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Contributors

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Cover image: A mosque washed out to sea after a magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck Indonesia's Central Sulawesi province in September 2018 triggering a tsunami, landslides, and land liquefaction that caused widespread destruction and loss of life. Jiro Ose / Save the Children.

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Institutional Amnesia and Humanitarian Disaster Management

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Image: A damaged school situated just one kilometre from the Contact Line in Eastern Ukraine, 2018. Simon Edmunds, Save the Children

Abstract

Institutional amnesia is a serious concern for those who plan for, respond to and recover from humanitarian crises. Yet little effort has been made to understand its effects in disaster management generally and humanitarian agencies specifically. Consequently, we have no idea how to reform in ways which can deal with the issue of memory-loss. This paper addresses these concerns by defining institutional amnesia in conceptual and empirical terms, establishing its causes in the humanitarian policy space, ascertaining its effects within and across disasters and, most importantly, setting out a series of recommendations that can help humanitarian agencies address their own amnesia. The central argument is that institutional memory-loss is robbing individuals, organisations and networks of their lesson-learning gains. This is the single biggest reason why memory-loss must be acknowledged and treated as matter of some urgency.

Introduction

Institutional amnesia is a metaphor that can be used to describe how individuals, organisations and inter-organisational networks no longer recall lessons from the past that could help them perform tasks in the present. Around the world, public sector leaders have begun to identify memory-loss as a fundamental issue that undermines their attempts to learn about, design and deliver public policies (Stark 2018). In response, an amnesia-orientated research agenda has recently emerged within public policy and public administration scholarship (Corbett et al. 2018; Stark 2019; Stark and Head 2019). That agenda complements pre-existing research about institutional memory, which is most commonly produced in psychology (Wright and Gaskell 1995; Baddeley 2007; Kliegel et al. 2008), organisational studies (Walsh and Ungson 1991; Linde 2009; March 2010) and the social sciences (Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992; Misztal 2003).

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of memory-loss in these works, little effort has been made to properly understand the effects of institutional amnesia in relation to disaster management generally and humanitarian agencies specifically. This paper addresses these research gaps by:

- Exploring who and what 'forgets' in terms of disaster management and the various dimensions of memory-loss;
- Defining the causes of institutional amnesia in relation to the humanitarian policy space;
- Establishing the effects of amnesia within disasters, across disasters and in the humanitarian sector more widely;
- Proposing a series of practitioner-orientated recommendations about how problematic forms of amnesia might be addressed.

The key message for researchers and practitioners is that institutional amnesia undermines lesson-learning gains. This simple point – that institutional amnesia robs organisations of their learned-lessons – is the single biggest reason why memory-loss must be given a higher priority within humanitarian agencies. The first step towards achieving this is to initially recognise the importance of amnesia and, thereafter, bring memory retention practices into our lesson-learning. We can begin to do this by defining its nature and its effects.

What is Institutional Amnesia?

A simple of way of understanding amnesia is to think about how and where memory is retained. The most obvious way is through the memory of individuals with experience. Institutional amnesia is therefore created when experienced individuals, who have learned their own lessons via participating in disaster management activities, leave their professional environment and take their memories with them.

However, memory is also retained within organisations. This is done through a variety of methods. The first and most obvious way is via record-keeping. Over the past twenty years, changes in the ways in which public sector agencies record data (as more formal records give way to digital and internet based archiving) and changes in the nature and location of decision making (as formal 'on the record' styles of decision making give way to a more informal styles) have both led to the loss of a great deal of institutional memory (Pollitt 2000; 2009). Amnesia can therefore be understood through weaknesses in the quality of those processes that archive the past and allow staff to access historical lessons.

A second, less obvious manifestation of organisational memory can be seen in the accumulation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) that institutionalise historical lessons. These are often the result of internal lesson-learning efforts that have identified issues and put in place reforms. Another dimension of institutional amnesia can therefore be measured in the decline or abandonment of procedures. This type of amnesia often occurs when no-one can remember why those procedures exist (Walsh and Ungson 1991; Stark 2019), which can happen if reforms in an organisation capture the lessons from the past but not necessarily the details of history (March and Levitt 1988). A failed operational response to a disaster, for example, may teach an agency that they need new contingency plans, better surge capacity or that their mutual aid relationships are performing poorly. Policies may be re-designed, new SOPs may be forthcoming and organisational memory may be enhanced as a consequence. Yet this does not guarantee that the history that propelled those lessons will be remembered. This poses a threat, particularly to procedures that are costly but not obviously related to an organisation's core business. For this reason, risk and crisis management practices are often forgotten or wilfully abandoned simply because they are not regularly used and no one recalls the history that justified their creation (Stark and Head 2019).

This alerts us to the fact that organisational memory also resides in an organisation's culture. Memory is not simply a tangible record of the past or a lesson that can be institutionalised procedurally. It is also organic, fluid and propagated through an organisation's 'storytelling' (Linde 2009). It can be found in the stories that are told about an organisation's creation, its traditions and its successes and failures (Boje 2008; Bevir and Rhodes 2010) and in organisational values and symbols that memorialise or curate the past (Edkins 2003). These cultural artefacts need not be organisationally specific. Consider, for example, the powerful mythology surrounding the concepts of neutrality and impartiality that pervade the humanitarian policy space. These values imbue the culture of most humanitarian organisations and have a curated history themselves, which is often told and retold in terms of a variety of historical events in which they were challenged or validated (for examples of both see Weiss 1999 and Terry 2002). When we think about institutional amnesia from this view it will therefore reflect an absence of cultural processes and artefacts that interpret the past.

Memory can also reside across organisations in networks (Corbett et al. 2018). Transformations in the nature of disaster management over the past three decades have translated it from a state-centric and hierarchical affair to something which demands much more network governance (Stark 2014). In this context, memory can be shared across many different inter-connected actors. There are (at least) two dimensions to inter-organisational memory of this nature. The first relates to the memory that is created via repeated interactions across time when different organisations need to come together to perform tasks. Repeated interactions of this nature lead to the creation of formal and informal inter-organisational forums and shared forms of storytelling (Corbett et al. 2018). A simple example here comes via the coordination mechanisms that are used to respond to emergencies and disaster, which are often held together via informal and organic relationships that have been built over time (Moynihan 2008). A second dimension of network memory relates to 'external memory', which is held beyond an organisation's borders. For example, Stark (2018) has made the case – in relation to disease control, flood management and bushfire policy – that external actors who exist beyond the borders of government are a valuable commodity because of their capacity to hold onto crisis management lessons for longer periods. These types of organisation – in the form of professional associations, advocacy groups, research centres and think tanks, for example – are often lesser amnesiacs simply because they are shielded from the political impulse to continually reform. These two types of memory show us that, from a network perspective, amnesia can be measured in a loss of inter-organisational understanding and coherence.

What Causes Institutional Amnesia?

The single biggest cause of institutional amnesia is organisational 'churn' which is evidenced primarily through turnover in staff. Humanitarian NGOs suffer from significantly higher rates of turnover than other not-for-profit actors (Korf et al. 2015). Turnover is caused by many factors, the single largest of which is undoubtedly funding continuity, which encourages short-term contracting in all NGOs (Richardson 2006; Korf et al. 2015). However, there is more to the turnover issue than staffing costs. For example, should a humanitarian agency wish to keep its staff for more than one crisis deployment, they will often find themselves up against a widespread perception that humanitarian work, particularly in emergencies, is a one-off for the CV rather than something to be pursued across the longer-term. Doctors, for example, often view their involvement in an international emergency response as something to be done once, either as a form of volunteering or as a one-off episode in their training, rather than something that represents a permanent career choice (Henry 2004). This perception is often compounded by the lack of meaningful career pathways for professionals and the (relatively) low wages in the humanitarian sector (Richardson 2006; Telford and Cosgrave 2007). High levels of turnover can also be attributed to the nature of the job itself: long absences away from home, the insecurity of disaster zones and the trauma that can be experienced within them can all influence an individual's willingness to participate in multiple deployments. For these reasons, humanitarian workers with partners and families are less likely to remain within an NGO for long enough to experience more than one disaster (Korf et al. 2015). Thus, what we see is a variety of structural, organisational and personal issues combining to run against the grain of long-term employment and memory retention in the sector.

However, churn can also be created intentionally. Short-term contracts, it has been argued, can be beneficial to a humanitarian organisation as a means of creating adaptive capacity in crisis responses (Korf et al. 2015). The need to quickly ramp up a relief effort, to adapt it to circumstance and to then de-scale it as events change may demand human resource strategies that are highly flexible. Moreover, it can also been argued that short-term contracts allow for a form of sectoral learning, which is created by staff moving across agencies, jurisdictions and roles but not leaving humanitarian work entirely.

Churn is also side effect of the ceaseless political need to be seen reforming policy, restructuring organisations and showing change (Pollitt 2000). This political impulse is universal to all policy areas and disaster management is no exception. Indeed, the problem is particularly pronounced in multi-level systems of governance, such as that which structures Disaster Risk Reduction internationally, that have a division of labour between policy formulation and policy implementation. In such systems, there is a tendency for the centre to ceaselessly create policy regardless of the capacity of local units to implement it. Continual upheaval of this nature can encourage churn in policy ideas, frameworks for action and institutional apparatus which all create a form of amnesia as policy operates without clear beginnings or ends and exists in a perpetual limbo. In this context, actors on the ground can wilfully 'forget' initiatives imposed from above. This is often an organisational coping strategy that allows front-line actors to ignore what they cannot do in order to focus on what they can (Stark 2018).

A variety of other dynamics can also erode memory. One interesting argument suggests that we create amnesia by neglecting to use history in lesson-learning efforts. At least three versions of this neglect are recorded in crisis management research. One relates to the way in which crises are viewed as exceptional, which leads to an underappreciation of the value of learning from history (Terry 2002). There is a tendency, well documented in studies of crises and hindsight learning, to view crises as one-offs that could not be foreseen and will not be repeated (Boin and Fischbacher-Smith 2011; Hindmoor and McConnell 2013). This tendency sits comfortably with views about the contemporary nature of crises more generally, which emphasise the contemporary disaster as a unique manifestation of the highly uncertain times in which we live (Beck 1992). Complex emergencies are one label that has been used to define

crises in these ways (for example, Natsios 1995). Yet when we look at complex emergencies, they actually reflect enduring problems that have not changed much across the years (Terry 2002). Consequently, we should not see them as exceptional or abnormal events which are characterised by unique forms of complexity but rather as more typical threats which can be understood through history (Terry 2002).

The neglect of history can also be a consequence of a wilful disinterest in learning about the past. This may be because confronting the past will challenge powerful interests, involve reforming the status quo or, more commonly, create political problems for incumbents and contemporary policies (Stark 2019). Thus, amnesia can be created through a simple unwillingness to interrogate the past because that means challenging dominant norms in the present. An illustrative example of this can be seen in the ways in which humanitarian aid continues to be militarised by governments in the global north. This is because of a continuing belief that aid is a policy tool for ensuring security. Continuity in this regard, Barakat et al. (2010) argue, reflects a wilful tradition of forgetting in the north that has deliberately ignored the many historical failures that expose the lack of connection between humanitarian aid, the pacification of domestic communities and the creation of security.

A final category worth noting under the wilful neglect of history relates to the positive nature of institutional amnesia as a means of overcoming trauma. For example, trauma-inducing disasters can create 'long shadow crises' ('t Hart and Boin 2001). This description captures how acute emergencies shape-shift into political crises. Long-shadow crises are often driven by those who suffered trauma as they constantly relive the past in ways which will not allow them to move on. For these groups, the political struggle is endless because they cannot put distance between themselves, the disaster and their trauma. Efforts to produce accountability, redress and compensation after disasters will never be enough for these groups because 'those who make politics out of pursuing such claims make themselves, and those they charge, slaves to what cannot be changed' (Olick and Demetriou 2006: 77). Although many traumatic events are met with a response that emphasises that 'we will remember' the debilitating effects of trauma and resentment can actually mean that some amnesia can help, simply because 'memory breathes revenge as often as it breathes reconciliation' (Assmann 1999: 15).

The Effects of Institutional Amnesia

Amnesia can create problematic effects within disaster responses, across disasters and in the humanitarian aid sector more broadly. Within disasters, the single largest problem emerges from the handover process through which staff replace each other. As staff rotate, memory of the emergency effort can be lost, and the wheel is reinvented both in terms of strategic decision making and operational actions (Richardson 2006; Telford and Cosgrave 2007). Typically, handovers occur as emergency relief begins to give way to longer term recovery and

development. As handovers happen in a crisis, memory of the needs of those affected, memory of the ad-hoc responses to the challenges of the emergency (some successful, others failed) and memory of the temporary relationships created on the front-line can all be lost. This may be because no systems are in place to bridge the gap. Alternatively, incoming staff (especially medical professionals) may orientate towards a form of 'learning by doing' which demands trial and error working at a personal level. Thus, the wheel (even if broken) is reinvented again and again across the life of an emergency response. Consider, for example, the account below, which many front-line humanitarian actors will recognise as familiar. It comes from the reconstruction of a 'day in the life' of a nurse on a Médecins Sans Frontières emergency project:

> First, she works alongside the newly arrived doctor. She has noticed that this doctor does not want to listen to anything about how his predecessors did the job; he wants to do it his own way and to find things out by himself. For Anna this is an inefficient 'learning-by-doing' approach that fails to take into consideration the experiences of others. With the high staff turnover in this emergency project, knowledge just slips away. (Hilhorst and Schmiemann 2002: 495, emphasis added)

A second issue created by amnesia relates to the lack of skills within a relief effort. When churn limits the number of individuals and organisations with experience of previous crises, mistakes can be made. This is particularly true in relation to large-scale events that require surge capacity. When humanitarian NGOs attempt to 'ramp-up' in order to address the very largest and most disastrous events, they often need to staff relief responses with people who have little experience. Well-known problems in the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, for example, have been attributed to the inexperience of NGO workers (Telford and Cosgrave 2007). Issues including fraud, excessively paternalistic forms of aid, a lack of local empowerment and the overuse of an asset-driven approach to relief, for example, have all been associated with the drafting in of inexperienced humanitarian workers to that crisis. However, issues of that nature are by no means confined to that example. They need to be understood as a long-running feature of humanitarian responses more generally that have been well-recognised for some time (other examples can be found in Hicks and Pappas 2006 and Loquercio et al. 2006).

Amnesia also undermines trust in relationships. This is an important issue in relation to several areas of a crisis response. In strict operational terms, supply chains can suffer due to amnesia. Logistics research has shown how constant turnover within a crisis response can undermine the trust that is required to build swift supply lines in contexts of uncertainty (Tomasini and Van Wassenhove 2009; Tatham and Kovacs 2010; Dubey et al. 2016). Capacity building, participation and empowerment at the local level can also suffer because of amnesia-driven mistrust. The cosmetic nature of a great deal of participatory approaches to disaster management is now well-known (see, for example, Clarke et al. 2010).

Local capacity building efforts, however, become even harder when staff turnover exacerbates power-sharing differences (Rothe 2012). Moreover, in certain regards, the lack of experienced staff in INGOs can undermine the capacity of local NGOs. The failure to include and empower grassroots development agencies in international disaster responses is a well-known problem (see, for example, Stumpenhorst et al. 2011). In certain crisis responses, the experience of local staff, which will be underscored by the lack of experience in INGOs, can mean that they are 'poached' by international actors (Telford and Cosgrave 2007). While this may empower the individual and, potentially, enhance the context-sensitivity of a crisis response, it can also create memory-loss at the local level.

The effects of amnesia within a disaster response are compounded by its effects across disasters. The fundamental issue here is the way in which institutional memory-loss affects formal lesson-learning efforts. When it comes to lesson-learning, the default position of most researchers is that a great deal of learning from crises fails to reform policy and organisations successfully (for a very small sample see, Perrow 2007; Elliott 2009; Drennan et al. 2015; Eburn and Dovers 2015). This position allows crisis researchers to explain long-running patterns in the causes of crises, in the ways in which they go undetected, and in the ways in which they are mishandled. However, when we place the concept of amnesia into these views it opens up an alternative explanation as to why we see problematic repetitions of past problems. It may not always be the case that governments are failing to learn but rather that amnesia is undermining learning efforts (Stark 2018).

There are two dimensions to this problem. The first relates to the quality of lessons which can be affected by the recycling of old ideas (Pollitt 2009). When old solutions, which have tried and failed, are forgotten about they can remerge as something new only to fail again. Thus cyclical problems continue. The continual waxing and waning of centralisation versus decentralisation as principles that ought to structure crisis response frameworks is a good example here. However, disaster management literature is replete with examples of poorly performing policies being continued. Barakat et al (2010: 5310), for example, discuss the constant use of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) and 'self-help' projects in conflict zones. Rather than generating legitimacy and support both kinds of project tend to 'instil a sense of pessimism among beneficiary populations that broader and more meaningful improvements in economic conditions may never arrive'. However, despite this failure, variations of these projects continue to be used. Thus, 'the cyclical resurrection of previously problematic paradigms may be viewed as a failure of institutional learning' (Barakat et al. 2010: 5297).

A second, more straightforward aspect to the amnesia-learning relationship relates to the erosion of lessons across time (for example, see Colten and Sumpter 2009). For this reason, successful learning may rest upon the creation of what psychologists' call 'prospective memory'. This is when knowledge is stored in a way that is not used in the present or the everyday yet remains available for performing tasks in the future (McDaniel and Einstein 2007; Kliegel et al. 2008). Thus, the challenge for post-crisis learning is to find ways to institutionalise lessons so that they can be shared across time so that when the next crisis arrives, prospective memory can be put into practice. This challenge takes us to a discussion of how we might address amnesia.

How Can We Cure Amnesia?

There are two caveats worth noting before prescriptions for remedying amnesia can be proposed. First, it is almost impossible to foresee a future in which institutional amnesia can be completely cured. We therefore need to resist the urge to demand the impossible because, quite simply, some of the causes of amnesia are simply too big to fix. It is highly unlikely, for example, that humanitarian NGOs, are going to be able to find the levels of continuous donor funding that will transform the sector into an attractive job market with high levels of pay, enduring job security and many career opportunities. For the same reason, the reliance of NGOs on short-term contracts is also here to stay. The urge to instigate reform amongst politicians and organisational leaders is also unlikely to dampen any time soon as reform is always more attractive than inaction. Similarly, at the individual level, the view that participating in an emergency relief effort is a one-off voluntary endeavour will also remain despite the ever-increasing professionalisation of the sector. Finally, the massive personal challenges of working in a disaster zone means that continual turnover within a crisis response is inevitable. Therefore, the structural, organisational and personal causes of churn, and their amnesia inducing effects, are here to stay.

The second caveat that needs to precede any recommendations in this area is that certain kinds of amnesia can be beneficial and should not be treated as a problem. Forgetting the past is a necessary part of changing policies and practices that do not work (de Holan 2011). An over-reliance on history in decision-making can stifle creativity (Weick 1988) and amnesia can be a means of ameliorating traumatic institutional memories (Bell 2006). Therefore, an agenda that sets out to reduce amnesia needs to first ask what memories need to be recalled, which ones are best forgotten and how a balance can be struck between both these positions in a specific context. Despite these caveats, humanitarian agencies might consider several ways in which they could go about improving their memory.

1. Introduce Memory Work into Lesson-Learning.
Knowledge retention and knowledge recall measures can ensure learned lessons are more likely to have a prospective mpact.
One method for achieving knowledge retention is to designate a specific monitor to oversee the implementation and the ongoing use of learned lessons. Innovative forms of public inquiry conducted

in Australia and beyond, for example, have shown how the creation of independent monitors have kept recommendations alive over a period of years (Stark 2018). Ideally, these kinds of lesson-learning watchdogs would be external, independent and have the capacity to conduct their own research. A good Australian example can be found in the Bushfires Royal Commission Independent Monitor who over a five-year period following the Black Saturday Bushfires published a series of reports about the ongoing implementation of the Royal Commission's reform agenda. This ensured that the lessons remained on the agenda years after the Commission finished reporting. While this is a good example of an external knowledge recall mechanism, there is nothing that precludes an internal unit or even a singular member of staff from performing this role if given the proper capacity. A second means of recalling lessons-learned relates to memorialisation, which is one means through which cultural forms of remembering can take place. Occasions which remember the victims and the survivors of disaster also offer an opportunity to recall specific lessons from that event. Regardless, of the specifics, the key message remains that lesson-learning without memory is meaningless.

2. Take Record-Keeping Seriously.

Develop archival processes that not only record organisational history in detail but can be easily accessed and disseminated. View record-keeping as a means of lesson-learning.

The easiest way to take record-keeping seriously is to appoint a historian as an archivist, which is a tactic that some government departments have turned to after years of neglecting their record-keeping. This move was a result of the realisation that old ideas that had already failed were being recycled and presented as new and that a public historian, backed by a departmental library, could detect such trends and deliver policy advice that might warn decision-makers about the dangers of repeating history (Szreter 2011). However, as a minimum, better record-keeping means finding a way to store lessons so that they can be accessed easily. A key part of this is re the narratives and the recording the nuance of past events and their relationships to reforms, procedures and behaviours. In this way, the 'why' behind business-as-usual can be explained. Finally, record-keeping ought to extend into the uncertainty of the emergency relief phase when possible. There is no doubt that those in the thick of a disaster zone are not going to prioritise the historical record when taking decisions. In fact, they may be uncomfortable with it at a fundamental level because of the shadow of post-crisis accountability and censure. However, by allocating specific resources to record-keeping, hard won experiences about what works in the heat of a disaster can be preserved across staff rotations. This is enough of a reason to at least trial the use of professional record-keepers in a crisis response. Ethnographers with disaster experience, for example, would be particularly useful in this regard.

3. Use External Memory.

Scope out and connect with external organisations who have expertise. Specialists that operate outside of fast-churning sectors can be a valuable repository of memory.

For many government agencies, NGOs can act as a form of external memory. This is because they are relatively stable in their policy focus and because their core advocacy messages tend to remain consistent over time. However, there is nothing to suggest that NGOs themselves cannot draw on external memory in the same way. The most obvious example is the research centre. Although they are also subject to the whims of external funding, long-running centres will have significant levels of institutional memory. Indeed, specialisation and expertise within an organisation is often an indicator of the likelihood of strong memory (Stark 2019). However, other bodies also have untapped stores of external memory. Trade unions and professional associations, for example, are often stable organisations with well-recorded histories and long-serving staff that will be able to recall sectoral trends. The most compelling source of external memory, however, is to be found in local capacities. Cultivating national platforms, local NGOs and indigenous participatory institutions around the world, for example, means supporting them to record and share their histories as a means of memory building. This agenda also contributes to an empowering form of development. Humanitarian agencies should therefore scan their networks, seek out external memory and build relationships in ways that could allow it to be tapped.

4. Increase Storytelling.

Stories of success and failure can propagate lessons across time and bridge the gap between outgoing and ingoing staff. Effort should be made to tell historical lessons as part of induction and basic training.

When thinking about enhancing memory, most organisations opt for the formal-institutional route. This means attempting to retain staff and embed lessons into formal procedures. However, storytelling is a crucial but neglected dimension of memory building that is easy to do, cost-efficient and can offer real returns. Organisations simply do not do it as they are too focused on daily business. However, perpetuating stories from the past, which teach new and existing actors about organisational history, can be something that is woven into business-as-usual practices. A simple means, for example, would be to include history in staff inductions and forms of basic training. Ethnographic organisational research tells us that newly arrived leaders often adopt and then quickly invoke stories from their organisation's past as a means of legitimising themselves (Linde 2009). This is one way in which memory passes over from old leaders to new incumbents. This type of appropriation could be extended to all staff via training processes.

5. Use Coordination Mechanisms for Knowledge Transfer.

Coordination mechanisms are a constant feature of disasters and can be used as a short-term repository for historical knowledge.

Whether it's the cluster framework at the international level or a domestic coordination framework like AIIMS or ICS, their purpose is to coordinate by centralising knowledge across a variety of different actors. This means that coordination mechanisms are a means of knowledge transfer across time. Moreover, coordination frameworks are a constant feature in disasters and remain while staff come and go. This means that they have the potential to reduce the memory-loss that occurs through staff handovers. Ideally, this responsibility should be given to the 'logistics' team within the coordination framework. Logistics capacities are a generic feature of most coordination frameworks, they are typically responsible for information management and logistics research has addressed issues of memory and memory-loss. Logistics teams could therefore take carriage of a record-keeping responsibility, which would then be used during handover periods. Of course, the assumption being made here is that humanitarian actors will be engaging with inter-organisational coordination mechanisms, which is not always a given.

Conclusion

It is time for those who prepare and respond to humanitarian crises to start taking institutional amnesia seriously. It can be the cause of lesson-learning failures, it can undermine the quality of emergency decision-making and operational processes, and it can fuel problematic forms of post-crisis politics. Ultimately, however, the single biggest reason why humanitarian agencies need to recognise memory-loss is because it is the dynamic which ensures that problematic pasts, which are registered in the causes of disasters and the issues that lead to their mishandling, return again and again to haunt humanitarian responses.

