the Humanitarian Leader

CENTRE FOR
HUMANITARIAN
LEADERSHIP

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About

An independent and bold voice for people working in the aid system, the *Humanitarian Leader* provides a platform for humanitarian professionals to test ideas and insight gained in humanitarian responses in an academic setting.

We are interested in telling the stories that challenge our collective assumptions about the humanitarian system. We welcome submissions that deal with concepts of humanitarian leadership, as well as ideas useful to humanitarian decision-makers, or that interact with our core understanding of the system.

Areas of focus include international humanitarian architecture, ethics, response design and implementation, evaluation methodology, strategic foresight and innovation, but all papers must inform humanitarian leadership.

The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.

Contributors

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Cover image: 27 March, 2019. The ruins of Mosul's Old City in northern Iraq, which was heavily bombed in the battle to retake the city from Islamic State control. © Claire Thomas / Save the Children.

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Studying humanitarianism: A course audit of master's degree programs in humanitarian action

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Image: A student undertaking the Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership speaks to a colleague.
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Abstract

Humanitarian emergencies are increasing globally and the world is facing the worst human displacement crisis since the end of World War II. The number of forcibly displaced people due to conflict, violence, severe weather events and complex emergencies has reached a record high of approximately 70 million. The United Nations estimates that 235 million people will urgently require humanitarian assistance in 2021 at a cost of approximately US$35 billion.

The increase of emergencies as well as the expansion of the humanitarian sector are accompanied by growing levels of professionalisation. The past few decades are characterised by humanitarian reforms, and the emergence of new codes, standards and frameworks to provide improved, better coordinated humanitarian aid. The increasing professionalisation of humanitarian aid is also reflected in the rapid growth of professional training and formal education. University courses in the field of 'humanitarian action' are multiplying around the globe. This is especially the case at a master's level and most visible in the 'Global North'.

Despite this trend, there is no universal agreement on a core course curriculum in Humanitarian Studies. This working paper surveys 23 'humanitarian action' master's degree programmes offered in the US, the UK, Europe, Australia and Nigeria to identify key commonalities across courses. This paper does not put forth a proposal of what a core curriculum should look like; rather, it highlights core commonalities across programs. Findings presented in this working paper are preliminary and contribute to the understanding of what could qualify as part of a 'core curriculum'.

Introduction

Humanitarian emergencies are increasing globally and the world is facing the worst human displacement crisis since the end of World War II. The number of forcibly displaced people due to persecution, conflict, violence, severe weather events, war, protracted crises and complex emergencies reached a record high of approximately 70 million in 2019 (UNHCR 2019). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), estimates that 235 million people will urgently require humanitarian assistance in 2021, necessitating a total of US$35 billion to meet the needs of disaster-affected populations (OCHA 2020).

Humanitarian aid and the humanitarian sector have undergone large-scale change over the past few decades, in particular, since the 1990s. Profound failures to deliver humanitarian assistance in a well-coordinated, transparent, professional and efficient way have led to significant humanitarian reforms and paradigm shifts. New ways of working, new frameworks, codes, principles and standards have emerged (Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), 2016; James 2016). They include the introduction of the minimum standards in humanitarian response—also known as Sphere Standards—in 2000, followed by the 2012 developed Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework (Sphere Project 2011; Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA), 2012; Sphere Project 2018).

The humanitarian sector is growing financially, involves a great number of traditional and new actors, and is becoming increasingly complex (Walker & Maxwell 2009; Maxwell & Gelsdorf 2019). The need for professional humanitarian practitioners is greater than ever before. Sudden, slow-onset and complex disasters require rapid and efficient aid responses, mobilising local, national, regional and international resources and personnel. The number of humanitarian and development aid workers is increasing by approximately 6% annually (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), 2010). An estimated 570,000 field personnel work in the humanitarian sector, with growing numbers of local/national humanitarian staff and a decline in international (expatriate), staff (ALNAP 2018).

Humanitarian agencies are increasingly changing their hiring practices. Employing untrained, inexperienced or unqualified volunteers has become unsustainable. Today's humanitarian professional must have technical skills, have undertaken formal training and education—often at a postgraduate level—and have professional experience. A master's qualification is often an entry requirement for working in the humanitarian sector or filling specific senior-level positions. The majority of humanitarian employment opportunities advertised internationally through OCHA's humanitarian information service ReliefWeb clearly specifies that job applicants must hold a university degree, often at a master's level (ReliefWeb 2020).

The ongoing professionalisation of humanitarian aid and the sector is also clearly reflected in and accompanied by the rapid expansion of educational initiatives around the world. These include formal humanitarian training, short courses and higher education programs. In particular, there is a growth in academic postgraduate master-level courses in the field of Humanitarian Assistance, Humanitarian Action and Humanitarian Studies. The majority of postgraduate courses in the field of Humanitarian Studies and in allied fields—such as Emergency and Disaster Management—have only emerged over the past 20 years. They are predominantly offered in the 'Global North', including the United States of America (US), Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Rainhorn, Smailbegovic & Jiekak 2010; Johnson et al. 2013).

Despite this trend, there is no agreement on a core course curriculum in Humanitarian Studies. This working paper surveys 23 'Humanitarian Action/Studies' master's degree programs offered in the US, the UK, Europe, Australia and Nigeria to identify key commonalities across courses. This paper does not put forth a proposal of how a core curriculum should look like; rather, it highlights core commonalities and differences across programs. Findings presented in this working paper are preliminary and contribute to the understanding of what could qualify as part of a 'core curriculum'. Findings are also relevant for stakeholders involved in current and future curriculum development and re-design activities.

Scope of the course audit and methodology applied in the survey

The scope of the course audit and predetermined factors for selecting and analysing Humanitarian Action master's degree programs included:

- Master-level courses (including Master of Arts and Master of Science),
- 'Humanitarian Assistance/Aid/Action/Studies' included in the course title
- Curriculum content that focuses on humanitarian assistance/aid/action
- Anglophone courses only (or courses where the language spoken and written is predominantly English).

The strategy applied to collect data for the course audit included the following activities:

- Reviewing existing key literature on humanitarian assistance and humanitarian studies related to postgraduate master-level programs
- Using the Google search engine to identify programs. Search terms (one word per entry and a combination of words per entry), included 'humanitarian', 'humanitarian studies', 'humanitarian action/ assistance/aid', 'postgraduate', 'master(s)', 'studies', 'program', 'university', 'higher education', 'emergency', 'disaster', 'development'
- Using 'Find a University Ltd', 'Graduate Prospects Ltd' and 'Studyportals Masters' search engines/websites to identify programs
- Accessing university homepages and other program-related websites

• Accessing other publically available course-related information, brochures, flyers, and program materials.

Overall, data on 23 master's degree programs was collected as part of this particular course audit. The courses included in the data pool have been selected based on the course title, core topics, subjects and themes covered in the curriculum. Any kind of master's degrees, including Master of Science (MSc), and Master of Arts (MA), are included in the data pool. Master's programs that include additional topic foci (both in the title as well as in their course curricula), are also included in the data pool on condition that 'humanitarian assistance/humanitarianism' represents a core theme in the master's program.

Programs that cover some humanitarian aid–related aspects but have different course titles and different thematic foci (for example, Sustainable Development, Refugee [and Forced Migration] Studies, Peace and Conflict Studies, Emergency and Disaster Management et cetera), are excluded from the data pool. Discipline-specific courses (for example, Public Health, Law, Engineering and Medicine), that have humanitarian specialisations (for example, humanitarian engineering and humanitarian logistics), are also excluded. Finally, short courses, professional certifications, formal training, undergraduate programs, bachelor's specialisation and other postgraduate programs, such as graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, and diplomas, are also excluded.

Based on the outlined selection criteria, the 23 Humanitarian Action/Assistance/Studies master's programs and universities included in this survey are:

1. University of London, London, UK: MSc Humanitarian Action
2. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Geneva, Switzerland and Oxford Brooks University, Oxford, UK: MA in Humanitarian Action and Peacebuilding
3. University of Bath, Bath, UK: MSc Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development
4. London School of Economics (LSE), and Political Science, London, UK: MSc International Development and Humanitarian Emergencies
5. University of Manchester, Manchester, UK: MSc Humanitarian Practice
6. University of York, York, UK: MSc International Humanitarian Affairs
7. Brunel University, London, UK: MSc Anthropology of International Development and Humanitarian Assistance
8. Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Liverpool, UK: MSc Humanitarian Studies
9. Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA), – includes core curricula from all partner universities: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programme in International Humanitarian Action
10. Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Portugal: Master in Humanitarian Action, Cooperation and Development
11. Sciences Po, France: MA in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action

12. Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies, Geneva, Switzerland: Master of Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Action
13. School of International Training, Washington, US: MA Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Management
14. Fordham University, New York, US: MSc Humanitarian Studies
15. Fordham University, New York, US: MA in International Humanitarian Action
16. Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, Boston, US: MA in Humanitarian Assistance
17. Wheaton College Graduate School, Wheaton, US: MA Humanitarian and Disaster Leadership
18. Jesuit Universities Humanitarian Action Network (JUHAN), US: Master of Professional Studies in Humanitarian Service Administration
19. Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia: Master of Humanitarian Assistance
20. Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia: Master of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Action
21. Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia: Master of Humanitarian and Development Studies
22. University of Maiduguri, Centre for Peace, Diplomatic and Development Studies, Nigeria: Masters of Humanitarian and Refugee Studies
23. University of Ibadan, Nigeria: Professional Master of Humanitarian and Refugee Studies.

To identify central characteristics and commonalities of all 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs, the data on each program was disaggregated by the following categories:

• University/institution's name
• Department and/or faculty/school
• Program/course name
• Country
• Length of the program
• Total number of units/credit points
• Compulsory units/subjects
• Elective units/subjects
• Cost
• Delivery mode
• Research component
• Internship requirement
• Entry requirements
• Notable characteristics
• Available scholarships.

Key data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet. (The document is not attached to this working paper, but is available upon request). The spreadsheet was used as the foundation for the basic comparison of the data. There are some limitations to using this approach. They include a lack of quantitative and qualitative data retrieved from interviews, surveys, focus group discussions with course directors, lecturers, students and graduates. Additionally, more in-depth data collection and data analysis of the following aspects has not been undertaken as part of this survey: student feedback, employability upon course completion, university–industry partnerships, university rankings, academic staff's background, teaching

pedagogies, teaching materials, assessment requirements, unit learning objectives and course learning outcomes.

However, as the focus of this Humanitarian Action master's course audit focuses solely on the course structure and central course components, including key subjects and themes that form part of the curriculum, the available data is sufficient for the inquiry.

Findings

The initial online search for humanitarian assistance–related master's degree programs through various websites, including 'Find a University Ltd', 'Graduate Prospects Ltd' and 'Studyportals Masters', resulted in a listing of 387 programs offered around the world. Broken down by continent, 276 programs appeared for Europe, 67 for North America, 33 for Oceania, 12 for Asia, five for Africa, and one for South America (Studyportals Masters 2020).

Closer examination of those 387 programs showed that a large number of listed programs are not mainly humanitarian aid–focused and/or titled, but include master's degrees termed as Humanitarian Engineering, Development Studies, Humanitarian Health Management, International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Humanitarian Logistics, Risk and Disaster Science, Disaster Management, Peacebuilding and Law, among others. These and similarly titled master's courses were not included in the selection of key Humanitarian Action/Studies master's degree programs as per the aforementioned set out key selection criteria for this specific course audit. Courses that included 'humanitarian studies/action/humanitarianism' and another term (for example, 'development'), in their title—for instance, Master of Development and Humanitarian Action— were included in the list of courses under the condition that 'humanitarian/humanitarianism' appeared in the program title and presented a curriculum focus. This left a total of 23 master's courses that were included in the review and analysis for this survey. All courses except two (Masters of Humanitarian and Refugee Studies offered by the University of Maiduguri in Nigeria and Professional Master of Humanitarian and Refugee Studies offered by the University of Ibadan in Nigeria), are delivered by institutions located in the 'Global North'.

The author acknowledges that humanitarian aid–related topics, themes and specialisations are also covered by other postgraduate programs that do not meet the aforementioned pre-determined course inclusion criteria for this particular course audit. Examples include non-humanitarian titled and focused programs such as Peace and Conflict Studies, International Human Rights/Humanitarian Law, International Relations/ Studies, Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Disaster Management and Sustainable Development. Countries outside the 'Global North' offering such programs include South Africa, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Colombia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Malaysia, Thailand, China and Vietnam (Find A University Ltd. 2020; Studyportals Masters 2020).

Notably, postgraduate courses in Disaster Management are increasingly offered throughout Asia and South-East Asia. Programs in Sustainable Development are increasingly offered by universities located in the Middle East. However, those programs are often technical and discipline-specific.

For the purpose of this Humanitarian Assistance master's course audit, only those programs that met all predetermined selection criteria were included. The analysis of all 23 courses based on the aforementioned categories showed that several main themes emerged across the data: course entry requirements, flexibility, research, practical components and academic foci (core themes in the curriculum and subjects taught).

Key commonalities and similarities across master's degree programs

Course entry requirements are similar across all Humanitarian Action master's courses: the successful completion of an undergraduate degree in the same or similar field; a formal application that includes a curriculum vitae, a letter of motivation and/or letters of references in some universities; and an IELTS test score of 6.5 (in some cases, 7.0), is required where English is not the applicant's native language. Seventeen out of 23 programs included a specific IELTS test score requirement or equivalent. Seven out of 23 programs either mentioned that professional experience is preferable and/or permits applicants without a bachelor's degree to be considered for selection into the program if they hold two to five years' relevant professional experience. Nine out of 23 programs did not mention the relevance or need for previous practical experience. A strict requirement of having two to five years' of professional experience in the humanitarian sector in order to successfully apply for course entry was the case for the remaining seven out of the analysed 23 programs.

Flexibility is a major aspect of all 23 Humanitarian Action master's courses. Categories of flexibility include the length of the program, delivery mode and location. The majority of courses are either one or two years (full-time). Nearly all programs offer flexibility in studying part-time, full-time or a combination of both. This, in turn, impacts the length of the program, depending on the modality of study a student chooses. Various programs also included options to complete intensives, including overseas. Four out of 23 Humanitarian Action master's degree programs are delivered exclusively online (University of London, Oxford Brooks University, Deakin University, University of York). This allows students to study from anywhere in the world, so long as they have access to the internet. Six other master's programs are seemingly offered only on-campus (London School of Economics, University of Maiduguri, University of Ibadan, Science Po, Fordham University and Tufts University). The remaining 13 programs are delivered in a blended format (online and on-campus),—many of which include a residential or overseas intensive component (for example, University of Bath, Manchester University, Brunel University, NOHA program, Fordham University, School of International

Training). The modality of studying is connected to location flexibility. Multiple programs show flexibility in locations where students attend classes and complete other course requirements such as research, fieldwork, placements and internships. For example, the NOHA program is offered by eight European universities and allows students to choose the desired location for their compulsory semester abroad at one of NOHA's partner universities.

Research is a core requirement for all Humanitarian Action master's programs except two (two universities did not provide information on required or optional research components). The majority of programs (fourteen), require students to complete a master's dissertation/thesis. Where a dissertation is not required, students must complete a research-related capstone, undertake a research project, and/or submit a research paper as part of the program (seven). Universities that did not specifically mention a dissertation or thesis but other forms of research include Tufts University, Western Sydney University, Deakin University, School of International Training and the University of Ibadan. The majority of programs also embed compulsory research-related seminars, capstone units, workshops or certain subjects (for example, Research Methods, Research and Ethics, Research Project).

Practical components are optional or compulsory in approximately half of the 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs. Fifteen programs have no mandatory practice requirement in their curriculum. In eight out of 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs, a practical component in form of a placement, internship, training, simulation-based learning or fieldwork is a mandatory requirement for course completion. Practical components vary across universities with regard to the type of practice-based learning. For example, the NOHA program requires students to undertake 'regional training' at a partner university and complete an internship placement. Western Sydney University and Sciences Po require students to complete either an internship or overseas study exchange. The School of International Training embeds a mandatory field practicum in Jordan, Switzerland or Uganda. Wheaton College Graduate School immerses students in fieldwork, a placement, and a simulation-based field operations subject. The University of Maiduguri and the University of Ibadan encourage students to complete their compulsory internship in a refugee or internally displaced people (IDP), camp in Africa. Where a professional practice component is not a mandatory requirement, students usually are provided with the opportunity to complete fieldwork or a placement as an elective.

Academic foci, themes and subject areas that Humanitarian Action master's programs cover in their curricula (to a varying extent), include history of humanitarianism, humanitarian principles and frameworks, aid in theory and practice, key issues in humanitarian (and development), practice, and critique of humanitarian aid practice (not part of or across all programs). In addition, conflict and security,

peacebuilding, international development/ development aid, sustainable development, politics/global governance, global/public health, human rights, forced migration, refugees, displacement, politics and globalisation, reconstruction and re-building also form part of the curriculum. Finally, program foci also include technical sectors in humanitarian response, media, advocacy and communication, geographic concentrations, leadership, teamwork, self-management, fundamentals of research, research dissertation, placement/practicum, training and fieldwork.

Common themes, subject areas, research and practical components that are comprehensively integrated by the majority of all 23 analysed master's degree programs in their curricula and, thus, could qualify as common principal curriculum components, are listed in the table opposite.

Evidence shows that nearly all Humanitarian Action/ Studies master's programs include a research component in their curriculum. Another core element is the teaching and learning about the history of humanitarianism and humanitarian assistance, humanitarian ethics, principles and frameworks, as well as cutting issues faced by the sector and humanitarian practitioners. A professional practice component in form of a placement, internship, training and/or fieldwork is also a key component in the curriculum in about half of all analysed programs. Other widely shared curriculum teaching and learning contents comprise emergency and disaster management, the international system (global governance/international relations, political aspects/political economy of aid), (sustainable), development, conflict/conflict resolution and peace (building). Other thematic areas that are part of at least a quarter of all analysed master's programs include management, leadership, protection/ International Humanitarian Law (IHL), (global/public), health, and forced migration/refugees/IDPs. Only a small number of programs (5-7), embed subjects around negotiation/diplomacy, media and advocacy, human rights and gender/gender-based violence (GBV), in their repertoire of core or elective units.

Key differences across master's degree programs

Some programs have specific academic foci. Some courses place an emphasis on technical or other predominantly humanitarian sector-related aspects linked to humanitarian action. This emphasis applies mainly to the selection of elective modules and subjects that students can choose from, but may also include compulsory/core subjects. Those, for example, include food security/food and nutrition in emergencies (for example, University of York, University of London, JUHAN, Deakin University and Tufts University), climate change (University of London, University of Manchester, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies), or logistics and supply management (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and Fordham University). Emerging non-traditional themes and subject areas that some programs offer as elective or core units also

Theme or subject area	Number of programs where this is a core component in the curriculum	Number of programs where this is an optional component (that is, an elective unit), in the curriculum
Dissertation/thesis and/or other research component	22	–
History of humanitarianism and the humanitarian system—principles, frameworks, ethics, cutting issues in development and aid practice (critique of humanitarianism),	17	4
Internship/placement/practicum	8	3
Development/Development Studies and/or Sustainable Development	7	4
Disaster and emergency management	7	2
Global Governance, international relations (IR), world politics, complex humanitarian emergencies, the political economy of aid	6	6
Management	6	2
Conflict, conflict resolution, peace and peacebuilding	5	4
Protection and International Humanitarian Law (IHL),	5	2
Leadership, self-management, teamwork	5	1
Global/public health	4	6
Technical/sector-related aspects of humanitarian response	4	1
Forced migration/refugees/IDPs	4	1
Negotiation and diplomacy	3	4
Media, advocacy and communication	3	4
Human rights	3	4
Gender/feminism/gender-based violence (GBV),	3	2

Figure 1: Core themes, topics and subject areas in Humanitarian Action master's programs (table created by author based on data collection and analysis),

include anthropology (University of Manchester, Brunel University, NOHA and Sciences Po), human(itarian), resources planning and administration (University of Manchester, Fordham University and JUHAN).

Other identified differences in the analysed 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs include a varying level of interdisciplinarity. Some programs stressed the importance of interdisciplinary teaching and research, whereas other programs had a quite discipline-specific focus (for example, development studies, peace and conflict studies, security studies, social sciences, psychology, health, disaster studies and anthropology). Humanitarian Action programs are housed in various departments, faculties and schools. They include Health Science, Law and Political Science, International Relations, Human Rights and, Theology.

Furthermore, programs offered by universities in the US, the UK and Australia notably offered various exit options for students who decide not to complete the entire master's program. Options include graduate diplomas, graduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas and postgraduate certificates. Some programs target a broader-level audience, while other programs are specifically aimed at practitioners already working in the humanitarian aid sector.

Discussion and conclusion

23 Humanitarian Action master's programs from around the world were analysed as part of this specific course audit. The predetermined factors for selecting and analysing humanitarian postgraduate programs included master-level courses, 'Humanitarian Assistance/Action/ Aid/Studies' included in the course title, curriculum focus on humanitarian action, and Anglophone courses only. Based on those course inclusion criteria, the search resulted in 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs. All programs are offered by academic institutions located in the 'Global North' (for example, the US, the UK, Europe and Australia), except two programs that are offered by universities in the 'Global South' (Nigeria).

A plethora of institutions in the 'Global North' as well as the 'Global South' offer master-level programs in humanitarian aid–related fields (for example, emergency and disaster management, (sustainable), development, and peace and conflict studies). However, those programs are not specifically titled as 'humanitarian'. Moreover, they are often technical and discipline-specific programs (for example, engineering, public health and international law).

The data analysis materialised that key commonalities of all 23 Humanitarian Action master's programs included in this survey comprise course entry requirements, flexibility, research, practical components and, curriculum-related academic foci.

Acknowledging the diversity within and between different humanitarian master's degrees and in which institution's departments, schools and faculties they are housed, there is much room for differences in approach and in the belief of what constitutes 'core' or 'common' concepts.

There are a number of key themes, topics and subject areas across all Humanitarian Action master's programs that could be considered as part of a common core curriculum. They comprise a research and/or dissertation element; a mandatory or optional practical component in form of training; a placement/internship; an intensive/workshop; and overseas mobility and/or fieldwork. Another core area in the teaching curriculum is the learning about and analysis of the humanitarian system, including the history of humanitarianism, humanitarian principles, frameworks, ethics and cutting issues in theory and practice. This is followed by the teaching, learning and research in the field of emergency and disaster management, the international system (global governance/international relations, political economy of aid), (sustainable), development, conflict/ conflict resolution and peace (building). Lastly, at least one quarter of all analysed master's degrees include aspects of leadership, management, protection/IHL and (public), health, as well as refugee/IDP/forced migration–related topics into the curriculum. In the process of the data analysis, it surfaced that only a handful of programs embed compulsory or elective subjects on negotiation/ diplomacy, media and advocacy, human rights and GBV/ gender-related issues of humanitarian aid into the curriculum. A critical examination of humanitarian aid and holistic critique of the entire humanitarian sector seem to only be an emerging phenomenon in course curricula. This illustrates that Humanitarian Action master's programs are still in the process of evolving.

This course audit proves the increasing emergence of common core themes, topics and subjects across Humanitarian Action master's programs. This investigation also unveils that a number of programs differ with regard to program duration, delivery mode as well as (optional), specialisations and thematic foci.

Further research is required to answer the question of how an internationally agreed Humanitarian Action master's degree core curriculum could—or should—be designed so that it meets industry demands and prepares current and prospective humanitarians for professional practice. Future research could entail the comparison and analysis of Humanitarian Action master's course learning outcomes, core units/subjects, assessment strategies, teaching and learning pedagogies, staff composition, university–industry partnerships, student satisfaction and graduate's employability upon course completion. Finally, an analysis of humanitarian action–related programs around the globe is essential to include the voices and views of all regions around the world in the design of an agreed common curriculum for Humanitarian Action master's degree programs.

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Diversity and humanitarian negotiation

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Image: A student engages in a practical component of Deakin University's Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership course. © The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership

Abstract

The humanitarian sector has steadily pushed forward with efforts to cultivate negotiation capacity among aid workers. However, considerations of how the profile of the humanitarian negotiator might shape negotiation outcomes have been, at best, in the background of ongoing professional discussions or, at worst, entirely overlooked. This working paper aims to fill this gap. Based on semi-structured interviews and survey data, this working paper assesses the role of identity characteristics in humanitarian negotiation processes. As the interview and survey results suggest, a negotiator's profile—including identity characteristics and past professional experiences—can shape counterparts' perceptions of humanitarian negotiators; fuel humanitarians' own biases and stereotypes of their interlocutors; and feed into challenging internal organisational dynamics, as humanitarian organisations seek to promote diversity and foster inclusion and belonging among staff.

Leadership relevance

Conducting frontline negotiations is one of the most complex endeavours that humanitarian leaders undertake. The biases and stereotypes that counterparts bring to bear, as well as those that drive humanitarian negotiators themselves, can be a crucial source of strength or weakness during humanitarian negotiation processes. Indeed, an important component of humanitarian leadership is understanding the biases that shape interlocutors' perceptions of humanitarians, the biases (conscious or unconscious), shaping humanitarians' own perceptions and worldviews, and how to harness the diverse traits—due to innate characteristics or acquired experiences—across a humanitarian team to work toward better humanitarian negotiation outcomes.

Introduction

The ability of humanitarian actors to negotiate issues of access and protection hinges to a large degree on the negotiator's identity characteristics and acquired experiences. However, as the humanitarian sector has steadily pushed forward with efforts to cultivate negotiation capacity among aid workers (Grace 2020), considerations of how the profile of the humanitarian negotiator might shape negotiation outcomes have been generally relegated to the background of ongoing professional discussions. This working paper suggests the need to bring notions of diversity from the periphery to the core of how humanitarians conceive of humanitarian negotiation processes.[1]

Based on semi-structured interviews, as well as an online survey completed by humanitarian practitioners, this working paper proceeds in three parts.[2] Part one presents general observations on the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation. Part two details four key dimensions of diversity that interviewees and survey respondents deemed to be relevant to humanitarian negotiation. Part three offers concluding remarks.

General observations on the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation

This section presents five general observations that survey respondents and interviewees offered on the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation. First, there was an overwhelming sense that various dimensions of diversity are important to consider, although a recognition of their relevance varies across contexts. The majority of respondents to the online survey (68%), felt that certain characteristics and profiles could give humanitarian negotiators a clear advantage in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), region, while 11.5% believed there were certain attributes and characteristics that are more likely to put the negotiators in that region at a disadvantage. Meanwhile, 6% believed it was context specific, while the remaining 5% believed identity characteristics did not really matter. When asked whether, in their view, greater diversity in negotiation teams is an asset in humanitarian negotiations, 95% responded that it mattered either a lot or a great deal. At the same time, 95% of the survey respondents believed that any negotiation performance or action brings about more positive results if approached through an ethnic, religious or cultural lens, at least in the MENA region, which was the survey's geographic focus. Interestingly, a majority of survey respondents (63%), felt that diversity in a team brings with it a set of challenges and opportunities that are specific to humanitarian work in the MENA region, while 21% differed with that view, and 15% stated that it was very situation specific.

On the context-specific nature of these issues, one interviewee's words capture a widely held sentiment: "There are some contexts where, because of who you are, you have more credibility, goodwill or favour. Sometimes that's because of what country you come from, because of what faith tradition you're in, because of ethnicity, or because of the language you speak". In another interviewee's words: "In some countries it's all about personal relationships, and in other countries, it's completely institutional. The guy in front of you doesn't care if it's you or your colleague [who he works with] if the institution has been there for 20 or 30 years, which is the case in some countries. In others, it's very personalised, very individual". Moreover, humanitarian negotiators can lack access to the right interlocutor. Some interviewees highlighted that, in their experience, it has been 'rare' or 'very rare' that they are able to engage with an actual decision maker. Other interviewees noted variations across different negotiation experiences in this regard. "Sometimes you sit across from someone that is clearly responsible and can do something about it, and sometimes that person has absolutely no power over the situation", an interviewee explained.

Second, humanitarians acknowledge the overall lack of adequate diversity across the sector, especially in senior leadership positions, where local staff, women, and people with disabilities are underrepresented (Blackney et al. 2019). Turning to the online survey, 68% of respondents were managers of teams that consisted of five or more personnel; a clear majority of these managers (77%), believed that their teams were sufficiently diverse. At the same time, a little over half of the survey respondents (53%), stated that their organisation's staff involved in humanitarian negotiations were only moderately diverse. Interviewees acknowledged that their organisations were making some efforts, citing different examples, such as having score cards against which headquarters can assess the organisation's move toward a more diverse staff.

Third, it is important to emphasise the dynamics of intersectionality when examining this topic. The European Inter-Agency Security Forum (EISF), provides a useful framework for reflecting on diversity in the context of humanitarian work, noting that "all aid workers have a diverse profile brought about by the intersectionality between the different aspects of their personal identities. This intersectional personal identity furthermore interplays with an individual's organisational role and their relationship to their operational context" (EISF 2018: 6). Interviewees highlighted the value of leveraging different elements that collectively make up one's identity, emphasising the most useful dimensions of their profile that can allow the negotiator to connect with their counterparts and downplaying those that counterparts could perceive as 'problem' points. In the words of one interviewee, "What makes the difference is the blend of different elements, in which you stress interchangeably one element more than another depending on the context you are in. Some people are skilled in how they do that. They are good chefs d'orchestre".

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1   See Appendix for a definition of the term 'diversity'.

2   See Appendix for more details on the research methodology.

Fourth, the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation flows in two directions, impacting not only how interlocutors perceive humanitarians but also how humanitarians perceive their interlocutors. Available evidence on the relationship between diversity and successful organisational outcomes suggests that biases and stereotyping are rife throughout the humanitarian sector,[3] and survey respondents expressed a range of views regarding the extent to which humanitarian actors' biases shape their perceptions of negotiation counterparts. In this regard, 47% of the online survey responders believed that humanitarian negotiators generally tend to stereotype their counterparts in the early phases of negotiation, but quickly adjust their beliefs based on subsequent information collection. Meanwhile, 32% of survey respondents maintained that humanitarian negotiators stereotype their counterparts in general throughout the negotiation process based on the counterpart's behaviour, position and attributes. Finally, only 16% believed that humanitarian negotiators approach their counterparts with a completely clean slate and open mind, while 5% could not be categorical about the approach either way.

All noted, however, that stereotyping also represents a normal fallback position in the face of uncertainty and insufficient preparation. Stereotyping counterparts can be a useful cognitive shortcut in situations when negotiation preparation time is limited, but frontline negotiators are also aware that it can have an adverse effect when stereotyping hinders efforts to weigh different options in a systematic and rational manner. One of the common stereotypes among international staff, as one interviewee described, is that the population living in territory controlled by an armed actor is sympathetic to that actor's political views or ideology. In a similar vein, one interviewee recounted an experience in which humanitarian actors initially underestimated a rebel-group commander's sympathies toward child protection objectives:

> "In one country, we were negotiating with an armed rebel group to get access. We spoke to them about the importance of protecting children. After listening to us, the commander that was present spoke about how he joined the rebel group. He said he joined at the age of 14, so he was in the same age group as the children we were speaking about. He said it had saved his life because they had nothing to eat in his family. Had we known this about him, we could have pitched the matter differently".

Fifth, interviewees discussed challenges related to internal dimensions of diversity, inclusion and belonging, as well as effective participation in tackling unconscious biases.[4] In frontline settings, context analysis and decision-making

processes are influenced by a confluence of uncertainty and a sense of urgency; the result can be less participatory decision-making. Inclusion and belonging can be casualties of these pressures, an issue that this working paper will examine in greater detail.

Four key dimensions of diversity

This section, drawing from the interview and survey data, discusses four dimensions of identity that humanitarian negotiators themselves have highlighted as worthy of examination. This section groups these dimensions into four overarching categories: sexual orientation and gender identity; nationality, ethnicity and cultural background; age and physical attributes; and professional skills and profile.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

Interviewees for this working paper affirmed—as previous research has also highlighted —that gender can impact a negotiation due to not only the counterpart's perceptions of gender, including bias against females, but also the capacities that the negotiator brings to bear that might be linked to one's gender identity (Du Pasquier 2016). In the words of one interviewee, in some contexts, "You need, as a woman, to prove more or show more or work more on being accepted as an interlocutor". Some female interviewees discussed experiences when negotiations stalled until a female negotiator was replaced by a man. An interviewee discussed working in a culturally conservative context in the MENA region, stating, "There's a [sense] there that, as a woman, you simply will not get the same access that men will get in these places. You won't get the same respect. You're not viewed in the same way. So it's the same question of context and culture. We have to be honest in these places that, if you send a woman in, she's not necessarily going to get the same results as a man".

Furthermore, gender can become an 'aggravating' factor when combined with other dimensions of a negotiator's profile. For example, a young woman may not be taken seriously in certain situations. Similarly, being an unmarried woman can also be a disadvantage in other situations, as some counterparts may make the assumption that there is 'something wrong' with the individual. Nevertheless, several interviewees highlighted that gender is not as important as other factors: for example, the negotiator's competence, experience and suitability for the position in question. Another decisive factor, particularly with culturally conservative armed groups, is whether the woman was perceived to be respectful of local norms. Interestingly, as one interviewee pointed out, being a foreign woman also had its advantages as they were considered in some parts of the MENA region as a 'third gender' that did not fit into the perceived male or female gender boxes and for which the usual social and cultural norms and rules were suspended.

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3   See Appendix for definitions of the terms 'bias' and 'stereotyping'.

4   See Appendix for definitions of the terms 'inclusion' and 'belonging'.

Female interviewees discussed many instances in which they were able to overcome their counterpart's biases. In this sense, even in culturally conservative contexts, gender can be more of a surmountable challenge to navigate than a definitive impediment. When some female negotiators felt that their gender could be perceived as a weakness, they would try to restore the balance by casually mentioning the numerous 'tough duty stations' where they have served in the past, in order to stress the point that they had enough relevant experience and that they were competent to do the job.

