



The Alan Shawn Feinstein International Famine Center

Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future

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DIGEST

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“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.”
Edmund Burke

The Shape of the Report

The essential optimism of the humanitarian enterprise, properly grounded and reinforced by effective programming, offers an important antidote to the prevailing “gloom and doom” approach to futuring. Evidence-based and value-informed advocacy can influence many of the key trends discussed below, especially the policy response of states and interstate bodies. Through the judicious use of resources as well as through focused expertise, NGOs can shape, as well as be shaped, by the future. This study explores four critical hypotheses concerning the future of NGO humanitarian action.

Hypothesis one: The hazards environment of disasters and crises will become more complex and subject to an increasing number of major jolts. Disasters and crises will be more frequent and extreme. Evidence for this hypothesis is explored in Section 1, Global Hazards Landscape,

Hypothesis two: The political environment within which NGOs operate will in all likelihood continue to curtail NGO independence and constrain humanitarian impartiality. (Section 2, the International Political and Policy Landscape)

Hypothesis three: NGOs as a phenomenon are here to stay but will be increasingly challenged by the tensions of thinking globally while acting locally as well as acting as service providers for the state while remaining non-governmental in nature. (Section 3, the Non Governmental Landscape).

Hypothesis four: While NGOs have shown little evidence of a desire or ability to think and plan strategically over periods longer than typical budget cycles, the evidence for hypotheses one through three suggests they urgent need to do so, taking control of their own futures to the extent possible. (Section 4, Implications for the Future)

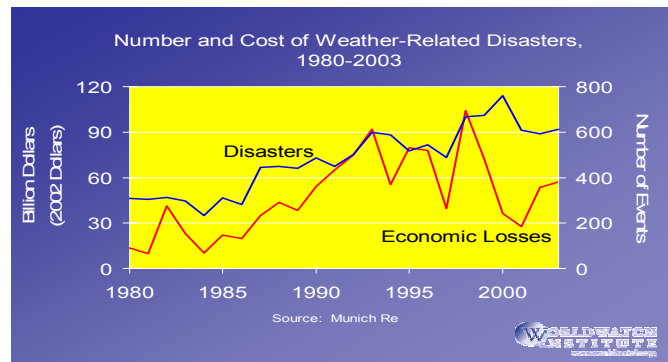
Section 1: Global Hazards Landscape

There are many hazards that one could map to predict the future: food security, water availability, conflict, technological innovation, demographics, and so on. This list is, quite literally, endless. We have taken four blocks of hazard determinants which we believe will be important to the humanitarian future. They are offered more as examples of the types of changes and consequences that humanitarian NGOs need to be aware of rather than as predictions or descriptions of the future.

The Environmental Hazardscape

By far the most serious hazard in the environmental landscape is posed by climate change; both in its certainty and its uncertainty. The devastation from flooding is often compounded by preexisting environmental conditions such as deforestation or farming on steep hill sides that leads to

additional flooding and/or mudslides and many additional deaths and injuries. Witness the recent horrendous loss of life in deforested Haiti from hurricane flooding compared with its forested neighbor the Dominican Republic. The flooding of the Yangtze River in 1998, which displaced over 200 million people, has been officially blamed on deforestation in the highlands of Sichuan by the Chinese government. The problem of massive flooding is likely to become more acute in the future. The UN estimates that by 2025 half of the world’s people will live in areas subject to major storms and excessive flooding. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change points to increased likelihood of episodic deluges in many parts of the world.



Similarly, and illustrating the global nature of environmental threats, the drought conditions of the Sahel are now attributable to the warming of sea surface temperatures of the Indian Ocean during the past 40 years. Since 1970 these have become a regular feature of the weather patterns of the Sahel region of Africa, occurring with increased frequency.

Snowfields and glaciers are melting at a dramatic rate due to global warming. More than 2.5 billion people worldwide depend upon these glacial systems to store water and release melt slowly throughout the dry season. The melt from the Himalayan Mountain ice fields feeds all of the great river systems of the Indian sub-continent. Loss of that feed would have disastrous consequences. At the base of many glaciers is a large and growing lake of melt water that is held in place by natural rock and ice dams. As the region warms, some of these dams will inevitably break, disgorging a wall of water that will deliver crushing destruction to millions living in the river valleys and on the plains kilometers below.

One-off megahazards, such as asteroid impact, giant tsunami-like waves caused by the catastrophic collapse of cliff faces into the sea and mega volcanic eruptions may seem like the stuff of science fiction, but they have all impacted the Earth in the past and the latter two in particular are of real future concern.

