Humanitarian Crises, Intervention and Security
A framework for evidence-based programming

Edited by
Liesbet Heyse, Andrej Zwitter, Rafael Wittek and Joost Herman
Humanitarian Crises, Intervention and Security

This book presents a new framework of analysis to assess natural and man-made disasters and humanitarian crises, and the feasibility of interventions in these complex emergencies.

The past half-century has witnessed a dramatic increase in such crises – such as in Haiti, Iraq and Sudan – and this volume aims to pioneer a theory-based, interdisciplinary framework that can assist students and practitioners in the field to acquire the skills and expertise necessary for evidence-based decision-making and programming in humanitarian action. It has four major objectives:

• to provide a tool for diagnosing and understanding complex emergencies, and build on the concepts of state security and human security to provide a ‘Snap-Shot Analysis’ of the status quo;
• to provide a tool for analyzing the causes of crises as well as the related stakeholder field;
• to provide a frame to structure and analyze the information required to evaluate, monitor and/or design interventions for different actors on a project and/or program level;
• to combine concepts used in the humanitarian field with underlying theory in a practically relevant way.

The book will be of much interest to students of humanitarian intervention, human security, peacebuilding, development studies, peace studies and IR in general.

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Conclusion

Liesbet Heyse, Andrej Zwitter, Rafael Wittek and Joost Herman

Humanitarian action often has to take place in highly complex environments, with strong pressures on coordination and cooperation between a heterogeneous group of stakeholders, tough budget constraints, demanding accountability requirements and considerable time pressure. These are highly adverse circumstances for any decision-maker. Yet it is these contexts within which aid organizations have to take informed decisions, among others when, where and how to intervene or with whom to cooperate. Not surprisingly, the humanitarian sector is often accused of having taken wrong or insufficiently informed decisions.

In the past decades, awareness has grown and urgency is felt to avoid wrong or uninformed decisions and resulting flaws in humanitarian aid provision. Collecting, evaluating and analyzing information and using this information for evidence-based programming is deemed key in preventing such repetitive mistakes. However, humanitarian crisis contexts are by far ideal settings for thorough and thoughtful information collection and analysis processes, if only due to contextual constraints such as safety risks, lack of (access to) information, doubtful reliability and validity of information, and the strategic use of information in humanitarian crises. Despite these constraints, we argue, the sector should strive for and can achieve increased impact by means of adopting an evidence-based programming approach.

A ‘meta’-model for evidence-based humanitarian programming

Successful evidence-based programming requires robust and reliable tools for the collection and analysis of information on the context of the crisis and its stakeholders. We argue that such methods should meet a set of seemingly contradicting requirements. First, such tools should be both quick to apply and sufficiently thorough as to prevent superficial or simply wrong analysis. Second, such methods need to be quite generally applicable but also adaptable to the specifics of various crisis contexts (disasters, conflicts, complex emergencies, etc.) so that not only experts and specialists, but also a broad range of aid workers can perform these analyses. Third, in addition to an analytical framework, these methods should also provide guidelines for how to use the findings for programming purposes.
The humanitarian sector can already draw on many frameworks, tools and methods, which have proven useful in achieving more impact and preventing repetitive mistakes. We argue that these tools score well on some of the above-mentioned requirements but less on others. For example, some models (e.g. MIRA) can be labeled ‘quick and coarse grained’ whilst others, such as the PAR and the SLA frameworks, are ‘slow but thorough’. In between these tools are political economy and arena approaches that provide a valuable actor-oriented lens, but offer less concrete entry points for humanitarian programming.

Our analysis of the pros and cons of existing models led us to develop a ‘meta-model’ for context analysis and evidence-based humanitarian programming: the Humanitarian Analysis and Intervention Framework (H-AID framework). This framework is supposed to complement existing approaches. We consider it to score high on both ‘speed’ and ‘thoroughness’: it can be applied by humanitarian practitioners working under time constraints, while yielding sufficiently reliable and valid information for decision-makers. Simultaneously, this framework aims to be generally applicable but locally adaptable as well as offering entry points for programming advice. The H-AID framework developed in this book is thus an attempt to help the sector in arriving at better ‘informed decisions’ when preparing and implementing humanitarian interventions.