Many interviewees were of the view that the female gender does not necessarily constitute a 'disabling' factor at all. Several interviewees made the point that Middle Eastern cultures had women leading negotiation teams at different moments throughout history (for example, in Iran and Palestine, et cetera). Various interviewees also pointed out the distinct advantage that women have in frontline negotiation settings. In particular, a woman can be in a better negotiating position because she can 'disarm' her counterpart. She may not project the same sheer force or flex muscles like a man; therefore, she can appear less threatening. Additionally, there can be a 'surprise effect' linked to a biased counterpart's low expectations of a female humanitarian negotiator. As one interviewee stated, "Since I am a woman, my counterparts do not expect me to carry a deep and thorough conversation. At the beginning of a conversation, I spend some time discussing general humanitarian issues. Then I take them through the military and political issues. They come along with me, but they are always a bit surprised". A humanitarian aid worker mentioned that she would deliberately put on make-up when she went to meet local authorities, as she felt that she would be better received. One especially interesting issue that emerged in the interviews was the special place that pregnant female negotiators occupied, at least in the MENA region, where the position of a mother is revered. One interviewee stated, "In one country, a woman was able to negotiate an access document. The national counterparts said that they had liked the fact that she was a pregnant woman. This is a respected role".

A woman can be in a better negotiating position because she can 'disarm' her counterpart

There can also be a gendered dimension to information gathering. One interviewee specified that, especially in a conservative country where females are 'invisible' outside of domestic environments, it can be easier for a woman to go deeper in relation to cultural understanding. Interviewees pointed out that women can be better situated to assess the humanitarian needs of the households of affected populations, as they can speak with the females in the households who are mothers and wives. Even men would feel more comfortable raising

certain personal issues with female humanitarian staff than with males. For example, during prison visits (such as those carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross), male detainees have sometimes been more comfortable opening up about their relationships with their wives and other female relatives when engaging with female delegates.

In light of these dynamics, interviewees recommended that humanitarian organisations undertake thorough analyses of counterparts' profiles to more effectively anticipate interlocutors' reactions in advance. When navigating such decisions, though, a humanitarian organisation risks becoming complicit in discriminatory behaviour. Some interviewees stated that it was important for humanitarian organisations to continue to include female negotiators, even when it is not comfortable for their counterparts, so as not to 'feed the beast' and become 'accomplices' in counterparts' biases. There is a view that a responsibility exists to represent the values for which the organisation stands and to 'push the envelope further' in order to demonstrate that the organisation supports women and is committed to empowering them.

A humanitarian organisation risks becoming complicit in discriminatory behaviour

These issues are particularly pertinent because, as a number of interviewees pointed out, sexist behaviour remains prevalent inside many organisations across the humanitarian sector. An interviewee described how proposals made by a competent woman were not taken on board when she made them; however, they were taken on board when a man made the same suggestion. Being local and a woman can be challenging when attempting to impose one's authority over the males in a team, particularly when male colleagues are older than a female supervisor.

Female interviewees stated that it takes 'thick skin' not to be discouraged by such behaviour and to insist on being taken seriously and treated fairly. "Women have to fight for space to be in frontline negotiations, as there is a tendency to try and limit the space that they have gained in that respect", one interviewee stated. Some women in more senior roles also perpetuate these gender dynamics themselves; they are part of the 'boys club' (that is, behaving like men or undermining women themselves). The feeling that women are judged by different yardsticks places female frontline negotiators under enormous professional pressure. An interviewee stated of this dynamic, "Women's failures speak for all women while a man's failure speaks for himself". According to one female interviewee, "The realisation that we are judged differently puts a lot of pressure on us. When I was younger, I was very anxious and always expected to be judged strictly even if it was not the case. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy at times". Indeed,

some female negotiators 'fall into the trap' by embodying the roles that are expected of them and that limit them from reaching their full potential as negotiators.

With sexual identity and gender identification issues, there can be a clash between key organisational values and needs

Interviewees also noted challenges that can arise for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual (LGBTQIA), humanitarian negotiators. Homosexuality is a capital offence in several countries in regions where humanitarian organisations operate, meaning LGBTQIA staff cannot be open about their sexual orientation in such contexts. Previous research has illuminated the discrimination and violence directed toward LGBTQIA staff from within their organisations (Mazurana and Donnelly 2017). One interviewee asserted that his organisation was trying to push diversity without sufficient sensitivity or understanding of the context on the ground: for example, sending two people who were gay to a location such as Darfur. In his view, while this may have served the organisational and politically correct agenda, it was ultimately counterproductive. In this sense, with sexual identity and gender identification issues, there can be a clash between key organisational values and needs. On the one hand, organisational efforts to promote diversity, inclusion and belonging as values include adopting an approach of equity during hiring processes. On the other hand, there can be a need to bring profile considerations into staffing decisions for reasons of staff security and effectiveness, given biases prevalent in the area of operation.

Nationality, ethnicity and cultural background
Nationality can have a clear influence on humanitarian negotiation processes. Interviewees relayed that being a national of a country that "does not trigger strong negative reactions" or that is associated with "positive" impressions in the counterpart can be very useful. One interviewee mentioned, "In Yemen, being half North-African would open doors. They would tell me, 'you are one of us'". Conversely, being a foreigner can be a liability. An interviewee discussed that difficulties can arise from "being labelled as a Western organisation, or potentially a Christian organisation", a challenge when engaging with "different communities who have not been in touch with us or connected to our work and our mandate".

Interviewees discussed similar dynamics for other dimensions of ethnicity, considered here in broad terms—reflecting the expansive definition that many political scientists have adopted of the term "ethnicity" (Varshney 2003: 4–5),—to include elements such as race, skin colour and religion. At least two interviewees asserted that their organisations have not sufficiently considered religious differences within a given country,

particularly those that may exist within the same religion (for example the sectarian divisions in Islam). Some humanitarian organisations erroneously assume that it is sufficient to send a Muslim to a Muslim country, regardless of their sect. One interviewee discussed the perceived benefits of sending a non-Muslim to a Muslim country beset by sectarian violence:

"I was a representative for a particular protection agency in Iraq. In 2003, when I was about to leave, I discussed with my senior managers who should come to replace me. My recommendation was that they should bring a Christian Iraqi to replace me so that the person could deal with both Sunni Iraqis and Shiite Iraqis. Being one or the other would not in my view enable the person to be firm with his/her constituencies. They did not listen to me, and in my view that compromised their role in the country after that".

Adaptability, when possible, can be an asset. One interviewee mentioned that her local colleague, a Christian, would adopt a Muslim name when he operated in a rebel-controlled area.

Many of the negotiators interviewed, specifically in relation to experiences in the MENA region, agreed that the colour of one's skin can influence counterparts' perceptions. One interviewee mentioned that dark-skinned staff had to be "the right colour of dark" from the perspective of the counterpart. Interviewees also noted that counterparts all too often assume that negotiators with darker skin are the more junior members of the team.

For international staff, there is the ever-present difficulty of cultivating an in-depth understanding of the local cultural context. Cultural dynamics can impact how negotiations unfold, including in relation to levels of formality and emotional expression, appetite for risk-taking, notions of justice, how negotiators interpret events or behaviours during the negotiation, selling styles, expectations regarding rewards and incentives, and preferences in terms of written formal agreements versus more informal oral understandings (for example, see Slim 2003; Pottier 2006; and Grace et al. 2015). One interviewee explained, "You cannot negotiate the same way with Asians, Africans, states and armed groups with different identities. You have to be culturally sensitive". Another interviewee relayed a not uncommon occurrence relevant for humanitarian negotiators from Western countries, stating, "If you're a Westerner coming into a conservative society and are offensive on a number of cultural levels, that can be very hurtful. Basic respect, basic understanding of the patterns, of the habits, is important". Cultural awareness also extends beyond matters of decorum, also playing into the negotiator's ability to analyse the context, the interlocutor and the issues at stake. In one interviewee's words:

"Cultural awareness is key, and it's actually not necessarily outward stuff, very visible stuff, like not shaking hands with women. It's whatever is lying underneath, and developing cultural awareness, taking time to learn that when you're going into a new country program. It's key to not rush into a negotiation but to spend the time and develop those skills ... I have seen, in Afghanistan, courses to guide people in the cultural awareness, and not just about the physical stuff, but about how a business transaction is done, the honour/shame element, how contracts are agreed, all of those kinds of issues. There are some trainings that exist, but there probably should be more to develop people's skills in that aspect, so they know what's going on in the room, what's not being said, so they can assess how to approach a situation".

Relatedly, interviewees discussed the impact of linguistic barriers. A language gap can be beneficial. For example, resorting to an interpreter can 'buy time' to think about one's response or one's next intervention during a negotiation. This can be useful when the conversation with your counterpart is tense or delicate. However, interviewees emphasised the detriments of a language gap. One interviewee explained:

"Many things can get lost in translation. And that also limits the ability to cultivate a good discussion. For example, in some cases you can crack a joke. There was one example where the person was citing a poem, and how do you translate that? The translator didn't know what to do with that. But the fact that the other person was citing a poem, I believe he was trying to set the tone or the atmosphere of the discussion".

The interview and survey results show a widespread acceptance of the primordial role that the interpreter plays in the negotiation team and process. A skilled interpreter can pass messages to the counterpart in a way that the foreign frontline negotiator facing a language barrier cannot. If a humanitarian negotiator engages effectively with the interpreter, the latter can be instrumental in helping the negotiator understand the culturally specific reactions of the counterpart. On the downside, a lack of 'chemistry' between the interpreter and the counterpart in a negotiation is likely to negatively affect the outcome of the negotiation. Therefore, it is very important for the interpreter to be given the opportunity to cultivate a relationship of trust with the counterpart, which is not always done in practice, nor is it always possible. In terms of joint preparation with the interpreter, interviewees pointed to the importance of agreeing on a "division of labour" and using role-playing exercises with their interpreters ahead of sensitive meetings.

These dynamics of cultural awareness and language point toward the inherent value of national staff in humanitarian negotiation processes. One interviewee recounted the usefulness of local staff in a particular challenging context, stating:

"We needed to discuss the text of a humanitarian appeal with a certain government that we knew would be tricky. Hence, after we would have our first official round of talks with them, we would send a seasoned local colleague who would explain to the government that certain things they wanted funded would not fly and that if they were to insist it would not help their interests".

Indeed, local staff can be best placed to use arguments rooted in norms that are relevant to the local population. A Western interviewee with extensive knowledge of Islamic studies discussed integrating norms rooted in the Quran into the discourse of his negotiations. He said, "Sometimes, even though I have studied Islamic studies, I don't have the legitimacy to persuade, to convince people of my point. The fact that it's me, a Westerner, saying it is the main reason why it's not convincing enough". The ultimate insight in such contexts is, he noted, "Who says something is at least as important as what is being said".

Local staff also sometimes resort to invoking the names of family members to 'buy goodwill'. As one interviewee recounted, "One of my close family members was a head of a political group, though he was not a member of the government. Still, everyone knew that he was a clean person and had an excellent reputation. I would sometimes say that I am his relative. It helped us to get access". But there is a delicate balance to strike in this regard, as one interviewee highlighted, "When we engage with communities [it is important] that we don't engage too closely that we become part of their internal decision-making process and lose the perception that we are independent and neutral in relation to them".

As these comments suggest, the embeddedness of local staff within the communities that humanitarian programs aim to serve can be a liability. As one interviewee said pointedly, "Your national staff can also have bias, that's another thing of which you have to be aware. They might be more biased towards some parts of the community than others, maybe because of similar ethnic backgrounds or because they think some people are more affected than others".

The converse challenge is that international staff can exhibit bias, as well as an unwarranted lack of trust and consideration, toward their local colleagues. Several interviewees felt that national staff have not been sufficiently consulted during negotiations, even when they clearly have useful expertise. One interviewee recounted:

"I have been in a situation where we arrived at a checkpoint with two male international staff. I am a senior national staff who knows the area well. They got out of the car and started to talk to the persons manning the checkpoints without even consulting me on what to do, when it was clear that I was the most knowledgeable among them. I think this happened because I am a national staff and a female".

A number of national staff interviewed for this study added that, in the absence of an atmosphere of mutual trust and openness, they would not automatically volunteer their views on the viability of a certain idea or course of action, especially if their views conflicted with those of senior management. Instead, they sometimes would afterward try to quietly "repair the damage" that, in their view, had been caused. Especially given that international staff hold the vast majority of senior humanitarian leadership positions (Blackney et al. 2019: 10), national staff with valuable insights about the local context, on many occasions, feel they have been excluded from pertinent decision-making processes. Respondents believed there have been many occasions in which biases have led internationals to underestimate the competencies and capabilities of local staff. Interviewees also highlighted that international staff tend to stereotype their own national staff in terms of how they imagine their web of 'loyalties'. Some national staff who were interviewed did not feel that the international staff sufficiently trusted them to do their work with impartiality and independence.

Several interviewees emphasised that the onus is on international staff to be proactive in this regard. As one interviewee elaborated, "From the perspective of someone coming into a different culture, it's not realising that you need that partnership with national colleagues. And I don't mean just working with a national colleague. I really think it's a partnering up with national colleagues that will help you out". And yet, "Sometimes people are afraid to ask", an interviewee mentioned of international staff, adding, "And don't just ask once. Ask everyone you can ask and collate the information. Also, sometimes people will only discuss these things if you are close with them, so it is important to make friends". Compounding this challenge is the sense, as a number of interviewees pointed out, that there is insufficient recognition that most of the humanitarians in international organisations are part of the 'elite' and that these organisations keep attracting the elite (particularly people who are from a privileged socio-economic background). The system tends to reproduce itself; this brings with it a certain set of problems, including the fact that humanitarians—international staff, in particular—can be perceived as elitist and inaccessible.

Overall, a common dynamic between international and national staff—and the long route that humanitarian organisations still need to traverse in terms of inclusion and belonging for national staff— is captured in the following interviewee's words:

> "We put so much pressure and so much authority and responsibility on the shoulders of our national staff in many of these places, and I think that they really do not get the credit or the respect or the attention that they deserve. Who that person knows, what family they come from, what their ethnic or religious background is can be deciding factors in the negotiation".

One interviewee highlighted that, when tensions arise with a counterpart in a negotiation, "The international has to be the one where the credit or the frustration, the anger, is directed, not the national staff member". The challenge for national staff in this regard, the interviewee continued, is to "carefully balance being seen to be merely a translator when the messages are hard, while also being an intermediary that is able to build trust with our counterparts".

Age and physical attributes

Perceptions varied among interviewees about the role of age in humanitarian negotiation. In some situations, being young can work in one's favour, as counterparts can assume that a young frontline negotiator is less competent. Respondents pointed out that "catching them by surprise" could work by proving one's competence and authority despite one's young age. In other situations, younger negotiators perceived that age predisposed counterparts to take the negotiator less seriously in ways that complicated the negotiation process. Other interviewees noted examples of military checkpoints manned by very young men who had a lot of decision-making power, which shows that age is not necessarily viewed as a requirement to elicit respect.

One interviewee pointed toward his physical fitness, among many other elements, as an attribute that has appeared to aid in his efforts to exert firmness in negotiation with armed actors. Conversely, another interviewee mentioned a colleague's physical appearance as an element that fed into an overall aggressive—and hence, counterproductive—approach. This interviewee explained:

> "Together with an international staff, I went to see a local counterpart. The international staff I was with already looked like a body builder from an American movie. Then when we arrived, he started to talk down to the counterpart a lot, almost lecturing him [about] what he should do or not do. Our counterpart was very upset by the way he talked to him, which, if we add it to the way he looked, just exacerbated the situation".

It is also worthy to note the policy attention that humanitarian organisations have granted in recent years to promoting inclusion and belonging of differently abled people in humanitarian response programming. For example, the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, developed in the context of the lead-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, articulates a commitment to meaningfully involve people with disabilities in every aspect of humanitarian program design and implementation (Handicap International n.d.).

Professional skills and profile

Whereas the dimensions of diversity thus far discussed relate to identity characteristics, much of the broader literature on diversity in organisations also considers issues such as past and present professional profile, as well as professional skills (Miller, Burke, and Glick 1998; Mohammed and Ringseis 2001; Olson, Parayitam, and Bao 2007; Mello and Delise 2015). The interviews revealed four particular issues relevant to this dimension of diversity. First, interviewees discussed how their past professional work predisposed them to acknowledge and appreciate the role that negotiation plays in humanitarian action. One interviewee grew up in a household where family members worked in international development. As a result, the interviewee understood "that humanitarian work is all about negotiation and the difficult dilemmas that that entails. Yes, I was ready, in that sense, compared, perhaps, to colleagues who enter the humanitarian world completely new to that context and might have different assumptions in the beginning". An emergency medical practitioner who was interviewed noted that, in her medical work before entering the humanitarian sector, she was always negotiating with, and for, her patients. She said, "As a professional, you negotiate for the benefit of your patient. It is natural to think that negotiation would be a part of your career".

Second, past professional history can lend legitimacy to a negotiator's profile and make it easier to forge an interpersonal connection. This can be the case, for example, when a frontline negotiator with previous military experience negotiates with armed actors. One interviewee articulated the view that military-to-military or police-to-police connections can transcend national and cultural divides.

Third, there can be benefits to assembling a team that cognitively complements one another. One interviewee discussed his experiences working with the same colleagues in multiple contexts. Their varying skillsets and approaches to analysing information and problem-solving proved to be a great asset. He said of his colleagues:

> "They knew my quirks, they knew my strengths and weaknesses … My friends and colleagues who have followed me have strengths that I don't have. They see things differently. Some of them are more deliberate. Some of them are fluent in languages that I'm not fluent in. Some people are experts in particular parts of the world. Some people know a heck of a lot more about a health or nutrition program than I do …"

Fourth, the level of the negotiator's organisational seniority can be an important dimension of the negotiator's profile. In this sense, bringing a senior colleague to the negotiation can be a show of respect. One interviewee explained:

> "When you go to talk to big actors in a country, you need to ensure you come to the table with the biggest director of your organisation, because that shows

respect. If I go somewhere to talk to the vice minister of a national department, and I am not the director of my organisation, that person will probably be disappointed because they didn't meet my boss".

Conversely, having a more senior colleague present can inherently lead to a more tense or charged interaction. One interviewee stated, "Having a foreigner, having senior management there, there are just fewer opportunities, I think. It closes certain doors. It makes it a bit more, not uncomfortable, but as if you have to come to a deal".

Conclusion

The humanitarian community is simultaneously reflecting on how to best capacitate its staff in negotiation and how to foster diversity, inclusion and belonging in terms of internal organisational policies, as well as approaches to program design and implementation. This working paper has sought to feed into both of these strands of reflections, illustrating how these two issues are, in fact, inherently intertwined. Humanitarian practitioners recognise the relationship between their profile—including their personal characteristics, as well as past professional experiences—and the humanitarian negotiation processes in which they engage. During negotiations, many humanitarians play up or down certain dimensions of their profile, depending on whether they perceive it to be beneficial or a hindrance.

This working paper concludes by highlighting two overarching challenges regarding the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation. One overarching challenge for humanitarian organisations is the potential trade-off between effectiveness and equity. On the one hand, a rights-based approach to working means treating employees in an equitable manner, meaning that one's competencies should matter and one's identity characteristics should not. On the other hand, effectiveness could entail making decisions about whom to engage for a negotiation based on the potential biases and stereotypes that counterparts have toward humanitarians and the potential 'breakthrough' in negotiations that can be realised through selecting one humanitarian rather than another, based on the aid workers' identity characteristics. Given that humanitarian organisations will continue to grapple with how far to take the process of bending toward their counterparts' biases, it is important that empirical research better understand the limits and opportunities of these decisions, and that the results of this research are brought into policy conversations.

A second overarching challenge is how to foster not only diversity but also inclusion and belonging. Promoting diversity is not enough. The more diverse the workforce, the more effort must be placed into building internal cohesion. The tensions that this working paper has explored between international and national staff show clearly the long path ahead for the humanitarian sector in this regard. This challenging process will entail bringing to the surface the biases and stereotypes that humanitarians harbour toward their own colleagues and their counterparts, in order to expose and work through these impediments to effective engagement.

The overall policy implication of this working paper is that humanitarian negotiators should approach the 'diversity' part of the puzzle in a more methodical and structured manner. Diversity is not only skin deep, but it requires a total rethink of the approach to negotiation capacity-building. Profile-blind approaches that ignore the import of identity characteristics in negotiation processes will only have limited efficacy. Moreover, humanitarian organisations will need to truly make space at the policy-making table for their diverse workforce. A cohesive investment in negotiation capacity-building, diversity, inclusion and belonging will more effectively empower humanitarian organisations to adopt a strategic approach to negotiation processes, better enabling organisations to achieve their ultimate objective: improved assistance to and protection of persons of concern.

Appendix

Methodology

This working paper is empirically rooted in three sources of data. First, extensive semi-structured interviews were conducted with 77 humanitarian actors about their negotiation experiences. These interviews were conducted by Rob Grace in collaboration with Anaïde Nahikian. The interviews were broad in scope, focusing on various aspects of humanitarian negotiation processes and capacity-building, allowing interviewees to raise issues of diversity as they deemed relevant. The interviewee pool includes practitioners with field experience working for United Nations (UN), agencies; international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs),; the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement; and professional fora and associations in the humanitarian sector. Interviewees discussed their experiences in multiple contexts, allowing for reflections on how lessons learned in one country may or may not be applicable in other contexts. Interviewees discussed humanitarian operations undertaken around the globe: in Africa (54 interviewees), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), region (40 interviewees), the Asia/Pacific region (42 interviewees), Europe (13 interviewees), and the Americas (14 interviewees). The numbers presented here reflect the fact that interviewees discussed experiences working in multiple locations.

Second, an online survey focusing specifically on diversity and humanitarian negotiation—and with a geographic focus on the MENA region—was circulated to humanitarian practitioners via the online portal of the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (CCHN). The CCHN online portal is accessible by humanitarian actors who are part of CCHN's professional network. The conditions for participation in the survey were that respondents: a), had previous experience in humanitarian negotiation, and b), had worked in the MENA region. The focus on the MENA region allowed for an examination of this issue in a context-specific manner in an area of the world facing numerous complex humanitarian crises. The survey was designed by Reem Alsalem and benefitted from substantive input from Claude Bruderlein, CCHN Director, and Andreas Kaufmann, CCHN Communications Officer. Andreas Kaufmann also provided generous technical support for the development and circulation of the survey.

Eighteen humanitarian negotiators completed the survey. A little over half of the participants (52%), were themselves from the MENA region. Respondents from the MENA region were Lebanese (2 respondents), Syrian (2 respondents), Yemeni (2 respondents), Iraqi (2 respondents), Lebanese-Brazilian (1 respondent), and stateless (1 respondent). The remaining respondents were Swiss (3 respondents), French (2 respondents), Spanish Colombian (1 respondent), Afghan (1 respondent), and Benin (1 respondent). The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed questions seeking to gauge their perspectives on the impact of diversity on humanitarian negotiations.

Third, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 13 humanitarian negotiators that have worked in the MENA region. Reem Alsalem conducted these interviews. Of these, eight were male and five were female. Only 31% were themselves from the region. These interviewees constituted a distinct pool of respondents that had not also filled out the survey. The interviews allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the relationship between diversity and humanitarian negotiation.

Key terms

Bias: This working paper understands biases to be "mental errors that skew reasoning and typically produce sub-optimal outcomes" (Adler 2005: 699).

Diversity: For the purposes of this working paper, borrowing the definition articulated by van Knippenberg, De Dreu and Homan (2004),—scholars who have examined diversity in other professional settings—"Diversity refers to differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from self" (1008). As van Knippenberg, De Dreu and Homan also note, "In principle, diversity thus refers to an almost infinite number of dimensions, ranging from age to nationality, from religious background to functional background, from task skills to relational skills, and from political preference to sexual preference. In practice, however, diversity research has mainly focused on gender, age, race/ethnicity, tenure, educational background, and functional background" (ibid). An important point to highlight is that this conceptualisation of diversity leaves open the question of which identity characteristics are actually relevant, an issue that this working paper probes.

Humanitarian negotiation: Drawing from the definition offered by the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (CCHN), "[I]nteractions with parties to a conflict and other relevant actors aimed at establishing the presence of humanitarian agencies in conflict environments, ensuring their access to vulnerable groups and facilitating the delivery of assistance and protection activities" (CCHN n.d.). The CCHN definition further elaborates, "These negotiations take place at the field level for the most part and involve a host of both state and non-state actors. They encompass an advocacy component relative to the protection of affected populations as well as a transactional component in setting the logistical and tactical parameters of humanitarian operations" (ibid).

Inclusion: One can understand inclusion to mean "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore et al. 2011: 1265). The concepts of diversity and inclusion, as the growing body of research on diversity in the humanitarian sector has acknowledged (see Blackney et al. 2019), go hand in hand. The concept of 'belonging', referring to "creating a sense of community", has also entered into the lexicon (McGregor 2019).

Stereotyping: This working paper understands stereotyping to mean "when people automatically assign specific traits or behavior to individuals based on assumptions about the group" (Adler 2005: 705).

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Revolutionary development: Why humanitarian and development aid need radical shifts

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Image: A woman makes the three-finger salute in front of police officers during a demonstration against the military coup, Yangon, Myanmar, 6 February 2021. © Aung Kyaw Htet/SOPA Images/ZUMA Wire/Alamy Live News

Abstract

A new vision for international development has been called for, and evidence indicates that the industry is experiencing broad fragmentation in terms of identified priorities, challenges, concerns and paths forward. It has most notably struggled to share power with local and national counterparts and truly embody the principles of participatory development. Meanwhile, the rate and intensity of existential crises threaten to overtake humanity's ability to adapt.

To replace deeply entrenched, unhelpful patterns (assumptions, behaviours and values), requires a new kind of thinking inspired and informed by transcendent learning processes that simultaneously lead to individual and collaborative action and transformation. This paper provides an argument which stresses the need for a seismic shift, from the still dominant underpinnings of modernism mindsets and patriarchal thought-forms towards a relational or participative consciousness that reflects feminist values and the deeply interconnected world that we live within.

The world is at a critical point of bifurcation

Humanity is at a crossroads. It will need to determine which approach to take to combat the numerous intractable issues facing the global community. The rate and intensity of existential crises threaten to overtake our ability to adapt. Today's transnational problems such as environmental catastrophe, growing poverty and inequality, unregulated capitalism, human trafficking, widespread tax avoidance, international crime, the arms trade, violent extremism, protracted warfare, nearly 70 million forcibly displaced people and pandemics have overwhelmed our institutions (Donini 2020). Notably, many religious and spiritual traditions have located this era at the heart of a transition point.

Meanwhile, a new vision for international development has been called for, and recent evidence indicates that the industry is experiencing broad fragmentation in terms of identified priorities, challenges, concerns and paths forward. It must reformulate to account for a trend that sees frequent reorganisation of foreign aid bureaucracy, proliferation of development actors, shrinking resources and rigid financing mechanisms, replacing (rather than reinforcing), local expertise and systems, compartmentalisation of projects and lack of systems thinking, and difficulties in keeping pace with technology and data (Ingram and Lord 2019). Unfortunately, the sector's power dynamics, culture, financing mechanisms and perverse incentive structures create compelling reasons to remain centralised and averse to innovation, learning and transformation (Rush et al. 2021). Numerous development analysts have sounded the alarm in recent decades that the process of development work had turned specious and drifted from its intention. Norgaard, for example, rejected modernity's definition of development, describing it as "control over nature through science, material abundance through superior technology, and effective government through rational social organisation", aiming at cultural and ecological homogenisation (Norgaard 1994; 1–6). Incontrovertible proof has arisen since Norgaard's indictment nearly three decades ago, in the form of the sixth largest mass extinction; a desire for recognition that there are different forms of knowledge as well as ways of knowing, valuing and interacting with the environment; a cultural resurgence of supra-nationalism and xenophobia; and the inefficacy of the multilateral international order. Alden et al. (2020), incisively summarise the internal excoriation the industry has put itself through in an effort to evolve, from the advent of community development to more scientific, measurable and rigorous measures of "aid effectiveness" to self-flagellation in the wake of corruption in Western multilateral institutions. In summary, the Western-centric aid model is in a flux and disintegrating quickly, as it can no longer defend "the 'fetishes' of modernisation—aggregate growth, infrastructure capacity, consumer demand, standard of living" but ignore the inherently contained threats within the model to the environment and humanity itself (Alden et al. 2020; 33).

Large, northern-based international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), are experiencing a particularly intense period of scrutiny and a crisis of legitimacy. In recent years, INGOs have undergone significant repositioning and restructuring to accommodate concerns that they are losing their grassroots orientation and becoming over-professionalised, depoliticised and less autonomous (Walton et al. 2016). In the journey to deliver large-scale projects globally, the identities of social change organisations have become lost in the milieu of "results-based management, log frames, and 'value for money' theories and tools" (PRIA 2012; 9). As a technocratic, mechanistic and reductionist mindset guides society's approach to problem-solving, in line with patriarchal conceptualisations of a "practical rationality" (Harding 1982; 238), the "science of delivery has been strangling the art of social transformation" (Sriskandarajah 2015), which has become subsumed by the myriad frameworks, guidelines, forms, toolkits and spreadsheets "nearly all based on logical rational planning models focused on audits and results", sharing "a linear input-output-outcome-impact 'theory of change'" while sidestepping "the vernacular and the local" (Scott 1998 in Wallace 2020; 40). The principal aim of this paper is to provide analysis of the internal evolution process within a sector that has not been successful, despite reforms and the introduction of new ways of working, in revitalising itself and meeting its mandate to provide well-coordinated, transparent, relevant and efficient humanitarian (and, more broadly, development), assistance (Bennet and Foley 2016), as well as offer a pathway to reinvigorating that evolution process.

Revolutionary development respects the primacy of context

It is well documented now that:

> "Legitimacy is automatically conferred on organisations that understand and conform to international rules and standards, that operate in English, that are fluent in industry jargon and that assimilate into existing processes. Legitimacy based on physical proximity, cultural affinity, operational readiness or adaptiveness, sustained access to populations and longevity of operations is undermined at best, and discarded at worst" (Fast and Bennet 2020; 17).

True reform that would cede control and prioritise local autonomy, giving power to structures and actors currently at the margins of the formal system, has yet to materialise; the sector is vulnerable to the hyper-capitalistic tendencies of competitiveness and promotion of organisational drivers for greater resources and visibility—an institutional isomorphism that sees the sector behave like corporations, but meanwhile remain risk-averse and closed to innovation (Rush et al. 2021; DuBois 2018).

Theories abound as to why the industry has struggled to surrender control to local and national counterparts. Humanitarianism and development organisations have suffered from a Western paternalism and hubris that treat the communities it serves as victims while not addressing the root causes of crises, which would require recognising the primacy of local, affected populations and first responders in having the context and knowledge to help themselves (DuBois 2018). While laudable, goals to eliminate poverty, protect all children and achieve gender equality are best achieved when interpreted and enacted by communities for themselves, and it may come as no surprise to practitioners who have worked in these areas for a long time that development programming is often seen as a condescending panacea to the perceived "pathologies" of lesser developed countries (Alden et al. 2020; 27). This is partly because "development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people—the development professionals" (Escobar 1995:81). For example, funding and influence must flow to community-based women's groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, who have expertise in tackling sexual abuse and live in the communities they serve, rather than relying on often poorly resourced, bureaucratic safeguarding mechanisms in patriarchal systems run by expatriates to prevent the sexual exploitation of recipients of aid by those who provide it (Flummerfelt and Peyton 2020). As Wallace so poignantly stated, "For them development is not a project, it is their life" (2020; 46).

Development programming is often seen as a condescending panacea to the perceived 'pathologies' of lesser developed countries

Only a fraction of international humanitarian financing reaches local and national responders; in 2018, just 1% of total bilateral aid went to local civil society organisations (CSOs), in developing countries (OECD 2020). We must see them as development actors in their own right, and strengthen their own programs and objectives. The parameters of the humanitarian community or system have been ill-defined (Willits-King et al. 2019; Currion 2018). Besides the usual suspects of national and international non-governmental organisations—UN humanitarian agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, host government authorities and donor agencies—we often fail to acknowledge the significant efforts of religious groups, military actors, the

private sector, diasporas and affected populations and other non-state actors. These parties are increasingly being incorporated into the various coordination and funding mechanisms of the humanitarian system, but continue to be sidelined and ostracised from the majority of international humanitarian financing, only recently being recognised by the 'traditional' system as key players in their own right, with their own agency and interests (Willits-King et al. 2019; Bennet and Foley 2016).

The industry continues to operate in a regressive fashion despite grandiose strategic plans calling for internal transformation

Opening up the system's funding structure to others creates obvious threats to its current members, and, within most development organisations, the quest for these resources has become an objective in itself. The pressure for institutional growth often results in organisations creating programs in which they lack the competence or connections to deliver (Bennet and Foley 2016:59). One avant-garde idea posits a "global public investment fund", a system of fixed and multi-directional international fiscal allocations which support global public goods and tackle transnational issues (Glennie 2019). Funding would be deposited to local and national organisations more quickly, bypassing the convoluted international humanitarian finance bureaucracy, and reaching first responders when they need it most. Among many consequences, one impact of funding arriving too late is to miss the window for meeting critical needs, which contributes to a deteriorating situation by leaving local authorities to provide immediate relief with inadequate resources, and often results in an influx of resources when the absorption capacity of the state and affected communities is at the lowest (Willits-King et al. 2019; 15). As importantly, a global public investment fund would be considerably less patronising and propose greater equality by requiring all countries to contribute an equal share towards funding common goals. This intrinsically recognises that all nations have unfulfilled development goals.

