THE HUMANITARIANS: UNDERSTANDING THE CRISIS OF THE
HUMANITARIAN FIELD

by

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To Carolyn
– my partner, my foundation, and my inspiration

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ABSTRACT

Faced with increasingly protracted armed conflicts, multiplying natural disasters, and new risks posed by climate change, rapid urbanization, and international migration, many observers believe that the international humanitarian regime is fast approaching its 'breaking point'. Although calls for change have grown, past assessments of the limits of humanitarian reform provide little grounds for optimism. Some have concluded that the enterprise appears 'condemned to repeat', pointing to the various material constraints facing aid organizations or implicating humanitarians themselves in structures of power and governance.

This dissertation takes up the question of humanitarian reform, asking: Why, despite repeated attempts to both standardize and democratize humanitarian response, has the scope of change consistently failed to meet expectations? What explains the shortcomings of past reforms, particularly efforts to improve coordination, accountability, and partnerships among international, national, and local responders? As opposed to focusing on material or normative constraints, the dissertation grounds its analysis in the internal competition that often accompanies new reform initiatives. Adopting a distinctly relational view, it interrogates the practices of authority and expertise that have become 'normalized' across the humanitarian field, and which have shaped the ways in which certain voices and perspectives are elevated above others in defining the direction and scope of change.

Specifically, I argue that authority within the humanitarian field has solidified among a core group of elite actors, made up primarily of the humanitarian policymakers and practitioners located in international headquarters. Drawing on various sources of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, this humanitarian elite has shaped the direction of reform in two ways. First, it has reinforced the influence of international perspectives and sources of expertise, whose authority is distinct from and necessarily above that of national and local governments and organizations. Second, and relatedly, it has ensured that reforms introduced over the past two decades have continued to prioritize the large-scale, *international* delivery of aid, typically at the expense of supporting or strengthening national and local capacities. The traditional authority of this humanitarian elite, however, may soon diminish, particularly as the humanitarian field increasingly witnesses a number of challenges 'from below'.

Adeso	African Development Solutions
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
ARA	American Relief Administration
CAAP	Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DPC	Direction de la Protection Civile
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Project
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPC	Humanitarian Programme Cycle
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
JEEAR	Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda
L3	Level 3
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VOICE	Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

Humanitarianism is in crisis. Faced with increasingly protracted armed conflicts, multiplying environmental disasters, and new risks posed by climate change, rapid urbanization, and international migration, many observers believe that the international humanitarian regime is "fast approaching its limits."[1] Globally, United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and various international and national non-governmental organizations are straining to assist the rising number of people forcibly displaced by armed conflict and natural disaster, which in 2014 surpassed 50 million for the first time since World War II.[2] On the ground, they have found their activities hampered by insecurity, limited operational capacity, and external political agendas, all of which have impeded their ability to access vulnerable populations. Above all, observers are recognizing the limits of a humanitarian regime that, in the words of former UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, is "no longer fit for purpose" and possibly beyond its "breaking point."[3]

The sources of the contemporary crisis of humanitarianism are three-fold. First, the modern humanitarian regime, which is grounded in a set of institutions, policies, and practices that has evolved over the past century and a half, currently faces a profound 'crisis of capacity'. Humanitarian organizations have found themselves "stretched thin"

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1 Antonio Guterres, "Think the Aid System Can Cope? It Can't," The World Economic Forum, *Agenda* (blog), January 18, 2015, https://agenda.weforum.org/2015/01/think-the-aid-system-can-cope-it-cant/.
2 "Global Forced Displacement Tops 50 Million for First Time in Post-World War II Era," *UNHCR*, June 20, 2014, http://www.unhcr.org/53a155bc6.html.
3 Guterres, "Think the Aid System Can Cope?"

in responding to unprecedented levels of forced displacement worldwide, and are

repeatedly compelled to make difficult decisions regarding when and where to focus their

efforts.[4] Second, and closely linked to the first, the humanitarian regime is facing a 'crisis

of means' brought on by a perpetual shortfall in resources. The regime, in the words of a

prominent UN official, is "financially broke" and unable to meet the record demand for

assistance.[5] Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the humanitarian regime is

confronting a 'crisis of legitimacy' brought on by continued questioning of the purposes,

dilemmas, and tensions of external intervention. Most recently, calls have grown for a

new paradigm of international assistance that seeks to break down a traditionally

Western-centric humanitarian regime and give greater voice and influence to those

beyond its boundaries.[6] Together, these challenges have generated considerable anxiety

regarding the limits of aid,[7] and how the three concurrent and inter-connected crises

described above may be resolved.

The crisis of humanitarianism, however, is hardly new, as humanitarian actors and

observers have long grappled with the moral, economic, and political dilemmas inherent

to their work. Over the years, they have undertaken various reform initiatives meant to

standardize their approach, resulting in the development of new processes, professional

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4 Elizabeth G. Ferris, "Responding to Chaos: The World's Beleaguered Humanitarian Community,"
Brookings Institution, *Order from Chaos: Foreign Policy in a Troubled World* (blog), 2015,
http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2015/04/09-world-humanitarian-community.
5 Heba Aly, "Q&A: 'UN Doesn't Have to Change,' Says Relief Chief," *IRIN* (blog), October 16, 2015,
http://www.irinnews.org/report/102119/qa-un-doesnt-have-change-says-relief-chief.
6 Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving
End of International Aid* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012); Christina Bennett
et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas
Development Institute, 2016); World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of
the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit" (New York: United Nations, 2015).
7 Unless specified otherwise, references to 'aid' or 'international assistance' throughout this dissertation
should be read as synonymous with 'humanitarian aid'. The United Nations defines the latter as assistance
intended "to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity," typically in response to
humanitarian crises. It is thus distinct from development aid, which seeks to respond to ongoing structural
issues such as systemic poverty. See "Humanitarian Assistance," UN Term, 2018, https://unterm.un.org/.

codes, and standards of quality and accountability. They have further attempted to decentralize and democratize the delivery of aid, by improving coordination with and support of affected governments, ensuring greater accountability to the beneficiaries of aid, and building 'new' partnerships with local NGOs. Despite decades of reform, humanitarian policymakers continue to struggle to address the deeper divides and structural inequalities facing the regime. Among advocates and critics alike, reform often seems out of reach. Some have concluded that the sector appears "condemned to repeat,"[8] suggesting that no amount of change will adequately resolve the challenges facing international aid work.

This study takes up the question of humanitarian reform, asking: Why, despite repeated attempts to both standardize and democratize humanitarian response, has the scope of change consistently failed to meet expectations? What explains the limits of reform, particularly efforts to improve coordination, accountability, and partnerships among international, national, and local responders? To date, considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to assessments of the various material impediments to change, including, most notably, inter-agency competition over funding and media attention and the continued politicization of aid.[9] More critical observers argue that humanitarianism is embedded in a distinct cultural and normative environment, and continues to be shaped

8 Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
9 See, for example, Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Antonio Donini, ed., *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012); Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004); Thomas G. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism: Collective Action Problems and Learning-Challenged Organizations," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2007): 47–65.

by its links to liberal global governance and legacies of paternalism and colonialism.[10] Many aid professionals, if asked to comment on the shortcomings of reform, will similarly frame their explanations along these lines, believing their work to be profoundly shaped by the combination of money, politics, and Western influence.

While important, past assessments of the limits of humanitarian reform have offered comparatively less understanding of the internal dynamics of the reform process, including the ways in which certain voices and perspectives may be elevated above others in defining the direction and scope of change. They typically focus, for instance, on the activities of 'traditional' humanitarian actors, including primarily those descended from the dominant Western humanitarian tradition, without questioning why this group has prevailed over others or how other actors may prioritize change. As a result, they fail to recognize the deep competition over authority and influence that often accompanies the question of reform, as the diversity of actors that make up the humanitarian regime compete to realize their interests and maintain or challenge the status quo. Adopting a more relational view, this study therefore re-imagines reform as the product of ongoing competition among actors to define the shape and direction of change. In doing so, my goal is to interrogate the structures of power and authority across the humanitarian 'field', which I view as a bounded social arena characterized by the power relations between actors, internalized habits and practices, and the struggle over different forms of capital. At stake within this field, I suggest, is authority over the direction of reform and the

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10 See, for example, Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 308; Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

regime as a whole, including who is in a position to influence processes of systemic change.

Specifically, I argue that authority within the humanitarian field has, over time, solidified among a core group of elite actors, whose influence has shaped contemporary understandings of and responses to humanitarian reform. Centred on the United Nations and encompassing the representatives of a handful of international organizations, this 'humanitarian elite' has contributed to the privileging of certain understandings of change, while closing off space for viable alternatives. Its claim to authority, as I seek to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, is rooted in four types of resources or 'capital': economic resources; cultural capital in the form of education, core competencies, and the 'right' kind of expertise; social capital and the influence gained through access to particular networks; and symbolic capital associated with the traditions and moral influence of international humanitarianism. These sources of capital, and the ways in which they have been concentrated among this elite group of actors, are at the heart of the struggles and hierarchies that cross-cut the humanitarian field. They are central to contemporary understandings of reform, and have shaped what ideas solidify into practice, whose perspectives are included and recognized as authoritative, and which voices are marginalized or left out as a result.

The presence of this humanitarian elite, I argue, holds important implications for the shape and direction of policy change. First, it has reinforced the influence of international perspectives and sources of expertise, whose authority is distinct from and necessarily above that of national and local governments and organizations. Most notably, policy and decision-making have been largely delegated upwards, to the

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policymakers and officials residing primarily in Geneva, New York, and other humanitarian capitals. This elite group dominates the policymaking process, with important implications for whose voices are heard in considerations of reform and whose, by extension, are not. Second, and relatedly, it has ensured that reforms introduced over the past two decades have continued to prioritize the large-scale, *international* delivery of humanitarian aid, typically at the expense of supporting or strengthening national and local capacities. The same authority structures that govern policymaking at the international level are thus visible in the organization and management of international assistance on the ground. As such, many of the new tools and standards that accompany reform initiatives continue to privilege outside sources of expertise over national and local ones. The stratification of knowledge and expertise present at the global level is therefore being reproduced on the ground, in ways that have served to marginalize national and local actors in many cases.

To develop this argument, I draw from the recent 'field turn' in international relations theory.[11] Building predominantly on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, such inquiries are explicitly relational in focus in exploring the everyday relations and practices of the agents that comprise the international sphere. Most notably, they help to reveal the struggles and hierarchies that have emerged over time as groups of actors compete for different forms of capital, including economic, cultural, social, or symbolic resources. Relations of domination, subordination, and contestation, they suggest, are common to all social 'fields', which are conceptualized as the arenas of struggle in which these competitions take place. This theoretical perspective provides a

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11 See Chapter 3.

useful lens through which to study the limits of humanitarian reform. Most notably, it centres analysis squarely on the relations and competition that underpin policy change. It helps to reveal the practices of authority and expertise that have become institutionalized or 'normalized' over time, including the assumptions and relationships that are readily taken for granted. These insights, I argue, are essential to broadening our understanding of the scope and limits of policy reform, an issue of increasing importance in light of the chronic crises of humanitarianism.

This sociological approach offers an important and alternative lens through which to study the question of humanitarian reform. While many scholars and professionals remain critical of the capacity of humanitarian actors to correct traditional and often counterproductive ways of thinking and acting, they typically focus on the material and political constraints to change. They highlight, for instance, the competition over donor funding and the increasing involvement of states in humanitarian response, both of which have created perverse incentives against cooperation among humanitarian organizations.[12] Others have been more critical, denouncing humanitarianism itself as inherently repressive or governmentalizing.[13] These approaches, however, typically limit their consideration of the diversity of actors and perspectives engaged in humanitarian response, and the ways in which they confront these dilemmas in their everyday practice. Hidden from view are the aid workers on the ground, career professionals in the

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12 See, for example, Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010); Smillie and Minear, *The Charity of Nations*; Weiss and Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism."
13 See, among others, Antonio Donini, "Through a Glass Darkly: Humanitarianism and Empire," in *Capitalizing on Catastrophe: Neoliberal Strategies in Disaster Reduction* (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2008), 29–46; Costas Douzinas, "The Many Faces of Humanitarianism," *Parrhesia* 2 (2007): 1–28; Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands"; Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*; Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism: A Nongovernment Government," in *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 149–59.

humanitarian capitals of Geneva, New York, and elsewhere, national staff employed as local consultants, contractors, or labourers, and the myriad actors residing on the peripheries of this field. For this reason, this research grounds its analysis within the relationships and hierarchies that make up the humanitarian field, which I define as comprised of all agents ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of natural or human-made crises. It proposes the need to rethink humanitarian reform efforts as political process, in order to bring to the fore the struggle for power and resources among differently positioned actors. In doing so, it seeks to better understand the relations of domination, dependence, and contestation intrinsic to this social space, and the entrenched interests and practices that may be inhibiting more proactive or transformational approaches to reform.

This research should not be read as an indictment of humanitarian action. Aid professionals and observers have been notably self-reflective regarding the challenges facing the humanitarian regime, and have made important advances in both policy and practice over the years. Instead, it seeks to contribute to current theoretical debates by interrogating the assumptions, practices, and hierarchies underpinning an increasingly diverse humanitarian field. In this manner, the dissertation also aims to inform current policy debates around the future of humanitarian response. As noted at the outset of this introductory chapter, there is mounting concern that existing paradigms of aid delivery are proving inadequate in their response to the challenges posed by protracted conflict, climate change, and other global threats. Consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit, convened by the UN Secretary-General in Istanbul in May 2016, similarly highlighted the need to "find new ways to tackle humanitarian needs in our fast-

changing world".[14] This project hopes to contribute to these discussions by revealing the

everyday politics of policy development and practice. In the process, I aim to provide a

more accurate understanding of the challenges of and obstacles to humanitarian reform,

with an eye to identifying openings for more successful and sustainable change.

Chapter Outline

The above argument will be developed in three distinct parts. The first part of the

dissertation provides a review of the relevant literature and develops the theoretical

framework and methodology. Chapter 2 offers a short overview of the emergence,

expansion, and consolidation of the international humanitarian regime, from its origins in

the Western tradition to its increasingly globalized institutions and practices today. Most

notably, it traces the dialectic of crisis and change that has accompanied the evolution of

this regime, and through which humanitarian actors have recognized, and challenged, the

moral, economic, and political dilemmas inherent to their work. Finally, it considers the

puzzle of humanitarian reform and reviews conventional explanations of the

shortcomings and challenges of policy change over the years.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and methodological framework of the

dissertation. It reviews the recent 'field turn' in international relations theory, which has

helped advance "a different reading of the international"[15] through its focus on the

relationships, hierarchies, and social struggles inherent to particular social arenas across

the international sphere. The chapter then outlines the research design of this project. It

develops an alternative explanation of the shortcomings of humanitarian reform and

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14 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "At a Glance" (OCHA, 2014).
15 Didier Bigo and Mikael R. Madsen, "'A Different Reading of the International': Pierre Bourdieu and International Studies," *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 219–24.

outlines the core concepts used in this project, including fields, capital, and authority. The final section describes the methodology of the dissertation and considers its limitations.

The second part of the dissertation directs its analytical gaze at the international level, focusing on the construction of authority within the humanitarian field and its effects on global policy making. Chapter 4 traces the contours and boundaries of the humanitarian 'field'. It explores the ways in which relations of authority within this social space have been constructed, maintained, and challenged over time, and the various forms of material and symbolic capital that have been central to such processes. In addition to economic resources, I argue that knowledge, network access, and moral standing within the humanitarian field have all been claimed by a core group of elite actors centred in and around the United Nations system. I also highlight the ways in which these relationships of authority have been challenged over time, most recently by governments and NGOs based in the Global South that have begun to contest the role and power of traditional humanitarian actors.

Chapter 5 builds on the insights of the previous chapter, exploring how authority structures within the humanitarian field have influenced the direction and limitations of past reform policies. It focuses on the circulation of people, resources, and ideas across the globe, suggesting that authority, knowledge, and decision-making have all been delegated upwards and centralized in this humanitarian elite, who themselves are typically concentrated in international headquarters. Operations and risks, by contrast, have been delegated downwards, to the field staff and national and local actors tasked with implementing new policy prescriptions. The chapter grounds its analysis within a case study of the 'humanitarian capital' of Geneva, which, perhaps more than any other

international policymaking hub, has enjoyed a unique and central position within the humanitarian field. This case study, I suggest, provides an important vantage point for examining when and where reform agendas originate, whose voices and interests are prioritized, and who, by extension, is marginalized or left out.

The final part of the dissertation shifts the focus from policy to practice, examining how authority structures cultivated at the global level have been manifested in the organization and delivery of aid. It develops three case studies, each focusing on a prominent area of reform over the past two decades. Chapter 6 considers a set of reforms intended to improve coordination among humanitarian actors. It focuses primarily on the cluster system, which, since its introduction in 2005, has served as the principal tool for coordinating activities among humanitarian actors and with disaster-affected governments. In practice, however, this approach has largely excluded national and local governments and organizations and has instead served to reinforce practices and habits that prioritize the international delivery and management of aid. This chapter draws examples from humanitarian responses in Haiti and the Philippines, as illustrations of the challenges of coordination, generally, and working with national and local authorities, specifically.

Chapter 7 opens the humanitarian toolbox in exploring the efforts of humanitarian organizations to improve the accountability of aid to beneficiaries. Looking across a number of accountability tools, it suggests that the proliferation of new standards and participatory methods has done little to address the more fundamental question of power in the delivery of aid. While humanitarian organizations are arguably better at giving and taking account of their activities on the ground, contemporary practice continues to

marginalize the active participation and engagement of recipients in decisions affecting their lives. A top-down, supply-oriented model of aid delivery, I argue, has remained the norm, without challenging the hierarchies of authority and expertise within which it is based.

Chapter 8 looks at the changing role of national and local actors in international humanitarian response, including the more recent interest in 'localizing' aid delivery. Although ubiquitous across the last two decades of reform, efforts to generate more equitable and complementary forms of partnership among international and local humanitarian organizations have generally failed to overcome top-down, asymmetrical relationships. In recent years, however, this rhetoric has grown in prominence, particularly as southern NGOs have gained the space and leverage to demand more transformative changes. This contestation 'from below' has opened a new front in the ongoing competition for authority and influence across the humanitarian field, as both traditional and relatively 'new' humanitarian actors struggle to assert their claims to expertise and moral standing.

The conclusion briefly summarizes the main arguments of the dissertation and offers a number of final thoughts. It reflects on the shortcomings of humanitarian reform to date and considers the possible sources of change. The latter, I observe, must be grounded in an understanding of the prevailing competition over authority and influence that has accompanied past reform processes and shaped the direction of change across the humanitarian field. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this dissertation, and offers a number of recommendations both for future research and for improving the policy and practice of humanitarian response.

Crisis and Change in Humanitarian Action

"I have been hearing terrible things about the state of humanitarianism of late. Reports have emerged from Iraq, Afghanistan and the east coast of the United States which claim that 'humanitarianism is in crisis'. Rumours have reached me that humanitarians are enduring a demoralizing malaise and that humanitarianism is suffering a terrible and potentially fatal illness. This news came on top of a previous report, first heard in Bosnia, that humanitarianism is already dead."

Hugo Slim, *A Call to Alms*, p.1

Introduction

The history of modern humanitarianism is one of evolution, crisis, and change. On the one hand, the international humanitarian regime, grounded in a set of institutions, norms, and rules, has expanded considerably in size and scope since 1863 and the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), considered the first formal humanitarian organization. Many, of course, continue to champion the traditional aspirations of the ICRC, evoking a 'relief-only', apolitical image of aid grounded in the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. On the other hand, this regime is regularly beset by a sense of internal crisis and 'malaise', as indicated in the opening quotation. Humanitarian actors are all too familiar with the moral, economic, and political dilemmas inherent to their work, and have explored in some depth the manipulation and politicization of aid, the paradoxes of international action, and the pitfalls and consequences of the humanitarian ideal. Some observers suggest that the pure, principled standard of aid was never more than myth, as the commitment to such

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ideals has always been "patchy, weak or simply nonexistent" in practice.[1] Over time, moreover, this tradition has competed with a range of conflicting visions and purposes, including those closely linked to the foreign policy objectives of governments and those that have been more developmental in nature. The humanitarian ideal, in other words, is rife with contradiction, thereby complicating efforts to reform a troubled sector.

In this chapter, I recount the evolution of the modern humanitarian regime, presented through the dialectic of crisis and change. In the first section, I briefly trace the emergence, expansion, and consolidation of this regime, from its early days in mid-nineteenth century Switzerland to the present, increasingly globalized, humanitarian sector. I then explore the origins and causes of the legitimacy crisis facing the sector, which has preoccupied humanitarian actors for much of the post-Cold War era and has inspired repeated efforts to reform the humanitarian regime. Next, I assess the conventional explanations of the shortcomings of reform, most of which, I suggest, focus on the material or normative impediments to change. Finally, I conclude with a brief look within the humanitarian 'field' and the relations that bind together or separate its inhabitants, a topic that I take up in more detail in the next chapter.[2]

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1 Ian Smillie, "The Emperor's Old Clothes: The Self-Created Siege of Humanitarian Action," in *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action*, ed. Antonio Donini (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012), 32.

2 Throughout the dissertation, I regularly refer to both the humanitarian 'regime' and the humanitarian 'field'. In the first instance, I mirror the definition of international regimes as commonly employed in international relations theory. One of the most popular definitions is that formulated by Stephen Krasner, who defined international regimes as "sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations." Regimes, as I suggest in the next chapter, are conceptually distinct from social 'fields'. In the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu, I define fields as arenas of struggle that are structured according to the relative positions of the actors within them. The humanitarian 'field' thus refers to the state of relations among agents ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of natural or human-made crises. On international regimes, see Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Robert O. Keohane, "Neoliberal Institutionalism: A Perspective on World Politics," in *International Institutions and State Power*, ed. Robert O. Keohane

The Evolution of Humanitarianism

It is impossible to speak of one humanitarian tradition in historical perspective. There are in fact several, each moulded by its unique historical and cultural past and founded in different world religions or philosophies.[3] Nonetheless, the many faces of humanitarianism are often forgotten or diminished in the telling of the history of humanitarian response, and ultimately over-shadowed by the more visible, multi-billion dollar humanitarian enterprise. Firmly grounded in its European origins, the Western tradition of charity and aid has strongly influenced the form and functioning of the formal humanitarian regime, the effects of which continue to resonate to this day.[4]

With this caveat in mind, this section will briefly summarize the beginnings and evolution of the 'international humanitarian regime', defined as "a system of actors, norms and responses that has emerged to address a common set of tasks."[5] I adopt a conventional reading of the history of humanitarianism,[6] which I divide into three chronological periods: the emergence of the formal humanitarian regime, from the formation of the ICRC in 1863 to the end of World War II; the expansion and increasingly global reach of humanitarian organizations during the Cold War period from 1945 to 1990; and the consolidation of the humanitarian regime during the post-Cold War

(London: Westview Press, 1989), 1–16; Oran R. Young, "International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions," *World Politics* 39, no. 1 (1986): 104–22.

3 Eleanor Davey, "New Players through Old Lenses: Why History Matters in Engaging with Southern Actors" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2012).

4 Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalized World," *Disasters* 34 (April 2, 2010): S220–37.

5 Astri Suhrke, "From Relief to Social Services: An International Humanitarian Regime Takes Form," in *Eroding Local Capacity: International Humanitarian Action in Africa*, ed. Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), 20–21.

6 See, for example, Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested: Where Angels Fear to Tread* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Eleanor Davey, John Borton, and Matthew Foley, "A History of the Humanitarian System: Western Origins and Foundations" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2013); Peter Walker and Daniel G. Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

period from 1990 onwards, which, conversely, also witnessed the onset of a deep and troubling 'malaise' across this sector. In doing so, I attempt to draw out a number of recurring themes, including lingering debates over principles, the instrumentalization of aid, and the dialectic of crisis and change. It should be remembered that this is a decidedly incomplete account of the history of humanitarianism. I will return to this theme in a later chapter, when I explore the biases and parochialism embedded in the Western humanitarian tradition.

Emergence (1859-1945)

Historical accounts of the international humanitarian regime typically begin with the advocacy of Swiss businessman Henri Dunant and the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Having stumbled upon the Battle of Solferino between French and Austro-Hungarian troops in northern Italy in 1859, Dunant was shocked by the total abandonment of the wounded on the battlefield. He later wrote that he felt compelled to act in the face of such suffering and death:

> The moral sense of the importance of human life; the humane desire to lighten a little the torments of all these poor wretches, or restore their shattered courage; the furious and relentless activity which a man summons up at such moments: all these combine to create a kind of energy which gives one a positive craving to relieve as many as one can.[7]

His memoir, *A Memory of Solferino*, called for the creation of volunteer relief societies that were officially recognized by states and which could be mobilized "to prevent, or at least to alleviate, the horrors of war."[8] He further proposed the signing of an international convention to protect wounded and sick soldiers, and those who care for them, without distinction of nationality. Inspired by his Christian faith and cosmopolitan leanings,

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7 Henri Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1959), 73.
8 Dunant, 127.

Dunant's advocacy culminated in the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Swiss city of Geneva in 1863 and the signing of the first Geneva Convention in 1864. Over the next few decades, national Red Cross societies would be established across much of Europe and were pressed into action as early as the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. These events, according to many observers, marked the beginning of modern humanitarianism and the foundation of international humanitarian law.[9]

The ICRC and its national societies were soon joined by other humanitarian organizations. The Save the Children Fund (SCF), the first international humanitarian non-governmental organization, was formed in 1919 to provide relief to children affected by World War I, on the premise that "the Child himself can be made one of the strongest influences for peace."[10] Over the course of the 1920s, national SCF sections, under the auspices of the International Save the Children Union in Geneva, soon became involved in a range of activities, including relief, settlement of refugees, educational work, and the first child sponsorship campaigns.[11] Many states also became involved in the delivery and management of relief activities at this time, often in pursuit of their broader foreign policy goals. The American Relief Administration (ARA), for instance, was established after the war by the United States Congress to provide aid to civilians on the Allied side of the war. It later operated in post-revolutionary Russia, with the implicit aim of gaining American influence in the country and undermining the Bolshevik government.[12]

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9 Pierre Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1985).
10 Dorothy Buxton and Edward Fuller, *The White Flame: The Story of the Save the Children Fund* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 81.
11 Buxton and Fuller, chap. III.
12 Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, 42–43.

The earliest humanitarian organizations were largely driven by ad hoc coalitions of like-minded individuals, with little of the institutional structures and trappings that characterize these organizations today. Dorothy Buxton, one of the co-founders of Save the Children, describes the early days of the Fund as follows:

> Its activities and organization were thrown into no cast-iron mould, formed from pre-conceptions and plans in regard to its future; the immediate work, from day to day, of saving the children absorbed the whole attention of its founders, and from day to day they sought to adopt whatever methods appeared to be, under the given circumstances […] the best adapted to the ends in view.[13]

With time, however, the budding humanitarian regime grew more organized, with dedicated staff, rules, and procedures. It also expanded into peacetime work, including various prevention and preparation activities as well as the provision of relief for victims of natural disasters.[14] Geneva, host to the ICRC, the SCF, and the League of Nations, became the recognized centre of humanitarian organizations and the intermediary for international diplomacy at the time.[15]

The early humanitarians were composed of men and women inspired by Christian understandings of charity and compassion, as well as the "spirit of international humanitarianism."[16] Dunant himself was motivated by the call of "tutti fratelli" ('all are brothers'), and a sense of international solidarity uniting all people.[17] The founders of Save the Children saw themselves as contributing to the task of "saving the soul of the world," by appealing to the common innocence of the child.[18] Many engaged solely in

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13 Buxton and Fuller, *The White Flame*, 22.
14 André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1984), 139–41; Buxton and Fuller, *The White Flame*, chap. III.
15 Joëlle Kuntz, *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History* (Geneva: Editions Zoé, 2011).
16 Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, 58.
17 Boissier, 26.
18 Buxton and Fuller, *The White Flame*, 48.

relief work, and emphasized their adherence to the Dunantist principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

The cosmopolitan ideals of the early humanitarians, however, were also rent by nationalism and parochialism from the beginning. States often treated national Red Cross societies as an extension of their war efforts and used them to support their broader foreign policy goals.[19] During World Wars I and II, they supported relief organizations that aligned with their strategic interests, to the neglect of populations on the opposing side of the wars. Discourses of cosmopolitanism were thus deeply entrenched in Western notions of progress, in which the advent of humanitarianism was viewed as a sign of the "forward march of Western civilization."[20] Gustave Moynier, one of the earliest and longest-serving presidents of the ICRC, argued that the Geneva Convention was evidence of an attempt by "civilized nations" to make war more humane. In contrast, he contended that "savage peoples do not consider war as a reprehensible act," and typically give free rein to their "brutal instincts."[21] He would later write that it was the duty of the ICRC to "spread abroad, in areas where new opportunities are opening up to our civilization, the philanthropic notions of which Europe prides itself on having been the birthplace."[22] This "unapologetic paternalism"[23] was grounded in the same spirit of the *mission civilisatrice* that guided the day, and was very much a product of the times. It was embedded, from

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19 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 81.
20 Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, 120.
21 Boissier, 120.
22 Boissier, 278.
23 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 75.

the beginning, in a discourse of salvation, which separates the 'saviours' who rescue and protect from the 'others' that are saved.[24]

The vision of Dunant and other early humanitarians was not universally accepted at the time. Florence Nightingale, a contemporary of Dunant who similarly lobbied for improved medical relief based on her experiences in the Crimean War, argued that his proposed relief societies were "objectionable because [...] such a society would take upon itself duties which ought to be performed by the government of each country and so would relieve them of responsibilities which really belong to them."[25] Such relief societies would thus facilitate the conduct of war, by releasing states from their humanitarian obligations to their own citizenry. The principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence were also deeply intertwined with the politics of the era, as was visible through both world wars as well as other regional conflicts.[26] The 'pure' image of aid propagated by Dunant and others was therefore problematic from the start, a criticism, as will be seen below, that has only become more pronounced over the years.

The early years of the formal humanitarian regime tapped into a burgeoning ethic of care in Europe, for those both in- and outside of national borders. It built on and paralleled other social movements occurring across the continent at the time, including the abolitionist campaigns and various social and labour reforms.[27] It expanded in size and scope through both world wars, as new organizations followed the lead of the ICRC. At the same time, however, it remained firmly rooted in Western traditions and

24 Craig Calhoun, "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order," in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 29–58; Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42 (2001): 201.
25 Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, 42.
26 Smillie, "The Emperor's Old Clothes."
27 Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, 36–38.

aspirations, and the belief that the humanitarian ideal could be spread to other parts of the world. This parochialism complicated the cosmopolitan claims of early humanitarians, and their commitment to the impartial, neutral, and independent delivery of relief.

Expansion (1945-1990)

Further expansion of the humanitarian regime accompanied World War II. A number of new NGOs emerged during or immediately after the war, including most notably the Oxford Famine Relief Committee and the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, known today as Oxfam and CARE International. Following the war, these organizations were joined by a number of international agencies that were part of the freshly minted United Nations, including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Food Programme (WFP). While initially focused on relief and recovery in Europe, this next generation of aid actors soon turned its attention to the newly independent and less developed countries of the 'Third World'. Propelled by the same cosmopolitan discourses that motivated their predecessors, the reach of these new humanitarians was global in scope. Many also ventured into the realm of development at this time, as they shifted focus from addressing basic humanitarian needs to tackling the long-term causes of suffering.[28]

These developments marked the first stages of the institutionalization of the international humanitarian regime. Prior to the war, most humanitarian responses were ad hoc in nature. Emergency appeals varied significantly from year to year, in line with the emergency of the day. After the war, however, response mechanisms and funding largely

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28 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, chap. 5.

stabilized, as initiatives meant to offer temporary solutions to a particular emergency

became permanent in nature.[29] Humanitarian organizations centralized and

bureaucratized their institutional structures, while aid professionals honed their vocation

to meet their new global ambitions.[30] In 1965, the ICRC adopted its "Fundamental

Principles of the Red Cross," which reaffirmed the Dunantist principles of humanity,

impartiality, neutrality, and independence as the core of its movement.[31] These principles

were soon viewed as constitutive of humanitarian work more generally, and widely

adopted by organizations across the humanitarian regime.[32]

The Cold War, however, quickly exposed important cracks in the foundation of this

regime. Some aid organizations were openly political in orientation, despite their

ostensible commitment to humanitarian principles. In Vietnam, for example, several

American NGOs positioned themselves alongside the US war effort, thus aligning with

the latter's Cold War containment policy. CARE International, Catholic Relief Services,

and several other NGOs viewed their interests as one and the same with the US, and

perceived their role as "an effective instrument of foreign policy."[33] The quagmire of

Vietnam put an end to the "age of innocence" that accompanied the expansion of the

humanitarian regime, as aid actors came to realize that their complicity could be

exploited for political and military purposes.[34] Worse, it demonstrated that the activities

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29 Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke, "Introduction," in *Eroding Local Capacity: International Humanitarian Action in Africa*, ed. Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), 6.
30 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 105.
31 Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1979).
32 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 139.
33 Larry Minear, "Humanitarian Action and Politicization: A Review of Experience Since World War II," in *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action*, ed. Antonio Donini (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012), 47.
34 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 147.

of aid agencies could contribute to, rather than alleviate, humanitarian emergencies, and thus be the cause of human suffering.

The secession of Biafra and the ensuing civil war in Nigeria from 1967-70 provoked further controversy, and was the source of considerable division and disagreement across the humanitarian regime. In responding to the risk of famine in Biafra, a number of humanitarian organizations openly defied the Nigerian government and proclaimed their solidarity with the breakaway region. The ensuing propaganda campaign, however, was co-opted by the Biafran leadership, and is thought to have prolonged the war as well as the suffering of the affected population.[35] The ICRC, for its part, struggled to maintain its neutrality among the belligerents, yet eventually made a limited number of humanitarian deliveries without the permission of the Nigerian military. Its decision to remain silent on abuses committed during the war caused a rift within the ICRC, particularly among those opposed to its traditional policy of discretion. One year after the war, Médecins Sans Frontières was founded by a group of former Red Cross volunteers committed to the principle of *témoignage* ('bearing witness').[36] The Biafra conflict, in various ways, offered a glimpse of the debates that would haunt the humanitarian sector for decades to come. It mirrored similar challenges in Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Sudan throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as humanitarian organizations continued to grapple with questions of sovereignty, neutrality, and the manipulation of aid.[37] It also foreshadowed the complex humanitarian emergencies that would confront

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35 Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, 46–49.
36 Renée C. Fox, *Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Medecins Sans Frontières* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 44–46.
37 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, chap. 7; Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, chap. 3; Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, chap. 2.

aid actors in the 1990s, and was among the first to expose the dividing lines and tensions intrinsic to the humanitarian sector.[38]

The Cold War marked the beginning of the international humanitarian regime. Aid agencies and professionals institutionalized their structures and processes, allowing them to turn their attention to a world of suffering. According to some proponents, the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence helped distance humanitarian actors from the interests of states during this period and offered them space to carry out their work.[39] Among others, however, the Cold War was seen as a time of manipulation and instrumentalization, as aid agencies quickly found themselves embroiled in the politics of superpower rivalry and decolonization.[40] The conflicts of this period presented a significant test of newly affirmed humanitarian principles, for which many organizations were ultimately ill-prepared.

Consolidation (1990-present)

The end of the Cold War and the decline of East-West tensions ushered in the "transformation" of the humanitarian regime.[41] Among some observers, the early 1990s represented the "golden days" of humanitarianism, marked by increased funding, growing international influence, better logistical capacities, and more states, international organizations, and agencies committed to humanitarian ideals than ever before.[42] Within this conducive environment, the regime further expanded in size and scope. Many new and established NGOs and UN agencies broadened their ambitions, as they increasingly

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38 Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*, 55–57.
39 David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).
40 Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, chap. 2; Smillie, "The Emperor's Old Clothes."
41 Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 723–40.
42 Hugo Slim, "A Call to Alms: Humanitarian Action and the Art of War" (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2004), 4.

tackled issues of human rights, development, peacebuilding, and social transformation alongside their traditional relief efforts. Some self-identified as "agents of change," and began working alongside states in delivering assistance and generating political change.[43] Although several observers have questioned whether these developments were, in fact, 'new',[44] it is clear that the meaning of humanitarianism itself was put up for debate during this time. The traditional distinction between relief, rights, development, and peacebuilding grew increasingly blurred, prompting many to reconsider the purposes and practices of humanitarian action.

The 1990s also helped to consolidate the international humanitarian regime that had begun to take root during the Cold War. In 1991, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 46/182, which designated the "central and unique role" of the UN in leading and coordinating humanitarian response efforts internationally.[45] Dubbed by one observer as the "Magna Carta of today's international humanitarian activity,"[46] this resolution created the post of Emergency Relief Coordinator within the UN system and established the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which remains the primary mechanism for inter-agency policy coordination across the humanitarian regime.[47] It also raised the visibility of and funding dedicated to UN agencies for humanitarian response, which had previously left much of this work to others. Backed by like-minded, largely Western donor states, this period thus solidified the structures of humanitarian governance centred

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43 Elizabeth G. Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 188.

44 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*; Smillie, "The Emperor's Old Clothes."

45 United Nations, "Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations," A/RES/46/182 (New York: UN General Assembly, December 19, 1991), para. 12.

46 Kenzo Oshima, "The Responsibility to Protect and Humanitarian Engagement," in *The Humanitarian Decade: Challenges For Humanitarian Assistance In The Last Decade And Into The Future*, vol. I (New York: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2004), 3.

47 Chaired by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, the IASC includes representatives from both UN and non-UN humanitarian agencies.

around UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement,[48] and

international NGOs.[49] These three arms of the humanitarian regime gained unprecedented

scope over the activities and financials of aid delivery, controlling, by some estimates,

upwards of 90 percent of all funds dedicated to humanitarian response by the end of the

1990s.[50]

This period of expansion and consolidation, however, also witnessed significant

setbacks on the ground. Many aid organizations were unprepared for the 'complex

humanitarian emergencies' of the post-Cold War era, which posed significant challenges

of access, insecurity, and coordination.[51] Somalia was, for many, the first foray into this

'new war' environment, and left its imprint on a generation of humanitarians.[52] Faced

with a multitude of militia groups, targeted attacks on aid workers, and an overwhelming

level of human need, aid organizations were forced to rely upon the protection of local

clans, thus jeopardizing their claim to neutrality. A number of NGOs openly campaigned

for military intervention, culminating in the televised, prime-time landing of American

forces on the beaches of Mogadishu. The presence of US and UN troops on the ground,

however, did little to abate the violence or stem the diversion of aid into the hands of the

militias. Some humanitarian NGOs eventually walked away, after recognizing that their

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48 The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement includes the following members: the International Committee of the Red Cross; the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
49 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 168–69.
50 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance 2003" (Nottingham: Development Initiatives, 2003).
51 Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
52 See, for example, Samantha Nutt, *Damned Nations: Greed, Guns, Armies, and Aid* (Toronto: Signal, 2012), chap. 1; James Orbinski, *An Imperfect Offering: Humanitarian Action in the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2009), chap. 4.

efforts were only feeding the war economy.[53] Humanitarians encountered a different set

of challenges in the former Yugoslavia, where aid largely served as an "alibi" for

Western indifference and a substitute for political and military inaction.[54] The UN

operation in Bosnia, in particular, generated considerable controversy, encapsulated by

the now well-known mantra that "there are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian

problems."[55] Delivering aid to the "well-fed dead," critics argued, no longer represented a

viable strategy in the face of ethnic cleansing and war crimes.[56]

   The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the ensuing refugee crisis in Zaire and

Tanzania shattered any lingering optimism regarding the transformation of

humanitarianism. Among the humanitarian organizations that arrived en masse after the

genocide to service the refugee camps, aid efforts were largely exploited by extremists in

the camps and used to carry out further attacks in Rwanda.[57] The "dark sides" of

humanitarianism were exposed, as aid actors began to recognize that their efforts and

goodwill could prolong the very suffering they meant to relieve.[58] In 1996, the Joint

Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR), an independent investigation

of the international response to the genocide and the most comprehensive assessment of a

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53 Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 168–91; Mark Bradbury and Robert Maletta, "When State-Building Fails: Famine, Counterterrorism, and the Politicization of Humanitarian Action in Somalia," in *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action*, ed. Antonio Donini (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012), 111–12.
54 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 174–80; Rieff, *A Bed for the Night*, chap. 4.
55 Sadako Ogata, *The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crises of the 1990s* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 25.
56 "The Well-Fed Dead in Bosnia," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/15/opinion/the-well-fed-dead-in-bosnia.html.
57 Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, chap. 5.
58 Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Hugo Slim, "Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War," *Disasters* 21, no. 3 (1997): 244–257; Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*

humanitarian mission to that date, confirmed these fears, concluding that many of the

humanitarian organizations involved had "performed in an unprofessional and

irresponsible manner that resulted not only in duplication of wasted resources but may

also have contributed to an unnecessary loss of life."[59] These damning criticisms sparked

further soul-searching among members of the humanitarian regime, as awareness grew of

the moral consequences of their work.

Similar introspection followed the humanitarian crises of the 2000s. The overt

politicization of aid in Afghanistan and Iraq was particularly polarizing, and exposed the

differences between the 'pragmatic' organizations that aligned with the American-led

coalitions to ensure their presence on the ground and the 'Dunantist' ones that kept their

distance.[60] In 2003 in the Darfur region of Sudan, the UN and various international NGOs

were slow to respond to the intensifying and highly visible conflict, partly as a result of

their preoccupation with events in the Middle East.[61] In late 2004, despite the massive

international response to the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami, relief efforts were

condemned as slow, fragmented, and lacking coordination.[62] Aid agencies were criticized

for their inability to learn from past mistakes, and for demonstrating "a tragic

combination of arrogance and ignorance" in their understanding of local needs and

realities.[63] Reflecting back on two decades of lacklustre humanitarian responses, some

critics blamed the humanitarian regime itself and argued that the growing complexity and

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59 John Borton, Emery Brusset, and Alistair Hallam, "The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience. Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects," Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996), 161.
60 Antonio Donini, Larry Minear, and Peter Walker, "The Future of Humanitarian Action: Mapping the Implications of Iraq and Other Recent Crises," *Disasters* 28, no. 2 (2004): 190–204.
61 Ferris, *The Politics of Protection*, 118.
62 John Telford and John Cosgrave, "Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006).
63 Telford and Cosgrave, 19.

reach of international aid efforts were responsible for the setbacks encountered on the ground.[64] Others suggested that the polarization and politicization of aid throughout the 2000s were reflective of deeper divides across the regime, and the "culmination of a longer term inability or unwillingness to address structural problems related to the shape and functioning of the humanitarian enterprise."[65]

The post-Cold War era was thus rife with contradiction across the humanitarian sector. On the one hand, the international humanitarian regime rapidly expanded in size and scope, becoming more visible, well-funded, and institutionalized than ever before. On the other hand, it confronted significant setbacks on the ground, and was ultimately unprepared for the challenges of Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq, and elsewhere. Old debates resurfaced and gained new force, particularly around the manipulation and politicization of aid.[66] Others questioned whether the humanitarian regime, despite being better funded and organized than ever before, was adequately equipped to meet the operational and moral challenges posed by 'new war' realities.[67] By the turn of the century, many observers were warning that humanitarianism was "in crisis,"[68] "aiding violence,"[69] and flirting with a "dangerous blurring of the lines between humanitarian and political action."[70] The impending sense of crisis triggered various calls for reform, to which this paper now turns.

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64 Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*; Smillie, "The Emperor's Old Clothes."
65 Donini, Minear, and Walker, "The Future of Humanitarian Action," 192.
66 See, for example, Antonio Donini, ed., *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012).
67 Anderson, *Do No Harm*; Hugo Slim, "Global Welfare: A Realistic Expectation for the International Humanitarian System?," *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action*, 2006.
68 Rieff, *A Bed for the Night*.
69 Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1998).
70 Donini, Minear, and Walker, "The Future of Humanitarian Action," 192.

A Regime 'in Crisis'

Considerable introspection followed the poorly coordinated, politicized, and ultimately inadequate humanitarian responses of the 1990s and 2000s, prompting many aid actors to question the legitimacy and consequences of their actions on the ground. Humanitarianism itself was put "in question,"[71] as its champions and critics interrogated its purposes, dilemmas, internal tensions, and boundaries.[72] Some observers highlighted the growing rift between the more traditional, relief-only model of aid and the "new humanitarianism's" explicit engagement with issues of development, human rights, and politics, and argued for a return to the more principled roots of humanitarian action.[73] Others probed the moral consequences and potential "dark sides" of this work, in recognition that humanitarian action can in fact prolong the suffering it intends to relieve.[74] Many agreed that the regime appeared "condemned to repeat" its past transgressions,[75] and suggested that the challenges and dilemmas facing humanitarian actors may never be adequately resolved.

Although the post-Cold War era marked a new height of anxiety and concern regarding the limits of humanitarian aid, the crisis facing the regime had been looming for some time. It reflected a sense of unease that had been present since the beginning, from the early politicization of aid during both world wars to the controversies that accompanied relief operations in Vietnam and Biafra. The difference, perhaps, was in the

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71 Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
72 See, for example, De Waal, *Famine Crimes*; Rieff, *A Bed for the Night*; Slim, "Doing the Right Thing."
73 Fiona Fox, "New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (2001): 275–89; Mark Duffield, Joanna Macrae, and Devon Curtis, "Editorial: Politics and Humanitarian Aid," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (2001): 269–274; Rieff, *A Bed for the Night*.
74 See, for example, Anderson, *Do No Harm*; Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue*; Slim, "Doing the Right Thing."
75 Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*?

level of attention given to humanitarian activities in the years following the Cold War, at

a time that aid organizations had more money and influence than ever before and

dramatically expanded the range and scale of their activities. The regime also became the

focus of considerable scholarly attention for the first time, and, inevitably, the target of

increasingly critical and scathing analyses. New expectations, therefore, were quickly

accompanied by a profound sense of disappointment, prompting the institutional crisis

and malaise that has been a recurring theme of the past two decades.

The legitimacy crisis that settled in during the 1990s, however, was the first to elicit

regime-wide calls for change, initiating a cycle of setback and reform that continues to

this day. The first reforms, initiated in the mid-1990s, sought greater professionalization

and standardization across the regime, in order to better manage the growing complexity

of aid work. In 1994, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent

Societies (IFRC) and a number of international NGOs spearheaded The Code of Conduct,

which outlines a professional code for all humanitarian actors and various principles for

working with affected peoples, governments, and UN agencies.[76] In 1997, a group of

NGOs and the ICRC initiated the Sphere Project, a process designed to improve the

quality and accountability of humanitarian aid and elaborate a set of universal minimum

standards for disaster response.[77] Other initiatives of the time included the launch of the

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), the

Humanitarian Ombudsman Project,[78] and the elaboration of common definitions of

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76 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, "The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NonGovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief," 1994.
77 Sphere Project, *The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, 2000.
78 Now the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (http://www.hapinternational.org/).

accountability[79] and protection,[80] all of which stemmed directly from or were hastened by

the humanitarian regime's poor response to the Rwandan genocide. The creation of the

IASC in 1992 and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

in 1998 further established new mechanisms for the coordination of aid. While

acknowledging the internal tensions and contradictions dividing the regime, proponents

of these reforms assumed they could be resolved or at least mitigated through better

coordination, standardization, and social scientific research.[81]

The lacklustre international reaction to the unfolding crisis in Darfur, followed

closely by the poorly coordinated tsunami response in 2004, catalyzed further calls for

change. Initiated by OCHA and coinciding with the wider UN reform process of the time,

this latest round of reform sought to tackle the deeper structural issues facing the

humanitarian regime.[82] OCHA's 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda established three

pillars of reform: more effective and strategic leadership; improved sectoral coordination

through a 'cluster approach'; and more adequate, timely, and predictable humanitarian

funding.[83] More effective partnerships among international, national, and local

humanitarian actors was later added as a fourth pillar, in response to criticism by

international NGOs that had been largely excluded from the UN-centred reform agenda.[84]

79 Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, "HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management" (Geneva: HAP International, 2007).
80 Sylvie Giossi Caverzasio, "Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards" (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 2001).
81 Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, "Humanitarianism and Practitioners: Social Science Matters," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 264–85.
82 Costanza Adinolfi et al., "Humanitarian Response Review" (New York and Geneva: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2005).
83 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Humanitarian Reform," in *OCHA Annual Report 2006* (OCHA, 2006), http://www.unocha.org/annualreport/2006/index.html.
84 Anne Street, "Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process" (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2009).

The IASC's 2011 Transformative Agenda, which again emphasized the importance of

leadership, coordination, and accountability, added further impetus to these reform

efforts, following setbacks and perceived failures in response to the earthquake in Haiti in

2010 and floods in Pakistan in 2011.[85] It also designated a set of definitions and

procedures for major humanitarian emergencies requiring system-wide mobilization, so-

called 'Level 3' or 'L3' events.[86]

Currently, the international humanitarian regime appears to be undergoing another

period of change, as aid agencies struggle to cope with protracted conflicts in Syria, Iraq,

and South Sudan, among others, and the growing vulnerabilities created by global climate

change, urbanization, and international migration. In 2016, the global humanitarian

appeal topped the $20 billion mark, representing a fourfold increase from a decade

before.[87] It targeted nearly 90 million people across 37 countries, the majority of which

had received aid for 10 straight years. Faced with the increasingly protracted nature of

crises, humanitarian activities have thus expanded beyond the delivery of relief to include

basic service provision, thereby straining already limited resources.[88]

The landscape of humanitarian action continues to change as well, as the familiar

group of Western humanitarian organizations discussed above has been joined by a

number of 'new' actors, including regional intergovernmental organizations, militaries,

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85 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions" (IASC, 2012), https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.
86 Since 2013, OCHA has declared L3 crises in six countries: the Philippines (2013-2014), Central African Republic (2013-2015), Syria (2013-present), South Sudan (2014-2016), Iraq (2014-present), and Yemen (2015-present). The designation of an L3 emergency is based on the scale, complexity, and urgency of the crisis, as well as domestic response capacities and the reputational risk for the UN humanitarian system. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: Definition and Procedures" (IASC, 2012).
87 Christina Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016), 26.
88 Bennett et al., 35.

the private sector, diaspora groups, and southern donors and non-governmental

organizations. Some of these actors, according to one observer, are "recently noticed" as

opposed to emerging, and have deep roots in their own cultures and humanitarian

traditions.[89] Many have long played an important role in protecting and saving lives in

the midst of crisis. Others are relatively new and are growing increasingly vocal about

their position in the regime.[90] All of these actors are challenging what Antonio Donini

refers to as the "northern humanitarian canon," which is grounded in northern/western

conceptions of charity and dominated by UN agencies and international NGOs based in

Europe and North America.[91] Although the sector remains dominated by the "old

guard,"[92] these 'new humanitarian actors' have brought into question past assumptions

and ways of working, as will be explored throughout this dissertation.

In light of these external and internal challenges, many proponents and critics are

once again revisiting the practices and purposes of the humanitarian regime.[93] Many of

these concerns, most notably, came to light in the process leading up to the World

Humanitarian Summit, which was convened in Istanbul in May 2016 and brought

together over 10,000 participants from across the sector. Viewed by some as the "best

opportunity in 25 years to rethink the foundations on which the system operates,"[94] the

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89 Antonio Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," in *Humanitarianism and Challenges of Cooperation*, ed. Volker M. Heins, Kai Koddenbrock, and Christine Unrau (New York: Routledge, 2016), 73.
90 IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs," *IRIN News*, October 22, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/report/102141/gloves-off-between-local-and-international-ngos.
91 Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," 73; See also Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go."
92 Glyn Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012" (London: ALNAP, 2012), 27–28.
93 See, for example, Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012); Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go"; Tara R. Gingerich and Marc Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head" (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2015).
94 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 8.

various regional and thematic consultations preceding the summit catalyzed renewed

debate on the successes and shortcomings of the humanitarian regime. Among other

outcomes, it brought to the fore issues related to the 'localization' of aid and the

continued marginalization of local actors, including national and local governments and

NGOs, in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.[95] Already, however, there is

considerable scepticism about whether this latest round of reform will adequately address

the hurdles facing an increasingly beleaguered humanitarian regime.[96]

Over the past two decades, reform initiatives have repeatedly sought to standardize

and institutionalize the practice of humanitarian action, in an effort to address the past

shortcomings of aid. Importantly, they have also attempted to decentralize and

democratize the international humanitarian regime through persistent appeals for better

coordination, accountability, and partnership among both aid actors and the various

stakeholders with whom they interact. Nonetheless, these reforms remain deeply

problematic in practice. While introducing a level of organization and professionalism

previously unknown to the regime, they have failed to address deeper divides and

structural inequalities: coordination structures have been unable to stem inter-

organizational competition and routinely exclude or overwhelm national and local level

capacities;[97] accountability mechanisms often fail to adequately include local

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95 See, for example, IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs."
96 United Nations, "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World
Humanitarian Summit," A/70/XX (New York: UN General Assembly, 2016); For critical appraisals of the
WHS consultation process, see Heba Aly, "The UN Secretary General's Vision for Humanitarian Reform,"
IRIN (blog), February 2, 2016, http://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2016/02/11/editor's-take-un-secretary-
general's-vision-humanitarian-reform; Rahul Chandran, "Saving the World Humanitarian Summit from
Itself," *Centre for Policy Research* (blog), October 26, 2015, http://cpr.unu.edu/saving-the-world-
humanitarian-summit-from-itself.html; Paul Currion, "Comment: A Desert Called Reform," *IRIN* (blog),
November 3, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2015/11/03/desert-called-reform.
97 Abby Stoddard et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007);
Julia Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee,

communities;[98] and partnerships forged with local players remain top-heavy and unequal.[99] Reform efforts have also been silent on more contentious divides across the regime, including most notably the tension between humanitarian principles and politics.[100] The next section explores conventional explanations of such shortcomings, which typically focus on the material and normative constraints to change.

Explaining the Limits of Reform

While aid organizations have done much to improve the practice of humanitarian action over the years, through better standards and coordination, critics suggest that these reform efforts will never adequately resolve the tensions and contradictions that are endemic to the project. In the opinion of many observers, humanitarian actors appear destined to navigate the "murky landscape" of difficult operational environments, external political agendas, internal competition, and impossible moral dilemmas, for which there are no humanitarian solutions.[101] Perpetual shortfalls in funding, particularly in comparison to the immensity of human need, have only augmented the gravity of these challenges. Confronted with such tensions, these observers contend, humanitarian actors

2010); Luz Saavedra and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response," ALNAP Working Paper (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2015).

98 Margie Buchanan-Smith, Jonathan Corpus Ong, and Sarah Routley, "Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response" (Plan International, 2015).

99 Ben Ramalingam, Bill Gray, and Giorgia Cerruti, "Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses" (Christian Aid, 2013); Andy Featherstone, "Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (Christian Aid, 2014); Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head."

100 Antonio Donini et al., "The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise" (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2008).

101 Donini, Minear, and Walker, "The Future of Humanitarian Action"; See also Barnett and Weiss, *Humanitarianism Contested*; Donini, *The Golden Fleece*; Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*

must "learn how best to play the outsider role," in order to better negotiate the various dilemmas of aid and mitigate the unintended consequences of their work.[102]

While acknowledging the difficult operational, political, and ethical environments in which humanitarian agencies work, others have questioned why the latter appear to be "learning-challenged" and resistant to change.[103] Fiona Terry, for instance, points to a troubling institutional culture of justification and self-preservation among these organizations, which has incited considerable defensiveness in the face of criticism.[104] Aid agencies, she contends, face strong material incentives to maintain an image of 'doing good', both externally, towards the donor states and publics that fund their activities, and internally, to ensure their continued growth relative to their competitors. Consequently, these agencies often downplay the potentially negative consequences of their actions, such that lessons learned are not always absorbed into the culture of the organization. Others have argued that the increased availability of funds in the 1990s only heightened competition in the aid marketplace, thus reducing incentives to cooperate and complicating reform efforts.[105] Faced with the choice between 'soft' humanitarian ethics and 'hard' economic realities, they and other critics therefore suggest that humanitarian action has been based more on the calculations of states and aid organizations than the "rather simple concept of saving lives."[106]

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102 Anderson, *Do No Harm*, 147.
103 Thomas G. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism: Collective Action Problems and Learning-Challenged Organizations," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 1 (2007): 47–65.
104 Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, chap. 6.
105 De Waal, *Famine Crimes*; Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004); Weiss and Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism."
106 Smillie and Minear, *The Charity of Nations*, 21.

Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett refer to these challenges of collective action as the "humanitarian's dilemma" – while all humanitarian actors could gain from better coordination, the vested interests of aid organizations and the structure of incentives they face ensure that they will continue to act "to the detriment of the wider system."[107] They argue that past reform efforts, which were largely voluntary in nature and outlined minimum standards and common definitions, often lacked 'real teeth' and therefore failed to significantly alter the practice of humanitarian action. Inter-organizational competition and top-down, supply-oriented approaches have thus remained the norm, while the needs and interests of national and local stakeholders have been marginalized. Ramalingam and Barnett conclude that reform efforts will continue to flounder, and past mistakes repeated, until mechanisms are created to enforce new policies, reward cooperation, and punish defections.

Others suggest that the recurrent shortcomings of the humanitarian regime are a consequence of political constraints brought on by the outside involvement of states. Gilles Carbonnier, a long-time observer of the regime, suggests that the supply boom of the past two decades is likely driven by a lack of political will for outside intervention as opposed to an increase in the number of conflicts and disasters.[108] As a result, donor governments have come to rely on humanitarian assistance as their default foreign policy option. Others have criticized the complicity of humanitarian organizations in this regard, many of whom, they suggest, have conceded to the political agendas of their benefactors in exchange for continued funding. They worry that the continuing securitization of aid in

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107 Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010), 6.
108 Gilles Carbonnier, *Humanitarian Economics: War, Disaster and the Global Aid Market* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015).

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a post-9/11 world will only heighten the resistance to reform, to the disadvantage of the humanitarian regime more generally.[109]

Adopting a more historical view, Barnett argues that humanitarianism has always been "a creature of the world it aspires to civilize," and has rarely been insulated from the influences of politics and power.[110] While applauding the aspirations and moral vision of humanitarian actors, he contends that their actions and objectives are more often constrained by the existing world order and the forces of production, violence, and compassion that underpin it. The recent manipulation of aid as part of Western anti-terrorism efforts is only one example of the humanitarian regime's long and uneasy relationship to the world of politics. Consequently, despite seemingly embodying the "promise of progress" in international relations, Barnett concludes that aid organizations are seldom distant from "the very world order that they want to resist."[111]

More critically, Mark Duffield contends that humanitarian operations have become implicated in a complex regime of liberal global governance, whose aim is to limit and contain instability on the borders of ordered society.[112] He and other critical theorists have sought to expose the structural inequalities and practices of power and paternalism intrinsic to the humanitarian regime.[113] Most notably, they highlight the growing

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109 Donini, Minear, and Walker, "The Future of Humanitarian Action," 192.

110 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*, 9; See also Michael Barnett, "Evolution Without Progress? Humanitarianism in a World of Hurt," *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 621–63.

111 Barnett, "Evolution Without Progress?," 621, 626.

112 Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 308; Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

113 See, for example, Michael N. Barnett, "Humanitarian Governance," *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (2013): 379–98; Alex De Waal, "An Emancipatory Imperium?: Power and Principle in the Humanitarian International," in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 295–316; Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, eds., *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

normative power of what has been termed "humanitarian government", through which

states and NGOs, in the name of morality, have become implicated in the management of

populations outside their borders.[114] This critical scholarship is steeped in post-colonial

theory, which is harshly critical of any pretensions to "rehearse colonial fantasies."[115] It

condemns power structures and discourses that elevate the role of external actors while

dismissing those subject to harm as secondary, passive recipients of aid.[116] While rarely

commenting directly on humanitarian reform efforts, these critical interpretations suggest

that this regime will always remain fraught with tension and contradiction. The practice

and knowledge underlying humanitarian action, they imply, is shot through with power

and politics, shaping how, when, and why international actors intervene.

