Expertise and Accountability in Humanitarian Response

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INTRODUCTION

As of April 2020, there were 180.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 117.1 million people to receive assistance, and 57 countries affected by humanitarian crises.[1] The work of humanitarian actors is undoubtedly invaluable. At the same time, it is unsurprising that these actors consistently fall short of expectations. They confront complex problems and must contend with the interests of both donors and vulnerable populations, interests that do not always align. Moreover, first responders are sometimes exposed to the dangers they are responding to. Syria is only one example where workers have to contend with warlords, rebels, and guerilla groups before they can reach the vulnerable, only to be denied entry at forced gunpoint to pay a heavy surcharge.

Humanitarian response took a sharp turn after World War II. The United Nations (UN) system emerged and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) grew exponentially in number as a Western response to the challenge of reconstructing Europe and decolonizing its former territories. Since then, the focus has turned to the developing world and the balance of power between humanitarian actors has shifted multiple times. Notable shifts include the renaming of the Disaster Relief Organization to the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in 1992 and the creation of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 1998. Formerly ad-hoc consultation mechanisms become more formalized through the creation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), now the central coordinating body for relief work. NGOs drafted codes of conduct and common standards for meeting needs, and built networks to strengthen program evaluation and accountability. The UN gave greater authority to humanitarian coordinators in crisis zones to oversee players on the ground and channel resources where they are needed most.

This paper focuses on one specific NGO, IMPACT Initiatives and cannot make generalizations about how expertise are situated in the humanitairan system. When the founder of French NGO, ACTED, noticed a deficit in data and evidence informing decision-making in the humanitarian crises, the idea for IMPACT was born. Since then, IMPACT Initiatives has grown to become a leading Geneva-based think-and-do tank which aims to improve the impact of humanitarian, stabilization and development action

[1] António Guterres, "COVID-19: Global Humanitarian Response Plan.".

through data, partnerships and capacity building programs. With over 400 staff members, including assessment, data analysis, GIS experts and field professionals, IMPACT teams are present in over 20 countries across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. IMPACT's mission is to shape practices and influence policies in humanitarian and development settings to positively impact individuals and communities. The NGO attempts to enable better and more effective decision-making by generating and promoting knowledge, tools and best-practices for humanitarian and development stakeholders.

The evolution of the humanitarian system has been well documented. However, theory regarding the role of expertise in this system is largely under-theorized. This is problematic given the enormous amount of power, money, and influence they wield across the globe. Thus, this paper considers NGOs, the UN, and vulnerable populations to delineate the various relationships in this emerging field. I begin this paper by considering how experts add value to humanitairan response, focusing specfically on the unique capacity of NGOs to contribute technical specialization, interdisciplinary analysis, and responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable populations. Then I explore the actors holding experts accountable, exploring accountability mechanisms by stakeholders, the humanitarian community broadly, and the community of experts more specifically. Finally, I evaluate the degree to which these accountability mechanisms encourage experts to contribute to the most effect humanitarian response. This paper ultimately finds that the humanitarian coordination system simultaneosuly allows experts the independence to contribute effective and appropriate assisstance, while also imposing accountability mechanisms to incentivize innovation and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature on the intersection of expertise and accountability is extensive, ranging from bureaucracies to multinational corporations. A complex and constantly shifting system like the humanitarian coordination and response system, though, is difficult to analyze. To address this gap, this paper considers three relevant bodies of literature: expertise in humanitarian crises, accountability in humanitarian crises, as well as the intersection of expertise and accountability in various bodies. This

section reviews the work on expertise and accountability to establish the foundation for this paper's examination of their intersection in humanitarian crises.

A broad review of the literature on expertise in humanitarian crises reveals consensus that expertise improves humanitarian response. Dennis King investigation of knowledge management in humanitarian organizations is one of many works finding that humanitarian response relying on expertise is ultimately more effective.[2] Michael Barnett's historical account of humanitarian organizations provides relevant context here.[3] Barnett finds that these organizations became increasingly bureaucratized after the 1990s, followed specifically by demands for professionalism alongside demand for actors with vocational knowledge and specialized training.

Expertise in humanitarian crises becomes more interesting, though, when examined through the lens of accountability. Despite the logical assumption, experts are not held accountable by the people they serve. To better understand this relationship, a useful comparative study is the intersection of expertise and accountability in bureaucracies. Kevin Esterling looks at American policy decisions to examine why policy makers would be motivated to improve decision-making by relying on expertise. [4] The distance between citizens and those making policy decisions is far. Moreover, in finding an asymmetry in access to expertise, Esterling identifies a rationale for citizens to defer to their officials' better judgment in their use of expertise. Yet, he considers prevailing literature to conclude that the ability of citizens to judge quality, in conjunction with the fact that proposals relying on expertise are ultimately more effective and socially efficient, incentivizes politicians to rely on expertise in the long run. Though citizens do not directly hold policy makers accountable, Esterling finds policy makers still tend to rely on expertise in making decisions out of a sense of accountability fueling drive to deliver stronger solutions. While humanitarian crises is much more complex, this study is useful in complicating the intersection of expertise and accountability.

