

Literature Review: Humanitarian Policy

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Denis Kennedy

University of Minnesota

Ole Jacob Sending

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Explanatory note

This review has been commissioned by the Norwegian Research Council, NORGLOBAL, in preparation for the launch of the new HUMPOL programme. The review was performed between May 1st and May 23.rd Given the time limits, the review only scratches the surface and does not pretend to cover research on humanitarian issues in any depth. We have sought to identify and describe *main* themes and trends in the literature, not to assess and adjudicate between different approaches (theoretical or methodological). While the report is a joint product, Denis Kennedy has been responsible for drafting the overall literature review and Ole Jacob Sending the section on Norwegian research on humanitarian issues.

Introduction

In the last two decades, humanitarianism has experienced tremendous growth, as both a field of endeavor and as a topic of scholarly research. In the tradition of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), humanitarianism is traditionally associated with impartial, neutral, and independent actions undertaken to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. Following on recent scholarship, this literature review defines *humanitarianism* as “the desire to relieve the suffering of distant strangers” (Barnett 2009: 622).

Humanitarianism is of tremendous consequence in contemporary global politics. Worldwide, humanitarian assistance amounts to roughly 15 billion USD annually (Global Humanitarian Assistance 2009: 1). There are roughly 2,600 international aid and development agencies plying their trade on every continent and in every corner of the globe; local and national organizations bring the number closer to 25,000 (Barnett 2008). In the public conscious, humanitarian organizations and themes are nothing short of omnipresent. On the television, on the Internet, in newspapers, and on billboards, humanitarian advertisements and humanitarian themes are among the principle modes of encounter between peoples and otherwise socially and physically distant worlds. It is little wonder, then, that scholars and commentators are placing increasing explanatory weight on humanitarianism.

Concurrent with the growth of the humanitarian sector, the field of humanitarian studies has experienced rapid development, together with its cognate fields of refugee studies and development studies. Currently, the landscape of humanitarian research consists of a handful of prominent thinktanks and centers of academic learning, including the Feinstein International Center (Tufts University, USA), the Humanitarian Policy Group (Overseas Development Institute, UK), and Humanitarian Outcomes (UK). Humanitarian-focused journals include the *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, *Refugee Studies*, and *Disasters*; scholarship is also published in mainstream academic journals ranging from *International Organization* to *Millennium* to

Voluntas. Over the last two decades, a significant number of books have also been published on the topic. This literature review concentrates on one aspect of this research, namely on a selection of important recent policy-focused articles; academic work is referenced as appropriate.

The analysis is organized around five themes; within these themes, an attempt is made to identify broad trends, key questions, and gaps in the literature:

1. Prevention and preparedness for humanitarian disasters;
2. Principled humanitarian action in conflict situations;
3. Armed violence and disarmament;
4. Future challenges for humanitarian assistance; and
5. Norwegian research.

With the exceptions noted below, most of the policy-oriented work surveyed adopts rigorous qualitative methodologies, including extensive individual and focus group interviews, electronic surveys, observations, and site visits. This research is frequently coupled with reviews of the relevant literatures. For instance, Egeland et al's 2011 OCHA-commissioned study, "To Stay and Deliver" features twelve case studies, including 6 field studies, interviews with more than 250 practitioners and policymakers, surveys of over 1100 national staff members, and a literature review. This study, referenced under *Theme 3*, is fairly representative of the typical methodology. Considerably fewer of these studies—policy or academic—adopt any sort of quantitative methodologies. Though there are exceptions to this rule, including some articles cited below, this must be recognized as a gap. In a large part, this finding reflects the considerably limited availability of data and the difficulty with which complex humanitarian issues lend themselves to measurement in the first place. As Walker and Pepper (2007) note in their quantitative study of the humanitarian funding environment, no effective methodology exists for determining humanitarian needs in any one crisis. The observation of poor data is noted elsewhere as well (Walker and Russ 2010: 14).

With respect to disciplinary approaches, the policy literature tends to defy easy categorization; if anything, it is best characterized as 'problem-solving' or practical. This is generally true of the

academic literature as well, though a fair amount of recent scholarship has come from International Relations (IR). Within this, some of the most widely cited research adopts a rationalist perspective, which tends to emphasize actors making strategic choices based on the structure of constraints and incentives. Cooley and Ron's "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action" (2002), is one of the most frequently cited examples of this approach. Cooley and Ron argue that competitive pressures and strategic logics explains the inability of aid agencies to respond satisfactorily to the arming of the refugee camps in Goma, DRC after the Rwandan genocide¹ (Cooley and Ron 2002). Carpenter's (2007; 2011) work on humanitarian advocacy network adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess network features and their impact on what types of norms are being advanced. Reflectivist approaches, concerning the importance of ideas, norms, and identities, have been somewhat less common, but this is beginning to change (e.g. Barnett 2009).

Theme 1: Prevention and preparedness for humanitarian disasters

The literature on the humanitarian response to disasters is fairly extensive. Certainly, this reflects the centrality of disaster response to humanitarian action; it relates also to the growing concern in the sector over the dual effects of climate change and population growth on disaster frequency and severity. Following the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) system, a *disaster* can be defined as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. A disaster is a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk" (FIC 2011: 4).

