

Changing Crisis and the Quest for Adequate Solutions. World Conference on Humanitarian Studies. Addis Ababa, 5-8th March 2016. Notes for the Global Insecurities Centre, SPAIS, Bristol University.

Susanne Jaspars, Research Associate, SPAIS. 15 March 2016.

I participated in the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies just over a week ago to present some of the findings of my PhD research on the history of food aid in Sudan and its relation with governance (supervised by Mark Duffield and Jutta Weldes), and to link up with other researchers and practitioners working on humanitarian issues. I presented a paper on 'long-term food aid, government response and obstacles to humanitarian assistance in Sudan', as part of a panel on 'obstacles to humanitarian assistance; obstructive authoritarian regimes and other actors' organised by Tanja Muller from the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute at Manchester University (see page 4 for more detail).

The World Conference on Humanitarian Studies is a two-yearly event where academics and practitioners meet to present research and discuss humanitarian issues.¹ This was the fourth conference and the first in Africa. This year the conference was dominated by the unprecedented scale of crisis (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Central African Republic, Nigeria, and South Sudan) and the refugee crisis affecting Europe after years of containment in the regions. The conference took place in the build up to the first World Humanitarian Summit (to be held in May 2016) called by the UN Secretary General to rethink humanitarianism in the face of the humanitarian system's inability to cope with today's crises. The UN Secretary General's report points to: an increase in natural disasters, the protracted nature of emergencies, emergencies in urban as well as rural populations, and large-scale conflicts. Disappointment with the report and its broad vision rather than setting out the practical reforms needed was frequently mentioned at the conference. Another criticism was that it covers a wide range of responses as part of humanitarian action, from political action to end conflict, to protection, justice, risk reduction and preparedness (in relation to refugees and migration), building on local capacity, investing in local actors, link relief with development (to end need) and most importantly promoting people's resilience. The UN SG gives *ending* need and investing in humanity as core responsibilities of the humanitarian system. His report is entitled: 'One humanity: shared responsibility.'

The conference started with a **keynote speech by Hugo Slim, Head of Policy at ICRC** (and previously Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethics Law and Armed Conflict at Oxford University), who discussed the title of the conference. Should humanitarians try to do everything or just do some things well? Slim argued that the principle of humanity was not as narrowly defined as many of us think, the ICRC defines it as: 'to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.' Humanitarian action can therefore include the means of survival; it can be seen as an everything project but in practice this is not possible, particularly in situations of conflict. It is more realistic to think about meeting needs rather than ending needs or preventing an even greater development reversal. Examples of ICRC projects that go beyond saving lives are: prevention of rape and sexual violence (as well as individual care), cattle vaccination and treatment in South Sudan, rehabilitating sewage

¹ Participating Universities include: Groningen (Globalisation studies), Manchester (Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute), Geneva (Centre for Research into Humanitarian Activities), Bochum (Institute for International Law, Peace and Armed Conflict), Wageningen, Ghent, Copenhagen, Tufts University, New York University, LSE, University College London, and the International Association of Universities (Network on Humanitarian Action), the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin and the Overseas Development Institute in London, and the Peace Research Institute in Oslo. NGO participation included: ICRC, IFRC, MSF, SCF, Mercy Corps and IRC.

systems in Lebanon. ICRC could engage in everything but practically it cannot. Adequate solutions means not being deflected by an idealism that wants to end all need. If you think about the principle of building local capacity: ought to implies can, but something should only be a moral absolute if you can actually do it. As humanitarians, we should only do what we can. Exercise prudence: need to be wise but cannot do everything. Meeting immediate need is an ethically honourable goal. Stopping people getting poorer is a good thing.

Comments on the speech included the risk of trade-off between broader humanitarian assistance and access, humanitarian assistance as part of the problem, and the need to engage the community. More importantly, the 'quest for adequate solutions' is disappointing as it entails a lack of ambition or aspiration. It seems as if the humanitarian community has lowered its expectations.