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[2] Dennis J. King, "Integrating Knowledge Management Into," in *IS Strategy », Information Systems Management, 16(4*, 1999, 70–72.
[3] Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 4 (2005): 723–40.
[4] Kevin Esterling, *The Political Economy of Expertise: Information and Efficiency in American National Politics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

Scholarship on accountability frequently starts with democracy, largely ignoring the accountability in non-democratic institutions. The literature on the intersection of expertise and accountability in international and multinational organizations is most relevant to this paper, as their intersection in NGOs is largely underdeveloped. Similar to bureaucracies, affected populations do not hold organizations accountable. A close reading reveals that, rather, experts are held accountable by the humanitarian community and stakeholders.

Accountability in the relationship between international organizations, scholars find, is highly compelling. Peter and Ernst Haas begin this investigation by looking at how knowledge informs an organization's values and practices, taking a constructivist stance to speak to the value of consensual knowledge in the interdependence of humanitarian organizations; organizations must agree on knowledge before they can work together.[5] Ole Jacob Sending makes clear that expertise is especially valuable in this discussion.[6] Sending delineates a sociologically informed account of authority to argue that humanitarian groups claim authority in their capacity to speak for affected populations in an impartial and neutral way, necessitating longstanding validation from other organizations to establish authority. Andrew Clapham's analysis of accountability between multinationals lacking measures to prevent human rights violations is also relevant here.[7] He identifies a shift from traditional forms of accountability to argue that one of the greatest forms of leverage in influencing multinationals is the power to influence reputations. This paper will extend this literature to consider how expertise is a combination of knowledge and social acceptance, providing humanitarian organizations with the power to hold each other accountable. There is clear agreement that expertise and legitimacy are intertwined in the community of experts, creating a system where organizations fortuitously hold each other accountable.

Accountability in the relationship between international organizations and their stakeholders is noticeably more contentious among scholars. Gerard Hafner begins on an

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[5] Peter M. Haas and Ernst B. Haas, "Learning to Learn: Improving International Governance," *Global Governance* 1, no. 3 (1995): 255–84.
[6] Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise* (University of Michigan Press, 2015).
[7] Andrew Clapham, "Introductory Remarks by Andrew Clapham," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 107 (2013): 199–200.

investigation of accountability in international organizations and, in finding a noticeable lack of clear definition for the word, turns to accountability as defined by international law.[8] Narrowing his investigation to international law allows Hafner to make a convincing argument for the need for greater responsibility in the international sphere regarding wrongful acts. He finds that states are increasingly transferring power to international organizations, yet international law is not growing to compensate for this shift in power. August Reinsich also points to this shift in power with concern, finding a shift in governance tasks from states to non-state actors.[9] Unlike Hafner, though, he builds on the reasoning of national constitutional courts and international human rights organs to argue that states that transfer power to international organizations consequently hold responsibility for that potential jurisdiction gap in human rights obligations. Even among scholars demanding greater efforts by states to hold non-state actors accountable, the debate is contentious.

An examination of accountability in the relationship between multinationals and their host countries is particularly relevant here. Susan Ariel Aaronson points to the magnitude of problems American-based multinationals confront in developing countries where governance is often inadequate.[10] She asserts that multinationals have the power to demand greater standards and places the responsibility on states to encourage them to do so, forming recommendations for governments to augment accountability measures. In weighing this debate, it is helpful to look to how the academic community is speaking about the growing influence of multinationals in global governance. Just like Hafner, both Reinsich and Aaronson examine international law, though they place responsibility for the jurisdiction gap on states. Many academics similarly argue that until international law is expanded to consider non-state actors, the responsibility lies with host or donor

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[8] Gerhard Hafner, "Accountability of International Organizations," *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 97 (2003): 236–40.
[9] August Reinisch, "Securing the Accountability of International Organizations," *Global Governance* 7, no. 2 (2001): 131–49.
[10] Susan Ariel Aaronson, "'Minding Our Business': What the United States Government Has Done and Can Do to Ensure That U.S. Multinationals Act Responsibly in Foreign Markets," *Journal of Business Ethics* 59, no. 1/2 (2005): 175–98.

member countries to demand greater accountability from non-state actors. How these states might demand accountability, though, still demands more thorough examination.

To better place relate these arguments to humanitarian crises, it is useful here to examine the literature accountability in humanitarian response, where themes including centralization and transparency are central.

