



Week 4

Governing Humanitarianism & Development: Past, Present & Future

*Week 4 examines the **past (1)**, **present (2)**, as well as the **future (3)** of governing humanitarianism & development. 'Governing' generally means having control and/or influence over something and/or someone, exerting a form of power. The purpose is to interrogate past and present questions, and future directions for both humanitarian & developmental governance. Students will fully grasp to what extent the past highlights lessons learned from previous events, situations, theories & practices, and how these lessons can inform present humanitarianism & development. One aim is also to reflect upon how both humanitarianism & development should be rethought of today, in light of global instability & uncertainty & shifting power relations that all induce increased contradictions & constraints.*

1. GOVERNING HUMANITARIANISM & DEVELOPMENT: PAST



- **Humanitarian governance**, broadly defined, is the attempt to regulate the humanitarian domain.
- It includes rules, structures, and mechanisms for promoting accountable and effective humanitarian practices.
- Humanitarian governance can be considered as an organised and globalised search for saving the lives, increase the welfare, and lessen the suffering of the most vulnerable human groups and communities.
- Although humanitarian governance is legitimised

as an act of benevolence, it can also help many different actors to realise their political and economic objectives.

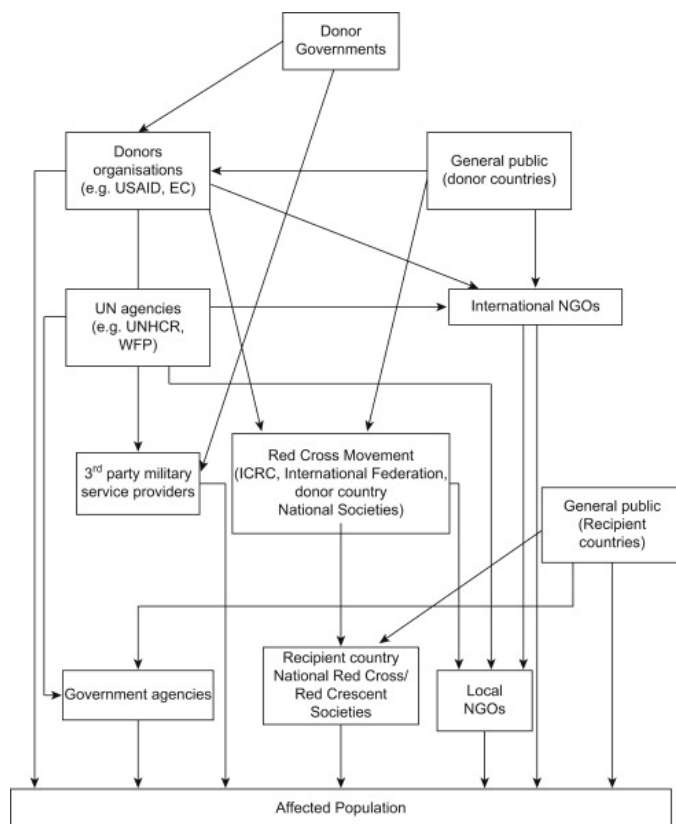
- Power and inequality are therefore central dimensions of humanitarian governance.
- Some humanitarian crises and the unintended and negative impacts of humanitarian intervention have spurred the development of humanitarian governance as a notion.
- Evaluations made of the operation Restore Hope in Somalia (1992-1993), genocide in Rwanda (1994), and the interventions in Bosnia (1992-1995) and Kosovo (1999) were key drivers in this respect.
- These historic humanitarian crises led to recommendations in the form of regulation and enforcement to ensure greater performance of international organisations as well as NGOs.
- Another concrete result of this dynamic was the establishment of the 'United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs'.
- In 1998, this one became the 'Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs'.

- OCHA is responsible for gathering humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent response to humanitarian emergencies.
- OCHA also guarantees a multilateral framework within which actors can contribute to this general response effort.
- Furthermore, the so-called 'Oslo Guidelines' on the use of military and civil defence assets in disaster relief were developed in 1994,
- They then updated in 2007 as a result of the increasing role played by the military in many humanitarian operations.