The industry continues to operate in a regressive fashion despite grandiose strategic plans calling for internal transformation. It has been shown that "relief programs are most effective when they are integrated, locally owned, and demand driven… humanitarian action in the 21st century remains constrained by a 20th-century aid model: siloed, supply driven, and centered on the individual mandates and sectors of major international aid agencies" (Konyndyk 2019; 1), which often operate within the frameworks of former imperial powers, hinting at a colonial 'residue' which the sector cannot seem to shake. McQuade asserts that "colonialism left deep scars on the Global South and for those genuinely interested in the welfare of non-Western countries, the first step is acknowledging this" (2017). We need to name and examine the issues that emerged from the

exploitative actions of colonialist practices. We need to be self-critical and actively dismantle sometimes subtle colonial habits, challenging dichotomies of 'us and them' through language such as 'local and expat' and 'donor and beneficiary'; disrupt concepts of 'here and there' through language such as 'home and in-the-field'; and to question why our 'implementing partners' are not our 'decision-making partners'. Significant changes are needed in the way the industry approaches frontline staff, including fairer recruitment and promotion practices, equal pay for equal jobs, investment in training and support, inclusion in decision-making processes and bodies, or the nurturing of an organisational culture that recognises varied forms of expertise and knowledge.

We need to name and examine the issues that emerged from the exploitative actions of colonialist practices

Revolutionary development acts in solidarity

We must strive for a new architecture and culture that places the international community under the control of national coordination. The first step in showing solidarity with first responders could mean making a shift to "context-based (rather than expertise- or theme/sector-based), teams that are integrated across disciplines" resulting in significant changes in how development agencies organise themselves within a country, "moving away from a system of siloes reporting back to Geneva, Rome and New York, rather than to the Humanitarian Coordinator or to the leader of the government's crisis management team" (DuBois 2018:18). This includes pressuring donors to harmonise their approaches for performance management, evaluation and audits, which would reflect their shared responsibility in making the humanitarian system more effective (Konyndyk 2019; 4). Concurrently, the funding we invest in research must raise the profile of and legitimate the use of local knowledge, traditions, values and social processes which are a "critical resource in development policy making, and … local actors should be the primary agents of diagnosis and prescription" (Girvan 2007; 32). In doing so, we may encounter new (and very old but overlooked), truth-seeking traditions.

The sector must further show true solidarity with the communities they serve. Where humanitarian assistance has morphed into long-term development work, affected populations have criticised the quality and relevance of aid in recent years (OECD 2019). It is unclear, however, whether the multitude of community feedback mechanisms deployed around the globe have resulted in genuine adaptation and improvement of programming. It is imperative that 'participatory development' does not mask the liberation and redistribution of power with lofty rhetoric and techniques, because, in practice, we must be prepared to "completely overhaul the system" and its very configuration (Brown et al.

2014:23). Solidarity continues to be built with individuals of diverse backgrounds, and practitioners routinely consider a variety of characteristics that has relevance to an individual's experience, but they struggle to ensure people are valued for their particular talents, abilities and cultural differences and that unity is found within this diversity. Although many organisations take great pains to ensure a 'strengths-based approach', systems require that practitioners emphasise the vulnerability of populations. We forget that when we're not looking, refugees in Uganda deftly resolve disputes without the help of professionals (Vancluysen and Ingelare 2020),; others are human rights activists from an early age, and have started their own organisations to provide essential services to other refugees (Bahre 2021). Perhaps reflecting our capitalistic tendency, we have commodified the people we are ultimately most accountable to, and made them into a resource and a fundraising tool. Fletcher (2020:3), argued 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". Indicative of the challenges of applying an intersectional lens across all workstreams, interagency coordination groups responsible for distilling and dispersing technical guidelines and minimum standards struggle to locate responsibility for particular issues and to see structural social constructs such as gender, class and race as underpinning all that they do as opposed to addressing them each in parallel.

Solidarity may be found in Yuval-Davis' notion of a "politics of belonging", which embodies a feminist "ethics of care" that "relates more to the ways people should relate and belong to each other rather than to what should be the boundaries of belonging" and pushes a "morality [that] does not ground its ontological base in membership in specific national, ethnic or religious communities but on transcending familial relationships into a universal principle of interpersonal relationships" (Yuval-Davis 2011; 372–76). The industry is not to be belittled for its attempts at internal growth, but commended for its collective efforts in self-awareness in a Protean sector. However, its internal evolution journey is a costly one, with countless resources expended for development actors to traverse the vicissitudes of their sector and reach the epiphany that the only heuristic it needs is to side with those who hold less power and lack the freedom to choose their paths.

We also need to consider our own context, more often.

"For those of us who live within the dominant culture of the West, our context often prevents us from understanding the consequences of our way of living. We are infantilised when it comes to basic knowledge like how money is created, where our waste goes, where our energy and resources are extracted from, where and how our food is grown, the history of our nations, and the origins of our sources of wealth" (Ladha 2020).

If we are to embody the values and principles we hold so dear as humanitarians, we will have to confront our position within a racially structured political economy underpinned by its colonial past. The development industry benefits from the large institutional bureaucracies left behind by the colonisers, which were not only unfamiliar to all these cultures but had been created to serve colonial goals, quite different from their own (Becker 2020; Kothari 2005; 427). As Stibral found, "a critical examination of humanitarian aid and holistic critique of the entire humanitarian sector seem to only be an emerging phenomenon in [humanitarian masters] course curricula" (2021; 10). Current education and training cannot be relied upon to nurture inquisitive, reflexive practitioners.

Revolutionary development is often politicised

The assumed neutrality of aid, a fundamental principle, is once again in question, with the concession that "it is often non-neutral community-based humanitarianism that is best placed to save lives and courageous enough to do so" (Slim 2020). Cronin-Furman et al. take aim specifically at the sector's much-touted "modern empowerment paradigm, which takes an ostensibly apolitical, technical approach to improving the lives of women in the developing world" by substituting "marginal improvements to the material conditions of women's lives for the capacity to mobilise to shift the conditions of their repression" (2017; 9, 16). They point out that livelihoods support, as well intentioned as it may be, "provides a temporary salve for emotional trauma ... Instead of conscientisation about the structures of oppression, skills training. And instead of agency, the choice between raising chickens or cows" (Cronin-Furman et al. 2017:11). Genuine empowerment strives to emancipate not assuage and it is necessary to ascertain and address the "structures of repression" which are often the result of "States in the developing world [being] constructed in the image of their colonial predecessors" and acknowledging that while we speak often of the "inclusion" of those "left behind" (UNGA 2015), we do not have the courage to scrutinise the forces that are doing the exclusion (Cronin-Furman et al. 2017; 10). Constitutional and legal reform around gender and power hierarchies invariably is the product of sustained advocacy by gender activists and their allies (O'Neill et al. 2014:9), thereby giving credence to the argument of supporting first responders who must fight for often incendiary political solutions.

Each country's development can only be sustained through engaged citisens and accountable governments; therefore, the energy, talents, resources and focus of development assistance could predominantly be focused on supporting a thriving civil society, so that nations are supported in their autopoietic development. It may be time to recognise the role of INGOs in overtly strengthening civil society movements and groups. The CIVICUS Monitor, which tracks civic space in 196 countries, revealed that only 3% of the world's population lived in countries where the core civic freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression were widely respected (CIVICUS 2020; 6). One way of characterising revolutionary development is to define it as, ultimately, the enhancement of freedom and choice for the individual, as Sen memorably argued many decades ago (1999). If we equate development practice with supporting individuals in the journey of progressing toward a higher state of self-awareness, self-control and self-directed will, then it follows that it must support grassroots movements and the civil societies of nations as a matter of priority; however, it may be beneficial to delineate collective freedom from individual freedom. O'Hearn (2009), qualifies Sen's impassioned plea for greater investment in individual freedom and capabilities, noting that this view "remains on the safe ground of Western individualism and avoids critical analysis of major western states and institutions", most of whom attained their levels of freedom, having "enjoyed pluralist democracy ... because the rest of the world starved".

Investing in the non-violent fight for collective rights has historical efficacy

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Investing in the non-violent fight for collective rights has historical efficacy. Looking at hundreds of campaigns over the last century, researchers found that non-violent campaigns are twice as likely to achieve their goals as violent campaigns, and, although the exact dynamics will depend on many factors, it takes around 3.5% of the population actively participating in the protests to ensure serious political change (Chenoweth 2008). Perhaps a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize should have been considered for the courageous people of Iraq and Lebanon who protested peacefully against endemic corruption in government; for the women of Nigeria who rallied to stop police abuse; for the people of Hong Kong who fought for democracy and for their civil liberties, at great risk to their own safety; and, today, for the women of Myanmar who are at the forefront of today's pro-democracy movement.

That social service organisations (such as INGOs), work to change individuals and social movement organisations work to change systems (Kramer 1981), may be an axiom in need of revisiting. Glasius and Ishkanian ascertained that, in recent years, during anti-capitalism/anti-austerity/pro-democracy protests, there was significant involvement of NGOs in street activism through what they term "surreptitious symbiosis", such as through the provision of non-monetary resources and the participation of NGO staff in a personal capacity (2014:2622), avoiding imperilling donor relationships (2014:2641). Many of the strategies employed by civil society organisations, such as amplifying the participation of the most marginalised and facilitating spaces to build solidarity, are similar to those of social movements, and although there are thus "common causal pathways ... [to] insurgent citisenship", a nuanced and measured perspective must be applied when analysing the extent to which international NGOs especially are contributing to systemic change (Karriem

and Benjamin 2005). The professionalisation of the sector has undoubtedly meant an increasing disconnection with citisen action, and the focus on projects over movements may have come at the detriment of genuine structural shifts in our realities. Global civil society now functions, in a sense, to normalise and stabilise the dysfunction of a liberal political economy, which through its very design threatens the welfare of populations by fulfilling its goal to contest, regulate and marginally modify the system of governmentality that subjectifies it but not challenge its core principles (Rowe and Lipschutz 2005; 15). NGOs are an institutional form of civil society through which "class relations are contested and reworked" and, until now, they have straddled the "imperialist and neoliberal ambitions of the aid regime and the popular mobilisations... in opposition to them". At this juncture of human evolution, it may be opportune to boldly determine whether the third sector "will advance or undermine this struggle" (Ismail and Kamat 2018; 573). Indeed, a revolutionary agenda such as gender justice cannot be achieved unless NGOs, especially transnational feminist ones, challenge the very conditions under which they operate, engage in contentious spaces and oppositional politics, and dispel the ambiguities surrounding their positions to date (Liinason 2021).

Revolutionary development will offer alternate (feminist), realities

Perhaps decolonisation is about much more than self-determination for local and national agencies working in development. It is also about releasing the entire sector from the grip of a patriarchal mindset. Aotearoa New Zealand activist Makere Stewart-Harawira (Waitaha), eloquently outlines the paths before us in a world "hovering on the brink of self-destruction" and implores us to consider bringing "the feminine principle and in the process, right balance and the compassionate mind, to the centre of our political ontologies" (2007:1). Humanity has the colossal task of undoing much of the damage done by 5,000 years of patriarchy, 500 years of capitalism and 50 years of neoliberalism. It is necessary to incentivise the world to cast off its collective wetiko—a term used by Native Americans for the individualistic and selfish mindset of the British colonists in North America (Ladha and Kirk 2016). This is not possible so long as the industry continues to participate in a dysfunctional, parasitic capitalist system, believing that with minor organisational policy tweaks and adjustments it can be made more ethical, more bearable. Over a decade ago, Kothari cogently outlined the paradox of an industry embracing participatory approaches to development while concomitantly being co-opted by the hegemony of the neoliberal agenda (2005; 438), and it appears to remain true today.

Experience tells us that it is not possible to challenge the conditions which abet rampant gender-based violence, abject poverty, ecological destruction and inequality by working within existing legal, regulatory, political and bureaucratic structures. The solution lies in our ability to "reclaim our intuition, stop casting blame, see the system as the source of its own problems, and find the courage and wisdom to restructure it" (Meadows 2008:4). Feminist scholars have for some time sought to identify, critique and challenge systems of injustice, oppression, and abuse supported by a patriarchal system (Becker 1999), identifying principles along the way to achieve such a monumental task such as collaboration, compassion, reflection and self-awareness, a focus on the collective not the individual, on the relational not the technical, integration not fragmentation, holism not reductionism and, of course, that the personal is, in fact, political.

While feminists are not agreed on a singular way of achieving this new reality, they concur that the process must be valued, and that organisations must always question putative norms, embedding a culture of non-hierarchy and non-duality, and an inquisitiveness and heterogeneity in praxis, in order to be continuously growing and learning. Many agencies recognise the coherence between human rights values and feminist ideals as well as the deontological approach to change that feminism takes. Some have begun the process of decentralising their decision-making structures as well as incorporating feminist principles of collaboration, emotional intelligence and empathy into their leadership training (Harper and Albrectsen 2020). Yet the long-term work of political action to collectively change the lives of the powerless and to consider feminist alternatives cannot be accomplished within the tight timeframes and budgets and overwhelming bureaucratic demands made by donors (Wallace 2020:45),—and this will need to change.

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*INGOs **will then need to systematically campaign with governments for the structural changes that are required to transform our global economy from one that extracts to one that gives life***

INGOs will then need to systematically campaign with governments for the structural changes that are required to transform our global economy from one that extracts to one that gives life. It has become apparent that our free-market ideology no longer represents progress, and many seminal thinkers and activists have put forward viable alternatives, including universal basic income, a global wealth tax and doughnut economics. Inspiring are the alternative visions like those embodied in feminist economics, which emphasises provision and distribution in the service of sustaining and producing life (Rodriguez Enriquez 2015), and rejects neoclassical economic theory, which characterises humans as rational, cost-benefit-calculating, interest-pursuing subjects. What we have witnessed is that neoliberalism is not just a manner of governing states or economies, but is intimately tied to the government of the individual, to a particular manner of living, and must be confronted (Read 2009).

Eisler's (1987), work resonates here: drawing on pre-historic data as old as Palaeolithic art in modern-day France to more recent inscriptions in Sumerian tablets, Eisler inferred that we once had societies in which masculine and feminine principles were equally valued and operated in partnership, resulting in cultural and technological advances which enhanced life. Societal models which were based on the 'dominator' model, in which masculine properties prevailed, tended to use advances to further domination and to marginalise and quell life. The latter tended to characterise life in dualities, the 'superior-inferior' or the 'in-group versus out-group' and this is "a key component in the construction of the enemy mentality so central to the maintenance of dominator systems" (Eisler 1987; 207). The ultimate goal is not to stamp out conflict between all people and to homogenise them; rather, it is to ensure conflict is productive rather than destructive and to appreciate and elevate differences (Eisler 1987:192).

Okech proposes:

"The purpose of this generation of feminists is clearly defined by the global political constellation, which demonstrates that the next frontier of struggle is not about reforming laws and seeking participation in flawed global systems of power but that the struggle rather lays in dismantling these systems" (2017:16).

Structural changes we are already witnessing include embracing a dissolution of traditional hierarchies and modes of authority, and a greater respect for the natural world as an entity with the same rights as sentient beings. Three decades ago, Eisler sanguinely predicted that our "gylanic prehistory" foreshadowed the decentralising and distribution of governance, a shift away from "technologies of destruction" making room for "as yet undreamed (and presently undreamable), enterprises" and "an economic order in which amassing more and more property as a means of protecting oneself from, as well as controlling, others will be seen for what it is: a form of sickness or aberration" (1987; 200–01).

Stewart-Harawira linked feminine principles for living and an innate spirituality which acted as the foundation for our interaction with others and the environment:

"As a race of beings, we have lost touch with the sacred ... More and more women are remembering that there was a time when the societies of human beings that lived on this planet our home, were much more matriarchal in nature, when the values by which existence was ordered were based on a spirituality which connected us to Mother Earth, to each other and to the universe" (1999).

What modern philosophy is now ruminating, ancient indigenous cultures have known for some time. Aboriginal Australians have long considered themselves integrated with and part of the natural world. For instance, the Nhunggabarra people from Nhunggal Country, northwestern NSW, believe that everything—animate (human, animal, plant), and inanimate (land forms)—has its own consciousness, rather than holding gods or spirits in high regard (Sveiby 2009). This knowledge has been dismissed, perhaps because modern industrialised societies do not give the same credence to non-textual information such as those shared through oral stories, dances and ceremonies by the Nhunggabarra people "to fulfil a mission to keep all alive" (Sveiby 2009:8). Karl Sveiby reconstructs the governance principles and model of Nhunggabarra society, which he surmises:

"Looks like a holistic structure, where every element supports the whole. With a spiritual belief that 'all are connected', the core value 'respect' follows naturally and ecosystem care is hence not only a matter of immediate survival, but also the reason for existence—the mission to 'keep all alive' ... the rules emphasise respect, individual responsibility and non-competitive behaviours and enforce behaviours such as collaboration, community building and care" (2009; 15).

Revolutionary development can instigate the systems change we need

That a metamorphosis for the sector is required is not in question, but in which direction and to what extent remains to be decided. The industry will need to consider the "great, big unstated assumptions" that constitute its way of working (Meadows 2008:162). The sector has oscillated between holism and compartmentalisation in its approach, from the creation of the humanitarian cluster system, which relegated areas of relief to specialists in various themes (water and sanitation, protection, food and nutrition and so on), to the acknowledgement that we require a seamless bond (the preferred jargon being "nexus"), between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work. Calls for better coordination reflect our ongoing struggle to incorporate a whole-of-problem perspective.

We know that we live within a complex system, which often has a number of attributes including nonlinearity, uncertainty, interconnectedness, interdependence, emergence, scale and self-organisation. Using concepts relating to the nature of complex systems, the nature of change and the behaviour of intelligent actors, complexity theory provides a basis for guiding this thinking. Feedback loops and dynamic uncertainties that are very difficult or impossible to understand and predict have often made designing effective development programming challenging, to say the least. To navigate such a byzantine world, we need to be able to use both deduction and induction processes of critical thinking, and to understand their limitations; the real value in better understanding complexity concepts for the development and humanitarian community may lie in its implicit suggestions about how we think about problems (Ramalingam et al. 2008). Meadows concurs: "I don't think the system's way of seeing is better than the reductionist way of thinking.

I think it's complementary, and therefore revealing … Each way of seeing allows our knowledge of the wondrous world in which we live to become a little more complete" (2008; 5).

The way a system reacts to outside forces that lambast and pummel, constrain, trigger or drive it is most revealing; Western society's response most often reflects its reliance on science, logic and reductionism over intuition and holism: "Psychologically and politically we would much rather assume that the cause of a problem is 'out there', rather than 'in here'". (Meadows 2008; 4). Indeed, the development sector's inability to abide by commitments made in The Grand Bargain at the World Humanitarian Summit, several years on, may be a result of an unwillingness to admit that our paralysis is the direct result of internalised privilege and power. This would require consistently interrogating our governments on their foreign and trade policies, which create the very deleterious situations development programming then seeks to redress. As governments purport to advance the policy commitments to gender equality and peace, global military spending, chiefly driven by OECD nations, tops $1.9 trillion per annum (SIPRI 2020). These same nations often host corporate actors who are responsible for land-grabbing and natural resource destruction in the same countries they provide development assistance. This is compounded by the awareness of many development practitioners that they must espouse values-change and policy shifts which haven't yet occurred in their own societies, or have only partially been met in their own contexts.

To foster cooperative success in human organisations, some believe that we should look to nature for inspiration

If humanity wants to survive and thrive indefinitely into the future, perhaps it must align its internal evolution with the trajectory of biological evolution. To foster cooperative success in human organisations, some believe that we should look to nature for inspiration. Nature nurtures life through communities, and cooperation appears to be at the core of all life creation, beginning at a cellular level with symbiogenesis (Capra and Luisi 2018). From these biological blocks, cooperation prevails at every level of the animal kingdom. Research confirms that the first instinct for humans is to cooperate rather than react selfishly (Rand et al. 2012). The days of competitive neo-liberal behaviour may be gone for the development sector if we emulate the practice of biomimicry, which fosters social support, collaboration and respect for intuition as much as objective data to support innovation (Neumann 2007). The development industry will need to evolve into a cooperative social organisation that nurtures networks of communication, encourages sharing and experimentation, and cultivates a climate of mutual support.

There is much written about the behaviour of organisations due to their "collective unconscious", which is created and preserved by the stories told regarding the processes and relationships of the organisation as well as the metaphors, symbols and archetypes generated to develop and enhance meaning and common language (Koçoğlu et al. 2016). The industry is already expanding its language to be commensurate with levels of complexity, which is important because "our mental models are mostly verbal" (Meadows 2008:174). Our mental models are also largely influenced by what is written, not just by the content but by the way the medium shapes our interpretations. In modern Western culture, with the advent of movable type, we have come to rely on the visual, what we can see. In primarily oral cultures, there is a kind of magic that media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964), proposes, resulting from an ability to silmultaneously hear and touch to perceive reality, and thus a disregard for linear cause-and-effect explanations. It is time for the sector to awaken to all its limitations, cultural and otherwise, and transition from acolytes of Western ways of conceptualising to purveyors of metamodern approaches to thinking and problem-solving.

Meta-modernism acknowledges that we have entered a stage where one can hold the possibility or experience of multiple realities simultaneously, a sort of "pragmatic idealism", which "oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2019). It is the emergence of a new way of feeling and thinking, one where "we can simultaneously critique the system, live within the contradiction of being complicit in that system, while working towards changing the system itself. We don't have to define ourselves by what we stand against, although we do have to know what we stand against and why" (Ladha 2020). We can be pro-trust rather than risk averse and pro-belonging rather than anti-racist.

The challenges of being an agent for social change includes an inertia that has stymied any potential for real revolution within the industry

The challenges of being an agent for social change today includes an inertia—an inexorable pull toward doing things the way they've always been done—that has stymied any potential for real revolution within the industry. Activists, "in their striving to do 'the good', if they did not maintain a very intentional wakefulness, almost always end up strengthening the very patterns and behaviours that they have set out to change" (Steiner 1986 in Kaplan and Davidoff 2014:4).

"Activists begin by questioning many of the norms which have come to characterise their social world, yet often end up endorsing one of the most normative current practices in our culture—the tendency towards management ... to focus on the shortest way to quantifiable results, to hold to a centre, to insist on bureaucratic forms of accountability ... the process of bureaucratisation, the normative procedures that assume and thereby lead to mistrust between people, to a culture of fear and conformity—all this becomes part of the world of social activism as well. And it signals the onset of what is really an assumption—that if we strategise and plan carefully enough we will be able to turn the world in the direction we wish it to go" (Kaplan and Davidoff 2014:6).

It is time to reconfigure the language around 'international development' to be about 'global development' and then to further stretch the imagination to what might constitute 'revolutionary development'. In essence, development practice might expand to include a revisitation of human identity and sense of self. If development work is in the business of creating alternative visions of reality—a better world—

then what we require is "a truly radical activism" which recognises that "the very way we think affects and changes the world that we see" (Kaplan and Davidoff 2014:28). A phenomenological approach, which respects the primacy of conscious experience from basic sensory perception to imagination, emotion, volition and action, "suggests that we recognise that our concepts illuminate what we see, inform what we see, but equally that what we see then further elucidates our concepts" (Kaplan and Davidoff 2014; 11), and through this process of reflection and inquiry we can reach an agreement, an intersubjectivity, if only one that recognises complete openness and receptivity is required of the mind before it can begin to espouse what kind of world it wants to live within (Kaplan and Davidoff 2014; 29).

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Opening doors in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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Humanitarian professional, author and activist Carla Vitantonio is a feminist and an advocate for human rights. In the past ten years, she has worked with governmental and non-governmental organisations in the DPRK, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Cuba. In each of those places, she stood beside the most vulnerable, being persons with disabilities, women and persons belonging to ethnic minorities. Carla believes in inclusive processes and the art of political negotiation. She has published two books with ADD Editore, *Myanmar Swing* (2021), and *Pyongyang Blues* (2019).

Nazanin Zadeh-Cummings has been researching humanitarian issues in the DPRK since 2014. She is both a lecturer in humanitarian studies and a graduate of a humanitarian studies master's program, informing her interests in humanitarian pedagogy and the role of higher education and critical perspectives in the humanitarian sector. Nazanin received her PhD from the City University of Hong Kong in 2019.

Image: Pyongyang International Airport, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 26 April 2012 © Jon Arnold Images Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Abstract

This paper considers the opportunities for effective humanitarian collaboration in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). It brings together perspectives from three individuals with extensive lived experience working in the DPRK. Collectively, these authors have worked in various sectors of international humanitarian aid and other areas of engagement such as emergency response and preparedness, education, social enterprise and tourism. The paper draws from these experiences to present lessons on overcoming obstacles and harnessing opportunities in the DPRK.

Leadership relevance

The paper informs humanitarian leadership by presenting experience-based knowledge on the DPRK. It is rooted in the practice of international engagement, and contains concrete lessons for leaders not only looking to expand their understanding of the DPRK but of aid in authoritarian contexts more broadly.

Opening doors in the DPRK:
An introduction
Nazanin Zadeh-Cummings

In 1995, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, also known as North Korea), made its first wide-scale appeal for international humanitarian aid while in the midst of a famine. Known as the Arduous March, between 1995 and 2000 the famine killed an estimated 600,000 to 1 million North Koreans (Goodkind & West, 2001). Humanitarian organisations, including large international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN), agencies, Red Cross bodies, and small DPRK-focused groups began working in the country. Some groups established residency in the country, with foreign staff living full-time in the DPRK, and others worked on a non-resident basis, with regular or ad-hoc visits.

As the famine era subsided, it became clear that North Koreans still faced issues of food insecurity and access to adequate healthcare and sanitation. Some high-profile NGOs left the country in the early years of engagement, such as Médecins sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors without Borders), who left in 1998 due to "lack of access, the inability to evaluate the quality of [their] program and the lack of any perspectives of improvement" (Claus, as cited in MSF 2014:120). Others pivoted from emergency famine aid to programs that aimed to address protracted humanitarian issues, and humanitarian engagement moved from an acute emergency phase to addressing more long-term needs. In 2005, the DPRK announced the end of the humanitarian aid era in favour of development aid, requiring all NGOs to leave. This did interrupt or end the work of some groups, but others were able to renegotiate and remain, or had already begun working on projects that incorporated sustainability concerns.

Since its first nuclear test in 2006, the DPRK has been sanctioned under UN Security Council (UNSC), resolutions. As sanctions have become broader, they have had a wider applicability to humanitarian engagement, such as restrictions on metal items. In 2017, UNSC resolution 2,397 established humanitarian exemptions. However, this process has been burdensome for aid groups, some of whom are small and not well-equipped to navigate expensive international bureaucratic processes; it has also weakened ability for agile and timely response, and, even with proper exemptions, humanitarians have faced challenges with procurement and banking (Zadeh-Cummings & Harris 2020). Secondary sanctions and travel bans from the United States have further complicated aid programs. In January 2020, the DPRK became one of the first countries in the world to close its border in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19), situation in China. The border remains shut at the time of writing, impacting tourism, trade and aid. Foreign humanitarian workers in the country faced growing restrictions and, by March 2021, there were no UN or NGO workers remaining in the DPRK (O'Carroll 2021).

It is at this moment of little foreign presence in the DPRK that the authors of this paper came together for an online panel at the 2021 Humanitarian Leadership Conference. The panel, which shared its title with this paper, was not borne of a desire to showcase the well-documented and well-known challenges of working in the DPRK, but to highlight the opportunities for rewarding collaboration, effective partnership and impactful cooperation. My co-authors—James Banfill, Jasmine Barrett and Carla Vitantonio—bring deep experience to the discussion. Collectively, they lived, visited and worked in the DPRK across a variety of fields, including international humanitarian aid and other areas of engagement such as emergency response and preparedness, education, social enterprise and tourism. This paper captures the lessons and insights they shared at the conference.

Our inquiry is based on several ideas. The first is that the DPRK is not inherently shrouded in mystery. We reject outdated concepts of the DPRK as 'crazy' or 'unpredictable'—or, as Smith (2000), put it in her critique, the "bad, mad, sad" paradigms. Instead, we focus on lived experience to draw out knowable aspects of the DPRK and working with North Koreans. In many other countries, it would not need to be said that individuals differ from one another but, when discussing the DPRK, it bears reminding that North Koreans are not monolithic. Thus, while the authors here share lessons and thoughts, it is with the assumption that readers recognise that not all North Koreans are the same. The second core concept of this paper is knowledge-sharing. We came together with the belief that sharing experiences in the DPRK would help provoke discussion to better prepare others to embark on work in the country. At the centre of this sharing and learning is the wellbeing of the North Korean people. This paper, and the panel behind it, is inspired by international solidarity with the citizens of the DPRK.

It is important to keep the welfare of North Korean people in the global conversation.

As the world waits for the DPRK to safely reopen its borders, the authors urge readers to seize this moment for reflection and learning. It is important to keep the welfare of North Korean people in the global conversation. We also encourage activism pointed at the barriers constructed by the international community. More work must be done to reduce the impact of sanctions on humanitarian engagement, including a reliable banking channel and smoother exemption processes, to open more doors.

The following three sections present lessons from the co-authors: Carla Vitantonio challenges the concept of the DPRK as a place unlike any other; Jasmine Barrett considers how to actually begin working in the DPRK, demystifying the process and showing the options

humanitarians can consider; and James Banfill asks how we can better prepare to work in North Korea. A conclusion collates the key messages.

Deconstructing the narrative of uniqueness
Carla Vitantonio

I have been asked several times to talk about aid in the DPRK. On many of these occasions, I could not help but generate delusion in my audience: according to some, I don't condemn the regime enough, thus allegedly positioning myself as 'pro-DPRK'. Those who support the regime, on the other hand, consider my reflections too critical and unacceptable: I am not a friend. As a humanitarian and a professional, I cannot satisfy either group: I refuse to take judgemental, black-and-white positions. It is not my role to express judgement on a culture or country that is too far from my own to be neutrally observed. All I can do is collect information, observe and devolve my observations in order to help collective sense-making and understanding.[1]

For an aid worker, every context is unique, and a good part of our job is to be able to learn and adapt to the context in order to make humanitarian assistance as effective as possible. It is not a mystery that one of the main principles that drives humanitarian aid is 'do no harm'; that is, "prevent and/or mitigate any adverse effects of interventions which can increase people's vulnerability to both physical and psychosocial risk" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2015). Needless to say, in order not to cause harm one needs to know the existing structures and, to some extent, accept them; I will return to this later.

If we start from this assumption—that every context is unique—we are immediately challenging the narrative of the DPRK as 'exceptional': the post-colonial idea of aid workers arriving in a ruthless country and doing what they can (or what they want), has luckily been overcome. Today, humanitarian assistance must be *accountable*: to donors, to beneficiaries and, to some extent, to the host country, too. In this sense, even in the DPRK we must abide by local rules and regulations in order to deliver assistance. This does not mean that we agree with the local rules and regulations, just as we may not agree with those of Ethiopia or Colombia, to mention two countries where aid delivery is massive. It means that we recognise reality, we observe the setting and we consider the challenges and opportunities that this setting gives us. From this starting point, we might well decide to provide assistance through projects that challenge some norms and aim at a systemic change. A clear example is all the work done by Humanity & Inclusion (formerly Handicap International), that worked alongside the DPRK government to bring them

first to the creation of a national law on disability, then to signing the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and finally to its ratification. It was a huge change, if we imagine that until 2000 the official position of the DPRK government was that there were no persons with disability in the country. Now, not only does the country have a quasi-civil society organisation—the Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled (KFPD),—working alongside the government to improve living conditions for people with disabilities, there are visible changes in Korean society, in favour of the inclusion of people with all kinds of disabilities. This stage of development was reached only through a constant exchange and dialogue with local authorities and organisations.

Today, humanitarian assistance must be accountable: to donors, to beneficiaries and, to some extent, to the host country, too.

I would like to deepen my considerations on the possibility (or not), of delivering aid in the DPRK. When we look at implementation modalities, we should recall the four humanitarian principles and see if they can be respected: humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. According to many, the one principle at stake in the DPRK is impartiality. Impartiality means that "humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions" (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2017).

The fact that the DPRK government restricts the area of aid to six out of nine provinces (excluding one province because it is too far to be reached,[2] and the remaining two because there are nuclear plants and, allegedly,[3] labour camps), brings many to question the capacity of aid agencies to be able to reach the most vulnerable. I am afraid there is not a unique response to this question; however, this situation is actually very frequent in aid. Similar challenges arise in countries such as Myanmar, Ethiopia, Cuba (just to name three), and aid agencies find their way around, without seeing their effectiveness questioned. The fact of the matter is that, if we contextualise humanitarian assistance, there

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1   In fact, this is one of the two reasons that foreign publishers use when I ask why they won't translate my book, *Pyongyang Blues*, into English. The other is that I do not hold a United States, United Kingdom or Republic of Korea passport.

2   Historically things have been different. Until 2006, all NGOs and UN agencies could reach the North Hamgyong Region, and had projects there. When the situation improved and the DPRK changed rules of access, NGOs progressively withdrew, and, as of the most recent available data, the only resident agencies currently operating there are WFP and UNICEF.

3   I use the word 'allegedly' because I have never personally seen one; I don't have the skills, nor do I think it's my role, to correctly interpret aerial pictures.

is no context in the world where these four principles can completely and transparently be respected. In addition, part of our work as humanitarians is to do our best in respecting the four principles, while walking a precarious line and balancing a set of unfortunate circumstances. In the DPRK, resident agencies found a reasonable way to maintain some impartiality: to deliver aid, the main rule was "no access, no aid". It is a very strong statement that was somehow respected by Korean authorities, and allowed NGOs to be able to conduct some monitoring, thus avoiding aid being delivered, as many feared, to the military, or to groups that did not need it.

"No access, no aid" is only one of several examples I could draw on to prove that delivering aid in the DPRK needs as much tact, diplomacy, strategy, and respect of the local context as is required in other parts of the world.