Scholars tend to debate decentralization in literature on accountability in humanitarian response. Peter Walker and Barnett consider efforts by the Humanitarian Club to work alongside affected populations in collecting data and knowledge to advocate for the decentralization of the humanitarian process.[11] They find that regional associations tend to be more responsive to local needs. Moreover, they point to the effectiveness of jointly negotiated standardized manuals and checklists in providing accountability. Peter Schuck's investigation of American bureaucracy is an interesting comparison, as he adopts the opposite stance. [12] He specifically focuses on policy failures to point to the danger in relying on subcontractors for expertise. Schuck posits that vast amounts of contracting reduce accountability and transparency given the logistical difficulty in monitoring the work of each. Though, the relevance of his argument to humanitarian situations is debatable. Next to the focus on policy making of Esterling's research, it is simultaneously useful to consider the role of expertise and accountability in policy failures. Considering the UN's attempts to both centralize and decentralize actors involved in humanitarian crises in recent years, this literature is particularly interesting.

Another method scholars point to bringing accountability is transparency. Jonathon Koppel highlights the firmly ingrained belief that governments should be transparent and open to regular inspection to suggest that demanding transparency from organizations should be straightforward.[13] Steven Bernstein similarly highlights the same value of transparency in governments, though posits the value is insufficient in international organizations by pointing to the fact that international organizations hold

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[11] Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015): 130–41.
[12] PETER H. SCHUCK, "The Bureaucracy," in *Why Government Fails So Often*, And How It Can Do Better (Princeton University Press, 2014), 307–26.
[13] Jonathan GS Koppell, "Pathologies of Accountability: ICANN and the Challenge of 'Multiple Accountabilities Disorder,'" *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 1 (2005): 94–108.

different authority structures than governments.[14] He suggests that demanding transparency from international organizations might be insufficient in holding them accountable. Taekyoon Kim adds useful nuance to the discussion of accountability.[15] Kim identifies contradiction of global accountability in two cases of the World Bank Inspection Panel to highlight the danger of an overemphasis on accountability along with insufficient accountability.

The work on expertise and accountability drives this paper's investigation of their intersection humanitarian response. The literature on bottom-up accountability in humanitarian response is small. Tomas Shipley, Matthew Jenkins, and Arne Strand examine reference mechanisms through which affected communities can be brought into monitoring activities, as well as tools available to managing corruption in humanitarian settings, like the 2010 Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. [16] The preferences and needs of affected populations, though, are largely absent in the work of scholars. This paper helps shine a light on recipients of aid.

METHODOLOGY

I test my thesis about the international community's approach to humanitarian response using data from related literature, various humanitarian organizations, as well as interviews from an NGO, IMPACT Initiatives. This data is distinguished from those of previous research by its focus on the intersection of expertise and accountability, specifically in the context of humanitarian response. The data is limited to humanitarian emergencies where a national government requests UN humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the data is largely based on interviews from IMPACT Initiatives and research regarding its activities in protracted crises where IMPACT is contributing, despite research in this area favoring a more exterior, theoretical approach.

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[14] Steven Bernstein, "Legitimacy in Intergovernmental and Non-State Global Governance," *Review of International Political Economy* 18, no. 1 (2011): 17–51.
[15] Taekyoon Kim, "Contradictions of Global Accountability: The World Bank, Development NGOs, and Global Social Governance," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 18, no. 2 (2011): 23–47.
[16] Tomas Shipley, Matthew Jenkins, and Arne Strand, "Managing Corruption Challenges in Humanitarian Settings" (Transparency International, 2019), JSTOR.

Nevertheless, I argue that there is still much to learn from a single organization. First of all, IMPACT is heavily involved in humanitarian response and has made remarkable difference in countries where it is active. Furthermore, any research regarding an active expert in humanitarian crises is worth pursuing because it provides empirical evidence for the larger theoretical argument of this paper. The literature on the intersection of expertise and accountability is quite comprehensive, as well as the literature on each theme in humanitarian crises. Yet, the combination still lacks strong academic consideration. Moreover, this research largely narrowly focuses on international organizations, leaving analysis of NGOs largely developed. Looking to a first-hand perspective from IMPACT on its role in providing data and analysis in humanitarian crises is critical to the foundation of this analysis. Lastly, a combination of primary and secondary sources provides a valuable perspective on how humanitarian work differs from the academics discussing it.

Data from protracted crises where IMPACT is contributing reveals the relationship between expertise, accountability, and humanitarian response. Moreover, interviews broadly explored IMPACT's unique positioning in contributing to humanitarian response, to whom IMPACT feels accountable, and how accountability encourages IMPACT to contribute to the most effective humanitarian response. Analysis in this paper falls into the same broad categories to identify key themes in each, particularly explaining the distance between vulnerable communities and experts recommending and providing aid. A historical lens of humanitarian response alongside relevant literature contextualizes and brings depth to this analysis. Thus, this paper adapts two sets of explanatory variables to measure effectiveness of humanitarian response. The first set of variables is theoretical, while the second is empirical.

EXPERTISE

It should be a logical assumption that reliance on expertise improves humanitarian response. Humanitarian crises are complex, involving seemingly unsurpassable barriers of hunger, security, and health, to name only a few. The world has evolved to create more efficient and effective solutions to addressing these problems. If there is ever a time to utilize them, it is humanitarian response. Expertise has come to be considered a central

asset of global governance. Moreover, reference to epistemic communities, or shared knowledge and policy objectives, have become commonplace and considered essential in literature in global governance. The world of expertise is a beast too large and undeveloped to explore comprehensively in this paper, so the scope will focus on the NGO, IMPACT Initiatives to begin investigating the role of expertise in humanitarian response. This paper finds that experts are uniquely positioned to add value in three main ways: technical specialization, interdisciplinary analysis, and responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable populations.

