequalities and to engender broader changes. As stated by Nigel Timmins, Deputy Humanitarian Director at Oxfam GB: “The risk is that by claiming to be neutral but then speaking out will lead to accusations of hypocrisy and so undermine the trust we seek”.²⁶

The problem remains that few organisations acknowledge that humanitarian principles – which have become a defining element of what humanitarian action should be – might not best serve the goals they have

24/ Slim, H. (1997) ‘Doing the right thing: Relief agencies, moral dilemmas and moral responsibility in political emergencies and wars. Disasters (21:3). September 1997.

25/ Walker, P. and Maxwell, D. (2009) *Shaping the Humanitarian World*. New York: Routledge. pp.121-24. Thomas Weiss, on his side, has proposed a slightly different categorisation between classicists, minimalists, maximalists and solidarists, characterised by their degree of political engagement and respect for the principles. See: Weiss, T. G. (1999) ‘Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action’. *Ethics and International Affairs* (13). pp.3-4.

26/ de Riedmatten, A. and Timmins, N. (2015) “Contrasting views – including ‘Neutrality’ in the CHS”. *Humanitarian Aid on the Move* (15). Groupe URD. pp.10-13. Available at: http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/HEM15_EN_Webpdf.pdf [Accessed: 27 May 2015].

Figure 2.2: Fundamental Principles pyramid



The hierarchical order and internal logic of the Fundamental Principles mentioned by Pictet (see footnote 28) can be represented by the above pyramid.

They are operational tools that help humanitarian actors to demonstrate in all circumstances that they are driven only by the desire to bring assistance and protection to the victims of crises without discrimination, and have no ulterior motives.

principle of Humanity,²⁹ qualified by Pictet as the 'essential' principle. Humanitarian action's sole purpose is to prevent and alleviate human suffering, to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being. Humanity provides the ethical basis of the humanitarian gesture that aims not only to deliver assistance to victims of crises but also protection, regardless of their nationality, religious beliefs or political allegiance, even in wartime. The inevitable corollary of this is non-discrimination, embodied in the principle of Impartiality, which provides that aid should be given on no other criteria than the severity of needs and in proportion to these needs. The moral ethic underlying humanitarian action and its overarching objectives is defined by these two 'substantive' principles, which set the bar by which humanitarian effectiveness should be measured.

As for Neutrality and Independence, they are practical tools that enable humanitarian actors to achieve this ideal. "Here, we are in the domain of means and not of ends," says Pictet.³⁰ These two principles, developed out of decades of field experience, have no moral value in themselves. They are operational tools that help humanitarian actors to demonstrate in all circumstances that they are driven only by the desire to bring assistance and protection to the victims of crises without discrimination, and have no ulterior motives. In politically polarised situations of conflict in particular, demonstrating that one does not take sides, abstaining from taking part in controversies of a political, religious or ideological nature, and showing one's autonomy from other political or economic interests at stake helps to promote acceptance by all, which facilitates safe access and lays the conditions for genuinely impartial assessment of needs.

Finally, the other Fundamental Principles of Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality

set for themselves, defined by their understanding of what humanitarian action encompasses. This results in widely inconsistent application of these principles by organisations that profess support for all of them in theory, but pick and choose which ones to apply in practice. This gap between words and action damages the integrity of humanitarian principles and exposes organisations to the accusations of hypocrisy Timmins warns about.

Humanitarian principles as a moral compass and driver of effectiveness: reflection on the ICRC's experience

Given the ICRC's long experience in a wide range of crisis contexts and its influence on the formulation of humanitarian principles – known within the RCRC Movement as 'Fundamental

Principles' – it is worth examining how it understands, interprets and applies them and how this contributes to humanitarian effectiveness. Although the organisation's approach is only one among many, the ICRC has proven its efficiency and effectiveness time and again in conflict situations and, in that respect, it deserves to be looked at in more depth.²⁷

The theory

For the ICRC in particular and the RCRC Movement in general, the seven Fundamental Principles provide an ethical, operational and institutional framework that guides humanitarian action. In the words of Jean Pictet, a famous ICRC jurist who theorised the Principles and studied their deeper meaning: "The principles of the Red Cross do not all have the same importance. They have a hierarchical order [and] an internal logic, so that each one to a degree flows from another."²⁸

ICRC's interpretation of the Fundamental Principles

The very objective of humanitarian action – and therefore a central component of humanitarian effectiveness – is defined by the

27/ Referring to OCHA's 2011 report *To Stay and Deliver*, Glyn Taylor et al. remark that "recent research has shown that the humanitarian operations most successful at maintaining operations in insecure settings have been those of the ICRC, in partnership with local Red Cross / Red Crescent societies, which are driven by intense outreach and humanitarian negotiation." Taylor, G. et al., *The State of the Humanitarian System*. 2012 Ed. London: ALNAP. p.24.

28/ Pictet, J. (1979) 'The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: A Commentary'. *International Review of the Red Cross*. Geneva.

29/ In the rest of this chapter, the principles will be capitalised when referring specifically to one of the Fundamental Principles and to how it is defined and interpreted within the RCRC Movement, to distinguish them from the more broadly accepted humanitarian principles.

30/ Pictet, op. cit.

are institutional in character. Although less directly relevant to the present discussion since specific to the RCRC Movement, these principles are crucial to enable the Movement as a whole to abide by its mission as defined by the principles of Humanity and Impartiality. For instance, the principle of Unity, which provides that there should be only one National RCRC Society per country, open to all and that covers its entire territory, is meant to enable these societies to deliver aid based on needs throughout their respective countries, in line with Impartiality. Syria is an interesting illustration in this respect. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent's (SARC) National Society has 14 branches and 84 sub-branches. This structure ensures that its work is carried out nationwide, yet anchored locally, and fully reflects the political and cultural diversity of the communities in which it operates, as noted in a New York Times article.³¹ Although no silver bullet, this attempt to implement the principle of Unity helps foster a public perception that the SARC is relatively neutral and independent of the parties to the conflict. In this way, it is maintaining and/or gaining some degree of acceptance by communities which will eventually allow it to deliver impartial aid throughout the country, in spite of numerous ongoing challenges.³²

Proximity to affected communities: a prerequisite and driver of effectiveness

In summary, the Fundamental Principles provide the RCRC Movement with tools for gaining the trust and acceptance of all parties, in order to secure safe access and proximity to the communities it assists, which is key to humanitarian effectiveness and relevance.

Proximity to the people is essential to understand the situation on the ground and assess people's material and protection needs based on their specific vulnerabilities (due to their age, gender, disabilities, etc.). This physical presence enables aid workers to develop a dialogue with communities, listen carefully to people's fears and aspirations, give them a voice and establish the human relationships necessary to "ensure respect for the human being", which is a crucial element of the principle of Humanity. Proximity also enables aid organisations to be aware of local realities, including existing

This physical presence enables aid workers to develop a dialogue with communities, listen carefully to people's fears and aspirations, give them a voice and establish the human relationships necessary to "ensure respect for the human being", which is a crucial element of the principle of Humanity.

local initiatives that address the needs of the people and to develop programmes that complement or support them, instead of duplicating or undermining their work.

Driven by this objective to work in proximity to affected communities and thereby maintain acceptance and access, humanitarian actors must also demonstrate accountability to these communities – that is, to respond in a relevant manner to their actual needs in line with the principle of Impartiality. In this sense, proximity is a driver of accountability and a prerequisite of effectiveness and relevance.

The practice

Far from obstructing the pragmatism needed to ensure the continued relevance of humanitarian action, the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence provide both an ethical compass and a pragmatic operational framework to navigate the complex and often dangerous environments in which humanitarians operate. As discussed above, critics sometimes argue that insisting on the apolitical character of humanitarian action is to ignore the political reality of humanitarian crises and the political implications of aid. This lack of political astuteness would sometimes undermine effective humanitarian action as it would preclude humanitarian actors from cooperating with other political actors, such as governments or armies, who are ultimately the ones who can bring effective solutions to humanitarian crises. Yet humanitarian principles, especially neutrality and

independence, are an acknowledgement, not a denial, of political reality and a guide with which to navigate it. "Indeed, like a swimmer, [the ICRC] is in politics up to its neck," says Pictet. "Also like the swimmer, who advances in the water but who drowns if he swallows it, the ICRC must reckon with politics without becoming part of it."³³ The principles provide the tools to make this possible.

In Afghanistan for instance – one of the very contexts where critics of humanitarian principles called for greater political pragmatism³⁴ – the consistent application of humanitarian principles has allowed the ICRC to maintain its presence throughout decades of conflict and deliver assistance and protection across multiple frontlines. As Antonio Donini observed in 2010: "[s]o far, only the ICRC has been able to develop a steady dialogue on access and acceptance with the Taliban," further adding that: "the World Health Organization, for example, needs to rely on the ICRC's contacts for its immunisation drives."³⁵ This acceptance and the access it made possible – at times benefiting other actors such as WHO – was not a straightforward process however, as Fiona Terry emphasised in a study on the ICRC's neutrality in Afghanistan. Indeed, the ICRC faced multiple ups and downs, including the targeted murder of one of its staff in March 2003. It required perseverance, consistency and creativity in the way it applied the principles "to demonstrate to all sides the benefits of having a neutral intermediary in the midst of conflict."³⁶

A balancing act in the service of needs

The ICRC's internal study on its application of the principles³⁷ illustrates how its delegates constantly recalibrate the balance struck between principles and other competing considerations in complex decision-making and analysis. This study shows that these

In this sense, proximity is a driver of accountability and a prerequisite of effectiveness and relevance.

31/ Anne Barnard, A. (2013) "Rushing to aid in Syrian war, but claiming no side". New York Times. 3 June 2013. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/03/world/middleeast/syrian-red-crescent-volunteers-sidestep-a-battle.html?_r=0. [Accessed 3 May 2015].
 32/ For other examples of application of the Fundamental Principles by other RCRC National Societies, see: O'Callaghan, S. and Leach, L. (2012) 'Principles in action in Lebanon'. London: British Red Cross/ICRC/Lebanese Red Cross; and O'Callaghan, S. and Backhurst, J. (2013) 'Principles in action in Somalia'. London: British Red Cross/Somali Red Crescent.
 33/ Pictet, J. (1979) 'The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: A Commentary'. International Review of the Red Cross. Geneva.
 34/ O'Brien, P. (2004) 'Politicized Humanitarianism: A Response to Nicolas de Torrente'. Harvard Human Rights Journal (17). pp.31-39.
 35/ Donini, A. (2010) 'Between a rock and a hard place: integration or independence of humanitarian action?'. International Review of the Red Cross (92: 880). December 2010. (Respectively) p.156 and p.152.
 36/ Terry, F. (2011) 'The International Committee of the Red Cross in Afghanistan: reasserting the neutrality of humanitarian action'. International Review of the Red Cross (93: 881). March 2011. p.177. This article draws on an internal ICRC study that looked specifically at how neutrality was applied in practice in ICRC operations in Sudan and Afghanistan: Terry, F. (2009) 'Research Project on the ICRC Practice of Neutrality'. ICRC.
 37/ 'Snapshot of ICRC application of Fundamental Principles' (internal study). ICRC. 2014.



Kids at a mosque in Aleppo, Syria, before the civil war.
© CHS Alliance/Michel Dikkes

principles provide a flexible framework to navigate the demands of various operational contexts, while remaining faithful to the overarching objective of delivering impartial humanitarian assistance and protection.

Even the 'substantive' principles of Humanity and Impartiality must be applied in light of the other principles. For instance, a rigid interpretation of the principle of Impartiality might be counterproductive in terms of how neutral a humanitarian actor is perceived to be, and hinder effective humanitarian action in some circumstances. As Fiona Terry noted in her internal study on Sudan and Afghanistan: "[w]hile neutrality as a concept has been understood [...] throughout the ICRC's presence in Sudan, the notion of impartiality has not, and the allocation of assistance in accordance with needs gives the impression of favouritism if the needs are not the same on either side."³⁸ While the ICRC always endeavours – in Sudan and other contexts – to tailor its response to the specific needs of different communities by conducting assessments on both sides of the

frontline or in rival communities, it is because its staff fully acknowledge the potential for misperceptions about the ICRC's neutrality that they take special care in listening to all communities and explaining to them the ways in which the ICRC works. Such an interpretation of impartiality through the lens of Neutrality ensures that the most severe needs are met, while accommodating in a relevant manner the needs of other communities who could resent and hinder an aid operation that they perceived as one-sided, and pose a real threat to the needier community or to the ICRC's staff.

In the same vein, the greater impartiality – and therefore effectiveness – of the response that can be gained from coordination with other humanitarian actors, especially in terms of greater geographic coverage of needs, must be balanced with the perception risks that this association with other actors create, which could impact the acceptance of the organisation. This explains why, as far as the cluster system is concerned,³⁹ the ICRC has taken the position from the outset that

it could neither be a cluster lead nor a formal cluster member. Formal membership would imply accountability to the UN system that would impact its independence and, at times, perceptions of its neutrality.⁴⁰

Indeed, in contexts where UN peacekeeping or political missions are supporting or perceived to support a party to a conflict (when not a party to the conflict themselves as is the case in the Democratic Republic of Congo⁴¹) any close association with the UN risks undermining the ability of the organisation to engage with all parties and to gain acceptance. Nonetheless, for the sake of ensuring impartial coverage of needs, to avoid duplicating activities and to maximise the operational complementarity of humanitarian actors,⁴² a certain degree of operational coordination does take place in the field. Informed by humanitarian principles, ICRC staff regularly meet and exchange with UN country teams' members either on a bilateral basis or by sitting as observer in cluster meetings, depending on the context and the associated reputational risks.

38/ Terry, F. (2009) 'Research Project on the ICRC Practice of Neutrality', op. cit. p.37.

39/ The 'cluster system' was put in place in the framework of the 2005 Humanitarian Reform developed by OCHA. This approach organises humanitarian coordination by sectorial groups like health, shelter, protection, etc. See 'Cluster Coordination' on OCHA's website for more information: <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/cluster-coordination> [Accessed: 6 May 2015].

40/ This is echoed by the authors of The State of the Humanitarian System report (see footnote 1 above) who consider that "clusters are also perceived to threaten humanitarian principles, where members are financially dependent on clusters or their lead organisations, and where clusters lead organisations are part of or close to integrated missions, peacekeeping forces or actors involved in conflict" (p.60).

41/ Sheeran, S. and Case, S. (2014) *The Intervention Brigade: Legal issues for the UN in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. New York: International Peace Institute. See also: Labbé, J. and Boutellis, A. (2013) 'Peace operations by proxy: implications for humanitarian action of UN peacekeeping partnerships with non-UN security forces'. *International Review of the Red Cross* (95: 891/892) Autumn/Winter 2013. pp.539-559.

42/ The need to deliver coordinated and complementary assistance is one of the Nine Commitments and quality criteria of the CHS.

These two examples show that, more than a rigid dogmatic framework, humanitarian principles provide a flexible and useful guide to cope with the political complexities of the environments in which humanitarian actors work. Neutrality and independence in particular are driven by the need to manage perceptions and gain acceptance by the authorities, parties to the conflict, influential leaders and the communities themselves. If the objective of an organisation is to deliver assistance and protection whenever there are needs across the entire territory in a given conflict, on either side of the frontline – as opposed to non-discriminatory aid at the programme level, such as in a given health centre – these principles are essential to gain access to, and work in proximity with, affected communities.

This constant and transparent dialogue with all parties, including non-state armed groups, is of paramount importance to cultivate confidence and acceptance, and dissipate possible misunderstandings and misperceptions.

Consistency, predictability and adaptability

However, the ICRC internal study shows that these principles are not sufficient in and of themselves to gain trust and acceptance. Other attributes such as transparency, consistency, confidentiality or discretion, and adaptability to the context appear crucial.

For instance, communicating transparently and in a consistent manner with all relevant parties and authorities is of paramount importance. Neutrality for example does not mean that a humanitarian organisation cannot work with a particular government to strengthen the capacity of its health ministry to meet its responsibilities vis-à-vis its population, or with a non-state armed group to provide international humanitarian law (IHL) training to its fighters. Yet, these kinds of activities can be misunderstood. One case study showed for example the importance of informing a rebel group of the reasons for the ICRC's involvement in IHL and first aid training of army and

police recruits led by the UN, in a context where the UN was perceived as closely associated to the government. This constant and transparent dialogue with all parties, including non-state armed groups, is of paramount importance to cultivate confidence and acceptance, and dissipate possible misunderstandings and misperceptions. But this dialogue is possible only if the organisation manages to project an image of neutrality and independence in the first place.

Confidentiality or discretion is also a way to maintain trust and acceptance in contexts where taking a public stance is often construed as political. This does not mean that violations of IHL or human rights law should not be addressed with the responsible parties, but that the preferred approach for the ICRC is to address them on a bilateral basis, in order to manage perceptions and cultivate some degree of confidence, informed by the principle of Neutrality. Neither does it mean that public denunciation is not possible, but rather that it should happen as a last resort, when other avenues have failed.⁴³ Other organisations choose to use public advocacy or 'name and shame' approaches to address violations of the law, and this is often complementary to the approach chosen by the ICRC. However, if an organisation's definition of effectiveness is a function of its ability to maintain proximity and a human relationship with affected communities, as is the case for the ICRC, then public advocacy or denunciation might be counterproductive to this goal.

Finally, and this is a crucial element, ICRC's internal study shows the importance of contextualising the application of the principles. While they provide a clear moral compass as defined by the principle of Humanity, humanitarian principles do not lend themselves well to a 'box-ticking' or 'one size fits all' approach. Humanitarian principles provide a framework that must be used with consistency (which contributes to predictability, another important element of trust-building), intelligence and creativity. Internal case studies clearly show that the way neutrality is perceived – and presented – in situations of criminal or gang violence for instance,⁴⁴ is different from situations of conflict that are more political in character. In one particular delegation for example, the ICRC developed a creative communication approach, called "neutralising the vocabulary",

ICRC's internal study shows the importance of contextualising the application of the principles.

whereby ICRC delegates identified antagonistic words such as "hitman" and "drug cartels", the mere use of which could be perceived as reflecting a biased position, especially by some criminal groups. In this context, ICRC staff simply refrained from using such words, preferring more neutral phrases like "organised violence groups". Although mostly cosmetic in appearance, this subtle communication shift, informed by the principle of Neutrality, considerably improved the dialogue with different stakeholders, resulting in greater acceptance of ICRC activities, better access and greater ability to engage communities and address their needs.

These different attributes must be nurtured as they enable and inform the relevant application of the principles across time and contexts. Ultimately, it is by showing consistency and predictability in the way it applies its principles – but also adaptability to the context – that the ICRC has managed to maintain its presence across frontlines, and over the years in some of the most complex and insecure contexts in the world, from Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia and Iraq. Indeed, it is not only the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance that defines humanitarian effectiveness, but also the ability to persuade all parties to respect their obligations in terms of protecting and assisting the communities they are responsible for. Fostering greater accountability among responsible authorities

Ultimately, it is by showing consistency and predictability in the way it applies its principles – but also adaptability to the context – that the ICRC has managed to maintain its presence across frontlines, in some of the most complex and insecure contexts in the world.

43/ ICRC. (2005) 'Action by the International Committee of the Red Cross in the event of violations of international humanitarian law or of other fundamental rules protecting persons in situations of violence'. International Review of the Red Cross (87: 858). June 2005. pp.393-400.

44/ For an in-depth description of the role of the ICRC in such contexts, including a brief discussion on ICRC's neutrality, see: 'The ICRC's role in situations of violence below the threshold of armed conflict'. ICRC. February 2014. Available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=9326135&jid=IRC&volumeld=-1&issuelid=-1&aid=9326091&bodyId=&membershipNumber=&societyETOCSession> [Accessed: 7 May 2015].

Indeed, applying humanitarian principles contributes to gaining acceptance and securing access, enabling organisations to work in proximity to communities, listen to their concerns and aspirations, and address their needs in a relevant manner.

— an often overlooked aspect of humanitarian effectiveness — must inevitably be pursued for the long haul and requires continuity and a relational aspect that the consistent application of the principles makes possible.

Conclusion

For the ICRC, humanitarian principles not only support and contribute to the effectiveness of humanitarian action, they also define it as a concept, which is understood primarily as addressing the objective needs of affected communities throughout a given territory affected by a crisis, in line with the principle of impartiality. While it is difficult to draw a measurable and quantitative causal link between principled humanitarian action and effectiveness — an objective that falls outside the scope of this chapter — there is undeniably a qualitative link. Indeed, applying humanitarian principles contributes to gaining acceptance and securing access, enabling organisations to work in proximity to communities, listen to their concerns and aspirations, and address their needs in a relevant manner. In turn, being relevant to affected communities is necessary to maintain their trust and acceptance. In that sense, proximity is a driver of accountability to communities, which is an important parameter of humanitarian effectiveness.

In addition, if used intelligently, transparently and responsibly, humanitarian principles provide eminently pragmatic tools that help organisations to adapt and tailor their response to the specific conditions and requirements of the context — another defining element of humanitarian effectiveness — while ensuring consistency and predictability.

Similarly, humanitarian principles — especially independence and neutrality — are useful tools to inform and set the parameters for engagement with other actors such as governments, the military or private companies. They should not be an excuse, however, to avoid engaging with such actors, whose complementarity and added value should be recognised. Rather, they are meant to inform the degree of cooperation desirable, depending on the context, to ensure that such engagement is not detrimental to the ability of an organisation to deliver aid in an impartial manner, which is the ethical ‘bottom-line’ for humanitarian effectiveness and arguably the very added-value of humanitarianism itself. In this respect, humanitarian actors need to recognise and acknowledge that applying humanitarian principles also entails limitations with regard to the type of activities one might engage in. Humanitarian principles serve a specific purpose and preclude engagement in processes of a more political or transformative nature, which are often more likely to address root causes of crises. As Peter Maurer, President of the ICRC, recently explained: “In theory we all share the same aspirations for global peace, development and security, as well as the understanding about the limits of humanitarian action in addressing or preventing the causes of crisis. In practice however, our experience shows that emergency access to vulnerable populations in some of the most contested areas depends on the ability to isolate humanitarian goals from other transformative goals, be they economic, political, social or human rights related.”⁴⁵

Drawing on the above, a few key considerations should be further explored and reflected upon:

1. It is the responsibility of all actors involved in humanitarian response to be more honest about the scope of their ambitions and transparent about their ability or intent to apply humanitarian principles — or, indeed, on the actual relevance of humanitarian principles to achieve their own objectives.
2. Humanitarian principles have become a mantra that all humanitarian actors feel obliged to invoke, while not necessarily walking the talk. This inconsistency reinforces accusations of hypocrisy and distrust vis-à-vis aid actors, negatively impacting the ability of others to deliver effective humanitarian assistance and protection. Humanitarian actors should therefore refrain from dogmatic invocation of principles that they do not support through their actions.
3. Organisations genuinely committing to abide by and apply humanitarian principles must acknowledge and accept the limitations that doing so entails, and equip their staff with the necessary policy guidance and training to enable them to apply the principles consistently and flexibly.

Our experience shows that emergency access to vulnerable populations in some of the most contested areas depends on the ability to isolate humanitarian goals from other transformative goals, be they economic, political, social or human rights related.



*A line of internally displaced persons waiting for aid in Kibati, 12 km north of Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo.
© ACT International*

45/ Maurer, P. 2014. ‘Humanitarian Diplomacy and Principled Humanitarian Action’ (speech). 2 October, La Maison de la Paix, Geneva. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/webcast-peter-maurer-humanitarian-diplomacy-and-principled-humanitarian-action> [Accessed: 6 May 2015].

Local communities and civil society have been responding to the earthquake in Kathmandu. Volunteers from Marwari Sewa Samiti distribute cooked meals to people living in the biggest camp in Tudikhel, Kathmandu. They have been distributing cooked meals to around 5000 people each day. There are several such community kitchens around the capital.
© ACT/DCA



Lars Peter Nissen
Director
ACAPS

Lars Peter Nissen has been Director of ACAPS since 2009. Experienced in response to both sudden-onset disasters and more protracted crises, he has for the past 20 years worked in numerous crises across the world, including Myanmar, Pakistan, El Salvador, Turkey, Uganda, Angola, Mozambique, DPRK, Afghanistan, and Zimbabwe. He has conducted a range of reviews and analyses of humanitarian programmes for NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Mr Nissen is a visiting professor at the University of Copenhagen and blogs on www.academic-cowboy.org.

The author wishes to thank Jock Baker, Richard Garfield and Roy Williams for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance, or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

03

Gandalfs and geeks: strengthening the accountability of humanitarian decision-making

What do we know about how humanitarian decisions are made, and how can we use it to get to more accountable decision-making, asks Lars Peter Nissen.

Originally, this chapter was going to focus on the positive developments in strengthening assessment practices and their impact on the overall efforts to make the humanitarian system more accountable. However, while writing the first draft, I had a conversation with an academic who had recently returned from West Africa where he had been doing research on the response to the Ebola epidemic. When asked what the biggest challenge had been, he answered “to get humanitarians to admit that they actually make decisions.”

The question posed by this remark is whether the main obstacle to improved accountability is not that we do not have an adequate evidence base for making decisions, but rather that humanitarians do not like making themselves accountable for the decisions they make. Therefore, instead of examining progress towards a stronger evidence base for decision-making, this chapter focuses on how humanitarians make decisions, and how to make that decision-making process more accountable.

In the absence of a strong and commonly accepted evidence base, humanitarian decision-making is more susceptible to political pressures.

What is the problem?

There are four main obstacles to more accountable, transparent decision-making. Firstly, the operational environment itself. The magnitude, diversity and complexity of disasters stretch the capacity of humanitarian actors, pushing agencies to balance the allocation of scarce resources between assessment, coordination and response. Gathering the evidence and working to make sense of a humanitarian crisis requires a significant investment in terms of time and money, and once engaged in a response, coordination and response tend to take priority, while assessment and sense-making are given less ongoing attention.

Secondly, humanitarian architecture plays a role. Aid organisations have diverse mandates, histories, capabilities and interests. This leads to different information needs and priorities, which tend to influence organisational assessments. Just as to a hammer every problem looks like a nail, so to a medical humanitarian agency, every problem looks like a health emergency. This makes it difficult for organisations to agree on one overall narrative for any given common assessment approach and, in turn, to one common understanding of the problem. Without this basic shared understanding or framing of the problem, it is difficult to agree on shared priorities across organisations and sectors.

Thirdly, humanitarian organisations are competing for scarce resources. In the absence of a strong and commonly accepted evidence base, humanitarian decision-making is more susceptible to political pressures. As a result, decisions may be informed more by institutional self-interest than by the needs of the affected communities.

The fourth obstacle is less well-known than adverse field conditions, sectoral 'tunnel vision', and competition: it is the fundamental disagreement among humanitarians about whether experience or evidence is the key to making good decisions.

Evidence or experience?

The first school of thought, led by wise old 'Gandalfs',¹ values experience as the key element in decision-making. A Gandalf has typically spent a lot of time in the humanitarian sector and appears at the critical moment, waves a wand, and solves the problem at hand. In a recent conversation with a typical Gandalf on the 2015 Nepal earthquake response, I argued that it was really good to have the first overall reports of the scope and scale of the disaster come out just 12 hours after the event. The reply? By that time, this particular Gandalf had already done his analysis and, he said, "I got it right!" – in other words, all that was needed to make up his mind about the disaster were a few initial reports on the event and his extensive experience.

The rationale for humanitarian action is constructed without significant use of current evidence.

The second school of thought is among a group of people one could describe as 'geeks'. A typical geek will have a strong focus on clear, quantifiable indicators, which can be measured through extensive collection of data using either traditional questionnaire interviews with affected people or 'big data' crowd-sourcing approaches. With these, the geek will summarise the status of a district, village or family. In other words, the geek places the same trust in an algorithm or composite measure as Gandalf does in experience.²

These two approaches are not exclusive to the humanitarian sector. In his book *The Signal and the Noise*, Nate Silver describes two fundamentally different approaches to predicting the performance of baseball players: the **data geeks** analysing the extensive data available on baseball performance and the **scouts**, who base their predictions on extensive knowledge of the team, watching games, talking to players and applying their experience.

The Gandalf–geek divide can also be found in decision-making, where research has identified two remarkably different approaches. One involves a rational, linear, almost mechanical

process, whereby data is used to rank and compare options, providing a clear evidence base for making the optimal choice.

The other, often employed in dynamic situations where the decision-maker is under significant time pressure, information is scarce, and the decision-maker is highly experienced, relies on organic decision-making. Decisions are made in a rapid feedback loop between cues from the environment and the experience of the decision-maker. This type of decision-making explains the behaviour of firefighters, airplane pilots, oil rig operators or combat soldiers. In some cases, decision-making is so instinctive that it is not clear to the decision-maker when or how he or she is making a decision.³

The two different decision-making approaches should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Rather they are two different 'mental gears', which are both useful, depending on the context. In stable, information-rich settings without urgent pressure to make decisions, the geeks' rational approach works best. In highly dynamic environments with large information gaps and pressure to make decisions, Gandalf's approach to decision-making is likely to be most effective.

The role of evidence in decision-making

The overall conclusion emerging from the study of humanitarian decision-making is that the rationale for humanitarian action is constructed without significant use of current evidence. When a new disaster occurs, the humanitarian system essentially repeats past operations, with minor adjustments. A study from 2012 reached the overall conclusion that there is a high level of 'path dependency' in decision-making, meaning that decisions on what to do in any given crisis is to a large extent based on what was done during the last emergency.

The humanitarian sector must therefore be challenged to open up the 'black box' and make explicit the evidence base, assumptions and options considered in coming to any given decision.

1/ Gandalf is a wise old wizard from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

2/ Nate Silver. *The Signal and the Noise*.

3/ See for example Gary Klein. *Streetlights and Shadows*.

*Sabita Mktan in front of her destroyed house in Bhattedanda, Nepal.
© ACT/FCA/Antti Helin*





Scenes of earthquake damage in Kathmandu.
© Christian Aid

But the starting-point in changing decision-making culture is therefore not to build the evidence base for decisions, but to recognise the political nature of decisions.

The study found this to be true both in contexts with strong governmental control of information, as well as in contexts where an 'international narrative' dominated.⁴

A 2004 study of needs assessment practices in the humanitarian sector found that: "The apparently mutual tendency of agencies and donors to 'construct' and 'solve' crises with little reference to evidence erodes trust in the system, and calls for a greater emphasis on evidence-based responses."⁵

However, a 2006 paper, *Evidence-based decision-making in the humanitarian sector*, noted that "knowledge and evidence are not the bottleneck, but rather the lack of political and organisational will to act on knowledge."⁶

In other words, the way in which the evidence base is translated into decisions is a 'black box': that is, we know what goes into the box (information) and what comes out (decisions), but the process whereby information is translated into decisions is not clear.

From an accountability point of view, this is the key issue. If it is not possible to examine a decision-making process, it is also not possible to evaluate the quality of the decision. The humanitarian sector must therefore be challenged to open up the 'black box' and make explicit the evidence base, assumptions and options considered in coming to any given decision.

The best of both worlds

We are far from the ambition set out in the CHS with respect to having an impartial assessment of needs that we can base our programming on. But the starting-point in changing decision-making culture is therefore not to build the evidence base for decisions, but to recognise the political nature of decisions. Decision-makers prioritise scarce resources between geographical areas, sectors and beneficiary groups.

Neither experience nor evidence will remove the need to consciously choose between different options. Humanitarians at times work in murky environments where information is scarce, the situation is rapidly changing and there is great pressure to make decisions. In these situations, decision-making will tend to be heavily experience-based. When humanitarian action takes place in more stable situations, where more information is available and there is time to consider different options, evidence will play a stronger role. No matter which approach is used, the key to strengthening the accountability of decision-making is openness around the way in which decisions are made. As humanitarians we need to admit not only that we make decisions, we also need to be open about how we make them. This change in decision-making culture is the key to making us more accountable to the crisis-affected people we serve.

As humanitarians we need to admit not only that we make decisions, we also need to be open about how we make them.

4/ James Darcy et al. (2013). 'The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision Making'. ACAPS Operational Learning Paper. http://www.acaps.org/img/documents/t-tufts_1306_acaps_3_online.pdf.

5/ James Darcy and C.A. Hoffman. According to Need.

6/ David A. Bradt. *Evidence-based decision-making in humanitarian assistance*.

Distributing hygiene materials to targeted communities in Kakata district, Margibi county, Liberia. Materials include buckets, chlorine, soap and awareness raising posters and T-shirts.

04

Would you recommend this aid programme to a friend?

Nick van Praag

Director
Ground Truth Solutions

Nick van Praag is founder and director of Ground Truth Solutions, a programme dedicated to bridging the gap between aid agencies and the people affected by humanitarian crises. Since its establishment in 2012, Ground Truth has become part of the evolving architecture of humanitarian accountability with programmes in Haiti, Pakistan, Ukraine, Sierra Leone and, most recently, in Nepal. Nick's prior career spanned humanitarian and development work at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Aga Khan Development Network, and the World Bank. His interest in beneficiary feedback and performance management stems from his work at the intersection of communication and public policy, and his experience of humanitarian aid delivery.

The author wishes to thank Alex Jacobs and Anna Wood for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

Nick van Praag explores how customer satisfaction techniques more commonly associated with the commercial world can improve humanitarian performance.

The world is still a long way from treating those whose lives are disrupted by conflict or natural disaster as they ought to be treated: as stakeholders in aid with valuable insight into running humanitarian programmes designed to serve their needs and respect their rights. Yet including greater input from their side can surely only add to the effectiveness of these programmes. It is generally accepted that greater accountability to affected people is a good idea in theory. The challenge today is to ensure it is acted upon in practice. This chapter describes a way of meeting this challenge with a methodology that embraces techniques honed in a world where the customer is king. There are many pitfalls in employing an approach inspired by the customer-satisfaction industry – pitfalls that have blunted other tools of accountability – but its record in the commercial world suggests it can lead to a tipping point in the quest for more responsive aid.

In the humanitarian space, the first systematic attempt to put accountability into operation was the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, an agenda ironically approved in 1994 while the horrors of



Getting rid of the protective clothing is a cumbersome task in Liberia.
© ACT/ICCO/Evert van Bodegom

If they are followed systematically, the perceptions of affected people could produce the same effect as customers' views have in the commercial world.

the Rwanda genocide were underway.¹ The chaos of the ensuing relief operation clearly showed that all was not well with the humanitarian system. An evaluation released the following year criticised the humanitarian community's response for its poor coordination and lack of accountability to either donors or affected people.² Several initiatives were launched in the following decade to do things better. They included an array of standards, codes of conduct, capacity-building programmes, learning initiatives and certification schemes,

aimed at spelling out the rationale for accountability, giving guidance on how to make it happen and introducing certification to give a stamp of approval to organisations making the grade.³ Evaluations of the responses to the 2004 tsunami and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti concluded there was still considerable room for improvement. The conclusions were echoed in DfID's 2011 Humanitarian Emergency Response Review⁴ and later in a joint report by Save the Children, Christian Aid and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP).⁵ A common thread was the failure of humanitarian actors to consult thoroughly with affected populations or give them a chance to offer their perspective on either relief programmes or the performance of the agencies charged with implementing them.

The most recent effort to address flaws in the accountability architecture is the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), which combines and rationalises the main elements of the leading quality and accountability initiatives – HAP, the Sphere Project and People In Aid.

While still in pilot mode in order to let operational agencies test indicators and provide feedback, the CHS breaks new ground with guidelines that stress the importance of giving people supposed to benefit from humanitarian aid the opportunity to say whether or not they actually do so.⁶

Lessons from the commercial world

The CHS indicators are a major advance on previous efforts to encourage greater accountability. If they are followed systematically, the perceptions of affected people could produce the same effect as customers' views have in the commercial world. Take Continental Airlines for example: it reversed its fortunes by taking stock of, tracking and responding to the views of its customers.⁷ In the automotive industry, heeding feedback has helped smart

1/ *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief* was developed and agreed upon by eight of the world's largest disaster response agencies in 1994. See: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf>.
 2/ Ericksson, J. (1996) 'The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience'. *OECD Synthesis Report*. See: <http://www.oecd.org/derec/sweden/50189495.pdf>.
 3/ For example, HAP's Standard on Quality and Accountability, People In Aid's Code of Good Practice, the Sphere Project's Handbook, the INGO Accountability Charter, the CDAC Network, CDA, ALNAP and so on.
 4/ DFID. (2011) *Humanitarian Emergency Response Review*. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67579/HERR.pdf.
 5/ Featherstone, A. (2013) 'Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?' Christian Aid, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. See: <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/improving-impact-do-accountability-mechanisms-deliver-results.pdf>.
 6/ The CHS sets out Nine Commitments that organisations and individuals in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide. See: <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>. [Accessed: 15 June 2015].
 7/ Bethune, G. (1998) *From Worst to First: Behind the Scenes of Continental's Remarkable Comeback*. New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

If the sequence of collecting information, learning and course correction is repeated at regular intervals, it can become a powerful tool of both accountability and performance management.

companies adopt successful strategies, while those that have turned a deaf ear to their customers have mostly perished.⁸ More recently, Apple's success owes a lot to its laser-like focus on its customers. Companies don't inquire into customers' views out of good manners. Rather, they recognise that customer feedback is a powerful source of intelligence which, when responded to credibly, can help them raise their game and gain a competitive edge. The principle of valuing feedback has now penetrated areas as disparate as education, local government, water supply, health care and philanthropy. Even the notoriously officious security teams at London's Heathrow Airport will inquire about the traveller's experience with their 'service.'

The customer service industry has become increasingly adept at collecting data without burdening clients with too many questions. A minimalist approach to data collection has taken over thanks to the American business strategist Fred Reichheld. In the mid-1990s he waded through thousands of previously asked questions and came up with what he called the Ultimate Question: 'Would you recommend this to a friend?' By posing a single question and scoring responses on a scale of 0 to 10, Reichheld provided a key measure of performance (customer loyalty) that can be tracked over time. His was a simple advance on the industry norm – time-consuming, multiple-question surveys that discouraged would-be respondents and swamped analysts with seas of data.⁹ In a wide range of activities the perception of the end-user is increasingly recognised not just as a gauge of what works but as a valuable tool to fix things that are broken and to alert organisations when new problems arise. The biggest lesson to be learned from the customer-satisfaction industry is the focus on using regular feedback to do a better job and on continuously tracking how customer perceptions change.