How to begin working in the DPRK: A practical guide for humanitarian practitioners
Jasmine Barrett

This section is a practical guide for humanitarian practitioners on how to set up a humanitarian project and begin working in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, often referred to as DPRK, North Korea or Korea.[4] My aim is to demystify the process, and demonstrate that it is not as complicated as it is perceived to be. I have been engaged in humanitarian work in the DPRK for 10 years, and I would like to share some of my personal experience with readers.

There are very few humanitarian organisations operating in the DPRK and aid appeals are chronically underfunded. With a population of 25 million people, almost half are classified by the UN as "in need", yet only a quarter are 'targeted' for humanitarian aid (UN Humanitarian Country Team [HCT] 2019). I hope that this paper will spur more humanitarian practitioners and organisations to reach out to local partners in the DPRK and start a conversation about how they can work together. With so few humanitarian actors present in the country, even a small project can be immensely appreciated by the locals, and have a big impact. There are both resident and non-resident NGOs and UN agencies working in the DPRK, but this paper will focus on setting up an aid program as a non-resident NGO, because this would be the most logical starting point for almost all humanitarian organisations.

The first step is to find a local partner. Many, but not all, local partners have their own websites that outline the scope of their work, their goals and interests, and who their existing foreign partners are. A list of local partner websites is included as an appendix.

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4   The people of the DPRK do not agree with the use of the term 'North Korea', so this section will respectfully use 'DPRK' or 'Korea'.

The National Coordinating Committee, a division of the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, partners with six UN agencies present in the DPRK, while the Korean European Cooperation Coordination Agency (KECCA), partners with the resident European NGOs (UN DPR Korea 2014). The DPRK Red Cross Society and the Ministry of Public Health partner with numerous resident and non-resident NGOs. Other local partners include the Korea Education Fund, which targets children through schools and orphanages; Care for the Elderly, whose remit includes people with age-related disabilities; and the Korea Green Fund, which specialises in clean, green technology, addressing climate change and protecting the environment. The KFPD targets people with disabilities and is responsible for the implementation of the UNCRPD; for full disclosure, KFPD is my local partner and I find them an excellent group to work with. There are a dozen other local partners, including the Korea–America Private Exchange Society (KAPES), which works exclusively with North American NGOs, and the Compatriots Association, which works exclusively with the Korean diaspora.

Local partners perform a number of essential functions and will be critical to the success of a project. It has been reported in the news media that when practitioners go to the DPRK there are 'minders' who watch them all the time, however, they do a lot more than simply 'mind' people. Basically, a local partner will facilitate everything a practitioner does in-country. They will apply for their visa, pick them up from the airport, and host them. They will facilitate logistics, distribution and transportation. They will organise their schedule and apply for permission for them to visit project sites for monitoring and evaluation. They will set up meetings, facilitate introductions, and act as interpreters. In short, having a local partner is like having local staff, but they are much more than that. They are guides, confidants and teachers. When making the initial contact with a local partner, I recommend asking one of their existing foreign partners for an introduction. Despite email addresses being listed on their websites, it is still necessary for practitioners to ask for an introduction and register their email address, otherwise the emails will bounce back.

Local partners perform a number of essential functions and will be critical to the success of a project.

The DPRK is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world. Therefore, it is important to be familiar with the UN sanctions regime and how to request a humanitarian exemption in the early stages of planning. Details of how to do this can be found on the UNSC website listed in the appendix. Humanitarian practitioners will also need to check if there are additional unilateral sanctions in the country where they are operating. Local partners will not be able to help navigate the sanctions regime, as they do not see them as legitimate.

Banking and logistics need to be considered. Local partners can help with logistics such as sending goods via shipping container to Nampo port, or sending goods by truck over the China–DPRK border. However, due to sanctions, there are no international banking channels available, so it is recommended that visitors seek advice from other humanitarian practitioners about how to safely and legally move their money.

On a practitioner's first visit, a local partner will pick them up from the airport, drive them to their hotel, and stay with them for the duration of their visit. Itineraries must be organised and emailed in advance; while small adjustments can usually be accommodated, it will be too late to make major changes on arrival. A well-planned itinerary is one of the keys to a fruitful visit, so it is important to include all the people and places one would like to visit, and plan tangible outcomes in order to maintain momentum. Cynics may say, "They only let you see what they want you to see", but this has not been my experience at all. It is surprising how accommodating they can be with your itinerary—all one has to do is ask.

In summary, to get a humanitarian project off the ground: find a local partner, become familiar with the sanctions, and network with humanitarian practitioners who have experience in-country. A stand-up comedian once told me a simple rule that he followed while working in China. He said, "Avoid the 'three Ts' [Tibet, Taiwan and Tiananmen] and you will be fine". A similar rule applies in the DPRK in terms of avoiding sensitive political topics. As humanitarian practitioners, our core business is not politics, but the humanitarian imperative. After years of working in the DPRK, trusted friendships have emerged with my local partners, and together we have witnessed tangible improvements in the lives of our beneficiaries.

Can we better prepare to work in North Korea and with North Koreans?
James Banfill

North Korea is a difficult place to gain experience. The practical reality of working in the country means interacting with North Koreans face-to-face. Non-North Korean[5] field practitioners typically gain an understanding of this operational environment through first-hand exposure over multiple years and visits. In pre-COVID-19 times, the DPRK was already one of the most isolated countries in the world, and opportunities for exposure remain limited. Although over 300 non-North Korean organisations have worked in the DPRK since the mid 1990s, only about 50 maintain an active presence.[6] Most

organisations maintain only a few dedicated staff due to in-country restrictions on free movement, staff and donor fatigue, political sensitivities and relatively high operating costs.[7] The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated North Korea's isolation. The current context raises questions about our ability to maintain effective and sustained humanitarian engagement over time. This section will make the case that preparation and training are important for working in North Korea, and propose ways of making such training relevant to working on the ground.

Why should we prepare to work in North Korea?

1. The need for trust in a complex and nuanced operating environment

The particular restrictions that the DPRK government places on non-North Korean organisations, such as limits on access, are well-documented (see, for example, Flake & Snyder 2003). Working in North Korea, there are almost always operational challenges, stemming from the country's isolation, poor infrastructure and political sensitivities. These restrictions and challenges are compounded by an information-poor environment with numerous political sensitivities.

North Korea is not monolithic spatially or temporally—regions often differ, trends change over time, and some periods of working in the country are more difficult or sensitive than others, largely influenced by political factors, both internal and external. Strong relationships with North Korean partners are instrumental in accurately assessing and navigating these changing environments and obtaining relevant real-time (or near real-time), information on the ground. These relationships are often based on trust both at the organisational level and, perhaps more importantly, the interpersonal level (Zadeh-Cummings 2019; Glenk 2020). While long-term partnerships help maintain trust on an organisation level, trust on the interpersonal level takes time, often on the scale of years, to develop.

2. Current capacity is lacking

Humanitarian challenges on the ground are complex and interconnected over a wide range of fields, including food insecurity, environmental degradation, infrastructure decay, chronic disease, et cetera (UN HCT 2020). The scale of these challenges can vary vastly by region or community. Such complex and interdisciplinary problems, or 'wicked problems', are often beyond the ability of individuals to fully comprehend, let alone solve (Brown et al. 2010), further highlighting the need for coordination and knowledge-sharing not only across organisations but across technical fields. The current capacity of both North Koreans and the international community is inadequate to meet the magnitude of challenges. Realistically addressing

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5   The term 'non-North Korean' is used to catch all actors working in the field in North Korea, including South Koreans or Koreans based overseas.

6   These organisations range in size from large international organisations, such as the World Food Programme, to small, privately funded non-governmental organisations, and even private philanthropists without any legal status. As such, the exact number active in the country at any given time remains unclear.

7   Operational costs (such as rent and telecommunications), for non-North Koreans to maintain a resident presence in Pyongyang are on par with international cities, such as Beijing.

these problems in the future will require an expansion of not only material and financial resources but also human resources. In the event of an emergency, this may need to occur rapidly.

The unintended actions and mistakes of non-North Koreans can have real consequences for North Korean's careers, livelihoods, even lives.

3. Mistakes have consequences

Lastly, the harsh reality of working in North Korea is that the unintended actions and mistakes of non-North Koreans can have real consequences for North Korean's careers, livelihoods, even lives. North Koreans are often held responsible for the actions of their non-North Korean partners by the country's extensive security apparatus. While non-North Koreans will likely be able to sense periods of increased tension or stress among North Korean partners, the exact nature of potential consequences (or dangers), may never be known or only understood *ex post facto*. Non-North Koreans working in North Korea need to be cognisant that, in the process of their work, colleagues may be transferred, fall out of favour or disappear. International personnel need to prepare to cope with this high-stress environment and its potential consequences (Miller 2012). For the sake of North Korean partners, we must also do our best to ensure the international community is not making the same mistakes repeatedly due to lack of awareness.

How might we prepare to work in North Korea?

1. More communication and coordination

After more than two and a half decades of engagement with North Korea, the degree of communication and coordination among non-North Korean actors is not proportional to the scale, severity, complexity and uncertainties of the situation. One reason for this is the relative sensitivity of North Korean authorities to detailed public discussion of work done inside the country. In some cases, knowledge-sharing may be counterproductive. Public discussion can lead to problems for in-country partners or, in extreme cases, lead to the banning of non-North Koreans from continuing to work in the country.[8]

Furthermore, there are silos of information across nationalities and generations as well as between organisations and individuals. Trust not only needs to be built between non-North Korean actors and North Koreans, but also between non-North Korean actors themselves. Such trust requires a recognition of the

need for preparation and coordinated dialogue about the scope and scale of such preparation. Compared to the 1990s, or even the early 2000s, non-North Korean actors have numerous technical means for knowledge-sharing (for example, digital crisis maps, online databases and Zoom).

2. Distilling lessons learned

Previous attempts have been made to distil lessons learned from interactions with North Korea in general, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Snyder 1999; Saccone 2003). From a practical perspective, the most enduring and instructive paper for working in North Korea is titled 'Unlikely partners: humanitarian aid agencies and North Korea' (Reed 2004). Reed identifies certain principles that have led to success in the field, such as build trust, appoint good staff, cultivate counterpart relations, prove yourself, design transparent projects, collaborate with other agencies, and persist. Each one of these principles encompasses numerous operational considerations in the field. Since Reed's publication, the international community has had an additional decade and a half of experience in North Korea that can be harnessed for better outcomes.

3. Scenario- or simulation-based training

Scenario-based training or simulations—so-called 'serious games'—may be a potential means of approximating the challenges, or sets of challenges, faced by practitioners in North Korea and transferring past lessons learned to newcomers in the field. Serious games have been employed to train field personnel for uncertain and high-stress environments, such as conflict situations as well as disaster and emergency response. In other words, can we approximate what it feels like to be in and work in North Korea?[9] What might such a serious game look like for the North Korean context?

As mentioned, non-North Korean organisations can be extremely cautious about the public sharing of information due to the sensitivities of the DPRK government. However, it should be possible to summarise past scenarios or dilemmas faced by field practitioners and strip them of information identifying locations, time and personas. What remains would be a generalised scenario, activity or dilemma for the trainee (or even the experienced practitioner), to attempt to problem-solve. The overall goal would be to compile a set of scenarios based on real events so that any person can quickly encounter both the diverse range and complex depth of problems faced on the ground in North Korea.

While it is important to note that serious games have limits and are not a substitute for actual field experience, serious games can also improve empathy, build teamwork and stimulate discussion (Solinska-

8   There is anecdotal evidence of non-North Koreans reporting on other non-North Koreans to North Korean authorities.

9   For an excellent narrative introduction to this topic, see Abrahamian (2020).

Nowak et al. 2018). In the North Korean field, all of these are desirable not only as takeaways for individuals, but in building relationships between non-North Korean actors.

<center>*</center>

North Korea is not an easy place to work for many reasons and opportunities to gain experience in the country are limited. Over the past two and a half decades, non-North Korean actors have accrued a wide-range of experience working in the North Korean operational environment. However, lessons-learned and coordination remain limited and disparate. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, while North Korean remains closed for the foreseeable future, we can prepare to work in the country in the future.

Conclusion
James Banfill, Jasmine Barrett, Carla Vitantonio and Nazanin Zadeh-Cummings

This working paper collated three pieces from individuals with significant experience working in the DPRK. In 'Deconstructing the narrative of uniqueness', Carla Vitantonio challenged the concept of the DPRK as "exceptional"; in 'How to begin working in DPRK: A practical guide for humanitarian practitioners', Jasmine Barrett outlined how humanitarians can practically approach building links in the DPRK; and in 'Can

we better prepare to work in North Korea and with North Koreans?', James Banfill considered how the international community can be better equipped for engaging in the DPRK. While each section presented perspectives, ideas and advice from its respective author, the overarching thread tying them together is the belief in the importance of cooperative engagement in the DPRK.

The authors present this work at a time when COVID-19 restrictions are severely hampering the international community's ability to engage with North Korea. This paper's message of understanding and pursuing engagement in the DPRK is relevant both during times of surges in cooperation and in times like these, where opportunities are sparse. We do not deny the challenges or specific considerations of working in the DPRK, but ask readers to continue to imagine possibilities and explore ways to open doors.

Appendix: DPRK humanitarian resources
UN agencies in the DPRK
https://dprkorea.un.org/

Local partners
Note: This is not an exhaustive list, and some local partners do not have a website.

Korea Education Fund: www.koredufund.org.kp/index.php?lang=eng

Korea Green Fund: naenara.com.kp/sites/kgf/index.php

PIINTEC: www.friend.com.kp/index.php/piintec/view/2593

Care for the Elderly: www.korelcfund.org.kp/index.php

Red Cross Society: www.friend.com.kp/dprkrcs/

Korean Red Cross Foundation: www.friend.com.kp/index.php/krcf

Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled: naenara.com.kp/sites/kfpd/

Ministry of Public Health: www.moph.gov.kp/en/

UN Security Council Sanctions and Humanitarian Exemptions
www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/exemptions-measures/humanitarian-exemption-requests

Australian bilateral sanctions on the DPRK
www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/security/sanctions/sanctions-regimes/north-korea/Pages/default

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Humanitarian innovation: The next step for greater impact

JENNIFER WILDE AND DAN MCCLURE

Jenny Wilde has over 15 years of hands-on experience as a senior manager in humanitarian response and as an innovation expert. She has supported innovative organisations and initiatives in countries as diverse as the USA, South Sudan and Nepal. She has pioneered initiatives that break from conventional innovation models and enable global scale.

Dan McClure acts as a senior innovation strategist for commercial, non-profit and governmental organisations, specialising in complex system innovation challenges. He has authored a number of papers on system innovation methodologies and agile enterprises. McClure is the former chair of the Humanitarian Innovation Fund's Advisory Board and is actively engaged with aid sector programs addressing cutting-edge issues such as scaling, localisation and dynamic collaboration-building. This work builds on decades of experience as a system innovation strategist working with global firms in fields spanning finance, retail, media, communications, education, energy and health.

Image: TEAM Kaist robot during the DARPA Rescue Robot Showdown at Fairplex Fairground in Pomona, California, 5 June, 2015. The DARPA event challenges teams to design robots that will conduct humanitarian, disaster relief and related operations / Alamy Stock Photo.
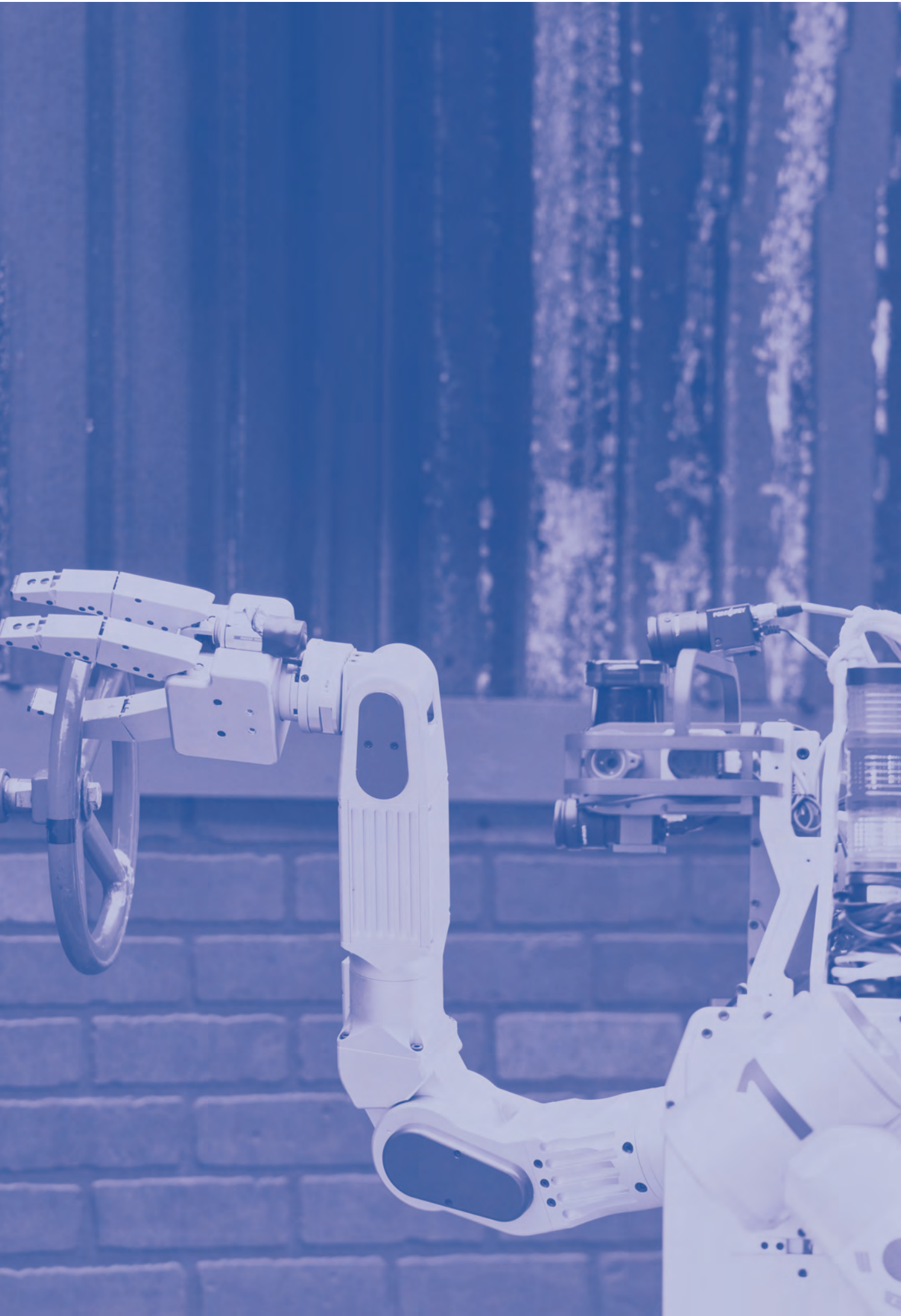
Abstract

Since 2010, the aid sector has invested significant funds in innovation practice, implementing pilots and other practices borrowed from Silicon Valley. While this has supported some impact, the aid sector has now hit a plateau with innovation, struggling to scale what works, frustrated by 'digital litter' (unsustainable technology projects), trying to overcome the small innovation trap, and 'pilotitis' (fatigue from implementing small-scale projects that never scale up). Many innovation leaders in the social and development sectors are realising that the 'lean' innovation approaches commonly used do not work well for the complex challenges in their sector.

To create the change and impact that our work demands, organisations must be able to work with real and messy challenges, and create large-scale innovative solutions. The sector is beginning to use system innovation to move past simplifying challenges in lean experiments and hackathons. This paper discusses how system innovation can support humanitarians to take the next step to innovation effectiveness, to create real impact in communities.

Introduction

When the team at ALNAP released its final review recommending a systematic approach to humanitarian innovation (Ramalingam et al. 2009), it was overwhelmed by the response that followed. Just ten years later, most aid agencies have declared innovation to be a core element of their work and organisational strategies (Dette 2016). From the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), and Global Alliance for Humanitarian Innovation (GAHI), to humanitarian labs, funding and studies have proliferated around the world (McClure & Gray 2015). However, despite a few notable successes, innovation work in the sector remains relatively superficial (Parker 2019). It has failed to transform the humanitarian sector and has met an "impact plateau" (McClure 2018). With a few exceptions, successful humanitarian innovation has worked within existing paradigms, along clear, well-established trajectories, seeking to "do what we do but better" (Rush et al. 2021), without seriously challenging existing structures and processes (Aleinikoff 2014). Too many promising pilots have proved unable to scale, and little progress has been made towards addressing some of the important large-scale problems.

While there are many reasons for this failure, one of the hidden causes is that humanitarian innovators have borrowed innovation practices from Silicon Valley that don't suit most of the challenges they are applied to. Many of the innovation practices that are currently used in the sector come from the methods of 'fail fast' or 'lean start-up'. While this has supported some impact, the challenge is that the innovation methods taken from Silicon Valley were made to create small-scale 'fast tests' or pilots that could be thrown away until an idea technically worked and someone would pay for it. While this is a powerful technique for innovating small-scale products and technology, it doesn't work well for the complex challenges in the humanitarian sector.

Humanitarian innovators have borrowed innovation practices from Silicon Valley that don't suit most of the challenges they are applied to.

Humanitarian innovation practices are dominated by business approaches focused on management and markets (Bloom & Betts 2013). But humanitarian innovation often works in fundamentally different contexts (volatile, changing contexts), and with complex problems (for example, providing portable water at a low cost in the desert for six months). In Silicon Valley, innovation is "all about making new stuff, agility, and adaptability, and knowing what's next. It's fast. It's cool. It wears a hoodie" (Fabian & Fabricant 2014). Working out how to deal with faecal sludge is … not that. In fact, if solving world hunger was fast and cool, someone would probably have already done it. Moreover, the notion that innovators should "move fast and break things" seems somewhat inconsistent with the work of a sector focused on finding effective ways to fix things (Currion 2019).

For the last decade, humanitarian innovators have mostly focused on lean innovation practices. Ten years on, many of these same innovators have already felt the limits of what lean and experimental innovation practices can provide. They have seen the complexity of many of the challenges that humanitarians face and how poorly it fits into narrow, short pilots with tools that allow for one type of user or beneficiary. So, what do we mean by lean innovation?

Experimental lean innovation

Experimental innovators use lean methods and run hackathons, utilise user-centred designs, and pursue pilot projects to fulfil specific needs. Once proven successful, the concepts tested in pilot programs are scaled up and deployed to support humanitarian operations around the world (McClure 2018). This kind of innovation can be highly effective for small-scale ideas that can be tested, developed and mass-produced for a functioning market, such as a new mobile app.

Experimental innovation tends to work on the assumption that a successful pilot will somehow move to scale through a high-resource model such as an acquisition or 'go-to-market' process of a large company. However, working pilots are not miniature versions of scaled-up programs. Focused on quickly testing a basic concept, they are intentionally short-term, simplified and isolated from real-world processes (McClure & Gray 2015). A pilot program is not concerned with managing local politics, training local businesses, setting up ongoing maintenance programs or changing behavioural norms (McClure & Gray 2015). In the real world, of course, effective implementation will require attention to all of these things.

In a humanitarian context, the lean start-up approach cannot continue experimenting with combinations of product and market until they achieve "product–market fit" (Mollick 2019). Nor can innovators rely on receiving rapid user feedback to inform their work. The potential for direct feedback from disaster-affected populations to donors and humanitarian agencies is very limited and, having few choices, "beneficiaries … frequently accept a flawed intervention rather than no help at all" (Twersky et al. 2013). There are also serious ethical problems associated with the notion of simply experimenting on vulnerable populations and accepting a large number of failures in order to develop the best solutions in the long run (Babineaux & Krumboltz 2014). Experimental pilot projects that lack careful consideration of existing systems may exacerbate or stimulate conflicts within a community, or further marginalise particularly vulnerable groups (Betts & Bloom 2014).

Three major areas where things go wrong using lean innovation

1. The innovation is too small

Lean innovation methods used most by humanitarians are designed to produce narrowly focused innovations for well-understood problems. These are powerful tools for developing something small such as a mobile app. Unfortunately, the sector has very few challenges that only need a specific piece of technology by itself to tackle them. Responding effectively to refugee health or addressing challenges of child protection needs more than a lone piece of technology. For example, by using a lean innovation method, we may get a better toilet, but communities may not use it, it may be too expensive, or it may not be possible to maintain it. The methods work with a small part of the challenge, but not the whole contextual challenge. So, when these 'lean' techniques are used on broader complex challenges that we have in the aid sector, they struggle to create complete, sustainable solutions.

As Hans Rosling, physician and public health strategist, said about new mobile app technologies:

> "We had hundreds of healthcare workers from across the world flying in to take action, and software developers constantly coming up with new pointless Ebola apps. Apps were their hammers and they were desperate for Ebola to be their nail" (2020).

2. The pilot is not sustainable impact

Often innovation promises quick results from modest investments—this is attractive to humanitarians. An innovation project can be conceived and run within a few months. This works well with small ideas that can be mass-produced into a functioning market. It fails badly in a humanitarian setting with bigger problems, different markets and financing structures. Humanitarian challenges require much more than an initial working pilot to create sustainable impact.

Consider a new tablet that might be used to enhance both classroom and at-home learning. This tablet might leverage cutting-edge technology, but all by itself it can't do much at all. To create a new learning experience, an education system will be needed to support the technology; teachers will need to incorporate the new tool into their instruction; and school administrators will need to evaluate and choose the new products and convince parents of its value. Looking further afield, a teaching revolution is likely to require new forms of content which will draw in educational experts, content designers and publishers. All this change needs to be endorsed by regulators. Success depends on the whole system working together, not just the clever new technology.

3. The real world is messy and complex

There is a common assumption that once an innovation has proven its effectiveness, it can be 'scaled' across many different contexts. This is seldom the case in practice.

Humanitarian challenges have diverse actors (from a ministry of health to mothers, for example), volatile contexts, and are just generally difficult to address. There are also a range of different ways the sector grows innovations, for example through coalitions, global process changes, or new funding practices. The methods we have taken from Silicon Valley do not well support how humanitarians create impact at scale.

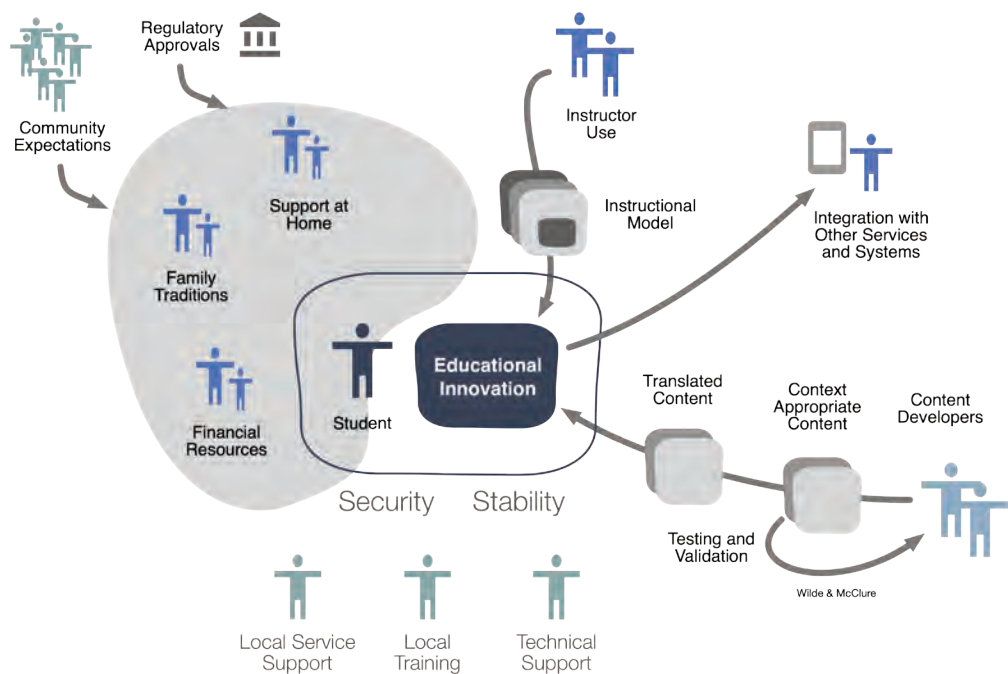**Simple problem ecosystem for student education**

Figure 1: Education innovation: a whole-system approach (McClure and Wilde),
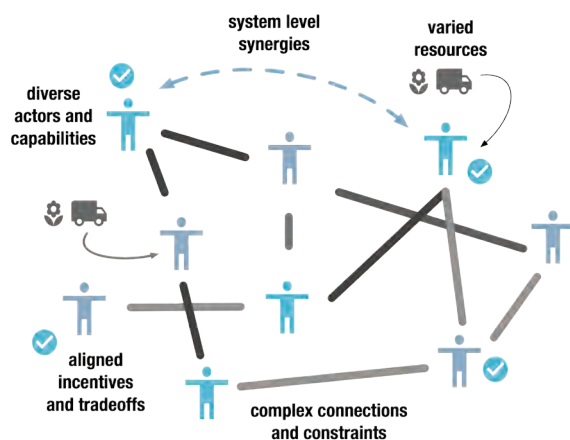
Figure 2: Real-world messiness framework (Wilde & McClure).

So, while lean innovation can work for some challenges, it doesn't work for many of the challenges in the humanitarian sector. At this point, some humanitarians then fall back on the common project management practices the sector (and world), have used for many decades to make broad change. Boardrooms of executives or senior leadership teams in-country will say, "Can't we just use the processes that work for our regular projects?", and so lean/experimental innovation is silenced and long-term research projects or multi-year project roadmaps take over again. We term this 'engineered innovation' because it grew out of engineering processes that brought the world a diversity of innovations that we take for granted today, from mass-produced cars to towering buildings. It is easy to see why the sector comes back to what it knows well when it is not seeing successful innovation scaling using lean methodology.

Let's further consider engineered innovation and what outcomes it can create for those affected by crisis.

Engineered innovation

Engineered innovation created success for larger, well-known problems with low-level complexity. This may include problems such as creating a better prosthetic foot with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) working on a highly defined project which must meet specific standards over a two-year research project; or working on big projects that are divided into smaller parts, which can be delivered separately according to rigid schedules and plans. It includes well-understood, repeatable engineering projects such as building a road or a school (McClure 2018), as well as a range of incremental improvements to existing products and processes. It can be highly successful for the right kinds of problems. For example, the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), shelter kit provides a selection of tools, fixings and tarpaulin sheets to assist with repairing and constructing emergency temporary shelters and other structures. This was not a new idea; it simply replaced the existing diverse range of shelter kits with a standardised version which had defined and tested specifications (Gray & Bayley 2015).

Like all engineering projects, the IFRC shelter kit was successful because those involved had a precise and accurate understanding of exactly what it would involve and how it would work in practice (McClure 2018). In general, however, humanitarian aid is delivered in such diverse, shifting contexts that it is almost impossible to predict and plan for every possible scenario. Moreover, few humanitarian challenges can be resolved by simply building a new structure or introducing a new widget. As Sasha Kramer, co-founder and executive director of SOIL, observed:

> "Building the toilet is the easy part. The most challenging step is making it work on the ground. The true challenge is not technology, it's really an issue of access, social mobilisation, and ongoing maintenance of the toilet" (Costanza-Chock 2020).

Few humanitarian challenges can be resolved by simply building a new structure or introducing a new widget.

In a similar way, while engineering practices may fit some innovation challenges in the humanitarian sector, they are not appropriate for most of the challenges for which the sector chooses to use innovation.

Once leaders and teams have struggled through solving complex innovation challenges using both lean and engineering methods, many innovators sense that something does not fit but are unsure what other approaches to use. Just because the sector has complex challenges, it does not mean that we should abandon the whole innovation endeavour. Rather, we need to utilise innovation techniques and methodologies that account for the diverse and complex challenges in which humanitarian work occurs. It is time for the humanitarian sector to utilise system innovation.

System innovation

System innovation is now growing across the social innovation sector and being implemented by some leaders in humanitarian innovation such as United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) or USAID. It is being utilised as a useful approach to innovate in complex contexts where both large-scale innovation is needed, and in contexts where the challenge or opportunity is not well known. In the humanitarian sector, complex challenges are unavoidable. Big, systemic problems simply cannot be addressed by building a new kind of toilet or designing a new mobile app, but rather an innovator needs to take in the whole problem and consider all the actors, resources and parts of the problem to make real, sustainable change. A powerful way to consider a whole problem and how a solution can create sustainable change with those it affects is by taking a systems approach.

Systems are all around us. There are easy systems to identify such as an educational system or a healthcare system. There are large systems such as the global food system, which shows how food growers are linked to food companies and to those who eventually buy and eat the food, the various policies, products and flow of capability, resources, infrastructure and more that sits around how food is created, moved and used globally. There are also small (but complex), systems, such as the cultural and behavioural systems that produce gender-based violence in Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya.

Even seemingly small innovations sit within broader economic, social, physical and political systems. For example, following Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998, Potters for Peace created a ceramic water filter production workshop in Nicaragua, distributing more than 5,000 filters within six months through various NGOs. Similar workshops have since been established in more than 15 countries around the world, and tens of thousands of filters have been distributed by humanitarian organisations (Betts & Bloom 2014). While this may appear to be a solid example of experimental innovation, the success of Potters for Peace actually relied on the ability of their innovation to fit into existing systems. For example, the relevant raw materials are readily available and affordable in rural areas around the world. Local people are accustomed to working with them and already store water in similar receptacles, so training is relatively straightforward and little behavioural change is required. The manufacturing process itself requires a relatively small investment and is therefore readily accessible and replicable. Potters for Peace had already established good relationships with local subsistence potters, who were keen to cooperate in establishing new workshops and small factories. As local manufacture is particularly sought after in humanitarian procurement, the filters quickly drew support from existing humanitarian organisations. Finally, the endorsement of point-of-use water filtration by the UN and WHO provided legitimacy to the concept itself (Betts & Bloom 2014).

