

practice” reports and field experiences can be found in their publications (Labbé and Daudin 2015).

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Independence

Along with humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, independence is a core humanitarian principle: “Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented” (OCHA 2012). Therefore, in its ideal configuration, humanitarianism aims at independence, for it is guided only by the aim to alleviate human suffering and save lives. Yet, wherever humanitarian action is promoted and conducted, a major concern that humanitarian organizations and practitioners have to face is the risk of manipulation by political, military, private, and religious actors.

Independence as a term situates humanitarian action in opposition to dependency, subjection, and domination. As a humanitarian principle, it is a product of “history, ethical imagination, and practical considerations” (Barnett and Weiss 2011: 109). Independence, like the principle of neutrality, is foundational in the pursuit of maintaining an apolitical impression of humanitarianism. Remaining aside, independent from politics, is an active strategy to create humanitarian space. Herein humanitarian issues are seen either as outside of

politics or the lowest common denominator between different politics, or even as diplomacy's "ground zero" (Paulmann 2013; Egeland 2013).

Maintaining humanitarian independence is a complex task. As a core principle and key operational strategy, independence is endorsed by those humanitarian actors refusing to accept resources (i.e. funding and donations) that might produce a conditionality compromising the actor's autonomy, either in scale or objectives (Minear 2002). In the context of complex emergencies and long-term conflicts, there have been several attempts by governmental, para-state, and armed groups at subordinating humanitarian goals to political ones (Donini 2011). However, humanitarian actors themselves may be inclined, in some circumstances, to accommodate or use political reasons and means to negotiate and deliver humanitarian aid, and at times to influence the course of events in conflict or post-disaster settings.

There are several other factors that may jeopardize the ambition for independence, for example the pressures of donors' agendas, the growing role of the private sector (from pharmaceutical corporations to agricultural industries and from insurance companies to service providers), the influence of broader goals (for instance in the case of faith-based humanitarian organizations) or simply the difficulty of handling the complexity of specific circumstances.

Independence is advocated particularly by some so-called traditional humanitarian actors. For example, Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) publicly speak against the instrumentalization of humanitarianism—although what happens in humanitarian practice is often the result of compromises and negotiations (De Lauri 2018). Other humanitarian actors are more directly involved in broad political projects such as promoting democracy, overthrowing a regime, or contributing to post-war reconstruction (Mascarenhas 2017). This indicates that the geography of humanitarian interventions and the variety of actors in the realm of humanitarianism are continuously redefining the interpretation of core humanitarian principles, including independence, and the way they are promoted and/or contested. Rather than being discussed ontologically as a single system, humanitarianism is best understood in plural terms with several independent and dependent interests at stake (Barnett and Weiss 2011).

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Indicators

Indicators are used to describe and measure different aspects of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian indicators fall into three distinct categories: situation indicators, response monitoring indicators, and impact indicators. Situation indicators track the effect a crisis has on both the affected population and infrastructure and services. They can either explain what the current situation is (baseline indicators) or explain what is required in crisis-affected areas (needs indicators). Response monitoring indicators consist of input, outcome, and output indicators. Input indicators show the financial and human resources provided for the response, outcome indicators measure the delivery of goods and services to affected populations towards the achievement of a particular outcome, and output indicators measure the likely or achieved effects of an intervention. Impact indicators measure the medium- to long-term results of an intervention (NATF 2012).

Gathering primary data for measuring progress using humanitarian indicators is often not feasible because of the inherent difficulties in collecting data during the acute phase of humanitarian emergencies and the ethical issues that surround conducting research when civilians are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. However, it may be possible to gather secondary data