'Exit' and 'voice'

Deploying these techniques in education and government, where people have both established rights and the luxury of choice, makes sense. But does the power of customer feedback translate to the humanitarian space, where affected people have little leverage and where incentives to use the data are small? In other words, can the customer service approach work in the context of market failure or in the absence of a market to begin with? The economist A.O. Hirschman grappled with this dilemma in his 1970 study of how people respond to the deteriorating quality of goods, services and other benefits in a non-competitive environment.¹⁰ He singled out two possible courses of action: 'exit' (withdraw from the situation) or 'voice' (improve things by complaining or suggesting how to resolve a grievance). A dissatisfied customer can take his

In a wide range of activities the perception of the end-user is increasingly recognised not just as a gauge of what works but as a valuable tool to fix things that are broken and to alert organisations when new problems arise.

or her business elsewhere or talk to the proverbial manager; a victim of political oppression can flee or protest; and a disgruntled worker can find another job or seek redress from their employer. To put this in the context of humanitarian aid, where options are limited, 'exit' relates not to physical flight but rather to psychological disengagement as people's sense of alienation grows. 'Voice' on the other hand implies enabling people to communicate their views with the confidence that doing so will make a difference, hence lowering the likelihood of 'exit'. Enabling 'voice' is not just a matter of listening, it also means providing affected communities with information about what they can realistically expect or demand, and about the limits of aid agencies' capacity to respond.

As the relief effort in Nepal moved into recovery mode a few weeks after the April 2015 earthquake, Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick told his country team:

"Communities need to receive information about who is doing what and where, and importantly, when. This means informing affected people of your agency's plans during distributions, field visits, assessments and health checks."¹¹ To be sure, informing people about what is happening and what they can expect from the relief effort is an important first step. But the real game-changer is to systematically collect their views on key aspects of the programme, analyse what they say and communicate the resulting insight back to the affected communities; then, through dialogue, work out how to translate the feedback into a more effective humanitarian response. Hence the proposition explored in this chapter: if the sequence of collecting information, learning and course correction is repeated at regular intervals, it can become a powerful tool of both accountability and performance management.

Constituent Voice

This is the essence of the Constituent Voice (CV) methodology that cuts through to measuring real progress against intended results while fostering trust between implementers and affected people.¹² CV draws on the participatory development thinking of people like Paulo Freire and Robert Chambers as well as A.O. Hirschman's work. Likewise, it embraces techniques borrowed from the customer service industry. Adapting aspects of the customer service approach to humanitarian work does not simply mean asking internally displaced people (IDPs) or refugees whether they are satisfied. The experience of Ground Truth Solutions, the programme I manage, shows that questions work best when they relate desired programme results to things worrying the affected people: Do they feel safe? Do they feel better prepared for another natural disaster?

Adapting aspects of the customer service approach to humanitarian work does not simply mean asking internally displaced people (IDPs) or refugees whether they are satisfied.

8/ Denove, C. and Power, J.D. (2006) Satisfaction: How Every Great Company Listens to the Voice of the Customer. New York: Penguin Group.

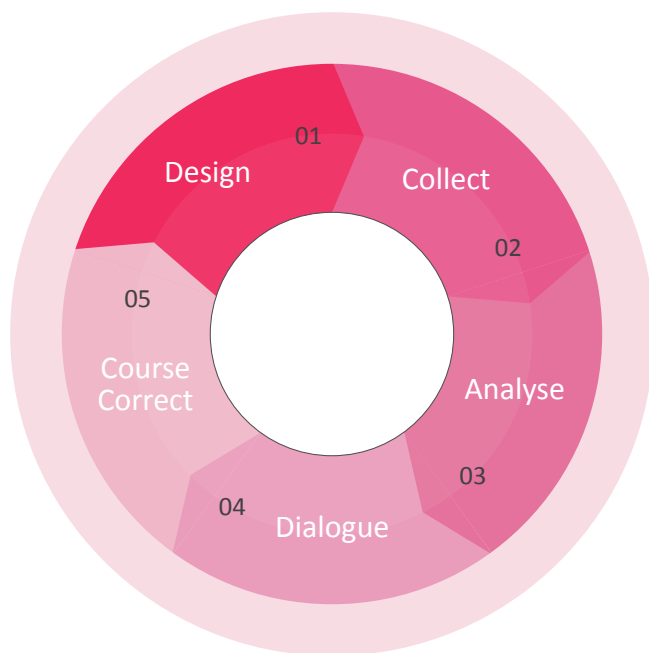
9/ Reichheld, F. and Markey, R. (2011) The Ultimate Question 2.0: How Net Promoter Companies Thrive in a Customer-Driven World. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press.

10/ Hirschman, A. (1970) Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

11/ CDAC Skype feed. 11 May 2015.

12/ Constituent Voice. 2015. See: <https://www.keystoneaccountability.org/analysis/constituency>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

Figure 4.1: The feedback loop



Ground Truth's hybrid methodology combines traditional social science models of participation with an approach to data collection and analysis adapted from the customer satisfaction industry. It has five stages and all are important.

Adapted from: <http://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/approach.html>

As the data builds up over time, the story becomes clearer and provides an increasingly robust guide to action.

to follow-up questions ('Why did you answer as you did?') and from further insight provided by affected people during dialogue sessions designed to make sense of the feedback. As the data builds up over time, the story becomes clearer and provides an increasingly robust guide to action.

In Haiti, for example, high levels of insecurity in the IDP camps contributed to a decision to speed up relocations to homes outside the camps, while post-relocation surveys conducted at regular intervals showed that people felt safe and welcome in their new homes. These findings had a bearing on the next stage of the programme. Instead of placing equal weight on community-integration and activities to generate income, which was thought a reasonable balance in the design of the programme, aid agencies shifted the emphasis to helping recipients earn a living. In Ukraine, regular feedback from internally displaced people pointed to the inadequacy of information they were receiving on humanitarian services. The response was two-fold: to provide more specific information on a website targeting IDPs and to upgrade outreach on social media, the information source of choice for young people. In Pakistan, villagers affected by flooding in Sindh in 2010 and 2011 made clear through successive surveys that they did not feel prepared to cope with another natural disaster, which had been a primary goal of the programme. Their responses to a five-question survey carried out every three months brought actionable suggestions for turning their plight around.

Questions and answers

Designing the right questions is the starting point. It requires diving deep into the 'theory of change' of a given programme, i.e. what it sets out to achieve. The next step is checking with the affected people themselves. In Haiti, for example, separate focus groups for men and women were held in the three locations covered by the pilot programme to learn first-hand how they saw things. Analysis of the goals and the input from affected people was then reduced to a list of five questions designed to provide a 'ping' of feedback at regular intervals on what all agreed were key issues. The final version of the questionnaire

Ground Truth Solutions has now tested this approach with several operational partners in programmes as wide-ranging as the post-earthquake transition in Haiti, recovery from the 2010-11 floods in Pakistan, assistance and integration of displaced people in Ukraine, and the Ebola response in Sierra Leone.¹³ The focus of inquiry is on people's perceptions concerning four themes which, based on preliminary evidence from our work in this diverse range of programmes, offer insight into how effective and efficient they are. These themes are:

- **Relationships:** this measures the nature of the relationship between 'benefactor' and 'beneficiary' through questions concerning trust, competence, respect, responsiveness and so on. It is linked with Hirschman's views on what drives 'exit', with the assumption that disengaged people are more likely to pull back and become less involved in the search for solutions.
- **Services:** this relates to the nuts and bolts of humanitarian action – perceptions on the quality, timeliness and relevance of services such as protection, camp management, shelter, water, sanitation, the distribution of non-food items and cash-transfer programmes.

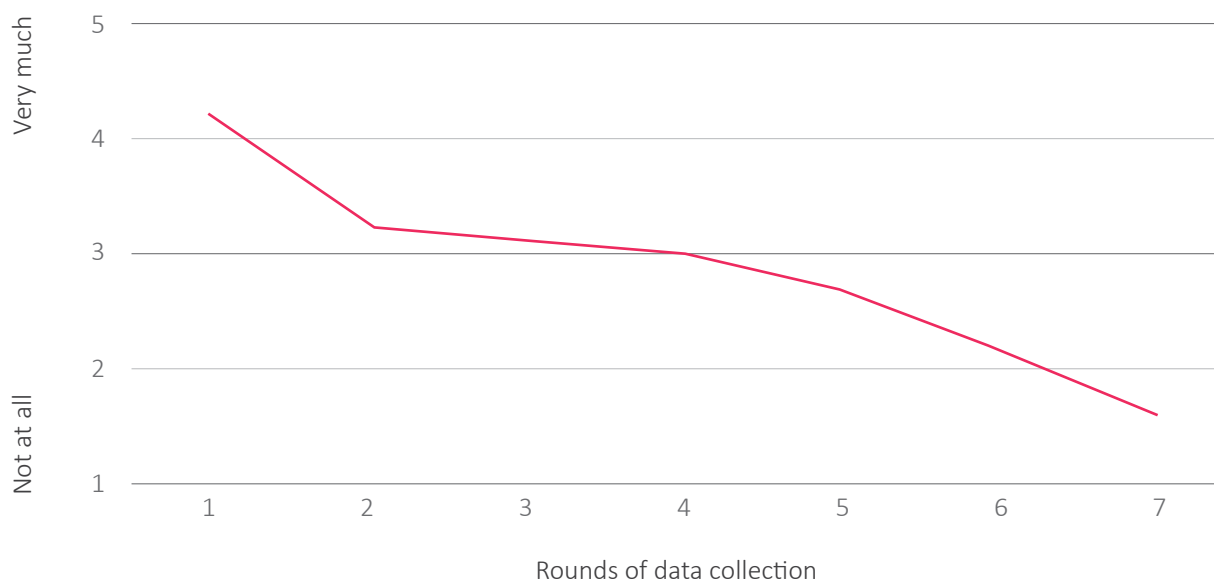
- **Agency:** this establishes whether people feel able to help find solutions or see themselves as passive recipients of aid. The hypothesis tested here is that empowered people drive effective programmes, whereas alienated ones do the opposite.
- **Results:** this covers disaster-hit people's viewpoints on the outcomes of aid programmes, by asking how they rate progress relative to improvements in their living conditions and other desired programme results.

Rapid cycle, continuous insight

The CV approach is rapid-cycle and asks a representative sample of the population only a few questions – from 5 to 10 per survey – but it asks them often. By requiring respondents to score questions – yes/no/don't know or on a scale of 0 to 10 – answers can be measured and tracked over time. Each round of answers provides aid managers with an updated sense of what is working and what isn't. Understanding *why* comes from responses

13/ Operational partners: J/P Haitian Relief Organization, Concern Worldwide, Mercy Corps, National Rural Support Programme and Oxfam.

Figure 4.2: Does fear of stigmatisation make people reluctant to report cases?



Over time, front line workers reported less fear of stigmatisation among Sierra Leoneans to report cases, with a sharp drop following initial findings of high stigma related concerns.

Adapted from: Ground Truth Solutions, Front line workers' views on the Ebola response, 2015, p.4.

included additional input from programme managers and was again checked with people from the affected communities to make sure they were comfortable with phrasing and translation.

Here the aim is to produce questions likely to bring out issues that are both important to affected people and can be acted upon by aid managers. The former want aid that is more responsive to their needs and enables them to play their part in finding solutions. The latter want feedback that informs their decision-making and helps them run better programmes – in other words, they want perceptions to which they can respond. In Pakistan, where local government is in partnership with a large national NGO in a community-driven recovery programme, one of the questions asked how far the affected people trusted local officials to support their community's efforts. When they consistently answered "not much", the NGO partner encouraged local government officials to take their role in the programme more seriously. As they did so, feedback became more positive. The pace of data collection can be adjusted to balance the humanitarian agencies' ability to digest and act on feedback with the need to adapt the line of inquiry to a fast-changing situation. At the height of the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, for example, data was collected from the general public every week, and fortnightly from frontline workers. In protracted situations, like Pakistan and Haiti, three-month intervals between rounds

of data collection have been adequate. The right frequency depends on both the volatility of the disaster situation and agencies' capacity to process feedback and act on the findings. When this capacity is relatively low, the way to reduce survey fatigue on both sides is to match the pace of data collection with the ability of aid managers to absorb it. In emergencies, changing survey questions to take account of fast-moving challenges ensures fresh insight and a more compelling narrative, which in turn helps drive interest and action. Take Sierra Leone, where a question that worried responders early in the crisis was whether harassment at checkpoints undermined the effort to stop people from moving around and thus spreading the disease. Once confirmed cases declined and restrictions on freedom of movement were lifted, the checkpoint question was removed and replaced with one about gender-based violence – an issue that became a major concern in the later stages of the Ebola response.

Data collection technologies

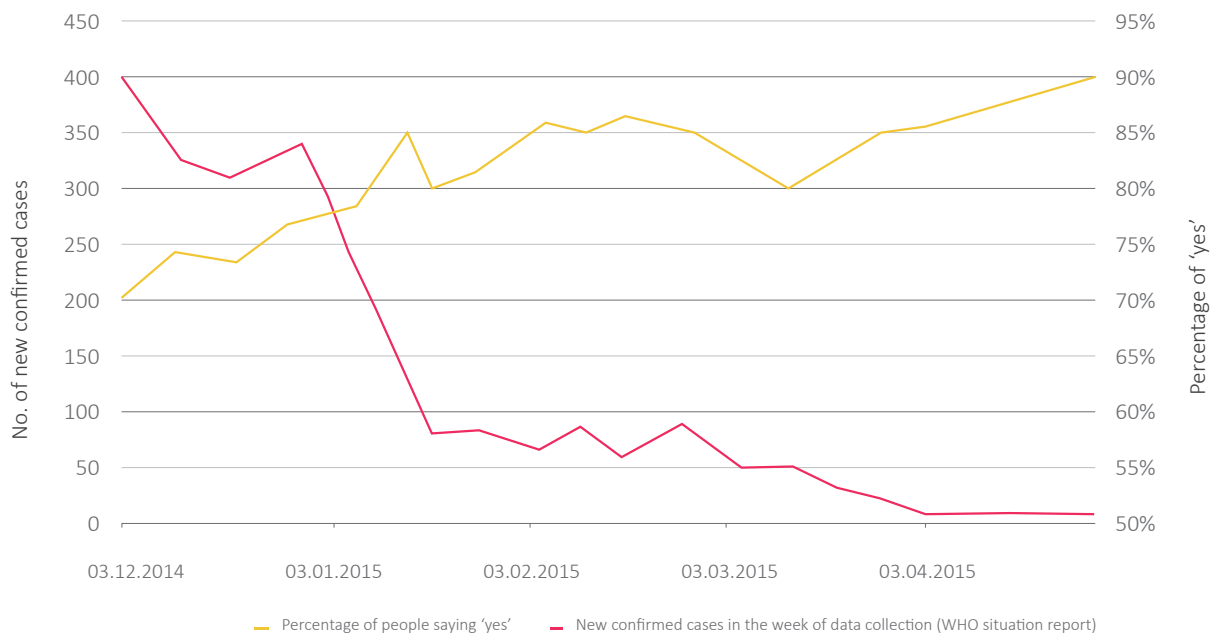
Modern communications technologies work in a wide range of country settings. In low-technology areas such as eastern parts of Pakistan's Sindh province, data collectors use clipboards and pens and go from home-to-home to collect data. In more connected places like Haiti,

they conduct face-to-face interviews and upload responses on their smart phones. In Sierra Leone, SMS was a more practical method for conducting the six-question survey of public perceptions about the Ebola response from a randomly selected sample of the country's population. Feedback was solicited weekly at first. Later, as the sense of urgency diminished, the pace of data collection slowed to fortnightly. Cost is a limitation when using SMS to hone in on specific provinces because it requires the same sample size (some 350 people for a 95% 'confidence interval'), regardless of whether the focus is on a particular district or the country as a whole. To obtain more detailed feedback from specific locations, our data collectors used cell phones to call frontline workers using telephone numbers provided by the agencies employing them. A widening range of apps and platforms make collecting this kind of feedback increasingly feasible.

Targeting the Ebola response

In Sierra Leone, programme managers had access to a regular stream of real-time data highlighting people's sense of the overall success of the Ebola response as well as the link between the stigma of carrying the disease and the willingness to report it. Humanitarian staff used the findings

Figure 4.3: Overall, is the Ebola response making progress against the spread of the disease?



Data shows a positive correlation between perceived progress in the fight against Ebola and drop in the number of new confirmed cases.

Adapted from: Ground Truth Solutions, Citizens' views of the Ebola response: Ground Truth survey of general public: Sierra Leone (Round 16), 2015, p.4.

A widening range of apps and platforms make collecting this kind of feedback increasingly feasible.

to improve programme services such as conditions in quarantine, the thoroughness with which houses were decontaminated and the effectiveness of awareness campaigns encouraging people to avoid bodily contact. As for stigma, frontline workers' feedback showed that fear of social rejection made people reluctant to report cases. These findings helped trigger a communications campaign to encourage the public to see things differently. It worked. Over the course of several weeks frontline workers reported a decrease in the feelings of personal shame that earlier impeded their efforts.

Triangulating objectively verified data with a continuous flow of snapshots of affected people's viewpoints can validate the percipience of their answers. The graph below illustrates the relationship between people's views of progress in fighting the virus and WHO data on newly confirmed cases. Asking people about progress in curbing the disease is similar to the 'right/wrong direction' question used in political polling and provides a broad indicator of progress. While their answers do not tell the whole story, they can

prompt follow-up scrutiny through focus groups and interviews with key respondents to get to the bottom of things. In Sierra Leone, where face-to-face meetings were difficult because of the danger of contracting Ebola, additional information came through surveys specifically centering on people's experience of quarantine and the decontamination of their homes. The telephone survey of people in quarantine helped clarify what the problems were: a lack of medicine, children's food and water for washing and cooking. These issues were eventually addressed.

Lessons from experience

So what lessons have we learned so far in testing this approach?

Data collection

It is possible to collect data on affected people's perceptions quickly and regularly by asking a few key questions often enough for programme managers to get a regularly updated picture of evolving sentiment. Obtaining a representative sample for each survey is relatively straightforward when surveying people in camps or rural villages. For out-of-camp populations, especially in urban areas, it is more difficult. In Haiti, for example, as people left camps and moved back into urban neighborhoods, the sample size fell from 700 in the first round to 500

in subsequent rounds. Even when there is access to names, addresses and GPS coordinates – as was the case in Haiti – people may not be at home when the data collector calls. Shortcomings in the sample size are overcome to an extent by the regularity of data collection, providing managers with a good sense of the trend rather than a precise reading at any point in time. Identifying and training data collectors depends on the instrument used to make the survey. Local data collection capacity is widely available and can be supplemented by mobile survey platforms such as GeoPoll for SMS and other phone-based survey instruments. Once collected, data can be analysed and visualised rapidly with standard tools like R, Tableau or Excel.

Data analysis and visualisation

Asking fewer questions means that data can be processed quickly. Ground Truth's target turn-around time is 48 hours – from raw data to final report. To make the data more accessible for end users, the emphasis is on clear graphics and minimal commentary. Programme managers want digestible findings, but also recommendations to spark deliberation and follow-up action.

Dialogue and communication

Verifying and making sense of feedback through dialogue with individuals and focus groups is essential. However, most operational agencies have limited capacity to run focus groups



The distribution of hygiene materials to targeted communities in Kakata district, Margibi county, Liberia. Materials include buckets, chlorine, soap and awareness raising posters and T-shirts.

Asking fewer questions means that data can be processed quickly.

or to listen in a way that provides insight. Nor is there much investment in developing staff capacity to do these things. There are, however, several promising approaches to this kind of dialogue pioneered for instance by CDAC, Integrity Action and Cordaid, who all offer valuable ways of managing this phase of the feedback cycle. A growing number of organisations are also working on communicating with disaster-hit communities.¹⁴ They have an important role to play in ensuring that people are informed about humanitarian services.¹⁵

Course correction

Continuous signals from feedback data provide regular squibs of intelligence that, while not painting a complete picture, may merit investigation and follow-up. The more frequent the rounds of feedback, the more compelling the data. Our experience suggests that it takes two or three rounds of data collection before the case for course correction reaches a critical mass. Even when the feedback is persuasive, moving to corrective action remains a challenge. Humanitarian agencies may be held back by competing demands on busy staff, the voluntary nature of compliance, rigid mindsets and skewed power relations. The inertia is amplified when several organisations are working together in a cluster or some other multi-agency framework. When this is the case, aid teams are reluctant to revisit an action plan that was hard to agree in the first place and is encumbered, by the time it is funded, with additional donor conditions.

Incentives, incentives, incentives

As is so often the case, incentives are crucial. With growing evidence that paying attention to the feelings and concerns of disaster-hit people delivers results, the challenge is to make it happen.

My shortlist of incentives includes the following:

1. Providing field managers with a tested and accepted way of gauging, tracking and acting on feedback from those they are assisting (a tool they say they currently lack¹⁶). At the moment there are so many competing approaches to accountability that managers find it hard to know which to use or how best to combine them. An industry standard bringing together essential features of a range of tools would be the stronger for placing less emphasis on the reporting of often non-essential measures of output and outcome.
2. Encouraging affected people to provide more candid feedback, by acting on what they say and letting them know, through systematic two-way communication, what has been done with their feedback. It is still rare for survey results and follow-up actions to be communicated back to communities.¹⁷ This makes it harder to create and sustain the trust that is essential if affected people are to engage without suspicion and play a bigger part in finding solutions.
3. Getting donors to keep pushing things forward. Some are already funding efforts to build the evidence base on the effectiveness of feedback systems and to promote better understanding of the benefits they bring. Donors should also consider removing reporting requirements that add little value so that agency staff can put their time to better use, not least to engage with affected people. Donors also have an important role to play in addressing entrenched power in the humanitarian system that they alone are in a position to challenge. At present, aid agencies pay a low price for failing to deliver on the accountability agenda. That is now beginning to change but it is time for donors to crank up the pace. In December 2014, the US Congress passed legislation mandating the collection of feedback (as well as evidence of how that feedback is being used) for all humanitarian organisations receiving US funds.¹⁸ DFID, SDC and other government donors are considering similar conditions. Private donors such as the IKEA Foundation and the Conrad Hilton Foundation are also pushing this agenda forward.¹⁹

4. Encouraging aid agency management to develop internal cultures that prompt staff to become keen listeners to affected people, and equally keen learners. Preliminary evidence from Ground Truth's work suggests that the stronger the management buy-in, the more robust the follow-through at the programme level. This means top managers must go beyond the rhetoric of accountability and align staff career opportunities with proven commitment to engage with affected people.

Conclusions

Over the last two decades much effort has gone into repositioning people we used to call aid beneficiaries as partners in the design and implementation of relief programmes. But calls for greater accountability have not done nearly enough to induce change in an aid sector reluctant to embrace it. Still, there is compelling evidence that continuously tracking affected people's perceptions and learning from their feedback improves performance. The hybrid method described in this chapter builds on much existing good practice. By adding insight from the customer service industry it creates a fresh approach to accountability: as an instrument of verification it underpins the progress enshrined in the CHS; as a tool of performance management, it supports the World Humanitarian Summit's focus on aid effectiveness; and as a new element in the emerging architecture of accountability, it helps ensure that agencies responding to catastrophes respect the basic rights of the people they are there to help. It cannot of course be the end of the search for greater accountability in the humanitarian system, which will come only when affected people are accepted as co-managers of aid. It is, however, a promising way station on the path to that distant goal.

It is still rare for survey results and follow-up actions to be communicated back to communities.

14/ The CDAC Network brings together a diverse group of organisations, including humanitarian and media development organisations and technology providers. See: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/>. [Accessed: 15 June 2015].

15/ This chapter does not cover complaints mechanisms or helplines. While they can play a role in some circumstances, they do not offer the broader perspective. In addition, they are difficult to manage, with calls for help or information only answered when staff members have the time or inclination to do so.

16/ According to T. Lanzing, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in S. Sudan talking on UN STAIT webinar, April 2015.

17/ The Nepal earthquake response is, at the time of writing, pushing things forward on this front with a DFID-funded Inter-agency Common Feedback Project.

18/ The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act 2015 (pp.1223-24, Division J). Available at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-113HPRT91668/pdf/CPRT-113HPRT91668.pdf>. [Accessed: 15 June 2015]. The provision is further described in the Explanatory Statement at: <http://rules.house.gov/sites/republicans.rules.house.gov/files/113-1/PDF/113-HR835a-ES-J.pdf>. [Accessed: 15 June 2015].

19/ Disclosure: DFID, ECHO, SDC and the IKEA and Conrad Hilton foundations have all funded the work of Ground Truth Solutions.

A man walks through the Zaatari Refugee Camp, located near Mafraq, Jordan. Opened in July 2012, the camp holds upwards of 20,000 refugees from the civil war inside Syria. International Orthodox Christian Charities and other members of the ACT Alliance are active in the camp providing essential items and services.
© ACT/Paul Jeffrey



Dr. Kamel Mohanna

President
Amel Association International

Dr. Kamel Mohanna was trained as a paediatrician in France. After graduating, he practiced in Dhojar for six months with vulnerable populations and then went on to work in Lebanon, at a time when his country was struggling with both civil war and Israeli occupation. It was during this time, in 1979, that he created the civil, non-sectarian association Amel, now an international NGO, of which he is currently the president. Amel manages 24 centers and 6 mobile units across Lebanon, with 800 staff and volunteers. Dr. Mohanna has worked for more than half a century in the humanitarian field, basing his action on positive thinking and permanent optimism. Dr. Mohanna's work and passion have been recognised by several prestigious awards, including officer of the Légion d'honneur. Dr. Mohanna leads both the Arab and Lebanese NGO networks' fight for a fairer and more humane world, through the collaboration of civil society of North and South as equal partners.

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05

National and international NGOs: equal partners?

International actors on the humanitarian scene don't always have all the answers, writes Dr. Kamel Mohanna. Involving in-country partners on a more equal footing would deliver better humanitarian results.

As the Syrian conflict enters its fifth year, the political resolve needed to end the violence is still a long way off, and the humanitarian needs are ever increasing. According to the latest figures, almost 220,000 Syrians have lost their lives to the fighting.¹ Nearly a third of Syria's population has been confined in areas under siege or internally displaced, whilst another 3.2 million have sought asylum outside of the country.²

Crossing the Lebanese border was relatively unrestricted for Syrians until January 2015.³ The resulting influx of 1.2 million refugees has put Lebanon under huge economic and social strain, throwing Syria's neighbour into a catastrophic situation of its own.⁴

1/ <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4aea5cc4-f96a-11e4-ae65-00144feab7de.html#axzz3aU81yWMg>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

2/ https://www.icrc.org/en/document/syria-2014-saw-escalating-human-cost-and-humanitarian-challenges#.VNYfifnF_iM. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

3/ <http://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/flooded-refugees-lebanon-slaps-visas-syrians>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

4/ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].



Kobane refugees in local refugee camp in Suruc, Turkey
© Mike Kollöffel

The number of refugees at present represents approximately a third of Lebanon's population, and despite the work of the humanitarian community, a great many of their needs are still unmet. The effectiveness of humanitarian assistance has so far been challenged not only by the unprecedented nature of the conflict (i.e. the deliberate targeting of civilians and humanitarian actors, and the proliferation and fragmentation of armed groups) but also by political deadlock and an insufficient level of international solidarity.

Despite the urgency of the situation, the lack of support and solidarity from both governments and civil society within the international community is being keenly felt by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey – the countries bearing the primary burden of sheltering and providing for an “unrelenting” flow of Syrian refugees.⁵ An equivalent of less than 2% of the number of Syrian refugees found in these five countries has been resettled elsewhere in the international community, with many Gulf countries being the least willing to offer asylum.⁶ The reluctance of the international community to share the responsibility increases

the pressure on the main host countries to provide a competent humanitarian response. In addition, increasing financial constraints (the Regional Response Plan to the Syrian crisis was 67% funded in 2014, but only 24% by June 2015⁷) make accountable interventions challenging to say the least.⁸ The integrity of the entire humanitarian response in Lebanon must therefore be reconsidered, to ensure that a genuine commitment to accountability drives the humanitarian response. Given their dynamic interaction with all stakeholders and the value that this adds, national NGOs should play a key role in suggesting improvements centred on the well-being of the most vulnerable.

The current situation, that sees funding flowing to INGOs rather than to national humanitarian organisations, is largely driven by the unwillingness of donors to handle a large amount of partners.

The current situation, that sees funding flowing to INGOs rather than to national humanitarian organisations, is largely driven by the unwillingness of donors to handle a large amount of partners. They also have an interest in delegating grant-related risk management to UN agencies or INGOs. It has however not necessarily resulted in the most appropriate or cost-effective responses on the ground. To take the case of Lebanon, amongst approximately 100 actors involved in assessing needs and identifying response mechanisms, only 16 were national NGOs.⁹ This is not new. The influx of international NGOs that started in the early 1990s changed the face of humanitarianism in Lebanon. The development of the “Charity Business”, the proliferation of ‘BONGOs’ (business-orientated NGOs) and the use of an increasingly bureaucratic, technocratic and compliance-orientated approach to programming by international actors has moved the focus of the response away from our substantive mission and sidelined the incredible value national NGOs deliver through their daily human interactions at the grassroots level.

5/ <http://www.unhcr.org/525fe3e59.pdf>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

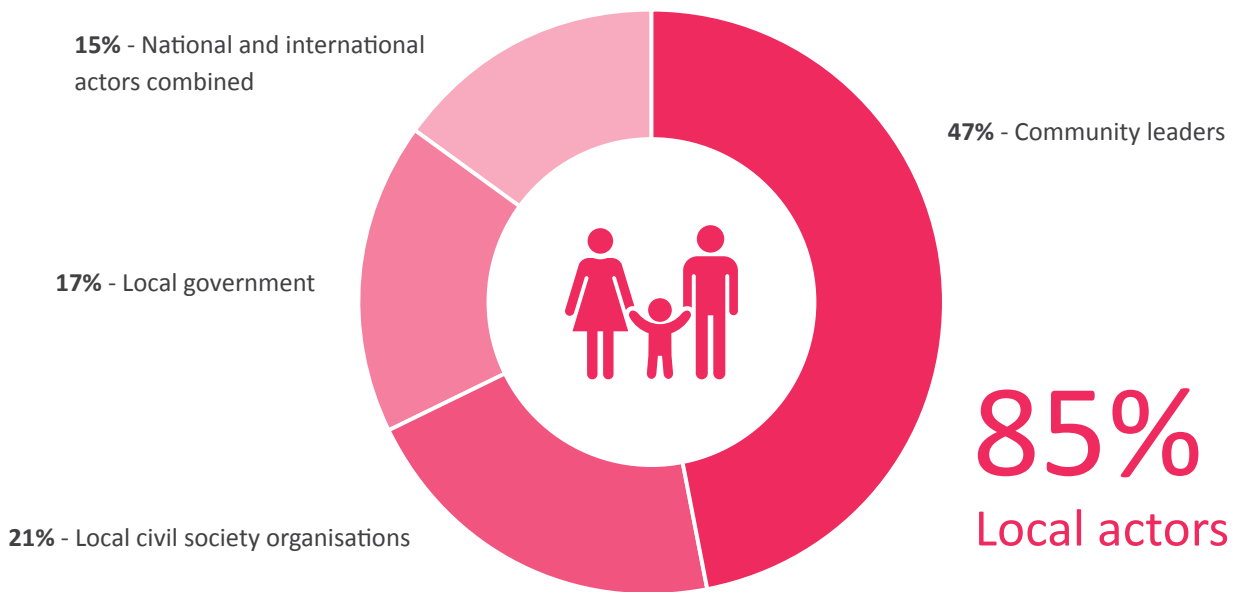
6/ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2014/12/facts-figures-syria-refugee-crisis-international-resettlement/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

7/ For 2014 figures, see: http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/GHA_crisis-briefing_Syria_March-2015_31-March.pdf. [Accessed: 24 June 2015]. For 2015 figures, see: <http://fts.unocha.org/pagelader.aspx?page=special-syriancrisis>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

8/ <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2014-09-30-SYRIASituation2014Contributions-RRP.pdf>

9/ <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/docs/Syria-rrp6-full-report.pdf>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

Figure 5.1: During a conflict situation, who understands the needs of your community the most?



When community members in North and South-East Asia were asked who understood their needs the most in conflict situations, 85% of responses pointed towards local actors, while only 15% pointed to national and international actors. Results likely have a strong correlation with national development levels.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for North and South-East Asia, 2014, p.46.

The results of consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) indicate that there are indeed obstacles to effective humanitarian response that relate to the insufficient role national actors are allowed to play in the system.

As external organisations and agencies have started to work in Lebanon, local expertise and knowledge have been increasingly overlooked,¹⁰ with humanitarian intervention adapted to conform to the standards of international organisations. The expertise and resources that INGOs commonly bring must of course be acknowledged. But while logical frameworks, performance indicators and other evaluation tools are essential for transparent action, national NGOs have found that these often undermine rather than support the contextual relevance of interventions. Evaluation mechanisms

are necessary, particularly when it comes to donor accountability, but do they actually support accountability to beneficiaries as well? The results of consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) indicate that there are indeed obstacles to effective humanitarian response that relate to the insufficient role national actors are allowed to play in the system.¹¹

If we are to deliver principled and effective humanitarian action, there need to be more equal partnerships between organisations from North and South, which value and balance what both national and international NGOs have to offer. We all know what needs to be done, and international stakeholders have committed to the equal partnership agenda in 2007.¹² Now we need to move from rhetoric to practice. A stronger combination of local knowledge and technical expertise is needed to ensure the needs and dignity of those we assist are met.

Contributing to values of integrity and commitment within the humanitarian sector, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) determines the essential elements for carrying out quality

humanitarian action. Amel has worked for years along the lines of the HAP Standard and considers its successor, the CHS, to be equally relevant to its work. This chapter looks at examples of how they have already been used in the field, and discusses the kind of relationship needed between national and international NGOs for these standards to be more effectively incorporated into humanitarian action in Lebanon. We will consider in particular the links between national NGOs and local communities, project sustainability, use of local knowledge and staff, the importance of collaboration and communication between actors, and access to funding.

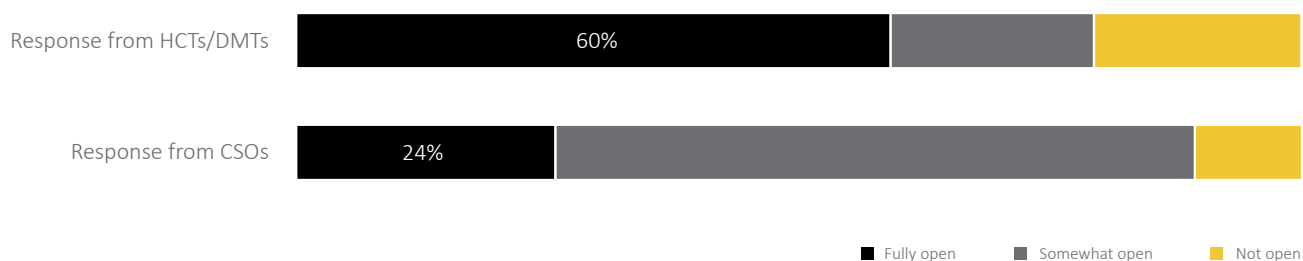
Strong links with local communities: a foundation to understanding needs

The outcome the CHS expects from humanitarian organisations is **well-timed assistance that is appropriate and**

10/ <http://csc.kc.daleel-madani.org/paper/international-aid-community-and-local-actors>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

11/ These obstacles include the following: a) The international humanitarian system does not take sufficient account of national actors, and should change to ensure it does so; b) National actors are not effectively represented in governance mechanisms of the humanitarian system; c) Direct international funding for national NGOs is insufficient, and overly complex procedures and aversion to risk prevents local NGOs from receiving direct funding; d) Funding for capacity-building in civil society is limited and approaches to capacity-building have not always been effective; and e) National NGO networks receive only limited support. See: 'Good humanitarian action is led by the state and builds on local response capacities wherever possible' (Global Forum Briefing Paper 4). ALNAP. 2015. Available at: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/20243>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

12/ See for example the widely endorsed 'Principles of Partnership', available at: <https://icvnetwork.org/system/files/versions/Principles%20of%20Partnership%20English.pdf>. [Accessed: 17 June 2015].

Figure 5.2: Perceptions of HCT openness to local actors.

A majority of HCT and DMT members considers that HCTs are fully open to local actors while a majority of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) considers them as only “somewhat open” to local actors.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for North and South-East Asia, 2014, p.9.

relevant to needs.¹³ That is to say, ensuring that programmes respond to needs and take account of risk assessments in their design. The evolution of the response to the Syrian crisis on Lebanese soil requires an ongoing revision process to ensure that programmes continue to be relevant to the changing situation. Given the strong relationships that national NGOs have with beneficiaries and other stakeholders, founded on a long-standing, reliable presence, and an intimate understanding of context and culture, national actors are well positioned to gather relevant information from different sources. Such trust, developed over time through “tightknit community relations”¹⁴ and proximity, gives national NGOs privileged access to vulnerable community members and the ability to quickly and efficiently identify their needs. This is a feature that large international NGOs recently arrived in the region struggle to deliver swiftly. It follows therefore that the grassroots experience and legitimacy of national NGOs should be given more value by the international community. Through committed and passionate individuals, we can ensure that humanitarian assistance is constantly improved, lessons are learned, programmes are adjusted, complaints are acknowledged and dealt with and, ultimately, that assistance is constantly improved instead of being

A response to the crisis cannot be based only on short-term projects, but should also plan for the day when international organisations will have left the scene.

defined only by an initial needs assessment. In this respect, the role of national NGOs can and should be reinforced when planning, conducting and updating needs assessments.

Local knowledge and staff: a basis for sustainability and programme continuity

Another important feature of the CHS resides in the importance it gives to **measuring the impact of humanitarian action, ensuring that local capacities are strengthened and preventing negative effects.** The Syrian crisis is no longer solely a humanitarian but now also a development issue. A response to the crisis cannot be based only on short-term projects, but should also plan for the day when international organisations will have left the scene. This means, in particular for national NGOs, advocating for improved governmental protection and service provision, designing empowering projects that do not create aid-dependent communities, and delivering positive impacts from interventions. There are a number of reasons why local NGOs are central to sustainable humanitarian and development action: they predominantly employ local staff who – often in contrast to expatriates – are able to communicate in local languages, understand the culture, stay longer with organisations and are less expensive (i.e. in terms of salaries, per diems and other benefits). These professionals provide much-needed continuity and are also

These professionals provide much-needed continuity and are also better placed to avoid interventions that create negative impacts, due to their familiarity with the context and the probability that they will remain in the country, supporting projects after international staff have moved on.

better placed to avoid interventions that create negative impacts, due to their familiarity with the context and the probability that they will remain in the country, supporting projects after international staff have moved on.