Given the number of moving pieces involved in getting a ceramic water filter to work at scale, it should be clear that humanitarian innovators cannot begin to address the really big problems without a far more sophisticated approach to innovation. There are many great water filters in the humanitarian space that don't address the systems they will be deployed into and never make it past a pilot phase.

System innovation represents a new area of innovation practice for the humanitarian sector.

System innovation represents a new area of innovation practice for the humanitarian sector. It starts by acknowledging that innovation has to operate in complex, dynamic, multi-actor systems in which
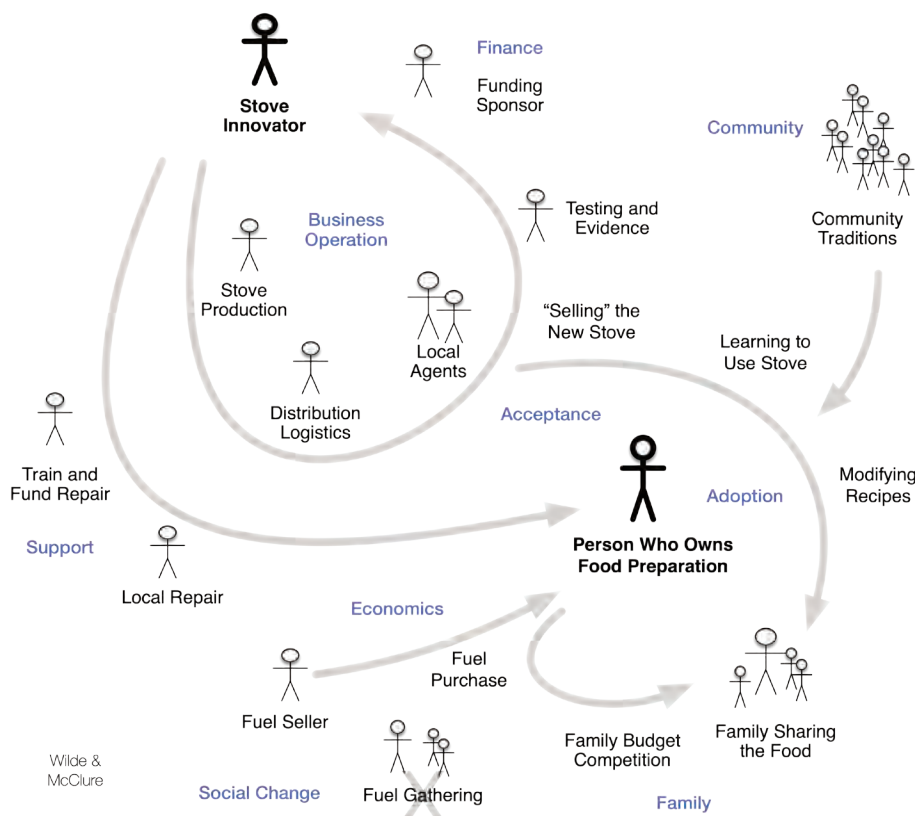
Building an ecosystem around a cookstove

Figure 3: Building an ecosystem around a cookstove (McClure and Wilde).

participants cooperate, compete and conflict with one another depending on their current alignment of interests (Adner 2017). People, processes and institutions within these systems are interdependent, so small changes can have unpredictable, cascading effects throughout (Rush et al. 2021). Systems innovators do not attempt to ignore or avoid complexity by focusing on specific individuals. Rather, they look at the big picture, mapping the whole complex web of people, resources and activities that constitute the problem (McClure 2018). Then, they look for the point in the system at which innovation could have the greatest impact. Rather than managing risks through exhaustive planning, systems innovators deal with project risks through continuous learning and adjustment (McClure 2018).

For example, when an innovator is building an improved cookstove, rather than using lean methods to focus on improving the stove for one type of 'user', or using engineered techniques of a two-year project to build and deploy a stove through a logframe strategy, a system methodology would start with understanding the many parts of the problem that the cookstove is addressing and the system it needs to succeed. The below model outlines the many parts of the problem that need to change for the cookstove to sustainably scale. It considers issues as diverse as testing and evidence (part of innovation management), learning to use the stove (family and community behavioural change), modifying recipes (cultural change), local repair and distribution (infrastructure changes), fuel purchase (economic and resource change), and many other parts to the problem that have nothing to do with how well the stove itself works, but everything to do with the stove's positive outcome on families and its ability to scale.

The practice of system innovation is made up of a number of tools such as creating systems maps and seeing the bigger picture of that challenge and solution, and using practices such as 'thin slicing' (an approach to implementing innovation that takes multiple parts of a solution to test at the same time), to make change. It uses different approaches such as the one pictured below, which develops a systems map of the challenge, so the innovator understands what the world looks like now, then building a map of what the world looks like in the future when the innovation or solution is scaled. Lastly, by taking thin slices of change, learning and pivoting, an innovator can create a sustainable, scalable innovation that works on a complex, real-world challenge.

Simple problem ecosystem for student education
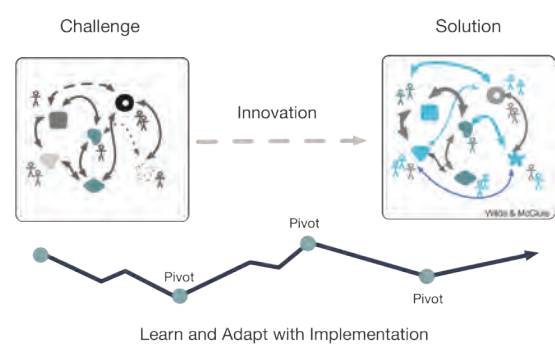
Figure 4: An evolving innovation journey (McClure and Wilde).

System innovation enables humanitarian innovators to advance truly impactful and ambitious forms of change in the real world. It allows promising solutions forged in the "crisis laboratory" (Bessant et al. 2016), to be developed and tailored to suit the needs of different local contexts. System innovation is not necessarily 'cool' and it does not wear a hoodie. It does, however, offer the tools and techniques we need to achieve transformative humanitarian innovation in a complex, messy world.

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Reimagining protection: Dignity, wellbeing and safety

ANDREW CUNNINGHAM

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Abstract

Core concepts in the humanitarian world are often used in ways that add to confusion rather than provide clarity. Research reports discuss technical details, propose theoretical frameworks or engage in policy debates, but rarely engage directly with key concepts themselves—their meaning, how they are used and understood, and their limitations. Protection is one important concept which begs for unpacking. The objective of this commentary is to spur discussion and reflection, to help clarify thinking around how we understand and use the term 'protection'. A particular example from the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), sector is used to propose a more nuanced way of thinking and speaking about protection. Dignity, wellbeing and safety are proposed as useful concepts to embed protection in humanitarian activities.

Author's note

The method of presenting empirical research is contested in the field of humanitarian studies. Being both a long-time practitioner and a doctoral-level trained researcher, I am often undecided on how much to ground such reflections on humanitarian practice 'in the literature'. I have detected an academicisation of humanitarian studies which goes a bit too far from the standpoint of a practitioner, but probably not far enough for academics. Some humanitarian studies journals replicate the approach of purely academic journals to the extent that the heart and soul of practice-based humanitarian writing is stripped away, and practitioners are barred from sharing their hard-earned reflections on their craft in a straightforward manner. The editor of this journal has kindly suggested a third way. This author's note presents the dilemma, while the commentary presents the literature.

Introduction

A protection perspective should pervade all aspects of humanitarian action, if we take as a starting point:

> "Humanitarian protection is about improving safety, well-being and dignity for crisis-affected populations. Protection refers not only to what we do but the way we do it. It involves actively applying core protection principles and responsibilities to our humanitarian work across all sectors" (Global Protection Cluster 2012).

Many aspects of protection should be considered, including respecting the principle of doing no harm; implementing services in a non-discriminatory way; identifying the most vulnerable people and their specific needs related to age, gender, disability or other relevant characteristics; and embedding community participation and empowerment perspectives into humanitarian programming. These aspects of protection must consider the specific nature of a humanitarian crisis and be adapted to distinct operational contexts.

Beyond this more pragmatic view of protection, a myriad of conceptualisations and perspectives have been formulated over the years. The legal basis of protection and how international human rights law and international humanitarian law relate to the concept of civilian protection is a traditional starting point (Heintze 2004). International humanitarian organisations with formal mandates, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), or the UN refugee organisation UNHCR, will often prejudice such an interpretation in their protection activities. A lens that looks at legal rights of civilians caught in conflicts or refugees seeking asylum is important when looking at the origins of the concept.

Much has been written, however, which seeks to expand the concept beyond this narrower view. 'New' perspectives and challenges to the understanding and implementation of protection agendas and programming abound (Bruderlein & Leaning 1999; DG ECHO 2016). Each era brings a different lens from which to view the protection project. DuBois (2009), speaks of protection as a fig leaf. In this view, humanitarian contexts are environments of unmanageable violence that legal protection regimes cannot solve and there is thus a limited amount that good humanitarian actors can do for populations suffering such violence. Yet humanitarians try to do their best for crisis-affected populations. Unfortunately, protection can be a fig leaf hiding the realities of violence from public view—the expectation is that something is being done and protection problems are being solved.

Protection can be a fig leaf hiding the realities of violence from public view.

As well as different perspectives from which to critique protection as a concept, each sub-sector has a wide literature on protection, be it related to refugees, disaster risk reduction, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, among others. This commentary offers a conceptual re-orientation of protection in WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), programming through a discussion of the specific protection-related issues that are most pertinent to WASH and how these relate to the organising principles of dignity, wellbeing and safety. However, WASH is but one case study of how the humanitarian sector can reimagine protection in practice. The lessons learned from embedding protection in WASH activities should and must be applied to other technical areas of humanitarian action. This case study aims to provide a template for how this process of reimagining can take place.

A concern for mainstreaming protection in humanitarian programming is not a recent development, nor is the concern for integrating protection within WASH activities.[1] From this practitioner's personal experience, a practical concern for protection was current at least as far back as the humanitarian response in the Rwandan refugee camps in Tanzania and then Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo), when discussions were held about how technical decisions impacted on the safety and wellbeing of the refugee population. The importance of a protection perspective in WASH should not need to be argued, as it does not need to be argued that protection must be integrated into humanitarian operations of any type. Protection has been on the WASH agenda for decades, but there is always room for improvement in how WASH programming operationalises a protection perspective. On a practical level, for example, women's health and hygiene issues are increasingly being taken more seriously, such as through the provision of menstrual hygiene kits. But more progress is needed related to the overall gender sensitivity of WASH programming, the depth of community involvement in program design, and the importance given to monitoring the impact of WASH activities for the wide variety of people they serve. These are all aspects of a dignity, wellbeing and safety perspective.

WASH programming

WASH programming comprises a wide variety of water, sanitation and hygiene services. These services are provided in camp settings, rural areas or urban settlements. Water can be provided in several ways: small dug or drilled wells fitted with hand pumps where water is pumped by the users; small-scale pumped boreholes

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1   For a discussion of protection in humanitarian action, it is worthwhile to start with the UNOCHA website dedicated to protection: https://www.unocha.org/es/themes/protection. For a discussion of mainstreaming protection in WASH programming, a good place to start is information compiled by the Protection and WASH cluster in Somalia: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/pm_somalia_booklet_-_wash_final.pdf

with gravity-fed water taps; or large-scale pumped water distribution networks. Water programs may also feature the provision of water filters for households, especially during an epidemic, or water container provision.

To collect water, people may need to travel a long distance and queue at a busy water point or may have problems with hand pumps not working correctly or being hard to use. Hand pumps and shallow wells are notoriously short-lived. Large-scale water networks with taps scattered through the settlement are less busy at individual water points as they serve fewer people, but also entail a much larger investment and have more infrastructure to repair and replace.

There is no perfect water distribution system, and many aspects must be balanced. Different choices concerning water provision will bring different benefits to the users. Some of these relate to hygiene considerations—what is the safest method of providing clean water? Some relate to ease of access—how can waiting times and travel times be decreased and ease of use improved? Cost is also an important consideration as budgets are not unlimited; with limited resources comes choices about which services will be provided and which will not. If a large-scale water network is put into place, what other activities are 'sacrificed' due to budget constraints or lack of operational bandwidth, such as sanitation or hygiene activities?

There is no perfect water distribution system, and many aspects must be balanced.

Sanitation encompasses a number of activities. For example, at the set-up phase of a refugee camp, sanitation could start with defecation fields, but as time goes on more sophisticated latrines could be provided, from communal multiple-hole latrines for whole areas to one- or two-hole improved pits for fewer users. Faecal waste management can either be done through emptying pits into waste pits or using faecal waste management systems much like septic tanks, which are increasingly being introduced.

Hygiene services run the gamut from health and hygiene education to the provision of soap and other washing materials, to the installation of washing points at latrines. Showers may be provided for washing, as well as areas for washing clothes.

Other WASH activities may include vector control—such as spraying against insects that are vectors of disease or providing medicated bed nets—and pest control. In a long-term camp setting, meat inspection and the construction of abattoirs may be implemented. Sometimes outbreaks of disease occur and WASH services, such as enhanced water treatment activities, must be increased.

Big 'P' and small 'p' protection

There are various ways to disentangle protection activities. One way is to contrast big 'P' protection activities to operational little 'p' protection activities. Big 'P' protection activities seek to provide formal legal protection for individuals and groups of vulnerable people, such as protections related to refugee status, while small 'p' protection activities implement programs in ways that reinforce the agency and dignity of those receiving assistance. An example of small 'p' protection would be providing facilities for culturally appropriate hygiene activities, such as showers that respond to gender norms. Small 'p' protection touches on a wide variety of WASH activities in multiple ways; a few indicative examples are described below.

Latrines must be located properly. For example, the geography and geology of a displaced camp dictates a certain placement of latrines, but the people who use the latrines also have a geography in mind based on their own challenges and needs. How a block of latrines is placed relative to housing; how the latrines are constructed (privacy issues),; the orientation of the doors (sometimes a religious consideration),; how the male and female latrines are labelled, among other concerns, are all important to communities. A dirty latrine or one that lacks washing facilities will not meet messages of hygiene promotion and inevitably affect one's physical and mental health, even if latrines are not often thought of in such a way.

Other issues can be subjected to the same sort of analysis. Hygiene activities are an obvious area, but other 'harder' activities are not exempt. The positioning of water points must consider several factors besides simple metrics of litres per person, such as decreasing waiting times and increasing safety for those in the queues, providing access closer to home, or being easy to use for all users. Showers are another example, as they are fraught with cultural and social challenges.

It is argued, however, that protection may not be the most useful term when discussing these issues. The difference between what we are categorising here as small 'p' and big 'P' protection needs to be clarified. We return, therefore, to the constituent parts of protection and equate protection with operational sensitivity to vulnerabilities: dignity, wellbeing and safety.

Dignity, wellbeing and safety

Let us break down protection from the standpoint of the key perspectives of safety, wellbeing and dignity. These three perspectives help to flesh out what protection in WASH means in practice, and from this basis we can then build a proper picture of what protection in WASH seeks to accomplish. These concepts are considered from the perspective of the users of WASH services. As described, WASH programming is highly focused on material interventions—the provision of infrastructure and services. The focus in the following discussion is on the users of these services and material interventions—as individuals and as communities.

To start, safety should not be confused with security. In the humanitarian sector, security usually refers to risks of physical violence.[2] Political actors, state and non-state armed groups, criminal groups and even local communities may all bring the risk of a full range of violence to those providing and, most importantly, to those receiving humanitarian aid. Violence against civilians, their agency, humanitarian security and a protection approach are all intertwined, and solutions often elude humanitarians (Baines & Paddon 2012). Safety is far simpler and involves risks of physical harm through accidents, negligence or poor design. There is an intersection where safety and security meet, however, and that is where design of infrastructure affects the security of individuals. A good example concerns the physical security of women, such as when poor lighting, a lack of latrine doors and an improper positioning of latrines, as well as many other issues, put women at risk of sexual violence. This has long been a major issue in WASH, but one that is not yet fully integrated into normal practice.

Safety has many elements and affects many groups who demand special attention, such as those with disabilities. The latrine may be functionally perfect, but if built on a slippery hill, it still may not be fit for purpose. It may be challenged that protection as a concept would somehow be debased if understood to be as pedestrian as physical safety; protection, after all, is not protection against physical injury by inanimate objects or natural conditions. But look at the issue from the standpoint of the users—is there not an expectation of safety, in the sense that infrastructure is meant to provide a service without the risk of harm?

Safety is easily articulated but the next two issues are more ambiguous—although they flow, to a certain extent, from the concept of safety.

Wellbeing is more than safety, security or the space where they overlap. Wellbeing is a combination of physical and mental health.[3] It is a sense that things are well in the physical environment, which in turn makes one feel well in oneself. The broken window metaphor is applicable here. This is the idea that a broken window indicates a lack of attention and encourages crime. In this metaphor, a broken water pump or a dirty latrine is the broken window. The environment is important,

and wellbeing is not only about lack of illness. Access to proper services—services that are tailored to the needs of the population and are not generic—are also important, as they demonstrate a certain level of engagement with the needs of the users.

Dignity is the most nebulous of the three and can be looked at from various perspectives and at different levels. Berry and Reddy (2010), discuss a community-based protection perspective, which speaks to the importance of dignity and agency in engaging with crisis-affected populations. Populations are not merely numbers, but people with agency and dignity. Does a lack of care hamper a feeling of dignity? Is inattention an enemy of dignity? Is feeling unsafe an affront to dignity? Queues and consequent tensions at water points, social restrictions to accessing certain services, an inability to access services because of a disability, and the like, can all decrease feelings of personal and cultural dignity. Poor hygiene facilities, lack of washing facilities or simply a dirty environment—do these not decrease a person's sense of wellbeing and thus affront one's dignity?

Queues and consequent tensions at water points, social restrictions to accessing certain services [...] can all decrease feelings of personal and cultural dignity.

Agency is a useful lens (I'Anson & Pfeifer 2013), even if sometimes overused as a concept. No one likes to feel burdened with constraints or put into situations where they have little control. Having a say in what happens is important. One wants to feel safe, especially when accessing basic services. WASH services are not those accessed by choice—they are not luxury items. Physical safety should at least be assured, and one's wellbeing is often linked to a sense of safety. Wellbeing is also derived from being well—physically, by not being sick, and by care being taken in service delivery. Dignity obviously comes from not being considered a nuisance, or being seen as part of a problem, but by being able to make choices and have some control and input into what is going on in one's own life and environment.

WASH activities intersect intimately with all of the themes, and, in many ways, are at the basis—along with food provision and medical care—of dignity, wellbeing and safety. WASH activities not only benefit users' physical health, they can contribute to their dignity and wellbeing, and at least engender their safety. In this view, the user is at the centre and their needs are seen holistically.

One reason for the lack of proper attention to dignity, wellbeing and safety is the false dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' WASH activities. Priorities change, especially when the focus changes from sanitation to highly technical activities such as water networks and complex faecal management facilities. The 'soft' side should never

2   The literature is vast, but for a concise review of the security and risk management perspective in humanitarian action, see this from EISF (2015),: https://gisf.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/EISF_Security-to-go_guide_Module-4_Security-strategies_Acceptance-protection-and-deterrence-.pdf

3   One straight-forward definition of wellbeing from the popular psychology press is: "Wellbeing is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress. More generally, wellbeing is just feeling well". https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/click-here-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being-definition-types-and-well-being-skills

be deprioritised, as infrastructure should follow needs, and safety, wellbeing and dignity are always important needs. Infrastructure design should follow small 'p' protection concerns.

Two points to mention separately include being aware of the needs of those living with disability and incontinence. Facilities for people with disability are frequently almost non-existent in camps or crowded urban settings. Where infrastructure is not able to solve the problem, other ways must be found to facilitate access to a full range of WASH services. Similarly, incontinence is a challenge that has, until recently, not been met by normal sanitation programming. These issues both present clear challenges to dignity, wellbeing and safety.

Cox's Bazar: Dignity, wellbeing and safety in practice

We will consider a specific program activity, the provision of shower facilities, in the context of the influx of Rohingya to the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh in 2017.[4] As a practical example, it is worthwhile considering the under-described issue of showers from a protection perspective. Showers are connected to a larger discussion of the importance of hygiene activities in emergency interventions, which is itself a critical theme of debate. A hygiene perspective invariably also leads to the important role of community engagement in program design given the social and religious elements which inform hygiene needs.

Shower facilities

What exactly are showers in the context of a refugee camp? Physically, showers are much like latrine blocks but without the faecal waste pit. The simple idea is to create an enclosed place with adequate drainage where one can wash oneself. There are a couple of key elements to the concept: a physical space is provided, where wastewater from bathing can be dealt with appropriately, and a space of privacy is provided.

The shower can therefore be looked at as a protection tool—a physical space with an objective to provide dignity and wellbeing in a safe way for users. But how does this work in practice? And to whom is this most relevant? There are cultural aspects, as well as gender considerations. The important issue is to understand the material needs of a population in a culturally and gender sensitive way. What is important is to layer a social analysis on top of a basic logic of hygiene provision. This section will describe three aspects which should be thought through: gender and, by extension, culture; community engagement; and program monitoring.

The shower can therefore be looked at as a protection tool—a physical space with an objective to provide dignity and wellbeing in a safe way for users.

Showers are representative of the larger issue of how simple WASH activities are perceived by users and their communities. Showers are physical things that respond to a specific hygiene need, but they are also important as safe spaces, or at least should be constructed and located in ways which engender safety. They also highlight the importance of dignity as an organising principle.

The shower facilities issue in the Cox's Bazar mega-camp was of this nature. On the surface, it was not clear why resources were allocated to them; in an overcrowded camp setting with massive WASH needs, were shower facilities a priority? But input from users made it clear that they were important for women in particular. The facilities provided a safe space for women to shower, as showering in public was not culturally acceptable. Linked with this question is whether hygiene activities collectively are a priority; however, as the link between hygiene and health is clear—such as the prevalence of scabies in a context of limited availability of washing water and/or poor hygiene facilities—hygiene has risen as an area of prioritisation over the years.[5]

As bathing will happen whether showers are provided or not, the next question to ask is: what are the consequences of bathing facilities not being made available, particularly for those who are not be able to bathe in public? From focus group discussions with women's groups in the Cox's Bazar mega-camp,[6] it became apparent that in the absence of shower structures women would bathe in their huts. Given the small size of the huts, there was little room for this activity, and it was also an unhygienic practice. Interestingly, the effect of creating a small space for bathing encouraged its use for defecation as well, especially at night. This practice was particularly unhygienic.

Another aspect of a situation where women were expected to bathe inside huts was a fear that this would constrain the ability of women to leave their huts altogether. This view came out quite strongly in focus group discussions with women who stated a high level of appreciation for the provision of shower facilities. More than the practical value in proper hygiene facilities being available, and even more than the preference for

4   The impetus for the following personal reflections were observations made from a 'lessons learned' exercise conducted in 2019 for an international NGO on the organisation's WASH response to the latest influx of Rohingya. It should be noted, however, that these reflections are my own.

5   See, for example, this webpage from UNICEF on how better hygiene leads to better health: https://www.unicef.org/wash/hygiene

6   Conducted by the author in 2019.

using proper-built rather than jerry-rigged facilities, was the element of freedom—the opportunity to leave the hut for reasons which were considered acceptable. The more activities that could be performed in the hut meant the fewer legitimate reasons women had to move around the camp.

The next step of analysis relates to where the showers were best physically situated. Beyond the provision of a safe physical space itself, there are other considerations relative to the geography of a camp, such as increasing opportunities for positive social interactions and decreasing chances of negative social interactions, such as intrusions by men into the bathing space or personal safety issues related to the journey to and from the showers. There are also natural links with other activities outside the usual remit of WASH programming, such as the facilitation of safe spaces. The location of physical structures, even as simple as a shower, should therefore be considered a social space—a space seen from a standpoint of dignity, wellbeing and safety.

Community involvement

Taking the above as given, this begs the question: how do we 'do' this type of analysis? Participatory community involvement in program design is not a new idea and has been a standard methodology within grassroots development work for decades, if not always used successfully. But in a refugee camp setting, with literally hundreds of thousands of people arriving and a massive camp infrastructure to be built in a completely new camp setting, it can be debated whether there is time for utilising such methodologies.

Regardless, in principle, communities should always be consulted. Certainly, there are standard operating procedures and tried and tested interventions that can quickly provide life-sustaining programming. This is particularly the case when prioritising material interventions, such as water provision and sanitation facilities. But consultation can also become a standard practice, and certain activities must seek community input.

What has often been described in the WASH world as 'soft' programming—hygiene interventions, hygiene education and similar activities—often gets deprioritised. For some of these activities, community consultation is integral to their successful implementation. An understanding of hygiene practices is needed to undertake a proper hygiene education program, for example. But this is not to say that all types of activities—however 'hard', such as water provision and latrine construction—would not also benefit from community consultation. For example, there may be particular ways the population expects to access water points, or latrines may need to be oriented in specific ways. The point here is that community consultation benefits WASH programming of any type and should be a standard part of program design.

Not all forms of community participation in program design, however, are created equal. The tendency to consult mostly male community leaders is widespread. It is often more difficult to convene women's groups unchaperoned by male leaders, and so these types of consultations do not always occur in a meaningful manner. Women often get ignored or have their input overridden.

Community consultation, it is argued, is a method of ensuring that a protection perspective is taken in program design. In the example provided above, showers were indeed provided, but it is uncertain how much decision-making was based on input from community consultation; that is, how much was the value of bathing facility provision, as described by women themselves, the impetus for the shower construction program? It certainly may have been, but, if so, the next step would naturally be for both the impact of the program to be monitored, and for the design and location of the showers to be evaluated in order for adaptations to be made in subsequent interventions.

Monitoring programming

Once activities are completed, they need to be monitored to determine if they are meeting the indicators of success. But more than this, data should also be collected on whether the program is having more than a material effect on the populations and is comprehensively meeting the needs of all users. For many types of WASH activities, the technical metrics are clear, but there are often less obvious social metrics of impact to consider. A protection perspective on the impact of shower facilities for women would be one of these. These social indicators, however, are often more difficult to assess. Continued community engagement and consultation is necessary.

Monitoring should therefore consider social changes, as they may indeed change over time. Original assumptions should be checked, and rules of thumb should not be allowed to become unverified operating assumptions. The danger is for social characteristics to become simplified statements that everyone 'knows'. This is internal monitoring—checking an organisation's logic, as much as external impact. Community engagement is also part of this process—not only at the beginning, but as the program develops. It is easy to forget something was done, and to forget to check with, or even identify, the most relevant parts of the communities.

As with so many physical structures, once built they are easy to forget, especially as new priorities take over. The social aspects are the easiest to forget to monitor. And after monitoring comes lessons learned, but the lessons learned must be considered and used to inform future operations. For showers, questions remain concerning construction methods; physical and social location of the showers; and how they could be more fully integrated into a comprehensive set of WASH activities.

Integration

Going forward, it is necessary to think in a more integrative way. It is good to focus on the various aspects which are included in WASH, and to fully elaborate on the different activities that respond to needs and how they fit together. However, WASH must also integrate into larger concerns—for example, protection—and some guiding principles are useful, such as dignity, wellbeing and safety.

As an example, one plan floating around the Cox's Bazar mega-camp was to set up areas where an adapted set of services could be provided to certain groups of people—one example being women, but there were others, such as the disabled, youth, elderly or any other group with particular needs. In the example of shower facilities, this would not necessarily mean that showers for women would only be provided in some sort of segregated section of the camp, but that a comprehensive set of activities could be considered for such areas that would complement those provided in the areas of the camp accessible by everyone. The objective would be to attend to issues of dignity, wellbeing and safety.

Conclusion: Reimagining protection

Let us return to discussing the protection concept itself. WASH was oriented as outward-facing service delivery programming, in which small 'p' protection plays a role, and an example of shower facilities was used to elaborate upon the central argument. But this commentary seeks to go beyond the specific and to generalise the findings. Dignity, wellbeing and safety are deserved by all in relation to every aspect of humanitarian programming. In fact, these ideas should probably be considered universal within every human community. Who doesn't want to live with dignity, in a state of wellbeing and in safety?

Who doesn't want to live with dignity, in a state of wellbeing and in safety?

'Protection' may simply be the wrong word to use to describe the underpinning operational principles, at least in reference to what we can think of as operational protection as opposed to formal legal protection mechanisms. It is argued that it is better to break down the concept into its component parts: dignity, wellbeing and safety. Each idea has its own operational implications and will inform program design in unique ways, but as well they all must work together. Putting these ideas together may dilute their individual power, but keeping them separate may lessen their synergistic potency.

Most fundamentally, when considering a concept like protection it is a question of perspective. One reason speaking about dignity, wellbeing and safety is better than the more nebulous concept of 'protection' is that together they describe the end state of activities. Programming, if implemented properly, should enable people to live with more dignity, with a better sense of wellbeing and with increased safety. The concept of protection somehow turns the perspective around and puts the onus on the program implementer to 'protect' the beneficiary, rather than assisting people in supported communities to live with dignity, in a state of wellbeing and in safety. The focus should be on the people desiring help, the communities they are part of, and the ways in which they want to be helped, rather than on the implementor.

Using the perspective of dignity, wellbeing and safety, therefore, more fully orients the perspective to individuals and communities and their needs. Examining how these concepts relate to WASH activities, particularly to the shower facilities example, showed the value of this approach to protection. The key point here is really about mindset and worldview. This is the importance of reflecting on technical services which can be envisioned through a community perspective—focusing on the meaning of a concept that allows for more appropriate programming. Related to this is the essential nature of community involvement in program design and in program monitoring. Community participation is not a one-off step taken at the beginning of an intervention, and dignity, wellbeing and safety should all be included in program monitoring and evaluation.

The conclusion of this commentary is not to lead the charge for the abandonment of the term 'protection', or to reformulate all definitions, guidelines, policies and practices around a new term or phrase. In any case, the three-term phrase dignity, wellbeing and safety is not a pithy formulation; it is suspected that the term 'protection', in all its guises, will continue to be used. Rather, the idea is simply for practitioners to be more nuanced in their understanding of the term in operational settings. Even a change in personal perspective by a practitioner is valuable when considering how humanitarian programming is seen and perceived by crisis-affected individuals and communities. Isn't it better to support someone in need to live with dignity, in a state of wellbeing and in safety, rather than seek to somehow provide nebulous 'protection'? Words matter, and concepts must be unpacked, broken down into their constituent parts, and made achievable through straight-forward operational choices. Therein lies true humanitarian leadership.

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Community-led disaster resilience in Nauiyu Aboriginal community

ANNIE INGRAM

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Abstract

There is a need for emergency management systems in Australia to shift to a more collaborative model that involves working *with* communities rather than simply delivering *to* communities. This research paper argues that in order to address this, emergency services organisations in Australia need to continue to shift from a service delivery approach to a more localised, participatory and consultative model that acknowledges and harnesses local leadership, knowledge, skills and experience creating opportunities for community driven and fit-for-purpose emergency management. The paper makes the case for why localised approaches are important in places with diverse populations such as the Northern Territory (NT). The NT Aboriginal community of Nauiyu's experience of evacuations due to flooding in 2015 and 2018 will be used as a case study to offer an example of locally led approaches to disaster resilience.

Leadership relevance

This paper offers insights into how leaders in emergency management in Australia can better serve the needs of remote Aboriginal communities. Leaders in emergency management throughout Australia often acknowledge they need to work better with Aboriginal people and communities, however many don't know where to start. This paper shares firsthand insight from Aboriginal people and those who have responded to emergencies affecting Aboriginal communities. Much of the literature on this topic doesn't offer potential solutions or link the Australian experience to the broader international humanitarian context. This paper seeks to do that, in order to offer emergency leaders in Australia a different perspective with practical examples.

Introduction

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit brought unprecedented commitment to and focus on localisation in the humanitarian sector. The resulting 'Grand Bargain' not only sets targets for financial reform in the humanitarian system but heralds a new way of working. It "envisions a level playing field where all meet as equals" (IASC 2016), and invites an era of working more collaboratively, respectfully and effectively with affected communities. Globally, the localisation agenda has already created shifts in the way humanitarian actors operate. While humanitarian organisations in Australia examine how to progress the localisation agenda in their work internationally, the ways humanitarian organisations work with communities in Australia must not be overlooked.

In Australia, it is widely recognised that remote Indigenous communities have become less resilient to disasters since colonisation (Paton & Johnston 2017; 272). A range of factors, including limited resources, power imbalances, a lack of meaningful representation on decision making bodies, lack of access to emergency plans and a lack of ownership in planning for emergency management persists (Australian Red Cross 2018c). This research project argues that in order to address this, emergency services organisations in Australia need to continue to shift from a service delivery approach to a more localised, participatory and consultative model that acknowledges and harnesses local leadership, knowledge, skills and experience, creating opportunities for community driven and fit-for-purpose emergency management (Australian Red Cross 2018c; Australian Red Cross 2019; Ellemor 2005).

Emergency services organisations in Australia need to continue to shift... to a more localised, participatory and consultative model that acknowledges and harnesses local leadership, knowledge, skills and experience.

This research project will first touch on the push for localisation throughout the humanitarian sector around the world and consider the extent to which localisation applies within Australia. Second, it will discuss why localised approaches are important in places with diverse populations such as the NT. It will then offer insights from disaster resilience work carried out by Australian Red Cross across three remote Aboriginal communities in the NT. Nauiyu community's experience of evacuations due to flooding in 2015 and 2018 will be used as a case study to offer an example of locally led approaches to disaster resilience.

How are Australian humanitarian organisations changing the way they work abroad? And does that apply in Australia?