When amnesia is ignored misdiagnoses occur and reforms miss the mark. We tell ourselves that we can fix cyclical problems by remedying how we learn, or by getting to grips with coordination failures or by increasing the use of evidence and research in planning efforts. These are all worthy endeavours, which will certainly improve disaster management efforts, but they are meaningless if they are forgotten because of the individual, organisational and network dynamics discussed above. If we really want to treat the pathologies that have created long-running problems in humanitarian responses to crises, we will need to work out how to remember them across time.

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Humanitarian Disaster Response: Understanding Aid Rejection

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Image: A mosque washed out to sea after a magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck Indonesia's Central Sulawesi province in September 2018 triggering a tsunami, landslides, and land liquefaction that caused widespread destruction and loss of life. Jiro Ose / Save the Children.

Abstract

Communities the world over continue to be alarmingly vulnerable to natural hazards, leading to no shortage of devastating consequences. Whether or not climate change brings forth an increasingly ferocious variety of hazards, actors involved in disaster response will still face a multiplicity of challenges to delivering lifesaving aid. For instance, humanitarian organizations sometimes face the challenge of overcoming the reluctance of disaster affected states to accept their assistance. When disasters extensively overwhelm state capacity the refusal of external assistance can have serious ramifications for those affected. Despite the stakes, research surrounding aid rejection in these contexts is limited. This analysis sheds more light on why aid rejection occurs and highlights to humanitarian organizations and other researchers the fundamental considerations to develop an understanding on this subject.

A synthesis of existing research on disaster response reveals the very tangible political risk that disaster affected states face when engaging with international offers of assistance. It is in the effort to mitigate this political risk to their legitimacy that states may ultimately decide to reject aid. A few key state characteristics such as response capacity, level of external intervention and domestic politics may also amplify this risk, resulting in a higher likelihood that external aid is rejected. This analysis engages with these factors to determine their validity and relevancy to humanitarian practitioners seeking to develop the appropriate organizational strategies.

In an effort to better understand aid rejection a disaster dataset was developed based on the concept that disasters with higher visibility on the international scene present a higher level of political risk for an affected state, and therefore have the highest likelihood of resulting in cases of aid rejection. However, in analysing disasters that met this criterion over a 10 year period the research found no instances where external aid was universally and indiscriminately rejected. This is not to say that there were no cases where an affected state rejected assistance from a particular party but that even in these instances those states did accept aid from some other source.

The implication of these findings is that states affected by natural borne disasters are likely to accept external offers of assistance so long as those offers carry a manageable level of political risk. Humanitarian organizations should therefore consider how they can mitigate the political risk they might present to an affected state as part of their disaster response strategy.

Introduction

The notion that the world is entering a period of increased exposure to natural hazards due to climate change is becoming near ubiquitous throughout global policy discussions. The humanitarian sector as a collective has been especially active in emphasizing the consequences of this phenomenon (New Humanitarian, 11 March 2018). This concern stems from the prediction that climate change will progressively increase the frequency and severity of natural hazards thereby adversely affecting the communities most vulnerable to them (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 21). If this notion should prove valid, which recent weather patterns seem to substantiate (Oxfam International 2019), then local, national and international disaster response strategies should be of ever increasing importance. Given also that climate change is a global phenomenon, cooperation at the international level might be of particular importance as an opportunity for progress. It is therefore troubling that research suggests states are increasingly likely to reject international aid in the wake of natural borne disasters (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 16, 115). A stark example of this trend was observed following the string of disasters that struck Indonesia in July and September of 2018. Whether the national government was justified in actively rejecting foreign aid is up for debate but the discernible strain on state capacity in the wake of the disasters certainly raises the question of whether this aid could have facilitated the disaster response (Rose 2018). While Indonesia did eventually acquiesce to a limited and controlled stream of international assistance, the apparent reluctance with which it did so was not a promising sign for international humanitarian responders. However, aid rejection following natural borne disasters is not unique to Indonesia nor to the present. The seemingly increasing prevalence of aid rejection should be worrying though considering the substantial efforts that have already been made towards facilitating aid acceptance in these contexts.

If aid rejection can indeed be expected to rise, this trend could have significant costs for humanitarian organizations and their potential beneficiaries. Given the probable consequences more efforts should be made to better understand aid rejection in the context of these disasters. Unfortunately, the body of research on aid rejection remains relatively limited. Especially lacking are analyses on the perspectives of states affected by natural borne disasters that choose to reject aid. While theories abound on states' motives for doing so, no comprehensive predictive models have emerged that capture the widespread berth of relevant factors. Most datasets and analytical models developed for the purpose of researching aid rejection are also regrettably limited in their scope. This is not surprising given the general opaqueness of disaster aid flow despite several major efforts for increased transparency.

Besides raw data any truly substantive analysis of aid rejection will also most likely require in-depth knowledge and understanding of an affected state, including its disaster response policies, mechanisms and the actions taken by its relevant domestic actors during the disaster. This insider knowledge, usually consisting of politically sensitive information, might often be outside the grasp of international researchers. In terms of terminological minutia, there is also considerable ambiguity surrounding the classification of disaster aid. Is a state considered an "aid rejecter" if it refuses offers of assistance from just one other state? If not, how many offers of assistance must it reject in order to be considered as such? Can analysts equate the discreet acceptance of monetary assistance with well-publicized transfers of material resources? Add the convolution of disaster response mechanisms available to states at the bilateral, regional and international level, not to mention the intricacies of domestic disaster response politics and these questions become increasingly complex. For good measure, consider also the subjective nature of even defining a disaster event. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), regarded as one of the most respectable stewards of disaster data, puts forth the following definition of a disaster:

> "Situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance" (CRED 2019).

Unsurprisingly, problems arise when a divergence of opinion exists between the affected state and international actors in determining the necessity or magnitude of external assistance required.

Suffice to say that a multitude of factors contribute to making the study of aid rejection a complicated endeavour. While acknowledging these analytical barriers, in fact precisely because of them, it is the purpose of this research to contribute towards shaping a more foundational understanding of aid rejection. The analysis hopes to achieve this through three main objectives:

1. To provide a summary on the existing body of research on aid rejection
2. To extrapolate the most relevant indicators of aid rejection for humanitarian practitioners
3. To develop an accurate dataset model and analytical approach for studying aid rejection

These objectives will each comprise a section of the analysis which together will form its structure, followed by a summary of the key conclusions.

Section One: Why States Reject Aid

If there is a preformed explanation for aid rejection it perhaps lies in the image of a rogue state, atop of which sits an incontrovertible dictator, spurning the helping hand of the international community following a disaster and insisting that its people will rely instead on their uniquely superior power of self-sufficiency. Inconveniently, this image is a misrepresentation. Travis Nelson (2010, p. 395) in his research actually finds that regime type is not a determining factor in aid acceptance following natural borne disasters. In the wake of a cyclone

a fairly elected representative government might be just as likely to reject aid as a brutal autocrat. Rather, the duration of time since a given state has experienced a significant regime transition has proved much more indicative of aid rejection (Nelson 2010, p. 395). In this theory, states view the acceptance of aid, especially following a highly publicized disaster, as an impactor on their legitimacy. Therefore, in periods of regime transition where their legitimacy is predictably most vulnerable, states are more likely to view acceptance of aid as a political risk they cannot afford. For example, Nelson notes how Myanmar's transition in progress from a military junta to a democracy was a key factor in why the regime rejected international assistance immediately following Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Nelson 2010, p. 396).

It is this notion of aid acceptance as a political risk which is especially important to recognize and is advanced by other research to greater and lesser degrees. What exactly is meant by the term "political risk" though? Within this analytical framework the term will refer to exposure to a potentially negative impact on state legitimacy. Since it is not within the scope of this paper to delve into the various contested definitions available for "state legitimacy" this analysis will satisfy itself with a common and general meaning which is the acceptance of the state's authority over its population. What is interesting to note is that political risk can be said to have two aspects: international and domestic. The international aspect of political risk can be seen as representing an external threat and the domestic an internal threat to state legitimacy. Although both aspects are doubtlessly intertwined, understanding them as two separate elements will assist in reviewing the relevant body of research.

Beginning with the international aspect of political risk, some research has found that states are more likely to reject aid if they perceive it as an attempt from an international actor to meddle in their domestic affairs (Allan & O'Donnell 2013, p. 47). In this case political risk might be interpreted as a threat to sovereignty. Some reports claim that disaster response can actually be a battleground for state sovereignty, with the affected state fending off incursions disguised in the form of aid (Bandopadhyay 2019). For instance, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti is a prime example of a state's agency being sidelined by an international response (Rodgers 2013). Considering the basic responsibilities a state holds to care for its population it is certainly not invalid to conclude that the assumption of some of this responsibility by a foreign power during a disaster is an infringement on this sovereignty.

Applying Rachel Brewer's theories on state reputation, aid rejection can also be understood as part of a realist calculus that states perform (Brewster 2009). In certain cases, states determine they have more to gain in the international arena by rejecting aid, or that at the very least their reputation will not suffer from doing so. A possible explanation for why states might interpret aid rejection as beneficial is that from a certain perspective the capacity to unilaterally respond to a disaster marks a key divide between "developed" and "developing"

countries. From this viewpoint, to accept foreign assistance is to admit a lack of independence, which can be interpreted as a lack of power. Contrast the idea of the United States and Haiti calling out to the international community for help following a disaster in their respective countries. One would be a shock and the other an expectation. Countries such as India and Turkey which in the last few decades have striven to transition from "recipient" to "donor" status (Smith 2011), or another growing regional power like Indonesia might be particularly keen to showcase their independence by rejecting aid.

For the governments of these countries, responding to a natural borne disaster under an international spotlight might actually present an opportunity to showcase their increased capability as a state. This is especially true considering the usually large involvement of military assets in disaster response. The rapid and effective mobilization of soldiers and military equipment in these contexts does not leave much to the imagination if rival states were considering what other means that force might be deployed for. From a humanitarian perspective though, that states are increasingly capable of unilaterally responding to disasters is theoretically an encouraging trend (UNESCAP 2017). However, real issues arise when states may prioritize the showcasing of independence over acknowledging when a disaster has overwhelmed their capacities, a point further discussed in section two. In terms of the international aspect of political risk, two factors emerge as significant. The first is the risk to sovereignty presented by the usurpation or perceived usurpation of the affected state's responsibilities by an external actor. The second is the risk to a state's international reputation by appearing weak or incapable in the face of a disaster.

On the domestic front, the acceptance of aid can also be seen to have significant political consequences. Parallel to the risk to its international reputation, a state's population could view their government as weak or inept depending on its response to a disaster (Cole, Healy & Werker 2012, p.167-181). There could be additional consequences when political contenders are poised to take advantage of an unfavorable disaster response narrative (Allan & O'Donnell 2013, p. 47). A good example in the United States is how the Bush administration's handling of Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans in 2005 became a rallying cry for the rival Democratic Party (Walsh 2015). Given the political risk of not meeting the needs of their disaster affected population though, it might be assumed that states would be more likely to accept aid in order to bolster any national response. As Kent, Armstrong and Obrecht (2013) note in their research however, the unknown factor of aid acceptance is often seen as the greater political risk. It therefore probably behooves states to ensure as much control over the management of a disaster response, foreign aid pouring in is not exactly conducive to that effort. However, as these researchers note, governments, comprised of an array of individuals facing an extremely stressful situation, cannot always be expected to act rationally (Kent, Armstrong & Obrecht 2013) despite perceiving disaster management as a key

impactor of domestic support and stability (Rubin 2019). Sometimes perhaps, aid rejection, rather than a conscious policy, occurs simply out of the mismanagement and bungling pervasive in any emergency context.

Returning to the theories and frameworks purporting deliberate aid refusal, Nelson's research (2010) is again valuable in building a coherent foundation for understanding state actions. For example, while Indonesia was not undergoing a significant regime change in 2018 one could assume the upcoming presidential election in 2019 was surely a factor for the government as they managed two major disaster responses, demonstrating perhaps that regime change and government transition can be similarly indicative of aid rejection. In fact, research surrounding voter behavior has concluded that constituents are influenced by not just the disaster response but the occurrence of the natural hazard itself (Cole, Healy & Werker 2012, p. 16). This makes increasingly clear the kind of political pressures a responding government faces in the attempt to overcome the negative bias already attached to them at the outset of a hazard event. Wooyeal Paik's research (2010, p. 442) goes a step further in actually validating states' treatment of aid acceptance as a political risk, pointing out several instances where government response to a disaster was inexorably linked to a subsequent regime change.

That governments are "right" to view international aid acceptance in this light may be uncomfortable to acknowledge for humanitarians whose main objective is the alleviation of suffering. However, as seasoned humanitarians already know, aid acceptance is politically charged and the practicalities of aid delivery will always be subject to some type of realpolitik. The worrying trend would again be that these political barriers are mounting, a concept not without validity according to some emerging factors. The immediacy of media coverage when a disaster occurs and its rampant spread across social media platforms combined with waves of nationalism that increase pressure on governments to appear strong and independent are some such factors (Maietta, Kennedy & Bourse 2018, p. 16, 115). A more optimistic factor is the increasing capacity of certain disaster prone states, especially in the Asia Pacific region, which might be reducing the need for international aid thereby resulting in its rejection (ALNAP 2010). What is clear is that humanitarian organizations will need to be ready to adapt to the changing realities of disaster response and should be wary of the dangerous bedfellows that nationalism and aid rejection may have become.

Section Two: Identifying States More Likely to Reject Aid

While an academic background on aid rejection is useful for developing an understanding of the topic, more operationally minded humanitarian practitioners might long for the practical conclusions. One particularly useful aspect of understanding aid rejection might be the capacity to identify states that are more likely to do so before disaster strikes. With this knowledge humanitarian organizations could appropriately tailor

their strategies for identified states to be better placed to deliver aid. This analysis will seek to contribute in this regard and while it cannot claim to provide a predictive equation for determining any given state's likelihood of rejecting aid, it should serve as a useful guide for identifying certain indicators that could help do so. Decision makers can use this information to develop more adaptive disaster response strategies as well as more effectively tailor the allocation of their resources. The analysis below covers three main theories, extrapolated from the reviewed research and other sources to highlight the indicators that may be most relevant for predicting aid rejection.

Capacity as an Indicator

Returning to the research, it was noted that states view aid acceptance as a political risk with significant international and domestic political impacts. Based on this understanding a general conclusion can be drawn that if states are able to avoid this political risk, they will (Carnegie & Dolan 2015, p. 3). In other words, if a state possesses the capacity to respond to a disaster without external aid it is very likely they will do so to mitigate this risk to their legitimacy. The inverse can be equally indicative, that is that states with less capacity for disaster response will more often find themselves in a position where the acceptance of aid is a necessity (Nelson 2010, p. 394). In this case, one need only look at an assessment of state capacity to determine the likelihood of aid rejection. For example, the severity of a natural hazard being equal, Austria should be more likely to reject aid than Afghanistan according to assessments of their disaster response capacity. Another way to simplify this notion would be that if a state truly needs aid, it will accept it. Obviously if that were always the case it would defeat the entire raison d'etre of this research and its counterparts but it is worth noting that this trend is generally true.

This may seem like a rather obvious set of conclusions but taken one step further it becomes a rather troubling one. Given that management of the political risk largely centres around perception, a state's actual capacity may be less important than its perceived capacity (Carnegie & Dolan 2015). In this case a state may reject external aid, forwarding the notion that it possesses the capacity to respond unilaterally, when in reality the disaster has exceeded its capacity. As researchers Allison Carnegie and Lindsay Dolan (2015, p. 3) note this maneuver can be accomplished (or attempted) when there is a plausible notion that the affected state might in fact possess the needed capacity. Drawing on these conclusions the states most likely to reject aid when their capacity has been overwhelmed would be those at high risk to natural hazards with passable levels of relevant coping capacity. These states are likely to experience the serious damage to life and property caused by natural hazards and possess enough capacity to justify a unilateral response. Taking the INFORM global risk index's measures of both exposure and capacity, countries that fall in this category would include China, India, Iran, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines and Vietnam, with Indonesia falling just shy of

being included on the list (INFORM 2018).[1] It is significant to note that more than a few of these intermediately vulnerable countries have rejected aid in the past.

State capacity as an indicator then offers a promising start to predicting aid acceptance behavior, although, it is ultimately an incomplete one. While it might be relatively accurate in determining that countries below a certain threshold of capacity will accept aid and others above a certain threshold reject it, predictability between these two thresholds becomes much less clear. There are also instances where countries with high capacity scores have accepted aid such as Japan and countries with low capacity scores rejected it such as Myanmar. Even establishing such thresholds would be highly dependent on the severity of a disaster leaving much to be desired in terms of predictive capability. Still, humanitarian organizations are encouraged to consider the identified intermediately vulnerable countries when developing their disaster response strategies as this theory would indicate a higher prevalence of aid rejection among them.

External Intervention as an Indicator

As was previously mentioned, the threat of external intervention can represent a significant political risk for a disaster affected country. If this is the case then higher levels of foreign interference in a country might indicate that country is more likely to accept aid, as this external threat to its legitimacy already exists and has either been voluntarily or involuntarily accepted. Conversely, countries with low levels of foreign interference would be more likely to balk at any international influence over their governance, even if it comes in the form of well-meaning aid. With this in mind, utilizing the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index (2018) to assess the level of external intervention in a state could prove a useful method for determining the likelihood of aid acceptance.[2] The theory is that countries with high levels of external intervention would be expected to accept aid and as the level of external intervention decreased so would the likelihood of aid acceptance.

As with state capacity this would probably not result in a perfectly linear predictive capability. While one could identify states with low levels of external intervention which would be more likely to reject aid it would be difficult to determine at what point the level of external intervention actually affects the likelihood of aid acceptance. Also similarly to state capacity, a good starting point for making this determination might be to focus on states which are transitioning from higher to lower levels of external intervention. States in this period might be particularly determined to avoid any

international efforts which would hold them back from reaching a sought after, more complete autonomy. This might be especially true if external intervention did have any correlative relationship with state legitimacy, a higher level of intervention perhaps being indicative of a less commanding government and vice versa. A government attempting to assert its authority might then view curbing external intervention, certainly in the form of aid, as a means to do so. Whether the relationship between external intervention and state legitimacy can be isolated as correlative would be an interesting topic for further research and in fact has already been explored among various studies in the development sector, although not within the scope of disaster response as far this researcher is aware. What can be said though is that states with lower levels of external intervention are probably less likely to accept aid. While this again might appear a relatively simple conclusion to make it is an important one to elucidate in order to begin to establish tangible metrics with which to build predictive models.

Domestic Politics as an Indicator

The last potential indicator identified by this analysis concerns the theories centered on voter behavior in response to disasters. Several key conclusions have been reached surrounding this topic which are especially relevant. The first is that disaster response within a state can highly depend on the political importance of the affected area as Thomas Garrett and Russel Sobel (2003) found in their research on federal relief allocation in the United States. The implication of this is that national governments might be more intent on demonstrating a strong national response in areas where the political stakes are higher, likely increasing the aversion to accepting foreign aid into these areas. Although this is not yet a validated assumption, at the very least humanitarian organizations should be aware of this domestic political consideration. Perhaps making extra efforts to integrate themselves under a national response in high political value areas or focusing their efforts in areas that might be more neglected following a disaster due to their political irrelevance.

Another assumption can be made based on the findings of Shawn Cole, Andrew Healy and Eric Werker (2012, p. 22) who found that the political stakes for an incumbent government are higher when a disaster occurs in close proximity to an election. The temporal importance of a disaster response is reinforced by an earlier study by Healy, this time with Neil Malhorta, (2009) in which they determined the initial logistical response to a disaster may be the most significant in terms of electoral impact. Recalling Indonesia's initial public rejection of aid which took place at a time when the upcoming presidential election was undoubtedly of political significance these points seem expressly relevant. It would therefore not be without reason for humanitarian organizations to assess a country's domestic political situation within the identified contexts in order to determine a risk of aid rejection. The indicative theory being that countries in the midst of political transitions, whether they be planned in a stable democracy or represented by

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1   The analysis selected countries on the INFORM Global Risk Index with both an exposure to natural hazard score above 7.0 (High-Very High) and a lack of coping capacity score between 3.2 and 4.6 (Medium). Indonesia was only just disqualified with a lack of coping capacity score of 4.7.

2   The Fund for Peace's external intervention indicator takes into account development and humanitarian aid among other factors.

political unrest under an autocratic ruler, would be more likely to reject aid. This theory could compliment the concept of period-since-regime-transition advanced by Nelson as part of a dual assessment. One part linked to the transition of power within a political system and one on the transition between political systems. While various factors might make it difficult to operationalize this indicator in a predictive manner it might be best incorporated into the political analysis that is conducted prior to engaging in a disaster response.

Prioritization

This section has up to this point focused on specific indicators which might be useful for identifying risk of aid rejection. As part of the effort to assist humanitarian practitioners it might also prove sensible to introduce a decision making process as well. This process centers on prioritizing countries according to the likelihood of requiring more nuanced approaches should a disaster occur. In other words, which countries are more likely to be averse to accepting aid. That a country is likely to reject aid should not be the sole grounds for prioritization though. Rather, in line with the humanitarian principles, priority should be placed where rejecting aid would result in the greatest human cost. A practical way to calculate this could be to start with an assessment of country risk. In this case we can again take the INFORM Global Risk Index as our measure. An organization could focus on the top 10 most at risk countries, or whatever global sample is relevant to the organization's reach and resources. The next step would be to classify the countries on this list in terms of likelihood of aid acceptance. Priority would be given to countries with a combination of the highest risk and lowest likelihood of aid acceptance. From the subsequent ranking, organizations could identify specific countries or regions where they might require a more adaptive disaster response strategy. A simple process, yet one that could provide decision makers with a critically increased level of preparedness.

Section Three: Measuring Aid Rejection

One of the main issues this research seeks to contend with is the very manner in which aid rejection is analysed. After all, varying disaster and aid flow datasets as well as varying definitions of what constitutes aid rejection will undoubtedly produce varying results. While the numerous perspectives taken by other research each hold a degree of validity, by adapting new research methods this analysis seeks to expand the richness of understanding in this field. Moreover, beyond the focus of aid rejection this research should also contribute to the wider field of international relations in terms of capturing data on state decision making practices.

As with most related research this analysis recommends drawing on CRED's Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) as the basis for natural borne disaster data. This analysis found it best to limit the types of natural hazards included in the dataset to those that have an immediate impact on the affected state's capacity and would subsequently warrant an immediate international response. The primary reason for doing so is that unlike in a protracted hazard such as a drought, a hazard with an immediate impact produces the specific and pronounced political risk that this analysis is concerned with. The state's response to this risk is more measurable and definitive and therefore allows for a clearer form of insight into the state's actions.

Where this research approach might begin to diverge from other frameworks is in determining the threshold for including these disasters into a dataset for measuring aid rejection. As the EM-DAT includes disasters with all magnitudes of human and material cost it casts too wide a net for identifying the instances of political risk posed by those disasters which could illicit aid refusal. The Austrian government for example is unlikely to face any serious political risk if faced by a storm that causes no casualties and limited economic damage. It would be unlikely to require outside assistance nor be offered it. How to determine the threshold where political risk is apparent then? Other research has taken the human death toll as a measure of a disaster's severity and therefore the political risk it might present. This is based on the notion that a high death toll attracts the attention of an international audience and it is ultimately the high visibility of a disaster which increases the political pressure on states, sometimes bringing about the rejection of aid (Nelson 2010). Our research will adopt this notion and focus its scope on disasters which can be expected to illicit this type of visibility, in this case measured by media coverage. However, as research conducted by Thomas Eisensee and David Strömberg (2007) concluded, the number of human casualties required to make international news headlines fluctuates wildly depending on the source of the disaster. While an earthquake that kills two people is likely to be covered by international news outlets a landslide that kills a hundred times that amount probably won't be (Eisensee & Strömberg 2007). This being considered, instead of setting a rather arbitrary death count as the standard for inclusion in the dataset this research framework will adopt the hazard specific metrics revealed by Eisensee and Strömberg as found in the table below.

Table 1. Number of deaths expected to illicit international news coverage by hazard type.

Hazard	Number of deaths
Volcanic Eruption	1
Earthquake	2
Wildfire	12
Storm	280
Flood	674
Landslide	882

Source: Eisensee and Strömberg, (2007).

This established threshold therefore identifies disasters that should be more likely to compel aid rejection based at least on the international aspect of political risk. While one would assume domestic audiences would have lower casualty thresholds when applying the equivalent pressure on their governments the international threshold should sufficiently capture what this research is after. A compilation of disasters that are perceived as severe enough to warrant political risk. As far as the temporal parameters this research will capture a period of 10 years, from 2008 to 2018. This period provided a significant amount of data points with contemporary relevancy.[3] The resulting dataset included 183 disasters for analysis, with a large share of these being earthquakes. The UN's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) is an excellent resource to measure the relevant aid flow for this dataset, and in most cases it allows researchers to relate aid from specific donors of all types to specific disasters in an affected state. For the purpose of analysing aid rejection this provides tangible data on when aid is sent which is a more desirable alternative than relying on rhetoric in the international arena to determine if a state did or did not accept it.

