Spring 2020

Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Settings: "Holding humanitarian organizations accountable to people."

Jazmin Williamson
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

Part of the Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Emergency Medicine Commons, Health Policy Commons, History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons, International Humanitarian Law Commons, Medicine and Health Commons, Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/3295

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.
Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Settings

"Holding humanitarian organizations accountable to people."

By Jazmin Williamson

Spring 2020

SIT Switzerland: Global Health and Development Policy

Academic Director: Dr. Alexander Lambert, Ph.D.

Schreiner University

Public Health
Abstract

Aim: This research aims to examine what guidelines and regulations help ensure that humanitarian organizations are held accountable to their beneficiary populations.

Background: Although people have always been the focus of humanitarian aid, their voice and participation didn't become a centralized part of the conversation until the 1990s and later gained real traction in the early 2000s. During these times, many new foundational documents were created to highlight the "centrality of local participation in aid." Among the documents that enshrined this new principle of population participation included the 1992 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Humanitarian Charter in 2000, the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles in 2003, and the Humanitarian Reform initiative in 2005. Later came the adoption of the Cluster approach and the introduction of the HESPER model for needs assessment, but despite the gains in policy development, little change was being made to address the concerns of the affected populations in humanitarian emergencies. Even with the creation of the Transformative agenda and its goal of accountability to affected populations (AAP) as its core principle, humanitarian reviews still find little reform in the area of accountability to affected populations.

Methods: A literature review was used to identify relevant peer-reviewed articles and gray literature that centered on "people power in humanitarian settings," donor to beneficiary relations, humanitarian coordination, humanitarian law and policy, and existing guidelines on accountability in humanitarian action. Two semi-structured, virtual interviews were conducted with experts in humanitarian aid and international policy who were chosen due to their relevant background in this topic. An analysis was conducted on the interviews to determine the main themes and subthemes in both responses.
Discussion: Factors that lead to a hinderance in accountability to affected populations include limited to no localization of aid in conflict settings, lack of communication between national and non-national humanitarian actors, marginalization of aid recipients’ leadership roles, problematic downward accountability measures, and a lack of participation when it comes to people’s perceived needs. However, due to prominent shortcomings in many recent major humanitarian responses, the importance of increasing accountability to people in humanitarian work has now become a focus that can no longer be ignored in the international community.

Results: Two themes emerged from this research: the implementation of proper channels to ensure accountability to affected populations and the barriers faced when working towards a coordinated approach for upholding humanitarian principles to aid recipients.

Conclusion: The lack of accountability to affected populations is not due to a lack of policy or principles, but rather it deals with the obscure nature of the rhetoric surrounding the humanitarian concept—"humanitarian relief must involve, and be accountable to, the crisis-affected people it serves"—and the inability of the humanitarian community to turn this idealistic doctrine into a reality.
Acknowledgments

This research was made possible due to the support of the mentors of the SIT Switzerland: Global Health and Development Policy program. And special thanks to my mentor, Dr. Ruth Grubesic of Schreiner University. Additional thanks are given to my interviewees: your willingness to discuss this topic made this research possible.
# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 7

Methodology ........................................................................................................................................ 10

Findings ............................................................................................................................................... 13

*Humanitarian Principles* ................................................................................................................. 13

*Centrality of Local Populations* ...................................................................................................... 14

*Accountability to Affected Populations* .......................................................................................... 15

*Interviewee Response Analysis* ......................................................................................................... 17

Discussions ........................................................................................................................................ 19

*Aid Localization in Emergency Settings* .......................................................................................... 19

*Marginalization of National Populations* ........................................................................................ 21

*Upward vs. Downward Accountability* ............................................................................................. 22

*Cooperation and Participation in Needs Assessment* ...................................................................... 22

*Recommendations for Implementation* .............................................................................................. 23

Limitations .......................................................................................................................................... 25

Conclusions ........................................................................................................................................ 25

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................................... 27

Appendices ......................................................................................................................................... 31
(I)  Professional Profiles of Interviewees .......................................................... 32

(II) Examples of Interview Questions ............................................................... 32