Australian Red Cross has traditionally worked internationally and in Australia. The 'Grand Bargain' has led to Australian Red Cross reviewing its role internationally. In October 2017, research examining the role of Australian Red Cross in the Pacific titled *Going local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian eco-system in the Pacific* was released. This report has been the catalyst for serious structural change within Australian Red Cross, leading to fundamental shifts in how Australian Red Cross manages international programs and supports Red Cross National Societies in the Pacific. Other major actors in the humanitarian sector in Australia have also followed suit in rethinking their role internationally and how the localisation agenda can be progressed. This has included Oxfam Australia (Oxfam Australia 2017a; Oxfam Australia 2017b; Oxfam Australia 2018), Save the Children (Save the Children 2019), and CARE Australia (Lehoux 2016).

The *Going Local* research posed the definition of localisation as follows:

> *lo.cal.is.a.tion* (n.),; is a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations (Ayobi et al 2017; 1).

It is important to note that while localisation has a financial component—the commitment to channel 25% of financing through local organisations by 2020—it encompasses far more than finance. Speaking at the 2019 Asia Pacific Humanitarian Leadership Conference, Adeso CEO Degan Ali said in her keynote speech that, "everyone thinks that localisation is just about money. It's not about money. It's about shifting power". Australian Red Cross describes implementing these shifts as follows: "The push is to work across the humanitarian/development nexus, and collaboratively across the sector, to leverage a bigger change than we could achieve on our own, and allow local actors to lead at every turn" (Ayobi et al 2017; 1).

"Everyone thinks that localisation is just about money. It's not about money. It's about shifting power"—Degan Ali

While it is clear that there are important shifts occurring in the way that Australian humanitarian organisations work internationally, it is less clear whether this same consideration is being given to Australian operations. The very definition of localisation above, with its focus on 'national actors', implies that it is something inherently international. What does this mean where power imbalances or historical disadvantage exist within a country? The structural inequalities

that exist between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous population are well documented. A history of colonialism, institutional racism, dispossession and forced disconnection with culture and language have all contributed to creating these enduring structural inequalities. While empowering communities and addressing structural inequalities may be spoken about using different language and terms in Australia, and not necessarily considered 'localisation' within countries, this global push for localisation may provide additional impetus at home too.

How might aspects of localisation apply within Australia and how are community-led approaches fostered here?

In 2018, I had the opportunity to work on a disaster resilience project with Australian Red Cross in the NT called Reimagining Resilience. The project aimed to explore ways to increase disaster resilience in remote Aboriginal communities through community-led approaches and ways of working that elevated and acknowledged Indigenous knowledge and leadership (Australian Red Cross 2018c). Australian Red Cross had received financing from the Department of the Chief Minister's NT Risk Priority Project Fund to implement the Reimagining Resilience project. The project sought to examine ways of strengthening remote Aboriginal community resilience in three key areas:

1. Harnessing existing traditional Indigenous knowledge to strengthen emergency management
2. Creating avenues for community-led emergency management and Indigenous representation
3. Contributing to systemic change in the emergency management sector.

The project focused on three communities prone to natural hazards across the Top End (generally considered to be the geographical area of the NT from the township of Katherine northwards), which were selected because Australian Red Cross had an existing presence and relationships within the communities. Activities for this project were then determined by each community in consultation with Red Cross. The three project sites were Pirlangimpi on the Tiwi Islands' Melville Island, Galiwin'ku on north-east Arnhem Land's Elcho Island and Nauiyu Community in Daly River.

Below is an overview of the focus in each:

Pirlangimpi, Tiwi Islands
- Focus: Art and traditional knowledge in supporting remote community resilience
- Partner: Munupi Arts.

Galiwin'ku, Elcho Island
- Focus: Governance and Yolngu authority and control in emergencies.
- Partner: Northern Australia Land and Sea Management Authority (NAILSMA).

Nauiyu, Daly River
- Focus: Cultural awareness in emergency workers
- Partner: Miriam-Rose Foundation.

I began working on the Reimagining Resilience project having recently moved to the NT from Indonesia via Adelaide. I had until then worked in roles in the international development sector in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. I was also nearing the end of the Masters of Humanitarian Assistance, so until that point I had been very focused on the international context. I was excited by the opportunity to move to the NT and see how this work translated in an Australian setting.

In coming into this new space, it struck me that there were many similarities in the ways practitioners talked about working with communities around disasters in the international and domestic context, but also many differences in understandings and terminology. In particular, there were two key concepts from the international context that frequently came through in discussions about challenges within Australia. The first was around localisation and shifting power to affected communities (Australian Red Cross 2019). The second was around the 'humanitarian-development nexus' and how emergency and development actors were better able to serve the needs of affected communities together (Australian Red Cross 2019). A key difference that I encountered in transitioning from an international to a domestic context was the tight legislation that exists around emergency management in Australia and the 'command and control' culture of the sector (AFAC 2017; Australian Red Cross 2019). It begs the question of how easy or possible it is for voices of affected communities to be heard or for community leadership in emergencies to be nurtured in this environment.

Why are different, localised responses needed in remote Aboriginal communities in the NT?

The NT is a particularly relevant region in which to explore the idea of localisation in the Australian context, as well as the importance of community-led approaches in emergency management. Demographically, geographically and linguistically, the NT is distinct from the rest of Australia (ABS 2016), and it has a complex disaster risk profile (ABC 2019). As a wide expanse of land spanning from the tropical northern islands to the arid central desert, the NT experiences a range of natural hazards. Given its proximity to Asia, the NT has also played a key role in emergencies in the region, such as receiving evacuated people from from terrorist bombings that occurred in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002 and 2005 (Parry 2012), and being a staging site for emergency medical treatment in those disasters (Palmer et al 2003), as well as receiving evacuees from Timor-Leste in the early 2000s during the fight for independence (McDowell 2006; ABC 2006). It is now host to the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre, which is responsible for Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT), that can rapidly deploy to international emergencies in the region (DFAT 2017).

The Top End is said to be "on the front line of Australia's most severe climate change", with 1,000 kilometers of mangroves having died in recent years along the Gulf of Carpentaria alone (Bardon 2019; ABC 2019). Indigenous people in remote areas are projected to be disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, particularly those who rely on the natural environment for hunting and fishing (Green et al 2009; Salleh 2007; ABC 2019). Disasters are part of the historical fabric of the NT and are etched into the psyche of long-time Territorians. Darwin is the only Australian capital city to be decimated by an environmental disaster (Tropical Cyclone Tracy on 24-26 December, 1974), and the only Australian capital city to have been bombed as an act of war (WW2 Japanese bombing of Darwin on 19 February, 1942), (Rechniewski 2012). The below section outlines the key areas in which the demography of the NT differs from the rest of Australia.

Aboriginal people as a percentage of the NT population

While the NT does not have the highest number of Aboriginal people, despite what many people believe (this is in fact attributed to New South Wales), the NT has by far the highest proportion of Aboriginal people as a percentage of the population (ABS 2017b; ABS 2019). Whereas Indigenous people make up 2.8% of the overall Australian population, Indigenous people make up 25.5% of the NT population (ABS 2017b). This data comes from the last Australian census carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, however it is often estimated that the Indigenous population in the NT is greater than 25.5%. Difficulty in reaching remote areas, transience of Indigenous people and linguistic, cultural and technological barriers to carrying out the census are possible reasons for this. The NT Government estimates Aboriginal people make up 30.3% of the population (NT Government 2019).

Percentage of Indigenous people living in rural or remote locations

Likewise, where Indigenous people live in the NT differs significantly to the location of other Indigenous people nationally. The census showed that around Australia, 20.4% of Indigenous people lived in a "rural or remote area" (ABS 2017a). In the NT however, the census indicated that 48.8% of Indigenous people lived in a "rural or remote area" (ABC 2017). The jump from 20.4% of the population to 48.8% of the population is already stark, but consider this: what do we consider a rural or remote area around Australia? Queensland and New South Wales are the most regionalised states in Australia. But living in a rural hub in one of these states

(like Mount Isa or Bourke), is very different to living in a remote area of the NT such as Galiwin'ku or Borroloola. These are communities of under 3,000 people, made up almost entirely of Aboriginal people who have kinship ties to one another, live on their traditional lands a considerable distance from any urban hub, and primarily speak languages other than English.

Linguistic diversity in the NT

The NT is also home to vast linguistic diversity—both among its Indigenous people and its diverse migrant population. In terms of Indigenous languages, the Top End is also equal second highest in the country in terms of the number of Indigenous languages spoken (ABS 2017a). According to the 2016 census, the Top End is home to more speakers of Indigenous languages than any other region of Australia (ABS 2017a). This area of the NT is also considered to be one of the most vulnerable to natural hazards and climate change so linguistic barriers must be a key consideration in emergency planning (ABC 2019; Bardon 2019).

The importance of recognising diversity and empowering communities in emergency management

It is clear from the ABS statistics that the NT is comprised of a population that is markedly different to that of the rest of Australia. However, many of Australia's emergency management systems and legislation are developed in and for Australia's major population centres. These systems often do not translate to the needs of remote Aboriginal communities or are not appropriate for the circumstances. The immense diversity that exists among Australia's First Nations people means that recognising, valuing and empowering community voices and leadership is crucial to getting emergency management right in such different contexts.

Disempowerment of affected communities in emergencies is not unique to remote Aboriginal communities—but structural inequality and historical disadvantage add additional complexities. Given its unique demographic and geography, and historical power imbalances, the NT provides a stark example. However, feelings of disempowerment when local voices and leadership are overlooked or ignored are indeed not unique to the NT or to Aboriginal communities.

The below quote, for example, refers to the experience of communities affected by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, but illustrates the same sense of disempowerment and undervaluing of local knowledge, existing governance and structures.

> "The locals found that their initiative and drive in the early days was smothered by a recovery process described as overlooking local knowledge and expertise in community leadership. It further disadvantaged those locals with construction equipment and skills, and men and women needing help with disaster-affected businesses. The overall

effect was disempowering, and contradicted the appearance of meaningful community consultation" (Zara and Parkinson 2013).

No matter the composition of the affected population, the way emergency responders treat people affected by disasters is important in their psychosocial recovery (Australian Red Cross 2010). Disaster management systems that do not place affected people at the centre of operations have the potential to do a great disservice to the people they are trying to help. In some instances, the response can cause greater damage than the emergency event itself. However, given the cultural, linguistic, geographic, historical and structural factors in the NT, the matter is even more complex when dealing with remote Aboriginal communities.

Case study: Nauiyu Community, Daly River Region, NT

The Reimagining Resilience project was brought about as a result of difficult past emergencies where the emergency services sector could have managed emergency responses and recovery affecting Aboriginal land and Aboriginal communities much better. Tropical Cyclones Nathan and Lam, which ravaged north-east Arnhem Land in February and March 2015, were consistently offered as examples of where local people had been disenfranchised in the relief and recovery efforts. Many Yolngu at Galiwin'ku who were affected by these cyclones refer to what came after the cyclones as "the real disaster", with external agencies operating without true deference to local authorities and governance structures and thereby creating a sense of disenfranchisement among the local population (Gondarra 2019).

In taking on this project, it seemed everyone I spoke with had stories they wanted to share about examples of where emergency actors had gone wrong in Aboriginal communities. Nauiyu stuck out as the community where people wanted to talk about examples of getting it right. There were also stories of struggles and mistakes, but there was a positivity in the way people spoke about Nauiyu in terms of how much had been learned, and how far everyone (the community and emergency sector), had come in responding to flooding in that community. Starting in this project I felt as though I was hearing constant stories of where the sector was getting it wrong, or at least was perceived to be. I was very interested to learn anything I could about the factors that contributed to getting it right.

Nauiyu is a small Aboriginal community situated on the banks of the Daly River which is vulnerable to flooding. The community is home to approximately 450 residents from 14 main family groups. There is a small air strip in the community, but access to the community is most commonly via long stretches of narrow, windy roads. The drive there takes approximately 2.5 hours from Darwin or 3 hours from Katherine. When the community floods, the community members are evacuated to Darwin and accommodated at Foskey Pavilion at the Darwin Showgrounds as per the Territory Emergency Plan (NT Government 2019). Nauiyu was originally established as a Catholic mission, and to this day the Catholic church located in the centre of the community is a prominent feature in community life. On the country surrounding the community, there are many sacred sites and places of cultural significance. The scenery around Daly River is tranquil, but the presence of a site called Blackfella Creek where an estimated 150 Aboriginal people were killed in the 1884 Woolwonga Massacre is a reminder that the history of this region has not always been so peaceful (Lindsay 2013; *The South Australian Register* 1886; Allam & Evershed 2019).

The two most recent evacuations took place in December 2015 and January 2018, spanning 15 days and 18 days respectively (Australian Red Cross 2015; Australian Red Cross 2018b). Under NT emergency arrangements, Territory Families is the government department responsible for leading the NT's Welfare Group and therefore responsible for evacuation centres (NT Government 2019). Australian Red Cross is a member of the Welfare Group and, since the 2015 Nauiyu evacuation, has had an arrangement with Territory Families for the management of evacuation centres (Australian Red Cross 2016; Australian Red Cross 2018a). In the 2015 evacuation, Territory Families managed the evacuation centre for the first four days as was the arrangement at the time, before asking Australian Red Cross to take over (Australian Red Cross 2016). An evacuation centre management contract has been in place ever since for Australian Red Cross to manage evacuation centres in the NT (Australian Red Cross 2019). Australian Red Cross has had a full-time staff member based in the community since 2013 who, along with carrying out other community development work, has assisted in emergency preparedness, response and recovery (Mitchell 2019a).

The relationship between this community and emergency agencies, as well as the community's preparedness for emergencies, have evolved over time. Feedback from the community was that the 2018 evacuation was far better than the 2015 evacuation. The following will discuss why that may have been the case and the key components of this progression that may be able to be applied or built upon in working with other Aboriginal communities around emergencies. The Reimagining Resilience project, interested in identifying factors that influenced this improvement, sought to better understand the community's experience with those two recent evacuations.

Throughout the course of the project, I was able to have many conversations with community members, emergency workers who had been involved in the floods, service providers based in the community, Red Cross workers involved with the community and the flooding, and government workers involved in emergency planning, about their perspectives on what was learned and improved on during the recent floods. The responses fell into three main categories.

1. A relationship focus
2. Community representation
3. Continuity of relationship and learning.

The following passage uses interviews with a community worker and a community Elder to delve into why these three areas have been important in improving Nauiyu community's experience of emergency evacuations between 2015 and 2018. It draws heavily from an interview with Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, an Elder from Nauiyu, in which she shares her community's experience with flood emergencies. It also draws from a report and case study series released by the Social Recovery Reference Group in which Red Cross facilitated the documentation of the experience in the NT of the two recent Nauiyu evacuations.

A relationship focus—learning from each other, learning how to be with each other

The Reimagining Resilience project highlighted the importance of relationships between communities and emergency agencies in enabling community-led response. It is important to build these trusted relationships over time, well in advance of a disaster event (Aldrich 2018). It can be said that a factor in the improvement of evacuations between 2015 and 2018 is the work that has been done in building relationships in the community outside of emergency times (Mitchell 2019b). Red Cross has had a presence in Nauiyu Community since 2013. The sustained relationship between Red Cross and the community has assisted in building mutual understanding, collaboration and decision making around recent evacuations. Maddy Bourke has been a community development officer with Red Cross since 2015. Of building relationships with the community, she says:

"I have over this period built up the trust of the community Elders and as a result been able to effect change in the way community responds to situations of emergency and great sorrow or stress … Trust is built from the community getting to know you and know they can rely on you in both the good and the bad times. I have tremendous respect for the community and their resilience in times of adversity. As a result of this I was included in many of the decision-making committees and was relied upon to help in many various situations. I was also able to establish a good rapport with the young people of the community, gaining their trust over the years I have been there" (Mitchell 2019a; 33).

Interested to know about the community's perspective on this, I had a conversation with Community Elder Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann about how she saw the development of the relationship between the 2015 and 2018 floods. As a retired teacher and school principal—and an eternal educator—it was no surprise that she identified a "learning mindset" as central to the development of relational trust.

Rather than viewing the relationship as fixed and unchanging, Miriam views it as a "process". She often refers to a "process of learning from each other" or a "process of learning to be with each other". This is her perspective on both the community and emergency services agencies learning how to work together, and the community, in its diversity, learning how to be with each other in a very different setting to what they are used to (Mitchell 2019a).

I asked Miriam how she thought the relationship between Nauiyu community and the emergency services sector, particularly those agencies involved in the community members' stay in the evacuation centre in Darwin, had changed.

"The first time we went out [2015] we were all in learning mode in how to deal with each other.

I think there was that thing of them not knowing how to do things with us and us not knowing what their expectation was I think that brought it to a head (a live and learn thing),; it was picked up and noted when we were there the first time.

It made it feel better for the second time because we know at least if we were going there again at least they have a little bit of an understanding of how we are going to react, you know, towards each other" (Mitchell 2019a; 34).

I asked if there were any things specifically put in place that led to these sorts of changes. Miriam explained that a lot of listening to the community had been done about what needed to happen in future. There was the appointment of the two community representatives for emergencies—Miriam-Rose and Mark Casey—which she explains was key in 2018. There was also the community design of an evacuation centre plan, so that if the community members were to be evacuated again, the evacuation centre could be set up in a way that suited them. This was able to be used in 2018. Miriam reflected that with all of this, issues were more easily identified and addressed in the evacuation centre in 2018:

"There was things I suppose put in place from the previous time we'd been with you. Listening to us—what it was—two people [community leaders Miriam-Rose and Mark] that was there—that is happening, this is happening, this has to be corrected somehow… just little things like that that we brought to their attention" (Mitchell 2019a; 34).

With the impacts of climate change already being felt by Nauiyu Community, Miriam-Rose is realistic about the likelihood of needing to be evacuated due to flooding again in the coming years. However, she is also optimistic about what will happen should the unfortunate arise.

"This is happening one many times too many because of the climate and stuff and we've got to go with the flow and learn and be good with each other and just with our people too that run amok" (Mitchell 2019a; 34).

"Nature's funny and she does things in her own way, and if there was going to be a time when we've got to come again to be with you, [I] think that would be almost even better than the last time" (Mitchell 2019a; 35).

Following the evacuation in 2018, Red Cross emergency services workers who were involved in the evacuation were invited to travel to Nauiyu for a Water Blessing in the river that had flooded. This was the community's way of offering thanks. The ceremony includes putting water on the head and the navel to symbolise coming into the world in infancy. The ceremony connects the people being blessed to that country and welcomes them as part of that place. The community also invited emergency services workers from various agencies to come and spend a week in their community to experience life in community and learn about country and culture. The workshop was suggested after the community was asked what it wanted to do with money earmarked for 'community resilience' and opted to educate the sector rather than the other way around, which was symbolic of where the relationship was between agencies and the community.

Community representation

Another key element that was identified as improving between the 2015 and 2018 evacuations was community representation in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. Nauiyu provides an example of how community can influence and be involved before, during and after disasters. While the importance of community representation and voice in emergency response is somewhat embedded into the emergency response psyche in the NT, particularly around evacuations, sustained involvement of community leaders is less common in other parts of the disaster management project cycle. There have certainly been examples in the NT where community representation has not been adequate but embedding community representation in emergency response has come a long way in the past few years and the sector continues to try to build on this (Australian Red Cross 2018c; Mitchell 2019b; Ellemor 2005). Nauiyu offers an example of how community members have been involved in preparedness, response and recovery, partly due to the sustained Red Cross emergency work in the community over the course of many years.

During the 2015 evacuation, a need was identified for people to speak for the community in a consolidated voice in order to represent the requirements of the community. There was a need for liaison of sorts between community and emergency agencies. Two Community Elders, Miriam-Rose and Mark, took on this role as it was seen to be important to have a male and female representative and that these people be from different family groups. These two would be the primary representatives, and representatives of other language groups or families would join or be consulted with as needed.

Miriam-Rose explained that she and Mark are very different people, but they complemented each other well. Of her relationship with Mark, she says:

"We get on like wildfire, he speaks my mother's language, he [has a] police background, me teaching background. He can be really, really heavy with people playing up. It's good—we've got different ways of talking to people... whether there's kids or adults" (Mitchell 2019a; 35).

She explained that they became the representatives in the evacuation centre during the 2015 evacuation, and the same approach was used again in the 2018 evacuation. The reasoning for this eventuating was described as follows:

"They [the people running the evacuation centre] were having problems with us in finding one or two spokespeople for the group. I suppose almost 500 people and they couldn't spread themselves out to go individually to speak to all the people there and so decided to have two people to talk to" (Mitchell 2019a; 36).

"Also wanted to make it into something to use in the future, me and another person, also get other Elders from other language groups. Sometimes it was just the two of us and sometimes they/we got the other language groups to come in, so we'd have sessions in the centre, as often as" (Mitchell 2019a; 36).

Miriam said their role was to "talk, update on things that were happening and if there were any things that the Elders wanted to update agencies on, that was their opportunity" (Mitchell 2019a; 36). In addition to these meetings with the Elders, there would also be a whole of community meeting in the evacuation centre each day.

While both sides—community and emergency services agencies—have seen the community representation as very important, Miriam-Rose reflects that it can be a challenging role.

"... you've got the community coming to you and all the agencies as well... sometimes that's an issue with me personally and I just get away from inside the pavilion and go and sit in the kitchen area. It's not just our mob, it's people from that side too, government mob, or other offices or businesses" (Mitchell 2019a; 36).

While it can be a difficult role, it is important to note that Miriam-Rose was offered accommodation outside of the evacuation centre by a charity she is affiliated with and turned down the offer. She said it was important she stay in the evacuation centre with her community and carry out this important role, even though it meant little reprieve for her personally. Of the offer to stay offsite Miriam said she was thankful, but she wanted to be there at the evacuation centre, "just in case something happens and that you're not understanding what the needs are in the people as we go through this process of learning from each other" (Mitchell 2019a; 34).

When the community was evacuated in 2018, there were clearer expectations all round and lots of lessons learned from the previous evacuation three years before. In 2018, the community representatives were able to establish the cultural expectations of people in the community for staying in the evacuation centre:

"... when we went the second time, I think the people had got the message because we'd talked to them too and said, 'Hey, look we're not here for a party, we're here because we've got issues at home with water and stuff and these people are trying to look after us and make sure that we're comfortable'" (Mitchell 2019a; 37).

It is important to have a coordinated approach from the agency side when approaching this community interface model. Firstly, as Miriam identified, it can be very taxing on the community representatives. Secondly, the community is likely to make little distinction between which agency is which and where different people they talk to in the centre are from. When community members at Nauiyu talk about their experience of being evacuated, the terms 'your mob' and 'my mob' are used when talking about the community and the agencies involved (Mitchell 2019a). In referring to all agencies as 'your mob', there is no distinction between the different parties involved whether it be government agencies, non-government organisations or other groups. This emphasises the importance of seamless coordination and communication between different agencies involved at this community interface (Mitchell 2019b). While agencies may have different mandates among themselves and tensions with other agencies, it is important that all agencies coordinate well to facilitate smoother experiences for the community.

Continuity of relationship and learning

None of this work is possible overnight and continual two-way learning through relationship building is needed over time. There is a requirement for sustained work outside of emergency responses to build on relationships and what has been learned. Meaningful partnership means two-way learning and respect; communities that are resilient and prepared for emergencies, and an emergency services workforce that is equipped to work with communities in culturally appropriate ways and to adapt to meet the needs of diverse populations.

Recognising this, Australian Red Cross and the Miriam-Rose Foundation ran cultural awareness workshops in Nauiyu in December 2018 and June 2019 for twenty emergency services workers. In the workshop, the community emphasised the importance of activities such as these and "slowly, slowly, learning to walk together in that comfortable walk" (Ungunmerr-Baumann 2019). While running the workshops, Miriam-Rose encouraged agency personnel, whether volunteer or paid, to keep coming back to deepen relationships and knowledge of their culture and country, remarking "it's not overnight we're going to get to know each other".

In the interview with Miriam-Rose, the importance of relationships and the difficulty of the inevitable turnover of staff in emergency agencies was discussed. It was noted that there was no expectation that things would remain continuous, rather a compassionate recognition that "you have to have a rest and go be with your mob". The impact of this relational trust was significant in terms of what the Nauiyu community leaders can expect and what they know is expected of them (Mitchell 2019a; 38).

Miriam-Rose touched on what it was like for her in the evacuation centre dealing with lots of different staff from different agencies:

"... then another person comes in and there are changeovers in the place at times, and we go looking for somebody and then they say 'this one's here in their place' and you're dealing with another new person that you're not familiar with ... sometimes that's hard, 'should I or shouldn't I, or should I just leave it?' A lot of the time it's not really serious stuff, but thinking, 'Oh how do we do this, change that, or how do the people do whatever it is that's happening here?' And sometimes I'm standing off because I don't know that person well—the people that I've now met, they've been exposed to us and we've found what is expected of us" (Mitchell 2019a; 38).

In order to work in culturally sensitive ways with communities, emergency services workers and agencies need to be aware of their own cultural values and how this may influence their work with community members. It is said that "the dominant cultural values of the organisations, agencies and partners working with communities will influence their perceptions of the community's capacity to be involved in decision making" (Mitchell 2019b; 57). It is often believed there are nine dimensions that underlie cultural similarity and difference in regard to cultural norms or values. The most relevant of these in the context of how the emergency sector can support community-led recovery is "societal individualism through to collectivism" (Mitchell 2019b; 57). Mitchell (2019b, 57), states that "this was evident in the Nauiyu Evacuation Centre where there was a respect for the values of the community demonstrated through the relational emphasis and the group goals that government and community were working towards".

A lot of work has been done in building relationships and creating more equal partnership models between community and emergency services agencies. The challenge now will be going one step further and better using Indigenous knowledge in mainstream emergency management. During the cultural workshops, Miriam spoke about learning how to navigate the cultural systems of mainstream Australia, particularly as a young teacher and in her dealings with government agencies in Darwin. She said she had needed to learn how to dress and how to talk in that particular environment. She told the group, "We have to learn how to be in your world, and now by coming here you can choose to learn how to be in our world" (Ungunmerr-Baumann 2019).

Conclusion

This research project has sought to highlight the diversity that exists in Australia and among our First Nations People and explore why localised emergency management approaches are important as a result. Emergency management systems in Australia are making efforts to shift to a more collaborative model that involves working *with* communities rather than simply delivering *to* communities. There is, however, still work to be done to shift from a service delivery approach to a more localised, participatory and consultative model that acknowledges and harnesses local knowledge and creates opportunities for community driven and fit-for-purpose emergency management for all Australians.

There is great promise in the appetite for change and reform in the localisation space in the global humanitarian landscape. When it comes to localisation, in carrying out these much-welcomed reforms globally, the sector mustn't overlook the opportunity to redress the power imbalances and lack of representation in emergencies that exist within Australia, particularly in some of our most vulnerable communities.

The localisation agenda provides an impetus to review power imbalances throughout the global humanitarian system, and those that exist within Australia should not be exempt.

As the interview with Nauiyu Community Elder Miriam-Rose shows, when there is a focus on strong relationships, continuous learning and community representation, the experience of an emergency can be much less stressful for affected people. It reinforced the importance of the emergency management sector in Australia valuing and acknowledging existing capacities and governance systems that exist within communities. The localisation agenda provides an impetus to review power imbalances throughout the global humanitarian system, and those that exist within Australia should not be exempt.

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How Lean transforms relationships to empower employees and increase impact

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Image: A Medair team distributes 'sealing off' kits to affected families in Beirut in the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion of August 2020. © Medair/Hiba Hajj Omar

Abstract

The challenges of humanitarian leadership are well-studied by the social sciences. However, there is untapped potential in applying private sector management principles and best practices to humanitarian work. Some non-profit organisations have fruitful experience applying Lean Management, an innovative management system developed by Toyota, which is not just about manufacturing better cars or improving industrial processes. Lean focuses the organisation on providing more value to its customers which, in the case of the humanitarian sector, are its beneficiaries. Our panel shared their experience of using Lean Management to address common issues in humanitarian operations. Their stories demonstrate the potential of Lean to transform work and relationships by devolving power to lower-level workers and partners. By empowering staff and local entities, it also improves relationships, collaboration, and ultimately the outcomes of humanitarian missions.

Leadership relevance

We argue that Lean Management is the practice of leadership from the ground up, driving an internal transformation that produces strategic gains. While doing so, it aligns with the principles and values of humanitarian work and could help to reduce imbalances of power.

Introduction

This paper, based on a panel presentation at the 2021 Humanitarian Leadership Conference, presents evidence of how Lean Management principles can empower employees and improve the impact of humanitarian work.

When we think of emergency response or humanitarian aid, it is widely assumed that a combination of good intentions, political will, and adequate funding will lead to meaningful results. By the same logic, perceived shortfalls in real performance are attributed to corruption, excessive overhead, or bureaucratic incompetence (usually without evidence). These assumptions deserve closer scrutiny. In the face of growing humanitarian need around the world, stepping up the pressure on individuals or institutions to donate more is not automatically the best answer, and certainly not the only answer. Without improving the system of work, its processes and how people contribute, simply pumping more inputs into that system will not improve beneficiary impact. An exclusive focus on governance (intensifying controls and audits), or spot innovations like drones or Geographic Information System (GIS), applications, will not suffice either. In our experience, operational excellence is one of the most sustainable solutions to shrinking donor budgets and the increasing funding gap.

More funding and people and controls → Better outcomes? Unlikely!

Figure 1: Simply pumping more inputs into a wasteful and dysfunctional system will not improve beneficiary impact.

In our experience, operational excellence is one of the most sustainable solutions to shrinking donor budgets and the increasing funding gap.

To demonstrate this, our panellists discussed how each of their organisations applied Lean Management to their work. Commercial organisations originally developed Lean Management because they, like their humanitarian counterparts, were also under pressure to use their resources judiciously, and to deliver measurable benefits. Over decades of practice, Lean has enabled private sector companies to 'do more with less', increasing both efficiency (defined as optimal use of resources, often reducing cost), and effectiveness (defined as achieving declared objectives). Humanitarian missions clearly need these kinds of improvements as well.

What makes Lean even more interesting to the humanitarian sector are the long-term cultural changes that take place within a Lean organisation: dismantling hierarchical command-and-control structures, devolving power to decision-makers on the front lines, team-based problem-solving, and empowering national staff. Based on the evidence, we are convinced that Lean can reduce imbalances of power.

Commercial organisations originally developed Lean Management because they, like their humanitarian counterparts, were also under pressure to use their resources judiciously, and to deliver measurable benefits.

In the following sections, we will explain what Lean is, describe how it was applied to four cases in the field, and provide a simple framework to help organisations to begin applying it themselves.

What is Lean and why is it important for humanitarian leadership?

"Lean is a form of team-based continuous improvement focusing on the identification and elimination of non-value-added activities, also known as 'waste', from the point of view of the customer" (Myerson in Netland & Powell 2017; 413).

To begin with the basics, Lean is a management system developed in the auto industry. After the devastation of the war, Toyota was a humble maker of industrial looms that made the quixotic decision to build cars. With very few resources and experience, located in an economically ravaged country, the Asian firm was an unlikely challenger to the prosperous Western manufacturers that dominated the world at the time. Ford Motor Company had invented not only the car, but the production process (the assembly line), that made its output both profitable and accessible to mass markets. Against the odds, and in the course of a few decades, Toyota was able to exceed the performance of its mighty competitors. Today, it is generally acknowledged by industry and academia that the Toyota Production System, also known as Lean Management, was the enabler of this success (Womack et al. 1991). Closely associated with Lean is Six Sigma, which was invented at the Motorola company, and made famous by Jack Welch at GE corporation. Six Sigma is a method to improve industrial processes and business performance by reducing variability.

At first glance, a methodology to improve factory performance may not appear relevant to humanitarians. "We are helping people, not making widgets", is a dismissive reaction we often hear from humanitarian leaders. However, the Cinderella story of the Toyota company illustrates the extraordinary potential that Lean, with its emphasis on continuous improvement, can have on any and every organisation.

At a practical level, Lean is based on the idea that organisations can add more value to their customers—in the case of humanitarian work, the beneficiaries they serve—by continuously improving everything they do by, for example, eliminating waste, finding ways to prevent mistakes, and by making it easier to see where problems routinely occur. Lean relies on the people working in the system to quickly solve problems at their root cause. Lean is, therefore, an alternative to the conventional hierarchical systems of command and control, which assumes that the boss knows best and should therefore make all key decisions, which are handed down to the less capable staff for (more or less mindless), execution.

Lean relies on the people working in the system to quickly solve problems at their root cause.

Lean can also be seen as a way to make work easier, faster, and cheaper so that resources go further and achieve greater impact. Although it is now associated with a set of tools (like just-in-time manufacturing, or Kanban), Lean is actually a way of thinking founded on respect for people, which is a fundamental value in humanitarian organisations. Lean builds the capacity of staff and then draws on their experience and insight to make processes better. It treats every employee's time, energy and ideas as precious resources that should not be wasted. Lean also reduces the burden on people caused by poor quality workflows, delays and excessive workload—common realities in humanitarian work that reduce well-being and may eventually lead to resignation.

Lean is best illustrated by real life examples that the panel presented. For example:

- Mapping and streamlining of processes, such as a procurement process from sourcing to payments, so everything happens more quickly and correctly
- Creating a standard operating procedure for shipping that identifies all the steps that need to be taken, to make sure that they're not missed, so that goods move to where they are needed as quickly as possible
- Preparing all required documents in advance of receiving goods in customs, so that the paperwork is submitted in a timely manner and the delivery leaves the airport as quickly as possible to reach beneficiaries
- Even labelling the cabinets visually in a shared kitchen so new staff can immediately see where things are, rather than having to open every cabinet to find what they need.

The immense success of Lean management relies on a deceptively simple accumulation of incremental improvements made by individuals and teams that learn to solve problems together. The shared satisfaction of doing things right and taking pride in being productive cannot be overstated, since it sets expectations of excellence in an organisation. Lean Management has established itself as a global standard, which has been applied to many contexts beyond the car factory, including service and non-profit sectors (Lean Education, Lean Healthcare and more). In spite of the ongoing professionalisation in the humanitarian sector, Lean has not, however, had the influence in this area that its track record would justify. It is this gap that motivates our research and this article.

