The Changing Context of Humanitarian Action: Key Challenges and Issues

Cristina Churruca-Muguruza

1 Introduction

Peace, stability and sustainable economic growth seem unachievable goals in many places of the world today. As the United Nations (UN) Secretary General acknowledges in his landmark report 'One Humanity: Shared Responsibility' for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), we are approaching a point in history in which there is a need 'to agree that we can and must do better to end conflict, alleviate suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability'.[1]

The inability to resolve protracted crises and intractable conflicts and the convergence of global trends such as climate change, migration and population growth, urbanisation, growing inequalities and resource scarcity are exacerbating people's vulnerability. At the same time, the international aid system has not kept pace with the impact of these challenges on the caseloads of humanitarian agencies and their operational environments. The recognition of the need to adapt to a changing humanitarian context and make humanitarian action more effective and inclusive to respond to the needs of people in crises led UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in 2013 to convene the first ever WHS in Istanbul in May 2016.[2]

---

[1]UN General Assembly (2016a).

[2]UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon took stock of these changes in his address to the 66th General Assembly, '*We the Peoples*', on 21 September 2011. One of the actions foreseen for building a safer and more secure world was to build a more global, accountable and robust humanitarian system by, among other specific measures, '*convening a world humanitarian summit to help share knowledge and establish common best practices among the wide spectrum of organisations involved in humanitarian action*' (UNSG 2011, p. 8).

C. Churruca-Muguruza (✉)
University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain
e-mail: cristina.churruca@deusto.es

In this context, the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the main external (global trends and current armed violence and conflict) and internal challenges facing humanitarian action and the key issues in its agenda. Most have been the subject of broad discussion under the four themes that were selected for the regional and expert consultations, which preceded the humanitarian summit (humanitarian effectiveness, reducing vulnerability and managing risk, transformation through innovation and serving the needs of people in conflict). Others unfolded over the years in the process of policy discussions, regarding the meaning and understanding of humanitarian action and its limits and links with development and peacebuilding.[3]

2 The Confluence of Global Trends

Several reports, studies and policy papers have acknowledged the currents of change that are transforming the foundations of the humanitarian domain, and the world, in unprecedented ways. Different global issues whose effects have not been sufficiently studied contribute to the risk of major large-scale and complex crises that will increase the suffering of vulnerable populations. Humanitarian stakeholders are greatly concerned about the impact that these issues may have on the caseloads of humanitarian agencies and their operational environments.[4] The following long-term problems should be mentioned:

- *Climate change, environmental degradation and fragility*: climate change results in more frequent and extreme-weather events, such as floods, tropical storms and droughts with devastating impacts in areas with fragile ecological systems and large population concentrations.
- *Population growth and migration*: the global population is estimated to grow to over 8 billion by 2025, and migration is and will continue to be one of the biggest challenges both within and across borders.
- *Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, rising youth population and social discontent*: the urban population is expected to double in Asia and increase by 150% in Africa from today to 2050. The large degree of urbanisation will fuel massive social inequities and break up the social fabric, especially in times of conflict.

---

[3]This chapter draws on research conducted for a study commissioned to the author by the European Union Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union at the request of the European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE) to prepare a common European position for the World Humanitarian summit: Churruca Muguruza (2015), http://www.europarl. europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU(2015)549048.

[4]See: Borton (2009); Cairns (2012); CaLP (2013); EUPRHA (2013), http://www.euprha.org/ library; Gelsdorf (2010); Global Humanitarian Assistance (2014), available (together with older as well as the most recent reports) at: www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/reports/; OCHA (2014).

- *Extreme poverty and inequality*: these ongoing issues leave whole communities and households in an almost irreversibly devastating state of vulnerability and need.
- *Increased resource scarcity and food crises*: water scarcity and energy demand represent major threats, both from a humanitarian and a geopolitical point of view.
- *Health pandemics and infectious diseases*: the impacts of health disasters amplify the pressures on weak and fragile States.