Together, these explanations have expanded our understanding of the shortcomings

of humanitarian reform and the impediments to change. On the one hand, they focus on

the various material constraints facing the humanitarian regime, both internally in the

form of inter-organizational competition and externally as a result of the outside

interference of donor states. On the other hand, they note that humanitarianism itself is

embedded in a distinct cultural and normative environment, with links to liberal global

governance and legacies of paternalism and colonialism. Put differently, these

explanations of the shortcomings of humanitarian reform can be categorized according to

two dimensions: whether they locate the source of dysfunction as internal or external to

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114 Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism: A Nongovernment Government," in *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 149–59; Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, "Introduction: Military and Humanitarian Government in the Age of Intervention," in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 9–25.
115 Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.
116 Calhoun, "The Idea of Emergency"; Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors"; Anne Orford, "Muscular Humanitarianism: Reading the Narratives of the New Interventionism," *European Journal of International Law* 10, no. 4 (January 1, 1999): 679–711.

the humanitarian regime; and whether they attribute this dysfunction to material or cultural forces. Mapping these explanations along these two dimensions produces the following typology:

Table 1: Explanations of the limits of humanitarian reform

	Internal	**External**
Material	Inter-organizational competition	State / political interference
Cultural	Intra-field competition(?)	Global (liberal) culture / neo-colonialism

Most humanitarian professionals and observers, if asked to comment on the shortcomings of humanitarian reform, will focus on some combination of the top two quadrants. Those more critically-minded will highlight the contradictions and inequalities embedded in regimes of global governance and neo-colonial discourses. The fourth explanation located in the bottom left quadrant, which I have tentatively labelled 'intra-field competition', offers an alternative hypothesis and is presented in the next chapter.

Looking within the Humanitarian 'Field'

Although the explanations outlined above usefully describe the material and normative constraints responsible for the recurrent shortcomings of reform, they offer comparatively less understanding of dynamics that are internal to the humanitarian regime. Humanitarian policymakers and professionals have been equally reflective regarding the operational, political, economic, and moral dilemmas confronting the regime, and have genuinely engaged with these issues in an effort to better meet the

needs of their beneficiaries.[117] Many speak openly of the limitations of their work, and

question why they and their peers continue to perpetuate practices, habits, modes of

operating, and relationships that they themselves view as ineffective. This highlights the

need to evaluate existing identities, roles, and relationships within the international

humanitarian regime, and investigate how and to what extent prevailing discourses and

practices have been able to make space for new actors, traditions, and approaches.

Those emphasizing the material or normative constraints to change, however, have

tended to overlook this tradition of introspection and critique. By focusing on material

factors, for instance, they offer little insight into the ways in which members of the

humanitarian regime have attempted to navigate the challenges of inter-organizational

competition or donor interference. Moreover, they fail to notice the processes of

negotiation and brokerage intrinsic to periods of reform, or how and why certain actors

and organizations may have an interest in maintaining the status quo. Critical scholarship

on the inherently repressive nature of humanitarianism, which often depicts external

intervention as an entirely hegemonic, unidirectional regime of governance, has similarly

obscured the complexity of aid work.[118] It typically ignores the diversity of actors,

perspectives, and interests that make up the humanitarian regime, and the relations and

power dynamics that bind together or separate its members. The emphasis on material or

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117 For example, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian
Action (ALNAP), a system-wide network dedicated to learning and evaluation, has a database of over
7,630 research papers, reports, case studies, learning portals, and best practice guides on humanitarian
action. As of 2014, 83 humanitarian organizations were full members of the Network. ALNAP, "Annual
Report 2013-2014" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2014).
118 For related critiques, see Tim Bending and Sergio Rosendo, "Rethinking the Mechanics of the 'Anti-
Politics Machine,'" in *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies*, ed.
David Lewis and David Mosse (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 217–37; David Mosse, "Global
Governance and the Ethnography of International Aid," in *The Aid Effect: Giving and Governing in
International Development*, ed. David Mosse and David J. Lewis (London: Pluto, 2005), 1–36.

normative factors, in other words, has neglected the internal processes of reform, and the ways in which certain interests and relationships may be prioritized over others.

Recent insights in the ethnography of aid have demonstrated the importance of a more relational perspective on external intervention. Raymond Apthorpe, in particular, has been at the forefront of efforts to better understand the peoples and relationships of what he calls "Aidland," a world characterized by "its own mental topographies, languages of discourse, lore and custom, and approaches to organizational knowledge and learning."[119] Typically drawing from their experiences as practitioners or consultants, he and others have explored the lives, beliefs, and practices of both development and humanitarian professionals, who they see as part of a vast and often contradictory transnational community. Its inhabitants, they suggest, typically share the same cosmopolitan worldview, occupy the same social worlds, and draw from the same pool of technocratic, expert knowledge, all of which enable them to carry out their practice across a range of settings and move effortlessly across diverse geographic and cultural contexts.[120] At the same time, however, they have shown that this community is riven with divides and internal tensions. Most notably, the "locally transient but internationally permanent" character of expatriates tends to generate a sealed-off, parochial view of the

119 Raymond Apthorpe, "With Alice in Aidland: A Seriously Satirical Allegory," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 199; See also Anne-Meike Fechter and Heather Hindman, eds., *Inside the Everyday Lives of Development Workers: The Challenges and Futures of Aidland* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2011); David Mosse, ed., *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).
120 Apthorpe, "With Alice in Aidland"; Rosalind Eyben, "The Sociality of International Aid and Policy Convergence," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 139–60; Tania Murray Li, "Rendering Society Technical: Government through Community and the Ethnographic Turn at the World Bank in Indonesia," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 57–80; Dinah Rajak and Jock Stirrat, "Parochial Cosmopolitanism and the Power of Nostalgia," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 161–76.

contexts in which they operate, shaping which problems are noticed, how they are presented, and what solutions are chosen to address them.[121] These scholars conclude that the discourses and knowledge practices of the citizens of Aidland are often resistant to change, in ways that have closed off consideration of important political or social dynamics occurring around them.

In the related field of international peacebuilding, Séverine Autesserre has similarly described the practices, habits, and narratives shared among international peacebuilders, which she dubs the "interveners' club."[122] While the members of this club are ostensibly motivated by the common goal of helping the people of the host country in which they are based, she suggests that the rules, rituals, and taken-for-granted behaviours and approaches internalized among them are predicated upon a distinct hierarchy of knowledge that prioritizes "thematic" or technical expertise over local knowledge and resources. External expertise, materials, and structures are thus privileged at the expense of developing and reinforcing those available locally, with implications for the sustainability of peacebuilding interventions. Her analysis, much like the work on 'Aidland', usefully highlights the assumptions, biases, and hierarchical relations embedded in the culture of external intervention. It draws attention to entrenched practices and relationships, all of which have shaped the delivery of international assistance in important and often problematic ways.

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121 David Mosse, "Introduction: The Anthropology of Expertise and Professionals in International Development," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 14; See also Ian Harper, "World Health and Nepal: Producing Internationals, Healthy Citizenship and the Cosmopolitan," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 123–38; Rajak and Stirrat, "Parochial Cosmopolitanism and the Power of Nostalgia."
122 Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Ole Jacob Sending suggests that such troubling behaviour is almost always built on a logic of hierarchy and subordination, which has served to reinforce the authority and rule of external interveners.[123] International aid workers, peacebuilders, and civil servants, he contends, all claim to represent the 'international,' thus positioning themselves as distinct from and standing above the 'local'. They typically view themselves as spokespersons and authority figures within their respective fields, and thus emblematic of the international community as a whole. Their claim to authority, in turn, is buttressed by internationally-defined rules, processes, and categories, and made manifest in concrete practices on the ground, as noted by Apthorpe and Autesserre. Consequently, those outside these international clubs, including most notably the targets of aid, have found it difficult to challenge and reshape practices of external intervention in line with their own terms and priorities.[124] The "pre-eminence of the international," in other words, has left little space for contestation or critique, thus perpetuating the relationships of authority inherent to "international rule."[125]

In various ways, these contributions all force attention to the everyday politics and relationships of external intervention. They reveal the knowledge claims and discourses employed by members of the international aid sector, the misconceptions created by partial or flawed assumptions, and the ways in which these biases are maintained and reinforced in practice. Relative to the shortcomings of humanitarian reform, in particular, they suggest that the failings and missteps encountered over the years may be internally generated and intrinsic to the culture of aid, and therefore not solely the product of

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123 Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
124 Sending, chap. 3.
125 Sending, 55.

material or normative factors. Most notably, they highlight the diverse actors and relationships that make up the humanitarian 'field', a social space characterized by internalized habits and practices, power relations, and hierarchies of authority and subordination. This explicitly relational view suggests that cultural and power dynamics internal to this social field may be just as important in explaining the challenges of humanitarian reform. Humanitarian policymakers and observers have long grappled with the operational, political, and ethical dilemmas facing the regime, and are well aware of the shortcomings of their efforts. Given over twenty years of relatively limited success, is it possible that the recurrent failings of reform may be innate to this regime, and embedded in the everyday relations and practices of aid?

Conclusion

Humanitarian professionals and observers have always been highly introspective, and have spent considerable time examining the 'malaise' facing the regime. They are keenly aware of the divides and contradictions inherent to their work, as well as the constraints to change. In seeking to understand the limits of reform, they have tended to focus on material or normative factors, including those both internal and external to the humanitarian regime. Nonetheless, the sector continues to struggle with the question of reform, an issue that has only become more pressing in recent years.

In focusing on material or normative explanations, however, these observers have diverted attention away from the diversity of actors, perspectives, and relationships that make up the humanitarian regime. They have missed the deep competition that has underpinned the very question of reform – specifically who has the authority to define the shape and direction of change. Such a focus necessitates greater attention to actors

themselves, their positions and resources relative to others, and how the authority of some has been constructed and maintained over time. The next chapter introduces a relational view of social 'fields', which, it suggests, can help to correct for the over-emphasis on material or normative accounts and can shed light on the relations that bind together or divide humanitarian actors in grappling with the question of reform.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

"In every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition."

Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, p.72

Introduction

The recent turn to field theory in international relations literature has sought to bring to light the everyday relations and practices that bind together or separate different actors across the international sphere.[1] Inspired by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the aim of such inquiries has been to "think relationally"[2] in order to uncover the distinct positions and resources of different actors. Their focus is squarely on the dynamics and conflicts that underpin particular social "fields", conceptualized as "arenas of struggle" in which actors compete over scarce resources, both material and symbolic.[3] Fields, they suggest, are structured according to the relative positions of the actors engaged in the struggle and, specifically, the state of the power relations among them. The structure of a field orients both the ways in which agents perceive and act on the social world, as well

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1 See, for example, Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ed., *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Didier Bigo and Mikael R. Madsen, "'A Different Reading of the International': Pierre Bourdieu and International Studies," *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 219–24; Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, "International Practices," *International Theory* 3, no. 01 (2011): 1–36; Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, "The Play of International Practice," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2015): 449–460; Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Symposium: The Practice Turn in International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly* (blog), 2015, http://www.isanet.org/Publications/ISQ/Posts/ID/4955/The-Practice-Turn-in-International-Relations.
2 Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97.
3 David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997), 122.

as the strategies they pursue in maintaining or challenging relations of domination and

dependence. The field turn in IR theory has thus attempted to offer "a different reading of

the international,"[4] by highlighting the relationships, hierarchies, and social struggles

inherent among the operators of international politics, including diplomats,[5] international

civil servants,[6] and peacebuilders,[7] among others.

In this chapter, I highlight the importance of social fields in constructing an

alternative understanding of the failings and limitations of humanitarian reform. Field

analysis, I argue, offers a useful corrective to the conventional emphasis on the material

or normative constraints to change. Most notably, its distinctly relational view helps to

direct attention to the power relations that separate differently positioned actors within

the humanitarian 'field', which I define as composed of individuals and organizations

ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of natural or

human-made crises.[8] It further brings to light the material and symbolic resources used to

construct, maintain, or challenge prevailing relationships of domination and dependence

across this social space. As such, it offers an important means of assessing why certain

groups continue to prevail over others and how such authority may be challenged over

time. Relative to the question of humanitarian reform, in particular, field analysis helps to

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4 Bigo and Madsen, "'A Different Reading of the International.'"
5 Vincent Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice: Multilateral Diplomacy and the Governance of International Security | European Journal of International Security," *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 1 (2016): 5–26; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, "Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): 889– 911; Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, eds., *Diplomacy and the Making of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
6 Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
7 Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
8 See Chapter 4 for a more detailed look at the actors, relations, and tensions that make up the humanitarian field.

illuminate the deep competition over authority and competence that has accompanied

considerations of policy change. It reveals the hierarchies and lines of inclusion and

exclusion intrinsic to the humanitarian field, which, as I suggest in later chapters, have

defined both the shape and direction of reform.

This chapter presents the theoretical and methodological framework that I use to

examine the relationships and practices making up the humanitarian field. The first

section introduces the recent 'field turn' in international relations theory, which has

usefully drawn attention to the hierarchies and relationships of authority across different

social spaces in the international sphere. I then apply these insights to my own alternative

understanding of humanitarian reform, and suggest that a shift in focus to the power

relations that separate agents across the humanitarian field will help to better explain the

perpetual shortcomings of change. The next section outlines the core concepts that are

central to the argument – fields, capital, and authority, respectively – and briefly explains

how these will operationalized in the chapters to follow. The fourth and final sections

summarize the research design, methodology, and limitations of the dissertation.

The Field Turn in IR Theory

Like constructivists and critical theorists of various camps, field analysts share the

view that international relations are socially constructed. The international is envisioned

to be "a densely structured social space," created in and through the everyday activities of

the practitioners of world politics.[9] However, rather than focusing on questions of identity

or norm diffusion and contestation, their interest is more historical in scope and driven by

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9 Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Introduction," in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

a concern with processes of power, domination, and exclusion across history.[10] In particular, they draw attention to the 'fields of struggle' that have emerged over time as actors compete over different forms of 'capital', including economic, cultural, social, or symbolic resources. They present a purely positional view of reality by tracing how agents are located vis-à-vis others within the boundaries of a particular field, defined as "a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions."[11] The dispositions and practices of agents are all moulded by their relative position within these social spaces, and the relations of domination, dependence, and contestation in which they are inextricably woven. Field analysis thus offers a 'topographical' analysis of the social, by mapping the boundaries of a field, the positions of differently situated agents, and the particular "battles of domination" that develop over scarce resources.[12]

The concept of the 'field' figures prominently within this analytical framework, and has been used to explore areas of inquiry as different as elite schools in France[13] to the practices of international diplomacy.[14] Although all fields are necessarily distinct from others, the social space of each is structured by its internal power relations, the objects of struggle, and the rules of the game.[15] Power relations within fields, according to Bourdieu, are typically hierarchical in nature and defined by the distribution of capital, which comes in various material and symbolic forms. They are historically constructed,

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10 Bueger and Gadinger, "The Play of International Practice," 454.
11 Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 97.
12 Bigo and Madsen, "'A Different Reading of the International,'" 221; See also Niilo Kauppi, "Bourdieu's Political Sociology and the Politics of European Integration," *Theory and Society* 32, no. 5–6 (2003): 775–89; Vincent Pouliot and Frédéric Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24–44.
13 Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
14 Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice."
15 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993), 72–77; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 94–114.

often divided unequally between the newcomers to a field and the established, dominant actors who try to keep out or marginalize competition. These struggles between the "heretics" and the "heirs" are oriented by certain stakes and interests that are specific to the field in question, be it material gain, prestige, or recognition of one's authority or competence.[16] The very structure of the field itself, and the relations of domination and subordination upon which it is based, is almost always at the heart of these struggles.[17] At the same time, however, the practices and strategies undertaken by those involved are shaped by their practical knowledge of the game and the rules that are taken for granted, and therefore remain within certain limits. The rules and structures of the social world are frequently internalized and perceived as natural, such that agents tend to "accept it much more readily than one might imagine."[18] As a result, relations of domination and subordination are often reproduced, leading to stability and regularity in the formation and maintenance of power structures.[19]

Field analysis has helped to bring into focus the relations, hierarchies, and lines of inclusion and exclusion intrinsic to various international fields. In the field of international diplomacy, for instance, field scholars have highlighted the importance of various social skills and competencies deployed within particular diplomatic practices, and how these translate into actual power over policy outcomes. Most notably, they have exposed the distinct struggles for authority that play out in multilateral circles, which are shaped as much by the skillsets and practical know-how of specific state representatives

16 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 30; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 123–25.
17 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 73.
18 Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 18.
19 Bueger and Gadinger, "The Play of International Practice," 455.

as they are by the interstate distribution of material capabilities.[20] Others have revealed

how individuals may be socialized into particular "communities of practice."[21] Within

these communities, shared identities, beliefs, and dispositions often help facilitate

coordination within the group, but may also be a source of division or exclusion. Séverine

Autesserre has shown how the practices, habits, and narratives shared among groups of

expatriates within the international peacebuilding field have produced a partial and

parochial view of the contexts in which they are embedded, thus shaping their

interactions with local populations.[22] Field analysts suggest that claims to represent the

'international', as distinct from and standing above the 'local', are almost always built on

a logic of hierarchy and subordination, in ways that have served to reinforce the authority

and rule of the former.[23]

Field analysis has also begun to shape our understanding of the practices of global

governance. To date, the vast literature on global governance has revealed much about

the operators of globalization, including "who these actors are, what they do, and how

they shape contemporary world politics."[24] This literature has examined how global life

is organized, structured, and managed, including the formal and informal arrangements

that influence "who gets to participate, whose voice matters, and whose vote counts."[25]

More recently, however, field theorists have looked beyond these descriptive and

structural accounts to explore the relationships of authority and power that underpin the

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20 Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, "Power in Practice"; Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice."
21 Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2005); Adler and Pouliot, "International Practices."
22 Autesserre, *Peaceland*.
23 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*.
24 Sending, 3.
25 Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in Global Governance," in *Power in Global Governance*, ed. Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.

realm of global governance. Ole Jacob Sending, for instance, suggests that global

governance should be re-imagined as "an ongoing process of competition for the

authority to define what is to be governed, how, and why."[26] His study of international

civil servants has helped to explain how authority is constructed, maintained, and

challenged within particular domains of global governance, and how "governance is

inherently bound up with knowledge claims about that which is to be governed."[27] Others

have explored the predominance of a "transnational power elite" over the field of global

governance, focusing on the individuals and professional groups that operate in, around,

and beyond international institutions.[28] This elite wields a disproportionate amount of

power and influence across various forums, including global finance and business,[29]

international law,[30] and international civil service.[31] At the same time, the ways in which

these elite actors adapt and transform global structures and ideas are often concealed

behind "the façade of global institutions."[32] The common social backgrounds of these

actors, the ways they organize themselves, and the resources they bring to bear all help to

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26 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 4.
27 Sending, 8.
28 Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen, eds., *Transnational Power Elites: The New Professionals of Governance, Law and Security* (London: Routledge, 2013); Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen, "Fields of Global Governance: How Transnational Power Elites Can Make Global Governance Intelligible," *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 324–30; Didier Bigo, "Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power," *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 225–58.
29 Eleni Tsingou, "Power Elites and Club-Model Governance in Global Finance," *International Political Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 340–42; Leonard Seabrooke and Eleni Tsingou, "Distinctions, Affiliations, and Professional Knowledge in Financial Reform Expert Groups," *Journal of European Public Policy* 21, no. 3 (2014): 389–407.
30 Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth, eds., *Lawyers and the Construction of Transnational Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
31 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*.
32 Kauppi and Madsen, "Fields of Global Governance," 324.

perpetuate their power and influence, in ways that transcend the institutions they represent.[33]

Together, these analyses have revealed the inequalities inherent in the social division of labour across various international fields, and the reasons why some actors, and not others, have emerged in positions of authority within particular spaces. Treating fields as the "totality of relations"[34] among differently positioned actors allows us to better understand these hierarchies and struggles and uncover the inner workings of power, including how and why some actors rise to positions of dominance.[35] The struggles that accompany such transitions can take various forms, involving contests over both material resources and other, more symbolic stakes, such as prestige, competence, or authority. Those who emerge victorious frequently dominate the form and functioning of the field in question, shaping which ideas solidify into practice, whose perspectives are included and recognized as authoritative, and which voices are left out as a result. These insights provide an alternative means to understand the challenges of humanitarian reform, to which I now turn.

Field Theory and the Practice of Humanitarian Reform

The explanations outlined in the previous chapter have broadened our understanding of the shortcomings of humanitarian response and the impediments to change. They highlight the material and normative constraints facing humanitarian actors, all of which have shaped the direction of reform. The preoccupation with such concerns,

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33 Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen, "Transnational Power Elites: The New Professionals of Governance, Law and Security," in *Transnational Power Elites: The New Professionals of Governance, Law and Security*, ed. Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–15.
34 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 32.
35 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 28.

however, has also led these scholars to neglect the underlying relations between actors within this sphere. Specifically, they miss the competition over authority and competence that has accompanied the question of reform. They typically focus on the activities and responses of 'traditional' humanitarian actors, without considering how this particular group has prevailed over others or why it has been recognized as authoritative. They also limit consideration of the relative importance of other actors across the regime, thereby failing to recognize the internal struggles that have accompanied considerations of reform or the ways in which certain groups are beginning to challenge the 'heirs' of this domain. In discounting diversity within the humanitarian regime, I argue, these conventional accounts have missed how certain social hierarchies within this space have been reproduced and, at times, challenged through the process of reform itself.

Field analysis offers a useful corrective to this over-emphasis on material and normative factors. Most notably, it centres analysis on the relations of domination, dependence, and contestation among agents within a particular social arena, and the resources that they themselves have identified as most important in their relations with others. As a result, it looks beyond the distribution of material goods or essentialized concepts such as governance, in order to explore the power relations, rules, and material and symbolic resources at the heart of the struggles between agents.[36] Field analysis further assumes that social action is not shaped by deep structural forces that underlie human consciousness. Rather, meaning evolves in and through interaction itself, as

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36 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 32–36.

agents both operate within structural constraints while trying to preserve or reconstruct their social reality.[37]

Specifically, field analysis proposes three important shifts in the study of humanitarian reform. First, rather than focusing on specific actors or the humanitarian regime more broadly, it directs attention to the state of the power relations among different positions across this social space. As discussed in the previous chapter, most conventional accounts tend to focus on the institutions, norms, and expectations that have accompanied the development of the modern humanitarian regime. They typically fix their analysis on the activities of the 'traditional' aid organizations at the centre of this regime, specifically those deriving from the dominant Western humanitarian tradition. In the process, however, they understate the commonalities among the individuals making up these organizations, and the core identities, dispositions, and behavioural patterns that cut across various humanitarian actors. They further limit consideration of the other actors that are increasingly engaging the humanitarian regime, including Southern donors and NGOs, faith-based organizations, militaries, the private sector, and diaspora groups.[38] Consideration of the humanitarian 'field', by contrast, focuses analysis squarely on the totality of relations among agents ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief, from long established international NGOs and UN agencies to relative newcomers to this space. In doing so, it reveals the power relations and hierarchies that separate differently positioned actors within this arena of struggle, and considers how these have been historically constructed and institutionalized over time. Drawing from this distinct conceptual lens, this dissertation will explore how the authority of a core group of elite

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37 Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power."
38 Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalized World," *Disasters* 34 (April 2, 2010): S220–37.

actors within the humanitarian field has solidified over time, what dispositions and practices bind this group together, and in which ways these relations have been reproduced or challenged through the process of reform.

Second, field analysis helps to illuminate the objects of struggle and lines of contestation within the humanitarian field. Much has been made of the material pressures facing aid organizations, which have fuelled both competition among them and a culture of justification that prioritizes donor satisfaction at the expense of critical self-reflection.[39] A broader view, however, reveals that the bulk of humanitarian funding remains concentrated among a handful of organizations, which draw their resources from a group of like-minded Western donor states.[40] Despite the competition between them, economic capital in the humanitarian field thus continues to privilege the "old guard",[41] and is a growing source of contention among those perceived to be outside this "humanitarian club."[42] Control of material resources is also only one of many sources of tension between the 'heirs' to this field and potential 'heretics'. Struggles over expertise, social access, moral standing, and other forms of symbolic capital all cross-cut the humanitarian field, in ways that reinforce established relations of dominance and

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39 Fiona Terry describes the "culture of justification" as the strong, upward pressures facing aid organizations to demonstrate the continued value and utility of their work. Given their dependence on donor resources, both public and private, she describes how these organizations have attempted to preserve an image of "doing good" at the expense of open discussion of the negative consequences of humanitarian action. See Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), chap. 6.

40 Donors belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) contributed over 94% of international humanitarian assistance over the past decade. Between 2009 and 2013, multilateral organizations and international NGOs received 81% of the funds from DAC donors. See Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2015).

41 Glyn Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012" (London: ALNAP, 2012), 27.

42 Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015); Imogen Wall, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs," *IRIN* (blog), October 22, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2015/10/22.

dependence. At stake is authority over the field as a whole, and who is in a position to define the shape and direction of the process of reform.

Finally, field analysis permits greater understanding of the rules and limits that are typically taken for granted within the humanitarian field, as well as the possible sources of change. Stability within fields derives from "an uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld,"[43] and the ideas, norms, and practical know-how that are accepted as self-evident among actors within a particular social space.[44] This knowledge, or *doxa*, tends to reinforce orthodoxy. As Bourdieu explains:

> "when [doxa] realizes itself in certain social positions, among the dominated in particular, it represents the most radical form of acceptance of the world, the most absolute form of conservatism. [...] There is no fuller way of finding natural conditions of existence that would be revolting to someone socialized under other conditions and who does not grasp them through categories of perception fashioned by this world."[45]

This taken-for-granted acceptance of established relationships and practices helps reveal why the dominated within particular fields, including the humanitarian field, are disposed to the status quo, even when the rules of the game are clearly to their disadvantage. It also suggests that change is most likely to occur within certain limits. The transformation of particular fields, according to Bourdieu, is rarely sudden or violent; instead, it more often arises in the form of "partial revolutions," as agents within a field adapt to new structural conditions.[46] It is frequently gradual in nature and characterized by minor adjustments and revisions, in ways that seldom bring into question the very foundations of the field. In calling attention to the rules and constraints of particular fields, this approach thus

43 Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 73.
44 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 30; Peter Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu," in *Critical Theorists and International Relations*, ed. Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan-Williams (London: Routledge, 2009), 106.
45 Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 74.
46 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 74.

offers important clues regarding the form and functioning of past humanitarian reforms and the potential limits of change.

Field analysis thus represents an important new direction in the study of humanitarian reform. From this perspective, reform is viewed as an ongoing process of competition for the authority to define the shape and direction of new policy changes. Such a focus necessitates greater attention to the diversity of actors across this space, their positions relative to others, and how the authority of some has been constructed, institutionalized, and maintained or challenged over time. In the process, this relational approach should add depth and complexity to the longstanding debate on the shortcomings of the humanitarian regime, which traditionally has either limited its focus to the material constraints to change or denounced the hegemonic nature of humanitarianism itself. While recognizing the economic, political, and moral dilemmas facing humanitarian actors, it seeks to look within these constraints in an attempt to bring to light ongoing negotiations and contestations over authority, knowledge, and power. It adopts a critical lens, examining how certain representations and dispositions have stabilized over time and the ways in which they have conditioned policy and practice. In the process, it assesses the obstacles to and scope for change, in an attempt to both understand the contemporary challenges of reform and inform current policy debates around the future of humanitarian action.

The Key Concepts

Three concepts – fields, capital, and authority – are essential to understanding the prospects and limits of change in the humanitarian field. This section examines each of

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these concepts in turn, followed by a discussion of how they may be applied to the study of humanitarian reform.

Fields

Fields, Bourdieu suggests, are shaped by the relations between differently positioned agents and are oriented around a given set of stakes. As discussed above, this relational view of reality presents an entirely different view of social structures. Rather than focusing solely on the distribution of capabilities,[47] field analysis is more interested in describing the relative positions of agents within a field, as well as the dispositions and practices associated with those positions.[48] According to Bourdieu, the structure of a field, defined by the present or potential situation of agents relative to others, governs the strategies aimed at transforming it.[49] Those who command the sources of capital within a field are inclined to conserve the status quo, in line with existing social arrangements that are perceived as "perfectly necessary, absolute and natural."[50] Those with the least capital, by contrast, are inclined toward strategies of subversion, and yet must do so within the practical limits of the field itself. A struggle within a particular field thus "presupposes agreement between the antagonists about what it is that is worth fighting about," such that the principles and stakes of the field are reproduced through the very act of struggle.[51] Accordingly, social action is neither a product of objective structures that

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47 Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979).
48 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 33.
49 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 73.
50 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 255.
51 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 73.

are entirely independent of the will of agents nor of subjective meanings and representations that are reducible solely to the agents themselves.[52]

Instead, this relational approach focuses attention on the internalized behaviour or 'habitus' that emerges from the conditioning effects of the field. These underlying dispositions are shaped by a sense of one's place within the present 'pecking order',[53] and cultivated through the experiences and histories associated with that position. They orient the ways in which agents perceive and act on the social world, which derive from a practical sense or 'feel for the game' as much as strategic calculation.[54] Although not strictly pre-determined, the practices of agents thus fall within certain limits or constraints. They are patterned, rather than necessarily purposive and calculated, and filtered through past habits, traditions, and beliefs.[55] Some behaviours are perceived as common-sense or taken-for-granted, while others are unthinkable within the logic of a particular field.

Bourdieu further contends that fields can be visualized as geographic spaces, enabling a 'social topology' of the relations between positions within a field.[56] From this perspective, actors are arranged according to the overall volume of capital that they possess as well as the form of this capital (more on this below). Those who occupy the same or neighbouring positions within such a scheme are often exposed to similar conditions and experiences. As a result, they "have every chance of having similar

52 Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power."
53 Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice."
54 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 66.
55 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 67–71.
56 Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," 16.

dispositions and interests, and thus of producing practices that are themselves similar."[57]

These similarities in position and disposition facilitate convergence and cooperation among particular groups, as well as divergence from those occupying different positions in the field. According to Bourdieu, the practices of members of the same group are therefore "always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish," and occur without conscious coordination.[58] Through the rhythm of everyday work, such collective dispositions and practices are institutionalized over time, until they are "comprehended as natural, legitimate, and even inevitable."[59]

More practically, analyzing the humanitarian field means mapping the relations within this social space and the sources of convergence and divergence among its constituents. It begins by identifying the main objects of struggle, and tracing this backwards to determine the positional and dispositional logics in which they originated.[60] A positional view entails plotting the distribution of resources and actors within the field, in search of persistent patterns of relations that bind together or separate certain agents. It directs attention to the formal and informal ties that have emerged over time, as well as the different sources of capital in which they have been grounded. In turn, a dispositional perspective involves reconstructing the inclinations and internalized behaviours shared among similarly positioned agents. As discussed below, determining dispositional logics can prove challenging, particularly when seeking to uncover deeply rooted meanings and

57 Bourdieu, 17; See also Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (2009): 559–92 for a related view from social network analysis.
58 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 59.
59 Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu," 107.
60 Pouliot and Mérand, "Bourdieu's Concepts: Political Sociology in International Relations," 32.

habits that may be invisible to the analyst.[61] Nonetheless, by tracing the relative positions

and dispositions of actors in the humanitarian field, I hope to reveal the logic and

hierarchy of its internal relations and the origins of the struggles that have accompanied

the question of reform.

Finally, it is important to note that social fields may be relatively autonomous or

interpenetrated by other fields. The stakes and rules of particular fields tend to generate

boundary effects, which separate the agents invested in the field from other actors.[62]

When these boundaries are sufficiently strong to exclude all other potential agents, the

field is considered to be autonomous from others. If the boundaries of a field are weak,

however, it may overlap with or be penetrated by other, related fields. In these cases,

fields are shaped by both the internal struggles of the agents invested in its stakes, as well

as the external interventions of agents from other fields.[63] As will be shown in the next

chapter, the boundaries of the humanitarian field are relatively weak, as it is frequently

constrained by and subject to developments occurring in the political sphere, most

notably, as well as the development and security fields.

Capital

Bourdieu's concept of capital refers to the resources recognized as relevant to a

field, and which are at the centre of the struggle between agents within that social space.

As discussed above, the volume and distribution of capital are at heart of the power

relations that structure the field. It further delineates the specific profits at stake, and the

resources that actors will mobilize as they struggle to maintain or transform their relative

61 Vincent Pouliot, "Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice," in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (New York: Routledge, 2013), 50–52.
62 Bigo, "Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations," 240.
63 Bigo, 240; Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu," 108.

position within the field. These resources, however, can only be understood relative to the function they serve within particular social spaces and relationships. As such, specific forms of capital are only important and effective to the extent that they are recognized as a "social relation of power" by the agents engaged in the field of struggle.[64]

Capital can exist in different forms, depending on the role that it plays in maintaining or challenging the prevailing relations of power. Bourdieu identifies four fundamental forms of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic.[65] Economic capital, in the form of material resources and property rights, is "at the root of all the other types of capital."[66] Bourdieu, however, warns that our view of power within a field must not be reduced to the economic determinism implied by Marxist theory. While economic capital can provide immediate access to certain goods and services, it may also be converted into noneconomic forms of power. It enables, for instance, long-term investments in education or social exchanges, which, when cultivated within a specific social milieu, can become important power resources in themselves.[67]

Cultural capital, in the form of skills, competencies, qualifications, aesthetic preferences, or general cultural awareness, is one such resource. It may be internalized in the habitus of individuals, providing the conceptual and verbal capacities needed to understand music, art, or science, for example. Such facilities, according to Bourdieu, are often inherited unconsciously, through family or social setting.[68] Cultural capital may also be institutionalized in the form of educational degrees or other credentials, which

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64 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 72–73; Bigo, "Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations," 237.
65 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.E. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.
66 Bourdieu, 54.
67 Bourdieu, 53–55; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 73–82.
68 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 47.

serve to authorize certain social positions or 'status groups' within society. It is typically

grounded in underlying economic conditions – the resources needed to invest in

education, for instance, are more readily available to the affluent.[69] Bourdieu suggests

that these cultural forms of capital serve to lock in class structures and social inequalities.

Social stratification is an unavoidable consequence, as these subtle elements of cultural

socialization further distinguish and set apart differently positioned actors.[70]

Social capital, including personal relationships and networks, provides a source of

collectively owned capital. Group membership in families, clans, cliques, or clubs

facilitate material and symbolic exchanges among members. It serves to concentrate

resources and interests, thereby multiplying the advantages that come with membership.[71]

The strength and cohesion of a group is defined by the magnitude and frequency of the

interactions between actors. Groups may also be socially instituted, providing a formal

and lasting means to maintain membership. The volume of social capital possessed by an

agent or group depends on the size and number of linkages that they can mobilize. Highly

central agents in a network often have considerable social power, enabling them to access

resources and information, alter common understandings of interests or norms, and put

forward agendas and policies that work to their benefit.[72] They may also withhold group

membership from certain actors, thus sanctioning those outside the group while

reaffirming its boundaries.[73]

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69 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 77.
70 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 47–51; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 135–41; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 75–80.
71 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 51–53.
72 Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," 570.
73 The concept of social capital is, of course, ubiquitous with Robert Putnam's studies of civic community in democratic governments. According to Putnam and colleagues, social capital, as developed through membership in social organizations and other form of association, helps to facilitate trust and cooperation

Together, the volume and distribution of these different forms of capital exercise symbolic power over the field as a whole, and serve to both produce and reproduce the prevailing structures of social domination. Bourdieu argues that relations of domination in modern societies have largely shifted from overt instances of coercion and physical violence to more symbolic and disguised forms of power.[74] Cultural and social forms of capital, in particular, are effective precisely because they lend legitimacy to the exercise of power. Internalized dispositions, cultural institutions, and social networks all serve to maintain and reinforce prevailing inequalities, particularly when they are (mis)perceived as legitimate. Bourdieu suggests that this symbolic capital, if unrecognized as such, presents itself as "the most economical mode of domination because it best corresponds to the economy of the system."[75] It renders invisible the operation of power in a field, and functions "only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even they themselves exercise it."[76] Such symbolic power is often manifest in rituals of recognition or prestige, and confers a sense of status to its holders.[77] The views of these actors can become difficult to ignore, particularly when backed up by educational qualifications, occupational titles, or the prestige associated with select clubs. Symbolic capital thus serves to institutionalize and guarantee lasting relations between

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among members of a community. In Bourdieu's view, however, social capital may also be a source of exclusion that serves to separate agents within a given field. See Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

74 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 126–28; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 82–92.

75 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 127.

76 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 164.

77 Peter Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu, the 'Cultural Turn' and the Practice of International History," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 168–69.

socially defined positions, particularly when the dominated legitimate their own

conditions of domination.[78]

At first blush, Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic domination closely resembles

Antonio Gramsci's conception of 'hegemony', defined as the combination of force and

consent through which "the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance,

but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules."[79] There are,

however, important differences between the two. Most notably, although both focus on

the maintenance of social order through the domination of economic and symbolic forms

of capital, the two theorists put forward differing claims regarding the capacity of the

dominated to understand and contest the positions in which they are located.[80] Consent,

according to Gramsci, involves the active and knowing participation of the dominated in

their own subordination. Bourdieu, by contrast, suggests that consent is moulded by the

effects of habitus, which functions below the level of consciousness and thus "beyond the

reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will."[81] Cultural and social capital, he

argues, further serve to mask and dissipate the hierarchical relations upon which they are

founded. The latter, of course, poses important implications for Bourdieu's conception of

change, an issue picked up in more detail in the next section.

In assessing the forms and distribution of capital in the humanitarian field, it is

important to not assume *a priori* what resources and capacities are most important for

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78 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 130–33; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 89–92.
79 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International, 1971), 244.
80 Michael Burawoy, "Cultural Domination: Gramsci Meets Bourdieu" (Madison WI, 2008), http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Bourdieu/4.Gramsci.pdf.
81 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 466.

actors within this space.[82] Instead, the analyst must seek to identify the forms of capital

that are recognized as important and effective by humanitarian actors themselves. Once

this step is complete, a topographical analysis that maps the distribution of resources and

actors across the humanitarian field should be possible. Social struggles must also be

located within their historical context, to capture evolving relationships over time and the

forms of capital that were central to these competitions.[83]

Authority

Authority implies some measure of voluntary compliance and a belief in the

legitimacy of an acknowledged superior.[84] It necessitates an act of deferral, as actors

recognize and submit to the judgement of an authoritative figure. Authority, in line with

Max Weber's ideal types, can assume various forms, from the traditional authority

thought to be pre-ordained to rule over a society to the rational-legal authority invested in

modern governments and bureaucracies.[85] In each of these cases, the relationship

between superordinate and subordinate actors is premised on the operation of power,

allowing those in an authoritative position to exert greater influence than they would

otherwise.

Much of the literature on authority, particularly in the discipline of IR, either

outlines ideal types of authority or simply assumes certain actors to be authoritative

within a particular domain.[86] These assumptions, however, often lead scholars to "take

the existence of legitimate authority for granted," rather than examining the structural

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82 Bigo, "Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations," 237.
83 Pouliot, "Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice," 52.
84 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (University of California Press, 1978), 212–13.
85 Weber, 215–16; See also Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules For The World: International Organizations In Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 20–29.
86 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 15.

conditions and underlying power dynamics from which these relationships emerge.[87] For

this reason, more recent work in IR theory has begun to explore the relational dimensions

of authority, and the dynamics of deferral and recognition that separate the 'governors'

from the 'governed'.[88] Those drawing from Bourdieu have assessed the ways in which

certain actors come to dominate over a particular field, and the forms of capital they use

to advance and maintain their claims to authority.[89] At the heart of this work is the

assumption that sources of authority are always under construction, and are shaped by the

broader pattern of relations among positions in a social space. This focus directs our

attention to the ongoing competition for authority among agents, and the reasons why

some actors and not others have been recognized as authoritative within a field.

Recognition is central to the conferral of authority.[90] It allows an actor's voice to be

heard, believed, and validated.[91] Actors thus compete to be recognized by others as

authorities, and draw on the material and symbolic resources available to advance their

distinct conception of what is to be governed.[92] They strive to be recognized in various

ways: as expert authorities in a technical or professional domain;[93] as moral authorities

over a certain issue-area or set of shared values;[94] or simply as competent and

87 Peter M. Blau, "Critical Remarks on Weber's Theory of Authority," *The American Political Science Review* 57, no. 2 (1963): 307.

88 Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

89 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*.

90 Sending, 23–24; Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, "Who Governs the Globe?," in *Who Governs the Globe?*, ed. Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9–10.

91 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules For The World*, 20.

92 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 12.

93 Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1–35; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

94 Richard Price, "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 579–606; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

distinguished practitioners of a particular craft or vocation.[95] The desire for social

distinction, notably the prestige and status that accompanies such a position of authority,

further drives the pursuit of recognition and is another source of symbolic power that may

be deployed elsewhere.[96] Nonetheless, while actors may strive for recognition and

authority, only some will have the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital

needed to achieve these objectives. For Bourdieu, the struggle for authority is thus one of

hierarchy and domination, which derives from the broader distribution of power and

capital within a field.[97]

The nature and functioning of different relationships of authority ultimately shape

the governance of particular fields. Governors set the agenda, define rules, and monitor

and adjudicate the governed.[98] They may serve as gatekeepers that keep certain issues off

the international agenda.[99] Relations among different groups of governors may also be

defined by hierarchies of authority, resulting in the creation of pecking orders that

structure the practice of governance.[100] Less obviously, the conferral of authority shapes

whose perspectives are included and recognized as important, and which voices are left

out or marginalized as a result. At stake, according to Bourdieu, is power over the

classificatory schemes and systems that shape meaning in the social world.[101] Those with

the most capital are often able to impose their view of the world as legitimate and

authoritative. They create new categories of actors and solutions, fix meanings in the

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95 Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice."
96 Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu," 108.
97 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 20.
98 Avant, Finnemore, and Sell, "Who Governs the Globe?," 2010, 14–16.
99 R. Charli Carpenter, "Governing the Global Agenda: 'Gatekeepers' and 'Issue Adoption' in Transnational Advocacy Networks," in *Who Governs the Globe?*, ed. Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 202–37.
100 Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice."
101 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 479; Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 107–16.

social world, and articulate new norms and rules.[102] The power to define and manage

issues, however, is only available to an authoritative few, to which others must defer. The

governed, as a result, are typically left with little space to effect change in their field.

While governors may, at times, draw on coercive measures to impose their will,

their authority is more often unquestioned and accepted as legitimate.[103] The

institutionalization of authority, Bourdieu suggests, "makes it possible, if not to dispense

completely with 'demonstration', at least to cease depending on it completely in order to

secure the belief and obedience of others."[104] With time, he argues, the relations between

positions in a field may be taken for granted and perceived as the natural order of things,

such that dominant actors no longer need to seek the recognition of authority. The

governed, in turn, may intuitively consent to their continued domination, without

recognizing their complicity in doing so. As relations of authority solidify into lasting

institutions, the holders of such symbolic capital may therefore "impose their own

categories as authoritative for the field as such."[105] Power within such a field derives not

from the discourse itself, but from "the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who

utter them."[106] It legitimates inequality, enabling actors to secure and render

misrecognized what would otherwise be obtained through force.

Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic domination, of course, tends toward a static

conception of change, and has been criticized for its over-determined explanations of

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102 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules For The World*, 31–34.
103 Avant, Finnemore, and Sell, "Who Governs the Globe?," 2010, 8.
104 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 131.
105 Sending, *The Politics of Expertise*, 24.
106 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 170.

stability and regularity within fields.[107] In response, Bourdieu notes that while habitus

may be adjusted to the logic and rules associated with particular regimes of authority, it

does not necessarily lead to mechanical determination.[108] Instead, he argues that the

practices and habits of agents should be seen within their historically and socially

conditioned constraints, which guide but do not determine their actions. Social change,

accordingly, is frequently gradual in nature, as agents and institutions adapt to shifts in

the underlying conditions of the field. More recent developments in field theory indicate

that even the most stable fields are characterized by continued jockeying for position, as

agents within these spaces manoeuvre to either safeguard their authority or improve,

however partially, their situation. At times, the very logic and rules of a social space may

be called into question, typically as a result of the introduction of new forms of capital or

changes occurring in proximate fields.[109] Such moments are often short-lived, and

resolved through the reassertion of authority and order on the part of incumbents or, more

rarely, through social transformation and the restructuring of power relations across the

field.

From the perspective of field analysis, humanitarian reform, and global governance

more generally, is re-imagined as an ongoing struggle for the authority to define how and

in what ways the humanitarian field will be governed. This conceptual lens offers greater

understanding of why some actors, and not others, have emerged in positions of authority

within this space, and the ways in which these hierarchies have been reproduced through

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107 See, for example, Richard Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism," *Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1982): 270–81; Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 211–17.
108 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, chap. 3.
109 Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu, the 'Cultural Turn' and the Practice of International History"; Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 1 (2011): 1–26.

the process of reform itself. While important, control of economic capital is only one dimension of the broader struggle for authority within this field. Claims to expertise, social access, and moral standing are all essential to governance within the humanitarian field, and have defined the shape and direction of the process of change. Those able to stake their claim to authority have dominated the form and functioning of reform, with implications for the field as a whole.

Operationalization

Using these three concepts – fields, capital, and authority – this dissertation examines the relationships of domination, dependence, and contestation that have accompanied the question of humanitarian reform. Throughout its chapters, I explore the diversity of actors, perspectives, and interests that make up the humanitarian field today, and trace the hierarchies and objects of struggle that influence the interactions among them. In doing so, I highlight the competition over authority and influence that has accompanied new change initiatives, and the ways in which certain voices and perspectives have been elevated above others in defining the direction and scope of reform.

My research followed a three-pronged strategy in this regard. First, I sought to map the contours and dividing lines of the humanitarian field, paying particular attention to the internal power relations, rules, and sources of struggle that define this social space. The humanitarian field, I found, is as diverse as it is large, and is comprised of a multitude of actors, organizations, groups, and networks. To make sense of this complexity, I therefore endeavoured to identify the key sources of convergence and divergence among the constituents of this social space. Through a combination of

methods, discussed in more detail below, I observed that agents within the humanitarian field are bound by a number of core beliefs and principles that transcend organizational lines. Chief among these is the common commitment to humanity and a desire to alleviate the suffering of those in need, which serve to delineate the actors and activities of this field from others that are more ostensibly political or economic in nature. At the same time, the field is cross-cut by latent struggles over knowledge and power within the delivery and management of aid. This includes, most notably, authority over the shape and direction of humanitarian reform, and who is in a position to influence processes of systemic change.

Second, I looked to identify the sources of capital at the heart of these debates, as a means of better understanding how relations of authority across the humanitarian field have been constructed, maintained, and challenged over time. To do so, I first sought to determine the resources and capacities identified by humanitarians themselves as most important to the everyday policy and practice of aid. I uncovered four forms of capital that are of particular significance in this regard: economic resources; cultural capital in the form of technical knowledge and expertise; social capital cultivated through access to specific networks and social groupings; and symbolic capital stemming from the moral prestige associated with the tradition of international humanitarianism. These forms of capital are central to the relationships and hierarchies that both bind together and divide this social space. Each, moreover, has been used to advance distinct claims to authority and governance. Economic capital, for example, remains concentrated among a core group of donors and organizations, which has cemented their role as the primary powerbrokers across the humanitarian field. The cultural capital that derives from having

a particular set of qualifications and experiences has served to elevate the voice and influence of some actors over others. The arrangement and distribution of these forms of capital reveal a humanitarian field that is deeply stratified, with significant implications for the policy and practice of aid.

Finally, I traced how the nature and functioning of different relationships of authority across the humanitarian field have shaped the governance of this social space. Most notably, I sought to determine the presence and relative influence of what I identified as a 'humanitarian elite'. Building on previous work on transnational power elites, which are defined by the concentration of various forms of capital in the hands of individuals working for one or more international institutions,[110] I found that economic resources, expertise, social access, and moral standing across the humanitarian field have all been claimed by a core group of actors. This elite, I suggest, is composed of a small number of professionals who work primarily for the UN and international NGOs and who have the economic means and cultural and social competencies needed to operate across national boundaries. The presence of this elite, moreover, has shaped the policy and practice of aid. At the global level, its claim to authority has contributed to the predominance of certain understandings of reform, while closing off space for viable alternatives. These authority structures are often replicated in the field, generating behaviours and practices that prioritize the roles and interests of international humanitarian responders over national and local counterparts. Above all, the presence and influence of this elite have ensured that humanitarian reforms continue to privilege

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110 Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Rask Madsen define the transnational power elite as a group of individuals, typically professionals, that operates in and across international institutions and that has disproportionate access to various power resources, including economic, expert, cultural, and network forms of capital. See Kauppi and Madsen, *Transnational Power Elites*, 2013.

the large-scale, *international* delivery of aid, typically at the expense of resources and capacities found more locally.

This three-pronged approach helped to reveal the relations of hierarchy and exclusion that are intrinsic to the operation of the humanitarian field. In drawing on the key concepts of fields, capital, and authority, it offered an alternative understanding of the internal dynamics of humanitarian reform, including the ways in which certain voices and perspectives have been elevated above others in influencing the shape and direction of change. Most notably, it illuminated the structures of power and authority across the humanitarian field, which, as I develop throughout the dissertation, have had important implications for the policy and practice of aid.

Methodology and Data Collection

To explore the social hierarchies inherent to the humanitarian field and their effects on the process of reform, this research involved a combination of discourse analysis, network analysis, and comparative case work. This multi-method approach was necessary to understand the past and present meanings and logics at work within this social space. As Vincent Pouliot explains with respect to field analysis more generally:

> The specificity of this interrogation lies in its traversing a structural space (an analytically derived distribution of resources), a dispositional one (a set of embodied histories and trajectories) *and* a practical one (situated interactions in the everyday life of muddling through). The challenge comes from the fact that no one single method exists that is able to span such distinct ontologies.[111]

Accordingly, I combined a variety of methods in an attempt to reveal the structure and logic of the humanitarian field, the dispositions and relations binding differently positioned agents, and the acute competition over authority occurring within this social

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111 Pouliot, "Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice," 46.

space. Throughout this process, my analytical gaze was both synchronic, exploring the

present state of power relations within this field, as well as diachronic, focusing on the

struggle for domination as the product of past social conflicts.[112]

Discursive analysis of key texts and interviews with humanitarian aid professionals

provided valuable insights into the rules, meanings, and dispositions that structure this

field. Textual analysis of organizational histories, autobiographies, and ethnographic

analyses offered a better understanding of the founding principles and traditions of the

humanitarian field, and how these have been used by certain actors to claim authority

over this space as a whole. In order to limit the range of possible texts to be surveyed, I

initially focused on those produced by the earliest and / or most influential humanitarian

organizations, including UN agencies (UNHCR and OCHA); the International Red Cross

and Red Crescent Movement (ICRC and IFRC); and a selection of international NGOs

(Save the Children, Oxfam, and Médecins Sans Frontières, among others). I then

broadened my analysis to include annual reports and statements released by relatively

'new' entrants to the humanitarian field, including, most notably, those of NGOs based in

the Global South. In addition to these foundational documents, I also examined the policy

papers and reactions that accompanied various reform agendas, including the 2005

Humanitarian Reform Agenda, the 2011 Transformative Agenda, and the 2016 World

Humanitarian Summit. These texts were particularly important for assessing the

narratives and discursive frames used to represent the challenges facing the humanitarian

regime. They further revealed the "master metaphors" employed to facilitate consensus

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112 Mustafa Emirbayer and Victoria Johnson, "Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis," *Theory and Society* 37, no. 1 (2008): 6.

and mobilize support for particular policies across a broad range of actors.[113] Throughout

this process, special attention was given to 'canonical' texts, which are typically cited by

many and emerge at critical junctures or crossroads in the development of an

organization or policy.[114]

Interviews with UN and humanitarian personnel in Geneva and other regional

hubs[115] helped to reconstruct the perspectives of practitioners themselves, providing

greater insight into the dispositions they have internalized and the "rationalizing

narratives"[116] they use to explain and justify the relationships and practices intrinsic to

their work. The objective of the interviews was to assess the ways in which humanitarian

actors have understood the challenges facing their sector, as well as, more implicitly, the

assumptions that guide their work and the positions from which they speak.[117] Areas of

inquiry included:

- What traditions, beliefs, and practices guide the work of humanitarian actors?
  Can sub-groups of actors be identified, based on positional or dispositional
  similarities?
- How is authority and expertise defined within the humanitarian field? How do
  these understandings structure the relations between actors?

113 David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 35; and David Mosse, "Global Governance and the Ethnography of International Aid," in *The Aid Effect: Giving and Governing in International Development*, ed. David Mosse and David J. Lewis (London: Pluto, 2005), 15. Emphasis in original.
114 Canonical texts, as defined by Iver Neumann, refer to the documents that have been highly influential in shaping the development of an organization or policy. These may include foundational texts, government white papers, organizational histories, and other forms of authoritative treatises or statements that are broadly received and frequently cited in the secondary literature. See Iver B. Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, ed. Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 67.
115 In-person interviews for this research project were conducted in Geneva. To add variation to the sample, I also conducted interviews by Skype with respondents in Bangladesh, England, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, and USA. Of 45 total interviews, 32 were conducted in Geneva.
116 David Mosse, *Cultivating Development*, 132, quoted in Autesserre, *Peaceland*, 284.
117 Pouliot, "Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice," 51–52.

- How do humanitarian actors perceive the challenges facing the regime? How are potential solutions framed and articulated?
- What are the primary sources of division within the humanitarian field? What forms of capital (e.g. economic, cultural, social) are at the heart of these differences?

In most cases, I did not ask respondents these questions directly, and instead attempted to extrapolate from other, more indirect lines of questioning regarding their relationship to other actors and organizations across the humanitarian field. I found, however, that respondents were well aware of the power relations and contradictions inherent to their work, and were often quite willing to explore the sources of the divisions they identified.

Using snowball-sampling techniques, the interview process attempted to encompass as wide a sample as possible and was conducted with contacts representing various humanitarian organizations. These included the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Refugee Agency, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and various international and regional NGOs. To add variation, interviews were also conducted with actors outside the formal humanitarian regime, including retired aid professionals, donor representatives, and consultants. In total, 45 formal and informal interviews were conducted between October 2015 and December 2016. Once collected, interview transcripts were coded and analyzed discursively. Special attention was given to the ways in which respondents viewed their role and position within the humanitarian field, as well as their relationship to other agents and organizations.

In addition to these discursive methods, network analysis helped to reveal the positional configuration of the humanitarian field. Much like field analysis, network

analytic methods offer a relational view of social structures, defined as "persistent

patterns of relations among agents that can define, enable, and constrain those agents."[118]

Positions, or nodes, are viewed as mutually dependent, as the links between them serve as

channels for the transmission of material and social resources. Specifically, network

analysis explores how the positioning of particular nodes and the formation of sub-groups

defined by dense economic and social ties can shape the patterns of relations among

actors.[119] This methodological approach offered a means of operationalizing Bourdieu's

concepts of field and capital. When coupled with the discursive methods discussed above,

it helped uncover the dispositional and positional logics of the humanitarian field, which

have shaped the flow of resources and ideas within this social space.

Finally, a comparative case design provided an important opportunity to evaluate

variation and commonality across several dimensions. In particular, it helped to assess the

extent to which power relations cultivated at the global level are maintained or

challenged in the field, thus introducing another level of analysis to the study. It also

helped to move the focus from policy to practice, by highlighting the ways in which the

competition for authority plays out on the ground. To this end, I examined three case

studies, each oriented around a particular policy area (see Table 2). First, I considered

recent reforms intended to improve coordination within humanitarian response, focusing

primarily on the cluster system introduced as part of the 2005 Humanitarian Reform

Agenda. The cluster approach was designed to help coordinate activities across

international organizations as well as with national and local governments and NGOs;

when implemented, however, it served to replicate structures of expertise and authority

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118 Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," 561.
119 Hafner-Burton, Kahler, and Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations."

Table 2: Case studies of humanitarian reform

Policy Area	Landmark moments	Key Documents
Coordination	1996: Inefficiencies of humanitarian response to Rwandan genocide linked to "poor overall coordination" 1998: Establishment of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2005: Launch of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda; introduction of Humanitarian Country Teams and the 'cluster' approach to coordination 2011: Expansion of the cluster approach as part of the Transformative Agenda	Borton et al., *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*, 1996. IASC, *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, 2006. Steets et al., *Cluster Approach Evaluation Synthesis Report*, 2010. IASC, *Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level*, 2012 IASC, *Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, 2015.
Accountability	1994: Code of Conduct for the Red Cross and NGOs signed 1996: Improved accountability identified as recommendation of Joint Evaluation of the Rwandan Response 1996-2003: The "accountability revolution," marked by the launch of various initiatives and standards 2011: Launch of the Transformative Agenda and Joint Standards Initiative on accountability	IFRC, *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, 1994. Sphere Project, *The Sphere Standards*, 2000. Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, *The HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*, 2007. IASC, *Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations*, 2011. CHS Alliance, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2015.
Partnership	2006: 'Partnership' added as fourth pillar of the 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda 2007: Principles of Partnership adopted by a consortium of humanitarian organizations 2015: 'Localization' emerges as key debate of the World Humanitarian Summit global consultations 2015: Launch of the NGO-led Charter for Change, outlining eight commitments to enable locally-led responses	Global Humanitarian Platform, *Principles of Partnership*, 2007. IFRC, *World Disasters Report 2015: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness*, 2015. WHS Secretariat, *Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit*, 2015. *Charter for Change: Localization of Humanitarian Aid*, 2015. *The Grand Bargain: A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need*, 2016.

cultivated at the global level. Second, I focused on reforms meant to enhance

accountability to the beneficiaries of aid. Looking across a selection of accountability

tools, I suggest that, despite the proliferation of new standards and participatory methods,

these efforts have failed to address the more fundamental question of power that is

inherent in the delivery of aid. Finally, I looked at efforts to generate more equitable and

complementary partnerships among international and local humanitarian organizations,

which in practice are generally premised on top-down, asymmetrical relationships. Each

of these policy areas has occupied a prominent position within the various reform

initiatives of the past 25 years. They also offer important insights into the negotiation of

authority and expertise across the humanitarian field, by focusing on the relations

between international humanitarian organizations and various actors at the national and

local levels.

The bulk of the interviews and research for this project was undertaken in Geneva,

Switzerland, over the course of two visits between October to December 2015 and May

to July 2016. Widely known as the 'humanitarian capital' of the world, Geneva has long

been at the centre of the international humanitarian regime, dating back to the founding

of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the city in 1863. Currently, the city

hosts 37 UN and international organizations, over 370 NGOs, and 176 diplomatic

missions.[120] An estimated 10 percent of humanitarian professionals worldwide are

believed to work in Geneva, while an additional 18 percent travel to the city on a regular

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[120] "Facts and Figures," International Geneva, accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.geneve-int.ch/facts-figures#3743.

basis, making this centre the world hub for humanitarian networking and exchange.[121]

The significant humanitarian presence in Geneva thus offered unparalleled access to

humanitarian professionals, as well as organizational archives. The workshops, seminars,

and meetings routinely held in the city also provided important opportunities for

participant observation, enabling insights on how issues of reform and change are

addressed and articulated by individuals across various forums. Supplementary

interviews with humanitarian professionals outside of Geneva were also conducted via

Skype, reaching contacts in Bangladesh, England, Germany, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand,

and USA. This offered access to humanitarian professionals residing outside of the

'Geneva bubble', permitting analysis of the similarities and differences between the two.

It also provided some initial insights on whether distance from Geneva has produced

other, alternative ways of thinking about problems of humanitarian reform.