Cooperation between international and national organisations is key to running effective projects. However, this partnership must build and protect the capacity of individuals and organisations who will continue their work long after international organisations have left, so that vulnerable communities can be supported on the way to post-conflict transition. National NGOs must be viewed as the stable humanitarian presence through which change happens.

Given the importance of local staff to national NGOs, the institutional knowledge they possess, and the time and resources Lebanese NGOs have invested in them, it is worrying (though understandable) to see many of them moving into better paid jobs

13/ <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

14/ <http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/758/ONTRAC-53-Transparent-accountable-legitimate-credible-NGO-responses-to-scrutiny.pdf>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

with international organisations. When this happens, not only is the sustainability and capacity of national NGOs undermined, but also the accountability of the 'implementing partners' of international organisations, because they are often one and the same.

We have already discussed the long-term positive impacts of building local capacity and retaining local staff. To achieve this, we must ensure respect for the salary scales and capacities of smaller NGOs, so that the humanitarian ecosystem continues to include small but strong and healthy national NGOs. Maybe, as suggested later on in this publication, international organisations should reflect on their often stated commitment to the development of national capacity, and find a way to fairly compensate the damage they inflict on national NGOs when they poach their staff.

Forums for dialogue: ensuring comprehensive service provision

Communication and coordination are essential for an effective intervention.

The CHS states that communities and people affected by crisis should have access to information, know their rights and entitlements, and participate in decisions that affect them, within a context where assistance is coordinated and complementary.

Feedback received in a recent stakeholder analysis in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region highlighted that participants were often confused over which organisation was providing which service, and noted duplication in certain areas.¹⁵ The UN cluster approach is intended to avoid such duplication and gaps in service provision, yet does not always succeed, not least because of the variation in funding of the various components of the response plan. For example, WASH programmes received 128% of requested

Astronomical sums are often spent by international agencies on administration, coordination and security, or for managing the funds that allow national NGOs to implement programmes.

National NGOs must be viewed as the stable humanitarian presence through which change happens.

funding in the last month of 2014, whilst the sector of Social Cohesion and Livelihoods, a domain particularly important to the Lebanese context, received just 10% of its target for employment assistance, income generation and business development projects, and 32% for technical training, literacy initiatives and life-skills training.¹⁶ Does the funding landscape reflect the priorities of communities or the interest of donors for specific sectors?

Ensuring that the work of national and local authorities as well as other humanitarian organisations is coordinated and complementary is one of the keys to effective interventions. To achieve that, the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis cannot be led solely by international organisations, while ignoring the value national actors can bring. This is not to deny the value and technical expertise international organisations provide, but rather acknowledge and use existing capacities. For example, national networks, such as the Lebanese NGOs Network, can allow for in-depth mapping of well-rooted, stable services that can act as a basis for responsible and sustainable referral systems. It is positive that Amel, a Lebanese NGO, is as a member of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and other national and international forums. There is however still a long way to go to full acknowledgement that the humanitarian community cannot

use the same model of coordination and delivery on every continent,¹⁷ and local capacities, where they exist, should be recognised and empowered.

Communication and collaboration is not only essential between humanitarian actors themselves, but between NGOs and their beneficiaries as well. Techniques to communicate effectively with beneficiaries have of course been developed by the international humanitarian community, but the key to their success is often dependent on understanding of culture and context, and use of appropriate language and dialects. National NGOs are better equipped than international organisations to ensure this is true for field staff and senior management alike. When senior managers don't have to rely on translators to follow the news or communicate with local communities and refugees, they are more likely to interact with the communities they intend to serve and make impartial, well-informed decisions.

The importance of focused and accessible funding

Responsible use and management of resources is essential in reaching a balance between quality, cost and effectiveness at all stages of the response. Communities and people affected by crisis should expect that organisations assisting them manage resources effectively, efficiently and ethically. Discussions, conferences, seminars and other humanitarian meetings are moments of necessary exchange and reflection. Nevertheless, they are not an end in themselves and the resources which they



Refugee children from Syria sing and dance in the street of their squatter settlement in the village of Jeb Jennine, in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.
© ACT/Paul Jeffrey

15/ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8664>.

16/ See 'Responding to changing needs?', ALNAP, 2014, p. 28, for a description of different approaches to coordination based on context. <http://www.alnap.org/node/19332.aspx>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

17/ <http://www.wvi.org/syria-crisis/pressrelease/humanitarian-ngos-fund-syria-response-now-it%E2%80%99s-too-late>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

require must be minimised if we want funds to be primarily used for the benefit of the most vulnerable. Astronomical sums are often spent by international agencies on administration, coordination and security, or for managing the funds that allow national NGOs to implement programmes. This significantly reduces the funds that directly benefit affected communities, and creates an expensive culture of high per diems and ‘humanitarian tourism’. In order to avoid falling further into this habit, we must all strive to ensure that civil society from North and South work together towards international solidarity and commitment, distancing itself from ‘Charity Business’ and an increasingly bureaucratic system that undermines real and just engagement. An alternative approach needs to be developed – one which balances professionalism and commitment, fosters respect and trust between international and national NGOs, and supports mutual information-sharing as well as service provision on an equal footing.

A further challenge in ensuring the responsible use and management of resources within the Lebanese context is the difficulty that local organisations have accessing funding from international donors, for example because of delays in receiving formal registrations. On occasion, international institutions offer funding but it often comes with unreasonable obstacles. This triggered the Syrian INGOs Regional Forum to state that donors “must not allow bureaucratic impediments which delay or hinder the delivery of aid, and that the allocation of funding must be done on an impartial basis and through a variety of channels.”¹⁸

Constraints imposed by donors can take the focus away from the end goal, and/or advance the preference of donors for large-scale interventions. According to Development Initiatives, between 2009 and 2013 only 1.6% of all humanitarian assistance went directly to national NGOs, even though they end up implementing a much larger proportion of humanitarian programmes.¹⁹ If a strong collaboration between international and national organisations truly existed, the preference for large-scale interventions would not be so prevalent. The reality is that international agencies often see collaboration with national entities as a constraint, and regularly make the choice to rule out local actors or work on the basis of unequal partnerships. Large portions of funding are channelled through UN agencies – take for example the US\$15 million pledged to Syria and neighbouring countries by the Finnish government, of which the majority will be delivered through UN agencies;²⁰

Between 2009 and 2013 only 1.6% of all humanitarian assistance went directly to national NGOs, even though they end up implementing a much larger proportion of humanitarian programmes.

or the pledges by Kuwait that have also been largely channelled through UN agencies and international NGOs.²¹ The difficulties smaller, national NGOs face to directly access funds and their reliance on project funding make their survival yet more of a struggle. Amel is fortunate enough to be in a position where 53% of its funds are derived from the participation of beneficiaries, revenues from its property, and its bi-annual gala dinners. This situation allows Amel to make independent choices for its organisation, its choice of programmes and its ability to act specifically where needs are not covered. Many other national NGOs are not so fortunate. Amel believes that every organisation, regardless of size or capacity, should be able to access funding without jeopardising its ability to act neutrally, and that funds received should not compromise an organisation’s independence. Indeed, funding often represents an extension of a foreign policy and power, placing conditions on how the funding is spent – stipulating, for example, which products an organisation must buy, and from where.²² This largely influences the development of a project and the effectiveness of the use of resources. Obstacles imposed on access to funding should be reduced to ensure that the needs of vulnerable communities are prioritised. Without addressing this imbalance, true progress, with fair input from national and international organisations, will be difficult to achieve.

Conclusions

Humanitarian action should steer its delivery model towards equal, strategic and long-lasting partnerships based on humanitarian principles. It is with these types of partnerships that humanitarian actors can apply an approach Amel believes in: “our principles define our position, which can then be put into practice.”

The CHS is a tool that supports the vision of a humanitarian response that promotes dignity for everyone, not just a privileged few.

Equal partnership must not only become a universal principle, but also a position that is translated into practice by the international community, allocating equal responsibility to and demanding equal accountability from national and international actors. In order to ensure these attitudes prevail within the sector, the international humanitarian community must allow national NGOs to play a more important role in humanitarian response. By adopting the above recommendations, Amel believes that we can achieve just this.

It is in light of these principles, and the arguments presented in this article, that we take position in favour of the following actions:

1. When appropriate, needs assessments and their revision should be contracted to national NGOs, given their privileged knowledge of and connection to local communities.
2. Rules of cooperation and collaboration between international organisations and national NGOs, inspired by the Principles of Partnership, should be enforced. They should result in an open dialogue, and joint project development, where international NGOs bring external expertise and financial resources, and national NGOs bring local knowledge and beneficiary communication techniques.
3. A certain amount of funding²³ should be directed to national NGOs, either directly or through pooled funds.
4. International organisations should suggest a mechanism to offset the costs incurred when staff are poached from national NGOs.
5. Cluster meetings and documents should be systematically translated into the local language and documents relevant to beneficiary communities communicated in an appropriate and understandable manner.
6. Programmes should concentrate on effectiveness, not just visibility. In the same vein, attributed project funds should reach beneficiaries, rather than simply covering administrative costs.

The CHS is a tool that supports the vision of a humanitarian response that promotes dignity for everyone, not just a privileged few.

18/ <http://www.wvi.org/syria-crisis/pressrelease/humanitarian-ngos-fund-syria-response-now-it%E2%80%99s-too-late>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

19/ ‘Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014’ Development Initiatives. p.64.

<http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GHA-Report-2014-interactive.pdf>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

20/ <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/finland-pledged-eur-15-million-victims-crisis-syria>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

21/ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/cash-strapped-u-n-to-look-for-syria-at-pledging-conference-in-kuwait/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

22/ <http://www.globalissues.org/article/35/foreign-aid-development-assistance#AidMoneyOftenTiedtoVariousRestrictiveConditions>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

23/ Christian Aid and Act Alliance suggested a minimum of 15%. See ‘Making the World Humanitarian Summit worth the climb’. Available at:

<https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/file/471236/download/513450>. [Accessed: 17 June 2015].

06

Aid and the role of government: what we can learn from Colombia

Diana Marcela Barbosa Maldonado

Political Scientist

Unit for the Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation of Victims

Diana Marcela Barbosa Maldonado is a political scientist with a M.A. degree in Government and Public Policy at the Universidad de los Andes and experience in human right violation risk analysis. She has led the prevention section of the Unit for the Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation of Victims since 2012 and has focused on the identification and prevention of causes and risks of human rights violations to enable a comprehensive response under the Law 1448. Before joining the Victims' Unit, she worked in the Presidential Agency for Social Action and the Presidential Human Rights Program conducting research on decision making in human rights protection.

The author wishes to thank Juan Pablo Caicedo and Viviana Jiménez for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

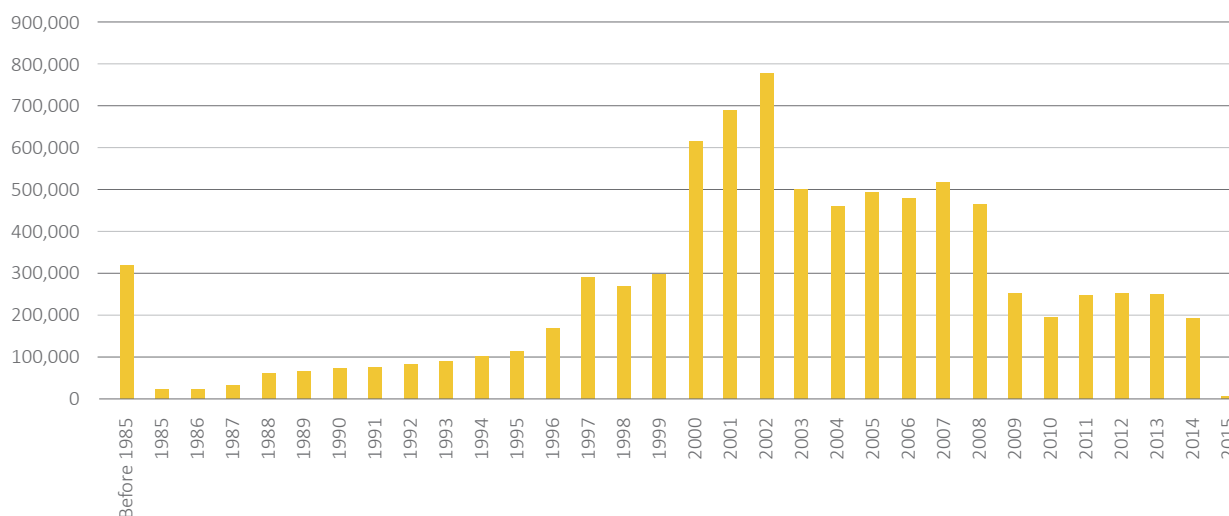
According to ALNAP, good humanitarian action is led by the state and builds on local response capacities wherever possible. Diana Marcela Barbosa Maldonado of the Colombian government's Unit for the Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation of Victims (Victims' Unit) explains how her country is working towards this objective.

More than one in seven of Colombia's 48 million people are victims of internal armed conflict, and over six million have been affected by forced displacement. To respond to this humanitarian crisis, the state has developed the National Public Policy of Assistance and Comprehensive Reparation of Victims.

As highlighted in one of the ALNAP global forum briefing papers: "Under UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 46/182, governments are responsible for leading and coordinating humanitarian assistance. The role of the international system is to provide additional support where the state does not have the capacity or the willingness to fulfil these obligations. [...] In general terms, however, there are clear potential benefits in state leadership of disaster response, including stronger links between humanitarian work and broader development activities, and increased government legitimacy and accountability."¹

1/ ALNAP. (2015) 'Good humanitarian action is led by the state and builds on local response capacities wherever possible'. Global Forum Briefing Paper (4). See: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/20243.aspx>. [Accessed: 26 June 2015].

Figure 6.1: Victims of the internal armed conflict



Between 1985 and May 2015, the Colombian government registered 7,124,829 victims of internal armed conflict, of which 86.6% (6,163,315 people) had been affected by forced displacement.

Adapted from: Victims' Unit, Colombia, May 2014.

This chapter aims to contribute to the discussion about effective humanitarian action by sharing: the Colombian government's experience in developing its leadership and central role in the provision of humanitarian assistance; the strategies it has implemented to support local authorities and improve the quality of aid provided; recommendations related to stakeholder coordination; and its assessment of the relevance of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

Across its territory of more than two million square kilometres,² Colombia boasts vast geographical and ethnic diversity. Since internal armed conflict affects the whole territory,³ the dispersal of its inhabitants and their ethnic diversity are both key considerations in the provision of suitable humanitarian aid to victims. In addition, governmental action to protect the victims of conflict is also determined by the constitutional and legal framework.

According to the current legal framework,⁴ the 1,120 local authorities in Colombia have the primary responsibility for guaranteeing immediate humanitarian assistance to victims. They must allocate the financial, human and technical resources necessary to supply the victims with the minimum standards of livelihood: i.e. food, water, sanitation, cleaning products, cookware, shelter, transport, and access to medical and psychological services.

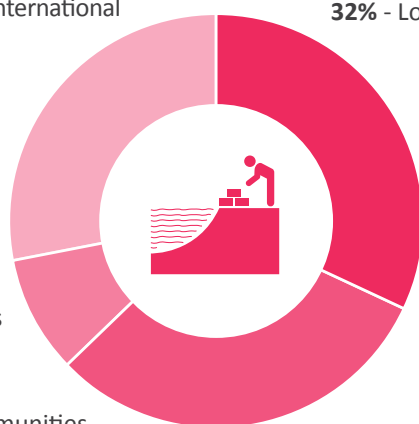
Figure 6.2: In your opinion, who has the primary responsibility to manage disaster risks in your community?

28% - National and international actors combined

32% - Local government

9% - Local CSOs

31% - Communities



72%
Local actors

When communities were asked who had the primary responsibility to manage disaster risks, local government was cited most frequently, with 72% of respondents referring to local actors. Figures may vary based on the level of development of a given country.

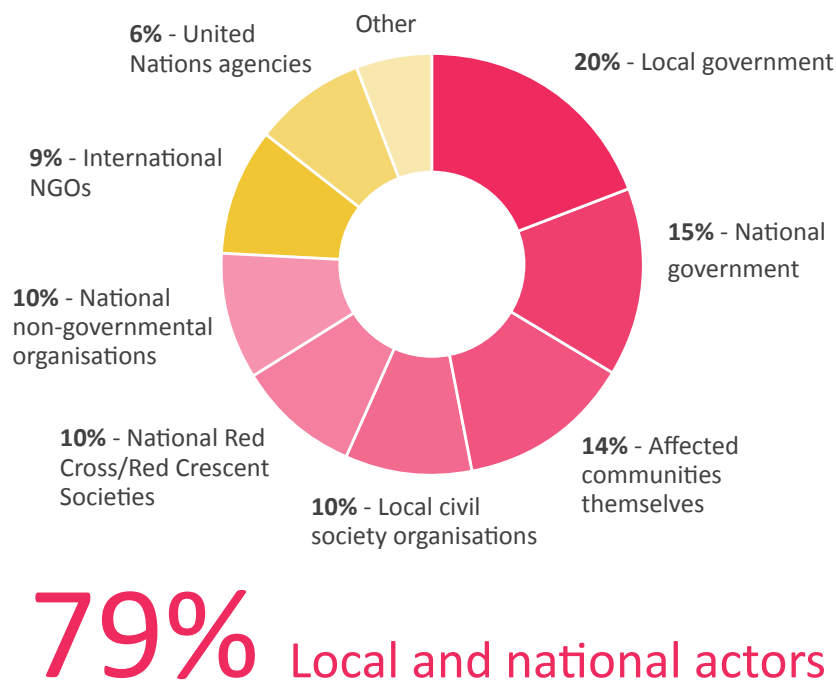
Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for North and South-East Asia, 2014, p.42.

2/ 2,129,748 km²

3/ In the past 30 years, victimisation has happened at least once in every single municipality of Colombia.

4/ (1997) Law 387; and (2011) Law 1448.

Figure 6.3: Who responds most effectively to the needs of affected communities in the region?



More than a third of respondents mentioned local or national government as the most effective responder, and over three quarters of respondents mentioned local and national actors as those most effectively responding to the needs of affected communities.

Adapted from: World Humanitarian Summit, Regional Consultation for North and South-East Asia, 2014, p.40.

This is used to anticipate the occurrence of future emergencies and set up local response capacity accordingly. An example is the Victimisation Risk Index (IRV).⁶ The index is a quantitative analysis tool that compares the risk of human rights violations amongst municipalities.

Another key task of the Victims' Unit is to continuously follow up, monitor and document incidents that may lead to emergency situations.⁷ This task is carried out by a team of 91 full-time professionals in the worst affected regions. Thanks to this work, the government is able to identify a humanitarian emergency as soon as it takes place and activate an immediate, comprehensive, coordinated and effective response. The Victims' Unit provides humanitarian aid within two to seven days of an emergency being declared,⁸ regardless of the extent of assistance required.⁹ The speed and scale of the Unit's response demonstrates a significant logistical, administrative and financial effort on the part of government to provide both a suitable and effective answer.

Coordination

Coordinating and planning, including defining the mechanism for the delivery of assistance, are all key elements of effective humanitarian action. Assistance and Reparations Committees required by law at both national and local levels have operated since 2012. All bodies of the government responsible for providing humanitarian assistance as well as representatives of victims take part in the process. It is within these committees that it is decided how to proceed in the case of an emergency. Contingency plans are developed, including the definition of roles, procedures and actions needed to prepare and respond.¹⁰

Furthermore, a coordination exercise with international humanitarian organisations, organised into Humanitarian Teams at both national and local levels is carried out. This approach, using national committees¹¹ and formal agreements, has resulted in improved information flow, better coordination of humanitarian action, standardisation of criteria and progress on the complementarity of actions.

When a local authority is unable to guarantee these minimum standards to the victims in their territory, or when the scale of the event overtakes their capacity to respond, the national government steps in to provide the additional humanitarian aid needed via mechanisms that meet the conditions in which the emergency is taking place.

National government strategies for immediate humanitarian assistance

To provide a humanitarian response according to the criteria of the CHS,⁵ the Victims' Unit, acting on behalf of the government, uses different strategies related to: (i) information and risk management; (ii) coordination with government

agencies and humanitarian organisations; and (iii) the development of mechanisms to adapt the assistance to the particular needs of the victims. To implement these strategies, the government provides permanent technical assistance to the municipalities as part of a continual process of learning and improvement. In addition, the government promotes mechanisms that involve the participation of victims. These mechanisms, which are backed by civil society organisations, the Constitutional Court and the National Congress put in place a comprehensive and continuous accountability process.

From information to action

To respond promptly to humanitarian emergencies, the Victims' Unit continuously collects and analyses information. One aspect of this is structural analysis to identify victimisation patterns and risk scenarios.

5/ http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/CHS_Guidance-Notes_and_Indicators_FOR_CONSULTATION.pdf. [Accessed: 26 June 2015].

6/ <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/>. [Accessed: 26 June 2015].

7/ The Victims' Unit monitored 1,108 humanitarian emergencies in 2012; 1,067 in 2013; and 981 in 2014. The decrease implies a diminishing of the intensity of the armed conflict. See: <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/?q=node/358>. [Accessed: 26 June 2015]; and <http://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/?q=node/357>. [Accessed: 26 June 2015].

8/ In some cases, delays can happen due to administrative processes when the call for support is made from the local level to the national level. It can also be a challenge to reach some areas that are only accessible by river.

9/ For in-kind humanitarian assistance, 1,341 deliveries have been conducted in the past three years, comprising a total of 6,945 metric tons.

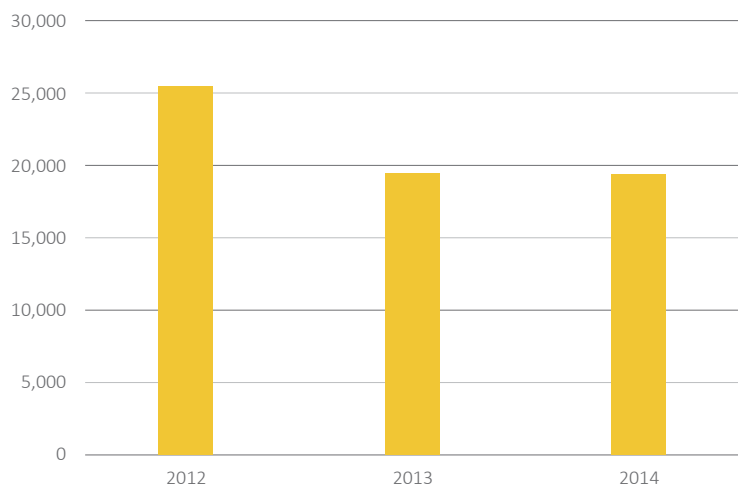
10/ The Victims' Unit advises the committees in the process of elaborating the plans. 550 municipalities have been advised in the past three years. According to the IRV, 73 of them correspond to 94% of high-risk municipalities and 91 correspond to 90% of those rated medium to high risk.

11/ Led by the Colombian Chancery in coordination with international humanitarian organisations operating in Colombia (represented by the humanitarian resident coordinator of the United Nations) and Colombian agencies in charge of coordinating assistance to victims of natural disasters, a formal committee was established to assist humanitarian emergencies.



Consultation on the building of the Panamerican Highway through the Darien Gap. The consultation included a variety of stakeholders from the affected communities. Voting on the consultation was overseen by the Comisión Ética de la Verdad.
© Christian Aid

Figure 6.4: Households attended in humanitarian emergencies (in-kind and in-cash mechanism)



Adapted from: Victims' Unit, Colombia.

according to the culture and habits of the affected population (there are currently seven groups of different foodstuffs and cleaning products); (ii) lodging kits, designed to provide temporary shelter in high-risk zones; (iii) school kits, consisting of basic school supplies so children can carry on studying even during an emergency situation; and (iv) children's sporting equipment, for recreational purposes. When dealing with an emergency, a tailored list of staple foodstuffs is used, and the type, weight and quantity of goods adapted according to the specific needs (age, gender, ethnicity, culture, geography) of the community.

2. In-cash immediate humanitarian assistance

This is implemented via agreements between the Victims' Unit and selected local authorities,¹³ and concerns the provision of cash to people recently affected by conflict. Recipients use the money to maintain minimum standards of nutrition, shelter and safe hygiene for themselves and their families, while the registration process with the Victims' Unit is ongoing. Once registered, victims are subsequently supported through social programmes.

3. Adaptation and construction of shelter infrastructure

This seeks to strengthen local capacity through complementary actions at the national level to develop projects and

Assistance

To deliver appropriate humanitarian assistance to victims according to the specifics of each situation, the government complements the actions of the local authorities via three mechanisms:

1. In-kind immediate humanitarian assistance

This refers to the urgent institutional response to humanitarian emergencies that affect very large numbers of people, such as massive displacements¹² and terrorist attacks. It consists of the supply of basic goods according to the Sphere standards. In-kind assistance can include: (i) food and cleaning products,

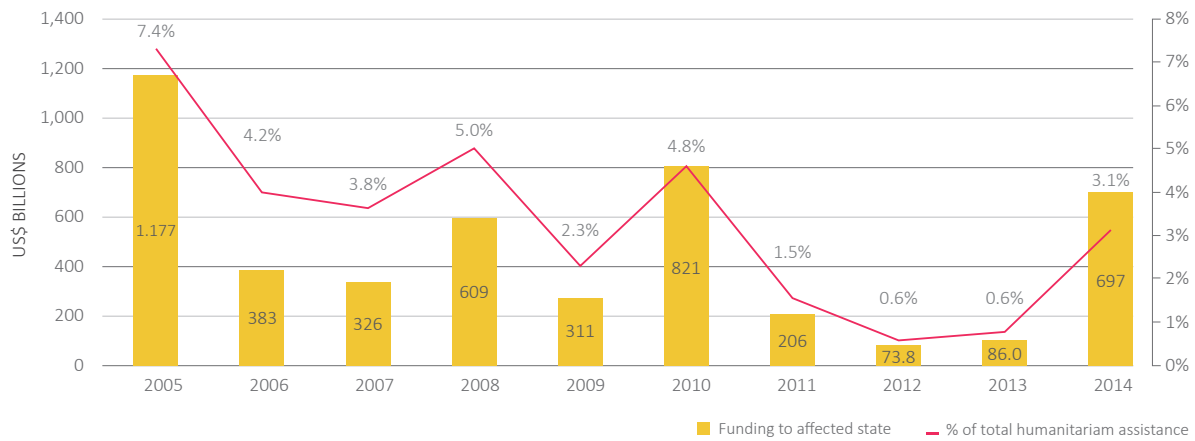


*Workers of an agricultural community project in Sucre, Colombia.
© ACT/Sean Hawkey*

12/ A massive displacement takes place when 10 or more households or 50 or more people are forced to flee their home due to armed conflict.

13/ Due to their budgetary and institutional restrictions, 154 municipalities were targeted in 2013, and 192 in 2014.

Figure 6.5: International humanitarian assistance channeled to affected-state governments, 2005-2014



While humanitarian funding via the State is limited by capacity and potential conflict with humanitarian principles in some contexts, it remains low when contrasted with the official discourse calling for more involvement of the State in humanitarian response.

Adapted from: Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015, 2015, p.76.

strategies to assist communities effectively and appropriately. It includes the supply of building materials, and furniture and construction tools to build and improve social and community infrastructure. Since 2012, nearly US\$2.5 million has been invested, benefiting 30 local projects in nine states, located in zones where a high risk of displacement has been identified, and guaranteeing temporary shelter to IDPs.

In the interests of accomplishing the strategies described above, the Victims' Unit carries out humanitarian missions. They are granted direct access to affected communities by the local authorities and international organisations operating in the area. The strategies used have resulted in more relevant and timely assistance.

Future challenges with humanitarian actors

The Colombian government has built its capacity and developed human, technical and budgetary expertise to deliver humanitarian assistance. The Victims' Unit has become an increasingly relevant actor in today's humanitarian context, complementing the

We believe that state authorities have a responsibility and role to play in humanitarian response and that under the right circumstances, they can do so more effectively than other actors.

work of local authorities, civil society and international organisations over the last three years. The agency is accountable for more than 3,000 humanitarian missions nationwide, and the allocation of US\$10 million for immediate in-kind and in-cash assistance to adapt and construct shelter.

We believe that state authorities have a responsibility and role to play in humanitarian response and that under the right circumstances, they can do so more effectively than other actors. In terms of coverage, the Colombian government has a broader, more permanent and predictable presence than any other actor, and can shift its resources geographically based on needs. All our staff are local (or at least regional) to the context where they work, and are therefore intimately aware of the context and culture in which they operate. Because their employment does not depend on project funding, they are more likely to stay in their position and support institutional memory and learning. This longer term presence, together with the direct voice citizens have through democratic elections, makes government institutions more accountable for their actions. Finally, country-wide action under a national framework means we can provide a more coherent and equitable response in any given humanitarian situation.

These achievements have reduced dependency on international actors for the delivery of assistance to victims of internal armed conflict. Coordinated and complementary action between humanitarian actors and the government has already resulted in more appropriate and effective responses. Applying the principles of the CHS to humanitarian response will be key to maintaining this progress in the future. The

challenge will be to implement new mechanisms to support more flexible programming by humanitarian organisations. Reinforcing these key aspects in Colombia will enable the humanitarian actors to break into other social realms in which the Colombian government is still incipient, such as the construction of sustainable solutions, or interventions in areas where the action of the government may threaten the well-being of the communities.

To conclude, given the key role that the Colombian government plays in humanitarian action and the importance of having victims participate in the definition of public policy around humanitarian assistance, it is essential to promote the humanitarian principles of the CHS at all levels. The process also needs to be recognised and endorsed by the victims, the sides involved in the conflict and society as a whole. In particular, it is imperative to build upon certain vital aspects of humanitarian action, such as the dissemination of humanitarian standards, access to areas of conflict, prioritisation of the humanitarian role played by government agencies, assessment of the impact of interventions, and accountability.

This longer term presence, together with the direct voice citizens have through democratic elections, makes government institutions more accountable for their actions.

07

Simon Richards

Senior decision-maker,
adviser and researcher
Social development and
humanitarian programmes

Simon Richards is a senior decision-maker, adviser and researcher with over twenty-five years experience working on social development and humanitarian programmes in diverse international environments and organisations within Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Over the past two decades his technical work has focused particularly on the areas of: conflict management, conflict sensitivity, stabilisation, and peace building. His work in programming and provision of technical and strategic advice has supported stakeholders including international and national NGOs, development contractors, multi-lateral agencies, government, and the corporate sector. Other significant areas of experience and expertise include governance, civil society strengthening, institutional development, and community development, within international development and humanitarian projects.

The author wishes to thank Sarah Bayne, Julia Messner and Jeremy Ross for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance, 3MDG or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

Development funds and accountability mainstreaming

Simon Richards suggests that a development health programme in Myanmar might tell us something about how to integrate accountability-based approaches into programming.

Be honest – how often have you criticised multi-donor trust funds and unwieldy efforts by donors as they do their best to fulfil the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness and their political masters' wishes to reduce administrative costs in distributing government funds, while simultaneously transforming societies and eradicating poverty before breakfast? We've all been guilty of criticising aid architecture (possibly in rather colourful language), no matter which layer of the aid spectrum we sit on. Well, I hate to be the harbinger of perhaps cautious, positive news, but there is an interesting experiment occurring in Myanmar at the Three Millennium Development Goal Fund (3MDG).

What's so interesting?

The blurring of lines between humanitarian, rehabilitation and development contexts demands increasingly sophisticated responses from all agencies operating across this spectrum. Humanitarian actors are increasingly working more directly with governments and their ministries and having to adapt short-term emergency practices to longer-term time frames.

What is 3MDG?

3MDG is a pooled donor fund, managed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), that supports the provision of health services contributing to Myanmar's efforts to achieve the three health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Their strategic focus and activities include prioritising essential maternal, newborn and child health services, and maintaining support for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria interventions. 3MDG supports Myanmar's Ministry of Health and builds the capacity of 3MDG partners to provide more equitable, affordable and good quality health services, responsive to the needs of the country's most vulnerable people.¹

There is much to be learned about how the sector can incentivise accountability and integrate it with other principles in the context of a multi-donor fund, and how this relates to effectiveness.

So what can humanitarians learn from more development-orientated projects such as 3MDG? In this particular experiment, a set of standards originally from the humanitarian sector (the HAP Standard) on accountability, equity, inclusivity and conflict sensitivity (AEI/CS) are being used, but the delivery and implementation approach is different to typical practice so far in the humanitarian sector.

At present, current approaches to aid effectiveness are firmly lodged in the tyranny of improved management efficiencies. In this respect, 3MDG has been guilty of doing some thinking about how to be more effective in the way they undertake and support their programming. While it includes elements of pragmatism in amalgamating a series of donor requirements to kill several birds with one stone, 3MDG's approach also adopts the application of these humanitarian principles within a longer-term time frame and mixed aid context. The model is aimed at creating more effective programmes and thereby influencing the design of donor-funding instruments more broadly. It is in effect directing more effort into *the way* partners implement programmes to inculcate cultural change, rather than focusing on outputs and results to the exclusion of a robust process. Potentially, there is much to be learned about how the sector can incentivise accountability and integrate it with other principles in the context of a multi-donor fund, and how this relates to effectiveness.

The current stage of the experiment

This trial is still at a very early stage, so the jury is out as to whether it will be as successful as hoped. Nevertheless, in the spirit of learning, it is still worth taking a bit of a 'selfie' to see how it evolves. A set of such selfies over the lifetime of the programme helps objectively assess the evolution and interpretation of the process simultaneously. This prevents us from (intentionally or otherwise) shaping intentions retrospectively in our favour. The grandest interpretation of this initiative is as a thread in the broader effort to build a transformative movement in governance and effective change at different levels: in society, i.e. how people interact with institutions (in the health sector); and within the aid sector, both with regard to multi-donor funding mechanisms and implementing partners' (IPs) cultures. This chapter explores the approach of the pooled donor mechanism of the 3MDG fund, in supporting the implementation of AEI/CS principles in their programme to improve aid effectiveness. It considers the challenges and issues observed, and lessons learned to date in the application of partner self-assessments on a set of common standards,¹ accompanied by technical assistance. The chapter also reflects on the inherent tensions within the application of different principles as well as the potential clashes between competing higher-order approaches. Stakeholder attitudes and perspectives concerning the approach on the one hand and contextual resonance on the other illustrate the issues accompanying the efforts to institutionalise application of the principles.

Figure 7.1: The eight 3MDG Standards

Standard 1

Leadership on Accountability, Equity and Inclusion

Organisations demonstrate their commitments to programme quality, which includes accountability, equity and inclusion.

Standard 2

Staff Capacity and Support

Organisations support their staff to improve programme quality.

Standard 3

Information Sharing and Transparency

Organisations publicly communicate their mandates, projects and what stakeholders can expect from them.

Standard 4

Participation

Organisations involve beneficiaries and communities in all phases of their projects.

Standard 5

Feedback and Response Mechanisms

Organisations put formal feedback and response mechanisms in place to gather and act on feedback.

Standard 6

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Organisations learn from experience to continually improve their performance.

Standard 7

Conflict Sensitivity

Organisations ensure that their activities do not make conflicts worse and where possible that they improve possibilities for peace.

Standard 8

Working with Partners and Other Stakeholders

Organisations collaborate with partners and other stakeholders to ensure coordinated and efficient interventions.

Adapted from: 3MDG (2015) *An approach to 'health for all'*

1/ The Three Millennium Goal Fund. (2015) "An approach to 'health for all'". Yangon.

Why? The rationale behind the approach

The first thing to consider is: why embark on this approach at all? The basic 3MDG theory of change is simple and compelling: *if* the capacity of institutions and systems to apply AEI/CS is increased, *then* there will be enhanced, accountable and responsive health services, which will result in increased access and a reduced communicable disease burden. In other words, through implementing AEI/CS, programming will be more effective in its contribution to addressing some of the social determinants of health.²

Multi-donor basket funds can be considered leviathans from anyone’s perspective. The practicalities of implementing specific donor needs and priorities through the application of a large number of separate strategies encompassing gender, disability and other factors are potentially overwhelming. How do you ensure the system and communities really benefit from this multitude of approaches, particularly when filtered through several layers of policy and practice of IPs and their local partners before eventually reaching the community? That’s where AEI/CS comes in.

How?

The next question that confronts 3MDG ‘new-age’ architects is: how do you ensure that the experiment delivers the intended results and that the principles and approaches are taken seriously? Are self-regulation, compliance mechanisms or supported incentives the best way to go?

Self-regulation or compliance?

There is a range of perspectives within agencies around how you ensure the principles are implemented, and an accompanying, parallel spectrum of donor expectations and approaches. At one end is self-regulation and at the other a stronger imperative involving compliance and policing. There is also a gap between rhetoric and reality among many IPs who insist they can be trusted to self-regulate.

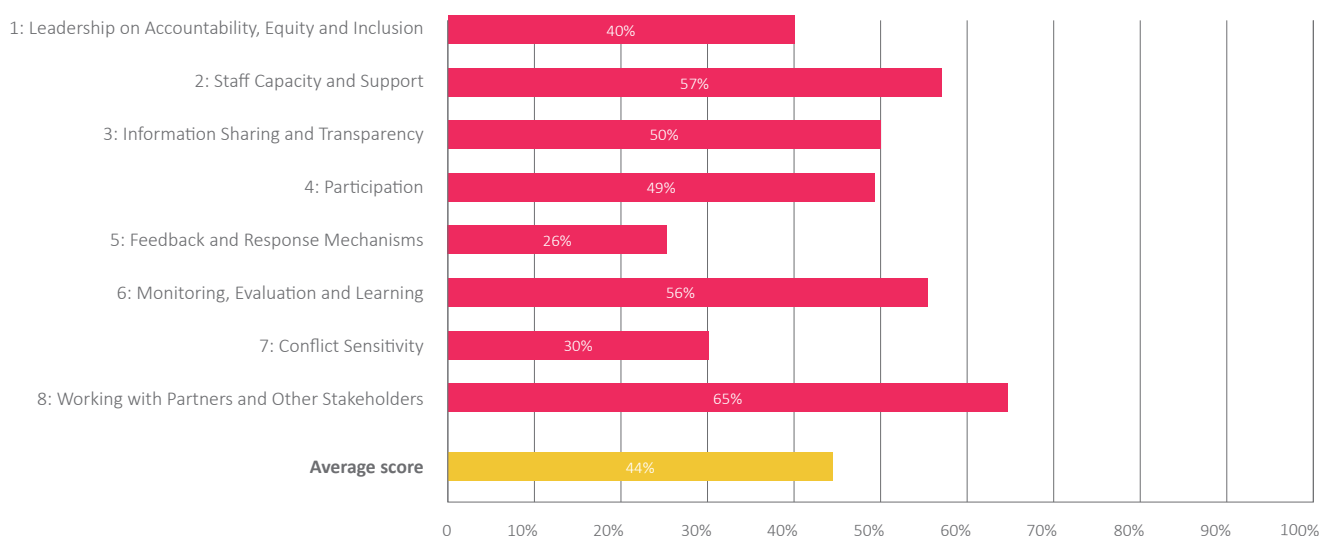
The de facto evidence from Myanmar – that self-regulation may not be as successful as hoped – comes from the initial baseline self-assessment survey on AEI/CS standards. On the plus side, participants were ruthlessly honest: they took the process seriously and intended to learn through it. Less positive, putting aside all the inevitable statistical caveats, is that scores suggest participants might need considerably more support than they say they do.