A second keynote speech was given by Tadesse Bekele from the Disaster Risk Management Commission in Ethiopia, on Risk Reduction Activities in Ethiopia.²

The papers presented at the conferences came under four broad themes:

- Humanitarian Crises and Development
- Conflict and Humanitarianism
- The Implications of Climate Change for Humanitarian Studies
- New Partnerships; New Technologies; Professionalism in Crisis Response

Each theme had a number of panels (climate change the fewest, interestingly). Topics of papers presented ranged from community resilience and resilience standards, to managing access limitations, the governance of security, humanitarian innovation, sexual violence in humanitarian crisis, humanitarian protection (including a panel on the Protection of Civilian sites in South Sudan), the Ebola crisis, redefining humanitarianism, historical perspectives on humanitarianism, locally-led humanitarian action, big data and modern technology, cash transfers, and obstacles to humanitarian assistance (see <https://humanitarianstudiesconference.org/index.php?id=9>, for more information on the panels). A number of panels reported findings of two large DFID funded research projects: the *Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium* led by ODI (with Tufts and Wageningen University, FAO and research institutes in Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal: <http://www.securelivelihoods.org/>) and the *Justice and Security and Research Programme* led by LSE (with University of Ghent, Tufts, African Security Sector Network, Social Science Research Council, South-East European Research Network, Video Journalism movement: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/JSRP/JSRP.aspx>).

Roundtables were held on the role of academia in the humanitarian sector, humanitarian cyber (in)security, cash transfers and the state of the humanitarian system, enhancing learning and research for humanitarian action, and professionalization of humanitarian action. I went to the first three.

In the panel sessions I went to, other than the failures of the humanitarian system and the need for (but also resistance to) reform, key issues raised in the conference were the multiple and overlapping sovereignties between UN and host governments (as in South Sudan's Protection of Civilian sites) and the rejection or regulation of international aid (discussions on locally-led humanitarian action in Japan and on obstacles to humanitarian aid). When is it OK for a government to reject aid or expel aid agencies? The other key issue for me was the lack of attention to the potential risks associated with new digital technologies amongst humanitarian actors. These risks

² It was difficult to hear so I unfortunately I have no notes.

were discussed in the round-table on humanitarian cyber (in)security but when I went to the roundtable on cash transfers straight after, the dangers associated with keeping and transferring electronic data on beneficiaries in one place and with digital cash transfers had not been analysed. It is clear that food aid and cash transfers pose different risks and that the latter need more consideration.

Some more detailed notes below on the panels I attended for those interested:

UNMISS Protection of Civilian sites: repacking safe areas or innovation in protection? Panel organiser: Sophia Dawkins

The first presentation was by Patryck Labuda (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights) on UN peace-keeping and PoC sites in South Sudan. He argued that laws around peace-keeping have not kept up with developments on the ground. Peace-keeping was originally a conflict-management tool to keep the belligerents in conflict separate (e.g Egypt and Israel in 1956), and was not planned for complicated civil wars. Things have changed but the law has not. The law states: consent of host states, impartiality, non-use of force. In South Sudan, no one has asked the rebel movements about consent. How can UNMISS be impartial if it is acting on behalf of the government of Sudan? The UN's Protection of Civilians mandate, which started in 1999, is really the main change. Peacekeepers can use force if civilians are at immediate threat of physical violence. In the South Sudan PoC sites the UN is required to act like the state. There are about 200,000 civilians in these sites. Two big issues:

1. Judicial authority. What kind of judicial powers does the UN have?
2. Detention. Can the UN detain people and keep them in detention indefinitely.

Article 16 in SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) in South Sudan, states that all UN premises remain the territory of South Sudan but the UN has exclusive authority in these sites. So there are two sovereignties in these sites, which has caused enormous problems in terms of actions taken in response to crime. The UN cannot prosecute and send criminals to its own jail but if it prevents the Sudan government from prosecuting them what are the consequences? Solutions have included the establishment of risk assessment committees to determine whether people can be handed over to the GOSS and the creation of temporary holding facilities. But the UN Security Council has just re-affirmed the peace-keeping principles (which actually no longer apply).

The second speaker was Flora McCrone from Justice Africa, who did ethnographic work in the PoC sites with youth gangs and 'teams' often accused of theft of other crimes. Many of these youths identify with American hip-hop culture and call themselves 'nigger'. They are often suspected of robbery and according to the UN, all the 'teams' are illegal, despite their claims of wanting to promote peace. UNMISS does not address the issue of why young people join gangs or why they are connected with crime. In future, she said, the UN needs to pre-empt the need for security and justice.

Dr. Leben Moro (Juba University, South Sudan) was discussant and described his own experience of having to seek safety in a PoC site. He raised the issue of durable solutions. What is the end game? He also mentioned that the youth gangs could be a form of youth empowerment, the exclusion of youth is a big issue not only for themselves but because they can be manipulated to do the dirty work of politicians. Alex de Waal commented that there were some precedents for UN detaining people in Mogadishu in 1993 and in Darfur community policing in the camps for displaced was one of the few positive outcomes of the peace negotiations.