Recurring disasters often lead to chronic poverty. Disasters destroy material goods (homes, schools, infrastructure, livestock and seeds) and negatively impact social capital (for example, by decreasing access to education, eroding social norms and values and contributing to incentives for longer-term migration). As a result, a vicious cycle ensues: chronic poverty makes it difficult to take measures necessary to mitigate effects of disasters. Where such disasters occur, they may cripple resources and increase poverty. The financial and economic crisis that began in 2007, for example, has lowered the standards of living of many and curtailed critical safety nets. In addition, austerity measures and shrinking foreign aid budgets in the developed world have reduced overall humanitarian resources required to cope with the increasing needs of ever more vulnerable populations.

Moreover, the confluence of several of the above-mentioned problematic global trends exacerbates existing problems. For example, climate change may have implications for energy, food and water shortages and increase what Betts has referred to as the number of so-called survival migrants.[5] Other issues exacerbate the vulnerability of people, scupper years of development cooperation and peacebuilding and can increase the risk of major conflict.[6] Such difficulties include growing migration, increasing inequality, social and demographic changes (ageing population in Western countries and exponential growth of the younger population in developing countries with unmet demands), rapid urbanisation and ensuing lack of access to service, as well as crime and disease, which are especially prone to occur in urban settlements.

3 Change and Continuity in Armed Conflict and Other Forms of Violence

The last three decades have witnessed both continuity and change in global dynamics of conflict and armed violence. One in every four people on the planet, a total of more than 1.5 billion people, lives in fragile areas affected by conflict or

---

[5]Betts (2010), pp. 361–382.
[6]OECD (2015).

high levels of organised crime and (urban) violence.[7] Current international conflictivity includes various forms of violence that often coexist and feed each other, challenging compartmentalised approaches to armed violence. Despite a downward trend in the number of conflicts and violent deaths, conflict has not disappeared.

Although the era of interstate armed conflict seems to have come to an end, internal conflicts persist. After declining for much of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of civil wars or internal conflicts of high intensity almost tripled, from 4 in 2007 to 11 in 2014.[8] New forms of violence, committed by international terrorist networks and transnational criminal organisations, further complicate the situation, challenging States, especially fragile ones, and systems of global governance.[9]

Most violent deaths occur in States suffering from endemic and prolonged violence concentrated in the more densely populated urban areas and among the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable social groups, particularly young people. Studies indicate that it is the aggregation of risk that enhances the likelihood and intensity of urban violence. Some predictions show how risks are aggravated by the socio-spatial characteristics of cities such as their heterogeneity, inability to absorb surplus low-skill labour, uneven provision of services and deep inequalities.[10] Savage and Muggha note that 'the degradation of complex systems of service delivery and taxation due to rapid urban expansion leads to what are often referred to as "cascading" problems that over-ride municipal capacities'.[11]

Some cities (Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Medellin, Colombia; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Karachi, Pakistan; and Tegucigalpa, Honduras, among others) are experiencing levels of bloodshed and disturbances that have been termed 'other situations of violence'[12] (OSV), which, by the high numbers of casualties and wounded and the enormity of displaced refugee populations, share many of the characteristics of conventional armed conflict.[13] This kind of urban violence is present all over the world from Latin America to sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Civilians, either as targeted or as accidental victims of the use of force, make up the largest number of casualties of conflict. Most of these conflicts are characterised by *shocking levels of brutality and gross disregard for human life and dignity*.[14] Armed conflict has devastating effects on civilians, whether as the direct victims of

---

[7]World Bank (2011), p. 2.

[8]See, von Seidel et al. (2014).

[9]Ibáñez Muñoz and Sánchez Aviles (2015); Stepanova (2010), http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2010/02. World Bank (2011), p. 2.

[10]Muggha (2012).

[11]Savage and Muggah (2012), http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1524.

[12]*Ibid*.

[13]*Ibid*.