The panel

Given the low profile of industrial solutions among humanitarian decision-makers, the sector's strong emphasis on political and social agency, and the often-formulaic documentation of Lean Programs at practicing firms, we felt that personal testimony would be the most compelling way to diffuse this innovation. To this end, we convened a panel consisting of five managers from international humanitarian organisations or government agencies.

1. Abebe Nigatu Endalew, People and Culture Director, World Vision Rwanda
2. Dr Andrew Parris, Process Excellence Manager, Medair Switzerland
3. Darine Ndihokubwayo, Commodity Manager, Food for the Hungry Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC),
4. Elias Yacoub, Logistics and Security Manager, Medair Lebanon
5. Robert Ssaka, Project Manager, Integrated Personnel and Payroll System, Ministry of Public Service, Government of Uganda Kampala

Dr Bublu Thakur-Weigold, the Director of the HumOSCM Lab at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich, and one of the authors of this paper, moderated the discussion.

The other author, Dr Andrew Parris, a long-time advocate of Lean, started with Lean in his doctoral studies in mechanical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the seminal study of the Toyota Production System (TPS), was made (Womack et al 1991). His research team, Lean Aircraft Initiative, studied the possibility of applying Lean to businesses outside of automobile manufacturing. They discovered that the transfer was not only feasible, but that Lean could greatly benefit the aircraft industry, which it was already starting to do. With this lesson in mind, Andrew gained practical experience with Lean management at Lockheed Martin before bringing Lean into the development and humanitarian sectors (Parris 2013, 2019, 2020). He applied Lean Six Sigma for nine years at World Vision, three of which were spent in East Africa, delivering training and supporting improvement. Andrew, who now promotes Lean in Medair as well as at other NGOs, trained all the panellists. The following case studies are summaries of their presentations at the conference session.

Case studies and learning

Robert's story: accelerating government payroll operations in Uganda

For many governments, including the government of Uganda, Lean is a new thing. They have not thought about using Lean and the benefits that are proven in industry. Having come from a background of Lean in the NGO sector, Robert saw an opportunity to use it to transform employee relations, productivity, and process efficiency for government operations and, in particular, the process of retirement benefits. It originally took an average of 2.8 years for the government of Uganda to start paying out retirement benefits to their employees after they retired. This lengthy delay created frustration and contributed to low levels of motivation among working government employees, who were aware that some of them would die before ever accessing their pensions

By leveraging Lean practices, the team came up with a way to improve the situation, which not only impacted employee productivity, but also improved the image of the government as a provider of quality and reliable services. Robert's colleagues mapped out the business process, looked at the underlying issues affecting the information needed for the process to start, and who had access to this information. They identified the roles and responsibilities, and made sure that there were rules for decision-making. And at the end of the day, they were able to identify the pain points in the process that led one department to take one year to process the pension application, while another finished in five years. These delays occurred even when the government had allocated money to pay employees as they retired.

The government of Uganda is a complex structure, with more than 80 local bodies operating all over the country. This meant that every problem in the regions eventually had to try to come to Kampala. The project therefore solved a number of logistics challenges that caused delays. In so doing, they decentralised the service, which helped to empower employees and restore the trust lost by retirees. Most importantly, the government was able to effectively use this success as a domestic example of positive change. At the same time, they experienced improved working relationships, higher employee productivity, and a happier community.

By making the workflow visible, working together to streamline it and reduce the number of handoffs, Robert Ssaka's Lean team was able to reduce pension applications from three years to five days.

To summarise, Robert's Lean project solved a problem in government operations in which pension payments were first made almost three years after the employee left the service of the government. By making the workflow visible, working together to streamline it and reduce the number of handoffs, his Lean team was able to reduce it from three years to five days. This was through simple, logical changes in the process, without any major reorganisation of the government or downsizing, or a new IT system. Indeed, even as Lean came into place, there was no replacement of staff and no one lost their jobs. But at the same time, it simplified the task, and what everybody had to do was clear. According to Robert, "with Lean you can achieve much more with existing resources".

Darine's story: streamlining purchase-to-pay at World Vision in Burundi

When she began applying Lean, Darine was working with World Vision as a supply chain and administration manager, where the Lean system was virtually unknown. Her team was executing its procurement as it had always been done, according to standard operating procedures and policies. This work proved to be increasingly ineffective and stressful. The system had reached a point where delays in meeting the program's demands and paying suppliers were on the rise. The team faced fraud audit queries and increasing pressure. Darine reflects on the hectic atmosphere in the office, "running up and down purchasing one thing today, tomorrow another... by the way, I need a pen as well". As a result, staff didn't have time to take their leave days, and there was a lot of burnout.

In training with Andrew Parris, Darine was introduced to Lean and Six Sigma, which equipped and inspired Darine to undertake a number of improvement projects. One of these was called Plan-to-Procure-to-Pay, for which Darine was the designated project manager, supported by the country director and other staff. Her team analysed the processes and work, where they discovered that they had been wasting a lot of resources, time, and energy. A number of redundancies became apparent. For example, a certain document had to be signed by four or five people in the same department or from the field. A driver had to travel 200 kilometres to get a purchasing requisition approved (signed), incurring costs for fuel and hotels, during which time that driver could not provide other services.

The team analysed what could be done better, changed, or eliminated completely. Darine and her colleagues mapped the processes and submitted a full report of recommended improvements, flagging the time and money that were wasted by the current way of doing things. The management reviewed and approved the proposed changes, and the project team began to implement the plan. They put in place a framework agreement, conducted market surveys to update price lists, and worked with the IT team to automate what was paper based at the time. Later, they presented their solutions to other offices to encourage the adoption of the streamlined processes and analysis of their procurement systems.

Sharing real-life examples from the field, Darine explained how trust erodes when processes are not optimal and a system is set up to fail, which creates a 'blame game'. She noted that when a project was overspent, her colleagues used to automatically blame procurement. The Lean analyses had revealed that they had been purchasing materials for projects that were already in their warehouse. The root cause of avoidable overspend was the organisation's inability to control the stock of items on hand. As a result of overspending, the donor did not trust the organisation, which had to submit to an increasing number of time-consuming audits. The procurement team often had to defend why a particular document was approved on a date that was different from when things were dispatched. They often had no explanation because they had simply reacted to a situation in which someone would bring documents for approval and subsequently lose those documents. A replacement would be prepared and backdated, which raised suspicion. It is also possible that someone with bad intentions executed an unauthorised transaction because it was paper-based, and it was easy to pencil in dates. Darine and her team also realised that they didn't have all the people who were authorised to sign located in one place. Once they became visible, each of these procedural issues were resolved.

Another important challenge faced by the procurement team was the fact that its suppliers typically waited an entire year to be paid. From a business perspective, this type of delay is unacceptable to firms that have delivered goods or services, because it forces them to effectively finance their customers' consumption for over a year. The team diagnosed root causes ranging from the loss of the procurement document, a missing signature, or a procedural enquiry that had not been properly completed.

Darine's Lean pilot project saved US$140,000 and reduced the construction time by 50%. Today, World Vision Burundi has a very good relationship with its suppliers, having cut standard payment times from one year to seven days.

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Elias' story: improving emergency response at Medair in Lebanon

In August 2020, Lebanon faced not only the Beirut blast, a huge chemical explosion, but also lockdown because of COVID-19. The country had a high inflation rate, and the situation was difficult in general. Lebanon relies on imports, and the import prices were affected by the prevailing economic crisis. Because the import currency is USD and Lebanon suffered a shortage of hard currency, this resulted in a shortage of vital goods in the country. This is the context of the Medair emergency response to the Beirut blast.

After the explosion, it took several hours for Medair's emergency team to know what exactly had happened. Senior leaders began to meet to decide how to respond. The first needs assessment, which was done door to door, gave a clearer idea of the needs. The response was divided into two phases, the first of which was the distribution of emergency relief shelter kits, and the second, reconstruction. As in any emergency response, time is of the essence, so Medair's teams quickly began to execute, and adjusted their processes as needed. This is where the existing Lean culture and habits of continuous improvement enabled them to face the daunting task.

Knowing there was a lack of materials in the country, Medair started the preparation for the second phase (reconstruction), while the first phase (emergency relief), was ongoing. Elias' logistics team launched a second assessment, using a survey that could be filled in on mobile devices. At the same time, their back office selected three suppliers through an open bid process. They soon realised the standard procurement process was too long and adjustments would have to be made in order to reach beneficiaries as soon as possible. Suppliers were asked to disclose the materials they had in stock, especially the critical quantities of glass that were needed to repair shattered windows, but not produced in Lebanon. In addition to inventory availability, they verified potential delivery times.

Elias explained the relentless focus on both incremental and larger process innovations in Medair's response. During the first needs assessment carried out door-to-door, they immediately started improving their method. This involved not only the field team but also the administration and cross-functional staff supporting the assessment. All colleagues reviewed and adjusted their work to the unfolding situation on a daily—if not hourly—basis, which was made possible by entrenched habits of communication. By eliminating the waste in the standard assessment which had been developed in another context, the responders were able to save time, and distribute a substantially larger number of kits than other organisations on the ground at the time (Parris et al. 2021).

Elias emphasised the importance of information-sharing and coordination in an emergency response, where the risk of confusion and redundant work is high. The Medair team worked with low technology like a WhatsApp group that included both volunteers and staff. This simple tool allowed requests coming from the field to go directly to the right person without having to go through the senior management team. In this way, everyone knew what was going on in the field and issues were sorted out by the team on the spot. Elias recalls that they did not wait for orders from the boss. The WhatsApp chat was simultaneously used like a good report, providing a summary of the day's events. Senior management was

always informed of these developments, but did not provide detailed instructions on how to respond to each change. These decisions were made by those who were close to the action and understood the conditions on the ground. Collaboration and fast information-sharing is part of the culture that already existed in Medair's Lebanese team, and a source of their high motivation. The country director was in the field on a daily basis to encourage and empower his staff. As Elias noted, "at some points you need motivation to continue, and I was getting it on a daily basis, and I was transferring it to the staff".

Abebe's story: making hiring faster at World Vision in Ethiopia

Without the right staff in the field at the right time, humanitarian missions cannot be successful. Abebe's organisation struggled with a recruitment process that was long and time-consuming, complex and expensive: before Lean, hiring took 120 days and required 129 work steps to be completed. They understood that this negative performance in a core function was a liability.

The philosophy of Lean encouraged Abebe's team to investigate the root causes of the dysfunction. They uncovered an excessive number of work steps and decision points in the process. After agreeing upon a common vision of excellence, they proceeded to reduce the process steps, and decision points, which decentralised decision-making. All this required a change of policies and guidelines, as well as the redesigning of approval levels and templates to eliminate the waste. The result was a new recruitment process that, from start to end took about 42 days. After implementing Lean, they had to complete only 60 steps for a new hire. Decision-making points fell from ten to four, making it possible to attract and hire competent and highly skilled candidates from the market in a timely manner.

Abebe reflected on the changes in culture and paradigm shifts that resulted from the project: where previously they had defined processes in their own interests, and through their own eyes, the team learned to see their processes through the customer's eyes. As he explained, "the children we serve are our customers, as are our donors".

Abebe emphasised that in Lean thinking, leaders are not there to improve processes. The people who do the work are there to improve processes, which is the essence of employee empowerment. With Lean they train and mentor employees to be process improvers by themselves. Engaging the entire workforce was very important to their success since organisational performance is not about expert knowledge. According to Abebe, "We don't need experts to come and solve problems. It has to become a place where all staff are engaged in process improvement so that continuous improvement will be a culture".

Lean and humanitarian leadership

This article raises the voices of industrial engineers as contributors to the discourse on the future of aid, which is dominated by the social sciences, and, arguably, the media. When engineers address the challenges of leadership, the focus of discourse shifts from political action to the drivers of operational performance, which is not commonly associated with strategic change. We argue, however, that Lean is about leadership from the ground up. This type of leadership drives an internal transformation that produces strategic gains (doing more with less which can close the funding gap). While doing so, it aligns seamlessly with the principles and values of humanitarian work.

As Darine observed, her colleagues at World Vision were initially reluctant to try Lean, thinking that they could not apply anything from the industrial or manufacturing world and expect it to work in a humanitarian setting. But she soon understood that her customers were the beneficiaries they served, and that they deserved to have better services because the donors give humanitarian organisations money to serve these beneficiaries. In her words, her organisation was a channel to convey the money to the beneficiaries. She reflected, "Whenever we give them poor services, whenever our projects fail, we have failed the beneficiaries. They may not be able to talk directly to the donor, but there are evaluations and feedback mechanisms in place. We get to know how a certain organisation is performing".

The stories shared by the panellists illustrate how, over time, any organisation can descend into a downward spiral: when things don't work, people think they can't work. As a consequence, they lose pride and confidence in themselves, and their leaders lose trust in the teams, hence try to control them. The cases demonstrate how, through Lean and continuous improvement, the teams on the ground took control of their system, instead of their system controlling them, and embarked on an upward spiral of performance. By improving one small process segment, the knock-on effects created improvements in other areas. This is how Darine's procurement team proceeded until it had saved US$140,000, reduced construction time by 50%, improved donor trust and audit results and, not least, compelled the staff to continue improving their own system. The pride in their achievements is palpable because, although they initially worked with an expert, the crucial knowledge came from within the organisation. It was not Dr Andrew Parris with

his MIT pedigree who told the team what to do, but Darine and her colleagues—the experts in their work—who went about devising, implementing, and owning the solutions.

It was not Dr Andrew Parris with his MIT pedigree who told the team what to do, but Darine and her colleagues—the experts in their work—who went about devising, implementing, and owning the solutions.

The results of the individual Lean projects speak for themselves. It is worth emphasising that, although it operates under specific conditions and challenges, the humanitarian sector is not proven to be any more wasteful than commercial industrial systems. On the contrary, a volume of research and case studies affirm that for-profit firms experience similar savings and improvements as they become Lean.

Practitioners of Lean often compare it (somewhat poetically), to a journey, which emphasises the ongoing or open-ended nature of the initiative, and hints at the personal investment. Because systems are characterised by constant change, in both boundary and internal conditions, what is a solution today will become tomorrow's outdated legacy, and a potential source of waste. Sustainable excellence is only possible if attention is paid to updating how work is done, eliminating waste as it becomes apparent, and if the focus on customer/beneficiary value is relentlessly reinforced.

Our panellists made clear that, with basic training and tools, humanitarian workers can apply Lean thinking and tools to achieve more with existing resources. Most readers will also be familiar with the blame game, and the firefighting which is all too common in dysfunctional systems. These are hidden costs in poorly executed humanitarian missions. The capacity-building that occurred in each Lean project also demonstrates the long-term, strengthening effects of continuous improvement on employee empowerment, morale, and a productive work culture. One of the insights gained from our case study of Medair's response to the Beirut Blast (Parris et al 2021), was that the organisation was prepared for that emergency not because it had a detailed 'Urban Explosion Response Plan' in place at any point in time. Instead, their superior results—faster, more effective, and less wasteful—can be attributed to the fact that their people, processes, and technology were mature and high-performing (Garvin 1993). When they took the initiative to respond to the sudden-onset crisis, they were quickly able to resolve the emerging challenges on the spot. The benefits of Lean

are particularly valuable in high-stress situations and resource-poor environments like these, which is exactly how Toyota began its own journey.

What your organisation can do to begin with Lean

Every organisation can begin applying Lean Management principles by following these steps:

1. Learn about Lean (see resources listed below), teach your team, and coach them to apply it.
   • Tip: Find a Lean expert to teach and coach you.

2. Start making small improvements on wasteful things that bother you. Structure your projects by following Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), cycle (see Figure 2),

3. For improvements that affect and need to involve others, convene a team that includes those who do the work. Apply the PDCA cycle together in a rigorous manner.
   • Tip: Ensure you identify and address root causes. Do not blame people but focus on what in the structure is creating negative behaviours.
   • Tip: Measure the 'before' and 'after' states in the process you are addressing. Document and share what was improved, together with what was learned, ideally using easy-to-digest media like video.

4. Leaders should ask their teams the following three questions about the system of work:
   • What is causing problems?
   • How can we do this better?
   • What do you need to succeed?
   …and then apply the PDCA cycle to address what you hear from your people.

5. Study the seven key Lean practices:
   • Identify value and waste
   • Prevent mistakes
   • Organise the area
   • Standardise work
   • Make work visual
   • Make work flow
   • Solve problems
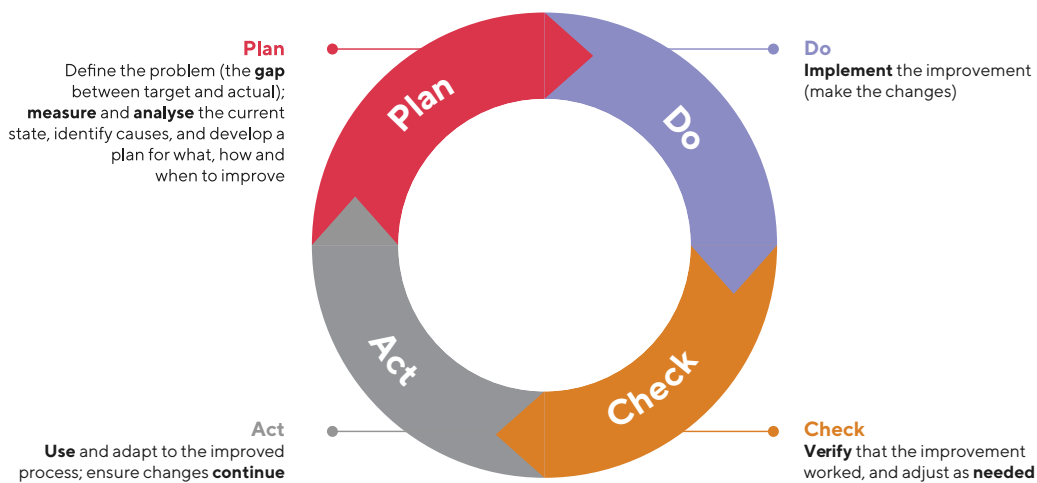   …and apply them diligently to improve work

Figure 2: The PDCA cycle

Free online resources

There are many valuable resources available for an individual or organisation wanting to learn more about Lean and apply it in the workplace. Many organisations and experts offer paid conferences, training and workshops. They also provide free resources like newsletters, podcasts, webinars and even electronic books.

Consider the following for starters:

Websites and books:
- Paul Akers (great videos), and his free book 2 Second Lean
- Lean Six Sigma for Good (great stories and e-books),

Blogs and Podcasts
- Gemba Academy (podcast),
- Mark Graban's Lean Blog (podcast),
- The Lean Effect podcast
- Lean Leadership for Ops Managers podcast

Lean Institutes
- Based in the US: Lean Enterprise Institute and their newsletter Lean Post
- Globally: Lean Global Network and their newsletter Planet Lean

Webinars
- Lean Frontiers has some great free webinars

Video from Toyota
- Meals per Hour project helping the Food Bank for New York City

Formal Training and Certification
- The Council for Six Sigma Certification: free PDF Lean Six Sigma textbooks and paid certification exams

Community on LinkedIn
- Lean Thinking for NGOs and Nonprofits: Lean4NGO

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Indigenous data in effective humanitarian responses

WAKANYI HOFFMAN

Wakanyi Hoffman is the founder of The African Folktales Project, an ongoing collection of oral stories obtained from Africa's Indigenous tribes aimed at teaching children about the role of informal and traditional knowledge in finding solutions that meet the challenges of achieving the global sustainable development goals. She is also a global education and media specialist and is the Director of Communications at Humanity Link and a board member of The Kenya Education Fund. She is a graduate of University College London and has worked globally as an editor and writer for international organisations. She is currently working on publishing African folktales as picture books to promote global citizenship education using the Indigenous knowledge system as the pedagogical approach to learning.

Abstract

In the international humanitarian landscape, crisis interventions are deployed based on a long-standing working culture that presupposes that local authorities are usually overwhelmed during a crisis and unable to mobilise local capacity. Thus, external human resource mobilisation is necessary. However, this may only be true in various instances, such as natural disasters, where rapid response is needed to extinguish further harm to human life. In most cases, there are no mechanisms to make prior assessments that can inform decision-makers about the kind of international assistance needed in the local context.

This is because existing data for the availability of resources is produced mainly by international aid agencies and their governing political institutions. This database of knowledge, which leans heavily on a post-colonial Anglocentric viewpoint about 'best practices', is used as the baseline to assess the ability of potential partners to mobilise their resources, while failing to include the capacity of local agents to determine what capacity exists in a particular context, what they are already capable of delivering and how best to support their response system (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction [UNISDR] 2008).

However, as access to digital communication devices and other globally useful technology in resource-constrained rural settings continues to emerge, this may soon change. This paper explores the ways in which Indigenous and local knowledge should contribute to the exploration of intelligent and sustainable solutions that are well-suited within the local context to mitigate and understand humanitarian crises before, during and after they occur, and how to curate, analyse and use local data and knowledge systems to create innovations that are sustainable and adaptive to the priorities of the local population.

Leadership relevance

This paper aims to showcase the importance of harnessing the full potential of local knowledge systems and data for international organisations to deliver better policies and services to citizens in marginalised communities worldwide. The paper also acknowledges that key challenges exist to identify and unpack the barriers to local knowledge drivers, such as power hierarchies within the international organisation that diminish the ability to collaborate with new and untried practices. Emphasis is placed on the importance of establishing non-hierarchical connections with local humanitarian actors living in the affected communities, in order to deliver aid and assistance that is relevant, helpful, and sustainable. The paper concludes by citing the *ubuntu* way, an Indigenous African resource mobilisation system, as a potentially beneficial method of sharing leadership roles to effectively mobilise local and international resources collaboratively. This approach ensures all sources of knowledge are valued and shared collectively to safeguard heritage and synthesise knowledge that generates sustainable, long-term solutions when responding to a crisis in marginalised communities.

Introduction

The connection between Indigenous knowledge and effective humanitarian action in local and marginalised settings has developed more research interest in recent years. The newer discussions on the importance of having access to this data highlight local actors' potential to improve humanitarian responses through integrating crucial knowledge into standards of operation. This paper argues that when deemed valid, local knowledge would help mitigate the effects of the crisis and even provide essential data for creating an effective early warning system. In doing so, those involved in the response can catch signs of impending disasters and mitigate the long-term effects on those directly affected (UNISDR 2008). Throughout scholarly literature detailing the role of local knowledge in humanitarian response, several arguments have been made for proposing more mainstream access to Indigenous knowledge (Davies 2020).

For example, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, since international responders could not travel to marginalised areas inhabited by Indigenous people, members of these communities self-organised to create effective response systems. It is now undoubtedly clear that local populations living in harsh conditions have a database of practices and strategies embedded in traditional knowledge designed to respond effectively to natural disasters (Zyck and Krebs 2015). Despite limited access to modern resources, these Indigenous residents have been able to mobilise the necessary resources to respond effectively to their immediate needs. Therefore, incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the humanitarian response mechanism would be beneficial to the responders. This system should include the participation of key members of the affected community, thus empowering local citizens to take leading roles in mitigating and reducing the effects of major crises on the residents' daily lives.

It is now undoubtedly clear that local populations living in harsh conditions have a database of practices and strategies embedded in traditional knowledge designed to respond effectively to natural disasters.

The consensus among humanitarian response field agents is unanimous in agreeing that local data is valuable, but quantifying its precise value is the challenge. In rural settings where modern resources are scarce, the process of gathering and disseminating local knowledge and mobilising local capacity is routinely deprioritised in favour of other Western standards of interventions. These methods are preferred because they provide quicker, more visible outcomes, usually intended to give immediate feedback to external donors (Zyck and Krebs 2015). This is despite multiple sources of evidence-based outcomes showing that local knowledge gathering that promotes secure, fluid, and non-hierarchical information sharing between humanitarian 'outsiders' and 'insiders' can help overcome these 'information islands' when local resources are valued and shared optimally.

Indigenous knowledge and its management in humanitarian crises is a highly underrepresented body of information in the literature on localised responses (that is, transferring leadership for resource mobilisation to local rather than international actors). Any reference to local knowledge is usually reduced to technical know-how such as the need for interpreters of the vernacular language, intricacies around access to local machinery and hardware, or basic contextual data such as who the elders are or who is in charge of local governing bodies. Such knowledge is usually invoked during the preparation and planning phase to assess the needs and give feedback to donors about the budget required to disperse international aid. However, this type of knowledge base fails to accurately assess the crisis based on the overarching goal of restoring people's livelihoods. In order to ensure that local communities can continue to prosper long after the crisis has dissipated, it is necessary to embed local knowledge into the standards of response.

Local data is sidelined when mobilising knowledge in crisis response because local humanitarian knowledge tends to be viewed as intuitive rather than evidence based. Furthermore, some local responders may even try to conform insufficiently to international humanitarian expectations, thus undermining the potential for local knowledge to be valued and utilised by the international development agents.

This paper argues that the standardised notion of evidence as something tangible or measurable by Western scientific measures needs to be challenged to include other undocumented, creative and flexible methods of knowledge collection. This process should be less concerned about the current measures of formalising data and more interested in being inclusive of communities' informal data that is equally adaptable and adheres to logical research protocols.

Scholars of Indigenous cultures argue that local knowledge systems found in local narratives provide significant "possibilities of existence based on different metaphysics that can generate other ways of knowing/being" (Andreotti 2019). These narratives do not adhere to modern standards of knowledge gathering and dissemination. They are passed from person to person or from generation to generation or exchanged in a peer-to-peer environment. The argument is reinforced by the notion that an Indigenous knowledge database contains a unique understanding of "temporality and futurity", which is irreducible to those oriented towards modern Western knowledge.

In addition to the absence of local contextual knowledge and the voices of local agents in crises, is the gaping lack of local capacity, or "capacity constraints" (Saferworld 2020). This pattern continues to replicate itself all around marginalised settings despite wide acknowledgment that local humanitarian action is "far-reaching, quick and

relevant" (Gingerich and Cohen 2015). The unwillingness to break the pattern is partly a result of the dilemma that international responders face in defining what capacities are essential or valuable to respond effectively and the tendency to measure value based on internationalised, Western standards.

Thus, this paper argues that global humanitarian action should encompass local knowledge systems to accurately assess and describe a community's perceptions of the crisis. As a result, this knowledge can provide sensible solutions to delivering aid and assistance that meets the immediate and long-term needs of the local citizens.

After analysing the research findings in *Extreme Economies*, a book by economics scholar Richard Davies (2020), researchers from the Brookings Institute (2021), conclude that the results provide critical social findings that hint at the "role of informal networks in building social trust as the glue that binds societies and nations". The analysis asserts that "Davies' stories reveal a variety and diversity of functions performed by informal networks", which further supports the concluding remarks of this paper.

Such reports are instrumental in providing evidence that local data, a synthesised version of Indigenous knowledge, is key to promoting sustainable innovations, which marginalised citizens can manage and maintain over time. When conducted to include local humanitarians in the overall crisis response, these sorts of reports help diversify the crisis response methods based on the premise that in any humanitarian emergency, local responders already have the capacity needed to react quickly in specific areas (Gingrich 2017).

As one survey in a recent report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI 2021), stated, "Even before any external emergency support comes in, it is actually the people and their existing local system and culture that help them survive and this capacity should be strengthened, not weakened".

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential for international responders to adapt the response and delivery of resources to the methods utilised by local responders who are more knowledgeable about the daily, evolving crisis, and shows a crucial need to strengthen partnerships between local and international responders (IASC 2020). Further, the global response to the pandemic reveals that data collected by national and local responders are more nuanced and timely, and less inflated than data collected by international agencies situated away from the crisis areas. This localised data provides a more accurate representation of the situation and facilitates better monitoring, thus enabling a more successful implementation process that local citizens can sustain.

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In conclusion, this paper asserts that an evolving database of local knowledge is a valuable tool for responding to humanitarian crises and unravelling some of the social norms that underpin harmful practices. If deemed a valuable asset, this knowledge will go a long way towards understanding the key drivers of social and behaviour change in communities that are hard to monitor and thereby provide a better methodology for keeping track of any shift in these practices over time.

What is Indigenous data?

Data is synonymous with knowledge. Indigenous data is, therefore, local knowledge generated from reliable sources living in rural communities who have a solid connection to the geographical terrain and a deep understanding of the needs of local citizens. Research shows that Indigenous data feeds local knowledge systems and plays a major role in ensuring that communities living in harsh landscapers that are prone to more natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and tsunamis have the technical capacity and can form the resilience required to reduce and avoid undesired short and long-term impacts from these hazards.

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Resilience is defined as:

"The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management" (UNDRR 2017).

The United Nations has already embedded Indigenous knowledge within the Hyogo Framework for Action (UNISDR 2005), primarily focusing on the importance of information management and exchange. It also highlights the use of "relevant traditional and Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage", stressing how it needs to be shared with and adapted to different target audiences such as international humanitarian agencies.

It is important to stress that contrary to an institutionalised humanitarian belief that Indigenous knowledge is not reliably factual, the idea of data itself is not a foreign concept to custodians of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous people "have always been data creators, data users, and data stewards" (Carroll et al. 2019). They have been passing it down through folktales, fables, song, dance, and other oral forms of storytelling. When closely observed, complex data is found embedded in Indigenous instructional practices and cultural principles.

Furthermore, heritage studies widely acknowledge that many Indigenous knowledge systems exist because of the ability for new generations to gather data by observation and experience with the natural environment, which then informs Indigenous practices, protocols, and ways of interacting with other people and with the natural world. Evidence exists to discount the sidelined positioning of Indigenous knowledge as intellectually wanting or unsustainably stored. For example, numerous studies demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge was meticulously stored and recorded in oral histories, ancestral stories, and heritage. Indicators such as "calendar sticks, totem poles, and even instruments" were used as information storage space openly accessible to all community members (Lonebear 2016).

Further studies show evidence that Indigenous populations are often well-positioned to observe and understand local ecosystems (UNISDR 2008). Even before we developed high-tech early warning systems or sophisticated standards and procedures for humanitarian response, Indigenous communities worldwide had been responding to natural disasters and other forms of humanitarian tragedies using traditional knowledge that was fit for purpose. This knowledge would be approved by previous generations and then passed down to the next generation. Their success in responding effectively to various crises is due to their close interactions with nature and observations of the ecosystem in which they reside in an interdependent way, observing other life forms as equal inhabitants of the natural landscape.

Since Indigenous knowledge is garnered throughout a lifetime and enhanced by oral history passed down through generations, Indigenous people often also have knowledge of changes in social and environmental systems over many decades or even centuries. Also, as many Indigenous people live in remote areas, they are often well placed to provide detailed information on local biodiversity and provide accurate warnings about any impending disruption to the circle of life.

Today, it is undoubtedly clear that the conservation of threatened wildlife or plant species in protected areas will largely depend upon the peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and development of partnerships with the long-term inhabitants of these areas. When Indigenous people become fully engaged as equal partners in developing knowledge data systems for crisis response,

they also become crucial agents providing timely research and monitoring, evaluation, and awareness raising about any crises that directly affect their livelihoods.

Despite the ongoing discussions about the importance of harnessing local expertise in gathering Indigenous data for effective crisis response, the international humanitarian community tends to separate humans from their natural landscape when disaster strikes. This separation is rooted in a widely held notion that people must be excluded if environments are to be preserved. However, such a division is unacceptable in Indigenous worldviews as ecosystems and social systems are viewed as co-existent. Thus, landscapes are rendered meaningless if the interdependent relationship between the ecosystem and social system is interrupted, as this symbiotic relationship forms the bedrock of Indigenous people's commitment to preserving the natural landscape that sustains them.

Furthermore, unlike Western scientists' opposition to the spiritual dimension of their findings, Indigenous thought values logic and spirituality, making no distinction between them. It is for this reason that efforts to contain Indigenous knowledge outside of its cultural and spiritual foundations often results in its misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and fragmentation.

President of the Center for Public Service Communications, John Scott, stated in a roundtable discussion with *The New Humanitarian* that:

> "The idea of traditional knowledge and resilience, strength, and risk reduction comes from paying attention and being a part of your environment—being observant, learning lessons, and moving on. It is not a monolithic thing. It is not historical documentation or a closed loop. Indigenous knowledge comes from hard knocks—from having experience and learning from it collectively" (Clement 2020).

Thus, by nature, Indigenous data "center[s] on interdependence" (Carroll et al. 2019), not the acquisition of personal knowledge. While individuals hold specific knowledge as oral storytellers or singers, or those with a specific, deeper understanding of the intricacies of the natural world, ultimately, all members of the community are held responsible for the collective stewardship of this vital knowledge.

While individuals hold specific knowledge as oral storytellers or singers, or those with a specific, deeper understanding of the intricacies of the natural world, ultimately, all members of the community are held responsible for the collective stewardship of this vital knowledge.

This paper will touch on *ubuntu*, an African philosophical concept of collective knowledge gathering and custodianship, in the concluding remarks. Within the context of the international humanitarian landscape, the *ubuntu* way could help establish a new understanding that knowledge about responding to a crisis should similarly belong to the collective. This method of co-creating knowledge systems is how Indigenous people collectively hold valuable data to ensure that it is accessible to all community members at certain times of need. If applied to the humanitarian landscape, the *ubuntu* way would provide new working conditions between international and local agents to ensure that the training required to respond effectively is passed on to all members of the humanitarian community, and that Indigenous data is identified and defined appropriately.

How can international humanitarian agencies identify local data?

It is critical first to recognise that Indigenous knowledge transfer is more than simply orally sourced information. Knowledge and the people's needs, practices, and lifestyles are all visible through the resources used for enhancing life. These could be materials used for building shelter, locally available sources of high nutrition, and also the types of stories or narratives shared on local communication channels or even orally from person to person. Therefore, it would be necessary for humanitarian agencies to build relationships with trusted local humanitarian agents to begin collecting and storing essential local/traditional knowledge and technical expertise and distribute it across all levels of the humanitarian system.