Obstacles to humanitarian assistance: Obstructive authoritarian regimes and other actors. Panel organiser: Tanja Muller.

This was the panel in which I presented a paper and was not able to make many notes on the other presentations. The first paper (by Anthony Redmond but presented by Bertrand Taithe, Manchester University) was on the highly disorganised response by foreign medical teams in response to the Haiti earthquake. In some cases teams were uninvited, carried out inappropriate procedures, and left without follow-up. There was no accountability in the provision of medical assistance. He suggested the host country must be enabled to assume a role in the registration of medical teams.

The second paper was on INGO legitimacy claims in South Sudan (by Roisin Read, also Manchester). INGOs have a long history in South Sudan. During Operation Lifeline Sudan, INGOs were able to act without questions about their legitimacy. They failed in their humanitarian goals but established exclusionary structures and poached staff from government. They had enormous and unchallenged power. With independence, there was optimism that the new government would take responsibility for protecting its population. The legitimacy of INGOs was questioned, so were their methods and practices. The new government was increasingly hostile. Does the right of access to aid confer legitimacy on INGOs? Does it mean governments need to allow access? A new INGO bill is due to be introduced in the near future.

The third paper was on disaster relief and the obstructive state in post-hurricane Felix Nicaragua (by Lisa Ficklin, Manchester). Nicaragua's strong state was instrumental in how relief was distributed, but not according to humanitarian principles. Aid was distributed in civil war battle grounds according to political identity and other aid was directed to beneficiaries from whom the state would receive a return. It was piggy-backed on to a rural development project in which farmers paid a percentage of their harvest. The government sold food at inflated prices. This challenges the assumption that increased state capacity automatically decreases state obstruction to humanitarian principles.

The final paper was my paper on long-term food aid, government response and obstacles to humanitarian assistance in Sudan. In this paper I argued that the current obstacles to humanitarian assistance are in part a function of the history of food aid and humanitarian assistance in Sudan and the responses by the Sudan government. From the Sudan government's perspective, the history of food aid could be divided into state-support, bypassing the state, and state control. I discussed how international agencies bypassed the state in the late 80s and 90s, and how the government gradually learnt to control international food aid and established its own food aid apparatus.

Questions and comments focussed on whether the state should really be called obstructive. Just trying to re-assert its authority? (but in Sudan it meant aid was not distributed according to humanitarian principles). If INGOs are weak they should be expelled. The issue of sovereignty and humanitarian assistance needs further discussion. This also came up as an issue in the following panel. Other comments were that aid and political economy should be an important part of the discussion.

Locally-led humanitarian action: the future or folly? Panel organisers: Tara Gingerich and Marc Cohen

The first speaker was Youssif El-Tayeb from DRRRA Sudan. He started with a discussion of the different local safety nets which in the past were used to assist poor people. Now it goes into a government 'Zakat chamber' and less is given to the poor. The diaspora plays a large role in assistance: 6 million Sudanese live outside Sudan. International NGOs initially established their own structures, and paid no attention to local organisations. Many national NGOs were created during the Darfur conflict, which was part of the process of Sudanising aid in Sudan. Parity and equity between national and international NGOs is important. Remove the condescension and build capacity in a genuine way.

This was followed by a presentation (by Oscar Gomez) about the response to the Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. He highlighted that we are not having a conversation about the rejection of aid. We need to disaggregate the ownership of aid – the final stage of ownership is being able to reject it. Japan after the earthquake accepted almost all aid that was offered, mainly because they did not want to offend anyone. They expected professionals but instead the response was highly chaotic and much of the assistance provided was not needed (e.g 20 search and rescue teams came but were not needed). WFP and military aid were amongst the most effective. Contradictory safety advice following the damage to the nuclear power stations created panic. Some of the most significant aid is that which assists communities after 3 years; the issues are still not resolved.

The discussion included points on the rejectability of aid, and the contrasts between Japan and Sudan. The Sudan government has tried to reject aid on many occasions, but populations would suffer. When is it OK to reject aid? Also on the role of INGOs other than capacity building? We used to say that INGOs could speak out when local NGOs could not, but they are no longer doing that. Youssif agreed and said that only OCHA had spoken out about 90,000 new IDPs in Jebel Marra. INGOs have said nothing, despite regular meetings in Khartoum.

Humanitarianism and cyber (in) security. Roundtable organisers: Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Kristoffer Lidén.