(III) Reference list for Abbreviations ............................................................... 34
**Introduction**

On January 12, 2010, a massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit 16 miles west of Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti on the island of Hispaniola. The devastating calamity had catastrophic effects: killing over 220,000 people, displacing several million more, and flattening most of the capital city.\(^1\) After the earthquake, many countries joined together to donate billions of dollars of unprecedented aid. Findings based on a report from 2013 showed that the data from the UN Special Envoy estimated that Haiti received over $9 billion in donations from public and private funds to rebuild infrastructure—a pursuit that has produced very little progress.\(^1\)

Although the efforts to mobilize relief during this natural disaster were impressive, the lack of accountability proved to decrease the effectiveness of the humanitarian measures. An article released through the Center for Global Development in 2012—two years after the earthquake—found that the Haitian government (often considered as corrupt) received less than 1% of aid for humanitarian purposes while "nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private contractors have been the intermediate recipients of most of these funds."\(^2\) Because of valid concerns raised and mistrust in Haiti’s top officials, most private funds bypassed the government of Haiti. Instead all the money and resources went directly into the hands of NGOs, faith-based organizations, or Haitian community groups. Even this method failed to improve accountability or transparency in the humanitarian response, leaving the people of Haiti to feel disappointed with the aid attempts and reeling with the question: "where exactly did the money go?"\(^3\) In the end, the failings of one of the greatest humanitarian relief efforts boiled down to a lack of accountability to the people.

---


\(^3\) Ramachandran and Walz (2012)
most affected by this astronomical disaster and the incapability of humanitarian relief
organizations to implement a plan for full cooperation with the national state in which they
operated.

Similarly, many years before, on December 26, 2004 another great earthquake had struck.
The Sumatra-Andaman Earthquake was even larger and more destructive, coming in at a 9.1
magnitude, making it one of the most powerful earthquakes and causing what has now been
referred to as the Christmas or Boxing Day Tsunami—one of the greatest tsunamis in over 40
years. The earthquake and resulting tsunami created more than 200,000 causalities, with the
countries being hit hardest including Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Somalia, Maldives, Malaysia,
Myanmar, Tanzania, Bangladesh, and Kenya, making it one of the deadliest tsunamis until the
2011 Japan Tsunami. Like the 2010 Haiti earthquake, this natural disaster saw humanitarian aid
come flowing in through such forms as money, workers, supplies, and other emergency
resources to rebuild infrastructure; in both cases, even the outpouring of aid didn't solve the
problems faced, making the humanitarian response seen as a "missed opportunity." While
undoubtedly the complexities that are faced in humanitarian situations are grandiose, due to the
considerable donor support that humanitarian organizations received, many evaluators concluded
that a higher level of accountability to the local population would have created a more
coordinated and effective response. Although the practices were acceptable in the humanitarian
response after the tsunami, namely in support of local and national aid programs, information
and accountability still was a significant weakness, with an evaluator writing, "a major

---

5 Davis and Gordon (2014)
shortcoming of international programs pertained to communication with affected people."⁷ Even with all the professionalism, expertise, and academic training that comes along with humanitarian work, in the end the voice of the people cannot be ignored, and if it is then the whole humanitarian system will fail to deliver. As such, it the recommendation is that affected communities make their own informed decisions based on information that humanitarian organizations provide. That way they could define and demand certain accountability standards to help negate "unfulfilled promises, poor performance, negligence, abuse or corruption."⁸ Overall, power dynamics between international aid organizations and local NGOs affected the accountability and, therefore, the effectiveness of the entire humanitarian response.

At first glance, these different humanitarian emergencies seem independent, standalone cases that have nothing in common. Upon closer examination, however, we can see that they all have one thing in common: a problem with accountability (or a lack thereof). Whether a natural disaster, human-made catastrophe, war or famine—each of these situations are similar in that they each caused the international community to wake up and examine what was being done to give people affected by crisis their voice and restore their trust in the world of humanitarian aid. Over time, humanitarian crises are becoming more complex and protracted, and through improved analyses and tools, responses can be better prioritized and more people-centered to ensure that the specific needs of affected people are met.