In terms of the actual analysis the principal shift that this approach takes from other related research is that it focuses on a much stricter definition of aid rejection. In doing so the intent is to discern the patterns of aid rejection which are most relevant to humanitarian organizations seeking to deliver disaster aid. After all, if Iran rejects aid from Israel following a devastating earthquake does that action reveal an established policy of aid refusal on the part of the Iranian government which might impact humanitarian organizations? In all likelihood it is only telling of the animosity that exists between the two states. To label Iran an aid rejecter in this case would be misleading if it was in fact accepting other, less antagonistic, offers of assistance. The aid rejection that truly impacts humanitarian operations is the broad and sweeping rejection which seemingly makes no effort to distinguish between an INGO and an international rival. In these instances the affected state makes a determined effort based on a conscious policy to refuse outside assistance regardless of where it might come from and how crucially it might be needed. In order to identify these specific instances the analysis has developed three benchmarks related to aid refusal which a state must meet in order to fall into the category of aid rejecter.

The first is whether the affected state accepted aid from any foreign entity which was directly related to the specified disaster. If it did, it cannot be considered an aid rejecter. This would mean that even if a disaster-struck United States only accepted aid from its benevolent Canadian neighbour and rejected all other offers of assistance it would not be classified as an aid rejecter. The logic of this standard is that if an affected state accepts aid from even one outside entity, whether governmental or not, it is displaying a willingness to receive assistance so long as that assistance is within an acceptable level of political risk. For our hypothetically disaster-struck United States, Canada might have presented the only politically acceptable donor option for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the US government doesn't view Canada as a threat, or the two countries have a long history of friendly relations which mitigates any notion of less than altruistic intent. Perhaps the consideration is even based more on the American public's favourable view of Canadians in general and accepting Canadian aid in the wake of a disaster could build a favourable disaster response narrative for incumbent government officials in an upcoming election. The same could be applied to non-governmental entities. Whether there is a religious affiliation, long standing relationship or a particular organizational framework, a certain combination of factors could make one specific organization more appealing as a donor or partner for disaster response. As was previously noted, this differs from other approaches to measuring aid rejection where a single or set number of rejections substantiate classifying a state as an aid rejecter. Simply but paradoxically put, a state is not an aid rejecter just because it rejects aid from certain entities, so long as it accepts aid from at least one other entity. By tilting the focus more towards instances of aid acceptance we should gain a better understanding of the kind of assistance an affected state wants rather than what it doesn't. Deepening this perspective would allow humanitarian organizations to more suitably tailor their response based on the distinctive wishes of a particular state.

If an affected state did not accept aid from any foreign entity for the specified disaster then the second criteria applied is whether it did so for another disaster that took place in the same calendar year. This allows the research to control for disasters which definitively did not necessitate outside assistance. An earthquake that kills two people in China might spark international intrigue but given that country's scale and resources it would probably not result in a flood of international offers of assistance and therefore present no opportunity to reject such offers. However, if in the same year a flood swept through China and killed thousands of people the offers would likely come pouring in. If China accepted assistance in this case it would imply that it might have done so for the theoretical earthquake if the assistance had been needed. Regardless, if an affected state chooses to accept disaster aid in the same calendar year as other disasters for which it did not then the implication is that the political risk of aid acceptance is not so great as to spur a policy of blanket refusal. Therefore, if an affected state accepted aid for any newsworthy disaster in the same calendar year as another newsworthy disaster then it will not be considered an aid rejecter.

3   And also focuses on the time period after the adoption of the IFRC's Guidelines on the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance or "IDRL". The IDRL guidelines represent a major policy milestone in facilitating the delivery of disaster aid and by analysing the time period following their introduction onto the international stage in 2007 we might gain a better understanding of how effective the initiative has been.

Should an affected state not accept aid for any newsworthy disaster in the calendar year the next criteria to be applied is whether it actively and publicly rejected aid from the international community. Once again we must acknowledge the general opaqueness which surrounds the flow of aid and prevents a clear determination of when aid rejection takes place. Offers of assistance between governments made behind closed doors will most likely not be reflected onto the public stage. However, when a disaster clearly exceeds the affected state's capacity resulting in a massive loss of life and/or level of human suffering, that state's rejection of plainly needed assistance is bound to make headlines. Since it is these instances humanitarian organizations are probably most concerned with, this final benchmark would identify them, relying on news coverage of the rejection as the indicator. This factor also helps control for disasters that again, while newsworthy, do not definitively exceed the capacity of the affected state and therefore do not result in a solicitation of aid.

Preliminary Findings

Applying these parameters to our dataset of 183 disasters this analysis found 0 instances where an affected state met the criteria to be considered an aid rejecter. The point should be emphasized here that these findings do not indicate that individual instances of aid rejection do not occur, they absolutely do. What these findings do illustrate is that on no occasion did an affected state deny all sources of external assistance. While there were 32 cases (17%) where the affected state did not accept aid, in none of these cases did the analysis find evidence that those states displayed an overt effort to reject all offers of international assistance. This was most likely due to the fact that the affected state possessed the internal capacity to adequately handle the disaster response, at least based on the relatively low number of deaths in these cases (CRED 2019). Of the 32, only four cases (2%) represented disasters with a death toll higher than 50 and only one case (<0.5%) with a death toll higher than 100; a series of wildfires in Australia in 2009 (CRED 2019). Given the high level of disaster response capacity in Australia it is reasonable to assume it did not require outside assistance. However, it is still possible that within these 32 cases a real need for external assistance existed and assistance was offered but refused. This refusal might not have been identified by the analysis if it did not make international headlines. It is worth reiterating again the state of muddiness surrounding aid flow. While a case by case analysis would certainly help clarify this the fact that none of these cases represented major disasters in terms of human loss seems to substantiate the original conclusion. The affected states probably did not require external assistance.

Also of note is the fact that both Myanmar in 2008 and Indonesia in 2018 accepted international assistance following the respective disasters that impacted them. Myanmar's rejection of aid following Cyclone Nargis is often touted as a textbook example of aid rejection as is Indonesia's following the twin disasters in 2018. While much discourse surrounds the very real proclamations

that each government made and followed through on about rejecting aid much less attention is paid to the manner in which each state accepted it. In Myanmar's case the channelling of aid through the regional body ASEAN rather than a seemingly more hostile international apparatus was a crucial condition for its acceptance, a process which certainly decreased the level of political risk faced by the transitioning regime (Allan & O'Donnell 2013). In Indonesia's case it may have been more a matter of controlling the scope of international assistance in order to make the political risk more manageable. It is worth noting that the first UNHRD shipment to the country didn't occur until 10 days after the disaster, a noticeably slower rate than most other responses (UNHRD 2019). Perhaps delaying the influx of aid was one way the Indonesian government sought to manage the political risk by ensuring that the national response was already well under way before an international response could take place. Similarly, in certain cases affected states were quite discriminatory with where they accepted aid from. Russia was such an example, accepting aid almost exclusively from close political allies or famously neutral Switzerland following a disaster (UNOCHA 2019). There were numerous such examples of this discrimination but the point being that the findings indicate states affected by these sudden onset hazards will ultimately accept international assistance if it is needed.

This perspective shifts the angle of focus onto successful aid deliveries rather than failures which in turn opens up the possibility for humanitarian organizations to mitigate the risk of aid rejection. For example, what factors about an aid delivery from Belarus make it palatable for the Russian government? Is it possible for a humanitarian organization to mirror these factors? Returning to the case of Myanmar, might regional bodies present an opportunity to increase the efficacy of aid delivery (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2018)? Hopefully, other researchers will seek to answer these questions and in doing so assist humanitarian organizations in placing themselves in ideal positions to deliver aid when and where it is most needed.

Conclusion

This analysis began with a review of previous research surrounding the politics of disaster response which yielded several insights. First and foremost is the reality that disasters are both inherently political and highly charged with potential political impacts. As such, states are deeply aware of how their management of a disaster presents a political risk both in terms of their international status and domestic legitimacy. It is likely the attempt to mitigate this political risk that results in a state rejecting external aid. At least in terms of rhetoric this seems especially true for states that view themselves as "up and coming" on the world stage and may hold an increased desire to showcase competence and independence to international and domestic audiences. Even when a disaster exceeds their capacity they might still choose to reject aid for fear of political consequences. Perhaps more insightful is the notion that states that are intermediately vulnerable,

in that they face high hazard exposure coupled with moderate capacity, are more likely to experience both the need for aid and the "need" to reject it. Capacity is therefore a useful indicator in determining likelihood of aid acceptance.

The level of external intervention in a state was also found to be an positive indicator for measuring the political risk of accepting aid. States with high levels of external intervention are likely to accept aid as the political risk to them is probably negligible. However, states with median levels of external intervention seem to face a potentially significant political risk when deciding to accept aid. This could be due to their transitory status between "donor" and "recipient" countries, with the acceptance of aid compromising their movement towards the donor side. Given that aid rejection is closely tied to a state's desire to appear competent in the eyes of their own constituency, it is also likely that domestic politics heavily influence a state's decision to accept aid.

Capacity, external intervention and domestic politics form a strong foundation for predicting the likelihood of aid rejection. The findings of this research suggest that the barriers to aid acceptance should not be insurmountable though. Humanitarian organizations that possess the foresight to identify potential risk of aid rejection, the capability to adapt themselves accordingly

and the will to build equitable partnerships should ultimately be among the most effective facilitators of aid. Considering the potential trend for increased aid rejection and the mounting consequences of climate change there is ample impetus for organizations to strive towards developing the most comprehensive disaster response strategies possible. The true challenge perhaps lies in upholding the humanitarian principles while doing so. Compromising the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence or impartiality for the sake of mitigating the political risk faced by the affected state would be a precarious path indeed.

While this analysis has decidedly focused on a negative connotation of political risk, there is undoubtedly a positive implication. Governments that effectively manage disaster responses, to include responses that make use of international assistance to bolster national efforts, stand to enhance their legitimacy as they fulfill arguably the most essential governmental responsibility of protecting life. That being said, it cannot help but be emphasized that the true key to fulfilling this fundamental responsibility lies in preventing disasters from taking place in the first place and investing in the necessary measures to reduce risk and vulnerability. Prevention might offer the most politically neutral opportunity for reducing disaster likelihood and should therefore sit within any truly effective disaster response strategy.

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When 'Leadership' Means Acknowledging Others Might Know Better

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Image: World leaders at the Reforming the United Nations: Management, Security, and Development meeting during the 72nd Session of the UN General Assembly, 2017, New York. White House Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

Abstract

Humanitarian work in the early twenty-first-century is steeped in the rhetoric of 'inclusion' and 'leave no one behind'. Yet, "too often it is the most vulnerable people and the people most in need [who] fall through the cracks" of humanitarian responses (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2018, p. 5).

This paper argues that humanitarian leadership is in need of a major paradigm shift: one requiring agencies to actually learn from people's lived reality, rather than trying to fit that lived reality into pre-existing international systems and procedures. Humanitarians should reconsider tools that are not fit for purpose and reconsider ways of working that are built on a flawed logic of 'vulnerability' and 'protection'. This paradigm shift is vital for ensuring that those "most vulnerable people", the most marginalised and excluded, are at the forefront of humanitarian (and development) thinking.

Introduction

Humanitarian work in the early twenty-first-century is steeped in the rhetoric of 'inclusion' and 'leave no one behind'. Yet, as the 2018 World Disasters Report tells us, "too often it is the most vulnerable people and the people most in need [who] fall through the cracks" of humanitarian responses (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC] 2018, p. 5). These are "... the people who we need to reach first, not last. They should be the forethought, not the afterthought" (IFRC 2018, p. 5).

So, what is going wrong? This paper argues that if humanitarians are to have any hope of ensuring that those "most vulnerable people"–whom the author prefers to describe as those who are most marginalised and excluded–are at the forefront of humanitarian (and development) thinking, there must be a major paradigm shift in humanitarian leadership.

Following de Ver's (2009) work on developmental leadership, which foregrounds the importance of contextual understanding while noting that "many of the conceptions of leadership in the literature are Western-oriented, universalist or individualistic", this shift will require actually listening to, and learning from, people's lived reality, rather than trying to fit that lived reality into pre-existing international systems and procedures that are built on a flawed logic of 'vulnerability' and 'protection' and that employ tools that are not fit for purpose.

Humanitarians need a fundamental realignment of knowledge–power dynamics, in which:

a) simplistic, ever-growing checklists of seemingly homogenous 'types' of people deemed to have 'special needs' are discarded in favour of continual reflection on, and real-time responses to, the effects of intersecting inequities that permeate our societies (both during and outside of humanitarian crises); *and*

b) ground-level, site-specific understandings of shifting patterns of marginalisation and exclusion are core to needs analyses and the humanitarian response.

Leaving no one behind?

The statements quoted in the introduction were made two years after the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, which was called in response to "the highest level of human suffering since the Second World War" (Agenda for Humanity 2016), and the launch of the Agenda for Humanity. In his report to the Summit, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated: "Leaving no one behind is a central aspiration of most political, ethical or religious codes and has always been at the heart of the humanitarian imperative" (Ban 2016).

The Agenda for Humanity, said Ban Ki-moon, had to be a "vision for change", which was:

> ... grounded in the value that unites us: our common humanity. This common humanity has many different ethnic and national identities, religious beliefs and cultural customs. Yet, it connects in the universal principle that there is inherent dignity and worth in every individual that must be protected, respected and given the opportunity and conditions to flourish. (Ban 2016)

As the author has noted elsewhere (Fletcher 2019), such aspirational statements are nothing new. Multi-country commitments to international development and humanitarian endeavours that build on our 'common humanity' and call for the inclusion of those who are most marginalised and excluded can be traced back to the post–World War II period, if not before. For example, the Marshall Plan was "directed ... against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos" (Marshall 1947). 'Purpose Three' of the UN Charter is:

> To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms *for all* without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. (United Nations 1948, emphasis added)

'Humanity' is one of four humanitarian principles that have been accepted across the world since the first Geneva Convention of 1949. (That may be changing; the recent Centre for Humanitarian Leadership working paper by Clarke and Parris (2019) explores the roots of these principles and argues for a new set of principles, namely "equity, solidarity, compassion and diversity".) In his inaugural address, then President of the United States Harry S. Truman laid the foundations of the program that became the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). He declared: "Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of *all* people" (Truman 1949, emphasis added).

Further declarations of defeating poverty and inequality have come and gone in the years since Truman's time. "Leaving no one behind" is, of course, the aspirational slogan of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their forerunner, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were built on "principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level" (United Nations General Assembly 2000). Intended as a shared international commitment to "all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable" (United Nations General Assembly 2000), the MDGs were called "the most successful anti-poverty movement in history" by Ban Ki-moon (United Nations 2015). Despite this, the final report on the 15-year effort to achieve the MDGs noted:

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Millions of people are being left behind, especially the poorest and those disadvantaged because of their sex, age, disability, ethnicity or geographic location. Targeted efforts will be needed to reach the *most vulnerable* people. (United Nations 2015, emphasis added)

'Vulnerable' or marginalised and excluded?

As has been noted for decades by theorists and activists (particularly those connected to feminist and disability rights theory and activism):

The concept of vulnerabilities disempowers, reducing our agency and productivity to trembling inadequacy in the face of adversity. *The language of risk is not ours.* We are, paradigmatically, 'copers', the ones who find ways to feed, clothe and educate our children, to keep depression at bay, to encourage hope, to care for our sick. We need to be supported from these strengths and capabilities rather than reduced to the vulnerable to be protected. (Reid et al. 2012, emphasis in original)

The humanitarian sector is "saturated with the language of vulnerability and risk"

Nevertheless, the humanitarian sector is "saturated with the language of vulnerability and risk" (Reid et al. 2012). It can be found throughout Ban Ki-moon's speech to the World Humanitarian Summit; it is the language of the United Nations, as indicated by the quote above and by the existence of a specific Global Protection Cluster (GPC); it is the language of the Agenda for Action, as part of which "more than 1000 … commitments [were] made to take action to uphold the rights and find solutions for the most vulnerable groups" (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] 2018. This bears repeating: there were more than 1000 commitments made, and the language through which they were presented was language in which commitments were made to do things for vulnerable groups, rather than to work alongside them, in solidarity. Clarke and Parris (2019) have proposed 'solidarity' as a new humanitarian principle; a replacement for the current principle of impartiality that, they argue: "not only places a barrier between 'us' and 'them' but insists that there be this separation and absence of judgement of the circumstances in which others find themselves."

The language used to define and describe the Agenda for Humanity commitments and actions shifts and changes within and between webpages and key documents; there are 'core commitments', 'individual commitments', 'joint commitments', 'themes', 'core responsibilities', 'shifts in direction' and 'transformations', each of which is defined and described in different ways at different points. For example, the five 'core responsibilities' and 24 'transformations' used as an organising principle on the website's 'core commitments' search engine do not match the core responsibilities and transformations listed elsewhere (for instance, in the downloadable trifold leaflet about the Agenda on the website). This is, perhaps, an inevitability; seeking consistency in anything that involves 9000 participants from diverse governments, civil society and non-government organisations, private sector and academic institutions could well be a never-ending task.

The seven 'transformations' identified under this core responsibility now seem to have settled into the following:
- address migration
- end statelessness
- empower and protect women and girls
- ensure education for all in crisis
- empower young people
- include the most vulnerable. (Agenda for Humanity 2016)

This last transformation is described as follows:

The needs and risks faced by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, adolescents and ethnic minorities must be identified and prioritised. National and international organizations should put in place strategies and programmes with a specific focus on protecting and respecting the rights of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged underpinned by comprehensive data analysis. (Agenda for Humanity 2016)

Who are the "most vulnerable groups", and how are workers on the ground supposed to be able to identify them, let alone protect them?

But who are the "most vulnerable groups", and how are workers on the ground supposed to be able to identify them, let alone protect them? The quote above references "Women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, adolescents and ethnic minorities"; the author searched within and across a wide range of materials related to the Humanitarian Summit and the Agenda for Humanity as well as the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Field Handbook (OCHA 2018), which references the Summit and resultant initiatives. From this, a (very long) list of human characteristics and conditions that will result in 'vulnerability' was developed, including the following:
- being female
- being old or young
- being disabled
- being a member of a minority race, ethnicity, political affiliation, religion, sexual identity or cultural group
- being indigenous
- being poor
- being a renter, squatter or landless person

- being forcibly displaced
- being a migrant
- being stateless
- being "associated with a party to an armed conflict"
- living in a rural area or "geographically-isolated area"
- living with HIV or AIDS.

The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, applies a slightly different method, which it calls an "age, gender and diversity" (AGD) approach; a "systematic application" of which is intended to ensure:

> that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities. (UNHCR 2011)

However, the focus is still firmly on "specific personal characteristics" (UNHCR 2011), with 'diversity' used to refer to characteristics, including 'different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnic background, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, health, social status, skill and other specific personal characteristics" (UNHCR 2011).

There is a strange neutrality at play here: first, that everyone who possesses the same characteristic is equally vulnerable; and, second, that people are vulnerable because of who they are or because they are in the 'wrong' place at the wrong time.

People are not marginalised and excluded just because they possess different characteristics to others

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As the author has argued elsewhere (Fletcher 2015b, 2015a, 2019), people are not marginalised and excluded just because they possess different characteristics to others. Sociologists have long agreed that humans are continually engaged in historically based social and political processes of inequity involving judgements of worth made on the basis of difference from perceived 'norms' (Acker 2006; Collins 1993; Connell 2002; Connell 2005 [1995]; Kimmel and Ferber 2014; Ore 2009; Rahman and Jackson 2010).

Our societies function on the basis of social hierarchies, which intersect. These hierarchies form around points of difference, such as race and ethnicity; gender; sex; sexuality; caste or socio-economic status; disability; and other characteristics (often on a culturally specific basis). For example, in some countries, religion (often tied to race and ethnicity) is a deeply influential factor in whether or not people have power in decision-making and access to resources; in others, it is of far less importance.

The dominant norm (which is not necessarily the same as the numerical majority) is the item against which someone's place on the hierarchy is judged; further:

> The social hierarchies at play in our worlds are (re) generated through on-going ways of deeply human thinking and acting, on-going inequitable relationships and power dynamics, and on-going (re)creation and implementation of systems and structures that are, themselves, symptoms of human-based decisions and value systems (e.g., laws, education and health systems, social welfare systems, tax systems, financial structures etc.). None of these exists outside of human relationships or outside of emotions. They occur within what Taylor (1985) called 'the realm of human self-interpretation'; a realm to which, he added, 'there is no dispassionate access'. (Fletcher 2019)

Those who are considered to be the 'right' category of race or ethnicity; the 'right' sex; the 'right' sexuality (in terms of who they are known or assumed to have sex with, as well as when, where and how); 'fit' dominant gender norms and so on, reap benefits. They are engaged in decision-making and they have preferential access to resources, such as education, health care, land, legal protection, etc. Those who do not are excluded from these benefits and, at worst, are subject to punishment (including refusal of their basic rights to life and justice). This is as true in humanitarian crises as it is in everyday life.

Taking a categorical approach (that is, putting people in fixed categories of 'vulnerability', such as women and girls, people with a disability, indigenous people, etc.) serves to mask the intersecting social hierarchies and judgements that function to marginalise and exclude people. It also serves to overwrite the deep reserves of resilience and capacity demonstrated by so many people in the face of human-inspired and weather-related disasters. As Reid et al. (2012) write, people need to be "supported from these strengths and capabilities rather than reduced to the vulnerable to be protected".

If we are serious about achieving this— and about achieving the commitments to partnerships of equality and to localisation— then humility will be an essential leadership quality.

Ensuring this happens in practice requires leadership (and leaders) that, first and foremost, acknowledges the limitations of taking a categorical approach to marginalisation and exclusion, including the reality that too often humanitarian and development workers are not asked to reflect on their own judgements and prejudices. Second, it requires demonstration of humility. While, traditionally, this trait may not be seen as central to leadership built on the model of 'leading from the front', it is essential for "leaving no one behind". If we are serious about achieving this—and about

achieving the commitments to partnerships of equality and to localisation—then humility will be an essential leadership quality.

Vulnerable to on-the-ground confusion

Given that the 'basic architecture' of the international humanitarian system comes from the United Nations, and that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (established in response to a UN resolution) is the primary mechanism for coordination of UN and non-UN humanitarian assistance, it is reasonable to expect the United Nations to be one of the organisations that leads the way in setting standards for humanitarian responses.

The 272-page *United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Field Handbook* (OCHA 2018), mentioned earlier, could be reasonably considered a key document—if not the key document—on "the what and the how of international emergency response" (OCHA 2018).

The UNDAC Handbook was developed using information drawn from the United Nations, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the IFRC and the Humanitarian Best Practice Network (OCHA 2018). It covers everything from seating arrangements suitable for different types of meetings (complete with diagrams; see Figure 1) to how to deal with the media during a humanitarian crisis (UNDAC 2018).

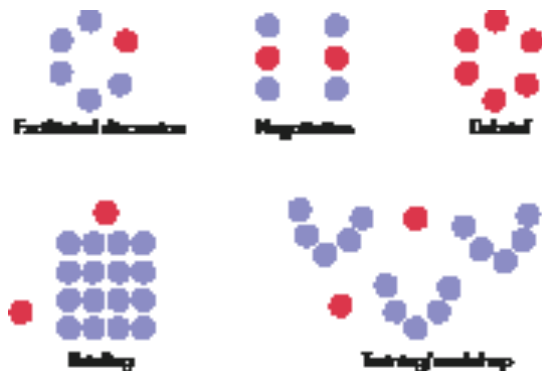More than 50 references to the word 'vulnerable' appear

in the UNDAC Handbook, mainly within the section 'Protection considerations'. The closest definition of 'vulnerable' was in the sub-section 'Specific needs of vulnerable groups', which stated:

> Vulnerable persons or groups of people are those who are exposed to a combination of, or more serious, risks than the rest of the population and who have limited capacity to cope with these risks. Vulnerability is context-specific and depends on the capacities and support networks of each individual. Women, men, boys and girls of all ages may require special interventions or support depending on their circumstances and the threats their environment poses.

Vulnerability in relation to one situation does not necessarily indicate vulnerability in all situations and blanket classification of vulnerable groups should be avoided. For this reason, it is useful to carry out a vulnerability assessment to understand the specific vulnerabilities of and within a population group to risks they face as well as the existing capacities to cope in the face of these risks.

