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Corruption

There has been a dramatic increase in the volume, cost, and length of humanitarian assistance provision since 2007, in large part because of the protracted nature of crisis (OCHA 2017). Humanitarian interventions are, for different reasons, more prone to corruption than regular development assistance and incidents of corruption more often go unreported (TI 2010). Paul Harvey (2015) argues that humanitarian aid agencies are reluctant to talk about corruption in the fear that it could undermine public support for aid in donor countries, as well as impact local aid relations and increase tension within societies.

Humanitarian interventions take place when there is a need to respond to an urgent or accumulated need for humanitarian assistance to support victims of conflicts and disasters and to save lives, as well as to negotiate access to and upholding of human rights. There are many types of interventions, ranging from responses to a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a flood, responding to an armed conflict that causes acute or consistent shortages of, for example, food, water, and medicine, and engagement with warring parties of influential groups that might block delivery of aid or deny all or part of the population access to services. The urgency to reach groups in need of assistance can lead to a larger willingness to accept a degree of corruption to get supplies to those in need. With large amounts of assistance shipped into

an area in a short time, there are also more opportunities to siphon off assistance.

Corruption in humanitarian intervention occurs at all stages of the program cycle, from the targeting and registration process to the transport and distribution of relief aid, procurement, financial and staff management, and program monitoring and evaluations (U4 2009). There is a noted concern that international agencies (and at times national ones) bring substantial resources into a resource-poor environment, often rapidly and with little in-depth knowledge of the environment. This leads to the risk of exacerbating existing endemic corruption and of resources being corruptly diverted (Walker and Maxwell 2009).

The term corruption does not lend itself to one univocal definition, since it can refer to different causes, contexts and social dynamics (De Lauri 2013). Corruption in humanitarian assistance can take many forms. According to the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (U4 2019), this extends beyond cash bribes and other forms of financial corruption. It can include the fraudulent diversion or theft of resources, the denial or granting of access to resources to serve political or military ends, extortion of affected populations, nepotism in recruitment practices in aid agencies, and sexual exploitation of those (predominantly women) seeking access to aid. The exact nature of corruption depends on the form of aid being provided, whether it is in cash or in kind and whether this is provision of shelter, food, health care, sanitation, longer-term infrastructure development, or all-encompassing support, such as in refugee camps.

Gender is a key dimension to understanding specific forms of corruption, which can then turn into sexual exploitation and abuse. In the short term, corruption compromises people's access to basic services such as food, shelter, family planning, health, and education. This has long-lasting physiological, psychological, and social consequences, and compromises people's opportunities for and prospects of social and economic empowerment (U4 2009).

Harvey (2015) argues that improving how corruption is tackled in humanitarian interventions matters because:

– corruption limits the scarce amount of aid reaching people who desperately need it;
– corruption is one of the main factors preventing better and more direct funding to humanitarian actors in developing countries;
– the perception of corruption undermines support for aid in donor countries.

Onsite monitoring of assistance provision deters and detects corruption, and that greater transparency in the information made available to local governments, recipient communities, and civil society organizations is important for

effective monitoring and genuine accountability (TI 2010). There is moreover some evidence that such downward accountability can empower beneficiaries to report corruption, if not restrained by hierarchical institutional policies, local power structures, and cultural inhibitions.

A significant issue relates to the normative understanding of corruption that still predominantly characterizes international donors and anti-corruption agencies' approaches, with a lack of grounded knowledge about the ways in which corruption itself may be seen as a modality of governance (De Lauri 2013).

Arne Strand

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Criminalization

Criminalization in the humanitarian space is a form of governance whereby national and supranational entities control and sanction humanitarian actors and affected populations. This includes criminalization processes, through which states, media, humanitarians, or citizens define particular groups and practices as criminal or as a crime, and the use of penal power to sanction violations of public law and harm to public welfare.