Limitations

This research presents a number of possible limitations. Most notably, it attempts to

describe the humanitarian field at large, and is bound to do some injustice to the diversity

of views among humanitarian actors. I compensated for the potential risk of over-

generalizing by initially seeking out as diverse a sample as possible, taking into account

organizational affiliation, professional background, experience, nationality, and gender. I

then attempted to hone in on what I have characterized as the 'humanitarian elite', in an

attempt to establish the core identities and boundaries of this group. Specifically, I

focused on the positional and dispositional similarities and divisions among this group,

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121 Anaïde Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian
Professional Networks," *Grotius International*, March 2013.

by exploring their social and cultural backgrounds, the networks in which they circulate, and their access to different forms of capital, all in an effort to assess the presence and cohesion of this elite group. I also looked for contradictory perspectives or evidence that challenged my efforts to identify the presence of this elite. It was entirely possible that conflicting and ultimately irreconcilable traditions or organizational identities may have precluded analysis of a cohesive elite group within the humanitarian field. Likewise, it was possible that prevailing practices allow for the relatively free and open exchange of knowledge and perspectives, including from below. Throughout the research process, I remained aware of and attempted to address these competing arguments and understandings.

Unravelling the dispositional or positional logics that guide the work of humanitarian actors presented a further challenge to this research. Such analysis is easier said than done; Pouliot, for instance, acknowledges that "in the actuality of research ... direct access is often complicated to get."[122] He suggests that interviews and textual analysis can serve as useful proxies for direct participant observation within the natural habitat of the study population, which represents his "method of choice."[123] Although this research did, to some extent, build on observations cultivated through four months of work in Geneva, it relied heavily on interview and textual analysis to reconstruct and probe the internalized dispositions and taken-for-granted assumptions of humanitarian actors. Interviewees, for example, were asked to assess the primary challenges facing the regime and to identify the actors and resources needed to address these issues. At other times, they were asked to describe a typical response situation, including the actions they

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122 Pouliot, "Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice," 48.
123 Pouliot, 48.

would take and how roles and responsibilities are divided among various actors. Textual

analysis of reform agendas, organizational reports, handbooks, and evaluations provided

an important window into the justificatory frameworks and practices of humanitarian

actors across a range of scenarios. In both the interviews and textual analysis, the goal

was to find "the nearest possible vantage point"[124] to practices and internalized

dispositions that may be deeply embedded across the humanitarian field. While perhaps

limited in comparison to direct participant observations, these methods offered a useful

alternative lens through which to assess power relations across the humanitarian field.

Similarly, the case studies used in this research cannot possibly reflect all areas of

humanitarian policy. Nonetheless, in focusing on three prominent areas of reform, I offer

a preliminary understanding of the limits and shortcomings of change in the humanitarian

field. The interpretive methods of this research provide a means to examine the extent to

which claims to expertise, social access, and moral standing within this sphere have been

employed to construct, maintain, and challenge particular regimes of power and

governance. While not offering a definitive 'test' of my claims, I highlight the important

contest over authority occurring within the humanitarian field, which has both structured

relations in this social space and conditioned the behaviour of its constituents. I further

suggest, like much constructivist research, that the findings of this study should be

applicable across a wide empirical range.[125]

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124 Edward Schatz, "What Kind(s) of Ethnography Does Political Science Need?," in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009), 307, quoted in Pouliot, *Methodology*, 51.
125 See Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 13.

This research also contains a potential selection bias. In conducting the bulk of my

research in Geneva, it is possible that my findings may privilege or reinforce the

perspectives of the very elite I am attempting to study. While my primary objective is to

explore the production of authority and knowledge within this group, it was important to

seek out alternative perspectives and opinions whenever possible. This included, most

notably, the voices of those who are often ignored or silenced by international

interventions.[126] While an adequate sample of aid recipients, local staff or consultants,

and aid workers across various contexts was certainly beyond the scope of this project, it

was possible to draw on alternative data sources to gain some insight concerning these

perspectives. For example, *The Listening Project*, undertaken by Mary Anderson and

collaborators, portrays the voices and experiences of over 6,000 people across 20

countries, including both the recipients and providers of aid.[127] A slightly older report,

The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise, similarly captures local perceptions of

humanitarian assistance across 12 case studies.[128] Finally, and perhaps most importantly,

the summary reports developed from a series of regional and thematic consultations

preceding the World Humanitarian Summit offered a window into the views and interests

of actors representing the full spectrum of the humanitarian field.[129] Comprising aid

recipients, humanitarian professionals from the Global North and South, and

126 See, for example, Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 377–404.
127 Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012).
128 Antonio Donini et al., "The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise" (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2008).
129 Eight regional consultations and a series of formal and informal thematic consultations were held throughout 2014 and 2015, and collectively represented the perspectives of over 23,000 individuals. The Summit itself was held in May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. See World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit" (New York: United Nations, 2015); United Nations, "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit," A/70/XX (New York: UN General Assembly, 2016).

representatives of donor and affected governments, among other actors, these summary

reports provided an invaluable perspective on this latest round of humanitarian reform.

Together, these reports represent a small sample of the growing literature on local

understandings of and responses to external aid,[130] and helped to provide an alternative,

bottom-up view of humanitarian response.

Given the importance of preserving an organization's public image or brand, I

encountered some, albeit limited, resistance in asking contacts to comment on the nature

of their work. For this reason, it is possible that my interview data contains a number of

"canned responses" – rehearsed statements that are reserved primarily for inquiring

journalists and researchers.[131] To help build trust, I maintained the confidentiality of

interviewees and attempted to generalize from the practices and perspectives of

individuals. Moreover, formal or canned statements may also be useful to some degree.

As Séverine Autesserre suggests, these responses help to document the ways international

interveners portray themselves to the outside world, including the narratives and frames

of reference they believe to be positive, principled, and non-controversial.[132] Participant

observation through formal meetings, workshops, seminars, and conferences also

provided a means to study and observe the narratives employed by humanitarian actors in

more regular work environments.

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130 See, for example, Caroline Abu-Sada, ed., *In the Eyes of Others: How People in Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid* (New York: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012); International Committee of the Red Cross, "Our World, Views from the Field" (Geneva: ICRC, 2009); Ashley South and Simon Harragin, "Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe." (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2012); Eva Svoboda and Sara Pantuliano, "International and Local / Diaspora Actors in the Syria Response: A Diverging Set of Systems?" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015).
131 Autesserre, *Peaceland*, 281.
132 Autesserre, 281.

Finally, as an outsider from the humanitarian field, it is possible that my observations may not accurately represent certain practices, habits, or past events. For this reason, I presented my findings to a number of different audiences, including academics, professionals, and policy-makers. This helped to generate important feedback regarding my perceptions of the humanitarian field, and share my findings with relevant stakeholders.

Conclusion

The theoretical goal of this dissertation is to offer an alternative understanding of the limitations of humanitarian reform. To do so, it draws from Pierre Bourdieu's conception of social fields, defined as arenas of struggle in which actors compete over the volume and distribution of material, cultural, social, and symbolic resources. In contrast to explanations highlighting the material or normative constraints facing humanitarian actors, this framework advances a relational understanding of the shortcomings of change. The concepts of fields, capital, and authority help to reveal the lines of inclusion and exclusion intrinsic to this social space, which, I argue, have influenced the shape and direction of reform.

In the chapters that follow, I build upon the theoretical and methodological framework presented here in assessing the policies and practices of the humanitarian field. My analysis reveals a humanitarian field that is deeply stratified, with implications for both the direction of policy change as well as the practice of aid delivery. Before turning to these arguments, however, I first map the contours and boundaries of the humanitarian field itself, a topic I take up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:

Mapping the Humanitarian Field

"Humanitarian action is by definition universal ... Wherever in the world there is manifest distress, the humanitarian by vocation must respond."

James Orbinski on accepting the
Nobel Peace Prize for Médecins sans Frontières, 10 December 1999

"There is nothing so ethnocentric, so particularistic, as the claim of universalism."

Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism*, p.40[1]

Introduction

The humanitarian vocation is, in a sense, universal. Its adherents are found across the globe, and its ideals recognized and celebrated in nearly all corners of the world. While offering the potential to unite, however, humanitarian practice has been marred by a number of lingering divides. As discussed in previous chapters, real and persistent fault lines have emerged on questions of principles, politics, and economics, all of which undermine the cohesion and identity of an already diverse community of humanitarian actors. The dominance of certain groups within this sphere is another source of tension that, until recently, has gone largely unquestioned. The latter directs our attention to more latent struggles over authority, knowledge, and power, particularly between established humanitarian actors and relative newcomers to the field. Later in the dissertation I will

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1 Quoted in Antonio Donini, "Humanitarianism, Perceptions, Power," in *In the Eyes of Others: How People in Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid*, ed. Caroline Abu-Sada (New York: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012), 191.

examine how these hierarchies have stabilized over time, and their role in shaping policy and practice across the humanitarian field.[2]

This chapter, however, offers a first look at the contours and boundaries of the humanitarian field, and explores the material and symbolic resources at the heart of the struggles for authority within this space. For the purposes of this project, I define the 'humanitarian field' as composed of agents whose core work is ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of natural or human-made crises, thereby distinguishing it from interests that are more explicitly political or economic in nature. This field encompasses a diverse range of actors and institutions, from long established international NGOs and UN agencies to relative newcomers to the field, including international, national, and local organizations based in the Global South. For reasons that will be elaborated below, its boundaries have become increasingly fluid in recent years, as human rights actors, militaries, armed groups, corporations, and diaspora groups, among others, have become involved in humanitarian work. The autonomy of this field is also regularly penetrated from outside, particularly as a result of decisions and developments occurring in the political field.

I begin the chapter by mapping the humanitarian field, drawing attention to its diversity as well as the stakes and interests that serve to bind it together. In the second section, I look at the formal and informal structures of authority across this social space, and briefly introduce the ways in which these practices of governance have been challenged over time. In the third section, I delve into these struggles for authority in more detail, and explore the different types of capital that have helped to construct and

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2 Chapters 5-8 look specifically at how particular hierarchies of authority have emerged, stabilized, and been contested over time across various policy domains.

maintain certain hierarchical relations. I identify four resources that are particularly

relevant to the current structure of governance within this field: economic resources;

knowledge-based capital in the form of education and other credentials; network access;

and the moral prestige associated with the tradition of international humanitarianism.

Each of these forms of capital, I conclude, has shaped the prevailing relationships of

authority across the humanitarian field, and contributed to the presence of a

'humanitarian elite' that continues to command the policy and practice of aid.

The Humanitarian Field

Made up of interconnected institutional, operational, and personal networks, the

humanitarian field is as diverse as it is large. As of 2014, there were approximately 4,480

organizations involved in humanitarian relief efforts, including UN humanitarian

agencies, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and non-governmental

organizations, both national and international.[3] Within the UN system, four agencies –

the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN

Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – are primarily

responsible for the provision of relief. The UN Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) serves to coordinate these and other humanitarian actors

in emergency responses. The NGO community, by contrast, is far more dispersed. The

largest and most visible NGOs are based predominantly in North America and Western

Europe, are well-established with an average organizational age of 57 years, and

command the largest percentage of NGO spending.[4] The majority of NGOs, however, as

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3 Abby Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015" (London: ALNAP, 2015), 38.
4 Glyn Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012" (London: ALNAP, 2012), 29.

well as Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, are based in the Global South. While many

of these work only in local or national settings, there has been a rising number of

southern international NGOs in recent years, whose reach extends beyond their country

of origin.[5] Many aid recipient states, particularly in Latin America and Asia, have also

expanded their national disaster response capacities, and are increasingly reaffirming

their right to independently manage and coordinate humanitarian response efforts within

their borders.[6]

Beyond the formal organizations, there are an estimated 450,000 individuals

working in the humanitarian field.[7] This includes career professionals and specialists, as

well as the multitude of actors required to carry out the everyday delivery of relief, such

as drivers, contractors, and logisticians.[8] This field, however, is far from cohesive, and is

split by personal or organizational rivalries. Staffers from the International Committee of

the Red Cross (ICRC), for instance, will go to great lengths to distinguish themselves

from the UN. Similarly, while alluding to the broader 'NGO community', representatives

of particular NGOs will nonetheless differentiate their work from that of other

organizations, and regularly compete for funding and media attention. The distinction

between international staff and their national counterparts, which include the vast

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5 Taylor et al., 27–31.
6 According to UN Resolution 46/182: "Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory." United Nations, "Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations," A/RES/46/182 (New York: UN General Assembly, December 19, 1991), para. 4; See also Paul Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected State in Disaster Response" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009).
7 Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 38.
8 Peter Walker and Catherine Russ, "Professionalizing the Humanitarian Sector: A Scoping Study" (ELRHA, 2010), 10–15.

majority of those employed by UN agencies and international NGOs,[9] can be another

source of division both within and across organizations.[10] At the same time,

specializations in particular thematic areas, such as sanitation or protection, offer distinct

'communities of practice' that often cut across organizational lines. The humanitarian

field is thus multi-layered and composed of overlapping groups and networks, from the

international staff in UN and NGO headquarters to the aid workers and labourers

operating on the ground.

The expansion and growing diversity of the humanitarian field has raised the

question of who and what should be considered 'humanitarian'.[11] This debate has

traditionally centred on the differences between 'Dunantist' organizations, such as the

ICRC or Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), and multi-mandate organizations that combine

humanitarian work with other commitments, such as reconstruction and development or

faith.[12] In recent years, attention has shifted to a range of 'new' humanitarian actors and

traditions, including diaspora groups, southern NGOs, and faith-based civil society

organizations. Peacekeeping forces, militaries, armed groups, and private sector entities

have also, at times, described their work in humanitarian terms, further stretching the

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9 A recent report estimates that 89 percent of field staff working for UN agencies, and 95 percent of those working for international NGOs, are nationals of the host country. See Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012," 30, 32.

10 Silke Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality: Experiences and Practices in Aid Relationships," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 8 (2012): 1459–74; Olga Shevchenko and Renée C. Fox, "'Nationals' and 'expatriates': Challenges of Fulfilling 'sans Frontières' ('without Borders') Ideals in International Humanitarian Action," *Health and Human Rights* 10, no. 1 (2008): 109–22.

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

12 Donini et al. have developed one of the more well-known typologies of humanitarian actors. They identify four main types of organizations: Principled, which prioritize the Dunantian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence; Pragmatist, which broadly identify with the foreign policy objectives of their home country; Solidarist, which incorporate more developmental objectives that address the root causes of crises; and faith-based, which embody both humanitarian and religious traditions. See Antonio Donini et al., "The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise" (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2008).

boundaries of what is considered humanitarian.[13] However, if humanitarianism can cover

all types of actors and activities, at what point do the boundaries that separate this field

from others begin to lose all meaning? Is there, in other words, a set of stakes and

interests that serves to motivate the agents invested in the humanitarian field and separate

them from other social spaces and actors?

Some suggest that the humanitarian ideal is universal in nature, cutting across time,

place, and culture.[14] It is grounded in a shared set of convictions and principles, chief

among these the belief in a common humanity and the desire to alleviate the suffering of

those in need. This "humanitarian impulse"[15] is, perhaps, felt most strongly among

humanitarian professionals and specialists. According to one UN representative I

interviewed:

> There is a common principle of humanity, if you will, that everybody buys into. [...]
> All of these people are there because they're the kind of people who basically say,
> "Somebody's in trouble and I have an obligation to help." And that affects all of
> them; the most cynical, highest-paid UN people to the sort of, what we call,
> sensible shoes, 'throwing the food off the back of a truck' person. [...] It's a useful
> thing to remember and recall because it's the thing that makes us a community.[16]

While possibly idealistic, this commitment to humanity and universality was present

across nearly all of the humanitarian representatives I interviewed.[17] The humanitarian

principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence also appeared to connect the

representatives of different organizations, even when they disagreed about how to put

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13 See Chapter 2.
14 Donini et al., "The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise," 9–14.
15 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (214).
16 Interview with UN representative (181).
17 In a commentary regarding the seven "fundamental principles" of the Red Cross, Jean Pictet similarly
identifies the belief in humanity as the "essential principle" motivating all other humanitarian aspirations.
The other principles are impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality.
See Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1979).

these into practice.[18] The differences between organizations were described as pragmatic rather than fundamental, and stopped short of calling into question the value of what they are collectively trying to achieve.[19] The humanitarian impulse, in other words, is infused with moral sentiment, which binds members of this field in the service of distant others.[20]

This ethos has fostered a sense of solidarity and responsibility among humanitarians that often transcends institutional lines. It is sometimes described by professionals as unique to members of this field, who live and breathe the humanitarian ideal through their daily work. As one respondent explained:

> Why do I think of myself as a humanitarian? Because we have this camaraderie of hardship, this camaraderie of misery, this camaraderie built around a view of our exceptionalism. And, yeah, I feel that kinship, that when I talk to my peers who have been through that, when I talk to everybody that I have been with over the last 10 years that has been somewhere, we have privileged access but a certain responsibility comes with it. […] Having seen that, having been in those places, you feel close to those who have been there with you and who felt the same anger and frustration with our inability to find solutions.[21]

Cultivated across different contexts and crises, this feeling of 'exceptionalism' serves to unite humanitarian actors, and is the source of informal exchanges and relationships across this field. In fact, many of the individuals I interviewed referred to the sense of community that forms in the midst of emergency, when "who's doing good work" matters more than organizational affiliations.[22] These personal bonds, forged during challenging and stressful times, typically rise above institutional lines and will last beyond particular crises. Many humanitarian professionals will also work for a number of

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18 See also Peter Walker, "What Does It Mean to Be a Professional Humanitarian?," *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* 14 (2004).
19 Interview with NGO representative (311).
20 Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
21 Interview with UN representative (114).
22 Interview with UN representative (112)

organizations over the course of their career, which further serves to expand and intensify these informal networks and break down organizational siloes.

The sense of exceptionalism described above also provides an indication of the perceived boundaries of the humanitarian field. Although rarely stated in such explicit terms, there is a subtext of indignation and salvation that underpins this work[23]; humanitarians are the ones "who are standing and counting as bodies come out" and who "have strong views about what ought to be done."[24] This narrative is buttressed by decades of historical experience and institutional evolution, which has reinforced the perception that humanitarians can and should be the only ones engaged in humanitarian response.[25] According to Christina Bennett et al., this exceptionalism has helped to maintain humanitarian action as a separate and distinct sphere of activity, thus distinguishing it from other forms of aid or intervention.[26] Sustaining this distinction, it is argued, is important for ensuring the security of aid workers in insecure areas, particularly as space for the impartial and neutral delivery of aid has diminished in recent years. At the same time, it has contributed to significant policing along the borders of the humanitarian field, as demonstrated by the reticence shown towards the humanitarian pursuits of militaries, corporations, and even development actors.[27] These divisions are

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23 See also Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*; Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42 (2001): 201.
24 Interview with UN representative (114).
25 Hugo Slim, "Humanitarianism with Borders? NGOs, Belligerent Military Forces and Humanitarian Action" (International Council of Voluntary Agencies Conference on NGOs in a changing world order, Geneva, 2003), https://www.icvanetwork.org/resources/humanitarianism-borders.
26 Christina Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016), chap. 3.
27 See, for example, Slim, "Humanitarianism with Borders?"; Stephen Hopgood, "Saying 'No' to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 98–123; Jeffrey Crisp, "Mind the Gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process," *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (April 1, 2001): 168–91, https://doi.org/10.2307/2676057.

often contrived, but are at the heart of the debate over who and what should be included in the boundaries of the 'humanitarian' field.

The humanitarian field thus comprises a diverse range of individuals, organizations, and activities. While the sector, according to some observers, can resemble "a state of constant squabble over mandates, priorities, strategy, money and operational turf,"[28] my interviews suggested that there are certain core beliefs and principles that bind together agents within this field. These values, I contend, serve also to delineate the edges of this social space. For the purposes of this project, I therefore focus specifically on those actors whose core work is ostensibly motivated by the principle of humanity and the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of crisis. This includes established actors, such as UN agencies, international NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as relative newcomers to the field, including diaspora groups and Southern-based organizations. While recognizing that the boundaries of the humanitarian field have become increasingly porous in recent years, I exclude the humanitarian pursuits of aid donors, peacekeepers, militaries, armed groups, and corporations. Although this potentially echoes the exceptionalism referred to above, the core identities and mandates of these actors are more political or economic in nature and therefore not primarily humanitarian.

This exceptionalism, as I suggest below, is also partly responsible for the contestations over authority occurring within the humanitarian field. With respect to relatively new entrants to this field, it has fostered a belief among humanitarian professionals that their everyday work is "something that only humanitarians can do and

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28 Hugo Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 15.

understand."[29] In practice, it has limited recognition of actors, capacities, and sources of expertise perceived to be outside this sphere. As will be shown throughout the remainder of this project, this humanitarian exceptionalism can exclude consideration of the potential role and contributions of disaster-affected states, communities, and non-governmental organizations. These actors are often viewed as recipients or implementers of aid, but rarely as active agents in their own rescue and recovery. Underpinning such preconceptions is the deeper competition over authority occurring within the humanitarian field, which has shaped the perspectives and contributions that are recognized as important within the policy and practice of aid. The following sections take up this question of authority in more detail.

Authority in the Humanitarian Field

As introduced in the previous chapter, authority within a particular field implies a degree of consent to the influence and judgement of a designated individual or organization. It may be institutionalized, in the form of bureaucracies or other structures, or more informal in nature, in the form of technical or moral expertise. Its conferral, moreover, rests on the ability of agents to draw upon and use particular forms of capital in advancing their claim to recognition. This directs our attention to the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources available within a given field, and the ways in which these are enacted in allowing an actor's voice to be heard and validated.

Before introducing the sources of authority within the humanitarian field, one qualification is in order. Although humanitarian principles are often portrayed as universal and above politics, in practice it is obvious that, as Michael Barnett writes,

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29 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 49.

humanitarianism "has always been inescapably part of this world."[30] The authority of

humanitarian actors is severely curtailed from above, and influenced by political

decisions made outside this field. On the ground, their activities and choices are shaped

by the political roots of crisis and the particularistic interests of states and armed groups,

both of which have created the seemingly endless demand for humanitarian assistance.

The strategic decision-making of humanitarian actors is equally constrained by the

priorities and interests of donor states, who have considerable influence in managing the

supply of humanitarian aid. As a weakly bounded field, the autonomy of humanitarians is

therefore narrowly defined. Their authority is primarily delegated, meaning their scope

for autonomous action is limited by the interests of their benefactors.[31]

While broadly constrained by the collective will of states, humanitarian actors

nonetheless retain considerable autonomy over the everyday activities and policies of aid

work. NGOs, for instance, have varying degrees of financial independence from states,

which, in combination with their organizational identity, has shaped their responses to

outside pressures.[32] Even financially dependent agencies such as UNHCR, which was

initially established with little autonomy from Member States and a limited lifespan, have

been able to significantly expand their mandates, resources, and responsibilities over the

years.[33] Humanitarian organizations, moreover, have cultivated considerable technical

expertise and moral influence, and are now recognized as authoritative actors in the area

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30 Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 220.
31 Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules For The World: International Organizations In Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 22–23.
32 Michael Barnett, "Evolution Without Progress? Humanitarianism in a World of Hurt," *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 621–63.
33 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules For The World*, chap. 4; Louise W Holborn, Philip Chartrand, and Rita Chartrand, *Refugees, a Problem of Our Time: The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951-1972* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

of relief. Many work in countries or regions where states are either unable or unwilling to go, thus expanding their claim to authority within this sphere.

There are few formal authoritative structures governing the humanitarian regime, which is more often described as atomized and voluntarily coordinating.[34] This decentralized model of governance is preferred by most organizations, which have varying mandates and priorities and are thus free to regulate themselves as they see fit.[35] Most, moreover, are wary of attempts to centralize authority within a limited set of actors, and will stress that there should be greater acknowledgement of the broader network or 'ecosystem' of humanitarian organizations.[36] This is particularly true of NGOs, who typically feel excluded from UN-led policy processes or coordination mechanisms, and have expressed their desire to be treated as 'equal partners' in the design and delivery of aid.[37] Such sentiments were repeated by many of those I interviewed, who criticized what they described as the growing "critical mass" of the UN and specifically OCHA,[38] including its efforts to assert control over the recent World Humanitarian Summit process.[39] Attempts to formalize governance over the humanitarian regime thus remain controversial, and are likely to rouse a range of opinions.

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34 See, for example, Paul Knox-Clarke, "Who's in Charge Here? A Literature Review on Approaches to Leadership in Humanitarian Operations" (London: ALNAP, 2013), 9; Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 106.
35 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 62.
36 See, for example, Randolph Kent, Justin Armstrong, and Alice Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector: Global Transformations and Their Consequences" (London: Humanitarian Futures Programme, 2013), 34–36.
37 See, for example, International Council of Voluntary Agencies, "NGO Perception on the State of Humanitarian Leadership, Coordination and Accountability" (Geneva: ICVA, 2014); Anne Street, "Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process" (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2009).
38 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).
39 See also Paul Currion, "Comment: A Desert Called Reform," *IRIN* (blog), November 3, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2015/11/03/desert-called-reform.

Policy coordination does, however, occur through some institutional channels. Most notably, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), established after the adoption of UN Resolution 46/182 in 1991, is the closest approximation of a formal, authoritative governing structure within the humanitarian regime. Chaired by the head of OCHA and bringing together UN agencies, Red Cross representatives, and several NGO consortia, the decisions made within this forum are viewed as having a global mandate and legitimacy. The IASC strives to provide a "unified voice" for humanitarian organizations, and has been the catalyst for joint policy development and important regime-wide reforms and evaluations.[40] At the same time, however, it is not seen as representative of the majority of humanitarian actors, and has been accused of sidelining the perspectives of southern NGOs and affected governments and communities.[41]

Inter-agency coordination structures have become another prominent feature of the humanitarian regime. NGO consortia, such as the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE) in Europe, or InterAction in the US, have offered important platforms for collaboration and coordination among NGOs, both international and national. In 2016, these traditional forums were joined by the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), the first global network of predominantly southern humanitarian organizations.[42] NGO federations, such as Save the Children International or Oxfam International, have also

40 Sara Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee" (Overseas Development Institute, 2014).
41 Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System: How to Truly Localize Aid," 2015; Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee," 17.
42 NEAR, "NEAR – the 'first Baby' of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit," May 23, 2016, http://www.near.ngo/home/detailview?id=19.

provided a means of coordinating members of the same organizational 'family'.[43] On the ground, Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and the cluster system, discussed in greater detail in a later chapter, have improved leadership and coordination among organizations involved in humanitarian response. However, these inter-agency structures have yet to produce a centralized model of authority across the humanitarian regime. While aid agencies typically sit on a number of such platforms, they are ultimately accountable to themselves, resulting in what some have described as "a complex and highly dynamic and dispersed form of networks-based governance."[44]

Beyond the structures noted above, there are other, more informal relationships of authority within the humanitarian field that have emerged and consolidated over time, and which have shaped the practices governing this space. Most obviously, perhaps, humanitarian organizations have claimed authority over the very recipients of aid, in whose name they act. Proximity and presence are prized among humanitarians, and serve as central sources of legitimacy in the eyes of donors and beneficiaries alike.[45] With boots on the ground, they can coordinate the delivery of relief, report on the needs of recipients, and 'bear witness' to ongoing violations of international humanitarian law. They are emissaries for the dispossessed, who, they suggest, are unable to speak for themselves.[46] While increasingly challenged by the beneficiaries of aid, such paternalistic orientations and relations remain pervasive across the humanitarian field. They are often premised on the assumption that humanitarians "know what needs to be done" in a crisis

43 Knox-Clarke, "Who's in Charge Here?," 10.
44 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 62.
45 Ole Jacob Sending, "United by Difference: Diplomacy as a Thin Culture," *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 654–655.
46 See Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 377–404.

situation, thus maintaining a strictly top-down relationship between the givers and receivers of aid.[47]

The traditional authority vested in Western humanitarian organizations is also being challenged from below, particularly among the Southern aid professionals, NGOs, and recipient governments that have long been marginalized within the humanitarian field. Although often acknowledged as the actors best placed to respond to and understand the needs of affected peoples, these groups typically report feeling sidelined by international actors or treated as sub-contractors as opposed to partners.[48] Through the World Humanitarian Summit process and elsewhere, many have called for a more decentralized global humanitarian regime that would redistribute more power, resources, and decision-making to national and local actors.[49] Such a shift would represent a fundamental reorientation of the humanitarian field, which one international NGO has described as "turning the system on its head."[50] Whether change is forthcoming is another question, particularly as the prevailing structure of incentives continues to favour a closed and top-down model of governance.[51]

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47 Kent, Armstrong, and Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector," 13; See also Michael Barnett, "International Paternalism and Humanitarian Governance," *Global Constitutionalism* 1, no. 03 (2012): 485–521.

48 See, for example, John Telford and John Cosgrave, "Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006); Ben Ramalingam, Bill Gray, and Giorgia Cerruti, "Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses" (Christian Aid, 2013); Andy Featherstone, "Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (Christian Aid, 2014).

49 See World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit" (New York: United Nations, 2015), chap. 7; United Nations, "One Humanity: Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit," A/70/XX (New York: UN General Assembly, 2016), para. 111–117; "Charter for Change: Localization of Humanitarian Aid," 2015, https://charter4change.org/.

50 Tara R. Gingerich and Marc Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head" (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2015).

51 Humanitarian Policy Group, "Localization in Humanitarian Practice" (ODI and ICVA, 2016).

Authority within the humanitarian field has thus developed through multiple channels, both formal and informal. On the one hand, the formal structures of governance within the humanitarian regime are largely decentralized in nature and dispersed across various inter-agency forums and the broader network of aid organizations. Consequently, there is no one organization or set of actors that can be said to govern the humanitarian regime. On the other hand, more informal relations of authority have emerged and consolidated over time, in ways that separate the givers of aid from its recipients and established humanitarian actors from relative newcomers to this sphere. These relations hint at more latent structures of inclusion and exclusion across the humanitarian field, which, despite claims to represent humanity and universality, have elevated certain voices and perspectives at the expense of others. The next section discusses these hierarchies of authority and influence in more depth, and explores the ways in which they have been carefully constructed and maintained over time. Such relations, I suggest, are deeply rooted in various forms of material and symbolic capital, which have shaped the practices of governance across this sphere.

Capital and the Construction of Authority

Capital is at the heart of the struggle between agents within a field. It exists in various forms – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – the volume and distribution of which define the structure of the field. The use and function of these resources are specific to the field in question, depending on the social relations of power that they serve. I focus on four forms of capital that are particularly relevant to the construction of authority in the humanitarian field: economic resources; cultural capital in the form of knowledge and expertise; social capital cultivated through access to particular networks

and social groupings; and symbolic capital associated with moral prestige. Each, I suggest, has been used to advance particular claims to governance, and is central to the relationships and hierarchies that both bind together and divide this social space.

Economic capital

Economic capital, it should be recalled, underpins all other types of capital.[52] It enables investments in certain goods or capacities, and may be exchanged for or converted into other forms of noneconomic resources, such as education or social access. International organizations and NGOs are typically thought to be weak in economic capital, particularly in comparison to states.[53] With limited resources, they must often rely on other instruments of 'soft' power, such as moral authority or persuasion. Nonetheless, economic capital within the humanitarian field, particularly its uneven distribution among humanitarian actors, has emerged as an important power resource in the construction of authority and, in recent years, an increasingly contentious object of struggle.

Although shortfalls in humanitarian funding are a persistent and troubling concern, in absolute terms the humanitarian market has been booming for well over two decades.[54] Its beginnings were relatively modest, constituting less than three percent of all Official Development Assistance allocated by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee

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52 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.E. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986), 54.

53 Ann Florini, ed., *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society* (Tokyo & Washington, D.C.: Japan Center for International Exchange and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

54 See Gilles Carbonnier, *Humanitarian Economics: War, Disaster and the Global Aid Market* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015).

(DAC) between 1970 and 1990.[55] During this period, spending on humanitarian

assistance only twice rose above $2 billion a year.[56] Since 1990, however, the

humanitarian market has dramatically expanded in size and scope (see Figure 1). A

record high of $28 billion in total humanitarian aid was provided in 2015, representing an

increase of nearly $3 billion from the previous year.[57] Direct government contributions to

humanitarian emergencies have not fallen below $12 billion since 2008, and are

continuing to trend upwards in light of the biggest displacement crisis since World War

II.[58]

Figure 1: Official humanitarian assistance (government donors, 1990-2013)

Source: Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015",
based on OECD/DAC and UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) data

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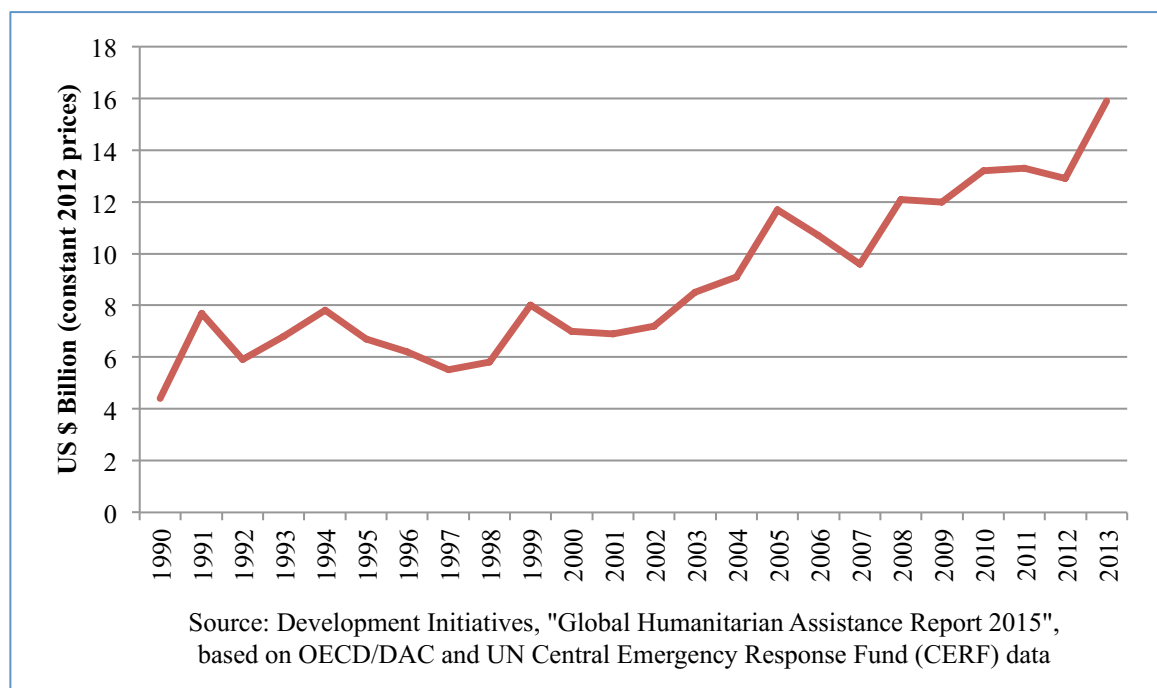
55 The OECD's Development Assistance Committee is composed of 30 member states from North
America and Europe, as well as Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
56 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance 2003" (Nottingham: Development
Initiatives, 2003).
57 This includes both public and private sources of funding. Development Initiatives, "Global
Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2016), 36.
58 Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 43–44.

These aid flows are still dominated by government donors from North America, Europe, and other OECD members. While contributions from other government donors are growing, most notably from those in the Middle East, DAC donors provided 88 percent of all government contributions in 2015 and 94 percent of all international humanitarian assistance over the last decade.[59] The bulk of these funds have gone largely to UN agencies and the largest international NGOs. In 2014, for instance, multilateral organizations received approximately two-thirds of government funding. Much of the remaining funds were directed to international NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which received 17 percent and 9 percent of funds, respectively, for that year.[60] Among international NGOs, five organizations represented roughly a third of all humanitarian expenditures by NGOs in 2014, while another 33 organizations had expenditures above $100 million.[61] Nearly all of these international NGOs are headquartered in the West or have Western origins,[62] and remain the "trusted partners" of DAC donors.[63]

By contrast, direct funding to governments and NGOs in crisis-affected countries remains limited. In 2015, only 1.2 percent of all international humanitarian assistance was channelled through affected governments. DAC donors, in particular, were reluctant

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59 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016," 44; Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2015), 30.
60 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016," 66–67.
61 In 2014, the five largest NGOs, in descending order, were: Medecins Sans Frontieres, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, and International Rescue Committee. Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 41.
62 The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), headquartered in Bangladesh and the world's largest non-governmental development organization in terms of number of employees, is the one exception in this regard. It has become increasingly involved in humanitarian response in recent years, particularly in climate change adaptation and mitigation. See Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, "2015 Annual Report" (Dhaka: BRAC, 2015), 6.
63 Lydia Poole, "Future Humanitarian Financing: Looking Beyond the Crisis" (CAFOD/FAO/World Vision, 2015), 20.

to work with national authorities, and contributed only a third of this amount.[64] National and local NGOs have been equally shut out of the majority of humanitarian assistance (see Figure 2). In 2015, they received a combined 2.1 percent of direct funding to NGOs, and only 0.4 percent of all donor funding.[65] Instead, most funding for local actors comes in the form of sub-grants disbursed by either UN agencies, which act as the primary 'gatekeepers' in this regard, or international NGOs.[66] In most cases, this funding must first pass through several levels of intermediaries, described by one observer as "convoluted and inefficient transaction chains," before reaching the intended recipient.[67] While recognizing the challenges involved in directly funding potentially hundreds of local and national NGOs in a crisis-affected state, the lack of direct support for these organizations runs directly counter to the recent policy discourse around 'localizing' aid.[68] Indeed, despite this rhetoric, representatives of southern-based NGOs report that it has become more difficult to access international funding in recent years, and suggest they are unfairly disadvantaged by donor application and reporting requirements and are often out-competed by international NGOs vying for the same funds.[69]

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64 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016," 73. There are, of course, constraints to funding crisis-affected governments, particularly in conflict settings. Nonetheless, the tendency to bypass national governments, which retain the primary responsibility for humanitarian response, is indicative of a problematic trend.
65 Development Initiatives, 70.
66 Lydia Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in National NGO Response Capacity" (London: CAFOD, 2013), 17.
67 Poole, "Future Humanitarian Financing," 20.
68 See Chapter 8.
69 Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End," 10; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness* (IFRC, 2015), 110–111.

Figure 2: International humanitarian assistance channelled directly to NGOs by category, 2015 (US $ million, constant 2014 prices)

Source: Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015"
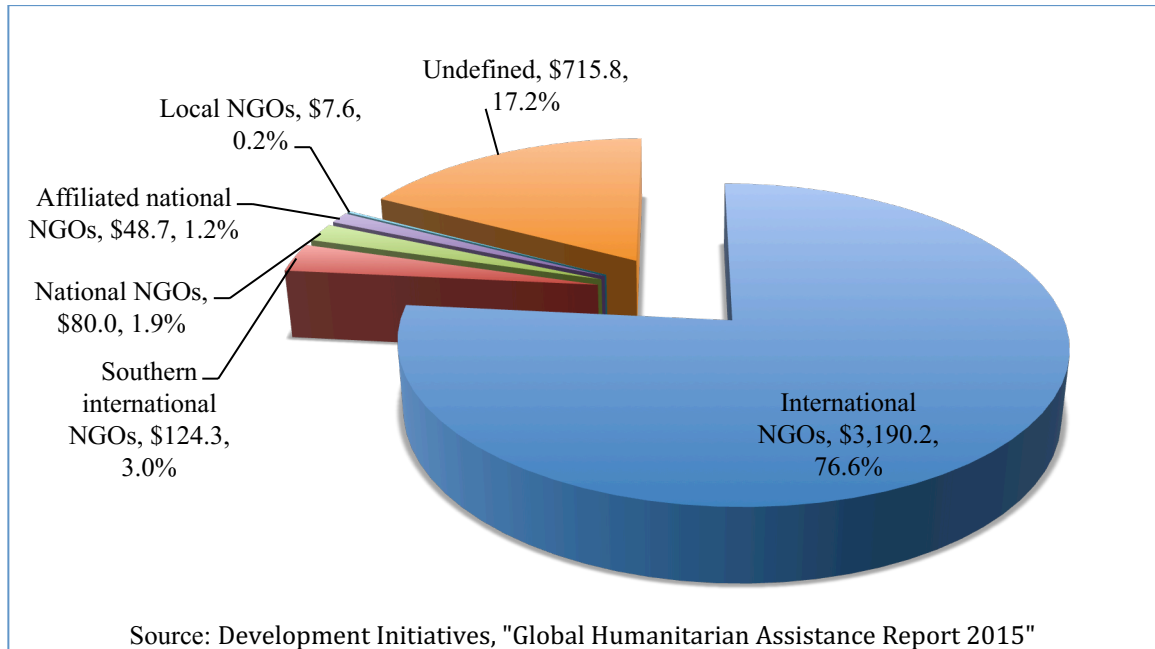
The concentration of economic capital within a core group of donor governments and organizations within the humanitarian field serves to reinforce the informal structures of authority described above. Most notably, funding channels continue to privilege the voices and priorities of the "old guard."[70] The bulk of aid dollars remains in the hands of the largest and most established international organizations, many of which have Western origins and continue to draw their resources from a group of like-minded Western donor states. These organizations have evolved into highly successful lobbyists and fundraisers, with the capacity to quickly adapt to changing donor requirements and priorities. In doing so, they have largely been able to maintain the status quo, and have retained direct access to the majority of resources as well as influence over its allocation.[71] By contrast, those excluded from these funds, including primarily local and national NGOs, have been

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70 Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012," 27.
71 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015*, 111–113.

afforded "little or no access to the corridors of power" and therefore few opportunities to

address their own priorities and concerns.[72] They are viewed primarily as sub-contractors,

and encouraged to access funds under the auspices of traditional international

organizations.[73] As such, the financing of international humanitarian assistance has the

appearance of being dominated by a "highly centralized and exclusive group,"[74] with

predominantly Western aid agencies located atop the "humanitarian pecking order."[75]

The stratification of economic capital in the humanitarian field has become

increasingly contentious in recent years, and is viewed as "unacceptably inegalitarian" by

a growing number of observers.[76] The 'localization' of aid, for instance, was a recurring

theme in the global consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit in May

2016. As will be discussed in a later chapter, much of the debate at this time centred on

humanitarian financing and the lack of direct funding for local organizations.[77] National

and local NGOs, which frequently serve as front-line responders in the midst of crisis,

repeatedly called for better recognition and support of their efforts, and "not just as

vehicles enabling international response."[78] While professionals and observers were

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72 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 112; See also Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015).

73 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 60; Steven A. Zyck and Hanna B. Krebs, "Localizing Humanitarianism: Improving Effectiveness through Inclusive Action" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015), 5.

74 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 58.

75 Kent, Armstrong, and Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector," 30.

76 Paul Knox-Clarke and Alice Obrecht, "Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action: Results and Analysis," Global Forum Briefing Papers (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2015), 103; See also Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid"; Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go"; Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head"; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015*.

77 See, for example, "Charter for Change"; Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System."

78 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity," 14.

receptive to such calls, many also acknowledged that change is unlikely to be

straightforward. According to one respondent:

> International NGOs don't want to lose market share. Their discourse is all about "we want to promote local capacity". But the reality is that the people, the fundraisers, the people in programming and the headquarters of these organizations are very mindful of not doing anything that's going to cut them out of business. So the incentive structures are such that change becomes very difficult.[79]

A report on the role of local partners similarly suggests that such transformative changes

would "pose threats to the status quo of the sector, in terms of resource distribution,

power and control."[80] Unsurprisingly, the greatest resistance has come from those with a

vested interest in the current distribution of resources across the humanitarian regime,

including UN agencies and international NGOs.

Such opposition to change, it can be presumed, is largely fed by the desire to

maintain the existing hierarchies of authority within the humanitarian field. With access

to the vast majority of government contributions, international organizations are clearly

the primary beneficiaries of the current structure of economic capital. Control of such

resources has cemented their role as the primary powerbrokers within this space,

providing them with disproportionate influence over both the policy and practice of aid.

As will be shown below, this dominance has also enabled important investments in the

cultural, social, and symbolic capital of this group, which have further reinforced their

authority over the field as a whole.

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79 Interview with UN representative (192).
80 Ramalingam, Gray, and Cerruti, "Missed Opportunities," 6; See also Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go"; Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head."

Knowledge capital

With relatively limited economic resources, international organizations and NGOs draw authority from their expertise and specialized knowledge of a particular domain.[81] Education, training, and credentialed qualifications all confer competence within a subject area, thus authorizing professionals from these organizations to make decisions on certain issues and solve problems. Deeply embedded social and cultural structures further shape the way experts view the world, influencing how they define particular problems and what solutions they pursue.[82] At the same time, the priority given to university degrees and specialized training can institutionalize "strictly established, legally guaranteed relations between recognized positions."[83] This cultural capital separates qualification-holders from those deemed unqualified, and creates hierarchies of authority and influence. Education and qualifications, often available only to those with the material resources needed to access them, can therefore serve to justify and reproduce existing social orders among agents in a particular domain.[84]

In the humanitarian field, the drive for specialization and professionalization is a relatively new phenomenon.[85] Early aid efforts, for instance, were grounded primarily in voluntarism and the "spirit of service."[86] Most relief work was carried out by missionaries and private philanthropists, who were guided by, in the case of the founders

81 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules For The World*; Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1–35.
82 James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
83 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 131.
84 Bourdieu, 130–134.
85 Walker, "What Does It Mean to Be a Professional Humanitarian?"
86 Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*, 15.

of the Save the Children Fund, no less than "saving the soul of the world."[87] Others were

"humanitarians by accident," and entered the sector by way of development work or

personal motivations.[88] In the early years of the humanitarian field, professional

credentials were therefore largely secondary to enthusiasm and commitment to the

cause.[89] At best, the result was inefficiency and perhaps naiveté. At worst, it was wasted

aid and further harm to crisis-affected populations.[90]

As the humanitarian regime expanded through the 1980s and 1990s, the field began

to rationalize and standardize its approach. The Code of Conduct and Sphere Standards,

along with other initiatives, were established at this time, as well as new university

degrees and training programs intended to formalize humanitarian credentials.

Organizations placed greater emphasis on professionalization, in an effort to increase

staff capacities, improve the quality of programs, and ultimately scale up the number,

size, and scope of relief operations.[91] Inter-agency platforms and professional networks

also helped to disseminate professional standards, best practices, and innovations

occurring across the sector.[92] The objective was to establish a common pool of

technocratic, expert knowledge and competencies, largely in order to satisfy donor

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87 Dorothy Buxton and Edward Fuller, *The White Flame: The Story of the Save the Children Fund* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), 48.
88 Interview with retired UN representative (191).
89 Maggie Black, *A Cause for Our Times: Oxfam the First 50 Years* (Oxford: Oxfam and Oxford University Press, 1992), 81.
90 Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).
91 Frances Richardson, "Meeting the Demand for Skilled and Experienced Humanitarian Workers," *Development in Practice* 16, no. 03–04 (2006): 334–41.
92 Anaïde Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks," *Grotius International*, March 2013.

demands for accountability and better respond to the challenging operational environments of the post-Cold War period.[93]

The push for professionalization, however, has had its detractors. Many of the individuals I interviewed were uncomfortable with the recent emphasis on formal training, and suggested that the most essential skills and competencies are those acquired on the ground.[94] When asked about their own training, most referred to the various countries they have worked in and the operations they have been part of, indicating there is a certain authority assigned to field experience, particularly across different contexts. Indeed, one professional I interviewed specified that you are not "part of the cadre" until you have completed one or two field placements, a view that was echoed by other respondents.[95] While recognizing that a certain level of professionalism is necessary to ensure the quality of aid, many of these individuals worried that the emphasis on reporting and structures is causing them to "lose touch with the beneficiaries."[96] Their comments reveal a lingering tension between professionalism and the spirit of voluntarism, which recognizes the need for standards and procedures but risks diluting the humanitarian impulses of the past.

More worryingly, the emphasis on professionalization has also become a source of division and hierarchy across the field. Most notably, access to professional development and educational opportunities has been largely confined to a small group of professionals, who work primarily for the UN and a handful of international NGOs. According to a

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93 Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism as a Scholarly Vocation," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 252–259.
94 See also Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality," 1464.
95 Interview with UN representative (121).
96 Interview with NGO representative (391).

global survey of humanitarian professionals, a majority of locally employed aid workers

reported that they have been unable to access professional development opportunities.

Training courses, for instance, were described as costly, "too far away," and available

"only to a select few," mainly those able to travel internationally.[97] The university

degrees and certificates most valued by international organizations, including primarily

those from institutions based in Western countries, are similarly inaccessible to most

local and national staff.[98] Locally employed aid workers, as a result, are typically

underrepresented in leadership positions, and face real barriers in moving up through the

formal humanitarian regime.[99] They are still likely to encounter a 'glass ceiling'

restricting their professional advancement, first critiqued by Hugo Slim over 20 years

ago.[100]

Other barriers are more latent, but equally serve to exclude those without the

requisite training or qualifications. As one observer explained:

> Everybody in this sector has degrees from, you know, a certain set of institutions, universities or graduate programs. And there is a language, right? [...] There is a language, and a way of speaking and a jargon that we all use that is almost like shorthand. And it's much easier to speak that way when you're talking with people in the know, because you can get through your thoughts a lot quicker. But what it means is that to anybody else outside of your world it's a very opaque way of talking.[101]

The ability to understand and speak this language, to be 'in the know', is essential for

opening up jobs and opportunities across the humanitarian field. Indeed, most leadership

posts in international organizations require graduate degrees and other high-level

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97 Catherine Russ, "Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization" (ELRHA, 2011).
98 Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality."
99 Roth; Shevchenko and Fox, "'Nationals' and 'expatriates.'"
100 Hugo Slim, "The Continuing Metamorphosis of the Humanitarian Practitioner: Some New Colours for an Endangered Chameleon," *Disasters* 19, no. 2 (1995): 110–26.
101 Interview with external consultant (611).

qualifications, thus ensuring that only certain candidates will rise to these positions.[102]

Such biases are often replicated on the ground, where, in the opinion of one report, "the old legacy of trained Europeans flying in to occupy key positions still needs to be further eroded."[103] Locally employed aid workers, as a result, can find themselves at a significant disadvantage, and shut out of job opportunities[104] or coordination structures on the ground.[105]

Post-colonial critiques have further exposed the ascendance of technical, thematic knowledge and Western modes of thinking and acting across the humanitarian and development sectors.[106] Professional expertise within these spheres is typically equated with objective knowledge and generalizable data, thus privileging specialization and other forms of technical know-how. While many humanitarian professionals would argue that such expertise improves efficiency in the midst of emergency and enables humanitarian professionals to work across a range of settings and countries, this often comes at the expense of in-depth historical, social, and cultural understandings of local contexts.[107] Writing from the related field of international peacebuilding, Séverine Autesserre suggests that the elevation of "thematic" expertise has moulded the understandings of external interveners, and legitimized the reliance on external expertise,

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102 Interview with NGO representative (351).
103 Russ, "Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization," 47.
104 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 64.
105 See Chapter 6.
106 See, for example, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Uma Kothari, "Authority and Expertise: The Professionalization of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent," *Antipode* 37, no. 3 (2005): 425–46; Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalized World," *Disasters* 34 (April 2, 2010): S220–37.
107 Kothari, "Authority and Expertise."

materials, and structures instead of those available locally.[108] Activities and decision-

making, in the view of another observer, have been tinged with a "universalism gloss"

that privileges international techniques and competencies over those of national or local

counterparts.[109] Aid organizations, of course, are aware of such critiques, and have

attempted to address these concerns through participatory approaches and more rigorous

measures of accountability. However, as will be discussed in a later chapter, many of

these efforts have only served to increase the distance between the givers and recipients

of humanitarian aid.[110]

Knowledge in the humanitarian field is thus highly stratified, and the source of

growing resentment. When asked, nationally and locally employed aid professionals

typically consider themselves to be as skilled and knowledgeable as their international

counterparts, and offering an important perspective that is not always recognized.[111]

Their experience, however, is often the opposite:

> The dynamic becomes the magnanimous international NGOs will help the local
> NGOs to become better; i.e. to become more like the international NGOs, to meet
> the standards that the international NGOs have set for themselves, and to deliver
> with the same level of effectiveness and efficiency that the international NGOs
> do.[112]

The relationship is top-down and hierarchical in nature, and based on the same

presumption of exceptionalism noted earlier. The role of international actors is to impart

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108 "Thematic" or technical expertise, according to Auteserre, derives from an in-depth understanding of
particular aspects of intervention work, such as project management, financing, or sanitation. It is typically
acquired through formal education or training. Thematic expertise, moreover, is distinct from "local"
knowledge, which is grounded in an intimate understanding of a place's political, social, cultural and
economic dynamics, and only acquired by living in the area for a significant period of time. See Séverine
Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New
York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
109 Shevchenko and Fox, "'Nationals' and 'expatriates,'" 117.
110 See Chapter 7.
111 Caroline Abu-Sada, ed., *In the Eyes of Others: How People in Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid* (New
York: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012), 52; Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality," 1465.
112 Interview with external consultant (631).

their skills and techniques, which are assumed to be lacking on the ground. The knowledge capital most valued in the humanitarian field is also that which is least accessible to locally employed staff: field experience from diverse contexts, and the ability to move transversally across national borders; the 'right' education and qualifications, particularly from Western universities; and the capacity to speak the jargon and discourse, often in a language that is not a maternal tongue. Such barriers have become increasingly institutionalized across the humanitarian field, and have elevated the legitimacy and authority of those with a particular set of qualifications and credentials. While not insurmountable, they ensure that only national and local staff that are able to master each of these forms of cultural capital will rise to higher positions within the humanitarian regime. More often, these barriers serve to exclude the vast majority of locally employed aid workers, particularly when combined with various economic inequalities and limited social access, to which I now turn.

Network capital

Membership within particular groups, both formal and informal, provides affiliated actors with the benefits of collectively owned social capital. These groups may be socially instituted, in the form of a title, class, or participation in a select club, or more organic in nature, through personal relationships and social networks. They typically form as a result of close physical proximity or through repeated economic and social exchanges.[113] Highly central agents within a network, defined according to the magnitude and frequency of the interactions they can mobilize, are considered to have significant

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113 Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 51–53.

social power.[114] They can access information and resources across the network, are influential in shaping beliefs and interests and, within particular policy domains, are frequently able to achieve their preferred outcomes.[115] Group membership also has strong isomorphic power, and facilitates convergence in the form of standards and norms.[116] Reproduced through continual exchange, such effects serve to reaffirm the identity and limits of a group, thereby distinguishing insiders from outsiders.

The humanitarian field exhibits many of these network effects. Although the formal structures of authority and decision-making across the humanitarian regime are highly decentralized, as mentioned earlier, many of the same organizations tend to be represented on the largest and most significant inter-agency bodies, including the IASC and various NGO consortia (see Figure 3). This has both consolidated decision-making within a core set of policy networks, while excluding organizations without the capacity needed to participate in these interconnected and overlapping forums. Attempts to engage traditionally excluded organizations within these inter-agency bodies, moreover, have achieved only marginal success. As one NGO representative explained:

> A lot of these bodies they do try to get [local] NGOs in, so they'll pay for their travel to a meeting and stuff. But then the real challenge I've observed with that is how you make that representative of what's going on in civil society. I guess it would help if we moved a lot of this stuff out of Geneva. Just by having it in somewhere like Nairobi it would be interesting.[117]

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114 Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (2009): 559–92.

115 David Knoke, "Policy Networks," in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, ed. John Scott and Peter Carrington (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 210–22.

116 Isomorphism refers to the similarity or homogeneity among agents or institutions facing the same set of environmental conditions. See Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147–60; David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

117 Interview with NGO representative (341).

These forums, many respondents acknowledged, are not accessible to the majority of humanitarian actors, and require a significant level of time and resources to navigate properly.[118] When dealing with UN agencies and UN member states, they also require specific competencies and skillsets, mainly the ability to operate in diplomatic circles.[119] Such investments are neither feasible nor relevant for most humanitarian actors. Nonetheless, by excluding the vast majority of humanitarian organizations these bodies are often thought to be concentrating power and decision-making "in the hands of a few," typically at the expense of the rest.[120]

Figure 3: Representation of international NGOs on inter-agency forums (by humanitarian expenditure)

	ICVA	InterAction	VOICE	SCHR*
Action Contre la Faim	■	■	■	
Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee		■		
CARE International	■	■	■	■
Caritas Internationalis	■		■	■
Catholic Relief Services		■		
International Rescue Committee	■	■	■	
Islamic Relief Worldwide		■	■	
Lutheran World Federation	■	■	■	■
Médecins du Monde	■	■	■	
Médecins sans Frontières International			■	
Norwegian Refugee Council	■		■	
Oxfam International	■	■	■	■
Plan International	■	■	■	
Save the Children International	■	■	■	■
SOS Children's Villages International		■	■	
World Vision International	■	■	■	■

*Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response

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118 See also Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 62.
119 Sending, "United by Difference," 651–652.
120 Interview with NGO representative (312).

The IASC has been the target of considerable criticism in this regard. As suggested above, this forum is viewed by many as an important coordinating body, whose decisions "provide visibility to and high-profile advocacy on key humanitarian issues and specific crises at the global level."[121] According to an internal evaluation, however, this forum is perceived by many as "not representative of the diverse array of actors working in disaster and conflict" and as "a 'Western' entity whose members are exclusively drawn from the 'formal' humanitarian system."[122] Regional and national organizations based in the Global South, by contrast, have reported feeling excluded or deliberately sidelined by this body. According to another assessment, their exclusion serves to "convey a key implicit message to newly acknowledged actors that they may be invited to play a role, but will be kept at the periphery in a Western-led system."[123] Rightly or not, decision-making authority is thought to be centralized within the IASC and a small core of institutions. This has fostered the perception that the humanitarian field remains dominated by predominantly Western organizations and donors, which are understood to have inordinate influence over the networks of governance across this space.

Personal and professional networks within the humanitarian field also tend to cluster in particular geographic locales, which become hubs for policy-making or the exchange of information and ideas. Geneva, for instance, has long represented the de facto 'humanitarian capital' of the world, and still serves as the headquarters for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as well as several UN humanitarian agencies and international NGOs. Other humanitarian hubs have emerged in London, Brussels, New

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121 Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee," 9.
122 Pantuliano et al., 9.
123 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 62; See also Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee," 16–17.

York, Nairobi, Amman, and Bangkok, among other cities, on the basis of organizational

presence or operational need.[124] Europe and North America, however, remain the primary

crossroads for exchanging information and norms across the humanitarian field. In a

survey mapping professional networks within the sector, three European cities – Geneva,

Brussels, and London – ranked in the top four locations most commonly frequented or

lived in by humanitarian professionals for work purposes. They were closely followed by

New York and Washington, D.C., which ranked fifth and sixth, respectively.[125] Nairobi

stood out as the sole exception in this regard, and was identified as the second most

visited or lived in city (see Figure 4). Europe and North America, the report concludes,

thus remain "at the centre of professional humanitarian exchanges."[126] They house the

world's largest humanitarian organizations, and are at the heart of policymaking and the

dissemination of professional standards and innovations across the humanitarian

sector.[127] Despite some movement to the Global South in recent years,[128] the centre of

gravity thus remains firmly rooted in the West.

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124 Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks."
125 Nahikian et al.
126 Nahikian et al.
127 See Chapter 5.
128 Recently, several international NGOs, including ActionAid and Oxfam International, have relocated, or will do so in the near future, their headquarters to the Global South, in cities such as Nairobi and Johannesburg. The goal is to be both "closer to the ground" and more representative of a globalized civil society. Several UN agencies, including OCHA and UNHCR, have also experimented with regional hubs. See Joanna Moorhead and Joe Sandler Clarke, "Big NGOs Prepare to Move South, but Will It Make a Difference?," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/16/big-ngos-africa-amnesty-oxfam-actionaid.