According to the World Health Organization, "The principal objective of international humanitarian action, and the purpose of coordination, is to meet the needs of affected people by means that are reliable, effective, inclusive, and respect humanitarian principles." The purpose of

---

⁷ Telford and Cosgrave (2007)  
⁸ Telford and Cosgrave (2007)
humanitarian action is meant to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity. The four core humanitarian principles as outlined by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence and serve as the foundation for all humanitarian activities. Furthermore, with the ICRC’s accountability to affected people framework, another principle that must be considered in humanitarian work is accountability-- "how to use power responsibly by taking account of, and being held accountable to, those who are affected by the use of such power." To be effective, successful, and adhering to international human rights, humanitarian organizations must be able to follow and promote the principles, laws, and norms associated with their work. As a work that is centered on people, by people and for people, humanitarians must be responsible to the people that are most affected by the emergency.

**Methodology**

This qualitative research was conducted by a two-pronged approach that included a literature review on humanitarian accountability to affected populations and a thematic analysis of two formal, semi-structured interviews with expert humanitarian practitioners. To compile the most relevant data and literature, key online databases like Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PubMed were used. Also, further research was obtained through the use of key university public health advisors. By using such variations of certain key terms like "people power in humanitarian action,” "accountability to affected populations,” "accountability in humanitarian settings”, and/or "humanitarian principles," the most pertinent information relating to this topic was obtained. The research criteria were limited to the past twenty years to gather the most up to date

---


information. However, because the topic of accountability to affected populations tends to a semi-new concept, the literature and findings are limited. With the help of websites from certain organizations, such as the ICRC, WHO, OCHA, MSF, among others, more relevant gray literature was found to provide additional insight on the role of humanitarians in conflict settings and their accountability to those they are working with.

Supplementary research was done with two expert interviewees. The practitioners interviewed were contacted because of their relevant work within the humanitarian field, and their level of experience on the topic through their advanced fields in academia. The interviewees were chosen based on their availability and were contacted through virtual means and email correspondence. Due to the difficulties being faced globally because of COVID-19, in-person interviews were not feasible with either of the interviewees because of social distancing measures. The interviewees included William Brady, MPH, and Dr. Hugo Slim, Ph.D.

Mr. Brady was chosen for both his personal and academic experience and expertise working as a humanitarian worker in global health. He worked as an epidemiologist in various fields including reproductive health, safe motherhood, and sexually transmitted diseases with his core competencies being in HIV/AIDS prevention. His work was in complex-humanitarian emergencies, working mostly with refugees during times of crisis. He's worked in over 40 countries and for various aid and research organizations such as the CDC, USAID, UNAIDS, UNHCR, and numerous other NGOs and is currently employed as a senior lecturer at Thammasat University in Bangkok, Thailand (Appendix I). 11 Likewise, Dr. Hugo Slim was quite a qualified candidate to interview, as he worked as the Head of Policy and Humanitarian

Diplomacy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University and he's previously worked for Save the Children and the United Nations in countries like Morocco, Sudan, Ethiopia, the occupied Palestine territories, and Bangladesh. In his career, Dr. Slim has expertly combined his work in academia and practice for over 35 years, and with his Ph.D. in humanitarian ethics, he wrote two books and runs a blog for ICRC on people's power in humanitarian work.

Both the interviewees answered a standardized set of questions as well as added questions that were given based on their responses (Appendix II). Furthermore, personalized questions were given to each interviewee based on their professional specializations and specific humanitarian experiences (Appendix II). Through the use of recorded and transcribed notes, the most relevant ideas, sub-themes, and quotes were extracted and qualitatively coded to fit the theme of the research criteria.

As with all qualitative research that involves "human subjects," ethical considerations were put in place to ensure the confidentially and informed consent of those who were interviewed. Written consent was obtained through email correspondence and secondary consent was given verbally at the onset of the interview when the aim and objectives were explained before any questions were asked. It was communicated to the interviewees that any written transcriptions or recordings would be deleted and destroyed following the completion and submission of this research and each interviewee was advised that they had the right to withdraw their consent at any given time. Moreover, all quotes included within the body of this paper were written with expressed permission from the interviewees, and these were confirmed by them to be whole, true, and correct. Due to the nature of each of the interviewees’ work in global health,

humanitarianism, and academia, there are no foreseeable repercussions expected from the disclosure of their names, professional histories, or current affiliations, because the research goes along with the work they are already known for. No other ethical considerations are expected to present themselves with the aforementioned methodology.