[14]See, UN Security Council (2015).

death, torture, kidnapping, physical injury, sexual violence, forced displacement and separation of families and damage of property or, as indirect victims, through conflict-induced increases in disease, hunger and malnutrition. Control over the civilian population is often one of the things at stake in a conflict.[15]

Direct and deliberate attacks on schools, hospitals and humanitarian workers, as well as the failure to comply with the most elementary norms of international humanitarian law, (IHL) are still the norm. Forced displacement has reached the highest level since World War II, causing an unprecedented migration crisis. It is estimated that by the end of 2015, 61 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalised violence or human rights violations: more specifically, these 61 million consist of 20.2 million refugees displaced outside the borders of their home States, 40.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 1.8 million asylum seekers, half of whom are women.[16]

Most of today's conflicts take on an international dimension linked to factors such as population displacements due to violence, trafficking in weapons and resources, support from neighbouring countries for one of the belligerents or participation of foreign fighters. Regionalisation, internationalisation and transnationalisation tend to make conflicts more lethal and long-lasting. This is one, but not the only, reason for the increasing complexity and fragmentation of contemporary conflicts. The increasing presence of violent extremist groups in conflict areas, with little or no interest in reaching political agreements, drives up the presence of organised crime and terrorist groups with transnational connections. Organised crime depends on ongoing conflict to continue extracting profit from operations in illegal markets. Criminals have thus no interest in contributing to ending conflict. Mark Duffield believes that these new forms of autonomy, resistance and organised violence, composed of non-State actors and private actors, are the expression of a new security scenario defined by what he calls 'network war'.[17] The multitude of actors with a stake in the violent clashes reflects that armed conflict has ceased to solely be a State activity.

As a consequence of these trends, the international community is in constant crisis management. Almost two-thirds of United Nations peacekeepers and almost 90% of personnel in United Nations special political missions are working in or on countries experiencing high-intensity conflict.[18] During the last decade, over 80% of humanitarian funding has gone towards saving lives in conflict settings.[19] The 2011 World Development Report highlighted to what degree violence has become a

---

[15]*Ibid.*

[16]UN General Assembly (2016c).

[17]Duffield (2002), pp. 153–166.

[18]UN General Assembly (2016a).

[19]At the end of 2015, each of the 10 largest consolidated humanitarian appeals involved situations of armed conflict. At the beginning of 2016, and throughout that year, the world had to deal with four L3 (level 3) disasters, the highest UN categorisation of crises: South Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

development problem. The report noted the changing patterns of violence, which is becoming less structured around notions of civil war and conflict and more focused around criminal violence, terrorism and civil unrest. New poverty data reveals that poverty is declining in many parts of the world, whereas countries affected by violence are lagging behind in this regard. No conflict-affected State has achieved a single Millennium Development Goal as of yet.[20] The Global Peace Index estimates the economic impact of containing or dealing with the consequences of violence and conflict in 2015 to stand at $13.6 trillion, or 13.3% of the global economy.[21] This is equivalent to the combined economies of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom.

4 Protection at the Centre of Humanitarian Action

The increasing scale and severity of human suffering in some regions and the insufficient funds available to counter it (6% including relief coordination and support services with the majority of funds benefiting coordination and support services) make a case for according protection a higher priority in humanitarian action.[22] In this vein, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals adopted a statement on 17 December 2013, which affirms that

> protection of all persons affected and at risk must inform humanitarian decision-making and response, including engagement with States and non-state parties to conflict. It must be central to our preparedness efforts, as part of immediate and life-saving activities, and throughout the duration of humanitarian response and beyond.[23]

The statement complements and reinforces the Rights Up Front initiative, which aims to strengthen United Nations action in protecting people from serious violations of international human rights law (HRL) and IHL.

A central component of protection is to understand the different rights and needs of specific vulnerable groups (such as women, children, displaced persons, migrants, refugees and those with disabilities). These groups are often neglected in the assessment, preparedness, design and delivery of humanitarian relief, making them *invisible* to relief operations. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States committed to leaving no one behind, including vulnerable people, such as IDPs and refugees, and those living in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies.[24] Protection and assistance of IDPs

---

[20]World Bank (2011), p. 4.

[21]Institute for Economics and Peace (2016), p. 3.

[22]European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department (2015), p. 21.

[23]Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals, The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, 17 December 2013, http://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/central ity_of_protection_in_humanitarian_action_statement_by_iasc_princi.pdf.

[24]UN General Assembly (2015).

is a matter of growing concern. In the absence of solutions to their plight, their number keeps rising. Women and girls are also disproportionately affected by crisis and exposed to gendered risks and vulnerabilities. Gender-based violence in some crisis settings affects more than 70% of women. It is a human rights, protection and health issue, which is exacerbated in times of conflict, disaster and displacement.

