

## **Rethinking Humanitarian Assistance Coordination**

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This paper develops an analytical framework to address an issue of enduring and seemingly intractable concern, how to secure improved coordination among those parties and organizations that seek to provide assistance in humanitarian crises. This matter receives persistent attention because all parties agree that more successful coordination of their efforts will lead to improved outcomes for those they seek to serve. The trouble is that the structure of actors and the operating environments in which humanitarian agents must work do not readily encourage broad and open cooperation among them. The humanitarian assistance literature has rightly been preoccupied with describing the dimensions of that operating environment and with seeking to understand better what conditions and characteristics of organizational structure and operation might lead to improved service delivery processes and outcomes.

While building upon that work and certainly believing in its importance, we begin to explore a different analytical tack here and, after providing a capsule review of what we believe to be central characteristics of the humanitarian agency operating environment, we suggest an alternate basis for understanding both the conditions for improved coordination and for how we might conceptualize their realization. We argue that the operating environment of humanitarian assistance is best conceived as an inter-organizational social network or regime and that the problem of power and authority in such situations must be re-founded or reconceived accordingly<sup>1</sup>. We develop this argument to contribute to what we perceive to be a vital and important ongoing dialogue among analysts concerning how humanitarian aid may most effectively be delivered in the context of a realistic appraisal of the structural and environmental conditions in which it is offered. We offer this analysis tentatively and in the knowledge that it remains incomplete. Still, we are hopeful that this way of conceiving of these issues and the analytic model that we offer on its foundation may help analysts and practitioners alike to imagine fresh possibilities for organizational action and possible new modes of thinking concerning the nature of cooperation and coordination in these always-complex situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-organizational networks diffuse power and authority and create interdependence by definition. Generally speaking, to implement a program or policy via multiple partners will require that all organizational participants reconsider who possesses actionable authority and power. Those interested in securing cooperative or joint and several actions will need to provide reasons or incentives or both that persuade network partners to proceed in ways that they believe ought to be pursued.

More specifically, to attend to these relatively broad aims in this brief effort, we first outline what we take to be the primary elements of the organizational environment in which humanitarian efforts must proceed, next suggest a way of thinking about how one might conceive of those conditions that builds on recent work by Minear (2002) and Stockton (2002) and then offer the elements of a strategic contingency model of the humanitarian assistance coordination dilemma (Raab and Milward, 2003). We then seek briefly to illustrate how this way of thinking leads us to understand better the major factors that shaped how humanitarian actors behaved and why in the Yugoslav, Rwanda and Afghan crises of the last decade or so. Our analytical frame leads us to rethink assumptions concerning how best to conceptualize both the environment and the behavior of humanitarian organizations engaged in providing assistance in emergency situations.

### **The Organizational Setting of Humanitarian Assistance: Reluctant Partners Operating Amidst Diffuse Authority**

Major contributors to the literature concerning humanitarian assistance agree that this setting does not encourage traditional forms of organizational coordination and may, indeed, actively discourage them (Minear, 2002, Stockton, 2002). This is so for a number of reasons. First, while the United Nations (UN) plays a vital role in humanitarian aid, that institution operates several major such organizations and the Security Council has vested none of them with capacity to control or oversee the efforts of their peers. Thus, the World Food Program exists along side the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which itself operates cheek by jowl with the United Nations Children's Education Fund which operates along side the World Health Organization and so on. This list might be extended but it suggests clearly that the UN is fractionated organizationally along functional lines as it seeks to address humanitarian crises. (Kent, 1987, Borton, 1993). For its part, the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, while nominally charged with coordination of United Nations humanitarian efforts, does not enjoy the operational latitude actually to tell any UN entity how it should behave or why when acting in a crisis (Reindorp, 2002, Reindorp and Wiles, 2001). It is also important to keep in mind that each of these organizations depends for funding on the goodwill of UN member governments and/or the broader populations of those nations. These states and

their citizens may elect to provide such funds, as each believes appropriate, based on their individual assessment of their perceived interests in specific nations or emergencies.