Figure 4: Top 10 cities most commonly frequented or lived in by humanitarian professionals

Source: Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks."
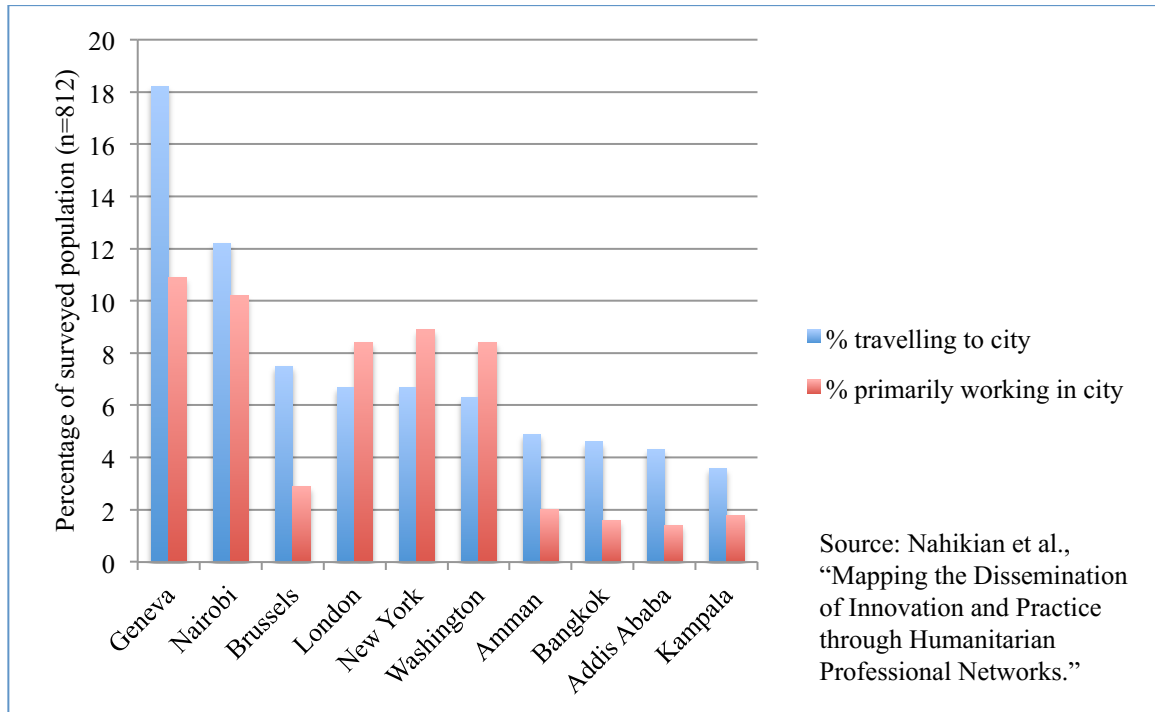
Writing from a critical lens, Antonio Donini argues that the "network power" embedded in the dynamics described above has made it increasingly difficult for new or emerging actors to challenge existing norms and rules across the humanitarian field.[129] Although often unacknowledged, he suggests this influence has imposed Western forms of organization, management, and standardization that are all reflected in the current shape and functioning of the international humanitarian regime. Such isomorphism has facilitated convergence and integration amongst traditional Western aid organizations, which can easily 'plug' into existing structures. By contrast, "going against the grain," Donini concludes, "butts against power dynamics that push in the opposite direction,"

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129 Donini, "The Far Side"; Antonio Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," in *Humanitarianism and Challenges of Cooperation*, ed. Volker M. Heins, Kai Koddenbrock, and Christine Unrau (New York: Routledge, 2016), 72–83.

thus marginalizing those that attempt to challenge the dominant model of aid.[130] As will

be shown in a later chapter, these network effects are frequently replicated on the ground,

where the structure and practice of international coordination mechanisms have similarly

proven to exclude local government and NGO representatives.[131]

Put differently, the humanitarian field has become increasingly exclusive in nature,

with social capital concentrated among a relatively small set of actors. Variously labelled

as an oligopoly,[132] cartel,[133] or elite club,[134] this group commands considerable influence

over the policy and practice of humanitarian relief. As described by Michael Barnett and

Peter Walker:

> Similar to many old-style associations and guilds before it, the Humanitarian Club
> is highly exclusive. Although the aid sector is far from being a closed shop, club
> membership yields useful privileges: a seat at the planning table, an invitation to
> field coordination meetings, and UN credentials. But membership criteria are set by
> the most senior club members, and outside candidates must pass rigorous tests.[135]

For those outside this 'club', there is a growing sense that the consolidation of power and

authority within the hands of a limited number of highly central actors has prevented

meaningful engagement with those on the peripheries of these policy networks.[136] As a

result, relatively new entrants to the field, including increasingly prominent regional and

national organizations based in the Global South, can "often find themselves knocking on

the clubhouse's closed door."[137] They have limited access within the networks of

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130 Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," 75.
131 See Chapter 6.
132 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 58.
133 Kent, Armstrong, and Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector," 30.
134 Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid."
135 Barnett and Walker.
136 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity," 110.
137 Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid."

authority and policy-making, and thus little means to affect the form and functioning of the international humanitarian architecture.

Moral capital

Although increasingly challenged today, international organizations based in the Global North continue to hold the primary levers of power across the humanitarian field. They have direct access to the vast majority of economic resources, as well as authority over its allocation. They hold significant cultural and social capital, both of which lend legitimacy to the existing configurations of power. Importantly, they also have considerable moral authority in shaping the policies and practices of aid. This influence is deeply rooted in the history and traditions of the humanitarian field, and has bestowed its holders with essential reserves of symbolic capital. This power imparts both status and recognition, while lending legitimacy to the prevailing structures of hierarchy within this social space.

Moral authority is an important form of symbolic capital for international organizations and NGOs.[138] Offering the power to mobilize, persuade, and cajole others into action, the moral influence of these actors is directly related to the claim that they "somehow [represent] the 'public interest' or the 'common good' rather than private interests."[139] Their activities are typically framed as distinct from or independent of

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138 See, for example, Stephen Hopgood, "Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred," *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 229–55; Richard Price, "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 579–606; Kathryn Sikkink, "Restructuring World Politics: The Limits and Asymmetries of Soft Power," in *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, ed. Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 301–18.
139 Thomas Risse, "The Power of Norms versus the Norms of Power: Transnational Civil Society and Human Rights," in *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, ed. Ann Florini (Tokyo &

political motives, and thus representative of the interests and values of 'humanity' and 'international community' more broadly.[140] The source of this authority is historical in origin and built, over time, through successful representations of the presumed 'sacredness' of their work.[141] It derives its strength from the power of discourse and performance, and is made real through words, symbols, and stories that stimulate recognition and action among potential followers. The moral authority of these organizations, moreover, cannot be separated from the cultural and social resources noted above; often they believe they have the moral obligation to harness their unique expertise and social access for the greater good.[142] The general sense of "doing good," however, can at times place the work of international organizations and NGOs beyond moral rebuke.[143] Consequently, links to the political interests of states or the broader international normative environment, including its Western, liberal leanings, may go unquestioned.[144] These actors may also reflect global disparities of influence, such as the North-South divide, or claim to speak on behalf of those they do not legitimately represent.[145]

The humanitarian field embodies many of these moral aspirations. Like other fields, it draws symbolic power from its traditions and rationalizing narratives, its triumphs and

Washington, D.C.: Japan Center for International Exchange and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), 186.

140 Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules For The World*, 23.

141 Hopgood, "Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred."

142 Price, "Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics," 589.

143 William F. Fisher, "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 439–64.

144 See, for example, Mark Duffield, "Governing the Borderlands: Decoding the Power of Aid," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 308; Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

145 Sikkink, "Restructuring World Politics," 307–308.

sacrifices, and its hard-won achievements.[146] Its commitment to humanity and

universalism, for instance, has been an enduring theme, dating back to Henri Dunant's

"international humanitarianism" and his "keen compassion for the unhappy, the humble,

the weak and the oppressed."[147] The same spirit of moral duty and cosmopolitanism has

carried through to this day, and is now deeply grounded in the values, motivations, and

historical traditions held by all humanitarians. By virtue of their historical experiences

and legacies, the sector's most storied organizations – the ICRC, MSF, and others – carry

the greatest moral clout.[148] On the basis of this symbolic power, they have gained the

authority to intervene in the midst of crisis and to pass ethical judgement or

condemnation on the actions of others.[149] Their activities resonate with discourses of

'international community,' which further provide the ethical justification to act on behalf

of distant strangers wherever they may be found.[150]

Such claims to moral authority are also distinctly anti-political in their stance. In

the quotation that opens this chapter, James Orbinski, former international president of

Médecins sans Frontières, proclaims that "humanitarian action is by definition universal,"

and that the efforts of humanitarians should not be bound by national frontiers or

interests.[151] He distinguishes humanitarian work from that of political actors, suggesting

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146 Hopgood, "Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred."
147 Pierre Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1985), 9, 56.
148 The ICRC has, perhaps, been the most active in tracing and commenting on its organizational history and traditions, and thus crafting "the ideal of the Red Cross." Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*, 8; See also Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*; André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1984).
149 Didier Fassin, "Heart of Humaneness: The Moral Economy of Humanitarian Intervention," in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 269–93.
150 Barnett, "Humanitarianism as a Scholarly Vocation," 241.
151 James Orbinski, "Nobel Lecture: Médecins Sans Frontières" (Oslo, December 10, 1999), http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1999/msf-lecture.html.

that, by contrast, "the political knows borders, and where crisis occurs, political response will vary because historical relations, balance of power, and the interests of one or the other must be considered."[152] This perception of humanitarianism as a domain of "anti-politics" has largely prevailed, even as the politicisation of humanitarian efforts has become increasingly obvious.[153] It is grounded in the belief that the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence can help to carve out 'humanitarian space' in the midst of crisis, thus ensuring distance from the "moral pollutant" of politics.[154]

While endowed with considerable moral capital, the symbolic power of humanitarians is nonetheless steeped in a particular set of values and traditions. In the past, this parochialism has manifest in the form of paternalistic behaviours and attitudes, from the civilizing impulses of early humanitarians to programs designed to bring progress and modernity to the 'Third World'. Barnett suggests this paternalism has continued to linger.[155] While less overt and often cloaked in universal values, humanitarians exercise the same mixture of care and control, on the basis that "they [know] what [is] in the best interest of local populations."[156] The latter, by contrast, are typically offered little room to articulate their own priorities and concerns. The moral authority of humanitarianism is thus double-edged; it provides the justification for action, while paradoxically closing off space for local political voices and other emancipatory alternatives.[157] When coupled with the knowledge and network resources held by

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152 Orbinski.
153 Fisher, "Doing Good?"; Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 723–40.
154 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002), quoted in Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," 24.
155 Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity*.
156 Barnett, 212.
157 David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

international organizations, it further justifies the concentration of economic capital in the hands of those deemed most capable to manage and disburse these resources.

The moral aspirations of humanitarians have also placed certain concerns beyond rebuke. While humanitarian actors have become increasingly aware of the consequences of their actions, to the point of being "positively flagellatory and chronically confessional" in the opinion of one of my respondents,[158] benevolence and good intentions do, at times, continue to outweigh critical scrutiny.[159] Their critical gaze, moreover, has remained inwards. Slim, for instance, suggests that many humanitarians, particularly those working for Western aid organizations, remain "mesmerized by 'our system' and its apparent importance," thus limiting the scope of issues that can be raised.[160] Instilled with significant reserves of moral capital, many humanitarian organizations have simply assumed that their traditional function as conduits for the delivery of aid should and will continue in the future.[161] Consequently, other, more fundamental issues, including the changing role of international agencies relative to new and emerging actors, have been largely left off the table. Such adjustments, however, have more to do with changing mindsets than institutional reforms. Relations of domination and subordination, and the symbolic power embodied in such claims to authority, have, as a result, been left untouched, and misrecognized as both natural and legitimate.

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158 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211)
159 Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), chap. 6; Mark Walkup, "Policy Dysfunction in Humanitarian Organizations: The Role of Coping Strategies, Institutions, and Organizational Culture," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 1997): 37–60.
160 Hugo Slim, "Global Welfare: A Realistic Expectation for the International Humanitarian System?," in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2005* (ALNAP, 2006), 23.
161 Kent, Armstrong, and Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector."

The monopoly and unquestioned moral authority of international humanitarians are, however, beginning to erode. As mentioned above, recent years have seen growing competition between established and 'new' humanitarian actors. While much of this debate has focused on more obvious indicators, including who has direct access to funding or training opportunities,[162] a number of more fundamental questions have also been raised. Which actors or organizations, for instance, are best placed to intervene or speak on behalf of the suffering? Who, on the basis of their moral authority and legitimacy, should make this decision? Humanitarian organizations have always aspired to "work themselves out of the job," thus envisioning a future in which humanitarians of different sizes and nationalities will assume the lead in response efforts.[163] As will be shown in the final chapter of this thesis, many are beginning to question when and if this future will come. Such changes, I suggest, may depend on the ability of local and national actors to mobilize other sources of moral capital in this regard.

Conclusion

The sources of capital traced above reveal a humanitarian field that is both transnational, on the one hand, and deeply stratified on the other. While its members may share the same goals and convictions, access to funding, professional development opportunities, and policy networks remains highly unequal. These inequities, I contend, have contributed to the emergence of a 'humanitarian elite', composed of a small group of professionals who work primarily for the UN and a handful of international NGOs and who have the economic capacities and cultural and social aptitudes needed to move

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162 See Chapter 8.
163 Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid."

transversally across national boundaries. The moral authority of the organizations they represent has further consolidated the symbolic power and legitimacy of this elite group of actors. Those at the head of this 'club' have access to the highest echelons of power and authority, and thus hold considerable influence over decision-making. By contrast, those excluded from these structures of authority, which include relatively new and emerging entrants to the humanitarian field, have limited capacity to influence the shape and direction of policy change.

Nonetheless, the increasingly prominent competition between this humanitarian elite and its various challengers is unlikely to dissipate in the near future. The hierarchies of authority that have traditionally governed this social space are far from permanent, and are subject to ongoing competition among agents both in- and outside this social space. Each of the forms of capital noted above has been the target of growing resentment in recent years, and will likely inspire future struggles over the governance of this social space. Indeed, many of these contests have already begun, as actors excluded from power in the past have sought to reshape the policy and practice of aid. These challenges to the traditional regimes of elite influence across the humanitarian field will be the focus of the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 5:

Made in Geneva? Policymaking and the Politics of Place

> *"This spirit of Geneva ... comprises a desire for liberty and universality, a confidence in man, provided he submit to rules, an inexhaustible curiosity as to ideas and people, a compassion for all miseries combined with an urge to invent, to ameliorate, to administer with method; this spirit, I say, escaping suddenly from its natural representatives, grows gigantic, adopts new significance even at the risk of weakening itself, and becomes the ideal of innumerable foreigners of all races ... The very name, 'Geneva,' comes thus to transcend any local or particular significance, and is transformed by a strange experience into a symbol."*
>
> Robert de Traz, *The Spirit of Geneva*, p.30[1]

Introduction

Having outlined the structures of authority and capital across the humanitarian field, we are now better placed to re-examine the limits of humanitarian reform. As described in an earlier chapter, the outcomes of past reform efforts have been decidedly mixed. Various organizational and regime-wide reform initiatives enacted over the past decade have helped to raise the standard of humanitarian response, by improving leadership capacities, coordination mechanisms, and resource mobilization across the international humanitarian regime. The sector, as a result, is now reaching more beneficiaries than ever before. These changes, however, have also been described as "tinkering at the edges," as opposed to addressing the underlying structures and assumptions on which the regime rests.[2] Appeals for better coordination, accountability,

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1 Quoted in Joëlle Kuntz, *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History* (Geneva: Editions Zoé, 2011), 81–82.
2 Humanitarian Policy Group, "Creating a Paradigm Shift: Statement for the World Humanitarian Summit Global Consultation" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015), 1; See also Christina Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016).

and partnership have faltered in practice, and remain deeply contentious among both international humanitarian actors and their national and local counterparts. Despite repeated efforts to decentralize and democratize the sector, reform efforts thus continue to miss the mark.

This chapter looks at how authority structures across the humanitarian field have influenced the process of reform. Specifically, I examine how certain humanitarian actors within this space have come to claim authority over the "international," as distinct from and above the "local." To this end, I trace the vertical disaggregation of knowledge and information, through which authority and decision-making have been delegated upwards to policymakers located primarily in international headquarters. Operations and risks, by contrast, have been transferred downwards, to the field staff and national and local actors who have little say in the framing of policy but are nonetheless tasked with carrying out new policy prescriptions. Building on a theme introduced at the end of the last chapter, I argue that this hierarchical structuring of knowledge and authority is tied to the presence of an elite group of actors, which dominates both the shape and direction of policymaking across the humanitarian field. Change initiatives, I suggest, are bound to the same imbalances of capital and authority, and are inherently political as a result.

I ground my analysis within a case study of the Swiss city of Geneva, considered the de facto 'humanitarian capital' of the world. Although one of several important policymaking hubs, including most notably New York, Geneva enjoys a unique role within the humanitarian field. Its long history of and engagement in humanitarianism have bestowed the city with significant reserves of moral capital, through which its institutions and organizations have exercised authority over the policy and practice of aid.

Decisions and policy prescriptions emanating from the city are often tinged with claims to universality and cosmopolitanism, as characterized, for instance, in the quotation that opens this chapter. In claiming to represent the 'international,' however, policymakers in Geneva have come to elevate their role as above the particularities of the 'local,' in ways that have served to reinforce their authority and rule. Through this case study, I therefore illuminate one manifestation of the humanitarian elite that has come to claim governance over the field as a whole. In doing so, I further draw important links to space and place, by demonstrating how policy authority has been consolidated within Geneva and why this city has come to occupy a central position across the humanitarian field.

Observations in this chapter come primarily from two sources. The bulk of the chapter is drawn from interview data and participant observations acquired over a period of four months in Geneva. During the interviews, I asked participants to reflect on the role of "international Geneva,"[3] and specifically its implications for policy development across the humanitarian regime. In some cases, I present longer excerpts from my interviews to demonstrate, from the perspective of policymakers themselves, the important influence of Geneva in the shaping and unfolding of humanitarian reform initiatives. To supplement my findings, I also utilize observations from papers submitted to a 2007 conference on "The spirit of Geneva in a globalized world", which similarly sought to explore Geneva's position as the pre-eminent locus of international and multilateral cooperation, particularly in the area of humanitarian action. Like many of the presenters to this conference, I acknowledge that the role of Geneva in the humanitarian regime is not entirely unique, and that hubs in New York, Brussels, Nairobi and

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3 "International Geneva" is a title used by the Republic and State of Geneva to refer to the concentration of International Organizations, Permanent Missions, NGOs and academia based in the city. The term is also commonly used by expatriates living and working in the city.

elsewhere each have their respective areas of focus and expertise. Nonetheless, I believe that this "international city"[4] has played an important, and at times contradictory, role in the shaping of the humanitarian field, and is thus worthy of study in itself. Specifically, throughout my research I remained attuned to its politics and parochialism, which, as I suggest below, help to account for the shortcomings of humanitarian reform in moving from policy to practice.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. First, I explore Geneva's construction as 'humanitarian capital' of the world. I demonstrate how, historically, the city has come to claim this mantle, and the ways in which it continues to play a unique and authoritative role within the humanitarian field today. Second, I examine the intended and unintended consequences of consolidating policy expertise and authority within Geneva. I suggest that, in claiming to speak on behalf of the field as a whole, the policymaking elite based in the city have solidified the upward flow of information and decision-making and concealed the parochialism inherent to their work, with important implications for determining whose voices are heard in the making of policy and whose, by extension, are not. Finally, in the last section I return to the question of humanitarian reform through an investigation of the Transformative Agenda, a reform process that was initiated from Geneva in 2011 and that carried sector-wide implications. Drawing connections to earlier themes in the chapter, I argue that the structures of governance inherent to policymaking within the humanitarian field help to explain the limits of this and other reform initiatives.

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4 Hugo Slim, "Geneva's Future: Reflections on the Role of a Values-based City," *International Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2007): 109.

Building a Humanitarian Capital

Geneva in historical perspective

The "spirit of Geneva," referred to in the opening quotation of this chapter, has

deep roots in the tradition and psyche of the city and its residents.[5] Indeed, adherents

suggest that this spirit can be traced back to the evangelism and humanism of Calvin,

under whose influence Geneva became the capital of the Reformation and a leading

intellectual centre in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century.[6] During this time, Geneva

witnessed an influx of refugees, including Calvin himself, escaping persecution and

religious conflict across Europe, thus marking the foundation of the city's humanitarian

tradition. These adherents similarly point to the ideals of liberalism and freedom of

thought embodied in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who was born in the city and

identified as a citizen of Geneva for much of his life.[7] Coupled with the city's long

history of self-determination and neutrality, such values fostered Geneva's cosmopolitan

outlook and the belief that the citizens of this city constituted "a special people with a

positive role to play in the larger world."[8] They set the stage for the writings and

advocacy of Henri Dunant, who drew his inspiration from the city's unique blend of

evangelism and internationalism.[9]

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5 Robert De Traz, *The Spirit of Geneva*, trans. Fried-Ann Kindler (London: Oxford University Press, 1935); François Bugnion, "The Spirit of Geneva and Its Relevance Today," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2007): 33–51; Otto Hieronymi, "The Spirit of Geneva and Globalization," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2007): 274–305; Otto Hieronymi and Kathleen Intag, "The Spirit of Geneva in a Globalized World," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2007): 8–19; Slim, "Geneva's Future."
6 Bugnion, "The Spirit of Geneva and Its Relevance Today," 42.
7 Ironically, though, such acclamation would come much later, as Rousseau and *The Social Contract* were banned from Geneva following the book's publication in 1762.
8 David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.
9 Pierre Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1985), chap. I.

The founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva in 1863 solidified the city's commitment to humanitarianism and its important position at the heart of the humanitarian field. As "cradle of the Red Cross," Geneva, and Switzerland more broadly, profoundly shaped the character and values of the ICRC, including its fundamental principles of humanity, neutrality, and universality.[10] Genevans provided the bulk of the financial resources and supplies needed in its early years, and continue to strongly identify with the organization. In response, perhaps, the ICRC chose the white armband with a red cross – the reverse of the Swiss flag – as its first emblem and maintains its headquarters in Geneva to this day. Based on the precedent set by the ICRC, several international organizations and NGOs established their headquarters in the city following World War I, making Geneva the "recognized centre of humanitarian and medical organizations."[11]

Geneva flourished in the 1920s as a hub of international cooperation and diplomacy, and came to embody the Wilsonian spirit of idealism and universal peace that prevailed at the time. Following the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Geneva soon hosted a range of international organizations and ideals, including the Assembly of the League of Nations, the International Labour Office, the Nansen Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the League of Red Cross Societies.[12] The city's identification as birthplace of the modern humanitarian movement and Switzerland's permanent neutrality

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10 Bugnion, "The Spirit of Geneva and Its Relevance Today," 43; See also Boissier, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, chap. III.
11 André Durand, *From Sarajevo to Hiroshima: History of the International Committee of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1984), 151.
12 The League of Red Cross Societies is now known as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The Nansen Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees predated the founding of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1950. Both organizations are still headquartered in Geneva.

all justified the convergence of international activity in this hub, as Geneva in effect

became "the twentieth century's first international city" and "prototype world capital."[13]

This status prevailed even as politics and power shifted west across the Atlantic

following World War II. Although the more politicized components of the United

Nations were relocated to New York, Geneva retained the organization's European

offices. This included the headquarters of the newly established Office of the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Health Organization (WHO), and,

later, regional offices for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development

Programme (UNDP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

(OCHA). While the realities of hard politics were largely left for the "political UN" in

New York, the specialized organizations in Geneva took on much of the technical and

everyday work of negotiating treaties and peace agreements and coordinating operations

in the field.[14] As Hugo Slim explains:

> In modern times, Geneva has cultivated a middle-ground space for free discussion
> in consonance with its tradition of asylum and hospitality. Perhaps Geneva's
> biggest contribution to peace has been as a place where free talks can be held –
> talks on disarmament, talks on treaties, talks on peace agreements and talks on
> global issues.[15]

The UN offices in Geneva assumed Switzerland's status as neutral state, thus occupying a

distinctly depoliticized space within the larger UN system. As a result, while the political

branch in New York stagnated for much of the Cold War, Geneva continued to expand its

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13 Slim, "Geneva's Future," 109–10.
14 Hieronymi, "The Spirit of Geneva and Globalization," 281.
15 Slim, "Geneva's Future," 114.

reputation during this time as the preeminent "values-based city" of the international community.[16]

The "spirit of Geneva" is thus deeply embedded in the ideals and institutions of the city. It emerged out of a profound sense of "Genevan exceptionalism," and the collective self-image that the citizens of Geneva are meant to make an important and positive contribution to the larger world.[17] This role has expanded over time, on the premise that key "Geneva values" such as peace, cooperation, and humanity can and should be promoted as universal values by all individuals.[18] Geneva, according to one particularly effusive account, has "cease[d] thus to be the exclusive attribute of the Genevans" and has been transformed into a "symbol" for the international community,[19] even as such aspirations have been difficult to realize in practice.

Geneva today

Today, "International Geneva," referring to the "unique concentration of International Organizations, Permanent Missions, NGOs and academia" based in the city,[20] has largely retained its global reputation for internationalism. It is home to 37 international organizations and upwards of 370 NGOs, comprising a number of humanitarian agencies as well as some of the leading organizations in the areas of human rights, trade, health, and communications, among others. It is also a recognized centre for multilateral diplomacy, with 176 permanent diplomatic missions based in the city. Together, the IOs, NGOs, and Permanent Missions in the city employ nearly 32,000

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16 Slim, 110.
17 Forsythe, *The Humanitarians*, 17.
18 Hieronymi, "The Spirit of Geneva and Globalization," 274.
19 De Traz, *The Spirit of Geneva*, 30, quoted in Kuntz, Geneva and the Call of Internationalism, 81-82.
20 "About Us," International Geneva, 2017, http://www.geneve-int.ch/about-us.

people, representing roughly one-tenth of the entire population of the Canton of

Geneva.[21] Outside of the international core of the city, Geneva has become a global

financial and banking centre, as well as a major hub for commodity trading. Its

demographics match the city's cosmopolitan outlook, with 41 percent of the population

born outside of Switzerland.[22] It remains, in other words, a global crossroad, blending

peoples, cultures, and ideals under the banner of internationalism.

 Geneva also continues to claim the mantle of 'humanitarian capital' of the world,

even as it has been joined by new regional and international hubs in Nairobi, Brussels,

Bangkok, and elsewhere.[23] It remains at the centre of the International Red Cross and Red

Crescent Movement, while nearly all UN humanitarian agencies are either headquartered

or maintain a sizeable presence in the city.[24] Among international NGOs, CARE

International, MSF International, and several NGO consortia have located their

international offices in Geneva, while a number of others have important policy bureaus

there. The diplomats and Permanent Missions based in the city are particularly attuned to

humanitarian issues, making Geneva an important venue for "discreet humanitarian

diplomacy."[25] The city also serves as the backdrop for dialogue on and reaffirmation of

the humanitarian principles, witnessed most visibly in the quadrennial International

Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.[26]

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21 "Facts and Figures," International Geneva, accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.geneve-int.ch/facts-figures#3743.
22 "Facts and Figures."
23 See Anaïde Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks," *Grotius International*, March 2013.
24 The World Food Programme, headquartered in Rome, is the sole exception in this regard.
25 Beat Schweizer, "'The Spirit of Geneva': Humanitarian Diplomacy and Advocacy," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2007): 164.
26 The International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent convenes every four years in Geneva and brings together representatives from all three components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Geneva thus remains "a hub for all things refugees, human rights, and humanitarian,"[27] and retains an important position at the heart of the humanitarian field. Its place as 'humanitarian capital' stems, in part, from its long tradition of humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism, as well as the concentration of international organizations and expertise in the city. This status is also carefully maintained by cantonal authorities in Geneva and Swiss foreign policymakers. As described in an official, state-sanctioned history of Geneva:

> For most Swiss political leaders "international Geneva" [...] has become a cornerstone of Swiss foreign policy – a niche of interests and expertise that must be defended in the same way as Britain, for example, defends its City of London, Paris defends its fashion industry and the United States supports its Silicon Valley. For Switzerland, international Geneva is an asset and an outlet.[28]

The role of international Geneva, however, has come increasingly under threat in recent years, as established and newly emerging international hubs have competed to attain the status and financial gains associated with hosting international organizations and summit meetings.[29] A shortage of office space and rising prices in Geneva have further prompted many organizations based in the city to consider decentralizing parts of their headquarters to other locations, both in Europe and internationally.[30] In relation to the humanitarian field, specifically, many of those I interviewed confessed that UN agencies and international NGOs in the city are under pressure to demonstrate the continuing utility and worth of Geneva as 'humanitarian capital', particularly relative to the political capital

Movement (ICRC, IFRC, and national societies), as well as state parties to the Geneva Conventions and observers from a range of humanitarian and development organizations.

27 Hieronymi and Intag, "The Spirit of Geneva in a Globalized World," 13.
28 Kuntz, *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism*, 79.
29 Hieronymi and Intag, "The Spirit of Geneva in a Globalized World," 15.
30 Jean Milligan, "What Future for the Humanitarian Capital of the World?," *IRINnews*, April 7, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/report/101332/what-future-for-the-humanitarian-capital-of-the-world.

of New York.[31] Nonetheless, they saw value in defending the tradition and image of the city, as providing space for "a different type of debate that you don't have in other places."[32] Many worried that transferring policy- and decision-making power to New York would unduly politicize humanitarian dialogues, thus compromising their work on the ground.

Despite these challenges, Geneva continues to occupy an authoritative position within the humanitarian field. While some have criticized its bureaucratic inertia and declining influence in a globalized era,[33] the city has retained a distinctive voice within this social space. As Slim explains:

> The fact remains that Geneva and its international institutions speak from an international space which – if the delivery is well judged – has a distinct moral voice and authority that are unique in the world. They can say things about migration, trade, freedom of thought, self-determination, war and peace that cannot be said in quite the same way from most other cities.[34]

This authority, particularly relative to the humanitarian field, stems from the significant reserves of moral capital that Geneva has built up over time. The city is viewed by many as the embodiment of the humanitarian ideal, and "birthplace of the humanitarian principles."[35] The continued concentration of expertise and network power in Geneva has further elevated the voice and influence of the organizations based in the city. Consequently, the policy debates occurring in Geneva carry a certain weight that is felt across the humanitarian field and is often taken for granted by those under its effect.[36] It

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31 See also Milligan.
32 Interview with UN representative (121).
33 See Hieronymi, "The Spirit of Geneva and Globalization."
34 Slim, "Geneva's Future," 122.
35 Interview with NGO representative (322).
36 Hieronymi, "The Spirit of Geneva and Globalization," 278.

originates from a position of authority, imparting a "seal of quality"[37] for what is

discussed, decided, and managed in Geneva.

Although joined by a number of regional and international hubs, Geneva thus

retains a unique role within the humanitarian field. Its recognition as 'humanitarian

capital' has deep historical roots, and has been purposefully maintained over time by both

Swiss political leaders and key actors based in the city. From this position, Geneva-based

organizations and institutions have exercised significant influence over the policy and

practice of aid, a function that continues to this day. This claim to authority, however, is

not without consequences. As I suggest below, in claiming to represent the

'international', and governance of the humanitarian field as a whole, policymakers in

Geneva have concealed the parochialism and politics inherent to their work. Such

hierarchies have profoundly shaped the making of humanitarian policy, influencing

whose voices are heard and recognized as important, and whose, by extension, are not.

The Politics of Policymaking

This section explores the intended and unintended effects of Geneva's role as

humanitarian capital. At its best, it has consolidated authority and resources in a

relatively depoliticized space, thus offering the impartiality and technical expertise

needed at a global policy level. At its worst, it has maintained the upward flow of

information and capital across the humanitarian field, resulting in policies that are

disconnected from realities on the ground and that favour international perspectives and

interests over local ones. As shown below, it has elevated the voice of the policymaking

elite based in the city and reinforced what Ole Jacob Sending has termed the "pre-

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37 Hans Lunshof, "Geneva as a Humanitarian Capital," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2007): 101.

eminence of the international,"[38] while marginalizing other roles and positions across the

humanitarian field. Such unintended effects help to explain the limits of past reform

efforts, as discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Depoliticization

As mentioned above, Geneva has maintained a role that is intentionally distinct

from the politicized debates common to other humanitarian hubs. Those I interviewed

frequently drew distinctions between New York, in particular, and Geneva, believing that

discussions taking place in the latter often have a different tone from those occurring

elsewhere. As one NGO representative explained:

> It's important to have this space independent from New York. [...] There you have
> the politics. Here you have space for the humanitarian. [...] Just the idea of having
> that space is very important because, you know, our colleagues in New York when
> they come here [they] have a whole other way of thinking.[39]

She later added that in Geneva, "you leave your politics at the door as much as you can,"

whether you are a policy advisor with a humanitarian organization or a diplomat with a

Permanent Mission. The latter, she observed, are particularly sensitive to humanitarian

issues, thus facilitating conversations different from those occurring in donor capitals.[40]

These sentiments were echoed by many of those I interviewed, who suggested that much

of the work ongoing in Geneva is "soaked in the Dunantian world of humanitarianism."[41]

Its depoliticization was viewed by many as essential to policymaking at the global level,

particularly in facilitating dialogue and collaboration among the organizations and

missions based in the city.

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38 Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise: Competing for Authority in Global Governance* (Ann
Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 55.
39 Interview with NGO representative (311).
40 Ibid. See also Schweizer, "The Spirit of Geneva."
41 Interview with UN representative (121).

Despite efforts to depoliticize this space, politics are rarely distant from the policy debates in Geneva. Indeed, one UN representative observed that there is "an almost inescapable trend towards more and more politicization of the humanitarian discourse" in the city.[42] This tension has become increasingly acute in recent years, particularly as humanitarian policymakers and diplomats continue to grapple with highly politicized conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. The protracted nature of these crises, coupled with the lack of political solutions, have exposed significant gaps in the humanitarian response, prompting many to consider whether traditional approaches and solutions are still 'fit for purpose'.[43] The realities of contemporary conflicts are thus pushing many humanitarian actors, including those in Geneva, closer to the interests and biases of states in the political field. Many have acknowledged that they have been tempted by the "spirit of New York" in the face of such challenges, and the desire to play a more public and political role in responding to these crises.[44]

The increasing politicization of humanitarian debates globally may help explain Geneva's enduring appeal as a symbol of idealism and cosmopolitan duty for the field as a whole. Many of those I interviewed saw value in defending the status and tradition of Geneva, as a place that is "so unlike the rough and tumble of the world."[45] The city symbolizes much of what the humanitarian field stands for – neutrality, impartiality, and independence – at a time when such principles are under threat, both in Geneva and

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42 Interview with UN representative (121).
43 Elizabeth G. Ferris, "Responding to Chaos: The World's Beleaguered Humanitarian Community," Brookings Institution, *Order from Chaos: Foreign Policy in a Troubled World* (blog), 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2015/04/09-world-humanitarian-community; Antonio Guterres, "Think the Aid System Can Cope? It Can't," The World Economic Forum, *Agenda* (blog), January 18, 2015, https://agenda.weforum.org/2015/01/think-the-aid-system-can-cope-it-cant/.
44 Schweizer, "The Spirit of Geneva," 165.
45 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).

beyond.[46] Humanitarians continue to cling to these ideals, even as they, possibly much

like Geneva itself, become increasingly divorced from realities on the ground.

The perception of Geneva as a distinctly depoliticized space may also be attributed

to the dispositions, or *habitus*, of its inhabitants, who have largely assumed the beliefs

and convictions associated with the city's unique development. As one of my respondents

explained:

> There's a tradition here that people respect. So when you are calling for a Geneva
> meeting, there's something behind that, there's an inherent belief that there's
> something important by the very fact that it's in Geneva.[47]

Among those I interviewed, including both newcomers as well as professionals who had

spent much of their careers in the city, there was a persistent attachment to the 'spirit of

Geneva'. Grounded in the unique moral and cosmopolitan outlook of the city, this

tradition clearly continues to resonate throughout its contemporary politics. It influences

the discussions and work that take place in the city, by orienting the way that actors

perceive and act on the world. This spirit, as I suggest below, also generates troubling

behaviours and habits, particularly in the way it has shaped the view of reality outside the

confines of the city.

Centralization

Geneva's role as humanitarian capital has helped to consolidate decision-making

and technical expertise in one central location. As an NGO representative observed:

> It's just so fascinating to see how many people are working on the range of
> humanitarian issues that are out there. [...] It's a stimulating place to be and really if

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46 Francis Kofi Abiew, "Humanitarian Action under Fire: Reflections on the Role of NGOs in Conflict and
Post-Conflict Situations," *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 2 (2012): 203–16; Jérémie Labbé and Pascal
Daudin, "Applying the Humanitarian Principles: Reflecting on the Experience of the International
Committee of the Red Cross" 97, no. 897–898 (2015): 183–210.
47 Interview with NGO representative (392).

you want an opinion and you want to really get into the nitty-gritty of almost any subject on humanitarianism, you'll find an expert on it here.[48]

While not diminishing the important role of New York and other regional and international hubs, the wealth of experience and knowledge located in Geneva was viewed by many of those I interviewed as necessary for engaging with the complexity of humanitarian policy on a global scale. The city brings together humanitarian policymakers, practitioners, and diplomats in one space, thereby enabling joint dialogue and conversation, both formal and informal. It further serves as a repository for information and field reports coming from operations around the world, thus permitting high-level discussions on the priorities and distribution of aid. It facilitates what Janice Gross Stein describes as "joined-up thinking," by bringing multiple partners to the table and enabling linkages across sectors on a range of complex problems and systems.[49]

Geneva is heavily networked in this regard. The city is a hub for collaboration and discussion, with the world's largest concentration of humanitarian professionals and many more traveling to the city for its regular meetings and conferences.[50] Such exchanges are vital for decision-making and the sharing of technical expertise. As one account suggests:

> For the international officials [based in Geneva] it undoubtedly provides a setting that facilitates their work: a single phone call is all that is needed, for example, ... for a High Commissioner for Refugees to dine with his or her counterpart for human rights and hammer out a solution to some difficult issue.[51]

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48 Interview with NGO representative (322).
49 Janice Stein, "Humanitarian Organizations: Accountable - Why, to Whom, for What, and How?," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 138.
50 Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks."
51 Kuntz, *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism*, 79.

These network effects were similarly appreciated among those I interviewed. The

frequency and pace of interactions, they suggested, make it "much easier to move

forward on certain activities or innovative ideas,"[52] while helping to "smooth things

over" when conflicts arise.[53] In times of crisis, meetings between organizations can be

arranged quickly and repeatedly, thus generating traction on the various facets of

response.[54] Geneva, in other words, provides an important platform for exchange among

humanitarian actors. Although the final decision on issues may be made elsewhere, in

New York or donor capitals for example, it remains "the locus of where the conversation

happens"[55] and thus provides direct entry into the policymaking process.

Access to the Geneva network, however, can also be highly exclusive. As an NGO

representative observed:

> If you're a serious humanitarian agency and you want to influence the [policy]
> debates you need to be here. [...] If you're going to steer those kinds of big picture
> issues then you need to be able to engage at the top.[56]

Those most successful in engaging at this level are able to "operate as diplomats," and

learn over time how to navigate competing political and organizational agendas.[57] They

are fluent in the culture and coded language of diplomacy, both of which are important

forms of cultural capital in Geneva. Participation in global policy debates, as a result, can

be "incredibly difficult for new entrants,"[58] including, most notably, the nationally- and

locally-based humanitarian NGOs that typically lack the specialized skillsets and

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52 Interview with UN representative (131).
53 Interview with UN representative (112).
54 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211)
55 Interview with UN representative (121).
56 Interview with NGO representative (351).
57 Ole Jacob Sending, "United by Difference: Diplomacy as a Thin Culture," *International Journal* 66, no.
3 (2011): 651.
58 Interview with NGO representative (351).

longstanding presence needed to effectively work at this level. The other barrier is simply

price. Geneva frequently tops the list of most expensive cities in the world,[59] thus

prohibiting all but the largest organizations from maintaining a presence in the city.[60]

Many others do not have the capacity or economic capital needed to participate at this

level, thus ensuring that policy debates are open only to a privileged few.

Even larger organizations and states have struggled to break into the elite nature of

the Geneva network. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), for instance, is

headquartered in Geneva in order to bring together the largest international organizations,

and yet has only marginally changed its membership over the last two decades.[61] Outside

organizations that have attempted to join the forum, such as the Organization of Islamic

Cooperation, have been regularly refused, a trend interpreted by some observers "as a

sign that the IASC and the broader 'traditional' system [are] resistant to change, insular

and overly protective."[62] Indeed, when asked, a former insider acknowledged that the

IASC has "not yet" caught up to the increasing heterogeneity of the humanitarian

landscape, as seen by the lack of diversity around the meeting table.[63] Another observer

described a similar dynamic with respect to 'new' humanitarian donors, such as China or

India, who do not view themselves as part of the traditional donor 'club' as represented in

Geneva.[64]

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59 See The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Worldwide Cost of Living 2016" (London: The Economist, 2016).
60 As noted above, even ICRC and the UN agencies based in Geneva are beginning to move certain functions out of the city, primarily as a result of the high cost of office space and salaries. See Milligan, "What Future for the Humanitarian Capital of the World?"
61 Sara Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee" (Overseas Development Institute, 2014), 16.
62 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 62.
63 Interview with UN representative (121).
64 Interview with UN representative (115).

Such biases, according to some critics, point to the lingering dominance of the

Western humanitarian tradition in Geneva.[65] While certain organizations have attempted

to broaden consultation, for example through UNHCR's annual NGO consultations,[66]

these forums largely remain the exception in Geneva. Instead, as an NGO representative

observed:

> It tends to be big northern/western organizations that have the resources to have a
> voice in Geneva. It means that the governance structure of the system is not as
> informed by southern voices, and not as informed by perspectives rising out of
> local communities, as it might be.[67]

Policy debates often remain dominated by established organizations, ensuring that only

certain voices and perspectives are being heard in Geneva. Centralization, as a result, has

also generated exclusion, particularly for those without the economic or cultural capital

needed to join the humanitarian elite present in Geneva.

Parochialism

The barriers facing perceived outsiders speak to a more troubling, unintentional

consequence of Geneva's role as humanitarian capital – namely, the insular worldview of

the actors and organizations based in the city and their growing disconnect from changing

realities on the ground. Many of those I interviewed acknowledged that policy

discussions occurring in the city can often feel removed from the outside world. Such

disconnects were, at times, viewed positively. An NGO representative described Geneva

as follows:

> This is a postcard city; it's a bit of a bubble. [...] There's a respite space here, that's
> sort of – healthy [laughter]. The air is good. There's something beautiful, the lakes,

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65 See Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalized World,"
Disasters 34 (April 2, 2010): S220–37.
66 The UNHCR's consultations with NGOs, held annually in Geneva, bring together over 500
representatives of NGOs and other stakeholders from around the world.
67 Interview with NGO representative (371).

maybe there's something also just in the climate that helps with the opportunity for creating more peaceful identities and peaceful mindsets to lead to better negotiation.[68]

Put differently, Geneva offers "a place to stop and think fresh."[69] Although many criticized the slow pace of decision-making and overly bureaucratic processes, its separation from the rest of the field was viewed as important in ensuring that new policies are well thought out and considered, and thus "knowledgeable as opposed to kneejerk."[70] Such distance was considered, by some, to be beneficial for policy development and an essential attribute of discussions in Geneva.

More often, however, these disconnects were seen in a more negative light, and in stark contrast to the instability and conflict inherent to the settings in which humanitarians work.[71] Those I interviewed highlighted a dangerous gap between rhetoric and reality in Geneva, which risks becoming detached from situations on the ground:

> I was once sitting in the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in a discussion of famine in North Korea staring out over the lake and I found that very disconcerting because we were in the most beautiful building overlooking this lake and it just seemed too far removed to be able to talk about serious issues [...] You are so far removed from the realities of the field that people can get – you know, I don't think it's surprising if people do become very removed.[72]

Others described the "Geneva bubble" as sterile and repetitive,[73] fostering the perception that "you can sit here and feel that world hunger's been solved."[74] While thought to represent a "sophisticated level of analysis," policy debates were nonetheless viewed as "disconnected from the field reality."[75] Many believed that policymakers in Geneva are

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68 Interview with NGO representative (392).
69 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).
70 Interview with NGO representative (311).
71 See also Hieronymi and Intag, "The Spirit of Geneva in a Globalized World," 12.
72 Interview with NGO representative (322).
73 Interview with UN representative (192).
74 Interview with NGO representative (392).
75 Interview with external consultant (632).

struggling to keep pace with changing developments on the ground, including the

increasing complexity of humanitarian response, the use of new technologies, and the

emergence of new players and donors in the delivery of aid.

This sense of detachment is partly attributable to life in Geneva itself. The setting is

undeniably impressive, with Mont Blanc and the Alps rising in the distance across Lake

Geneva. The city itself is primarily made up of international civil servants, many of

whom will spend much of their career in Geneva. Those that pursue this path are,

predictably, occupied by the daily routines of life and work – they start families, they

travel on the weekends, and they worry about career advancement. Formal meetings, I

observed, were often followed by more mundane conversations; discussion of the crisis

in Syria, for example, was quickly swapped for talk of summer vacation plans or

complaints regarding the high price of coffee. When asked, respondents described these

kinds of conversations as "self-focused on Geneva"[76] and "Geneva-centric."[77] While

viewed as natural, many worried that the routines and patterns of everyday work in

Geneva are the cause of "a bit of complacency and not a lot of field relevance,"[78] and

ultimately distract from the humanitarian work they have set out to achieve.

The *habitus* associated with the "Geneva career"[79] poses important implications for

policy development. Most notably, it has bred a sense of exceptionalism and insularity

from realities beyond the borders of the city. Detached from the urgency and pressing

needs of situations on the ground, policymakers in Geneva instead deal largely in the

abstract. They draw primarily on sources of thematic knowledge, including generalizable

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76 Interview with UN representative (131).
77 Interview with NGO representative (371).
78 Interview with NGO representative (311).
79 Interview with NGO representative (371).

data and specialized, technical expertise. Their prescriptions are similarly universal in

scope, and often broadly applicable across a range of contexts. For actors outside of

Geneva, however, the handbooks and protocols developed in the city are perceived to be

"handed down from on high"[80] and are thought to have "very little to do with what people

in the field do or think."[81] Most notably, policy documents frequently lack the

contextually specific sources of information needed to translate such guidance into

concrete, practicable tools. New policy prescriptions, as I suggest in the chapters that

follow, can therefore falter in implementation, lost somewhere in the "disconnect in

expectations" between policymakers in headquarters and those on the ground.[82]

     Geneva's exceptionalism has also potentially diminished the scope for internal

debate and self-reflection. As one respondent noted:

> I've never yet been in a meeting in Geneva where somebody has stood up and torn
> into something. [...] I mean this is their job, this is their life, they all agree, they all
> come. It's like going to mass, you know, you don't come here to disagree, you just
> come to do the liturgy.[83]

Policy development in Geneva typically favours consensus-based decision-making,

which one observer described as tending to "flatten things out."[84] Another suggested that

the city is far too "cosy" and "closed doors," and that most organizations in the city are

motivated by the mantra of "not to shame, not to blame."[85] As a result, debates typically

repeat the same statements or positions, and are often more about enrolling supporters

than resolving actual differences. In many cases, disagreements between individuals and

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80 Interview with UN representative (115).
81 Interview with external consultant (632).
82 Interview with UN representative (115).
83 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).
84 Interview with NGO representative (311).
85 Interview with NGO representative (323).

organizations may be buried within new policy prescriptions, forming hidden fault lines

that may only emerge through implementation of the policy itself.[86]

Geneva's role as humanitarian capital is thus highly insulated from experiences on

the ground, where both locally-based field staff and recipient communities confront the

everyday realities of aid. Despite their universalist aspirations, policymakers in Geneva

must often rely on partial and possibly parochial views of the world beyond the

boundaries of the city, which nonetheless form the basis for new policy models and

prescriptions. Local contexts and particularities, by consequence, are viewed as

secondary or contingent, and interpreted through a lens that is self-enclosed and socially

embedded.[87] Some organizations have, of course, attempted to break down the

boundaries around Geneva. UNHCR, for example, operates on a rotational policy that

cycles international staff in and out of headquarters every few years.[88] Policy advisors for

other organizations will regularly conduct field visits, which are generally short-term in

nature yet provide important "news of reality," in the words of one of my respondents.[89]

While such policies may offer policymakers a window into situations on the ground, they

are nonetheless limited in scope. Universally applicable knowledge and tools, reinforced

by the routines and exceptional nature of everyday life in Geneva, remain the norm, thus

privileging certain perspectives and modes of operating.

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86 See David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005); David Lewis and David Mosse, eds., *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2006).

87 See Dinah Rajak and Jock Stirrat, "Parochial Cosmopolitanism and the Power of Nostalgia," in *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, ed. David Mosse (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 161–76.

88 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Recruitment Brochure: General Information on Entitlements & Benefits for International Staff" (UNHCR, 2016), 5.

89 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).

Vertical disaggregation of knowledge

Finally, by centralizing authority in Geneva, policymakers have unintentionally created a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges international voices and perspectives at the expense of their national and local counterparts.[90] This hierarchy is characterized by the disaggregation of knowledge and power both upwards and downwards. On the one hand, policy setting and decision-making have been delegated upwards, to the humanitarian elite in Geneva who view themselves as spokespersons for the field as a whole. This elite group, born of the unique confluence of policymakers, practitioners, and diplomats found in the city, wields a disproportionate amount of authority and influence across various humanitarian forums. It is responsible for setting the policy agenda, articulating new rules and norms, and disseminating its priorities through policy documents and handbooks.[91] On the other hand, operations and risks have been devolved downwards, to the nationally- and locally-based actors and organizations tasked with implementing new policies and programs. High-level policy, as a result, has remained separate from on-the-ground operations, with implications for the ways in which roles and responsibilities have been assigned across the humanitarian field. The vertical disaggregation of knowledge and expertise is also an important source of imbalance across the field, particularly in reinforcing the position of the 'international' as distinct from and above the 'local'.

Most notably, in speaking on behalf of the humanitarian field, the policymaking elite in Geneva have asserted their claim to governance over this space. Drawing from the

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90 This section builds off of Autesserre's discussion of 'The Politics of Knowledge'. See Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chaps. 2 & 3.
91 See also Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 1.

city's traditional place at the centre of the humanitarian field, they speak from a position that is both historically and morally unique and that has conferred the authority to weigh in on a range of interests and issues. Importantly, they also have considerable influence over the distribution and arrangement of different forms of capital across the humanitarian field. In conjunction with New York and UN Member States, they are responsible for significant economic decisions regarding the allocation and disbursement of humanitarian funds, affecting nearly all actors and organizations across the regime. Professional standards and competencies are agreed upon and circulated among their networks, with regime-wide implications.[92] Policy debates on matters of coordination, accountability, and other issues are decided within closed circles, which, as mentioned above, are open only to an exclusive few.[93] Geneva, in other words, is the international arena in which the humanitarian professional and political elite convene to shape the form and functioning of the field as a whole.[94] The authority conferred to this elite group is felt and recognized far beyond the borders of the city, and transmitted through networks that reach nearly all corners of the humanitarian field.

This influence has been reinforced by the gamut of rules, processes, and categories that are defined and propagated from Geneva, all of which have maintained the upward flow of knowledge and power across the field. Most notably, increasingly stringent reporting requirements have ensured the continued authority and control of international

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92 Nahikian et al., "Mapping the Dissemination of Innovation and Practice through Humanitarian Professional Networks."
93 See Chapters 6-8.
94 See Robert Latham, "Mapping Global/Local Spaces," in *Political Space: Frontiers of Change and Governance in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yale H. Ferguson and R. J. Barry Jones, SUNY Series in Global Politics (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 131–50.

policymakers over nearly all aspects of humanitarian response. As a former UN

representative, now retired, explained:

> What I'm finding [...] is that as everything has got more structured, people are more
> removed from the situation and decision-making. [...] During my last assignment in
> Afghanistan, and for reasons I can appreciate, the headquarters, which was Geneva,
> [...] wanted information all the time. So you spend a lot of time pushing out
> reports. As opposed to once upon a time [...] I would send a telex report, which
> would be a few paragraphs, once a week, which meant you spent the rest of the
> time doing stuff.[95]

Reporting requirements, in other words, are limiting the flexibility and autonomy of the

practitioners charged with 'doing stuff' on the ground. While helping to standardise and

professionalize humanitarian response, such requirements have also preserved, and even

expanded, the influence and authority of headquarters. International policymakers, as a

result, have retained their role as purveyor of expertise and as the agents best placed to

manage and coordinate a response. Decision-making has been delegated upwards, often

at the expense of alternative or more localized approaches.[96]

Operations and risks, by contrast, have been devolved downwards to nationally-

and locally-based actors and organizations, which remain relatively marginal within the

prevailing structure of knowledge and information. As consumers of new policy

prescriptions and programs, their role is often that of the implementer or sub-contractor,

without meaningfully participating in the design or delivery of humanitarian response.[97]

Their task is to operationalize policies that have been 'handed down,' often under the

guidance of international actors. Their capabilities and capacities, as a result, are typically

overlooked, in favour of what one respondent labeled the "superiority of international

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95 Interview with UN representative (191).
96 Randolph Kent, Justin Armstrong, and Alice Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations
in the Humanitarian Sector: Global Transformations and Their Consequences" (London: Humanitarian
Futures Programme, 2013), 14.
97 See Chapter 8.

expertise."[98] Moreover, in an era of increased insecurity and danger to aid workers, these

actors must frequently assume the operational risks that international organizations can

choose to avoid.[99] This unequal relationship breeds frustration, resentment, and, at times,

resistance, while generating policies and interventions that repeatedly perform below

expectations.[100] As I discuss in a later chapter, it has also inspired contestation from

below, as local actors and organizations have increasingly sought to challenge the roles

and responsibilities inherent within the humanitarian field's prevailing division of labour.

In between these super- and subordinate positions are the brokers that disseminate

and report back on new policies and practices. Operating at the intersections of different

world-views and knowledge systems, brokers occupy an important position in negotiating

roles, relationships, and representations.[101] In the humanitarian field, these intermediaries

serve as the necessary link between headquarters and situations on the ground. As a

representative for the ICRC explained:

> We can be at meetings all the time and someone would have come back from Lake
> Chad from a two week trip listening to people and thinking about Boko Haram and
> meeting interesting people out there, etcetera, etcetera. [...] So we've got people
> coming through this building and leaving and coming back all the time. [...] That's
> very much the culture of ICRC. You know, the muddy boot is part of the
> authoritative footwear.[102]

The production and dissemination of knowledge across the humanitarian field is heavily

dependent on these 'muddy boots', who are regularly in between headquarters and the

field and can therefore report back on the implementation of new policies and programs

on the ground. They serve as a key check, however partial, for discussions in Geneva,

98 Interview with NGO representative (371).
99 Sean Healy and Sandrine Tiller, "Where Is Everyone? Responding to Emergencies in the Most Difficult
Places" (London: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2014).
100 Autesserre, *Peaceland*, chap. 3.
101 See Lewis and Mosse, *Development Brokers and Translators*.
102 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).

which one respondent described as otherwise "going around and around with no real base in reality."[103] Less known is the extent to which these brokers serve to stabilize or potentially transform policies and practices across the various contexts in which they operate.[104] Nonetheless, they occupy an authoritative position within the prevailing hierarchy of knowledge, particularly in serving as the crucial link between international and local realities.

Geneva's position as humanitarian capital, and the hierarchy on which it rests, thus speaks to the differential power dynamics inherent across this field. As policies take shape, the uncertainties and tensions that accompany such processes fade from view – guidelines and protocols are formalized, reporting lines and hierarchies are defined, and roles and responsibilities are assigned.[105] In the process, the humanitarian elite in Geneva retain an important role as representatives and spokespersons for the 'international,' thereby positioning themselves above and separate from the 'local'. The language and orthodoxy embedded within new policies are intimately tied to this hierarchy of knowledge, and perpetuate the roles and relationships inherent to the vertical structuring of influence and power.[106] Consequently, those outside the networks and institutions of

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103 Interview with NGO representative (321)

104 David Lewis and David Mosse suggest that in the development field brokers play a key role in translating policy into practice, by negotiating and building common meanings and definitions among the diverse groups of stakeholders involved in any development project. In doing so, they help to maintain, and at times challenge, the structures of power and authority inherent within the implementation of any new policy. See Lewis and Mosse, *Development Brokers and Translators*.

105 See Mosse, *Cultivating Development*.

106 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chap. 2.

Geneva have found it difficult to challenge and reshape globally defined standards, even as these hierarchies and inequalities have come increasingly under attack.[107]

Explaining the Limits of Reform, Revisited

The inherently political and parochial nature of humanitarian policymaking offers an alternative explanation for the shortcomings of reform. Contrary to most conventional accounts, which, as discussed previously, typically highlight the material and political constraints to change, the biases described above suggest that reform is likely to occur within certain limits. New policy initiatives are ultimately the product of time and place, and are shaped by the environment in which they are born. In Geneva, the intended and unintended effects of depoliticization, centralization, parochialism, and hierarchy have elevated certain voices and interests above others. They have influenced how policymakers understand and approach certain issues, which are filtered through a particular social and cultural lens. This is not to imply that policymakers in Geneva or elsewhere are wilfully misleading or undermining humanitarian reform efforts. Indeed, many are genuinely committed to change, and are troubled by the recurrent failings and limitations of aid. Nonetheless, in developing new reform agendas, these humanitarian elite are necessarily confined by the environment in which they reside, with all the biases and vested interests this entails. Policy development, much like the humanitarian field itself, thus remains deeply structured, at the expense of change more generally.

The Transformative Agenda offers a useful example of the parochialism and hierarchy inherent to the process of reform. Launched by the IASC in Geneva in 2011

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107 See Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System: How to Truly Localize Aid," 2015; Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015); Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go."

following high-profile setbacks in Haiti and Pakistan, this reform agenda sought to tackle

a number of important structural issues facing the humanitarian sector. It identified three

priority areas: "empowered leadership" that can be deployed from the outset of a crisis;

mutual accountability in delivering a collective humanitarian response; and more

effective and efficient coordination mechanisms.[108] The latter, in particular, aimed to

streamline the existing 'cluster approach,' which seeks to facilitate coordination among

humanitarian organizations and disaster-affected governments within specific technical

sectors.[109] This reform agenda also introduced a 'Level 3' or 'L3' designation for major

humanitarian emergencies requiring system-wide mobilization,[110] as well as the new

Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) designed to guide activities and resource

allocations across all phases of a response.[111] Its introduction was accompanied by a

number of guidance notes, protocols, and reference modules, all intended to help translate

its prescriptions into practice (see Table 3).

To many observers, the Transformative Agenda represented a "reform of the

reform,"[112] as it built on the key pillars and lessons learned of previous reform efforts,

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108 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions" (IASC, 2012), https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.
109 See Chapter 6.
110 Since 2013, OCHA has declared L3 crises in six countries: the Philippines (2013-2014), Central African Republic (2013-2015), Syria (2013-present), South Sudan (2014-2016), Iraq (2014-present), and Yemen (2015-present). The designation of an L3 emergency is based on the scale, complexity, and urgency of the crisis, as well as domestic response capacities and the reputational risk for the UN humanitarian system. Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: Definition and Procedures" (IASC, 2012).
111 See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle" (IASC, 2015).
112 Abby Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015" (London: ALNAP, 2015), 106.