It is in effect directing more effort into the way partners implement programmes.

So if we assume self-regulation is not necessarily the most effective way to introduce principles, what is? Controlled regulation approaches such as policing involve a lot of effort and are not very constructive for relationship-building, since they imply a lack of trust, and involve the use of penalties and negative enforcement models. Perhaps the closest description of 3MDG’s approach is captured by (in the jargon) ‘Nudge Theory’. This is the political theory and behavioural science concept that suggests positive reinforcement works better than direct legislation or compliance.

For 3MDG, applying AEI/CS is a bit more than a ‘nudge’, but it is still positive reinforcement rather than force. At its most positive, and because it’s the first time such an approach is used, the process may also assist in defining and reflecting on the best way to refine the approach in order to achieve the objectives. So the initiative

Figure 7.2: Average self-assessment scores of 18 Implementing Partners on 3MDG Accountability, Equity, Inclusion and Conflict Sensitivity standards 2014



Self-assessment results allow organisations to better respond to capacity development needs and to measure progress.

Adapted from: 'The 2014 AEI&CS Assessment Synthesis Report: A Synthesis Report of 3MDG Implementing Partner's 2014 Accountability, Equity, Inclusion & Conflict Sensitivity Assessments'. Yangon

2/ The author has paraphrased the ToC slightly for the purposes of this discussion. Please refer to 3MDG formal documentation for the definitive version in: The Three Millennium Goal Fund. (2015) 'The 2014 AEI&CS Assessment Synthesis Report: A Synthesis Report of 3MDG Implementing Partner's 2014 Accountability, Equity, Inclusion & Conflict Sensitivity Assessments'. Yangon.

is somewhere in the middle of the compliance–self-regulation spectrum. Rather than penalising failure, positive incentives that allow for and fund innovation are built in. In keeping with Nudge Theory, the AEI/CS approach is a catalyst and tool supporting partners to achieve behaviour change.

In-house or external technical assistance?

Should the support from 3MDG on AEI/CS have been in the form of in-house technical assistance or through an external service provider? In terms of cost-effectiveness and management, it made more sense for 3MDG to go down the external path (bringing in HAP – now the CHS Alliance), given the lack of in-house expertise. There is also benefit in having an objective partner provide improvement support separately to avoid blurring the lines between the functions of management, accountability, and to implement the principles in a non-judgmental manner. The type of technical assistance provided has also been evolving, but at this stage includes the following elements:³

- Introducing the standards and principles to all agencies through introductory workshops.
- Training trainers (AEI/CS focal points) within organisations to take training and support forward.
- Providing resources and support to IPs on request.
- Supporting 3MDG when requested.

There are, however, several assumptions underpinning successful technical assistance provision. The provider is reliant on being *invited* to give assistance. In order for this invitation to be extended, recipient agencies must first recognise their own deficiencies and value the service the provider has to offer. Even if technical assistance is provided, the uptake of advice is also not guaranteed, and the provider has limited influence in this regard. These challenges may reduce the ultimate effectiveness of the approach. In this respect, had 3MDG taken on the challenge of providing technical assistance themselves, their influence and leverage would have been significantly stronger, for obvious reasons.

Emerging challenges and dilemmas

It goes without saying, the vision is a great one and the approach makes sense. But does it really work conceptually and what does it mean in practice? What are the challenges and compromises in applying a package of principles in mixed, complex aid environments? How do you overcome short-term project approaches in the interests of meeting institutional challenges?

A package of principles or individual strategies?

In searching for simplicity in a model, there are always tensions finding ‘one size that fits all’. In this case, the question is to what extent the AEI/CS concepts fit together in one package – especially aspects like equity or conflict sensitivity. How do IPs undertake this work? Do they have the capacity?

Fulfilling accountability, equity, inclusivity, and then conflict sensitivity on top, is a lot to deal with. Each different strand is valid and a significant approach in its own right, despite the enormous overlap between them (which is the very reason they are packaged together). But are they all equal in significance? Do they deserve equal emphasis and investment of time and energy? This is a matter of ongoing debate and depends on the perspective of the individual or organisation asking the question. From the CHS Alliance perspective, the entry point is accountability to others. Others see the equation differently and suggest that having an entry point defines the emphasis too much and risks overshadowing concepts that deserve more light. For instance, one major stakeholder suggested that inclusivity encompassing ethnicity and minority groups and indeed gender is fine, but the amalgamation of all these aspects together dilutes the level of due emphasis that a gender focus requires. Similarly, to what extent should conflict sensitivity be incorporated? A failure to be accountable, transparent and inclusive may result in possible conflict, but one can also argue that equity or lack of equality⁴ can also be a cause of conflict if unequal resource allocation drives perceptions of difference,

reinforcing conflict divides. Conflict sensitivity is also very context-specific and so cannot be treated in quite the same way as other principles in the package.

Tensions between principles

In other words, there are tensions between different principles as well as overlapping reinforcements. One classic case is currently found in the clash between conflict sensitivity and equity principles in Rakhine State in Western Myanmar. Here, the humanitarian principle of meeting needs and emphasising equitable resource distribution clashes with the need to provide *equal* resources to both sides of the conflict in order to avoid reinforcing perceptions that one side is benefiting more, or at the expense of the other. Perhaps such tensions are inevitable, but they do present challenges to the smooth implementation of a package of principles and their perceived relative importance by the different stakeholders.

There is also a further dimension relevant to the broader debate, which is the possibility of tensions between various higher level approaches and principles underpinning aid effectiveness and the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. Conflict sensitivity, which is an inherently political endeavour, is a case in point. Harmer and Ray (2009) and Bayne (2012)⁵ noted that donors are usually committed simultaneously to the Paris Declaration, the Fragile States’ (FS) Principles and the principles of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative. This entails balancing three sets of complex commitments: respecting the independence and neutrality of humanitarian action; pursuing ‘state building as the central objective’ of engagement with FS principles; and ensuring countries’ ‘ownership’ over development strategies. 3MDG works directly with the Myanmar government to strengthen the health system, but this risks creating tensions in conflict-affected areas and those not controlled by the government (hence the relevance of an equity based approach). This leads to the risk of further tensions in the application of higher-level approaches as well as within the AEI/CS package. It will be important to keep an eye on how these tensions or compromises play out in the contested areas of Myanmar.

3/ Note that there has been considerable varying emphasis and time allocated to each of them.

4/ Equity in terms of resource allocation addressing health refers to the concept that allocation is in proportion to the needs of the relevant stakeholder to bring them up to the norm. While equality in terms of resources proposes that all stakeholders receive equal amounts. As WHO points out: “Health inequities therefore involve more than inequality with respect to health determinants, access to the resources needed to improve and maintain health or health outcomes.” Implicit in these terms is a recognition that a failure to avoid or overcome inequalities infringes on fairness and human rights norms. See: <http://www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/equity/en/>. [Accessed: 22 May 2015].

5/ See: Bayne, S. (2012) ‘Strengthening Principled Humanitarian Response Capacities: European donor financing policies and procedures’. Bristol: The IDL Group; and Harmer, A. and Ray, D. P. (2009) ‘Study on the relevance and applicability of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in Humanitarian Assistance’. ODI HPG.

Gaps in the accountability 'system'

At present there is also an assumption that the full benefit of the AEI/CS principles gets passed down fully through the system. However, the expected trickle-down of positive benefits of the approach is probably diluted, as it reflects the different ways in which the approach is understood by and between actors at each level down the line: i.e. from donors and 3MDG; to 3MDG and its IPs; then to IPs and local partners; and finally local partners and communities.

It has to be acknowledged that there is presently a large gap in the current accountability health network and system for the AEI/CS initiative. Perhaps the second biggest stakeholder in health service provision and societal transformation is the government.⁶ While the communities are the most significant drivers of change, it is critical to involve the government in AEI/CS as progress is likely to be limited without their involvement. In this regard, 3MDG is proceeding with careful, deep consultations with the Ministry of Health to identify existing strengths and approaches that are already built into the health system and to discuss how to build on them to create synergies. This is an area of work and engagement that will continue to emerge over the course of the initiative.

Institutionalisation

A key aspect of the 3MDG approach may be that while AEI/CS is applied through the project, the development and application of institutional standards has implications and consequences for the IP organisation beyond the project. These standards are based on the HAP Standard but have been modified a little to better fit the Myanmar context (see figure 7.1). This has included the additional standard of conflict sensitivity that was not in the HAP Standard, but which is a welcome and necessary addition.⁷ Alongside the application of the set of standards, there are other elements within the initiative that reinforce the institutionalisation of AEI/CS. These include having a focal point for AEI/CS (a funded position) within each IP, supporting their training in methodologies and in the delivery of a training programme (i.e. a Training of Trainers, or 'ToT'), to be rolled out within their own organisations. To support a culture of continuous learning and peer support, there are also communities of practice being developed. In the case of AEI, this has its historical genesis in the work of HAP following Cyclone Nargis, but under 3MDG there are also additional conflict sensitivity communities of practice being developed.

*At one end is self-regulation
and at the other a stronger
imperative involving
compliance and policing.*

Stakeholder perspectives and insights

Interviewing participants about their perspectives, even at this very early stage of the experiment, surfaced a range of insights and potential lessons. These ranged from the 'fit' of values with the context, attitudes to the above-mentioned 'nudge' approach and the methodology of the technical assistance.

Contextual fit

How can general principles be applied consistently across such a fragmented and diverse environment as Myanmar? Across the country you find active armed conflict, 'post-conflict' situations, humanitarian and development programmes, and all flavours in between. The second and perhaps more striking aspect is the obvious range and diversity of cultures, religions and ethnicities with different values which are often expressed through different forms of community governance. So are AEI/CS principles simply neo-colonialist western values or do they have inherent resonances with the multitude of different world views? Interestingly, Myanmar respondents felt the concepts were a good fit with different value systems across the country but terminology is new and needs further adjusting to the context. In this respect, the praxis in applying AEI concepts has become rusty and has not really been applied to government leadership due to the restrictive governance environment. National partners also noted the need to build up a critical mass of practitioners and understanding across different development sectors, not only health. Broadening the approach will enable discussions, application and progress towards faster and stronger societal transformation.

Stakeholder attitudes to the AEI/CS initiative

Stakeholder attitudes have been an interesting area of discussion. At one end of the spectrum are the agencies with 'we are experts already'

syndrome: those who do not want support and believe they are already implementing AEI/CS principles more comprehensively than any technical assistance agency ever could. While this may well be true in some cases, the challenge is how to harness this expertise for peer learning, create momentum for the change of norms, and instil a sense of group responsibility for progress. In this respect, the existing AEI group has been active and it is pleasing to see the openness with which participants are willing to bring resources to the common pool. There are also positive signs of other emerging communities of practice and opportunities, as well as a willingness to share learning and expertise across organisations that will hopefully result in faster progress. In such a pressurised sector with little 'system redundancy' (and in the light of management efficiencies), sparing human resources for common benefit is not easy.

6/ The author would argue that the 'people' are the biggest stakeholder overall.

7/ Some might argue that CHS standard 3 incorporates or covers this aspect, but the author considers that this is insufficiently explicit in its articulation of conflict sensitivity.

One year after the Cyclone in Myanmar, distributing bags of rice.
© ACT/DKH/CWS



At the other end of the spectrum there are partners, particularly local organisations, who do not have a high level of expertise and have not yet had the chance to be trained, nor to apply AEI/CS principles in any depth. The awareness is there, but the depth in application and knowledge across the sector is not yet cohesive. In fact, a consistent description from both international and national partners was that their application of AEI/CS had been fragmented and inconsistently applied before the initiative began, and that they were relying extensively on their intuition and contextual understanding rather than technical knowledge. As a result of the initiative, application of AEI/CS standards has been more systematic. Agencies described cases where AEI principles may have been taken forward but the energy (and resources) died out and progress halted or was in abeyance until the system was re-energised (and re-funded). In other words progress has been sporadic.

International organisations agreed and acknowledged that the specific areas of reporting formats, budgets and being accountable to 3MDG for implementation of AEI/CS ‘focused the mind’ and definitely improved their application. As one respondent admitted: “We would have done it anyway, but perhaps not so carefully or systematically!”

Sustainability

A common concern expressed by national partners was around the ‘sustainability’ of progress in AEI/CS implementation, and the need for a critical mass of agencies applying them consistently to achieve a broader momentum. They were also similarly concerned whether there would be an ongoing investment of funding through different projects to enable the continuation, expansion and deepening of the inculcation of AEI/CS principles. For instance, some voiced concerns that if 3MDG funds were no longer available

to support this development, there might be a danger of it falling down the agenda again, and the gains achieved being lost. Other major funding sources for health programming were reportedly not so supportive of AEI/CS, suggesting the need for a common application across similar funds.

Funding incentives

A well-appreciated characteristic of the 3MDG approach has been funding responsiveness to the context through a contingency budget line. While not allocated specifically to AEI/CS, 3MDG staff noted examples where IPs had proposed activities associated with conflict sensitivity. It would be a sensible next step to dedicate a similar budget line to AEI/CS, as this would incentivise creativity and provide an in-built piloting/learning approach that could reveal new context-specific ways of ‘doing business’. Similarly, allocated funding for dedicated staff was also considered very positive.



*The students of Kyaiklat Ka Lay primary school.
© ACT/DKH/CWS*

Accessing support

While the library of resources is still an ongoing development, Myanmar partners appreciated the availability of toolkits, best practice examples and case studies facilitated through 3MDG-funded technical assistance. Comprehensive training has been a good entry point through which to engage with partners, but it remains to be seen how the CHS Alliance is able to provide ongoing tailored technical assistance across such a wide range of partners and needs. Nevertheless overall, partners felt support methods had helped create momentum and improve understanding and application of AEI/CS.

Emerging lessons

This section outlines lessons that are already emerging at this early stage, including: the perennial issues of synchronising processes in pooled funds; the usefulness of formal self-assessments in the middle ground between compliance and self-regulation; and how best to address long-term institutionalisation processes within project timeframes.

A key element of learning is assessing what difference it is making. How do you know if mainstreaming AEI/CS is actually increasing programme effectiveness? In the absence of any counterfactual, this is tricky – as is assessing when success may emerge (which could be within or outside the project timeframe). Current experience and indications would suggest this is taking longer than anticipated and this may also reduce programme effectiveness and impact. However, the institutionalisation of standards will, at least, be clearly measurable in terms of scores. The deeper question on institutionalising these standards is the extent to which they have created new norms within institutions. For conflict sensitivity, it is perhaps even harder to assess success, but 3MDG has invested significantly in methodologies to identify change related to conflict sensitivity practice or impact and it will be extremely interesting to see learning outcomes over the next couple of years.

The standards

The use of self-assessments may well be the most effective approach to address change at multiple levels, simultaneously affecting institutional policies and their application without reverting to policing. It is hoped that they will also encourage and increase healthy internal ambitions to improve organisational scores and demonstrate the relevance of these approaches in all types of context.

Some classic slips revisited

Given that it's still early days to assess progress and meaning, some participants have already made useful observations reflecting a broader perspective. For instance, 3MDG and donors both recognised an apparent (and typical) paradox. On the one hand, the 3MDG programme has been significantly overdesigned and is prescriptive (as evidenced by consistent feedback from stakeholders and, more concretely, by the description of action (DOA)). On the other hand, while the DOA does reference accountability, social inclusion and other principles, the implementation model came later. This means the AEI/CS initiative has been perceived as an 'add-on'. This perception has been exacerbated by an underestimation of the challenges facing HAP in 2014 as they got up to speed with the context, needs and expectations of all stakeholders, and how to deliver efficiently. Greater integration earlier on might have helped better synchronise AEI/CS with broader 3MDG processes and also avoided the 'catch-up syndrome'. For instance, one partner noted that the ToT on AEI/CS was well received but as a result of the training, the IPs realised that they needed and wished to undertake further AEI/CS activities in the future, which were not budgeted for. This event happened after broader 3MDG budgeting processes, reportedly making it difficult for them to fund these new activities. While 3MDG reports that there is flexibility to adjust funding lines throughout the year, some IPs understand this as only being able to fund newly proposed AEI/CS activities at the expense of other activities and by going through additional budgeting processes.

Vertical institutionalisation

A far more positive tension is that encountered as 3MDG try to support a long-term process in a short-term project. The AEI/CS initiative is project-driven in terms of timing and parameters under 3MDG. However, it is also simultaneously supporting a process based on institutionalising AEI/CS principles throughout all the stakeholders' work, not only the 3MDG project. This positive approach encourages longer-term transformative change processes in all actors. It will be interesting to see the effect of this vertical institutionalisation and understand its evolution outside the 3MDG project (more 'selfies' needed in the future). To what extent will it create norms across the sector (and the community)? Will incremental change be passed on

to other projects or will impact dissipate with staff transfers, or when projects end? Or will it simply fall foul of difficulties in applying process-orientated change in short timeframes? Equally, will the model influence donors as much as intended?

Conflict sensitivity

An interesting aspect and consequence of specific investment in conflict sensitivity has been the dramatically increased understanding by 3MDG and other stakeholders of the complexity associated with such a range of conflict environments. Myanmar encompasses the whole spectrum of conflict environments from active conflict zones to ceasefire scenarios, post-conflict contexts and areas that have remained relatively untouched. It has also raised a series of interesting questions about what it means to operate there. For instance, what does programme success look like in a ceasefire environment like Kayah State in southeastern Myanmar, (i.e. neither post-conflict nor humanitarian), compared to a context like Rakhine State?⁸ At its most basic, success may constitute simply continuing to function and work with all actors in a positive manner – that is, contributing to the enabling environment, opening space, educating and creating good will for all aid investment for the benefit of marginalised people. However, what is the role of a programme like 3MDG in peace-building, if the opportunity to contribute or do more arises? Perceived neutrality and the commonality of 'health as a bridge' across divides can provide opportunities that other approaches don't. These are tricky moral questions as well as questions of mandate, particularly if actors have the capacity for such roles.

Humanitarian and common funds – what does this mean for the future?

Pooled funds are common disbursement mechanisms in both humanitarian and development contexts. Nearly 20 have been set up in humanitarian situations since 1998.⁹ In development environments, they are particularly common in the build-up to key events, such as elections, referendums and constitutional processes, although they can also encompass sectors from peace to civil society strengthening.¹⁰

8/ According to the United Nations, 77% of the 540,700 people deemed to be affected by conflict or inter-communal violence in Myanmar are located in Rakhine state. See http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2015%20Myanmar%20Humanitarian%20Response%20Plan_0.pdf, [Accessed: 26 June 2015].

9/ Global Humanitarian Assistance. (2011) 'Pooled funding mechanisms and large-scale disasters: Case studies of Haiti and Pakistan'. UK: Development Initiatives.

10/ The 'ERFs' – CERF, ERF, – can learn a number of useful lessons from the 3MDG approach. The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a global fund that allows donors to contribute to a pool of funds that is then allocated to UN agencies by the Emergency Relief Coordinator in New York, USA. The Emergency Response Fund (ERF) is an in-country mechanism to provide rapid and flexible funding to agencies (mainly NGOs) to address unforeseen humanitarian needs.

The strategy of 3MDG is particularly relevant because it takes an institutionalising approach to the agencies rather than just the project.

Firstly, and most importantly, these principles, once adapted, are applicable and relevant for any environment, whether humanitarian or development. The majority of contexts where the bulk of aid funds are directed are chronic complex emergencies where humanitarian and development programmes may be implemented simultaneously. The introduction of AEI/CS through major funding mechanisms provides for a more consistent application of principles across contexts, rather than one set for one type of actor (e.g. development actors) and another for another type of actor (e.g. humanitarian) – or more likely the same actor (with a dual mandate) applying funds from another source in the same environment. The strategy of 3MDG is particularly relevant because it takes an institutionalising approach to the agencies rather than just the project.

Read any funding proposal and you will see a range of codes of conduct and principles listed or alluded to, but rarely do these proposals explicitly outline budget implications and specifics on how principles will be applied. So the introduction of AEI/CS into the common pooled funds methodology is an accountability mechanism itself, even if at face value it is ‘upwardly’ accountable to the donors, in order to be ‘downwardly’ accountable to the beneficiaries!

Secondly, it normalises practices and application of AEI/CS principles throughout the system, rather than only the rhetoric in one portion of the sector – at the centre. This is in both directions; accountability upwards to donors and downwards to implementers but also to people and communities. Generally, the CHS Alliance has found that staff have a greater understanding of AEI at the centre of organisations, but the level of staff understanding of these principles decreases the further from the centre you travel. This is not surprising since the people at the centre are likely to have written the proposals – i.e. career professionals in the aid sector who know the jargon perfectly. At the outer margins are likely to be staff recruited locally for the project, who have received less training, are more junior, and less familiar with the terminology. However, these are also the staff at the coalface, trying to put the principles into

practice. So ensuring that AEI/CS is instituted throughout all key stakeholder approaches ensures the normalisation and coherency of practices throughout the system.

Thirdly, the 3MDG approach provides for a platform of learning and development of praxis that can then benefit all actors. The development of communities of practice in pooled fund mechanisms inculcates two important elements: encouraging and institutionalising learning; and sharing knowledge for immediate application in the field. Too often in both humanitarian and development fields, learning may take place in an organisation but rarely reaches a broader audience, even if it is in a smart, swish report (whether it is even transferred to an agency’s other programmes is not guaranteed either). Who has time to consistently read all this learning that is going on, and actually apply it? Nevertheless, while this emerging methodology may be difficult to implement, it does increase the likelihood of reinforcing exposure to (and hopefully application of) shared learning and knowledge.

It is clear that there is enormous potential within the approach. The litmus test for 3MDG is as follows: Firstly, will data collected through monitoring mechanisms result in a strong evidence base demonstrating the basic theory of change, i.e. that AEI/CS approaches will significantly affect social determinants of health and the incidence of communicable disease (as just one measure of impact on health)? Secondly, is the way in which this approach is fostered and implemented through positive ‘nudges’ in a multi-donor funding mechanism successful? Thirdly, is the delivery method – externally provided technical assistance for all partners – the most effective?

If the answer to all these questions is yes, the 3MDG donors, who provide probably the majority of global ODA and humanitarian aid, are in a strong position to support the use of a common framework and language (the CHS?) in other pooled fund mechanisms. While some contextual adaptation is always necessary, this would avoid the continual redesign and redevelopment of different formats in different countries.

The 3MDG donors, who provide probably the majority of global ODA and humanitarian aid, are in a strong position to support the use of a common framework and language.

Conclusions

The experiment is unleashing something, but what exactly? To go beyond this promising start, an evidence base needs to be developed that tests the following hypotheses: firstly, that this approach may change attitudes and behaviours more broadly within aid agencies; secondly, that the consistent coherent application of AEI/CS principles across a whole sector with technical assistance is appropriate and can be applied to the whole spectrum of humanitarian to development contexts, and conflict environments; and thirdly, that the incentives are more likely to create behaviour change, norms and learning across pooled fund mechanisms.

Important parts of the puzzle have still to emerge: does AEI/CS actually create more effective programmes, and to what extent do its influences extend simultaneously *through* agencies into other non-3MDG programmes, *downwards* to the community and *upwards* to donors?

Based on the indications at this early stage of the experiment, it seems reasonable to make the following recommendations:

1. Donors and pooled fund mechanisms should promote consistently improved AEI/CS quality upfront by supporting standards similar to 3MDG rather than only investing in ex-post evaluations.
2. Pooled fund mechanisms should support the incentivisation of AEI/CS quality through built-in allocated programme funding and simultaneous support for organisations to develop their capacity, rather than exclusively demanding programme results.
3. Donors are encouraged to support a variety of ongoing learning methodologies to reinforce the institutionalisation and application of best practice for these principles within pooled funding mechanisms. This also means researching and developing more sophisticated tools for supporting change and measuring the effectiveness of aid provision in mixed complex aid environments.

While HAP had a field presence in Myanmar from 2014 to mid-2015 to provide capacity support on AEI&CS, from August 2015 this capacity support will be undertaken by the CHS Alliance from its Geneva office, based on requests from 3MDG partners.



Cedesa Masson digs the foundation for the new school. As a parent having his child in the school, he can work for cash for one month at the school site. Ecole Bonberger, Dano, Haiti.
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Philip Tamminga has over 25 years of experience in the humanitarian and development sector working with the UN, IFRC, and DARA among others. He recently led a two-year research and multi-stakeholder consultation process, sponsored by the SCHR, to identify the most relevant and appropriate approach to standards, third-party verification and certification for the humanitarian sector. Since then he has collaborated with HAP and the CHS Alliance to develop tools and guidance to implement, assess and verify use of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS).

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08

Bringing aid to account: the CHS and third-party verification

The Core Humanitarian Standard and third-party verification are vital accountability tools to help us deliver the aid that communities affected by crises need and want, writes Philip Tamminga.

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) is a unique opportunity for a global dialogue on improving humanitarian assistance. Despite considerable efforts over the past two decades, progress has been frustratingly slow: international funding falls miserably short of needs, and aid efforts are often too slow, uncoordinated, inappropriate and ineffective.¹ Perhaps one of the biggest gaps of all is a consistent and collective lack of accountability when it comes to ensuring the needs and priorities of people vulnerable to and affected by crises are at the centre of the way assistance is provided. In order to have a long-term impact, the WHS must lead to actions. The CHS is a vital tool to move us on from *debating* how we deliver effective aid accountably to those we aim to assist, to taking practical steps to *achieving* it.

1/ See, for example, the Development Initiatives (2015) Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014 report (available at <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GHA-Report-2014-interactive.pdf>) or ALNAP (2015) State of the Humanitarian System report (available at: <http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/effectiveness/sohs>).

This chapter argues that the CHS, along with its accompanying third party verification mechanisms, can help us make measurable progress towards improving aid effectiveness and accountability, reducing vulnerability and increasing innovation. Widespread application and verification of the CHS provides the sector with a much-needed common approach to defining how quality and accountability is measured, verified and improved. Most importantly, verification of the CHS gives us the tools necessary to provide independent, objective assurances that aid organisations are living up to their commitments to put the needs of affected populations at the centre of response efforts. Before discussing the CHS and third party verification, it is useful to put the CHS in the wider global context and address some of the critics of third party verification.

How standards and third party verification work in other sectors

The idea behind most standards is that they offer a way to systematise approaches to doing things, and through this ensure higher levels of efficiency, consistency and quality in people, processes, products or services. Typically, standards emerge out of a necessity, perceived or real, to provide order in what would otherwise be a chaotic, fragmented operating environment for organisations.

While standards have been around for some time, it was only after the establishment in 1947 of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) that standards truly became global, offering a means of achieving rationalisation, interoperability and

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interconnectedness between different sectors and countries. Since then, ISO's work has expanded exponentially, with standards organisations operating in almost every country in the world, and the application of over 20,000 registered standards covering virtually every aspect of social and economic activity.²

Obvious as it sounds, standards alone are meaningless unless they are actually being used. This is why most standards are accompanied by verification systems, ranging from self-assessment and reporting, to independent, third party verification and certification. Each of these approaches offer varying degrees of rigour in the way compliance with a standard is assessed and reported. However, third party verification is often considered the most reliable approach, as it provides an independent, objective and impartial assessment of compliance with the standard in question. To safeguard the objectivity and rigour of verification processes, most third party verification and certification schemes are accredited by a national accreditation body as meeting the standard established by the ISO for conformity audits. Globally, there are now thousands of accredited third party standards verification and certification systems.³

In recent years, new standards and verification systems attempting to link social and environmental goals have emerged, such as poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, industrial and commercial practices. Examples include the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Fairtrade and others. Like other sectors, values-based standards systems have gradually moved towards consolidating and harmonising standards, and developing a more coherent

approach to certification and labelling. Increasingly, those responsible for these values-based systems have also sought to reinforce the credibility of their standards and certification labels, and demonstrate results and impact on their stated goals. For example, ISEAL, an umbrella organisation of many social and environmental standards and certification schemes, has developed rigorous codes of good practice around developing credible standards, evidence-based verification processes, and results and impact measurement.⁴

How standards and third party verification are used in the humanitarian sector

The humanitarian sector has not been immune from the global trend towards standardisation. A mapping exercise done by the Joint Standards Initiative project (JSI), the precursor to the CHS, listed at least 70 different standards in the sector.⁵ Many of these standards emerged in response to concerns about the quality, accountability

One of the shortcomings of many of the standards initiatives in the humanitarian sector has been the lack of robust monitoring, reporting and verification systems.

and outcomes of humanitarian actions, while others were developed to respond to specific technical needs, such as setting out a common approach to livestock management in emergency situations, for example. Others, such as financial reporting and auditing requirements, are the result of donor-driven concepts of accountability.

For the most part, there has been little coherence or interoperability between these standards⁶, making it difficult for aid workers and organisations to interpret and prioritise the multiple demands on them in a way that shows they are applying good

2/ See the International Standards Organisation (ISO) (www.iso.org) for more information on international standards, including those offering guidance on how to develop and measure standards, as well as how to verify compliance with those standards.

3/ See the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) (<http://www.iaf.nu/>) for more information on the thousands of internationally accredited third party verification and certification systems around the world today.

4/ See for example ISEAL's various Codes of Good Practice on standards development, assurance, and impacts measurement. (<http://www.isealliance.org/our-work/defining-credibility/codes-of-good-practice>).

5/ See, for example, the mapping exercise conducted by the JSI and other reports. Available at <http://pool.fruitycms.com/humanitarianstandards/QA-Mapping-Exercise-Report-from-Liza-Cragg-website.pdf>

6/ An exception are Sphere's technical standards and their related companion standards. For more information see: <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/handbook-companions/>

practices or meeting multiple externally driven requirements. This lack of coherence has also made it difficult to communicate clearly to crisis-affected communities and other stakeholders what they can expect from organisations providing assistance.

One of the shortcomings of many of the standards initiatives in the humanitarian sector has been the lack of robust monitoring, reporting and verification systems to help track and assess how standards are being used, and with what results. Assessing the use of standards is often not an explicit part of evaluation processes – which tend to focus on ex-post project and programme level outputs and outcomes – and experiences with third party verification are limited.

One concern is that third party verification of compliance with standards can perversely make organisations more risk-averse, bureaucratic and less agile in meeting urgent needs.

The result is the lack of a comprehensive analysis and evidence base to establish the role standards and third party verification play in aid effectiveness, and the added value they bring to it. There are exceptions of course, most notably, HAP and People In Aid's respective standards and certification processes (now consolidated under the CHS Alliance), which have strong verification mechanisms and have evaluated their impact, but this aspect is rarely integrated directly or explicitly with the design of most standards initiatives.⁷

This explains some of the motivations behind the development of the CHS. In many ways, the CHS is the product of a natural process of evolution in the sector, with clear parallels to developments in other sectors. The CHS builds on much of the positive learning from HAP, People In Aid, the Sphere Project and other initiatives, and addresses many of the gaps which have hitherto limited the potential of these

Critics argue that in many cases the standard and its accompanying verification process can be too rigorous, acting as an impediment preventing new actors from joining, and a barrier to innovation.

standards as a tool to improve quality, effectiveness and accountability. It provides a coherent, harmonised global framework that is compatible with existing standards and quality assurance processes used by organisations. The CHS was specifically designed to be measureable and verifiable, using a standardised, objective methodology and in line with OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. These features help address the issues of interoperability of different organisations working in different crisis contexts, as well as contributing to the building of an evidence base of comparable data about how it is being used (as will be discussed later in this chapter).

Criticisms of third party verification and certification

Nevertheless, there is the perception amongst a small number of stakeholders that third party verification (and by extension, certification) of standards is not the most appropriate approach to promoting aid effectiveness. Rather than embracing the CHS and third party verification as an opportunity to bring more coherence and consistency to humanitarian actions, some see it as a threat. One concern is that third party verification of compliance with standards can perversely make organisations more risk-averse, bureaucratic and less agile in meeting urgent needs in challenging crisis situations. The argument is that organisations will tend to focus more on meeting external audit requirements, rather than meeting their mission and objectives. Others argue that standards and

third party verification can work at crossed purposes with organisational learning, and that the sector needs to be more flexible, adaptable and innovative, in order to respond effectively to specific crisis contexts. Third party verification and certification, according to these critics, is not the best tool to support this goal in part because it reinforces a more rigorous system that prioritises compliance over learning.⁸

As an example, an ALNAP study on innovation suggests that the current humanitarian system tends to emphasise conformity and compliance, whether imposed by donors, internal organisational culture or the crisis context, at the expense of risk-taking and innovation. It says learning is "inhibited by a growing culture of compliance and the rigid contractual nature of aid relationships, both of which push agencies to deliver according to pre-defined goals, methods and targets."⁹

Similar arguments have been made about other NGO standards and verification systems. Some critics suggest that a rigid set of compliance requirements is often simply a regulatory system in disguise, where certification becomes either a legal operational requirement, or is part of de facto sector-wide self-regulation to ensure quality, and limit access and participation to only those who meet the requirements.¹⁰ Critics argue that in many cases the standard and its accompanying verification process can be too rigorous, acting as an impediment preventing new actors from joining, and a barrier to innovation. There is particular concern that standards approaches can, perversely, be used to limit the work of non-profit and civil society organisations.¹¹

On the other hand, others suggest that some standards are too vague and limited in scope, and the assessment process too subjective to offer a good analysis of whether or not an organisation merits the confidence of its stakeholders. An example is the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance charity-rating system, which has been criticised as overly simplistic and inherently biased by creating conflicts of interest between the assessing body (BBB) and its clients.¹² Other examples include

7/ The SCHR Certification Review project assessed in detail several different standards, verification and certification systems, and found that HAP's and People In Aid's approaches were amongst the most rigorous. See www.schr.info/certification for more information and reports.

8/ Stakeholders consulted as part of the SCHR Certification Review project raised many of these concerns, which were carefully considered in the project's final findings and recommendations. See www.schr.info/certification for additional information and background documents on the stakeholder consultations.

9/ Ramalingam, B., Scriven, K., & Foley, C. (2009). Innovations in international humanitarian action. p.11. That said, the study acknowledges, "...Tools to improve learning and accountability have been among the most strongly supported process innovations. These include standards such as People In Aid (Human Resource processes), Sphere (minimum standards for delivery in five key sectors) and HAP-International (beneficiary accountability)" (p 33).

10/ Examples include the healthcare sector, where healthcare facilities and professionals are licensed and certified in order to practice. See for example the World Bank Toolkit for Accreditation Programmes at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/HEALTHNUTRITIONANDPOPULATION/Resources/AccreditationToolkit.pdf>

11/ See for example, Hammad & Morton (2011) on the risks of using standards as a control mechanism for NGOs: Hammad, L., & Morton, B. (2011). Greater Influence, Greater Responsibility: are INGOs' Self-Regulatory Accountability Standards Effective?

12/ See for example, recent criticism of the BBB Wise Giving Alliance at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2012/12/27/better-business-bureau-charity-ratings-donations/1636957/>



Recipients of the food distribution in Mwingi, Kenya, check their names on the list.
© ACT/Paul Jeffrey

Verification- and certification-like processes already exist for many humanitarian and development NGOs in many countries.

some environmental certification schemes – labelled ‘green washing’ by activist groups – that simply allow corporations to perpetuate business practices deemed unethical or unsustainable.¹³ Some commentators worry that a proliferation of certification labels reduces the overall impact and credibility of all schemes.¹⁴

Addressing the sceptics

The problem with many of these critiques is that they fail to acknowledge the reality that organisations face increasing pressure to demonstrate accountability and performance. Verification- and

certification-like processes already exist for many humanitarian and development NGOs in many countries, such as Australia, Cambodia, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United States, to name a few. The regulatory requirements for charities and NGOs, along with donor funding requirements, mean that external scrutiny and verification in one form or another is (forgive the pun) “standard operating procedure” for the vast majority of organisations carrying out humanitarian or development programmes.¹⁵

The inexorable trend towards more rigorous, evidence-based reporting of performance and accountability, particularly among non-profits and NGOs, is in part due to the collective failures of the sector to show it can self-regulate, learn from its mistakes, and continuously improve quality, accountability and effectiveness. As an example of these increasing demands, the US Congress recently passed legislation that any organisation receiving USAID funding must report on its results, including the degree of satisfaction among the beneficiaries of its programming.¹⁶

Similarly, the NGO ratings organisation Charity Navigator has followed suit and now requires organisations to systematically report on their results, accountability and transparency as part of their external review process.¹⁷ Another example is the increasing requirement of many funding and partnership agreements to demonstrate that gender, age and ability are considered in programme design, which has led to greater awareness of the importance of these issues – although wide-scale and consistent application of gender analysis in programmes is still lacking in the sector.¹⁸

The evidence

The other major flaw in arguments against external verification of standards is that they are simply not supported by the available evidence. Suggestions that external verification impedes learning and continuous improvement, or could draw resources away from improving quality or effectiveness, are simplistic. Indeed, ALNAP’s study on utilisation of evaluation

13/ See for example, the Greenwashing Index, at: <http://www.greenwashingindex.com/>

14/ See for example, <http://www.dralanknight.com/my-narrative/product-stewardship-and-certification-meltdown>

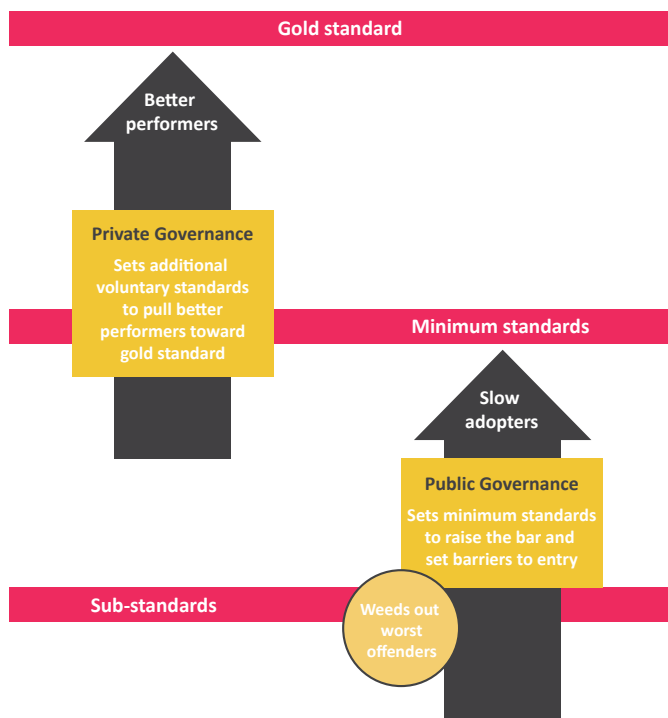
15/ This information is based on reviews and interviews of key stakeholders and users of NGO regulatory frameworks and voluntary certification systems in several countries, including Australia, Ethiopia, Pakistan, the Philippines, the UK and the USA carried out by the SCHR Certification Review project. More information is available at: www.schr.info/certification.