**Findings**

The literature review revealed the following themes: the need for an increased commitment to humanitarian principles, the importance of strengthening cooperation, coordination, transparency and respect, the complexity of implementing proper channels for accountability to affected populations and the barriers faced when working towards a coordinated approach for upholding humanitarian principles to aid recipients.

**Humanitarian Principles**

Humanitarian principles come from the four core principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence and were first proposed by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. They are now enshrined as part of the mandate and are a part of the codes of conduct in all humanitarian organizations worldwide. They are meant to protect lives and alleviate suffering by promoting and ensuring compliance to common values and are essential for effective humanitarian coordination and for "establishing and maintaining access to affected people."\(^{13}\) Commitment to humanitarian principles helps to set a standard for organizations involved in humanitarian work and is outlined in many codes of conduct for humanitarian organizations. One of the most notable codes of conduct is the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief programs

and its importance is highlighted by the fact that it has more than 492 signatories.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to the four core principles, the ICRC Code of Conduct includes other ethical regulations such as respect, confidentiality, cooperation, and participation as well as others.

Additionally, the code of conduct clearly states, "We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources."\textsuperscript{15} Therefore, accountability is a principle that the ICRC, other humanitarian NGOs, and organizations and all those who have signed ICRC’s Code of Conduct have agreed upon. Along with accountability, humanitarian codes of conduct also pledge to involve "beneficiaries" in their work.

Centrality of Local Populations

After the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004-2005, shortcomings in the humanitarian relief system were quite prominent, but even with the following UN Humanitarian Reforms, the problems of accountability and ownership remained because it marginalized the voice of local actors rather than made them a prominent voice in their operations. Furthermore, the reform initiatives "failed to meaningfully address local/international power dynamics, and arguably made them worse by further centralizing power and influence with major international agencies."\textsuperscript{16} While the reforms sought to do good, the hierarchal structure it created erased the central role that affected populations should have, taking away a part of their voice in relief efforts. With two of the ten critical elements of the 1992 ICRC Code of Conduct is focused on

\textsuperscript{14} Bagshaw (2012)
participation and accountability, humanitarians should be committed to ensuring that the center of all their work is the people affected. As such, humanitarian organizations are to involve the beneficiary population in "the design, management, and implementation (of aid programs) and to strive to achieve full community participation." With accountability and participation being put at the center of humanitarian discourse, the idea of engaging with affected populations was once again affirmed in the ICRC Code of conduct with principles 6 and 7. Now seen as a right, engagement with aid recipients is an essential part of recognizing the dignity of the crisis-affected community. Moreover, in terms of accountability, affected populations must be able to have influence over decision-making and then be able to have the means to assess and even sanction the actions of humanitarian organizations when needed. Lastly, they should be transparent to both donors and their aid recipients to share information effectively. Putting people at the center of humanitarian action, although a worthwhile and honorable goal, is still seen by many as rhetoric rather than a form of measurable action in reality, and there is still a way to go to providing accountability to affected populations.

Accountability to Affected Populations

Although there is a widespread commitment to the principle, there is no agreed-upon official definition of the word "accountability" in the humanitarian world. There is, however, a consensus and understanding that the principle of accountability "requires that organizations and their staff fulfill and respect their legal and ethical responsibilities and use their power