Table 3: Key documents of the Transformative Agenda

Priority Area	Document	Purpose
Leadership	Protocols on Empowered Leadership and System-Wide (Level 3) Activation (2013)	Reference documents that define the concepts and actions needed for 'empowered leadership' in responding to Level 3 emergencies
	Humanitarian Coordination Pool	A tool used to identify qualified professionals for humanitarian coordination leadership positions
	Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism (2013)	An inter-agency roster of senior and experienced international staff that may be deployed in the context of a Level 3 emergency
Accountability	Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (2011)	Five commitments to accountability endorsed by IASC Principals and incorporated into policies and operational guidelines
	Accountability Analysis and Planning Tool (2013)	A synthesis of key industry standards and frameworks on accountability
	Operational Framework for Accountability to Affected Populations (2016)	A framework for identifying practical entry points for improving accountability to affected populations
Coordination	Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level (2012)	Reference guide developed for field practitioners that outlines the basic elements of cluster coordination at the country level
	Reference module for the implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (2015)	Reference module that defines the roles and responsibilities of international humanitarian actors and their interactions with each other and national and local actors
	The Multi Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment Manual (2015)	A joint needs assessment tool used to collect and analyse information on affected people in the context of sudden onset emergencies

most notably the UN-led 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda.[113] Responding to previous

criticisms of the "patchy"[114] and "process-oriented"[115] application of this earlier

initiative, the goal of the Transformative Agenda was to rejuvenate the humanitarian

reform effort by "simplifying processes and mechanisms, improving inter-agency

communication and collaboration, and building confidence in the system as a whole."[116]

Its "ultimate objective," as defined in its opening chapeau statement, was to improve

accountability to affected peoples through "effective and timely decision-making and

planning."[117]

The Transformative Agenda was directed by the IASC out of Geneva, and has been

identified by member organizations and other representatives as "the clearest recent

example of where the IASC has had a concrete impact."[118] The reform is considered to

have strengthened the leadership of humanitarian coordinators, reinforced international

surge capacities, and improved coordination at the global level, among other positive

outcomes.[119] The Transformative Agenda has also been commended for fostering greater

inter-agency coordination among IASC members and a number of important stakeholders

at the headquarters level. Several international NGOs, for example, invested heavily in

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113 Initiated by OCHA, the Humanitarian Reform Agenda also built on three pillars of change: more effective and strategic leadership; improved sectoral coordination through the cluster approach; and more adequate, timely, and predictable humanitarian funding. Expanded partnership among international, national, and local humanitarian actors was later added as a fourth pillar. See Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Humanitarian Reform," in *OCHA Annual Report 2006* (OCHA, 2006), http://www.unocha.org/annualreport/2006/index.html.
114 Anne Street, "Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process" (NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2009).
115 Julia Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010), 10.
116 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012," 2.
117 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2.
118 Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee," 9.
119 Susanna Krueger, Andras Derzsi-Horvath, and Julia Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda: A Review of Reviews and Their Follow-Up" (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, 2016).

the reform process, demonstrating a level of support that, in the opinion of one evaluation, "ran counter to the competing positions of their agencies with regard to funding and mandates."[120] The Transformative Agenda thus minimized some of the inter-agency competition and vested interests that typically accompany reform efforts,[121] at least within the Geneva network.

Despite this high-level support, however, proponents of the Transformative Agenda initially struggled to expand the reform process beyond UN and NGO headquarters. While striving to promote "concerted and coordinated action" across a variety of levels, from headquarters through to the regional and country management of IASC members and the regime more broadly,[122] uptake of the reform in practice was notably slower. NGOs, in particular, described IASC engagement as "weak and inconsistent," resulting in considerable confusion regarding the implications or impact of the Transformative Agenda.[123] Consequently, despite its regime-wide aspirations, the reform process was viewed by many as more about "getting the IASC house in order," as opposed to meaningfully engaging actors and organizations outside the policy networks in Geneva.[124]

Indeed, the Transformative Agenda was reflective of many of the limitations and biases of humanitarian policymaking described above. Most notably, policymakers in

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120 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, 33; Other NGOs, however, reported that they were insufficiently consulted throughout the development of the Transformative Agenda, resulting in what they describe as a "non-transparent and patchy process." See Yulia Dyukova and Pauline Chetcuti, "ACF International and the Transformative Agenda" (Paris: ACF International, 2014).
121 See Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010).
122 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012," 4.
123 Dyukova and Chetcuti, "ACF International and the Transformative Agenda," 11.
124 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 39.

Geneva struggled to connect the proposed changes to realities on the ground. As a headquarters-led initiative, its main outputs were primarily new tools and processes, which were then disseminated in the form of protocols and reference modules. Most were developed almost exclusively at the global level and applied inflexibly, regardless of context.[125] The Transformative Agenda further increased reporting requirements, which one evaluation has described as placing "undue burden on field staff."[126] Rather than streamlining existing processes, as originally intended, many of the changes proposed by this reform agenda ended up "feeding the process beast,"[127] without generating improvements on the ground.

The development and launch of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle is instructive in this regard. The HPC offers a set of inter-linked tools to assist humanitarian organizations in planning their activities and defining their collective responsibilities across the various phases of response. It outlines six successive stages within the full humanitarian 'cycle', from emergency response preparedness to review and evaluation.[128] In its original formulation, it was intended to be "applied flexibly and in a 'light-touch' manner," in order to ensure evidence-based and contextually relevant responses.[129] In practice, however, it achieved the opposite. A review of L3 emergencies since the rollout of the Transformative Agenda found that, in many cases, the timelines associated with the HPC were employed rigidly and without consideration of the type of emergency,

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125 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, 39.
126 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, 28.
127 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, 28.
128 The six identified stages in the humanitarian programme cycle include: emergency response preparedness; needs assessment and analysis; strategic response planning; implementation and monitoring; resource mobilization; and operational peer review and evaluation. See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Reference Module for the Implementation of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle."
129 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 1.

resulting in the delivery of aid and programming that was poorly adapted to the context in question.[130] One respondent, in commenting on the application of the HPC in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, similarly observed that its elements were applied "by the book," as dictated by the reference modules developed at headquarters.[131] In discussing the same response, another suggested that:

> In the Philippines, the entire focus was on ensuring that we were going through these processes as it was written in the guidance. It was supposed to be by the book and we still have now difficulties to convince some of our colleagues that the idea of having a humanitarian response plan is not simply to have a nice shiny document that we're going to show to the donors.[132]

Both agreed that the response faced pressure from headquarters to strictly adhere to the guidance laid out in the HPC, largely in order to demonstrate the utility of this new approach.[133] Humanitarian professionals, of course, face a persistent tension in balancing the imperatives of coordination against the need to ensure a flexible and decentralized approach. In the case of Typhoon Haiyan, demanding reporting requirements and regular requests for information from headquarters limited this flexibility, while inadvertently increasing the vertical nature of the response.[134] These one-way information flows, from field to the centre, have been observed across a number of responses applying the Transformative Agenda, typically with the effect of disempowering staff on the ground.[135]

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130 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda."
131 Interview with UN representative (116).
132 Interview with UN representative (141).
133 As the first major disaster following the launch of the Transformative Agenda, the 2013 response to Typhoon Haiyan was seen by many observers as an important first test of this reform package. See Teresa Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (New York: OCHA, 2014).
134 Hanley et al., 53.
135 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 25.

The challenges associated with the Transformative Agenda, moreover, have not been limited to the HPC. The IASC's Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP), which were adopted as part of the broader reform package and aimed to promote common operational guidelines on accountability among its members and partners, were similarly deemed "operationally irrelevant" for teams working on the ground.[136] Most notably, the action plans and tools associated with this framework, particularly in their initial implementation, were viewed as overly complex and ultimately disconnected from the needs of disaster-affected peoples.[137] L3 designations triggered by headquarters have also been criticized for being "top-heavy"[138] and prioritizing international activities and processes in ways that supplant national and local capacities.[139] In various ways, the Transformative Agenda has thus struggled to connect its tools and processes to activities on the ground.

This disconnect from operational realities can be partly attributed to the insularity and parochialism of Geneva. When asked about the shortcomings of this reform, one headquarters representative acknowledged that the "spirit" of the Transformative Agenda was "lost in the development of the tools, guidance and processes that were attached to it."[140] Another respondent attributed this issue, in part, to the exceptional worldview cultivated in Geneva:

> There is this tendency, especially once you get the UN involved, that there's process over process over process, and in total, this can have a really counterproductive effect, because it binds so much time and so many resources.

136 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, 29.
137 As described in a later chapter, CAAP and other sector-wide frameworks on accountability continue to struggle to address the 'accountability deficit' intrinsic to aid. See Chapter 7.
138 Michiel Hofman and Sandrine Tiller, "'Recently Noticed' Aid Actors: MSF's Interaction with a Changing Humanitarian Landscape," *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 63 (2015): 27.
139 See Chapter 6.
140 Interview with UN representative (141).

> And I do think Geneva being such a bubble, where you have an audience for things that go into a great level of detail, only contributes to things being so complex and so detailed.[141]

Those on the ground, she suggested, simply do not have the capacity or time needed to translate the highly technical, generalized guidance emerging from headquarters into concrete actions on the ground. This concern was echoed by many of the humanitarian professionals I interviewed, particularly those working in regional offices. The latter decried the disconnect between "the technocrats sitting in headquarters" and the rest of the field,[142] and criticized the notion that "the solution to everything is guidance."[143] The tools and recommendations of technocrats were viewed as having little operational relevance, which hampered the impact of proposed changes on the ground.

Several respondents suggested that the Transformative Agenda ultimately lost sight of its main objective – improved accountability to affected peoples – as the emphasis on process eventually overwhelmed all other concerns. Responding specifically to efforts to streamline the cluster approach, one UN representative explained:

> The work of the clusters, at the very beginning of the crisis, is very much around these processes and products. You don't have time to do anything else. And we are fighting our friends in OCHA to make them understand that this is not our objective. [...] The real deliverables are very different – that is, do we make a positive difference to the lives of the people or not? This is the real deliverable.[144]

The process demands entailed by the cluster approach, he contended, can often supplant other priorities, including, most notably, the responsive capacity of those charged with the delivery of aid to affected peoples. Referring to the Transformative Agenda more broadly, one evaluation concludes that the policymakers involved in its development

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141 Interview with external consultant (632).
142 Interview with UN representative (115).
143 Interview with UN representative (131).
144 Interview with UN representative (141).

ultimately "got lost in the process," producing a series of drafts and protocols that were perceived by those outside headquarters as "a never-ending process" and as generating "abstract" results.[145] Many of these processes inevitably faltered in their application, as the practitioners on the ground struggled to connect the policy to practice.

The Transformative Agenda further reinforced the vertical disaggregation of knowledge and power described above. As a headquarters-led process, policymakers in Geneva retained their central role in framing the policy agenda and articulating new rules and norms. Their proposed reforms were disseminated to staff on the ground, often, according to those I interviewed from regional offices, with little or no consultation. This agenda was then consolidated through new processes and reporting requirements, which solidified the upward flow of information. The development of the Transformative Agenda therefore reaffirmed the vertical structuring of knowledge and power, while diminishing the voices and perspectives of those charged with its implementation. It also ran counter to longstanding demands to better engage local actors, including national authorities and NGOs, in the design of new reform initiatives, despite concerns dating back to the implementation of the 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda.[146] As will be shown in later chapters, this hierarchical structure has had important implications in practice, particularly in reinforcing the role and authority of international expertise at the expense of more contextually grounded responses.[147]

Some of the shortcomings of the Transformative Agenda, it should be noted, can be traced back to the effects of inter-organizational competition and a lack of political will.

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145 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 36–37.
146 See Street, "Review of the Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process."
147 See Chapter 8, as well as Kent, Armstrong, and Obrecht, "The Future of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Humanitarian Sector," 14.

This reform initiative was, for example, viewed by some observers as an attempt to "give [the UN] more power,"[148] a criticism linked to lingering concerns regarding the presumed authority of UN agencies over the humanitarian regime. Others have blamed donor states for micromanaging the reform process while failing to change their own practices.[149] From its inception, however, the Transformative Agenda struggled to connect with operational realities and needs, a problem that has little to do with organizational competition or politics. Tasked with no less than "transforming the way in which the humanitarian community responds to emergencies,"[150] international policymakers fell back on universal templates and increasingly complex technical protocols. While offering sophisticated and intelligent guidance, these documents proved to be of limited value to those engaged in the everyday work of operations on the ground. Despite good intentions, the Transformative Agenda thus faltered in implementation, lost somewhere in the disconnect between the policy elite in headquarters and the rest of the field.

The Transformative Agenda faced the further challenge of improving policy coordination across the regime while responding to immediate humanitarian needs on the ground. The tension between these two imperatives is, perhaps, unavoidable, and yet humanitarian professionals are often confronted with the formidable task of attempting to achieve both at the same time. The most successful responses are typically those that employ existing policies and best practices while allowing for flexibility and learning on the ground, particularly through engaging with the environment in which aid workers are

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148 Interview with NGO representative (322).
149 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 34–35.
150 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Key Messages: The IASC Transformative Agenda" (IASC, 2012), 1.

deployed.[151] The ability to gather and act upon information from the field, integrate with

and take cues from the local environment, and coordinate and re-prioritize relief efforts in

response to emerging challenges are all essential to translating new policy frameworks

into positive outcomes on the ground. However, in maintaining the upward flow of

information, from the field to headquarters, the reporting requirements and process

demands prioritized by the Transformative Agenda instead stifled this flexibility and

responsive capacity. It promoted a vertical and ultimately parochial model of response,

resulting in important disconnects from realities confronted on the ground.

Faced with the challenge of reforming a vast and increasingly complex

humanitarian regime, policymakers in Geneva thus focused on the elements of reform

they understood best – specifically, the development and implementation of new

guidance notes and processes. While many of the problems inherent to the initial roll-out

of the Transformative Agenda were eventually corrected, often through training seminars

as well as updated, and substantially longer, reference modules, the reform effort as a

whole remained top-heavy and process-driven.[152] It failed, moreover, to escape the

confines of Geneva. As one UN representative, currently based in Southeast Asia,

explained:

> You get this very interesting worldview, which is seen out of the conference
> windows at the Palais des Nations and the various NGO conference rooms that
> there are in Geneva. Guidance and advice is handed down from on high from the
> Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the other bodies [...] that are all based there.

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151 From the related field of international peacebuilding, Lise Morjé Howard indicates that "first-level"
organizational learning, which derives from the capacity of international peacebuilders to engage with and
learn from the environment in which they are deployed, was a necessary condition in explaining successful
outcomes across six peacebuilding missions. See Lise Morjé Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars*
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
152 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 39.

> [...] And you have a bit of the sense that the people who live and work out of Geneva tend to see it as the humanitarian capital of the world.[153]

Geneva's exceptionalism and narrow worldview, he and others suggested, helps explain the shortcomings of the Transformative Agenda and other reform processes. While rich in economic, cultural, and social capital, all of which have conferred a unique authority over the field, the humanitarian elite in Geneva remain far removed from realities on the ground. The policies they develop rely on partial and often parochial views of the world outside the city, and lack much of the context and specificity needed to ensure that new reform initiatives ultimately reflect operational needs. The vertical structuring of knowledge and power further ensures that information flows are primarily upwards in nature, while transferring risks and operations downwards. As a result of such dynamics, the international, as represented in Geneva and elsewhere, has remained distinct from and above the rest of the field, at the expense of change more generally.

Conclusion

As de facto 'humanitarian capital' of the world, Geneva occupies a unique position within the broader humanitarian field. On the one hand, its peoples and outlook are quintessentially cosmopolitan, and driven by aspirations that transcend national boundaries. On the other hand, its internationalist outlook has inadvertently privileged certain perspectives and modes of operating, while consolidating authority and capital within a core group of policymakers. This hierarchical structure, I contend, helps explain the shortcomings of recent reform efforts, including the Transformative Agenda. Most notably, it has contributed to the prioritization of technical and generalizable knowledge

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153 Interview with UN representative (115). The Palais des Nations is the headquarters of the UN Office at Geneva.

over other forms of knowing, while closing off understandings of events and phenomena outside the boundaries of this group. It has also reinforced the predominance of international rule, through which a select group of policy elites has maintained its authority over the field as a whole. This structuring of knowledge and power, as represented in Geneva, poses a significant challenge to humanitarian reform, particularly in limiting the voices and perspectives that are heard through the process of change.

The following chapters build on this theme as they move the discussion from policy to practice. Through case studies of three prominent areas of reform – specifically, improving coordination, accountability, and partnership across the humanitarian regime – they examine how authority structures cultivated at the global level have been manifested in the organization and delivery of aid. The same hierarchical structures, I suggest, are visible across the practice of humanitarianism, with important implications for the process of reform more generally.

Coordinating Humanitarian Response: Humanitarian Clusters and the Hierarchy of Expertise

You can put their hands on the steering wheel for a short while, but then after that they really want to drive.

Interview with UN representative

Introduction

Coordination, in the eyes of some, represents "an almost impossible task"[1] within an increasingly large and diverse humanitarian field. A combination of factors, including organizational independence, competition for funding and media visibility, and the growing complexity of humanitarian operations, have all conspired to limit coordination and collaboration among aid organizations in the past. The coordination challenge has been further augmented by the expanding roles of militaries, businesses, and southern governments and NGOs in humanitarian response, which have posed additional difficulties of working across different languages and organizational cultures. These concerns have captured the attention of humanitarian professionals, who, in a recent survey, identified poorly coordinated response efforts as the single biggest weakness hindering aid effectiveness, above insecurity, limited access, and inadequate funding.[2]

Among the range of coordination challenges facing humanitarian actors, working with national and local authorities has, perhaps, proven the most intractable. While various mechanisms introduced over the past decade have generally improved

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1 Luz Saavedra and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response," ALNAP Working Paper (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2015), 5.
2 Glyn Taylor et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2012" (London: ALNAP, 2012), 67.

coordination among international players, these approaches have yet to ensure that national and local governments and NGOs are being adequately engaged within the management of humanitarian response. Across various contexts, evaluations have shown that international coordination structures tend to overwhelm national capacities for disaster response, or bypass them altogether. These concerns continue to linger to this day, despite a growing wealth of policy guidance on this issue. This raises the questions of how and to what extent should international and national coordination mechanisms intersect? Is there an inherent tension between an effective international response and one that incorporates national and local actors?

In this chapter, I consider reforms intended to improve coordination across the humanitarian regime, focusing in particular on those meant to expand collaboration with national and local authorities and organizations. While attempting to decentralize humanitarian response and support local counterparts in leading and coordinating their own relief and recovery efforts, the reforms introduced over the past decade, I contend, have instead maintained the patterns of hierarchy and exclusion they were intended to address. Most notably, they have served to reinforce practices and habits that remain premised on the large-scale, *international* delivery of aid. Historically, humanitarian responders have prioritized a top-down model of aid distribution, which has tended to exclude local actors and privilege the role of international practitioners in managing, coordinating and delivering assistance. Recent reforms have done little to correct this bias and, as I suggest, have further consolidated authority and capital within coordination structures led and managed by international actors. The past two decades of coordination reforms, in other words, have served to reproduce, and even reinforce, the boundaries

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between the international humanitarian elite and their national and local counterparts, on the innate assumption that the former are better placed to lead an effective response.

This chapter is the first of three to consider the practice of humanitarianism, thus shifting focus from the policy of aid to an assessment of its implications on the ground. Over the next three chapters, I consider three areas of reform, each of which has figured prominently over the past two decades of change. In each case, I explore how authority structures and elite biases cultivated at the global level have shaped the organization and delivery of aid. I contend that the same stratification of knowledge and expertise present at the global level has been reproduced on the ground, where the structural inequalities between the international and the local are being maintained. These studies suggest that, in spite of years of reform, the regime has yet to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions, behaviours, and power dynamics embedded in the structure of the humanitarian field.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first offers an overview of the coordination reforms enacted over the past two decades, focusing, in particular, on the enduring challenge of engaging national and local actors within the management of humanitarian response. The second section presents examples from Haiti and the Philippines, as illustrations of the challenges of coordination, generally, and working with national and local capacities, specifically. The final section explores some of the practices and habits underpinning the contemporary delivery model of international humanitarian response, many of which, I suggest, have been cultivated in the same authority structures present at the global level.

Coordinating Humanitarian Response

Over the past two decades, the humanitarian regime has embarked on a wide-ranging effort to improve coordination among aid actors, both globally and on the ground. The earliest reforms came on the heels of the inadequate response to the Rwandan genocide in the mid-1990s, which was blamed for the "substantial duplication of effort and inefficient use of resources."[3] A comprehensive review of the response singled out the intense competition and lack of coordination between humanitarian organizations as contributing factors in this regard.[4] As outlined in an earlier chapter, a number of reform initiatives followed this scathing review, including the establishment of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the elaboration of new professional codes and standards. Most were intended to improve coordination among international organizations, which, among other concerns, were viewed as overly independent and lacking accountability to each other and to the recipients of aid.

Following further missteps in response to the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan in the early 2000s, OCHA launched a regime-wide assessment of the capabilities and shortfalls of the UN humanitarian system and international aid more generally. Its Humanitarian Response Review identified "a number of well-known long-standing gaps that the system has failed to address," including "limited linkages and collaboration" among the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and NGOs.[5] These findings, released shortly after similarly poor evaluations of the Indian Ocean tsunami response in

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3 John Borton, Emery Brusset, and Alistair Hallam, "The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience. Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects," Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996), 151.
4 See Borton, Brusset, and Hallam.
5 Costanza Adinolfi et al., "Humanitarian Response Review" (New York and Geneva: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2005), 8,10.

2004,[6] prompted additional calls for reform, particularly in response to what was described as the regime's troubling history of "*ad hoc*, unpredictable humanitarian responses."[7]

Launched in 2005, the UN's Humanitarian Reform Agenda prioritized improved sectoral coordination as one of four pillars of reform, alongside more strategic leadership, timely and predictable humanitarian funding, and effective partnerships among international, national, and local humanitarian actors.[8] Specifically, the reform agenda introduced two new structures intended to improve coordination at the country level: Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) and the 'cluster' approach. HCTs act as the primary forum for strategic and operational decision-making in a given country, and include representatives from UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international NGOs and, occasionally, donors or local NGOs. They are chaired by a Humanitarian Coordinator, appointed by the UN, who is "responsible for leading and coordinating humanitarian action of relevant organizations in country."[9] Clusters operate below the HCTs, and are intended to help coordinate activity within specific technical sectors, such as emergency shelter, health, and food security, among others.[10] Each

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6 John Telford and John Cosgrave, "Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006); Ian Christoplos, "Links between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development in the Tsunami Response" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006).

7 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response" (IASC, 2006), 1.

8 See Chapter 2.

9 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Terms of Reference for the Humanitarian Coordinator" (IASC, 2009), 1.

10 At the global level, clusters have been established in 11 key sectors: logistics, nutrition, emergency shelter, camp management and coordination, health, protection, food security, emergency telecommunication, early recovery, education, and sanitation, water and hygiene. At the country level, specific clusters are activated according to needs on the ground. In certain situations, some clusters may be combined, while others may not be activated at all. See Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Cluster Coordination," accessed March 22, 2017, http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/cluster-coordination.

cluster is coordinated by a designated lead agency, which provides leadership for the

sector as a whole and is meant to act as a 'provider of last resort' when gaps in response

arise. Various guidance notes and reference modules have accompanied the introduction

and development of these coordination structures,[11] which were later reaffirmed and

expanded as part of the 2011 Transformative Agenda.[12]

The cluster approach, in particular, is thought to represent one of the most

important and visible innovations emerging from the last decade of humanitarian reform,

and is now seen as "the principal tool available to the international community for

coordinating and accounting for their response."[13] It operates at both the global and

country levels. Internationally, cluster leads aim to strengthen sector-wide response

capacities, through the development and dissemination of new standards and policies,

training and preparedness work, and operational support for responses on the ground. At

the country level, clusters serve as the chief forum for coordinating technical activities on

the ground, and bring together representatives of both international agencies as well as

national and local governments and NGOs. They are responsible for a broad range of

functions and activities at this level, including information sharing, strategic planning and

decision-making, advocacy, and monitoring and reporting. In settings at risk of recurrent

or significant new disasters, they are also commonly tasked with contingency planning,

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11 See, among others, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response"; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities" (IASC, 2011); Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level" (IASC, 2012); Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level" (IASC, 2015).
12 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Transformative Agenda 2012: Chapeau and Compendium of Actions" (IASC, 2012), https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.
13 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level," 3.

preparedness, and capacity building.[14] These activities, however, are dependent on available resources, such that many clusters are often forced to focus on a smaller number of responsibilities.[15]

Although the cluster approach has become a well-established component of humanitarian response, it is nonetheless dogged by a number of concerns. When first introduced, clusters were thought to be "UN-centric" and to deliberately sideline NGOs in favour of UN structures and leadership.[16] While NGO support for the approach has grown, some cluster participants continue to express concerns regarding the loss of organizational autonomy.[17] Others have criticized the overly bureaucratic approach to clusters, and suggest that they have been primarily "process- rather than action-oriented" in practice.[18] While the Transformation Agenda attempted to improve cluster efficiency, recent evaluations indicate that this reform initiative instead increased the process demands associated with cluster coordination.[19]

The cluster approach has also been criticized for failing to adequately engage national and local governments and NGOs. Early evaluations found that clusters tended to overwhelm, undermine, or bypass national capacities for disaster response.[20] The latter were often poorly understood prior to cluster rollout or were simply assumed to be weak

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14 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 9–10.
15 Paul Knox-Clarke and Leah Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2015), 38.
16 Abby Stoddard et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007), 19.
17 Knox-Clarke and Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters," 31–32.
18 Julia Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010), 10.
19 Susanna Krueger, Andras Derzsi-Horvath, and Julia Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda: A Review of Reviews and Their Follow-Up" (Berlin: Global Public Policy Institute, 2016), 23.
20 Stoddard et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation"; Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report"; Paul Harvey and Adele Harmer, "Building Trust: Challenges for National Authorities and International Aid Agencies in Working Together in Times of Disasters" (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2011).

or non-existent,[21] as will be discussed below in the case of Haiti. Governments, for their part, were initially wary of the cluster approach, as they feared that it would rival or supplant national disaster response mechanisms.[22] Many expressed concern that the emphasis on international coordination demonstrated insufficient respect for the primary role of states in disaster response, as outlined in UN Resolution 46/182. It should be noted, of course, that governments are not always well-placed to lead and coordinate a response, due to capacity constraints or their involvement in a conflict.[23] As suggested below, however, such constraints do not necessarily preclude engagement with national and local capacities.

The inclusion of national and local actors remains one of the most problematic elements of the cluster approach, and has been the focus of considerable attention in IASC policy papers and reference modules.[24] A recent guidance note on working with national authorities, for instance, states:

> Wherever possible, international humanitarian actors should organize themselves to support or complement existing national response mechanisms rather than create parallel ones which may actually weaken or undermine national efforts.[25]

The latest reference module for cluster coordination further indicates that "clusters are a temporary coordination solution" and should be de-activated as soon as national

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21 Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report."
22 See Paul Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected State in Disaster Response" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009).
23 Knox-Clarke and Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters," 63–67.
24 See, for example, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response"; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities"; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at the Country Level"; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level."
25 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities," 2.

authorities are able to assume leadership of the response.[26] To this end, cluster leads are encouraged to invite government officials to co-chair cluster meetings and are responsible for promoting various capacity building initiatives, including training and support for national authorities.[27] Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter, this guidance has yet to improve engagement of national and local governments and NGOs. The practices and habits associated with clusters remain firmly linked to the international delivery and coordination of aid, effectively reducing local counterparts to relatively marginal roles.

Views From the Ground

In reflecting back on the past two decades of coordination reforms, the introduction of HCTs and the cluster approach has arguably improved the effectiveness of international response. Although concerns remain, these inter-agency structures have generally produced better collaboration and less duplication of effort among humanitarian organizations. As indicated above, however, these approaches have struggled to appropriately engage national and local actors, including both governments and NGOs. Instead, the model of coordination advanced by the HCTs and cluster approach remains premised on the large-scale, international delivery of aid, which in effect pushes national and local capacities to the side.

The examples of Haiti and the Philippines offer useful illustrations of the challenges of coordination in the midst of humanitarian response, particularly in terms of engaging national and local actors. Focusing specifically on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti

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26 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level," 7.
27 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Operational Guidance for Cluster Lead Agencies on Working with National Authorities," 4.

and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, I discuss how the international response in both cases bypassed national and local governments and organizations. Top-down approaches to coordination remained the norm, to the detriment of the humanitarian efforts more broadly. These case studies demonstrate the prevailing tendency towards a model of aid delivery that prioritizes the role of international practitioners in managing, coordinating and distributing assistance, regardless of existing capacities on the ground. In the final section of the chapter, I zoom in on the practices and habits that underpin this approach, and which have maintained the prevailing hierarchies of elite authority and expertise across the humanitarian field.

While both cases represent large, sudden-onset disasters that generated significant international attention and resources, they differ in one key respect. As the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Haiti is often characterized as suffering from a "recurrent, low-intensity crisis."[28] Its disaster response capacities are limited and, following the 2010 earthquake, were all but wiped out alongside the devastation of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital.[29] The Philippines, by contrast, is a middle-income country that has dedicated significant resources to strengthening its national response capacities. Despite their differing levels of capacity, however, in both countries national ownership of the relief and recovery operations was supplanted by the imposition of international coordination structures, with implications for the effectiveness of the responses as a whole. Importantly, for the purposes of this study, both disasters also occurred shortly after major periods of reform – the 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda and 2011 Transformative Agenda, respectively – and were thus viewed as critical tests of these

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28 Canadian International Development Agency, *Canadian cooperation with Haiti: Reflecting on a decade of 'difficult partnership'* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2004), 5.
29 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti" (IASC, 2010).

initiatives. With these considerations in mind, I turn now to the examples of Haiti and the Philippines.

Haiti

The January 2010 earthquake in Haiti represented the deadliest natural disaster in the country's history, and the largest internationally since the introduction of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda in 2005. The 7.0-magnitude earthquake had devastating effects, killing an estimated 230,000 people and displacing another 2.3 million.[30] Much of the country's infrastructure and basic services was destroyed, while the collapse of many public buildings in Port-au-Prince left the civil service crippled. The scale of devastation was further compounded by Haiti's underlying vulnerabilities, including its endemic poverty and recurrent natural and political crises. A cholera outbreak ten months after the earthquake augmented the already overwhelming loss of life, and claimed an additional 4,800 lives in less than a year.[31]

Initial rescue efforts were led by Haitians themselves, and aided by the large presence of NGOs already on the ground as well as the country's proximity to North America. Despite its reduced capacity, the government's Direction de la Protection Civile (DPC) was operational the day after the earthquake,[32] and began to coordinate national and civil society relief efforts within the first week of the crisis.[33] Local NGOs were also active on the ground, and provided immediate assistance to those affected by the disaster. These early efforts were soon supported by various international search and rescue teams,

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30 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 5.
31 Alejando Cravioto et al., "Final Report of the Independent Panel of Experts on the Cholera Outbreak in Haiti" (United Nations, 2011), 8.
32 The DPC is part of the Haitian Ministry of the Interior. It is primarily responsible for the management of risks and disasters across Haiti. "Direction de La Protection Civile," Centre de Renseignements Administratifs d'Haïti, accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.servicespublics.gouv.ht/site/rsmo/DPC.
33 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti," 7–8.

followed by an influx of aid organizations and foreign militaries. By the end of the first month of the crisis, an estimated 400 international NGOs were operating in Haiti, all ostensibly motivated by the mantra of "build back better."[34]

Given the number of organizations operating on the ground, effective coordination was viewed as critical to the success of the humanitarian response. The cluster approach had been previously used in Haiti in response to flooding in 2008, and was re-activated after the earthquake. Twelve clusters were launched in Haiti and another six in neighbouring Dominican Republic, although many were hampered by delays and weak leadership.[35] In a number of cases, the government appointed ministry officials to co-lead the clusters.[36] Following an initial delay, the Humanitarian Country Team for Haiti was convened in February 2010 to coordinate the overall response and provide strategic guidance.

The effectiveness of these coordination structures, however, was limited by a number of factors. Most notably, the presence of hundreds of organizations on the ground, which included NGOs, religious groups, and private sector providers of varying sizes and levels of professionalism, led to considerable chaos in the first months of the response. In some cases, cluster leads were responsible for coordinating the activities of over 200 participants.[37] Many of these actors were unfamiliar with the cluster approach or simply bypassed it altogether. As a result, cluster meetings were often forced to work according to the lowest common denominator and, at best, served as platforms for the

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34 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti" (IASC, 2010), 8, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda.
35 Abhijit Bhattacharjee and Roberta Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake" (OCHA, 2011), 23.
36 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti," 9.
37 Bhattacharjee and Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake," 27.

exchange of information.[38] The logistical constraints posed by the scale of the disaster

and the destruction of basic infrastructure further delayed the scaling up of some clusters.

Many attributed the setbacks encountered in Haiti to NGO competition over funding and

media coverage, as well as deficiencies inherent to the political economy of aid.[39] In

some cases, these shortcomings were attributed to the cluster system itself,[40] which, when

coupled with the similarly poor international response to flooding in Pakistan later in

2010, provided the impetus for the launch of the Transformative Agenda one year later.[41]

The cluster approach in Haiti further served to marginalize national and local

actors, who were largely bypassed from the outset of the response.[42] Many of the clusters,

for instance, operated independently of the government's own technical ministries,

resulting in the creation of parallel structures and the latter's almost total exclusion from

relief and recovery planning.[43] Local NGOs and civil society actors were similarly

excluded from cluster groups, and instead relegated to the role of implementing

partners.[44] Aid agencies therefore lacked the contextual and cultural knowledge offered

by local actors, which was, as a result, poorly reflected in the design and delivery of the

response. As one report concludes:

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38 Bhattacharjee and Lossio, 27.

39 Lancet, "Growth of Aid and the Decline of Humanitarianism," *The Lancet* 375, no. 9711 (January 23, 2010): 253; Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010).

40 See, for example, Jean-Marc Biquet, "Haiti: Between Emergency and Reconstruction," *International Development Policy* 3, no. 4 (2013), http://poldev.revues.org/1600.

41 Andrea Binder, "Is the Humanitarian Failure in Haiti a System Failure?," *International Development Policy* 3, no. 4 (2013): para. 12, http://poldev.revues.org/1625.

42 François Grünewald, Andrea Binder, and Yves Georges, "Inter-agency Real-time Evaluation in Haiti: 3 Months after the Earthquake" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010), 43; Bhattacharjee and Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake"; Jonathan Patrick, "Haiti Earthquake Response: Emerging Evaluation Lessons," Evaluation Insights (OECD-DAC, 2011).

43 Bhattacharjee and Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake," 32.

44 Anne Street, "Humanitarian Partnerships: What Do They Really Mean?," *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 50 (2011): 43–45.

> Largely missing from [needs] assessments were contextual analyses (particularly on political and economic issues) and capacity assessments of Haitian stakeholders (most notably the Haitian government) which would have allowed the humanitarian community a greater understanding of Haitian social and political dynamics and of the capacities of their natural Haitian partners across government and civil society to engage with and even lead recovery.[45]

Instead, many clusters worked "almost to the exclusion" of these actors, which, over time, contributed to increasingly strained relations with the government and a growing sense of bitterness among the Haitian population at large.[46]

The exclusion of national and local actors can, in part, be attributed to the practices and behaviours of the international responders, who operated in almost total disregard of the local context. Many of these external actors were motivated by what one evaluator calls "the myth of speed,"[47] and a sense of urgency that inhibited consideration or recognition of pre-existing capacities. In the case of Haiti, this bias contributed to the "under-estimation and under-utilization" of national and local capacities, such that the contributions of Haitians themselves were frequently ignored or overlooked.[48] The activities of international actors were based on the assumption that little or no capacity existed locally; most, as a result, looked externally for solutions and short-term fixes.[49] They further failed to link into Haiti's strong and well-organized civil society network, which predated the earthquake.[50] Instead, the approach taken was reflective of the

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45 Patrick, "Haiti Earthquake Response," 3.

46 Bhattacharjee and Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake," 32; See also François Grünewald and Blanche Renaudin, "Real-Time Evaluation of the Response to the Haiti Earthquake of 12 January 2010" (Groupe URD, 2010); Mark Schuller, "Haiti's Bitter Harvest: Humanitarian Aid in the 'Republic of NGOs,'" in *The Golden Fleece: Manipulation and Independence in Humanitarian Action*, ed. Antonio Donini (Boulder, CO: Kumarian Press, 2012), 171–93.

47 Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report," 38.

48 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti," 18.

49 Haiti Joint Evaluation, "An Independent Joint Evaluation of the Haiti Earthquake Humanitarian Response" (CARE and Save the Children, 2010), 32.

50 Patrick Duplat and Emilie Parry, "Haiti: From the Ground Up" (Washington, D.C.: Refugees International, 2010).

longstanding trend of donor states and international NGOs in Haiti choosing to 'sidestep' national and local actors viewed as either inefficient or corrupt.[51]

Other barriers to local engagement were more basic in nature. The expatriate staff that accompanied the international response was composed primarily of newcomers to Haiti, who often had little knowledge of the country's history or culture. Many of these humanitarians had limited abilities in French or Creole, thus limiting their ability to work with local partners or adequately assess needs on the ground.[52] Cluster meetings, specifically, were typically conducted in English, while valuable coordination and information materials were rarely translated into French or Creole.[53] The majority of these meetings, moreover, were held in the UN logistics base, which was inaccessible to local people. Even for those organizations able to access this base, the costs incurred in both resources and travel time ensured that only the largest were able to regularly participate in cluster activities.[54] While some clusters, including the health and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) groups, did eventually relocate their meeting spaces, these barriers diminished the scope for local engagement, reducing it to, at best, token participation.

The international response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti thus supplanted, rather than supported, local actors from the outset of the response. The clusters regularly

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51 See Schuller, "Haiti's Bitter Harvest."
52 Grünewald, Binder, and Georges, "Inter-agency Real-time Evaluation in Haiti: 3 Months after the Earthquake"; Haiti Joint Evaluation, "An Independent Joint Evaluation of the Haiti Earthquake Humanitarian Response."
53 Aimee Ansari, "Haiti: A Once-in-a-Century Chance for Change" (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2010); Grünewald, Binder, and Georges, "Inter-agency Real-time Evaluation in Haiti: 3 Months after the Earthquake."
54 Bhattacharjee and Lossio, "Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake," 31.

excluded national authorities and NGOs, and thus missed opportunities to engage these actors in designing or delivering aid efforts in the country. As one report concludes:

> Largely unfamiliar with humanitarian natural disasters in urban areas and compounded by poor contextual understanding of Haiti's society and economy and of the capacity of key stakeholders, the humanitarian community's reaction was a classical response: self contained, working outside government systems and reliant on imported material and personnel.[55]

The effects of this response were felt both symbolically, in the exclusion of local actors from the decisions affecting their lives, and materially; one estimate suggests that, two years after the earthquake, less than 0.6 percent of the $6.04 billion spent on humanitarian relief and recovery in Haiti had been disbursed through local NGOs and private businesses.[56] The exclusion of local actors therefore affected all elements of the response, with lasting implications for recovery operations across the country.

Some observers have used the case of Haiti to highlight the recurrent shortcomings of humanitarian reform. They point to a number of problems encountered in Haiti that are endemic to aid – including the lack of coordination and the competition over funding and media coverage – and conclude that, five years after its introduction, the Humanitarian Reform Agenda had generated few meaningful changes in the practice of humanitarian response.[57] They further suggest that international humanitarian organizations will continue to act "to the detriment of the wider system" until the underlying political economy of aid is addressed.[58] There is, particularly in the case of Haiti, a grain of truth inherent to this conclusion. It ignores, however, the underlying relations between actors

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55 Patrick, "Haiti Earthquake Response," 4.
56 Lilianne Fan, "Disaster as Opportunity?: Building Back Better in Aceh, Myanmar and Haiti" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2013).
57 Ramalingam and Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?"
58 Ramalingam and Barnett, 6.

in the humanitarian field, and the entrenched practices and biases that led certain

humanitarians to assume authority over relief efforts in the country. In Haiti, national and

local capacities were simply assumed to be too weak to be of value to the overall

response, and were thus overlooked in the design and delivery of aid. In the Philippines,

to which I now turn, the international response pushed these capacities to the side,

neglecting both the government's substantial investments in its national response systems

and its desire to lead the relief and recovery efforts.

Philippines

Known locally as Yolanda, Typhoon Haiyan was the strongest tropical cyclone

ever recorded when it struck the central islands of the Philippines on 8 November 2013.

The typhoon killed over 6,000 people and displaced another 4 million, many of whom

were residing in areas characterized by high levels of poverty. The city of Tacloban on

the island of Leyte was the hardest hit and lost about 90 percent of its infrastructure,

including sea and air ports.[59] Typhoon Haiyan, moreover, arrived on the heels of several

major crises across the Philippines, including a series of tropical storms and typhoons, the

Bohol earthquake in October 2013, and ongoing clashes with separatist groups. National

response capacities were thus already under strain prior to the arrival of Typhoon

Haiyan.[60]

As a country prone to natural hazards, the Philippines had dedicated significant

resources to strengthening its national response capacities prior to the disaster. In 2007,

its government adopted the cluster approach to better prepare for and respond to natural

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59 Abby Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015" (London: ALNAP, 2015), 65.
60 Charles-Antoine Hofmann et al., "Learning Review of the Cooperation between the Government of the Philippines and Humanitarian Actors in Their Response to Typhoon Yolanda" (Disaster Response Dialogue, 2014), 9.

disasters, and since then had regularly engaged both national and international partners in a range of disaster preparedness programs.[61] At the time of the typhoon, national and local NGOs in the country were also actively participating in a number of inter-organizational networks, with the goal of improving humanitarian performance and reducing the impact of future disasters.[62]

Despite these measures, however, the scale of the devastation left by Typhoon Haiyan necessitated the government's appeal for international assistance in the days following the disaster. In response to this request, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator triggered a Level 3 (L3) response, requiring "system-wide emergency activation,"[63] which initiated a surge of international resources and staff. Nearly $1 billion in funding was mobilized, from both government donors and private sector sources, including notably the Filipino diaspora.[64] In contrast to the shortcomings encountered in Haiti, the response to Typhoon Haiyan was widely considered a success. Despite the scale of the crisis, evaluations found the response to be "timely, at scale and appropriately targeted to immediate needs."[65] For some, the successful response to Typhoon Haiyan was an example "of how 'tremendously' the capacity of the international system has improved," particularly when compared to the decade before.[66]

The coordination of the response effort has also been described in positive terms. The clusters were relatively well-funded and were able to scale up quickly after the

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61 Teresa Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (New York: OCHA, 2014), 18.
62 See Kim Scriven, "The Philippines: Understanding Humanitarian Networks" (ALNAP, 2012).
63 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Humanitarian System-Wide Emergency Activation: Definition and Procedures" (IASC, 2012), 1.
64 Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 65.
65 Stoddard et al., 57.
66 Stoddard et al., 58.

typhoon had passed. Standby agreements and the disaster preparedness efforts of the

government further facilitated close cooperation in the early days of the response.[67]

Although a number of agencies still chose to bypass the cluster system, the approach was

generally considered effective, resulting in improved coverage and quality of assistance.[68]

Despite its successes, the response to Typhoon Haiyan was nonetheless faulted for

not better engaging with national and local authorities. Although the disaster management

capacities of the Philippines were stronger than those of Haiti, the surge of international

personnel eventually overwhelmed national structures. According to one report:

> Once the surge had started and the humanitarian architecture began to take shape it
> gained a momentum of its own, [...] there was very limited latitude for government
> to shape or influence the humanitarian architecture. [...] That is not to say the
> government rejected it; more that it was overwhelming.[69]

Pre-existing partnerships were bypassed or ignored, as international personnel largely

assumed authority over the response.[70] Within the clusters, although government officials

co-chaired many of the meetings and remained nominally in the lead, many reportedly

felt "pushed to one side" by the number and influence of international players in the

room.[71] Consequently, the planning processes of the government and international

organizations soon diverged as the two followed complementary but separate paths.

Opportunities to support the government's own recovery and reconstruction plan,

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67 Stoddard et al., 65.
68 Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response," 52–54.
69 Andy Featherstone, "Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (Christian Aid, 2014), 19; See also Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response."
70 Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 61.
71 Interview with UN representative (115). See also Stoddard et al., 61.

published one month after the disaster, were missed, while the sizeable international

presence undercut national ownership of the response.[72]

The response was even less successful in involving civil society partners. Although

a number of local NGOs and networks were operating on the ground, their engagement

within international coordination structures remained relatively limited and few were

invited to attend cluster meetings. Among those that did, the lack of translation and the

"international look and feel" of the coordination meetings were found to be unwelcoming

or intimidating, much like in Haiti.[73] Most meetings were held in urban centres, often far

from the frontlines of the response, thus imposing considerable investments of time and

travel on local actors. For these reasons, representatives of national and local NGOs

reported feeling excluded from the clusters, and many chose to absent themselves over

time.[74] Trust remained low, as many local humanitarians felt that their international NGO

and UN counterparts did not respect their capacities and contextual knowledge.[75]

The limited engagement of national and local actors in the Haiyan response can be

partly attributed to the need to demonstrate a successful international response. As the

first major natural disaster since the introduction of the Transformative Agenda, the

response was viewed by many as a critical test of this latest reform package.[76] As

mentioned in the previous chapter, many of its protocols were thus applied "by the book"

as a means to validate this model to an external audience. This preference for pre-

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72 See Featherstone, "Missed Again"; Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response."
73 Featherstone, "Missed Again," 20; See also John Tipper, "Engaging with Clusters: Empowering and Learning from Local Organizations," *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 63 (2015): 23–25.
74 Featherstone, "Missed Again."
75 Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response," 51.
76 Hanley et al., 53.

packaged guidance inadvertently caused a number of issues in coordinating with national

partners. As one report concludes:

> The humanitarian structure that was deployed in response to Haiyan was little
> different in shape and composition to that deployed in Pakistan, Haiti or Central
> African Republic. As a consequence, many international staff felt very comfortable
> with it and were able to use it effectively. Nevertheless, despite the history of
> humanitarian response in the Philippines, it still felt very foreign to many of the
> government officials who were tasked to engage with it.[77]

The high visibility of the crisis, moreover, attracted the attention of various heads of

agencies, which further contributed to the rigid application of international coordination

structures. This added to the increasingly vertical and siloed nature of the response, as

reporting lines to headquarters frequently prevailed over horizontal linkages with

government or local NGOs.[78]

The international response also revealed the preference for particular forms of

expertise, at the expense of knowledge that was more contextually or culturally grounded.

The surge personnel that arrived in the Philippines were largely technical advisors, and

were recruited from global rosters on the basis of their proficiency in particular sectors.

In many cases, they replaced locally-based UN or NGO staff, despite having only

minimal knowledge of the local context or of government structures. Country expertise, it

can be inferred, was thus deemed less important or secondary to the sectoral expertise of

surge personnel. As a result, the views and interests of national and local actors were

largely marginalized or pushed to the side. According to one evaluation:

> The net effect of the surge was to deliver an effective response, but one that
> sidelined many in-country staff, failed to adequately join up with national systems,
> and ended up creating parallel structures built upon a global model that was not
> well-suited to the national-led, middle-income country context of the Philippines. It

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77 Featherstone, "Missed Again," 19.
78 Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response," 53.

would have been more efficient if it had truly adapted to the context. This may well have involved down-scaling and "nationalizing" the surge capacity earlier.[79]

By failing to prioritize either knowledge of the local context or pre-existing relationships with national partners, the international response thus diverged along its own distinct path. It delivered an effective response, but at the expense of strengthening national capacities or fostering ownership. Its top-down approach, moreover, was largely perceived by national counterparts as evidence of the "arrogance and disrespect"[80] of international personnel, and was a source of lingering resentment among communities who felt "obliged to be grateful."[81]

This imbalance remained relatively unchanged for months after the beginning of the Haiyan response. International coordination structures were left in place and, according to various reports, typically struggled to hand over leadership and responsibility of recovery efforts to government officials.[82] This situation only changed in July 2014, nearly eight months later, when the government announced the end of humanitarian programming and declared that the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Rehabilitation and Recovery would assume all coordination capacities. This announcement, in the opinion of one observer, was reflective of the "deeper conceptual tension" between, on the one hand, the host government's sovereignty and desire to manage the disaster response in its own country and, on the other, the international humanitarian community's presumed leadership of these situations.[83] Tellingly, the

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79 Hanley et al., 67.
80 Hanley et al., 45.
81 See Jonathan Corpus Ong, Jaime Manuel Flores, and Pamela Combinido, "Obliged to Be Grateful: How Local Communities Experienced Humanitarian Actors in the Haiyan Response" (Plan International, 2015).
82 Featherstone, "Missed Again," 24; Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response," 50.
83 Hanley et al., "IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response," 50.

government of the Philippines did not request international assistance in response to Typhoon Hagupit one year later, and instead assumed authority for the coordination of all relief efforts in the country.[84]

While viewed as more successful than the response in Haiti, international relief and recovery efforts in the Philippines were, arguably, achieved at the expense of national ownership. The international response was largely the same as that in Haiti; based on the large-scale, international delivery of aid in a context where the government was assumed to have limited ability to cope. In both cases, national and local actors were marginalized or bypassed altogether, regardless of their pre-existing capacities or guidance encouraging humanitarian organizations to support national response mechanisms.

The examples of Haiti and the Philippines are indicative of the habituated practice of top-down, internationally led approaches to aid delivery and coordination. This model of aid distribution, as described by Ben Ramalingam and John Mitchell, is adjusted for "direct, large-scale delivery in conditions where the state and national bodies have little or no capacity," irrespective of actual existing capacities on the ground.[85] It prioritizes international action and identifies a central role for international practitioners in managing, coordinating and delivering an effective response. Nonetheless, as is evident from the case studies above, even the most devastated governments and communities typically retain some capacity to respond, and have much to contribute in terms of locally and culturally grounded understandings of the context in question. These contributions, however, often go unnoticed or are pushed to the side, to the detriment of the response

84 IRIN, "From Haiyan to Hagupit - What Changed?," *IRIN News*, December 8, 2014, http://www.irinnews.org/report/100925/haiyan-hagupit-what-changed.
85 Ben Ramalingam and John Mitchell, "Responding to Changing Needs? Challenges and Opportunities for Humanitarian Action" (ALNAP, 2014), 27.

more broadly. In the next section, I consider the habits and behaviours inherent to this

approach, which, as I suggest, reinforce a hierarchy of expertise that privileges the

authority of international responders and excludes national and local actors in the

coordination of humanitarian response.

The Practice of Coordination

This section explores the practices and habits underpinning the contemporary

model of humanitarian coordination. It focuses on four dimensions of humanitarian

practice: language, work routines, and other barriers to entry; the need for speed; the

prioritization of sectoral expertise over other forms of knowledge; and the preference for

outside solutions. Each of these practices, I contend, are historically rooted and

entrenched in various forms of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. They are linked to

the stratification of authority and expertise present at the global policy level, and have

served to reproduce the same structural inequalities on the ground. They suggest,

moreover, that reforms enacted over the past two decades have yet to challenge some of

the fundamental assumptions and power dynamics intrinsic to the humanitarian field, a

discussion I take up at the end of the chapter.

Barriers to entry

Various barriers to entry serve to separate international responders from their

national and local counterparts. Chief among these is the issue of language. As seen in

the case of Haiti and the Philippines and observed elsewhere,[86] coordination meetings run

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86 In surveys of over 1,300 aid professionals and government officials across 100 countries, a majority of respondents indicated that coordination meetings were not held in the national language of the host country or with translation for national participants. See Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015," 77.

by international organizations are typically conducted in English and to a lesser extent

French, which have remained the *lingua francas* of international humanitarian response

efforts. Translation services in clusters remain rare, while the documents and resources

prepared for these meetings are seldom circulated in local languages. Combined with the

heavy use of technical jargon and acronyms, described by one observer as "a very

specific, humanitarian variant of English,"[87] this cultural barrier tends to diminish the

scope for local participation. As explained by the employee of a Cambodian NGO:

> INGO staff speak fast in English and use big words, and by doing so, shut local
> staff out of decision making. Those who are not adept at English or at
> communicating in the style of the foreign culture were likely to miss opportunities
> for meaningful engagement.[88]

The issue of language serves as a significant barrier to the participation of government

officials and civil society representatives. Although a longstanding concern and noted in

various evaluations spanning a range of contexts, it has yet to be addressed in a

meaningful way.[89]

The work routines of international responders and the manner in which cluster

meetings are run can amplify these dynamics. In some cases, the foreign-dominated and

fast-paced nature of cluster meetings can inadvertently contribute to the exclusion of

government officials and local NGO representatives. One global cluster lead, reflecting

on the response to Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu in 2015, acknowledges that the environment

created in clusters can be off-putting for many national staff:

> The culture was completely foreign – early morning starts, loud, a militarized
> culture, everyone there with their wanker jackets and badges, high pressure,

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87 Knox-Clarke and Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters," 56.
88 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, "The Listening Project Issue Paper: The Role of Staffing
Decisions" (Cambridge, MA: CDA, 2010), 4.
89 ALNAP, "How Can We Better Involve National Actors in Humanitarian Coordination?" (London:
ALNAP/ODI, 2016), 12.

completely different from the way anyone operates [in Vanuatu]. It would have been an extremely difficult thing for a [Ni-Vanuatu] to walk into that room.[90]

Even the markers of membership within clusters, which among humanitarian professionals can include the Red Cross logo, the MSF t-shirt, or agency ID cards, among others, can erect boundaries between international and local staff. Without such markers, the latter can feel like "poor relations," whose views and opinions are thought to be of limited value.[91]

International surge staff, moreover, often move from one context to the next, and may establish personal networks and pre-existing relations that further push national and local counterparts to the side. One observer suggests that social ties can be equally as important as formal meetings in improving coordination; they help professionals adapt to changing contexts, enable discussion of sensitive topics, and build trust on the ground.[92] These informal exchanges, however, can also erect significant barriers between international and local actors by excluding those considered to be outside the 'in-group'. Several of the professionals I interviewed acknowledged that discussions of the most important issues often occur outside of official coordination platforms, in what one respondent described as "non-logo meetings."[93] These unofficial meetings, they suggested, provide space to discuss sensitive issues, such as corruption or security, or to "wash our dirty laundry" away from national and local counterparts.[94] In being excluded from these meetings, however, the latter may feel as though they are not trusted, or that

90 Rebecca Barber, "One Size Doesn't Fit All: Tailoring the International Response to the National Need Following Vanuatu's Cyclone Pam" (Save the Children, 2015), 19.
91 See, for example, Tipper, "Engaging with Clusters," 19.
92 Saavedra and Knox-Clarke, "Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response," 44–45.
93 Interview with NGO representative (322).
94 Interview with UN representative (141).

they do not have the right skills and competencies needed to work effectively with international staff.[95]

A final, perhaps obvious, barrier relates to the location of cluster meetings. In many cases, coordination platforms are hosted within secured compounds or in urban centres that are far from the frontlines of response, thereby imposing considerable investments of time and travel on local actors or closing off participation altogether, as was the case in Haiti.[96] The location of cluster meetings also has the effect of centralizing humanitarian response efforts. As one cluster participant explains:

> Most of the heads of agency are in the capital and a lot of decisions are made there without proper consultation of people based in (subnational area). I've seen that in other countries as well […] the decision-making process is often too centralized.[97]

The overall coordination of response is typically centralized at the national level and thus disconnected from those working on the ground, including local officials and NGOs. While cluster mechanisms are intended to develop links with and build on local capacities, valuable insights regarding local needs and contexts may, as a result, be overlooked or ignored in favour of the international response. Distance from local contexts may also contribute to misunderstandings or incorrect framing of the scope of problems on the ground, with implications for the overall response.[98]

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95 See also Harvey and Harmer, "Building Trust," 16–17.
96 ALNAP, "How Can We Better Involve National Actors in Humanitarian Coordination?," 13.
97 Knox-Clarke and Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters," 69.
98 Séverine Autesserre describes a similar dynamic with respect to international peacebuilding operations, in which mission headquarters are frequently located in national capitals and thus far from operational environments. This separation, she suggests, has contributed to incorrect and potentially dangerous diagnoses of the situation on the ground. See Séverine Autesserre, "Hobbes and the Congo: Frames, Local Violence, and International Intervention," *International Organization* 63, no. 2 (2009): 249–80; Séverine Autesserre, "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences," *African Affairs* 111, no. 443 (April 1, 2012): 202–22, https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr080.

These barriers speak to the prevailing imbalances in cultural and social capital within humanitarian response. Most notably, the examples indicated above suggest that knowledge and network access remain limited to particular social groupings and locales. In many contexts, these imbalances circumscribe the space for exchange, by diminishing the scope for local participation or excluding local actors altogether. International humanitarian personnel, of course, can face significant practical constraints in attempting to address these barriers, depending on the location of the emergency and the native language. Nonetheless, the most effective international responses have been those able to level these inequities in knowledge and network capital and foster opportunities for dialogue between international and local actors. In Mozambique, for example, timely responses to flooding and relatively cooperative relations between aid agencies and government have been credited to the ability of international staff to speak the local language. A large number of expatriates in Mozambique speak Portuguese and are on long-term postings, thus enabling them to develop effective working relations with national authorities.[99] More generally, aid recipients report that local language skills improve the ability of aid practitioners to serve beneficiaries and foster good relationships with the community; in doing so, they also send an important implicit message that international staff value the local population.[100] These positive examples, however, remain the minority, particularly as the top-down model of aid delivery continues to prevail across the sector.[101]

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99 See Conor Foley, "Mozambique: A Case Study in the Role of the Affected State in Humanitarian Action" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007).
100 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, "The Role of Staffing Decisions," 3–4.
101 Ramalingam and Mitchell, "Responding to Changing Needs?," 27–28.

The 'need for speed'

The 'need for speed' that frequently accompanies disaster response can further

inhibit recognition of existing capacities on the ground. The contemporary model of

humanitarian coordination is premised on speed and a sense of urgency; clusters, for

instance, are to be activated in the face of "a sharp deterioration or significant change in

the humanitarian situation" and when the "scale of need" exceeds national response

capacities.[102] In practice, these criteria have been used to justify the rapid influx of

international personnel and external sources of capital in addressing needs on the ground.

Clusters, consequently, are often implemented with minimal analysis of existing

structures or capacities, while incoming surge personnel typically have little knowledge

of national actors and institutions.[103] This has contributed to heavy coordination

processes that are applied rigidly and are poorly adapted to context, and which can push

national and local capacities to the side.[104]

The work routines of humanitarian professionals may, once again, amplify these

dynamics. One cluster lead I interviewed suggested that the fast-paced nature of

international responses precludes local engagement. He explained:

> It's so fast, it's so quick. When you are engaged in a major crisis from day one, you
> know that you're going to work for at least 20 hours per day, you don't have a
> weekend, maybe more than that [...] Because of that context, you're not even
> thinking about how you're going to bring [the government] in.[105]

The time constraints facing humanitarian professionals also tempt many to rely on the

templates and models developed elsewhere, often without consideration of local

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102 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at Country Level,"
10.
103 Saavedra and Knox-Clarke, "Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response."
104 Krueger, Derzsi-Horvath, and Steets, "IASC Transformative Agenda," 24.
105 Interview with UN representative (141).

contexts.[106] This partly explains the rigid application of the cluster approach and

humanitarian programme cycle in the Philippines, where the scale of the response and the

multiple competing demands on responders elicited the reliance on pre-existing practice.

