Humanitarian learning in practice

Case studies co-created by learners from the Humanitarian Essentials Massive Online Open Course (MOOC)
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“This is a marvellous example of reflections for practicing humanitarian principles; there should be more learning space for doing this because humanitarian principles are not just ideas, they need to be applied and prioritised. I hope these cases studies inspire volunteers and aid workers.”

Alessandra De Guio, Humanitarian Learning Adviser,
Humanitarian Leadership Academy
As part of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Humanitarian Essentials, organised by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy from 16 October to 12 November 2017, course participants were asked to submit a case study exercise. This assignment had as objective to internalise the learning contents of the MOOC and combine them with the professional experience and interests of the participants.

MOOC learners were asked to draft a case study on how they have applied or would apply humanitarian principles in their current or future working context. This exercise allowed them to better understand the key challenges and dilemmas related to the application of humanitarian principles, by reflecting on them in specific crisis situations and emergencies.

In total, 66 case studies were submitted. A peer review was applied to score the case studies against a number of criteria, including "demonstrated understanding of the principles and their main challenges and dilemmas, demonstrated learning, and reader-friendliness". This review resulted in a top-30, of which the tutor of the MOOC selected fifteen case studies that would be published on the Academy’s website and online platform Kaya for learning purposes.

Learning is based on critical reflection, and indeed the following case studies identify room for improvement in a number of situations, both natural disasters and conflicts. The perspective of the affected population needs to be considered and decisions are to be driven by the concern for the people. Yet, as humanitarians do not work in isolation, it is crucial to understand the overall picture of crisis response and to appreciate the interests, capacities and limitations of other actors.

Finally, several of the case studies refer to ongoing developments in the humanitarian sector to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of aid delivery. Others offer interesting insights in what can be learned from responding to current crises.

The case studies cover emergency situations from Kenya to Colombia to the Philippines and Greece. The fifteen authors come from different backgrounds and offer various understandings. All together, these case studies provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges of applying humanitarian principles in the field, and we hope that their work is an inspiration for others who like to reflect and learn.

Gudrun Van Pottelbergh
Independent Analyst and Trainer
MOOC Facilitator

"Thank you for your nice words and comments on my case study. I was already very happy and grateful of having had the opportunity to follow the course and to learn a lot of material useful for my job. I am even happier of reading that my case study is part of the top-15."
Juan Luis Barbolla Casas, MOOC participant
Background

It is difficult to explain the refugee crisis in Europe in one paragraph, so I will simply summarize the situation as it relates to Greece, specifically. After the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, many migrants fled to the Greek islands, some even travelling on rafts and makeshift boats across the sea from Turkey or paying to make high-risk crossings to the islands. Once on land, however, the ever-changing migrant policies across Europe exacerbate an already complicated registration system. This process adds additional pressures, stresses, and complications to the refugees’ already difficult journey. Many organisations are working to address basic needs. But, what I find interesting is that, as humanitarian crises continue to propagate around the world, coordination seems to fall apart as organisations attempt to address so many disparate areas of need at once.

Now, the Greek government is set to take on more of the funding role, as the European Union pulls a portion of its resources from this situation. To make matters worse, very few people arriving daily know what is going on at these higher policy levels, or what the transition means for the programs they depend on. Mercy Corps, together with International Rescue Committee and local partners, focuses on free access Wi-Fi hotspots and information provision through a website, mobile app, and Facebook page called Refugee.Info. At this time, it seems critical that refugees have access to knowledge and understanding of policy decisions. This access can empower decisions that have direct influence on their futures as they make daily choices about movement, registration, safety, and access to services.

Challenge/dilemma

Many challenges exist in this environment. First, ever-changing policies pose difficulties in the development of web content to share with beneficiaries. Because of the policy changes in Greece specifically, but also countries around the European Union, it is difficult to keep up with regular updates. Another challenge is the communication lag time and lack of feedback loops between high-level policymakers, camp staff, NGOs, and the residents of the camps. Because of this communication breakdown, the information available via traditional sources – such as paper pamphlets – is rarely up-to-date. Without adequate and timely information, it is hard for anyone to make educated decisions about their future and lives. At this critical juncture for a refugee, access to reliable and timely information gives them the dignity and independence to make vital decisions for themselves and their families. A third challenge is the lack of infrastructure to access information in the camps that makes information dissemination very difficult. Even those people who have smart phones may not have access to the internet. One final challenge, although not an exhaustive list, is that, while organisations may disagree with or see the dangers of certain xenophobic policies, we try to remain neutral.

Refugee.Info introduced several activities to address and mitigate these challenges. First, the Facebook, website and blog content teams provide up-to-date information about refugee and migration policies of different European countries. The teams essentially pass along and compile news on policy changes, dispel rumors, and help to answer questions. The content team also translates and provides information on registration, services, and employment, among other things.
things, for refugees in Greece. Our content moderators and writers are constantly updating and verifying the website and social media in order to keep up with the volatile political environment, news cycle, and incessant rumors. We also worked to set up free Wi-Fi hotspots, placed throughout various camps. We ensure that the hardware is in a protected space to avoid unnecessary damage. The Wi-Fi service is available to everyone. It includes multiple languages and is geo-located to provide the most relevant information. This has been successful in Greece and has become a key component of our expansion strategy in other countries. Finally, our Refugee.Info teams focus on providing access to reliable information. Other divisions of Mercy Corps work on advocacy and policy issues. This helps us to remain impartial and politically neutral as we provide access.

There are many challenges that we still have to address such as misinformation or risky information on the internet, or smugglers’ postings. While we try to censor smuggler activity on our website, in some cases, smuggling provides a path for refugees to countries that may have more “favorable” refugee policies. In this case, we try to remain impartial and warn about the dangers of smuggling. However, while we don’t advertise smuggling or allow smugglers to comment on our pages, we also don’t tell people whether or not to use a smuggler to cross borders. Additional questions come up daily, and we try to do our best to provide information for people to maintain their independence and make their own decisions.

Lessons learned

1. Personally, one of the things I struggle with is keep our focus on information dissemination. Other organisations will tackle food, education, blankets, etc. Acknowledging this separation and disaggregation is one way to increase the capability of Mercy Corps, our partners, and other NGOs to coordinate more effectively. While we want to help in all of the ways we can, this risks muddying the waters. We must each focus on our individual mandates in order to improve coordination together.

2. Another thing that we have begun to think about as our program is expanding is the protection of users. Let’s examine the Wi-Fi component. Theoretically, it is open to anyone. Yet in practice, there is a need to incorporate more protection-thinking into our model. For example, is the physical location of Wi-Fi service safe and accessible to women, disabled users, etc.? Overall, by providing services such as the website, Facebook, and mobile app, our program enables people to independent and free decision-making based on accurate information throughout this humanitarian crisis.

3. We do believe that Wi-Fi, access to the internet and information is a right of people everywhere. I think with this mindset, our program really does address dignity and humanity of people in crisis. We do not tell people what to do or which decisions are correct, but rather focus on providing information that can empower a user to make their own decision.

4. We also, in this specific programming and humanitarian response, do not try to influence the Greek government, or any government policy. We remain neutral and impartial, simply passing along the information and perhaps the impact that this information has on decision-making for refugees.

The author of this case study didn’t wish to be named.

‘There are many challenges that we still have to address such as misinformation or risky information on the internet, or smugglers’ postings.’
Background

Kenya is one of the few countries in the East and Greater Horn of Africa that has had relative stability unlike its neighbours. In this regard, Kenya has been host to refugees and asylum seekers from many of its neighbours including Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea. These nationalities constitute the largest caseload of refugees and asylum seekers though there are limited numbers from other nationalities.

The legislation that guides refugee management in Kenya is the Refugees Act No. 13 of 2006. This act established the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) which is ‘responsible for all administrative matters concerning refugees in Kenya, and shall, in that capacity, coordinate activities and programmes relating to refugees’ (National Council for Law Reporting). The act (Article 16.2) empowers the Minister, by notice in the Gazette, and in consultation with the host community, to designate places and areas in Kenya to be either transit centres and/or refugee camps.

To this end, there exists Kakuma refugee camp with four zones, Dadaab refugee complex with five camps (now four camps) and Kalobeyei settlement (as an initiative to promote self-reliance among refugees and asylum seekers). About 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers reside in Nairobi and other urban areas. The current population of refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya is over 400,000 (UNHCR, n.d.).