---

Responsibly in humanitarian action.\(^{20}\) Despite the aim of accountability to aid recipients, oftentimes these principles stay as rhetoric and difficulties lie in the fact there is a discrepancy between what donors perceive is needed and what the expectations of the affected population are. With the launch of the Transformative Agenda after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, accountability to affected populations was once again at the forefront of the humanitarian agenda, and AAP goals are now a part of almost every major aid organizations' accountability framework. The ICRC AAP institutional framework is an essential document of humanitarian assistance that articulates "how to use power responsibly by taking account of, and being held accountable to, those who are affected by the use of such power."\(^{21}\) The goal of AAP is to provide a voice to affected people and put them at the center of humanitarian action by regularly providing information to affected communities, making community-informed decisions, enabling communities to assess and comment on aid performance, raising awareness and ensuring that well-established community-based complaint mechanisms are in place.\(^{22}\) To achieve the goals of the AAP guidelines, nine commitments were set out by the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (Figure 1). The AAP is further divided into three dimensions of accountability: taking account, giving account, and being held to account to give people influence in decision-making, to give people information, and to let people provide feedback on humanitarian work.\(^{23}\)

---

\(^{20}\) Tan, Y., & Von Schreeb, J. (2015). Humanitarian Assistance and Accountability: What Are We Really Talking About? Prehospital and Disaster Medicine, 30(3), 264-270. doi:10.1017/S1049023X15000254


Interviewee Response Analysis

After analyzing two semi-formal interviews, some major themes were identified: the implementation of proper channels to ensure accountability and the barriers faced when working towards a coordinated approach for upholding humanitarian principles. During the interviews conducted for the sake of this research, coordination and transparency were two factors that were also stressed by both interviewees. While Dr. Slim pointed out the challenge with achieving collective action with barriers being not enough time or money, Mr. Brady further emphasized that coordination was essential but only successful when there were proper mechanisms to assure transparency to people.

As a former on-the-ground humanitarian who specialized in working with refugees and IDPs, Mr. Brady identified the complexities that faced humanitarians in their responses during emergencies. With his career in humanitarian development, he spoke of accountability from an implementation point of view with things starting at the people level. When he spoke of the
barriers faced in implementing strong channels for accountability, he included the growing responsibilities that aid organizations owe to their recipients, problems with donor coordination and lack of commitment, and lastly, he listed poor governance as "the biggest risk to humanitarian work." However, when asked about the fundamental policies and principles that protect and govern humanitarian aid, Mr. Brady pointed out that despite the commitment of every humanitarian and the institutional codes of conduct, there often exist significant problems in humanitarianism today because values can be given up for money to keep aid organizations alive. This sometimes significantly reduces the amount of aid getting to the implementation level. Elaborating, he stated, "I’ve never seen any darker days than now in terms of neutrality." The lack of neutrality creates a challenge in upholding humanitarian principles and values when donor states sometime have too great a share of the power in decision making. While power is being fought over in battles between Washington, Paris, London, etc. communities also have a voice through their local leaders and advocates so, therefore “coordination is key.”

While there is a push to see affected populations as “shareholders” in humanitarian action, rather than just beneficiaries for greater accountability and transparency, Dr. Slim, a British humanitarian scholar, and the former head of the ICRC Development Policy sector, acknowledged that confidentiality was also a “special ethical burden” of responsibility to states affected by a disaster. With a preference of dialogue between States, Dr. Slim spoke of ICRC’s approach of being transparent with State actors to maintain accountability to them and their people, while staying away from public transparency to “stay and sustain a confidential dialogue

24 Brady W., Thammasat University, Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson, April 24, 2020
25 Brady (2020)
26 Brady (2020)
27 Slim, Hugo; Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson; April 23, 2020
with the state.” However, from within the state, community engagement, and AAP guidelines are used to maintain accountability and transparency to the people they work with to understand the people’s needs to create the best response. So, while Dr. Slim acknowledges that humanitarian organizations try to be accountable to communities, he admitted that they don’t yet have “a great science of it.”

Discussions

This study was aimed at examining the barriers to accountability for affected populations, and what the humanitarian community is doing to address, reform, and improve access to information to communities in emergencies. As the number of humanitarian emergencies around the world continue to increase, due to political instability, climate change, and other man-made disasters, the need for a clear, integrated, and coordinated humanitarian response is now greater than ever. Despite this, interagency cooperation and community engagement are areas that still need improvement. Although most foundational humanitarian doctrines have a version of the principle that states that “humanitarian relief must involve, and be accountable, to the crisis-affected people it serves,” little growth has been created to shift this principle into practice. However, even with numerous humanitarian reform commitments, a “people-centered” approach in humanitarian settings is still a long way from becoming a reality.