Obtaining and maintaining humanitarian access to populations affected by conflict has been a constant challenge since the birth of modern humanitarianism. Access plays a key role in the protection of civilians and is a litmus test for effective humanitarian operations. Yet, in today's reality, many humanitarian organisations struggle daily to gain access to people in need. In Syria, the combination of extraordinary levels of displacement, both as a survival strategy and as a tool of sectarian cleansing with the high levels of deliberate siege or protracted entrapment of civilians, have posed a strategic test to effective humanitarian operations.[25]

The increasing scale and severity of attacks against civilians in current conflicts also calls for greater respect of international laws that govern the protection of civilians. As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recognises, 'the general lack of protection in crises affecting civilians caught up in armed conflict and other situations of violence is due, not to an inadequate legal framework, but to poor compliance'.[26] Parties to a conflict bear the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of people in areas under their control. Their compliance with their obligations under IHL and HRL is paramount to ensuring the protection of people affected by conflict.

5   Humanitarian Implications of Migration Flows

Large movements of refugees and migrants are not a new phenomenon, but the current scale of forced displacement is different from earlier crises. Some countries have seemed ill-prepared and unwilling to receive large movements of people, causing internal tensions, stringent border restrictions and limited access to asylum. People remain displaced for ever longer periods of time in the absence of solutions, yet the response to the refugee crisis focuses almost exclusively on providing humanitarian assistance. This has put an enormous strain on not only the people displaced but also the countries and communities receiving them.[27]

According to the United Nations Population Division, the number of international migrants has soared from 173 million to 244 million over the past 15 years.[28] This figure is likely to continue to rise.

---

[25]Slim and Trombetta (2014), p. 45.

[26]ICRC (2012), p. 7.

[27]UN General Assembly (2016b).

[28]UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015).

Beyond numbers, displacement and migration patterns have changed significantly in recent years. Increasing numbers of migrants are crossing international borders in search of protection and a better life. Following the Arab Spring, the Mediterranean region has been the theatre where irregular migration has gained the largest visibility due to the ever more dangerous trajectories used and the high number of migrant deaths.[29] Between 1998 and 2015, more than 22,000 persons are documented to have died in attempting to migrate to the European Union. The conditions leading to this death toll have become an issue of humanitarian concern.[30] Furthermore, even before crossing the European border, whether by sea or by land, migrants are often exposed to serious risks of abuse and exploitation en route, including by smugglers. This is particularly true for women and girls who are often stranded in transit countries where they may face sexually based violence.

The challenges regarding border management and irregular migration are neither new nor unique to the European Union. However, the trend in the number of migrants coming to the region continues to increase and reaches far beyond the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. Migrant flows are mixed, meaning economic migrants travel the same routes as asylum seekers and refugees. The humanitarian implications of these mixed flows include the need to decrease or prevent deaths of migrants on their way to Europe, help families to know the fate of missing relatives and identify and process asylum seekers in order to protect refugees and their rights.[31] Other concerns are the mistreatment of migrants at the borders, including practices that infringe their liberty and security, and detention regimes on both sides of the European Union borders that fail to adequately respect minimum human rights standards.

6 Demanding a Paradigm Shift: From Managing Crisis to Managing Risk

Humanitarian organisations are more and more frequently faced with situations where populations come under different layers of pressure due to a combination of trends and factors (demographic, economic, environmental degradation, climate change, violence, chronic poverty), which increase their vulnerability. Humanitarian needs are on the rise because of an increase in the incidence of natural disasters and the inability to resolve protracted crises and complex political emergencies

---

[29]The majority of these migrants set sail from Libya and are either Syrians or Sub-Saharan Africans, especially from Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia. See, MHub (2015), http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Conditions-and-Risks-in-Mixed-Migration-in-North-East-Africa.pdf.

[30]International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2015), http://missingmigrants.iom.int/latest-global-figures; Brian and Laczko (2014).