The roundtable organisers produced notes on the session which are attached. The main issues discussed were how to research cyber problems in humanitarian action, the changing nature of technology and so far the almost complete lack of consideration amongst humanitarian actors about the risks associated with holding and transferring information digitally. Whilst evidence-based decision-making has always been important, the data is now all in one place. Social media provides different challenges: agencies cannot control what every member of staff and particularly volunteers put on facebook. How to get consent from people who were filmed by drones? The use of big data can also pose risks: pictures of crisis-affected area is now often the first response, but this can also put people or organisations at risk of attack. Furthermore, data can be used commercially by the companies that collect it themselves. The different nature of decision-making between those who design technology and humanitarians also needs more recognitions: the former being largely top-down and the latter bottom-up. Humanitarian and human rights approaches have different approaches to information, the former would collect the minimum necessary and human rights organisations as much as possible, so the latter potentially carries greater risks.

Humanitarian cash transfers. Roundtable organised by Paul Harvey.

Other speakers included Wendy Fenton (Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI, London) and Julia Steets (Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin). Paul reported on the findings of the high-level panel

on cash transfers. The panel's recommendations included: more unconditional cash, invest readiness for cash, better measurement and tracking and use cash to meet a range of needs. The panel preferred cash to vouchers. Other recommendations were: link with governments, development actors, social protection, capitalise on private sector expertise, where possible deliver cash digitally, improve data security, privacy and regulatory compliance, and improve coordination. Specific emphasis was placed on the need for humanitarians to work better with the private sector. Finally, it was recommended that cash should be central to humanitarian response plans and that assessments and targeting should be separate from the delivery of cash. The UN Secretary General has also highlighted the importance of shifting to cash transfers in the run-up to the WHS.

However, there are questions around agency willingness to change – cash cuts across sectors and is threatening. DFID and ECHO are on board but the US still provides tied food aid. Giving people cash is also difficult in American discourse – welfare is pejorative term. The US runs largest food aid programme in the world for its own population – food stamps. The humanitarian architecture will also change: would there still be a need for clusters? Need for fewer and smaller organisations? Aid organisations may have to become global social workers, focussing on protection and ensuring the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

Julia Steets added that if cash was used as a default, it would be provided in 70% of humanitarian contexts. Food, NFI, shelter – 80-90%. Maybe agriculture. The percentage for health, water, and education would be less. Protection would remain as is. Estimates that could have about 40% of humanitarian budget as cash. Overheads would be reduced. Negative aspects? The use of assets by agencies as a negotiation tool would be impaired. Non-cash component would become more expensive. Who would foot that bill?

Wendy Fenton added that still only only 6-10% of humanitarian assistance is cash. Why? We have the evidence of its effectiveness. The obstacles towards progress are political and institutional barriers. There is a lot of fear about what changing to cash as default means. For many, it means giving up power and visibility.

Discussion focussed on the risks and potentially negative effects. Would humanitarian's protection role be compromised if there were fewer social workers on the ground? A loss of proximity to conflict-affected populations will disconnect aid workers from the populations they aim to assist. Whilst the risks associated with cash transfers do not appear to be greater than food aid, they are under-investigated. Data security is one example, who else would be interested in data, how are agencies considering the risk of cyber ransom. The roundtable organisers felt they should get help from the private sector for data security. The common view is that digital transfers offer a degree of protection (compared to food aid) to beneficiaries because it is not visible. But the risks of cash transfers are different. The roundtable organisers were not aware of any studies of the political economy or of the social and political impact of cash transfers.

The Humanitarian Present: Crisis, Malaise, Reform. Panel organiser: Antonio Donini

The first presentation was by David Morgan (Dalhousie University), who examined how humanitarian actors have taken on the challenge of reform. He argued that the humanitarian system is informed by an elite, which has the same sets of beliefs and which acts and understand reform in the same ways. This has re-inforced the boundaries between national and international actors. The use of jargon limits the participation of local actors and generalizable data is prioritised over local perspectives. Reforms (clusters, accountability standards, etc) have maintained these patterns of exclusion, which is what they were intended to address.