Aid Localization in Emergency Settings

---

28 Slim (2020)
29 Slim (2020)
The first obstacle in realizing a humanitarian setting where the affected population has a say in the emergency response they receive, is the trouble organizations create when building a localized response. “Localization” in conflict settings involves humanitarian actors yielding to a transfer of power and resources to local leaders rather than outsiders.\textsuperscript{32} When localization is done properly, NGOs and crises-affected populations work together alongside NNGOs and INGOs who guide them to determine the distribution of funds and international aid. Organizing localization should start simple with token consultation measures and lead to “properly handing over the stick (and the dollars).”\textsuperscript{33} Speaking with Dr. Hugo Slim on the idea of localization, he expressed that he believed that this would be a good change in the humanitarian community. Continuing, he noted that for localization to happen a Darwinian approach should be taken or a “sort of revolution was needed to destroy the humanitarian bourgeois of the agencies and set the people free.”\textsuperscript{34} Generally speaking, most of those in the humanitarian aid system seem to agree that localization is a good idea, but unfortunately, a combination of certain ideas and institutions prevent it from achieving proper progress. A localized response is seen as risky because it involves relinquishing control even in messy and dangerous situations, which leads to the fear of aid diversion in places where it’s believed that governments and local NGOs are less likely to properly divert funds.\textsuperscript{35} For localization to truly work, humanitarian actors must start looking at conflict settings from a “strengths-assessment” perspective instead of a “needs-assessment” based angle.

Marginalization of National Populations

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[33] Stephen and Saldivar (2018)
\item[34] Slim, Hugo; Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson; April 23, 2020
\item[35] Stephen and Saldivar (2018)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Adopting a “strength-based assessment” attitude allows humanitarians to focus on assets, capacities, and skills that a local population could have instead of focusing on filling a silo of perceived deficits such as infrastructure, food, basic goods, or other need capacities. As a social experience, humanitarian work is a means of understanding people’s needs and conditions to best serve and work with them as individuals and groups for the better good. Working to achieve improvements in people’s lives and the world, means that good humanitarian action “should be deeply people-centered.” However, an upward approach is still taken in humanitarian situations and this donor-recipient relationship that persists serves as a barrier for people affected by emergencies to receive accountability from the humanitarian actors working within their states. In his interview, Dr. Slim spoke of this donor-recipient relationship from the viewpoint of investors and investees and explained how humanitarian workers have taken on the role of negotiator to make sure that recipients become shareholders. Although accountability is an important aspect of humanitarianism, a key finding has been that answers from aid organizations tend to go up toward “internal decision-making structures, their funders (whether they are government or private), the media that highlights their work, and the authorities that allow their presence.” To change the perspective of the people, humanitarian workers, and donors will take time, and reform is needed for a more rights-based approach to ensure accountability to all involved.

Upward vs. Downward Accountability

---

37 Slim, Hugo; Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson; April 23, 2020
38 Slim ICRC Blog (2020)
Moreover, if there is unequal accountability in humanitarian aid from provider to recipient, then the effectiveness and relevance of that aid will become compromised. However, even though it is increasingly being recognized as an ineffective means of lifting people out of crisis and poverty, accountability continues to flow upward toward donors, instead of trickling down to the recipient--the people most affected and in need.\textsuperscript{39} Even though increased accountability is continuously being demanded in humanitarian practice, the key focus remains on accountability to the patrons of aid—donors such as governments, businesses, and foundations.\textsuperscript{40} But despite the proven importance of downward accountability from aid donor to beneficiary “examples abound about aid being diverted, misused, or serving to buttress political and/or military strategies directed against the interests of the people it intends to help.”\textsuperscript{41}