Core components of the H-AID framework

As outlined in this book, the H-AID framework consists of three core components: Comprehensive Context Analysis, Intervention Analysis and Stakeholder Analysis (see Figure C.1). We briefly summarize them below.

**Comprehensive Context Analysis: a multidisciplinary effort**

CCA is firmly grounded in comprehensive security and securitization debates in International Relations. Five specific context dimensions crucial to CCA have been discussed: the political, economic, socio-cultural, food and health, and environmental contexts. These chapters demonstrate that a proper CCA of humanitarian crises is multidisciplinary in nature, and needs to combine insights from academic disciplines ranging from economics to medicine, and from anthropology to biology. The CCA also illustrates the power of visualizing the results. The ‘radar chart’ facilitates comparisons between different security dimensions, and identification of constraints and capabilities. These five context dimensions are always present and we therefore deem them crucial for any context analysis.

**Intervention Analysis: doing good by doing nothing?**

The H-AID framework also provides guidance for decision-makers, country and project managers, project proposal writers, assessment teams and humanitarian
experts to make the step from context analysis to intervention design. Using the method of theory-based *ex ante* evaluation allows to thoroughly think through, in advance, if action is required in a certain situation, and, if so, which action is then most suitable. Such an exercise consists of three steps: (1) identifying a set of interventions deemed suitable to a particular humanitarian situation; (2) outlining necessary context conditions for success of such identified interventions; (3) comparing these necessary context conditions to the actual context characteristics.

The H-AID framework purposefully follows a needs-based rather than a supply-driven approach in intervention analysis. This implies that an *ex ante* evaluation of proposed interventions might lead to the conclusion that these interventions might not be suitable or desirable, or might actually do more harm than good. Such an intervention analysis may help to prevent standardized responses and tunnel vision.
Stakeholder Analysis for negotiation and strategic action

The Stakeholder Analysis tool presented in this book helps to find out which of the suitable interventions may also be feasible and safe options. Stakeholder analyses in the humanitarian sector often are limited to an actor mapping exercise, which outlines a set of stakeholders present on the scene. The H-AID Stakeholder Analysis also requires identification of the key conflicting issues as they are related to the design of interventions, as well as the position, salience and power of these stakeholders. This information allows derivation of strategic insights for negotiation, both for purposes of implementing projects as well as of achieving organizational security.

Taken together, the three tools of the H-AID meta-framework (Comprehensive Context Analysis, Intervention Analysis and Stakeholder Analysis) provide information that is essential for the design of feasible interventions, and offer useful instruments for visualization. This information includes contextual capabilities and constraints, trends indicated by stakeholder interactions, stakeholder related risks and opportunities and the kinds of interventions that are appropriate. These three elements come with tools that allow for illustrating the information and thereby supporting the decision-making process. Finally, as a crucial component of any intervention design, this book provides guidelines and theoretical considerations for monitoring and evaluation as well as quality assurance. Each of these components requires that aid workers acquire a solid basis in information collection and analysis skills: they should know what information is valuable to collect, how to collect valid and reliable information, as well as to judge information quality, to analyze it, interpret it, scale and weigh it. We have also provided basic guidelines as how to achieve this.

Limitations to the H-AID framework

The H-AID framework has potential to assist the humanitarian sector in achieving evidence-based programming, but of course is not without limitations. We discuss four of these below.

Fuzzy categories and the risk of over- or underestimation

With the exception of the domains of food and health, there are usually no clearly defined sets of indicators or objective thresholds to assess the level of threat related to economic, social, political or environmental security. The lack of such objective criteria entails the risk of arbitrary judgments, and may lead to over- or underestimation of the threat to a specific domain. The analytical tools presented in the book are not able to solve this problem, and will not offer an ‘objective’ assessment of a situation. The tools do, however, offer guidelines for a comprehensive analysis, for identifying ‘known unknowns’, and for being transparent about assumptions and choices made in the information collection and analysis process.
Interrelated domains and issues of causality

The five context dimensions are interrelated and influence each other. For example, threats to economic security may be the cause of threats to food security, which in turn can be a threat for social security. Though there are instruments to analyze and identify these interrelations – such as cause mapping, root cause or stream analysis techniques – the tools in this book do not provide much guidance as how to systematically take these interrelationships into account in terms of mapping and describing them, and drawing conclusions about implications for interventions. The radar graph is not a causal map, but a tool that offers a summary overview. Nevertheless, it may help to trigger questions about the repercussions of conditions and events in one context on threats to security in other contexts.