However, it is equally important to note that while the co-sharing of knowledge between local and international agents can broaden cooperation, it is sometimes the breeding ground for hidden power struggles. Even when well-meaning international agents collaborate with their local peers in field missions, the final decision-making mechanism is steered by a higher level of managers who mainly reside in headquarters in the Global North. There is also a tendency for some local agents to only share information that they believe is what the donors wish to receive.

Nevertheless, various means are available to create a neutral space in which international and local agents can come together and experience a peer-to-peer knowledge exchange exercise. For example, 'Insight', a participatory game designed by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Tandon and Chmutina 2020), is intended to capture "Community Held Knowledge for Disaster Resilience and Sustaining Heritage" by international and local professionals in a non-hierarchical way. This game could also help establish a working relationship between international and local humanitarian agents by tapping into the knowledge and experience held by local experts living

in marginalised communities and prone to severe natural and humanitarian disasters.

International humanitarian agencies should also engage in interagency knowledge-sharing to challenge their understanding of the local setting and find answers to what they do not know. In order to achieve this level of awareness, they would also need to recognise local data as fragmented pieces of highly synthesised Indigenous knowledge, which is the foundation of localised narratives containing effective, actionable practices, as demonstrated in the infographic below.

Indigenous knowledge as data

Collected & sorted

Used to solve local problems

For sustainable development

Effective use of Indigenous data. Vera Hoffman, Grade 10 Art Student, United World College, ISAK–Japan, 2021.

By interrogating their self-beliefs about the levels of intelligence and expertise of local humanitarians and recognising the top-down power discourse between the Global North donors and the Global South recipients, international humanitarian agents can better understand how to identify local data. Understanding and accepting that it does not measure against the same Western standards of knowledge verification would also help them learn to curate and interpret what is crucial to delivering aid and assistance in the most cost-effective, locally relevant, and globally sustainable way.

Ultimately, international agents will need to start dismantling the internal hierarchical system that stands in the way of effectively functioning as peers alongside their local counterparts in order to fully accept and help identity Indigenous data systems as a valid form of knowledge.

Understanding the dynamism of local data

Indigenous knowledge is the bedrock of local data. In order to effectively curate data that is necessary and context-fit to responding to humanitarian crises in non-modern settings, it is crucial to understand the premise and dynamism of local knowledge.

Often, Indigenous knowledge is represented as a fixed body of wisdom passed down intact from generation to generation. Also, such terms as 'tradition' or 'heritage' are used to describe its relevance, suggesting that is it dated or was only valuable to a past civilisation (United Nations Education, Social, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] 2021). In reality, local knowledge is a continuous process of reassessment, renewal, and expansion that ensures each new generation has the intellectual capacity to use this database to innovate new ways of adapting to emerging changes and find solutions to new crises.

A common misconception about Indigenous people is that they are averse to modern technologies, preferring outdated resources that are not fit for current times. Others argue that by embracing new technologies, Indigenous people would abandon their heritage and lose touch with their values and natural environment. But in reality, as expressed in a statement by UNESCO (2021), "the capacity to incorporate new tools and skills has always been fundamental to the dynamism of Indigenous cultures". It is by being selective in choosing the right modern technology to incorporate into their traditional methods that many Indigenous communities have maintained their social and economic systems to enhance their distinctive worldview.

Due to the speed with which the modern world is embracing and innovating new digital technology, this paper recognises that Indigenous people face "a difficult paradox in their relationship with modernity" despite their continued effort to adapt to new ways of being" (Andreotti et al. 2019). To avoid unprecedented clashes with other civilisations encroaching on their landscapes, Indigenous communities living in those spaces will need to increase their use of various modern technological advances. In addition, they will also need to share their unique technological achievements, showcasing what has been developing alongside modern technological advances to broaden the global community's understanding of the dynamic nature of local knowledge systems steeped in Indigenous data. This will help external humanitarian responders understand that there exist other best practices available for responding to various crises that threaten humanity's continued existence.

How to use Indigenous knowledge for effective crisis response

During times of drought, war, or the extreme, adverse effects of climate change, Indigenous knowledge provides invaluable guidance on how to collect locally

sourced resources that would rapidly aid in halting the crisis (Indigenous Disaster Risk Reduction). However, well-meaning international humanitarian agencies vastly underutilise this knowledge due to the nature of the effort it would take to source, verify and learn how to use local data to innovate sustainable solutions that will continue to solve impending disasters (Zyck and Krebs 2015).

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Although Indigenous knowledge is widely referred to as informal due to the unconventional way in which it is stored, it is essential knowledge that can be authenticated using orally sourced historical findings. This data records past civilisations' traditional knowledge, sometimes referred to as Indigenous scientific knowledge (UNESCO 2021). It includes lived experiences that can be verified using epistemological methods.

This kind of knowledge is gleaned from the recurring stories passed down through generations as blueprints for surviving future crises. These 'stories' are actual records of knowledge databases containing specific instructions or 'survival knowledge' and solutions to sustainable development challenges, tailormade to keep mending the social fabric of the local population and ensure their continued prosperity.

From an Indigenous population standpoint, where a lot of development work is concentrated, it is a misconception to assume that the humanitarian crises that emerge out of conflict situations in these communities result from a lack of knowledge on how to resolve disputes. Most of the time, the problems are instigated by a disruption to a complex system of intricately interconnected relationships formed through social ties that date back several centuries.

When disruption to this system occurs, it may take several years of attempted conflict resolution using strategies and solutions that have worked effectively in the past, before the problem becomes a disaster worthy of international attention. When this happens, the kind of rapid humanitarian response intended to help ease the immediate effects of the aftermath is not always effective in solving the long-term effects of the crisis.

To respond effectively in these areas, humanitarian agencies need to analyse the backstory that led to this point of irreconcilable dispute. When unpacked, there is usually a traceable oral database of information that multiple sources can validate to provide a verifiable background and context in which the point of difference

emerged. Based on the information analysed, this gives guidance on the most effective means to move forward peacefully.

These crises are not isolated cases that require standardised institutional solutions. They should be considered indicators of a much larger story with key players and multiple outcomes at stake. Therefore, it is counterintuitive to humanitarian action to assume that local or informal knowledge is secondary to other mainstreamed solutions, which may have successfully resolved crises in other parts of the world. In most cases, such solutions may fail to solve crises specific to marginalised and underdeveloped parts of the world.

As humanitarian crises continue to increase alongside the growing global population, response agencies must change the language and understanding of what essential knowledge is or is not. To Indigenous communities, what the rest of the world considers informal knowledge is the primary source of information about many aspects of their lifestyle. This knowledge is usually meticulously stored in the memories of the old folk to be shared at precise moments with the youth through oral storytelling and well-designed peer-to-peer cultural engagements. This practice ensures that the older citizens are held responsible for continuous learning and maintaining knowledge about the community's best practices. Doing so facilitates cooperation among the elders, a process which, when given due time, could even accelerate the possibilities of achieving such high global aspirations as gender equality.

For example, men and women share common knowledge within Indigenous communities with clearly established gender roles, such as those living in forested areas in the Philippines. However, they also hold specific knowledge sets to perform specific roles (Vera and Brusola-Vera 2021). Women have areas of expertise such as forest management, complemented by their transmission methods. This system and process of disseminating knowledge is essential to sustaining Indigenous people's livelihoods, values, and community well-being.

To respond effectively in these settings, external humanitarian agents need a clear understanding of how the differences in expertise between women and men, especially concerning resource access and decision-making, can sometimes create patterns of gender-specific vulnerability in the face of a humanitarian crisis. Therefore, external humanitarian responders also need to take a keen interest in the cultural understanding of the gender-specific vulnerabilities in disaster-prone communities when responding to crises in these locations.

To establish an effective humanitarian response system that includes local knowledge, international agencies need to establish who the key local actors are, as they usually have a long-standing presence in their communities. These local agents have gained respect and a network of valuable relationships based on trust, thus giving them immediate logistical access

to resources that are not readily available to outside responders. Ultimately, local actors are best positioned to mobilise local experts who can provide leadership and guidance on using Indigenous knowledge for effective crisis response.

Coming together to respond together: The *Ubuntu* way

The concept of *ubuntu* loosely translates into a communal or collective effort. It is a philosophical ideology that originated with the Bantu languages in Africa to promote collaboration for finding long-term solutions that challenge all citizens' individual prosperity and collective well-being. From a humanitarian standpoint, the *ubuntu* way encourages a collective working mindset, which requires an improvised, inclusive, compassionate, and collaborative understanding of different ideas from different experts, especially those who have a deeper connection and understanding of the local narrative.

From a humanitarian standpoint, the ubuntu way encourages a collective working mindset, which requires an improvised, inclusive, compassionate, and collaborative understanding of different ideas from different experts.

Therefore, the *ubuntu* way dismantles knowledge hierarchies that are synonymous with formal and mainly Eurocentric knowledge-sharing methods based on the premise that Indigenous knowledge systems are founded on the interdependent relationships between people and nature. As a result, no knowledge is considered isolated to an individual, and all knowledge is considered suitable for use by all to preserve the land and the continuation of heritage.

This paper argues that the *ubuntu* way has great potential to redistribute humanitarian leadership to all knowledge experts, in order to contribute further to global knowledge relevant for effective humanitarian response in marginalised settings. This knowledge can also be essentialised within the global standards for crisis response to redesign the humanitarian response system to ensure that the solutions applied promote sustainability and resiliency for all world citizens, and that humanitarian agents, whether local or global, learn to work together as equal peers.

Conclusion

The challenges of today's world are vast and complex and require the mobilisation of the best available resources and essential knowledge to make intelligent decisions. This paper argues that Indigenous knowledge holders play a key role in building this database and should be equal knowledge partners. This argument challenges humanitarian actors whose decision-making mechanism

is driven by donors in the Global North to open their doors and usher in local knowledge experts to the table. In doing so, the collective peer group can succeed in addressing jointly defined challenges such as the effects of climate change on the lives of all citizens of the world.

It should be acknowledged that each group of knowledge experts brings different and valuable expertise to the table. When allowed to emerge in a non-hierarchical manner, it could lead to smart innovations and novel solutions to complex problems. For this to happen, the communication channels between the two groups must remain open, and as argued above, the *ubuntu* way could be a useful method of building dialogues founded on mutual respect.

International humanitarian actors are called on to take a step back to listen to other people's voices, people who can speak in their own terms and language, and use this knowledge as evidence of the diversity of solutions available for responding effectively to a crisis in non-modern settings.

There is a clear need for an institutionalised behavioural shift from rejecting knowledge that does not conform to Western standards to accepting that there are other effective ways of solving problems around the world. In order to integrate local knowledge into humanitarian response systems, the members of the governing humanitarian institutions will also need to self-reflect upon their internalised biases against other worldviews in order to expand their own.

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The power to lead

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Image: Two children learn about coronavirus in their tent in Idlib, Syria. The Violet Organisation for Relief and Development has been holding 'awareness raising' plays for children in camps to increase their awareness of the pandemic, teaching them how to wash their hands and stay safe © Save the Children

Abstract

The staff in local organisations are taking on the largest proportion of risk in a humanitarian response by being on the frontlines and endangering their physical and mental well-being. This paper reflects on how local organisations are taking leadership over the responses within their countries despite the challenges of bringing the localisation agenda and commitments into reality. Further, it recommends how international actors can reflect on their localisation efforts to reach a more tangible change that aligns with the Grand Bargain commitments. In addition to advocating for more access to direct funding, the paper also provides examples of how to shift leadership to a more community-driven response aligned with the concept of the triple nexus, and shares firsthand experience from the work of a local organisation that is active in the Syria response and driven by the commitment to create youth-led change.

Leadership relevance

Local organisations working in crisis settings, such as in northwest Syria, are not only capable of taking on leadership, but are also pushed to do so through the communities they serve. However, their efforts are limited due to the lack of influence over funding priorities and few opportunities to access funding directly, which is a topic much discussed among the international community. The paper reflects on the leadership a local organisation was able to take due to strong community acceptance and also points out how the organisation has limited opportunities for further success within the current system. This paper seeks to offer international leaders and decision makers new insights in how to approach localisation and leadership in protracted humanitarian contexts, such as Syria. Further, it offers practical examples on how the local leadership agenda can be pushed forward by investing in community initiatives.

Introduction

Over the past five years, the international community has increasingly advocated for locally led humanitarian action. This shift has been discussed at the World Humanitarian Summit 2016 in Istanbul, as well as in the 'Grand Bargain'—a commitment to agree on planned results and steps for localised aid (IASC 2017). While several humanitarian organisations and donors have shared those commitments and put it into their multiyear agendas, tangible actions have been slow and burdened by bureaucracy and red tape.

This paper reflects on how local organisations are taking the lead in responses within their country despite this, and working to bring the localisation agenda and commitments into reality. Further, it recommends how international actors can reflect on their localisation efforts to reach a more tangible change that aligns with the Grand Bargain commitments. The paper is based on personal reflection and the experiences of international staff working with a Syrian-funded national organisation—the Violet Organisation for Relief and Development (referred to in this paper as Violet), which is active in the cross-border response from Turkey to northwest Syria. The reflections made may not reflect the perspectives and experiences in other humanitarian responses or organisations. When speaking about community, community members, youth or volunteers, the paper considers all different members within the community.

Defining localisation

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 'localisation' is "a process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations and to prepare national actors for future humanitarian responses" (OECD 2020).

Working for a local organisation, localisation is a term we use to advocate for our work, however it often feels like being caught between two worlds when referring to this topic. On the one hand, we speak up in meetings and advocate for a more localised response, knowing our staff have proven their capacity to do so over the last ten years. On the other hand, localisation often seems to appear as a mere communications buzzword among partners, donors and grant proposals. So what does a genuine local response look like? This is the question that organisations like Violet have been tackling.

Localisation often seems to appear as a mere communications buzzword among partners, donors and grant proposals. So what does a genuine local response look like? This is the question that organisations like Violet have been tackling.

Localisation and leadership

At the beginning of the Syria crisis, communities and families in and around Idleb, a city in the northwest, were motivated to come together and create small, self-organised relief operations, as there were a limited number of civil society organisations in existence. In the case of Violet, the leader of this volunteer effort was a young Syrian from Idleb named Fouad Sayed Issa. Issa was 16 years old at that time, and his goal was to support vulnerable families in his neighbourhood. Due to their rapidly increasing needs, his grassroots movement grew and was able to register as an organisation in Turkey so that they could receive funding from international organisations.

Violet developed from a community initiative into an organisation with over 1,000 staff and a US$16 million budget in 2020. Violet also shows its leadership capacity through its strong Facebook following of over 500,000 individuals, mostly from northwest Syria, who share their feedback and thoughts on implemented projects. The story that has inspired the foundation of Violet is undoubtedly very similar to many other grassroots movements around the world.

Building partnerships

The model of partnering with international organisations in joint responses has been relevant in northwest Syria since the beginning and remains the modus operandi in 2021. Those partnerships do not only focus on funding the response, but also on building the capacity of local organisations, which has been a significant contribution to strengthening the civil society landscape in northwest Syria.

Since the beginning of the response, both local and international organisations have been seeking to diversify their partnerships for multiple reasons. Currently, one key reason for diversifying is to be prepared for potential new challenges linked to the outcome of external factors such as the renewal of the UN cross-border resolution. To become the implementing partner of an international organisation, local organisations must invest in organisational governance, capacity and skilled staff. Over the duration of the Syrian crisis, numerous local organisations have already invested heavily in these areas and are able to live up to the sectors' standards. Many have been supported by their strategic international partners over many years in building both individual and organisational capacity.

Yet at this point in time, ten years into the Syrian response, the original idea of localisation as defined by the OECD seems to be butting against reality.

The same local organisations that have been operational for almost a decade face seemingly insurmountable hurdles to take the reins in terms of funding and objectives. For example, in 2020 a plenitude of donor funds focused on the COVID-19 response, which was undeniably urgent and important. However, although Syrian organisations advocated for more livelihood projects to mitigate the social and economic effects of the pandemic, these pleas fell on deaf ears.

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Local Syrian organisations are rarely able to participate in decision-making processes on a high level, and thus have little influence on donor priorities. Direct access to funding is only available to a limited extent, even though those same grants have been implemented through international partners for many years. Direct access would not only promote the concept of localisation, but also decrease administrative costs along the way and increase the amount of funding reaching the target groups—something which every actor in the humanitarian sector should be striving for.

Joint conversations and roundtables between donors, international partners and local actors are rare, despite this being mooted in the Grand Bargain. In this agreement, aid organisations and donors committed to, among other things, removing and reducing barriers that prevent organisations or donors from partnering with local and national responders. A target was even set to channel at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible (IASC 2017).

While there is funding available to local organisations in the northwest Syria response, a significant amount of this money is channelled through the Syria Humanitarian Pool Fund. To receive this funding, local organisations must undergo due diligence and risk assessment. In many cases, the country pool fund has strict requirements and allows for only limited flexibility. Additionally, many national and international organisations are competing for the available funding. This leads to the need for competitive budgets, meaning support and administrative costs must be covered through other sources.

The impact of limited access to funding

Once international organisations take the decision to leave the response and focus on other crises, local civil society responders remain, and often face an uncertain and fearful future. With limited donor budgets and many crises competing for funding to provide much needed humanitarian assistance, this fear is justified to a certain extent—especially when organisations are unable to access key donors directly. This is a major limiting factor in allowing national and local actors to take leadership over the response.

Given the political contexts of many crises, there is a clear understanding why donors and the foreign affairs offices of various countries hesitate to provide funds directly to local organisations, however, it is not a solution to take leadership from outside the country without having the affected population also be a key decision maker. Yes, needs assessments and participatory approaches are often applied, but this is not the same as being a decision maker in the response; it is merely giving an opinion as to the priorities and trusting the responding organisations and donors to consider them within the scope of the project or program. Thus, the hesitations seen in localisation are also sparking the debate and conversation about decolonising humanitarian aid.

Best practice: community-rooted leadership

While the Grand Bargain commitment to more access for local organisations to direct funding stalls, civil society groups in northwest Syria are not sitting around waiting for this high-level topic to be solved. Despite the deteriorating consequences of the Syrian crisis, one positive outcome is a very strong, capable, and motivated civil society—a civil society that is speaking up and loudly advocating for its communities' needs. As there are many different requirements that need covering—reaching from food assistance to education to psychosocial support—Violet has identified youth empowerment as the solution to address several needs within their target community.

As part of the Brussels V conference, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', held in 2021 (EEAS 2021), the Syrian NGO Alliance has produced a report as "an insight into the lives of Syrian youth" (Syrian NGO Alliance 2021). Youth is very important from the perspective of Syrian civil society, and so the international community were asked to "listen to their voices, dreams and visions" (Syrian NGO Alliance 2021). Key advocacy messages in the report included "recognising youth as a resource with motivation and drive to become active change agents", "investing into developing a comprehensive strategy for engagement with youth", and "prioritising youth (14 to 25 years old), as a special target group across all sectors" (Syrian NGO Alliance, 2021).

As a youth movement, Violet has seen the success that can stem from young people's motivation, passion, and urge to create change. Young people make up most of the population in Syria—when the crisis started, they were the children who had to drop out of school and who grew up in a place characterised by conflict and displacement. A new generation of children in Syria are now experiencing the same, which puts them at high risk too. Young people are role models for children in their community and can influence them in a positive or adverse way. Thus, building their resilience has a significant impact on younger generations too. No matter the outcome of the crisis, the youth will be the ones taking the lead in rebuilding the country. Therefore, youth seemed a very logical resource to invest in.

Since 2016, Violet has been investing in young people as emergency responders within their community. The organisation has managed to build a strong network of young men and women who are willing to participate in a humanitarian response as volunteers, or for a small per diem, to cover emerging needs within their community. The youth receive holistic training, learning everything from first aid, to how to handle evacuations, to providing

psychosocial support. They work with children and lead zero points during peaks in displacements. Utilising existing community resources, such as youth volunteers, has multiple benefits, including the ability to respond very rapidly, a strong acceptance among the community and lower human resource costs.

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Another highly successful element of the Violet project has been the increased capacity of volunteers to go on to find paid jobs in other organisations, which is a clear win-win for all parties. The approach taken by Violet is locally driven and focuses strongly on community ownership.

From a leadership perspective, training community volunteers is a significant and promising approach to building both resilience and ownership as well as creating sustainability. Training local youth to conduct need assessments and develop and design needs-based projects also allows the affected population to decide upon the response themselves and operates within the limit of the available financial or human resources in the community.

Despite all this, it remains challenging for Violet to receive funding to run this volunteer response.

Local leadership and the triple nexus in a protracted crisis

Since 2011, millions of Euros have been mobilised to support internally displaced Syrians within Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. This has improved the situation of the crisis-affected families and individuals significantly, but only in an unsustainable, short-term way. It does not solve any of the fundamental problems or consequences of the crisis. Currently, over 80% of Syrians live below the poverty line, the destruction of basic infrastructure is significant, and access to health care or education, especially secondary education, is limited (UN OCHA 2021).

The situation in Syria aligns with the changing characteristics of several crises observed globally. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA):

"The volume, cost and length of humanitarian assistance over the past 10 years has grown dramatically, mainly due to the protracted nature of crises and scarce development action in many contexts where vulnerability is the highest. For example, inter-agency humanitarian appeals now last an average of seven years, and the size of appeals has increased nearly 400% in the last decade" (UN OCHA 2019).

While there is no legal or unified definition of a protracted crisis, the following paragraph from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is applicable to the situation in northwest Syria:

"The humanitarian consequences of protracted conflict are severe and can be immediate and cumulative. People's experience of a protracted conflict typically involves immediate direct suffering as a result of attacks, deprivation and displacement, and more indirect suffering due to the cumulative deterioration of basic services, life chances and livelihoods. People's needs cut across many different sectors and extend over many years" (ICRC 2016; 5).

Due to the changing factors in crises, the topic of the triple nexus has emerged as another angle to support affected populations with resilience building. The triple nexus, or the 'humanitarian-development-peace' nexus, is defined as "interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions" with the aim of "strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity" (OECD DAC 2021). The triple nexus offers another opportunity for local actors and civil society to take the lead in long-term responses to the crises they experience.

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Ten years in, the situation in northwest Syria remains catastrophic and yet the nexus is rarely applied by those involved. This raises the question—why? This is an especially urgent question, as long-term livelihood building projects have regularly been among the advocacy messages of local actors and several areas within northwest Syria are now considered as safe for livelihood projects.

In his article on the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), Tarek Tawil reflects on why the Syria crisis shows us the triple nexus is a myth:

"The concept of the triple nexus is promising, it is closer to a fairy tale. How would life-saving actors survive in protracted crises and remain efficient? How would development actors operate in hostile contexts? Would they need to adjust their mandates? As peace processes are essential to ending armed conflict, should we incorporate them in humanitarian and development operations? How would humanitarian action remain principled? Could development agencies invest in areas controlled by the donors' enemies?" (Tawil 2020).

While the "triple nexus talk (is), very present in meetings and global conferences, at HQ level it has hardly been applied in operations. A first step to resolve this may be

contextualised research on an operational level to explore limitations and opportunities for piloting humanitarian-development operations" (Tawil 2020). At the same time, some local organisations in northwest Syria are seeing the triple nexus as a key part of the pressing need to respond to the situation they observe among the affected population.

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Active relief organisations are mostly governed by mandates designed for short-term/life-saving purposes. In a protracted crisis, such as the case in Syria, humanitarian aid may cause the adverse long-term impact of creating dependency. In northwest Syria, this can be observed in the dependency on food or cash assistance due to limited livelihood and income opportunities, or when young people consider joining armed groups to cover family needs.

The triple nexus approach needs stability, and many Syrian cities and rural areas are now secure. As Tawil says:

"In such areas, there has been an opportunity to start rehabilitation of infrastructure, public health facilities and services, markets, schools, and housing. This should have led to a restoration of livelihoods and boosted economic growth. Yet, development projects in Syria remain small in scale and function as patchwork rather than addressing the roots. Why is there a lack of large-scale development projects in safe and secure locations? What is the meeting or transition point between the two domains? What is the role of politics in launching long-standing interventions to change people's lives?" (Tawil 2020).

While these discussions may be taking place on global and donor levels, many local organisations are not included in these conversations. This is despite the importance of civil society being engaged, "as these organisations have an opportunity to influence what collaboration looks like. It is important to evaluate the situation and conversation and bring concrete recommendations and influence the conversation" (ICVA 2016).

While it is still not clear what the nexus would mean in northwest Syria, how peace would be defined and what role local organisations would play, it is certain that the focus has to shift from short-term, one-off humanitarian aid to multi-year projects with strong early recovery and development components. At Violet, the need to engage with triple nexus programming is seen, but due to the conflicting priorities of donor or partner driven agendas, the limited existence of nexus funding and the lack of direct access, this engagement mostly remains a far-off dream.

For some community initiatives emerging from Violet staff or volunteers, the organisation is unable to find a donor or partner to implement them. An option here is to conduct those initiatives independently or through fundraising from private donors, allowing the organisation to decide what ideas are worth investing in, despite the limited unearmarked funds. One such example that has been recognised globally is Violet's efforts to host an Olympic Games for children in a camp in northwest Syria—a recreational and joyful activity that is not part of a humanitarian program (*Aljazeera* 2021). The idea aligns with the approach of sports for development, which is not a funding focus in northwest Syria, but which has a strong impact on children and youth in their personal development journeys. For Violet, such initiatives are relevant and important. They are designed to build a strong, positive confidence among young people so that they can be ready and able to take the lead in rebuilding their country. Self-confidence, team spirit and soft skills are the starting point for doing so.

Thanks to its experiences with volunteering, short-term projects and community initiatives such as these, Violet plans to build a large, sustainable youth empowerment program to build livelihoods and resilience. This is planned to be inclusive for young men, women and youth living with disabilities. The goal is to not only build resilience, but also to foster the youth's motivation to become change makers for Syria's future.

The triple nexus is an attractive concept to build this around and is often used when advocating for such funding. However, due to the number of open questions (outlined by Tarek Tawil above), the triple nexus is still not a concept that is applied, despite the local organisations' interest, readiness, and willingness. Syrian organisations have strong experience in managing funds responsibly, transparently and while maintaining accountability to affected persons. They can also create a significant difference even with small grants, as training for livelihoods and skills is not costly to implement.

Risk taking

Leadership driven by local actors can take several forms: being active in coordination mechanisms to influence the response, using social media for two-way communication, engaging volunteers to assist with humanitarian needs or exploring concepts such as the triple nexus. All forms of local leadership are relevant to the needs and hopes of affected populations—be it directly or through advocating to partners or donors.

Unfortunately, several forms of local leadership are limited or affected by available funding and external factors. For instance, engaging volunteers is best practice for community engagement and a prime example of a successful locally-led response, but what is not often talked about is the risk local organisations and local communities are taking to do so.

Volunteers, such as those engaged at Violet, are taking on risk in being first responders on the frontlines and serving their communities—and do so without insurance or coverage by the duty of care of international donors or partners. If an incident happens, which is not unlikely, local organisations must find their own way to support the volunteer or the family.

Yet while being a volunteer is a high risk, it also comes with big benefits. Volunteers not only support their families and create a sense of community, they also develop skills that can help them to find employment afterwards. Risk taking is frequently discussed when initiating new partnerships with international organisations, but local staff often brush it off with the simple statement that this is their duty. They are responding to people in need—despite the risk.

Reducing the barriers to local leadership

Because staff in local organisations are taking on the largest proportion of risk in a humanitarian response by being on the frontlines and endangering their physical and mental well-being, they should not only take leadership on the ground, but also leadership over funding objectives and decision-making processes that affect their country and community.

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There are several donors and organisations that are leading the way with outstanding efforts on localisation. Nonetheless, the conflicting priorities in a humanitarian response pushes the attention to a rapid response with immediate outputs in form of cash or kits distributed to the most vulnerable people. However, humanitarian agencies and donors might consider several other ways to foster an inclusive, community-rooted response with local leadership.

Empowering local community leadership

Shifting the long-term focus from established organisations to community-rooted initiatives.
Creating lasting change must come from within the community, and community-rooted initiatives are able to lead such a change due to their acceptance, understanding and motivation.

Due to the protracted situation in northwest Syria, the international community is relying on well-established national organisations to uphold access to services for crisis-affected populations in need of humanitarian assistance. While this is a solution for now, it is built on unstable ground. Since the beginning of 2020, international and national organisations have been fearful that the UN cross-border aid resolution might not be renewed, which would jeopardise the whole response. It is also feared that the attention of international donors might switch to other crises in Yemen, Afghanistan or the global climate crisis.

To reduce the negative consequences of a potential drop in funding or the non-renewal of the cross-border resolution, and to decrease the overall dependency on humanitarian assistance, community initiatives and grassroot movements must be on the priority list for the international community. Such initiatives may include identifying needs within the community and coming up with a collective solution that is within the scope of the affected community. In a humanitarian response, participatory approaches can be limited due to the time constraints and often consist of rapid need assessments, feedback mechanisms and lessons learnt. But local community committees can still identify their own needs and seek to cover them through advocacy or their own initiatives. Many of these initiatives will likely also focus on creating livelihood opportunities, business ideas and other ways to create income, which is much needed given the economic impact of the protracted crisis.

There is strong potential to integrate community initiatives in the concept of the triple nexus: engage them as first responders, enable them to identify solutions to community problems in a participatory way and support them to take leadership in the peace process—starting with building social cohesion between internally displaced persons and the host community.

While established national organisations are representing the community they serve in UN-led coordination mechanisms, they are not able to represent every community member's view or preferences. This approach is limited and not fully inclusive. By investing into community initiatives, supporting local organisations in engaging volunteers or with community development funds, community members can group together and take leadership in a field that is relevant to them or the group they represent.

As local as possible: enable communities to become first responders.
Despite rapid response mechanisms and commitment to timely assistance, the timeframe between requesting funds and releasing them is significant for those affected by the crisis.

One key aspect in better supporting locally rooted initiatives is to enable them to respond to their needs. In a context such as northwest Syria, this also entails responding to disasters or emergencies within their community. If an emergency in a community occurs, for instance due to an airstrike, the affected persons must be trained not only in first aid, but also in psychosocial

first aid, leading an evacuation and taking first measures. Even before that, communities should be able to identify potential threats in their area and how to prevent them.

Not all leadership positions are taken voluntarily, but an emergency pushes those immediately available to become leaders to handle the situation. Therefore, investing into community emergency leadership, especially in areas close to frontlines, can save lives.

Invest in innovation.

In settings with limited resources, new ideas come up or must be developed to cover existing needs with the available capacities.

When one of the largest displacements in the history of the Syria crisis happened, organisations struggled to find shelter for the displaced families. At Violet, the volunteers came up with the idea to host a hotline for house or landowners to offer their available apartment, room or house to internally displaced families. Internally displaced families could also call to request a shelter free of charge. All that was done by Violet's volunteers was to facilitate between the two parties. The initiative was created on the ground and proved to be successful in assisting the displaced families.

This simple idea provides evidence for why community development funds should be available to cover needs identified within the community. Simultaneously, there should be access to resources to pilot new ideas and innovations. Different community members are facing challenges in their daily life and may have an idea how to solve it for several people, however resources are too limited. Investing in innovation hubs, training or funds can enable communities to take leadership over the challenges they face with ideas created from within.

The power to lead

Leadership is the power or ability to lead a group of people—but it is a process, and it is connected to social influence. A leader can come from within, or from the outside. Empowering local communities to create change by leading from within is one approach that can encompass the idea of localisation and the concept of the triple nexus.

In the context of the Syrian crisis, national organisations connect between the community level and international partners or donors. They are the port between the affected persons and those who are committing to provide financial assistance, which does not only make them negotiators, but also leaders.

Their leadership efforts, combined with the risks they take, should allow them to access the needed resources to be in this position. Yet despite all the efforts of Grand Bargain signees, in 2020 only 13 signatories (compared to 5 in 2017), allocated 25% or more of their humanitarian funds to national and local responders as directly as possible. COVID-19 has given many local actors a

higher responsibility to respond to the global health emergency within their countries. When reflecting the Grand Bargain five years on, "there were hopes that the pandemic would accelerate progress on both availability and cascading of quality funding down the transaction chain from donors to frontline responders. If COVID-19 was a test this regard, then some aid organisations feel the Grand Bargain has failed" (HPG 2021).

Direct access to institutional funding means being able to influence donor objectives, it means being part of the conversations that are taking place at a high level and bringing in the local perspective. It means taking leadership over a crisis that affects your own country. Accessing funding directly also means reducing administrative costs and allowing national organisations to access multiyear contracts with budget for their own capacity building. The local organisations I have worked with are trying desperately to live up to international requirements, as it enables them to receive funding and allows them to continue responding to the needs within their communities. However, not all capacity building needs are related to a specific partnership, project, or intervention. Some capacity building needs derive from the organisation's future plans, self-assessments and the desire to engage in new areas of work. Accessing funding could allow local organisations to budget for advocacy staff, to invest into new fundraising mechanisms or to pilot new community initiatives.

Direct access to funding cannot solve all problems regarding localisation, but it can make a significant difference by giving local organisations the power to lead.

Conclusion

When we are speaking in the office about localisation and the issue of access to direct donor funds, we usually circle back to one point, which seems the most promising idea: pooling together general funds to open an office in Europe or Great Britain, as other Syrian organisations have already done. Then, the organisation would at least be able to apply for funding over there.

Localisation strives to empower a local response; it is meant to reduce the barriers local responders are facing. So far, there is still a resistance to committing to the concept fully, especially to shifting the power when it comes to funding. But seeing local organisations trying to overcome barriers by becoming international organisations themselves seems like the wrong outcome of localisation efforts.

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