

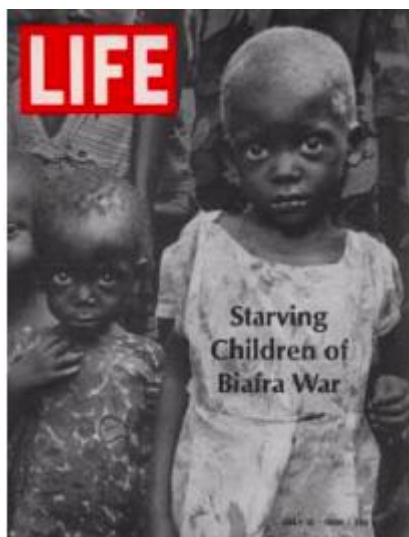
Summer course 2023 12/7 – 13/7

KUNO organised another Summer Course this year. During this two-day introductory course on humanitarian aid, humanitarian academics, practitioners and policymakers discussed some very important aspects of humanitarian work. A mix of practical knowledge, debates and working sessions was designed to broaden understanding of the humanitarian field, improve the efficiency of humanitarian workers and strengthen their network. The 18 participants had two intense but productive learning days. In this short report one can read an overview of the sessions that took place.



Battle of Solferino (1859), where the idea of founding the Red Cross/Red Crescent was born by Henri Dunant.

Day 1. Morning Session



Thea Hilhorst, Professor of Humanitarian Studies from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam, kicked off the Summer Course with an interactive presentation of the historical developments that led to the contemporary humanitarian practices and standards. From the Battle of Solferino (1859), via the Biafra War (1967-1970), to the unprecedented number of humanitarian crises in recent years. Thea Hilhorst highlighted the origins of humanitarian aid, the different trends, how humanitarian standards developed and how, on paper, humanitarian principles appear to be universal. However, they are in practice incredibly complex.

Thea took the group on a historical journey of humanitarianism. The participants engaged in the conversation and yielded interesting discussions on, for example, Thea's 'hobby horse' gender issues, such as transactional sex, in humanitarian settings conflict.

The participants got one question during each session and the first question was: *What would be for you the most important / the leading principle of Humanitarian Action?* See the participants' answers on the right. Solidarity, humanity, dignity, equality are some of the answers that drive the humanitarian professionals who joined the Summer Course.



Day 1. Afternoon Session

The afternoon session began with a working session on this case led by **Benoit de Gryse**, Head of Programmes and Advocacy at Stichting Vluchteling (SV). During this working session, participants had to work in groups to map out options for a fictional NGO having to deal with the issue:

The Taliban announces a ban on female NGO workers.

Do you stay or do you leave as a humanitarian organisation that mainly provides aid to women and children? What are your red lines and how do you ensure compliance with the humanitarian principles?



After the case study, Benoit shared his key lessons as Head of Programmes and Advocacy at SV and with 15 years of experience in the field, working for Médecins Sans Frontières in amongst others Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indonesia. In this sense, he reflected on the importance of having a clear understanding of what you stand for as an organisation.

One of the conclusions that Benoit shared: “Doing the right things is difficult and doing everything perfectly is quite impossible”. The bureaucratisation of the aid sector, such as standards and indicators, takes away from the principles, but having a clear understanding of what drives you as an organisation can help you tremendously in a challenging context like Afghanistan.

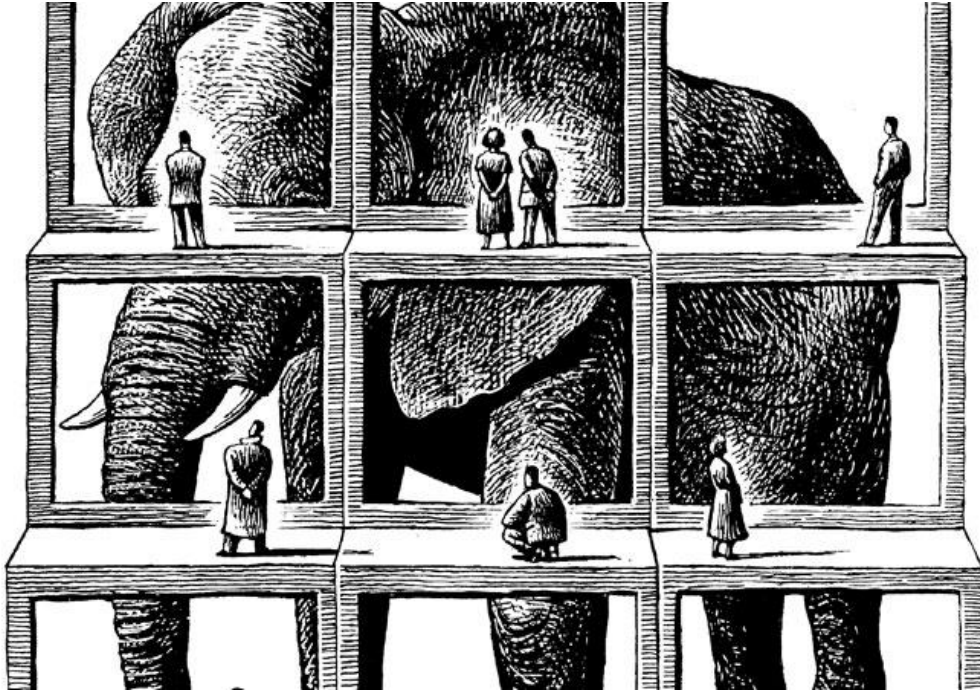


Image that Benoit de Gryse used to illustrate that overseeing a humanitarian situation is usually very complex and you must be well aware that you can probably only see a (small) part of the whole situation. The place from which you look strongly determines your analysis.