To grasp the how NGOs like IMPACT bring technical specialization to humanitarian response, it is useful to first adapt a historical lens. Though the date of the establishment of the first NGO is contentious, scholars agree that humanitarian organizations have been around for centuries. A few notable early scientific NGOs include the Society for the Recovery of the Drowned in 1767 Amsterdam, specializing in the rescue and resuscitation of victims drowning and shipwreck, as well as the Royal Jennerian Society in 1803, specializing in small pox eradication. The most critical player in the development of international NGOs was Henri Dunant, who founded the Red Cross movement in 1863 to help military medical services. From their origin, humanitarian organizations have been relying on expertise to fill gaps in state response to humanitarian crises. While governments are tasked with generally ensuring human welfare, NGOs can devote their resources and expertise towards a single issue and therein become a uniquely informed and qualified body to address it, whether it be eradicating small pox or caring for wounded soldiers.

IMPACT is an expert in research, specifically specializing in primary data collection and analysis. As an interviewee stated quite concisely: “What we do is research.” This specialization can be contrasted with a UN agency like World Food Program (WFP), or the food assistance branch of the UN. While the organization has a research team, the WFP’s mission is addressing food insecurity and research is analyzed through that lens. Moreover, in organizations responsible for both research and implementation, any budget restraints will inevitably limit research, as implementation of assistance is always the priority. By focusing all its resources and energy on research, IMPACT can excel in its field. That IMPACT is a leader in this field is clear from the

fact that, among other organizations with similar commitments, it is the only NGO conducting field-based research, including key informant interviews. An interviewee described how it is “very easy to be on the ground” and conduct research from the site of a humanitarian crisis, rather than merely sitting in Geneva crunching numbers. They continued to explain that there is a general “recognition” that IMPACT can “deliver something somebody else can’t.”

This conception of specialization might suggest that NGOs are limited in their analysis an issue. A comparative look at NGOs next to IGOs reveals, however, that they have unique flexibility in being able to adapt an interdisciplinary lens. A capacity for interdisciplinary analysis is especially valuable within the framework of human development. The latest model for economic development, human development, attempts to create conditions in which individuals might live up to their fullest potential. The model advocates for encouraging local development and allowing local actors to decide what further development looks like. An understanding of what comes first has flipped– development must be holistic to be sustainable. This paradigm shift is a product of the 2008 crises, when institutions like the IMF and World Bank began to question whether fixing a country’s economy could single-handedly push development. Rather, it became accepted that humanitarian intervention is good for world order, but some tools might be misused. Applied to humanitarian crises, the framework suggests that a specific humanitarian issue cannot be addressed alone, rather only in tandem with other areas of need. An interviewee at IMPACT explained how the “appeal” comes from the NGO’s “independence,” or lack of affiliation with any specific cluster. IMPACT can objectively enter a situation and focus on what on the crises context, the needs of populations, and what needs to be addressed because it is not directly implementing programs, rather just conducting research. UN Agencies, on the other hand, tend to be leads of clusters, like the Global Protection Cluster is led by UNHCR. Such a role focuses the scope of their activities. If IMPACT only considered affected populations through the lens of *food*, it would have never learned that households actually prefer cash grants over food supplies; even if the immediate issue is food, the larger need is self-sufficiency. Interdisciplinary analysis is critical to creating sustainable change in affected communities.

Beyond these learned forms of assistance, NGO solutions are often rooted in local contexts. For IMPACT, this relationship is explicitly clear as it collects its information directly from affected populations through its field-based research. For organizations employing local actors in their response, the value of these local roots cannot be understated. The response to the Ebola crisis relied on the active involvement of local community health workers, village elders, and teachers, to help convince the families of victims to forgo traditional burial rituals to contain the spread of infection. In the aftermath of earthquakes in Nepal, locals carried out the majority of the rescues, and local Sherpas and truck drivers transported aid along treacherous roads to remote villages at great personal risk.[17] NGOs are employing innovative methods to democratize assistance, including relying on recipients to collect data and participate in the international response. Nepal provides another valuable example here: local populations collected cell phone GPS to aid in mapping affecting areas, effectively accelerating relief efforts. It is important to acknowledge that true partnerships between relief agencies and local populations are still emerging. Moreover, even in current partnerships, local players often play reactive roles, playing little to no part in designing or monitoring projects. At the same time, it is clear that the humanitarian community is committed to building stronger, more equitable partnerships with local actors.