The issues

¹ They argue that when an organization's survival depends on making strategic choices in an uncertain market environment, its interests will be shaped, perhaps even unintentionally, by market incentives, given that to secure contracts is to stay solvent. This contributes to a lack of serious coordination among NGOs.

Disasters are a major, and increasing, problem; they have increased from under 100 natural disasters reported annually before 1975 to over 450 reported in 2000. Though better reporting is a factor, the rise in population, increased urbanization, building in risk prone areas, and climate change are all important factors (FIC 2011). On the aggregate, natural disasters affect an average of 250,000,000 people per year in the past decade; this figure has increased by an average of 50-60,000 people each decade since the early 1970s. Moreover, disasters are now more complex and destructive because of political and economic interconnectedness brought about by globalization (Webster et al. 2009).

Closely related to disaster, climate change has been the topic of a number of prominent policy studies in recent years; collectively, this body of research attempts to improve the understanding of how climate change may affect international humanitarian response. This is consequential inasmuch as, as one study puts it, “there is now sufficient scientific data to conclude, with a high degree of certainty, that the likely speed and magnitude of climate change in the 21st century will be unprecedented in human experience, posing daunting challenges of adaptation and mitigation for all life forms on the planet” (Morinière et al. 2009: 19). For some, climate change represents this generation’s ‘Cold War’ in its impact and the level of response necessary to address it. Morinière et al conclude that climate change requires a comprehensive rethinking of disaster response. First, it is clear that climate change is related to a number of other factors, including securitization, globalization, and demographic growth, that complicate its effects and have important implications for the response. Put simply, no climate consequence occurs in a vacuum. Second, climate change is slow-moving; this compels a rethinking of the traditional conception of disasters as sudden onset, requiring in turn a more holistic view of human vulnerability. Finally, the report makes clear that though there is considerable scientific evidence to support climate change predictions, there is insufficient interaction between climate change negotiators and the humanitarian community; there is wisdom, but little leadership.

These conclusions are ratified by a recent (2009) study from the Feinstein International Center (FIC) on climate change’s impact on humanitarian spending. Using mixed methodologies, including quantitative analysis, it finds that climate change will yield significant increases in

costs. Estimates range from a 32% best case scenario, or USD 57 million (in which the only change is in frequency of disasters), to a worst case 1600% increase, USD 2.7 billion (factoring in intensity of disaster). Even conservative estimates suggest that far more resources will be needed even to maintain present levels of disaster response (Webster et al. 2009).

Demographic trends represent another area of disaster research. A 2009 study on “Demographic Trends and their Humanitarian Impacts” argues that one of the most significant events of the last century was the unprecedented growth of world population, from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 6.1 billion in 2000, most coming after World War II. 86% of this growth took place in developing countries; today, virtually all of the 82 million yearly population growth occurs in developing countries (Haub 2009). Demographic growth is intimately related to disaster response inasmuch as it portends rises in urbanization, resource exhaustion, and inhabitation of marginal areas. The threat is of mass casualties.

The response

On the NGO side, research has been devoted to case studies of NGO operations in disaster situations (Webster et al. 2009; FIC 2011). The general view of these reports is that preparedness has improved, but aid providers are still not adequately coordinated in their disaster response. On the recipient side, affected communities are insufficiently, if at all, mobilized in to support response efforts.

On the donor side, several major studies have examined humanitarian funding, which consistently lags behind needs. The most comprehensive study is Walker and Pepper’s “Follow the Money,” a 2007 FIC report on disaster response funding. Walker and Pepper find that of an estimated USD 4-5 billion, roughly equal parts are disbursed to each of the Red Cross, NGOs, and the UN; NGOs in turn deliver the lion’s share of emergency assistance (58%) as UN and Red Cross funds are then subcontracted out (Walker and Pepper 2007). Dollar-wise, the figures sound impressive; however, aid is rarely distributed according to need. As recently as 2007, half of all humanitarian aid went to Iraq, Sudan, Palestine, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Less visible crisis zones frequently suffer from donor apathy.

For instance, the Zimbabwe (2004) and Zambia (2007) flash floods received only 14% and 12% of needed funds (Walker and Pepper 2007; Global Humanitarian Assistance 2009). Compared to relief efforts, disaster response receives only limited international funding; one study finds that only 5-10% of bilateral funding is earmarked for disaster relief response (FIC 2011).

Finally, concerning host state responsibilities, studies observe that aid agencies all too often neglect the central role of the state; “neutrality and independence have been taken as shorthand for disengagement from state structures, rather than necessitating principled engagement with them” (Harvey 2009). This comment characterizes the literature, as well; most studies are almost entirely focused on NGO response to disaster, often to the neglect of the host state. Harvey argues that host states should invest their own resources in responding to and preventing disasters—it is ethically right, politically popular, and economically effective. It could be argued as well that the policy literature should invest more time in studying the other actors engaged in disaster response.

Conclusions

Disaster response, especially climate change, has received increasing attention in the policy oriented literature. If predictions are correct, one implication of climate change research is that funding needs will rise tremendously in coming decades; this poses concerns at a time in which humanitarian funding has begun to level off. This portends increasing pressure on aid agencies to act efficiently and in a coordinated fashion. A second implication is that analyses of disaster response need to do more to examine the interconnectedness of disaster and other aspects of human vulnerability, including environmental, political, and security factors. To date, these issues have been mentioned, but not comprehensively analyzed (C.f. Duffield 2001). This means seriously engaging with issues of political power and influence.