► **For more information, please consult the ProQuest eBook and additional readings.**

2. GOVERNING HUMANITARIANISM & DEVELOPMENT: PRESENT

- Self-regulation is one key ingredient of humanitarian governance.
- At both transnational, national and local scales, humanitarianism has been governed by non-state actors – humanitarian organisations.
- The rules and regulations governing the humanitarian sector have been a self-organised attempt at action.
- To date, this action has ranged from voluntary codes of conduct to more institutional structures (enforcement and sanctioning mechanisms).
- But the content of these regulations is defined by political processes led by actors given unequal power and influence, and with multiple agencies, values, and objectives.
- NGOs have created most handbooks and standards in this regard.
- This includes 'minimum standards' to help improve accountability as well as the overall quality of humanitarian responses.

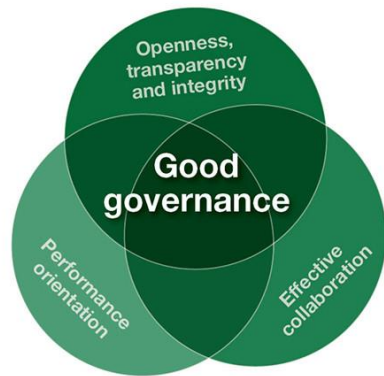


- Although the primary humanitarian and developmental actors are international and non-governmental, states continue to exert a role in both shaping and implementing humanitarian governance.
- Based on the 1991 UN Humanitarian Resolution, they have the first responsibility to protect their citizens in situations of disasters and emergencies and should in principle be able to respond to humanitarian crises.
- Whenever states require aid, they should be able to coordinate external assistance.
- There are state laws and procedures in aid-receiving, as well as for the supervision of humanitarian organisations.
- These regulations generally relate to much wider matters of politics and governance.
- Thus, restrictions of access for humanitarian organisations can also be used as a way of controlling populations, constraining NGOs, and curbing human rights.
- All humanitarians must always be able to face the contradiction between providing support and preserving the independence needed to protect those in need.

► *For more information, please consult the ProQuest eBook and additional readings.*

3. GOVERNING HUMANITARIANISM & DEVELOPMENT: FUTURE

- One of the challenges of governing humanitarians is the ‘accountability black hole’.
- Although humanitarian governance may originally be driven by a humanitarian ethos of assisting the most vulnerable, it can also have side effects.



- Indeed, humanitarian governance also involves practices ruling the lives of the most vulnerable without providing means of recourse to hold the humanitarians accountable for their actions.
 - Humanitarians may be involved in operations to promote their agendas or states’ objectives.
 - Thereby, they risk reproducing unequal power relations and are not held responsible for this.
 - Humanitarian organisations across the globe face challenges in delivering aid, securing funds and preserving public trust.
 - There are necessarily trade-offs between ideas of sovereignty, development, and human rights.
- As an outcome, humanitarians are now also major sub-contractors of governments, and often paradoxically detractors of the very institutions that they rely on for funds.
- This interrogates future directions for global humanitarian governance in relation to its pasts, highlighting lessons to be learned from historical events and practices.
- Besides, it raises the question as to whether humanitarian expansion has come at the expense of core human values and effective intervention.
- It asks how the pursuit of global equity and social justice can and has been pursued through changing international and local power structures.
- How can we rethink future directions of humanitarian governance across the world?
- How can shifting power relations be merged into the pursuit of equity and justice?
- What would renewed ways of working, in greater harmony with current realities, look like?
- What will be the characteristics of future successful humanitarian actions in time?
- There is evidently a challenge of bridging present gaps in policy and practice, as well as in the national and international spheres of intellectual reflection and practice.

► *For more information, please consult the ProQuest eBook and additional readings.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The below-reading materials can be found on ProQuest through your VLE platform (Online Library).

ProQuest eBook

- Kevin M. Cahill, *History and Hope: The International Humanitarian Reader* (Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 169-191.

Additional readings

- Stuart Gordon, *Regulating Humanitarian Governance: Humanitarianism & the ‘Risk Society’* (*Politics & Governance*, 2020).
- Jomo K. Sundaram & Anis Chowdhury, *Is Good Governance Good for Development?* (Bloomsbury Academic, UN Series on Development, 2012).