16/ See <https://keystoneaccountability.wordpress.com/2015/01/14/tim-to-the-rescue-legislating-accountability/>

17/ See <https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=1526#VVCFxd1YIE>

18/ Mazurana, D., Benelli, P., Gupta, H., & Walker, P. (2011). Sex & Age Matter. Improving Humanitarian Response in Emergencies.

Figure 8.1: Standards and verification as an incentive to improve sector-wide performance



Reviews of successful standards and third-party verification schemes in other sectors show that voluntary governance (self-regulation) combined with public governance (such as government regulations) tend to draw the entire sector towards better performance. In the case of the CHS, when governments, donors and coordinating bodies (such as clusters) begin to use the standard as a reference, it will help distinguish better performers from poor performers, while simultaneously stimulating slow adopters and new actors to work towards the standards, and for good performers to work towards excellence.

Adapted from: Steering Committee of the State-of-Knowledge Assessment of Standards and Certification, *Toward sustainability: The roles and limitations of certification*, Washington, DC: RESOLVE, Inc., 2012, p.84.

The other major flaw in arguments against external verification of standards is that they are simply not supported by the available evidence.

of the standards and verification system, and not necessarily the value of external verification *per se*. That said, it is also clear that there is a need for much more research around the long-term impact of standards and verification systems, making it difficult at this time to definitively state that verification of compliance with standards has a *directly attributable positive or negative impact* on issues like quality and effectiveness.

Nevertheless, three recent major studies offer some convincing evidence that third party verification and certification can have positive impacts, including contributions to organisational learning, improved quality assurance processes, and internal business practices. The first two studies focused on the added value for businesses that are certified as complying with ISO 9001 standard, one of the world's best-known quality assurance standards. A United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) study of 600 businesses in over a dozen Asian countries found that there are "clear empirical economic benefits to the effective implementation and accredited certification of quality management systems" for certified organisations.²¹ Indeed, 98% of the businesses surveyed reported that certification represented a good return on investment,²² and a clear majority claimed that "surveillance audits support continuous improvement."²³ These findings are consistent with a 2012 report from the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), which surveyed over 4000 respondents from businesses in 41 countries – the majority representing small to medium-sized business with fewer than 250 employees (a similar size to many NGOs) – on their experiences with certification processes. Four out of five reported that certification processes added value to their business, with nearly half reporting improved business practices as the main outcomes of external verification. Compliance with regulatory requirements was only a motivating factor for 13% of the businesses undertaking certification, although almost 80% reported that the process itself helped them meet external requirements.²⁴

The third study, more in line with the dynamics of the humanitarian sector, took a critical look at the impact of values-based social

There is no credible data to show that external verification of the use of standards has a net negative effect on any sector.

shows a number of different factors that make it difficult to consistently apply learning, not least the lack of a culture of learning (and one might add, accountability) and adequate systems to integrate learning into working processes.¹⁹ In this light, it is hard to claim that strong internal quality assurance processes, backed by third party verification, are to blame for the difficulties the sector has in applying learning and improving effectiveness.

Of the dozens of studies reviewed for this chapter, the majority conclude that organisations working towards meeting a standard overwhelmingly report benefits from participating in an external verification process.²⁰ Experiences with verification and certification across several sectors, including the humanitarian sector, support the thesis that a carefully designed external verification system is an important tool to promote greater, more consistent approaches to quality assurance, accountability and effectiveness. In fact, there is no credible data to show that external verification of the use of standards has a net *negative* effect on any sector.

While many researchers question some aspects of a standards and verification process, the criticisms are, more often than not, around poor design and application

19/ Sandison, P. (2006). The utilisation of evaluations. *Review of Humanitarian Action: Evaluation Utilisation*, 89–144.
 20/ A full bibliography of all the articles reviewed would be impractical, but are available on request from the author.
 21/ UNIDO. (2012). *ISO 9001 — its relevance and impact in Asian Developing Economies*.
 22/ Op cit. p.43.
 23/ Op cit. p.55.
 24/ International Accreditation Forum (2013).

Four out of five reported that certification processes added value to their business.

and environmental certification schemes.²⁵ Conducted by a respected group of academics, business sector leaders and sustainability organisations, the study had a degree of balance, scope and rigour seldom seen in other studies. In broad conclusion, the report found that “[the] evidence of the direct impacts of standards and certification systems suggests significant though not universal positive changes in near-term social and economic well-being and environmental practices.”²⁶ These included financial benefit and evidence of learning and improved management practices, amongst others.

More interesting, however, is the report’s assertion that *indirect* impacts of certification “are substantial and probably greater than the direct impacts.”²⁷ The report argues that certification is often part of a complex interaction between governments (i.e. formal regulatory schemes), businesses, civil society and consumers. The result of these interactions can lead to indirect impacts including innovation, learning, capacity-building, policy and market adaptation, synergies between public and private compliance mechanisms, and opportunities for coalition building and support for the aims behind certification.²⁸

Lessons from the humanitarian sector

However, rather than looking outside the sector for evidence of the added value of third party verification, a more compelling case can be made from the outcomes of research and extensive consultations with multiple stakeholders on their needs and expectations regarding standards and verification.²⁹ Of particular interest are the views of

organisations that have actually undertaken a third party verification and/or certification process. The results of this research strongly supports the claim that external verification against a common standard has a positive effect on participating organisations, and indirectly influences behaviour more widely in the sector.³⁰

Reviews of People In Aid and HAP’s respective verification and certification processes clearly show that each has made a contribution to improved quality, organisational effectiveness and accountability. For example, several independent evaluations of People In Aid’s certification against its people management standards have shown that the process helps participating organisations to “implement a continuous cycle of improvement” by identifying gaps and taking steps to improve their systems.³¹ Other studies have found a “consistent conviction that ... engagement with the Code [Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel] has resulted in corresponding improvements in organisational effectiveness.”³² It further noted that “the evidence base for the improvement in people management was clear... in terms of policy, procedure, management practice,” though variable when looking for “plausible links to improved programming”. Similar results were found in a 2011 impact assessment. Member organisations “reported without exception that [People In Aid] have had a beneficial impact on the organisation.”³³

Reviews of HAP’s experience with accountability standards and certification reveal very similar findings. A 2013 review exercise with HAP-certified organisations concluded that: “Agencies saw HAP certification as a useful tool and a structured approach to identify progress in embedding accountability within organisational culture, systems and processes, in staff competences and practice improvements...taking the decision to go for certification and moving through the process did positively impact on the pace and reach of organizational change, including stronger management buy-in.”³⁴

Another study analysed the progress of certified organisations in addressing issues identified through the accountability audit.³⁵

The trend showed that the number of non-compliance issues identified decreased over time, at least in the case of those criteria under the organisation’s control, suggesting that learning and change process had taken place.³⁶ The study acknowledged certification “was not the only driver of change in terms of improvements in program quality and impact, but that the process did have a positive impact on the organizational priority and pace to make these improvements.”³⁷

Other examples can be drawn from NGO certification-type processes at the national level. For example, hundreds of US-based NGOs participate in InterAction’s member self-assessment and certification process.³⁸ While not directly comparable to an external certification scheme, the process provides a structured, comprehensive framework to assess organisations against InterAction’s Private Voluntary Organization (PVO) standard. Interestingly, InterAction piloted a third party verification and certification system for members involved in child sponsorship programmes. An internal review noted that the learning element from the verification and audit process “trumped any benefit that may result from public knowledge of their third party certification.”³⁹ It also noted that accountability for compliance with a standard “cannot and must not be the end in itself. Rather, having standards and subscribing to a more rigorous compliance system must be part of a systemic commitment to transparency and to an on-going, regular institutional

The CHS also provides a much needed bridge linking issues of accountability to performance, and making sure the results of actions are relevant and appropriate for the people they are intended to assist.

25/ Steering Committee of the State-of-Knowledge Assessment of Standards and Certification, Toward sustainability: The roles and limitations of certification, Washington, DC: RESOLVE, Inc., 2012.

26/ Op cit. p.101

27/ Ibid.

28/ Op cit. p.84

29/ Together, the JSI and CHS processes and the SCHR Certification Review project interviewed more than 3000 stakeholders in the sector around the use, benefits and limitations of standards and third party verification, providing an excellent basis to determine the most appropriate standards and verification model for the sector.

30/ See, for example, the various reports produced as part of the SCHR Certification Review project, available at: www.schr.info/certification.

31/ Davidson, S., & Raynard, P. (2001). Ahead of the Field: Pilot agencies and the People In Aid code 1997-2000. p.11.

32/ Swarbrick, A. (2007). Making a difference? Evaluating the impact of the People in Aid Code. p.14.

33/ Pesh, F., Hashemi, N., & Davies, T. (2012). Assessing People In Aid’s Impact. p.4.

34/ Lewinsky, T. (2013). Linking accountability policy and practice with evidence: four thought pieces. p.2.

35/ Perry, S. (2013). Impact of HAP’s Certification Scheme: Assessing the Business Case.

36/ Op cit. p.21.

37/ Op cit. p.49.

38/ See <http://www.interaction.org/work/accountability> for more details on its Private Voluntary Organisation (PVO) Self-Certification Plus scheme.

39/ Unpublished internal review (dated October 2008) shared by InterAction with the SCHR Certification Review project. p.8

self-examination of the systems, policies and procedures needed for each agency to provide appropriate, consistent and effective service delivery.⁴⁰

Similar reviews and interviews with dozens of NGOs and governments participating in other certification schemes at the national or international level showed comparable results. While there were issues around the design, affordability and complexity of verification and certification processes, most organisations reported that, on the whole, verification and certification added value in terms of systematically improving their internal processes and more consistently considering accountability and effectiveness in their work.⁴¹

The learning element from the verification and audit process “trumped any benefit that may result from public knowledge of their third party certification.”

Third party verification of the CHS and the link to aid quality, effectiveness and accountability

Based on the available evidence, there is no reason why external verification of compliance with the CHS will *a priori* act as an impediment to the kind of organisational learning and improvements needed to increase effectiveness and accountability in humanitarian actions. In fact, the opposite is more likely: a strong verification system increases the likelihood that organisations will develop and sustain a more systematic approach to quality assurance, learning and performance issues, with corresponding positive effects on aid effectiveness.

A unique and exciting feature of the CHS is that it provides a more comprehensive and holistic way to view accountability, one that has been hitherto lacking in the sector. Accountability to affected people, as promoted by HAP over the

In different situations, contexts and organisations, many different approaches can be used to achieve the same result.

past decade, remains the centrepiece of the CHS, and rightly so. But the CHS also provides a much needed bridge linking issues of accountability to performance, and making sure the results of actions are relevant and appropriate for the people they are intended to assist. It also helps redefine donor-driven definitions of accountability around how and where money and resources are spent and, more importantly, whether or not aid efforts represent value for money in the eyes of affected communities. This logic underpins each of the Nine Commitments of the CHS, and as such, represents a step-change in how the sector thinks about the design, implementation, management and evaluation of aid programmes.⁴²

The following list outlines four key reasons how third party verification of the CHS can contribute to improved aid effectiveness and accountability by:

1. Providing a comprehensive framework to assess and verify performance and accountability

Too many commitments made in the aid sector are empty promises, with no real incentives, or mechanisms by which to demonstrate that those promises are being kept. The CHS provides a means of verifying whether or not organisations are serious about putting people at the centre of their humanitarian responses. Every CHS Commitment, with its quality criterion, accompanying key actions and organisational responsibilities, is designed in a way that promotes people-centred responses and practical actions to support them. The CHS asks organisations to demonstrate that they have made every reasonable effort to apply its criteria, justify when this has not been possible, and take actions to address any shortcomings in the future.⁴³

Third party verification is an ideal way to facilitate this. The CHS Verification Framework developed to accompany the

CHS is a systematic way to assess and verify that organisations are implementing it. This includes verification protocols with consistent methodology to assess organisations against the CHS, identifying and responding to weaknesses, and incorporating learning into its current and future practices. Part of the assessment methodology includes ensuring the views of affected people about the quality of aid and the relationship with aid providers are considered whenever possible, since they are key to reinforcing the central themes of aid quality, effectiveness and accountability.⁴⁴

While the protocols themselves are a rigorous, systematic approach to assessing an organisation, the process itself is sufficiently flexible to adapt to different contexts, organisational capacities and working methods. The emphasis is on whether the concepts behind the CHS Commitments and quality criteria are adhered to and whether the organisation fulfils its commitment to good practices and continuous improvement.

Too many commitments made in the aid sector are empty promises, with no real incentives.

More flexible criteria for verifying how the CHS Commitments are applied, rather than fixed notions of compliance or non-compliance, are themselves recognition that in different situations, contexts and organisations, many different approaches can be used to achieve the same result. Verification can therefore help promote adaptability and innovation. This makes it particularly suited to the humanitarian and development sector, where ways of working with communities affected by crises are just as important as the products or outputs of interventions.

The CHS is built around the idea of continuous improvement, recognising that humanitarian action is a complex undertaking.

40/ Op cit. p.15

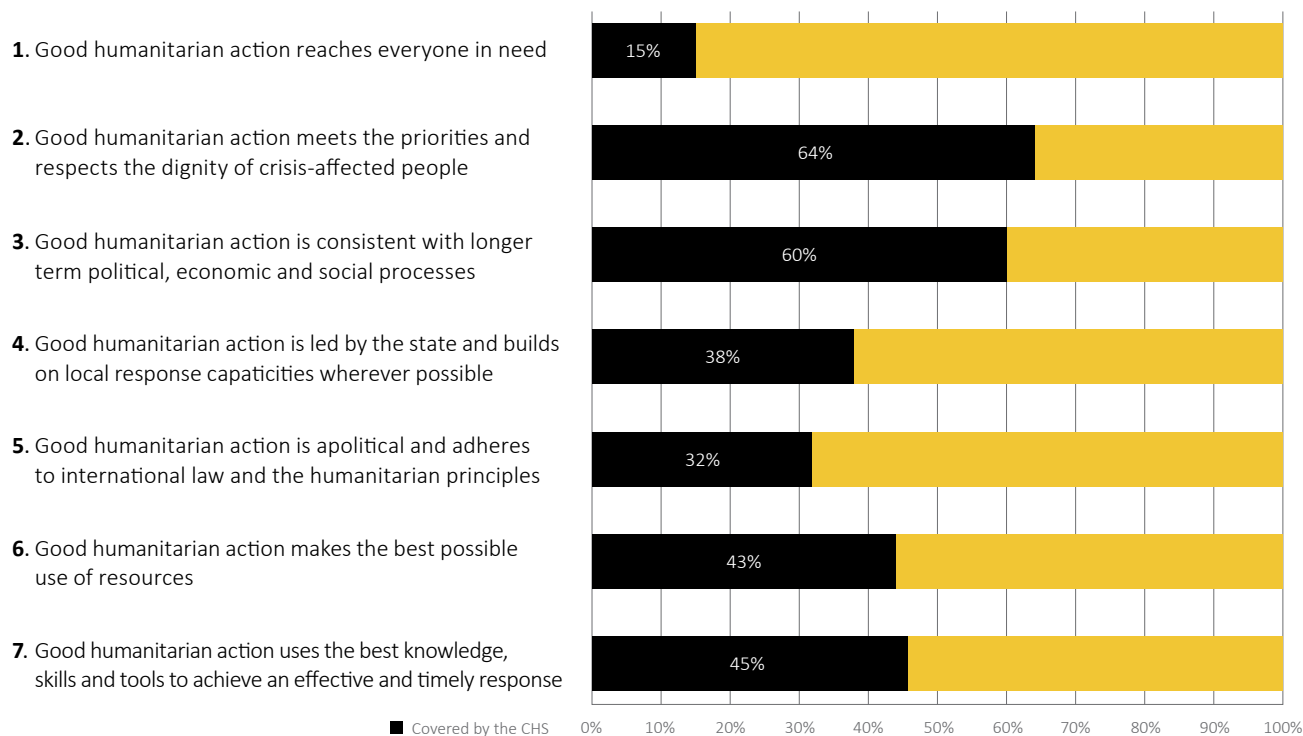
41/ See the SCHR Certification Review project findings at: www.schr.info/certification.

42/ For more information on the development and content of the standard see: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

43/ See the introductory sections of the standard itself, and accompanying Guidance Notes and Indicators for more background on how the standard should be interpreted and applied. Both documents available at: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org

44/ The CHS Verification Framework, Verification Scheme and other accompanying tools have been developed by the CHS Alliance. See <http://chsalliance.org/what-we-do/> verification for more information.

Figure 8.2: ALNAP Global Forum recommendations covered by the CHS (for each Briefing Paper):



The Core Humanitarian Standard addresses a large share of the 267 recommendations included in the 7 ALNAP Global Forum briefing papers, especially those related to “meeting the priorities and respecting the dignity of crisis-affected people”, and those related to “ensuring that humanitarian action is consistent with longer term political, economic and social processes”. Source: CHS Alliance analysis. Details available at <http://goo.gl/yik4NL>

It provides an organisation with a clear, objective diagnostic of where improvements are needed, and an action plan to address, track and benchmark progress against them over time.

2. Building a stronger foundation for continuous learning and improvement, and benchmarking good practice

These verification protocols have already been tested in several contexts with different types of organisations, with excellent results. The experience so far reinforces the conclusion that external verification is accessible, affordable, and adds value to the organisation in terms of understanding where its strengths are and where it needs to improve its effectiveness and accountability. It also shows that it is possible to assess large and small, national and international NGOs against the same requirements. In effect, this helps level the playing field in a system inherently biased against local and national actors by applying the same standard to all.⁴⁵

The CHS is built around the idea of continuous improvement, recognising that humanitarian action is a complex undertaking, and many situations make it difficult to consistently or perfectly meet any standard or good practice. Nevertheless, working in challenging contexts should not exempt any organisation, no matter what role it plays (funder, implementer, coordinating body, partner, etc.), from demonstrating with evidence that it is committed to improving the way it works. One advantage of third party verification is that it is a powerful tool for benchmarking good practices and promoting continuous learning and improvement. Most evaluation processes are one-off exercises with a limited focus on project or programme outputs and outcomes, providing only

a partial picture of an organisation’s capacity, accountability and performance. In contrast, third party verification implies a regular, ongoing and independent assessment of the organisation’s capacities and performance over time. Assessing and verifying an organisation against a comprehensive standard like the CHS allows for a more holistic overview of an organisation’s systems, processes and practices. It provides an organisation with a clear, objective diagnostic of where improvements are needed, and an action plan to address, track and benchmark progress against them over time. It also helps organisations see how improving (or failing to improve) in certain areas affects performance in others, and apply these insights to encourage wider organisational learning and improvement. The process validates internal efforts to improve and provides external assurances that there has been measurable progress in applying the CHS. This becomes an incentive to make positive, sustained changes to an organisation’s ways of working.⁴⁶

45/ See <http://chsalliance.org/what-we-do/verification> for more information on how the Verification Framework was developed and field tested.

46/ Despite the widespread use of OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, the objectives, design and methodology of many evaluations are often quite variable, and dependent on the commissioning agency, the competencies of the evaluators, and the evaluation approach selected. As such, the evaluations are often very limited in scope, and the results not easily comparable across organisations, crisis contexts or programming areas. In contrast, the CHS integrates the OECD/DAC criteria, but offers a greater level of precision on how criteria such as “effectiveness” can be assessed.

The end result is that in many mature sectors, robust quality assurance processes are the norm, not the exception.

Beyond the immediate advantages to individual organisations, third party verification over time provides a useful database of comparable information on how each of the CHS Commitments, quality criteria, key actions and organisational responsibilities are understood and applied by different organisations. While each organisation's data remains confidential (unless it wishes to share the information for the purposes of transparency), the overall trends and patterns of CHS implementation can be consolidated and shared widely, to help organisations benchmark themselves against others, and to track overall progress in the sector. It will undoubtedly help the sector as a whole in building a convincing evidence base on how well we are doing at putting people at the centre of our actions. An additional benefit is that this information will be extremely useful when revising and improving the standard over time.

3. Strengthening quality assurance and risk management processes in the sector

If the experience in other industries is anything to go by, third party verification of the CHS should help strengthen quality assurance and risk management mechanisms throughout the sector. Organisations undergoing third party verification tend to invest resources in their internal quality assurance processes to ensure more consistency in quality and performance, but also as a risk management tool to reduce the possibilities of major failures. The end result is that in many mature sectors, robust quality assurance processes are the norm, not the exception.

The humanitarian sector is no different. As noted above, the verification system for the CHS is designed to be flexible. The process does not simply look for evidence of compliance, but also considers whether an organisation's processes are in the spirit of the CHS, and aligned with its goal of delivering better quality and more effective and accountable responses.

The focus is on assessing the strength of internal quality-control mechanisms and assessing potential areas where there is a risk that the CHS Commitments may not be met. Verification allows organisations to pinpoint areas where more work may be required to ensure more consistent application of the CHS.

The experience in other sectors suggests that this can lead to organisations operating more effectively and efficiently, not just in terms of internal processes, but also in their relationships with key stakeholders and the outcomes of their work. As more and more organisations undergo external verification, the cumulative effect is likely to be better quality assurance processes for the sector in general. Since the CHS is designed to improve performance and accountability to deliver timely, appropriate and relevant interventions, widespread adoption and implementation of the standard should inevitably drive improvements in aid effectiveness throughout the sector itself.

4. Rebuilding trust and confidence in organisations

Another important benefit of third party verification is that it can help restore trust and confidence in organisations engaged in humanitarian actions. Organisations that have undergone third party verification or gained certification often report that staff feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride that comes with meeting a benchmark and having their efforts externally recognised and validated. Just as financial or management audits provide a degree of assurance that good management practices are met, verification of the CHS provides external stakeholders with objective assurances that the organisation is professional and committed to the principles and values behind the CHS. Communicating this externally to supporters and other stakeholders is a means of building trust and confidence in the organisation.

More importantly, over time, as affected communities and local authorities become more aware of the CHS, they will have a clearer idea what they can expect from aid organisations. Third party verification could in future help people determine which organisations are more likely to provide relevant, appropriate and effective responses in an ethical, respectful manner. As more organisations engage in third party verification, this will become an incentive to others to demonstrate that they too are credible, professional and working towards full and consistent application of the CHS.

This is consistent with some of the points made in the Listening Project's Time to Listen report.⁴⁷ The report argues that 'proceduralisation' makes the current system biased toward bureaucratic systems and processes, rather than genuine people-centred approaches: "People in recipient societies also want the predictability and consistency that procedures can provide. What they want does not differ from what most donors and operational agencies also want — namely, standardized processes for ensuring that outsiders and insiders, in each context, can effectively engage together to promote peace and development."⁴⁸

Conclusions and recommendations

The fundamental contribution of the CHS is that it redresses the accountability deficit in the sector, by making sure applying and measuring the standard is explicitly linked to the quality of outcomes for communities affected by crises. However, unless this is accompanied by strong verification mechanisms, there is a risk that the CHS will become yet another empty declaration of good intentions. The WHS faces the same risks: the Summit outcomes will be largely hollow promises if they are not accompanied by a comprehensive framework to measure, verify and report on how we are individually and collectively improving the quality, effectiveness and accountability of aid efforts.

As this chapter has argued, the CHS and its accompanying verification mechanisms are precisely the kind of framework needed to translate the aims of the WHS into practical action on effectiveness and accountability. Third party verification is not an impediment to the continuous learning and improvement advocated by the CHS, but instead a powerful tool to ensure that it can help organisations better equip themselves to understand where improvements are needed, and work more consistently towards meeting the

Another important benefit of third party verification is that it can help restore trust and confidence in organisations engaged in humanitarian actions.

47/ Anderson, M., Brown, D., & Jean, I. (2012). Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid. Nursing management (Harrow, London, England : 1994) (Vol. 19, p. 9). doi:10.7748/nm2012.07.19.4.9.p8699.

48/ Op cit. p.82

quality and accountability commitments contained in the CHS. By demonstrating that organisations are competent, professional and working towards an agreed standard and good practices, it can help rebuild the trust and confidence of all stakeholders – and refocus attention on fulfilling our collective commitment and responsibility to provide more effective and accountable responses for people affected by crises. A number of stakeholders have directly or indirectly referenced the CHS in their recommendations to WHS, making it a useful framework for translating the key aims of the Summit into practical actions.⁴⁹

Here are three concrete recommendations to the WHS on how the CHS can be used to move the aid effectiveness and accountability agenda forward:

1. Use the CHS as a framework to guide capacity-strengthening strategies.

Significant resources have been invested in strengthening the capacity of humanitarian actors over the past few decades. However, the lack of a common and coherent approach to designing and measuring these actions means that it is hard to show the results of those efforts. Through its Nine Commitments and Quality Criteria, the CHS describes the key characteristics of a principled, accountable and effective organisation. This makes it a useful framework to ensure that capacity-strengthening activities are orientated around ensuring organisations have the capacities to meet these aims. **The WHS outcomes could support this by specifically**

recommending all actors use the CHS to support a more coherent and common approach to capacity-strengthening strategies.

2. Use the CHS as a common reporting framework for humanitarian aid effectiveness.

A key challenge identified in the WHS consultations is the inadequate evidence available to indicate the progress we are making towards greater aid effectiveness and accountability. The diversity of approaches by individual organisations, institutional donors and others to monitor and evaluate results makes it a challenge to demonstrate our collective impact. The CHS offers an excellent foundation to track our collective progress towards meeting the WHS goals. Its design is purposely aligned to meet OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, but goes a step further by offering more tangible, concrete examples of what relevant, appropriate, connected and effective assistance means and how it can be demonstrated. Developing a common reporting framework around the CHS, and encouraging all stakeholders (including governments, donors, UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and others) to report on their contribution to the CHS would allow us to track our collective progress against the aims of improving aid effectiveness and accountability.

The WHS outcomes could support this by calling on all actors to align their reporting with the CHS as a means of showing collective impact.

3. Promote widespread third party verification of the CHS by all actors.

There is significant interest and commitment from NGOs to use third party verification against the CHS to assess their capacity, performance and accountability. But not enough actors submit to a similar degree of external scrutiny to demonstrate how they contribute to aid effectiveness. This is particularly the case of institutional and government donors and UN agencies. The CHS can be used to correct this imbalance. Encouraging all actors to support and engage with third party verification would provide evidence on how they contribute to putting communities affected by crises at the heart of their humanitarian actions. Third party verification would reinforce greater transparency, mutual accountability and more equitable relations amongst stakeholders. This in turn would contribute to restoring trust and confidence amongst all stakeholders in the sector, and in due course give affected communities a means by which to hold all organisations to account.

The WHS outcomes can support this by calling on all actors to use third party verification against the CHS as a means of showing that their commitments to aid effectiveness and accountability are reflected in their practices.

Acting on these three recommendations would show we are serious about demonstrating our capacity, accountability and performance, with robust evidence that shows people affected by crises are always at the centre of our actions.



Stief, aged 27, and Mesih, aged 33, lifted the hygiene kits up to an ATV to be distributed to 3 relocation areas in Indonesia. © CT/YEU/Prasetio Wijaksono

49/ See for example the briefing papers synthesising the recommendations from regional and global consultations for the WHS prepared by ALNAP for a global consultation. Available at: <http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/effectiveness/global-forum>

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09

How can we curb corruption in humanitarian operations?

Nicolas Séris and Roslyn Hees of Transparency International consider how to improve transparency and accountability in the humanitarian aid sector.

Corruption undermines the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian operations. Promoting integrity measures, including setting up transparency and accountability systems, not only helps to identify corruption cases, but also helps to address corruption risks and reduce the pressures, opportunities and rationalisations that drive humanitarian aid staff and other stakeholders to engage in corrupt practices.

When most people think of corruption, they imagine financial fraud, bribery and extortion, perpetrated by greedy public officials, often in collusion with venal contractors. Surely these kinds of practices would not be found in the provision of humanitarian assistance, where actions motivated by the humanitarian imperative are delivered by committed humanitarian staff? And yet the noble intentions that underpin humanitarian aid programmes do not always protect them from corruption.

Surely these kinds of practices would not be found in the provision of humanitarian assistance, where actions motivated by the humanitarian imperative are delivered by committed humanitarian staff?

Transparency International (TI) defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”.¹ In the case of humanitarian assistance, resources have been entrusted to organisations – including national and local governments, inter-governmental organisations, NGOs and local communities – specifically for alleviating the suffering of people affected by crises and restoring their dignity. The power inherent in these resources can be abused for a variety of reasons: for financial gain or political influence, to enhance personal or organisational reputation, or to meet family, social or business obligations.

Bribery and extortion distort programme decision-making processes and increase the cost of goods and services. The impact of this kind of financial corruption is most often manifested in the diminished quantity or quality of aid resources reaching the targeted beneficiaries.² However, some abuses of power, which we define as ‘non-financial corruption’, will not be reflected in financial accounts and other formal documentation. These include: the hiring of less qualified staff through nepotism and cronyism; bias or political interference in the targeting or registration of beneficiaries or distribution of relief resources that results in the exclusion of the most vulnerable; the extortion of sexual favours in return for aid; or the coercion and intimidation of staff to turn a blind eye to or participate in corruption. These abuses reduce the quality of humanitarian aid programmes and undermine the humanitarian mission. Non-financial corruption is less amenable to administrative controls and requires different strategies for its detection, remedy and prevention.

It is important to note that corruption does not only benefit individuals. TI uses the term ‘private gain’ in contrast to the concept of ‘the public good’: power can be abused to benefit a person, a family or community, ethnic, regional or religious groupings, political parties and organisations, corporations, professional or social associations, warlords or militia. In some countries, corruption has become so embedded in the power dynamics and the fabric of society that it has become the norm, considered the only way to get things done.

This article will examine the reasons why humanitarian operations are vulnerable to corruption and highlight the main risks humanitarian organisations encounter in their operations. We will also review operational policies, regulations and other measures that can mitigate identified corruption risks. Finally, we will make a number of recommendations on strategies that have the potential to reduce corruption and enhance the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian operations.

Why are humanitarian operations vulnerable to corruption risks?

At the macro level, it is estimated that the cost of corruption equals more than 5% of global GDP and that over US\$1 trillion is paid in bribes each year,³ which are wasted resources. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient research data to be able to estimate the specific impact of corruption in humanitarian aid. The evidence we have is largely anecdotal and cannot be extrapolated. The lack of quantitative data

Bribery and extortion distort programme decision-making processes and increase the cost of goods and services.

regarding the amount of humanitarian aid lost to corruption is problematic as it undermines the drive to advocate for enhanced anti-corruption measures.

Operating in challenging environments

We do know that the challenging environments within which humanitarian aid is delivered make it vulnerable to corruption risks. Most international humanitarian operations take place in fragile states, with weak rule of law, inefficient or dysfunctional public institutions including oversight organisations, and low absorptive capacity. In such contexts, principles of transparency and accountability are unknown, poorly understood or only given lip service.⁴ Injecting large amounts of aid resources into resource-poor economies where people have urgent personal survival needs sets off desperate competition for those resources, exacerbates power imbalances, and increases opportunities and temptations for corruption. For example, post-earthquake aid to Haiti was estimated by 2013 to be between US\$7.6 billion and US\$9 billion (depending on its definition), compared to Haiti’s annual GDP of US\$6.6 billion in 2010.⁵

These countries also suffer from high levels of pre-existing, endemic corruption. The top ten priority countries featured in OCHA’s 2015 Consolidated Appeal all received very low rankings in TI’s 2014 Corruption Perception Index, scoring less than 25 out of a possible 100.⁶ Where corruption is deeply embedded, government officials routinely demand bribes or ‘facilitation payments’ for performing normal public services, and suppliers expect to win contracts based on bribery or political interference, rather than on the basis of competitive price and quality.⁷

In addition, there is often a heavy reliance on political, social and economic patronage as a normal way of operating in emergency-affected countries. Traditional power structures that aid agencies may turn to for local knowledge and feedback may be dominated by particular regional, ethnic or clan networks that discriminate against women and minorities. Nepotism and cronyism may be

- 1/ Transparency International (2014) ‘Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations’. p.xi. Available at: http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/preventing_corruption_in_humanitarian_operations. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].
- 2/ Maxwell, D. et al. (2008) ‘Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance: Final Research Report’. Transparency International, Feinstein International Center and Overseas Development Institute. pp.7-8. Available at: <http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Prevent-Corrupt-in-Human-Asst-2008.pdf>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].
- 3/ OECD. (2014) ‘The rationale for fighting corruption’. Cleangovbiz. See: <http://www.cleangovbiz.org>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015]. ‘Trillion Dollar Theft in Developing Countries: Staggering Losses due to Corruption Exceed Incoming Aid, says report by Global Financial Integrity’. Available at: <http://www.ibtimes.com/trillion-dollar-debt-staggering-losses-due-to-corruption-exceed-incoming-aid>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].
- 4/ Maxwell, D. et al. (2008) op. cit. pp.8-9.
- 5/ (2014) ‘Haiti earthquake: Where did the money go?’ The Guardian. [Online]. Available at: www.theguardian.com/global-development-poverty-matters/2013/jan/14. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].
- 6/ Iraq: 16; Syria: 20; Central African Republic: 24; South Sudan: 15; Afghanistan: 12; Democratic Republic of Congo: 22; Myanmar: 21; Somalia: 8; Sudan: 11; Yemen: 19. Data not available for the West Bank-Gaza territories. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2014*. Berlin: Transparency International.
- 7/ See: Transparency International UK (2014) ‘Countering Small Bribes’ pp.5-6. Available at: <http://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/15-publications/1096-countering-small-bribes/>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015]; and Transparency International. (2014) ‘Curbing Corruption in Public Procurement’. p.6-10. Available at: http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/curbing_corruption_in_public_procurement:_a_practical_guide [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

Injecting large amounts of aid resources into resource-poor economies where people have urgent personal survival needs sets off desperate competition for those resources, exacerbates power imbalances, and increases opportunities and temptations for corruption.

seen as culturally and socially appropriate.⁸ It is difficult for external aid providers to navigate these unfamiliar waters to find the right balance between respect for local culture and their own values, standards and processes. As assessments of the Haiti 2010 earthquake response and early discussions on the Nepal 2015 earthquake response have indicated, there can also be tensions and trade-offs between the urgency of saving lives, working through corrupt or dysfunctional national and local institutions, organisational fiduciary responsibilities, and sustainable recovery and reconstruction.⁹

Many humanitarian operations take place in highly insecure environments, limiting humanitarian space and putting staff at risk. This is exacerbated by the political instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid in conflict-affected or politically strategic contexts and by the involvement of international military forces in delivering aid.¹⁰ Civilian aid workers are no longer perceived as inherently benign and neutral. Violence against humanitarian aid operations has risen over the last decade, with an increasing number of major attacks: in 2013, the number of people killed, seriously injured or kidnapped spiked at 464.¹¹

The difficult context for humanitarian programmes has further internal impacts on aid agencies. A rapid scale-up of programmes and staff in a sudden-onset emergency and the pressure to disburse funds and demonstrate quick results overstretch staff already stressed by the inevitable gap between needs and resources, and overloaded with multiple

initiatives. In long-standing chronic or repeated emergencies, particularly conflict contexts, there is often a high level of staff burnout. Both situations lead to high staff turnover,¹² with a resulting loss of local knowledge, institutional understanding or memory of the dynamics of a particular emergency, allowing mistakes and misunderstandings to be repeated.

What are the main risks of corruption in the humanitarian aid sector?

Risks related to programme support functions

Corruption risks affect finance, supply chain management and procurement, and the Human Resources (HR) support functions.

Financial corruption risks

Financial corruption risks comprise a set of threats including financial fraud and embezzlement, improper accounting, false or inflated invoices or receipts, manipulated audits, payroll and claims fraud, and bribery for local permits or access to public services. Finance-related risks are particularly high for agencies operating in a cash-only environment or for programmes involving cash transfers (conditional or unconditional) to beneficiaries where there is no possibility of delivering cash through bank agents or mobile banking. Acts of financial corruption are generally 'inside jobs' involving agency staff forging invoices, receipts or audit reports, or colluding with vendors to obtain inflated or distorted accounting documents or reports. In cash-for-work or cash-for-goods programming, lists of beneficiaries can be manipulated and payments made to 'ghost' beneficiaries.

Supply chain and procurement processes

Supply chain and procurement processes represent one of the highest risks of corruption for agencies implementing humanitarian operations. Aid resources are at risk of being diverted during transport and storage through the manipulation or 'loss' of inventory documents. Vehicles and other assets belonging to the agency

(mobile and satellite phones, for instance) can be used by staff for personal or commercial activities. Fuel supply and vehicle repairs are prone to corruption through collusion between staff and suppliers. These are examples of relatively small corrupt practices that nevertheless can have a large cumulative impact on organisational budgets.

Procurement processes can be manipulated by agency staff at the specification, pre-qualification, bid evaluation, contract, award and implementation stages to favour specific contractors. 'Phantom' suppliers can be created to minimise competition in the bidding process or to mask personal connections and conflict of interest. Suppliers may collude with each other to inflate costs or bribe staff to accept sub-standard goods or services. Suppliers could also collude with agency staff to tender for unnecessary goods or equipment or to inflate the quantities required. Construction and reconstruction programmes are particularly vulnerable to corruption because of their high value and technical complexity, and the limited capacity for agency oversight.

HR support functions

Bias in recruitment, promotion or deployment, short-circuiting controls in emergencies or hidden conflicts of interest are common risks affecting the Human Resources function. Risks are particularly high during sudden-onset emergencies requiring a rapid scale-up of local staff to respond to urgent needs. Staff responsible for recruitment, promotion or deployment can favour relatives, members of their communities or political parties. Agencies can be subject to pressures to recruit and employ staff from certain regions, ethnic groups or political affiliations. In situations of conflict in particular, staff may also be exposed to physical or psychological threats in order to participate in or close their eyes to corrupt practices.