> Vulnerability is influenced by displacement, geographic location, specific cultural and social power dynamics, access to information and education, access to material and financial resources, access to services and infrastructure, social support networks and specific characteristics of the group, family, or individual …

> Specific groups are often more vulnerable and need special assistance in the aftermath of a disaster. Experience shows that these groups almost always include women, children, people with disabilities and older persons. Other potentially vulnerable groups include the poor, persons living with HIV/AIDS, indigenous groups, families hosting IDPs, renters, squatters and the landless, geographically-isolated communities, individuals associated with a party to an armed conflict and certain ethnic and cultural minority groups in given countries. (OCHA 2018, p. 19, s. L.3.2)

The confusions contained in this quote are many. On the one hand, we are told that vulnerability arises when people "have limited capacity" to cope with risks. Then, vulnerability is defined as "context-specific" (rather than specific to a person's capacities) but still dependent on "the capacities and support networks of each individual". If an individual is a woman, man, boy or girl of any age, they may require "special interventions"; but "women, children, people with disabilities and older persons" will "almost always" require special assistance (regardless of their capacities or support networks). Over and above this, there is a long list of other categories of people who are "potentially vulnerable". Although the quote references the usefulness of carrying out a "vulnerability assessment", no further reference to this could be found in the UNDAC Handbook.

It is beyond imagining what responders are supposed to do in the field, other than to simply hone in on women, children, old people and anyone who is easily identifiable as disabled (whatever their socio-economic status, HIV status, indigeneity, ethnicity and so on).

Changing this requires leadership that is both humble and courageous; leadership that is willing to admit that the long used and ever-growing 'checklists' of 'types' of people designated 'vulnerable' do not actually tell us who is being left out at any particular site, at any particular time. Further, leadership must be shown when advocating for the time and resources needed to develop contextual understanding; and for monitoring and evaluation systems that actually hold people to account for effective identification of, and locally informed responses to, shifting and intersecting social hierarchies.

Such systems will, however, require radical re-thinking of the ways in which assessments are carried out.

In need of reassessment

A whole raft of new materials related to needs assessment have been developed in this space since the World Humanitarian Summit, in large part due to the Grand Bargain. Developed by 16 donors and aid organisations as a response to the report *Too important to fail: addressing the humanitarian financing gap* (High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing 2017), the Grand Bargain was presented at the Summit. It aims to "get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action" (IASC, no date).

Now involving "more than 30 of the biggest donors and aid providers" (Agenda for Humanity 2016), the Grand Bargain involves nine 'workstreams' with 49 commitments underneath them, plus one cross-cutting commitment (to "enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors"). One workstream, titled 'Improve joint and impartial needs assessments', includes a number of resources, which include *Grand Bargain principles for needs assessment ethos* and *Methodology to assess coordinated multi-sector needs assessments*.

The principles are obviously intended as international best practice; they:

> … represent core values that have been agreed to by organizations at the global level, in particular, the Code of Conduct and the Humanitarian Charter, and are implemented at global, regional and operational levels. (Grand Bargain Workstream 5, no date)

Principle 1 states that needs assessments should be "people-centred and inclusive" as well as "sensitive to age, sex, and all relevant aspects of diversity", with 'diversity' defined in a footnote (Grand Bargain Workstream 5, no date). This footnote cites the *UNHCR policy on age, gender and diversity*, *quoted previously*: "*diversity* refers to different values, attitudes, cultural perspectives, beliefs, ethnic background, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, health, social status, skill and other specific personal characteristics" (UNHCR 2011).

Principle 1 also states that "people with special needs" will require "special attention" (Grand Bargain Workstream 5, no date). Rights activists across the world would argue that there are no such 'special needs' but one basic need: fulfilment of universal human rights for all, whether that means provision of mobility aids for people with disability or ensuring that poor, ethnic minority women are able to take part in the making of decisions that will affect them.

The methodology, created to assess whether or not good quality needs assessments have been undertaken, lists a series of "minimum requirements for multi-sectoral need assessments", one of which is: "The assessment identifies *characteristics* that increase the vulnerability of different groups in the given context (e.g. gender, age, disability, minority status, displacement, etc.)" (Global Public Policy Institute and Inspire Consortium, no date, emphasis added).

What is supposed to happen in needs assessments in practice? The UNDAC Handbook contains a section on 'assessment', in which "vulnerabilities and risks" are identified as part of "what you need to know" in first-stage planning (OCHA 2018, p. 14, s. I.3). Minimum information required includes "which vulnerable groups lived in affected areas before impact and what they lived on" (OCHA 2018, p. 14, s. I.3). The list of possible sources for such data includes national institutions, UN agencies, international and local non-governmental organisations, international and local media, geospatial and satellite imagery, databases and datasets, websites, social media and pre-existing large-scale survey data.

Members of affected communities (or even community leaders, local civil society organisations or civil society networks) are not mentioned, despite the reality that lived knowledge of the way in which marginalisation and exclusion plays out at a particular site is really only available at this level.

Understanding the complexities of local power dynamics can, of course, be time-consuming and difficult to achieve.

Understanding the complexities of local power dynamics can, of course, be time-consuming and difficult to achieve. Internal community divisions can run so deep and be so long-standing that they feel 'natural' to those involved. In such instances, what outsiders might term 'exclusion' is instead understood as a mode of 'protection'; justified as necessary to maintain religious or cultural traditions. (These arguments are still used by many people in Australia today, for example in relation to same-sex marriage or sexuality education in schools.) These arguments are often used to 'explain' inequities, such as women's lack of involvement in collective decision-making or the exclusion of transgender people from their family networks.

It is not possible to understand the realities of marginalisation and exclusion in a community without asking those involved.

It is not possible to understand the realities of marginalisation and exclusion in a community without asking those involved. Of necessity, this includes both

those who are marginalised and excluded and those who participate in the marginalisation and exclusion.

In some cases, those who are marginalised and excluded may be invisible; either because they are literally kept out of sight or are unable to move around freely (as is so often the case for people with disabilities) or because they are not recognised as community members. In Myanmar, for example, internal migrants are often extremely poor day labourers who live on the outskirts of communities and are not considered to be members of those communities because they are not registered there; thus, they do not even appear on local people's radar when it comes to thinking about 'who is left out' of those communities.

The ways in which these patterns of marginalisation and exclusion play out shift subtly from site to site, as explored in 'Appendix: A case study of complexity'. Further, different patterns will be clear to different people; and when communities have faced wholescale upheaval (as in the Rohingya crisis) and everyone is reduced to a state of homelessness, poverty and trauma, then the specific patterns of marginalisation and exclusion that existed in a specific community prior to that upheaval will be much harder to identify.

Simple observation of those who manage to obtain those resources that are available—for instance, being able to source a tarpaulin to erect a makeshift shelter—and those who do not, can always be followed by attempts to understand why some people are being left out and how things would need to be done differently to ensure that their rights are being met. There is a world of difference between this and meeting someone's 'special needs'. (Another whole paper could be written about how humanitarians might seek to learn from the resilience and coping mechanisms of those who manage to survive in the face of marginalisation and exclusion, or in the wake of man-made and weather-related disasters.)

Working for a development organisation, from international non-government organisations (INGOs) to local civil society organisations (CSOs), does not automatically 'cleanse' people of their prejudices. Recognition of this would enable humanitarians to identify the difference between marginalisation and exclusion and 'natural' judgements of some people as less worthy than others. The author has worked closely with many admirable people who are proud to fight for social justice, but who hold deeply discriminatory views: women's rights activists who do not support the rights of transgender women; human rights campaigners who do not engage with disability organisations; and UN staff members who are anti-Islam. The author has written elsewhere of her own 'Ah-ha' moment upon realising that, despite having worked on issues related to gender and sexuality for years, she had presumed that a young woman working in a bottle shop (off-licence) would not know anything about wine (Fletcher 2014). Everyone has prejudices; the trick is in being able to recognise them and striving to limit the effect they have on behaviour. Few leaders in the humanitarian and development space are willing to even talk about this, let alone build space into staff training programs that encourage active reflection on such deeply human issues.

'Participation' needs to be more than a buzzword

Turning back to the UNDAC Handbook (OCHA 2018), it advises that the participation of "vulnerable groups" in the design of programs should be "encouraged", despite an absolute lack of clarity on exactly who is to be labelled 'vulnerable', by whom, and how.

Nearly ten years ago, 'participation' was one of a series of words termed "buzzwords and fuzzwords" (Cornwall and Eade 2010), described as "a constant supply of must-use terms and catchphrases" used in international development that are:

> ... simultaneously descriptive and normative, concrete and yet aspirational, intuitive and clunkily pedestrian, capable of expressing the most deeply held convictions or of being simply full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. (Eade 2010)

In a chapter on 'participation', Pablo Alejandro Leal wrote, "Somewhere in the mid-1980s, participation ascended to the pantheon of development buzzwords, catchphrases, and euphemisms." He added: "One cannot speak of participation when a few global power brokers decide the fates of more than two thirds of the world's population" (Leal 2010).

Cornwall (2003) has also been disparaging of what she described as:

> ... claims to 'full participation' and 'the participation of all stakeholders'—familiar from innumerable project documents and descriptions of participatory processes—[which] all too often boil down to situations in which only the voices and versions of the vocal few are raised and heard.

Participation of those who are marginalised and excluded remains a central pillar of both development and humanitarian aspirations.

Nonetheless, participation of those who are marginalised and excluded remains a central pillar of both development and humanitarian aspirations. It is unclear whether or not the World Humanitarian Summit was an exercise in this sort of participation; the Agenda for Humanity website stated that the Summit brought together:

> 9000 participants ... including 55 Heads of State and Government, hundreds of civil society and non-governmental organisations, and partners including the private sector and academia ... Together, they

generated more than 3500 commitments to action and launched more than a dozen new partnerships and initiatives to turn the Agenda for Humanity into meaningful change for the world's most vulnerable people. (Agenda for Humanity 2016)

No mention is made here of participation in the Summit by either those who have experienced crises or, even more appropriately, those who have experienced crises and "fell through the cracks" (IFRC 2018).

There are two possible explanations for this: first, these people were not included in the 9000-strong Summit invite list; second, their participation was not felt to be important enough to note in the description of attendees. Both explanations are troubling. Nonetheless, the Grand Bargain has dedicated Workstream 6 to a "Participation Revolution", which will ensure that the voices of people who might otherwise fall through the cracks are "heard and acted upon" (IASC, no date).

Other Agenda-related commitments to reaching those 'left behind' can be found in the Inclusion Charter, which contains "commitments and actions" that "draw and build upon the core commitments developed for the World Humanitarian Summit discussions" (Inclusion Charter, no date). The first commitment is to 'participation', and states:

> We will systematically engage with all affected people, including the most marginalised, to deliver meaningful participation and consultation to ensure that their views are reflected in all aspects of the response including assessment, design, delivery and monitoring and evaluation. (Inclusion Charter, no date)

The Charter was:

> … developed by leading organisations that have a specific mandate to support particular vulnerable groups including children, youth, older people and persons with disabilities, as well as national and international NGOs and networks that are concerned about ensuring humanitarian assistance reaches the most vulnerable crisis-affected people. (Inclusion Charter, no date)

Again, it is difficult to tell whether or not those "vulnerable groups" were included in the development of the Charter.

At an institutional level, Charter4Change is a commitment to greater participation of "southern-based national actors" in humanitarian response. Currently signed by 35 INGOs and endorsed by hundreds of southern-based national and local organisations, the Charter acknowledges that "only 0.2% of humanitarian aid is channelled directly to national non-government actors (NGOs and CSOs) for humanitarian work", and calls for an increase in direct funding to these organisations (Charter4Change 2015). Charter signatories are also committed to "emphasis[ing] the importance of national actors" while, at the same time, providing "robust organisational support and capacity strengthening" to them (Charter4Change 2015).

The Charter makes no reference to the existing capacity within these organisations, despite referencing the Global Humanitarian Platform Principles of Partnership that state:

> The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. (Global Humanitarian Platform 2007)

The Global Humanitarian Platform was established in 2006 to "enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian action" and was, in some ways, the younger sibling of what became the World Humanitarian Summit. It brought together NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the UN and related international organisations, with a focus on changing "the way in which international humanitarian actors work together" (International Council of Voluntary Agencies, no date). At the last meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform steering committee, held in July 2010, a background paper warned that "the scale of humanitarian needs is likely to outweigh the capacity of humanitarian organisations in some situations" (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response 2010): a warning that had become reality by the World Humanitarian Summit. The paper also noted both the increasing politicisation of aid and rising levels of mistrust towards humanitarian efforts seen as "part of a Western agenda" (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response 2010).

The paper concluded with calls for humanitarian organisations to "rethink the manner in which they operate" where humanitarian space is reduced. It added:

> It is very important for humanitarian actors to develop strong context analysis, and to make sure that the nature and causes of vulnerability are well understood, in order to provide the most appropriate responses. (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response 2010)

Ensuring that it is possible to be done in practice—which means ensuring appropriate program funding, designs, timelines, monitoring and evaluation systems and more—would surely be a great example of leadership that acknowledges others might know better.

Conclusion

We are now nearly ten years past the *Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response* background paper quoted above, and two years past the World Humanitarian Summit and launch of the Agenda for Humanity. Spending any time on the Agenda's dedicated website gives one a sense of a grand idea being fleshed out in real-time, while various political and other power-plays take place below the surface.

The vast scale and scope of the Agenda for Humanity is overwhelming; as are the political, ideological and economic complexities of conflicts and inequities—or human-made disasters—often compounded by large-

scale weather events, that are occurring across the world today. The ever-shifting winds of politics, ideology and economics that buffet both forms of disasters are often only loosely connected to what Ban Ki-moon referred to as "the value that unites us: our common humanity … [and] the universal principle that there is inherent dignity and worth in every individual" (Ban 2016).

The failure of actors across the world to live by this universal principle was one of the drivers for the Agenda for Humanity; as Ban Ki-moon noted:

> Brutal and seemingly intractable conflicts have devastated the lives of millions of people, threatening the futures of entire generations. More countries are slipping into fragility, marked by extreme poverty and weak institutions and compounded by natural hazards and climate-induced disasters. Violent extremism, terrorism and transnational crime are creating persistent instability. Growing economic inequality within countries and the widening gap between the rich and the poor are further marginalizing the most vulnerable people in society. (Ban 2016)

At ground level, when people have lost everything and need humanitarian assistance, it is the bonds of common humanity and equal value that can be the motivators for recovery.

At ground level, when people have lost everything and need humanitarian assistance, it is the bonds of common humanity and equal value that can be the motivators for recovery. But this recovery will never be equitable unless humanitarian actors at all levels are able to show leadership in abandoning their 'tick lists of vulnerability' and start supporting people to learn from those who are marginalised and excluded, as well as from the communities in which they live.

This is the realignment of knowledge–power dynamics mentioned at the start of this paper. It requires leaders to show humility and courage, and to acknowledge that members of communities are best placed to help

humanitarians learn about who is being left out. It also requires flexibility–the subject of a two-year workstream implemented by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP)– and a willingness to accept that attaining the SDGs, the Agenda for Humanity and all the other international initiatives is both complicated and complex work. Humanitarian responses are complicated in that they are like building a rocket ship with lots of different parts that need to be brought together in a particular way in order for the ship to be able to lift off. But they are also complex, which is another matter entirely. Complex situations are like bringing up children. No matter how many times you have done it before, each new situation is different and requires constant learning and adjustment as you go along, because unanticipated challenges and opportunities will keep emerging (Fletcher 2019; Funnell and Rogers 2011; Glouberman and Zimmerman 2002). These challenges and opportunities will be highly context dependent and will require much deeper thinking about the social, political and systemic (re)production of intersecting inequities that permeate our societies, both during and outside of humanitarian crises. Virtue signalling by adding to the ever-growing list of 'vulnerable' people is not good enough.

Without such shifts to what would be more a developmental leadership model (Lyne de Vere 2009), the author sees little hope of real change. As noted in the *Agenda for Humanity Synthesis Report 2018*:

> The lack of time and resources invested in doing things differently, and the reluctance to adapt entrenched systems, processes and attitudes, mean that, for the most part, progress has been limited to what can be achieved within existing humanitarian structures. Changes that require rethinking the established way of doing things, including those that call for the inclusion of a more diverse set of actors in decision-making, have made less headway. (OCHA 2018, p. 6)

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Appendix: A case study of complexity
By Gillian Fletcher

In Myanmar, where I have worked as a consultant for nearly 20 years, issues of ethnic identity are both central to issues of inequity and impossible to pin down in any categorical form.

Yes, on paper there are 135 ethnic groups recognised by the Government (not including Rohingya), and these are grouped into eight "major racial groups".[1] However, as Cheesman (2017) has noted, it is not known how the number '135' became official, or the data on which it is based.

Historic and deep fault lines lie underneath this state-accepted typology. For example, the Kachin (one of the eight identified groups) "encompass a number of ethnic groups speaking almost a dozen distinct languages". Kachin people from the Jingpho/Jingphaw groups consider themselves to be 'pure' Kachin, while many of those who belong to different language groups do not even identify as Kachin; they are Lisu, Maru, Lashu and so on.

Most people considered to belong to this 'racial group' are Christian, but a minority follow animism or Buddhism. Despite being in the minority, Buddhist Kachin were given preferential access to education during the decades of military rule. Minority Rights Group International has received reports of:

> … community members being subjected to conversion activities and discriminatory treatment by authorities because of their religion, such as rewards if they convert to Buddhism or exemption from forced labour, lower prices for basic foodstuffs such as rice and greater educational opportunities.[2]

Each of Myanmar's 'racial groups'–including the majority group, Bamar–has similar layers of complexity, deepened yet further by dominant religious and cultural norms used to justify marginalisation and exclusion on the basis of sex (with deeper layers of discrimination for women who are considered to be lower on other hierarchies, such as sexuality), disability, poverty, age, and more.

Then there is the complexity of who holds formal or informal power in each site. Long-standing systems of control include heads of ten households, heads of 100 households, official village leaders and unofficial village leaders (both of whom may be aligned with a particular ethnic armed group or religious group), political parties, and a wide array of local civil society organisations (CSOs). These range from small village-based organisations that exist to cover funeral costs

to organisations that are part of an informal national network of rights-based, equity-focused CSOs. Then there is the Buddhist nationalist movement Ma Ba Tha, known in English as the Patriotic Association of Myanmar, which is closely linked to the Myanmar military and is vehemently anti-Muslim. Ma Ba Tha has contributed hugely to marginalisation and exclusion experienced by Muslim people across Myanmar; the movement was also behind what are known as the 'race and religion' laws, which abused women's rights in pursuit of Buddhist nationalism.[3]

This plays out across the country on a day-by-day basis, in ways that would be mostly invisible to anyone not actively involved. Bamar staff tell me it has taken them years to win a level of trust when working in minority ethnic areas; younger female managers have spoken of being subtly disregarded by older men, as well as of undermining themselves because they have internalised their 'place' on the hierarchies of age and sex; and, in a particularly development-specific hierarchy, highly skilled national staff who do not speak English (despite, perhaps, speaking two or three other languages) complain of being passed over again and again for well-paid jobs in international non-government organisations (INGOs) or with donors and international organisations.

These complexities cannot be reduced to tick lists of 'categories' of people, nor can they be understood or negotiated without paying careful attention to what is happening on the ground.

Religion is one of many sites of inequity in Myanmar.
Photo: Gillian Fletcher

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3   The four laws are the Monogamy Law; Religious Conversion Law; Interfaith Marriage Law; and the Population Control Law; https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/burma-four-race-and-religion-protection-laws-adopted/

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1   Myanmar National Portal, https://www.myanmar.gov.mm/en/web/guest/people-society

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When 'Leadership' Means Acknowledging Others Might Know Better

Humanitarian Solutions to Improve Dignity and Wellbeing for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

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Abstract

There are almost 1 million Rohingya refugees currently living in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The vast majority of these people are confined to government-run camps—they live in deplorable conditions, are unable to legally work or leave the camps, and are entirely supported by international aid. The Rohingya suffer from a distinct lack of access to durable solutions, in that safe return to Myanmar is not possible and the prospects of local integration or resettlement to a third country are extremely limited. While ending refugee crises invariably requires long-term political solutions, this article will argue that where repeated efforts to pressure Myanmar to address its human rights abuses and create the conditions for safe and voluntary repatriation have proven ineffective, more attention should be paid to shorter-term humanitarian solutions. Potential interim strategies designed to increase self-sufficiency, dignity and wellbeing will be assessed with a view to developing a holistic strategy that can provide short- and medium-term support, while a longer-term political solution to what is one of world's most severe humanitarian crises is sought.

Introduction

The Rohingya have been fleeing persecution by the Myanmar government and military, otherwise known as the Tatmadaw, for decades. In what has become a desperate situation, these people are currently confined to encampment with no realistic prospects of voluntary repatriation, integration or resettlement. Efforts on the part of the international community dating back as far as the 1980s to pressure Myanmar to address its lamentable human rights record have failed time and time again, and human rights abuses persist today despite political change and the arrival of so-called democratic government in 2015. After briefly outlining the Rohingya's lack of access to durable solutions and highlighting the limited prospects of Myanmar accepting their return while respecting their human rights in the near future, this paper will analyse strategies proposed and/or implemented in three other camp settings (Thailand, Ethiopia and Uganda) before presenting a tailored solution for the Rohingya context. The solution will involve a range of short- and medium-term initiatives designed to increase self-reliance through livelihood opportunities, access to land and the easing of restrictions on work and movement. Such interventions are critical to the survival of the Rohingya where longer-term political discussions have essentially stalled.

Mass exoduses from Rakhine State in Myanmar across the border to neighbouring Bangladesh occurred in 1978, 1991–1992, 1996–1997, 2012 and, most recently, 2017–2018. While each exodus has been significant in number, the one commencing in August 2017 was by far the greatest; almost 720,000 stateless Rohingya women, men and children fled highly organised attacks by the Tatmadaw involving beatings, rape and murder, in what has been described as "a textbook example of ethnic cleaning" (Al Hussein in Beyrer & Kamarulzaman 2017, p. 1571). There are 32 camps in Cox's Bazar in which some 930,000 Rohingya reside. Two camps were formed following the 1991–1992 influx, now home to around 50,000 people, while the remaining camps were formed following the 2017–2018 influx. The fact that camps dating back almost 30 years are still in existence today indicates the likely future of those recently formed.

According to Bangladesh law, the Rohingya are not allowed to leave their specific camp or engage in work, with the exception of 'cash-based interventions' through which humanitarian agencies are permitted to employ Rohingya on an hourly basis to perform manual tasks inside the camps. Other than this cash-for-work program, the Rohingya are entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance to address the most basic needs, such as food, water, shelter and health services. These provisions aim to save lives, reduce suffering and maintain dignity, and are provided by a range of United Nations and non-government organisations funded by national governments from around the world. There is ample coverage of the deplorable conditions in which the Rohingya live within the camps—of particular note are alarming health conditions (Ahmed et al 2018); poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) standards (Hsan et al 2019) and limited education (Prodip 2017, and Chan,

Chiu & Chan 2017). The dire situation is compounded by the fact that the Rohingya cannot leave the camps (at the time of writing, the Bangladesh Army was erecting a fence around the perimeter of all camps), nor do they have access to information via the internet due to a government ban.

Despite the urgency of the situation, access to any of the three internationally recognised durable solutions—voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement—is years away, at best. 'Durable solutions' are solutions that enable refugees to secure the political, legal and social conditions necessary to maintain life, livelihood and dignity (Danish Refugee Council 2020). While clearly the preferred option of Bangladesh and indeed the international community, as evidenced by the two repatriation agreements signed between Bangladesh and Myanmar since 2017, safe repatriation to Myanmar is simply not possible. The Myanmar government has failed to improve the living conditions of the 120,000 Rohingya who have remained confined to Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps in Rakhine State since 2012 (Beyrer & Kamarulzaman 2017), much less address the lack of legal status of the Rohingya by granting citizenship and ensuring equal rights to the other peoples of Myanmar (Kipgen 2019). Only a fundamental shift in law and policy by the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw could bring about the conditions for return and stop the repeated forced displacement that has defined the Rohingya's existence since the 1970s (Brinham 2017 and Tran 1996). The challenge, therefore, is how to address the disconnect between the need for structural solutions, which may be years, even decades, away, and the limitations of humanitarian assistance, which can only provide the bare minimum of support.

Local integration of nearly 1 million Rohingya is a highly unlikely option in a country where 25% of the population lives below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank 2016), a stance made very clear by government at all levels in Bangladesh. In an already unstable political environment, the potential range of challenges that local integration would pose to the local economy, political system, environment and society in general (Al Imran & Mian 2014; Alam 2018, Brinham 2017; and Tran 1996) presents too great a risk for the Bangladesh government to entertain. Additionally, continued encampment allows the government to show its 'humanitarian' side (by permitting refuge in Bangladesh) while playing to people's sense of nationalism (by limiting such refuge to camps in order to protect Bangladeshi citizens' interests). Finally, the third durable solution, resettlement, is afforded much less attention because it is both legally impossible and contrary to the prevailing populist sentiment seen in many parts of the world (Juan-Torres 2017). While the Bangladesh government refuses to recognise the Rohingya as refugees and support their resettlement to avoid creating a 'pull-factor' from Myanmar (Bhatia et al 2018 and Rashid 2019), the reality is that, given the insular policies of the United States, Europe and other influential countries, resettlement of such a large caseload would likely take decades were it even possible (Rashid 2019).