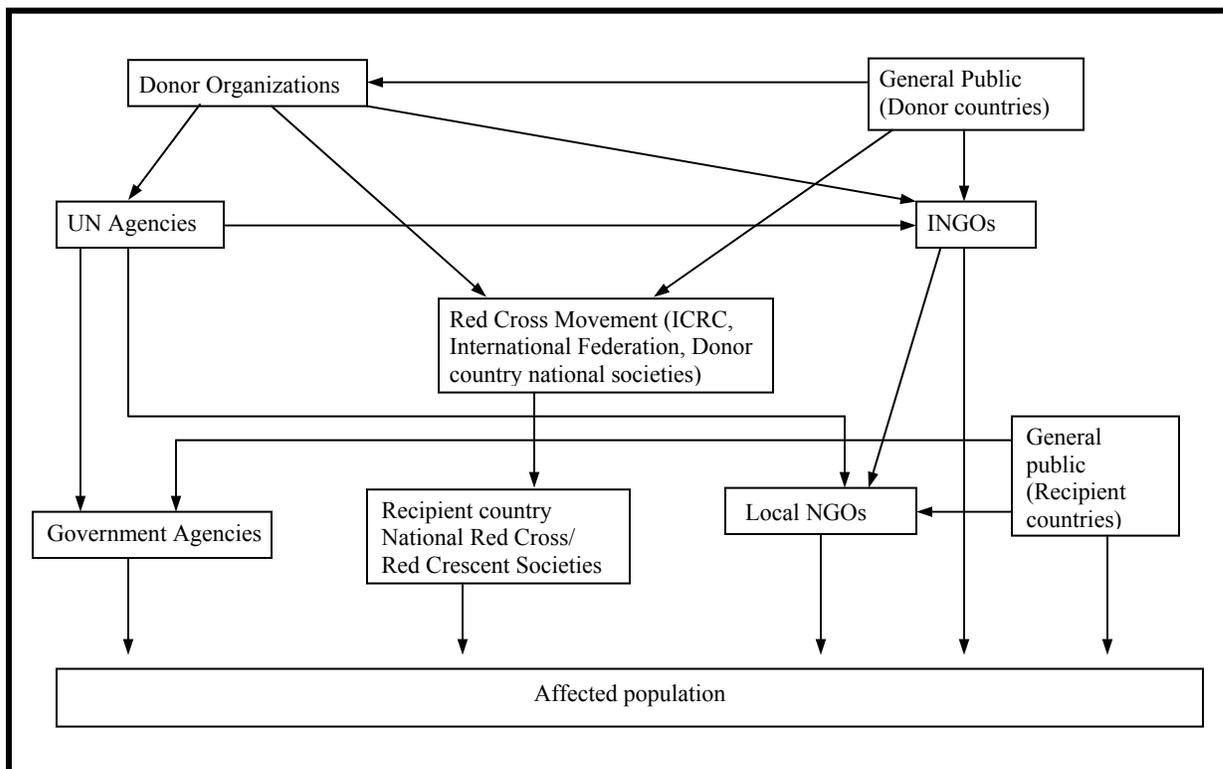
This state of affairs, while obviously managerially quite complex, hardly exhausts the obstacles confronting effective coordination in humanitarian crisis scenarios. Instead, both on grounds of helping the affected peoples develop or refine their capacity to aid themselves and because many UN humanitarian agencies are not operating entities, a variety of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) as well as national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are likely to be involved in aid efforts as well. These may number in the dozens so that imagining coordination among them by a single agent, even one possessing a kitbag of strong tools that the international humanitarian environment typically does not provide, is daunting.

All of this is to say that the characteristic organizational environment operative in humanitarian emergencies finds a number of UN agencies anxious to assist but with no common actor empowered with coordinating their efforts and with no secure budget available to do so. A number of international nongovernmental institutions are similarly poised to provide help but with like uncertainty in their finances and an indeterminate number of local (intra-national) NGOs at least potentially eager to intervene as well. Notably, this already long list leaves aside the question of the possible independent role of major Western nations (especially) and whether the government of the affected state is itself willing and able to mobilize help for those requiring it. National capacity and political will to act often depend in no small measure on whether the disaster is linked to war and what role that government is playing in the conflict or, in some instances, conflicts (The Economist, Sudan, 2004). The environment for active and self-conscious top down coordination of aid efforts in most humanitarian crises is hardly auspicious.

Individual and international nongovernmental agencies bring their own missions and organizational strategies to their aid efforts and their managers and leaders quite naturally find it difficult to see the world through other than the lenses that those perspectives supply (Scott, 2003). The UN organizations are also likely to wish to proceed against the claims placed upon them in concert with their favored INGO and NGO allies. Governments, meanwhile, both donor and crisis afflicted, will act as appears appropriate to their

interests both in determining whether to respond and in discerning how to do so. This is at least a pluralistic organizational environment if not a hyper-pluralistic one that is characterized foremost by the lack of any overarching legitimate authority with capacity or claim to suggest how individual players, let alone all of the actors as collectivity, should act or operate. The humanitarian organizational context, in short, is one of diffuse authority among a number of related and perhaps interdependent, but nonetheless at least quasi-autonomous, participants. Authority in this organizational context is “noncentralized” and multi-organizational. Figure 1 depicts an example of the range of actors typically involved in humanitarian assistance efforts. To suggest that these operating environments are complex somehow seems an inadequate descriptor of their Rube Goldberg-like intricacy.