[31]The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2015), p. 15.

caused by armed conflict. In turn, disasters and conflict are entwined in different ways. Violent conflict causes and aggravates social vulnerability and conflict, and complex political emergencies continue to exacerbate natural disasters. There is a wide recognition that the humanitarian system is not currently optimally set up to help people and governments manage current global trends in order to limit unnecessary loss of life and suffering, better protect livelihoods and in the long term reduce the need for humanitarian assistance.[32]

Unresolved protracted political emergencies and chronic vulnerability make it difficult to take appropriate measures to mitigate disaster effects and therefore heighten the possibility of new disasters happening. It is a vicious cycle, which demands that disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management are mainstreamed not only in the humanitarian but also in the development sectors. In addition, chronic vulnerability challenges the humanitarian system in a critical way, whereby a humanitarian crisis context becomes indistinguishable from a transitional period or a development era. It fact, it is not the context but the actors' approach that differs. Understanding chronic vulnerability and preventing slow-onset emergencies requires humanitarian and development actors to work together more collaboratively.[33] A recurrent example is the response of the international community and affected countries to the crises in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel since 2011, which has brought significant progress to both regions. Solutions to other chronic problems remain elusive. For example, expanding slum populations have raised concerns about the abilities of cities to cope with and adapt to further population influx.

The primordial importance of prevention (preventing a crisis from breaking out) and preparedness (ensuring that an individual, a household, a country or a region is ready to manage the effects of such crisis) has shifted to the centre of discussions at the 2016 WHS. Humanitarian actors stand at the crossroads of a policy shift from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention through disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management. This policy shift, underlying the WHS initiative, came together in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA's) flagship report Saving Lives Today and Tomorrow: Managing the Risk of Humanitarian Crises, which was launched in New York on 31 March 2014, calls for a fundamental shift in the way that humanitarian and development actors operate. It suggests that aid groups and donors begin to shift from responding to crises in a purely reactive manner and instead adopt an approach that proactively anticipates and prevents crises through effective risk management. Such an approach is urgently needed in a context of a chronically underfunded global humanitarian budget.

---

[32]There is evidence of the rising impact disasters have had over the past 30 years: over 3.3 million people killed; 50% of deaths occurred in poverty-stricken countries, but they accounted for only 9% of disasters. The economic cost of disasters has tripled. Disasters also push people into poverty. Poverty levels after the Haiti 2010 earthquake and Djibouti 2011 drought returned to early 2001–2003 levels. See, OCHA (2014).

[33]Rubin (2006).

7 A Common Understanding of Humanitarian Action and Its Limits?

Humanitarian aid is by definition a response to man-made crises and natural disasters, a fundamental expression of the universal value of solidarity between people. Working towards solidarity is, in theory, the core function of humanitarians.

What differentiates humanitarian aid from any other type of aid is that it is provided according to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, although organisations understand their mission differently depending on their mandate and the context in which they operate. On one end of the spectrum, we find the ICRC *whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance*.[34] On the other, many organisations, such as Save the Children, are inspired by the idea that *integrated interventions can achieve much more than saving lives by promoting overall regional stability*,[35] for which the humanitarian system should *place emphasis on seeking opportunities to transform and rebuild communities, using their own capacity and based on their own priorities and aspirations*.[36]

The main conceptual challenge for humanitarian actors is to clarify the different types of humanitarian action and decide to which extent aid can and should be principled on the strategic objective to transform communities and societies for the better. It might be advisable to differentiate between a humanitarian action based on humanitarian principles in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence and humanitarian action as emergency relief or early recovery assistance, aiming at *supporting communities to overcome crises and protect and promote human rights*.[37] In this vein, humanitarian actors must examine what results humanitarians can deliver, in which capacities the sector should invest and which responsibilities they should hand over to other actors.

The humanitarian sector must be realistic as to what it can achieve and its added value. Issues of resilience, disaster risk reduction, preparedness, prevention and risk management are not the core task of humanitarians alone, although humanitarians are more and more called upon to shoulder the lion's share of responsibility. Neither can humanitarians address root causes of poverty and vulnerability. Therefore, collaboration with development actors is a must. On the other hand, there is an underlying tension between needs-based and rights-based approaches to humanitarian action. The incorporation of protection of vulnerable populations into humanitarian action resembles a human rights approach, which some humanitarians

---

[34]ICRC (2014), p. 5.

[35]Save the Children (2014), p. 15.

