

# The Humanitarian Academic Agenda

An inventory

12/6/2017

In the autumn of 2017 several humanitarian knowledge initiatives will be launched in The Hague. The OCHA Data Centre will place its first employees in the Humanity Hub, the International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) will settle at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) and the Humanitarian Knowledge Centre (HKC) will have its launching event. A perfect moment for the International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus University) and the Humanitarian Knowledge Centre, in close cooperation with the The Hague Academic Coalition, to make an inventory of old and new knowledge activities in The Hague. This paper is a reflection on the exchange of thoughts that over forty practitioners, policy-makers and academics from the humanitarian field had on current humanitarian issues.

**kuno**





KUNO is an initiative of ten NGOs and five knowledge institutes from the Dutch humanitarian sector. KUNO's goal is to strengthen the humanitarian sector in the Netherlands. KUNO is a platform for joint learning, reflection and debate. We organize expert meetings, working sessions for professionals, webinars, training and public debates. All of our events are cross-sectoral and organized in cooperation with our partners.

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# 1. Alice Obrecht (Research fellow ALNAP), Landscape of research and knowledge in the humanitarian system.

*'Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. It's wonderful to be here in the Netherlands. I've been asked to speak to you about the broader landscape for research and knowledge in the humanitarian system. And since the aim here is to set up a network for knowledge sharing in the Netherlands, I thought I'd focus my talk on the role that networks play in supporting a landscape for learning and knowledge, and what changes in that landscape might mean for networks moving forward. So I will start by telling you a little about ALNAP as a knowledge sharing network and how we've approached our mission. Then I'll discuss some high level changes in the humanitarian knowledge landscape over the past two decades and conclude with some reflections on the role that networks can play within this landscape.'*

## **What ALNAP is:**

ALNAP stands for the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance. It was established on the back of the JEEAR in 1996, which called for greater collective and independent learning from evaluations to support accountability and performance.

There were three main quality and accountability initiatives that came out of the JEEAR—one on standards, which became the Sphere handbook, one on certification, which became the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, and one on learning, which became ALNAP

So from the very beginning of ALNAP, the close link was made between knowledge-sharing and better humanitarian performance. The motivation was to take a collective, networked approach learning and knowledge sharing, in order to improve the accountability and performance of the humanitarian system.

## **Network**

To achieve this, ALNAP was established as a unique system-wide network that would feature membership from all types of actors engaged in humanitarian action. Our membership is made up of all of the constituencies within the system: donors, INGOs, UN agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, National NGOs, Umbrella groups and networks, and academic institutions. Each of these groups has their own networks that they are a part of—for example, NGOs have ICVA and Interaction, and donors have the Good Humanitarian Donorship group. But ALNAP is the network where all of these groups can come together to share learning. This diversity of ALNAP's membership reflects its origins as a collective endeavour, on the part of the humanitarian system, to learn and to make improvements based on that learning.

## How We Work

Now there are many ways in which ALNAP works as a network to achieve this collective aim, all of which is directed by a strategy which we revise every five years in wide consultation with our membership.

### 1. **Repository for humanitarian knowledge resources** (HELP; Portals)

One of the primary ways in which we support knowledge-sharing for better learning and performance is through our repositories for evaluations, research and other learning outputs. Our HELP Library contains over 11,000 items and is the largest repository of humanitarian learning online. In addition to this, we offer portal hosting for specific issues or topics, such as urban or the Syria response.

### 2. **Sharing and disseminating** (newsletter and events listings)

We also actively share and disseminate information about our members work through newsletters and events listings, and now in the modern era, through tweets.

### 3. **Networked learning opportunities** (COPs, AM, webinars and events)

We organise a range of network events and fora, such as our online communities of practice, our webinar series, in-person workshops, and of course our big Annual meeting, where we bring together 200 participants from across the humanitarian system to discuss an issue of shared concern.