Cooperation and Participation in Needs Assessment

To move accountability to affected people from theory to practice, there are many factors involved, but two important concepts that will be examined are coordination and participation. Coordination from an interagency level is improving with the adoption of the Transformative Agenda’s cluster approach, however, it is “centralized by default, which keeps it away from local actors and crisis-affected people.”\textsuperscript{42} For participation to occur, transparency is also needed between humanitarian actors and local populations, but there are difficulties that prevent clarity from happening between humanitarian actors and aid recipients. First, even though transparency is a key ingredient, with the risk of putting staff members and partners in harm’s way, “security

\textsuperscript{39} O’Dwyer, B., & Unerman, J. (2010). Enhancing the role of accountability in promoting the rights of beneficiaries of development NGOs. \textit{Accounting & Business Research (Wolters Kluwer UK)}, 40(5), 451–471. \url{https://doi.org/10.1080/00014788.2010.9995323}

\textsuperscript{40} O’Dwyer and Unerman (2010)

\textsuperscript{41} de Torrenté, N. (2013). The Relevance and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid: Reflections about the Relationship between Providers and Recipients. Social Research, 80(2), 607–634.

and transparency are often conflicting goals.\textsuperscript{43} Second, there is concern that too much information in the hands of aid recipients will give them the power to somehow manipulate the needed aid for non-humanitarian purposes.\textsuperscript{44} However, the need for transparency can oftentimes outweighs the downfalls, especially because one of the major obstacles in building participation with affected populations is that “there is a lack of understanding by national civil society actors of what the humanitarian coordination structure looks like, and how or why they might participate in it.”\textsuperscript{45} Without a proper comprehension of the humanitarian system, affected populations are unable to make education, well-informed decisions about their needs.

Recommendations for Accountability Implementation

Considering the research and the finding that policy development is strong in the humanitarian community, the first recommendation based on this study is that aid organizations adopt humanitarian principles not simply as tenets, but also as a concrete guide for their actions. This is recommended to be done on an implementation level, by measuring the input and output of aid and its results on affected communities. Turning the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid from dogma into an attainable goal isn’t easy, but it can be achieved in an ethical, operational manner by following a “hierarchal order and internal logic”, as illustrated below (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} ALNAP. Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre ... (2014, October 7). Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/report/world/rhetoric-or-reality-putting-affected-people-centre-humanitarian-action
\textsuperscript{44} ALNAP (2014)
Furthermore, to achieve a reasonable standard of accountability to affected populations on all levels, a global definition of the term must be agreed upon. With a consensus of what accountability is and how it is to be achieved, affected populations can have a baseline of expectations that aid providers can use in their implementation models.

Another recommendation is that existing accountability designs be strengthened, with a greater emphasis on cooperation, coordination, transparency, and most importantly respect for the people affected by humanitarian crises. Moreover, methods to streamline aid through local actors is urged to be built up and enlarged for better accountability through downward actions. Lastly, although accountability to affected people is still a somewhat young, and growing idea, commitment to the dialogue will assure that in time, accountability will soon go from rhetoric to reality.

**Limitations**

It should be noted, that due to time restraints, difficulties in obtaining an interview because of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the inconvenience of the
corresponding methods, the results of this research may have the potential to be biased because of such a small sample size of interviewees.

This study has many limitations related to limited time and resources. The sample size was quite small, and this can lead to potential biases. This study also was not based on first-hand findings, but rather by theoretical analysis and observational findings. Furthermore, the findings were based on past events and case studies, meaning that it possibly cannot be translated into current or future humanitarian conflicts. However, the interview findings combined with the information gathered through literature reviews suggests a higher level of validity in the findings to strengthen the conclusions given.