Donor- and agency-specific demands for data, reports and inputs may further orient

decision-making processes and reporting lines upwards, typically at the expense of

including national or local capacities.[107]

The short deployments and high turnover of international personnel can further

exacerbate the exclusion of national and local actors. The challenge of high turnover rates

and the rapid circulation of international surge staff in and out of emergency contexts has

been noted in numerous evaluations, and has been found, among humanitarians, to

"[inhibit] their ability to understand any but the most material dimensions of the situation

at a local level."[108] Those operating on the ground, as a result, typically lack local

knowledge, language skills, or in-depth understandings of the political or socioeconomic

contexts in which they are working, all of which compromise their ability to

communicate or develop relations with government officials or local people. Within

clusters, specifically, high turnover has been found to contribute to the loss of

institutional memory, as well as inconsistencies and gaps over time.[109] It inhibits

development of local knowledge, or of the personal relationships needed to work

successfully with government or NGO counterparts. The latter, in particular, often need

106 See Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 90–93.
107 ALNAP, "How Can We Improve Humanitarian Coordination across a Response?" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2016), 6.
108 Harvey and Harmer, "Building Trust," 16.
109 Knox-Clarke and Campbell, "Exploring Coordination in Humanitarian Clusters," 74; Paul Knox-Clarke and Leah Campbell, "Improving Humanitarian Coordination" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2016), 35.

to be continually rebuilt over the course of a response, thus inhibiting effective collaboration.[110]

The 'need for speed' has deep historical roots in the humanitarian field. It can be traced back across the humanitarian sector's long history of intervention in the Global South, where human needs were great and local capacities, traditionally, were low. International organizations, as a result, frequently took the lead in managing and overseeing humanitarian responses. This model of top-down, comprehensive delivery, according to one observer, remains the "mainstay of the humanitarian sector" today,[111] and is entrenched in the continued prioritization of external forms of economic and cultural capital. This model has two effects. First, it demands an urgent response to humanitarian crises and directs attention to the immediate sources of suffering, as opposed to root causes.[112] Second, it elevates the role of external actors, by focusing attention on the resources and expertise that they can supply as opposed to what is in demand on the ground. In practice, the behaviours and habits associated with this model serve to prioritize the economic and knowledge capital held by international actors, while limiting recognition of the capacities and sources of expertise found locally. This dynamic may become mutually reinforcing over time, particularly as opportunities to strengthen the capacities of national and local actors in the longer term continue to be missed.

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110 Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected State in Disaster Response," 33.
111 Ramalingam and Mitchell, "Responding to Changing Needs?," 27.
112 See Craig Calhoun, "The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)order," in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 29–58.

Humanitarian relief efforts, of course, require a rapid response and will inevitably face challenges of coordination under the best of circumstances. The stresses and demands placed on aid practitioners also necessitate some level of turnover, particularly as the mental health effects of working in these challenging contexts become better known and recognized.[113] At the same time, the sense of urgency that frequently accompanies international responses should not necessarily preclude better engagement of national and local actors. As one evaluation of the Haiti response concluded:

> The perceived need for haste in the initial period after the earthquake was understandable yet risked bypassing the Haitian government and local people. [...] Identified weakness in Haitian government and civil society capacity should have highlighted, not negated, the need to work through and empower government to promote long-term recovery.[114]

Instead, as seen in Haiti and elsewhere, the capital to be supplied by international actors is frequently elevated above that which is available or in demand locally, at the expense of strengthening national and local capacities for response.

Sectoral expertise over local knowledge

In response to the complex and multifaceted needs of humanitarian responses, clusters were designed to foster collaboration among agencies within specific technical or sectoral areas. Organizations participating within clusters are grouped according to their area of specialization – nutrition, shelter, protection, and so on – thereby allowing them to consolidate their expertise and resources. In practice, however, this sectoral approach has contributed to compartmentalized or 'siloed' responses. The needs of disaster-affected peoples, most notably, can rarely be reduced to a single sector. Evaluations have

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113 See Holly Young, "Guardian Research Suggests Mental Health Crisis among Aid Workers," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/23/guardian-research-suggests-mental-health-crisis-among-aid-workers.
114 Patrick, "Haiti Earthquake Response," 5.

shown that such siloed approaches can often subject aid recipients to redundant or

unnecessary assessments, while neglecting important cross-cutting issues, such as gender

or livelihood concerns.[115] Government ministries, moreover, may not be structured along

the same sectoral divisions as the cluster approach, resulting in further challenges of

coordination between government and humanitarian officials.[116] Compartmentalization,

in sum, makes it difficult for humanitarians to address strategic or response-wide issues.

While these challenges are gradually being addressed, including through updated

guidance on "inter-cluster coordination,"[117] the humanitarian regime has yet to move

beyond its sectoral approach to collaboration.

More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the cluster model has elevated

the relative importance of technical expertise over other forms of knowledge, including

local and contextual understandings of the country or region in question. Returning to the

example of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the international surge personnel who

took on leadership of the response were recruited primarily on the basis of their

coordination experience and their sectoral expertise. Drawn from global rosters, they

typically replaced or assumed authority over locally-based UN or NGO staff, many of

whom had been based in the country for an extended period of time and had established

relationships with government or civil society partners. One UN representative with

knowledge of the Haiyan response described the situation as follows:

> A lot of the [in-country] heads of agencies, because they didn't have the requisite
> humanitarian experience, were replaced. So the government walks into its

115 Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report," 36–37.
116 Saavedra and Knox-Clarke, "Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response," 28.
117 See, for example, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Reference Module for Cluster Coordination at
Country Level," 26–29.

coordination meeting with a whole bunch of new faces around the table. And they're like, "Well, who are you?"[118]

In the Philippines, local UN and NGO staff were therefore replaced by international personnel deemed to have the 'right' kind of knowledge capital, primarily sectoral expertise. Although the technical proficiency of these actors allowed them to quickly and efficiently assume responsibility of the response, they typically lacked a basic understanding of the political and social structures of the country in which they were based. Many were entirely unfamiliar with the Philippines, and had limited knowledge of how government or civil society in the country was organized.[119] By contrast, the locally-based staff that had such contextual knowledge were pushed to the side, and were thus unable to prevent or correct many of the disconnects that followed.

In the Haiyan response, country expertise and awareness of local contexts or relationships were therefore deemed secondary to sectoral knowledge. Séverine Autesserre describes a similar dynamic with respect to the field of international peacebuilding, where thematic and technical proficiencies have equally been elevated above local understandings.[120] This imbalance, she suggests, has devalued local knowledge, which is frequently ignored or overlooked within "the politics of knowledge" inherent to international peacebuilding. She argues:

> The idea of sending foreigners to a country they have never visited or studied so they can help people they know nothing about makes sense only to individuals and institutions who place the highest value on thematic competency and who deem local expertise unnecessary. Without such knowledge hierarchy to justify it, the very notion would seem absurd.[121]

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118 Interview with UN representative (115).
119 Featherstone, "Missed Again," 20.
120 Autesserre, *Peaceland*.
121 Autesserre, 72.

Much like in the peacebuilding field, familiarity with local contexts is "neither a prerequisite nor a necessity" for international humanitarians.[122] Instead, their expertise derives from particular aspects of intervention work, which may then be transferred from one crisis to the next.

The preference for sectoral expertise poses important consequences for the coordination and delivery of aid. As mentioned above, it contributes to compartmentalized responses, while inhibiting the horizontal linkages necessary for more holistic or context-specific responses.[123] It further reduces the focus to specific technical areas and reporting lines, as opposed to the overall quality of response. One NGO respondent observed:

> What bothers me with the professionals coming in is that they think that the architecture and the coordination is the objective. [...] My jaw dropped when there was a young, eager, smart, P-3 professional who'd been out to some emergency who came back and did a report and said: "you know, it was just a great success. In the first two months we established the clusters. Everything went really well. We were able to get reporting requirements. We were able to do this. We were able to do that." Nothing about the response. Nothing about the assistance provided.[124]

Another observer describes this dynamic as "the authority of format," suggesting that the structures and work processes associated with clusters often take precedence over the response itself. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the preference for sectoral over local knowledge can contribute to inappropriate and potentially ineffective or inefficient responses. It limits the flexibility of responses; the cluster approach tends to be instituted as a "single, monolithic system," rather than tailored to a given context or situation.[125] Surge staff, moreover, may bring experiences or lessons from another response that do

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122 Autesserre, 72.
123 ALNAP, "How Can We Improve Humanitarian Coordination across a Response?," 10.
124 Interview with NGO representative (311).
125 Luz Saavedra and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Better Together? The Benefits and Challenges of Coordination in the Field" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2015), 41.

not translate over to the context in question.[126] In other cases, as in Haiti and the

Philippines, they may lack knowledge of local customs or cultures, generating resentment

among local populations.[127]

The ascendance of sectoral expertise across the humanitarian field is likely linked

to the ongoing efforts to professionalize and standardize the regime. As described in a

previous chapter,[128] humanitarian organizations since the 1990s have prioritized the

development of occupational standards and core competencies.[129] University degrees and

training programs have attempted to formalize the professional pathways for

humanitarians, and increasingly offer specializations in nutrition, logistics, and sanitation,

among others.[130] Practitioners, moreover, are encouraged to develop their skills through

field placements in various countries, and thus to privilege breadth of sectoral expertise at

the expense of in-depth contextual understandings. Such practices are explained, and

defended, by the need to establish a common pool of technocratic, expert knowledge that

is transferrable across crises and contexts. In the process, however, humanitarian

professionals have elevated technical expertise above other forms of knowledge capital,

including the contextual and cultural understandings needed to craft more grounded and

bottom-up responses.

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126 Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report," 33.
127 See, for example, Imogen Wall and Yves Gerald Chéry, "Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak. Best Practice and Lessons Learned in Communication with Disaster Affected Communities: Haiti 2010" (BBC World Service Trust, UKAID, Internews Europe, 2010); Ong, Flores, and Combinido, "Obliged to Be Grateful: How Local Communities Experienced Humanitarian Actors in the Haiyan Response."
128 See Chapter 4.
129 See, for example, Peter Walker, "What Does It Mean to Be a Professional Humanitarian?," *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* 14 (2004); Frances Richardson, "Meeting the Demand for Skilled and Experienced Humanitarian Workers," *Development in Practice* 16, no. 03–04 (2006): 334–41; Peter Walker and Catherine Russ, "Professionalizing the Humanitarian Sector: A Scoping Study" (ELRHA, 2010); Catherine Russ, "Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization" (ELRHA, 2011).
130 See Walker and Russ, "Professionalizing the Humanitarian Sector."

Sectoral knowledge thus represents one of the most prized forms of knowledge capital across the humanitarian field, secondary only, perhaps, to the experience cultivated through placements in different contexts.[131] The cluster approach has served to reinforce this hierarchy of knowledge, by compartmentalizing the activities of humanitarian professionals within specific technical areas. The priority given to this form of knowledge capital, however, directly contradicts that which is most valued by disaster-affected peoples and communities. When asked, the latter regularly identify locally and culturally grounded knowledge as "an essential element in designing and implementing effective aid efforts."[132] They are critical of expatriates who do not have sufficient local knowledge at the outset of programming, and who do not stay long enough to gain it. While enabling international humanitarian professionals to move easily across borders and crises, the preference for sectoral expertise thus appears out of sync with the interests of those it is intended to serve.

The preference for outside solutions

Various barriers to entry, the need for speed, and the prioritization of sectoral expertise all create a bias toward outside approaches and solutions. Within the current structure of the humanitarian field, the most relevant forms of capital are those found outside the context in question. This includes external resources, capacities, and expertise, all of which are assumed to be necessary ingredients for a timely and effective response. Locally derived forms of capital, by contrast, are typically thought to be weak or non-existent. In practice, the preference for outside solutions has elevated the relative importance of international expertise and resources, which are typically substituted for

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131 See Chapter 4.
132 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, "The Role of Staffing Decisions," 2.

those found locally. This poses important implications for the overall structure and coordination of humanitarian response.

The cluster approach itself was designed to address prevailing deficits in international coordination, as a means to improve the management and delivery of external assistance.[133] It originated in the Humanitarian Reform Agenda, a regime-wide review focused primarily on the functioning and shortcomings of international organizations. The Transformative Agenda similarly attempted to improve the predictability and accountability of international response, in response to high-profile setbacks in Haiti and Pakistan. Both reforms, in other words, were primarily focused on international structures and processes. Consequently, it has not always been clear how the cluster approach should support a government-led model of coordination. A UN respondent explained:

> The way that coordination works, including the way it's outlined in the Transformative Agenda and the Humanitarian Reform, the way that the architecture has now been set up is to accommodate humanitarian responders. The structures that we build are there to accommodate the humanitarian actors that show up for that particular emergency. They are not there primarily to address the needs of affected peoples.[134]

While guidance notes and reference modules produced by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee have increasingly addressed the issue of working with national authorities, the cluster approach has, in practice, remained internationally focused. As seen in the cases of Haiti and the Philippines, international interveners and structures continue to replace or push to the side local capacities. This trend, according to the same UN official, raises

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133 ALNAP, "How Can We Better Involve National Actors in Humanitarian Coordination?," 4.
134 Interview with UN representative (116).

the question of "who is the coordination structure for and who is it serving?" The

approach, to date, suggests the emphasis is squarely on the international.

When pressed, the UN and NGO staff I interviewed had mixed reactions to this

issue. In many cases, they were quick to point out the practical and ethical dilemmas they

face in the midst of emergency: do they slow down, to engage in capacity building

activities and provide local actors with the time and space to assume leadership of the

response; or do they act now, and potentially save more lives? One representative of a

NGO engaged in the provision of medical care was particularly pointed in this regard:

> Our objective is to treat patients. We are not a social organization. [...] We are here
> to treat patients that do not receive treatment if we don't do it. [...] We want always
> the perfect world, the perfect situation, the perfect responsibility, but we are
> working in a shitty world.[135]

While humanitarians should, in a perfect world, aim to strengthen local capacities and

provide governments or other nationals with the space to lead, circumstances are rarely

favourable in this regard. As noted above, a government's desire to coordinate a response

might not always be realistic or feasible. They may face severe capacity constraints or

may be party to a conflict, thus compromising their neutrality and impartiality. These

constraints, however, should not necessarily preclude engagement. National and local

capacities are often present in even the most resource-constrained environments, yet are

routinely under-estimated or under-utilized in favour of outside solutions for many of the

reasons suggested above.

Implications

The practices and habits described in the previous sections have served to

reproduce the prevailing hierarchies of authority and expertise across the humanitarian

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135 Interview with NGO representative (323).

field. They mirror the stratification of knowledge present at the global policy level, in ways that continue to prioritize the elite role of international actors and exclude national and local counterparts. Reforms intended to improve coordination, particularly with those on the ground, have thus fallen short in practice, and in certain cases have even reinforced problematic behaviours. The assumption remains the same: international expertise and knowledge is a substitute, rather than a resource, for national and local capacities. The rifts separating international responders from their national and local counterparts are visible across a number of contexts, where imbalances in authority and capital have erected significant boundaries between the two.

The coordination reforms enacted over the past two decades have thus failed to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions and power dynamics intrinsic to the humanitarian field. Most obviously, the practices described above continue to privilege the role and influence of an international humanitarian elite, which primarily relies on outside sources of capital over those found locally. The presence of these elite actors, who are drawn from global rosters and who typically arrive en masse after the onset of disaster, has served to limit the role of national and local actors in coordinating and managing their own response efforts. International personnel, moreover, continue to miss opportunities to benefit from and build on the knowledge, cultural understandings, and capacities present at the national and local levels, to the detriment of the overall effectiveness of the response. Overly internationalized responses are therefore failing to strengthen local capacities and institutions in the long-term, prompting concerns, in some cases, that the latter may be too weak to step in once international aid is withdrawn.[136]

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136 Featherstone, "Missed Again."

Governments, moreover, have not been empowered to lead, even in situations where they have the capacity and will to assume ownership of a response. International humanitarian assistance continues to prioritize top-down, internationally led approaches to aid delivery and coordination, in ways that systematically exclude or marginalize national and local authorities. In some cases, the participation of government officials, as chairs or co-chairs of coordination meetings, may be token at best. A UN official explained:

> Chairing a cluster and leading a cluster is [*sic*] very different ... [Government representatives] may be chairing, but they are not necessarily leading. And that is often because either they don't have the knowledge of the mechanism itself or the entire circus that we have created. [...] We lose completely the idea of empowering them. We need to build their capacity or strengthen their capacity or, if they have the capacity, to give them the space. We're not very good at doing that.[137]

These capacity strengthening activities, however, are often secondary to the international response. If the latter is to truly support and complement national capacities for coordination, it may need to be better aligned with existing government response structures and practices.

The exclusionary dynamics described above raise the question of how international coordination structures could better acknowledge and empower national and local capacities. Most obviously, perhaps, clusters should be designed to support and strengthen national response structures, as opposed to creating parallel processes or pushing local efforts to the side. This demands a level of preparedness and dialogue prior to the onset of disaster, to ensure that international and national structures are aligned. This also likely necessitates different models of humanitarian response, depending on the capacities and constraints of the country or context in question. Ramalingam and

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137 Interview with UN representative (141).

Mitchell, for example, describe a continuum of models of humanitarian response.[138]

These range from 'comprehensive' approaches, in which international agencies take the

lead in coordinating a response due to limited national capacities, to 'collaborative' and

'consultative' models, in which international responses support national coordination or

address specific gaps in domestic capacities. They contend, however, that the

comprehensive model has remained the "*modus operandi*" of the humanitarian field to

date, regardless of existing capacities on the ground.[139] In line with the analysis above,

this suggests that international responders have yet to acknowledge national and local

actors as equal partners in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Clusters, moreover, should actively encourage and make space for local

participation. In recognition of prevailing imbalances in knowledge and network capital,

coordinating agencies such as OCHA should look to engage government officials and

civil society representatives throughout the design and management of humanitarian

response. To facilitate this participation, international responders will likely need to

address the various barriers to entry described above – recognizing, for example, that

coordination meetings could be conducted in the local language or offer translation

services. International organizations should also seek to support, rather than replace, their

locally-based staff, who often have the requisite country expertise as well as established

relationships with government or civil society partners. In practice, however, this would

require better acknowledgement and recognition of the relative importance of other forms

of knowledge capital, including local knowledge. To date, such sources of expertise have

been subsumed by the current preference for sectoral proficiency and outside solutions.

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138 Ramalingam and Mitchell, "Responding to Changing Needs?"
139 Ramalingam and Mitchell, 27.

The exclusionary dynamics noted above may also be changing, as emerging and middle-income countries have become increasingly assertive in their engagement with the international humanitarian regime. Key states and organizations in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, for example, are now more cautious and targeted in requesting international assistance, or have attempted to dictate its delivery on their terms.[140] A UN official, commenting on Southeast Asia, suggested that:

> In this part of the world, [internationally-led coordination] just doesn't wash with governments anymore. Governments are saying to us, very clearly: "in a large-scale disaster we're leading, you come and you support us. [...] The lessons we've taken away from the Haiyan response are that you work within our structures now if you want to come in and support us."[141]

A few states, such as India, are actively rejecting or modifying norms and assumptions that have traditionally guided the delivery of humanitarian aid.[142] Based on the experiences of Haiti and Typhoon Haiyan, among other cases, governments are therefore beginning to challenge the presumed authority of the international humanitarian elite. Some are suggesting that the latter must demonstrate the comparative advantage of the capital and resources they may bring to bear, particularly over those found locally.[143] Such challenges are bringing into question the shape and functioning of the humanitarian field, in ways that will inevitably influence the practice of aid. They are discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this dissertation.

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140 See Randolph Kent, ed., *Planning from the Future: Is the Humanitarian System Fit for Purpose?* (Humanitarian Policy Group, 2016), 38–39; Zeynep Sezgin and Dennis Dijkzeul, eds., *The New Humanitarians in International Practice: Emerging Actors and Contested Principles* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
141 Interview with UN representative (115).
142 See Kristina Roepstorff, "India as Humanitarian Actor: Convergences and Divergences with DAC Donor Principles and Practices," in *The New Humanitarians in International Practice: Emerging Actors and Contested Principles*, ed. Zeynep Sezgin and Dennis Dijkzeul (New York: Routledge, 2015), 45–63.
143 Interview with UN representative (116).

Conclusion

The coordination reforms introduced over the past decade have thus maintained the patterns of exclusion that they were, in part, intended to address. Underpinned by certain beliefs and practices inherent to the international delivery of aid, these changes have served to strengthen, rather than reduce, the boundaries between international responders and their national and local counterparts. Authority and capital remain consolidated in the hands of an elite few, often at the expense of national leadership and ownership of response. The same stratification of knowledge and expertise present at the global level is therefore being reproduced in the field, where the structural inequalities between the international and the local have been maintained.

As indicated above, the barriers to entry that preclude local engagement are often basic in nature. The language or location of coordination meetings, for instance, continues to circumscribe the space for exchange, thus limiting the participation and involvement of national and local actors. The preference for sectoral expertise has reinforced the relative importance of thematic knowledge, and elevated external sources of capital over those found locally. These entrenched habits and practices suggest that, in spite of years of reform, the humanitarian regime has not addressed some of fundamental assumptions and power dynamics embedded in the structure of the international humanitarian field. They reveal the limits of reform, which has yet to challenge the underlying hierarchies of international assistance.

CHAPTER 7:

Opening the Humanitarian Toolbox: Accountability and Humanitarian Practice

"This is how the verb 'to participate' is conjugated: I participate, you participate, they decide."

Grassroots development worker, *Time to Listen*, p.69

Introduction

The top-down, supply-oriented model of aid delivery, as described in the previous chapter, has traditionally been premised on the transfer of assistance and expertise from the wealthy Global North to the relatively poorer Global South. As part of this model, outside organizations funded by donors from North America and Europe exercised considerable authority over the delivery of aid on the ground, often with minimal input from or accountability to their recipients. The latter, by contrast, were typically excluded from the very choices affecting their lives, and removed altogether from decision-making power. This model of aid delivery has defined the contemporary practice of humanitarianism, in ways that have worked to silence the unique circumstances and needs of those on the receiving end.[1]

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing to today, the humanitarian regime has undergone an "accountability revolution" designed to address the imbalance of power inherent to aid delivery.[2] New frameworks and initiatives have been developed, all with the goal of ensuring that humanitarian organizations and professionals are more

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1 Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 377–404.
2 Frances Stevenson and Matthew Foley, eds., "The 'Accountability Revolution,'" *Humanitarian Exchange* 24 (2003).

accountable to those they are trying to assist. The standard developed by the

Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) is perhaps the most widely recognized across

the regime, and defines accountability as "the process of taking into account the views of,

and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily the people affected

by power or authority."[3] The HAP Standard and other initiatives have attempted to

rethink the power dynamics inherent to humanitarian aid, and ensure that disaster-

affected populations are not seen as passive actors in their own relief and recovery.

Various tools and mechanisms have accompanied the development of these frameworks,

with the goal of fostering information sharing and transparency, collecting feedback and

complaints, and advancing participatory approaches.

Over the past two decades, the accountability revolution has, arguably, generated

noticeable improvements in changing the practice of aid. Humanitarian actors now

routinely "give account" of their activities and objectives on the ground, and "take

account" of the views and perspectives of disaster-affected populations. Despite this

progress, however, it is unclear whether such initiatives have increased the extent to

which they are "being held to account" for the responsible use of power.[4] Some have

questioned whether the multitude of accountability tools available today have generated

meaningful change, particularly in redressing the power imbalance intrinsic to aid

delivery and ensuring that humanitarian actors are engaging, listening to, and including

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3 Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, "The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management" (Geneva: HAP International, 2010), 1.
4 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee defines accountability along these three dimensions, suggesting that aid agencies should 'give account' of their activities by transparently and effectively sharing information, 'take account' by giving communities influence over decision-making, and 'be held to account' by providing communities with the opportunity to assess and sanction their actions. See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP): A Brief Overview," 2015.

recipients in the decisions affecting their lives.[5] This raises two inter-related questions:

Have the standards and tools developed over the past two decades increased the

accountability of humanitarian actors, particularly to those on the receiving end of aid?

Or has the discourse of accountability served to mask more deeply entrenched divides

across the humanitarian field?

This chapter takes up these questions, as it explores the evolution and effects of the

past two decades of accountability reforms. I argue that, while aid actors are better at

giving and taking account of their activities, contemporary humanitarian practice

continues to marginalize the active participation and engagement of aid recipients. The

feedback mechanisms and participatory tools in use today, I suggest, are primarily

unidirectional in nature, and designed to share or collect information without engaging in

meaningful dialogue with those on the receiving end. Consequently, while aspiring

towards more "people-centred humanitarian response,"[6] the top-down, supply-oriented

model of aid delivery has remained the norm, without breaking down or challenging the

hierarchies of authority and capital on which it is based.

In focusing on this prominent area of reform, this chapter opens up the toolbox of

the humanitarian elite and offers an important look at the mechanisms and methodologies

used to translate its commitments into practice. While changes introduced over the past

two decades have attempted to create space for the more meaningful participation of aid

recipients, I contend that these reforms have instead maintained the patterns of elite

control and exclusion that they were intended to address. Most notably, outside

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5 Dayna Brown and Antonio Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2014).
6 Sphere Project, *The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: 2011 Edition*, 3rd ed., 2011, 55.

humanitarian actors have retained considerable authority over decision-making, largely on the basis of their technical expertise and the paternalistic presumption that they know what is best for disaster-affected communities. Entrenched habits and practices, which are grounded in particular forms of knowledge and social capital, have thus proven difficult to change. These behaviours are at the heart of the contemporary challenge of humanitarian reform, and largely mirror structural inequalities found across various areas of policy change.

The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first outlines the core objectives and aims of the accountability revolution, from conception to contemporary practice. The second section opens up the humanitarian toolbox in exploring the various frameworks and mechanisms designed to translate international commitments into practice. It looks at four areas of accountability, focusing on the strengths and limitations of each: information sharing; feedback and complaints; participation; and monitoring and evaluation. The final section assesses the prevailing accountability deficit, and questions whether the language of accountability has served to paper over problematic behaviours and norms intrinsic to the humanitarian elite.

The Accountability Revolution

Efforts to improve the accountability of humanitarian aid date back to the latter half of the 1980s, at a time when the regime was beginning to face greater scrutiny of its core practices and assumptions. Writing in 1986, Barbara Harrell-Bond observed that despite inordinate attention at the time to government corruption and the potential misuse of aid funds by recipient countries, humanitarian actors had remained surprisingly immune from such criticism. She argued:

No system has yet been devised to ensure that either consultants or agency staff are themselves accountable for the *impact* of the programmes they design, be it to their own constituencies, to their host governments or to the refugees they purport to assist."[7]

She was particularly critical of the anti-participatory approach of humanitarians, which typically designated outside actors as decision-makers and excluded the views and expectations of recipients. At the turn of the decade, Alex de Waal suggested that aid funds further undercut the official accountability of recipient governments, by replacing the search for local political solutions with apolitical, external interventions.[8] The 1980s and 1990s, he later wrote, was witness to a "retreat from accountability," as the expansion of the humanitarian regime and its activities became intertwined with the decline of state responsibilities.[9] The regime, it was suggested at the time, thus lacked any sense of accountability to those it professed to assist, often in direct contrast to the stated aims and motivations of humanitarian organizations.

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 brought many of these issues into sharp relief. As has been mentioned before, this "watershed moment"[10] placed the issue of humanitarian accountability firmly in the spotlight, as the poor performance of aid organizations and the lack of attention to the negative consequences of the response were strongly rebuked by both insiders and international media. Observers were particularly critical of the absence of 'downward accountability' to aid recipients, as the competition for media visibility and donor funding was elevated above the concerns and needs of

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7 Barbara E. Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 14. Emphasis in original.
8 Alex De Waal, *Famine That Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
9 Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), chap. 4.
10 Jessica Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review: Has the Balance of Power Shifted?," in *2013 Humanitarian Accountability Report* (Geneva: Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, 2013), 20.

beneficiaries.[11] In response to such concerns, the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) concluded that existing accountability mechanisms within the humanitarian regime should be "radically strengthened" in order to ensure greater attention and responsibility to the recipients of aid.[12]

The "accountability revolution"[13] that followed was marked by the launch of a number of initiatives and standards, all with the common goal of improving accountability to the recipients of aid. Each sought to improve the quality of response and minimize the negative consequences of aid, albeit in different ways (see Table 4). The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, signed in 1994, committed signatories to "hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources," thereby identifying humanitarian actors as the critical link between donors and recipients.[14] People in Aid, an inter-organizational initiative launched in 1995, published a Code of Good Practice designed to enhance staff management and professionalization,[15] while the Sphere Standards, first released in 2000, offered a number of core and technical standards intended to improve "people-centred humanitarian response."[16] In various ways, these initiatives sought to address the problems encountered in Rwanda and elsewhere, and generated important attention and momentum around the issue of accountability.

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11 John Borton, Emery Brusset, and Alistair Hallam, "The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience. Study 3: Humanitarian Aid and Effects," Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996).
12 Borton, Brusset, and Hallam.
13 Stevenson and Foley, "The 'Accountability Revolution.'"
14 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, "The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NonGovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief," 1994, 4.
15 People in Aid, "Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel" (London: Humanitarian Practice Network, 2003).
16 Sphere Project, *The Sphere Project*, 55.

Individual organizations later drew on these initiatives to develop their own policies and guidelines, resulting in an increasingly robust, if diffuse, industry of accountability standards, rating systems, and audit techniques.[17]

Table 4: Key initiatives of the 'accountability revolution'

Initiative	Interpretation of humanitarian accountability
The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (1994)	Humanitarian agencies and organizations are accountable to both those they seek to assist and those from whom they accept resources
People in Aid Code of Good Practice (1995)	Accountability equated with professionalism, organizational effectiveness, and good practice, to donors, beneficiaries, staff, and volunteers
Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (1997)	Accountability achieved by improving the quality, availability and use of knowledge and evidence across the humanitarian sector
Sphere Standards (2000)	Accountability defined by the ways in which organizations and projects involve different groups in making decisions, managing activities, and judging and challenging results
HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management (2007)	Accountability is the means through which power is used responsibly
IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (2011)	Accountability to affected populations is an active commitment to use power responsibly, by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organizations seek to assist
Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (2015)	Accountability refers to 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

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17 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review."

The Humanitarian Accountability Project, established in 2003, offered perhaps the most explicit statement on accountability. Defining accountability as "the means through which power is used responsibly," it drew specific attention to the responsibilities of those in positions of authority and the rights of peoples under their influence.[18] Accountability, it suggested, is the process of being held to account by different stakeholders, particularly those on the receiving end of aid. The HAP Standard, first published in 2007, elaborated a number of benchmarks and indices that collectively delineated the responsibilities of aid providers, and created a voluntary association of organizations to help monitor compliance.[19] The definition of accountability outlined in the HAP Standard remains the most widely used across the humanitarian regime. Most notably for the purposes of this chapter, it sought to make visible, and therefore diminish, the imbalance between humanitarian actors and recipients, thus drawing important attention to the power dynamics intrinsic to aid. I draw on this understanding of accountability as responsibility throughout the remainder of this chapter, as I assess the extent to which the tools developed by humanitarian professionals have been able to address and ultimately reduce the inequalities inherent to their work.

The interest in humanitarian accountability has been motivated by three main concerns.[20] First, values-based or normative rationales identify greater accountability to recipients as simply the 'right thing to do', and as fulfilling the moral obligation of aid

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18 Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, "The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management," 1.
19 The HAP Standard outlines six benchmarks designed to improve the accountability of humanitarian organizations, including: establishing and delivering on commitments; staff competency; sharing information; participation; handling complaints; and learning and continual improvement.
20 See Hugo Slim, "By What Authority? The Legitimacy and Accountability of Non-Governmental Organizations," *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* 10 (2002); Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review"; Brown and Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality?"

actors to strive to "do no harm" in responding to the needs of disaster-affected peoples.[21]

This coincided with the emergence of a rights-based approach to humanitarianism in the

1990s, which prioritized respect for the fundamental rights and dignity of affected

groups. Second, instrumental justifications view accountability as essential to improving

the quality and effectiveness of aid. Proponents contend that accountability tools help to

ensure that humanitarian actors are guided by evidence and are actively monitoring the

outcomes of their work.[22] Some also note that accountability may enhance trust among

aid recipients and thus better guarantee the security of aid workers on the ground, a

growing concern in recent years.[23] Finally, emancipatory rationales promote an expanded

conception of accountability that includes disaster-affected groups in the decision-making

processes that impact their lives. Participation and engagement, it is suggested, help to

improve ownership of response and address underlying vulnerabilities, while fostering

the conditions for transformative change. They also link to notions of democratic

accountability, and the belief that humanitarian actors must be responsive to the victims

they claim to represent.[24] This broader view of accountability, however, is

understandably controversial, and typically challenged by more traditional, Dunantist

organizations that eschew strategies of social change.[25]

The rapid expansion of accountability tools since the late 1990s has contributed to

considerable confusion and inconsistency in practice. One estimate suggests that, by

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21 Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).
22 Hugo Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), 99–101; Janice Stein, "Humanitarian Organizations: Accountable - Why, to Whom, for What, and How?," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 133–34.
23 Laura Jump, "Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms: A Literature Review" (Development Initiatives, 2013), 10.
24 Slim, "By What Authority?"
25 Brown and Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality?," 21–22.

2012, there were 147 different accountability initiatives, guidelines, and codes of conduct in use across the humanitarian regime.[26] Many employ different definitions of accountability and are only weakly interlinked, thus complicating the work of those tasked with unpacking and operationalizing these tools.[27] For these reasons, a ten year review of the HAP Standard identified the sheer number of initiatives and standards as "part of the problem" facing the accountability revolution, and the cause of limited or inconsistent uptake of these tools on the ground.[28]

In response to the growing confusion, two inter-agency initiatives have recently sought to establish new, regime-wide frameworks on accountability. In 2011, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as part of its broader Transformative Agenda, adopted the Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) in an attempt to promote common operational guidelines on accountability among IASC members and partners.[29] This so-called "meta-framework" of accountability commitments and indicators, which draw primarily from the Sphere and HAP standards, is intended to foster a "culture of accountability" and focuses on five core areas: leadership; transparency; feedback and complaints; participation; and design, monitoring and evaluation.[30] Also in 2011, HAP, People in Aid, and the Sphere Project collaboratively launched the Joint Standards Initiative in an attempt to develop a more coherent standards framework for the regime. They produced the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality

26 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review," 26.
27 Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, "SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations: An Overview of Lessons Learned" (Geneva: SCHR, 2010); Paul Knox-Clarke and John Mitchell, "Reflections on the Accountability Revolution," *Humanitarian Exchange* 52 (2011): 3–5.
28 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review," 26.
29 See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations," 2011, www.aap/humanitarianresponse.info; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "The IASC Principals' Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations: Tools to Assist in Meeting the Commitments" (IASC, 2011).
30 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "Accountability to Affected Populations," 1.

and Accountability (CHS), released in 2015, which sets out nine commitments for improving accountability to disaster-affected populations and holding humanitarian actors to account. In line with the HAP Standard, both the CAAP and CHS define accountability as a commitment to using power responsibly, therefore ensuring a continued focus on the structural inequalities of aid. While other frameworks and tools remain in use, these two initiatives have reconciled some of the previous gaps and inconsistencies in application and now serve as the primary reference point for accountability across the regime.

Reflecting on the past two decades of the accountability revolution, observers have noted a number of modest improvements in the delivery of aid. While acknowledging the various practical constraints facing humanitarian actors, including lack of access, security concerns, and the timeliness of response, they suggest that the regime has nonetheless witnessed important advances in accountability policies and practices. Organizations now routinely include accountability considerations in the design and delivery of response and, in some cases, have increased staff and funding to meet their commitments in this regard. Aid actors regularly consult with beneficiaries and include them in decision-making or evaluation processes, although, as detailed below, such activities do not always generate broader, strategic changes in programming. The recipients of aid, moreover, are making their voices and needs heard, through the widespread use of feedback and complaint mechanisms and, increasingly, through the innovative use of new information and communication technologies.[31]

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31 Rahul Chandran and Andrew Thow, eds., *Humanitarianism in the Network Age* (New York: OCHA, 2013).

More critical assessments of the accountability revolution, however, suggest that the regime still faces a significant "accountability deficit" in practice.[32] Most significantly, these critics note that humanitarian organizations remain guided by their upward accountability to donors, which continues to "squeeze out" downward accountability to disaster-affected populations.[33] Nearly all accountability frameworks, moreover, are made up of voluntary commitments and self-imposed obligations, and thus hold no formal consequences for non-compliance. Critics suggest that the accountability reforms of the past two decades therefore lack 'real teeth' by failing to sanction those who disregard their responsibilities.[34] The tools in use today, they contend, have largely failed to shift or redress the prevailing imbalance in power, such that recipient populations still have few means to hold international aid practitioners to account.

The past two decades of accountability reforms, in other words, have returned mixed results. On the one hand, proponents highlight the significant investments incurred and changes implemented over this period, resulting in a wide, and at times dizzying, array of standards, guidelines, and frameworks. Various accountability tools and mechanisms have been developed to bolster these commitments, and to guide the efforts of humanitarian professionals. On the other hand, it remains unclear if these initiatives have generated meaningful change, and if humanitarian organizations and practitioners are truly being held to account for the responsible use of power on the ground. In the next section, I look at several of the tools and mechanisms that have been developed, and

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32 Michael Jennings, "International NGOs Must Address Their Accountability Deficit," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/feb/09/ngos-accountability-deficit-legal-framework.
33 Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, "SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations," 6.
34 Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010).

explore in greater depth the strengths and limitations of these approaches. In opening this

accountability toolbox, I question the extent to which these tools have addressed the

imbalance of power between humanitarian professionals and recipients, a topic taken up

in more detail in the final section of the chapter.

The Humanitarian Toolbox

The humanitarian toolbox has expanded significantly over the past two decades, as

aid organizations have developed new tools and mechanisms to help translate their

accountability commitments into practice. Many of these innovations are linked to either

organization-specific policies or to the various inter-agency accountability frameworks

described above. Using the IASC's Commitments on Accountability to Affected

Populations and the joint Core Humanitarian Standard as points of reference, this section

explores a number of the tools and approaches associated with these broadly supported

reform proposals. Specifically, it focuses on four areas of accountability that are common

to both frameworks: information sharing, as a means of *giving account* of the activities

and objectives of humanitarian actors on the ground; feedback and complaints, as a

means of *taking account* of the views of disaster-affected populations; participation, with

the aim of enabling the involvement of recipients in decision-making processes and

ultimately ensuring that humanitarian actors are *being held to account* for their actions;

and monitoring and evaluation, to review performance, identify lessons, and hopefully

learn from past experiences. These areas offer a useful window into the actual practice of

accountability, and the behaviours and assumptions that have accompanied the

accountability revolution. In each case, I assess the extent to which the tools and

mechanisms employed by humanitarian professionals have been able to address the

inequalities in authority inherent to their work, in line with the understanding of accountability as the responsible use of power.

Information sharing

Information has increasingly been viewed as a form of aid in itself, to be provided alongside other deliverables such as food, water, and shelter.[35] Information sharing is also intrinsically linked to accountability, as a means to ensure that disaster-affected populations are aware of the objectives and activities of humanitarian organizations working in their area.[36] To this end, the CAAP commits agencies to "provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them," including goals and objectives, expected timeframes and results, and how the organization in question can be held to account.[37] The CHS similarly notes that aid recipients should "know their rights and entitlements, have access to information, and participate in decisions that affect them," in languages and formats that are culturally appropriate and accessible according to age, gender, and diversity.[38] Both commitments are premised on the assumption that information sharing can help communities to mitigate future risks and make informed decisions about their own relief and recovery efforts, and thus contribute to "the rebalancing of existing 'aid delivery' power dynamics."[39]

Information sharing strategies typically employ a range of media in reaching aid recipients, including print, radio, SMS, and social media. While the means and methods

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35 See Jonathan Walter, ed., *World Disasters Report 2005: Focus on Information Sharing in Disasters* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2005).
36 See CDAC Network, "Communicating with Communities and Accountability" (CDAC Network, 2014).
37 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "The IASC Principals' Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations," 8–9.
38 CHS Alliance, "Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability," 13.
39 CDAC Network, "Communicating with Communities and Accountability," 6.

often vary according to context, the objective of such strategies is to provide communities

with the information necessary to make informed decisions about the relief efforts that

matter to them.[40] Following the earthquake in Haiti, for example, radio and SMS message

broadcasting were widely used to disseminate public health messages, dispel myths and

rumours, and provide information on recovery and reconstruction activities. SMS

platforms were also used to conduct public opinion polling, thus opening a means of two-

way communication between the providers and recipients of aid.[41] Similar techniques

were used in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan and in Nepal after the

devastating 2015 earthquake, among other cases.[42] More generally, some have observed

that the spread of information and communications technologies, including more widely

available cellular and internet access, will eventually lead to a "fundamental shift in

power" across the humanitarian regime, by enabling aid actors to reach a broader

audience than ever before and facilitating more diverse and bottom-up forms of

communication and decision-making.[43]

In practice, the emphasis on information sharing has struggled to advance beyond a

delivery model approach to international assistance.[44] On the one hand, improved

information sharing techniques have addressed a key concern of the accountability

revolution; mainly, better transparency relative to the activities and decisions of

humanitarian actors on the ground. On the other hand, the decision about what

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40 CDAC Network, 4.
41 See Anne Nelson, Ivan Sigal, and Dean Zambrano, "Media, Information Systems and Communities: Lessons from Haiti" (CDAC Network, 2010).
42 See Caroline Austin and Nicki Bailey, "Typhoon Haiyan Learning Review: A Review of Communicating with Communities Initiatives and Coordination in the Response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines" (CDAC Network, 2014); Margie Buchanan-Smith, Subindra Bogati, and Sarah Routley, "Are You Listening Now? Community Perspectives on Communicating with Communities During the Nepal Earthquake Response" (CDAC Network, 2016).
43 See Chandran and Thow, *Humanitarianism in the Network Age*.
44 This paragraph draws from Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, chap. 9.

information to share, with whom, and through which means remains the prerogative of those charged with the delivery of aid. This has contributed to significant information gaps, including, most notably, a discrepancy in preferred methods of communication.[45] Surveys with affected peoples, for instance, have repeatedly identified a preference for face-to-face communication, which is valued for promoting dialogue between humanitarian practitioners and recipients.[46] Aid organizations, by contrast, largely prefer more formal channels of information sharing such as radio, which enable them to reach a larger audience with relative ease. The reliance on radio and other forms of mass communication media, however, can close off space for dialogue and feedback.[47] Access to such information, moreover, may be highly dependent on location, gender, or socioeconomic status, while the messaging itself often lacks context-specific or localized information.[48] Nonetheless, many humanitarian organizations continue to employ these techniques, in effect prioritizing information dissemination over dialogue with disaster-affected peoples.

This mismatch in preferred communication channels also speaks to a more fundamental concern regarding the outflow of information. Most information sharing methods used by humanitarian organizations operate on a 'one-to-many' messaging approach, focusing primarily on the delivery of information deemed critical to the response. Communities, however, have indicated a need for both better information *and*

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45 See Margie Buchanan-Smith, Jonathan Corpus Ong, and Sarah Routley, "Who's Listening? Accountability to Affected People in the Haiyan Response" (Plan International, 2015); Buchanan-Smith, Bogati, and Routley, "Are You Listening Now?"
46 Francesca Bonino, Isabella Jean, and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms: Research, Evidence, and Guidance" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2014); Buchanan-Smith, Ong, and Routley, "Who's Listening?"; Buchanan-Smith, Bogati, and Routley, "Are You Listening Now?"
47 Theodora Hannides, "Humanitarian Broadcasting in Emergencies: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings" (London: BBC Media Action, 2015), 6.
48 Hannides, 6.

communication, involving two-way dialogue between the providers and recipients of aid.[49] Without such feedback loops, observers suggest, recipients can often feel as though their concerns are not being heard. In the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan, for instance, humanitarian actors employed a range of mechanisms designed to share information, including information boards and posters, SMS, hotlines, and community consultations, among others. These approaches, however, largely overlooked or ignored the concerns emanating from communities, particularly regarding aid distribution practices and selection criteria that contravened Filipino customs.[50] Information sharing in this context, as a result, was viewed as unidirectional in nature, and based more on explaining existing practices as opposed to listening to feedback from the communities. This resonates with findings from Haiti and Nepal,[51] and is reflective of a more general trend of failing to listen to those on the receiving end of aid.[52]

For this reason, some observers question whether information sharing practices have significantly changed over the past decade. As one report concludes:

> The lack of effective interaction with communities remains a deep-seated problem. [...] While humanitarian organizations and Governments recognize the need to take advantage of new data sources, there is still a tendency for people removed from a crisis to decide what is best for the people living through that crisis.[53]

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49 Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, 114–15.
50 In Filipino culture, neighbours are often regarded as members of the extended family. The targeted distribution of aid following Typhoon Haiyan, however, failed to take these cultural norms into account, and is thought to have triggered competition and conflict in previously close-knit communities. Although humanitarian organizations were aware of this concern – beneficiary selection emerged as the primary concern identified by recipients through various feedback mechanisms – few changed their practices in the weeks and months following the disaster. See Buchanan-Smith, Ong, and Routley, "Who's Listening?," 29–31.
51 Imogen Wall and Yves Gerald Chéry, "Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak. Best Practice and Lessons Learned in Communication with Disaster Affected Communities: Haiti 2010" (BBC World Service Trust, UKAID, Internews Europe, 2010); Buchanan-Smith, Bogati, and Routley, "Are You Listening Now?"
52 Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*.
53 Chandran and Thow, *Humanitarianism in the Network Age*, 25.

Information sharing practices, in sum, remain premised on a delivery model of aid. Outside actors have largely retained authority over the type and content of information to be shared, thus limiting the extent to which recipients have been engaged in genuine dialogue and two-way forms of sharing and listening.[54] Information sharing, consequently, has remained heavily skewed towards humanitarian actors, resulting in important communication gaps in practice.

Feedback and complaints

Recognizing, perhaps, the limitations of one-way channels of information sharing, a number of humanitarian organizations have put in place mechanisms to collect feedback and complaints from the recipients of aid. Both the CAAP and CHS prioritize the use of feedback and complaints tools, and encourage humanitarian actors to "actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming."[55] Feedback and complaints mechanisms refer to any procedures or tools designed to canvass the views and opinions of recipients. They are generally considered effective if they collect, acknowledge, and respond to feedback received, thus 'closing the loop' between the providers and recipients of aid.[56] Donors, moreover, are increasingly requiring humanitarian organizations to have feedback mechanisms in place, as part of their own commitment to ensuring "adequate involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian response."[57]

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54 Wall and Chéry, "Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak," 5.
55 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "The IASC Principals' Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations," 9.
56 Francesca Bonino, Isabella Jean, and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Closing the Loop: Effective Feedback in Humanitarian Contexts" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2014).
57 Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, "Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship" (OECD-DAC, 2003), 2.

There has been a significant increase in the use of feedback and complaints

mechanisms in recent years. Most involve some formal means of registering feedback

and grievances, including suggestion or complaint boxes, call centres, SMS platforms,

focus groups, or community assessments.[58] Other approaches may be more informal in

nature and embedded in the everyday activities of programming, for example through

program monitoring and evaluation.[59] An expanding body of guidance has accompanied

the growing interest in feedback and complaints mechanisms, offering direction on field-

level practices, challenges, lessons learned, and community perceptions, in both sudden-

onset crises and insecure environments.[60] The latter present particular challenges to the

collection of feedback and complaints, and often require international humanitarian

organizations to lean heavily on local partners or third-party monitors, as well as other

forms of remote management.[61]

Although aid providers are increasingly incorporating feedback and complaints

mechanisms into their programming, their effect remains unclear. In a survey of aid

recipients across three countries, for example, a majority of respondents reported that

humanitarian organizations had solicited their feedback; of these, however, only 19

percent indicated that any follow-up action had been taken.[62] Most noted that they were

only partly satisfied with the quality of aid received. More generally, recipients rarely

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58 Jump, "Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms," 4.
59 Bonino, Jean, and Knox-Clarke, "Closing the Loop," 9–11.
60 See Bonino, Jean, and Knox-Clarke, "Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms"; Inter-Agency Standing
Committee, "Best Practice Guide: Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms" (Geneva:
IASC, 2016); Lotte Ruppert, Elias Sagmeister, and Julia Steets, "Listening to Communities in Insecure
Environments: Lessons from Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria"
(Global Public Policy Institute, 2016).
61 Ruppert, Sagmeister, and Steets, "Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments"; Antonio Donini
and Daniel Maxwell, "From Face-to-Face to Face-to-Screen: Remote Management, Effectiveness and
Accountability of Humanitarian Action in Insecure Environments - ICRC," *International Review of the Red
Cross* 95, no. 890 (2013): 383–413.
62 Abby Stoddard et al., "The State of the Humanitarian System 2015" (London: ALNAP, 2015), 96.

know whether their input has been received or if humanitarian organizations are working

to address their concerns.[63] The lack of follow-up or response can generate

disappointment among communities, and a sense of feeling "used" by aid agencies.[64]

These findings suggest that, despite the widespread use of feedback tools, data collection

is not always followed by efforts to report back on or respond to the feedback received.

Those on the receiving end of aid, as a result, can feel as though their concerns are not

being heard or addressed.

The scope of feedback solicited from aid recipients, moreover, is often narrowly

defined. Most feedback mechanisms are adjusted for what Bonino et al. have labelled

'Type I' feedback, which typically concerns the quality of assistance received.[65] Such

feedback tends to focus on day-to-day activities and other project-level details, and is

thus relatively easy to address. Humanitarian actors, by contrast, often struggle to collect

or act on 'Type II' feedback related to the overall goals and objectives of programming.

The latter may call into question the very premise or rationale of assistance, and is

therefore pushed to the side in favour of the minor adjustments necessitated by Type I

feedback. Feedback and complaints mechanisms, consequently, tend to be seen in narrow

and programmatic terms, thereby limiting the extent to which aid recipients may become

involved in the broader decisions and choices that affect their lives.

As opposed to fostering two-way dialogue, accountability tools meant to collect

feedback and complaints have thus remained primarily extractive in nature. They are

guided by practices that have limited the scope and quality of the feedback received, and

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63 Dayna Brown, "Accountability: Everybody's Responsibility," in *2015 Humanitarian Accountability Report: On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective?* (Geneva: CHS Alliance, 2015), 13.
64 Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, 73.
65 Bonino, Jean, and Knox-Clarke, "Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms," 102.

that have tended to "see 'communication' as primarily the process of delivering or extracting information."[66] While humanitarian actors have expanded their capacities to take account of the views and concerns of recipients, they have yet to move towards more meaningful dialogue and communication. The practice of collecting feedback and complaints, in other words, has remained primarily unidirectional in nature, with few means for communities to hold humanitarians to account.

Participation

Various tools and frameworks in use across the humanitarian regime have sought to promote the more meaningful or 'higher level' participation of disaster-affected peoples within the delivery of aid.[67] Drawing inspiration from the development sector, which has long recognized the need to build programming around the priorities and strategies of the poor themselves,[68] these tools seek to enable a more active role for recipients within planning exercises, decision-making, or implementation. In doing so, they look to diminish the inequalities between humanitarian practitioners and recipients by enhancing the latter's control over and 'ownership' of aid activities across all phases of response.[69] Accordingly, the CAAP encourages participatory approaches that "enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them," through initial assessment, project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.[70] The CHS similarly calls on humanitarian actors to "ensure representation is inclusive, involving the participation and engagement of communities and people

66 Wall and Chéry, "Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak," 5.
67 Alice Obrecht et al., "WHS Effectiveness Theme Focal Issue: Accountability" (ALNAP, 2015), 11.
68 Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Essex, UK: Longman, scientific & technical, 1983); See also Brown and Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality?," 17–19.
69 ALNAP, "Participation by Crisis-Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action: A Handbook for Practitioners" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003), 24.
70 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "The IASC Principals' Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations," 10.

affected by crisis at all stages of the work."[71] These commitments are "people-centred" in their approach, and premised on the assumption that the participation of disaster-affected populations and recognition of their capacities in the face of adversity are central to surviving with dignity.[72]

Across the humanitarian regime, participation is generally understood to mean the engagement of disaster-affected peoples across one or more phases of response.[73] The literature describes a continuum of participation that is divided among three main approaches, each varying according to the degree of control that the recipients of aid may exert over decision-making.[74] *Instrumental* approaches view participation as a means of achieving program goals and primarily involve recipients through feedback mechanisms, as described above, or community consultations. *Collaborative* approaches prioritize the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and resources, as humanitarian actors and recipients collectively work towards a common goal. *Supportive* approaches seek to assist local actors in carrying out their own activities and initiatives, typically through the provision of material, financial, or technical support or advice. While each of these approaches recognizes local capacities and potentials, the latter, in theory, goes the furthest in supporting locally driven and owned initiatives.

Although interest in participatory approaches has grown considerably in recent years, progress towards greater engagement and local ownership has been more uneven in implementation. Some studies suggest that while disaster-affected populations may be

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71 CHS Alliance, "Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability," 13.
72 Sphere Project, *The Sphere Project*, 55–57.
73 ALNAP, "Participation by Crisis-Affected Populations in Humanitarian Action," 20.
74 ALNAP, 20–21; Neil Barry and Jane Barham, "Review of Existing Practices to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations" (ECHO, 2012), 57–58.

involved at the outset of a response, most notably through the assessment phase, meaningful participation tends to drop off throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring of aid activities.[75] Follow-up from initial assessments and consultations remain rare, thus limiting the extent to which aid recipients may participate in later phases of the response. The latter, for their part, largely feel excluded from decision-making processes, and report seeing little evidence that their views and concerns are being taken into account by humanitarian actors.[76] Despite the increasing popularity of the language of 'participation', some observers have thus questioned whether such rhetoric has been used to dress up 'business as usual' across the humanitarian regime.[77]

Participatory approaches, of course, face a number of operational constraints that have limited their uptake in practice. While many humanitarian practitioners look to prioritize participation from the outset of response, they acknowledge that the urgency or timeframe of intervention can often supplant local engagement.[78] Indeed, in chronically insecure environments, participation is typically viewed as secondary to providing some modicum of life-saving assistance. The challenge of operationalizing participatory approaches is further exacerbated by short-term planning cycles and fixed donor requirements, which have been cited as factors hindering participation.[79] Some

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75 Jessica Alexander, "Informed Decision Making: Including the Voice of Affected Communities in the Process," in *2015 Humanitarian Accountability Report: On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective?* (Geneva: CHS Alliance, 2015), 100; Barry and Barham, "Review of Existing Practices to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations," 46; Brown and Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality?," 40.
76 Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, 71–72.
77 See Chapter 8 for further discussion of the rhetoric, and appropriation, of 'participation' and other buzzwords across the humanitarian regime.
78 Barry and Barham, "Review of Existing Practices to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations," 42.
79 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review," 28–29.

organizations are also reluctant to move towards more developmental understandings of participation, for fear of straying too far into questions of power and politics.[80]

Some limitations, however, are more fundamental in nature, and linked to practices that continue to privilege the interests and needs of humanitarian professionals. Most notably, the heavy reliance on needs assessments and pre-existing templates, most of which have been developed elsewhere and are applied regardless of local context, can minimize the participation of disaster-affected peoples.[81] These templates often rely on checklists that filter the participation of recipients through set categories. The information provided is then assessed in relation to predetermined needs, rather than the vulnerabilities and capacities identified by participants themselves.[82] Such approaches rarely resonate with how disaster-affected peoples might view their own situation, nor acknowledge how they might prioritize the support they receive. At their worst, they reduce participation to an output or 'tick-box' to be reported back to donors.[83] As opposed to fostering collaboration or support for local initiatives, pre-existing models of participation therefore limit, in most cases, the scope for local engagement and buy-in.

The stove piping of participation through predetermined assessments and programs raises the question of whose needs and interests are valued most. Genuine participation, as mentioned above, entails the transfer of responsibility and control from benefactor to beneficiary. It necessitates, in the words of one author, a "change in mindset that truly

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80 Brown and Donini, "Rhetoric or Reality?," 60.
81 See also Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 90–93.
82 Barry and Barham, "Review of Existing Practices to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations," 46.
83 Barry and Barham, 66.

embraces the input of crisis-affected people,"[84] and which creates space for meaningful

local engagement. As currently practiced, however, participation is still largely carried

out on terms dictated by humanitarian professionals.[85] It serves to validate predetermined

decisions and solutions, without calling into question whether these are appropriate to the

context in which they are being applied. Rather than addressing the power disparities

inherent to aid, the shift to more participatory approaches has thus preserved much of the

current imbalance in expertise and capital. Participation, in this light, continues to work

to the benefit of humanitarian professionals, who are still viewed as the primary

facilitators and decision-makers of international assistance.

Monitoring and evaluation

The final dimension of accountability considered here relates to the monitoring and

evaluation (M&E) capacities of humanitarian organizations. Both are prioritized by the

CAAP and CHS; the latter, for example, states that disaster-affected peoples and

communities "can expect delivery of improved assistance as organizations learn from

experience and reflection."[86] Humanitarian professionals should learn, innovate, and

implement changes on the basis of continual monitoring,[87] and should feed this learning

back into their organization on an ongoing basis.[88] These commitments seek to enhance

accountability by encouraging practitioners to demonstrate the effectiveness of

programming and account for the impact of their work.

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84 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review," 50.
85 Charlotte Dufour et al., "Rights, Standards and Quality in a Complex Humanitarian Space: Is Sphere the Right Tool?," *Disasters* 28, no. 2 (2004): 124–41.
86 CHS Alliance, "Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability," 16.
87 CHS Alliance, 16.
88 Inter-Agency Standing Committee, "IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations," 1.

The pressure to demonstrate that humanitarian aid is grounded in evidence has increased substantially over the past two decades. A range of M&E techniques, including peer reviews, audits, needs assessments, and other program monitoring tools, are now regularly employed by humanitarian actors and used to guide and review program implementation.[89] The number of organizational, inter-agency, and sectoral evaluations has also grown substantially, with the objective of demonstrating 'what works' and what, by extension, does not in humanitarian response.[90] There are concerns, however, that this evidence base is not being applied consistently, and that M&E techniques have remained largely disconnected from practice.[91] Others contend that advances in learning and evaluation have yet to translate into improved decision-making on the ground.[92]

The question of local knowledge, taken up in more detail in the next chapter, offers a useful example in this regard. In 1996, the JEEAR was highly critical of humanitarian actors for failing to take into account political and social contexts in responding to the Rwandan genocide:

> The situation has been made more difficult by the fact that a large number of relief agency personnel had not previously worked in the region, knew little about Rwandese society and, as a result, were oblivious to many of the issues of concern to the ordinary, Kinyarwanda-speaking Rwandese.[93]

89 For a list of these analysis and response tools, see Dennis Dijkzeul, Dorothea Hilhorst, and Peter Walker, "Introduction: Evidence-Based Action in Humanitarian Crises," *Disasters* 37 (2013): S3–7.

90 ALNAP's Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Portal, for example, contains over 2,200 evaluation reports. See ALNAP, "Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Portal," 2017, http://www.alnap.org/resources/.

91 Alistair Hallam, "Harnessing the Power of Evaluation in Humanitarian Action: An Initiative to Improve Understanding and Use of Evaluation" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2011); James Darcy and Paul Knox-Clarke, "Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2013); James Darcy et al., "The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision Making" (Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2013).

92 Lars Peter Nissen, "Gandalfs and Geeks: Strengthening the Accountability of Humanitarian Decision-Making," in *2015 Humanitarian Accountability Report: On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective?* (Geneva: CHS Alliance, 2015), 28–31.