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This precarious situation begs the question of where to go from here in terms of advancing the Rohingya's prospects of achieving a durable solution. Various options are presented in the existing literature, which can be broken down into two categories: general strategies applicable to any refugee context; and those relating specifically to the Rohingya in Bangladesh. As this paper will show, however, these strategies have proved thoroughly ineffective to date due to Myanmar's resolute disregard for the rights of the Rohingya. Rather than persisting with ineffective policies, it is submitted that short-term solutions designed to increase refugees' self-reliance must be assessed with a view to establishing strategies that will improve the Rohingya's wellbeing, as long-term solutions remain out of reach. In line with UNHCR's guidance that "enabling refugees to become self-reliant pending the realization of an appropriate long-term solution is an important first step towards achieving any of the three durable solutions" (UNHCR 2011, p. 186), this paper will assess the applicability of interventions used in other contexts in the Rohingya camps and conclude with a tailored-solution for the Rohingya context considering both long- and short-term solutions.

Strategies presented in the existing literature
Non-context specific strategies
There is considerable discussion around the role of the international community in bringing about the conditions to create durable solutions in general, without applicability to any specific refugee crisis. Various authors have analysed refugee crises across the globe and produced recommendations designed to tackle the issues. As will be shown, their applicability to the Rohingya crises and, therefore, their effectiveness, is highly questionable.

Cristiani (2015), Morgan (2002) and Loescher & Milner (2003) all strongly advocate for the need for external assistance in one form or another. Cristiani focuses on the need for international involvement in the form of international relations and foreign policy to resolve refugee crises, while Morgan looks more specifically at external assistance through peace enforcement and nation-building. Loescher & Milner note the importance of states actively engaging in capacity-building in the countries from which refugees flee and reconsidering how the external elements of their policies may be utilised to respond to crises in a more comprehensive fashion. More specifically, they assert the importance of the European Union (EU) and its member states and other countries making concerted efforts to directly address the human rights abuses that cause refugees to flee and seek refuge in the first place. While strategies such as these no doubt have merit as general approaches, without more specific, contextualised details, the failure of these very forms of external assistance to have any impact on the policies of the Myanmar government to date (described in more detail below) casts serious doubt on their applicability to the Rohingya crisis.

Solutions specific to the Rohingya context
A significant body of academic literature is dedicated to solutions specific to the Rohingya crisis. These solutions can broadly be categorised as follows:

1. International pressure on Myanmar to change their policies towards the Rohingya.

2. Increased burden-sharing on the part of third countries in terms of resettlement and financial support to Bangladesh.

3. Increased self-reliance on the part of the Rohingya to better equip them for what will most likely be their new life in Bangladesh.

As in the case of the more general solutions outlined above, it is evident that the first two lack applicability on the current political environment. The third solution, however, has promise but requires much deeper examination.

Collective pressure, whether through treaties, joint action or otherwise, to pressure Myanmar into resolving the Rohingya issue are widely proposed. Al Imran & Mian (2014) argue that Bangladesh should enter into bilateral or multilateral treaties to garner the support needed to resolve the crisis, as well as engage the international community in general to pressure Myanmar to take the lead in resolving the problem, while Brinham (2017) talks of a "joined-up effort to secure durable solutions". Suaedy & Hafiz (2015) take a different approach in examining the decades-long struggle of the Rohingya to gain citizenship in Myanmar, noting that "stronger international and ASEAN involvement is needed to change the Myanmar government policy of discrimination against minorities, particularly the Rohingya" (p. 57). The fundamental flaw in this collective pressure approach, however, is the fact that the international community, led predominantly by the United States (US) and the EU—itself a collection of sovereign countries—have been attempting to pressure the Myanmar government to address their deplorable human rights policies for decades. The continued persecution of the Rohingya, among other minority groups, in the face of these efforts is strong evidence that these policies have failed.

Ever since the violent suppression and killing of thousands of citizens who demonstrated against the ruling government in 1988, the US has taken a raft of measures to pressure the government of Myanmar (previously Burma) to stop the violation of internationally recognised human rights. Ewing Chow (2007) provides a detailed account of these measures, some of which include revoking Myanmar's benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences; non-renewal of bilateral textile agreements; prohibiting any new assistance to Myanmar, including prohibiting US citizens both in the US and in Myanmar from making new investments in Myanmar; and barring any expansion of existing trade commitments. In 2003, the US banned the importation of any goods produced in Myanmar, froze assets in the US held by government officials and

banned visas to the US for the same individuals, and committed to blocking any application by Myanmar for loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. In addition, the US State Department has released reports accusing the Myanmar government of serious human rights abuses. Meanwhile, measures taken by the EU since 1996 involve suspending all defence cooperation and non-humanitarian bilateral aid, and extending and strengthening existing sanctions such as an arms embargo, visa bans, the revocation of benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences, asset freezes and bans on the export of equipment to Myanmar. While some of these sanctions were lifted following the transition of power to the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2015, a range of sanctions nonetheless continue today. Finally, examples of multilateral pressure include multiple UN-led enquiries into human rights abuses and a resolution by the International Labour Organization ending technical cooperation with Myanmar and barring Myanmar from meetings.

The Myanmar government's ongoing gross mistreatment of the Rohingya and other minority groups since the sanctions, resolutions and other collective efforts since 1988 shows their futility. Military offensives and violence by law enforcement against the Rohingya have seen repeated mass exodus from Rakhine State to Bangladesh, including 250,000 people in 1992–1992, 10,000 in 1996 and 7000 in 1997. The movements were so great that in 2012 Bangladesh closed the border to thousands of fleeing Rohingya, though in August 2017 it had no choice to reopen them when some 700,000 people stormed the border to escape what has since been called a genocide. This is in addition to the 600,000 Rohingya that remain in Rakhine State, 120,000 of whom are restricted to squalid IDP camps under the control of the Myanmar Army and surviving only on aid. Sadly, the Rohingya are not the only persecuted minority from Myanmar. There remain almost 100,000 predominantly Karen and Karenni refugees in camps located along the Thai–Myanmar border who fled government offensives in the eastern states of Myanmar over the past three decades. With refugees lining its borders to both the east and west, the blatant ineffectiveness of the collective international pressure on Myanmar to change its ways is palpable, casting great doubt over suggestions to do the same in the current context when Myanmar's position has not changed. While this clearly does not mean that the use of collective pressure should be abandoned entirely, it does show that the likelihood of producing any significant results in the short term is minimal, and that other strategies must be given more attention.

Increased burden-sharing on the part of third countries is a critical part of any refugee response, as recently recognised through the Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR 1996). Rashid (2019), Gorlick (2019) and Beyer & Kamarulzaman (2017) all highlight the importance of third countries supporting Bangladesh through humanitarian assistance and/or resettlement. Nevertheless, in judging what impact they might have, one must look closer at the current situation when it comes to the two key aspects of burden-sharing: resettlement to third countries and financial support to Bangladesh. As a matter of policy, resettlement to third countries is currently restricted by the Bangladesh government in an attempt to avoid the creation of a 'pull factor', which would encourage the remaining 600,000 Rohingya located across the border in Rakhine State to cross the border in the hope of resettlement (UNHCR in Rashid 2019). Further, even if Bangladesh did allow resettlement to take place, the number of refugees accepted would be insignificant compared to the Rohingya population in Bangladesh, given the current resettlement policies of the main recipient countries (the US, Canada and Australia). As Rashid (p. 9) notes, "In the wake of the influence of right-wing political forces in Europe and Australia and the retreat of the US—a traditional refugee resettlement state—from admitting migrants and refugees, third-country resettlement of Rohingyas has a bleak future." With respect to financial contributions to Bangladesh as the host country, as with any protracted refugee situation (despite being less than three years since the most recent influx), donor fatigue has already set in, with total funding falling significantly from US$827 million in 2019 to just US$198 million during the first five months of 2020 (UNOCHA 2020). The politics of aid can be cruel and the Rohingya crisis has all but disappeared from the media, giving way to crises in the Middle East, such as in Syria and Yemen, which have a direct impact on key states such as the US and Europe. Like collective pressure, it is argued that when burden-sharing is viewed in the context of the current political environment its applicability and effectiveness are called into question.

The third solution, increasing the self-reliance of the Rohingya, is a far more practical solution. Under the current context, it can be applied with a reasonable chance of successfully bringing about results in improving the wellbeing of the Rohingya. Self-reliance refers to "developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance" (UNHCR 2005, p. 1). Though criticised by Easton-Calabria & Omata (2018) as driven by donors looking for low-cost strategies to withdraw support from protracted refugee crises, self-reliance has wide support. Bhatia (2018), Gorlick (2019) and Rashid (2019) all make mention of the need for greater support for the Rohingya while they remain in Bangladesh: Bhatia and Gorlick both note the importance of short-term measures designed to increase access to work and education, while Rashid mentions the importance of enhancing capacities and reducing refugees' reliance on aid (though without offering any detailed analysis). While without doubt the most productive of the three approaches, nowhere in the existing literature is this explored in depth, with reference to specific strategies that may guide the policies and programs of governments, the UN and aid agencies. It is argued that it is the most appropriate strategy in a context where the alternative is perpetual dependency on aid with no access to durable solutions; further examination is required into this critical area.

Strategies adopted in other refugee contexts
Thailand

Decades of military offensives against the minority ethnic groups of southeastern Myanmar have seen over 150,000 people take refuge across the border in Thailand. While the most intense fighting took place during between 1980 and 2005, and despite the fact that Myanmar has seen political changes and the beginning of quasi-civilian rule since 2011, almost 100,000 refugees remain on the Thai side of the border. This case study is of particular relevance as not only does it involve the same source country, government and military (Myanmar), but refugees in both Thailand and Bangladesh suffer from the same heavy government-imposed restrictions to movement outside the camps and obtaining legal work.

Maynard & Suter (2009) provide a detailed overview of the main strategies used to enhance self-reliance in the Thai camps, involving support to produce handicrafts, deliver income-generation training, facilitate access to markets, and provide human rights education. Due to government restrictions, the handicrafts produced, which include traditional clothing, blankets and wall hangings, were previously only sold within the camps; however, following advocacy by NGOs to the Royal Thai Government, the products are now sold outside the camps. This increased access to markets represents a significant advancement in the ability of the camp residents to become self-reliant.

Specific aspects of income-generation training include increasing profitability, accessing markets and developing marketing strategies. Alongside income-generation training, other livelihood strategies include vocational and micro-enterprise training, funding for micro-enterprise equipment, resources and repair management, self-managed savings schemes, and collaboration with local villagers in product development and marketing channels (Maynard & Suter, ibid). Notably, Maynard & Suter (p. 145) argue that providing human rights training on key issues, such as the right to work and fair pay, also proved effective "in building social capital and networks to circumvent barriers and build capacity to achieve social and economic self-reliance".

Given the fact that the refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh suffer from the same restrictions on work and movement, these strategies are highly relevant to the Cox's Bazar context. The provision of materials, tools and machines as required to support the production of handicrafts for sale within the camps would provide an important source of income for those with the relevant skills, while training could also be provided to others in parallel to ensure equal opportunities for all. In particular, the production of clothing, paintings, decorations and wall hangings would be of use given the existing skills of Rohingya women and girls, who particularly suffer from a lack of access to livelihood opportunities due to cultural norms that do not allow them to leave their homes during the day. Income-generation training, including how to maximize earnings power, would also be very useful as Rohingya have very limited access to markets, though the low literacy rate would need to be taken into consideration when designing the program. An excellent livelihood would be repairs to basic items such as solar lights, which are provided to all households by humanitarian agencies yet frequently break. Finally, the application of a rights-based approach, as employed in the Thai camps, through which knowledge and practices around human rights can be taught, is of the utmost importance for the Rohingya. Considering their status as stateless refugees and given the fact that the concept of human rights has been denied to them from birth, education on relevant human rights frameworks, including international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights–and, more specifically, their relevance to the Rohingya–would be of huge benefit in forming a basis for advocacy for improved conditions, either directly or through other stakeholders, as well as promoting solidarity among the refugee community. Note, however, that this would need to be done in a context-specific way: for the Rohingya, who have arguably enjoyed none of the basic human rights during their lifetime, it may be difficult to understand the relevance of these rights or how they can be of service to them as people who are more concerned with survival.

Ethiopia

The arrival of Eritrean refugees to Ethiopia commenced during the Ethiopian–Eritrean War (1998–2000) and has continued since, largely due to the Eritrean government policy of military conscription. In 2019, 70,129 new asylum seekers from Eritrea sought refuge in Ethiopia, and, by the end of 2019, the registered population in the Tigray and Afar area stood at 139,281 persons (UNHCR 2019). The vast majority of these people live in camps dependent on aid, while a very small number have benefited from an 'out-of-camp scheme' through which Eritreans are permitted to live outside the camps if they are able to support themselves. As previously mentioned, the Rohingya are not permitted to leave the camps in Cox's Bazar at this stage, therefore, the latter option is not analysed in this paper.

Like the Rohingya and the Myanmar refugees in Thailand, encampment with very limited access to durable solutions has led to a very low level of self-reliance in the camps and livelihood interventions are the most appropriate response (Samuel Hall Consulting 2014). Key initiatives outlined by Samuel Hall Consulting (ibid) that are designed to increase access to livelihoods include nine-month-long vocational training in electronics and electricity, metal work, construction, food preparation, furniture making and tailoring/garment making. While this has increased knowledge of necessary vocational skills, life skills, literacy and numeracy among the refugees, Samuel Hall Consulting notes that three months after completing the training, the number of graduates with jobs was not as high as had been expected. Samuel Hall Consulting recommends a follow-up program including an apprenticeship, local and regional trade fairs, innovative credit mechanisms and self-help groups to support micro-entrepreneurship.

As discussed above, vocational training is an excellent strategy that would allow the Rohingya to learn skills that could be applied to generate income and develop self-reliance. However, critical to the success of such a program is a demand for the skills taught, which may not be present in the camps at Cox's Bazar. Household and community shelters are not connected to mains electricity and most households only have one portable solar light with no household solar lighting system. This means that almost no households have the power to run anything more than a simple radio, mobile phone or torch/lamp, therefore, training in electronics and electricity should be limited to information specific to these devices. Construction training is certainly useful, as in a camp with 200,000 households and thousands of community structures to support them there is always repair and construction work, creating strong demand for specific skills that would increase both employability and salary received. Metal work, however, would be of very limited use at present—the Bangladesh government has banned the use of metal given its permanent nature and the perception it would create among the host community.

Apprenticeship programs have the advantage of providing hands-on experience using skills taught in training, and the many international and local agencies working in the camps could create such opportunities within their existing programs. Strictly speaking, these would need to be unpaid apprenticeships due to the restriction on work; however, agencies could circumvent this by hiring the Rohingya as skilled cash-for-work (that is, paid more than unskilled labourers), which the government has allowed to date so long as the Rohingya are hired on an hourly basis. This highlights a need for advocacy to allow the Rohingya to be hired as staff, which would allow them to enjoy better work conditions and greater job security. This might be achieved through a special arrangement to allow work initially within the camps with a view to expanding to work outside the camps at a later time. Similarly, barriers to leaving the camp mean that trade fairs could only be conducted within the camp. Very interesting to note, however, is the shift by the Thai government to allow the sale of refugee-produced handicrafts in markets outside the camps along the Thai border. Donors and implementing aid agencies could use this precedent as the basis for advocacy to pressure the Bangladesh government to do the same for the Rohingya, arguing that increased access to specific markets, such as the nearby Kutupalong, Balukhali and Shamlapur markets, results in increased self-reliance of the Rohingya without negatively impacting host community livelihoods (Weftshop in Maynard & Suter 2009).

Samuel Hall Consulting (op cit) highlights the possible use of credit mechanisms, but notes: "micro-finance credit mechanisms require relatively stable environments to mitigate the risks, a condition that is not fulfilled in the Ethiopian camps where the fluidity of movements would make the mechanism unsustainable" (p. 49). While the extremely limited movements in and out of the camps at Cox's Bazar create the ideal environment in terms of population stability, the Bangladesh government to date has banned the use of exclusive cash programming on a large scale, instead preferring in-kind and/or voucher-based programming (again due to the political issues involved in providing cash to refugees). Another issue is that the Rohingya do not officially have access to markets outside of the camps, and humanitarian agencies should not be seen to encourage refugees to attempt to leave the camps to procure materials and tools. Any micro-credit scheme would therefore need to operate without cash, perhaps with a points system that could be used to purchase goods and services within the camp. Samuel Hall Consulting also notes the role of diaspora in supporting credit mechanisms; however, the relatively small number of Rohingya diaspora would likely limit this. Notwithstanding, the Rohingya who have been resettled to countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, Ireland and the UK could both provide funds and lobby their respective governments to support these, and indeed other, schemes.

Uganda

Uganda is host to some 1.4 million refugees, the vast majority of whom are from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR 2020). While Uganda has hosted refugees since as early as the 1950s, those currently taking refuge in Uganda are predominantly there as a result of the civil war in South Sudan that has raged since 2013. Uganda's liberal refugee policy has been praised by the international community as a "model for Africa" (UNHCR in Schiltz et al 2009). Uganda follows a non-encampment policy via its Settlement Transformative Agenda, and legislation allows refugees freedom of movement and the right to work, to establish a business, to own property and access national services, including primary and secondary education. 92% of refugees live in settlements located alongside host communities in which they are provided with a plot of land to be used for housing and agricultural purposes (UNHCR, 2019). A key aspect of Uganda's approach is that refugees are integrated into the National Development Plan, which ensures that refugees are formally part of the development agenda of Uganda (see Uganda United Nations Country Team and the World Bank, 2017, in their discussion of the Ugandan Refugee and Host Population Empowerment [ReHOPE] Strategic Framework).

Despite being far more flexible than the refugee policies of Bangladesh, Thailand or Ethiopia, the Ugandan system has received strong criticism. Schiltz et al (2019) and Kaiser (2006) both highlight the insufficient resources provided to refugees living in settlements for them to become self-reliant, while Kaiser goes on to describe how the remoteness of the settlements results in infertile soil and poor access to markets, communication and transport systems. Further, while officially enjoying freedom of movement, refugees are usually still required to obtain administrative permits to leave and return to their designated settlements (World Bank 2016); in any case, they are effectively restricted to their settlements due to the lack of support afforded to them in urban areas, where they fall outside the

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scope of Uganda's formal refugee policies and become 'invisible' (Hovil 2018). Finally, the merits of the Ugandan policy must be considered in light of the various motives at play. Hovil (ibid, p. 3) perhaps best makes the point: "Uganda's progressive refugee policies have been shaped and adopted as part of a broader strategy of engagement with the international community that has sought to boost Uganda's reputation and guarantee that its government has access to much needed external development and humanitarian aid." While this should not necessarily detract from the policy, it does warrant a deeper analysis into its effectiveness and the relative returns enjoyed by the various stakeholders, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Criticism notwithstanding, there are clear benefits to the Ugandan refugee policy, which should be seen as an example of a possible alternative for the Bangladesh government. It is accepted that the granting of unrestricted freedom of movement and the right to work and own property is not possible for the foreseeable future due to the political implications (which is also unsurprising given that Uganda did not enact the relevant legislation until some 50 years after the first refugees arrived); however, settlements divided into plots of land and allocated to Rohingya households, within which they could move freely, is arguably a very reasonable approach under the circumstances, especially considering the relative similarities between the two contexts. The refugee caseloads in Bangladesh and Uganda are similar at around 1 million; a significant majority of land in both countries is rural; and the refugee and host communities in the rural areas of both countries share the same skills, religion and even language (in parts of eastern Bangladesh). In fact, the Rohingya were living in conditions very similar to this before fleeing Myanmar, the critical difference being that in Bangladesh they would not be subjected to arbitrary detention, forced labour and other human rights abuses by the Tatmadaw. Though some activists would argue that the Rohingya should enjoy full freedom of movement, a pragmatic approach designed to provide short-term solutions must involve concessions; the reality is that convincing the Bangladesh government to even allow relative freedom of movement is not an easy task. Given the highly politicised nature of the Rohingya issue in Bangladesh, rejecting the government's constraints and calling for larger-scale reform will almost certainly be met with resistance, possibly even ending the conversation. While ultimately a question of morality, in a context where refugees are enduring immense physical and psychological suffering on a daily basis, there is a strong argument that doing so would be counter-productive to the core priority in this particular moment: the achievement of interim shorter-term humanitarian solutions necessary to alleviate such hardship.

A key challenge, however, is the political risk involved with the perceived integration of the refugee population into Bangladeshi society. As noted by Kaiser (op cit), without freedom of movement from the settlements, refugees cannot survive as they cannot access the markets necessary to fully capitalise on produce grown on their plots. The challenge then is how to provide the Rohingya with access to those markets without granting unrestricted movement rights. One potential solution would be to establish settlements in areas where there are already well-functioning markets—for example, for every 50 plots at least one functioning local market will be accessible to both host and refugee community members. This set-up would support the creation of the conditions to build self-reliance while avoiding actual or perceived integration by ensuring that refugees could not move beyond their settlement without permission. Worthy of note is that, at the time of writing, the Bangladesh government is developing land on an island off the coast of Bangladesh to relocate approximately 100,000 refugees (see Banerjee 2020 for further details). While no movement has taken place yet, it does prove that the relocation of refugees to other areas of the country where they could move around freely is a realistic option. Finally, by integrating refugee support into the overall development program of Bangladesh, as was done through the Ugandan ReHOPE Strategic Framework, such support is likely to be seen as part of a larger development program that will benefit the host community, rather than a purely humanitarian initiative that will exclusively benefit the refugees.

Key to any such strategy is advocacy for the relaxation of restrictions on movements. Samuel Hall Consulting (op cit) and Maynard & Suter (op cit) emphasise the importance of engaging with local authorities at various levels to stress the mutual benefits of allowing greater access to markets, whether they be for labour, goods or services. There is also extensive academic literature on the benefits of allowing the integration of refugee communities into host communities (World Bank 2017; Assad 2018; Betts et al 2014; and Fallah et al 2018). While the sheer number of Rohingya would present challenges, advocacy for at least partial access to local markets (possibly in the form of a set-up described above) is strongly recommended, based on the success of similar Thai and Ugandan policies.

A tailored solution for the Rohingya in Bangladesh

The current discussion is focused on the role of the international community in pressuring Myanmar to create the conditions for safe repatriation, which is misdirected. It does not consider the repeated failed attempts of the West to influence Myanmar during the previous four decades and the fact that such attempts continue to have limited prospects of success today. While these efforts should continue through different means to produce better results, policy makers should also shift their attention to short-term humanitarian solutions designed to bring about improved conditions for the Rohingya while longer-term political solutions are sought. An examination of case studies in Thailand, Ethiopia and Uganda reveals a number of possible strategies. At a minimum, interventions to increase livelihood opportunities should be supported, including vocational training, apprenticeships and micro-credit

schemes. These should be complemented by advocacy to increase access to markets and trade fairs, as well as engagement of the Rohingya diaspora to provide financial and political support. Strategies such as these will provide the skills, knowledge and basic inputs to empower refugees to generate income and provide for themselves.

Only so much can be done within the limits of the camps, however, and these initiatives should be seen as a bare minimum to maintain dignity and wellbeing. In the medium-term, the international community should work with the Bangladesh government to shift the current heavily restrictive refugee policy towards allowing access to land, relative freedom of movement and the integration of refugee support into Bangladesh's overall national development strategy through a system such as the Ugandan Settlement Transformation Agenda. Formally permitting the use of land for agricultural or other purposes, providing support to start up production on that land, and ensuring access to nearby markets will not only provide the Rohingya with the means to become self-sufficient, it will stimulate the local economy. In doing so, this will generate significant benefits for the nearby host community and overall development of Bangladesh. These measures are critical to protecting the Rohingya's basic human rights while longer-term political solutions are sought, which will one day hopefully allow the Rohingya to safely return to their homes in Myanmar.

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A Feminist Future for the Pacific: Envisioning an Inclusive and Transformative Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate the lives and wellbeing of millions of people around the world; women and girls, people with disabilities, youth, older people, and sexual and gender minorities are most at risk of 'being left behind'. While confirmed cases of COVID-19 are low in the Pacific compared with other regions, the threat of the virus remains and the wider social and economic impacts are already evident. Pacific Island countries grappling with pervasive inequality, sustainable development challenges and climate change now must consider their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper envisions an inclusive and transformative feminist response focused on four key outcomes: preserving access to healthcare and essential services; promoting women's economic empowerment; protecting women and girls from gender-based violence; and supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups to express their voice and claim their rights amid the pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID–19 pandemic continues to devastate the lives and wellbeing of millions of people around the world; women and girls, people with disabilities, youth, older people and sexual and gender minorities are most at risk of 'being left behind' (United Nations 2020). On 31 December 2019 a cluster of cases of viral pneumonia were identified in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. On 30 January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus a "public health emergency of international concern", and by 11 March 2020 a "pandemic" (WHO 2020). The virus reached the Pacific just two days later on 13 March 2020, with the first case recorded in French Polynesia. Several months on, six Pacific Island countries (Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia and Papua New Guinea) have reported more than 960 cases and 11 deaths (WHO 2020). While confirmed cases of COVID–19 in the Pacific are low compared with other regions, the threat of the virus remains and the wider social and economic impacts of the pandemic are already evident.