There are various actors providing assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. UNHCR and the Government of Kenya through the Department of Refugee Affairs (now Refugee Affairs Secretariat) play the coordination role as well as take lead in refugee status determination and in issuance of various documents to refugees and asylum seekers. Other actors include international and national NGOs.

A clash of interests

Upholding Humanitarian Principles while they clash with national interests

In 2015 and 2016, Kenya experienced several terrorist attacks and the government and security agencies were under pressure to ensure protection of its citizens and their property. Quickly, there rose a link between Somali refugees, the refugee camps and the rise of terrorist attacks. On May 6, 2016, the Government issued a directive that saw the disbandment of the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) and that instituted mechanisms leading to the closure of the refugee camps. (OCHA, 2016).

The reactions to the directive were mixed: Kenyans who had bought into the narrative that refugees were responsible for the deteriorating security situation supported the intended closure of the camp. UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations plus other organisations that champion for the upholding Protecting the asylum space in Kenya

Written by Amani Bawata

‘Kenya has been host to refugees and asylum seekers from many of its neighbours including Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea.’
of the rights of forcibly displaced persons opined that doing so undermines the rights of the refugees and asylum seekers. A case was filed in court, and the courts blocked the directive.

The directive contravened the following humanitarian principles:

a. Impartiality: The Somali refugees had a right to receive impartial humanitarian assistance and that they should not be distinguished on the basis of nationality. Should the directive be enforced, only the Somali refugees would have been repatriated back to Somalia.

b. Independence: Should the directive be enforced and humanitarian actors be called upon to facilitate the repatriation of Somali refugees back to Somalia, those humanitarian actors risk being viewed as propagating the foreign policy on Kenya on refugees.

Being a Kenyan who has been affected by the fear of being involved in a terrorist attack, I understood and supported the directive. Being a humanitarian worker with a national NGO with operations in the Dadaab refugee complex, I was concerned about how to ensure protection for the Somali refugees. With the clashing interests, I took the following position: Pressure the government to be honest about what is predisposing the country to terrorist attacks while also reminding them of their obligation to protect the asylum space in Kenya. However, we would not be loud and combative in our engagement with the government so that we can achieve both objectives.

Some of the factors that we considered include the risk of losing public support should we be too loud about the rights of the Somali refugees and the risk of losing our reputation as a national NGO that has been on the forefront in championing for the rights of displaced persons.

The efforts of the international community and national actors (there was even a court case on the directive), meant that the government went slow on the directive and UNHCR and her partners had to demonstrate commitment towards the implementation of the planned repatriation of Somali refugees.

Lessons learned

Any advocacy initiative is preceded by a careful analysis of concerns that may necessitate advocacy and an analysis of the strategies of advocating. In this case, a careful analysis of the basis for the position of the government and the risks associated with whichever position I/we took is important. This informed the position that humanitarian actors took: dissociate refugees and terrorists, work with government on modalities of improving national security and promote durable solutions for refugees.

Such a situation requires a negotiation around which principles have to be upheld no matter what and what we can give up so as to appear to be keen on negotiation. The security of the country and the protection of the rights of the Somali refugees had to be upheld. The linking of Somali refugees to terrorism was challenged.
The first emergency response to the “Refugee Crisis” in the Balkans

Written by Barbora Havranová

Background

Context: It was in the late summer/fall of the year 2015 when a group of students went with one national branch of an international NGO to the Balkans to help with the alarming situation that we all have had seen in the media at that time. Many and many refugees were fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan because of the ongoing conflicts and unstable situations. They were on their route through the Balkans to reach a safe place, mentioning usually hopes to reach Germany or Sweden. And as they were fleeing dangerous places, and were living difficult situations on their way as well, they had the right to assistance. And it was necessary to take all possible steps to alleviate their suffering (Humanitarian imperative). Some countries were “safe-guarding” the way to allow them to pass quickly, in order to actually “get rid of the problem". Some countries built their barriers or walls, closed the borders and did not let anybody pass which then caused that the main route was changing frequently, and the information became even more blurred. The information was very blurred from the beginning, not just for the refugees and migrants, but also for the whole international community (Problematic communication). There was sometimes lack of coordination of all the actors (Problematic coordination).

Response: The NGOs and volunteers were arriving to different places around the Balkans. They were bringing water, food, and non-food items. But sometimes, they brought something that was already there and therefore was not needed (Help not relevant to their needs). The lack of information and coordination was obvious (Problems with communication and coordination). Big international NGOs were not always present in the field (Problems with effectivity and timeliness). But there were many volunteers/student-volunteers that were ready to help. Even though, they were doing all they could, they were most of the time not experienced and not trained before (Problems with competences of volunteers). As there was a lack of information, sometimes we were not able to respond adequately to the needs. The response was not effective and timely. Also, not always well coordinated. The distribution of food, water and non-food items was not very transparent (Problems with management of resources).

Challenge/dilemma

In this case study, I focus on Core Humanitarian Standard in which the four principles – Humanity, Impartiality, Independence, Neutrality, are implemented into the Commitments and Quality Criteria. The Commitments and the Quality Criteria are the ones that bring the lessons learned. The commitments are mentioned at the end of this part of the case study to make all the points even clearer.

The biggest challenge was the coordination of all the actors which then caused the lack of information among all the actors (Problem with commitments nb. 4 & 6). In the beginning, it was probably also the speed of the response from big international NGOs that have trained staff, but at this point they were sometimes not present. Their role as coordinators of the response and all the volunteers was really missing there at this point (Problem with commitments nb. 2 & 8). And as it was mostly the volunteers responding in some areas, and as they were not trained, there was sometimes a duplication of provided aid or the processes were not transparent enough (the distribution of items – for example people were receiving many food packages, chose just the items they liked and threw the rest away/ left the rest wherever on the ground) (Problem with commitments nb. 1, 2, 8 & 9).

We tried to coordinate and get together with all the volunteers, and come up with more transparent processes. We tried to avoid the duplication by coordination. We tried to improve the communication among all the actors, we exchanged contacts with different groups of volunteers in different refugee camps, to have better access to information for the next mission of the NGO, to avoid the duplication and bring the items that are really needed in each camp.

The Commitments and Quality Criteria that were mostly difficult to fulfill and why:

1. Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs. Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant. Problem: There were duplications within donations from different actors and during distributions.

2. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time. Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is effective and timely. Problem: The big NGOs with trained staff were not present early enough. And as there were problems with coordination, the response was not so effective.

3. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them. Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback. Problem: The refugees did not have a sufficient access to information which deepened the confusion among them. The lack of information was a problem among the volunteers and NGO members as well, which in general did not help with the communication among all actors.

4. Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance. Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary. Problem: The response was not well coordinated – lack of information, coordination, and the duplications. Big NGOs were not always present and volunteers were not experienced in coordinating emergency response like this.

5. Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers. Quality Criterion: Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably. Problem: The volunteers were not always competent, trained and well-managed. The response was not so effective.

6. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection. Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve. But...

7. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance as organisations learn from experience and reflection. Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve. But...
Lessons learned

The coordination is very important. All the actors must cooperate and firstly, plan all their efforts together to make sure the response will be effective and there will be no duplications. The communication is part of the coordination. Without proper communication, there is no coordination. Also, I find that educated staff is very much an advantage. This sector is about helping people in need. But just the motivation to help is not enough. In order to help effectively, there is still a lot to learn for all of us, students, volunteers, aid workers.

‘All the actors must cooperate and firstly, plan all their efforts together to make sure the response will be effective and there will be no duplications.’
Humanitarian response to a hurricane

Written by Chris Gerlach

Background
Within the space of five weeks, the country of Hordeen (imaginary country for the purpose of this case study) was hit by two hurricanes in rapid succession. The first hurricane, a category 3 storm, caused substantial damage in all regions of Hordeen. Shortly after, the second hurricane, a category 5 storm, hit the north-eastern part of Hordeen, leading to multiple deaths and causing near-total destruction of the infrastructure which had survived the first hurricane.

Immediately after the first hurricane, OCHA was asked to coordinate the humanitarian response in Hordeen, involving multiple UN agencies, the relevant national government agencies and the military, local and international organisations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, as well as a few private sector organisations. Over the last decade and through similar disaster responses, OCHA has established a good working relationship with the government of Hordeen in a natural disaster context.