93 Borton, Brusset, and Hallam, "The International Response to Conflict and Genocide," 176.

Ten years later, the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition lambasted the "tragic combination of arrogance and ignorance" that accompanied the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami,[94] which it suggested was characterized by the "brushing aside" of local authorities and organizations, the "misrecognition" of local capacities, and "poor-quality beneficiary participation."[95] Although somewhat improved, similar problems accompanied the responses in Haiti in 2010 and the Philippines in 2013, as described in the previous chapter. These findings, representing nearly two decades of humanitarian practice, reveal a troubling and recurrent trend of neglecting to act on lessons from the field. They suggest, as Jessica Alexander and others have argued, that "lessons are more often 'identified' rather than 'learned',"[96] with important implications for accountability to disaster-affected peoples.

The failure to learn stems, in part, from practices associated with the delivery model of aid. Although ostensibly designed to assess impacts, defined as the long-term effects of an intervention,[97] monitoring and evaluation tools are more often used to measure outputs, processes, and outcomes. Put differently, they measure the number of products and goods that were delivered and the ways in which they were disbursed, as opposed to the actual effects of those interventions.[98] On the one hand, impact is inherently difficult to gauge, due to a number of practical challenges associated with the

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94 Ian Christoplos, "Links between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development in the Tsunami Response" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006), 83.

95 John Telford and John Cosgrave, "Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report" (London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006), 93.

96 Alexander, "Accountability 10 Years in Review," 21; See also Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), chap. 6.

97 Saul Guerrero, Sophie Woodhead, and Marieke Hounjet, "On the Right Track?: A Brief Review of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Humanitarian Sector" (ACF International, 2013), 3.

98 Guerrero, Woodhead, and Hounjet, 7.

collection, measurement, and attribution of data collected in the field.[99] On the other

hand, practices associated with M&E have also prioritized, in the words of one report,

"what is tangible over what is meaningful and useful."[100] It is far easier, for example, to

measure the number of food packets delivered, than to determine whether this

intervention is contributing to the long-term issue of food insecurity in a particular

community or region. This practice derives from the upward pressure felt by

humanitarian organizations to demonstrate what has been delivered, in terms that are easy

to describe to donors and can therefore justify funding decisions.[101] Consequently, the

more difficult question of what has been achieved is often diminished, at the expense of

fully understanding the long-term effects of aid.[102]

The failure to learn may also be attributed to prevailing relationships of hierarchy

and authority that have limited the voice and influence of recipients in contemporary

practices of M&E. In a meta-analysis of humanitarian evaluations conducted between

2001 and 2004, Beck and Buchanan-Smith observe that almost three-quarters of the

reports surveyed had either failed to solicit the perspectives of beneficiaries or held only

minimal consultations.[103] A review of evaluations of the Haiti earthquake response

similarly revealed an over-reliance on methodologies that largely excluded the views of

aid recipients. Instead, many of the evaluations, which were conducted by external

consultants over the course of short field visits, focused primarily on humanitarian

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99 Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, 101.
100 Guerrero, Woodhead, and Hounjet, "On the Right Track?: A Brief Review of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Humanitarian Sector," 7.
101 Julia Steets, Elias Sagmeister, and Lotte Ruppert, "Eyes and Ears on the Ground: Monitoring Aid in Insecure Environments" (Global Public Policy Institute, 2016), 25–26.
102 Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, 40–41.
103 Tony Beck and Margie Buchanan-Smith, "Joint Evaluations Coming of Age?: The Quality and Future Scope of Joint Evaluations" (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2008), 110–12.

professionals, who were practically and linguistically more accessible.[104] These trends, which have largely continued to this day,[105] suggest a troubling practice of excluding the perspectives of the very groups targeted by humanitarian aid, raising the question of whose voices and inputs are valued most. It is possible that M&E tools may implicitly serve to validate the processes and procedures that humanitarian organizations have designed and put in place, to the exclusion of the needs of disaster-affected populations.

Important regime-wide changes and policy developments have, of course, occurred as a result of past evaluations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the cluster system has undergone a decade of tinkering and adjustments, stemming primarily from a series of comparative and cluster-specific evaluations.[106] The growing use of cash-based programming, in place of distributing food and other goods, is another example of the impact of evaluation and research on humanitarian practice.[107] Nonetheless, it appears that these lessons tend to be applied selectively, and are based more on the right confluence of attention, people, and institutional evolution.[108] More often, contemporary M&E techniques appear to validate, and thus reinforce, prevailing practices and behaviours. This raises the question of whose voice matters most in relation to the question of reform, and the extent to which entrenched roles and assumptions may underpin the resistance to change. The next section takes up these issues in more detail.

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104 Katherine Haver, "Haiti Earthquake Response: Mapping and Analysis of Gaps and Duplications in Evaluations" (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2011), 12–13.
105 Alexander, "Informed Decision Making," 100.
106 See, for example, Abby Stoddard et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2007); Julia Steets et al., "Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2010); Julia Steets et al., "FAO/WFP Joint Evaluation of Food Security Cluster Coordination in Humanitarian Action" (FAO/WFP, 2014).
107 Darcy and Knox-Clarke, "Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action," 31–32.
108 Sandison, "The Utilization of Evaluations"; Darcy and Knox-Clarke, "Evidence and Knowledge in Humanitarian Action."

Addressing the Accountability Deficit

In reflecting on the various tools described above, it is evident that the humanitarian field has made noticeable strides forward in improving its accountability to the recipients of aid. Humanitarians now routinely 'give account' of their activities and objectives on the ground, through various information sharing platforms and methods. They have equally expanded their ability to 'take account' of the views of disaster-affected populations through feedback and complaints mechanisms and, increasingly, the use of participatory methodologies. The previous section, however, also reveals a number of lingering challenges in addressing the imbalances in power and authority inherent to the field. It suggests there has been less progress in ensuring that humanitarian actors are 'being held to account', most notably in ways that take responsibility for past missteps and give greater voice and influence to recipients. This raises important questions regarding the scope and potential limits of the accountability agenda, which the remainder of this chapter will seek to tackle. Is the prevailing accountability deficit linked to operational or material constraints? Or has the language of accountability served to paper over more deeply entrenched habits and practices, which inhibit the further transfer of power and authority across the humanitarian field?

Many of the issues inherent to the accountability deficit are linked to factors outside the control of humanitarian actors. Emergency situations are, by definition, "non-ideal," as humanitarians must often make decisions on the basis of limited information and in the context of immediate human needs.[109] The tension between the 'need for speed' and 'accountability' is particularly acute for those on the ground, who must balance the

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109 Darcy et al., "The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision Making," 6.

pressing needs of the moment with the various commitments outlined in the CAAP, CHS, and other initiatives. The urgency of humanitarian responses has further limited the scope for reflection and learning, as one NGO representative observed:

> Everybody talks about learning, about innovation, you know [...] how can we do better and whatever. Enough people are thinking about all that stuff, but organizations just have too much, too much. And then the next crisis is right there.[110]

Unsurprisingly, many humanitarian responders prioritize the imperative to act quickly, believing that accountability to the recipients of aid may be 'added on' later.[111] The accountability deficit is further complicated by the realities of insufficient funding, short timeframes, limited access, and high staff turnover, all of which make it difficult to reliably and consistently communicate with disaster-affected peoples, apply participatory methods, or engage in ongoing monitoring and evaluation. In some cases, such factors can "make standards impossible to meet," and pose a significant challenge to the central tenets of the accountability agenda.[112]

The tension between upward and downward accountability has further limited the application of certain accountability tools. Although the Code of Conduct, for instance, prioritizes accountability to both "those who wish to assist and those who need assistance,"[113] the structure of power and economic capital across the humanitarian field has effectively tipped the scales in favour of the former. In recent years, aid organizations have been bound by increasingly stringent reporting requirements to donors.

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110 Interview with NGO representative (314).
111 Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, "SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations," 13.
112 Sphere Project, *The Sphere Project*, 8.
113 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, "The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NonGovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief," 4.

Humanitarian professionals, as a result, often find themselves spending an inordinate amount of time providing what one observer describes as "a constant running commentary" on project rationales, spend rates, outputs, and deliverables.[114] They are typically wary of reporting on failures or other shortcomings for fear of losing funding or support; one NGO respondent noted that "we can't afford to show that we're not successful," which has contributed to risk averse behaviour and a lack of learning.[115] Humanitarian organizations, moreover, must simultaneously be accountable to disaster-affected peoples and the communities hosting them, to national and local authorities, and to one another, which ultimately detracts from their ability to engage in more bottom-up approaches. Economic realities and multiple lines of accountability present "a big dose of political realism," in the words of Hugo Slim, and help explain why participatory and responsive programming may be truncated in practice.[116]

While these operational and material constraints are obviously challenging to overcome, the question of whether the language of accountability has served to paper over entrenched habits and practices is harder to answer. To return to an earlier point, initial understandings of accountability in relation to this sector drew from notions of democratic accountability, understood as the legitimate right of elected officials to act in the interests of the people. In the humanitarian field, however, it is clear that accountability is far from the democratic ideal. Most notably, there is no such social contract between rulers and the ruled.[117] Rather than being negotiated between the providers and recipients of aid, the various accountability initiatives launched over the

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114 Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, 106.
115 Interview with NGO representative (313). See also Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, 229–32.
116 Slim, *Humanitarian Ethics*, 105.
117 For a related discussion, see Slim, "By What Authority?"

past two decades were developed in isolation from the latter, and entirely without their participation or consent. Accountability, according to contemporary humanitarian practice, has thus been imposed from above,[118] as "something that agencies *grant* to the local population."[119] The power asymmetry is fundamentally different from that of democratic accountability, and has remained largely unchanged through the development of various standards and frameworks. Coupled with the voluntary nature of these commitments, humanitarians therefore determine the level of accountability they 'give' to disaster-affected populations, with no formal consequences for failing to meet the standards they have set.

If humanitarian actors are not democratically accountable to aid recipients, are they at least legitimate representatives of these peoples? Slim has developed a typology to assess the precise nature of NGO legitimacy; two of these ideal types are relevant for the discussion developed here.[120] Organizations, he suggests, can be said to be *speaking with* communities if they are working with representatives of the group and speaking and acting with their consent. Alternatively, they may be *speaking for* those communities, if, as is so often claimed, the latter are unable to speak out themselves.[121] Viewed through this lens, the various feedback mechanisms and participatory methodologies employed by

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118 Janice Stein notes that accountability standards may be determined either by negotiation between parties, or through imposition, by one party over another. See Stein, "Humanitarian Organizations: Accountable - Why, to Whom, for What, and How?," 125.

119 Dorothea Hilhorst, "Taking Accountability to the next Level," in *2015 Humanitarian Accountability Report: On the Road to Istanbul: How Can the World Humanitarian Summit Make Humanitarian Response More Effective?* (Geneva: CHS Alliance, 2015), 104–12. Emphasis in original.

120 Slim distinguishes between four ideal types in describing the 'voice legitimacy' of NGOs. The latter may be *speaking as* the poor or affected community if they are made up of representatives of the community itself; *speaking with* communities if they are working with representatives of the community and speaking and acting with their consent; *speaking for* the community if its representatives are unable to speak out themselves; or *speaking about* issues of poverty or insecurity, if described in general terms. See Slim, "By What Authority?," 4–5.

121 See also Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries."

humanitarian organizations may be seen as primarily speaking for disaster-affected

populations. The latter, as is evident from the discussion above, still do not feel as though

their needs and perspectives are being adequately heard or acknowledged by

humanitarian actors. Many communities suggest that, while they may offer feedback or

be asked to participate in decision-making, humanitarians rarely act on this input or

report back. Rather than speaking with disaster-affected peoples, humanitarian actors

have therefore retained final authority over decision-making, based largely on their

assumptions of what is best for the communities in question.

Speaking for communities, Slim warns, can be problematic, as NGOs may

inadvertently distort or capture the voice of aid recipients in ways that are not

representative of their interests. This concern has been raised through a number of

evaluations, which have suggested that the feedback and participatory tools employed by

humanitarian actors are more often used to 'extract' information and validate

predetermined decisions than institute processes for ongoing dialogue.[122] These practices

are reflective of the presumed expertise and knowledge capital of humanitarian

professionals, who, accordingly, have been tasked with determining what is best for

disaster-affected communities. As one NGO representative observed:

> What does consultation, what does involving the affected population really mean?
> [...] Do I really want to know what they want or do I just want to give them what I
> have, and say: "well, we sort of consulted but hey, you still need what I think you
> need and that's this." If you break up the whole discussion and actually sit down

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122 Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, "SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations," 15; See also Barry and Barham, "Review of Existing Practices to Ensure Participation of Disaster-Affected Communities in Humanitarian Aid Operations," 58; Buchanan-Smith, Bogati, and Routley, "Are You Listening Now?," 62; Wall and Chéry, "Ann Kite Yo Pale. Let Them Speak," 5.

with people who are your clients and not your beneficiaries your whole logic needs to shift so much. There's rhetoric around that, but not a lot of following suit.[123]

The rhetoric of accountability, in other words, has yet to fundamentally shift the imbalance in authority and capital that is intrinsic to relations between the providers and receivers of aid. The former have retained control over aid delivery, with the power to decide who is deserving of this aid, what form it will take, and how it should be provided.[124]

The presumption of authority on the part of humanitarian professionals is not, in itself, a concern. A certain degree of expertise and technical knowledge, grounded in a set of widely accepted accountability standards, is clearly necessary to ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of aid. To return to a theme from previous chapters, however, the knowledge capital embedded in these claims to expertise has been elevated above all else within contemporary humanitarian practice. This has, in effect, reinforced the hierarchical relationship between aid recipients and a humanitarian elite, whose presence in disaster-affected contexts may be temporary but who nonetheless has significant authority and influence over the delivery of aid. The expertise of this elite is vested in the 'international,' and the universal, technical knowledge that is exceptional from and above 'local' knowledge.[125] The latter, by contrast, is typically seen to be "less sophisticated and more parochial,"[126] and ultimately of less value to humanitarian response. This assumption is at odds with a considerable body of evidence, which has demonstrated the important role of both local coping mechanisms and contextual knowledge in disaster

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123 Interview with NGO representative (314).
124 See Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees Be Humane?," *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (February 2002): 51.
125 See Autesserre, *Peaceland*.
126 Autesserre, 84.

response.[127] From an accountability perspective, local knowledge is also important for verifying the quality of aid, identifying potential missteps, and ensuring that disaster-affected peoples are playing an active and influential role in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Nonetheless, despite the growing use of feedback mechanisms and participatory tools, contemporary practice continues to minimize the engagement and contributions of recipients in humanitarian response. This, of course, is reinforced by a top-down model of aid delivery that continues to prioritize external sources of capital as the "axiomatic starting point for humanitarian action,"[128] notwithstanding evidence to the contrary.

Contemporary humanitarian practice, as a result, is far from the ideals established in the various accountability frameworks developed over the past two decades. While humanitarian professionals have introduced new feedback mechanisms and participatory tools, they have largely resisted changes that fundamentally challenge the prevailing structures of authority and capital across the humanitarian field. As one NGO representative observed:

> We do accountability, we have a feedback box, you know, but it doesn't go all the way [...] I imagine that if you really go all the way in this power structure thinking and what we really want is to help people get back on their feet, we would have to turn around completely the entire humanitarian structure and sector. We're not ready for that. [...] In that sense we're not that far along at all.[129]

127 See, for example, Erin Baines and Emily Paddon, "'This Is How We Survived': Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection," *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 231–47; Casey A. Barrs, "How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory" (New York: Cuny Center, 2010); Ashley South and Simon Harragin, "Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe." (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2012); Roger Thorleifsson, "Coping Strategies among Self-Settled Syrians in Lebanon," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 47 (2014): 23.
128 Terry, 233.
129 Interview with NGO representative (314).

To "go all the way" in addressing the existing imbalance of power requires important shifts in the practice of aid. For humanitarian professionals, it means breaking down hierarchies of authority and elite control, and relinquishing claims to expertise in ways that make space for the engagement and contributions of others. It requires meaningful dialogue that recognizes and builds on the knowledge and sources of capital present in local communities and governments. Entrenched practices and habits, however, have proven resistant to change. The top-down, supply oriented model of aid delivery has remained the norm as a result, based largely on assumptions of what is best for those on the receiving end of international assistance.

Conclusion

While the humanitarian regime is, arguably, better at 'giving' and 'taking' account of its activities, aid organizations and professionals have generally resisted changes that would truly level the imbalance of authority and capital between them and the recipients of aid. Humanitarians, in other words, are not yet 'being held to account' for the responsible use of their power. While partly stemming from various operational and material constraints, this accountability deficit can also be linked to a long and troubling history of top-down, supply-oriented habits and behaviours, which have limited the uptake of accountability standards. Accountability, as a result, remains imposed from above, and is reflective of the hierarchical and elite nature of practice across the humanitarian field. Such practice has, to date, remained largely resistant to change, notwithstanding the recent rhetoric of accountability.

In the previous two chapters, I focused largely on the perpetuation of entrenched assumptions, behaviours, and power dynamics across the humanitarian field. Through

case studies of recent policy changes in the areas of coordination and accountability, I

attempted to demonstrate how authority structures cultivated at the global level have

shaped the organization and delivery of aid, and have largely been maintained through

the process of reform. In the final case study, to which I turn now, I shift focus and

explicitly take on the question of contestation, as has emerged through the recent debate

on 'localization'. I assess the possibility of change within the humanitarian field,

exploring how certain actors have challenged the prevailing regimes of authority within

this space and to what extent they have begun to reshape humanitarian practice 'from

below'.

CHAPTER 8:

Localizing Aid: The Challenge from Below

"Often the questions I'm asked assume that somehow everything is broke. It isn't. The system is not broken. It's simply financially broke."

Interview with UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O'Brien, *IRIN News*, 16 October 2015

"Those directly impacted by humanitarian crisis in their own backyards – individuals, civil society organizations, private sector actors, governments – want more control [...] Regional and local actors are demanding accompaniment rather than direction. We are appealing for true and equal partnership."

Degan Ali, speech delivered at the World Humanitarian Summit Global Consultation, 16 October 2015

Introduction

In October 2015, over 1,200 representatives from across the humanitarian regime gathered in Geneva for the World Humanitarian Summit's Global Consultation, the last of a series of regional and thematic consultations preceding the summit in Istanbul in May 2016. The goal of the consultation was to generate momentum and buy-in leading up to the summit itself, viewed by many as the best opportunity to 'rethink' the policy and practice of humanitarian aid in 25 years.[1] It brought together delegations representing the full spectrum of the humanitarian field, including UN agencies, northern- and southern-based NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as governments, the private sector, and academia. Personally, the Global Consultation, held just days after I first arrived in Geneva, provided an invaluable opportunity to observe humanitarian diplomacy in action. More substantively, the meeting brought to the fore a

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1 Christina Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016), 8.

number of issues related to the 'localization' of aid, including most notably the continued

marginalization of local actors in humanitarian financing and response. While collegial in

nature, it laid bare deep and contentious fault lines across the humanitarian field, and

exposed a growing rift between international and local providers of aid.[2]

Considerations of the role of local actors, of course, are not new to the

humanitarian regime. As discussed in previous chapters, coordination and accountability

reforms have long grappled with the question of how to best engage national and local

governments and NGOs in the delivery and management of aid. International NGOs,

moreover, regularly collaborate with local counterparts in various capacity building

activities and partnership arrangements. The localization agenda, however, which

emerged over the course of the WHS consultations, represented perhaps the most distinct

and articulate challenge to date regarding the role and influence of national and local

actors in humanitarian response. Using the WHS as their global platform, local, national,

and international NGOs based in the Global South forcefully advocated for a new

approach to humanitarianism, based on a more humane and people-centred model of

response and a more equitable distribution of power among all players involved. They

challenged what they viewed as the "systemic failure" of past reform initiatives, which,

from their perspective, had failed to break down the inequities and hierarchies separating

international actors from national and local responders and recipients.[3] While their

demands were not new, the WHS consultations amplified their collective voice,

2 See, for example, IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs," *IRIN News*, October 22, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/report/102141/gloves-off-between-local-and-international-ngos.
3 Imogen Wall, "'We Are Demanding Change': the Somali Woman Taking on International NGOs," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2016, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/21/degan-ali-somali-woman-taking-on-the-humanitarian-system.

culminating in a Global Consultation characterized by simmering tension and open calls for transformative change.

In previous chapters, I have sought to demonstrate how power across the humanitarian field has come to be vested in an elite group of international professionals, whose presence has shaped the policy and practice of aid. I have shown how the distribution of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital has profoundly influenced the process of humanitarian reform and reproduced hierarchies of authority and control across this space. In this chapter, by contrast, I examine the possibility of change within the prevailing distribution of power, focusing specifically on contestation 'from below'. I explore the origins and evolution of the local turn in humanitarian response, and assess the extent to which local and national actors have been able to make their voices heard across the field. On the one hand, the growing interest in localizing aid has been driven by pragmatic considerations; protracted crises and changing realities in operational theatres are forcing international humanitarian actors to increasingly engage with local counterparts. On the other hand, the discussion surrounding the role of local actors is also deeply political: Who should lead humanitarian response? Which actors should be recognized as authoritative in this regard?

While much of the controversy surrounding the WHS consultations centred on the unequal distribution of funding among international and local actors, this debate, I suggest, ultimately extends beyond material considerations. At its core, it highlights the deep competition over power and influence that accompanies all questions of humanitarian reform. National and local actors, which include both governments and NGOs at various levels of response, are agitating for greater recognition of their

authority, skills, and competencies, which, to date, have been largely overlooked by their international counterparts. They are leveraging various forms of capital – cultural, social, and symbolic – to buttress their claims, and to push for a more level playing field among all involved. At stake is greater authority over the delivery and management of humanitarian response, in a space traditionally dominated by a core group of Western-based organizations and professionals. While the WHS has come and gone without transformative change, the appeals for a rebalancing of power are unlikely to dissipate.

The localization debate, I argue, is also definitional in nature, particularly on the question of who and what counts as 'local'. The ambiguity inherent to the term has enabled humanitarian actors of various stripes to claim the mantle of local, including many that could be considered international in scope. Its lack of definition accommodates a range of actors, who have appropriated the language of the local to advance distinct interests and agendas. The future of the local turn, I conclude, thus hinges on the capacity of actors across the humanitarian field to mould this term to their advantage, with implications for both funding and influence within this social space.

The first section of this chapter returns to field theory, as I consider Bourdieu's conception of contestation and change across social fields. I then explore the shape and contours of the 'local turn' in humanitarianism, considering both its origins and evolution over time. In the next section, I examine the obstacles to the local turn, and trace the ways in which cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital have been employed to shape the process of reform. I conclude by assessing the future of the local in humanitarian response, noting in particular the definitional debate that is increasingly preoccupying the field.

Bourdieu, Field Theory, and the Space for Change

Fields, it may be recalled, are densely structured social spaces, created in and through the everyday competition among agents over different forms of capital. Their structure, according to Bourdieu, is defined by the "*state* of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle," and is itself always at stake.[4] Those who dominate within a particular field typically shape its structure and functioning to their advantage, while contending with the resistance of those who are dominated. The use of language and discourse is central to their expression of authority, and serves to legitimize certain activities and institutions and close off consideration of others.[5] Internalized and reproduced over time, these discursive practices, and the rules and ordering practices they convey, lead to considerable regularity in the formation and maintenance of the structures of domination.

Bourdieu's field analysis has been frequently targeted for its static conception of change, including its over-determined explanation of social action and stability.[6] These critiques have centred primarily on his conception of *habitus*, which he views as cultivated through the dispositions and experiences associated with a particular position in a field. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, operates without conscious recognition and tends to generate the 'reasonable' and 'common-sense' behaviours that are adjusted to the particular logic and rules of a social space. It does not necessarily lead to mechanical determination, but instead guides the practices and actions of agents within historically

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4 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE Publications, 1993), 73.
5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chap. 3.
6 See, for example, Richard Jenkins, "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism," *Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1982): 270–81; David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997), 211–17.

and socially conditioned constraints.[7] Nonetheless, critics charge that this view of social reality produces an "inescapable structural determinism," which is better at explaining the durability of particular structures and hierarchies than accounting for change.[8] In response, Bourdieu suggests that change within a given field is rarely sudden or violent; rather, it is more often gradual in nature and characterized by a continual process of evolution, as habitus and practices adapt to new structural conditions.

Habitus is therefore an adaptive mechanism, which responds to present situations in light of previous experiences. Specifically, Bourdieu identifies three types of situations – derived from the interaction between habitus and the structural conditions of a given field – that may potentially lead to change.[9] The first is a situation of social reproduction, which occurs when the distribution of different forms of capital has not changed from the conditions in which the habitus of agents was first formed. Existing structures and hierarchies tend to prevail, and are perceived and readily accepted as natural. When the underlying conditions of the field begin to change, resulting in new opportunities and constraints, habitus will adapt accordingly. Gradual change can result in situations of what Bourdieu calls the "hysteresis" of habitus, defined as the lag between previous dispositions and new experiences, typically resulting in missed opportunities and ill-adapted responses to changing conditions.[10] Finally, a situation of social crisis may occur as a result of sudden changes in the structure of the field, which stem from the introduction of new forms of capital or changes occurring in proximate fields.[11] During

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7 See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chap. 3.
8 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 211; See also Peter Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu, the 'cultural Turn' and the Practice of International History," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 170.
9 See Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 213–14.
10 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 59.
11 Jackson, "Pierre Bourdieu, the 'cultural Turn' and the Practice of International History," 171.

these times, the assumptions and rules governing the field in question can begin to break down, leading to greater questioning of the status quo and possible revolt. These situations, however, are rare. More often, Bourdieu suggests, change arises through "partial revolutions," which "constantly occur in fields [but] do not call into question the very foundations of the game."[12] Social change, in other words, tends to emerge through partial adjustments and revision, as agents and institutions within a field adapt to new conditions.

While Bourdieu focused much of his attention on the reproduction of social orders, more recent developments in field theory have considered the constant jockeying for position among actors within a given field, which in turn can lead to social change.[13] Drawing from social movement theory, these authors have sought to demonstrate how the strategic interactions between agents can vary under different historical conditions. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, for example, identify a continuum of field conditions, from "settled" to "unsettled," which presents different opportunities for incumbents and challengers alike.[14] Settled or stable fields are those in which certain agents have been able to retain control for an extended period of time, and have made use of their material, cultural, and social advantages to safeguard and reproduce their authority. Despite the dominance of these actors, such fields may nonetheless be the site of continued manoeuvring for position and partial improvements, although often through less overt

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12 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 74.
13 Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 1 (2011): 1–26; Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
14 See Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, chap. 4.

forms of resistance.[15] Unsettled or unstable fields are those characterized by significant contention regarding the prevailing logic and rules of a social space. During these times, Fligstein and McAdam suggest, "all aspects of the field are up for grabs," from its raison d'être and composition to the understandings and actions perceived as legitimate and natural.[16] Skilled social actors, particularly those with the cognitive and practical capacities needed to mobilize different forms of capital, can wield significant influence in these moments, and may contribute to the creation of new identities, coalitions, and hierarchies. Such periods of profound change, however, are typically short-lived, as new rules and hierarchies coalesce and quickly become institutionalized. In many cases, incumbents are able to restore or impose order, possibly by allying themselves or granting concessions to one or more challengers. More rarely, a crisis may be resolved through genuine transformation and the fundamental restructuring of power relations across the field.

Notably, Fligstein and McAdam also consider the relationships among individual fields, which they view as another important source of change. Bourdieu recognized that actors may operate in many different fields at the same time, and may import various forms of capital from one to another. Nevertheless, his conceptualization of the boundaries between fields remained relatively underdeveloped.[17] Fligstein and McAdam, by contrast, focus greater attention to the broader environment in which individual fields are located. Social change, they suggest, is often the product of instability in proximate or related fields, which can engender new pressures on agents within the field in question.

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15 See also James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
16 Fligstein and McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, 84.
17 Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 119–22.

While incumbents may be well positioned to withstand this turbulence, at times the

"ripple effects" from proximate fields will unsettle the status quo and create new

opportunities for challengers.[18] As will be shown later in the chapter, the crisis facing the

humanitarian field has followed on the heels of a series of crises and developments in the

political field, creating both uncertainty regarding the underlying logic of this space as

well as new opportunities for traditionally marginalized actors.

Social change, in sum, may come in different forms and derive from various

sources. In most cases the pace of change is slow, as actors and institutions evolve and

adapt to changing underlying conditions. Nonetheless, such periods may be characterized

by continued jockeying for advantage, even if these efforts only marginally improve

one's position in the field. In other, more transformational moments, change can be

sudden and jarring, and marked by considerable uncertainty and questioning of

assumptions previously taken for granted. In these rare cases, the structure and logic of a

particular field may be overturned, resulting in the formation of new coalitions and

hierarchies of power. Developments in proximate fields, moreover, can influence or

accelerate the pace of change. These insights usefully inform our understanding of the

contemporary 'crisis' of the humanitarian field, to which the rest of this chapter is

devoted.

The Local Turn in the Humanitarian Field

While often considered a relatively new phenomenon, the recent turn to the 'local'

actually has deep roots within the humanitarian field. Dating back to at least the late

1980s and 1990s, the role of local actors, including national and local governments, civil

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18 Fligstein and McAdam, "Toward a General Theory of Strategic Action Fields," 8–9.

society and non-governmental organizations, and communities, has been the focus of

significant attention across the regime.[19] Partnership, empowerment, and local ownership

are now commonly discussed among both scholars and practitioners and represent core

elements of the more recent 'localization' agenda, as debated in the context of the World

Humanitarian Summit. Discussions of the local have also closely followed those in the

related fields of international development and peacebuilding, which, over the years, have

similarly expanded their understanding and critique of the role of local actors in both

theory and practice.[20]

Despite its long history, theoretical treatment of the local as it relates to

humanitarianism has remained relatively limited to date. The term itself suffers from a

lack of conceptualization, as considerable confusion abounds over who or what should be

considered local. The local has different meanings depending on the actor; debates in the

UN General Assembly, for example, typically centre on the role of national authorities in

disaster-affected states,[21] while international NGOs often refer to national or local

organizations and partners. 'Localization,' moreover, has emerged as an umbrella term

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19 See, for example, William Postma, "NGO Partnership and Institutional Development: Making It Real, Making It Intentional," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 447–71; Deborah Eade, *Capacity-Building: An Approach to People-Centered Development* (Oxford : Atlantic Highlands, N.J: Oxfam Publishing, 1997); Ian Smillie, ed., *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001).

20 See, for example, Robert Chambers, *Revolutions in Development Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 2008); Michael Lambek, "Catching the Local," *Anthropological Theory* 11, no. 2 (2011): 197–221; Roger Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local? Critical Localism and Peacebuilding," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 840–856; Hanna Leonardsson and Gustav Rudd, "The 'local Turn' in Peacebuilding: A Literature Review of Effective and Emancipatory Local Peacebuilding," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 825–39; Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond, "The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace," *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–783; Thania Paffenholz, "Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment towards an Agenda for Future Research," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015): 857–74.

21 See, for example, United Nations, "Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations," A/RES/46/182 (New York: UN General Assembly, December 19, 1991); United Nations, "Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the United Nations," A/RES/61/134 (New York: UN General Assembly, December 14, 2006).

seemingly used to refer to any activities involving local actors.[22] For some, localization is

linked to terms such as participation or partnership, which, as mentioned in previous

chapters, can be equated with the out-sourcing of pre-determined assistance.[23] For others,

localization has become a rallying cry for a political agenda aimed at "turning the system

on its head"[24] and "shifting more power, resources, and responsibility from the

international actors […] to local actors."[25] As discussed below, the lack of definition of

these terms has enabled a range of actors to appropriate the language of the local to

advance distinct interests and agendas.

While lacking conceptual definition, the promotion of local actors and capacities in

humanitarian response is far from new. UN Resolution 46/182, adopted in 1991 and

considered one of the founding documents of the modern humanitarian regime, affirmed

the primary responsibility of disaster-affected states in coordinating humanitarian

assistance within their territories and called on all members of the international

community to assist developing countries in strengthening their capacities in this

regard.[26] The 1994 Code of Conduct states that international actors should "attempt to

build disaster response on local capacities," and commits signatories to working through

local organizations as partners in planning and implementation.[27] The 2003 Good

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22 Imogen Wall and Kerren Hedlund, "Localization and Locally-Led Crisis Response: A Literature Review" (Local to Global Protection, 2016), 11.

23 Steven A. Zyck and Hanna B. Krebs, "Localizing Humanitarianism: Improving Effectiveness through Inclusive Action" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015).

24 Tara R. Gingerich and Marc Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head" (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2015).

25 Marc Cohen et al., "Righting the Wrong: Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership to Save Lives and Strengthen Communities" (Oxfam America, 2016), 1.

26 United Nations, "Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations."

27 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, "The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NonGovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief," 1994, 4.

Humanitarian Donorship initiative, which has outlined 23 principles and good practices

for donor governments, similarly encourages donors to ensure the inclusion of

beneficiaries in humanitarian response and to strengthen the capacities of governments

and local communities in preparing for and responding to crises.[28] The role of national

and local governments and organizations is thus recognized in many of the regime's

founding principles and documents. The translation of these commitments into practice,

however, has been less than ideal, as the humanitarian regime has struggled to advance

the role of national and local actors and organizations in the delivery and implementation

of aid.

Early efforts to include local actors in humanitarian response were seen largely

through the lens of capacity building. In parallel with similar movements in the

development field, interest in capacity building arose predominantly in the 1990s.[29]

Involving the transfer of resources, skills, and knowledge from international to local

organizations, such activities were viewed as a means to support and strengthen the role

of the latter in disaster response.[30] Multi-mandate organizations, in particular, promoted

capacity building as a core element of their mission, in line with the broader objective of

empowering local actors and reducing dependence on external aid. Although less

aspirational, fostering local 'buy-in' was also seen as a means of improving the efficiency

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28 Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, "Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship" (OECD-DAC, 2003).
29 Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*.
30 Brooke Lauten, "Time to Reassess Capacity-Building Partnerships," *Forced Migration Review* 28 (2007): 4–6; François Audet, "What Future Role for Local Organizations? A Reflection on the Need for Humanitarian Capacity-Building," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 884 (2011): 1151–1164.

of aid and lowering the cost of intervention, of particular relevance at a time that humanitarian operations were significantly expanding in size and scope.[31]

The model of capacity building promoted in the 1990s and early 2000s, however, encountered a number of problems that reduced its overall effectiveness. Funding for capacity building, most notably, was often limited and time-bound, and frequently curtailed in light of pressing emergency needs.[32] Some organizations were also reluctant to engage in local capacity building, which they viewed as too closely linked to development activities and thus outside the scope of their humanitarian mandate.[33] Those working for local governments and organizations reported feeling as though they were not trusted by international counterparts to manage funds effectively and with proper accountability. From the perspective of local communities, efforts to build local capacity were seen as imposed by outside actors, and ultimately divorced from locally defined needs and priorities.[34]

The latter, in particular, hints at a deeper and more troubling tension that has plagued the inclusion of local actors in humanitarian response. As Naomi Pardington and Melanie Coyne explain, early efforts to engage local actors were often premised on the assumption that capacity building "is something that is 'done' to indigenous organizations by their northern partners," resulting in the one-way transfer of knowledge

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31 Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke, "Introduction," in *Eroding Local Capacity: International Humanitarian Action in Africa*, ed. Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), 6–16.
32 Ben Ramalingam, Bill Gray, and Giorgia Cerruti, "Missed Opportunities: The Case for Strengthening National and Local Partnership-Based Humanitarian Responses" (Christian Aid, 2013).
33 Audet, "What Future Role for Local Organizations?," 1154–55.
34 Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown, and Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid* (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012), chap. 7; Lydia Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in National NGO Response Capacity" (London: CAFOD, 2013), 10.

and resources.[35] They typically ignored local structures and knowledge, and viewed national and local organizations as largely passive actors with little to contribute to the process. Capacity building arrangements at the time were thus deeply asymmetrical.[36] Many were characterized by patronage as opposed to partnership, with minimal sharing of responsibility and risks.[37]

The traditional model of capacity building, as developed in the 1990s and early 2000s, gradually gave way to greater emphasis on local participation and ownership of response. The 'Principles of Partnership,' adopted in 2007 by a consortium of humanitarian organizations, served as the primary frame of reference for a more balanced model of inter-institutional partnerships. In recognition of the power dynamics at play, the Principles attempted to address past asymmetries by better acknowledging the capacities and contributions of both international and local actors.[38] They prioritized five guiding principles – equality, transparency, responsibility, complementarity, and results-oriented approaches – and sought to foster more equitable relations among all humanitarian actors.[39] More broadly, partnership was belatedly included as the fourth pillar of the UN's 2005 Humanitarian Reform Agenda, in acknowledgement of the growing necessity of collaboration and diversity in humanitarian response.[40]

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35 Naomi Pardington and Melanie Coyne, "An African Perspective on Capacity Building," *Forced Migration Review* 28 (2007): 22; See also Deborah Eade, "Capacity Building: Who Builds Whose Capacity?," *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4–5 (2007): 630–639.
36 Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke, eds., *Eroding Local Capacity: International Humanitarian Action in Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002).
37 Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*.
38 Lauten, "Time to Reassess Capacity-Building Partnerships."
39 "Principles of Partnership" (Global Humanitarian Platform, 2007), https://icvanetwork.org/global-humanitarian-platform-ghp-overview.
40 OCHA, "The Four Pillars of Humanitarian Reform" (United Nations, 2006).

In practice, however, humanitarian actors have struggled to advance the language of partnership from rhetoric to reality.[41] The challenge is partly one of speed and efficiency. The development of meaningful partnerships typically requires significant investments of time and resources. In emergency response, however, the imperative to deliver assistance swiftly and efficiently can outweigh partnership activities. Indeed, international organizations can often work more directly, quickly, and at scale compared to local partners, such that the latter may be pushed to the side or bypassed altogether.[42] Lingering concerns regarding the actual or perceived neutrality and impartiality of local actors can further complicate partnership considerations in the midst of crisis.[43] Funding for partnership activities, as a result, tends to be premised on small, short-term grants, which local organizations may only access once they "trickle down the aid chain."[44]

While the imperative to deliver a rapid and efficient response is clearly a complicating factor, efforts to enhance partnerships with national and local actors have also grappled with persistent issues of power and politics. Many partnerships remain premised on a subcontracting model of delivery and implementation, with particular emphasis on the efficient distribution of goods and services to beneficiaries.[45] Within this business model, international organizations hold the operational reins; they coordinate the provision of material outputs and deliverables, while measuring pre-determined

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41 Marion Couldrey and Melanie Morris, eds., "Enhancing Southern Capacity; Rhetoric and Reality," *Forced Migration Review* 28 (2007); Christine Knudsen, "Partnership in Principle, Partnership in Practice," *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine April* 50 (2011): 5–8.
42 Andy Featherstone, "Missed Again: Making Space for Partnership in the Typhoon Haiyan Response" (Christian Aid, 2014), 14–16; Arjuna Parakrama, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Forced Migration Review* 28 (2007): 7–8.
43 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness* (IFRC, 2015), 17.
44 Featherstone, "Missed Again," 22.
45 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, "The Listening Project Issue Paper: International Assistance as a Delivery System" (Cambridge, MA: CDA, 2008); Anderson, Brown, and Jean, *Time to Listen*, chap. 4.

indicators of effectiveness and efficiency. National and local actors, by contrast, are viewed as the "delivery mechanism" or implementing partner, and are engaged primarily as sub-contractors.[46] While ostensibly based on partnership, this approach remains top-down in orientation. Formal decision-making authority rests exclusively in the hands of international actors, with little space for local counterparts in the design or planning of programming.

More recently, growing dissatisfaction with prevailing asymmetries of power and the incremental pace of change has coalesced in the 'localization' agenda. Led by a loose coalition of actors, including predominantly multi-mandate organizations in the Global North and a handful of international and national NGOs in the Global South, this agenda rose to prominence in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit. Using the summit and its consultations as their platform, its advocates have argued forcefully for change, on the premise that national and local actors can, and should, assume the lead in delivering humanitarian aid. Their focus is squarely on addressing lingering imbalances across the regime, by "shifting more power, resources, and responsibility from the international actors."[47] They envision a future "in which local actors take ownership of humanitarian action," resulting in responses that are more timely, context-specific, and ultimately able to save more lives.[48]

The localization agenda has been guided by two overarching objectives. On the one hand, it reflects a deeper ideological conviction that humanitarian assistance should strive

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46 CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, "International Assistance as a Delivery System," 8; See also Zyck and Krebs, "Localizing Humanitarianism"; Wall and Hedlund, "Localization and Locally-Led Crisis Response."
47 Cohen et al., "Righting the Wrong," i.
48 Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head," 9.

for sustainability and ultimately bridge the gap between crisis and long-term development.[49] It coincides well with the goals of multi-mandate organizations, whose focus is not limited to humanitarian work. On the other hand, the localization agenda also reveals a lingering, and potentially increasing, frustration with the limits of past reform efforts. Dissatisfied with the incremental pace of change, some proponents of localization have called for the regime to be "turned on its head," in order to bring national and local actors to the fore and bolster commitments to partnership and ownership.[50] Others have been more modest in this regard and have advocated for greater complementarity in the relief efforts of all humanitarian actors.[51] The latter, in particular, are guided by the mantra of "as local as possible and as international as necessary," in recognition that both international and local actors are necessary for effective response.[52]

This political agenda coalesced in the NGO-led Charter for Change, which first circulated in 2015 and outlines eight commitments to deliver change and enable more locally-led responses. Signed by international NGOs from the Global North and endorsed by a number of those from the South, the Charter contains the goal of ensuring that "southern-based national actors can play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response."[53] Most notably, it commits signatories to pass at least 20 percent of their humanitarian funding to national NGOs, in an attempt to rectify the past asymmetries of aid financing. The call for financial reform also emerged as a predominant theme of the World Humanitarian Summit. The "Grand Bargain," the name

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49 Ed Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict" (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016), 7.
50 Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head."
51 Humanitarian Policy Group, "Localization in Humanitarian Practice" (ODI and ICVA, 2016).
52 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Restoring Humanity: Synthesis of the Consultation Process for the World Humanitarian Summit" (New York: United Nations, 2015), 95.
53 "Charter for Change: Localization of Humanitarian Aid," 2015, 1, https://charter4change.org/.

given to a package of reforms agreed to by donors and a number of humanitarian

organizations at the summit, similarly commits its adherents to target at least 25 percent

of humanitarian funding to national and local responders by 2020, albeit "as directly as

possible."[54]

In reflecting back on the evolution of the local turn, a number of factors account for

its growing prominence in global policy debates. Most notably, political crises in Syria,

Iraq, and elsewhere have brought to the fore the limits of the traditional humanitarian

regime.[55] Faced with escalating human needs and perpetual shortfalls in funding, this

contemporary "crisis" of humanitarianism has opened up space for consideration of new

perspectives and practices. Insecurity and access constraints in Syria, in particular, have

highlighted the important and previously undervalued role of local groups in procuring,

transporting, and delivering assistance in hard to reach areas.[56] New working

relationships have forced a certain degree of pragmatism on the sector, and recognition of

the contributions of various actors to humanitarian response. Combined with the enduring

sense of "malaise" hanging over the sector,[57] this crisis of confidence has called into

question past assumptions and ways of working, which are increasingly at odds with the

changing realities of the field.

The prominence of the local in humanitarian response also reflects the expanding

capacities and assertiveness of actors based in the Global South. Emerging and middle-

income countries, for instance, are becoming far more active in humanitarian response

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54 "The Grand Bargain: A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need" (Istanbul, 2016), 5.
55 Antonio Guterres, "Think the Aid System Can Cope? It Can't," The World Economic Forum, *Agenda*, (January 18, 2015), https://agenda.weforum.org/2015/01/think-the-aid-system-can-cope-it-cant/.
56 Wall and Hedlund, "Localization and Locally-Led Crisis Response," 13.
57 See Chapter 2.

and are less reliant on international support. Based partly on the experience of the
Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan, many have begun to push back against the
perceived 'heavy hand' of international actors.[58] New and increasingly prominent country
donors, which include Brazil, Turkey, and several Gulf states, as well as regional inter-
governmental organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, are taking
on expanded roles, which may further regionalize humanitarian response in the future.[59]
The voices of civil society, represented by southern-based international NGOs and
various regional networks, have equally become louder, better organized, and more
targeted in recent years. The World Humanitarian Summit, in particular, provided an
important platform for southern NGOs to assert their own interests and priorities in
international debates.[60]

Finally, the localization agenda has followed similar discussions in the related
fields of international development and peacebuilding. The question of local ownership
and working within national contexts has been widely discussed in development debates,
and featured prominently in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and later
agreements.[61] Southern development organizations have also become increasingly vocal
within these discussions, and have forced Northern-based NGOs to reconsider their roles
and activities on the ground.[62] The peacebuilding field has similarly witnessed its own
turn to the local in recent years, although many continue to question whether the growing

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58 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era," 38.
59 See Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2015), chap. 3.
60 IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs."
61 The Paris Declaration, for example, committed donors and partner countries to improving country ownership of development, most notably in ensuring that "partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development policies." This commitment was reaffirmed through the Accra Agenda for Action. See "The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonization, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability" (Paris: OECD, 2005); "Accra Agenda for Action" (Accra, Ghana: OECD, 2008).
62 Smillie, *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, 191.

focus on local actors has sufficiently transformed entrenched interests and power structures.[63] Debates in the humanitarian field have clearly mirrored these trends. The pace of change, however, has been noticeably slower, for reasons that will be considered below.

The shortcomings of the local turn, and the accompanying discourse of capacity building, partnership, and localization, are reflective of the limits of humanitarian reform in general. Efforts to include local actors, as they have evolved over the years, reveal both lingering structural inequalities as well as deeply embedded tensions regarding the roles and activities of international and local counterparts. Rhetoric, as a result, has struggled to translate into policy or action, despite the long history of engagement on this issue. The next section considers various explanations for the shortcomings of the local turn, focusing on both its material and cultural dimensions.

Obstacles to the Local Turn

In an earlier chapter, I outlined a typology of explanations of the shortcomings of humanitarian reform, mapped according to two dimensions: whether they locate the source of dysfunction as internal or external to the humanitarian regime; and whether they attribute this dysfunction to material or cultural forces (see Table 5). Explanations focusing on the material constraints to change typically look at the effects of either inter-organizational competition or the outside interference of the political sphere. Those exploring the cultural barriers to reform, by contrast, focus more on the effects of power and governance, including the humanitarian field's links to liberal global governance and,

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63 Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Local Turn in Peace Building"; Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local?"

as I have described throughout this dissertation, its internal dynamics of authority and competition.

Table 5: Explanations of the limits of humanitarian reform, revisited

	Internal	External
Material	Inter-organizational competition	State / Political interference
Cultural	Intra-field competition	Global (liberal) culture / Neo-colonialism

Each of these explanations offers a distinct understanding of the limited inclusion of local actors across the humanitarian regime. This section briefly considers each in turn. It concludes with a longer discussion of the contestation over power and authority occurring across the humanitarian field, which, I suggest, provides the most compelling explanation of how certain social hierarchies within this space have been reproduced and, at times, challenged through the process of reform itself.

Political interference

Most humanitarian professionals and observers, if asked to comment on the shortcomings of the local turn to date, will tend to focus on the financing of international humanitarian assistance. Specifically, they point to the inequalities inherent to aid, which has concentrated funding and resources in the hands of a select group of organizations. Donor governments, most notably, typically prefer to channel humanitarian financing through a few trusted partners, in order to manage risk and ensure political accountability to their constituents. Strict requirements for accountability and risk management further ensure that only the largest and most well-resourced organizations will be able to qualify

for bilateral funding.[64] Many donors, moreover, face their own internal resource

constraints, and have sought to reduce their number of partnerships with NGOs in order

to rationalize workloads and diminish the demands on overstretched aid departments.[65]

Most, as a result, tend to work with what one respondent described as "known

providers",[66] primarily organizations that are based domestically and with which they

have longstanding relationships. Consequently, while donor governments may commit to

better support local response capacities,[67] in practice such restrictions typically inhibit

their ability to fund national and local actors directly. Most humanitarian financing, as a

result, continues to be channelled through international organizations, which act as the

intermediaries between donors and local actors. In the process, these agencies assume

many of the reporting and accountability requirements imposed by donors, while also

managing the risk associated with local partnerships.[68]

Many donor governments, moreover, are required by domestic legislation to work

only with organizations that are based or have offices in their country. The European

Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO), which represents the second

largest bilateral donor of official humanitarian financing, is restricted by legislation to

fund only those organizations that are based and legally registered in the European

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64 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era," 63.
65 Lydia Poole, "Future Humanitarian Financing: Looking Beyond the Crisis" (CAFOD/FAO/World Vision, 2015), 20.
66 Interview with NGO representative (341).
67 The Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, for example, commit donors to "strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises." See Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, "Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship."
68 Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End," 14.

Union.[69] Direct financing to local organizations, for either operations or capacity building, is thus strictly limited. The Canada Revenue Agency requires registered charities operating outside of Canada to exercise "direction and control" over the activities of the intermediary organizations with whom they work, including how resources are used and how the overall goals and scope of the project are defined.[70] Many DAC donors have similar policies in place.[71] Although some have begun to experiment with alternative financing modalities and partnership arrangements, such efforts remain relatively small-scale in nature.

Among observers, there is also considerable scepticism regarding the commitment of donor countries to humanitarian reform. The regime, they suggest, functions well for donors as currently constituted, thus lessening the scope for change. As a UN representative explained:

> Part of that [reluctance to change] is also fear of loss of control. [Donors] have built the system, the system works for them, it delivers what they need and want to deliver [...] There's a fear that collapsing the system leads us to return to what we had before, and the dysfunction that happened in the absence of the system.[72]

Gilles Carbonnier similarly contends that humanitarian assistance has become the "foreign policy instrument of choice," and is "often used by default to compensate for the lack of political resolve and capacity to put an end to war."[73] Humanitarian aid is used to respond to, and lessen, public pressure to assist distant strangers, and yet rarely addresses

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69 Michel Van Bruaene et al., "Evaluation of the Potential Effectiveness and Efficiency Gains of Working Directly with Local NGOs in the Humanitarian Interventions of the Commission" (Aachen, DE: European Commission Directorate, 2013), 17.
70 Government of Canada, "Canadian Registered Charities Carrying out Activities Outside Canada" (2010), sec. 7, https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/policies-guidance/guidance-002-canadian-registered-charities-carrying-activities-outside-canada.html.
71 See Start Network, "How Can Donor Requirements Be Reformed to Better Support Efforts to Strengthen Local Humanitarian Capacity" (Start Network, 2014).
72 Interview with UN representative (181).
73 Gilles Carbonnier, *Humanitarian Economics: War, Disaster and the Global Aid Market* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015), 37,65.

the root causes of crises abroad.[74] From this perspective, the commitment to reform among donor governments is thus minimal; humanitarian action is accomplishing what it has set out to achieve, without addressing the underlying structural inequalities of aid or global governance more generally.

Humanitarianism, in other words, remains highly susceptible to political interference on the part of donor states. While donors may be ostensibly interested in funding and directly working with local organizations, many are bound by their own interests and priorities. These political realities present a significant check to the local turn, and have served to lock in existing power imbalances across the humanitarian regime.

Inter-organizational competition

Some critics argue that the reluctance to fund local actors is related to a lingering concern with protecting market share across the humanitarian regime. Direct funding to local actors, it has been suggested, poses a direct threat and possible "existential challenge" to the business model of more established international organizations, including the UN agencies and international NGOs that currently remain the primary mediators of funds.[75] As one respondent explained:

> I think there really is a fear to lose space, to lose control, and to look at the survival
> of the organization in the next 10 or 20 years. I'm sure that this exists. If you are

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74 For a similar critique of international interventionism, see Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

75 Louise Redvers, "Aid Reform: Turkeys Won't Vote for Christmas," *IRIN*, August 4, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2015/08/04/aid-reform-turkeys-won't-vote-christmas; See also Wall and Hedlund, "Localization and Locally-Led Crisis Response," 21; Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era," 59.

the director of an organization today, […] your first beneficiary is your own organization.[76]

Direct funding to local organizations, in other words, challenges the growth models of international counterparts, and their ability to increase or at least maintain organizational funding.[77] This competition for funding, whether real or perceived, represents another barrier to the local turn, and is a potentially powerful disincentive to those who fear being "cut out of business."[78]

To date, international organizations have largely monopolized the financing of humanitarian assistance, and have limited the opportunities for new and emerging humanitarian actors to access funds directly. National and local NGOs, for example, were the direct recipients of only 0.4 percent of all donor funds in 2015.[79] Many report feeling out-competed by international NGOs, or suggest that donor requirements for funding have raised the bar for entry so high that smaller NGOs are simply ineligible to apply for funds.[80] National and local organizations, as result, have often found themselves locked in the delivery model of aid described above, and highly dependent on the short-term grants and subcontracting arrangements made available through international partners.

Disaster-affected governments have been similarly shut out of the majority of humanitarian assistance. In 2015, affected governments received only 1.2 percent of all international humanitarian assistance, the majority of which was made available by donor

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76 Interview with NGO representative (312).
77 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era," 59.
78 Interview with UN representative (192).
79 This estimate is based on "first level" recipients, meaning that the organizations in question received direct funding from a country donor or UN-led pooled fund. Estimates based on "second" or "third level" funding channels, through which organizations received funding through one or more intermediaries, are currently unavailable. See Christian Els and Nils Carstensen, "Funding of Local and National Humanitarian Actors" (Local to Global Protection, 2015).
80 Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End."

countries that are not part of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee.[81]

Although there are obvious barriers to directly funding governments in some cases, particularly in the context of armed conflict, the limited funds made available to these actors potentially reflect the longstanding reluctance to finance governments perceived by international donors and organizations as "corrupt, ineffectual, and unhelpfully restrictive."[82] This perception, however, ignores the increasingly prominent role of middle-income countries in disaster response, many of which are forced to access funds from non-traditional donors or other sources.[83] The propensity to work around recipient governments can also exacerbate the weaknesses of the latter, thereby ensuring their continued dependence on external sources of aid.

Inter-organizational competition has thus served to protect the interests of the donors and organizations at the centre of the humanitarian regime. Financing is heavily biased towards the largest and most established international organizations, many of which have Western origins and draw their resources from like-minded Western donor states. These actors, as a result, continue to wield significant power and influence, and constitute a highly exclusive group or "oligopoly," in the words of one report.[84] Those outside these structures, by contrast, are often depicted as "inadequate, corrupt, and unable to deliver to the same standard," and can find themselves unable to access humanitarian financing.[85] Instead, local actors are encouraged to engage the humanitarian

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81 DAC donors contributed only 30 percent of the $256 million in humanitarian assistance channeled through governments in 2015. See Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2016), 73.
82 Paul Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected State in Disaster Response" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2009), 28.
83 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016," 73.
84 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era," 58.
85 Ibid., 60.

regime under the umbrella of traditional donors and international organizations, which in effect preserves the current structure of this system. These internal economic dynamics, in the eyes of some, represent a significant barrier to reform, and explain the limited progress to date relative to the localization of aid.

Global liberal culture

Explanations focusing on the cultural dynamics of the local turn typically highlight the humanitarian regime's links to liberal global governance and legacies of paternalism and colonialism. The contemporary practice of humanitarianism, these observers suggest, is the product of a particular community – one cultivated and concentrated in the West.[86] Consequently, when humanitarian organizations attempt to assist peoples in need, they do so by drawing from a culturally embedded repertoire of knowledge and thinking. Whether consciously or not, they become carriers of liberal norms of individualism and universalism, which may not always resonate in the contexts in which they work.[87]

Relative to the local turn, specifically, these observers point to several cultural barriers to reform. Notably, they highlight the isomorphic effects of a humanitarian regime that is grounded, financially and culturally, in North America and Western Europe. Western-based donors and organizations have, over time, established the standards and norms of this regime, which new players must assume if they are to become accepted members of the humanitarian 'club'.[88] Institutionalization, moreover,

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86 See, for example, ibid.; Antonio Donini, "The Far Side: The Meta Functions of Humanitarianism in a Globalized World," *Disasters* 34 (April 2, 2010): S220–37.

87 Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism as a Scholarly Vocation," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 235–63.

88 Donini, "The Far Side"; Antonio Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," in *Humanitarianism and Challenges of Cooperation*, ed. Volker M. Heins, Kai Koddenbrock, and Christine Unrau (New York: Routledge, 2016), 72–83.

has led to the privileging of particular voices and forms of knowing, thus stifling the emergence of indigenous or non-Western voices. Such biases can have a profound silencing effect, by ensuring that only certain perspectives come to the fore in the shaping and implementation of humanitarian reform.[89]

Critical theorists, moreover, contend that efforts to 'localize' humanitarian response are inevitably linked to a particular conceptualization of the local that is grounded in entrenched views and ways of thinking about the world. Discussing the local turn in international peacebuilding, Roger Mac Ginty suggests that:

> A rather traditional view of the local persists among some international organizations and donor states, namely that it is static, rural, traditional, incapable and waiting to be civilized, developed, monetized and shown how it can be 'properly' governed. [...] The world-view of the 'civilizing' metropole and of the centrifugal transmission of expertise and governance modalities is very much alive. Internationally sponsored meta-policies of statebuilding, protectorates, governance reform and economic restructuring are based on the notion that 'we know best' and are embedded in modes of thinking.[90]

Discourses of capacity building, partnership, and ownership may all be viewed in the same light. While humanitarian organizations have, of course, become more attuned and sensitive to the needs and perspectives of local actors over the years, many remain locked in a system of thinking that views the local as something to be moulded by outside actors. They prioritize a particular type of local – specifically one that can be instrumentalized and acted upon from without.[91]

More critically, some observers suggest that humanitarian operations have become implicated in a complex regime of liberal global governance, whose aim is to limit and

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89 Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1996): 377–404.
90 Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local?," 841.
91 Ibid.

contain instability on the borders of ordered international community.[92]

Humanitarianism, in other words, has become fundamental to the advancement of the 'liberal' peace, and the promotion of Western standards of human rights and democracy abroad.[93] The 'local', as such, has been appropriated alongside other seemingly benign concepts, including, for example, 'participation', 'ownership', and 'partnership'.[94] These terms justify particular interventions in and on the local, while imparting legitimacy and consent. They serve to mask relations that remain inherently unequal, as opposed to truly shifting power across the humanitarian regime.[95]

For critical theorists, the localization agenda thus represents the rejection of universal conceptions of humanitarianism in favour of those that are more particular and culturally grounded.[96] It challenges dominant ways of thinking and acting across the humanitarian regime, and the Western canon on which they are based.[97] While careful to avoid presenting this contest in binary terms, these theorists see local actors as the vehicle of resistance against international intervention.[98] The latter, in particular, hints at the deeper competition over authority and power, to which I now turn.

Intra-field competition

Although each of the above explanations offers useful insights on the limits of reform, they also divert attention from the important questions of how and why change

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92 Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001); Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
93 Donini, "The Far Side."
94 For a similar critique, see Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, "What Do Buzzwords Do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty Reduction,'" *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (2005): 1043–60.
95 Ibid.
96 Mac Ginty and Richmond, "The Local Turn in Peace Building."
97 Donini, "Decoding the Software of Humanitarian Action: Universal or Pluriversal?," 73.
98 Paffenholz, "Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding"; Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local?"

occurs – or fails to occur. Those examining the effects of inter-organizational competition and political interference, for example, tend to limit their focus to the distribution of material capital across the humanitarian regime, which, as they observe, remains concentrated among a select group of 'traditional' humanitarian actors and donors. The latter continue to hold the primary levers of power, while offering limited scope for change. The debate over humanitarian reform, according to these proponents, thus principally revolves around the command of and access to material resources.