The United Nations Secretary–General António Guterres declared: "The virus does not discriminate; but its impacts do" (United Nations 2020).

Estimates suggest COVID–19 could drive half a billion people into poverty worldwide and the number of people living in extreme poverty in East Asia and the Pacific could increase by 11 million if conditions worsen.

Estimates suggest COVID–19 could drive half a billion people into poverty worldwide (Oxfam 2020), and the number of people living in extreme poverty in East Asia and the Pacific could increase by 11 million if conditions worsen (World Bank 2020). Four Pacific Island countries (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu) are still categorised as least developed countries (LDCs) and face the prospect of graduation in the coming decade (Webb 2019). Vanuatu is scheduled to graduate from LDC status in 2020 and Solomon Islands in 2024, however, that timetable now appears uncertain. The COVID–19 pandemic threatens to reverse the development gains and progress made towards Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals across the Pacific, and risks exacerbating inequality and marginalisation for the region's most vulnerable people.

Pacific Island countries already grappling with pervasive inequality, sustainable development challenges and climate change now must consider their response to the impacts of COVID–19. The pandemic is exposing fractures in weak healthcare systems and lack of essential services, decimating economies highly reliant on women's labour participation such as tourism and hospitality, and fueling gender–based violence in a region where rates are already the highest in the world. As Pacific Island governments and development partners undertake measures to design COVID-19 preparedness and response plans, policies and programs in an attempt to "build back better" (United Nations 2020), this paper envisions an inclusive and transformative feminist response to the crisis that places women, girls and vulnerable groups at the centre of these efforts. Using a gender lens, the paper focuses on four key outcomes: preserving access to healthcare and essential services; promoting women's economic empowerment; protecting women and girls from gender–based violence; and supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups to express their voice and claim their rights amid the pandemic.

Preserved access to healthcare

The COVID–19 pandemic threatens to undermine health gains made in the Pacific over recent decades, disproportionately affecting women and girls, older people, people with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, and people who are immuno-compromised or have pre–existing medical conditions. Pacific Island countries face particular and unique challenges in providing quality, affordable and accessible healthcare given the geographic isolation, vast distances and limited resources; the pandemic will place further strain on fragile health systems. The Police Minister in Papua New Guinea stated, "The country's health system is not capable of dealing with an epidemic," (Handley & Whiting 2020) and the Government of Kiribati declared it lacks "the human resources and capacity to prevent and stop the spread of disease" (Graue 2020). The pandemic is also compounding existing crises in the region, with the COVID–19 national state of emergency in Samoa announced just one week after the state of emergency for the measles outbreak ended.

A global survey by WHO found countries are already experiencing a reduction and discontinuation of health services during the COVID–19 pandemic (WHO 2020). More than half of countries postponed public screening programs, and the majority of countries partially or fully reassigned health ministry staff to the COVID–19 response. Health services have been disrupted due to lockdown and quarantine measures, supply chain delays and shortages in procuring essential medicines and supplies, and requirements for physical distancing and use of personal protective equipment. Interruption or de-prioritisation of health services endangers and discriminates against vulnerable groups who are already most at risk of contracting the virus. It is estimated three-quarters of HIV programs globally have been disrupted by the COVID–19 pandemic (The Global Fund 2020). Hormonal and gender affirming treatments for sexual and gender minorities may also be impacted, and institutional caregiving for people with disabilities or older people will become more challenging for frontline workers to deliver.

A Feminist Future for the Pacific

While average life expectancy across the Pacific is increasing, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals for health has been uneven. Child and maternal mortality rates are on the rise across the Pacific (WHO 2017), and further increases are expected as a result of COVID–19. The pandemic will create additional barriers for women and girls to access child, maternal and sexual and reproductive health services, leading to higher rates of unintended pregnancies (UNFPA 2020). Lockdown measures have impacted contraceptive production and supply chains, with several large manufacturers in Asia significantly reducing their capacity (Purdy 2020). Pacific Island countries are also concerned with balancing health service provision against the demands of preparing for and responding to COVID–19. In Papua New Guinea, the head of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Papua New Guinea, suggested COVID–19 had made pregnancy even more dangerous for women and their babies and advised, "It's not best to plan a pregnancy this year" (Whiting 2020).

The WHO reports that prevention and treatment services for non–communicable diseases (NCDs) have been severely disrupted due to COVID–19 (WHO 2020).

This is of particular concern as people with pre-existing health conditions are at greater risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19.

This is of particular concern as people with pre–existing health conditions are at greater risk of serious illness or death from COVID–19. The Western Pacific region has some of the highest rates of NCDs in the world, accounting for 86% of total deaths (McClure 2020); diarrhoea, waterborne diseases, tuberculosis and respiratory tract infections are most prevalent. Diabetes and smoking are also widespread in the Pacific. An estimated 35% of the world's adults aged 20 to 79 years with diabetes live in the Western Pacific region (IDF 2019) and 26% of the region's population are current tobacco users (WHO 2020); both diabetes and smoking have been identified as co-morbidities for COVID–19. Lifestyle diseases aggravated by alcohol consumption and poor nutrition are becoming more frequent, with high rates of heart disease, hypertension and obesity. In Papua New Guinea, preliminary data indicates a spike in mortality rates from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases during the pandemic (McClure 2020).

Although healthcare is available free of charge across most of the Pacific, health–seeking behaviours of vulnerable groups is influenced by a range of factors during the pandemic. Quarantine, lockdowns and transport restrictions limit the autonomy and mobility of women, girls and vulnerable groups, and create additional barriers to access health services. Reduction or loss of income may limit household budgets available to spend on transport or the purchase of medicines, and additional caring responsibilities make it more difficult for women to attend appointments. Women, girls and other vulnerable groups typically have lower access to mobile phones and internet, which limits access to risk communications and public health messages that encourage continued uptake of healthcare services. Disruptions to existing services and heightened fears and anxieties around the pandemic may encourage communities to rely more heavily on traditional healers and medicine, leading to the late presentation of people with COVID–19 symptoms or other chronic illnesses.

Women are at the forefront of the COVID–19 response and disproportionally represented in healthcare, social services and caring roles, placing them at higher risk of contracting the virus. The WHO estimates that globally 70% of healthcare workers are women, and in the Western Pacific 41% of physicians and 81% of nurses are women (Boniol et al 2019). Global research indicates notable differences in employment conditions and gender pay gaps for women healthcare workers (UN Women 2020). Women frontline responders are often required to use poorly fitting personal protective equipment (Topping 2020) and more likely to be subjected to violence, stigma and discrimination from family and communities given their greater proximity and exposure to the virus. These factors are likely to lead to higher rates of stress and anxiety among frontline responders if they fear transmitting the virus to their own household; provisions such as alternative accommodation are rarely provided. There are also challenges in providing frontline workers with appropriate training and skills related to the COVID–19 pandemic, particularly for those in rural and outer island areas.

A feminist response to COVID–19 recognises the gendered impact of the pandemic and focuses specifically on the needs of women, girls and vulnerable groups. Preparedness and response plans should include robust gender, disability and inclusion analysis, and data disaggregated by gender, age and disability. Investments in child, maternal, and sexual and reproductive health should be increased including midwifery, neonatal services, and child feeding and vaccination programs. Innovative and flexible health delivery models such as tele–health should be adopted to respond to the needs of vulnerable groups, including people living in rural and outer island areas. Supply chains and distribution channels for essential medicines and contraceptives should be guaranteed, and efforts should be made to procure personal protective equipment that has been specifically designed for women frontline workers. Training and psychosocial support should be provided for women frontline workers. Risk communication materials and campaigns should be inclusive in language, format and delivery channel and specifically targeted to vulnerable groups.

Improved access to safe water, sanitation and menstrual health

The effectiveness of the COVID-19 public health response is highly dependent on reliable, affordable and sustainable access to safe water and sanitation, particularly for women, girls and vulnerable groups. In the Pacific it is estimated 45% of people lack access to basic drinking water and 70% lack access to basic sanitation – the highest of any region in the world (Minchin 2020). Given its scarcity, the use of water for drinking and cooking is often prioritised before handwashing and hygiene. Water and sanitation facilities are generally inadequate, poorly maintained and fail to meet basic needs, such as a lack of soap and water, limited privacy, and no place to dispose of used menstrual hygiene products. Access is particularly limited in health clinics, schools and workplaces, as well as for older people, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities. Together these challenges pose serious safety concerns and increase the risks of sexual and gender-based violence for vulnerable groups when using sanitation facilities. Women and girls, particularly those with a disability, from poor households, or who live in rural or outer island areas, face difficulties in accessing quality and affordable menstrual hygiene products during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost one quarter of women and girls surveyed from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu reported menstrual hygiene products had become more expensive since the beginning of the pandemic due a decrease in available income and disruptions to supply chains (Plan International 2020). Women in Fiji reported that prices of menstrual hygiene products increased by between FJ$0.50 and FJ$3 per packet (Tora 2020).Women and girls may resort to making their own products with varying efficacy, or have to travel long distances to purchase imported products, exposing them to additional safety risks. Menstrual hygiene is considered "the last taboo" (Burnet Institute 2017) in the Pacific, and cultural practices that impose behavioural restrictions on menstruating women and girls, such as being unable to cook or made to sleep outside, place women and girls at heightened risk during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate water governance challenges in the Pacific and divert essential investments towards other priorities. In urban and densely populated areas, increasing population growth is placing additional pressure on existing water services. In rural and outer island areas, Pacific Island countries face continued challenges in providing access to safe water and sanitation due to geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure and limited resources. Across the region, inadequate investment in the construction and maintenance of water resources is contributing to a growing crisis. For example in Kiribati, inadequate water and sanitation contributes to high rates of diarrheal and waterborne diseases estimated to cost the government more than A$7 million annually, or around 4% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (ABC News 2014). The impact of poor water and sanitation services falls disproportionately on women and girls who bear the primary burden of unpaid care and household duties such as cleaning, cooking, washing, and caring for children, people with disabilities, older people and ill family members.

A feminist response to the COVID-19 pandemic ensures women, girls and vulnerable groups are provided with improved access to safe water, sanitation and menstrual health:

- Increased investments in the construction of facilities such as piped water supplies, toilets and handwashing stations should be made, with a focus on healthcare clinics, schools and workplaces.

- Plans should embrace inclusive design principles that prioritise the needs, accessibility and safety of vulnerable groups, for example by including ramps, handles, lockable doors, sufficient lighting and provisions for menstrual hygiene.

- Utility connection fees should be waived for vulnerable households.

- Supply chains and distribution channels for menstrual hygiene products should be guaranteed, and prices regulated to mitigate against inflation.

- Women and girls, particularly those with disabilities or in rural and outer island areas, should be provided with dignity kits including soap and menstrual hygiene products.

- Women microenterprises should be supported through income-generating activities to equip them with the knowledge and skills to produce and sell sanitary pads.

- Risk communication materials and campaigns should be adapted to the local context and include information on menstrual hygiene.

- Women, people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities should be included in water governance leadership and decision-making.

Strengthening food security

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious threat to the food security and nutrition of women, girls and other vulnerable groups. The Pacific region is geographically isolated, with limited arable land, few resources, and highly exposed to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Most households rely on subsistence agricultural production for livelihoods and food security. Pacific Island countries typically produce less than 65% of their country's dietary energy supply domestically (FAO 2020), and depend on international commercial shipping routes to deliver food and other essential items. There is limited diet diversity across the region with many Pacific Island countries moving away from diets high in fish, fruits and vegetables to a heavy reliance on processed Western food products that are high in

salt, sugar and fat. Seven of the top ten countries for diabetes globally are located in the Pacific (World Bank 2019), and there are also high rates of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, there have been reports of increased food prices across the Pacific and some food shortages, particularly in rural and outer island areas where domestic travel has been curtailed. In Kiribati the price of rice has risen by over 50% and in Fiji the cost of popular vegetables increased between 11 to 36%, and in some cases up to 75% (Hibi 2020). Communities in Fiji are reporting frequent thefts from communal food gardens (Doherty 2020), and there are warnings of severe impacts of food supplies in Papua New Guinea (Bourke & Kanua 2020). Lockdown and quarantine measures, mobility and transport restrictions and requirements for physical distancing have impacted the ability of households to continue subsistence agricultural production to meet their basic needs. Supplies of imported fertilisers and livestock feed may also be affected.

Households experiencing a loss or reduction of income are faced with difficult choices to adjust the quantity, nutritional value or diversity of food purchased. Women and men may decide to eat less or skip meals to ensure that other household members such as children or older people can eat. This is likely to further exacerbate the poor nutritional outcomes for many in the Pacific, particularly for women and children. Women in the Pacific are often primarily responsible for the sourcing of food and preparation of meals in the household. Additional pressures stemming from a loss or reduction of income, rising food prices, food shortages, mobility restrictions, and larger numbers of household members living under one roof may place women and girls at further risk of domestic and gender-based violence.

A feminist response to the COVID-19 pandemic ensures women, girls and vulnerable groups are supported to strengthen their food security and nutrition:

- Food parcels and cash transfers should be provided to the most at-risk households.

- Food subsidies should be increased or introduced, food prices monitored, and supply chains strengthened to ensure that food can be delivered, stored and distributed in rural and outer island areas to mitigate against potential food shortages.

- Community outreach programs should be supported to continue essential nutritional support, particularly for women and children, through child-feeding clinics and provision of vitamin supplements.

- Women subsistence farmers should be provided with seeds, tools, equipment and training to promote local food production, with a particular focus on market gardens and traditional food crops.

- Refurbishments to public marketplaces should be made to ensure provisions for physical distancing and safe water, sanitation and hygiene so women market vendors can continue to trade produce safely.

Continued support for learning and education

Government-sanctioned emergency measures, school closures, and reductions in public transport in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly impacted the educational outcomes and overall wellbeing of girls and boys in the Pacific. In some cases, provisions have been made for online and distance learning programs, however, there may be a number of barriers for girls and boys to effectively access these services.

Mobile internet penetration in the Pacific is the lowest in the world, with just 38% of the region's population estimated to have access, and the quality and availability of teaching, materials and resources is likely to be limited.

Mobile internet penetration in the Pacific is the lowest in the world, with just 38% of the region's population estimated to have access (GSMA 2019), and the quality and availability of teaching, materials and resources is likely to be limited. School closures may also result in girls and boys missing out on other initiatives such as school feeding programs. While primary education is free across the Pacific region, many countries charge school fees for junior or senior secondary education, which may no longer be affordable for families who are experiencing a reduction or loss of income.

Girls and boys may lack appropriate supervision if parents or guardians are required to work outside the home during the school closures, or may be placed at further risk of domestic and gender-based violence within the home. School closures may place girls and boys at greater risk of child labour and commercial sexual exploitation and abuse as families face increased economic hardship, and place a disproportionate burden on women who traditionally undertake caring roles for children within the household. Girls and boys in the Pacific, particularly those from rural and outer island communities, often travel long distances to school each day or may reside with extended families or in boarding houses. Quarantine and lockdown measures, and disruptions to public transport and domestic travel may prevent girls and boys from returning home during the pandemic. In some countries, such as Tuvalu, there have also been reports of significant migration of families and children from the capital city to outer islands (Kitara & Farbotko 2020).

A feminist approach to education during the pandemic ensures that girls and boys are able to continue their learning and education:

- Girls and boys should be provided with access to remote learning programs and school materials that are accessible in multiple formats (radio, television and online), and tailored to girls and boys with disabilities and special learning needs.

- Free or subsidised computers and internet should be considered, and cash transfers or waivers should be provided for households to support school fees and other educational costs for secondary students.

- Alternative provisions should be made to provide girls and boys with access to school feeding programs.

- Women and those with caring responsibilities should be provided with additional support through increased investments in childcare facilities, and free or subsidised childcare in areas where these services are already available.

Promoting women's economic empowerment

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating influence on Pacific Island economies, disproportionately impacting women and vulnerable groups and exacerbating gender inequalities across the region.

The pandemic has been described as the "job killer of the century" (Doherty 2020), with 91% of Pacific businesses suffering negative impacts and a decline in revenue (Pacific Trade Invest Australia 2020). Women are overrepresented in the sectors and jobs hardest hit by COVID-19 such as tourism. The Pacific tourism industry accounts for up to 50% of economic activity in the region in countries including Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu (ILO 2020); however, the impacts of continued closure of international borders, grounding of flights and supply chain disruptions have been disastrous. For example, Cook Islands has suffered a 60% reduction in GDP since the pandemic began and 70% of tourism workers in Vanuatu have lost their jobs (Movono & Scheyvens 2020). With half of the region's population aged under 23 years (The Pacific Community 2016), a freefall in Pacific Island economies coupled with a 'youth bulge' is expected to increase youth unemployment.

Across the Pacific, men outnumber women in paid employment (outside the agricultural sector) by approximately two to one (DFAT 2020). The majority of women in the Pacific are employed in the informal economy, which is driving economic development in the region and contributing income for basic household needs. In Solomon Islands, women are responsible for around 90% (US$9–14.4 million) of the annual turnover at Honiara Central Market (IFC 2010) and in Samoa, 80% of the private sector is comprised of microenterprises, of which women are estimated to lead over 40% (Hedditch & Manuel 2010). The nature of the informal economy, characterised by precarious job security, less pay and

lack of social protection such as benefits or insurance, makes women particularly vulnerable to the economic fallout of the pandemic. Women with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities are also more likely to be unemployed or work in the informal sector. In addition to a reduction in income generating activities, women also lack options and resources to pay for care for children, older people, and people with disabilities.

International labour mobility programs provide Pacific women with important opportunities for labour participation and economic empowerment. Under Australia's Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) in 2018–19, almost one in five Pacific seasonal workers were women, with most originating from Vanuatu, Tonga and Timor-Leste (Lawton 2019). Due to international border closures and flight restrictions, some women currently holding labour mobility visas have been unable to travel to participate in seasonal work programs, exacerbating household economic insecurity and financial hardship. Some women migrant workers already engaged in seasonal work programs have been unable to return home, with an estimated 7000 workers under Australia's SWP stranded in Australia and ineligible for government benefits (Howes 2020). Some workers have been able to continue employment, however, others have been laid off or had their hours reduced. While provisions have been made to extend visas in light of continued border closures, women migrant workers may face particular challenges maintaining access to safe accommodation and healthcare, including reproductive health services in host countries during the pandemic.

The value of remittances to the Pacific is projected to decline significantly as a result of the economic impacts of COVID-19, disproportionately impacting women, girls and vulnerable groups. Remittances from Pacific labour migrants and diaspora communities provide a substantial contribution to the region's economy valued at around 10% of GDP annually, and as much as 40% of GDP in Tonga (IMF 2020). Global research suggests that while women migrant workers earn less than men and pay more in transfer feeds, they typically remit a larger portion of their earnings than men (Un Women 2020). In the Pacific, remittances are commonly used to cover essential household expenditure including food, healthcare and school fees. Women migrant workers and diaspora communities face additional challenges sending remittances home to support families during the pandemic, including reduced access to money transfer operators and digital literacy barriers, which preclude women from making online transfers. Women migrant workers and diaspora communities may also reduce or change their patterns in sending remittances home due to access challenges or a reduction or loss of income.

The COVID-19 pandemic will increase the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work resulting in additional burdens for women and girls in the Pacific. In the Asia Pacific region, women perform four

times more unpaid care work than men (ILO 2018). In the Pacific, gender roles are clearly defined and women are typically responsible for subsistence agricultural production and household duties. Closure of schools and essential services and additional pressures on health systems means women and girls shoulder the majority of work to educate children at home or care for sick family members.

The direct personal interaction required in care work means that physical distancing is difficult to practice, which places women and girls at further risk of contracting the virus. Concerns around food insecurity place additional pressures on women and girls who spend more time sourcing and preparing food. Discriminatory policies also create barriers for vulnerable groups such as sexual and gender minorities to access paid carers leave or other social protection mechanisms.

A feminist response to the COVID–19 pandemic promotes the economic empowerment of women, girls and vulnerable groups as the key to a resilient and equitable recovery:

- Economic stimulus packages should be tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups and formal social protection benefits should be expanded to include universal basic income, targeted cash transfers, and provisions for women employed in the informal sector.

- Employers should modify leave policies, such as sick leave, parental leave or carers leave, to ensure they are inclusive of women, people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities.

- Remittance transfer fees should be subsidised and partnerships sought between financial institutions and other private sector businesses to increase the accessibility of money transfer operators during the pandemic.

- Community engagement programs should be expanded with the aim of transforming gender norms and promoting the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work within the household.

- Care arrangements for children, people with disabilities and older people should be provided to relieve the burden on women and caregivers.

Protecting women and girls from gender–based violence

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating gender–based violence in a region where rates are already at crisis levels. The Pacific has the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world, with as many as two in every three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, often at the hands of a family member or intimate partner (Tlozek 2016). Gender–based violence magnifies existing inequalities in societies, with increased risks for people with disabilities and sexual

and gender minorities. Additional pressures on households and relationships such as lockdown and quarantine measures including crowded living conditions and longer periods of time inside, restrictions on movement, and increased economic hardship are exacerbating pre-existing inequalities that create conditions for increased gender-based violence towards women and girls. Since the beginning of the pandemic, women's organisations in Fiji and Tonga have reported increases in calls to national domestic violence helplines of between 54 to 500%, with almost 50% of women in Fiji reporting a direct correlation between increased violence and the COVID–19 pandemic (UN Women 2020).

Services for women and girls affected by gender–based violence are already limited in the Pacific, particularly in rural and outer island areas, and COVID-19 threatens to divert precious resources and funding away from these services. Pervasive social attitudes and gender norms across the Pacific reinforce perceptions that violence against women and girls is justified and that men have the right to control women, particularly where men consider women to be 'unfaithful' or 'disobedient'. Cases of gender-based violence are widely underreported due to prevailing stigmas and discrimination. Women and girls affected by violence face significant barriers in leaving abusive partners, including limited financial means, lack of alternative accommodation, and stigmas attached to reporting and seeking support. Quarantine and lockdowns, restrictions on movement and public gatherings, and disruptions to programs and services mean that women and girls have less mobility and autonomy and are cut off from normal support services and social networks including colleagues, extended family members, youth and sporting clubs, and church groups.

A feminist response to the COVID–19 pandemic protects women and girls from increased rates of gender-based violence:

- Preparedness and response plans should include robust gender and 'Do No Harm' analysis, and protection (including child protection) principles should be mainstreamed throughout.

- Increased investments should be made in women's organisations, crisis centres and gender–based violence support services including toll–free helplines, free confidential counselling, legal aid, case management and safe–house accommodation.

- Innovative and flexible health delivery models such as online or phone counselling should be adopted and operating procedures for safe–house accommodation should be reviewed to ensure shelters are safe for women and girls during the pandemic.

- Community outreach should be expanded, with a focus on long-term programs that aim to transform the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys.

- Frontline workers should be trained on responding to disclosures of gender-based violence and referral pathways.

Supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups to express their voice and claim their rights amid the pandemic

Policies designed to mitigate and respond to the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic also threaten to erode fundamental values of dignity, equality, human rights and civil liberties across the Pacific, particularly for women, girls and vulnerable groups. The nature of the pandemic has demanded an urgent and robust response from governments who have responded by imposing national states of emergency, international border closures, and enforced quarantine and curfew measures in several countries including Fiji and Tonga. However, this has also left limited opportunities for more thoughtful and considered policymaking that prioritises a rights-based approach and commitments to principles of transparency, accountability and inclusive participation. For example, in May 2020 the Papua New Guinea Parliament increased the state's security powers to respond to public health emergencies under the *Public Health Emergency Bill* 2020 (Australian National University 2020). The government developed the policy in haste; it provided opposition members with less than one day to review the bill, and there was no public consultation undertaken.

Many Pacific Island governments developed COVID-19 national preparedness and response plans with little or no consultation or engagement from civil society or communities. Women, people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities are underrepresented in formal leadership roles across the Pacific, with women's political participation at 8.8% (Pacific Women in Politics 2020). Given the limited role of women in leadership and decision-making, it is unlikely that women and vulnerable groups were meaningfully consulted, heard or represented during these processes. As a result, there is a risk that national plans and policies fail to address the needs and priorities of women, girls and vulnerable groups; alternatively, there is a risk that plans and policies result in measures that are intentionally or inadvertently discriminatory towards marginalised groups such as people with disabilities or sexual and gender minorities. For example, the Government of Vanuatu's (2020) newly released 'Tumi Evriwan Tugeta' Recovery Strategy 2020–2023 for Tropical Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 does not reference any specific objectives or strategies to address issues of gender-based violence or women's economic empowerment.