Stakeholder Analysis versus stakeholder dialogue

Stakeholder Analysis is a tool designed to maximize the outcomes of one single stakeholder. Though the tool may nevertheless be useful for resolving conflicts, it provides little guidance for how to solve collective action problems and achieve joint production across several stakeholders. For example, some crisis situations may require major collaborative efforts, which can only be achieved through inter-organizational coordination of the organizational field as a whole. The application of stakeholder analysis techniques that maximize the outcomes of single stakeholders (e.g. specific humanitarian organizations) may be less fruitful in such settings, unless flanked by other techniques directed towards finding sustainable joined solutions, like stakeholder dialogues.

Quantification and the risk of quasi-precision

Both CCA and stakeholder analysis use quantification as an analytical aid. While facilitating transparency about assumptions and decisions as well as fostering systematic comparison, one danger of this approach is that small errors may cumulate to large biases and that numbers are reified as a reality of their own. This may lead to an impression of quasi-precision. Consequently, such quantification steps should be done with caution. Interpretations should be grounded in thorough background knowledge on how the ‘raw’ information on context or stakeholder characteristics has been translated into numerical indicators, and in particular on the size of the potential error margins associated with the estimates. The H-AID framework therefore also shows the importance of a multi-method approach to humanitarian CCA, in which qualitative and quantitative information is used.

Adopting, routinizing and testing the H-AID framework

A key objective of this book is to show the added value of evidence-based programming and the use of tools such as the H-AID framework. A remaining
challenge is how to build such a framework in existing organizational routines. This is not an easy task, as discussed in the chapter on monitoring, evaluation and learning in humanitarian organizations. One of the reasons is that the H-AID framework assumes an ongoing analytical and reflective process, closely aligned with monitoring processes in the project management cycle as well as internal management processes such as learning processes and security management. How is this achieved in aid organizations? Moreover, how can we make sure that the tool is not only used, but also used correctly and constantly improved?

It is beyond the scope of this book to provide a comprehensive analysis of how to build such sustainable routines (see also Chapter 13). We only sketch three organizational arrangements that might facilitate building such routines. First, the skills required for conducting a sound context, intervention and stakeholder analysis can be learned. Hence, professionalization of training of aid workers is an important safeguard to ensure a sound application of these techniques. These training efforts can be organized at the level of the humanitarian sector or within single humanitarian organizations. To ensure the quality of the training, cooperation between practitioners and academics has been proven to be very effective in the past, and should thus be sustained in the future. Even short training modules can be highly effective. Once acquired, these skills need to be practiced in order not to fade, so humanitarian organizations may benefit from making practical training and refreshing of these skills an integral part of their investments in its workforce.

Second, another ingredient for taking informed decisions is the availability, quality and rapid accessibility of information. The sector is to compliment for its efforts to improve the continuous and collective collection, systematization and accessibility of knowledge about emergency contexts, intervention processes and project performance. Great efforts to build systematic repositories have already been started, such as done in OCHA, ALNAP, ACAPs, various humanitarian organizations (CARE) and via internet applications such as the Humanitarian Genome search engine of lessons learnt in humanitarian aid (www.humaitariangenome.com).

Third, in order to remain useful, the tool itself needs to be constantly tested against real life applications, and subsequently adapted, expanded and improved. This requires continuous feedback by practitioners on the strengths and shortcomings of the tools as well as comparative case studies conducted by humanitarian studies students and scholars.

All in all, we consider the potential benefits of the H-AID framework in terms of speed, thoroughness, general applicability, local adaptability and generating programming advice to outweigh its limitations. It is an instrument that complements existing frameworks. We believe that its qualities have the potential to assist humanitarian organizations in their attempts to improve evidence-based programming. We hope that the framework will further prove its usefulness in future applications.
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