Figure 1: The International Relief System



(Source: Borton, 1993, 188.)

We view this organizational environment as a perhaps uniquely complex network form of governance or social action. We follow O’Toole in our understanding of networks:

Networks are structures of interdependence involving multiple organizations or parts thereof, where one unit is not merely the formal subordinate of the other in some larger hierarchical arrangement. Networks exhibit some structural stability but extend beyond formal established linkages and policy legitimated ties. The notion of networks excludes more formal hierarchies and perfect markets, but includes a wide range of structures in between. The institutional glue congealing networked ties may include authority bonds, exchange relations and coalitions based on common interest, all within a single multiunit structure (O'Toole, 1997, 45).

While constructed anew in each emergency in its particulars, UN humanitarian aid network interventions are always structurally without a single steersman with operative hierarchical control. Such glue as exists to cause the otherwise self-directed members of these networks to work together must be built of the stuff to which O'Toole alludes and that fact constitutes an enduring challenge for those operating in these environments.

Robert Stoker's characterization of the program implementation environment of American federalism aptly captures, by analogy, many of the major dimensions of the network context that confronts the parties intervening in humanitarian emergencies:

If cooperation cannot be induced by command, the limits of national leadership [read UN leadership in the humanitarian context] are often defined by the inclination of reluctant partners to cooperate and the difficulties of implementation may be understood as problems of inducing cooperation within a context of diffuse authority (1991, 14).

As in American federalism, no single player in humanitarian aid scenarios, including the UN which has never been given such latitude from its member governments nor offered it as a result to any of its agencies, can command either the affected national governments or proto governments (such as may exist in instances of civil war), the array of UN entities, or the many INGOs and NGOs operative in these situations to behave in specific ways. This situation has often been decried, not least by donor governments

and their agencies, for what it implies about the capacity of these organizations to cooperate and provide needed assistance efficiently and effectively. But however much its implications may be lamented; it is obvious that these parties have been continuously unable or unwilling to agree to change it<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, a strong conceptual case can be made for such organizational pluralism in network implementation structures to the extent that “planting many flowers” yields more efficacious aid because it requires the engaged parties to come together and to develop voluntary and enduring forms of cooperation while ensuring that each is attentive to local conditions and needs. Minear captured this tension well as he discussed the distinction between coordination by hierarchical control (or command) and that by consensus:

A consensus approach to coordination generates shared ownership, enlisting the entire community in the humanitarian effort. Yet, that approach also requires time and energy to hammer out common approaches and mutually satisfactory arrangements. By contrast, the insertion or imposition of a command element provides clearer lines of authority and accountability and generates faster paced action, sometimes sacrificing a sense of participation. The solution is not to devise a middle solution but to choose one or the other and work to offset its inherent disadvantages (2002, 34).

We believe that the determinative actors in these situations—most vitally the permanent members of the Security Council—have already elected in favor of a noncentralized humanitarian intervention framework (at least in the sense of overhead control or hierarchical direction) and that the need to find means to secure a modicum of cooperation given that unchanging (at least it has not changed despite some three decades of reports and expressions of concern) condition is compelling (Borton, 1996). We see the humanitarian scenario as one of diffuse authority among a range of players unwilling, for a variety of often cogent reasons—competition for media salience, competition for resources, fragmented missions, perceived

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<sup>2</sup> The comprehensive histories of UN humanitarian efforts that we reviewed for this effort have made this much clear; the UN Security Council has never demonstrated the political will to vest a single United Nations entity with sufficient authority to command or control humanitarian interventions despite several decades of reports urging such actions in the strongest possible terms. We have concluded that such reticence is not accidental and unlikely to change.

national interests—among others—to cede controlling authority of organizational action to any other single network player except in very specific circumstances and certainly never in the abstract. The operational challenge therefore, in our view, lies not in finding means to persuade UN members or NGOs to provide for more centralized coordination and control of their actions or in seeking to overcome the deficiencies of coordination by consensus but in devising humanitarian social networks of action that can act effectively without central control or direction. In our view, this requires the development of organizational network environments in which stakeholders develop a robust array of communication channels that foster inter-organizational awareness and, finally, network learning.