The second presentation was by Dan Maxwell (Tufts University), who introduced a project called 'Planning from the Future' which is jointly carried out by the Humanitarian Policy Group in ODI, Kings College (London) and Tufts University. It has a historical component, assesses the current situation and projects to the future. The history of humanitarian action shows that little in the current situation is completely new: continuity of empire, continuity in the instrumentalisation of aid, and how humanitarisms have been different throughout the world. The current situation has seen a growth in humanitarian budgets, need, and a gap between assessed need and funding. The nature of conflict is changing from mainly internal conflict to terrorism and state fragility. Protracted crisis is the new norm. 70-80% of humanitarian budgets goes to crises of more than 8 years. Trends within the system are a growth in institutionalisation, top-down programming, ongoing issues about accountability and a struggle to apply principles and protection. We saw system failure in Sudan and Sri Lanka. Dan finished his presentation with some 'positive' changes: market-based approaches, cash transfers, approaches to protection, insurance and risk financing, technological changes, evidence-based decision making, improved response to natural disasters, resilience, and the rise of non-traditional humanitarian actors. However, as I pointed out in the discussion, many of these could also be seen as increasing the exclusion of national actors from decision-making.

The final presentation was by Antonio Donini (also Tufts), who raised similar issues. A few big agencies determine the rules of the game, the dominant discourse. Major overhaul of the humanitarian system is needed. But can this come from within the aid industry? Change has never come from the inside, it needs to come from outside. His proposed reforms included: 1. Cash transfers, localisation, subsidiarity. 2. Independent funding for needs assessments and M&E. 3. Establishment of independent commission for reform.

The idea of the independent commission drew a lot of criticism in the discussion. Participants thought that this would be drawn from the same elite. Some suggested a social movement was needed because the system is not going to reform itself. The other two main issues brought out in the discussion was the need to look at the local instrumentalisation of aid and the politics of cash transfers. If cash transfers were scaled up, would there be a need for clusters? The role of the private sector would be increased, WFP decreased.

(Re)defining Humanitarianism. Panel organised by the *Justice and Security and Research Programme* led by LSE, including the following speakers: Henry Radice, Tim Allen, Mary Kaldor, Rachel Ibreck, Koen Vlassenroot, Alex de Waal, Tatiana Carayannis.

This session introduced some of the topics covered in their soon to be published Dictionary of Humanitarianism. The key topics covered were:

- War and humanitarianism (Kaldor). Rule of war (IHL: distinction, proportionality) and humanitarian principles (neutrality and impartiality) cannot be applied in today's wars. War is often a predatory social condition, with many armed actors. In the War on Terror, Bush claimed it was a new war, so principles did not apply. In Syria, at what point did protests change to armed rebellion? Now the west is using war for humanitarian purposes.
- The politics of humanitarianism (Radice). Humanity is the most political of all principles. Humanitarian action has social and political consequences. The humanitarian impulse is essentially an impulse – all humanitarians negotiate on a daily basis. Need to look back at the origins of humanitarianism, e.g. the role of social movements in the battle of Solferino, and look at humanitarian action at large.
- Europe's response to the refugee crisis (?). Humanitarian action is used to justify a deterrent on the basis of security risks. E.g. the rescue operation in the Mediterranean is a security response, fighting migration but is presented as a humanitarian response. People

are pushed back to countries such as Turkey or Libya, with poor human rights records or in conflict.

- Cultural issues (?). The importance of memory and history for affected populations. Rather than treating people as 'bare life' (ref to Agamben), humanitarians need to support practices of burial, and other culturally appropriate rituals.
- Resources and conflict (Vlassenroot?). There is a growing concern about the role of resources (including aid) and greed in conflict. Intervention to prevent access of armed groups to resources? Resource governance is often seen as a priority in post-conflict resolution but even this can be turned into an opportunity. Political processes are underestimated.
- Preventive action (Carayannis). Started with UN role to prevent super-power rivalries from turning into armed conflict. Greater flexibility of international community stopped with the Rwanda crisis. The focus is now on structural intervention but definitions of prevention are too broad to be researchable. What is it we are preventing?
- Genocide (Allen). The term was first coined in 1944 but not used in the Nuremberg trials. Something that was indescribable and must never happen again. Defined in 1946 followed in 1948 by the convention on the prevention of genocide, which was essentially to prevent a crime that hadn't happened yet. An intention to destroy whole or in part a particular religious or ethnic group (political groups excluded because objection by Russia). Prosecutions have been for very narrowly defined genocide – Srebrenica, Darfur? But instrumental killing was only part of what was going on. Other contexts where mass killing of a particular group has taken place e.g. northern Uganda, has not been called genocide.

In the discussion issues were raised about the role of multi-national arms suppliers, the selective use of the term genocide, alternative frameworks for humanitarian intervention if humanitarian principles are no longer valid (complement with human right law), the use of 'preventive action' in the WoT.