The Urban Hazardscape

Over 100 million people live in slum communities, most in the medium-sized cities of less developed countries. It is in the less developed countries and particularly in Africa where

the population growth of the next decade will largely take place. If present trends are not challenged, the rural population will flee to the city, pushed by war and the collapse of rural economies. Yet the city is also where self organized political action is most likely, where education and health services can be provided most efficiently, and where economic growth is going to happen. Crisis and opportunity meet face-to-face – the ultimate ambiguity.

Trends in urbanization and urbanism over the past decade have several prominent features, each with implications for the human condition and the humanitarian enterprise.

- Rapid urban growth, especially in Africa. The urban growth rate in Africa is the highest in the world; 5% per annum. By 2025 Africa could be more than 50% urban.
- Growth and general neglect of smaller and medium-sized urban places. Nations facing debt burdens and laboring under the constraints of structural adjustment have downsized urban services and public service employment. These cuts have been hardest for smaller cities which often lack political power at the national level.
- The growth of slums, reflecting the underside of urbanization. Some 72 percent of Africa's urban population lives in slums.
- Refugee settlements as quasi-urban places. The 1980s and 1990s saw the proliferation of very large refugee settlements which, because of their size and longevity, took on features of natural urban places. They have in effect become towns or small cities in their own right.
- Growth of urban social movements. Social movements have grown along with cities. These include organizations of homeless people, pavement dwellers, squatters, the new unemployed.
- Urban networks and the facilitation of humanitarian responses. Increased ease of transport and communication has brought such services closer to formerly isolated rural and border areas.

Four features are likely to characterize the urbanization of the future. These features represent an informal checklist for strategic planning by NGOs and other major actors.

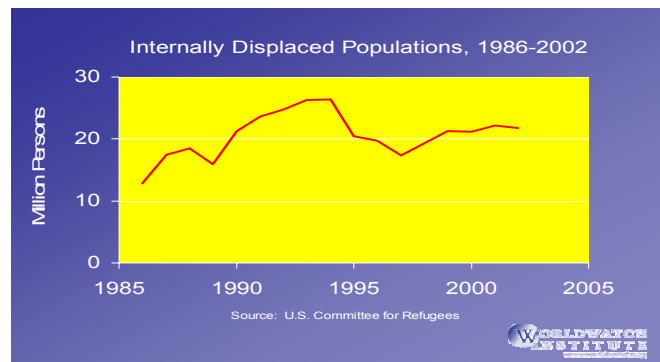
1. The coming years are likely to witness a wider range and number of urban crises and disasters.
2. Combinations of natural and technological hazards and cascades of multiple natural and technological/environmental hazard events are increasingly likely.

Such cascading, complexly interacting events may be accompanied by violence, depending on the underlying stability of urban society and polity.

3. The emergence of new vulnerable groups. NGOs frequently focus their work on such groups. Some groups will likely require special attention as vulnerability to urban risks increases. These include those living with AIDS (especially in southern Africa, India, and Russia), illegal immigrants/workers, workers in export-enclave “sweat shops,” displaced persons and refugees, orphans and homeless children/ youth, war veterans, and especially former soldiers and “child soldiers” (as in Angola, Cambodia).
4. The drivers of urban change and the root causes of urbanization will become more powerful over time. The concentration of low income, vulnerable people in dangerous urban locations has many causes. More immediate drivers include the collapse of rural livelihoods, especially due to competition with U.S. and European farmers who receive enormous subsidies from their own governments.

The Migration Hazardscape

While people on the move has traditionally meant refugee crises, that is not what the future holds. Today there are some 11.9 million refugees, 24 million forcibly displaced people and some 100 million who have been displaced over the past decade by major development programs. Human trafficking is now more profitable than illegal arms sales or drug trade.



Key developments in the field of migration during the past decade bearing on the strategic planning of NGOs include the following:

- Increased number of urban refugees and IDPs, as part of the general urbanization trend discussed in the previous section.
- The emergence of new destination countries (Pacific Rim, Gulf states, South Africa) and new routes for the purposes of labor migration, trafficking and smuggling, and asylum.

- An upsurge in human trafficking, sparing no country.
- A spate of new laws and institutions, especially since 9/11, regulating migration and reduce terrorist infiltration.
- New protection and security problems facing many migrants and refugees.