### **Reconceiving Humanitarian Interventions as Dynamic and Evolving “Power To” Networks**

Another way to convey this point is to revisit Clarence Stone’s distinction between “power over” and “power to.” In his view, the actors in the American chaordic environment of governance (and by extension humanitarian networks as well), characterized, that is, by both order and chaos or competition and potential cooperation among its participants, constitute emergent networks of action (Hock, 1999). Stone argues that

Political power is the power to accomplish things. If society is not neatly integrated into a hierarchy of command and control, the problems of governance cannot be reduced to the question of who holds authority over others. Instead—assuming that numerous centers of authority exist, each pursuing its own ends—the purpose of governance is not to command but to create the capacity to act—to create the ‘power to’ accomplish collective goals. This is done by creating arrangements that allow numerous authorities to cooperate to achieve collective goals (1989, 229).

Seen from this vantage point, the social networks that constitute the humanitarian aid environment are dynamic and evolutionary and characterized by a series of actors, each of whom may elect not only to work together with other parties in the network but also to determine the grounds on which they will do so if and when they do so elect. No single player oversees this process that is the product of “informal communicative relations, a horizontal as opposed to a hierarchical pattern of relations, and a decentralized

pattern of actors' positions. These relations are based on the exchange of information, money, political support or credible commitments for cooperative behavior among state, societal, and private actors" (Raab and Milward, 2003, 417).

The network of humanitarian actors in a given emergency or crisis must create its own power to act without the supervisory claim or influence exerted by a single strong coordinating agent and must develop commonly the wherewithal or "power to" act collectively. Such "networks of effective action", as they have been dubbed by Ricigliano (2003) must overcome the potential "opportunism, conflicting goals, differential tolerance for risk, and unwillingness to contribute their 'fair' share to the common task that may occur among network participants to create, or better, to institutionalize, shared capacity for problem solving" (Daboub and Calton, 2002, 87). This scenario is one of decidedly mixed motives among participants but it is also clear that effective leadership and organizational strategy as well as a common need for information holds considerable promise to help participants in these networks overcome the structural impediments otherwise present.

The principal challenge appears to be to develop sustained and sustainable communication ties among actors that are linked most basically by their common interest to develop a capacity to act without the imposition of unifying control. The essential imperative is to elicit sufficient cooperation among network participants so as to provide aid without at the same time requiring that any single network participant forsake substantial operating independence. This is the primary motivation for stakeholders to meet and to seek to find ways to act in concert. As Glynn and colleagues have remarked, in structural terms, "the impulse to organize is antithetical to the effort to pluralize" (2000, 726). The trick in the humanitarian context is to address this reality by building a sufficient density of common claims and formal and informal organizational ties to create an ongoing social network of shared purposive organizational action.

This contention suggests that humanitarian networks must be seen as pluralist sets of stakeholder organizations that are only loosely coupled around a broad interest in avoiding more forceful coordination from above as well as a common interest in providing needed assistance, however differentially

understood. Those common claims—the most positive reasons for cooperation—must be constructed and reconstructed on the basis of a relatively weak and yet persistent set of relationships among the (at least) UN, NGO, governmental and INGO organizations engaged in addressing human crises. Realistically, therefore, long-term cooperation must result from a shared set of values-based claims that network members must first develop and then act upon as they interact in order to develop a modicum of trust and mutual confidence. That trust and confidence will, in turn, sustain and provide fertile ground for continued interactions and ultimately for successful coordination of organizational activities.

### **Elements of an Analytical Framework to Describe Humanitarian Networks**

#### *The Structure of the Humanitarian Network Operating Environment*

Loosely coupled humanitarian organization networks evidence relatively weak but nonetheless enduring structural ties because the various relevant UN entities and their many partner INGOs are nearly always asked to respond in some fashion to humanitarian crises wherever they erupt. But as networks of action they are also subject to a crucial set of important contextual or environmental conditions and these must be recalled even as the issue of how to build and sustain cooperation within them is considered.