Risks are particularly high during sudden-onset emergencies requiring a rapid scale-up of local staff to respond to urgent needs.

8/ Maxwell, D. et al. (2008) op. cit. p.9.

9/ Valbrun, M. (2012) 'After the quake, praise becomes resentment in Haiti'. Center for Public Integrity. Available at: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/01/10/7838/after-quake-praise-becomes-resentment-haiti>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015]. Neelakantan, A. (2015) 'Nepal's Political Faultlines'. International Crisis Group. Available at: <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/asia/2015/05/26/nepals-political-faultlines>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

10/ Donini, A. ed. (2012) 'The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action'. Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press.

11/ Aid Worker Security Report. 2014. Major attacks on aid workers: summary statistics 2003-2013.

12/ Loquercio, D., Hammersley, M. and Emmens, B. (2006) 'Understanding and addressing staff turnover in humanitarian agencies' p.9. Available at: <http://www.odihpn.org/hpn-resources/network-papers/understanding-and-addressing-staff-turnover-in-humanitarian-agencies>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

Training on corruption risks and remedies

Transparency International-Norway and the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have developed e-learning modules and instructor-led training (ILT) materials that will be publically and freely available to humanitarian actors to support training of staff to detect and prevent corruption in their operations.

Risks related to implementation of the programme cycle

Corruption risks also affect the different steps in the implementation of the programme cycle from the needs assessment to the final evaluation.

During **needs assessments**, the identification of target populations or project locations can be biased or inflated to favour recipients of aid based on ethnic or political affiliations, or to attract resources to be diverted. Bribes can be demanded when requesting necessary permits and licences to access public services such as water, electricity or the internet. It can also happen along the supply chain (from the clearance of goods by the customs authorities to passing through different checkpoints to access the point of delivery). The selection of **local partners** and community relief committees can also be subject to manipulation by staff or local elites due to bribery, nepotism or cronyism. **Coordination mechanisms** among the different humanitarian actors are often inefficient, particularly at the beginning of a response. This can lead to the risk of aid and services being duplicated, and so increase opportunities for corruption.

The **targeting and selection of beneficiaries** is a process that is particularly vulnerable to manipulation by including or excluding certain groups based on membership of a particular community, or political interests or affiliations. People may register several times (with or without staff collusion), claim entitlements for deceased or non-existent relatives ('ghost' beneficiaries) or sell their registration documents. Agency staff or local authorities can also request bribes or sexual favours to include people on a beneficiary list. **During distributions**, staff can modify the composition or size of entitlements, and rations

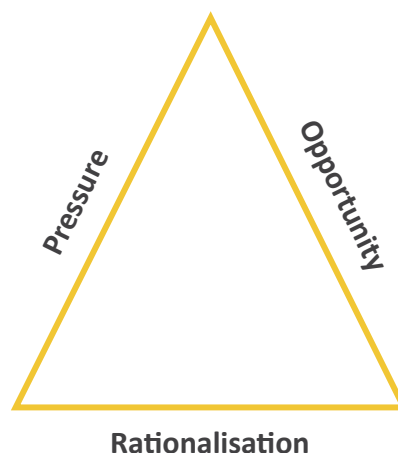
can be diverted for sale on the private market. Programme monitoring and evaluation reports can also be distorted or falsified to attract more resources or to cover up for corruption.

Aid can also be forcefully diverted by armed groups or officials during and after distribution as a form of tax for war or protection. In highly insecure environments, remote management of aid operations can increase the risk of undetected corruption and reduce accountability to beneficiaries.

Mitigating the risks of corruption in humanitarian operations

Drivers of corruption

Corruption is driven by a number of factors that can be illustrated by the 'fraud triangle' below.¹³



To combat corruption, a humanitarian organisation needs to create an internal culture of integrity.

This model assumes that a combination of factors – motive (pressure), rationalisation and opportunity – can explain why an individual decides to participate actively or passively in corrupt activities:

- **Motive** can include financial need or simple greed, social and economic pressures, or extortion and physical threats.
- 'Gatekeepers' who control access to aid resources or beneficiaries (such as customs officials, police, local authorities, militias, traditional leaders, or locally contracted staff and volunteers) may not earn a living wage and thus **rationalise** supplementing their meagre incomes through bribes. Beneficiary communities may view these resources as 'foreign money' from rich donors, and thus feel little ownership of, fiduciary responsibility for, or effective control over use of the aid. Local leaders who do not feel sufficiently consulted on beneficiary needs and appropriate agency processes may view international aid programmes as misguided and wasteful, so justifying

Greater transparency is a prerequisite for communities to hold organisations providing humanitarian assistance to account.

13/ Cressey, D. R. (1973) *Other People's Money*. Montclair, NJ: Patterson-Smith.



Desperate refugees, tired of waiting in lines, rush into a World Food Programme compound in the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya. Tens of thousands of newly arrived Somalis have swelled the population of what was already the world's largest refugee camp.

© ACT/Paul Jeffrey

Uwajibikaji Pamoja: a collective complaint and response mechanism¹⁷

Uwajibikaji Pamoja (“Accountability Together” in Kiswahili) is an automated web-based Integrated Complaint Referral Mechanism. Implemented by TI-Kenya in partnership with over 40 state agencies and international and local organisations, the initiative enables members of the public and organisations to submit and refer complaints concerning aid and service delivery to the relevant public and private authorities at county level, through a toll-free SMS line, email or walk-in service. People with no access to a mobile phone or internet may visit the nearest office of a partner organisation participating in the intervention, or speak to frontline staff in the field to lodge their complaints. The walk-in option also allows people who cannot read or write to report their cases.

local corruption.¹⁴ Other rationalisations include arguments such as “everyone does it” or “this is the only way to get things done”.

- **Opportunity** addresses the risk calculation of the potential perpetrator of corruption. If, say, administrative controls are weakened due to pressure to deliver aid rapidly, if audits and programme monitoring are insufficient and superficial, or if reports of corruption are not promptly followed up, investigated and sanctions applied, the perception that corrupt practices will probably go unpunished makes them more likely to happen again.

Tools to combat corruption

To combat corruption, a humanitarian organisation needs to create an internal culture of integrity, come to a full understanding of the environment in which it is operating, and reduce the opportunities and incentives for staff and other humanitarian stakeholders to engage in corrupt practices. The measures outlined below are set out in more detail in the TI Handbook for Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations (updated in 2014), and are based on current good practices in the humanitarian and other sectors.¹⁵ Many of them also correspond to the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), which was also published in 2014.¹⁶

Internal controls and regulations alone are not sufficient to prevent and detect corruption. They should be combined with transparency and accountability initiatives to ensure communities can participate and provide feedback at all stages of the humanitarian intervention.

To reduce the **pressure** to which humanitarian staff and other stakeholders can be exposed (a common ‘motive’), humanitarian organisations can define and implement ethical **values and behavioural standards** that help staff resist temptations to engage in corruption. In addition, **leadership signals** (including the ‘tone at the top’ and ‘walking the talk’) from organisational managers modelling ethical behaviour are critical. The organisation’s **code of conduct** can define clearly what constitutes corrupt behaviour and how it will be dealt with, spelling out the procedures for **investigation and sanctions**. Specific policies and guidelines can also be set up to prevent and report

sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), covering all staff, volunteers and partners as well as beneficiaries and communities affected by crisis. Staff should be required to declare any potential **conflict of interest** and refrain from engaging in any recruitment or procurement processes when they have a connection to an applicant or bidder. A **gifts and hospitality policy** can outline the circumstances in which it is unacceptable for staff to receive gifts from a third party. Donors and implementing agencies are also encouraged to set up safe, user-friendly **whistle-blower mechanisms** through which staff can report corruption. An **ethics office** within the organisation can provide advice to staff and others on ethics and corruption cases. **Staff induction and training** as well as **emergency preparedness** processes can include analysis of corruption risks and appropriate remedies for them.

Rationalisations of corruption can be addressed not only by clear ethical standards for staff as set out above, but also by a deeper **understanding of corruption risks** emanating from the external environment. While they may not be able to influence the external environment, humanitarian donors and agencies can assess the institutional and power dynamics in specific emergency contexts so as to better prepare themselves to identify, monitor and address the corruption risks they may face.

14/ For example, “Aid agencies are partial, unaccountable and potentially corrupt and they fail to meet refugees’ most pressing needs”-- criticisms from World Humanitarian Summit focus groups with aid recipients in the Middle East. And: IRIN. (2015) ‘What refugees really think of aid agencies’. Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/101197/what-refugees-really-think-of-aid-agencies> [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

Aid recipients interviewed in the ‘Time to Listen’ study complained that: “There are aspects of international assistance that they see as ‘corrupting influences’ that appear to condone endemic local corruption or, in some cases, even feed it and worsen it. These include what people see as extravagant spending or needless waste by international aid agencies and their staff, the delivery of too much aid (too quickly), and the absence of serious or effective accountability in aid efforts.” Anderson, M. B. et al. (2012) ‘Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of Humanitarian Aid’. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. pp.99-100.

15/ Transparency International. (2014) op.cit.

16/ <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

17/ For more on this, see: <http://www.tikenya.org/index.php/press-releases/268-uwajibikaji-pamoja-giving-voice-to-turkana-residents>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

Addressing corruption reported via a hotline¹⁸

Since 2010, TI Pakistan has been running a hotline to report fraud, wastage and abuse in a multi-billion dollar aid programme funded by USAID that channels grants through local governmental and non-governmental organisations, including to assist the victims of the 2010 floods. Particular emphasis is placed on corruption in procurement and HR. After investigations, several disciplinary actions were taken by the USAID Office of the Inspector General, including: the dismissal of ten local NGO staff for gross misconduct; the dismissal of 21 staff at a local NGO for corruption, and its debarment from future USAID grants; the dismissal of a USAID contractor due to fraud in procurement processes; and termination of the contracts of several USAID implementing partners (IPs) involved in fraudulent practices. Agricultural inputs and cash were also delivered to affected populations who had not been included in the distribution lists due to corruption.

Greater **transparency** in providing information to affected people concerning programme plans and budgets, targeting criteria and beneficiaries' rights and entitlements (CHS Commitment 4) is a prerequisite for communities to hold organisations providing humanitarian assistance to account. Transparency must be accompanied by active **communication and accountability systems** to engage and elicit feedback from beneficiaries, which can help improve the quality and effectiveness of programme services and foster increased local ownership of international aid programmes (CHS Commitment 3). Setting up context-adapted confidential **complaint mechanisms** for people to report any grievances regarding the aid provided (CHS Commitment 5), while ensuring a prompt response to complaints, can help agencies to identify corruption cases and also serve as an important deterrent. Although there have been improvements in recent years, most complaint mechanisms remain agency- and project-specific. These multiple and overlapping mechanisms are less effective than a collective approach to beneficiary feedback.

The **opportunity** for corrupt behaviours and practices can more easily be countered by

Local civil society organisations could train and guide affected communities to monitor aid. This could increase community ownership of aid programmes and reduce incentives for corrupt behaviour.

Senior managers of humanitarian organisations are key in establishing a culture of integrity within their organisations, giving leadership signals and behaving as role models for their staff.

a humanitarian organisation's **internal controls**. Governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organisations can establish, publicise and ensure compliance of all staff and related parties to institutional values, policies, regulations and procedures that can mitigate corruption risks in their operations. **Audits** that go beyond 'the paper trail' and independent field-level **monitoring and evaluation** are particularly important for detecting and deterring corruption. Guidelines related to the **separation of duties** for financial, procurement, logistics and HR decision-making functions, as well as for areas of the programme cycle posing a high corruption risk (e.g. needs assessments, targeting, etc.), are essential safeguards to preserve integrity. **Resource tracking systems**, including regular budget and asset monitoring systems, can promote a culture of transparency and make it harder for corruption to take place.

Better **coordination** of humanitarian interventions (CHS Commitment 6) can help ensure that humanitarian activities are not duplicated, so reducing opportunities to divert resources.

Conclusions and recommendations

Why, despite the good practices mentioned above, does corruption still occur in humanitarian operations? In this chapter, we have delved into a number of key challenges that impede the reduction of corruption in humanitarian operations.

The following recommendations seek to address these challenges and to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of humanitarian operations in the changing and challenging contexts where they take place.

1. Quantify the scale and impact of corruption in humanitarian operations.

There is no comprehensive quantitative data regarding the scale or proportion of corruption in the humanitarian aid sector, and further research on this issue should be undertaken. The absence of quantitative data does not allow humanitarian aid organisations to quantify the amount of resources 'lost' to corruption, which weakens the rationale and incentives to invest time and resources in integrity initiatives. The establishment of credible baselines would also allow humanitarian organisations to assess the effectiveness of anti-corruption tools and practices and to measure progress over time.

2. Establish an organisational culture of integrity.

Senior managers of humanitarian organisations are key in establishing a culture of integrity

18/ For more on this, see: <https://www.anti-fraudhotline.com>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].



Turkana ICRM convener (Paul Edonga) sensitising the community on how to report complaints through the "Uwajibikaji Pamoja" platform in Kalokol location, Turkana, December 2014.
© TI-Kenya/ Kelly Lynch

within their organisations, giving leadership signals and behaving as role models for their staff. This is likely to limit a certain culture of impunity that still prevails, the temptation to cover up fraud and other forms of corruption, and to blame or prosecute whistle-blowers (as happened recently when a senior UN employee reported alleged sexual exploitation of children by French peacekeeping troops in the Central African Republic).¹⁹ Commitments to transparency, integrity and accountability should not only be embedded into organisations' values and policies, but also built into staff inductions, training and performance appraisals, to ensure that all staff have a common understanding of the risks involved and to create incentives to report and address corruption.

3. Carry out corruption risk analyses as part of emergency preparedness.

Donors and aid implementing agencies should, as part of needs assessments and emergency preparedness, undertake agency- and context-specific mapping and analysis of their internal incentives and controls regarding corruption, as well as of the cultural norms, and the political, institutional, social, and power structures and dynamics in ongoing or potential crisis environments. These measures can better prepare them to deal with the internal and external corruption risks specific to a particular response, and design a more focused strategy to reduce them.

4. Develop a multi-pronged anti-corruption strategy.

Although critical, internal controls and regulations to reduce motive, opportunity and rationalisation (i.e. the drivers of corruption mentioned earlier) alone are not sufficient to prevent and detect corruption. They should be combined with transparency and accountability initiatives to ensure communities can participate and provide feedback at all stages of the humanitarian intervention. Such initiatives can positively impact the quality of humanitarian aid²⁰ and also expose and deter corruption by comparing official accounts with the reality on the ground.²¹ However, the reverse is also true. Several studies have shown that providing information and seeking feedback (voice) do not have the intended impacts unless they: are accompanied by audits and field monitoring and evaluation; trigger prompt provider responses, including investigations and appropriate sanctions; and lead to the incorporation of lessons learned through accountability into future programme design and processes.²² The implementation of a comprehensive anti-corruption policy and strategy should be a donor criterion for agency funding eligibility.

5. Improve communication with affected communities through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

The increased penetration of mobile phones (and therefore SMS messaging,

FM radio and internet access) is providing new opportunities to engage with communities via two-way communication channels. Community radio, in local languages, is a very efficient way to engage with communities. Innovative ICT solutions, such as sending early warning information directly to people's mobile phones through bulk SMS and the use of social media, have helped improve people's access to information in recent years. However, it is worth noting that the most vulnerable people still have no access to mobile phones and that illiteracy still prevents many from understanding information and engaging with aid providers. It is thus essential to continue holding direct consultations and informing people regarding their rights and entitlements through public forums and direct face-to-face dialogue.

6. Engage affected communities in monitoring and reporting corruption risks.

Despite the increased investment in accountability systems for humanitarian operations, little has been done by the humanitarian community to engage communities in monitoring corruption risks. Nonetheless, community mobilisation against (and monitoring of) corruption has been successfully piloted outside the humanitarian sector, including in international development

19/ IRIN. (2015) 'UN aid worker suspended for leaking report on child abuse by French troops'. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/un-aid-worker-suspended-leaking-report-child-abuse-french-troops-car>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

20/ A. Featherstone, A. (2013) 'Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?' Christian Aid, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. Available at: <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/improving-impact-do-accountability-mechanisms-deliver-results.pdf>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

21/ Joshi, A. (2013) 'Do they work? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives in Service Delivery'. p.18. See: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/Mis_SPC/60827_DPRJoshi_Preprint.pdf [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

22/ See: Gaventa, J. and McGee, R. (2010) 'Review of impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives: Synthetic report'. Available at: <http://www.transparency-initiative.org/reports/synthesis-report-impact-and-effectiveness-of-transparency-and-accountability-initiatives>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015]; and Joshi, A. (2013) op. cit.

Fox, J. (2014) 'Social Accountability: What does the evidence really say? Global Partnership for Social Accountability'. Available at: <http://www.thegpsa.org/sa/news/social-accountability-what-does-evidence-really-say>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

Are cash transfer programmes more or less prone to corruption than other aid programmes?

Although cash is more attractive to the potentially corrupt than any other form of aid because it is so immediate and easy to use, an analysis of the 2011 drought response²⁴ conducted by TI-Kenya found that cash transfers and the use of bank agents or mobile technology can reduce the risks of corruption by reducing or eliminating procurement, transport, storage and distribution from the aid cycle, thus cutting out intermediary steps and agents.

aid programmes.²³ Indicators of potential context-specific corrupt practices should be developed, ideally based on a corruption risk-mapping exercise. Local civil society organisations could train and guide affected communities to monitor aid. This could increase community ownership of aid programmes and reduce incentives for corrupt behaviour.

7. Take advantage of new technologies to increase programme effectiveness.

Cash-transfer programmes using electronic technologies should be scaled up. The use of 'smart cards' bearing beneficiaries' fingerprints, or chip cards protected by PIN numbers, combined with cash transferred to bank accounts and mobile banking systems, can limit the risk of 'ghost' beneficiaries and multiple registrations while also facilitating monitoring and controls. The use of biometric data for beneficiary registration can also reduce the risks of multiple or 'ghost' registrations. GPS systems can help in needs assessments or for tracking aid and reducing duplication of responses.

8. Adopt international collective standards for transparency and accountability.

Humanitarian organisations should be encouraged to comply with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), and publish data on their programmes according to the IATI Activity Standard.²⁵ Collective approaches around accountability to affected people and the adoption of recognised industry standards such as the CHS should be encouraged. The Commitments of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on Accountability to Affected Populations

(AAP),²⁶ currently being put into operation and piloted by a multi-stakeholder task force, is also a promising initiative. Humanitarian organisations who have operationalised standards on transparency, integrity and accountability, and who are able to demonstrate progress on and compliance with the CHS indicators should have a comparative advantage when applying for grants.

9. Increase incentives to openly discuss risks and report corruption cases transparently.

There are a number of disincentives for humanitarian organisations to openly discuss risks and report corruption incidents. Although humanitarian aid organisations and donor agencies that have informal or formal fraud and anti-corruption strategies generally declare an official goal of 'zero tolerance' of corruption, this should not result in a refusal to acknowledge that corruption can happen despite an organisation's best intentions and policies. This could have the effect of discouraging interventions in high-risk contexts. Aid providers should be encouraged to report corruption cases in a transparent manner, without the threat of grants being terminated by donors, as long as they can show they are seriously tackling the underlying problems.

Humanitarian organisations operating in the same context are likely to face similar corruption risks and similar challenges in delivering aid accountably and with integrity. Discussing corruption risks openly and strategically, both within and between organisations, is a prerequisite

Discussing corruption risks openly and strategically, both within and between organisations, is a prerequisite of a more practical approach to reducing corruption risks.

of a more practical approach to reducing corruption risks. Multi-stakeholder discussions between international and national humanitarian aid organisations, donors, national and local governments, and local civil society organisations, should be encouraged as well as forums to share challenges and discuss joint approaches to curbing corruption. Improved collaboration with affected country governments and local NGOs is particularly important for the long-term sustainability of interventions.

Curbing corruption is a long-term effort that equires collective and multi-pronged strategies. For anti-corruption interventions to be given the necessary strategic importance and adequate resources, leaders of humanitarian organisations as well as donors and affected governments have a key role to play. Additional research, case studies and documented practices that demonstrate how enhancing transparency and accountability contributes to saving lives, alleviating suffering and maintaining human dignity will also provide the indispensable incentives for humanitarian actors to intensify their efforts to curb corruption risks in their work.

23/ Beyerle, S. (2014) 'Curtailling Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice'. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc; Chêne, M. (2012) 'Impact of community monitoring on corruption'. Norway: U4. Available at: <http://www.u4.no/publications/impact-of-community-monitoring-on-corruption/>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

24/ Transparency International. (2012) 'The Food Assistance Integrity Study, Analysis of the 2011 Drought response in Kenya'.

25/ <http://www.aidtransparency.net>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

26/ <http://www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-people>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

A woman pauses to rest while trekking across eastern Kenya near the Somali border. The Somali woman left her home a month earlier, fleeing drought and conflict, to head for the Dadaab refugee complex.
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A worker from the ACT Alliance digs a trench marking the boundaries of plots where newly arrived refugees will make their home in the Dadaab refugee camp in northwestern Kenya.
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Humanitarian Action Coordinator

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10

Collective accountability: are we really in this together?

The accountability of clusters, HCTs and other groups of organisations coordinating their efforts is due a fundamental rethink, says Matthew Serventy.

As humanitarians, can we ever be collectively accountable for our response? Since the introduction of Humanitarian Reform, and its reinforcement through the Transformative Agenda, collaborative humanitarian decision-making has been strengthened through the cluster approach and the development of Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs). Over the same period, we have seen the growth of organisations focused on accountability to affected populations (AAP), such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), and organisational adoption of accountability processes and principles such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and the Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP). However, humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies are primarily focused on building organisational cultures of accountability; concentrating on internal arrangements to ensure that the voice and participation of the communities they assist are incorporated in their programmes. Less attention is paid to collective accountability – the notion that common decision-making bodies should be more accountable as collectives to people affected by crises.

Tensions are created for organisations and decision-making collectives by the extensive set of accountabilities they have in different 'directions': upwards to head office and donors, and sideways to cluster partners, organisations or government departments. This restricts space for accountability downwards to affected communities. However, collectives should, as a 'rule of thumb', expend as much time and effort on collective downward accountability as they do on upwards and sideways accountability. Accountability generally encounters a major obstacle in the many people and organisations that are unwilling to change the way they work. For example, two thirds of the feedback gathered during the Typhoon Haiyan response in the Philippines was critical of targeting criteria. Yet, a key reason why targeting continued was simply because "it's the way we do it".¹ Thinking about accountability as a collective may provide actors with an opportunity to help each other to adjust the way they operate. This chapter explores collective accountability in three ways: **taking account**, which refers to participation and engagement; **giving account**, which relates to transparency and communication with communities (CWC); and **responsibility**, i.e. taking ownership of our collective decisions and accepting credit – and blame – where it is due. Giving and taking account by collectives should be relatively straightforward: we can adapt existing principles of organisational AAP to develop collective AAP processes. Collective responsibility, on the other hand, is more difficult to address, and a concept far more likely to be contested. But both of these aspects can be enhanced in our response through actions and activities specific to key humanitarian collectives.

To improve collective accountability, it makes sense to take small steps and develop them at the local collective level, and within the cluster and the HCT. Global-level collectives, notably the Global Clusters, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) and donor groups such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative, all have important roles to play in supporting and informing collective accountability. Yet, while global support is required, the most frequent refrain of the time-pressed humanitarian is "but how do I do it?" This chapter examines how HCTs and clusters could approach it, and suggests some simple steps to strengthen the application of collective accountability.

Collective accountability involves firstly accepting and then taking ownership of the fact that in the humanitarian sphere, all actors are inextricably interlinked. If we are to work collectively towards a common cause, we need to collectively account for our common vision and method, and bear collective responsibility for our actions.

What is collective accountability?

Collective accountability is not simply a sum of the individual accountability efforts of partner organisations that make up the collective. Even if every member of a cluster or HCT has AAP processes in place, the collective decision-making can still be unaccountable. For instance, it is common that in inter-cluster, HCT or more general coordination forums,

Accountability generally encounters a major obstacle in the many people and organisations that are unwilling to change the way they work.

the voices of people affected by crises are entirely absent. Meanwhile, it is conceivable (though unlikely) that a cluster or an HCT could be collectively accountable, ensuring that affected people's voices were heard and acted upon in overall strategies and planning, without individual members having their own internal accountability programmes. Collective accountability can be described by a set of specific accountabilities attributed to a particular collective – e.g. that a cluster must describe how it sets common targeting criteria, or that an HCT should listen to a common feedback mechanism for guidance. It should be grounded in an understanding that the collectives that define the overall humanitarian response may set a direction that differs from the specific responsibilities of the individuals or organisations involved. If one's mandate is food, but there is an overriding protection crisis, protection should be allowed to guide the collective response – and vice-versa. In her case study of AAP in the Typhoon Haiyan response, Margie Buchanan-Smith describes this as asking: "Are we doing the right things?" instead of

the standard question of: "Are we doing things right?"² Collective accountability can also include the promotion and coordination of 'common AAP' efforts and organisational AAP understandings, in addition to developing a sense of collectives being accountable in their own right.

The structures that define humanitarian 'business' represent fundamental obstacles to collective AAP. A strong sectoral focus is reflected in the technical mandates of many organisations (e.g. WFP, MSF, etc.), and in particular by the silos of the cluster approach (e.g. Food, Health, Education, Protection, etc.). While these silos allow for a consolidation of expertise and improved coverage, the structures themselves may constrain how humanitarian actors operate: the Somali National NGO MURDO described clusters as having "the authority of format"³ – that cluster structures and their associated work processes seem fully formed and incapable of adaptation, and that national NGOs are simply forced to adopt them. Those inside an organisation are also constrained by the expectation that employees, particularly senior staff, will push their area of specialism, chase funding and provide agency visibility. Nigel Fisher, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Haiti described how three weeks after the 2010 earthquake, the people's priorities were jobs, education and shelter, ahead of food.⁴ Imagine if a WFP head of office argued to donors that they should reduce WFP funding in favour of other sectors. (S)he would be quickly removed from his/her post.

There are regular complaints made against the arrogance and paternalism of international humanitarian approaches, but this arrogance, in part at least, is systemic, or habitual rather than personal. In Myanmar, IDPs didn't want lights in their toilets (provided based on an assumed risk of gender-based violence): they wanted them in their homes, for education and for employment, in order to be able to leave the camps.⁵ This didn't happen, because it is 'standard protective practice' to provide lights in toilets, irrespective of the wishes of the people affected. Similarly, the cluster

It is common that in inter-cluster, HCT or more general coordination forums, the voices of people affected by crises are entirely absent.

1/ Buchanan-Smith, M. See: <http://www.odi.org/events/4211-aap-communication-haiyan-philippines-ebola#audiovideo>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

2/ Buchanan-Smith, M. See: <http://www.odi.org/events/4211-aap-communication-haiyan-philippines-ebola#audiovideo>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

3/ Author's research interview. See: <http://www.odi.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-56/national-ngos-and-the-cluster-approach-the-authority-of-format>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

4/ Author's conversation with DFID representative.

5/ Author's conversation with DFID representative.

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'silo approach' creates a danger of gaps between the sectors. In Kyrgyzstan in 2010 electricity supply was a key issue. Families required power for home-based incomes, education and food preparation, yet despite a single issue affecting multiple sectors, only INGOs with a multi-sector approach could support this expressed need, and no cluster oversaw it as an activity.

Humanitarians are realising that what works for coordination in one context may not in another. To be collectively accountable, it is essential to examine the collective structures employed – in particular the role of government in collective decision-making. Ben Ramalingam and John Mitchell have suggested that humanitarian action can be grouped under four 'C' classifications: comprehensive, collaborative, constrained and consultative.⁶ The 'comprehensive' model is unfortunately the most common – where international organisations understand themselves as central to humanitarian decision-making, to the exclusion of national actors, including affected people. Tackling diverse emergencies using a single model of response is a recipe for *further* disaster, and clusters and HCTs must be ready to adapt their structures, and be more nuanced and creative in their understanding of, and their response to, emergencies. A strong connection to affected communities is key to this understanding.

Unfortunately, it is easy to find examples of failures of collective 'responsibility' at a global level: in March 2014, MSF investigated a "mysterious disease" in Guinea, and within two weeks had declared an "unprecedented" Ebola outbreak.⁷ Despite the international esteem in which MSF is held, its appeals to the global humanitarian community were ignored or discounted, and concerted global collective action was not undertaken until August, costing thousands of lives. In the Horn of Africa Famine in 2012, early warning systems clearly indicated an impending disaster, but yet again regional

collectives failed to act. The IASC Real Time Evaluation stated that "the HCT's misreading of the crisis led to insufficient urgency, an inappropriate strategy and a late response."⁸ There is also the 'CNN effect' and/or geopolitical interests which focus attention on one emergency, while another is largely ignored.

The danger in collective responsibility is that when we are *all responsible*, we can individually avoid taking the blame or being part of the solution. Recommendations from Operational Peer Reviews (OPR) and Real Time or other evaluative processes are only useful to the extent that they are followed up. Experience from many countries shows that humanitarian organisations, HCTs, inter-cluster bodies and clusters will readily respond to suggestions they already agree with, but ignore or avoid suggestions that will be difficult, costly or outside their technical mandate. In terms of AAP at the country level, this could be tackled by developing a third-party platform – that is, a separate entity with independence to oversee accountability. An inter-agency AAP advisor heading up such a platform can be highly effective in ensuring collective accountability, but only where the HCT and inter-cluster forums commit to supporting them and implementing their recommendations.

While there have been failures, there have also been improvements in collective accountability. It is becoming more commonplace for HCTs to 'give account' by producing key documents in national languages, such as the Humanitarian Response Plan in Ukraine in 2015, or the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) in the Philippines in 2014. At a national level, while responding to conflict in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the shelter cluster 'took account' by developing a common strategy based on protection considerations expressed by the community, and successfully resisted strenuous efforts by individual partners to provide a variety of shelter responses.

Caution must be used if collectives attempt to define their accountability in isolation. During the CHS review in Ethiopia in 2014, the team discovered that notions of mutual accountability were understood by national NGOs to mean that "communities (and local authorities) are partners in the relationship and have shared responsibilities."⁹ This was in stark contrast to the Northern understanding that organisations are solely accountable to beneficiaries. Allowing for a community-driven, local understanding

of collective accountability might challenge our preconceptions and require a different approach to accountability. Given that affected communities are actors in their own right, we must also question a system that allows our decision-making collectives to fail to provide what people say they need most.

In certain crises, there has been an expansion of the numbers of new actors joining clusters without being bound by, or even aware of, key humanitarian principles and standards. This provided the impetus for the development of the 'Minimum commitments for participation in clusters',¹⁰ which include readiness to participate in actions that specifically improve accountability to affected people, and a commitment to consistently engage in the cluster's collective work. The Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) and its resultant CHS were reactions to "growing evidence from humanitarian crises over the past decade that voluntary approaches to self-regulation are not enough to ensure compliance."¹¹ These global-level efforts to provide a common understanding of accountability have not always trickled down to field-level collectives. While collective AAP is emerging in some forums, it's still far from a reality, and top-down leadership doesn't always provide the answer. So what is currently commonplace in collective accountability, what has been tried, and where could we potentially go with it?

Collective accountability and the Transformative Agenda

The Transformative Agenda (TA) has moved humanitarian vision and operation from individual project planning to developing common strategic and operational approaches. The variety of common approaches within

The danger in collective responsibility is that when we are all responsible, we can individually avoid taking the blame or being part of the solution.

6/ Ramalingam, B. and Mitchell, J. (2014) 'Responding to changing needs? Challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action'. Montreux XIII Meeting Paper. Available at: <http://www.alnap.org/node/19332.aspx>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].
7/ <http://www.msf.org/article/ebola-pushed-limit-and-beyond>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].
8/ <http://reliefweb.int/report/world/iasc-real-time-evaluation-humanitarian-response-horn-africa-drought-crisis-somalia>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].
9/ Tamminga, P. and Evans, R. (2014). Available at: <http://schr.info/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].
10/ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/about-clusters/who-does-what>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].
11/ HAP. (2013) 'FAQs on the Joint Standards Initiative'. See: <http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/the-core-humanitarian-standard.aspx>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

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the TA has actually strengthened collective accountability. The inter-agency assessments – either Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) or Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) – provide a collective understanding of the emergency, which creates the basis for the decision-making and agenda-setting of the Strategic Response Plan (SRP). Despite improvements in collective assessments there remains a tendency to ‘silo’ the response from day one, by treating all questions as sector-specific. Why not begin instead with open-ended questions to respondents, such as: “What are your top priorities?” In the absence of this broader view, actors will tend to focus only on issues in their own sector, at the exclusion of other priorities and considerations. Very often their priorities may not be the same as those of the communities they are serving. For example, the MIRA in Typhoon Haiyan highlighted mass communication as a key need without it being reflected in the SRP. This is a fundamental collective responsibility – HCTs and clusters must respond to issues raised by inter-sector assessments, even when they raise issues no single cluster or agency wants to address. The gap between listening and taking collective action persists in many responses, though there are ongoing efforts to reduce this, such as the ‘perception surveys’¹⁵ of the Ebola response, aimed at calibrating other monitoring efforts.

The TA has also seen development of common monitoring tools, such as the Periodic Monitoring Report (PMR).¹⁶ Good monitoring and indicators are essential elements of an accountable response, and the PMR is an attempt to bring monitoring more closely in line with objectives laid out in the SRP. The development by OCHA of the Indicator Registry,¹⁷ a library of sample indicators developed by the clusters (including AAP indicators), has provided potential ways to establish links from assessment through to monitoring. But do we need to monitor

The Typhoon Haiyan response – what collective accountability looked like in the Philippines

The Haiyan response in the Philippines was the first time an inter-agency AAP expert was deployed to assist the HCT and the clusters in improving AAP in the emergency. The IAHE found that the collective efforts on AAP and CWC were a ‘significant feature’ of the response. A collective feedback mechanism for inter-agency use was established, known as Pamata Kita (“Let’s Talk Together”). The IAHE highlighted the “value of inter-cluster coordination beyond the conventional cluster system ... [and] the success of AAP/CWC mechanisms at gathering community-wide (rather than sector- or agency-specific) feedback.”¹² Local government units have not only taken on the findings from the feedback mechanism, but are adopting the model for their own use in future. The IAHE found evidence that: “Feedback did influence the activities of agencies and clusters, although ... the affected populations themselves could not see the whole feedback loop at work.” Collective feedback mechanisms also provided “significant initiatives to highlight the perspectives of particular communities.”¹³ When Plan International reported on the successes of Pamata Kita, they observed that: “It has proved harder to retro-fit common approaches across agencies during the response than it would have been to develop them in advance ... it appears likely that advance preparation will be crucial in taking the approach further.”¹⁴ This is a key area where global clusters can play a role, to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for establishing and responding to common feedback processes.

An AAP Action Plan was developed for the Haiyan response by the AAP/PSEA Task Team at the request of the EDG. While endorsed by the EDG and the IASC Principals, the plan suffered from not having been developed at field level. Clusters did not all subscribe to the idea that there should be a collective AAP plan, and without a field-based development process, there was no buy-in from the HCT or cluster members to carry out the recommended actions. Locally, the AAP Coordinator developed a code of conduct on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), later endorsed by the HCT, as well as sowing the seeds of Pamata Kita. Community organisations and local businesses felt uncomfortable attending cluster meetings due to meeting locations and ‘formal’ processes. OCHA subsequently rearranged its meeting rooms and processes and this simple restructuring, as well as improved information about clusters, allowed improved participation of these first responders.

12/ IASC. (2014) ‘Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response’. p.74. Available at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/programme-cycle/space/document/iasc-inter-agency-humanitarian-evaluation-typhoon-haiyan-response>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

13/ Ibid. p.39.

14/ <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-63/pamata-kita-lets-listen-together>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

15/ <http://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

16/ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/programme-cycle/space/search?search=periodic+monitoring>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

17/ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/ir>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].



Participants in a cash-for-work programme clean up debris in Tacloban, a city in the Philippines province of Leyte that was hit hard by Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013.
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differently as a collective? Could we ask the community what their indicators of effective response would be? The *Good Enough Guide*¹⁸ describes using school attendance rates as a measure of water availability (going to school or collecting water being opposing choices for young family members in a particular context). Measuring context-specific indicators is the best way to identify and respond to context-specific problems.

Finally, the TA has encouraged the collective evaluation processes of the Operational Peer Review (OPR) and IAHE. These processes explicitly include AAP and collective responsibilities in their guidelines, and include guidance on improving AAP efforts. The EDG can ensure discussions with communities are part of any OPR, and can request that clusters and HCTs develop explicit collective planning on AAP. The EDGs have the ability

Despite improvements in collective assessments there remains a tendency to 'silo' the response from day one, by treating all questions as sector-specific.

to collectively and individually reward accountable and collaborative behaviour, and hold representatives accountable for their share of responsibility for collective results. There is little or no evidence to date, beyond making recommendations, of the EDGs sanctioning an underperforming HCT or enforcing AAP efforts. This is another example of where a third-party body can assist, engaging with the community on behalf of the collective and following up on recommendations.

The in-country 'leadership team'

A key concern for establishing collective accountability is the make-up and nature of HCTs. Humanitarian organisations lack formal obligations to the Humanitarian Coordinator, and many NGOs are not represented on HCTs at all. Without effective representation we cannot expect a great deal of shared responsibility to be taken by those on the 'outside' of the HCT. OCHA has argued that the 'Empowered Leadership' envisioned through the TA requires "not only the right people in the right place, but also an environment that enables leaders."¹⁹ What's needed is a leadership team which has a stronger sense of their collective accountability to people affected by crises rather than a focus on their

HCTs and clusters must respond to issues raised by inter-sector assessments, even when they raise issues no single cluster or agency wants to address.

internal accountability to HQ or the Executive Board. This would require institutional support for HCT members to take decisions that support the collective, over and above priorities of individual organisations.

Donors can further encourage collective accountability by removing funding processes that encourage competition between HCT members (the competition for funds in the Haiyan Response initial CERF allocation, for example, was described by one HCT member as a "bloodbath"). Short-term inflexible funding models do not allow for collective accountability. The most logical and cost-effective planning in many settings would be delivered by multi-year planning and investment cycles. These would allow for changes in projects based on feedback from communities affected by crises. HCTs are also generally dominated

18/ A result of the ECB Project. See: <http://www.ecbproject.org/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

19/ Messina, C. (2013) 'Humanitarian leadership: more than just about leaders'. Available at: <http://www.odihpn.org/the-humanitarian-space/news/announcements/blog-articles/humanitarian-leadership-more-than-just-about-leaders>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

Donors can further encourage collective accountability by removing funding processes that encourage competition between HCT.

by UN agencies, whether 'operational' or not, making decisions on priorities, partners and funding, without any external evaluation. HCTs also suffer from a lack of consistent representation from national governments, and HCT planning is not always in line with that of government, even where nations have significant capacity to respond.