One of the most significant trends in the last decade has been the feminization of migration streams that heretofore were primarily male. Recent statistics on gender distribution of international migrants indicate that fully 47.5 per cent are women. Would-be migrants and refugees now face a series of obstacles. Well before the events of September 11, 2001, they confronted anti-immigrant climates in many European countries, as well in the “new migration” countries in Latin America, Central East Europe, Asia, and South Africa. In countries of first asylum in Africa and Asia, governments have increasingly adopted restrictive refugee policies, requiring refugees to stay in camps and limiting or ending their rights to work and move around freely. Since 9/11, new security measures, reinforced by the public perception that migrants are linked to security threats, have been imposed

Destination countries face the challenge of how to combat trafficking and prevent abuse of asylum systems without jeopardizing refugee protection. As the range and types of migration flows increase, pressure on the borders of prosperous countries will rise and governments will be under growing pressure to find ways to manage their borders. For their part, sending countries face the challenge of addressing the systems of endemic poverty, conflicts, and human rights abuses that underlie much of today’s migration.

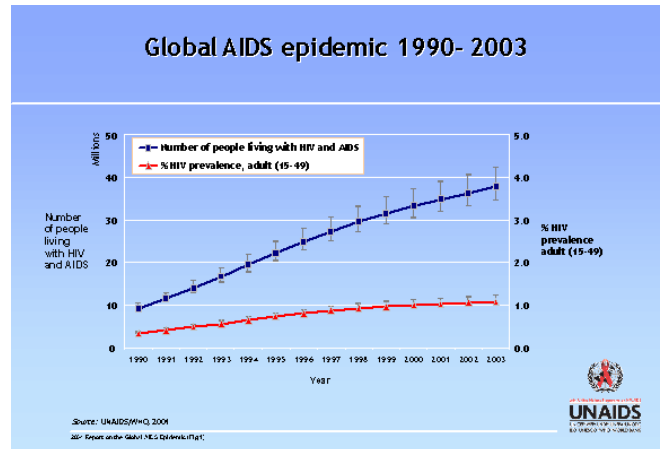
There are dark clouds on the horizon as regarding funding for migration-related activities. As the UN finds itself less able to cope with protracted situations, NGOs will need to pick up the slack, perhaps through funds mobilized from the concerned general public. UNHCR’s current budget crunch means that in some cases it asks its operational NGO partners to find their own funding to implement UNHCR programs. NGOs will need to devise new ways to respond to identified need.

The HIV/AIDS Hazardscape

The dying has only just begun. By 2015 the HIV/AIDS pandemic will be killing between 5 and 10 million people a year. It is an epidemic which seeks out the most vulnerable, those already living in destitution, economically exploited, and threatened by violence. It exacerbates the economic, life, and attitude gaps between haves and have-nots. Today, a generation into the epidemic, infection with HIV does not need to be a death sentence; antiretroviral treatment can render it a chronic disease. At its higher levels of prevalence and killing, HIV/AIDS can transform the economy and

power structure of societies, pushing them into poverty and anarchy or totalitarianism.

Yet new epidemics can be prevented and existing epidemics turned around. The crucial factor is accountable leadership at the highest levels in both developed and developing countries, generating holistic public health responses which prevent new infection, support existing cases and prevent the breakdown of economic and political systems.



Both across and within countries, HIV diseases disproportionately affects the poor and powerless. Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest region in the world, shoulders the overwhelming majority of the burden of HIV/AIDS.

The spread of HIV within a country reflects a similar differential, beginning in vulnerable marginalized “high-risk” groups such as commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, and IVDU. From these marginalized groups, infection can spread to the general population, hitting the poorest and most disadvantaged the hardest.

AIDS is no longer seen as only a medical disease but now also as a social problem related to cultural, political, and economic factors. If HIV transmission were to stop today, which it won’t, the situation regarding orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa will get still worse. Within the next 10 years, it is projected that there will be 40 million children in Africa who have lost at least one parent to AIDS.

With an eye on the future, social scientists and policy makers have sketched out worst-case and best-case scenarios, each with a bearing on the roles played by NGOs.

In the worst-case scenario, leaders continue to deny the threat of AIDS. HIV remains a taboo topic, becalming efforts at mass education and prevention. According to projections in this scenario, Africa by 2015 will have been decimated by the disease. The same will be true of parts of Asia. There will be widespread food shortages because of scarce labor and a shift on the part of wage-earners to subsistence farming for basic survival. In Africa by 2015, around 50 million

people will have died. In the most affected countries, 15-30% of workers are HIV positive and GDP is 30% lower than expected. In the West, infected people live almost normal lives on long-term treatment. Vaccines protect the rest of the population.