And then finally, we as the ALNAP Secretariat shape the content of learning by improving the quality of evaluations and evidence and by carrying out original research and analyzing the performance of the entire humanitarian system.

### 4. **Improve quality of evaluations and evidence** (EHA guide)

### 5. **Research and analysis of system performance**

What is important to highlight here is how much this activity is really driven by our broader network. I want to come back at the end to this point and discuss the challenges we face in maintaining the strength of a network in a globalized world.

## Knowledge Landscape in Humanitarian System

So that's a bit on ALNAP, who we are and what we do. I'd like to talk now about how we have seen the humanitarian knowledge landscape evolve over the two decades. I want to cover general trends of the past two decades, but with an emphasis on what I've seen in the past few years as the research lead at ALNAP for effectiveness and performance.

## Topics

The first area of change I want to talk about are the topics that we address in research and learning activities. At our recent Annual meeting, John Mitchell was reflecting on change in the broader humanitarian system over the past two decades and he said that ‘everything has changed, and yet nothing has changed.’ And I think that’s also true to a large degree for research topics in humanitarian action.

So on the one hand, there is always change in the knowledge landscape because of so called ‘buzzwords’. These arise as hot new topics that everyone needs to include in their proposals and strategies for a while until the new one comes along. But the buzzwords can mask the fact that most of the core issues for humanitarian research have remained very much the same over two decades.

In preparation for this talk, I looked back at the issues that were being talked about in the research landscape 15-40 years ago. So I went back to some of the old Reviews of Humanitarian Action that ALNAP used to produce, as well as the journal, Disasters. And a lot of the ideas that were in those, are still being asked today: performance monitoring and measurement, capacity building, localisation. To give one striking example, I sit on the ethics review board for ODI and just reviewed a new research project in the shelter sector looking to understand local people’s coping capacities for shelter. In the very first edition of the Disasters in 1977 there is an article entitled emergency shelter which discusses the need for the emergency shelter sector to better understand traditional forms of shelter and housing structures and adapt assistance to these. So a lot of topics have stayed the same, but what has changed here is a real advance in the kinds of questions we are asking, and the quality of the research designs that are being used to answer them. The studies being undertaken today have more sophisticated methodologies and are more grounded in partnerships between aid organisations and academic institutions. Studies looking at the effectiveness of interventions are an example of how technically advanced the system is becoming, with an increase in randomised control trials and systematic reviews. The method might not be right for every research topic or question, but it has been an important shift in the sector.

Where there are shifts in topics, I think in recent years we’re seeing an increase in attention to ‘where’ questions and ‘how’ questions. Humanitarian organisations are increasingly concerned with achieving better tools and research to understand their surrounding context. A context of particular emphasis is the protracted, complex crisis setting which has now occupied more than 80% of the humanitarian caseload. Finally, in terms of new topics, we’re seeing a large focus the ‘how’ of humanitarian assistance-- around structure and governance of the humanitarian system.

## Change Initiatives

Why are we talking about where and how? A lot of this has to do with fall out from the second area of influence I’d like to talk about, which is Change initiatives. Unless you were underneath a rock for the past couple of years you will have heard about the World Humanitarian Summit as well as possibly the Grand Bargain, which is an agreement amongst donors, UN agencies and NGOs to bring about a range of reforms to how they work together and deliver humanitarian aid.

My personal reflection—and this is not an ALNAP position or a position even held by the ALNAP Secretariat—my personal reflection is that there are huge missed opportunities happening here in terms of delivering high quality learning around the WHS and Grand Bargain. Just to give two examples.

First is with the issue of measurement. The SDGs and Sendai Framework were inter-governmental processes. This meant that not only were the outcomes of these frameworks negotiated and accepted by a wide number of member states, but they also had clear frameworks attached to them for measuring progress. There is no such indicator framework for the World Humanitarian Summit. Instead, individual organisations are submitting their own self reported data, many without any indicators, in order to show what progress is being made.