While critical and post-colonial critiques tend to focus more on the cultural barriers to reform, including the humanitarian regime's roots in Western traditions of thinking and acting on the world, their argument is often presented in binary terms. International intervention is typically depicted as a unidirectional regime of governance, with international actors exercising near hegemony over their local counterparts. The 'international', moreover, tends to be conflated with the West, without consideration of other, non-Western international actors.[99] The 'local', in turn, is romanticized or 'flattened', and discussed in homogenous terms that fail to recognize its complexity or internal divides.[100] Recent research on the role of the local in international peacebuilding has, in fact, shown that the people and activities thought to inhabit this space are frequently divided along hierarchical, ethnic, and gender lines.[101] In neglecting such dynamics, critical theorists fail to consider the struggles and internal contests over who and what may claim to represent the 'local'.

Both material and cultural explanations miss the deep competition that has underpinned the very question of reform – specifically which actors have the authority to

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99 Paffenholz, "Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding."
100 Mac Ginty, "Where Is the Local?"
101 Ibid.; Paffenholz, "Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding."

define the shape and direction of change. This focus demands greater attention to the

diversity of actors that make up the humanitarian field, and resources they have employed

to construct and maintain their authority over time. Such resources, moreover, extend

beyond the simple distribution of economic capital. Instead, it is important to recognize

how cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital have been utilized to shape the

process of reform and reproduce certain social hierarchies across the humanitarian field.

These power resources also provide an indication of the sources of change, including the

means through which certain groups have begun to challenge the 'heirs' of this domain.

The prioritization of particular forms of knowledge capital, for example, has served

to justify and reproduce a particular social hierarchy that separates the presumed experts

from the non-experts.[102] Most notably, the professionalization of the sector, and the

priority given to formal education, training, and qualifications, has triggered the

ascendance of what one of my respondents dubbed "the superiority of international

expertise"[103] when partnering with or building the capacities of local counterparts. The

presumption is that the international, credentialed knowledge held by a small group of

humanitarian professionals is of universal value, and trumps that which is local or

particular. The role of this international elite is therefore to impart knowledge and

techniques assumed to be lacking on the ground. Local resources and capacities, by

contrast, are thought to be insufficient or inferior, while local actors themselves are

assumed to be less capable and at higher risk of corruption or partiality. Knowledge

capital, in other words, is highly stratified across the humanitarian field and, traditionally,

has run counter to efforts to localize humanitarianism.

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102 For a similar critique, see Michael Barnett, "International Paternalism and Humanitarian Governance," *Global Constitutionalism* 1, no. 3 (2012): 485–521.
103 Interview with NGO representative (371).

This sense of hierarchy, however, is based on assumptions that, as one report suggests, "seem increasingly at odds with the changing reality of the field."[104] Actors once ostensibly considered 'local', which now include middle- or high-income countries in the Global South, Southern international NGOs, and thousands of nationally employed practitioners working for international organizations, are increasingly demanding recognition of their unique forms of knowledge capital, and of skills and competencies that are on par with international counterparts.[105] This capital includes culturally and contextually grounded forms of knowledge, and often a keen awareness of the needs and priorities of aid recipients. What these actors lack, in many cases, are the resources and economic capital needed to access training[106] or to build and sustain internal capacity.[107]

The changing nature of conflict has further forced greater awareness of and appreciation for the growing significance of local organizations in humanitarian response. In Syria, for example, insecurity and access constraints have brought to the fore the role of local players, including informal relief networks, professional associations, and diaspora organizations.[108] Much of the actual delivery of aid, involving the procurement, transportation, and distribution of assistance, is now done by local actors, who have filled the gap left by the absence of international humanitarian responders. Similar experiences in Iraq, Somalia, and South Sudan, among others, have likewise highlighted the

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104 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015*, 21.
105 Caroline Abu-Sada, ed., *In the Eyes of Others: How People in Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid* (New York: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012), 52; Louise Redvers, "NGOs: Bridging the North South Divide," *IRIN*, June 8, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2015/06/08/ngos-bridging-north-south-divide; Silke Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality: Experiences and Practices in Aid Relationships," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 8 (2012): 1465.
106 Roth, "Professionalization Trends and Inequality"; Catherine Russ, "Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization" (ELRHA, 2011).
107 Ramalingam, Gray, and Cerruti, "Missed Opportunities"; Redvers, "Bridging the North South Divide."
108 Eva Svoboda and Sara Pantuliano, "International and Local / Diaspora Actors in the Syria Response: A Diverging Set of Systems?" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015).

sophistication of local response, while bringing into question traditional practices and

models of delivery.[109] Knowledge capital in the form of country expertise and local

knowledge has thus grown in prominence in recent years. National and local actors,

accordingly, are now calling for greater acknowledgement of their role, contributions,

and expertise in humanitarian response, as witnessed through the World Humanitarian

Summit and elsewhere.

Traditionally, in- and out-group dynamics have further served to concentrate social

capital among an elite few across the humanitarian field. Today, the humanitarian

professionals and organizations at the heart of this social space remain highly influential

in shaping standards and norms across their various humanitarian networks, thus ensuring

that reforms continue to reflect their interests and preferred outcomes. Antonio Donini, a

prominent critic of the 'network effects' of humanitarianism, describes the distorting

power of international actors on the local as follows:

> Seen from below, the [humanitarian] enterprise is self-referential and reflects the
> expectation that humanitarian theatres should adapt to it, rather than the reverse. It
> thrives on isomorphism (you can join us, but only on our terms) and deploys its
> network power through the imposition of management practices and standards that
> act as barriers to entry for local initiatives or non-like-minded national players or
> community groups.[110]

The distribution of social capital has inhibited new and emerging actors from challenging

prevailing norms and rules across the humanitarian field. As Donini suggests, those

seeking entry to this social space have been compelled to recognize, and therefore

reproduce, its fundamental tenets and ordering principles, as set out by those who have

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109 See, for example, Cohen et al., "Righting the Wrong"; Sean Healy and Sandrine Tiller, "Where Is
Everyone? Responding to Emergencies in the Most Difficult Places" (London: Médecins Sans Frontières,
2014); Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict."
110 Antonio Donini, "Humanitarianism, Perceptions, Power," in *In the Eyes of Others: How People in
Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid*, ed. Caroline Abu-Sada (New York: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012),
187.

traditionally dominated the field. New players to a game, Bourdieu similarly contends, are often required to pay these forms of "entry fees," through which they acknowledge and buy into the rules and stakes of the game. Change, consequently, typically remains within certain limits, as strategies of subversion designed to alter the game "do not call into question [...] its fundamental axioms, [and] the bedrock of ultimate beliefs on which the whole game is based."[111]

Recognizing this, perhaps, and in reaction to the exclusive nature of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and other international humanitarian forums,[112] Southern-based organizations have increasingly sought to challenge the prevailing distribution of social capital by establishing their own alternative networks of practice and advocacy. Regional networks of NGOs in Africa and Asia, for example, have successfully raised the profile and influence of Southern voices in humanitarian debates and policies.[113] The World Humanitarian Summit, moreover, served as a platform for the launch of several new South-South initiatives, most notably including the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR). This global network, composed exclusively of non-Western-based organizations that "must be locally rooted in the community," aims to bring together organizations from across the Global South to coordinate advocacy efforts, capacity strengthening and, eventually, funding allocations, by serving as an intermediary or "broker" that will help direct funds from large donors to smaller southern NGOs.[114] Perhaps most notably, it intends to address what it views as the systemic failures of the humanitarian regime, and has the stated mission of "reshap[ing] the top-down

111 Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, 74.
112 See Chapter 5.
113 Ben Ramalingam, "The Demand For, Feasibility and Scope of a Global Network of Southern NGOs in Disaster Resilience, Response and Recovery" (Adeso, 2015).
114 Redvers, "Bridging the North South Divide."

humanitarian and development system to one that is locally driven and owned."[115] These

alternative networks reflect the growing dissatisfaction with and resentment of the

established bases of power and social capital across the humanitarian field, and may be

interpreted as a challenge to the prevailing rules and ordering principles of this space.

They have found allies, moreover, among a number of organizations based in the Global

North, which have reiterated the call for new approaches that "turn our current system on

its head."[116] The influence of this emerging coalition, however, may be limited by their

continued reliance on traditional sources of funding and economic capital, which remain

firmly tied to Western donors and organizations. Their capacity to challenge the network

and isomorphic effects described above also remains unknown. Nonetheless, such

networks represent a deliberate attempt to further decentralize the humanitarian field, and

to locate new centres of authority and capital based in the Global South.

Significantly, NEAR and other actors have also called into question the traditional

moral authority of international humanitarian organizations. While the debates

surrounding the World Humanitarian Summit largely centred on more obvious indicators,

such as the percentage of total funding directed to local actors, at their heart they raised

the fundamental issue of who should have authority over the financing, shape, and

delivery of humanitarian aid. Increasingly, new entrants to the humanitarian field have

challenged the presumed universal values and moral cosmopolitanism of the international

players that have traditionally assumed this role. They suggest that international

humanitarians have "lost their moral compass,"[117] and have drawn similarities to colonial

115 NEAR, "Who We Are," *Network for Empowered Aid Response*, 2016, http://www.near.ngo/who-we-are.
116 Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head," 7.
117 Wall, "We Are Demanding Change."

policies.[118] Some have gone so far as to question whether international NGOs and other actors "still have the right to exist," after decades of engagement in the Global South and admittedly mixed results.[119] These challengers, or 'heretics' in the words of Bourdieu, envision a future based on "a more dignified and equitable humanitarian system," whose ethos is "locally rooted" and "people-centred" as opposed to top-down in nature.[120] The localization agenda thus represents an alternative moral vision of humanitarian response that challenges the presumed authority and ethical duties of the international elite that have traditionally dominated this space.

Southern actors, moreover, have harnessed the rhetoric and discourse of international organizations to mobilize additional symbolic capital and further buttress their own claims to moral authority over the humanitarian field. Their calls for change regularly invoke the same language of partnership and empowerment, while calling on international actors to live up to past commitments and promises in this regard.[121] Degan Ali, executive director of the Kenyan-based NGO African Development Solutions (Adeso) and a particularly vocal proponent of the localization agenda, suggested the following about the World Humanitarian Summit:

> The process for me is about empowering the affected communities and local actors, to voice their concerns and what changes are necessary to ensure dignity and respect of affected communities. [...] This is not an abstract academic conversation for us, but a reality fraught with insecurity, danger, hunger, violations of the most grotesque form, humiliation and loss of dignity.[122]

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118 See IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs."
119 Deborah Doane, "Do International NGOs Still Have the Right to Exist?," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2016, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/13/do-international-ngos-still-have-the-right-to-exist.
120 Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System: How to Truly Localize Aid," 2015, 1–2.
121 See, for example, Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System."
122 See Degan Ali, *WHS Glocon 16 October 2015 Part 2 English*, YouTube video (Geneva, 2015), sec. 06:20-12:10, https://youtu.be/vZFy8ZlBl18.

At the Global Consultation in Geneva, she argued that local actors are now "demanding change" and that Western donors and organizations must be "prepared to be uncomfortable" in confronting this challenge from below.[123] In private conversations, Western donors and organizations admit to feeling increasingly 'boxed in' by this discourse, as rhetorically and morally they support many of the same goals now being demanded by southern actors. Their moral authority, moreover, has been called into question, leaving them with limited space to deny recent appeals for change.

This challenge from below has triggered a range of responses across the humanitarian field. The quotations at the outset of this chapter are indicative of the mixed reactions in this regard. Stephen O'Brien, in his former role as UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, argued that "the system is not broken – it's simply financially broke."[124] This observation, unsurprisingly, elicited considerable backlash among critics, who argued that his focus on the economic dimensions of the problem served to deflect attention from the political objectives of the localization agenda.[125] As an archetypal example of the humanitarian elite I have attempted to describe throughout this dissertation, his position may also be interpreted as attempting to preserve the existing structure of the field. O'Brien's diagnosis of the issue, moreover, is in stark contrast to that of Ali and her supporters, who suggest that local actors and communities are appealing for "true and equal partnership" and "accompaniment rather than

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123 Wall, "We Are Demanding Change."

124 Heba Aly, "Q&A: 'UN Doesn't Have to Change,' Says Relief Chief," *IRIN*, October 16, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/report/102119/qa-%E2%80%98un-doesn%E2%80%99t-have-change%E2%80%99-says-relief-chief.

125 See Paul Currion, "Comment: A Desert Called Reform," *IRIN*, November 3, 2015, http://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2015/11/03/desert-called-reform.

direction."[126] They are calling, in other words, for a fundamental change in approach, to one that challenges the prevailing hierarchies of authority and control across the humanitarian field.

The localization challenge has been described by some as a "zero-sum game," pitting local NGOs and communities against their international counterparts.[127] While this characterization overly simplifies the nature of this debate, it usefully highlights the growing contest over power and authority across the humanitarian field. This challenge, I suggest, has been brought on by a series of changes that are both external and internal in nature, with implications for the structure of the field. On the one hand, these changes are directly linked to a series of political crises that have brought to the fore the limits of traditional humanitarian responses. On the other hand, they are tied to shifts in the underlying distribution of capital across the humanitarian field. As is evident from the discussion above, local actors are accumulating larger reserves of cultural, social, and symbolic capital, through which they are increasingly challenging traditional regimes of authority and governance across the humanitarian field. Although they continue to face a significant deficit of economic capital, their jockeying for position has unsettled the prevailing logic and rules of this social space and called into question assumptions regarding the roles of international and local actors that were once considered natural and legitimate. The space for change, consequently, has widened and directly contributed to the emergence of new players and coalitions.

In contrast to the material and normative obstacles to changes described above, a distinct focus on the dynamics of the humanitarian field thus illuminates the competition

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126 Ali, *WHS Glocon 16 October 2015 Part 2 English*, sec. 06:20-12:10.
127 IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs."

over authority and influence that has accompanied the question of reform. It reveals how an elite group of actors within this field has, historically, prevailed over others, and how this relationship is beginning to evolve in line with shifts in the underlying distribution of capital. This view further extends existing explanations of the shortcomings of reform by bringing to light the ongoing contestations over authority, knowledge, and power occurring across the humanitarian field. It suggests that the primary sources of tension extend beyond material factors, and include struggles over expertise, social access, and moral standing. These cultural, social, and symbolic forms of capital cross-cut the humanitarian field, and are now being leveraged in ways that maintain or challenge established relations of hierarchy and influence. At stake is authority over the field as a whole, including who is in a position to define the shape and direction of change.

It remains difficult to predict, however, the extent to which the current pressures for change will affect the prevailing state of relations across the humanitarian field. While donors and international organizations have committed to transform their relationship with and financing of local actors, through most notably the Charter for Change and Grand Bargain, it is unknown whether these commitments will be more than rhetorical in nature. Are we witnessing a fundamental transformation of this field, involving the formation of new coalitions and hierarchies of power? Or does the localization agenda represent a "partial revolution," marked by minor adjustments to changing underlying conditions while leaving the fundamental logic of the field intact? Past experiences of reform, as discussed in previous chapters, suggest that the latter is more likely. Nonetheless, as habits and practices adapt to the changing realities of this social space, the localization agenda is unlikely to dissipate. We may, in fact, be witnessing the

gradual levelling of the humanitarian field, brought on by greater awareness of, and possibly funding for, the role of local organizations in humanitarian response.

What Future for the Local?

In considering the implications of the localization agenda on the humanitarian field, the question remains: who or what is 'local'? As mentioned above, the local is an inherently contested term. Its application covers a range of actors and activities, including governments of various levels, non-governmental and civil society organizations, communities, and individuals. Some international organizations have equally claimed the mantle of local actor, on the basis of their longstanding presence in a particular context or country. Viewed in this light, the ambiguity inherent in the conceptualization of the local is perhaps deliberate; it accommodates a range of stakeholders, who have appropriated the language of the local according to their own interests and purposes.

The future of the local thus hinges on its definition, with direct implications for funding and influence. This debate is already beginning to emerge, as various organizations and coalitions of actors have attempted to capitalize on the uncertainty of this term to mobilize support around their definition of the 'local'. Some have depicted the localization debate in binary terms that tend to idealize the local and malign the international. Commentary surrounding the World Humanitarian Summit, for example, frequently referred to the emerging debate as reflective of the "North-South divide"[128] and as "gloves off between local and international NGOs."[129] Several proponents of the localization agenda have encouraged this distinction; Degan Ali, for instance, has framed

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128 Redvers, "Bridging the North South Divide."
129 IRIN, "Gloves off between Local and International NGOs."

the challenge from below as homogeneous, proclaiming that "We as the Global South are demanding change."[130] On the one hand, this discursive framing has successfully mobilized attention to the localization agenda, by rhetorically pitting the international against the local. On the other hand, in claiming to speak on behalf of all national and local actors, its proponents frequently gloss over the complexities and tensions inherent across a diverse grouping of actors and organizations. They further minimize other concerns, including the important distinction between natural and human-made crises and the extent to which local actors may be compromised in their ability to adhere to humanitarian principles.[131] Such considerations, however, are often overlooked in the current framing of the localization agenda.

National governments also stand to gain by positioning themselves as local actors. Viewed from the perspective of governments coping with natural or human-made crises in their countries, the local turn reinforces the primary role of states in disaster response, as outlined in UN Resolution 46/182. Governments outside of traditional donor countries have long been critical of external forms of intervention, and have criticized international organizations for ignoring questions of sovereignty and sidelining the capacities and responsibilities of states.[132] At the same time, the localization agenda risks supporting governments that have an interest in preventing foreign actors from witnessing repression and human rights abuses on the ground.[133] The expulsion of international NGOs from Sudan in 2009, defended as part of the government's efforts to "Sudanize" humanitarian activities in the country, is an example in this regard, particularly as this action followed

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130 Ali, *WHS Glocon 16 October 2015 Part 2 English*, sec. 06:20-12:10.
131 Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict."
132 See Harvey, "Towards Good Humanitarian Government: The Role of the Affected State in Disaster Response."
133 Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict."

outside criticism of the government's human rights record.[134] Many other governments have constrained the humanitarian space available to NGOs or questioned their legitimacy, including those that are locally based but foreign funded. As middle- and high-income countries in the Global South continue to grow in strength and influence, many will assert their right to deal with political and humanitarian crises according to their own, ostensibly local, interests and priorities.

International organizations are also "going local,"[135] in ways that often advance their own distinct agenda. Proponents of World Vision International, which ranks in the top five largest international NGOs in the world, have suggested that the definition of local necessarily "varies by context."[136] They contend that national franchises such as World Vision India, which has been registered in India since 1976, could be considered local, despite their affiliation to larger international networks. Oxfam International, which has been one of the most vocal proponents of localization, has aligned this agenda with its own model of partnership, which includes capacity building with governmental and non-governmental partners in country.[137] Several prominent international NGOs, including ActionAid and Oxfam International, have relocated their headquarters to the Global South in order to be "closer to the ground" and to build a more ostensibly "multi-

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134 Darfur Consortium (2009), *One month on in Darfur and Sudan: the expulsion and suspension of international and national humanitarian and human rights organizations* (April 2009), quoted in ibid.
135 Koenraad Van Brabant, "Five Ways to Make Aid Locally Sourced," *The Guardian*, March 1, 2016, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/01/the-aid-localization-debate-five-issues-for-the-world-humanitarian-summit.
136 Louise Redvers, "Local Aid Agencies: Still Waiting for a Bigger Share of the Funding Cake," *IRIN*, March 27, 2017, https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/03/27/local-aid-agencies-still-waiting-bigger-share-funding-cake.
137 See Gingerich and Cohen, "Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head."

polar civil society landscape."[138] All of these NGOs profess to support the local turn, albeit in ways that clearly reinforce their existing business models. This raises the question of what organizational changes, if any, they may advance in the future.

The ambiguity surrounding humanitarian financing and funding for local actors also explains the recent interest in so-called "fundermediary" organizations, which act as the critical intermediary between international donors and the eventual recipients of aid.[139] A number of networks and alliances have emerged in recent years, all of which have the apparent aim of directing funding to local organizations. The Start Network, which began as a consortium of British humanitarian organizations, manages a pooled fund that directs assistance to partner organizations responding to small-scale crises around the world.[140] NEAR, as mentioned earlier, has similar aspirations, although exclusively focused on southern-based organizations. The UN has similarly promoted its country-based pooled funds, which allow donors to pool unearmarked humanitarian funds in support of specific needs, as "the largest source of directly accessible funding for national NGOs."[141] These unique funding arrangements are gradually changing the nature of humanitarian financing. At the same time, it may be inferred that each of these 'fundermediaries' has a vested interest in positioning itself as the best 'flow-through' organization for funding targeted at local actors, thereby allowing it to continue to attract its own sources of financing.

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138 Joanna Moorhead and Joe Sandler Clarke, "Big NGOs Prepare to Move South, but Will It Make a Difference?," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/16/big-ngos-africa-amnesty-oxfam-actionaid.
139 Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, "Five Reasons Donors Give for Not Funding Local NGOs Directly," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2015, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/09/five-reasons-donors-give-for-not-funding-local-ngos-directly.
140 Start Network, "About Us," *Start Network*, 2015, https://startnetwork.org/about-us.
141 OCHA, "Annual Report 2016" (New York: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2017).

At the heart of this definitional debate is the question of who should be recognized as the authoritative actors in relation to humanitarian response. The stakeholders involved are each mobilizing different forms of capital – cultural, social, moral – to buttress their claims. At stake, most obviously, is access to funding. At the World Humanitarian Summit, donors committed to target, by 2020, at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to national and local responders "as directly as possible."[142] Left unanswered was the question of who or what should be considered local. This helps explain why different coalitions of actors have attempted to align and identify themselves as 'local,' as a means to best position themselves for future funding. It also suggests that the role of donors will remain paramount moving forward, particularly as their definition of the local will ultimately determine access to funding.

The ripple effects of such definitional debates may also extend beyond matters of funding. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the use of language and discourse is central to expressions of authority, by legitimizing certain activities and closing off others. The unresolved question of who and what is local indicates a field in flux, one characterized by different coalitions of actors jockeying for advantage. It suggests that the traditional influence of established humanitarian actors may have reached its peak, as alternative views of and approaches to humanitarianism gain traction across this social space. While it is unknown where such debates will lead, they will inevitably follow changes in the underlying structure of the field.

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142 "The Grand Bargain," 5.

Conclusion

I opened this chapter with an examination of the nature of change across social fields. Change, according to Bourdieu and his contemporaries, is directly related to the state of power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in social struggle. It is typically slow and piecemeal in nature, characterized more often by partial revolutions and adjustments as opposed to rapid transformations. Periods of instability, nonetheless, may open space for consideration of new understandings and actions, while questioning those once perceived as natural. New coalitions, hierarchies, and concessions are bound to emerge during these times, contributing to change in the prevailing hierarchy of power.

The evolution of the local turn over the past two decades has exhibited many of these effects. Consideration and awareness of the local have grown tremendously among humanitarian actors, while the discourse of partnership, empowerment, and ownership is now firmly embedded in the lexicon of the field. While such change was largely rhetorical at first, the localization agenda has gained traction in recent years, in line with the expanding capacities and assertiveness of actors based in the Global South. Political crises as well as shifts in the underlying distribution of cultural, social, and symbolic capital have brought to the fore alternative understandings and perceptions of the role of the local in humanitarian response. The established logic and rules underpinning the humanitarian field have grown increasingly unsettled as a result, in ways that continue to resonate across this social space.

In the end, the World Humanitarian Summit ultimately did not produce the transformative change it set out to achieve. Although the summit produced 32 regime-wide commitments to action and thousands of individual and organizational

commitments to change,[143] the humanitarian field, arguably, remains as hierarchical and unequal as ever before. Nonetheless, the consultations and meetings leading up to the summit itself drew unprecedented attention to the role and position of local actors in humanitarian response. They exposed deep rifts across the field, and highlighted the competition that has accompanied questions of change. At stake, as in all humanitarian reform efforts, is authority and influence over the policy and practice of aid. This contest, I suggest, has become more pronounced in recent years, and is unlikely to subside. While not transformative or immediate, it will continue to drive change, however partial, across the humanitarian field, in ways certain to create new opportunities for traditionally marginalized actors within this social space.

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143 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Commitments to Action" (New York: United Nations, 2016).

CHAPTER 9:

Conclusion

"The international humanitarian enterprise is out of step with the realities of the world in which it operates and is far from fit to meet the challenges of the future. A fundamental shift in the humanitarian business model is overdue – from a culture and set of practices that tend towards insularity, reactiveness and competition towards an enterprise rooted in anticipation, transparency, research and experimentation, and strategic collaboration."

Looking Beyond the Crisis, p.3

Introduction

The World Humanitarian Summit, held in May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, elicited mixed reactions from participants and observers.[1] On the one hand, the summit drew over 10,000 participants and solicited over 3,100 individual and joint commitments to change.[2] The cross-section of individuals and organizations in attendance perfectly encapsulated the diversity of the humanitarian field today, as aid professionals, civil servants, CEOs, celebrities, and representatives of NGOs from both the Global North and South converged on Istanbul to express their support for this process. On the other hand, the summit was made up of primarily "B-list participation,"[3] and did not attract political leaders from permanent members of the UN Security Council or top donor countries, with the notable exception of Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. The wide-ranging

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1 See, for example, Heba Aly, "The World Humanitarian Summit: Winners and Losers," *IRIN* (blog), May 26, 2016, http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2016/05/26/world-humanitarian-summit-winners-and-losers; Christina Bennett, "World Humanitarian Summit: Political Breakthrough or Fringe Festival?," *ODI* (blog), May 25, 2016, https://www.odi.org/comment/10401-world-humanitarian-summit-political-breakthrough-or-fringe-festival; Paul Currion, "The Wrong Future," *IRIN* (blog), May 20, 2016, http://www.irinnews.org/opinion/2016/05/20/wrong-future; Hugo Slim, "Istanbul Dispatch: A First Look Back at the World Humanitarian Summit," International Committee of the Red Cross, *Humanitarian Law & Policy* (blog), May 26, 2016, http://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2016/05/26/istanbul-dispatch/.
2 World Humanitarian Summit secretariat, "Commitments to Action" (New York: United Nations, 2016).
3 Bennett, "World Humanitarian Summit."

agenda, which included high-level political meetings, open plenaries, and a number of special sessions and side-events, also contributed to the event's "schizophrenia" and was thought to have failed to rally participants around a common vision or objectives.[4] Consequently, while the WHS garnered significant attention and numerous commitments to change, observers soon worried that this momentum would not be sustained.

The mixed reactions to the WHS are reflective of the prevailing challenge of humanitarian reform. They point us back to the central questions and puzzles that motivated this dissertation: What explains the limits of reform? What roles and relationships have influenced the shape and direction of change? In response, I posited that the process of reform has been shaped by the enduring competition over authority and capital that is intrinsic to the humanitarian field. As opposed to conventional accounts, which typically focus on the material or political barriers to change, I focused attention on the power relations that separate different positions across this social space. I argued that authority within the humanitarian field has, over time, solidified among a core group of elite actors, based predominantly in Geneva, New York, and other humanitarian capitals. These hierarchical relations of authority, I suggested, have profoundly influenced contemporary understandings of and responses to humanitarian reform. As a result, promised change has continually fallen short, breeding scepticism toward the WHS and other reform initiatives.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on some of the core findings of this research, including implications for current and future prospects for humanitarian reform. The first section briefly summarizes the main arguments of the dissertation. The second considers

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4 Bennett.

the possible sources of transformation and change, which, I suggest, must be grounded in an understanding of the prevailing competition over authority and capital occurring across the humanitarian field. The final section looks beyond the humanitarian field, and discusses how the findings of this research relate to the broader landscape of global governance.

The Argument, Revisited

The question of how to address the limits of reform is of central importance in moving towards a humanitarian regime that is more participatory, accountable, and, above all, responsive to the needs and interests of people affected by disaster. Humanitarian actors have long grappled with the enduring 'malaise' affecting their sector, and have explored, in some depth, the past shortcomings of change. Most conventional explanations focus on the material and institutional impediments to change, in the form of inter-organizational competition and political interference. More critical scholars have noted that humanitarianism itself is embedded in a distinct cultural and normative environment, with links to the liberal regime of global governance and legacies of colonial and paternalistic policies and practices. While important, these analyses offer comparatively less understanding of dynamics that are internal to the humanitarian regime. They fail to recognize the competition over authority and influence that has accompanied new change initiatives, and the ways in which certain voices and perspectives have been elevated above others in defining the direction and scope of reform.

For this reason, this dissertation offered an alternative lens through which to approach the study of humanitarian reform. Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's conception

of social fields, defined as the configuration or arrangement of relations between positions within a given social space, it centred its analysis on the relationships of domination, dependence, and contestation among agents across the humanitarian field. Its scope was deliberately wide, and encompassed the diversity of actors, perspectives, and interests that make up the humanitarian field today. In doing so, it drew attention to the competition over authority and competence among differently positioned agents within this social space. Most notably, it highlighted the presence and influence of a 'humanitarian elite', and the various sources of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital that have helped buttress its claim to authority. It also revealed the ideas, norms, and practices that continue to be taken for granted within this social space, and the ways in which these have begun to be contested by traditionally marginalized actors.

The humanitarian field is as diverse as it is large, raising the question of who and what should be considered 'humanitarian'. From its Western origins, the formal humanitarian regime has been joined by a range of actors and institutions, including Southern aid donors and organizations, diaspora groups, militaries, and private sector entities. The field is multi-layered in nature and composed of overlapping groups and networks, from the UN and NGO staff in international headquarters to the aid workers and locally employed staff working on the ground. For the purposes of this dissertation, I defined the humanitarian field as limited to the work of agents who are ostensibly motivated by the provision of life-saving relief in the midst of natural or human-made crises, thereby separating this field from others that are more political or economic in nature. While perhaps artificial, this boundary, I argued, is at the root of the profound sense of exceptionalism that surrounds this field, and which has endeavoured to maintain

humanitarian action as a separate and distinct sphere of activity. As I suggested throughout the dissertation, this exceptionalism is also partly responsible for the hierarchical structuring of authority across the humanitarian field, as it has limited recognition of actors, capacities, and sources of expertise perceived to be outside the traditional centres of humanitarian influence.

Capital is at the heart of the struggle between agents within the humanitarian field. I identified four resources that are particularly relevant to the construction of authority and governance across this social space: economic resources; cultural capital in the form of education, core competencies, and the 'right' kind of acquired knowledge; social capital and the influence gained through access to particular networks; and symbolic capital associated with the traditions and moral weight attached to international humanitarianism. These sources of capital, and the ways in which they have been traditionally concentrated among a select group of elite actors, reveal a humanitarian field that is deeply stratified. Each, moreover, has been used to advance particular claims to governance, with profound implications for the policy and practice of aid.

Most notably, authority and decision-making powers within the humanitarian field have been largely delegated upwards, to the policymakers and officials located in international headquarters. This elite group of actors, made up of humanitarian professionals based primarily in Geneva, New York, and, to a lesser extent, various regional hubs around the world, dominates the shape and direction of policymaking across the humanitarian regime. Access to this cosmopolitan elite, moreover, remains limited; its members have typically attended universities in Europe or North America, speak English or French, and are able to move transversally across organizations or

operations. This hierarchical structuring has reinforced the upward flow of information and decision-making across the humanitarian field. It has also contributed to the 'pre-eminence of the international' and the privileging of certain fundamental assumptions and practices, including the preference for universal policy prescriptions and top-down, technical solutions. It has concealed the parochialism inherent to humanitarian reform, with important implications for whose voices are heard in the making of new policy and whose, by extension, are not.

These same authority structures are visible in the organization and delivery of international assistance on the ground. Through case studies of three prominent areas of reform – coordination, accountability, and partnership – I explored some of the fundamental behaviours and habits underpinning the contemporary practice of humanitarianism. Although the past two decades of reform have resulted in the proliferation of new tools and standards, I found that many of these developments continue to privilege outside sources of expertise over those based locally. The latter includes national and local government officials, civil society actors, and communities and individuals, all of whom appear to be constrained in their abilities to direct the delivery of external aid or hold international humanitarian actors to account. While attempting to decentralize and democratize the practice of aid, it appears that recent reforms have yet to effectively challenge some of the fundamental assumptions, behaviours, and power dynamics embedded in the structure of the humanitarian field. The same stratification of knowledge and expertise present at the global level is thus being reproduced on the ground, in ways that continue to exclude national and local actors.

Above all, these case studies revealed a humanitarian field that remains premised on the large-scale, *international* delivery of aid. Reforms introduced over the past two decades have largely sustained this model by prioritizing the role of international actors in managing, coordinating, and delivering assistance. International expertise and knowledge, in many cases, continues to be seen as the sole legitimate basis for humanitarian action. Underpinned by certain entrenched practices and habits, policy changes have therefore served to strengthen an implicit hierarchy of authority and assumed effectiveness in the delivery of aid. They have further reinforced, rather than reduced, the boundaries between international responders and their national and local counterparts. The former, consequently, continue to miss opportunities to benefit from and build on the knowledge, cultural understandings, and capacities present at the national and local levels. Dependence on international capacities and institutions has thus remained the norm, often at the expense of strengthening those found locally.

These dynamics, however, may be changing, as the humanitarian field is increasingly witnessing a number of challenges 'from below'. The governments of emerging and middle-income countries, most notably, have become more assertive in their engagements with the international humanitarian regime. Many are wary of receiving international assistance, or have attempted to direct its delivery on their own terms. Regional and national NGOs based in the Global South, moreover, have begun to challenge the presumed authority of international humanitarian actors, and have called on the latter to better demonstrate the comparative advantages of the capital and resources they may bring to bear. The World Humanitarian Summit, in particular, laid bare deep and contentious fault lines across the field. The localization agenda, which emerged over

the course of the WHS consultations, was perhaps the most significant challenge in this regard, and successfully brought together local, national, and international NGOs from across the Global South.

Thus far, these challenges from below have yet to produce transformational changes to the fundamental assumptions and hierarchies of humanitarian aid. Those at the head of the field's policymaking elite have few incentives, material or otherwise, to truly reform the dominant modes of policy and practice across this space. Nonetheless, these challenges have brought into question the functioning of the field itself, and the logic and rules that guide its operation. They are reflective of the competition over authority and influence that is intrinsic to all periods of reform. While change is unlikely to be revolutionary, these challenges hint at a period of adjustment across the humanitarian field. The next section considers some of the possible sources of change, and suggests a number of measures that could help to initiate these developments.

Understanding the Sources of Change

In the introduction to this dissertation, I briefly outlined the three concurrent and inter-connected crises facing the humanitarian regime. These include, firstly, a 'crisis of capacity', as humanitarian organizations have found themselves stretched to the limits in attempting to keep pace with the growing and increasingly protracted number of crises. Closely linked to this is a 'crisis of means' brought on by persistent shortfalls in funding. Finally, I suggested that the regime faces a 'crisis of legitimacy' that has been looming for some time. The latter has become particularly acute in recent years, as a range of actors, often incorrectly labelled 'new' humanitarians, have agitated for better access to funding and greater recognition of their capacities and expertise. Top-down approaches to

aid delivery, I observed, have become ever more unpalatable, leading to mounting

expectations for change.

For many, the World Humanitarian Summit represented the best opportunity in

years to rethink the very foundations of the humanitarian regime.[5] Among those I

interviewed, there was a prevailing sense of optimism regarding the possibility of change:

> I think what [the WHS] has done, if nothing else, is galvanize an entire sector
> around a global conversation about change. It's really motivated that. Every
> organization that's been even halfway engaged in the summit has come out with
> some kind of paper, or statement, or policy, or think piece about what needs to
> change. And, you know, maybe at the end there will be a groundswell of motivation
> to change something.[6]

Another respondent suggested that:

> The WHS has legitimized and given credibility to voices that we don't hear a lot.
> By doing regional consultations, and bringing these voices in, now you cannot just
> ignore that.[7]

Meaningful attempts to reform the humanitarian regime, however, must learn from the

shortcomings of the past, and avoid policy changes that amount to little more than

"tinkering at the edges."[8] Instead, they must actively address structural divides and

embrace the role and autonomy of actors formerly at the margins of the field. They

should confront behaviours and practices that are parochial and possibly paternalistic in

nature, and make space for alternative perspectives and sources of expertise. They should

orient activities away from previously centralized and top-down approaches to aid

delivery, and move towards a regime that acknowledges and capitalizes on its own

diversity.

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5 Christina Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action for the Modern Era" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2016), 8.
6 Interview with external consultant (611).
7 Interview with NGO representative (312).
8 Humanitarian Policy Group, "Creating a Paradigm Shift: Statement for the World Humanitarian Summit Global Consultation" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015), 1.

Such change necessitates a fundamental shift in the culture of aid. On the one hand, it requires buy-in and support from those at the centre of the humanitarian field. With few incentives to cede their traditional authority, elite actors in the humanitarian field are unlikely to welcome policy reforms that call into question their central position. Consequently, new reforms could look to introduce standards and guidelines that have "real teeth," and which reward cooperation and punish transgressors.[9] Ideally, these changes should be accompanied by new monetary supports and policies that alter material incentives on the ground. On the other hand, reform must look to facilitate change from below by creating space for new actors and perspectives. In working towards a more collective response, such change must build on the knowledge and capacities present at the national and local levels and recognize the comparative advantages of diverse groups of actors.

Above all, meaningful humanitarian reform must acknowledge, and even embrace, the ongoing competition over authority and influence occurring across the humanitarian field. Although some observers were, perhaps, disappointed with the eventual outcomes of the WHS, the desire for change is unlikely to dissipate. In response, actors across the humanitarian field should seek to better understand the imbalances of the past, as a means of moving towards a more level playing field in the future. This directs our attention back to the various forms of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – at the heart of this competition. Each, I suggest below, may prove to be important sources of change.

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9 Ben Ramalingam and Michael Barnett, "The Humanitarian's Dilemma: Collective Action or Inaction in International Relief?," Background Note (London: Overseas Development Institute, August 2010), 6.

Economic change

The economic barriers to change remain among the most difficult to address, and were rightfully the focus of considerable attention in the consultations leading up to the WHS. As one of my respondents observed:

> As long as we don't change the way we finance or seriously think about the incentives that creates, the change cannot happen. It's just not possible. There's not enough incentive to do that. And everybody bears some responsibility.[10]

The contemporary model of aid delivery has served to protect the interests of the organizations at the centre of humanitarian operations, who have few incentives to open access to funding and thus reduce their market share. Correcting the current imbalance of humanitarian financing must, therefore, start with concerted action on the part of donor governments. This includes, most notably, policy changes intended to remove barriers to access for national and local actors, likely through reviews of risk management procedures and cumbersome application processes.[11] Flexible or unearmarked financing arrangements may also enable further investments in capacity building, ideally in ways that recognize and build on existing capacities on the ground.

One of the most promising practices in recent years has been the increasing use of pooled funds and umbrella grants. UN-managed country-based pooled funds (CBPF), for example, provide a means for donors to provide more direct funding to national and local organizations. In practice, donors are encouraged to provide unearmarked funding to a CBPF operating within a particular context, which is then responsible for identifying and

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10 Interview with UN representative (114).
11 See Lydia Poole, "Future Humanitarian Financing: Looking Beyond the Crisis" (CAFOD/FAO/World Vision, 2015).

vetting recipient organizations.[12] Employed in 18 countries as of the end of 2017, these

funds have been viewed as an important means of improving the accessibility of funding

to national and local humanitarian organizations, without imposing heavy administrative

burdens on donors or recipient organizations.[13] The Start Fund, a pooled fund managed

exclusively by NGOs under the auspices of the Start Network, has similarly improved the

distribution of funds to smaller and more locally-based responders.[14] These innovations

provide an important means of facilitating direct access to funding for national and local

actors. They further help to reduce the number of intermediary organizations involved,

thus offering a more direct link between donors and local recipients.

At the same time, new sources of funds across the humanitarian field may also

enable an expanded role for national and local actors. Although the majority of donor

funding continues to derive from countries in Europe and North America, a number of

non-traditional donors are increasingly contributing to international humanitarian

assistance. Most notably, governments from the Middle East and North Africa region

have accounted for the largest percentage increases in aid contributions in recent years,

and comprised approximately 11 percent of all government funding in 2015.[15] Compared

to their European and North American counterparts, these countries are far more likely to

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12 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Country-Based Pooled Funds," 2017, https://www.unocha.org/our-work/humanitarian-financing/country-based-pooled-funds-cbpfs.
13 See Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016" (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2016), 69; Lydia Poole, "Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in National NGO Response Capacity" (London: CAFOD, 2013), 23–24.
14 The Start Fund is operated through the Start Network, which is made up of 42 national and international aid agencies and over 7,000 national and local partners. Financed by a number of European donors, the Fund is managed exclusively by member organizations and strives to provide rapid funding to small and medium scale crises. See Start Network, "Start Fund," Start Network, 2016, https://startnetwork.org/start-fund.
15 Development Initiatives, "Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016," 44.

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channel bilateral support directly to disaster-affected governments,[16] and tend to operate outside mainstream international efforts.[17] Albeit relatively small to date, these alternative sources of funding will likely continue to grow in the future, and are certain to shake up traditional funding bases. More negatively, they may also contribute to the further politicization of humanitarian assistance, particularly among states that have come to view aid as an extension of their foreign policy goals.

Some observers, of course, have argued that the practice of humanitarian financing should be 'turned on its head' by shifting as much funding as possible directly to local actors. Adeso, for example, has called on donors to provide 20 percent of total funding directly to national and local organizations by 2020.[18] While laudable, such demands should be tempered by a dose of realism. The aid departments of most donor countries face their own internal capacity constraints, and are unlikely to be able to disburse and appropriately manage funding to potentially hundreds of smaller national and local organizations around the world. Concerns regarding corruption and risk, while not insurmountable, will also remain an important consideration. At the same time, not all local organizations have the capacity or competence to manage large disbursements of funding. As opposed to fundamentally rewriting the rules of humanitarian financing, as Adeso and others suggest, the preferred balance is likely somewhere in between. Nonetheless, as innovations like pooled funds begin to provide donors with more direct

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16 In 2015, 70 percent of all funding channeled directly to affected governments derived from donors outside the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). The latter, by contrast, channeled only 0.5 percent of international humanitarian assistance through affected governments. Development Initiatives, 73.

17 Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015).

18 Adeso, "A More Dignified and Equitable Humanitarian System: How to Truly Localize Aid," 2015.

access to local recipients, traditional organizations may find themselves to be unnecessary links in between.

Cultural change

Cultural divides, including those stemming from differences in language, work routines, and the prioritization of particular ways of knowing, are pervasive across the humanitarian field. They serve to diminish the scope for local participation by excluding national and local actors at the most basic level. In recognition of these imbalances, coordinating agencies such as OCHA should seek to find new avenues to enhance the participation of local actors. Cluster meetings, for example, could be held in local languages or offer translation services. Government officials and civil society representatives could be brought more actively into the design and management of responses from the outset, and be better engaged throughout all phases of aid delivery and coordination. Preparedness work could help to ensure that international coordination structures and processes align with national capacities and interests, in order to avoid, for instance, the challenges encountered in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan. Such measures would help to ensure that national and local actors are provided with the opportunity to lead or contribute to the delivery of humanitarian response.

Recruitment and training opportunities are another source of imbalance across the humanitarian field, and could be made more accessible to national and local staff. International organizations should look to hire and rely more on local employees, including in management and leadership positions. The significant wage gap between international and local staff, another prominent source of concern throughout the WHS

consultations, should also be addressed in this regard.[19] Observers suggest that current

disparities in hiring and salaries tend to be a source of resentment among locally

employed aid workers, who report feeling less valued than their expatriate colleagues.

Such differential treatment may further undermine the effectiveness of aid programs on

the ground, by damaging working relationships and fostering divisions among staff.[20]

Finally, national and local staff should have better access to professional development

and training courses, including those outside their home country.[21] This could help to

ensure that career progression opportunities are not solely limited to those able to travel

internationally.

Above all, humanitarians should seek to better balance the values attached to

technical and local sources of knowledge. Specialized, technical knowledge across a

variety of sectors is, of course, essential to any effective response. Techniques that are

transferable across contexts enable humanitarian professionals to quickly and efficiently

apply their craft in a range of settings and countries. The preference for generalizable

data, moreover, has helped to improve the efficiency and transparency of aid.[22]

Nonetheless, the emphasis on specialization and standardization has often come at the

expense of in-depth understandings of the historical, political, and cultural contexts in

which humanitarians work. It has contributed to the elevation of outside approaches and

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19 See NEAR, "Closing the Gap: Reinforce, Do Not Replace Local Capacities," May 2016; Anonymous, "Why Do Expats Earn More than the Rest of Us?," Secret aid worker, the Guardian, March 29, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/29/secret-aid-worker-why-do-expats-earn-more-than-the-rest-of-us.
20 Stuart C. Carr and Ishbel McWha-Hermann, "Mind the Gap in Local and International Aid Workers' Salaries," The Conversation, April 17, 2016, http://theconversation.com/mind-the-gap-in-local-and-international-aid-workers-salaries-47273; Ishbel McWha-Hermann et al., "Exploring Practical Pathways for Reward Fairness in International NGOs" (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2017).
21 See Catherine Russ, "Global Survey on Humanitarian Professionalization" (ELRHA, 2011).
22 Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid."

solutions over those found locally, and pushed to the side the unique contributions and expertise of national and local actors.

To counterbalance such trends, humanitarian professionals should, at a minimum, receive better training in and be recruited on the basis of in-depth country expertise. This could help to generate greater awareness of local contexts and capacities, and may even encourage better engagement and integration with local actors in humanitarian response. Preferably, however, humanitarians should also seek to model approaches that provide greater space for local ownership and participation. The most successful responses are those that are grounded in and responsive to in-depth local knowledge, thus enabling interveners to mediate between international approaches and priorities and the needs of local communities. In Lebanon, for example, case study research has found that national and local organizations "know their wounds," and are most effective when able to assert their autonomy from outside actors and act according to their own understandings of local challenges.[23] Such autonomy is necessary for both enhancing the sustainability of local responses, and improving the long-term effectiveness and impact of aid. As this research concludes:

> Knowledge of context – knowledge of wounds – is more than a useful input to programme design. It is the foundation of national and local organizations' endurance, their ability to resist and, over time, to build and heal.[24]

Proponents of the localization agenda have similarly advocated for greater space for local ownership in conceiving, designing, and managing aid responses, on the basis that national and local actors are best placed to know and listen to the priorities of the communities in which they reside. Creating this space would empower local actors and

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23 Luz Saavedra, "We Know Our Wounds: National and Local Organizations Involved in Humanitarian Response in Lebanon," ALNAP Country Study (London: ODI/ALNAP, 2016).
24 Saavedra, 34.

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reduce the power differential with outsiders, while working towards responses that are

ultimately more sensitive to local needs and interests.

Social change

The consolidation of resources and decision-making within a core set of policy

networks across the humanitarian field has been highly exclusionary in practice. Inter-

agency bodies, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, should be opened to a

more diverse and regionally-based cross-section of organizations, thus countering the

perception of Western bias. A review of the IASC recommends that the committee should

seek to regionalize its structures by devolving its core functions and avenues for dialogue

to the regional level.[25] As part of this new model, the IASC's meetings and working

groups would be regionalized and comprised of representatives relevant to the specific

geographic area, thus allowing the forum to focus on regional and country issues. Along

these lines, OCHA has introduced regional "IASC-like" mechanisms in several contexts

in recent years, most notably in the Asia-Pacific region, in response to a perceived need

for stronger coordination and collaboration at the regional level.[26] Such mechanisms,

however, could be greatly expanded, particularly as demand continues to grow for

versatile and diverse structures of humanitarian response that harness the experiences and

expertise of a wide range of actors.

Effort should also be made to expand the influence of regional humanitarian hubs,

such as Nairobi, Amman, and Bangkok. The latter already serve as important operational

centres, and are host to significant numbers of humanitarian professionals representing

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25 Sara Pantuliano et al., "Review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee" (Overseas Development Institute, 2014), 21.
26 Pantuliano et al., 18–19.

international, regional, and national organizations. Based on this unique confluence of actors, these centres could be further developed into policy hubs in their own right and offer new perspectives and solutions based on the challenges and opportunities of the region in which they are located. International organizations, moreover, should have greater policy representation at these levels. The UN's ongoing attempts to decentralize its organizational structures and the decision of several international NGOs to relocate their headquarters to the Global South are welcome developments in this regard.[27] In addition to representing an important symbolic gesture, such movements should contribute to the regionalization of the humanitarian regime and continue to break down some of the traditional boundaries between international and local counterparts.

To some extent, the regionalization or even localization of the humanitarian field is already underway. The recent emergence of Southern-based networks and alliances, for instance, has helped to challenge the prevailing consolidation of power and authority across the humanitarian field. These networks have successfully raised the profile and voice of Southern NGOs, as seen most obviously through the WHS. As one of my respondents observed:

> If you think of the kind of space we gave to Adeso at the World Humanitarian
> Summit here – a Somalian national NGO – I don't know if that was imaginable ten
> years ago. [...] Could we have imagined that a national NGO from Somalia would
> have been one of the most vocal and heard people within the debate?[28]

The challenge from below presented by Adeso and others is reflective of the growing dissatisfaction with the traditional regimes of authority and capital across the humanitarian field. It has contributed to important questioning of certain entrenched

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27 See, for example, Joanna Moorhead and Joe Sandler Clarke, "Big NGOs Prepare to Move South, but Will It Make a Difference?," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/16/big-ngos-africa-amnesty-oxfam-actionaid.
28 Interview with UN representative (114).

assumptions and behaviours, and has unsettled some of the guiding rules of this social

space. While their capacity to generate transformational change is likely limited in the

near-term, these organizations are undoubtedly contributing to the establishment of new

bases of power in the Global South.

Rhetorically, at least, many of the humanitarian professionals I interviewed were

supportive of efforts to decentralize and regionalize the humanitarian regime. As opposed

to bringing international, regional, and national actors under the auspices of an enlarged

"humanitarian tent,"[29] several respondents suggested that the regime should aspire to

move towards a model of response that embraces the diversity of this social space and

adopts a differentiated approach on the basis of context and needs. As one of my

respondents observed:

> I think the answer is not bringing people into the tent, but actually having lots of
> different networks and communities that are covering needs, are able to work, are
> able to access finance and are respected for their diversity. [...] I think it's much
> better that people accept that there are different systems.[30]

Such a model, respondents explained, should be based on greater recognition of the

diversity of actors, at the global, regional, and national levels, that contribute to effective

responses. It should prioritize decentralization and complementarity, whereby "those who

are empowered to act [...] are those who have a comparative advantage in a given

situation at a given moment in time."[31] Moving towards this model, however, requires

greater understanding of the varied contributions of actors at all levels, including both the

resources and capabilities they may bring to bear as well as their potential limitations.

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29 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go," 64.
30 Interview with Red Cross and Red Crescent representative (211).
31 Interview with NGO representative (313).

Although research has begun to move in this direction,[32] there is a clear need for better

evidence and analysis of the unique comparative advantages of local, national, and

international actors.

Symbolic change

Ultimately, meaningful humanitarian reform must generate important symbolic

changes, particularly in challenging some of the most deeply rooted assumptions and

roles across the field. As noted earlier in the dissertation, the structures, norms, and

culture of the international humanitarian regime are all products of the distinct normative

and cultural environment from which they emerged. They are steeped in Western values

and behaviours, and strongly linked to legacies of paternalism and colonialism. In

practice, this has elevated the moral influence of the international actors and

organizations that have assumed authority for the care and control of the populations

under their purview. This sense of paternalism continues to linger to this day, although it

has been increasingly contested in recent years.

In response to the recent challenges presented by national and local humanitarian

actors, some critics have gone so far as to question whether international NGOs and other

bodies "still have the right to exist."[33] They have called into doubt the presumed moral

authority of the humanitarian professionals representing these organizations, as well as

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32 See, for example, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2015: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness* (IFRC, 2015); Ed Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict" (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016); Steven A. Zyck and Hanna B. Krebs, "Localising Humanitarianism: Improving Effectiveness through Inclusive Action" (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2015).
33 Deborah Doane, "Do International NGOs Still Have the Right to Exist?," *The Guardian*, March 13, 2016, sec. Global Development Professionals Network, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/13/do-international-ngos-still-have-the-right-to-exist.

the maxim that such actors are striving to "work themselves out of the job."[34] The

respective roles of international and local actors, however, should not be seen as mutually

exclusive. While the contributions of actors at the national and local levels should, of

course, be better recognized and acknowledged, this does not necessarily entail a

diminished role for international counterparts. As one of my respondents observed:

> Localization is definitely something that needs to be looked at, that we need to do better, we need to encourage and promote. But, we should also be aware that international humanitarian assistance is absolutely necessary sometimes. […] Sometimes local actors are the best placed [to act] and we need to be absolutely supporting; sometimes the government will be the one; and sometimes you will need INGOs and the UN to step in.[35]

The latter, most notably, will continue to play an important role in providing technical

assistance to national and local organizations, brokering new partnerships, and

advocating for additional resources in responding to the world's crises. They can

negotiate for humanitarian space among warring parties, and can serve as the flagbearers

for principled humanitarian action.[36] Finally, they can help to mitigate a number of

concerns related to the expanding role of national and local actors, including corruption,

risk management, and gender-sensitivity.

In the future, therefore, international humanitarian organizations may be best

placed to play a facilitating role in support of the agendas and goals formulated by local

stakeholders. This vision, however, requires a significant restructuring of the prevailing

distribution of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital across the humanitarian

field. Most notably, international actors must be convinced to "let go" of power and

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34 Barnett and Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid."
35 Interview with NGO representative (312).
36 Schenkenberg, "The Challenges of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict."

control in playing a more supportive role for national and local counterparts.[37] They must

relinquish their grip on the management and organization of aid delivery, and create

greater space for authorities on the ground. Such shifts will necessitate significant change

and questioning of the assumptions, behaviours, and practices that currently underpin

humanitarian response. They may also be inevitable. As noted in the previous chapter,

advocates of the localization agenda are clearly and loudly demanding change. They have

leveraged the language of partnership, empowerment, and ownership that is pervasive

across the humanitarian field, and have used this rhetoric to call into doubt the traditional

moral authority of international actors. As these calls sink in, the latter may find

themselves less able to ignore or deny the appeals for change.

Beyond the Humanitarian Field

While this research has focused predominantly on the humanitarian field, its

findings extend beyond this distinct social space. As noted in an earlier chapter, field

analysis has been used to advance our understanding of the varied practices of global

governance, including the relationships of authority and power that underpin international

regimes. This dissertation has revealed many of the same hierarchies that are present

elsewhere, which, like the humanitarian field, are underpinned by competing claims to

economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. At the same time, it extends these

findings in a number of ways.

Most notably, this dissertation suggests that policy changes or other processes of

reform are unlikely to succeed without also tackling the relationships of authority at their

core. Building on other studies of global governance, I re-imagined politics at the

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37 Bennett et al., "Time to Let Go."

international level as an ongoing process of competition for the authority to define what

and who is to be governed and in what ways. I extended these insights by focusing

specifically on processes of reform, arguing that the biases inherent to the humanitarian

field are visible from policy through to practice. This finding may help to inform studies

of policy change in other related fields. Recurrent efforts to reform international

peacebuilding, to name an obvious example, have fallen short in practice, and have been

similarly linked to the elevation of external sources of expertise and knowledge over

those found locally.[38] The use of prominent buzzwords in development policy, which

often centre around notions of participation and empowerment, have similarly served to

frame solutions in ways that justify particular development interventions and legitimize

"business as usual."[39] At stake within any policy change, I contend, is authority to shape

the scope and direction of reform. This demands greater attention to the relations of

domination, dependence, and contestation within a field, and the ways that particular

regimes of governance may elevate or diminish particular voices.

This dissertation has further shown how prevailing structures of authority orient

actors within a field towards particular solutions and approaches, while excluding

consideration of others. This resonates with findings from the fields of development,[40]

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38 See Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Roger Mac Ginty, "Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace," *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 139–63; Elisa Randazzo, "The Paradoxes of the 'Everyday': Scrutinizing the Local Turn in Peace Building," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (2016): 1351–70.

39 Andrea Cornwall and Karen Brock, "What Do Buzzwords Do for Development Policy? A Critical Look at 'Participation', 'Empowerment' and 'Poverty Reduction,'" *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (2005): 1044.

40 Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Essex, UK: Longman, scientific & technical, 1983); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Anne-Meike Fechter and Heather Hindman, eds., *Inside the Everyday Lives of Development Workers: The Challenges and Futures of Aidland* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2011); David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

peacebuilding,[41] and diplomacy,[42] among others. Practitioners across each of these respective fields exhibit many of the same practices and habits as humanitarians, including the prioritization of technical over local expertise, limited understanding of or concern for local contexts, and a preference for external approaches and fixes. This dissertation extends these insights, however, by suggesting that attempts to reform existing institutions or model new practices or behaviours will rarely overcome the hierarchies and inequalities they are intended to address. In some cases, as I demonstrated through my case studies of coordination and accountability practices, new policy changes may even reinforce established relationships of dominance and dependence. Instead, the transformation of particular fields is more likely to occur as a result of challenges to the prevailing distribution of authority and capital, in ways that may not be foreseen by those occupying a dominant position within these social arenas.

Lastly, the findings of this research draw attention to the sources of contestation and change within particular social fields. A relational lens, I contend, necessarily directs our focus to the diversity of actors within a field, including those that are traditionally overlooked or marginalized within the prevailing distribution of power. It highlights the economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources that serve to maintain relationships of authority, but which may also be the genesis of new forms of critique or contestation. In the field of international development, this view could help to explain how relatively marginalized players, including most notably governments and civil society organizations in the Global South, have begun to assert their independence in relation to traditional

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41 Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
42 Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, "International Practices," *International Theory* 3, no. 01 (2011): 1–36; Vincent Pouliot, "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities," *International Organization* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 257–88.

donors and international organizations.[43] More broadly, it helps to highlight the material and symbolic resources that form the "weapons of the weak" in resisting oppression and hegemony.[44] Such insights broaden our understanding of the sources of change 'from below.' If properly acknowledged and understood, they hold considerable promise for improving the potential effectiveness of international interventions.

This brief review is meant to encourage areas for further inquiry. It suggests that a greater understanding of social fields, and the hierarchies and practices that underpin them, can help us to better recognize the everyday politics and relationships of external intervention. Most notably, it draws our attention to the power relations, internalized habits and practices, and hierarchies of authority and subordination that characterize any social space. These constraints, which may be embedded in the very rules and taken-for-granted behaviours of the field in question, are intrinsic to policy change, and may be just as important as material or normative factors in explaining the shortcomings of reform.

Conclusion

Crisis, in various understandings of the term, is endemic to the humanitarian field. Most obviously, humanitarians operate at the frontlines of emergency, both natural and human-made, and regularly work under incredible duress. Their operational environment is shaped by external political agendas, limited resources, and impossible choices, all of which may challenge even the most seasoned humanitarian. At the same time, this field has long been confronted with its own internal crisis, forcing its inhabitants to grapple

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43 Paulo Esteves and Manaíra Assunção, "South–South Cooperation and the International Development Battlefield: Between the OECD and the UN," *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 10 (2014): 1775–90.
44 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

with the moral, economic, and political dilemmas of their work and question the very legitimacy of their practices and behaviour on the ground. This malaise continues to afflict the humanitarian field, and is unlikely to abate any time soon.

In drawing attention to the relationships and practices intrinsic to aid, I have sought to offer an alternative understanding of the roots of, and possible solutions to, this crisis of legitimacy. My findings reveal a field in flux, which is contending with both its internal boundaries and its traditional regimes of authority. The economic, cultural, social, and moral sources of authority across the humanitarian field have all come into question in recent years, in ways that will continue to unsettle the shape and functioning of this social space. The increasingly prominent competition between the 'heirs' to the humanitarian field and its 'heretics' is unlikely to dissipate and is slowly, I believe, reshaping the policies and practices of humanitarian aid. While change may be gradual, I hope that these challenges from below will continue to expose and call into question the accepted ways of acting and knowing across this social space. In the process, the humanitarian field may, one day, move towards a model of response that is truly built on the dignity and potential of those affected by crisis.

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