In some countries, extraordinary measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the infringement of civil freedoms and liberties and shrinking civil society space. Media watchdogs such as Reporters Without Borders have condemned countries including Fiji and Papua New Guinea for exploiting the crisis, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has called on governments to stop using the pandemic as "a pretext to restrict information and stifle criticism" (Robie 2020). In April 2020 Papua New Guinea's police minister accused two journalists reporting on COVID-19 with "misrepresenting" information and "publishing biased and misleading reports" (Pacific Media Watch 2020). Many national emergency measures include harsh provisions for spreading misinformation during the pandemic, including hefty fines and long jail sentences. While some countries have established dedicated COVID-19 hotlines and shared public information on government ministry websites and social media channels, information has been sporadic and piecemeal.

A feminist response to the COVID-19 pandemic supports vulnerable and marginalised groups to express their voice and claim their rights in the midst of the pandemic:

- National preparedness and response plans and policies must protect and promote human rights and dignity at the centre of the response.

- Policies and plans should incorporate robust gender, disability and inclusion analysis; and women's organisations should be included in research, data collection and needs assessments.

- Women's participation and leadership is essential for an effective response to the pandemic, and women should be included in national and local taskforces, committees, and decision-making processes.

- Women, people with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities should be offered genuine and meaningful pathways for engagement, and opportunities to inform and shape the response.

- Civil society should be strongly represented in discussions and consultations, including women's organisations, disabled peoples organisations, youth networks, and faith leaders and faith-based organisations.

- Plans and policies should be shared publically and openly with communities in inclusive and accessible formats to promote transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

The COVID–19 pandemic has already had a devastating impact on the Pacific region, risking hard–won development gains and exacerbating existing inequalities. The impacts of the pandemic are gendered and intersectional, disproportionately affecting women and girls, people with disabilities, youth, older people and sexual and gender minorities. While confirmed cases of the virus remain low, COVID–19 is placing further strain on fragile healthcare systems and essential services, with women at the frontline of the response. The impact of COVID–19 on key sectors such as tourism has significantly impacted women's economic participation, and the pandemic will increase the burden of unpaid care and domestic work for women and girls. Emergency measures such as lockdowns are impacting the autonomy and mobility of women, girls and vulnerable groups and exacerbating rates of gender–based violence. National policies and response plans risk failing to address the needs and priorities of women, girls and vulnerable groups, leading to further discrimination and marginalisation. A rights–based, inclusive and transformative approach to COVID–19 response and recovery is vital if we are to achieve a more feminist future for the Pacific.

Leader revelance response

It is critical for humanitarian leaders to situate feminist leadership principles and behaviours at the centre of the Pacific COVID–19 response, with the 'how' just as important as the 'what'. Leaders must adopt inclusive approaches that facilitate genuine and meaningful engagement from women, girls and vulnerable groups, and make intentional efforts to address barriers to their participation. Partnerships with local organisations and networks such as women's organisations and disabled peoples organisations should promote equity and diversity through sharing of power, decision–making and resource allocation. Self–care and caring for others during the pandemic should be prioritised by creating supportive, flexible and respectful working environments.

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Worthy Victims: A Critique of Neoliberalism within Humanitarian Communications

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This particular article was inspired by my participation in the Big Sleep Out on 7 December 2019. The Sleep Out is an annual fundraiser that encourages members of the public to come together on a cold winter's night in December to sleep outside in Trafalgar Square, London. One thread running through the night was the importance of all the fundraisers and the donations they had raised. Indeed, several individuals who were previously rough sleepers, would introduce themselves between the celebrity performances to thank fundraisers for their continued monetary support. While I do not dismiss the fact that the money raised is important, I believe there are instances when it is necessary to resist the temptation of ironic solidarity.

I had two very sobering thoughts during the course of that night. The first: this was not a glimpse into another's reality. It was a privileged point of observation and sympathy designed to promote a feeling of doing good through consumerism. The second: walking only five minutes away from the secured venue, I overheard an altercation between some very drunken homeless individuals. Although I could not make out their entire conversation, I did overhear them talking about the event and the awareness being raised. That awareness, ironically, was for individuals in their circumstances, but they were not allowed within the gated premises. They were still the ungrateful and unworthy victims in our capitalist system. Let us not deceive ourselves on this: they were the spectacle that we didn't want to see.

Image: Sacks of food prepared to enter Gaza strip at the Kerem Shalom border crossing Israel, 2008. Eddie Gerald / Alamy Stock Photo

Abstract

This article discusses neoliberalism in the context of humanitarian communication with a particular emphasis placed towards the *self*. The neoliberal self combines features of entrepreneurship and consumerism with the contemporary discourse of 'doing our part'.

To combat such criticism, an argument has been advanced that we must be more open to the experiences, histories, cultures, and identities of individuals that are different from ourselves. This does not mean that we should accept injustice in the name of culture. This also does not mean that we should narrow our understanding of difference whereby problems of the other 'just happen to be'. It does mean, however, that dialogue is a crucial component of understanding needs and realising that not only does justice look different in other communities, but within our highly globalised and capitalist societies no problem is solely self-determined.

Self-reflexive knowledge that discloses the sources and limits of power is therefore a key factor in moving away from a system that requires one to be identified as poor. Crucially, what this article hopes to advocate is a form of communication that is centred on a normative ethics of care.

Introduction

At its simplest, humanitarian communication frequently calls upon Western audiences to care for, and act in solidarity with, distant others (Barnett and Weiss, 2008). Given that humanitarianism is seen as one of the most important of all ethical acts, communication within this field is a tool that is rightly under continuous scrutiny. From the early emergence of 'poverty porn' and shock-effect campaigns to the use of positive imagery that overlooked the agency of the sufferer, it seems as if no form of communication within this field will ever do justice to the suffering other (Orgad, 2017). Post-humanitarian communication is no different. The market logic used in this communication assumes that emotions belong within a moral economy of scarcity, whereby instrumentalising the self is now a profitable means of increasing donations. Shani Orgad (2012, p. 78) aptly states that humanitarianism has become an "ethics of click, donate and temporary grand gestures" based on a universal, common-sense definition of 'doing our part'. This common-sense approach does not rely on any particular political ideology, except for a reductionist understanding that people suffer, and we have a moral obligation to relieve suffering. Indeed, the focus of post-humanitarian communication is primarily on the neoliberal subject, who is constructed as a form of social capital advancing social change. This paper critiques this use of neoliberalism.

The first objective of this article is to outline how post-humanitarian appeals construct an ideal victim to convince Western publics to support their causes (Chouliraki, 2010). More specifically, this article examines how the tendency to view people in terms of one dominant identity (i.e. women and children from the Global South as poor, backward and illiterate) represents a gross misappropriation of the power dynamics between the Global North and Global South (Dirlik, 1994). Crucially, we live in a world where there is remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression. Many of these persisting issues involve poverty, famines, violations of basic needs and liberties and the suppression of political freedoms, as well as worsening threats to the sustainability of our environment and social lives. All of these are issues that can be observed, in some capacity, in rich countries as well as poorer ones.

Rather, the primary aim of this essay is to illustrate the point that a myriad of power dynamics underscores our global issues. Unless we appreciate that human beings need to be located against their cultural and historical backgrounds – with their actions interpreted through systems of meaning accredited to their environments – we not only misunderstand our benevolence but also do humanitarianism a grave injustice. Indeed, suffering within our complex world cannot be dismissed using the simplistic economic rationale of gathering donations, as beneath the images of distant sufferers and the amount raised through fundraisers there are real injustices and needs that must be adequately addressed. Thus, the hope of this discussion is to engage with contemporary debate and contribute to a rethinking of how market logic is used within humanitarian communication.

The Marketing of the Self

Narrative lies at the heart of humanitarian communication, specifically in instances of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) working in the Global South. These NGOs use narrative techniques to communicate messages to potential donors in the affluent Global North. Post-humanitarianism campaigns rely on this narrative to draw audiences into the appeal by highlighting problems caused by the suffering and how one can help ease them (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010). This shifts the focus onto the neoliberal values of selfhood, a sentiment perfectly captured by slogans such as "Will you transform lives today?" and "In a time of crisis, one small act can make you a hero". Within this section, this article will seek to elaborate on two main objections towards the reliance on neoliberalism within humanitarian communication. The first objection relates to the construction of an ideal victim, and the second focuses on what Chouliaraki calls "ironic solidarity".

Our first argument is consistent with an observation made by many scholars that, put simply, women and children predominantly constitute the face of distant suffering (Mohanty, 1984; Fahmy, 2004; Dogra, 2011). This assertion is given noteworthy credence in David Campbell's (2007) content analysis of photos published in newspapers during the Ethiopian famine of 1984, which uncovered that mothers and children were featured in humanitarian communication more than any other subject. In particular, most of these images relied on the subject looking away from the camera, having blank facial expressions and displaying a passive demeanour. The most obvious implication to draw from Campbell's analysis is that photography seeks to reinforce the viewer's sense of power as a stark contrast to the hopelessness of the subject. These images encourage empathy because not only is the connotation of the innocence of a mother and child one that we can resonate with, but these frames also maintain the "deserving poor" narrative in a manner that does not make the audience feel uncomfortable (Orgad, 2017; Ong, 2019). It is within this context that the women-and-children group becomes ubiquitous across all representational sites of humanitarianism and advocacy. However, not only is this thinking contested within post-colonial and feminist scholarship, but these essentialising images of third-world women and children also become familiar emotive symbols to Western donors and form a regime of truth (Mohanty, 1984, 1991; Fanon, 1993; Dirlik, 1994; Hall, 1997; Fahmy, 2004). As Campbell fittingly concludes, these visual displays convey a geopolitical perspective that "both manifests and enables power relations through which spatial distances between self/other, civilised/barbaric, North/South, developed/underdeveloped are produced and maintained" (Campbell, 2007, p. 380).

Let us take a closer look at this discourse by using the example of the Nothing But Nets campaign run by the United Nations Foundation. This is a global campaign whose mission is to raise awareness and funds to fight malaria. In 2017, Nothing But Nets used the medium of virtual reality to narrate the story of an 11-year-old girl

named Amisa, a refugee living in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania (United Nations Foundations, 2017). Amisa encapsulates all the features of a tragic hero, as far as the Global North audience is concerned. Although she is intelligent and driven, several personal tragedies pose threats to her and her family. The military has taken her father, and two of her six younger siblings have now tested positive for malaria. As a survivor of malaria herself, she is grateful to have moved into the camp, where she hopes her two younger siblings can also fight the disease. By constructing the ideal victim, NGO communication simultaneously controls the voice of the injustice and suffering. A case in point is summed up in the following form of gratitude expressed by Amisa in the VR:

> "I love learning. I want to be a nurse when I grow up. To help deliver babies and keep people safe. But I have to stay healthy if I want to stay in school. That is why I am so grateful to get our new mosquito nets. The health workers say that the nets help prevent malaria. I wish everyone here could have one." (United Nations Foundation, 2017)

Amisa neatly exemplifies a common binary construction of the Global South girl, one where she is both a victim and a tool for development. This binary permits the Global North audience to view her as worthy of attention and help (Fahmy, 2004; Dogra, 2011). One crucial element of this doctrine is that these stereotypes of the Global South victim emphasise a few memorable and straightforward characteristics that reduce everything about the person to those traits, thus exaggerating and simplifying identities and freezing these individuals in time (Mohanty, 1991; Hall, 1997; Dogra, 2011). Needless to say, this article is not promoting that we must dismiss the fact that some of these women and children in the Global South do suffer severe forms of violence. However, it is equally certain that not all women and children in the Global South need saving by the West (Mohanty, 1984; Fahmy, 2004). This article is also not objecting to the descriptive use of a universal grouping of characteristics for political science purposes. For instance, it is perfectly acceptable for women and children from the continent of Asia to be descriptively characterised as 'women and children from Asia'. As Chandra Mohanty (1991) similarly contests, the problem with this universal projection arises when the women and children from Asia become a homogenous sociological grouping that symbolises a shared history of suffering and oppression. In this case, we simultaneously say far too much and too little (Mohanty, 1991; Dauphine, 2007). Indeed, this homogenising projects a simplistic account of innocent victims of problems that 'happen to be'. These constructions ignore structural issues, they permit the dynamics of power to remain in the dark and, most importantly, they romanticise the notion of saving (Dirlik, 1994; Cameron and Haanstra, 2008; Mason, 2011;Ong, 2019).

This brings us to the second objection of neoliberalism, which focuses on Chouliaraki's notion of irony. Chouliaraki (2012) uses a discussion of ActionAid's Find Your Feeling campaign to highlight the epistemic shift in humanitarian communication from a politics ofpity to one of ironic solidarity. What I find most intriguing about this account is the analysis of how the pleasures of the self have now come to shape our ethical motivations. As mentioned previously, the context of the suffering is almost irrelevant to the construction of the worthy victim. Indeed, returning to the example of Amisa, at no point is any attention paid in the VR experience to the complex terrain around Tanzanian refugee camps and the remnants of the Burundian Civil War (1993–2005), which caused many to flee their homes. This is crucial because the neoliberal form of post-humanitarian communication is concerned with calling upon us as moral actors to help (Chouliraki, 2010). However, it is almost impossible to expect anyone to respond to a call that remains founded on an incomplete understanding of the sufferer's needs. The outcome of this neoliberal portrayal is that the feeling of the self becomes the focus of the intervention (Chouliaraki, 2012). Instead of engaging debates, or a deeper understanding of our complicities in preserving global injustices, we confront a barrage of resistances and common-sense assertions so widespread that it hinders the formation of counter-hegemonies (Foucault, 1984; Tester, 2010; Nash, 2018).

It is important to briefly halt the current argument to highlight a theoretical discussion of the panopticon (Kapoor, 2005). Panopticism refers to the phenomenon of self-policing and is a concept first introduced by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Under the watchful eyes of the community, participants will perform roles agreed upon by an audience (typically the elites within society) by living up to an expectation or carrying out a socially warranted duty. The panoptic character implies that power relationships are used to determine our social norms. This affects how people interact and how information and knowledge are conveyed and exchanged. Foucault uses this logic to conclude that a society's members end up self-disciplining; that is, the society will internalise socioeconomic, cultural and patriarchal codes to establish agreed-upon moral norms (Foucault, 1984; Hunt, 1993). Prima facie, when we 'do our bit' for society – either by clickingon a hyperlink, creating a GoFundMe page, buying ethically, hosting a bake sale or taking part in a sporting event – we feel that we have fulfilled our moral duty (Mason, 2011). Indeed, our current social norms accept these actions as a promise of moral redemption in exchange for minimal effort, and this becomes our common-sense norm for enacting social change (Baaz, 2005; Tester, 2010). Through this form of communication, the audience is encouraged to focus on the self and what they can do, as these particular acts of consumption or solidarity are not selfish but are instead about helping to ease suffering (Brough, 2012; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015).

Post-humanitarian communication then becomes justified through the doctrine of consequentialism. Therefore, we are morally obligated to act because doing something is always perceived as better than doing nothing.

The crucial point to be taken from the above analysis is the idea that the wealthy Global North donors 'do their part' is, therefore, a fabricated narrative; it is one that continues to be reiterated in a form of fiction passed on from politicians, the media, the public and NGOs (Tester, 2010; Mason, 2011; Brough, 2012). Against this background, we take pride in the philanthropic notion of us helping them and 'doing our bit'. Indeed, it is certainly not an accident, I think, that my earlier objections to context and needs can be overlooked using this simple assertion of 'doing one's part'. Rather, this form of 'doing one's part' is graciously summedup by an NGO worker interviewed by Orgad:

> "The most important thing is the work we do is good; increase in funding means we can do more work and that is the most important thing – and people on the ground, are they interested in these ridiculous intellectual discussions about how they're being portrayed and your post-colonial theory from Sussex? Thank you very much! They're much more interested whether you get them some food or not." (Orgad, 2017, p. 104)

Undoubtedly, many will agree that his is a compelling argument. It is widely accepted that it is absolutely frustrating to live in a world where millions are dying unnecessarily from a lack of nutrition, medical attention or social care; where women and girls are denied education simply because of their gender; where certain communal practices breed acute misery; and where millions of individuals remain below baseline levels of absolute poverty. Donations provide quick solutions to reducing these frustrations, and falsely lead us to think we are doing good.Indeed, common-sense humanitarianism ultimately sustains itself based on the premise that we all want to be seen as doers, as active participants working towards changing our global order for the better (Tester, 2010; Brough, 2012). Undoubtedly too, the money raised through donations will do some good, but it will also project a false understanding ofthe world. Yet, the central concern is that the current debates focus too heavily on the projection of the self and self-transformation. Here, the individualis not expected to invest time and effort in learning about the plight of those they seek to help. Nor is one supposed to articulate claims in political terms regarding, for example, how resources should bespent or how to bring about sustainable change.

Instead, the focus is on how much one can raise and how one can feel like a better person. In essence, these neoliberal fictions harbour the false illusion of the affluent, self-sufficient and modern Global North individual whose donations will change the world (Mohanty, 1984; Dirlik, 1994).

This narcissistic, inward form of post-humanitarian communication acts only as a BAND-AID® hiding the fundamental structural inequalities and our complicity in perpetuating injustices.

From rhetoric to action: Uncovering the power of humanitarianism

As discussed in relation to panopticism, every society has their own common-sense norms that influence individuals' choices. People approve of behaviour that conforms to the dictates of their morality and disapprove of conduct that violates established norms (Foucault, 1984; Hausman, McPherson and Satz, 2017). Those who violate common-sense norms based on the 'doing our part' narrative typically experience guilt or shame. However, what is the point of circulating images that require people to be identified as poor and dismiss the complexities of our global power relations? The answer is not to stop NGO communication or fundraising efforts, but rather lies in a more sophisticated understanding of our actions and non-actions.

In his conception of power, Bourdieu suggests that power is culturally and symbolically created and continuously re-legitimised through an interplay of agency and structure that he calls 'habitus' (Hunt, 1993; Bourdieu, Translated by Peter Collier; 2020). The critical point in his analysis is that habitus is not fixed or permanent, and thus can be changed. Indeed, attempting to tackle current stigmatisations without challenging the underlying economic and social inequalities is futile. Put simply, the crucial point here is that changing the world for the better will inevitably involve carrying out the task of clarification, contextualisation and analysis (Shome and Hegde, 2002). This clarification does not promote superficial readings of representation, whereby we all begin discussions by stating you are a person with X identity and Y beliefs and Z history. Put another way, it is unlikely to hold out on the promise of constructing a perfect solution to the issues around representation. This has been, and perhaps will always be, a matter of endless debate. However, what this article hopes to advocate is a form of communication that is centred on a normative ethics of care. As a practice, the ethics of care responds to needs, and builds mutual concern and trust amongst individuals (Hopgood, 2008; Barnett, 2008). It is not the same as benevolence or the narcissism advocated through neoliberal values.

Rather, relationships of care must be reciprocal and built on a mutual understanding of needs. Aspost-colonial scholarship has reiterated, venomously, in recent debates, there are significant dangers inherent in perspectives that believe it is self-evident that all human beings have some interests in common (Spivak, 1988; Dirlik, 1994; Shome and Hegde, 2002). Through open dialogue, this mutual understanding can be captured to prevent a strict imposition of alien beliefs and practices on supposedly 'backward' cultures (Sen, 2000). Similarly, Virginia Held provides a comprehensive analysis of the ethics of care and aptly captures the position that I hope humanitarian communication will begin to seek, whereby "to be a caring person requires more than the

right motives or dispositions. It requires the ability to engage in the practice of care, and the exercise of this ability" (2006, p. 49). This is desirable in working towards building more authentic relationships of learning and moving away from the commodification of suffering forshort-term benefits, a sentiment that must be captured in all forms of humanitarian communication.

It is true that arguments made in the last few paragraphs have represented a move towards a normative understanding of humanitarian communication, and on that basis, may be criticised for being too generic. However, before ending this discussion, let me highlight a practical example of post-humanitarian communication that perfectly captures the perspective being advanced.

At the end of 2004, there was a significant international humanitarian response to assist those suffering inthe aftermath the Indonesian earthquake and the Indian Ocean tsunami (Redfield, 2008). Following this, there was a moral outpouring of donations ushered in by the international community. At the height of this moral commitment, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announced that they would no longer be seeking donations for this specific cause because they had already far exceeded their fundraising goals and any further donations would have been worthless. They understood their limitations; despite the tremendous suffering from the natural disaster and the huge levels of destruction, there was relatively little disease. The organisation instead used their communication to ask contributors to allow funds to be redirected to less well-publicised projects. Following the analysis of Peter Redfield, it is fair for us to understand that suffering will, unfortunately, always continue; however, by halting fundraising, MSF understood their role and power within humanitarianism (Redfield, 2008). Indeed, without ignoring the importance of economics, the usefulness of wealth lies in the things that it allows us to do; it is an instrumental tool to help us achieve long-term substantive freedoms (Nodding, 1986; Sen, 2000; Hopgood, 2008; Aristotle, Ross and Brown, 2009). It is important then to emphasise this instrumental use of wealth, as there are plenty of other significant influences on our lives. Rather, the impact of wealth on our lives is surely contingent upon other factors. Therefore, what is particularly admirable from this account of MSF's actions is their rejection of our norms around common-sense humanitarianism, that confuse charitable donations with the alleviation of widespread institutional destitution, which often promises far more than it can ever deliver.

Fundamentally, it is safe to say that post-humanitarian communication that relies on the construction of solidarity and celebrates the neoliberal self-gaze fails to highlight the radical differences and inequalities between the Global North and Global South, and injustice and global exploitation more broadly (Chouliaraki, 2010, 2012; Brough, 2012). Failure to address problems around the self as an expression of care for the Global South 'victim' results in the acceptance of the general commodification of social relations, which prevents a complete understanding of suffering or injustice within our global society (Tester, 2010; Dirlik, 1994; Shome and Hegde, 2002; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015). Indeed, it is common, but often a mistake, for NGO campaigns to advance the view that social change flows directly and immediately from the exposure of donors' fundraising efforts. Instead, social change presents the biggest gap between rhetoric and behaviour. Post-humanitarian communication may promise and promote rhetoric advancing change but translating this into sustainable action takes time. Admittedly, it is indisputably easier and more appealing to accept post-humanitarian communication. Nonetheless, it is difficult to understand why this should be regarded as a criticism of the position advanced in this article, rather than as a sharp critique of the need to change ourcommon-sense understanding of humanitarianism: a change that is sorely needed if we are to maintain humanitarianism as the ultimate ethical act (Barnett and Weiss, 2008).

Conclusion

To summarise, this article has focused on the implications of using neoliberal values of the self within post-humanitarian communications. It has been argued that instead of producing outcomes that allow vulnerable individuals to gain greater control over their injustices, the social relationship maintained through this narrative requires the beneficiary to be reduced to a reflection of their plights. Such neoliberal portrayals view Global South beneficiaries as homogeneous entities of unfortunate problems that just happen to arise, when in reality, in our globalised world, our actions and consequences remain profoundly interconnected (Dirlik, 1994; Chouliaraki, 2010, 2012). Indeed, the rhetoric of just 'doing one's part' is commonly employed to provide short-term technical solutions without seeking to challenge or contest our norms or understanding.

In essence, beneath all the victim narratives and neoliberal selfhood, there are real people whose suffering deserves to be recognised, not because they are working towards an education or are children or women but because humanitarianism demands it. If humanitarianism is the ultimate ethical act, our communication must respect humanity as an end in itself (Barnett & Weiss, 2008). Such ends are linked to the idea that we have obligations to others, which include helping others through an ethics of care that moves beyond mere benevolence and that is founded upon dialogue of mutual understanding to achieve long-term solidarity – a sentiment that must be reflected within humanitarian communications.

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From Individual Wellbeing to Collective Welfare: A New Perspective of Being and Becoming in a Post-Pandemic World

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Abstract

This article gives an overview of the twice four-dimensional logic that underpins the POZE paradigm at the individual and collective level. It is based on the understanding that human existence is a composition of four dimensions—soul, heart, mind and body, expressed as aspirations, emotions, thoughts and sensations. This individual multidimensionality reflects the collective arena, which is composed of micro, meso, macro and meta dimensions, in the form of individuals, communities, countries and planet earth.

Individual wellbeing is the cause and consequence of collective welfare, due to four principles that influence the individual and the collective sphere: change, connection, continuity and complementarity. One without the other is not sustainable. Aid must be designed and delivered with the ambition of holistic support that considers not only each dimension but contributes to the optimisation of their mutual interplay, the ultimate ambition being to lift individuals everywhere to fulfill their potential.

Introduction

When something is shattered to pieces, it cannot be fixed. The scenario that emerged as 2020 moved through the pain of COVID-19 is, on the one hand, very different from the societal setting that existed before the pandemic; on the other hand, the worst part of the pandemic derives from the prevalence of a situation that has lingered for centuries.

Trust is damaged and inequity expanded.[1] In some ways, the confidence that many people had in the systems they took for granted is now gone. From one day to the next, social gatherings, shopping, outdoor activities and travel turned from ordinary necessities to high-risk luxuries. Around the world, governments, including those of the richest nations, were overwhelmed, failing to respond on the spot to a crisis that was prone to happen sooner rather than later. In other ways, the pandemic has pulled back the veil of a systemic social paradox that has been lingering for too long. A few have (too) much, while many survive on a bare minimum. The COVID-19 conundrum puts everyone at risk of infection, yet the outcomes of that risk, and even the level of exposure to it, are heavily influenced by a person's socio-economic status. Inequity has been growing under the radar. The pandemic has put it, and us, on the spot.