A second gap is in the analysis, because even if we just work with self-reported data, there is still real value in doing an analysis of this data and trying to draw out trends and key findings. OCHA issued an open call for people to do this analysis for them but they received very few applications by academic institutions. Which means that for some of these topics, the organisation that is doing the analysis is an organisation that has an advocacy interest in that topic. I'm sure they'll do a great job with it, but it would be useful if we could get an independent research perspective on the Summit and the progress being made.

Why aren't these links stronger? Well the people responsible for implementing these change initiatives are not well resourced for doing any research or analysis, or for paying others to do it for them. And I think the incentives on the academic side also aren't really there—so there's a discussion to be had about what enables academics to engage with these policy implementation processes and how this can be encouraged more.

## **Actors**

This is where some of the biggest changes have taken place.

### *PRODUCERS*

The good news is that there is more attention to knowledge, research and evidence and the role that these play in improving HA. Just taking evaluation as an example, the professionalization of humanitarian evaluation has increased dramatically over the past two decades. People are now getting graduate degrees in humanitarian evaluation and there are full time staff and MEAL units within any top grade humanitarian agency.

We also see that not only are academic institutions increasing in their focus on humanitarian issues, but there is an increase in research and knowledge production by implementing agencies themselves. So the development of evidence or research units within major INGOs or UN agencies has become a big trend.

And as I mentioned already before, the kinds of research going on is also increasing, with the introduction of randomised control trials and other methods from evidence-based medicine coming into the humanitarian sector.

And this large expansion of activity has two implications—first, it has led to greater competition and duplication. We can ask ourselves, is this competition and duplication

necessarily a bad thing? It tends to be viewed as a bad thing in the humanitarian sector, but if you look at academia, having multiple people working on the same topic is generally viewed as a normal practice that is a sign of a healthy research environment. In the humanitarian sector, there is an open question as to whether this competition leads to more learning and higher quality knowledge outcomes, or whether it inhibits this.

The increase in knowledge production also has led to a Ferrari and bike situation—huge gaps are opening up in the data and research literacy of practitioners and organizations in the sector, which means communication between them is becoming more difficult and people are talking past each other. Some people are still commissioning evaluations without a methodology section while others are running large mixed method joint evaluations.

#### *Mappers, Synthesizers and Translators*

As the rise in research activities has occurred, there's been a real need to map these activities, synthesize their findings and translate the mass amount of information into usable analysis and guidance. This is where the mappers, synthesizers and translators come in, organizations such as 3ie, leading on gap mapping methods, Evidence Aid and the Humanitarian Evidence Program piloting the use of systematic review methods for humanitarian questions, Elrha's Research Prioritization Exercise, which is seeking to map the research landscape of the humanitarian system, and of course the Humanitarian Data Centre, which is looking at improving data literacy and data visualization in the system.

Even this meta activity is increasing so much that we now are seeing things like a map of maps being proposed. So I think a key point to bear in mind as we move forward is to keep building relationships amongst this middle group and make sure that this stays strong, so that we can keep strengthening the links between producers and users.

#### *USERS*

Last but not least, the users. As the humanitarian system expands to include more organizations, and more diverse staff within organizations, we see a wider range of end users for learning and knowledge products. This is good but can also make it difficult to find the right channels to reach these users. This is a problem that major international organizations have with their country teams, let alone anyone trying to influence multiple organizations in the system.

Users are also more connected to producers of knowledge—they may now have research units within their own organization for example. But this means there is also a more significant overload problem—the increase in information and data leads users to be inundated with documents, toolkits and guides, which will mean that none of them get read.

So, in short, quality is getting better but quantity is skyrocketing. There's a lot of activity and it's not joined up.