Since early 2000, Hordeen has been largely stable with little civil unrest. People of multiple ethnicities and religions have lived together mostly peacefully, with the exception of the north-eastern region where, over the years, the government has repeatedly clashed with a local tribe over administrative, nationality and territorial rights.

Challenge/dilemma
While the government has asked OCHA and other partners to provide support and assistance to its citizens, it does not want to accept help in the north-eastern region due to the conflict with the local tribe. However, a needs assessment carried out after the second hurricane showed that life-saving assistance was especially urgent in the north-eastern region which had been hit particularly hard.

This poses multiple dilemmas and challenges. First, the humanitarian imperative clearly states that nothing should override the obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. The focus lies on ensuring that aid goes to those who have the greatest need, which in this case are the affected people living in the north-eastern region. The government’s attempt to prevent aid from reaching them also directly opposes the principle of impartiality, which requires us to deliver assistance on the basis of need alone, regardless of, for example, gender, race or ethnicity. Then there is the practical dilemma of how to negotiate access without jeopardising the current relationship with the government as this could potentially lead to the international community not being re-invited to coordinate future responses or being expelled immediately, directly placing at risk the lives of all people in Hordeen. And lastly, even if access is successfully negotiated with the government, it may be possible that the tribe in the north-eastern region does not recognise the humanitarian actors sent to deliver aid as acting independently, but rather views them as government agents and as a result may refuse to allow them access.

It is clear that action must be taken to ensure aid reaches all affected people – this is a non-negotiable. Access negotiations with both parties, the government and the tribe, must be held and concluded swiftly to ensure that the affected people receive aid in time. As part of the discussions, emphasis must be placed on the humanitarian imperative and the humanitarian principles, making clear that these are also a non-negotiable. Particularly important in this instance is the principle of independence, as both sides will have to be convinced sufficiently that the humanitarian agencies responding in the north-east will not be acting on behalf of either the government or the tribe. This may also have implications for which of the local partners and government agencies can be involved, not to mention the military.

While involving the military can offer some clear advantages, such as its ability to rapidly transport equipment to otherwise inaccessible areas, it has to be carefully negotiated and should only be considered as a last resort. In this case, due to the bad condition of roads, bridges and tunnels, it may be necessary to negotiate military assistance to reach the affected population in time. However, it is absolutely paramount to clearly define the rules and set strict parameters, based, for example, on the IASC Civil-Military Guidelines. This includes establishing the humanitarian actors as leads, ensuring respect for the humanitarian principles, preparing an exit-strategy, and clearly defining the limited involvement that is expected from the military. Lastly, leaders of the tribe have to be involved in these discussions in order to ensure that the humanitarian actors are still seen as independent and not perceived as being affiliated with the government, which could negatively impact their security.

Lessons learned
Thinking through this scenario, even if only fictional, has allowed me to reflect more deeply on the humanitarian principles and their applicability in the field. The role of the principle of independence, something I must confess I probably took as given, has now raised my interest in particular. Ultimately, and as discussed in the MOOC, the government has the primary responsibility to organise, initiate, coordinate and implement humanitarian assistance. But what happens in those cases where the government is the perpetrator or deliberately ignores parts of its population? Or when humanitarian agencies are largely dependent on a donor who may be involved in hostilities in the field? This case study, along with the examples in the MOOC, have helped me to more clearly understand how important adherence to the humanitarian principles is for humanitarian actors, and how, ultimately, they ensure that we can carry out our work to serve people affected by disaster and conflict. I look forward to learning more about their practical applicability in the coming years.

This case study describes an imaginary situation.
**Principled humanitarian action in Somalia**

Written by Eric Tschiember

**Background**

Somalia continues to face a long and drawn-out humanitarian crisis because of the combined effects of climate change, internal conflicts, failed governance, and subsequent mass displacements and security concerns.

In 2011, the situation culminated in a famine that killed 260,000 people. In 2017, 6.7 million need urgent humanitarian assistance, half of them suffering from hunger. Accessibility, security, and the political situation vary greatly between Somalia’s regions, with different capacities and ideologies of the respective (de facto) governments.

Much of South Central Somalia is under the control of militias (Al Shabaab, Ahlu Sunna Waljama). The population, although viewed as ethnically and culturally homogenous, is violently divided in four main patrilinial clans. Minority groups are highly discriminated.

Non-state local actors, including more than 2,000 local NGOs, follow no clear legal framework in any of Somalia’s regions. International actors, including the UN agencies, Western INGOs, are often viewed by many Somalis as politically partisan or culturally sensitive and insincere donor.

**Challenge/dilemma**

- Access to those most in needs/vulnerable due to poor harvests, decimated crops, displacements, etc.—difficulty in identifying and accessing these groups or individuals in the different parts of the Somalian territory, increased by the lack of credible statistics and logistical challenges, insecurity, (Humanity: address human suffering wherever it is found).

- Assist all ethnic/cultural groups, communities or clans, including for instance the Somalis under militias rules – potential divisions, conflicts, and discriminations on age/gender/diversity might have been exacerbated by more than 25 years of ongoing crises.

- Central and local governments unable to coordinate alone both emergency and early recovery actions – potentially conflictual agendas may lead to poor or ineffective governments responses and even worsen the situation for some groups or individuals.

- Foreign governments or UN officials attempting to engage INGOs/NGOs in political processes in support of the “official” government in Mogadishu – accepting such pressures would reinforce the negative opinion of many Somalis about INGOs viewed as politically partisan.

- With all other key local stakeholders including clan elders, minority groups and communities/diaspora representatives, local NGOs, etc. This will help gaining local knowledge, improve coordination and trust, ensure national/local ownership and participation is set as a priority.

As a humanitarian manager, what I would propose to do:

1. Identify, understand, assess the local situation and priority needs.
   - Analyse existing documents (socio-political background, actors mapping, needs/risk assessment, etc.).
   - Conduct if necessary complementary analysis/assessment.
   - Share priorities with key partners in place.
   This will help allocate resources and gain access to those most in need, and identify accessibility issues (e.g. in the areas of conflict or under militias rules).

2. Establish effective communication networks.
   - With legitimate or de facto authorities to obtain access to all parts of the territory and to the different groups. This could help negotiating de facto arrangements with militias to provide aid to Somalis in militias held areas.

3. Facilitate national/local participation and ownership.
   - Develop a participatory approach at all stages, with active engagement of all stakeholders in decisions that affect their lives.
   - Facilitate participation by all parts of the country, with many Somali groups and stakeholders (questionnaires/workshops) to confirm priority needs, areas and plans of interventions.

- Adapt to the highly fragmented situation in Somalia, with rapidly changing structures and alliances between local actors – assisting those most in need wherever they are and ensuring national ownership must be the goal, without taking position on political or ideological goals or disputes.

- Neutrality: ensure not taking sides in hostilities or engaging in any controversies.

- Impartiality: provide aid based on need alone making no adverse distinction on any basis.

- Foreign governments or UN officials attempting to engage INGOs/NGOs in political processes in support of the “official” government in Mogadishu – accepting such pressures would reinforce the negative opinion of many Somalis about INGOs viewed as politically partisan.

- Code of Conduct/Art.4 (“We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.”)

- With all other key local stakeholders including clan elders, minority groups and communities/diaspora representatives, local NGOs, etc. This will help gaining local knowledge, improve coordination and trust, ensure national/local ownership and participation is set as a priority.

4. Establish effective coordination among international and national actors.
   - Use inclusive processes that entail Somali organisations, support national/local emergency and development plans/budgets.
   - Coordinate aid delivery based on specialty to support, rather than duplicate, national efforts.

5. Apply the five principles of partnership (equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility, complementarity).
   - As key enablers to a long-lasting relationship with the local actors, focusing on mutual respect and information sharing.

6. Provide appropriate emergency aid on the ground.
   - Focus on those with the greatest needs and most vulnerable (e.g. on food/water/shelters/health/sanitation concerns).

7. Prepare transition and support early recovery.
   - Focus on improving the national capacity to act to provide a vision of the sort of country for which both emergency and transition support lay the groundwork.
   - Identify and mainstream early recovery opportunities/needs/response plans (e.g. agricultural & non-agricultural livelihoods, infrastructure/health, etc.).