Another recurring theme is the lack of quality data. As Webster et al put it, “a critical finding is that, for a profession that deals every day in life-and-death decisions and the allocation of scarce resources, there is a stunning paucity of rigorous data upon which to judge the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of humanitarian response” (Webster et al. 2009: 10). This is related to

the vagueness of the concept ‘disaster’ itself, which one study called “too all-encompassing” for specific programming (FIC 2011). Productive future research would certainly include greater collaboration between humanitarian and scientific communities.

Theme 2: Principled humanitarian action in conflict situations²

Since the end of the Cold War, the humanitarian community has devoted considerable time and energy formulating and debating humanitarian principles. Post September 11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, these issues have taken on considerable urgency in light of three trends: 1.) increased military involvement in humanitarianism; 2.) concerns about securing independent humanitarian action in conflict zones; and 3.) violence and human security. The literature is large and well-developed in this area; the following summary only scratches the surface.

Growth of the field and principles

The field of humanitarianism has undergone a dramatic transformation since the late 1980s, fueled by growth in the number of organizations and expansion in the scope and nature of missions. One of the most noteworthy trends has been the rise of rights-based and avowedly activist humanitarianism (Hopgood 2006; Kennedy 2005; Minear 2002). In David Chandler’s estimation, we are witnessing the end of a strict separation between strategic ends-based state assistance and needs-based NGO activism. Chandler links Human Rights “solidarity” humanitarianism to Oxfam in Britain and MSF in France; these trends accelerated during the mid 1980s and after, reinforcing a new international system based on long term capacity building (Chandler 2002). Mission expansion in turn has created tensions between those who advocate for a limited humanitarian role—care as pre-political, based in charity, and minimalist—and perhaps the majority, who link humanitarianism to broader notions of human progress, engage in consequentialist analysis, and focus on root causes. This relates also to the intersection of humanitarian relief and development.

² This section covers, as per the Terms of Reference for this review, the following issues: Protection of civilians, the situation for women in war and conflict, humanitarian space, international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.

The growth in the sector and the response to certain crises—notably Rwanda (1994), but also the Southeast Asian Tsunami (2004)—has precipitated efforts among aid workers to elaborate common values and standards. This has been done most notably with codes and quality initiatives like the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief and the Sphere Project. The NGO Code of Conduct had at its heart “an assumption that there is a shared set of core values” (Walker and Russ 2010: 15). For humanitarian scholars, professionalization and regulation herald evolution in the field; the FIC’s “Ambiguity and Change” report indicates that “the sector is maturing with a growing number of technical standards, charters and codes to guide its activities for increased effectiveness and accountability” (Borel et al. 2004: 2). Studies on humanitarian principles tend to assume the presence of a meaningful “global humanitarian community” that is bound by standards and linked by technology and networking (E.g. Walker and Russ 2010). But to what extent can we say that a humanitarian community actually exists?

Military involvement and integration

Since September 11, 2001, a key driver for research on humanitarian principles is the increasing involvement of military personnel in humanitarian work, represented most clearly by the concept of *integration*. Integration has four principal components: comprehensive mission planning, strategies to achieve outcomes, evaluation of the humanitarian impact of decisions, and joint assessment of operations as they unfold (Forster 2005). The goal of integration and mission coordination is to improve the responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency of international humanitarian relief and crisis response. It involves coordination and cooperation in the planning and use of military and civil defense assets in humanitarian operations. On a state level, integration also represents the potential for tighter control over operations. On a more abstract level, the push to integrate can help remind state actors that humanitarian crises are primarily political problems requiring a political solution, not just a humanitarian band aid. The benefits of integration and coordination for humanitarian actors are less apparent, but they include enhanced access to certain combat areas, the potential for increased state funding, and military protection in crisis zones. Efficiency, of course, appeals to aid agencies as well, given that saving time and effort may mean better helping the final beneficiaries.

Reports indicate that the relationship between the military and humanitarians has changed significantly in the last decade as the military has expanded its missions to encompass support for humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts and civilian protection (Wheeler and Harmer 2006; Barry and Jefferys 2002). As a paper by Antonio Donini puts it, “the extreme politicization, militarization, and instrumentalization of the aid environment, the narrowing of humanitarian space, insecurity for aid workers, and vitriolic or nationalistic attacks against aid agencies are deeply affecting the ways humanitarian agencies operate on the ground” (Donini 2010: 2). Donini and Wheeler’s studies highlight a situation in which there is limited interest in principled humanitarian action by Coalition forces, where humanitarian actors are pressured into mission supporting roles, and in which Afghans have difficulty distinguishing between actors.

International humanitarian law

The research on international humanitarian law (IHL) could easily fill a literature review in its own right. IHL is the branch of international law concerned with limiting the use of violence in armed conflicts by “a) sparing those who do not or no longer directly participate in hostilities; b) restricting it to the amount necessary to achieve the aim of the conflict, which—independently of the causes fought for—can only be to weaken the military potential of the enemy” (Sassòli, Bouvier, and Quintin 2011: 1). Two of the most influential books on the topic are Michael Byers’ *War Law* (2005) and Michael Walzer’s *Just and Unjust Wars* (2000). Both provide historic perspectives on the laws of war; Byers offers a highly readable overview of UN action, self-defense, humanitarian intervention, and law during conflict while Walzer advances a moral argument about proper conduct in war. There are also more specific contributions on the origins and evolution of humanitarian law proper (Carey et al. 2003; 2006).