## So where does this leave the role of networks?

### THE USER IS KEY:

- We make sure that we are really driven by our network members and their needs and concerns, which helps us ensure our work is actually useful.
- Targeted knowledge products have highest uptake—this is how we break through the ‘noise’
- As humanitarian system is more populous and diverse, gets harder to reach all users

### THE HUB MATTERS:

- Which means that the hub really matters. But being a hub is not a matter of ‘if we build it, they will come.’ Networks need to be proactive and this requires a lot of work and investment of time, which needs resourcing.
- It will also be important to think about connecting better to other hubs. People continue to come to ALNAP to find out what is happening more broadly in the system on a particular issue, but we are finding it useful to link to hubs and networks to reach more end users.

## LOOKING AHEAD

### **A knowledge landscape that is at least the sum of its parts, potentially more**

We are now a highly networked, portalled, platformed and mapped sector, but there is a question as to whether this is actually letting us be the sum of our parts, and is allowing us to learn.

In order to enhance learning we need to seek meaningful connections to users of knowledge, something more than just open online platforms. How do we meaningfully connect to users? To other producers? To other networks?

### **New frontiers for research and data**

What does rigorous method look like?

Making sense of what we have and using it better.

And finally, in today’s political climates as a knowledge sharing network we cannot take what we do for granted.

### **Making the case for knowledge**

We should be thinking more about how to offer a *Clear demonstration of the value of learning for humanitarian performance*

And as networks we can often see improvements being made in the system—we need to celebrate these a bit more: *Using research and evidence to argue for the value of humanitarian aid*

## 2. Thea Hilhorst (Professor humanitarian aid and reconstruction ISS), sneak preview on the International Humanitarian Studies Association.

### What is the International Humanitarian Studies Association?

The International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) was established in 2009 in response to a growing interest in humanitarian issues among academics from different disciplinary backgrounds. IHSA is a network of professionals engaged with the study of humanitarian crises and response, including researchers, policy actors and practitioners. The main activity of IHSA has been to organise the World Humanitarian Studies Conference, which offers a platform for exchange of information, debate, and networking for humanitarian professionals from different disciplines, organisations and geographical regions. IHSA has organised conferences every two years since 2009, with the first being hosted by Groningen University in that year. Conferences in 2011, 2013 and 2016 were hosted by Tufts University in Boston, by Kadir Has University in Istanbul and by Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, respectively. The average number of participants has been 375 for each conference, and the number of people on the IHSA mailing list is 1365. In addition, IHSA has a number of affiliate institutions which provide support and share its interests: the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), University of Groningen (Globalisation Studies), the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute in London, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, and the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York.

With the unprecedented scale of humanitarian crises in the world today, involving refugees and displacement, conflict, natural disasters and protracted emergencies, the need for humanitarian studies to understand crises and to inform evidence-based response is greater than ever before. The purpose of the IHSA is to study the rapidly evolving humanitarian sector and its current and emerging practices. In 2016, the IHSA organised a survey of its members to get their opinion on professionalising the association. The result was that most members who completed the survey would like to see greater IHSA involvement in the promotion and dissemination of evidence-based research on humanitarian issues and practices. Survey participants also recommended a governance model which could accommodate both individual and institutional members. This paper outlines the plans for professionalising the IHSA, taking feedback from the membership into account.

### Objectives of the association

The aim of IHSA is to:

- Provide a platform for researchers and practitioners for debate, dialogue and exchange;
- Promote the advancement of knowledge on humanitarian crises and response;
- Lead debate on the nature and role of humanitarian studies;

- Facilitate the dissemination of research findings and evidence on humanitarian crises; and
- Encourage exchange and cooperation between universities, specialised research centres, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations.

Humanitarian studies is concerned with the study of humanitarian crises caused by natural disaster, conflict or political instability, and the responses to these by a range of actors, authorities and organisations. It examines how humanitarian crises evolve, how they affect people and their institutions, communities and societies, the responses they trigger and their intended and actual effects.