Even scholars have noticed this paradigm shift in the humanitarian community. Ole Jacob Sending considers how actors that participate in global governance “become authoritative” by delineating a constructivist, sociologically informed account of authority.[18] His argument is particularly interesting because, while he references the traditional conception of expert authority– or general belief in the institution of science as setting the rules for truth-seeking practices– he also posits that humanitarian groups seek influence through moral authority. [19] Sending finds that “moral authority” accrues from the claim to “represent those who cannot speak for themselves,” in an attempt to advance a common good.[20] Within the context of humanitarian response, Sending’s argument

[17] Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, “Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015), 134.
[18] Ole Jacob Sending, *The Politics of Expertise* (University of Michigan Press, 2015), 3.
[19] Ibid., 14.
[20] Ibid., 17.

suggests that experts gain authority in framing their knowledge as impartial, neutral, and representative of those it is meant to address. While such a shift should incentivize more relevant humanitarian expertise, it is also problematic in allowing actors to impose evaluative criteria in accordance with other actors seeking recognition. Moreover, Michael Barnett and Peter Walker consider the evolution of humanitarian aid to find that an increasing reliance on professionalism– or generalizable data, manuals, and checklists meant to enhance the efficiency and transparency of aid delivery– has come “at the expense of the less quantifiable forms of knowledge” of affected populations.[21] Their finding suggests that, in the humanitarian community’s growing appreciation for expert knowledge, the voice of intervening humanitarians has become more credible than the voice of local actors.

While it is clear that NGOs bring invaluable data and evidence to humanitarian response, we must keep in mind that experts have near unilateral power in controlling the narrative of affected populations.

ACCOUNTABILITY

To begin an analysis of accountability in humanitarian response, it is critical to begin with a clear definition. The concept of accountability derives from the Old French equivalent for *comptes à render*, or the rendering of accounts.[22] Keohane theorizes accountability for international organizations to find that, true to the term’s original meaning, standard definitions emphasize “*information* and *sanctions*.”[23] Accountability is a relational term, so any discussion of accountability must distinguish between those actors holding power and those with accountability. This paper focuses on the actors holding experts accountable, specifically stakeholders, the humanitarian community broadly, and the community of experts more specifically.

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[21] Michael Barnett and Peter Walker, “Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid: How to Make Relief More Accountable,” *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2015), 137.
[22] Mel Dubnick, *Clarifying Accountability: An Ethical Theory Framework, in* PUBLIC SECTOR ETHICS: FINDING AND IMPLEMENTING VALUES 68, 70 (Charles Sampford & Noel Prestoneds., 1998).

[23] Robert O Keohane, “The Concept of Accountability in World Politics and the Use of Force,” 1124.

Before proceeding, accountability to affected populations must be addressed. The simple fact that affected populations cannot demand sanctions reveals that they cannot hold the actors delivering their response accountable. This relationship debunks the common assumption of a direct relationship of accountability between service providers and consumers. Keohane's description of accountability in courts is particularly relevant here. Just as he finds that courts serve as "trustees of the public good" and deliberately not held accountable, so do humanitarians.[24] Though courts and NGOs are created to serve the public, they cannot be viewed as agents of the public because, as delineated in the previous section, experts are perceived to hold greater credibility. Moreover, the simple fact that international law is state-centric reveals that it lacks an accountability mechanism for organizations. A traditional purely legal analysis, though, ignores the fact that there may be other safeguards.

If service providers are not accountable to consumers, then the next logical relationship to consider is that with the employer, or the person writing checks. Donors tend to participate in creating the founding documents of an organization, and then hold the power to disburse and withhold funds. While it seems only natural that donors would be interested in ensuring their funds are being spent most effectively, the obvious question is, by whose standards? Critics point to international organizations as merely vehicles for states to carry out their "dirty work," or activities that they themselves may be prevented from engaging in. It is a highly contentious debate– whether donors intervene in humanitarian crises to further their own interests or bring the most effective response.

This debate began when states began increasingly shifting governance tasks to non-state actors, including international organizations and supranational organizations, in recent decades. Because these organizations were typically viewed as guarantors rather than perpetrators of human rights, demanding accountability from them initially seemed odd, allowing them almost complete independence. August Reinisch considers this shift to find, instead, that it is exactly the direct involvement of international organizations in global governance that has created situations where they might "violate fundamental

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[24] Robert O Keohane, "The Concept of Accountability in World Politics and the Use of Force," 1126.

rights of individuals."[25] Reinisch invokes the ancient query of *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*, or who guards the guardians?, to situation his claim. Like many other scholars in his field, he finds that it is up to the international community to ensure states are pursuing humanitarian goals and, moreover, holding organizations liable for human rights infringements. *Health Affairs* published an article in December 2010 from a group of scholars similarly calling for professionalization of the humanitarian workforce, more specifically through a supranational apparatus to promote the "evidence based" quality and integrity of the workforce.[26] Scholars were voicing a clear demand for shifting norms in humanitarian response.