One of the more important recent debates in IHL addresses the *responsibility to protect* (R2P), which is the idea that sovereignty is contingent on state behavior. R2P embodies the idea that state sovereignty implies the responsibility of a state for its people, and when a state is unable or unwilling to stop serious harm to its population, sovereignty yields to the international responsibility to protect (ICISS 2001). R2P has remained a controversial topic in the decade

since the original report was published; Byers deems it well-intentioned, but abstract in its principles (Byers 2005: 107); other studies have questioned whether R2P in fact implies the dangerous imposition of liberal norms of intervention globally, with the US-led invasion of Iraq as exhibit A (Chandler 2004; Bellamy 2005). Indeed, as the debate over NATO actions in Libya and the lack of authorization for similar actions in Syria demonstrates, questions of who decides what constitutes breach and who intervenes are scarcely more resolved than when R2P was first proposed.

Whither independence and impartiality?

In spite of the potential for efficiency gains, integration remains a controversial topic. Notably, it forces tough, even existential, choices on humanitarian actors. Humanitarian identity has traditionally been exemplified by the linked values of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Neutrality signifies not taking sides in a conflict; impartiality implies nondiscrimination in the provision of relief; and independence means action outside of state interests and control. The encroachment of military and political actors into ‘humanitarian space’ thus remains a significant preoccupation of the policy literature. Donini argues that the result is that there is little understanding of, and respect for, humanitarian principles by insurgents who are able to paint the UN and NGOs with the occupiers’ brush. Barry and Jefferys suggest that impartiality is fundamentally at issue; military actors can never be impartial in the humanitarian sense, not least because aid is only delivered where these actors have a presence—in areas of strategic interest. They also question the effectiveness of assistance delivered by the military in the absence of corroborating evidence (Barry and Jefferys 2002).

From the earliest stages, humanitarians were given space to operate on the condition of neutrality. Though reality has rarely matched this ideal, it has worked well, to a point. Integration and coordination appear to threaten the traditional image of humanitarian action as independent relief not tied to state power and interests. Beyond the very real specter of violence, the shrinking of humanitarian space has also heralded a serious identity crisis among humanitarian workers and military personnel, alike. Integrating aid agencies challenges the

humanitarian self-image as external actors *challenging* political authority. Humanitarians, in this view, hold states accountable; they are free from all parties.

Human security

There are two implications of military involvement in humanitarian affairs. The first is the suspected link between politicized humanitarianism and violence against aid workers. This claim is investigated in greater detail below (*Theme 3*). The second implication has to do with whether military involvement actually improves security outcomes for affected populations. There are several recent studies on this topic; the findings do not provide much cause for optimism. A 2004 FIC study on human security in Afghanistan found that international perceptions often failed to match the conditions on the ground. In particular, areas of Afghanistan considered High or Medium Risk (based on attacks against expats) are often areas of security for local populations; conversely, areas deemed permissive for NGOs and the UN are often areas where local populations experience high levels of conflict and insecurity at the hands of armed political groups and warlords. This study and others suggest that local populations—in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Sierra Leone—define security based on their levels of *human security*, including access to health care, education, and economic opportunities (FIC 2004; Donini et al. 2005). Put differently, perceptions of security differ significantly among actors. For the military, security entails force protection; for local populations, safety includes human security. Another study calls into question the effectiveness of the ‘hearts and minds’ strategy—projects intended to win over a crucial population by influencing local perceptions—though case analysis in Kenya and Afghanistan (Bradbury and Kleinman 2010).

Protection of civilians and women

Although discussed separately here for purpose of analysis, research relating to the protection of civilians and women are intimately linked to the wider study of international humanitarian law. Indeed, the distinction between civilians and combatants is a core principle of IHL (Sassòli, Bouvier, and Quintin 2011). The policy-oriented literature is broad in scope; as a general statement, key concerns tend to be with assessing proportionality of response and protection of civilians in the context of innovations in the practice and technology of warfare. For instance, a

recent article by Michael Schmitt (2005) assesses the impact of precision weaponry on civilian protection. *Precision weaponry* relates to the ability to locate, identify, and strike a target in a timely fashion and to determine whether the objective has been met. Whereas precision attack is often heralded as a possible solution to the problem of collateral damage, Schmitt argues that it may raise also expectations and provide incentive for combatants to reinterpret humanitarian law. In other words, precision cannot replace judgment (Schmitt 2005). Protection is also closely linked to the theme of human security, discussed separately in this review.