[36]*Ibid.*

[37]*Id.*, p. 1.

still consider a political issue, distinct from humanitarian action. Yet more and more affected populations are seeking the implementation of HRL, IHL and an end to impunity of those violating these frameworks.

Humanitarian actors should accept that they have to apply not only *a framework of context* and *risk analysis, needs assessments*[38] but also *a rights-based approach that helps to identify threats and vulnerabilities and their causes as well as violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and to establish appropriate responses*.[39] Yet reports suggest that protection issues are still not systematically identified and addressed in humanitarian response and advocacy.[40] This underlines the need for enhanced collaboration between humanitarian and human rights actors.

8 A Call for a More Inclusive Humanitarian System

Discussions on humanitarian effectiveness start with the question of how to meet the humanitarian needs of all people with timely and appropriate aid that is delivered in a collaborative and sustainable manner. This involves gaining a better understanding of what aid vulnerable people and communities require and what they are currently doing to meet their own needs. In this regard, the main challenge lies in how to respond to the demands of developing countries, which seek support to create resilient national and local capacities to sustainably end the underlying conditions that create humanitarian crises. However, this is not a simple and straightforward process. There are a number of underlying tensions that should be taken into consideration.

Host States are becoming increasingly reluctant to get involved in what they perceive as *humanitarian interventionism* at the expense of their national prerogatives. This reluctance is asserted in two different ways. On the one hand, certain host States are developing disaster management systems, which are both willing and able to act as *host coordinators*, as well as *implementers* of disaster responses during crisis. In this vein, many States have increased the capacities of their national disaster management authorities and improved local efforts to prepare

---

[38]Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Inter Agency Standing Committee Principals (2013), p. 5, http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/tools_and_guidance/human_rights_protection/OHCHR-UNHCR%20Joint%20Paper_EN.pdf.

[39]*Ibid.*

[40]There is a lot of confusion about the meaning of protection. Protection can be understood in three ways: as an objective, as a legal responsibility and as an activity. Protection is an objective that requires equal respect for the rights of all individuals, without discrimination, in accordance with national and international law. Protection is also a legal responsibility, mainly of the State and its agents. Protection of civilians is a legal concept based on IHL, human rights and refugee law. It refers to the protection of civilians in armed conflict according to IHL and human rights law.

for and respond to humanitarian crises.[41] On the other hand, authoritarian States are prepared to contain or keep a close eye on humanitarian interventions, hindering humanitarians' access to people in need. Host governments are not always capable or willing to respond to the needs of affected people, notably in the case of IDPs and refugees.

As the current armed conflict in Syria and the expulsion of aid agencies from Sudan in 2009 clearly highlight, providing humanitarian assistance depends on a certain amount of State consent. The experiences of the last years in Syria and other States in crisis need to be evaluated to find the most creative ways of working in States *where humanitarian action is firmly nationalised and leaves little room for a diverse array*.[42]

Humanitarian nationalism, as it appeared in Sri Lanka, Sudan or Myanmar, is likely to be increasingly common. The need to support more localised humanitarian responses, particularly by directly funding local actors, faces several challenges besides differing from international humanitarian financing practice based on appeals. These challenges include fiduciary risks, aid diversion and corruption at a time where there is a growing request for greater accountability and transparency in developed countries. In some contexts, a local-level response is not the most effective, and working with local actors may lead to mixed results, as in the case of *aid gatekeepers*, experienced by IDPs in Mogadishu, Somalia.[43] Last but not least, there is the resistance of international NGOs that are increasingly competing for funds in a humanitarian landscape dominated by five international *mega* NGOs.[44]

Tensions also exist between western-based humanitarian agencies and emerging humanitarian institutions from other regions, which may have different codes of conduct and work outside the multilateral framework. For example, the humanitarian role of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the NGOs working under its umbrella, is based on the Islamic principles of charity (*Zakat*) and a shared religious community among Muslims (*Ummah*), which clashes with traditional humanitarian principles of universality and neutrality.[45] This raises concerns but also emphasises the need to include a variety of actors in the current humanitarian system.

Besides increasing capacities and expertise of national authorities and local responders, many new actors have also begun to engage in humanitarian action. They include militaries, national and international businesses, *digital humanitarians* and diaspora groups, among others. The question remains how all the major actors involved in humanitarian action can better *inter-operate* with each other.