When asked about accountability, interviewees at IMPACT pointed to a shift in humanitarian response after the Grand Bargain. As part of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing sought solutions to close the humanitarian financing gap. Launched in 2016 Istanbul, the Grand Bargain represented a unique agreement between sixty-one of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations to put more means in the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. One of the commitments specifically acknowledged decisions had to be based on evidence. The implication of this commitment, as noted by interviewees, was significantly greater demand for evidence-based response by donors. One interviewee noted that, where evidence used to be a "buzzword," now it has become something "you have to have."

At first glance, this demand for greater evidence seems to provide another mechanism for asserting political interests in foreign countries. We imagine that expertise must be objective, but the fact remains that these organizations are made up of people and are created to solve problems by states that imagine particular problems. Moreover, their policies have real political outcomes. The simple fact that ideologies frame assumptions about the world means that, if something is contentious, one could argue it is inherently political. On some level, it must be accepted that donors pursue political interests in humanitarian intervention, most apparent at the agenda-setting level. Anne-Marie

[25] August Reinisch, "Securing the Accountability of International Organizations," *Global Governance* 7, no. 2 (2001): 131.
[26] Peter Walker et al., "A Blueprint For Professionalizing Humanitarian Assistance," *Health Affairs* 29, no. 12 (December 2010).

Slaughter, in her analysis of accountability in global governance, similarly criticizes the way the guardianship role of technocrats is socialized to believe that "deeply political trade-offs" are based on "objective expertise."[27] She worries for government networks making decisions in back rooms on the basis of distorted domestic or international preferences and bypassing global deliberation.

Only interviews with IMPACT frame Slaughter's fears as, at least partially, addressed by the Grand Bargain. For IMPACT, this shift translated into greater demand for their work, as donors increasingly funded research organizations alongside implementation organizations to address specific crises. Not only did funding research organizations allow donors to publicly demonstrate interest in expertise, but the separation between the organizations research and implementation also made it nearly impossible to pursue private interests. This separation was effective for a couple of reasons: distance and transparency. Rather than relying on technocrats to set priorities, donors had look to experts from around the globe. Moreover, these experts did not simply submit uninterpreted data or information, but rather information subjected to methodological analysis and arrangement. This separation also brought a greater degree of transparency as organizations like IMPACT began publishing their research online for the benefit and scrutiny of the entire global community. Donors became uniquely interested in holding experts accountable because only with a strong technical basis could they justify intervention. Moreover, only with strong technical expertise would the funding towards research be relevant and useful to the funding towards implementation. The context of rapidly changing contexts makes this relationship quite clear. IMPACT had a series of activities lined up in Uganda when coronavirus hit the country, forcing the organization to redirect its activities. If a donor had asked for specific information or specific activities to pursue private interests, the research IMPACT produced would not be relevant to the organization implementing a response to coronavirus.

Beyond direct mechanisms of accountability, the humanitarian architecture has shifted to necessitate consensus among expertise, sharing accountability throughout the

[27] Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Disaggregated Sovereignty: Towards the Public Accountability of Global Government Networks," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 2 (2004), 165.

humanitarian framework. A quick historical glance demonstrates the motivation behind this shift. Though the concept of coordination between UN and non-UN actors became institutionalized in 1971 through the Disaster Relief Organization, it was only after the Gulf Wars that coordination began to resemble the system in place today with the founding of the IASC and OCHA. In the midst of Iraq's large-scale humanitarian crisis, the UN's humanitarian involvement inadvertently prevented alleviation of deteriorating living conditions. First, its "Oil-for-Food Program" failed to provide a comprehensive solution to the problem, sanctions management suffered from a lack of standards and stifled decision-making, and confusion of authority between various humanitarian actors de-incentivized participation.[28]

The humanitarian response architecture radically shifted as a response: inter-agency forums were formed at the global and local level, through the IASC and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) respectively. Each is chaired by a UN representative: The ERC sits at the very top, reporting directly to the UN Secretary General and heading both the IASC and OCHA. The IASC is composed of representatives from UN Agencies, the World Bank, the Red Cross, and the NGO consortia, all of whom may be providers of humanitarian assistance and also finance other smaller organizations, typically locally based NGOs. OCHA, on the other hand, coordinates UN humanitarian efforts and more directly provides support during a crises. In the event of a humanitarian crisis, an overwhelmed government can request assistance from the UN. The ERC will then appoint a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) to lead country level humanitarian efforts coordinated through the HCT, composed of representatives from UN agencies, the Red Cross, NGOs, and the national government. The ERC generally appoints the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) for that country as the HC.

A focus on the diffuse authority of each body reveals the country and global inter-agency forums as driving humanitarian response, spreading accountability throughout the international community. The central concern is that organizations share information, take organizations strengths into coordination when planning humanitarian operations,

[28] Sarah R Denne, "Re-Thinking Humanitarian Aid in the Post-Gulf War Era: The International Committee of the Red Cross Takes the Lead," 874.

and divide responsibilities to avoid duplication of efforts and confusion.[29] It is clear that this diffuse authority is a form of accountability because information management informs decisions, and humanitarians face a loss in legitimacy if their expertise cannot be upheld in the findings of others. Humanitarians rely on coordination, not only for decision-making, but also for the production of knowledge. The process for organizing emergency response on the ground is called a Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC). As a first step, all actors in the HCT, either jointly or on their own, being collecting evidence for a Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) and a Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). The effort estimates the numbers in need and prioritized sector needs by urgency for planning and implementation of humanitarian response. From there, the HCT develops a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for strategic response planning.