Day 2. Morning Session - Part I

Rolf Wijnstra, senior humanitarian policy officer of the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), kicked off day 2 of the Summer Course explaining the Dutch course of action in humanitarian diplomacy and emergency aid: People First. With skyrocketing needs and an increasing amount of challenges, how does the MFA from a donor perspective view the humanitarian sector? Globally, the Netherlands is a large humanitarian donor and strongly involved in mechanisms to strengthen the effectiveness of humanitarian action, such as the Grand Bargain and strives for more localised humanitarian action.

As Minister for Trade and Aid, Sigrid Kaag (2017-2021) ensured that Mental Health and Psycho Social Support (MHPSS) were prioritised by the Netherlands. Highly relevant in times of protracted conflict and migration.

This photo is from the Mind the Mind Now Conference (October 2019, Amsterdam) where Sigrid Kaag underlined the MHPSS-priority on behalf of the Netherlands.

Mental Health & Psycho Social Support is also the focus of the Lebanese NGO Embrace, presenting their case in the second part of this morning session (see below).



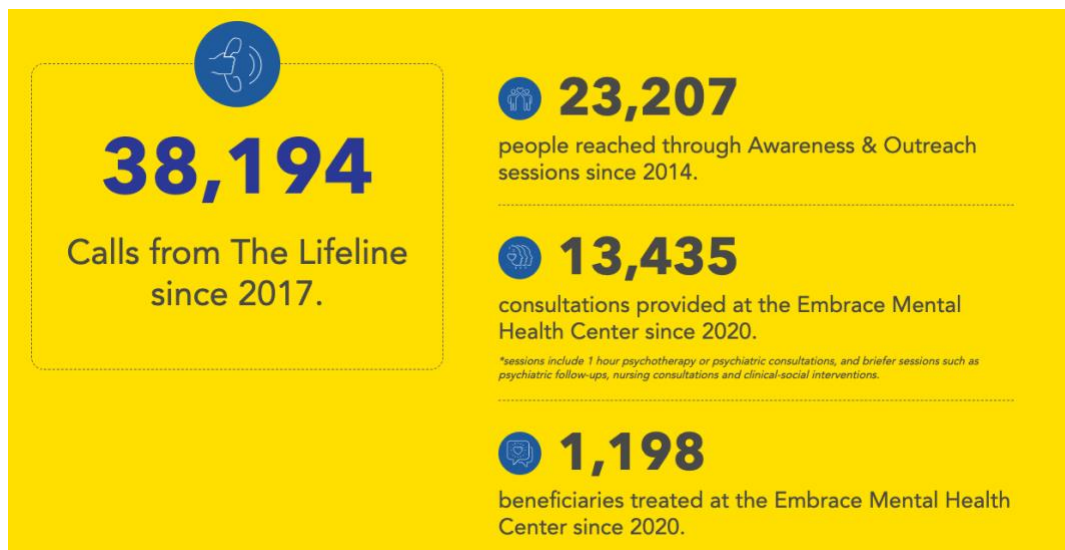
Day 2. Morning Session - Part II



Part two of the morning programme was delivered by **Pia Zeinoun**, vice-president Embrace (Lebanon) and Director of the Embrace Mental Health Center (EMHC). Although Pia Zeinoun was connected with the Summer Course via a video call, she gave a very powerful talk about her own experiences, the rapid growth of Embrace, and the incredible work Embrace is doing to raise awareness on the importance of mental health and to make mental health services accessible to everyone in Lebanon. Donors and

intermediaries do not always support the work of a local actor like Embrace, which can be a challenge for them.

The participants of the Summer Course highly appreciated the (honest) presentation that Pia gave and praised the work that she and Embrace have been doing over the last few years.



WE HAVE A VISION FORWARD

All persons in pursue a better mental health and can reach dignified access to care without social, personal and structural barriers.

“All persons in Lebanon pursue a better mental health and can reach dignified access to care without social, personal and structural barriers”

- Vision Embrace

Day 2. Afternoon Session

In the final session of the Summer Course, **Emiel Martens** and **Wouter Oomen**, founders of the Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, provided an introduction to the features and pitfalls of communication on humanitarian aid and international development, and the importance of ethical communication. After two full days of learning, Emiel and Wouter managed to motivate the audience in an engaging discussion on the problematic images Western (I)NGOs use to portray countries where humanitarian aid is provided.

Emiel Martens and Wouter Oomen used a speech of US-president Harry Truman in 1949 as a starting point for the international discussion on development. The language of this discourse changed significantly in 1983 following the famine in Ethiopia, when NGOs had to reach out to the general public instead of the donors for fundraising. This started the imaginary debate on the spectacle, stereotyping and power imbalance that became visible in the images that Western (international) NGOs use to raise funds from the general public. To visualise this, Emiel and Wouter showed five campaigns NGO's had in the last couple of years that were nominated for the *Fly in the Eye Award*.



Final remarks

To end with, the two learning days were very insightful and fruitful with stories from different perspectives (academic, humanitarian practitioner, donor, communications), each of which provided eye-openers. Moreover, the open and honest discussions afterwards and the participants' sharp questions were highly appreciated by the speakers and KUNO. It also taught us again how hard the dilemmas can be that are part of humanitarian work. We try to do good things under very bad circumstances - where you can never do it completely right.

KUNO is looking forward to organise the Summer Course again next year.