These factors make the HCT potentially one of the hardest nuts to crack in terms of collective accountability: how can an unrepresentative, competitive, unequally empowered group with poorly defined decision-making processes be held collectively accountable for its decisions and actions? Nonetheless, there are opportunities and good practices that can set the stage for more collective ownership of accountability at this level.

Taking account – listening to the population

1. Participation in the HCT could take the form of national NGOs, or consortia where they exist, being invited to attend HCT meetings.
2. Key HCT decisions can be 'field-tested' through discussions with communities and their leaders.
3. Reviews and advice from common service feedback mechanisms (such as illustrated by the example of Pamata Kita) can become standard HCT agenda items to ensure a response remains relevant to affected people. Donors can give preference to inter-agency or inter-sector projects developed in consultation with communities, and the HCT can publicly state that this is a prioritisation criteria.

Giving account – explaining what we are doing

1. The HCT should provide details of the SRP to affected communities to outline what shape the response will take (including any limitations it will have) to help manage their expectations. Very few SRPs are available in the language of the country, unless it happens to be

French, Spanish or English. Very rarely are SRPs shared widely with community leaders or local government, often because they may not agree with the analysis or priorities. As a minimum, HCTs should translate executive summaries, or produce newsletters or similar to keep affected communities updated.

2. Transparent documentation of how decisions are taken, including minutes and proceedings of meetings, should be generally available.
3. The HCT should ensure the establishment of an inter-agency feedback and complaints mechanism,²⁰ and integrate AAP into assessments, strategies, monitoring and evaluations, and report back to the EDG on AAP actions taken.

Responsibility

HCTs are expected to function despite having to deal with the variety of agendas (i.e. political, 'development versus humanitarian', human rights and security), mandates and interpersonal limits under which its members operate. OCHA's Humanitarian Leadership Strengthening Unit (HLSU) argues that the HCT "should be seen, should be treated, and should behave as a team of leaders who share responsibility for achieving collective results."²¹ Despite this advice, HCTs still rarely consider themselves so much answerable to the community, or the national government, as to their respective bosses. HCTs will not be able to be collectively accountable without cultural change in member organisations that frees up HCTs to make decisions based on evidence and facts, rather than opinions and agency mandates. HCTs must also be ready to adapt the SRP when flawed analysis is found. The membership of HCTs should be examined – for instance, why should small UN agencies be represented, while far larger operational NGOs are not invited? Membership should be based on organisational capacity and size, with the ten largest organisations getting a seat at the table. The HCT structure and processes must be likewise re-examined, with decision-making processes clearly defined, and priorities based on evidence gathered through multiple means. The unfortunate reality is that feedback from affected communities does not necessarily equate to the HCT guiding substantial changes in programming, but rather to organisations providing redress to individuals, or making small adjustments to processes.

Many will need to reframe their mandate to include collective responsibility for emergency responses, and re-educate their senior leaders to embrace collective

responsibility. Some processes already exist: pooled funds ensure collaborative action and donors could provide further incentives to HCTs for behaving collectively by including collective AAP requirements in bilateral agreements. In order to establish a culture of accountability in the response, the HC and the HCT could advocate with donors to support projects with explicit AAP aspects or goals. The TA has allowed for the EDG to review the performance of HCTs, as well as for HCTs to self-monitor through OPRs. HCTs could develop collective accountability workplans as a matter of course, and be reviewed against them.

Collective accountability and the clusters

It does not seem that individual organisational accountability automatically leads to a sense of collective cluster accountability. Despite most INGOs and some UN agencies having internal accountability departments, these rarely result in the development of common AAP approaches, except where organisations are already working collectively in consortia or similar. Furthermore, the organisational AAP processes are rarely reflected upon in cluster meetings, nor do they inform a more general sense of collective accountability. To start a collective notion of accountability, the cluster can 'self-assess', monitor, learn and report on AAP. OCHA can encourage cluster coordinators to play a leading role in the development of inter-agency and collective accountability.

This will not happen automatically, and cluster coordinators and OCHA staff need the training and skills to include collective accountability in their work. The Global Food Security Cluster Coordinator²² has highlighted that cluster coordinators'

What's needed is a leadership team which has a stronger sense of their collective accountability to people affected by crises rather than a focus on their internal accountability to HQ or the Executive Board.

20 Such as exist in Kenya, Pakistan, Philippines and other countries.

21/ Messina, C. (2013) 'Humanitarian leadership: more than just about leaders'. Available at: <http://www.odihpn.org/the-humanitarian-space/news/announcements/blog-articles/humanitarian-leadership-more-than-just-about-leaders>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

22/ Ferrand, C. (2015) in STAIT Webinar: Humanitarian Country Teams & Inter-cluster Coordination linkages - 23 Feb 14:00 GMT. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIYfa_CpUGw [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

Majdi Abduharaman (right) and Abraham Thom repair the hand pump on a well in Bor, a city in South Sudan's Jonglei State that has been the scene of fierce fighting in recent months between the country's military and anti-government rebels.
© ACT/Paul Jeffrey



HCTs will not be able to be collectively accountable without cultural change in member organisations that frees up HCTs to make decisions based on evidence and facts, rather than opinions and agency mandates.

skillssets are often too limited to deal with a topic such as collective accountability. Global clusters therefore need to consider the profile of coordinators – for example, should a coordinator have a broad understanding of coordinating action, and consider issues such as collective accountability, rather than being a subject matter expert?

Clusters could take time to come to agreement on what AAP standards they agree to follow as individual organisations. They could agree on a common language on what it takes to be accountable collectively, and identify areas where AAP commitments such as those found in the CHS could be translated into collective action. The inter-cluster forum can provide coherence for how clusters work with AAP, providing agreed guidelines, and helping to incorporate AAP into country strategy, targeting criteria and other overarching documents. An inter-cluster collective accountability advisor could lead such a process, both guiding clusters on how to approach collective AAP, and following up on commitments made. There are arguments, particularly within OCHA, that inter-agency AAP advisors are not required because AAP should be built into everyone's working practice already. The reality is that it is not. Without an individual or group committed to developing and guiding collective accountability practice, it is unlikely to flourish.

Donors could have a role in encouraging clusters to develop community information plans, and supporting these financially. They should encourage clusters to expend as much reporting time and energy on affected communities as they do on donors themselves. Donors could encourage flexible programming that is quickly adaptable to changes in the context, or in rapid response to the views of beneficiaries. They could also be more flexible themselves, by providing small sums for small collective endeavours and encouraging new ideas, or providing greater support to pooled funding mechanisms, which are less likely to be siloed.

The function of Information Management in clusters could be more broadly defined. Most Information Management Officers (IMOs) spend most of their time collating information, and developing maps and graphics to prepare reports used by HQs or the cluster itself. In this age of social media, there are increasing opportunities for IMOs to take a central role in collective accountability. Feedback systems via SMS (as seen in Haiti), or the use of Twitter (the Philippines) allow for real-time feedback on specific geographic needs and issues. The possibilities are rapidly expanding, and organisations such as Translators without Borders can now connect across hitherto unbridgeable divides between responders and recipients. Innovations such as the Humanitarian Data Exchange²³ can improve quantitative data, while IMOs must also consider collation and dissemination of the more qualitative data that community consultations yield.

How can an unrepresentative, competitive, unequally empowered group with poorly defined decision-making processes be held collectively accountable for its decisions and actions?

Taking account – listening to the population

1. Once decisions have been made and implemented, the cluster must review those decisions in light of the community response, and adjust them where required. Participation doesn't have to mean inviting the community to cluster meetings, but it does mean that clusters should review collective decisions proactively, and field-test them with communities before implementation.
2. Clusters and inter-cluster forums can include common community feedback reviews as standing agenda items. Clusters were originally intended to be short-term collectives, where some leeway could be given for a lack of community participation. However in reality, they often exist for years. Over these time periods, clusters have the opportunity to make far more context-driven and nuanced decisions.

3. The inter-cluster forum also has an opportunity to address issues that 'fall through the cracks' between the clusters. If, for instance, urban power supplies post-conflict are an issue affecting education, livelihoods and protection, which cluster should have the responsibility to discover its pivotal importance, and to answer the need?
4. Clusters and inter-cluster forums can also develop AAP checklists and guidelines for ensuring quality distributions, particularly for less experienced organisations. There are examples of agency telephone hotlines in many countries: building on lessons learned in the Philippines, Iraq is establishing an inter-cluster call centre where clusters provide answers to common questions, and call centre staff collate and share data with the inter-cluster forum.

Giving account – explaining what we are doing

1. Clusters, and in particular the inter-cluster group, can communicate the results of needs assessments and evaluations to affected communities, even when the message is negative. They can provide community messaging on common technical standards, principles of delivery and codes of conduct, rights of recipients, beneficiary criteria and the limits to the international aid role. The inter-cluster forum should form its own common communications and feedback strategies, using and supporting processes in the same mould as Pamata Kita.
2. The inter-cluster forum can keep people affected by crises informed of what they are entitled to and what the humanitarian community is planning. In Kyrgyzstan, the inter-cluster group produced one-page newsletters, featuring answers to the most common questions asked of each cluster.
3. Beneficiaries commonly complain about targeting criteria, which impose artificial distinctions upon communities. In the Philippines, the Pamata Kita project highlighted that shelter targeting decisions were creating social divisions, in particular making smaller households ineligible for transitional shelter support.²⁴ Since those who miss out don't have any one specific implementer to complain to, the cluster as a whole should take responsibility for explaining targeting decisions to them.

23/ <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/humanitarian-data-ocha-launches-ground-breaking-data-exchange-platform>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].

24/ Ong, J. (2015) 'Hidden Injuries of Humanitarian Relief'. <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20150223164553-xdmv2/>. [Accessed: 24 June 2015].



After the Japan tsunami, volunteers plan their relief activities.
© ACT/CWS

Despite this, the clusters and the inter-cluster group represent perhaps the best opportunity to implement collective accountable practice. They are more representative than the HCT, have a broader range of skillsets and experiences to draw on, and are arguably a little more adventurous.

Responsibility

Clusters generally consider themselves accountable to their members, while the members (i.e. the humanitarian organisations) are accountable to the beneficiaries. All clusters work like this. For example, the shelter cluster states that “accountability ... lies with cluster

members, not the cluster team members themselves.”²⁵ This seems sensible – obvious, even – until we start to unpack the notion. Decisions are made collectively in the cluster, on household targeting, geographic distribution and local technical standards, and even on issues such as ‘do no harm’ or how to manage access. Given that all cluster members are then expected to abide by these collective decisions, should it be the responsibility of the members alone to be accountable for decisions they might not have entirely agreed with? If you were to ask one NGO or UN agency in a cluster if they would hold themselves responsible for the actions of another NGO, they would most likely strongly reject the notion. Yet if we consider how the collective works at an operational level, some level of responsibility must be assumed. For example, when humanitarian actors meet and divide a country response up geographically, sharing out different districts, each member of the cluster is tacitly ‘approving’ the other organisations

Maybe a new language of collective accountability will be required to enable a collective uptake.

to fulfil their role effectively and appropriately. So when things go wrong, they must bear some of the responsibility to take this up within the cluster, and step in to assist if required. How to manage this joint responsibility has been a constant issue for clusters, and one which has never been satisfactorily resolved, even considering the ‘Minimum commitments’ mentioned above.

Despite this, the clusters and the inter-cluster group represent perhaps the best opportunity to implement collective accountable practice. They are more representative than the HCT, have a broader range of skillsets and experiences

25/ Cluster Accountability Working Group. 2014. See <https://www.sheltercluster.org/working-group/accountability>.

First steps towards collective accountability – from global to local

- 1. Senior leadership is critical** – collective accountability needs to start at the top:
 - The IASC AAP/PSEA task team should develop standards on collective accountability, based on existing approaches such as the CHS.
 - The EDG needs to enforce these standards and follow up on recommendations from EDG missions and OPRs.
 - One Emergency Director should become a global leader for AAP.
 - Donors need to demand planning based on community engagement.
 - OCHA HLSU should develop training and guidance to allow HCs to lead the HCT into being a collectively accountable body.
 - Global clusters need to develop and provide guidance on collective accountability.

- 2. A shift in thinking is required** – the response must establish a collective accountability mindset:
 - The inter-cluster forum should develop, adopt and monitor country-specific minimum collective accountability and quality standards.
 - The HCT should establish a third-party accountability platform, headed by an accountability advisor, and commit to following its guidance.
 - All clusters, in cooperation with IMOs, should adopt indicators that monitor how affected communities perceive the relevance, timeliness and effectiveness of their actions, and use them to adapt their action.
 - Donors, organisations and all collective forums need to reconsider their approach to coordination and cooperation – they must put aside their preconceptions and technical biases, and make the voice of the population their guiding principle.

to draw on, and are arguably a little more adventurous. However this will require both the global clusters and OCHA to deploy coordinators who operate with an ‘accountability lens’. It will also require them to critically examine their own understanding of clusters, revisiting their positions on accountability, and the consequences of how clusters operate.

So where to from here?

There is no doubt that humanitarian action is becoming more coordinated, even as the numbers and types of actors grow. HAP, Sphere, and now the CHS are aligning, although a common language has taken a long time to develop, just as the AAP approach has been slow to achieve broad uptake. Maybe a new language of collective accountability will be required to enable a collective uptake. We assume that collective accountability leads to greater collective effectiveness, but this hypothesis has not yet been tested with the

rigour needed in the few examples we have to choose from. As we continue to better understand collective AAP, we may develop a different set of accountabilities.

Collective accountability cannot use a ‘cookie cutter’ approach – different cultures and different emergency situations require markedly different accountability approaches. These contextualised approaches could possibly be developed by HCTs and clusters alone, but are far more likely to be developed by ensuring the establishment of an independent third-party platform, or at least an individual responsible for collective accountability. The role of national government in ensuring international accountability is ignored in too many contexts. HCT and cluster structures must actively pursue ways to meaningfully include national partners, including government, national NGOs and, of course, affected people.

Can we really work together? We already are in many ways, as the HCTs and clusters in certain countries have taken various steps toward collective accountability.

Developing standards for delivery by cluster, inter-agency feedback mechanisms... these are the little steps that are easy to take and set us on the road. Some common approaches, such as inter-agency monitoring, may need rebranding as accountability in order to demonstrate that this is nothing new to humanitarian action. With these small steps we build on existing knowledge and practice, so that each step gradually becomes standard procedure. Perhaps the key requirement of collective accountability will be a kind of humility, an ability to put aside competition and agency positioning and genuinely seek collaborative outcomes.

Developing standards for delivery by cluster, inter-agency feedback mechanisms... these are the little steps that are easy to take and set us on the road.

A woman digs with a machete as she builds a temporary home in a spontaneous camp for quake survivors established in Croix-des-Bouquets, Haiti, north of the capital Port-au-Prince.
© Paul Jeffrey /ACT



Jonathan Potter

Executive Director
People In Aid

Jonathan Potter was the Executive Director of People In Aid from 2001 to September 2015. People In Aid was a UK-based non-profit committed to helping humanitarian and development organisations to enhance the quality of support and management they give to their staff and volunteers. It learnt from and supported a global membership and delivered a wide-ranging portfolio of work on good practice in HR and people management. The CHS Alliance is taking forward this legacy. Jonathan has managed sector-wide projects and worked with many networks, including as Chair of EPN (the Emergency Personnel Network) from 2004 until 2009 and Humanitarian Chair of ELRHA (Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Action) until 2012.

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11

People Management: the shape of things to come

Jonathan Potter looks at the role of HR and people management in delivering high-quality, accountable and effective humanitarian action through the CHS – now and in the future.

Created in 1995, People In Aid merged earlier this year with HAP International to become the CHS Alliance. One of the Alliance's key tasks is to "support the sector in ensuring organisations and staff work effectively in delivering quality and accountable programmes" under the guidance of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).¹ The CHS helps optimise organisational and individual performance in humanitarian and development action. People In Aid's work, advocacy and influence over the years has resulted in the emphasis given to Human Resources (HR) and people management² issues throughout the CHS and this, in turn, forms an important part of the mandate of the CHS Alliance: to "lead improvements in people management".

Over the past 20 years, People In Aid's focus on HR and people management has led to positive changes in the humanitarian and development sector. Amongst other things, HR teams are

1/ Available at: www.corehumanitarianstandard.org. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

2/ Roughly speaking, HR covers the policies and practices which organisations need to have, while people management is what managers need to know and do, with and for their staff.



Participants in the 2013 Humanitarian Human Resources (HHR) Africa conference in Nairobi discussing "Effective Humanitarian Leadership: How can HR demonstrate and develop it?" © CHS Alliance

The fact that operational effectiveness is so inextricably linked to competent, well-managed staff persuaded People In Aid to give up its own Code in favour of the new single standard for the sector, the CHS.

regularly deployed early to emergencies; the HR function has gained a voice in the leadership team; certification, engagement surveys and HR audits have increased knowledge of, and support to, HR and people management; expatriates are no longer the main focus of policy and planning; and systems such as talent management, competencies, metrics and HR Information Systems have been introduced or more widely rolled out.

This chapter will examine the links between People In Aid's focus on staff, and accountable, effective humanitarian and development programmes. It will demonstrate that good practice in people management and in HR is an essential contributor to accountability and effectiveness. And on the future of staffing, it will argue that no organisation will be truly accountable to its staff – nor therefore by extension to its partners and stakeholders – until it ensures they receive parallel treatment to the communities they work with.

Linking people management with quality, accountability and effectiveness

When the Emergency Capacity-Building Project and People In Aid released their report on Surge Capacity in 2007,³ there was one big idea: "Agencies need to adopt a whole-organisation approach to surge capacity. If this does not happen, their capacity to respond will be compromised." This approach was implemented by trustee boards in Europe, the US, the UN and elsewhere.

Such an approach requires – in advance – simultaneous financial, operational and workforce planning. This comprehensive workforce planning, shaped by organisational strategy, ensures the right number of staff with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to deliver short- and long-term organisational objectives. It supports efficient and timely programme delivery, mitigates risk, ensures efficient use of resources, and motivates and engages staff (e.g. by offering clearly defined career paths).

A less joined-up approach is a risk to operational effectiveness. While the People In Aid Code has had a long and successful life, and evidence of its impact is noticeable in a great many organisations working in the

sector, organisations using a separate code (usually owned by HR) will end up with a less joined-up approach to people management. The fact that operational effectiveness is so inextricably linked to competent, well-managed staff persuaded People In Aid to give up its own Code in favour of the new single standard for the sector, the CHS.

Competent and well-managed staff are at the heart of an accountable and effective organisation. Staff raise and manage funds, coordinate activities, interact with affected communities, report to donors, come up with innovative ways to deliver aid, and represent the face of the organisation. They make things happen at all levels and at every stage of the programme cycle. It is therefore self-evident that an organisation needs to support and manage its own staff appropriately and responsibly, or else the effectiveness and accountability of the organisation itself will suffer. Motivation and performance can decline, and staff turnover increase, owing to any number of factors: e.g. poor management of teams and individuals; leaders not being true to organisational values; inadequate reward for work done; recruitment processes failing

Competent and well-managed staff are at the heart of an accountable and effective organisation.

INGOs may decide not to operate directly in the field, instead carrying out advocacy and fundraising while leaving national and local NGOs to employ staff and deliver programmes.

to spot sexual predators; employers failing in their duty of care to staff; and limited opportunities for self-development, to name but a few.

We cannot allow poor HR or people management to undermine quality or accountability in humanitarian response, and the CHS strongly promotes people

management as an essential ingredient of organisational effectiveness. CHS Commitment 8 is all about this, while workforce planning, staff behaviours, training and other HR-related topics are recurring themes throughout the CHS.

The 'Key Actions' in the CHS are defined as: "What staff engaged in humanitarian action should do to deliver high-quality programmes consistently and to be accountable to those they seek to assist."⁴ This acknowledges that staff are central to the successful application of the CHS and prompts senior management to put a major focus on their own personnel, and on how they can be supported to comply with the CHS Commitments. In other words, the CHS is a whole-organisation approach which results in quality, accountability and effectiveness.

Managing in the future

Organisations need to be ready for today and preparing for the future. But who are tomorrow's staff? What should they be able to do? And how can the organisation make sure they do it?

Who are tomorrow's staff?

The International Civil Society Centre and others expect that the national and international NGOs of the future will have to be 'of the community' and not 'for the community': they predict humanitarian workforces that are increasingly similar in profile to the communities they assist. Expatriates will continue to bring unique value of course, particularly because of their

Fighting poaching

Staff turnover and poaching are two factors that deter investment in national staff. Turnover cripples effective and appropriate aid delivery,¹⁰ not least because it results in the loss of institutional knowledge and weakening of established relationships.¹¹

There are a number of points to be made about the 'poaching' of another organisation's staff:

- partnership with national organisations should involve strengthening their capacities, not reducing them;
- national NGOs and civil administrations are weakened by poaching, and lose their investment in that staff member; yet of course
- individuals should be able to choose who they work for, to earn more or to broaden their experience.

Poaching has long been an issue, and its negative impacts on national capacity have been clearly illustrated by responses in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Haiti and elsewhere.

But there are some tested solutions. At the time of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the Myanmar INGO Coordination Office was promoting agreements between agencies that a new, suitably skilled staff member should be recruited before staff of a national NGO could move to an INGO or the UN. There are also internal solutions available to national NGOs (though matching a UN/INGO pay offer is not usually one of them), including: clear notice periods; clear contract lengths; and encouraging their staff to take secondments. Better than all of these of course is for organisations to espouse the values and culture a worker seeks in an employer, and provide decent promotion prospects and good management.

A stimulating discussion between leaders of Senegalese and Malaysian organisations has proposed the 'footballer analogy'.¹² Professional footballers are trained by their club. A second club which buys that footballer pays compensation to the club for that training, in addition to whatever salary offer they make to the player.

Applying this to our world is not simple because of funding constraints and the hope that local organisations will be fairly rewarded for their work in future (as is currently not the case). However, here is a future scenario which the CHS Alliance will gladly offer to work on with the sector:

- All international organisations and their donors commit to achieving their mission first and foremost by strengthening national and local capacity.
- International organisations compensate national and local organisations from whom they hire staff.
- National and local organisations invest this compensation in competitive pay and training.

4/ Core Humanitarian Standard. p.5. <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/> [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

knowledge of organisational systems, access to funding, perceived neutrality and impartiality, and experience with different approaches in different contexts. The advantages of local employees include context-specific knowledge and skills, acceptance by local communities, and lower cost. Further strengthening the capacity of local organisations and communities as first-responders is a task required of all organisations, as reflected in the first ‘expected result’ of DFID’s latest humanitarian fund, which envisions: “Improving the knowledge and understanding of national staff of civil society organisations and their counterparts so they can be better prepared for emergencies and better able to deliver an effective response when disasters strike.”⁵

If more humanitarian and development workers are to be drawn from the local population in future, organisations need to be agile enough to adjust their staff-related practices and values to this reality:

- INGOs may decide not to operate directly in the field, instead carrying out advocacy and fundraising while leaving national and local NGOs to employ staff and deliver programmes (i.e. becoming catalysers of response rather than service deliverers).⁶ To this end, there is considerable work underway in the sector to strengthen partnerships, develop national talent and leaders⁷ and, with donors, look at direct funding.⁸
- ‘Connection’ will be a key word for the future. A result of People In Aid’s requirement for its certified members to conduct staff engagement surveys has been that national and field staff realised they worked for and with a head office, and that it cared about their opinion. Organisational culture, values, policies and processes are often diluted as they pass down the chain from HQ through regional and country offices, and eventually to programme offices and refugee camps. How will organisations ‘connect’ to employees who work in their own communities?
- Workers already have a variety of employment relationships which they and their organisation must agree on (e.g. fixed-term contracts, consultancy, volunteering, etc.). This list will expand to include freelance, agency and entrepreneurial relationships for example.

Figure 11.1: Core humanitarian competencies identified by People in Aid in 2011

Here are some of the core humanitarian competencies identified by People In Aid in 2011:
Applying humanitarian standards and principles
Ensuring programme quality and impact
Working accountably
Making decisions
Listening and creating dialogue
Working with others
Minimising risk to communities, partners and stakeholders
Managing personal safety and security
Adapting and coping
Maintaining professionalism
Self-awareness
Motivating and influencing others
Critical judgement

The framework was the result of a process managed by ActionAid on behalf of the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies in 2011, which was facilitated by People In Aid. Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework, http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/CBHA_Core_Humanitarian_Competerencies_Framework_2012_col_WEB%5B1%5D.pdf.

- ‘Poaching’⁹ of staff continues to be a challenge, particularly for national NGOs but also for local government (see box on the previous page).

Most of these may well still be valid, but in the future they will need to be updated¹³ in order to reflect changes in the way humanitarian programmes take place and the move towards professionalism in the sector.¹⁴

What should tomorrow’s staff be able to do?

Whether expatriate or local, staff need the right skills and behaviours, and the future requires a focus on new ones. Assessing required technical skills (e.g. medical, logistical, WASH, etc.) is a matter for each individual organisation and its programmes, but there are core requirements for individual aid workers (see box below).

Candidates for inclusion on the list include:

- **Communication:** as the sector (re-) discovers the importance of its daily interaction with the people it aims to work with, effectively communicating with and providing information to people affected by a natural disaster or a man-made crisis will become two hugely important elements of humanitarian response.¹⁵

5/ iati.dfid.gov.uk/iati_documents/4397181.doc. p.1. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

6/ Potter, J. (2015) ‘How can an organisation be future-fit’. See: <http://www.peopleinaid.org/news/621.aspx>. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

7/ To use a UK example, there are two programmes from the START Network called ‘Developing Talent’ and ‘Shifting the Power’. See: <http://www.start-network.org/how/start-build/#.VVWnu-89VhHw>. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

8/ For example, see: analysis from http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2013/LNGO_Evaluation.pdf [Accessed: 28 June 2015]; and action by USAID through its Development Grants Program.

9/ ‘Poaching’ means one organisation proactively approaching and recruiting another organisation’s staff.

10/ Daniel Zetterlund, CEO International Aid Services. See: <http://www.peopleinaid.org/news/651.aspx> [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

11/ North and Southeast Asia consultation for the World Humanitarian Summit. See: <https://www.worldhumanitarianissummit.org/node/451985> [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

12/ Mamadou Ndiaye of OFADEC and Dr. Ahmad Faizal Perdaus of Mercy Malaysia.

13/ The CHS Alliance will be consulting on and updating this list for the START Network in 2016.

14/ State of HR. 2014 Ed. People In Aid. p.22. Available at: [http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/pubs/StateofHR2014\(1\).pdf](http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/pubs/StateofHR2014(1).pdf). [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

15/ See: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/?map=humanitarian-communication-roster-responding-skills-gap-emergency-response-sector>. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

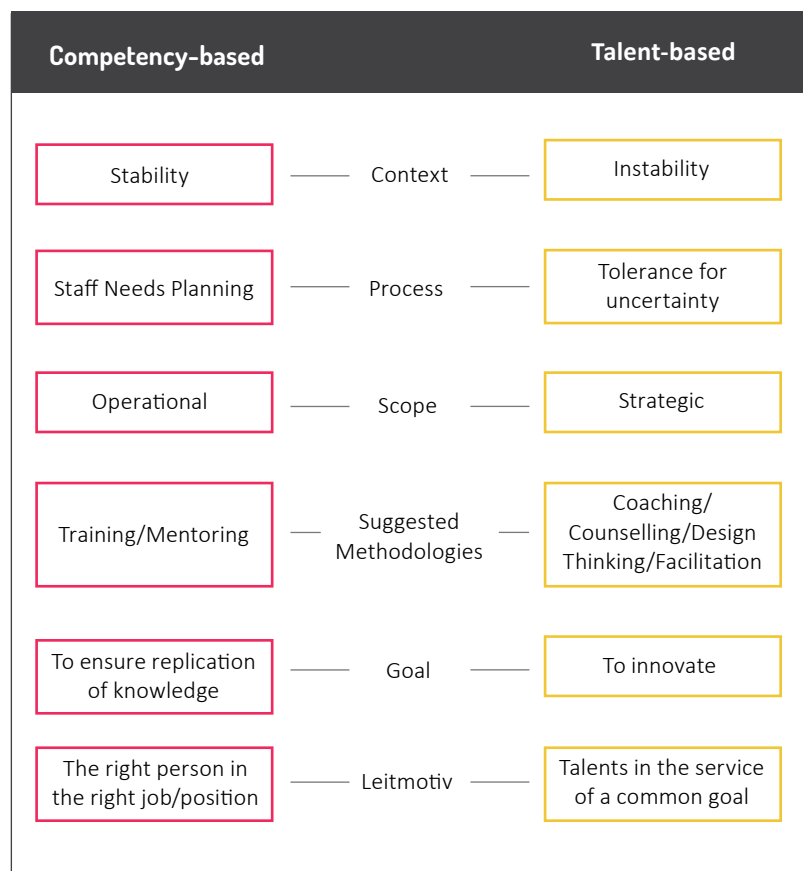
Whether expatriate or local, staff need the right skills and behaviours, and the future requires a focus on new ones.

- **Matrix working**¹⁶: with the continuous push for humanitarian organisations to effectively collaborate through clusters with partners, national authorities and communities affected by crises, staff see their reporting lines and accountability commitments multiply. Reporting lines will increasingly grow laterally, bringing day-to-day humanitarian work closer to matrix management. The Roffey Park Institute has identified four ‘individual enablers’ supporting this way of working: (to) express personal conviction and ownership of project goals; harness sources of personal power and influence; demonstrate authenticity and integrity; and build connections, collaborate and network.¹⁷
- **Technology and virtual working**: new technology speeds up response times, allows for meetings to take place virtually and across time zones, and also requires processes to be managed quicker. In a recent survey of managers, 61% of respondents agreed that “digital technologies and social media are changing the way I do things in my organisation”; and 66% of respondents agreed that “my organisation needs to recruit or develop new leadership capabilities to take advantage of digital technologies”.¹⁸ Working with and managing teams that are geographically dispersed will require not only increased emotional intelligence and an ability to inspire trust, but also more self-management skills to keep organisations functional.

Also likely to feature in a revised list are: resilience, or ‘grit’; ideas from CHS Commitment 9 such as ethical

‘Poaching’ of staff continues to be a challenge, particularly for national NGOs but also for local government.

Figure 11.2: Competency-based vs. talent-based approach to staff



The competencies approach to staff can cramp innovation if it defines too strictly what is expected of employees. A talent-based approach is an alternative, focusing more on staff’s career path, successful team-building and using talent effectively to achieve organisation-wide goals. A talent-based approach does however require innovative HR and a higher tolerance for risk.

Adapted from: Casla, Susana F., 6 levels to compare both approaches, 2015.

or environmentally-friendly practices; understanding what value an organisation adds to a response; and leadership practices such as the ability to influence without authority.

How can the organisation support staff?

Organisations have, for some time, been giving a lot of thought to equal treatment (for example, how to close the gap between expatriates and national staff in terms

of their employment opportunities or salary packages).¹⁹ The CHS itself looks further ahead in regard to staff treatment, suggesting organisations should “assess, where relevant, how far internal processes and support for staff meet the actions and organisational responsibilities set out within the CHS.”²⁰ An organisation should indeed aim to treat both staff and beneficiaries with the same high operational and organisational standards. What could this look like? Policies and practices relating to sexual exploitation and abuse in the office do not differ from

16/ “Effective matrix working goes beyond considerations of structure and embraces culture, leadership, organisational values, strategy and psychology. As Ford and Randolph explain, a matrix organisation is: “any organization that employs a multiple command system that includes not only a multiple command structure but also related support mechanisms and an associated organizational culture and behaviour pattern.”, Ford, R. C., & Randolph, W. A. (1992). Cross-functional structures: A review and integration of matrix organization and project management. *Journal of Management*, 18(2), 267-294.

17/ Roffey Park Institute. (2015) ‘Living in a Matrix’.

18/ See: http://www.roffeypark.com/executive-education/training-courses-skills-development/leading-in-a-digital-age/?_cldee=am9uYXRoYW5AcGVvcGxlaW5haWQub3Jn&utm_source=ClickDimensions&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Enews%20April%2015#sthash.i7AL3jwN.dpuf. [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

19/ Some thoughts and examples can be found here: <http://www.peopleinaid.org/news/514.aspx>. [Accessed: 28 June 2015]; and [http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/pubs/wateraid-global-reward-case-study-oct-2011\(2\).pdf](http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/pubs/wateraid-global-reward-case-study-oct-2011(2).pdf) [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

20/ *Core Humanitarian Standard*. p.6. <http://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/> [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

Recommendations:

- 1. Break down the barrier between HR and Operations:** CEOs and senior operational colleagues should work with the HR function to understand fully why and how the CHS links people management with operational work.
- 2. Start planning for your future workforce:** organisations need to plan for the day when their staff are drawn predominantly from the communities with which they work.
- 3. Apply the standards you promote for affected communities to your staff:** organisations should consider applying the Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities of the CHS to their staff.

any PSEA programme work delivered in affected communities. Programmes on women's empowerment are carried out by female staff who are themselves empowered through, for example, training or reasonable promotion prospects. Work to preserve the safety and dignity of affected people is also reflected in the duty of care, well-being and security plans offered to organisational staff. Feedback mechanisms are paralleled by staff engagement activities or grievance procedures.²¹ In short, employers should look at all Nine Commitments in the CHS, change the wording to apply to their staff and see whether they meet the standard.²²

Conclusions

It's safe to assume all staff and volunteers who work with and for communities affected by crisis, disaster and poverty want three things. First, that their employer is effective and accountable in its work with communities. Second, that they have a satisfactory relationship with their organisation (e.g. they are managed well; can choose the working pattern which suits them; want to invest their skills and energy to stay there; feel appreciated and are learning new skills, etc.). Third, that their leaders make the first two points happen. A commentator on the Typhoon Haiyan response in the Philippines remarked: "[T]he experience of agencies that appear to have been more successful than others in embedding a culture of accountability within their practices shows that it is the

commitment of their leaders to the cause, rather than the specific tools they chose to implement it, that makes it stick."²³

Organisations that want to be accountable and effective can work with the CHS. This will encourage them to embrace and recognise the central importance of good people management, and to apply it. Organisations need to acknowledge changing realities as they plan for the future, working to predict and accommodate the needs of future staff and to ensure culture, policies, processes and systems will welcome and support them. The sector will be truly ready for the future when organisations are able to offer quality and accountability to communities through "competent and well-managed staff",²⁴ who in turn benefit from similar levels of quality and accountability provided by their employers.

In short, employers should look at all Nine Commitments in the CHS, change the wording to apply to their staff and see whether they meet the standard.



A woman transfers part of the day's catch in Karonga, a town in northern Malawi. Fish from Lake Malawi, which is bordered by Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique, provide an important part of people's diet in this area.
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21/ Evidence for some of these examples can be found in the report from the joint evaluation by ALNAP, HAP, People In Aid and Sphere. See: <http://www.peopleinaid.org/news/161.aspx> [Accessed: 28 June 2015].

22/ CHS Commitment 4 might, for example, read as: "Staff know their rights and entitlements, and have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them".

23/ Wigley, B. (2015) Constructing a culture of accountability: lessons from the Philippines. *Humanitarian Exchange* (63).

24/ See CHS Commitment 8.

Masbore village, Zandoma province, Burkina Faso. Extremes of weather such as drought, storms and floods cause food shortages, malnutrition and health problems especially among the young of the village. © ACT/Christian Aid/Amanda Farrant

12

Informed decision making: including the voice of affected communities in the process.

Jessica Alexander

Humanitarian consultant

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The author wishes to thank Francesca Bonino and Nick van Praag for providing invaluable comments on the draft versions of this chapter. The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are however solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the CHS Alliance, or those of the peer reviewers. Details of all reviewers can be found on the inside back cover of this report.

Technology is driving unprecedented opportunities to directly hear what people affected by crises need and to design or adapt programmes based on what matters to them most, as Jessica Alexander explains.

Data: why does information matter?

Informed decision-making relies on analysis of data related not only to needs, but also capacities and the contextual landscape in which humanitarian operations are carried out. This analysis is critical to launching and maintaining responsive humanitarian action that is accountable for how services are delivered and used.¹ Decision-makers use data to inform humanitarian operations in multiple ways, as outlined in Table 1 on the next page. The use of data and the evidence it generates can guide improvements to humanitarian programming² as well as indicate whether or not work is worthwhile and effective.

1/ OCHA (2015) 'Humanitarian Effectiveness Study' – forthcoming (to be published in September 2015).
2/ 'Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action' (concept note). ALNAP 28th Annual Meeting, 2013.

Table 1: Kinds of data that inform humanitarian operations.

<p>Pre-crisis: What capacities already exist?</p>	<p>Understanding what exists before a crisis and how this can be built upon, includes information such as census data, livelihood patterns or capacities and vulnerabilities.³</p>
<p>Early warning: Is there a need for humanitarian response?</p>	<p>Early warning information is based on indicators to describe the situation and compare it with accepted crisis thresholds, to show that the qualifying conditions for a current or predicted crisis situation have been met.⁴</p>
<p>Scale, key priority sectors, and locations: How much humanitarian assistance is needed?</p>	<p>Assessment data can determine not only the needs but also capacities that exist on the ground as well as the contextual realities that define a humanitarian crisis. This data collection should be regularly updated to reflect the evolving nature of a humanitarian crisis.</p>
<p>Monitoring: Are we meeting the main objectives and should adjustments be made?</p>	<p>Monitoring data, especially programme monitoring and system monitoring, provides insights into how effectively the humanitarian community (either on an individual agency level or as a collective) is reaching its goals.</p>
<p>Tracking performance over time and across emergencies: Is the system as a whole improving from one crisis to the next?</p>	<p>Understanding what has worked and not worked in response to a particular crisis comes from information produced by evaluation data and analysis. Evaluations can answer questions around causation as well.</p>

Informed decision making relies on analysis of data related not only to needs, but also capacities and the contextual landscape in which humanitarian operations are carried out.

Data collected as a result of discussions and other interactions with affected communities is an increasingly important source of information and should be a parameter to consider when planning and making decisions.⁵ Evidence, although still scant, has suggested that including these perspectives is important not only from an ethical standpoint, but also because it can improve the quality, relevance and effectiveness of a given response.⁶ Improvements have been made with regard to collecting information from affected people, yet the humanitarian community still struggles to do this well on a regular, structured basis and use the information to inform and influence decisions.