The scholarly community also speaks to the value of shared accountability, specifically through coordination in the production of knowledge like in the HPC. Peter and Ernst Haas take a constructivist stance to speak to the value of consensual knowledge in the interdependence of humanitarian organizations. While Reinisch asserts that transfer of power from governments to organizations was intentional, Haas and Haas characterize the transfer as passive, identifying a growing reliance on the knowledge of specialists. Moreover, they find this shift as positive in finding that expert knowledge necessitates methodology and can be easily subjected to review. They define consensual knowledge as "structured information about causes and effects among physical and social phenomena that enjoys general acceptance as true and accurate among the members of the relevant professional community."[30] They find that it must be analyzed, arranged, and structured in accordance with epistemological principles that command wide acceptance in society. In producing knowledge, experts must be confident it can pass rigorous evaluation by the international community. While it is true that the principles accepted as true among the international community might be misplaced, it is certainly harder to

[29] Nina W. T. Hall, "A Catalyst for Cooperation: The Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Humanitarian Response to Climate Change," *Global Governance* 22, no. 3 (2016): 369–87.

[30] Peter M. Haas and Ernst B. Haas, "Learning to Learn: Improving International Governance," *Global Governance* 1, no. 3 (1995), 259.

pursue private ends. The more voices in a community, especially given the degree of diversity among experts in the humanitarian community, the more objective it must be.

Even more specifically focusing on the community of experts reveals competition as a third accountability mechanism. In the framework of the principle agency problem, we can assume that there are multiple NGOs with the same or very similar commitments, competing for name recognition, influence, and access to funding. Assuming donors to be rational actors, NGOs thrive in demonstrating their relevance. Once IMPACT gained a foothold in Venezuela, it reached out to different partners to discuss providing further assistance, along it to scale up operations in the region. Alexander Betts calls this competition regime complexity, focusing his analysis on the strategic interactions between states and international organizations. He finds that the overlap presents an opportunity, in offering the potential for new partnerships and complementary overlaps, but also threatens to sideline organizations. Accountability functions in the threat of relevance and the reliance on information for proof of success. Betts argues that, to stay relevant, organizations will engage "beyond the boundaries" of its commitments.[31] Interviews with IMPACT reveal the organization pushed boundaries and found its niche in conducting field research, citing its unique presence on the ground in humanitarian crises. Betts' argument suggests that the inherent competition of regime complexity forces experts to innovate to find the most effective solutions to a given issue.

Adam Smith's theory of market forces and Max Weber's theory of bureaucracies offer two more lenses through which to analyze competition between experts. Smith's market forces theory is best understood with the example of the tech industry. In the early 1990s, Silicon Valley was exploding with the possibility of technology, with college drop outs writing software and creating companies that shot up in value overnight and then quickly plummeted. With a tolerance for failure, techies would simply pick up and move on. Smith's chain of command was broken into parts and success in the marketplace meant producing more efficiently than your competitor. Looking to military life, Weber saw a shocking difference– some soldiers will lose everything and have to be willing to

[31] Alexander Betts, "Regime Complexity and International Organizations: UNHCR as a Challenged Institution," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 19, no. 1 (August 12, 2013), 79.

obey orders anyway, knowing they are doomed to die. Weber's chain of command was a pyramid, in which you move up by doing your job, staying in line, and reaffirming the underlying values of the system.[32] Applied to the humanitarian sector, the distinction between Smith's and Weber's framework is critical– Smith's framework would promote effective expertise, whereas Weber's framework would promote inclusive expertise. Betts' conception of regime complexity suggests that Smith's framework is most appropriate, in highlighting only donor objectives as fixed and an implicit potential for failure in an NGO's capacity to meet them, allowing the most effective and efficient NGOs to thrive. This capacity for failure represents an extreme version of Keohane's sanctions, ensuring accountability through competition. Weber's framework, then, might be more appropriate for IGOs like UN agencies, which are not allowed to fail.

EFFECTIVNESS

It is clear that there are accountability mechanisms in humanitarian response to motivate expertise. To fully evaluate the degree to which these mechanism motivate the most effective assistance, it is essential to refer back to the ways in which experts add value. If experts bring technical specialization, how do accountability mechanisms ensure organizational learning? If experts bring interdisciplinary analysis, how do accountability mechanisms incentivize innovative solutions? If experts bring localized knowledge, how do accountability mechanisms empower efforts to reach the most affected populations?