Particular areas of interest for the association therefore include, but are not restricted to:

- causes, dynamics and effects of humanitarian crises and famine;
- experience of crisis-affected communities, refugees and internally displaced people;
- the politics and discourse of humanitarian crises and response;
- political, military and humanitarian interventions;
- legal issues pertaining to humanitarian affairs, including protection, access, international humanitarian law and human rights;
- humanitarian aid policies, practices and organisations (local, national and international);
- humanitarian architecture and governance;
- disaster preparedness, prevention, risk reduction, and early warning;
- the linkages between humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation, resilience, development, peacebuilding and security, particularly in protracted crises; and
- aid worker security, remote management and the digitisation of aid.

### **Bringing IHSA to the next level**

After organising four international conferences, it was concluded that it was time to (re-)organise IHSA as an association. A survey among the membership brought out that a large majority of participants regarded the IHSA conferences as of similar (67%) or higher quality (23%) than other academic conferences. A large majority of the participants, however, did not consider the conferences the major objective of IHSA, but expect the association to promote and disseminate humanitarian research in broader terms. It was also stressed that the governance of IHSA needed to become more effective and transparent. An agenda was thus set to form IHSA into a professional studies association.

## **IHSA and the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016**

Humanitarian scholars at the WHS formulated 6 commitments of humanitarian scholars.

1. We commit to make humanitarian research more collaborative and inclusive, especially with non-traditional knowledge actors and affected communities, and to ensure that knowledge is relevant to policy and practice.
2. We commit to research the impacts of the WHS - both positive and negative - on those affected by humanitarian emergencies and the future of humanitarian action. This research will include assessing the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of commitments made by WHS participants; the impact of those commitments; and the process and history of the summit itself.
3. We commit to further develop and adopt evidence-based approaches relevant to humanitarian research. Member states and humanitarian actors should support the achievement of this commitment by making humanitarian research and education a political, financial, and operational priority.
4. We commit to localize humanitarian research and education within the regions and communities affected by emergencies by recognizing, establishing, supporting and collaborating with research and educational institutions in crisis-affected areas. Member states should work to remove political, regulatory, and financial barriers that impede research and prevent the development of research institutions in crisis-affected areas.
5. We commit to improve the impact and increase the use of humanitarian research by encouraging and supporting trans-disciplinary research that collaborates with non-traditional knowledge actors. To this end, we will strive to make our research accessible and relevant beyond traditional venues, such as conferences and publications, by placing the enfranchisement of affected communities themselves at the center of our work.
6. We commit to protect academic freedom, uphold scientific ethics, and be accountable for the research we do, how it is undertaken, and how it is used. We will seek to make our results and data as open and public as possible, ensuring that our ethical obligations to the populations we research and those we research them with come first.

Promoting these commitments will be an important objective of IHSA in the coming years.

### **IHSA in The Hague**

To enable the professionalization of the studies association, the municipality of The Hague has given a subsidy that will allow IHSA to strengthen its governance and services, and to expand its membership and financial base. The project will be completed at the end of 2018. IHSA will be based in the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. ISS is an international graduate institute focusing on international development and global justice. It belongs to the Erasmus University, and has been based in The Hague since 1952. It houses 60 academic staff engaging in critical and multi-disciplinary research.

### 3. Christine Pirenne (Head of Humanitarian Aid, Ministry Foreign Affairs), sneak preview on the OCHA Data Centre.

There are more cell phones than people on this planet. Every minute 200 million emails and . 300,000 tweets are sent. 72 hours of video are uploaded on YouTube. Every minute!

And as you all know, this is not just happening in Amsterdam and New York. Across Syria, Somalia, Yemen: even if humanitarian access is difficult, the use of technology is often widespread. Many people fleeing from home leave almost everything behind, but they do take their cell phone.

Humanitarian agencies too, are undergoing a digital revolution. With the increase in and ease of technology, there is more data than ever on humanitarian crises: on who needs assistance and on which organization is providing which help, where, to whom and at what cost, for example. In the humanitarian sector, where working in a coordinated way -- avoiding gaps in assistance and avoiding duplicating work -- can actually save lives, information is key. And so data is gold.

As Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we therefore feel a responsibility to push the use of humanitarian data forward. We are very proud of our new partnership with OCHA in opening the Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague.

The Centre's mission is to increase the use and impact of data in the humanitarian sector. It will provide a public good to the entire humanitarian community: it will e.g. bring data together, facilitate data sharing agreements between organizations, provide training to humanitarians.

And this is crucial, because the challenge faced by the humanitarian community is not a lack of technology or a lack of data. We face challenges in putting that data to effective use.

Let me illustrate with an example. Helena Fraser, head of OCHA's regional office covering Syria, visited us a few weeks ago. She explained that it took her office more than 5 years to finally bring the data together to be able to answer the very basic humanitarian questions: where in Syria are the most vulnerable people? What exactly do they need? And how does the humanitarian response compare to those needs? 5 years! And after those years we finally have the mechanisms in place to monitor these questions close enough to real-time to actually influence the humanitarian response.

Why did it take 5 years? Because data is scattered across organizations who don't all see the benefit in sharing it with each other. Because some don't have policies on how to

responsibly share privacy-sensitive information on the vulnerability of people. Because some, providing cross-border aid from Turkey were afraid their data would end up in the hands of the Syrian regime. Because attention is so focused on response that sometimes we forget to invest in understanding the bigger picture that will actually improve that response. Some of these reasons are better than others, but the end result is simply that our response is too often not based on evidence that is out there.

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More generally, working on data is hindered by at least three main challenges.

Ethical challenges. What about privacy of people? What are the risks of sharing data with others, and can we accept them?

Institutional challenges. Companies own data and expertise which humanitarians could use. The corporate and humanitarian sectors need to work together to have an impact. The same goes for humanitarians amongst themselves. But interests differ and trust is not always there. We have to seek the right incentives for all to cooperate.

Challenges of awareness. Even the best data with the most powerful analysis is useless if a humanitarian field worker does not understand it, does not recognize its value and does not act on it.

These challenges have something in common: they cannot be solved by one organization alone. They require collective power, across organizations and in many cases across sectors. We need the private sector to share data and expertise. We need the humanitarian organizations to trust each other more. And universities to share applied expertise.

The Centre for Humanitarian Data can play a crucial role in furthering this agenda by being a space of true collaboration. The Centre will be opened by August and operational at full capacity by January next year. We invite all of you with an interest in data to reach out to OCHA and ask how the centre can benefit your work and how you can contribute to it.

## **4. Tineke Ceelen (Director Stichting Vluchteling), a sneak preview on the Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange.**

### **The need of a Dutch humanitarian knowledge network**

Having worked in this sector for a long time already, I realised we, as humanitarian organisations, mainly discuss funding related issues, but do not actively discuss the core of our work: humanitarian dilemmas, new trends in the sector, share research and recommendations.

Our work, as practitioners in the field, can gain enormously from a better exchange of knowledge. There is so much knowledge available within the NGOs, at the universities, research institutes, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and all the knowledge is complementary as it reflects different perspectives on the same issues. Anyone who regularly visits refugee camps, disaster areas or conflict zones knows that you will return home with new questions, new dilemmas or new solutions. Recently, I visited some of our programmes in Mogadishu, Somalia. Humanitarian access is a huge challenge in Somalia, but extremely important to be able to reach those most in need. Knowledge sharing and experience sharing on humanitarian access and humanitarian negotiations is vital to secure and sustain humanitarian access, especially in situations of armed conflict. How do we negotiate safe access for our staff, with whom do we negotiate? How do we map out the context in which we work? The knowledge sharing should not only be at headquarters or capital levels, but definitely also at field level.

Furthermore, as a sector, we need to reflect on the humanitarian principles, on our goals, as well as on the practical bottlenecks of our work (e.g. on cash, on localisation). We experienced this need during the preparations for the Dutch Humanitarian Summit (2015) and the World Humanitarian Summit (2016). At the moment we do not have a platform that facilitates this kind of knowledge sharing or reflection in our daily work. And that is where the Humanitarian Knowledge Centre comes in.

### **Why a Humanitarian Knowledge Centre in The Netherlands?**

We should be more proud of what we have achieved here in The Netherlands; we should be more proud of the Dutch contribution to the sector. We are a relevant and big player in the humanitarian field and we have our own specific experiences, our own research programmes and our specific values which create the base for our Dutch policies. Of course we have access to the knowledge and experience of our international partners, such as IRC in the US or Oxfam in the UK, and please do not forget knowledge institutes in the Global South. We will rely on that knowledge and on their intellectual leadership, innovation and policy. However, there is also a need for the Dutch perspective and a need for knowledge sharing and reflection in a Dutch setting, for Dutch intellectual leadership in debates on humanitarian dilemmas and developments.



## **Politicization**

Many topics are relevant for the Knowledge Centre. Topics such as 'cash' and 'localisation' need to be discussed in depth: in which contexts does it work, what are the lessons learned, what are the risks, how can we mitigate those risks?

However, personally, I have a strong interest in the politicisation of humanitarian work. This is not a new debate. However, in Europe, the politicization of humanitarian aid is fed by the 'Europe refugee crisis', which is actually a European political and identity crisis. The populist sentiment has grown amongst our populations and has consequences for our work in the field. Can we uphold our independence, impartiality and neutrality when the humanitarian values are increasingly violated in conflict settings? I do not have the answers to this question. However, we do need a space where we can have critical debates and challenge each other on these questions and our assumptions.

## 5. Take aways of four discussion tables

### Discussion table – Localisation

Chair: Tilleke Kiewied, Oxfam Novib

During the localization discussion table we had quite a mixed audience with members from knowledge institutions, NGOs and the diaspora. The discussion centered mostly around the following points:

1. Thinking about localization we have to reflect: what are the minimum standards, **who defines standards and requirements?** And what can you be flexible about. Also: **what are the selection criteria on with whom do you work?** What are the role of your own local partners and, for example, the diaspora? Localization should not be about 'dumping' on local actors but about **creating space for local actors** to develop their capacity, voice and influence;
2. We need to acknowledge the impact of context. There are **different scenarios under which localization will take different forms** (brought to the table by Dirk Salomons). Depends on who you work with and in what kind of environment – for example, fragile states, or middle income states. This requires a good understanding of the local and national actors operating in the environment – assessment of the humanitarian eco-system – and how international actors can add value, be complementary
3. For research: **there is a black hole in research on localization**. There are possibilities to look into how localization is done in development studies. We have to look at a large range of case studies and establish conditions under which localization can work. Some work is being done but mainly from within the INGO sector.
4. We have to **reflect on the role of international humanitarian agencies in the future**. Are we needed? If so, what kind of role should we take?
5. There is a **possible gap between providing direct support in a humanitarian situation and building things up with local actors**. In order to work together with local actors in the best way possible, we have to understand the local system. Further discussion is needed about this subject.

## Discussion table – Cash

Chair: Evert van Bodegom, ICCO en Kerk in Actie

### Opening questions:

- What are the challenges that we face in the NGO sector regarding cash transfers?
- Are cash transfers the current ‘hype’? and with this in mind, might donors be prioritising this area as it is easy to measure, at the expense of funding other, less easy to measure, interventions?

### Areas for further research:

- **What assumptions underpin cash transfers?** At present, cash is often given to women rather than men. What are the assumptions that underpin who is given cash? Is cash given in a culturally sensitive, context specific way e.g. in some contexts it may be better to provide something specific, such as a goat, rather than cash.
- **What opportunities and challenges do different modalities present?** e.g. cash, mobile phones, cash on cards. Opportunities and challenges will differ across contexts.
- **Market analysis** – Oxfam works with mapping systems to conduct market analyses but these remain problematic e.g. difficult to map when population dispersed across geographical areas, often in a context of high prices, rising costs. There are mapping tools available but challenges remain around the process of actually collecting this information.
- **Data privacy and protection.** Calls to share data for cash distribution. Issue of collecting data on beneficiaries. Particularly relevant in context of call for even bigger proposals and consortiums. Linked to wider protection issues e.g. collecting data on vulnerable populations. Also issues around vulnerable people not wanting to have their data collected.
- How does giving cash affect local dynamics (economy)?
- **Risk for donors and NGOs:** Cash transfers present a challenge for donor and NGO communications. At a time when aid is particularly politicized, there is anxiety that images of NGOs handing out cash, rather than more traditional aid such as food and shelter, could lead to backlash from opponents of aid and the public. The risks for beneficiaries in receiving cash, in whatever mode, needs to be taken into account as well.

## Discussion table – Politicization of Aid

Chair: Ton Huijzer, chair Humanitarian Knowledge Centre

The most important take-away points from this table were:

1. Aid has always been politicized. Therefore, we have to learn from history.
2. As agencies **and policy makers**, we need good examples. We always focus on the bad examples. But there must be examples of how humanitarian principles (**and IHL**) can work well to **get access and carry out humanitarian operations**. It should convince politicians of the need for principled aid.
3. Humanitarian negotiations are very important. It would be nice to contact the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and see if we can work together.
4. Politicization is a very broad subject. The starting point for these take-aways should be a seminar. We should take five topics and see: how does it work? How can humanitarian principles and IHL make a difference?

## **Discussion Table – Innovation**

Chair: Prof. Bartel van de Walle, TU Delft

The most important take-away points from this discussion table were:

### **Effective innovation**

A strong plea for frugal innovation (bottom up, localized) and incremental innovation (build very small steps in standing procedures). Innovations must always be very well adapted to local situations: check the end-users.

### **Big data**

Big data could be a huge opportunity, but ...

- Take good care of data ownership; data access by the wrong people (officials) could mean serious security risks for people on the ground.
- Ensure the quality of the data and of the data analyses.

### **Partnering academics & civil society organizations**

There is a gap between what academics like to do, what innovations are developed and what is needed in local situations. Researchers experience barriers to perform field research; NGOs experience barriers to access academic knowledge.

### **Main conclusion**

Innovation should start from a problem base.

## 5. Program

### Program Humanitarian agenda event (Monday June 12)

#### Word of welcome & Introduction to theme and programme of the afternoon (14:30)

- Linda Johnson, Executive secretary International Institute of Social Studies (ISS/EUR)
- Peter Heintze, coordinator Humanitarian Knowledge Centre (HKC)

#### Key note speech: the academic agenda and current humanitarian challenges (14:45)

- Alice Obrecht, research fellow ALNAP.

#### Presentations on new humanitarian knowledge initiatives in The Hague (15:15)

- Prof. Thea Hilhorst, ISS/EUR, Chair International Humanitarian Studies Association.
- Christine Pirenne, Head Humanitarian Aid, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the OCHA Data Centre.
- Tineke Ceelen, director St. Vluchteling on the Humanitarian Knowledge Centre (HKC).

#### Table discussions: Four tables each devoted to one urgent humanitarian theme (15:45)

- *Localisation*

Chair: Tilleke Kiewied, Oxfam Novib

- *Cash*

Chair: Evert van Bodegom, ICCO-Kerk in Actie

- *Politicization of humanitarian aid,*

Chair: Ton Huijzer, HKC

- *The impact of technological change*

Chair: prof. Bartel van de Walle, TU Delft

#### Final plenary session (16:30)

- Harvest of the discussion tables: each chair presents findings, cq take aways
- Final remarks by prof. Inge Hutter, rector ISS/EUR

Drinks & networking