Women receive specific attention in the protection of civilian literature, for reasons explained by Judith Gardam in her review of gender and IHL; namely, women are the major victims of conflict situations and they experience conflict in a different way given their higher rates of poverty and frequent exclusion from power structures. Gardam argues that IHL, and specifically the Geneva Conventions, provide little indication that women experience specific difficulties in war by focusing exclusively on sexual violence, pregnant women, and mothers (Gardam 1998; c.f. Durham 2002). This inattention to gender appears to have changed for the better in recent years, thanks in a large part to the work of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). UNIFEM is one of the single largest sources of policy-oriented literature on women in conflict; recent studies have targeted sexual violence, gender and disarmament, and women's land and property rights (UNIFEM 2010, 2004a, 2001). A number of recent studies have focused on one aspect of this shift, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which attempts to redefine international frameworks to recognize that war has become highly gendered. Resolution 1325 seeks to strengthen protection of women in conflict, involve women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding, and strengthen the focus on gender justice (UNIFEM 2004b; Black 2009). Left unquestioned is whether attention to vulnerable women (and children) may paradoxically weaken norms on the protection of male noncombatants (Carpenter 2005).

Conclusions

Security and humanitarian relief is one of the more well-tilled areas of the policy literature; the outline above only sketches the outlines. This is not to say that questions do not endure. For starters, the literature is preoccupied with the belief that military action threatens impartial

humanitarian action. However, military integration is hardly the only constraint on NGO impartiality; NGO reliance on state funding is at least as significant. It would be productive to link studies on integration with those on funding—in conflict zones, does state funding of NGOs influence humanitarian outcomes? Is there an upside to integration? Second, it is difficult to find a positive argument for integration in the policy literature; and yet, these issues are unlikely to disappear. Is a productive dialogue possible? Finally, concerning principles, one of the implications of the literature is that it may be time for a rethinking of humanitarian values given the extent to which humanitarianism and development have converged. There is clearly a need for additional research on ideas and identities in humanitarian action, and analysis as to whether values have shifted as organizational logics, including funding, bureaucratization, and professionalization, have manifested themselves in the sector.

Theme 3: Armed violence and disarmament

The literature on armed violence and disarmament is not entirely distinct from the previous. As a general statement, among academics and policymakers alike, there is newfound preoccupation with state failure, irregular troops, and ease of access to weapons in the global South. Together, these constitute the conditions for “complex humanitarian emergencies,” conflicts owing to multiple causes, featuring multiple local actors, and compelling an international response. These preoccupations signal a change in the security problematic; as Mark Duffield writes, security is increasingly about managing underdevelopment and transition (Duffield 2001; Barnett 2008).

Operating in insecure environments

One branch of the literature addresses agency operational practices in insecure environments. This follows from the perception highlighted above that violence against aid workers has increased in recent years. This raises questions concerning the links between politicized humanitarianism and violence, such as in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion in 2001.

By far the most comprehensive study on this topic, Stoddard and Harmer’s recent “Supporting Security for Humanitarian Action” (2010) combines a literature review with interviews to examine aid agency responses to insecurity. They find that for each of the last three years, more

than 200 aid workers were killed, kidnapped, or seriously wounded in the field. These numbers are striking; however, they suggest that security is not declining *worldwide*; only in a handful of highly charged conflict environments—Afghanistan, Somalia, and Darfur—has violence has been particularly severe. Aid agencies and donor governments are increasingly investing effort promoting good practice in organizational security. To date, there is considerable variation among actors in their preparedness and high costs depending on the theatre (Stoddard and Harmer 2010).

This study follows on Stoddard et al’s 2006 study on “Providing aid in insecure environments,” which was the culmination of a two year empirical analysis of the claims of increasing violence against aid workers. The study found that though the absolute number of acts of violence had increased, this rise was largely consistent with the corresponding rise in aid workers in the field from 1997-2005. Still, absolute violence had increased against national Red Cross and Red Crescent workers and both absolute and relative levels of violence had increased towards NGO workers. This violence is often targeted, not incidental. However, regression analyses failed to find strong correlation to factors such as the presence of a UN ‘integrated mission’, interventions by major state powers, or the presence of terrorist cells (Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver 2006).

In terms of concrete security practices in these zones, these studies acknowledge the trend towards professionalization and systematization since the late 1990s. Stoddard et al (2006) and Egeland et al (2011) have published detailed studies on the topic; both highlight the decline in strategies of *active acceptance* (involving cultivating the aid agency as a familiar and trusted entity in the host community and maintaining lines of communication with parties to a conflict) in highly unstable areas and the rise in low-profile or clandestine modes of programming, specifically the increasing reliance on local and national partners. This has entailed a shifting of the burden, and the risk, to local actors. Egeland et al emphasize the downsides of “bunkerization”—aid operations hiding behind barricades and fortifications. The key, they suggest, is not to avoid risk, but to find effective means of adapting.

There is a relative dearth of studies on humanitarian disarmament and its possible effect on security in specific settings. Stites and Akabwai's (2009) detailed case study on disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda stands as an exception to the rule. This research analyzes the role of disarmament policies on livelihood systems in northeastern Uganda. Combining semi-structured focus group interviews and field site visits and drawing on previous research the study concludes that though disarmament presents obvious benefits for enhancing security, to be effective it must be combined with tools that address the factors underpinning the violence, including poverty, marginalization, and livelihood loss. Disarmament as practiced in Karamoja has had the support of local populations; however, as implemented, without a supporting program, it has had deleterious outcomes for human security. These problems include increased insecurity for communities, stripping of assets, shifts in gender roles, and an increase in attacks on communities (Stites and Akabwai 2009).

Conclusions

Considering the relative lack of studies on disarmament, this appears to be an area that requires additional research. As Stites and Akabwai note, disarmament has logical attractiveness—without guns, gun violence should decline—however, they suggest that disarmament alone is not sufficient to achieve security. In particular, attention should be paid to the relationship between disarmament and protection, a concept that has taken on increasing importance in recent years as humanitarians contemplate the linkages between aid and human security.

The research on securing aid workers has additional implications. For instance, Stoddard et al observe that different actors (military, NGOs, local communities) have different understandings of security. When we consider the increasing engagement of the military and for-profits in humanitarianism, we should recognize the extent to which different values—and different motives—may yield different results in the field. After all, fulfilling a mission or fulfilling a contract is different from acting out of a principled belief in human dignity. If military or commercial aid suppliers are risk-averse, how are security practices likely to change? Moreover,

is security the most productive lens through which to approach relief in conflict situations?
What sorts of practices does a security discourse enable?

Theme 4: Future challenges for humanitarian assistance

The preceding literature brought to the fore a set of contemporary issues in international humanitarian relief. It also hinted at questions that are likely to endure in the future, including globalization, climate change, and population growth. In fact, a significant portion of the policy literature is preoccupied with anticipating future humanitarian challenges. This section focuses on analyses of current and anticipated trends in the organization of the sector, highlighting networks, sector leadership, and future drives towards rulemaking, specialization, and professionalization. For many of the studies below, the hope is that research will “help to clarify and support organizational change within the humanitarian sector so that organizations can increase effectiveness and efficiency, ultimately improving the lives of their beneficiaries while balancing local needs and global realities” (Webster et al. 2009: 5).

What is coordination and why is it seen as necessary? A recent study on “Humanitarian Coordination” (2008) defines *coordination* as a “systematic utilization of policy instruments to deliver humanitarian assistance in a cohesive and effective manner” (ATHA 2008). Properly realized, coordinated humanitarian action can achieve the twin goals of saving lives and relieving suffering, and development coordination can provide partner countries with the tools to achieve long-term improvements in living conditions. Coordination is an ongoing concern; given the aforementioned scarcity of financial resources relative to humanitarian disasters, it is seen as vital that organizations coordinate in order to achieve efficiency gains in cost, labor, and resources. Moreover, rarely are single organizations large enough to act on their own. As NGOs continue to grow in number and importance, the demand for coordination is likely to grow in parallel (Borel et al. 2004; ATHA 2008).

Networks

There is no true “leader” of the humanitarian system. Though the UN, Red Cross, and donor states regularly play motivating roles in various circumstances, the sector more properly

resembles a complex web of global networks. These include a network of United Nations agencies, in which essential coordination functions are assigned to the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the Humanitarian Coordinators at the country level. A second network encompasses the Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement, and includes coordination mechanisms between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. A third network consists of non-governmental organizations linked through three main groupings: InterAction, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR). There is a great deal of overlap among these networks (ATHA 2008).

The complicated nature of this system, in particular the lack of clear lines of responsibility, led to the development of the “cluster approach” in December 2005. The cluster approach was initially applied to nine sectors of humanitarian response; it sought to develop partnerships in key sectors of humanitarian response and to formalize the lead role of particular agencies in these sectors. For instance, the IFRC plays the lead role in the emergency shelter cluster; the World Health Organization heads the health cluster (Stoddard et al. 2007; ATHA 2008). A 2007 OCHA evaluation concluded that despite a troubled rollout process, the cluster approach has yielded systematic improvement in coordinated humanitarian response, though progress has been uneven across country cases and clusters. Overall, the authors find that the benefits (including identifying coverage gaps and fostering stronger leadership) exceed the costs (no improvement in accountability, weakness in partnerships) (Stoddard et al. 2007).

NGOs: Large agencies lead by default?

The humanitarian field has various centers. On a general level, we might speak of the global North (including DAC donors and key organizations). Speaking of the northern dominance of the humanitarian enterprise, Donini (2007) argues that “the official humanitarian enterprise remains a select club in which the rules are set by a rather peculiar set of players who are generally far-removed from the realities of the people they purport to help” (2).

Breaking this down further, we can identify a de facto oligopoly of 7-8 major humanitarian organizations that wield disproportionate influence. These organizations dominate the funding, the airwaves, and the quality and accountability initiatives. Indeed, “what is often portrayed as an unseemly NGO “scramble”... may in reality be evolving into somewhat less of a free-for-all.” Though there are hundreds of NGOs, roughly 75 percent of their humanitarian spending flows through fewer than fifteen large international NGOs (Borel et al 2004: 64; see also Walker and Pepper 2007: 1-5). These organizations include CARE, CRS, Save the Children, WVI, Oxfam, MSF, Mercy Corps, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Borel et al report that the increase in the size of NGOs and the consolidation of their numbers is likely to increase.

The future: Rulemaking, professionalization, and specialization

The past two decades has seen a trend in the humanitarian sector towards professionalization and the elaboration of sector-wide standards, including the Code of Conduct and the Sphere Minimum Standards. This trend appears likely to continue; however, it bears recognizing that there are important divisions within the sector. Sections of the humanitarian community, notably Oxfam and other British organizations, wish to see a tighter, more rule-based community emerge, one in which NGOs are held to performance standards and made fully accountable for their programs. Other organizations, especially Médecins Sans Frontières and the francophone agencies, remain suspicious of initiatives that, they fear, will create rigid, lowest-common-denominator standards and open the door to the manipulation of aid by donor governments (Stoddard 2002).

A second trend that is likely to continue is towards increased professionalization in the sector. *Professionalization*, which is associated with “high personal standards in the working context,” is the subject of a recent study from ELRHA (Enhanced Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance). This study intends the creation of a professional association which it sees as the logical culmination of the Code of Conduct (Walker and Russ 2010).

A final organizational trend is towards increased specialization among aid agencies—in other words, towards de facto organization of the sector. This has been given a boost by the cluster approach and is likely to continue. Although most NGOs conduct programs across sectors, most occupy specific operational niches, such as CARE in food delivery and logistics, MSF in health, Oxfam in water and sanitation, and Save the Children on the needs of children (Stoddard 2002).

Conclusions

For all of the analysis of professionalization and coordination, one finds surprisingly little questioning about whether these trends have yielded a better or more effective humanitarian sector (C.f. Donini 2007). Related, though there has been a proliferation of quality and accountability initiatives, what effect have these had on the field? Few studies do more than look at individual initiatives. And what alternative approaches to humanitarian relief will emerge? Notably, faith-based organizations remain little studied; nor have southern NGOs received significant attention, even as their numbers have grown tremendously. In light of shifting geopolitical currents, including the rise to prominence of the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), this remains a glaring gap in the literature.

Theme 5: Norwegian contributions

There is quite a lot of Norwegian research on issues that are pertinent to humanitarian issues but that are not, strictly speaking, about humanitarian issues. A case in point is the literature on state building, peace building and fragile states, whose central objective is to describe and account for how external actors operate, whether they succeed or not, why, and what to do about it (Bøås 2009; Rolandsen 2009; Vebersvik 2006; Suhrke 2011). This research is relevant for an understanding of the challenges also facing humanitarian actors inasmuch as they, too, are “external” actors often operating in a post-conflict setting. This literature points to the importance of understanding the political character of the context in which humanitarian actors operate, something that is often lacking in the extensive evaluation literature on humanitarian relief. The same can be said of studies of the living conditions among refugee populations: such

research is central because it provides much-needed facts about the living conditions of those that humanitarian actors are there to help (Blome Jacobsen 2003). The general point to be made is that research on humanitarian issues is characterized by a bifurcation between in-depth empirical evaluation of specific projects and organizations (Brusset 2002), on the one hand, and by more theoretically driven analyses of the political, and politicized, context within which humanitarian actors are operating, on the other (cf Taylor 2006; Reid-Henry 2011).

Research on prevention of and preparedness for humanitarian disaster has been principally linked to natural disasters, some of which relates to a more recent trend to look at humanitarian disasters stemming from climate change. A central finding here is that there is far too little investment in the prevention of and preparedness for disasters (Stokke 2007). A related research area is the more general one of disaster and risk management, some of which are relevant to humanitarian questions (Olsen and Scharffscher 2004; Scharffscher 2010). Here, insights from organizational theory and management are brought to bear on how humanitarian organizations operate. This research forms part also of an international trend – cited above – where measuring performance and securing accountability for funds is considered increasingly important (Riksrevisionen 2008).

There is a sizeable literature on the living conditions of refugees and the findings from these studies are important in their own right (COSIT 2005).³ In order to improve on humanitarian assistance, such surveys could preferably be linked up more closely with detailed, and more theoretically informed, analyses of the limits and challenges that external actors face in taking over governmental responsibilities, often for extended periods of time. The same challenge can be said to hold for linking existing knowledge from the field of public health to social scientific analyses. Studies of reproductive health in refugee camps (Bjertness and Kristensen 2010), for example, could very well be used as a basis for social scientific analyses of how refugee camps shape cultural norms. Less voluminous yet quite significant research is nonetheless done on the practical challenges of translating moral universals of IHL into actionable categories and rules of thumb among practitioners (Sandvik 2011).

³ For an overview, see FAFO's reports: www.faf.no

In Norwegian public discourse, “humanitarian” has a broad and a narrow meaning. A narrow, analytical meaning concerns humanitarian principles and humanitarian relief. A broader meaning is used to describe Norwegian foreign policy more generally. In the context of such a broader meaning of “humanitarian”, there are several studies that situates, and critiques, the values of humanitarianism and their place within a political project. Key examples include Tvedt (2002) on elite circulation and Østerud’s (2006) critique of Norwegian foreign policy.

Perhaps the most well-known research on humanitarian issues is that which concerns how humanitarian actors receive, manages and distributes funds. Here, a central concern has been accountability vis a vis donors, and the minimization of fiduciary risks (Groth 1998; Bauck et al 2005; Brusset 2002). A related theme is the nature and effectiveness of humanitarian logistical mechanisms, and the coordination of humanitarian relief (Kruke and Olsen 2005; Cosgrave and Lægreid 2008; Strand 2003). Similarly, there is a long tradition of studies of refugees, one example being FAFO’s studies of living conditions among Palestinian refugees dating back to the early 1990s.⁴ There is also some research on displacement and forced migration (Horst 2006), on the gaps between legal rights and their fulfillment for IDPs (Fadnes 2008), and on how refugee return impact on conflict dynamics (Harpviken 2009). In general, both the literature on refugees and that on coordination and effectiveness has tended to focus on specific organizations or countries. There has been comparatively little effort to link findings from sub-themes under the humanitarian umbrella to more overarching questions about the character and changes in the humanitarian system.

The literature on humanitarian issues as they pertain to UN peace operations has expanded considerably over the last few years. The study of UN “integrated missions” from 2005 is a case in point, as it brought debates about organizational reform at the UN and the concept of “humanitarian space” to the forefront of research efforts (Eide et al. 2005; Jennings and Kaspersen 2008). Research on the implications for humanitarian work of the COIN strategy employed in Afghanistan can also be located here. The research on the protection of civilians

⁴ FAFO Refugee Working Group, <http://www.fafon.no/IsesWeb/Projects.htm>

(PoC) is slightly different in that it covers a larger set of issues – ranging from different meanings of PoC as a task for peacekeepers (de Carvalho and Lie 2011) to R2P (Stamnes 2009). Two main trends should be highlighted: First, there has been a tendency to focus on single case studies rather than proper comparisons: We know quite a lot about the evolution of PoC practices within the UN mission in the DR Congo, but little about how and why it differs from other UN missions. Second, there are quite a few studies that trace how a given policy – on PoC, say – is implemented at the country level (Kjeksrud and Aasland 2010), but there has been little research on the political, organizational and cultural factors that help “frame” how humanitarian issues are perceived by non-humanitarian and humanitarian actors alike.

Research on vulnerable groups – women and children in particular – has been also grown considerably over the last few years, especially after UNSC 1325 (Skjeie et al 2008; Solheim et al 2010; Tryggestad 2009). The emphasis on UNSC Resolution 1325 is a prime example of how a single yet ambiguous concept has allowed for a variety of distinct approaches (Jennings 2008; Stensland and Sending 2011). Studies of international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights remains a central concern: While humanitarianism is said to be apolitical and universal, studies document how human rights norms are central to humanitarian action directly or indirectly, with potentially far-reaching consequences for the integrity and claimed universality of humanitarian action. Here, legal issues are central, and a key point in this literature – however scarce it may be – is that legal rules are not uniformly applied, nor is it clear how they always should be applied in UN peace operations, say (Larsen and Harlem 2009). Similarly, there is legally oriented research on the efforts undertaken to ban certain forms of ammunition (humanitarian disarmament) (Nystuen 2009). Of less direct relevance for humanitarian relief yet still significant for the context in which humanitarian work is done is the research on transitional justice, where breaches of international humanitarian law is brought into the peace- and reconciliation process (García-Godos 2008).

Conclusions

Norwegian research on humanitarian issues is fragmented. There is a sizeable literature on different key aspects of humanitarian relief and humanitarian policy. Similarly, humanitarian issues as they pertain to conflicts and attendant efforts of conflict management, and some work

on prevention and disasters. There is also a bulk of literature that sits at the interstices of humanitarian values and human rights, a case in point being PoC and work done under the heading of UNSC 1325. However, there are few studies that takes on the structural features of humanitarianism, or that engages in systematic comparisons between countries, organizations, or refugee situations. This is in part explained by the challenges of gathering empirical data in humanitarian emergencies. But it also has to do with the fact that most of the research has to date been funded by donor institutions, and with the specialization of academic research into sub-themes (i.e. refugees, disarmament, coordination, IHL) that is not integrated with each other. Finally, there is scarcely little genuinely inter-disciplinary research.

Conclusions

This literature review has sought to provide an overview of the policy research on humanitarian issues as specified in the ToR. The body of research has grown by leaps and bounds. However, it is clear that significant gaps remain in the public knowledge of humanitarianism. First, several studies have noted the lack of available data upon which to make policy decisions. For instance, Stoddard et al's study on security practices (2006) complicated previous, largely anecdotal work on aid violence, by differentiating between rates of violence in different theatres. Simultaneously, there is a need for more rigorous theoretical work. Many of the essential issues related to aid and development derive from basic questions of power—such as that exercised by donors over NGOs and NGOs over local communities—and identity—including questions of

principles and institutional arrangements. Moreover, it is readily apparent that, of the available research, detailed case studies predominate to the detriment of more comparative and systemic analysis. For instance, much of the research on aid in conflict zones has focused specifically on Afghanistan. Systemic, theory-driven research would provide opportunities for linking together individual studies into larger narratives, something that appears invaluable given the extent to which seemingly discrete events, e.g. disasters or violence, are actually rooted in larger webs of significance. As the sector evolves, it seems important that research be able to track new actors and institutional arrangements as well. This seems especially important when considering that the humanitarian system has no centre – no dominant actor. We have also noted the gaps in knowledge of local and faith-based NGOs. The same can be said about non-OECD donors, but studies are emerging that look at the role Saudi Arabia, for example (Al-Yahya and Furstier 2011). And then there are the structural features of the governance of humanitarian relief: How does the networked character of humanitarian governance affect its effectiveness? Who is in a position to shape the agenda and define best practice? How do humanitarian practices change over time – through incremental change, innovation, or “muddling through”?

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