- Establish effective coordination among international and national actors.
  - Use inclusive processes that entail Somali organisations, support national/local emergency and development plans/budgets.
  - Coordinate aid delivery based on specialty to support, rather than duplicate, national efforts.

- Coordinate with Somalia NGO consortium (e.g. NGOs/INGOs from Muslim majority states as facilitators of humanitarian aid).

This will help, within the cluster approach in place, align each other’s specialties in the integrated response.
This will help reduce the humanitarian-development gap, and break the cycle of Somalia’s dependence on humanitarian assistance with more coordinated approach during/between/post-crises.

**Lessons learned**

Participation, ownership, and effective coordination among international/national actors are key to deliver appropriate aid to those most in need.

Applying all humanitarian principles remains a huge challenge, especially amid ongoing insecurity in post-conflict situations, access constraints, political pressure, high staff turnover, lack of credible statistics, logistical challenges, limited resources and technical capacity facing many aid agencies.

In a situation of chronic food insecurity, emergency aid cannot be the only answer: there is a need to address the underlying causes of dependence, increase the resilience and capacities of communities, establish platforms for stabilisation to help implement sustainable peace and capacity development in response to the needs.

‘Participation, ownership, and effective coordination among international/national actors are key to deliver appropriate aid to those most in need.’
Abort the campaign

Written by Frédéric Laviole

Background
Geneva, Switzerland, August 2021 – The Board of Directors of a large international NGO is holding an extraordinary session to discuss an urgent matter. It concerns its global advocacy campaign which denounces Israel for breaching International Law and Human Rights Laws by maintaining and increasing the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Since the beginning of the recent armed conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza, the Jewish lobby has been exerting significant pressure on the NGO. They insist that the NGO put on hold its advocacy campaign for the duration of the conflict, as it “just contributes to exacerbate tensions between parties”. This comes at a time when the NGO is still struggling to extend humanitarian assistance to the people affected by the conflict in Gaza; while trying to coordinate actions with an array of humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors (NGOs, UN, the Palestinian Authority, the media, foreign governments, armed groups and the local populations).

As the Directors review the meeting agenda, the Chairman suggests to first review the humanitarian principles to “take a step back” prior to discussing this complicated matter. Before long, the Board agrees that this is the government’s response to the organisation’s advocacy campaign. Therefore, containing the advocacy campaign might translate into better access to Gaza for the organisation’s humanitarian personnel to enter Gaza. The NGO has good reasons to think that this is the government’s response to the organisation’s advocacy campaign. As one Director concluded: “It is an integral part of our mission.”

On the one side, putting on hold the advocacy campaign would allow the organisation to 1) effectively apply the neutrality principle both locally (where the emergency relief intervention is taking place) and globally. In the medium term, this could contribute to 2) strengthen the NGO’s reputation as a neutral humanitarian actor and hence facilitate access to countries where governments are usually reluctant to let in foreign humanitarian organisations. In addition, it would 3) help reduce external pressure on the organisation. For instance, since the start of the conflict, the Israeli government has made it increasingly difficult for the NGO to obtain authorisations for its humanitarian personnel to enter Gaza. The NGO has good reasons to think that this is the government’s response to the organisation’s advocacy campaign. Therefore, containing the advocacy campaign might translate into better access to Gaza for the organisation’s humanitarian workers and consequently increase the effectiveness of the NGO’s interventions on the ground. Another example is a visit paid by one of the Directors by a company representative offering significant funding to contribute toward the emergency relief effort in Gaza; only if the NGO accepts to “temporarily put on hold its advocacy efforts on the Palestinian case to concentrate on other conflicts unrelated to Israel’s interests”. This proposition was quickly dismissed, as it would constitute a serious breach to the humanitarian principles, among which the organisation’s Code of Ethics, although accepting the proposition might have meant hundreds of additional lives saved, directly contributing to fulfill the humanity principle. But as one of the Directors put it: “We cannot risk jeopardizing our independence even if sadly it means losing an opportunity to save more lives. We must continue to seek a durable solution to the conflict through our advocacy work. It is an integral part of our mission.”

Lessons learned
As shown in the text, there are cases where the application of one humanitarian principle may prevent the full application of another principle. In the case study, I suggested that if the NGO had decided to accept the bribe to save more lives (humanity principle), it would have negated the independence principle.

The humanitarian principles may, and are, interpreted and applied in different ways depending on the organisation and context. It may be more difficult for larger organisations with multiple programmes implemented both globally and in-country, to apply the neutrality principle at all levels and at all times. Smaller under-funded local organisations may struggle to remain independent in contexts where funding is politically motivated and comes with conditions. Local faith-based organisations may experience pressure from their supporting base to prioritise segments of the population that share the same faith (which would negate the humanitarian imperative affirming the need to prioritise the persons most in need).

Several environmental factors can make organisations more or less capable of effectively applying the humanitarian principles, among which the organisation’s supporters, local or foreign governments, the private sector and the lack of funding. These factors must be considered as we strive to apply the humanitarian principles in our work as humanitarians.

This case study describes an imaginary situation.
Background
In March 2016, as a reaction to the high number of people crossing the Mediterranean into the Greek islands with an aim to seek protection in Europe, the European Union (EU) has struck an agreement with Turkey. The EU-Turkey statement aims to address the flow of smuggled migrants and asylum seekers travelling from Turkey to the Greek islands by allowing Greece to return to Turkey “all new irregular migrants” arriving after March 20, 2016. In exchange, EU Member States will increase resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, accelerate visa liberalisation for Turks, and boost financial support for Turkey’s refugee population. This has resulted in people being constrained in the Greek islands waiting for their asylum applications to be reviewed, and staying in appalling conditions in the camps. The EU and its Member States are the main donor in the humanitarian response in Greece.

Challenge/dilemma
The Greek islands do not have the capacity of hosting several thousand migrants and asylum seekers. The camps there are incredibly overcrowded, with many protection, shelter and other issues, lack of health services, particularly mental health. The vulnerabilities of the people are accelerated, leading to them becoming even more vulnerable than before arriving to Europe. This might be a deterrence strategy to keep the people from seeking protection in Europe, or it might be the lack of political will, or lack of capacities within the Greek government to deal with such situation. Overall, the complex situation in the Greek islands exposes an issue of accountability, with many actors involved in the response. It is not quite clear who is in the end responsible - the Greek government, NGOs, UN Agencies, or the European Union.

The geographical restriction, which prevents people from legally exiting the Greek islands and move to the mainland, leads to more vulnerable people stranded. Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings. The principle of humanity is not fully implemented there - with people being exposed to protection issues.

NGOs and UN agencies working there can be questioned on the basis of impartiality and independence. Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases. Also, humanitarians must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives.

The situation in the Greek islands exposes the dilemma for humanitarian actors between helping the people in need and being a tool of the political agenda. While NGOs and UN agencies are indeed helping people stranded on the islands, they are also very dependent on the European funding, which can restrict them from properly advocating for the rights of the people.

Finally, the EU and its Member States are willing to sacrifice their commitments to human rights and humanitarian principles, and are taking the EU–Turkey statement as an example of migration management, reproducing it in other countries in the Middle East and Africa.

Lessons learned
The EU–Turkey statement should not be considered as a good migration management policy. The smuggling and human trafficking networks must be destroyed, however, only the opening of legal and reliable ways to seek asylum and have protection in Europe will do so. Such agreements do not stop the smuggling; rather open other geographical pathways. The agreement must ensure that people who need protection are provided with dignified conditions and their vulnerabilities are addressed. The NGOs and UN agencies must ensure that they work in accordance to the humanitarian principles. And the other stakeholders, such as the EU, should ensure that the humanitarian actors have the conditions to fulfill their mandate.

The author of this case study didn’t wish to be named.
Hurricane Evan hit the Fiji Islands (2012)

Written by Joëlle Glerum

Background
The Fiji Islands located in the Pacific consist of over 300 islands of which only one third are inhabited. The biggest island is often described as the mainland of Fiji.

Following a category 4/5 hurricane in December 2012, the heaviest in the past 20 years, Fiji was severely damaged. Early warning systems were in place and Fiji had about a week to prepare for the disaster to come. The national authority expected a category 4 to hit the islands. Together with the military, they opened 200 evacuation centres. They moved a large amount of people from the islands to the mainland.

Also, they warned people to prepare (such as installing hurricane shutters) and remain inside during the hurricane. As a precaution they cut some of the power supplies in the main cities in case of falling power lines. The hospital was closed except for emergencies.