Starting from the same data but building on a different set of responses, the best-case scenario projects a different and more hopeful trajectory for the evolution of the AIDS epidemic. In the countries most affected by the disease, governments, business and civil society unite to build the infrastructure to care for millions living with HIV. Fewer people contract AIDS and those that do have greater support and comprehensive care. In Africa, countries with infection rates of 30%-40% in 2004, fall to 15% by 2015. By 2015, the epidemic isn't over. The number of people infected in southern Africa, Russia, India and China continues to rise but at a slower rate. The fight against AIDS empowers women and brings their voices to bear on a range of social issues. More young people decide to postpone sex, stick to one partner, and are tested together before having unprotected sex. The social stigma of AIDS is lifted.

Even under the best scenario, there are still enormous pressures on the education and health systems as a quarter to one third of skilled and educated workers have died.

The key lesson about AIDS from its first 20 years is that new epidemics can be prevented and existing epidemics turned around. The crucial factor is accountable leadership at the highest levels in both developed and developing countries. Leaders from the broad arenas of government, civil society, the international community and business must be champions of action. The extent to which AIDS shapes the humanitarian future depends on decisions made today. For the best-case scenario to become reality, deeper national and international commitment in a variety of forms is indispensable.

Section 2: The International Political and Policy Landscape

The reality of the political manipulation of aid and the equal temptation for humanitarian agencies to take political sides has always been with us. While those pressures waned during the post-Cold War period, they are back with a vengeance. Humanitarians play on two very different stages: locally at each road block, burnt out village, and displaced persons' camp, and internationally engaged on such matters as the UN Security Council resolutions, the War on Terror, and the promotion of universal ideas. On both stages, how they are perceived by those who control accesses and resources and those they seek to assist is key to their effectiveness.

Globalization and a sea-change in the power of states have left many nations with diminishing control over their

resources and their future. In trying to help balance this unequal equation, humanitarian (largely northern) NGOs risk being intimately associated with the powers and forces that many in the South believe have placed them, as nations and individuals, in this humiliating position. Universal compassionate humanitarian action based on trust and acceptance can no longer be taken as a given.

Humanitarian action has always taken place within a political context. What has changed since the Cold War has been the degree to which humanitarian action has been infiltrated and penetrated by geo-political concerns. During the post-Cold War era (roughly from 1989 until 9/11/2001), the politicization of aid that had characterized the Cold War eased. With the terrorist attacks against the U.S. and the Bush administration's response to them, however, the division of the world into those "for" or "against" the U.S. has constricted the room available for neutral and independent humanitarian action. The principle that people have a right to humanitarian assistance irrespective of location or political affiliation has come under increasing pressure.

The challenge of situating humanitarian work in relation to political, military, and peacekeeping action and actors has produced, broadly speaking, three different approaches. They are described by the shorthand of *integration* (in which humanitarian policies and programs serve the UN's political objectives), *insulation* (in which humanitarian action remains within, but is somehow protected from close association with, those objectives), and *independence* (in which humanitarian activities are free to go their own way). The choices are urgent since UN humanitarian work is frequently carried out in raging, simmering, or recently concluded civil wars in which the UN plays a political and sometimes military role.

Although battered and bruised by the Iraq experience, the United Nations should not be written off as a key player in the future. Beyond the experience of one crisis or another, the shape of multilateral things to come is likely to be influenced by a number of variables affecting the international system. These include the management of three sets of tensions.

- between the UN as an institution committed to protecting the rights of "We the peoples ..." (a human security focus) and as a temple of sovereign states (a political agenda).
- between the cooptation and the irrelevance of the UN. The world body has been buffeted by the U.S. political agenda bypassed by events on which no consensus among member states has been found.
- between the integration of crisis management into the UN's political and peacekeeping framework and the protection of humanitarian action from the

manipulation that goes with such integration, as noted above.



[Cartoon reproduced with permission of the artist]

Universal Ethos, Western Apparatus

The key question to be explored, post-Iraq and -Afghanistan, is whether given the diversity of the “humanitarian community” and the multiplicity of contradictory pressures to which it is subjected, it is naïve to expect harmony on issues of principle.

Most practitioners would agree that principles have been eroded in Afghanistan and Iraq and no longer command the respect or elicit the restraint that they once enjoyed. Most organizations that see themselves as “humanitarian” remain solidly wedded to the principle of impartiality. Neutrality and independence, in contexts such as Iraq and Afghanistan, are much more difficult to uphold without compromise. Some NGOs and even UN agencies have conceded that they are not neutral, while acceptance of funding from a belligerent renders protestations of independence suspect.