Organizational learning in the humanitarian system demonstrates an authentic desire for improved response because it requires more than superficial concern for accountability. Organizational learning can best be understood as the process of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within the system, allowing it to improve with experience. The humanitarian framework necessitates the sharing of information. Yet, the IASC goes beyond those responsibilities in compiling jointly negotiated standards. Institutional learning requires design that provides for the provision of nonpartisan scientific information about the environment, regular feedback of information regarding activities, and the building of monitoring and research capacities. The IASC accomplishes all three in compiling best practices from monitoring and compiling the

[32] Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (Yale University Press, 2006).

success of experts in the system. Moreover, by drawing those standards from empirical experience, the IASC gives a voice to those who might not have otherwise been considered in the discussion. Even smaller, less known NGOs who find success in their activities can impact global standards.

At the same time, less known experts might struggle to find initial support, especially in the case of diffuse benefits. In 1996, in partnership with three foreign countries, the Grameen bank created a mobile phone company to extend telephone services across Bangaldesh, challenging conventional wisdom by buying power in a developing country too low to build a profitable wireless network. This idea was radical for a few reasons: There was no landline service in most of the 80,000 villages in Bangladesh, so only within a human development framework, intent on empowering the poor to lift themselves out of poverty, would such a suggestion make sense. Second, the project relied on a social business model framework where one invested to recover costs and derive social profit, rather than financial profit. Grameen Phone gave the poor the majority of shares in the company to allow them to benefit from soaring profits. Lastly, the project challenged value propositions by relying on "telephone ladies," or by giving local entrepreneurs bank loans to buy phones without collateral. Those women then provided phone service across their villages by lending users their phone for a couple of minutes.[33] The project developed local employment, helped many avoid a costly purchase, and was highly profitable for local populations. By 2008, the market had 40 million subscribers. Yet, despite widespread support today for the project's methodology of micro financing, it is unlikely such a radical project would thrive with present accountability mechanisms given a lack of supportive research, consensual knowledge or empirical success. In fact, the only reason the project initially found success was because its pioneer, Muhammad Yunus, offered to become a guarantor for the initial loans, personally taking on the risk. Further decentralization of the humanitarian framework is necessary to incentivize experts to innovate in creating the most effective humanitarian solutions.

[33] Muhammad Yunus, Bertrand Moingeon, and Laurence Lehmann-Ortega, "Building Social Business Models: Lessons from the Grameen Experience," *Long Range Planning* 43, no. 2–3 (April 2010): 308–25.

There also are many cases where innovative solutions are encouraged, namely when an organization can make a compelling case for its solution. IMPACT's activities with information management in Afghanistan provide a perfect case study. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) brought in IMPACT as part of the NGO consortia, specifically to be the information management agency. One interviewee described the circumstances:

> "Previously, the different organizations were going out based on some kind of referral mechanism to a specific area, collecting the data themselves, and we were then finding that there was data stored on seven different servers by people that were not necessarily equipped because it's not their main job to data collect. Analysis was being done unsystematically. It was being done by each different organization differently, and the way in which this data was shared was definitely not consistent… Sometimes we saw duplications because organizations would go to the same area and talk to the same people twice."
>
> "We were brought in to streamline the tool that was being used, we trained the enumerators from these different organizations, and the different organizations would then go out to the areas that they were already operating in, use our tools to collect data, and then when they uploaded it would come into our server."

Though IMPACT's efforts were clearly aimed at creating more effective response, they were met with significant friction within the consortium because they were demanding a slightly different data collection methodology. Moreover, if the data collected was shocking in any way, it was too easy for other NGOs to blame IMPACT's data collection method. Yet, because IMPACT received support from donors and promised transparency, it was able to persevere. IMPACT has now found strong buy-in from the consortium, the program runs smoothly, and IMPACT was able to significantly speed up response time. This case demonstrates how having multiple systems of accountability allow innovative solutions that might be foreign or uncomfortable to one group of actors.

The final indicator considers the degree to which experts are empowered to reach the most affected populations. A framework called "Accountability to Affected Populations" (AAP) has been gaining steam in the humanitarian community to address this very concern. In Somalia, IMPACT partnered with NGO Africa's Voices to capture

perceptions of affected populations regarding humanitarian response. Moreover, IMPACT is expanding to develop an initiative called AGORA, with the mission of creating more localized, area-based response. If aid is directed at a city, IMPACT wants to first ascertain the needs of each neighborhood. One interviewee states that they saw full accountability as receiving approval from affected populations before releasing documentation reflective of their needs. The plurality of initiatives IMPACT is taking to capture the voice of affected populations, especially those most vulnerable, is symptomatic of the larger push within the humanitarian community. Increased reliance on NGOs, who derive value form local roots, can only fuel this movement.

CONCLUSION

An interviewee posited that, in an ideal world, there would be a perfectly scientific way of making decisions, then amended to describe this ideal world as impossible because humanitarian response deals with human beings. Similarly, there can be no ideal humanitarian response because needs are just too complex. This paper demonstrates that experts are invaluable to humanitarian response, and how the coordination system is effective in ensuring accountability. As demands for greater evidence-based decision-making grows, humanitarian actors will only increasingly rely on the added-value of expertise.

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