What kind of data currently exists and where are we falling short?

Traditionally, information is collected during needs assessments and during regular exercises to monitor programme indicators. Improvements have been made in the past 15 years not only in the collection of this data but also its use. Examples of progress include OCHA-led needs assessments and monitoring exercises such as the MIRA or humanitarian dashboards. These processes largely rely on the consolidation of individual programme data, which agencies have become more sophisticated in collecting and using.

That said, gaps still remain with regard to the quality of information collected, its dissemination and use, and the inclusion of affected people in the process. For example, ALNAP notes that evaluations “tend to rely almost exclusively on qualitative methods and on purposive sampling to identify interviewees, while often failing

to include beneficiary groups among those consulted.”⁷ Numerous factors explain this reality: access difficulties; short operational cycles; limited staff capacity; time constraints; the rapidly changing nature of emergencies making data quickly obsolete; high levels of risk aversion; and the fear that data or information could expose shortcomings in a response.⁸ Even where regular data is collected, the lack of standardised, consistent methods makes it difficult to compare results and understand changes over time.⁹

Typically, data is collected in a haphazard, ad hoc fashion, with members of the humanitarian community often challenged to decide what information should be gathered. Agency-specific programme- or project-level data may be collected, but indicators and formats tend to be inconsistent. This makes it difficult to aggregate

Gaps still remain with regard to the quality of information collected, its dissemination and use, and the inclusion of affected people in the process.

3/ Darcy, J., Stobaugh, H., Walker, P. and Maxwell, D. (2013) ‘The Use of Data in Humanitarian Decision Making’. ACAPS Operational Learning Paper.
 4/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014) ‘Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action’. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.
 5/ Note, numerous terms are used to describe the actions needed to be taken to ensure the responsible use of power such as accountability to affected people, communicating with communities and engagement of crisis-affected people. ALNAP’s 2014 background paper to their annual meeting in Addis Ababa clarifies these and other terms and their relation to levels of engagement with affected people. See: <http://www.alnap.org/resource/12859.aspx>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].
 6/ Featherstone, A. (2013) ‘Improving Impact: Do Accountability Mechanisms Deliver Results?’. London: Christian Aid, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership.
 7/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2013) ‘Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action’. London: ALNAP/ODI.
 8/ ‘Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action’ (concept note). ALNAP 28th Annual Meeting. 2013.
 9/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014), op cit.

data across agencies and sectors, sometimes resulting in findings that are contradictory or not sufficiently detailed or reliable to be used for decision-making.¹⁰ Furthermore, these inconsistencies mean that the credibility of data can become diluted and the results discredited if they don't align with agency agendas. Where consistent data is collected, humanitarians are often so focused on managing the response that resources aren't devoted to analysing and using it to enhance decision-making.

In addition, the majority of evaluations still take place towards the close of operations, when the opportunity to make corrections when they matter has passed. Rarely are 'lessons learned' carried over from one humanitarian context to the next and lessons from past experience are rarely put into current practice.¹¹

The humanitarian sector is weak at informing communities about what was done with the information they provided.

Although ALNAP's *State of the Humanitarian System* tracks how the humanitarian system has performed every two years, and some meta-evaluations aggregate information from several evaluations to identify trends in particular sectors, most humanitarian evaluations are one-offs and do not compare emergencies over time.¹² Finally, the sector lacks incentives for follow-up on poor performance, in particular when it comes to collective action, an area where clear responsibilities and accountabilities are difficult to allocate.

The inclusion of affected people as a source of data is most often the result of extractive collection processes¹³ that regularly fail to address or discuss the issues that are most important to people.¹⁴ The humanitarian sector is weak at informing communities about what was done with the information they provided and how it influenced activities (or not, as the case may be). The *State of the Humanitarian System* 2015 echoes findings from its previous edition, as well as the 2013 edition of the *Humanitarian Accountability Report*, noting that people are rarely consulted on project design

and little action is taken (in terms of addressing specific problems or redesigning programmes) based on information coming from affected people.¹⁵ For the moment, as ALNAP notes, the humanitarian community cannot yet claim to systematically consult potential aid recipients at the assessment, monitoring and evaluation phases of the typical project cycle.¹⁶ Indeed, evaluations that include users' rating of the performance of the programmes that are targeting them are the exception rather than the rule. As an illustration of this point, while attempting to gather data for this chapter, it was very difficult to find systematic quantitative information about how communities rate the effectiveness of the humanitarian responses assisting them. Recent initiatives which have solicited input from affected people – such as surveys conducted for the *State of the Humanitarian System* 2015 and the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) global consultation process, or OCHA's Humanitarian Effectiveness Survey – are typically one-off exercises. Although such surveys have value in as much as they can highlight issues that need addressing or even motivate the sector to act, they cannot be a substitute for the routine monitoring of and response to how communities and people rate the relevance, targeting and effectiveness of humanitarian action.

Opportunities and improvements

Today's data-rich world provides numerous opportunities to not only collect and use data but also access perceptual data from affected people. Understanding what each of these sources will provide, and how they complement and triangulate each other, can transform the face of a response, as the following examples illustrate.

Information technology

Advances in information technology (IT) have the potential to greatly improve the ability of humanitarians to collect and analyse data, and ensure that it is used.¹⁷ Hand-held devices, for example, are being used with greater frequency to collect information from affected people, meaning that it can be uploaded and analysed in real time. In 2014, during heightened violence in the Central African Republic, use of the LMMS Android-based platform brought numerous

Finally, the sector lacks incentives for follow-up on poor performance, in particular when it comes to collective action, an area where clear responsibilities and accountabilities are difficult to allocate.

benefits, including greater timeliness, improved targeting and faster dissemination of results.¹⁸ In Somalia, the Danish Refugee Council successfully used an SMS-based platform to solicit feedback from affected people in remote areas.¹⁹ In Sierra Leone during the 2015 Ebola response, mobile phone data analysis was used to track the spread of the disease. When combined with healthcare facility maps prepared by volunteers, aid workers had access to valuable, actionable information to plan their response. Remote telephone polling of needs and perceptions of humanitarian assistance has also been conducted through technologies such as interactive voice response technology and SMS. As the *State of the Humanitarian System* 2015 notes, limitations associated with the use of this technology can constrain the representativeness in samples as well as the contexts in which they can be used.²⁰ However, these technologies are worth adopting because they make the analysis, treatment and consolidation of data associated with humanitarian programmes much quicker and more effective.

Social media

Affected people are increasingly able to voice their needs, issues and concerns through direct use of social media tools, including as a reaction to how humanitarian aid resources are used. People actively use these channels to articulate their expectations, mobilise community support and expose the limitations of humanitarian assistance.

Evaluations that include users' rating of the performance of the programmes that are targeting them are the exception rather than the rule.

10/ This was noted in Loquercio, D. (2014) 'Promoting accountability in the Central African Republic response'. Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (62).

11/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2013) 'Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.

12/ OCHA (2015) 'Humanitarian Effectiveness Study' – forthcoming (to be published in September 2015).

13/ See, for example: Alexander, J. and Bonino, F. (2014) 'Ensuring quality of evidence generated through participatory evaluation in humanitarian contexts'. ALNAP Discussion Series, Method Note 3. <http://www.alnap.org/resource/19163>. [Accessed: 25 June 2015].

14/ Brown, D., Donini, A. and Knox Clarke, P. (2014) 'Engagement of crisis-affected people in humanitarian action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.

15/ The State of the Humanitarian System (2015), ALNAP.

16/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2013) 'Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.

17/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014) 'Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.

18/ Loquercio, D. (2014) 'Promoting accountability in the Central African Republic response'. Humanitarian Exchange Magazine (62).

19/ For more information, see: <http://drcbeneficiaryfeedback.blogspot.ch/>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

20/ The State of the Humanitarian System (2015), ALNAP.



The affected population scattered across the north of Afghanistan faces challenges in accessing shelter, water, food, and health services.
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Advances in information technology (IT) have the potential to greatly improve the ability of humanitarians to collect and analyse data, and ensure that it is used.

Reports coming from Twitter during the 2010 cholera outbreak following the earthquake in Haiti were both fast and accurate, as the information correlated well with official government statistics, as well as being quicker to collect.²¹ More recently, an analysis of more than 440,000 tweets posted during the first 48 hours of the Typhoon Haiyan response found that about 44% related to needs and donations, and 15% of the tweets were potentially relevant to humanitarian clusters.²² Social media gives affected people a way to bring their views and priorities to the attention of the wider public as well as humanitarians, but the latter need to adapt the approach they take and skills they allocate to monitoring crises to make the most of it.

Regular feedback from affected people

As described by Nick van Praag in chapter 4, Ground Truth Solutions collects data from affected people on a range of topics:

from service delivery and outcomes to the relationship between aid providers and affected people, and the latter's sense of their ability to make a difference in their own lives. By using short questionnaires and feeding the analysis back to strategic decision-makers on a regular basis, humanitarian staff on the ground are able to track perceptions and shift programme direction appropriately. During the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, Ground Truth Solutions conducted four separate 'light-touch' surveys (of citizens, frontline workers, people in quarantine and those who experienced decontamination) covering a range of issues related to the response. The findings were analysed, triangulated, then distilled into simple visual reports with clear recommendations.²³

Existing and preferred communication channels

Radio has been effective, not only to disseminate information about the response, but also to collect feedback and information from affected people. While some agencies have set up hotlines, these are often complemented by radio programmes which invite listeners to phone in and discuss concerns. Examples of this are Radyo Abante in the Philippines²⁴ as well as BBC Media Action²⁵ during the Ebola response. In the Nepal response,

the Common Feedback Project is being piloted to aggregate data from a diverse array of feedback channels (e.g. interpersonal communications, helpdesks and suggestion boxes, SMS and mobile feedback, radio, social media, etc.) based on what is most appropriate and available in different locations to provide guidance on key issues and trends.²⁶ Groups like Words of Relief²⁷ facilitate translation of these communications, so that linguistic barriers do not impede the speed and use of these exchanges.

The way forward

Many have argued that there is a need to better embed information gathering and use within the culture, processes and structure of humanitarian organisations.²⁸ As Lars Peter Nissen advocates in chapter 3, the humanitarian sector needs an appropriate mix of reliable evidence and experience when making decisions. The advances described

Social media gives affected people a way to bring their views and priorities to the attention of the wider public as well as humanitarians.

21/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2013) 'Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.

22/ OCHA World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2014.

23/ All reports can be found on Ground Truth's website: <http://www.groundtruthsolutions.org/>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

24/ <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/i/20141216140951-uj94t/>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

25/ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/where-we-work/africa/sierra-leone>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

26/ <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Nepal%20Earthquake%20Inter-agency%20Common%20Feedback%20Project%20Proposal%20v3.pdf>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

27/ <http://www.elrha.org/map-location/words-relief/>. [Accessed 25 June 2015].

28/ Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014) 'Insufficient evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action'. London: ALNAP/ODI.



A Bolivian woman on the altiplano cooks a meal of quinoa, potato and llama meat.
© ACT/Sean Hawkey

With the recent passing of US legislation, ignoring the voice of communities when planning, monitoring and reviewing programmes may soon no longer be an option.

here are exciting opportunities to provide decision-makers with a broader range of timely and relevant sources to inform their actions, the impact of which can then be measured against a subsequent round of data.

Building on existing processes and experiences, such as agency feedback mechanisms, real-time reviews or participatory approaches, and using an

While aid organisations long for a 'silver bullet' type innovation to answer their data needs, many continue to manage beneficiary lists in Excel tables, relying on printouts at distribution sites or conducting surveys on paper forms.

approach that allows for collective use of results, a more people-centered approach could yield significant improvements. With the recent passing of US legislation mandating the collection of feedback for any funded humanitarian programme, and the WHS pushing for both increased effectiveness and accountability to affected communities, ignoring the voice of communities when planning, monitoring and reviewing programmes may soon no longer be an option.

In order to move this agenda forward, some simple suggestions could be adopted:

1. Leverage readily available and commonly used technology:

The use of smartphones, tablets, mobile apps and social media is ubiquitous in the professional and personal lives of humanitarians. While aid organisations long for a 'silver bullet' type innovation to answer their data needs, many continue to manage beneficiary lists in Excel tables, relying on printouts at distribution sites or conducting surveys on paper forms. Everyday, easy-to-use, ready-made tools that can save time and money (while making data analysis faster and more powerful) already exist or can be easily adapted.

2. Agree on a set of generic indicators for perception data from affected communities:

In order for efforts to include the opinions of affected communities, what questions

they are asked, and how they are formulated needs careful consideration. A core set of questions that apply across emergencies (to measure common features such as timeliness, relevance and effectiveness) could be combined with more specific questions for each response. The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Guidance Notes and Indicators offer a starting point for such an exercise.²⁹ These can generate comparable data, and be promoted as a tool to support decision making.

3. Aggregate perception data from affected communities at the collective level:

'Satisfaction' type questions should be promoted in policy instruments, standards and donor requirements. This data should: 1) be collected at regular intervals throughout the Humanitarian Programme Cycle; 2) be disaggregated, for example by age and gender; 3) be fed back to communities for clarification; and 4) result in visible change for those who have been consulted. The analysis of this data should feature on the agenda of coordination mechanisms (e.g. cluster meetings, HCTs, etc.) and feed into decision-making processes.

With the range of opportunities and incentives driving greater use of data, the time is ripe for a shift towards embedding information into humanitarian response.

Refugees from Kobane, Syria, in a local refugee camp in Suruc, Turkey.
© Mike Kollöffel





A woman carries food to her tent in a settlement of Syrian refugees in Minyara, a village in the Akkar district of northern Lebanon.

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Taking accountability to the next level

For the World Humanitarian Summit to deliver more effective and accountable humanitarian response, it will need to push the humanitarian community to rethink its governance and find ways to be collectively accountable, argues Dorothea Hilhorst.

The Rwanda genocide triggered major transformations in humanitarian response, which led to significant progress in the areas of accountability, standards, staff duty of care, coordination, timeliness, information, logistics and effectiveness. As a result, the dignity of communities and the rights of aid recipients have become more central to the humanitarian response. While congratulations for these achievements are in order, now is not the time to sit back. What has been achieved pales in comparison to the rapidly increasing challenges the humanitarian sector faces: the multiple and complex crises of today; the high numbers of IDPs and protracted refugee situations; the increasingly insecure conditions of aid; increasingly 'fragile' contexts; the rise of terrorist-related violence; and the growing frequency of disasters triggered by natural hazards. All of these demand still greater efforts to make humanitarian response more effective.

In December 2014, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), the Sphere Project, People In Aid and Groupe URD launched the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). In June 2015, People In Aid and HAP merged to form the CHS Alliance, an organisation with over 200 members, which aims to facilitate high-quality, accountable assistance to people affected by disaster, conflict or poverty through the use of the CHS as a common quality framework.



The CHS was designed to reflect the evolution of the aid landscape: affected communities have taken a more prominent role in service delivery; there are more capable service providers locally and regionally; and national governments are taking more responsibility for the coordination and provision of aid, especially in contexts of natural disaster. Rapidly changing technology is making it possible to scale up low-cost innovations in many areas of service delivery and accountability, facilitating the delivery of aid tailored to specific contexts and people, for example through the provision of cash relief. And finally, more attention has been devoted to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and other activities that are weaving together humanitarian aid and development like never before.

These issues will be central to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, and this report has put forward different perspectives, approaches and concrete suggestions that can help improve both accountability and effectiveness. As the contributors to this report have so eloquently illustrated, there are still major improvements to be made with regard to the accountability of humanitarian response. In particular, it was suggested that accountability must be strengthened

beyond the narrow confines of direct distribution of aid. I call this ‘taking accountability to the next level’. Key aspects of this ‘next level’ are: acting on the key (political) concerns of affected people; rethinking the implications of accountability for the governance of aid; reforming agencies towards more internal and mutual accountability; and considering accountability at the level of the humanitarian system, rather than the individual agency level alone.

There is no discussion about the ethical case for accountability: affected populations are the primary stakeholders, and at the core of aid stands the principle of humanity – the imperative to relieve the suffering of affected people. They are the *raison d’être*, on whose behalf agencies raise money and operate. However, as Nick van Praag points out in chapter 4, accountability is about much more than just ‘good manners’. Accountability goes hand in hand with an approach based on the humanitarian principles. Indeed, without transparency and listening, no one can credibly claim to truly respect the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality or independence. When the link between accountability and effectiveness of aid was posed at the opening ceremony of the CHS Alliance,

one of the panel members declared: “This relation is obvious, when we only look at the enormous wastes encountered in programmes that did not meet people’s needs or failed to take into account risks and threats to succeed...”

This concluding chapter reviews the accountability and effectiveness issues presented in this report on two levels. Firstly, it looks at them at the project or programme level. Secondly, how can we take accountability practice to the level where it leads to change in the humanitarian system itself, its governance and the collective humanitarian response.

Accountability goes hand in hand with an approach based on the humanitarian principles. Indeed, without transparency and listening, no one can credibly claim to truly respect the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality or independence.

Improving programme-level accountability

Accountability consists of 'taking account' (listening, participation and engagement), 'giving account' (transparency and communication with communities), and 'responsibility' (taking ownership for actions and non-actions, and accepting credit and blame).¹ In chapter 1, we noted that accountability initiatives have traditionally been strongest at the programme level because they are usually in the direct sphere of influence of a single humanitarian agency. Organisations are better at giving account, and aid has become more transparent. Taking account has developed as far as soliciting feedback is concerned. There has however been less progress on participatory programming and taking responsibility. Accountability includes being held to account and this ought to mean that sometimes people get disciplined or poor agency practice is named and shamed.

Nonetheless, significant change can be seen: recipient councils, participatory programming and feedback score cards have become common aspects of programmes. A major change is that we increasingly see flexible service delivery that does not provide a fixed package, but enables people to set their own priorities. Cash relief, in particular, is coming up as such a mechanism that puts people in control over the assistance they need. The different chapters of this report provide lessons and suggestions to build on this progress and make service delivery in crisis situations yet more accountable and effective. Here are five elements that stand out:

Taking smart and context-sensitive approaches to principles

In chapter 2, Jérémie Labbé highlighted the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, which continue to be key anchor points underpinning the humanitarian policy of agencies, the UN and nation states. His chapter points to the strong connection between accountability, principles and effectiveness, whereby principled action both allows and requires proximity. In order

Accountability includes being held to account and this ought to mean that sometimes people get disciplined or poor agency practice is named and shamed.

to be perceived as neutral and independent, agencies need to engage populations and talk to people on all sides of the conflict. This is closely related to transparency and listening – in other words, accountability – and thus enhances aid effectiveness.

Chapter 2 also reminds us of the need to see the application of the principles (and approaches) in context. Principles should be taken less as a rigid dogmatic framework, and more as a flexible and useful guide to cope with the political complexities of the environments in which humanitarian actors work. This means that aid needs to be adapted to the type of crisis (conflict, refugee crisis, prolonged conflict, state fragility, etc.) and that aid providers need to have a process and approach where context-sensitivity is seen as central to more accountable practice.²

Making more effective use of technology and communication

New technologies and means of communication have opened up huge opportunities and already started to change the aid landscape: the use of electronic payment systems (e.g. mobile phones, ATMs, pre-paid cards, etc.) has made providing cash (when appropriate) simpler, more efficient and more effective; Geographic Information System (GIS) applications allow us to effectively map damages and facilitate disaster response; and big data can be used for early warning of food security or health issues, and improve targeting, registration and monitoring of disaster-affected populations.

With the rise of social media, aid actors no longer have a monopoly on information or control of the way in which needs are identified.

With the rise of social media, aid actors no longer have a monopoly on information or control of the way in which needs are identified. Ways to respond meaningfully to unsolicited feedback, where affected populations find their own channels to express critical opinions about aid, need to be found. More should be done to systematically use this feedback, and mainstream tools that can help in this endeavour. One example as described by Nick van Praag in chapter 4 is the use of recurring surveys to obtain feedback from affected communities on an ongoing basis, rather than through one-off data gathering. Transforming this potential will be a key challenge of the innovation agenda, as the sector works out how to make sense of and use the increasing amount of data and information available.³

Connecting humanitarian and development processes

Linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) is often a key priority,⁴ yet for a long time humanitarian aid has been criticised for not effectively linking with and even undermining development. There are many institutional obstacles, and the more relief activities move towards development, the more messy and political they tend to become.⁵ In contexts of natural disaster, and prolonged crises within contexts of institutional and state fragility, agencies increasingly frame their programmes in a resilience paradigm, focusing on the ability of households and communities to address shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces vulnerability.

It is acknowledged that relief, rehabilitation and development cannot be seen as a linear process whereby a brief period of relief is followed by reconstruction and then development, each phase supported by a specific methodology.⁶ LRRD requires a flexible approach, where agencies can quickly adjust their modalities to changing conditions, doing what must be done and taking advantage of opportunities to enhance more structural development. There is much to be gained to make humanitarian aid as developmental as possible in a given situation. There are situations where aid can only concentrate on saving lives. Yet, in each situation, agencies should aim to make as much use as possible of existing capacities, resources and markets so as to protect or enhance development conditions and – at the very least – minimise disturbance for local development processes.

1/ See chapter 10.

2/ See chapter 7.

3/ See chapter 12.

4/ See also: ALNAP. (2015) 'Good Humanitarian Action is Consistent with Longer-Term Political, Economic and Social Processes'. <http://www.alnap.org/node/20656.aspx>

5/ Otto, R. M. (2013) 'Linking Relief and Development: More than old solutions for old problems?' The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department).

6/ Buchanan-Smith, M. and Fabbri, P. (2005) 'Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development: A review of the debate'. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition. Mosel, I. and S. Levine (2014) Remaking the case for linking relief, rehabilitation and development. How LRRD can become a practically useful concept for assistance in difficult places. HPG commissioned report. <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8882.pdf>.



Lebanese women cook side by side with Syrian refugee women to prepare soup that will feed 240 Syrian refugee families living in the Akkar district of northern Lebanon. © International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), ACT Alliance/IOCC

Yet, in each situation, agencies should aim to make as much use as possible of existing capacities, resources and markets so as to protect or enhance development conditions.

Fostering coherent accountability throughout the organisation

Where agencies have improved their accountability in field operations, they may still want to conduct an internal review to make sure they have developed a coherent accountability system in terms of policies, organisation and management. Are policies, decision-making procedures,⁷ standards and operational processes organised transparently? How does the organisation make sure that lessons learned become lessons applied? Proven methods for doing this include internal and peer reviews. There is also mounting evidence that external verification helps agencies to develop coherent accountability processes.⁸

Making accountability more than a ritual

Taking a whole-organisation approach to accountability can also ensure that accountability becomes more than a ritual. Accountability should be about more than just transparency and soliciting feedback. Much can be gained by advancing participatory programming and taking ownership for actions and non-actions, and accepting credit and blame.⁹ It is important to critically monitor the working of accountability in practice (what to do with unwelcome feedback when listening; is communication and transparency well-received; are adjustments on the basis of feedback more than just tokenistic?). Establishing accountability mechanisms is an important step but not a guarantee

How does the organisation make sure that lessons learned become lessons applied?

of effective aid for the most vulnerable people, as accountability relations like every other social relationship are shaped by power and inequality.¹⁰

Taking accountability to the next level

Some people speak of a humanitarian system, but this evokes an image of control and design that is far removed from the unpredictability of environments in which organisations operate and the complexity of the aid system itself. Humanitarian aid can better be imagined as an arena where a large variety of different actors negotiate the relations, politics and practices of aid, including the meaning of effectiveness and accountability.¹¹ Service providers include the government, a range of local institutions, large international agencies, donors and a plethora of private and diaspora initiatives. Aid is also shaped by the people affected by crises, host communities, local institutions, the media, political actors and other stakeholders.

7/ See chapter 3.

8/ See chapter 8.

9/ See chapter 10.

10/ Davis, A. (2007) 'Concerning accountability of humanitarian action'. Networkpaper 58. Humanitarian Policy Group. Overseas Development Institute.

11/ Hülhorst, D. and Jansen, B. (2010) 'Humanitarian Space as Arena: a perspective of everyday practice'. *Development and Change* 41(6): 1117–1139.



Rafeba Hussein teaches in a school in the Sabra refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon, run by the Department of Service for Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches.
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Most of the literature on the accountability of aid agencies to crisis-affected communities takes the aid agency as the point of departure. Accountability then appears to be something that agencies grant to the local population, which tends to make the language of accountability quite patronising.

The different chapters of this report agree that major opportunities and lessons for the future are found in advancing accountability beyond the level of projects and direct service delivery.

Taking accountability to the next level refers, in my view, to three key questions:

- How can humanitarian actors respond to people's needs beyond the services they have to offer?
- How can agencies, inter-agency structures and donors enhance system-wide accountability?
- What does accountability mean for the governance of aid?

There are a number of key themes in this report which point the way forward:

Moving from patronising forms of accountability towards co-governance of aid

Most of the literature on the accountability of aid agencies to crisis-affected communities takes the aid agency as the point of departure. Accountability then appears to be something that agencies *grant* to the local population, which tends to make the language of accountability quite patronising. So what does 'real' accountability mean for the governance of aid?

There has been a shift away from considering people solely as vulnerable recipients and towards recognising and seeking to enhance their resilience, as well as making people and communities the starting point. Likewise, post-crisis restoration of infrastructure and services is increasingly framed as community-driven, with communities as much as possible in the driving seat. This change is also illustrated by the fact that the CHS is written from the point of view of crisis-affected communities.

Notwithstanding these developments, discussions on accountability often slip back into more patronising ways of thinking and changing this will demand more than just a shift in language: it will require rethinking the nature of accountability to people

affected by crises. While agencies define all other accountability relationships as mutual, the primary accountability relationship to affected communities is often conceptualised as a one-way street: that is, focusing on the rights of people to quality services. Citizen voice and rights are key in defining accountability. However, in the relationship between state and society, citizens have rights and responsibilities. Crisis response should more effectively build on people's capacities, existing solidarity mechanisms in communities, and the responsibilities of local elites, institutions and state agents. External aid should not duplicate or undermine local responses, and may call upon local forces to shoulder their share of the responsibility. In other words, accountability relations between aid agencies and crisis-affected people should be reciprocal.

Secondly, a real accountability revolution requires the rethinking of the governance of service providers. In chapter 11, Jonathan Potter forecasts a future in which national and international NGOs are not for the community but of the community. As long as humanitarian agencies are self-governed, they determine the level of accountability they 'give'. A key question is therefore that of co-governance systems. How can relevant constituencies have an actual say in policy setting and the delivery of aid? How can they enforce accountability, including applying sanctions when performance is not up to agreed standards?¹² And how could such

12/ Ackerman, J. (2004) 'Co-Governance for Accountability: Beyond "Exit" and "Voice"'. *World Development* (32: 3). pp.447-463.

approaches be made compatible with the principle of independence, especially in relation to the state. One of the options could be to move from feedback mechanisms to local level audit processes.¹³

Thinking about ‘sideways’ accountability: the relation between aid providers

Matthew Serventy (chapter 10) examined the important issue of how inter-agency structures such as the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and clusters can become more accountable. But how about inter-agency accountability? The ultimate objective of each agency is to improve the lives of affected people, which provides a moral incentive to take up responsibility for the response as a whole. There is also an effectiveness and legitimacy incentive for sideways accountability: affected communities often don’t distinguish between different aid providers, and problems with one agency can easily tarnish the credibility of the entire sector, jeopardising the effectiveness and legitimacy of the whole response. Finally, there is a learning incentive in sideways accountability, as there is immense potential in peer reviews and other inter-agency forms of monitoring to find benchmarks and good practices that can be used to improve agencies’ service delivery.

In recent years, humanitarian agencies have become highly aware of the importance of sideways accountability and invested more systematically in joint learning initiatives such as peer reviews, seminars to exchange and share information, inter-agency community feedback, response mechanisms, and so on. Developments in coordination, such as the introduction of the cluster approach, can also be seen to enhance sideways accountability, including to local authorities. There have however also been setbacks: since the 2005 Indian Ocean Tsunami evaluation,¹⁴ there have not been any joint evaluations.

Humanitarian aid is a competitive field and agencies (NGOs as much as UN agencies) can at times engage in ‘turf wars’ or prioritise their own programmes over investing in the sector as a whole. Coordination is more geared to the practical issues of ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘where’, without touching on ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. Programme managers may be overburdened with everyday logistical challenges and don’t always make time to consider the bigger picture.

This report highlights several areas that require inter-agency accountability measures to respond to challenges that affect humanitarian effectiveness. One such issue is the fight against corruption and abuse of aid. Another relates to political complications and finding principled ways to deal with these. Finally, we can ask whether the presence of a large number of international agencies is always appropriate and effective.

International aid is expensive, distorts local economies, undermines local institutions and is not sustainable.

Localising service delivery: moving international agencies to an auxiliary and facilitating role

Balancing the role of international agencies with national service providers is a crucial issue. International aid is expensive, distorts local economies, undermines local institutions and is not sustainable. Nevertheless, there will also be crises that outstrip local capacities and require an international response capacity. The question therefore is how to render the international presence as minimal as possible. The UN and INGOs have strong discourses on subsidiarity (international organisations only step in when local resources are lacking) and partnership. There are indeed an increasing number of INGOs that operate through local partners. Nonetheless, the Global Humanitarian Assistance report finds that only 0.2% of total international humanitarian assistance went directly to local and national NGOs, and just 3.1% to the governments of affected states.¹⁵

In the case of natural disasters, the Hyogo Framework for Action and now the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction place a premium on the roles and responsibilities of national actors. In the case of conflict, national governments continue to have responsibilities to the population and must abide by International Humanitarian Law.

There are reasons for caution too. The purpose of humanitarian aid to save lives and restore dignity must always be the central consideration, and national governments and service providers can stand in the way of this. In conflict situations this is often obvious, yet natural disasters also happen on account of bad governance and often coincide with conflict.

Localising service delivery means that international organisations will – much more than they do today – play an auxiliary role in enabling and facilitating national governmental and non-governmental service delivery. The aim should be to assist in rendering national service delivery effective and accountable. It will truly be a change in aid culture when national service delivery becomes the norm, and international service delivery needs to be justified (for example, what makes the situation so special that direct international service delivery is required? Why are national service capacities not ready to take over and what can be done to make this happen?).

Fine-tuning accountability systems to people and institutions

A classical distinction between humanitarian assistance and development aid is that development is more geared towards strengthening institutions and works through state authorities and NGOs, whereas humanitarian assistance focuses more on individuals and households in need. Their respective accountability systems are likewise different: following the Paris and Accra declarations, new models of partnerships have been developed where donors and partner countries aim to hold one another mutually accountable for development results. Humanitarian agencies, on the other hand, seek more direct relations with the people they are assisting, and have accountability systems to actively seek feedback from service recipients.

These differences have grown over time, but aren’t necessarily any longer appropriate or relevant to today’s realities. Communities affected by poverty or crises do not see the distinction between crisis response and development, since they are intertwined in many ways, as development and humanitarian communities alike acknowledge. With the Busan ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’ of 2011,

13/ See <http://www.pogar.org/publications/ac/books/practicalguide-socialaudit-e.pdf>

14/ For details, see, Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), 2007, “Synthesis Report: Expanded Summary: Joint evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami”, by John Cosgrave.

15/ <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/report/gha-report-2015>

for example, the developmental view on mutual accountability and state ownership has gained some prominence in fragile states as well, and to some extent bridges the two types of accountability.

Humanitarian agencies often shy away from local government, traditional or religious leaders, or local NGOs, out of concern that they may be perceived as taking sides in conflict. However, independence and neutrality should not be seen as excuses not to engage with these actors. The key is to find ways to be accountable to national institutions and safeguard principled and effective humanitarian aid.

Development actors, on the other hand, can learn from humanitarians about the importance of direct accountability to affected people. Connecting to government, traditional or religious authorities, and civil society organisations is not a substitute for direct accountability and participation, as there is often a mismatch between authorities and people.

Taking accountability to the next level means developing accountability systems that balance relations with authorities and other institutional stakeholders and direct accountability to crisis-affected communities. This means that accountability systems need to be fine-tuned to the context and the type of crisis.

Transforming internal accountability: the crucial role of implementing staff

Accountability to affected people gets a lot of attention, but according to Jonathan Potter in chapter 11, it is equally important for agencies to listen to the people who work directly with affected communities. Implementing staff work with communities on a daily basis, and they often know better than anyone what the problems are with the provision of aid. Implementing staff are also responsible for many of the innovations that come out of humanitarian assistance, as they find creative ways of dealing with the obstacles they encounter as they go about their work.

Humanitarian agencies have invested a great deal in improving human resource systems. The CHS incorporates a number of explicit and implicit references to the importance of employing competent staff under fair and just working conditions. It is important to have well motivated staff and to respect workers' rights.

A point for discussion is whether agencies have enough space to listen to the stories of aid workers. Chapter 3 dealt with the tension that often exists between 'gandalfs' (experience-driven humanitarians) and 'geeks' (evidence-driven humanitarians). Agencies should aim to accommodate both. Staff are used to accounting for their actions: they report what they have done and achieved on a regular basis and in standardised ways. However, accountability should be about more than reporting on finances and numbers. The word 'account' refers as much to a story as to a report. Accountability can thus be read as 'report-ability' as well as 'tell-a-story-about-ability', and we need to ensure that staff and affected populations can tell their stories and experiences and be taken seriously.¹⁶

Has aid become too bureaucratized to listen to and act on the stories of implementing staff? There is a strong preference for relying on externally derived knowledge and evidence, and this may be at the expense of building on the good judgment of affected communities and the people who work with them on a day-to-day basis. It is important to create unrestricted 'upward' flows of information (i.e. from the field) in organisations and make internal accountability more mutual. It pays off to listen to implementing staff in order to pick up early warning signals when problems occur, and learn from everyday innovations to make programmes more effective and accountable to affected people.

Taking a systemic approach: understanding the importance of advocacy and diplomacy

Aid agencies want to support affected people to build livelihoods and access services in order to lead a healthy life with dignity. Aid programmes are usually temporary and minor contributions to this ambition. Sometimes, there is simply an immediate imperative to save lives, but in other more protracted situations, vulnerable people want aid actors to assist in structurally improving their life prospects by addressing oppressive politics and supporting systemic changes in their institutional and physical environment. James Darcy's warning from the 2013 edition of this report is still relevant: "We have to be careful not to see accountability in narrow programmatic

terms; and in isolation from the nexus of other (sometimes more fundamental) accountability relationships of which it forms part."¹⁷

Advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy begin with understanding the frameworks that governments have committed to, and enabling staff members to use these in their daily diplomacy and negotiations with authorities. International Humanitarian Law, national law and international human rights treaties provide a strong basis to call upon international and national actors to better protect civilians and ensure assistance is provided, with respect for constituents' voice and rights.

A systemic approach requires that aid agencies carefully analyse the (political) context and strategise to enhance the accountability of national governments, and international political accountability for the protection of civilians and the provision of funding. It also requires that agencies monitor potential negative effects of their engagements in the medium and longer term. A particular challenge is to address the shrinking space for civil society in a number of crisis-affected countries. Again, this issue points to the need for principled engagement with states: not using principles as an excuse for disengagement but anchoring engagement in these principles and International Humanitarian Law.

In cases where local citizens have more room for manoeuvre, agencies can also assist local communities to enhance their advocacy skills. Some agencies choose not to provide direct services to crisis-affected people, but instead train local communities and accompany them as they negotiate quality service provision with local authorities, NGOs and other service providers for themselves.

Conclusion

Accountability is important. Apart from the ethical imperative to be accountable, good accountability relations also enable principled and safe service delivery and they condition effectiveness of aid.

Service delivery to crisis-affected people has become more accountable in the last 20 years. There are still gaps between what agencies have committed to do and what they actually do, between the systems in place and how they work in practice, and between lessons learned and lessons

16/ This distinction was already forwarded in 1967 by Harold Garfinkel in *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. p.33.

17/ Darcy, J. 'Have we lost the plot? Revisiting the accountability debate'. *Humanitarian Accountability Report*. 2013 Ed. p.5.



Somali children who fled drought and war at home walk joyfully through their new home neighbourhood on the outskirts of the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya.

© ACT/Paul Jeffrey

It takes a village to build a well. Residents of the Khamsadegaig Camp for internally displaced persons look down a well they built with help from the Darfur Emergency Response Operation, a joint programme of Caritas Internationalis and Action by Churches Together (ACT). © ACT Alliance/Paul Jeffrey



applied. The chapters of this report provide valuable pointers and reminders on: improving accountability in service delivery underpinned by humanitarian principles; using technology effectively; internalising accountability instead of ritualising it; linking relief to development; and seeking coherence in accountability relations through all levels of the organisation. These issues can be summarised by the idiom that agencies have to “walk the talk”.

This is not a straightforward operation of adding on accountability measures. It implies that agencies have to adopt working processes that are sensitive to feedback, have a strong antenna for contextual change and the politics of aid, continuously monitor their work including the effect of measures to improve accountability, and have the power and courage to adapt the course of their actions where necessary.

The second part of the chapter dealt with issues that can take accountability to the next level. Accountability to affected populations in service delivery is within the immediate sphere of influence of agencies. The major challenges and opportunities to address, in the view of many contributors to this report, exist on a level beyond that of single-agency projects.

Bringing accountability to the next level will transform the character of service delivery in response to crises and poverty. Accountability relations and the promotion of aid effectiveness involve a complex system of donors, national governments, service providers and communities. If aid programmes are to become more effective and adjustable to contexts and respond to people’s priority needs, changes are required by all these different actors. Humanitarian agencies will be taken far outside of their comfort zone, being held to account more systematically

and developing a proactive culture that maximises principled engagement with affected people and other stakeholders. Humanitarian donors will change who they fund and how. Aid workers will do their jobs in a different way: relating to local and national authorities and the people they are trying to help will be central in their job descriptions. Moving out of the comfort zone in which too much of today’s humanitarian action takes place and enduring some discomfort in the process of change is needed in order to deliver more genuinely accountable humanitarian action.

The major challenges and opportunities to address, in the view of many contributors to this report, exist on a level beyond that of single-agency projects.

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“It is the people, not our mandate, that must provide the rationale for what we do and how we do it. If we are going to achieve results for the people, we must begin with leadership from the countries, the communities and the people we serve. This means our agenda [...] is fully informed by the concerns of the people we serve and with whom we partner. This has rightly taken centre stage during the [World Humanitarian] Summit because being people-centred ultimately means recognising the primary role of local communities in preparedness and response.”

Ertharin Cousin

Executive Director of the World Food Programme
*Closing remarks at the World Humanitarian Summit Pacific
Regional Consultation in Auckland, New Zealand*



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