Among humanitarian agencies, four broad positions can be identified on matters of humanitarian principle and engagement with political agendas. The resulting template, however, oversimplifies complex realities and does not do justice to institutional and contextual nuances. The four are:

1. Principle-centered – agencies striving to respect the tenets of the Dunantist humanitarian tradition enshrined in the principles of the Red Cross Movement;
2. Pragmatist – agencies which attach greater importance to “getting the job done,” even at the expense of compromising core principles;
3. Solidarist – agencies which express solidarity with those who suffer, taking, if necessary, a political stance on such matters as human rights abuses; and

4. Faith-based – agencies affiliated with particular religious traditions that are committed to address the underlying or root causes of suffering and injustice.

Humanitarian action is widely viewed as the latest in a series of impositions of alien values, practices and lifestyles. Northern incursions into the South – from the Crusades to colonialism and beyond – have historically been perceived very differently depending on the vantage point. When and where the struggle between Jihad and MacWorld becomes acute – in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya and elsewhere – humanitarian action is likely seen a part of MacWorld.

If the bona fides of humanitarian actors are to be re-established, those involved must take a hard look at whom they talk to and how they talk. A logical starting point involves acknowledging the existence and importance of other humanitarian traditions – Islamic in the first instance, but others as well – and being prepared to share the stage with them.

The end of the Cold War thrust humanitarian and human rights agendas into each others’ arms, or at least forced the actors to confront each other. This was partly due to the increased activism of rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch who are increasingly present on the ground, with or without the official sanction of legal or de facto authorities. More recently, some discordant voices have warned against the unwarranted expansion of the humanitarian agenda to encompass human rights aspirations. Humanitarian groups have been warned against the temptation to do actual human rights work in crisis countries. The blurring of lines is seen as deeply problematic, if not dangerous, both for aid workers on the ground and for beneficiaries. Four possible trends in humanitarian/human-rights relations are identified.

Section 3: The Non-Governmental Landscape

Whether NGOs are the brave new face of people-led action or the co-opted workhorses of states shedding their welfare responsibilities, the phenomenon of NGO growth is a reality. For humanitarian NGOs, now claiming some 60% of \$10 billion in annual global humanitarian spending, this heady position has brought risks and challenges. Increased reliance on state funding challenges their independence. Being drawn into the modus operandi of the commercial market place challenges the role of ideals and advocacy, while competition from the military challenges their sense of worthiness and self-value. As major players, humanitarian NGOs lament these developments but can and should do far more to shape them.

Roughly \$10 billion annually has been provided in recent years to the humanitarian enterprise by OECD/DAC governments and their publics and by non-OECD/DAC donors. Funding for humanitarian work, which during the

1970s and 1980s represented some three percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows, now represents 10% of ODA. Growth in humanitarian aid, now a larger piece of a smaller aid pie, has come at the expense of development assistance, which has shrunk.

The NGO share of this total has grown. Western NGOs receive funding from three major sources: bilateral governments, multilateral organizations, and private contributors. In 2001, private contributions to NGOs worldwide were estimated at \$1.5 billion. NGOs programmed about one third of all bilateral humanitarian assistance and as much as half of all humanitarian funds managed by UN agencies.

Four key trends have characterized recent developments in donor-NGO relations. First, donors are more insistent on measurable outputs. Second, greater cohesion has emerged within the NGO subsector, reflecting agency concerns about increased accountability to donors and their own perceived need for greater independence. Third, NGOs have increased the advocacy component of their work. Finally, the bona fides of NGOs as non-governmental agencies have occasioned more reflection. Each of these trends, and their likely meaning for the humanitarian marketplace of the future, is examined in turn.

Recent events have caused increasing attention to the non-governmental aspect of NGOs. The increasing invasiveness of government donors into NGO decision-making and the need for advocacy efforts in support of humanitarian space and values have led NGOs to look afresh at their relative degree of independence. What is the real meaning of “non-governmental,” especially when most NGOs now habitually accept significant amounts of government resources? Is it a euphemism, or a distinguishing quality?

In an effort to safeguard their independence of action, some U.S. NGOs have diversified their portfolios, reaching out to ECHO and individual European government aid agencies, whether directly or through European counterparts or representational offices. This strategy – in effect, spreading relationships and risks of NGO dependency – does not address the underlying question of a private funding base as distinct from one or more governmental funding sources. It does, however, offer some protections, particularly inasmuch as donors in DAC and other forums have had only limited success in harmonizing their aid policies.

The humanitarian marketplace includes not only card-carrying humanitarian agencies but also other actors that are increasingly taking on tasks in the humanitarian sphere. As for-profit contractors and military personnel doing civic action work have become more active on the scene, competition with traditional humanitarian agencies has increased. As for competition from commercial contractors, the media’s focus on the role of mega-firms such as KBR and the Bechtel Corporation in Iraq has highlighted their

activities and the lack of competitive bidding for contracts. In actual fact, however, such contractors are doing more in areas such as water and power infrastructure where NGOs have no demonstrated particular comparative advantage. The competition is more intense from smaller for-profit contractors working in the health and education sectors. Some NGOs concede that for-profit contractors are threatening because they spotlight the lack of evidence accumulated by NGOs over the years that would demonstrate the value of their activities from a results-based perspective.