2020 showed that the modus operandi of the past is inadequate. COVID-19 confronts us with the need for something different, because doing more of the same yields more of the same. Today's challenge is to neither pick up the shards and patch them together into something makeshift, nor come up with more of the same that failed before. Can we create something new?

The new normal entails an emergency that engulfs large parts of society. It illustrates that a shift away from the patchwork approach of aid to a holistic understanding of support is needed; an all-encompassing 360-degree vision of short-term interventions, medium-term investments and long-term cooperation. Following a brief overview of the present context, we will look at the parameters that underpin the propositions in this paper, at the individual level and in the collective sphere. This is followed by a deeper dive into the logic underneath, which outlines a dynamic from the inside out and from the outside in. We conclude with a summary and way forward for a post-pandemic world that is worth living.

POZE, the paradigm shift that is presented in these pages, may appear radical and yet it merely unites within a coherent framework thus far disconnected elements that were found in different disciplines over the past centuries. Nothing new is in it, yet the applied outcome can be a game-changer.[2] A brief view of the status quo makes it blatantly clear why such change is needed.

Context

COVID-19 is a reminder that humans around the world are fundamentally all the same; the result of four dimensions—soul, heart, mind and body, which find their expression in aspirations, emotions, thoughts and sensations. Thus, the unfolding situation may either serve as a social equaliser, because it affects people independently from their passport, income, skin colour, gender and skills, or it may cultivate a groundswell of drastic disconnection. Everyone is affected by the coronavirus and the measures to contain it, directly or indirectly; yet the way in which individuals are impacted by the situation varies dramatically, on a physical, mental, social and material level.[3] The present discrepancy of equal exposure/unequal outcome derives from the systemic setting that we have been evolving in, individually and collectively over the past centuries.

Until March 2020, it was possible for many people and governments to ignore the division that marks society. No longer, "because now, in the era of the virus, a poor person's sickness can affect a wealthy society's health" (Roy 2020), COVID-19 does not discriminate between those who get infected—from stars to subway workers, housewives to academics, and beyond gender and paychecks, across nations and literacy levels, people fall sick, some of them fatally. It is a context that is prone to panic and fear, to isolation and xenophobia. But the experience that sick people and their families go through depends on money and location. If you are poor and/or live in a low-income neighbourhood, your chances of getting severely sick or dying are significantly heightened, while the likelihood of quality healthcare diminishes dramatically. The universality of impact coupled with the unequal chances of survival is a prime illustration of the systemic social paradox that has shaped our collective existence for centuries. Reality unfolds into a frail scenario in which few have a lot and many have (too) little, while the sum of resources would suffice to cover everyone's essential needs. A shock like COVID-19 dismantles that feeble framework.

Addressing this paradox, which may appear like a Gordian knot, begins at the core of the core, at the centre of the smallest entity of our collective existence. Solving the conundrum that COVID-19 has placed in our hands begins with the aspiration of individual beings (Walther 2020c).

Individuals will influence what happens next. There are, and always have been, many factors that are out of our control. COVID-19 has brutally reminded us that whatever illusion of steadiness and homeostasis we had, it was nothing more than a temporary grip on a glitchy, morphing, dissolving and ever-evolving reality—which is by its own nature out of control. We cannot control the spheres in which we operate, but we can control how we operate in them, including with whom we interact and how. The influence that derives from these interactions influences the ultimate outcome within and among these spheres. This may seem contradictory, but it is not. Uncertainty seems to be the name of the game these days; but it always was that way.

From Individual Wellbeing to Collective Welfare

COVID-19 has merely revealed that everything can change, always and unexpectedly. Amid this omnipresent uncertainty we can, however, identify and influence the factors of certitude that exist. Four principles apply to individuals and society alike:

1. Connection: everything is linked to everything else; nothing happens in a vacuum.
2. Change: everything always evolves; nothing stays the same forever.
3. Continuum: everything is part of a whole; nothing occurs secluded from the rest.
4. Complementarity: everything needs something else to be complete; no phenomenon occurs without a counterpart that may be its opposite.

Internally, the interaction between our aspirations, emotions, thoughts and sensations influences who and how we are, what we do, and how we interact with our environment. Externally, the mutual interplay between individuals and institutions shapes the society that we evolve in, and the individuals in it. A word on each of these dimensions follows as the basic structure to organise subsequent reflections.

The ongoing interplay within this multidimensional kaleidoscope influences who we are, and what we do individually and as part of a group. These interactions between individuals and their environment shape society, which impacts the individuals that constitute it in return (Walther 2020a). A word on each of these dimensions—the individual and the collective arena—follows as the basic structure of subsequent reflections.

Individual dimensions

Our present mindset and personality (who we are) influences how we experience the world. And how we experience our environment influences how we express ourselves in it (what we do). It is a two-way road, whereby our physical action is influenced by our mental set-up and vice versa (Doidge 2011). The aspirations that underpin our actions (why we do something) motivate our decisions far beyond the rational sphere, and impact the context in which we live (where we are).

Since Plato, philosophers have described the decision-making process as either rational or emotional (Lehrer 2010). However, neuroscientific findings increasingly prove that our best decisions are a blend of both feeling and reason, depending on the situation. To influence decision-making processes, it is crucial to not only think about what we feed the brain, but also carefully reflect on how the different parts of the brain respond. Within this perspective, it is important to consider an additional angle: error. Research shows the existence of 'systematic' errors within the machinery of cognition, which cause irrational choices independent of 'corruption' by emotions (Damasio 2012). What we think and do leaves physical traces in our mental hardware (Doidge 2011). Emotions are fundamental in determining our opinions, decisions and deriving from them our behaviour. Thoughts and emotions influence each other mutually.

Let us look at the four dimensions that matter within this internal dynamic. The soul represents the essence of who we are.[4] It is the core of our being and embodies our aspirations. The desire to find meaning in everyday existence influences what we feel, think and do (Frankl 1946). The quest of why, the need of purpose, is anchored here. It naturally relates to connection with other beings, and the inherent desire of a shared existence, which involves the sharing of resources (Nowak 2011).

The second dimension relates to our emotions. Metaphorically speaking, they are of the heart. They influence how we feel about ourselves, others and life overall. Who we are and what we do is only partially the result of rational choices; our decisions are significantly influenced by our emotions (Lehrer 2007).

Emotions are commonly defined as "any conscious or unconscious experience characterised by intense mental activity".[5] Physiologically speaking, these mental activities are mostly processed in the amygdala part of the brain (Bzdok et al. 2012). They can be understood, influenced and used systematically in the process of personal and collective change dynamics.

In basic terms, emotions can be considered and studied as "simple patterned behavioral and physiological responses to specific stimuli" (Gratch and Marsella 2003). Increasingly, however, neural and psychological research suggests that there is a tight integration of emotional and cognitive processes, with emotions playing a central role in cognition and decision-making (Damasio and Descartes 1994).

The third dimension of our being is the mind. Thoughts influence our emotions and aspirations, our physical experiences and expressions, and are influenced by them (Kahnemann 2007). Thoughts, ideas and beliefs result from a complex mix of genetic disposition, education, beliefs, memories, upbringing and environment. Anchored mostly in the mind, they are influenced by hardware features such as neurological pathways, hormones, blood supply, nutrition, et cetera; and by software factors such as our past and present expressions and experiences. Thus, they stand in constant connection with the rest of our being. How we think in the present is not only influenced by who we currently are as a person; it is influenced by our past being, and it influences who we evolve into in the future.

The fourth dimension is the body, which is on the one hand the outer shell that connects and separates our internal and external realm; on the other, a channel through which we relate to the world. What happens in the physical space directly impacts our mental and emotional evolution. As an interface between the inside and the outside, the body allows us to experience the world and express ourselves in it, including in relationship to other human beings. Physiological aspects experienced via our senses influence how we think and feel. The signals taken in by our senses are direct, such as heat or colours, and indirect, such as words and the gestures of others; they are external,

looking at the outside, and internal, reflecting body signals such as pain or hunger. Furthermore, invisible factors such as the state of our microbiome, blood-sugar level, hormone balance, immune system, et cetera affect our ability to reason, our mood and our attitude toward the world (Gordon 2009).

Nothing happens in a vacuum; the body reflects our internal circumstances. Conversely, our experience of the environment impacts our internal circumstances, shaping our perspective of the world and thereby our reaction to it. Whatever happens at the centre radiates out, like a stone cast into the water. Whichever state our internal realm is in—our emotions and thoughts, which are influenced by our aspirations—impacts our perception of and interaction with the outside world (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Spiral soul to body
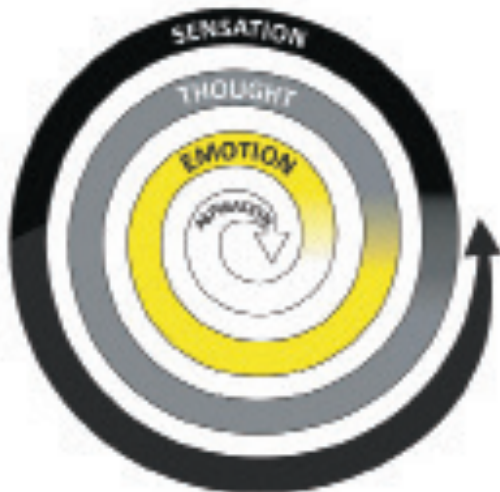
Everything is connected, from the inside out and from the outside in. Our soul finds its expression in our aspirations. These influence the heart, which is the source of our emotions. How we feel impacts our mind. How and what we think impacts our overall wellbeing, and our behavior. From the inside out and from the outside in. The body is the interface between our inner and outer realities. Experiences influence our mind and heart, our thoughts and feelings. Physical experiences influence our inner realm, while the latter shapes what our expressions, our attitudes, and our behavior in the outside world is and will be. Images supplied by the author.

Life is like a mirror. Whatever happens around us has a counterpart inside of us; inversely, what happens inside has a matching part outside. The four dimensions that influence our personal experiences and expressions reflect the four-dimensional dynamic that shape society to which we now turn.

Collective dimensions

The micro level refers on the one hand to the four-dimensional internal composition of every individual's being. On the other, it relates to the fundamental component that every individual represents in society.

Every person is at the same time part of various meso-entities, different types of institutions and communities (for example, family, church, workplace, school, political party or sports club). These meso-entities organise and unite individuals within entities that have a group identity, distinguishing them from others; they also function as an intermediary between the individual person and the subsequent macro level; the latter encompasses the economic, political and cultural spheres that we, and our lives, evolve in. Respectively and combined, these three dimensions form part of the meta-dimension which also covers nature. It should be noted here that the meta level includes supra-national organisations and entities such as the United Nations, which have a global mandate and impact (Figure 2).

Micro, meso, macro and meta dimensions mutually influence and shape each other. Whatever happens in one dimension has repercussions within and upon the other ones—immediately or eventually, directly or indirectly.

How we deal with this set-up is a matter of choice. We can focus on one dimension, while leaving aside the others. Alternatively, we have the possibility to put the panoply of pieces into a holistic vision, which capitalises on synergy, and systematically influences their causal interplay. We can leave the outcome of the constellations that influence our existence to pure chance. Then again, we can choose to consciously influence them in view of results that lead us closer to our medium-term and final goals. Acknowledging, analysing, appreciating and methodically addressing the twice four-dimensional dynamic that shapes our reality is challenging, but possible. It may appear like an overwhelming endeavour to look beyond personal interests, and, in the case of governments, national interests. Yet, what we know and have grants us a power that is far beyond anything previously imaginable.

Figure 2: Spiral from individual to planet

In the perspective of the present prism, individuals are at the same time a unit that forms part of a whole, and a four-dimensional entity that is ruled by the same interconnected dynamics that determine the collectivity which it is part of. Images supplied by the author.

This cycle of mutual influence is ongoing and constant. Aspirations influence emotions. Emotions influence thoughts, therefore decisions. Decisions result in expressions that involve sensations, forming experiences. Together, these elements create memories. If repeated many times, recreated patterns become habits that gradually result in certain character traits, which in turn trigger certain emotions during certain situations. It is a spiral that operates in both directions, from the inside out and from the outside in.

Once we understand the dynamics that underpin our own behaviour, we start to understand the behaviour of others. This two-fold understanding enables us to influence both our own behaviour and others'. An all-encompassing understanding of human behaviour is a major asset to optimise our behaviour in view of our own happiness, the happiness of others and the overall functioning of the communities that we are part of.

Every day is a test whether we are mature enough to use our own personal influence for a common good.

The logic underneath

The following is a succinct overview of the multidisciplinary foundation that this paradigm and the related change methodology draw upon.

When our soul, heart, mind and body are aligned we enter a state of inner peace, from which the harmonisation of our relationships with others flows effortlessly. Understanding the direct and indirect impact that the interplay of aspirations, emotions, thoughts and sensations has on ourselves, and on our environment, allows us to systematically develop the influence that we need. Instead of being influenced, we influence. The results of such multidisciplinary cognisance are to our own benefit and can be turned to the benefit others.

Change from the inside out

Neuroimaging shows the physiological construct that connects thoughts, emotions and physical feelings within shared neural networks. There is a functional architecture of diverse mental states that were previously seen as intangible. The brain perceives our mental states through situated conceptualisations, which combine three sources of stimulation (Barrett 2009). The first is sensory stimulation from the world outside the skin. Exteroceptive sensory signals come from light, vibrations, chemicals, sound, et cetera. The second type of stimulation comes from interoceptive sensory signals within the body (the internal milieu, which includes the microbiome that resides in the gut and has a direct connection to the brain). The third source of stimulation is prior experience, also referred to as memory or category knowledge, which

the brain makes available in part by the re-activation of sensory and motor neurons (Bzdok et al. 2012).

These three sources—sensations from the world, sensations from the body, and prior experience—are continually available. The neurological networks that process them can be thought of as the basic ingredients that form all mental processes. Whatever we experience as emotion, cognition or perception results from the combination and weighting of these ingredients. In contrast to previous beliefs, recent studies show that there is not one network for each emotion or even for the experience of emotion versus cognition. Rather, they are all part of the same network, a living spiderweb that connects every aspect of our inner and outer experience of that state called reality (Barrett 2006). Humans have evolved to decode their environment (Fliesler 2017). We unconsciously analyse what is happening long before cognitive judgement sets in. Built into the hardware of our body and brain, this intricate mechanism allows us to sense approaching events that would otherwise evade our awareness (Lehrer 2010); alerting us to patterns in our environment that are so subtle we cannot consciously detect them. The resulting 'gut instinct' is crucial for survival, but fallible. The brain's ability for pattern recognition and pattern identification may trigger suspicion of unfamiliar things or cause us to be overly reactive to people who remind us of someone (Dhaliwal 2011). The interpretation we make of an event depends on our prevailing mindset, which is influenced by both our past experiences, including upbringing and education, and current exposure to influences such as opinions and social currents.

During the first months of a child's life, only the right frontal lobe is active. It is this brain component that will eventually specialise in visual–spatial perception, creativity and emotions. During the initial phase of life, we experience and express our emotions directly (Goleman 1995), because the inhibition of the left frontal lobe is not yet coming into play. Our internal filter mechanisms are still being established. A baby cries when it's unhappy and laughs when it's happy, without a detour via the learned 'right/wrong' department of social expectation. As we grow up, our being shifts attention from the world to the self. Gradually, we are not just reacting to the world, but proactively acting in it.

Daniel Kahneman's explanation of two parallel yet complementary thought systems helps us to understand how to use intuition with care (Kahneman 2011). 'System 1' is fast, instinctive and emotional, used in situations requiring fast reaction because we face (or seem to face) immediate danger. 'System 2' is slower, more deliberative and logical. While the first is automatic, the second needs concentration and agency to process thoughts. It is part of the conscious self, which makes choices, has reasons and holds beliefs.

In the same way in which the intake and analyses of sensorial inputs happens via a spiderweb that embraces the whole body, the brain is far more versatile than presumed for a long time (Kahneman 2011). The right/

left separation that was long considered as a valid schematisation of the brain's operating system is only part of the answer. Recent evidence is consistent with a psychological constructionist approach of the mind: a set of interacting brain regions commonly involved in basic psychological operations of both an emotional and non-emotional nature are active during emotion experience and perception across a range of discrete emotion categories (Lindquist et al. 2012).[6]

Furthermore, the brain can change its own structure and function in response to mental experience, due to neuroplasticity (Doidge 2007). The brain's capacities are dynamic and trainable: "The brain is a far more open system than we ever imagined, and nature has gone very far to help us perceive and take in the world around us. It has given us a brain that survives in a changing world by changing itself."

Change from the outside in

Action and attitude shape each other, and hereby our emotions. When we aspire to be kind, generous, patient or a good listener, then we can start to induce this character trait long before it feels like a natural manifestation of our character. The brain is our best friend when it comes to the design and implementation of who we want to be.

The outside-in change dynamic works in smaller and larger ways. On the one hand, bodily posture impacts our physical, mental and emotional status. It influences our mood, memory, behaviour and stress levels. It not only eases the symptoms of depression but lessens self-focus (Cuddy 2015). Physiologically speaking, a physical pose that reflects an attitude of power—upright, square shoulders and head up—sends a signal to the brain; a neural impulse which turns into an actual, physiological response that boosts brainpower. Furthermore, posture affects hormone levels—decreasing cortisol and increasing testosterone, the latter being associated with self-confidence (Veenstra et al. 2017). On the other hand, our action impacts our experiences and memories which eventually reshapes our mindset; both metaphorically and practically speaking.

The best way to become part of social change is to be proactive.

The best way to become part of social change is to be proactive, plunging into new projects and activities, interacting with very different kinds of people, and experimenting with unfamiliar ways of getting things done (Ibarra 2015). The traditionally assumed logical sequence—think, then act—is often reversed in a personal change process. Paradoxically, we only increase our self-knowledge in the process of making changes.

Priming new habits can begin with actions that are performed consciously, even if the underlying motivation is not intuitive. Gradually, the resulting experiences will result in new habit patterns in the mind. Especially in times of transition and uncertainty, thinking and introspection may follow physical experimentation—not only vice versa. Transformation involves action, which is likely to cause discomfort if the intended change requires the individual to move out of their comfort zone. Actually, it is only outside of this zone's border that personal change occurs. As these new unacquainted behaviours are performed repeatedly, they induce changes in the physical brain circuitry thanks to neuroplasticity (Doidge 2007), which makes them ever more permanent until they feel 'normal'.

Social norms, or mores, which are the unwritten rules of behaviour considered acceptable in a group or society, result from the interplay between beliefs and behaviour, between individuals and larger communities (Bicchieri 2017). In the same way that poverty and violence are condoned in some parts of the world, avoiding and addressing these issues individually and collectively can become a new norm.

Humans are hardwired to cooperate, and whatever one does for others has benefits in both directions—for the one who acts and the one who's acted for. Moreover, benefits of pro-social action occur on four levels. The very act of giving back to the community boosts a person's happiness, health and sense of physical wellbeing (Plante 2012). Beyond benefit for the one who acts and the one who is acted for, others who witness altruistic acts experience renewed hope, appeasement and the desire to take similar action (Ramey 2016). From such an expanding attitude of kindness and care among individuals, society overall benefits as the occurrence and acceptability of inequality and deprivation shrink.

Conclusions: Revealing common ground

There are various ways to build connections between people, including surface commonalities such as nationality, language, gender, skin colour, hobbies, professions, et cetera. Depending on context, these same aspects that serve as connectors among the people of one group may become features of separation within groups and between one group and another. This has been understood and used by politicians and activists throughout time.

Untouched by these surface-linkages and separations runs the undercurrent that joins human beings across times and borders, generations and socio-economic conditions. The universal foundation that connects us are the four dimensions of our individual existence, the building blocks of humankind: soul, heart, mind and body, which find their expression as aspirations, emotions, thoughts and sensations.

No matter who you are and where you come from, how we experience the world around us, and what we do in reaction to this experience, depends on these four dimensions and their interplay.

As seen in this paper, every human being has wants and needs, feelings and thoughts; as well as painful and pleasant experiences. COVID-19 has reminded us that we are all the same. In contrast to AIDS, which served for a long time to further enshrine the stigma of certain so-called high-risk categories, such as homosexuality and drug use; and in contrast to Ebola, which only affected countries in Africa (with some exceptions), the coronavirus does not spare anyone.

If nothing else, the virus may push us out of our mental comfort zone.

If nothing else, the virus may push us out of our mental comfort zone; snap us out of the lukewarm slumber that made us believe that we are different, better, worthier and–subliminally spoken–less at risk. Being aware of our common foundation, we can shape our lives rather than be puppets pushed under by the torrential current of a crisis.

Everything is connected. Micro-level optimisation conditions the optimisation of collective dynamics. How individuals, institutions, countries and the planet interact simultaneously and cross-dimensionally determines society. Designing, developing and decorating the post-COVID-19 architecture depends on interplays as much as it derives from the respective components. Whichever road is pursued post-COVID-19, a careful balance of the risks and benefits that derive from the chosen path must precede the shifts. Assessment and action must use the prism of mutual interplays.

Our failure to prevent and prepare for an epidemiological disaster such as COVID-19 should serve as a springboard to set up and learn a solid systemic response, a cyber-epidemiological plan for the virtual space. One cannot improve the past, but it would be stupid not to project ourselves into the future.

On the optimistic side, we now have a vast panoply of technological tools at our disposition.

On the optimistic side, we now have a vast panoply of technological tools at our disposition. We are better connected and potentially better coordinated than ever before in history. And the physical and nutritional status of most people is much better than a century ago when populations in Europe emerged from World War I, many significantly weakened by malnutrition and deprivation.

We know more, have more and can do more than ever before. Today's 7.8-billion-dollar question is whether we will use this knowledge and capacity not just for our

own sake, but as part of a holistic perspective–serving everyone and hereby ourselves. The fundamental question that underpins what comes next is whether we are ready to:

1. acknowledge that each of us is driven by instinct and inclined to follow the path of the least (mental) effort; and
2. accept that we have the choice to overcome that instinct in favour of a pro-active initiative to connect for good.COVID-19 has brought challenges, but it does not mean the end of the world; it is merely the end of the world that we knew. It may sound strange, but we have been lucky this time around. The toll of COVID-19 is heavy for humans and the economy, but it could have been worse. Imagine a breakdown of the internet simultaneous to the economic downturn and the upheaval of national healthcare systems.

However, after the crisis will be before the crisis. We must seize this wake-up call to get ready for the next time, individually and collectively. Can we create a system that lifts people up to unfold their potential?

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Endnotes

1   Equity is based on the idea of moral equality, the principle that people should be treated as equals. It refers to the notion that, despite many differences, all people share a common humanity or human dignity and, as a result of this, we must consider how each of them should be treated. It is not the same as treating people equally, as we shall see; rather, it is the idea that all count in the moral calculus (Jones 2009). While inequality may derive from objective differences such as height or age, inequity is the moral judgement that disadvantages people based on these differences.

2   For details, please refer to the three books that were published by Springer Nature in 2020: Development, Humanitarian aid and social welfare: Social change from the inside out, Humanitarian work, social change and human behavior: Compassion for change and Development and connection in the times of COVID: Corona's call for conscious choices.

3   Even though the virus affects everyone, and though everyone can get infected, who de facto gets sick and how much individuals and their family are impacted is heavily determined by inequity in general, and racial inequity in particular. COVID-19 figures that are broken down by race are difficult to come by due to political resistance; however, available figures are disturbing. In many majority-white countries, people from other ethnic and racial groups have less access to economic resources; an economic vulnerability which often translates to poorer health outcomes. As of April 2020, in Chicago 72% of people who died of coronavirus were black, although only one-third of the city's population is. In the UK, of the first 2249 patients with confirmed COVID-19, 35% were non-white; though the proportion of non-white people in England and Wales is only 14% (Ro 2020). Similar discrepancies were registered in other countries, such as South Africa, Australia or Ecuador, where being in a racial minority is mirrored by economic hardship. These figures do not illustrate that certain genetic circumstances make one race more vulnerable than another to contract the disease and/or to die from it; rather they offer a dire socio-economic x-ray of our society.

4   In its most basic sense, the word 'soul' means 'life', either physical or eternal (Merriam Webster). The primary distinction between soul and spirit in man is that the soul is the animate life, or the seat of the senses, desires, affections and appetites, whereas the spirit is commonly used as a reference to the part in humans that seek a connection to God.

5   See Cabanac (2002): "Emotion is any mental experience with high intensity and high hedonic content (pleasure/displeasure)."

6   Since the onset of psychology, experts have wondered which parts of the brain are responsible for which functions. Commonly, two theories are under discussion: the locationist approach (that is, the hypothesis that discrete emotion categories consistently and specifically correspond to distinct brain regions) and the psychological constructionist approach (that is, the hypothesis that discrete emotion categories are constructed of more general brain networks not specific to those categories). Recent evidence supports the latter (Lindquist et al. 2012).