At the same time, airlines (such as Air Pacific) grounded flights leaving almost 2,000 visitors stranded. Australia and New Zealand offered support to Fiji and had search and rescue teams on standby.

After the hurricane passed there were no casualties however some people lost everything, leaving them displaced. Most people had no water, electricity and/or food.

In the first few days the national authority announced a ‘Declaration of a State of Natural Disaster’. They removed debris as well as reactivate the power supply stations. It took about 3 days to let the airport run again. This allowed assistance from New Zealand and Australia to arrive in form of a specialist team. Also, some in–country clusters were activated such as the shelter cluster (consisting of the government, and NGOs). The shelter cluster was responsible for those losing their house to receive emergency shelter.

Secondly, they started in the centre of the main cities and slowly moved to the suburbs. It took approximately 10 days to give the city of Nadi its light back. There was enough water and the pipelines were bringing clean water within 3 days.

Challenge 1: Time for preparations. The national authority warned and evacuated people (from the islands and lower areas) however there was not a real plan in place. Local people installed hurricane shutters and some even cut down tall trees.

Challenge 2: The infrastructure, buildings and roads, were damaged. The local people, the national government and specialist teams removed debris from the road, cleaned the road and/or fixed the road if needed. Luckily there was not so much damage to the roads. The fire brigade was struggling to deal with all the cries for help in regard to buildings or housing.

Challenge 3: Water, electricity and food became scarce. The national government took precautions in regard to electricity however they did not calculate losing it for quite some time. They first restored the electricity at the International Airport of Nadi (allowing specialist teams and food to come in). Food had become scarce and people started to break into shops (whom remained closed for several days after the disaster hit).

Challenge 4: People were internally displaced. Tourists were not able to leave and had to wait in evacuation centres or on the islands (waiting out for the storm to come). A few people lost their house. In a month almost zero people were left in the evacuation centres as the shelter cluster stepped up to secure housing. Half a year later temporary or permanent housing was not yet in place.

Lessons learned
I experienced the hurricane while volunteering in Fiji. I saw a beautiful country destroyed. I stayed with my host family together at her sisters’ house. We almost lost the roof of the house during the storm as a window broke. We had to be creative and open a window on the other side of the house to let the roof stay on top of the house. The house of my host family was severely damaged, since a palm tree had fallen on top of the roof. We remained in this house without electricity (approx. 7 days), water (approx. 3 days) and a damaged roof (long time). The shops remained closed for a long time and food became scarce. Before the storm my host family stored food in containers in case food would become scarce.

If I reflect my experience on the humanitarian principles; humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence I think it went well.

Challenge/dilemma

The national authority expected a category 4 to hit the islands. Together with the military, they opened 200 evacuation centres.

Humanity: Before the disaster many people were evacuated. The people most in need were given priority such as the people on the smaller islands as they would be in the direct path of the hurricane. After the disaster assistance arrived and provided everyone in need with the basics; water, food and shelter.

Neutrality: This principle is not relevant regarding this situation as its issues were mainly solved in–country and there was not a conflictual situation.

Impartiality: I am not sure if assistance after the disaster was provided on the basis of need. The Fijian government decided to open the airport first. This would allow foreign assistance to be able to come. They started providing assistance from the main cities inwards. We could assume that the poorest people of Fiji live inland – meaning they received assistance the latest. On the other side most people live in the cities. Perhaps it was not on the basis of need but trying to provide assistance to the highest number of people.

Independence: The government in Fiji is mainly respected by the people of Fiji and acted responsible and independent.

I am not certain if the Fijian authority provided assistance to those most in need however I think they provided assistance which allowed Fijians to rebuild their country and lives. In a certain sense I believe re–opening the airport was of significant importance to gain assistance but also to allow evacuees to return to their home country. Also, reopening the airport allowed tourists to come to Fiji – which in fact is the main source of income for most Fijians.
In July 2016 the civil war in South Sudan worsened and the number of refugees crossing the border to Uganda dramatically increased. The entry pace in the country was continuous and huge during several months. As a consequence, 800,000 new refugees have settled in settlements in the north of Uganda. More than 80% are women and children under 18. These refugees have fled the country with few goods after experiencing or witnessing ordeals of all types. They are in need of urgent assistance, material and psychological.

The context in Uganda is favourable, as the government applies an open refugee policy, meaning that they have freedom of movement and access to social services, education and health. In practice, most South Sudanese refugees live in settlements (not camps) together with the host communities in northern Uganda.

The relevant actors are:
• Refugees
• Host communities
• Central and local authorities
• Humanitarian organisations: NGOs, UNHCR.

The response crisis has focused on setting up new settlements and reinforcing the existing ones (Uganda has a long tradition of hosting refugees) and providing for emergency needs with an emphasis on food, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter and protection, including psychosocial support.

Challenge/dilemma
Such a big sudden crisis has given rise to several challenges:
• Lack of coordination among humanitarian actors. The unexpected arrival of so many refugees caught the humanitarian organisations by surprise. No needs/capacity mapping had been made. Without knowing the existing capacities it’s difficult in a first instance to coordinate and to efficiently react to this crisis.
• Resource scarcity. The number of refugees tripled in few months. It is difficult to be materially ready. Even in such situation the humanity principle has to be kept.
• Backlog in the refugee registration process. Civil servants can’t keep up with the pace registering new arrivals. This brings collateral problems as unregistered people don’t have access to humanitarian aid. At the same time other people could register more than once in different settlements and receive more aid than planned to the detriment of other refugees.
• Rising tensions between refugees and host communities. Even if the international humanitarian aid includes the needs of host communities, the magnitude of the refugee influx has overstretched natural resources such as land and triggered the rise of dissatisfaction in the local population. Even if our main goal is to tackle the refugee crisis we have to keep impartial not discriminating people in need on the basis of their status, either refugees or locals.
• Rising tensions between different groups of refugees. The South Sudanese population is composed by different ethnic groups who in normal circumstances live peacefully together. However, one characteristic of
the South Sudanese conflict is that ethnic
groups are often associated to different
sides. If we took one side or another our
principle of neutrality would be easily
challenged.

Lessons learned
No matter the challenges we face as
humanitarians the overarching principle to
keep is the humanitarian imperative.

As humanitarian organisations we should
have paid attention to preparedness by
putting processes and systems in place to be
ready to unexpected crises. More dialogue
and coordination, including a capacity
mapping, among the different organisations
ideally under the umbrella of the UNHCR
(the agency in charge of coordinating
the refugee response together with the
Ugandan government) in the framework of
the humanitarian country team. In addition,
resources and processes to quickly assess
the needs in the aftermath of the crisis should
have been ready to build as soon as possible a
mapping of needs to cross with the capacity
mapping. The result would be to know who
does what and where in an efficient and
prompt way. The principles of partnership are
to be applied: complementarity, transparency,
equality, results-oriented approach. Also,
Core Humanitarian Standard – Commitment 6
(Humanitarian response is coordinated and
complementary).

As for the scarcity of resources, little is in our
hands as humanitarian workers. What we
can do is advocate our headquarters and
donors’ representations in Uganda. Media in
our level should be used to help recipients to
alleviate their situation, to keep them informed
about their direct interests and about the
measures our organisations are putting in
place. Advocate communication to raise
funds would be more the responsibility of our
headquarters. Given the scarcity of resources,
their allocation has to be made efficiently,
looking at the Core Humanitarian Standard –
Commitment 1 (Humanitarian response to
be appropriate and relevant.); Commitment
2 (Humanitarian response is effective and
timely.); Commitment 9 (Resources are
managed and used responsibly for the
intended purpose). We shouldn’t forget
the composition of the refugee population
(80% are women and children under 18).
An age-gender approach is necessary to
improve the effectiveness of the response.
A diversity approach, as will be seen below
when commenting on the tension risks, will
also be useful. In general, a screening of the
vulnerable people, no matter their reason for
vulnerability, must be made. The application of
Core Humanitarian Standard – Commitment
4 (Humanitarian response is based on
communication, participation and feedback)
allowing participation and feedback from
the recipients should be guaranteed.

The backlog in the registration process is
under the Ugandan government and UNHCR
responsibility. Therefore, there is little to be
done by us.