Competition from the military exists both at the level of funding and in the jockeying for position in the field. Some donors (e.g., the U.K.) fund civic action activities by the military and traditional agencies from separate pots. As a result, the two sets of actors are not locked in a zero-sum contest. Others (e.g., Canada) may use ODA accounts in a given crisis in order to fund civic action work. Still others (e.g., the U.S.) may advance funds to the military from humanitarian accounts, later to be reimbursed once defense appropriations catch up with events.

In the field, NGOs have been outraged by military personnel who have solicited funds from NGOs for their civic action work and by the quick-and-dirty approach the military has taken toward reconstruction. The proposal currently under DAC review that funds provided for civic action by the military be counted as official development assistance (ODA) would doubtless exacerbate the issue.

The increase in size of NGOs and the consolidation of their numbers is likely to increase. Mega-NGOs, or BINGOs (Big International NGOs), are the equivalents of multinational corporations not only in their global reach but also in their range of soup-to-nuts activities.

Although there is a perceptible trend towards NGO consolidation, it is not clear whether this trend will, can, or, for that matter, should continue into the future. Very large NGOs, much like very large corporations, can sometimes implode from sheer size. There are also calls – some from the BINGOs themselves – for a more “networked” model that moves away from centralized management of activities and towards consortia, franchises, and partnerships which can be more nimble, less costly, and equally, if not more, effective. Some NGOs see advantages in specialization, rather than covering a waterfront of issues.

The division of labor within the NGO subsector is likely to be refined. The structure of the NGO community is changing to allow for new partnerships and networks. Institutional insulation is giving way to institutional partnerships involving a more diverse array of actors, including for-profit and military institutions. The deck is shuffled as a new breed of southern NGOs reaches maturity, as established NGOs grapple with the pangs of age, size and specialized focus, and as new modes of partnership and management among groups and consortia of NGOs develop.

The financing of NGO activities will, according to most prognostications, continue to be substantial. In recent years, as noted earlier, humanitarian aid has come to represent a larger portion of a shrinking ODA pie. As humanitarian NGOs have continued to grow and expand in scope and legitimacy, many nations spent large proportions of their aid budgets through NGOs. At the same time, NGOs have benefited from new sources of funding. Resources from private investors and donors, including individuals, foundations, and corporations more than doubled from 1988 to 1999.

Preserving NGO identity from one year to the next is also becoming more difficult as donors earmark funds for particular projects or fashions. The combination of earmarked funds and trendy projects makes for a smaller pool of aid for less publicized or chronic emergencies. Combating donor fatigue will require clear proof of results. Good management and demonstrable outcomes will, as noted earlier, become even more key in securing funding over the next years.

Rapid growth coupled with structural changes in the NGO sector has triggered new challenges to NGO management. Entering a time when virtually anyone with a phone, fax, and business card can become an NGO, three management challenges are likely to loom large: the management of growth, the cultivation of diversity, and the need for efficiency.

There are management implications of rapid growth in the size of NGOs. The strengths that make NGOs nimble and successful when they are small can be lost as they grow. As NGOs become “corporatized,” they may take on the management pathologies of large corporations and government bureaucracies, including lack of communication, of human resources and training, and of a common agency vision and mission.

Cultivating diversity is a second looming management challenge. NGOs are no longer primarily a northern vehicle; in fact, they have grown more rapidly in the South than in the North during the past decade. For the most part, North-South NGO partnerships remain unequal and uneven. While northern NGOs may make conscious efforts toward genuine mutuality and equity, client NGOs have emerged in the South which essentially serve as sub-contractors.

A third major management challenge involves efficiency, a key demand of donors on NGOs. Financial efficiency exists in tension with the desire to experiment with new ideas, which (as with pharmaceutical research) can be risky and expensive. Too large a focus on efficiency can easily lead to predictability and a repetition of things known to work. The challenge is to retain a focus on the defining purpose of NGOs, which relates to innovation, and not take on the

zealous focus on simple economic efficiency that is better done by the market sector.

As NGOs assume more major roles within the international aid apparatus, they make service provision a larger portion of their work. It has been steadily growing since the 1990s. In this framework, NGOs become a kind of subcontractor or instrument of privatization for states, utilizing their role as mediator and maneuvering between donors and recipient projects. This subcontracting can lead to cooption of NGO agendas and missions. NGOs also have obvious responsibilities to the people they serve, as well as to each other and to the missions they aim to uphold.