---

[41]Harvey (2009).

[42]Slim and Trombetta (2014), p. 61.

[43]Drumtra (2014).

[44]Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Oxfam International, the International Save the Children Alliance and World Vision International (ALNAP, 2015).

[45]Svoboda et al. (2015).

Depending on the context, one must determine which actors are best placed to respond, who should lead or coordinate humanitarian responses and what goals need to be met. International humanitarian aid now involves a multitude of actors, including regional organisations, which are developing their own coordination mechanisms and member States with their own capabilities and structures. An array of non-core humanitarian actors works in parallel and often in coordination with the rest of the humanitarian system, working towards different goals and approaches that need to be considered. These include militaries, private-sector entities, including commercial contractors, religious institutions and diaspora groups, together with formal and informal private givers. Despite the differences between these actors, it is less important who is delivering the assistance than how well the needs of people are met.

9 Conclusion

The WHS process was a unique opportunity to address the external and internal challenges facing global humanitarian action today. The need for enhanced investment in risk mitigation and risk management, which existing structures are not equipped to provide, is real, but it should not overshadow the more important problem: humanitarianism has become a global big leaf to avoid addressing the causes of disasters.

Preventing or reducing the risk of disaster is only one part of dealing with long-term consequences of humanitarian crises. The underlying processes of chronic poverty, environmental degradation, global climate change and political marginalisation are the true issues to address. Shifting the focus from curing maladies to preventing them presents challenges at multiple levels, for the humanitarian community and, even more so, for governments and development actors. The latter dispose of adequate tools to address underlying causes (livelihood diversification, resource conservation, practices and political participation). Finding solutions to protracted crises is fundamentally a political issue that requires the full extent of political will, capacity and resources of donor governments and affected States. Access to people in need and compliance with IHL are not limited to but depend mainly on commitment from governments.

Humanitarian aid continues to be used to address gaps where political and development solutions have failed. This leads the humanitarian system to overstretch, so that it can no longer meet increasing needs. As Sadako Ogata, long-term humanitarian civil servant, wrote in her autobiography on her experiences during a decade serving as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees: 'There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems.'[46]

---

[46]Ogata (2005).

References

Betts A (2010) Survival migration: a new protection framework. Glob Gov 16:361–382

Borton J (2009) Future of the humanitarian system: impact of internal changes. Feinstein International Center, Medford

Brian T, Laczko F (eds) (2014) Fatal journeys: tracking lives lost during migration. IOM, Geneva

Cairns E (2012) Crises in a new world order: challenging the humanitarian project, Oxfam Briefing Papers 158. Oxfam International

CaLP (2013) Drivers of change, adapted from the Cash Transfer Programming Trends Analysis Meeting, June

Churruca Muguruza C (2015) Towards more effective global humanitarian action: how the EU can contribute, EP/EXPO/B/DEVEFWC/08/, PE 549048 at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EXPO_STU(2015)549048

Drumtra J (2014) Internal displacement in Somalia, Brooking-LSE Project on internal displacement. Brookings Institution, Washington

Duffield M (2002) War as a network enterprise. The new security terrain and its implications. Cult Values J Cult Res 6(1&2):153–166

EUPRHA (2013) State of the art in humanitarian action. EUPRHA Report at http://www.euprha.org/library

European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department (2015) Towards more effective global humanitarian action: how the EU can contribute

Gelsdorf K (2010) Global challenges and their impact on international humanitarian action, OCHA Occasional Policy Briefing Series, No. 1

Global Humanitarian Assistance (2014) Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014. Development Initiatives, London at www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org

Harvey P (2009) Towards good humanitarian government, the role of the affected state in disaster response. HPG Report 29. ODI, London

Ibáñez Muñoz J, Sánchez Aviles C (Dir.) (2015) Mercados ilegales y violencia armada. Los vínculos entre la criminalidad organizada y la conflictividad internacional. Tecnos, Madrid

ICRC (2012) Enhancing protection for civilians in armed conflict and other situations of violence. ICRC, Geneva

ICRC (2014) ICRC strategy 2015–2018 adopted by the ICRC assembly on 18 June 2014. ICRC, Geneva