Finally, to scale down tensions among different
communities, either host and refugees or
different ethnic groups, we must be firm in the
application of the humanitarian principles. We
have to be neutral, not taking sides no matter
what our personal opinion is. Some South
Sudanese crime perpetrators will be among
the refugees. We have to apply the impartiality
and humanity principles and address aid to
whoever needs it. We have to protect those
at risk of been attacked and excluded by
other members and groups. To have a more
influential role in diminishing tensions, a good
relationship with different stakeholders, like
host communities and local authorities, should
have been built in advance as stated in Core
Humanitarian Standard – Commitment 3
(Humanitarian response strengthens local
capacities and avoids negative effects.),
always keeping in mind the principle of
independence.
The role of humanitarian actors in the Rohingya crisis in Bangladesh

Written by Laura Stopher Clark

Background

Since early August 2017 an estimated 600,000 (including an estimated 300,000 children) ethnic Rohingya minority from Rakhine State in Myanmar have crossed the border into Bangladesh following a violent crackdown by the military who do not recognise the Rohingya Muslims as citizens of Myanmar.

Due to the ongoing nature of this crisis there are many actors already present in existing refugee camps including the national government of Bangladesh which is leading the response, UN agencies, INGO’s, National NGOs and local community based organisations. However, the recent speed and scale up in the displacement of people has meant many peoples’ basic needs are now not being met. The existing camps are extremely overcrowded and the terrain is hilly and muddy, not helped by the continuing rains of the current season.

The dire situation needs a multi sectoral response including shelter, WASH, health, nutrition, protection and education.

Challenge/dilemma

The initial challenge is to stop the flow of people out of Myanmar and into the camps. The violence in Myanmar must stop and the safety of the Rohingya ethnic group must not be resolved quickly. International Humanitarian actors cannot fulfill this role and remain neutral hence the need to advocate to their governments who can take up a public stance against the Myanmar government’s treatment of the Rohingya.

The next major challenge is meeting the basic needs of all the Rohingya now in the refugee camps in Bangladesh. It will be a struggle to stick to the principle of humanity in this context as so many people have so many needs. The existing camps are way over capacity and the government of Bangladesh has identified more land where further camps can be set up. However, the natural topography and climate in the area further complicate things as the rains are causing small scale landslides and flooding.

The lack of suitable space is exacerbating all the problems as there is not enough flat space to set up larger facilities such as health clinics or distribution centres, meaning more mobile centres possibly leading to the exclusion of people in harder to reach areas thus conflicting with the principle of impartiality and providing assistance based solely on needs. The lack of basic sanitation poses the risk of the outbreak of disease, so safe water supplies need to be established and sanitary latrines need to be built and personal hygiene kits and practices need to be shared. Lack of governance in camps and the number of separated families could lead to exploitation of certain vulnerable groups via gender based violence, child labour, survival sex or people trafficking. To adhere to the principle of impartiality thorough needs assessments must happen regularly so that delivery is based solely on needs.

The crisis is not likely to be resolved quickly so the provision of education for the displaced children is imperative. This will help to prevent long term damage to the prospects of these children in the future with the aim of enabling them to learn and develop skills which can help them earn a livelihood in later life. However, deciding on a curriculum presents its own challenges as what may have been taught in Myanmar may not be taught in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh will have its own idea of what to teach these children but it is important that humanitarian actors ensure the principle of independence and provide a programme based only on what is needed. There will also be many people in the camps who have seen distressing scenes of violence and lost loved ones and therefore likely to have adverse mental health problems. Mental health is not a concept that is widely accepted in all cultures so to provide help for people the humanitarian actors must remain independent to external pressures and persist in their treatment of mental health problems.

Lessons learned

As this is an ongoing emergency the main lessons to be learnt from this emergency are not yet known but there are a number of consequences which can be discussed already. Needs assessments may identify vulnerable groups which culturally are not used to being singled out or receiving additional support. This could lead to conflict in families or between genders if not appropriately managed and discussed with the effected population. The concerns of the host community must be listened to and addressed to avoid any conflict over resources given that the host population will also have many needs.

The scale up in Bangladesh needed to have been quicker from all actors involved. The delay in reacting will have resulted in the death and suffering of the affected Rohingya population and this goes against the key principle of humanity. The response needs more resources and funding and we must not waste any more time otherwise this could turn into an even worse situation if there is a serious outbreak of disease.

With a situation as complex as this where so many basic needs are not being met, it is very hard to know where to start, that is why there must be great collaboration and communication between all humanitarian actors so that the needs of the people can be efficiently met and the burden of trying to achieve this can be spread across many people and funding sources. As the emergency continues to unfold, constant monitoring and evaluation of programmes and constant engagement with all affected groups will try to ensure that no harm is done by the responders and that everyone’s specific needs can be met.
Struggling with the implementation phase of a project in a humanitarian crisis

Written by Lenin Daza Camacho

Background

Between 2009 and 2010 Ecuador experienced a refugee crisis with the massive arrivals of Colombian citizens that were looking for international protection since their lives were at risk in their country. In order to cope with that issue, the government of Ecuador offered a humanitarian response along with local and international organisations as well as with the support of some agencies of the United Nations through projects in a variety of fields such as legal aid, housing, food, health, among others. An international non-governmental organisation that operated in three provinces of the country obtained a grant provided by an important governmental institution from the United States of America that supports initiatives for helping asylum-seekers and refugees. The project consisted in providing legal aid and psychosocial support for women victims of gender-based violence who were asylum-seekers and refugees. The components of the project also contained other kind of assistance such as provision of supplies, community workshops on raising awareness about gender-based violence and the legal assistance for processing permanent residences for Colombian woman that had Ecuadorian children.

Challenge/dilemma

The issues this NGO had to deal with during the implementation phase of the project were due to the lack of a proper needs assessment, which was noticed because most of the objectives were made through assumptions, so the affected people’s view was not taken into account. In this regard, it was clear that the NGO did not consider building accountability to the affected people, which eventually occasioned the following problems:

- Two important risks were not taken into account: lack of capacity to reach out all the targeted communities to deliver the workshops on raising awareness about gender-based violence and the difficulties with the public administration to process permanent residences for more than 800 Colombian women. When the implementation of the project was taking place, the workshops in the communities were delivered as informative sessions which did not comply with the project’s aim that was to allow the people in the communities to participate expressing their concerns, this occurred since the capacity of the NGO was not enough to cover all the places that were targeted in the proposal so, as a result, the attendance to the workshops was quite low insofar as sometimes the number of attendees was less than ten people, which showed that the organisation was losing credibility. In terms of the second risk, the organisation came across the visa requirements were not easy to meet for the vast majority of women so, at some moment, the groups of beneficiaries stop visiting the office inasmuch as the organisation was not able to help everyone to get all the requisites to apply for a permanent residence.

- Many of the professionals hired to implement this project were not qualified for the assignments demanded by the project, which affected the reputation of the organisation insofar as it lost important spaces with key stakeholders. Further, because of this, the principle of
Because of these situations, the other organisations that were present activities of this project. was supposed to be provided through the fiscal year, which meant that the organisation had to implement the whole project in less than a year. This affected the implementation of the project started from changing the head of office, since the one who was running the project at the beginning did not take the proper decisions to have an effective implementation. The team also experienced some changes since it was necessary to form a side team to oversee the well development of this project. This permitted the project to run in a more organised manner.

The team designated to contribute in the implementation of the project started from making an analysis of the completion of the activities in order to develop an action plan. The first issue that attracted the attention was how to recover the trust of the stakeholders that were in the field; to do this, it was arranged several meetings to express the commitment of the organisation with the target group, this action allowed to gain back the work with other organisations that were working for the sake of people in need of international protection. As a result, the organisation was given back the opportunity to participate in the working groups that the other stakeholders were attending.

Solutions provided:

- In order to deal with these concerns, the organisations had to make a restructuration of the administration starting from changing the head of office, since the one who was running the project at the beginning did not take the proper decisions to have an effective implementation.

- The team also experienced some changes since it was necessary to form a side team to oversee the well development of this project. This permitted the project to run in a more organised manner.

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- The service provided to the target group was another of the big concerns since many beneficiaries were reluctant to be served by the organisation’s workers. To tackle this situation, the side team moved from the desk to the locations where the beneficiaries lived in order to start a needs assessment. This action gave the NGO the opportunity to show to the affected people the immense interest that the organisation had to help them for the improvement of their lives.

- Another problem found was the bureaucratic proceedings that the organisation was having with the former administration, which was affecting significantly the development of activities, thus, the designated team made the internal proceedings more flexible in order to provide the services to our beneficiaries in a faster manner.

Lessons learned:

- According to the principle of humanity, the purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and ensure respect for human beings, therefore, beneficiaries must be the priority at all the stages in a humanitarian crisis.

- The service provided to the target group was another of the big concerns since many beneficiaries were reluctant to be served by the organisation’s workers. To tackle this situation, the side team moved from the desk to the locations where the beneficiaries lived in order to start a needs assessment. This action gave the NGO the opportunity to show to the affected people the immense interest that the organisation had to help them for the improvement of their lives.

- Another problem found was the bureaucratic proceedings that the organisation was having with the former administration, which was affecting significantly the development of activities, thus, the designated team made the internal proceedings more flexible in order to provide the services to our beneficiaries in a faster manner.

- In order to prevent conflicts, the relationship with other organisations must be constantly strengthen through effective communication paths and efficient mechanisms of coordination inasmuch as these are the best ways to build trust with stakeholders.

- To act according to the do no harm principle, it is crucial to make a risk analysis for any project in order to avoid exposing beneficiaries to further harm in humanitarian crisis.

- Building accountability to affected people is vital in a humanitarian action, thus, including beneficiaries through needs assessment processes is important to understand their needs, vulnerabilities, capacities and risks they can face.

- Cooperating with governmental authorities can improve significantly the responses to humanitarian crisis since, eventually, they are the decision-makers in terms of public policy. However, it is important to bear in mind all the time the principles of impartiality and independence to make no distinctions and to be autonomous at all stages of humanitarian actions.
The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Yemen
Written by Maria Halvorsen

Background
The war in Yemen has been going on for more than two years and the situation is getting more and more unbearable for people living in the country. Prices for consumer goods are high as well as unemployment, which is affecting the population dramatically. More than half of the population lack access to healthcare and women often deliver babies at home, and only seek support in case of complications. Almost 2 million people are internally displaced and 80% of the population needs humanitarian assistance. Yemen is facing one of the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, including the fastest growing cholera epidemic ever recorded, the world’s largest food emergency and widespread population displacement. The threat of famine is increasing, with an estimated 17 million people facing food insecurity and 1.8 million children acutely malnourished. More than half of the country’s population lacks access to clean water and functional and safe toilets. 1 out of 4 is in danger of starvation unless the help reaches them.

Opposing parties in the conflict are constantly obstructing humanitarian organisations to reach people in need. Schools have repeatedly been targeted in the conflict and children are used as child soldiers by both sides, a direct violation of children’s human rights and international humanitarian law. Civilians should not be targets and they are entitled to protection, education and healthcare, even during war. Since the armed conflict started in March 2015, at least 5,000 civilians, including 1,120 children, have lost their lives and more than 8,500 people have been injured by armed violence.

Challenge/dilemma

Humanity
A big challenge in Yemen regarding humanity is that both sides in the conflict prevent help from reaching people in need. It is therefore important to stay true to all humanitarian principles to gain access to the most vulnerable people in the country. By being neutral, impartial and independent the help is more likely to pass combating parties. One way of doing this is working with local organisations that are known to the government, and help may more likely be accepted.

Neutrality
Since dialogue is needed with many different actors, keeping a dialogue with combating parties, may question an organisations’ status as neutral. For organisations with religious or political causes, being neutral in their assistance might be even more difficult to prove, especially in the circumstances in Yemen. Even so, I think this might be one of the easiest principle to follow in the situation of Yemen. I think it is difficult to gain access to the country, but once you are in I believe it is possible to act neutral.

Impartiality
A challenge is that help is only allowed to some people by combating parties. Therefore, humanitarian organisations might not be able to target those most in need. By having a dependable assessment of who is the most vulnerable and in need of help, this may increase the likelihood of help reaching people most in need of assistance.

Independence
I think this might be a big challenge in Yemen, because of the dilemma where humanitarian organisations are not allowed to help. A challenge is balancing the need to keep a dialogue with all sides of the conflict, without being influenced and without letting others decide who and where to help.

Lessons learned
By studying Yemen, a real conflict and situation, I realise the difficulties in providing help and preventing the humanitarian crisis from escalating even further. When first learning about the humanitarian principles, they seem so obvious and universal. But when working with this case study and Yemen as an example, I realise that it might not always be so easy to pursue them. Before even thinking about getting in to a country to provide assistance there are so many aspects you need to consider. Is it possible for your organisation to stay true to the humanitarian principles? Or are other organisations more suitable? I also see the importance of working with local organisations in Yemen, not only because they know the needs best, but because they are more likely accepted by parties in the conflict who decide if you can help or not. I see big problems with being independent, when you are dependent on the good will of combating parties, for providing aid.
Humanitarian response in the Haiyan operation in Leyte

Written by Nora Mustacisa

Background
Taclaban City in the Philippines had been devastated by the super typhoon Haiyan on 8 November 2013. Thousands of people died, property damaged and livelihoods affected. This was the worst typhoon ever experienced in the Philippines. After the typhoon, shortage of food and drinking water caused people to panic, looting of food items for survival occurred, threats of burglary during night time had been feared due to total blackout. Temporarily, the local government was not functional since everyone was a victim.

Plenty of INGOs, NGOs and other sectors came in to provide support. OCHA spearheaded the cluster meetings for all sectoral interventions, but each player had its own implementing guidelines to follow and strategies employed from the selection of target areas to targeting of beneficiaries. There had been coordination mechanism at the regional and provincial level but there was none at the municipal level.

Challenge/dilemma
Despite plenty of INGO/NGOs, there were municipalities with less or no intervention at all, they also were hit by the typhoon like the case of the Municipality of Villaba, Leyte. There were rumours of political issue during the selection process of municipalities that’s why it was not covered. I understand from the sessions that among the humanitarian principles to be considered are impartiality and independence.

We covered three (3) municipalities from the start of the emergency phase until the recovery phase. One of the challenging experiences we faced was the manipulation of Municipal Mayors in the selection of beneficiaries, they were asking our team to exclude people who were in the opposition. As a Red Cross worker, we are bound to follow the seven (7) principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary, unity and universality. We made that clear to the partners, it was not easy to influence them though, it took us sometime to finalise our list of beneficiaries because we had to stand with our principles. To overcome the challenge, we engaged the community members in the selection of beneficiaries, by allowing them to identify the most needy in a community assembly. With support from our local volunteers, they did too the assessment and validation of those in the list.

In the emergency phase, INGOs/NGOs were overwhelmed to provide support that resulted in duplication of intervention especially that relief needs to be provided as soon as possible, not knowing that bulk of relief goods had also been shifted to the municipalities from the National government, other NGOs also provided. Despite having project briefing with the local government unit and coordination during entry to the municipalities, still lapses on having the same beneficiaries were not avoided. From the lessons learned in the emergency phase, we started to work on creating a Municipal Technical Working Group (TWG) represented by all sectoral department heads, NGOs and Line Agencies implementing the same project, as a way of sharing notes and addressing issues that confronted the implementation of the project.

Lessons learned
Engagement of the community is one way of ensuring accountability and transparency of the operation. It does not only neutralises the situation, it also provides sense of ownership on any intervention being taken over. Having the community feel ownership in the intervention boost their dignity which the principle of humanity is all about.

Coordination matters, due to our willingness to provide immediate response, we tend to forget of bringing together all players to share personal experience and expertise to the table. Synergising is very vital to synchronise efforts, it does not only save time, effort and resources both financial and technical, it does discourage corruption from within the organisation we are supporting. Coordination reinforces neutrality, independence, impartiality and emphasise humanity in the processes. By pulling all players together, issues are tackled and actions are agreed in consensus, not imposed by one, not taking sides, but well thought-off, well planned for the good of the most needy.
Gaining access to people in need within the areas affected by Boko Haram activities

Written by Raluca Rimaru

Background

Introductory note: I have not been involved in the response to the crisis in the field; but work on the topic from a donor perspective. Thus this case study is located somewhere between a real experience and an imaginary situation.

The crisis started in 2009 in North-Eastern Nigeria. The Islamist group(s) known as Boko Haram (BH) started an insurgency and quickly gained territorial control over most areas in Borno State. Subsequently, those areas became inaccessible not only to the government but also to humanitarian workers. Ongoing fighting in several states in North-Eastern Nigeria quickly led to displacement within Nigeria and further 200,000 people have been estimated to live in those territories became visible. Even though large areas in Borno State have been liberated by the Nigerian military, they are still not fully accessible to humanitarians. 900,000 people have been estimated to live in those areas and possibly be in need of humanitarian assistance.

The situation in the Lake Chad Basin qualifies as a non-international armed conflict (NIAC). The NIAC takes place between the government of Nigeria on the one side and non-state armed groups on the other side. While the non-state party to the conflict is mostly known as BH, this is not one sole armed group anymore. It contains different factions with partly different ideological reasoning when it comes to who can be targeted in the fight for creating an Islamic State (IS). Accordingly, the different factions do not all answer to one leader. As a result, negotiating access to populations in need is a heavy challenge. This fact additionally hinders the actors involved in finding a political solution to the crisis. After pledging allegiance to the IS in order to become its Western Africa Province (ISWAP), power struggles between the long-time leader Abubakar Shekau of BH and the son of the founder of the group, Abu Musab al-Barnawi led to the division of the group into two main factions. Additionally, the governments of the affected states founded the so called Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in order to coordinate their military response among themselves. As military operations advanced, BH lost most of the territory it controlled at the peak of its activities. Only then, the true extent of the human suffering within these territories became visible. Even though large areas in Borno State have been liberated by the Nigerian military, they are still not fully accessible to humanitarians. 900,000 people have been estimated to live in those areas and possibly be in need of humanitarian assistance.

Challenge/dilemma

As already mentioned above, the main challenge for humanitarians in this scenario is getting access to people in need and providing aid without becoming a target of the parties involved in the conflict. Applying the humanitarian principles should in theory promote the access. However, in this case the non-state armed groups involved fight not only against the state but also against any “western” involvement as shown by the complete rejection of any form of “western education”. However, most humanitarian organisations on the ground are “western” or at least financed by “western donors”. Thus, it is difficult to negotiate access with those that perceive you as the enemy. On the one side, humanitarians might be perceived to represent the opposite of what they are intending to achieve. On the other side, they might be even seen as a foreign policy instrument to fight back the insurgency (independence). Thus, negotiating access is a very difficult undertaking.

This is aggravated by the position of the Nigerian State: According to the military aid is only recommended to be provided in areas that have been completely freed from BH. Additionally, implementing humanitarian activities is only recommended in areas where the state armed forces can guarantee the safety of humanitarians. As a result, the safety of humanitarians is ensured with military escorts, helicopter landing areas used by humanitarians are secured by the military and humanitarians’ safe spaces are patrolled during night time. Regular security incidents even in the secured areas prove the high risks. Thus, most organisations including United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes accept and use the support of the Nigerian armed forces to ensure the safety of their personnel and their operations and widen their access. As a result, the question arises whether there is any interferences regarding the programming and targeting of people in need by the government or military. Misuse of power is a risk. Such interference would infringe the independence of humanitarian actors.

It is important to stress that all humanitarian activities have be coordinated with the affected government. The government is the first responder to crisis and should have the opportunity to address the existing needs itself. However, tight coordination could be perceived as a breach of humanitarians’ neutrality – meaning that humanitarians should not take sides in hostilities or engage in political/ethical/ideological controversies. In North-East Nigeria, while the government welcomes humanitarian assistance in general, civil-military coordination poses an issue with regard to the principle of neutrality. The Nigerian armed forces take their role to ensure safety and security very seriously. However, in order to ensure the smooth coordination, security considerations need to be balanced with the humanitarian principles. There is a thin line between coordinating but remaining neutral and being perceived to have chosen one side over the other. Therefore, guidelines need to be agreed upon what civil-military coordination implies as well as how and where it takes place.

Finally, as most areas were controlled by BH until recently, the response developed was only partly appropriate to address the needs revealed once military action turned more areas accessible. The established coordination structures did not cope with the scale-up of humanitarian operations fast enough. However, proper coordination of activities is a prerequisite for effective and efficient aid delivery. Under these circumstances, adopting a purely needs-based approach, where the person most in need gets aid first (inclusivity) is only partially possible. The same applies to a response providing immediate life-saving assistance and protection when lives are in danger (humanity): Coordination is key when it comes to thorough needs assessments and well programmed humanitarian actions. Without it, ensuring the overall response is purely needs-driven is simply not possible.

Lessons learned

Negotiating access is a very difficult undertaking. It is full of challenges. Implementing the humanitarian imperative and emphasising the work we do is purely for humanitarian reasons seems the only way to go. Being aware of how one or the own organisation is perceived, is a must, in order to address and possibly change this perception as quick as possible and make sure that our actions reflect our principled approach. The same applies to the independence of the organisation: making clear that even though the resources come partly from state donors, they do not impact the needs-based
Coordination is a key factor when it comes to thorough needs assessments and well programmed humanitarian actions. Without it, ensuring the overall response is purely needs-driven is simply not possible.

A participatory approach to programming and implementation as well as well functioning coordination of operations can help achieve this.

As this context shows, knowing the views and interests of all actors involved and developing adequate strategies to gain access without compromising on the humanitarian principles is key to humanitarian action.
Background
Since the eruption of the conflict in Syria, migration has become a hot topic throughout Europe. Even though many countries have experienced migration for many years before, the migration issue has assumed an increasingly political relevance, which has an influence not only on policy-making but also on humanitarian response, as aid agencies receiving funding from institutions and Member States are also inevitably driven from political priorities. This in turn could lead to aid not reaching those most in need.

Challenge/dilemma
Humanitarian aid should never be politicised and according to its principles it should always be neutral and impartial. However it is to note that migration and refugees are assuming an increasingly political relevance within Europe. The main dilemma I see when looking at European leaders and institutions is how to solve the misleadingly called refugee crisis in the best interest of refugees and not political priorities. Examples of this challenge could be the deal signed by the EU with Turkey but also the code of conduct established for NGOs operating in the Mediterranean Sea or again the agreement with Libya whereby security forces are trained to prevent migration and smuggling. Whilst on one side EU leaders are concerned of migration flows it is not acceptable on a humanitarian level to confine refugees in third countries or to provide ‘aid’ in the form of financial support to prevent them to reach safer ports in Europe. By doing so those in need are affected in multiple ways: either assistance does not reach them or they are deprived of the choice of seeking refuge or they are forced to stay in a third country where their life is at risk, where they might be confined in a camp and where their right as asylum seekers are not respected hence they are sent back to their countries of origin.

Hiding behind such labels the assistance provided is clearly political and not humanitarian. If I had a say in such situation I would call for the independence and neutrality of humanitarian aid, which should by no mean follow political priorities. More specifically allocation of funds should be based on actual needs and delivered in the best interest of the people of concern, and not of those of governments. Refugees should be given a better treatment, and NGOs should be able to operate in the name of humanitarian principles, without being limited in their actions. At the same time also NGOs should play a significant role in shaping this debate by using their advocacy power in order to influence governments and donors in the allocation of funding, solely basing their decisions and actions on beneficiaries’ needs.

Lessons learned
Whilst humanitarian principles have a long-lasting history it is not possible to argue that they are by now well rooted in our societies. If we look at how the EU is dealing with the refugee crisis it is possible to note how political priorities are prevailing on humanitarian assistance. This course has been helpful in reminding us once again how the legal humanitarian basis is there and available for all decision-makers and stakeholders to be applied. When going through the different modules it seems so logic and simple how humanitarian aid and work should be implemented but at the same time it shows how in reality many of the essentials are still not respected. It is important to keep advocating for the respect of International Humanitarian Law being it in Europe or in conflict thorn countries and to think of people of concern as the real beneficiaries of humanitarian action following the notions of humanity and equality. Besides equality also age and gender should be taken into account when looking at the crises surrounding us and when planning their responses. Even though it sounds easy it will actually be an overwhelming challenge to stick to humanitarian principles in the years to come, given the complexity of ongoing conflicts and the rise of populism among Europe. It is therefore important – as easy and banal as it sounds – to remind our leaders and fellows to be promoter of human rights, humanity and equality and to strive together for a better Europe where everyone is welcome and aid is delivered to all those in needs, independently from politics, security and fears.

The author of this case study didn’t wish to be named.
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