To whom should NGOs be accountable and through what mechanisms? There are multiple stakeholders. NGOs collaborate upwards, downwards, and horizontally. Some people argue that some NGOs or growing NGO networks are big enough that they are not accountable to anyone but themselves and the causes they purport to serve. Some northern NGOs are held accountable by public and media, so an ebb and flow of donations is likely.

The growth of and changes within the NGO sector have brought new challenges for its identity, scale of responsibility, and purpose within the broader global community. NGOs today are at a point of unprecedented influence, responsibility, and credibility.

Section 4: Implications for the Future

Humanitarian NGOs are fundamentally action-oriented bodies seeking to deliver assistance and protection. They are committed to learning from evaluations, academic studies, and action research, but research and learning are not their main business. The more specific and directly applicable to field projects, the more likely such findings are to influence behavior. Present NGO collaboration with the research community has identified as a critical problem the poor collection of baseline and monitoring data. Learning that challenges policy, management, and funding, however, is far harder for NGOs to absorb.

In the past ten years – roughly since the Rwanda genocide and in reflection upon it – the understanding of how crises play out from the household to the global level has changed dramatically. In that time, globalization has moved from a theory to a living reality; many humanitarian NGOs have shifted from national to transnational in structure; and the use of a broader livelihoods analysis and the development of specific technical advances have improved aid to crisis-affected households.

The past decade has seen a steadily expanding understanding among humanitarian organizations and personnel of the political context of humanitarian action and a steady outpouring of political analysis on what drives war and

conflict. Work by David Keene on the political economy of modern war and by Mark Duffield on globalization and the cooption of the aid community have represented seminal contributions. Yet it has been NGOs and humanitarian practitioner-academics who, closer to the field, have driven developments in understanding and improving the humanitarian system.

Among the key themes in the applied learning process have been accountability, financial transparency, and understanding the dynamics of vulnerability in local communities. Beyond the evaluation of Rwanda, the past decade has brought forth the Sphere project, People in Aid, and the Humanitarian Accountability Project. Through the writings of people like Hugo Slim and Mary B. Anderson, the morality and ethics of aid have been explored and scrutinized as never before. All of this work has radically changed the way humanitarian practitioners see their role and accountability.

Paralleling the commitment to improve the quality of assistance has been a growing concern to identify and understand better the financial flows within the aid system. The development of the UN's Consolidated Appeal Process and its financial tracking mechanisms, coupled with the advent and maturation of Reliefweb, have led to greater transparency in financial and information flow.

The coming decade: lessons to be learned

The political analysis of humanitarian crises and humanitarian action is deeply challenging to humanitarians, particularly NGOs. Its central message is that, in a global economy with global communications, no one sits outside the power structures that shape people's lives, least of all NGOs with a western genesis largely funded by western governments and a western public. These are not easy issues for NGOs to face, not least because they are premised on political-economy models which owe as much to one's political beliefs as they do to empirical evidence. As a result, opting for these models require agencies to make political judgments.

Humanitarian agencies, particularly NGOs, remain consistently poor in collecting and analyzing data on impact. This is to some extent the result of a rapidly changing environment and difficulties with security and access as well as of cultural factors which render information-sharing inimical to the ethos of most NGOs. The Sphere Project has been instrumental in encouraging more coherent monitoring systems, although in the past these have focused on the project-level rather than the population level. Despite the fact that monitoring systems and indicators have been well developed for most interventions, there is huge diversity in the capacity to implement these monitoring systems. Poor agency capacity is often exacerbated by a lack of national policies and guidelines on minimum requirements for monitoring.

Eyeing the future, the issue is not what will be but rather how best to prepare for what might be. Institutions in the humanitarian sector have shown relatively little interest in future planning or in preparing to be more adaptive to changes in the short-term. Even less interest in or capacity for dealing with changes and complexity in the longer term is evident. Yet the purpose of speculating about what might be is not to predict but to sensitize, to explore ways that individuals and organizations can be more responsive to the environment in which they will operate. Factors that help explain the typical NGO lethargy in the area of strategic planning include the following:

- *Lack of institutional incentive.* Most NGO governing bodies appear not to seek any longer-term plans or visions from their organizations. Almost without exception, internal dialogue with senior management focuses instead upon specific institutional problems or issues of short-term concern and consequence.
- *Collaboration difficulties.* The difficulties in developing collaborative interactions, whether within the humanitarian sector or beyond, reflect more than just the normal frustrations associated with size and bureaucracy. Collaboration is widely viewed as a process largely dominated by "the strong against the weak."
- *The ethos of humanitarian agencies.* The history, assumptions, and traditional ethos of "the relief worker" still pervade the attitudes of many in the humanitarian community. The more an agency's resources and identity are geared towards disasters, the smaller the proportion of resources devoted to planning, particularly as compared to organizations that see themselves as primarily developmental.