Conclusions

Accountability to affected populations is only possible with a successful implementation of humanitarian principles and a commitment to cooperation, participation, and transparency. While there are no measurable outcomes and little improvement in the current state of humanitarian affairs, the lack of accountability to people is not due to a lack of policy or principles. The problem with accountability starts with the task of turning obscure rhetoric into a concrete concept: “that humanitarian relief must involve, and be accountable to, the crisis-affected people it serves.” As Dr. Hugo Slim pointed out, accountability is a question of ethics—it starts with mutual respect among humanitarian actors and the people they are working with. As humanitarian organizations work to improve their accountability measures, human rights must be at the forefront of the efforts so that the doctrines that govern humanitarian action will go from being idealistic ideas to a measurable reality.
This study calls for a greater level of implementation of humanitarian principles in the context of accountability to affected populations in emergencies in humanitarian action and reform. It also recognizes the need to create a legal definition of the term “accountability” for the humanitarian community to agree upon. Moreover, further consensus is needed on models of accountability implementation based on cooperation, coordination, transparency to aid recipients, and respect. Lastly, this study calls for more research to examine the impact of humanitarian policies and principles on creating attainable and measurable change in accountability to affected populations and ensuring that humanitarian organizations are accountable to those most affected by their actions.

**Bibliography**


   http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1426185


17. Brady W., Thammasat University, Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson, April 24, 2020
18. Slim, Hugo; Personal Skype Interview by Jazmin Williamson; April 23, 2020


Appendices

Appendix I:

*Professional Profiles of Interviewees*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Affiliated Organizations</th>
<th>Positions</th>
<th>Source of Expertise</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Brady</td>
<td>School of Global Studies, Thammasat University</td>
<td>Assistant Dean for Research and Academic Services/ Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>35+ years of experience working as a humanitarian practitioner and academic scholar</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugo Slim</td>
<td>ICRC; Oxford University</td>
<td>Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy; Senior Research Fellow- Oxford Institute for Ethics</td>
<td>35+ years of experience as a humanitarian policy developer and researching humanitarian ethics</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix II**

*Standardized Interview Questions*
1. Can you please give me a summary of your experiences working with humanitarian organizations?

2. As a principle, “humanitarian relief must involve, and be accountable to, the crisis-affected people it serves.” From your professional perspective, what strides are humanitarian organizations making to change this principle to reality?

3. What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by humanitarian workers and organizations when it comes to providing accountability to the people in times of crisis?

_Interviewee-Specific Questions_

William Brady

1. What, in your opinion are some setbacks that humanitarian organizations face when implementing “people-power” in emergency work?

2. During your fieldwork experiences, how did you and your teamwork facilitate a partnership with the people in the community in which you worked?

3. The cluster approach was adopted in 2006 as part of the UN Humanitarian Reform Process and was created as a way for agencies to coordinate together towards a common goal in emergency settings. Do you believe that the implementation of the cluster approach in humanitarian settings has strengthened interagency cooperation amongst humanitarian organizations and “affected populations?”

4. The Humanitarian Emergency Settings Perceived Needs (HESPER) scale was created to assess the perceived needs of those affected by large-scale emergencies, to avoid basic mistakes in resource allocation and program design as well as a way to increase accountability. Has the HESPER model of perceived need ever been used in your field of
work with people? If so, what was the biggest benefit of this model in working with the people?

Hugo Slim

1. As an employee of the ICRC, how do you think the Accountability to Affected People (AAP) Framework, has helped humanitarians use their power responsibly and be held accountable to those affected by their work?

2. How does the role of humanitarian ethics play into the concept of “accountability to affected populations?”

3. You mention in your article, “People power in humanitarian action” that for humanitarian organizations to work ethically, they must work diagnostically with people on problems and solutions. Do you have an example of a humanitarian setting where this diagnostic model was successfully put in place?

4. In February 2019, the Center for Global Development created a workshop to explore constraints to progress and develop priorities for future reforms where they found that accountability and participation are ultimately issues of who wields power and influence over key resources and decisions. So, from your experience, in a humanitarian context, who would you say holds the most power and influence for funds, resources, and decision-making?

5. In your work of evaluating humanitarian work, what do think continues to be the biggest barrier for accountability to people as “shareholders” in their communities, instead of just simply being beneficiaries?

Appendix III
Reference List of Abbreviations

AAP ~ Accountability to affected populations

LNGO ~ local nongovernmental organizations

NNGO ~ non-national governmental organizations

INGO ~ international nongovernmental organizations

ICRC ~International Committee of the Red Cross/ Red Crescent

MSF ~ Médecins Sans Frontiers/ Doctors Without Borders

WHO ~ World Health Organization

OCHA ~ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs