

Report KUNO

Summer Course

July 2018





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.

www.kuno-platform.nl

kuno@kuno-platform.nl

Cover photo: the participants during the summer course

Authors: Renée van Abswoude (KUNO) and Peter Heintze (KUNO)

Introduction

On 5 and 6 July 2018, KUNO organized a Summer Course for professionals with limited humanitarian experience who have started working for a humanitarian organization, and for professionals who have humanitarian experience but who want a thorough and coherent update. The aim of this Summer Course was two-fold: to provide insight into the most important guiding principles and settings for humanitarian work, and to allow reflection on the most important dilemmas and discussions (e.g. access, security, the Grand Bargain and the use of big data).

The 18 participants of the Summer Course came from diverse backgrounds. Most were employees of Dutch international NGOs, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a Dutch bank were also present. However, their positions within their organizations did differ (communication managers, policy officers, a legal advisor and a fundraiser), as did their expectations. Some wanted a general introduction to terminology and basic principles, while others wanted to learn about localization, the developmental aid nexus, the connection between humanitarian aid and data and innovation. Finally, the general aim was to become more critical.

This report offers a review of the first KUNO Summer Course (2018).

Speakers

The kick-off was provided by **Tineke Ceelen**, director of the Netherlands Refugee Foundation (Stichting Vluchteling). She highlighted the necessity of the Summer Course: many mistakes are made because people are unaware of crucial, but basic knowledge. Getting to know the basics is a guiding principle of this Summer Course, provided by the most experienced practitioners and best-informed academics.

The first speaker was **Thea Hilhorst**, Professor of Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction at the International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus University). She discussed two major strands in humanitarian thinking. The first is the classic humanitarian aid paradigm, which focusses on principles, the international aid machinery and the notion of exceptionalism. Herein, the link between development and aid is not visible. Over time, resilience



humanitarianism was breaking through, with profound changes in humanitarian governance as a result: less focus on humanitarian principles and more focus on the capacities and important role of local and national actors. Often, the two different approaches seem so compete. However, Hilhorst stressed that these two lines of thinking should not be seen chronologically or as mutually exclusive. Her advice is to think in scenarios (different contexts need different approaches), rather than theory.

Jan Ninck Blok is a legal advisor to the Dutch Red Cross. He introduced the participants to the Battle of Solferino (1859), which Henri Dunant witnessed. This key historical event inspired him to formulate the humanitarian principles. Furthermore, Jan Ninck Blok gave a short introduction to International Humanitarian Law. Finally, he discussed the 'devils dilemma' between protecting civilians and limiting warfare. How to balance military necessity and humanity? Linked to these theories, **Eselijn Mulder**, humanitarian programme lead at Oxfam Novib and lead of the Joint Rohingya Response of the Dutch Relief Alliance in Bangladesh, provided a practical overview in relation to the Rohingya Response. After that, she discussed humanitarian standards and principles and related them to the difficulty of gaining access. Finally, Elselijn Mulder elaborated on the tension between development and humanitarian aid: do you focus on providing emergency food and war or do you build houses and roads?

Joost Herman, professor of Humanitarian Action at Groningen University, provided an overview of the humanitarian architecture, in which the inconvenient truth exists about a 'humanitarian bubble' that is hardly reflected upon. Over the years, humanitarian organizations crafted this 'humanitarian bubble', which suggests that a humanitarian system exists. Within that system there is a Humanitarian Space

supported by International Humanitarian Law, the humanitarian principles and international legal instruments. In reality, this system is much more complex: many more actors and legal frameworks are involved than previously anticipated. Furthermore, the constant, rapid change and institutional capacities add to the complexity. This also raises the question whether it can be considered a system at all. This new bubble is labelled as the 'New Humanitarian Space', with its subsequent challenges and obstacles in the 21st century.

A practical overview of access, security and humanitarian negotiations was provided by **Katrien Coppens**, delegate general director of *Médecins Sans Frontières* Netherlands. She argued that, besides objectively delivering aid, it is important to focus on the human aspect of the people involved, both aid providers and aid receivers. In the end, person-to-person negotiations determine the result of the work of an organization. **Dr Wilbur Perlot** showed the technical aspects behind these negotiations. As deputy director of Clingendael Academy, he provided a sneak preview of the 'Humanitarian Negotiations' training. He discussed in an interactive way the basics of humanitarian negotiations and the influence of humanitarian principles on negotiations. He argued that time pressure and lack of trust in humanitarian negotiations are important and interesting, and subsequently provided participants with a toolkit for negotiating during a humanitarian setting.

The first day was closed by **Dr Bram Jansen**, lecturer in Conflict and Disaster Studies at Wageningen University. Jansen provided participants with a perspective from affected populations in crises. He focused specifically on the aid encounter, which refers to contact between aid providers and aid recipients that occurs on the ground (social interface). His main argument is that humanitarian aid organizations should focus more on the people on the ground and thus try to understand the lives of affected populations to really understand the practices on the ground. He supported this argument by discussing two concepts. The first concept was agency, which refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make free choices. This means that humanitarian organizations should not portray aid recipients as passive beneficiaries, but as active people that have their own capacity to respond in a disaster. Related to this is the concept of labelling, which refers to describing someone or something in a word or short phrase (for example, the use of the word 'victims'). In humanitarian programmes, this practice is both a necessity and a pitfall.

The second day started with **Evert van Bodegom**, coordinator of the Disaster Management Team of ICCO-*Kerk in Actie* and **Hero Anwar Birzw**, programme director for REACH Iraq, who joined the Summer Course through Skype. Together, they introduced the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain. Whereas Evert van Bodegom discussed the theoretical notions behind the ten workstreams discussed in the Grand Bargain, Hero contributed to the discussion by providing a local, subjective view on how the different workstreams have influenced her work. Afterwards, four workstreams (no. 2, 7, 8, 10) were elaborated more extensively with an interactive session in which the participants needed to come up with certain solutions. In conclusion, all participants agreed that it is a long way to reach the ultimate goal.

In the afternoon, **Dr Kees Boersma**, lecturer in Crisis and Disaster Response VU Amsterdam, discussed digital innovation in the humanitarian field. He discussed the many opportunities we have, for example that large data sets can identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical and legal claims. He also showed participants the pitfalls, such as the digital gap and the participatory aspect. He concluded by arguing that technological data has an added value in the 21st century, but only as an addition to other data.

Thomas Baar, project manager of HumanityX, discussed how technology and innovation can be used to aid the humanitarian field. Baar identified the issue that humanitarian workers are unaware of the added value of data, and 'just' want to use it. He argued that you should think about data and technology the other way around: rather than using data, look at the context of a specific organization and assess how technology may be useful. This knowledge was further explored in a scenario session about a data breach (based on a real incident) that focused on the volatility of data. Just like in the 'real world', participants had limited time to provide statements for a debate. Participants then discussed the issues.

In hindsight

The Summer Course was very well appreciated, and participants joined in with enthusiasm. They greatly appreciated the time reserved for reflective questions and critical debates. Also, the different positions of the experts and their different approaches and statements provoked interesting questions and discussions. The interactive sessions were well received.

Finally, the informal setting of the Summer Course allowed for a safe space in which questions could be asked. Overall, the Summer Course was valued very positively: an overwhelming majority of the participants would recommend the Summer Course to colleagues.