Gender, sexuality and violence in humanitarian crisis. Panel organisers: Dorothea Hilhorst, Dyan Mazurana and Teddy Atim.

The first paper was by Holly Ritchie (Institute of Social Studies in The Hague) on 'women's enterprise, human security and inclusion for Syrian refugees in Jordan. The main finding was that because work was illegal and men were more likely to be extradited back to Syria if found working, many women became involved in periodic work outside the house for the first time. This had positive impact in relation to income and acquiring new skills, but work was very piecemeal and potentially exploitative. Because this was a new activity, social protection from within the community and solidarity between women was limited.

The next paper was by Teddy Atim (Wageningen University/Tufts University) who presented her research on the female survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (SV). Women are often not seen as involved in conflict but for those who experience SV it has life-long consequences. Most do not go back to school, but those who did managed to get skilled employment. Other skills training, usually provided by NGOs, did not really make a difference as they could not use the skills to make a living. Women experienced frequent revictimisation: 30% had married, but often trapped in abusive relationships because they were seen as spoilt marriage partners. Children born from SV were treated differently: not sent to school and often deserted by parents. The women and children continued to be stigmatised because of their association with the LRA. No resources or compensation had been offered to the families. The study points to the need to consider the wider context, not just the victims.

The final paper was by Thea Hilhorst, Nynke Douma, and Jocelyn Matabaro (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague) on sexual violence response in DRC. She referred to an earlier report, 'Fond de Commerce', in which they reported on the unintended consequences of SV response. These findings were not popular and included: the statistics provided bloated figures and unwarranted extrapolations, issues with coordination and professionalism, women with fistula as result of child birth not SV, forced convictions because sometimes NGOs were given money for the number of convictions, erosion of Congolese constituency for controlling SV and no attention to other gender issues (e.g. teenage pregnancy). Additional research after one year showed that international attention continues but funding is reduced. But a wide range of interventions was framed as SV programmes because this was the only place where funding is available. This meant programmes were difficult to monitor. A key issue now is 'copinage', or consensual boyfriend/girlfriend relationship but in which men can be convicted if the family disapproves because sex under 18 is illegal. There is still not enough attention to gender-based violence more broadly.

Hunger and conflict – the 2015 Global Hunger Index. Panel organiser: Alex de Waal.

This started with a presentation (by Bart Minter, German Agro-Action?) on the Global Hunger Index (GHI) a composite quantitative indicator used to compare hunger in different countries, show progress and create incentives to act to end hunger. The index is a combination of undernutrition, child wasting, child stunting and mortality, but when I asked what the added advantage was of combining 4 quantitative indicators to make one the presenter could not remember how or why the indicator was developed. The major "revelation" was that conflict and hunger were closely associated (Chad and CAR have some of the highest GHI), but otherwise general progress (only 52 out of 170 countries where the index is alarming). No data for Sudan, Somalia and the Congo. I also pointed out that a single indicator of hunger would re-enforce the trend towards standardised rather than context-specific interventions.

The second presentation was by Alex de Waal (Tufts University) on his analysis of famine mortality since the 1870, which showed a massive drop in famine mortality in recent years. Darfur and Somalia were exceptions but still, mortality in these crises was much lower than the mass deaths in China, Vietnam and Cambodia in the past 50 years. Causes of famines with the highest mortality were armed conflict and political oppression. Progress was thought to be the result of increase in food production, public health, transport infra-structure and poverty reduction. As population increased, mortality decreased.

The panel included two other presentations by Concern, one of North Kivu (DRC) and another on Somalia and South Sudan, both of which gave some examples of how conflict caused hunger and famine much of which has been shown by past research (asset loss, increase in prices and market transaction costs, displacement, destruction of infra-structure). The latter presentation also made the point that ending hunger is important for economic growth. Cost of hunger is \$6/day in labour activity.

The role of academia in the humanitarian sector. Roundtable with Wendy Fenton (Humanitarian Practice Network, ODI), Francis Hill (Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance – ELRHA), and Thea Hilhorst (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague).

This roundtable was organised because the World Humanitarian Summit asked for contributions from academia. They suggested contributions on: what academia can offer towards future humanitarian action, its educational and societal role, support for humanitarian faculties in southern countries, help decision-making based on academic quality evidence and support research agenda for humanitarian action.