Institute for Economics and Peace (2016) The global peace index, p 3

International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2015) Missing Migrants Project database, "Latest global figures, 2015". Available from http://missingmigrants.iom.int/latest-global-figures

MHub (2015) Conditions and risks of mixed migration in North East Africa Study 2, November, http://www.mixedmigrationhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Conditions-and-Risks-in-Mixed-Migration-in-North-East-Africa.pdf

Muggha R (2012) Researching the urban dilemma: urbanization, poverty and violence. International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), Ottawa

OCHA (2014) Saving lives today and tomorrow: managing the risk of humanitarian crises. OCHA, New York

ODI (2015) Humanitarian trends and trajectories to 2030: Europe and others group. ODI, London, p 15

OECD (2015) States of fragility 2015. OECD, Washington

Ogata S (2005) The turbulent decade: confronting the refugee crisis in the 1990s. W.W. Norton, New York

ONCHR, UNHCR IASC Principals. The protection of human rights in humanitarian crises, a joint background paper, 8 May 2013., http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/tools_and_guidance/human_rights_protection/OHCHR-UNHCR%20Joint%20Paper_EN.pdf

Rubin V (2006) The humanitarian-development debate and chronic vulnerability: lessons from Niger. Humanitarian Exchange, no 33, March

Savage K, Muggah R (2012) Urban violence and humanitarian action: engaging the fragile city. J Humanit Assist 1, at http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/1524

Save the Children (2014) Education in emergencies: a community's need, a child's right. World Humanitarian Summit – Regional Consultation: East and Southern Africa Engagement, London

Slim HL, Trombetta L (2014) Syria crisis common context analysis. Report commissioned by the IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group as part of the Syria Co-ordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) Initiative. IASC Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group, New York, May

Stepanova E (2010) Armed conflict, crime and criminal violence, Chapter 2, SIPRI Yearbook 2010. SIPRI, http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2010/02

Svoboda E, Zyck SA, Osman D, Hashi A (2015) Islamic humanitarianism? The evolving role of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation in Somalia and beyond. Humanitarian Policy Group, February, p 5

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon (2011) We the Peoples, 21 September 2011. UNSG, p 8

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Trends in international migration, 2015, Population Facts, No. 2015/4, December 2015

United Nations-General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015

United Nations-General Assembly, One humanity: shared responsibility. Report of the Secretary General for the World Humanitarian Summit, A/70/709, 2 February 2016a

United Nations-General Assembly, In safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants. Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/59, 21 April 2016b

United Nations–General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance, A/71/82–E/2016/60, 26 April 2016c

United Nations–Security Council, Report of the Secretary General on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, S/2015/243, 18 June 2015

von Seidel S et al (2014) Major recent trends in violent conflict, Occasional Paper 1. University Centre for Policy Research, Tokyo

World Bank (2011) World Development Report 2011. Conflict, security, and development. The World Bank, Washington, p 2

Further Readings

Armstrong J (2013) The future of humanitarian security in fragile contexts. European Interagency Security Forum

Austin B, Fisher RJ, Giessmann HJ (eds) (2011) Advancing conflict transformation. The Berghof Handbook II. Barbara Budrich Publishers, Pladen/Framington Hills. Online at www.berghof-handbook.net

Barnett M, Weiss TG (eds) (2011) Humanitarianism contested. Cornell University, Ithaca and London

Donini A (ed) (2012) The golden fleece. Manipulation and independence in humanitarian action. Kumarian Press, Sterling

Duffield M (2007) Security, development and unending wars. Polity, London

Gibbons P, Heintze H-J (2015) The humanitarian challenge. 20 years European Network on Humanitarian Action (NOHA). Springer, Berlin

Mac Ginty R, Peterson JH (2016) The Routledge companion to humanitarian action. Routledge, London

Walker P, Maxwell D (2009) Shaping the humanitarian world. Routledge, London and New York

Cristina Churruca-Muguruza is Associate Professor of International Relations and Coordinator of the World Politics and Humanitarian Action Module of the NOHA Joint Master's Programme in International Humanitarian Action at the Institute of Human Rights of the University of Deusto, Spain.