If NGOs are responsive in the future to the need for greater universality in the aid enterprise, the aid worker in ten years time will be more "local" than international. In a world marked increasingly by the forces of globalization, localization will become of greater significance to those concerned with humanitarian action. Becoming an integral part of the landscape in non-western countries, however, will take significant structural changes in the humanitarian apparatus. Whether the agencies require a specific "civilization-changing" event to spark such as change remains to be seen.

Three broad sets of developments are needed. They involve promoting a paradigm shift regarding humanitarian security strategies, introducing serious planning for the future, and practicing the art of systematic speculation.

- First, human security strategies as a paradigm shift. Such a shift would lead to a new criterion of adapting to change, one in which human

vulnerability becomes for the first time an overt and explicit yardstick.

- Second, introducing futures into the organization. Whether or not a paradigm shift in the direction of human security occurs, it will be essential to encourage NGOs to nurture the creativity, flexibility, information absorption capacity, and planning and policy-making authority to anticipate and respond to ambiguity and change. In developing capacity responsive to rapid change and complexity, organizational structure per se is less an issue than are organizational dynamics.
- Third, the art of systematic speculation. Planners and policy-makers are often inhibited in their efforts to plan for the longer-term because of their assumption that the future cannot be predicted. This attitude reflects in part the linear thinking that requires a precise understanding of cause and effect sequencing, suggesting an inherent resistance to ambiguity. And yet as a recent study of future consequences of climate change suggests, the only way to develop means to deal with the possible consequences of such change is to identify "a sequence of steps, each with associated uncertainties."
- Finally, advocacy. Effective humanitarian institutions of 2015 will most likely devote far more time to a broad range of advocacy issues than they do today. The focus of such advocacy will be on global vulnerability, intensified attention to center-periphery asymmetries, and emergency prevention and preparedness.

Globalization

The 1990s have set in place four facets of globalization, each of which play off and to each other.

- First, the globalization of corporate growth. Corporations, not the economy or trade or international relations, lie at the heart of globalization. While corporate behavior is not somehow intrinsically at variance with human values, NGOs at some point in the future will have to engage the corporations as they engaged the colonial state in years gone by.
- Second, globalization of technology, and especially information technology, will increasingly place issues of privacy, transparency, and accountability in the forefront. In a world where there is nowhere to hide, agencies seeking to provide assistance will have increased access to real-time information and the ability to aggregate information across selected populations.

- Third, globalization means that the schisms that divide "them and us" will increasingly be less geographical (north/south), less ideological (democratic/statist), and less even less religious (Judaean-Christian/Muslim) in nature than at present. Fissures deeper still will separate the beneficiaries of globalization from those exploited by it.
- Fourth, globalization has been accompanied by an upsurge in civil society activity around the world. Whether the global "associational revolution" proves as significant as was the rise of the nineteenth century nation state remains to be seen. Organized civil society, however, represents a counterweight to the forces of globalization and a force for enhanced human security in its various aspects.

Universality

If globalization is the context, universality must be the distinguishing feature of humanitarian action of the future. Humanitarianism is, first and foremost, a value-driven endeavor. The international humanitarian apparatus and the personnel associated with it affirm the universality of its values. Yet that affirmation is anything but universally shared. The future needs to be characterized by a genuine search for global values, not by a self-serving attempt to globalize western values.

The ultimate safety net – which is one way of seeing humanitarianism – will not survive unless humanitarians lobby for it globally. Humanitarians, who have often positioned themselves as the adversary of, or the substitutes for, states, will need on occasion to be willing to see states as allies. Strategic planning of the future will require many new partnerships.

Over time, traditional divisions between natural and manmade disasters, between relief efforts and development work, between humanitarian action and human rights, between environmental concern and work conditions will come to seem increasingly threadbare and vacuous. Understanding causality in terms of complex and chaotic systems rather than just linear change will inevitably challenge present-day divisions in the larger human welfare community. In the final analysis, emergencies are not aberrant phenomena but reflections of the ways that societies structure themselves and allocate resources. Anticipating and responding to change should be likewise strategic.

[Note: the full report, including an Executive Summary, endnotes, a list of publications for future reference, and information about the research team, may be downloaded from the Famine Center website at famine.tufts.edu]