In general, practitioners highlighted the need for academics to make their work accessible, and academics mentioned the lack of incentives for engagement with practitioners and working on dissemination and uptake within the typical academic career trajectory. Applied research, done by think-tanks is often quicker and more impact focussed, but not as rigorous as academic research. There are an increasing number of partnerships between academics, think-tanks, and NGOs which is overcoming some of the prejudices about academics by practitioners. ELRHA brings together practitioners and academics. Prejudices might include: academics do not have field experience, are too critical, do not communicate in an accessible way. Conversely, as expressed by Hilhorst, academic research should not need to immediately applicable, being rigorous and critical is essential but there is also a need to have more social engagement, particularly now academics are considered stakeholders in the World Humanitarian Summit. The imbalance between African and western researchers was brought up, and that one of the most important roles of academics is education and supporting southern researchers.

The key points were summarised as: 1. More cooperation between academics and practitioners is needed but at the same time academics have to keep some distance to be positively critical. 2. Academics contribute the rigour of methods and in-depth analysis. 3. More focus on dissemination, making research findings understandable to practitioners. 4. Determine how academia can have a role in generating evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. But how is it used? What responsibility to academics have to ensure implementation?

Annex – Summarizing notes from roundtable on Humanitarian Cyber (in)security. Authors: Kristin B. Sandvik and Kristoffer Liden.

How can cyberspace become a threat to the security of humanitarian workers, aid delivery and recipients, including making humanitarian actors into threat actors? How can the humanitarian principles help us think through these challenges?

Chair: Kristoffer Lidén

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik: problem framing

Reflections on responses:

Robin Mays: The role of humanitarian design and cross-professional dialogue in being «technology ready»

Leith Baker: notes from practice.

Michaël Neuman: The future of humanitarian skillsets: negotiations, diplomacy and acceptance versus ransomware, identity theft, spear phishing and social engineering

Andrej Zwitter: Reflections on how the moral underpinnings of the humanitarian sector (imperatives and principles) should inform our engagement with digital technology and big data

This roundtable sought to bring together participants from the IHSA/Addis panels on innovation, technology and humanitarian security to reflect on the risks and threats against humanitarians and their organizations, aid delivery and aid recipients emanating from the humanitarian cyberspace, as the humanitarian sector continues to integrate digital technology and social media platforms into its work, as the reliance on connectivity increases, and as ‘humanitarian data’ is becoming a form of relief in its own right.

The objective of the roundtable was to collaboratively crunch ideas for the further development of a critical and relevant research agenda in this emerging field of humanitarian studies.

What is the humanitarian cyberspace?

The humanitarian cyberspace is conceived as a social arena where various individuals and organizations (including donors, UN agencies, NGOs, staff, beneficiaries, private sector actors, peacekeepers and other military actors) negotiate activities and outcomes in ways that are both enabled and constrained by technology. The premise is that the construction of technology is subject to political contestation – that is, to the realities of professionalism, finance and politics; at the same time, the diffusion of non-human objects – including cyberspace – generates new political settlements, which in themselves constitute forms of institutional power (Sandvik 2015).

The context

The societal and operational context of the humanitarian cyberspace is in flux as digital technology and constant connectivity globalizes (while digital shadows persists); as there is a proliferation of cyber targets and threat actors in the humanitarian cyberspace; and the general construction/normalization of cyber-security as a “non-virtual” threat to societal security continues.

There is a thickening of legal framework generally on cyberspace- cybercrime, data protection law, and post 9/11 surveillance regulations. The number of countries with privacy and data protection legislation continues to rise, including several jurisdictions struggling with emergencies. There is also a specific thickening of the humanitarian legal framework as humanitarian information security is being litigated. As noted in the Steve Dennis versus the NRC case,

In the view of the Court, the management and organizers at the NRC should have provided equally clear guidelines and instructions on how information security was to be preserved. This should have been part of the security plan. In connection with this, the Court makes reference to the fact that the NRC after the incident also has changed its practice, making an assessment of information security a standard part of such security plans. (Steve Dennis vs NRC 15-032886TVI-OTI R/05)

Core issue

How can cyberspace become a threat to the security of humanitarian workers, aid delivery and recipients, including making humanitarian actors into threat actors?

This topic can be approached in three different manners:

Through a **technology-first prism**, focusing on problems with the technology when deployed in the humanitarian sector. What are the ethical, legal implications of deploying certain technologies in the humanitarian setting? What are the perceived challenges? Here, we need to consider the relevance of using experiences from other fields (information management and cyber security) to conceptualize risks and threats.

Through a **practice lens**, where concrete and structural challenges pertaining to information technology and the humanitarian cyberspace are identified based on everyday practice and the challenges facing practitioners. There is a need for a better problem framing and problem ownership by the humanitarian sector but also by academics. We cannot deal in generalities.

Through **futurist (or not so futurist) scenarios**. Imagining new cyber threats and their implications for humanitarian action; before threats have materialized or technology is adopted. It is also important to be articulating what the security challenges are for humanitarians here? What may do no harm and preparedness look like?[\[1\]](#)

The session addressed a number of **binaries** in the humanitarian technology debate.

1. How do we deal with this? Fear approach to technology versus proactive approach

Is fear currency in getting the issues on the table and getting resources to address it, or does fear hinder acceptance, learning and planning? Reasonable fear of “worst case scenarios” but tradeoff-time, resources, focus taken away from field operations.

2. Sequential versus collapsing time frames

One way of structuring an inquiry of the humanitarian cyberspace is to explore changes over time, as the cybersecurity discourse itself has moved from a **lack of staff capacity and connectivity and malfunctioning digital technology** to a **concern with lack of staff cyber hygiene, the need for responsible data management and due diligence with respect to digital maintenance**(maintaining updated security software and practices) and finally to the present concern with **spearheaded attacks and social engineering, enabling destruction, distortion or capture of data and digital identities**. However, it was pointed out that this chronological frame was collapsing in various ways in different humanitarian settings.

3. Nothing new versus something new

We should avoid fetishizing newness, and avoid assumptions about the inherently transformative quality of digital technology, connectivity and virtuality. Technological utopian may run the risk of “erasing the history and politics of the situation....and lead us to slip into blank space discourses” (borrowing from R. Read from the session on provincializing humanitarianism).

On the other hand, we also have to explore what is new, and how it generates, redistributes or accumulates power and resources. Speed is a defining quality of humanitarian action; digital technology is changing the conditions for speed and acceleration. Furthermore, the scale of which digital technology may transform humanitarians into threat actors, and the rise of remote threats to humanitarians and humanitarian work is new.

4. The value of qualitative versus quantitative data

The example of needs assessments for food security was given as an example of an area where the introduction of mobile devices focused on recording quantitative data was leading to a loss of local knowledge and local participation. Conversely, it is possible to see this as a move towards diminishing the power of traditional gatekeepers in needs assessment.

5. Do no harm: do nothing or do bad?

Technology may present us with a choice between humanitarian imperatives in concrete contexts: aiding according to need versus doing no harm. Sending personal identifiable data over google mail unsecured versus “experimenting in the name of efficiency and emergency”.

6. Marginal but sexy versus mundane and important: critique or distraction?

The need to focus on actual and prolific threats- the abominable but marginal humanitarian drone versus the googlemailed excel sheet. But this is also an artificial dichotomy. Today, the fundamental challenge is combination of lowtech/high-tech sources of information and data that were formerly separate.

7. Social media use: failure to regulate and control activity versus bottom up source of information

While humanitarian organizations have tried and failed to achieve a top-down control of social media use, they are increasingly looking for ways to harness this “bottom up” data for programming and responses.

8. Values: Private sector versus the humanitarian sector

This was discussed as a two-part binary that discussed both the clash of values (worth/profit versus principles) between humanitarians and the private sector but also as a clash in professional values and accountability perceptions.

9. Top down versus bottom up approaches/accountability perceptions

While humanitarians are supposed to be held accountable for their work, there is a risk that technology designers are not accountable for making technology solutions that work for humanitarian work.

The big questions lay at the design part of the process, when hardcoding determines the parameters of information sharing and access, not only with respect to the post-facto aspect of data sharing as social practice.

Information management systems have been designed based on corporate business models, where the purpose is to channel information upwards to the decision maker. However, this is not suited to humanitarian organizations where field staff needs to be enabled and empowered to take decisions

without involving headquarters and where the challenge is to provide actors on the ground with the needed information (horizontal movement of information)

10. Human rights versus humanitarian epistemic communities: data hoarding versus burning

There is an emergent tension between the two communities. Human rights practitioners look to collect and store as much data as possible, in order to mine for evidence of crimes at a later stage in the future with a view to use the international criminal court, regional human rights courts or domestic tribunals to obtain justice for victims. Humanitarians are increasingly concerned about how little data they can collect, how fast they can destroy it and how thoroughly they can destroy it.

Message: The humanitarian principles are not outdated in the context of the digital turn, but more important than ever in maneuvering emergent humanitarian cyber insecurity challenges.

Literature

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