A summary list of relevant enduring conditions or characteristics of humanitarian assistance networks as we have derived them from the relevant literature follows:

- These networks are occupied by loosely coupled organizations whose members cross sectors and who may neither recognize nor assume overseeing or controlling coordinating authority. Indeed, as with many INGOs and NGOs, their very existence and certainly their role in these crises is predicated in part on their perceived independence from both local government and international (UN) and bi-lateral agencies. It may not simply be assumed that NGOs or INGOs occupy roles in a humanitarian network simply to implement UN (or other actor) policies or programs. The potential effectiveness of these humanitarian aid networks will be deeply affected by
  - a. The resources of the national governments involved including their fiscal and institutional capacities to respond

- b. The political capacity and willingness of those same governments to respond
- c. Whether, in fact, a government may even be said to exist in an affected nation especially when humanitarian tragedies unfold in times of civil strife or conflict (Arguably, a government must first exist to possess capacity and to demonstrate a will or its dearth.)
- Humanitarian network potential will also be shaped by varying political willingness among major UN donor nations to respond to humanitarian-based claims with funds to support responsive action
- Both the character and potential of humanitarian efforts will also be conditioned importantly by whether major UN (Security Council members) respond with military force or with combined humanitarian aid and armed force or with only military action<sup>3</sup>
- The variable salience of humanitarian emergencies in the Western (especially) press also conditions how donor nations will respond to crisis-based claims. This is not simply a question of whether a given situation receives attention but whether it garners sufficient attention and concern that it becomes a macro scale concern that demands ongoing public official comment and/or action (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993)
- The nature and caliber of an UN agency as well as INGO and NGO leadership will mediate stakeholder actions in humanitarian networks by affecting, often profoundly, how aims are articulated and whether information is shared and for what purposes and in what ways within and among organizational actors in the network.

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<sup>3</sup> The presence or absence of civil conflict changes the humanitarian environment profoundly in our view. This is so both because its presence often endangers the lives of humanitarian aid agents while making their already difficult responsibilities often impossible to prosecute. It is also the case, however, because such strife—ethnic cleansing, warlord genocide etc.—may bring foreign troops and when nations commit troops they are very likely to set the conditions for all forms of action, humanitarian or otherwise, while their troops are under duress. Such nations control the theater of action and may simply use their military resources to augment if not eclipse their civilian humanitarian aid counterparts. Civil conflict is important for itself but just as significant for the interventions it brings and the consequences those choices bring in train for humanitarian organizations.

*The Boundary Spanning Claims of the Humanitarian Network Operating Environment*

If these represent many of the more salient factors at play in these networks, it nonetheless seems clear that they will together condition but not ordain the outcomes of humanitarian action arising from them. They may set the stage or provide the context or environment within which network participant action occurs but they do not dictate how stakeholders will interact or choose to react (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003). Rather, network stakeholders will choose how to act to create problem-solving capacity—or elect not to do so—within their relatively weak but ongoing sets of relationships<sup>4</sup>. In short, to develop a context sensitive theory of humanitarian network action, one must also chart the range and character of continuing significant patterns of communication and ties among network stakeholders and highlight those in the context of the most significant features of their operating environments.

That said, it is nonetheless interesting and important to note that these interactions and the organizational choices they imply are at least partly conditioned by the structural claims and structurally derived incentives in which they occur. The network environment alone is not determinative but neither are participants free to act in any way they please. Instead, they must act within the constraints of their operating contexts even as they exercise such freedom of choice as they possess to seek to alter those conditions and structures. Network participant leaders possess and exercise real agency but their capacity to do so is hardly unfettered.

As noted above, effective network cooperation requires that dissimilar institutional staffs develop relatively enduring relationships across organizational boundaries. That is, staffers must discern good reasons to develop and to maintain working relationships to other institutions in the network. For INGOs and NGOs, relations are often likely to reflect a fiscal spine, that is, to be built in some part on contractual

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<sup>4</sup> We are impressed by the strength of weak ties if these can be exploited to develop more robust normative claims including inter-personal trust and thereby organizational boundary spanning relations of potential action. See M. Granovetter, 1973 and Wallis, 1994.

obligations—at least for those many NGOs with contractual relationships with UN and INGO agencies as well as donor governments. For UN entities, the situation is more complex and horizontal communication and relations among these organizations are likely to be predicated disproportionately and primarily on normative and trust based claims. Indeed, to the extent that productive inter-organizational relationships evolve among UN humanitarian agencies, they are likely, over the long pull, to be the product of shared goals or objectives or common strategies. Arguably, these cannot exist without trust and mutual trust among network participants may not develop without frequent and mutually beneficial communication and action. It seems fair to conclude that fiscal agency alone is insufficient to assure common aspirations among network participants though for some participants it may provide at least a foundation for continuing interaction. That fact suggests in turn that effective coordination of organizational activities may require that organizations have more in common than a simple shared fiduciary claim.

One key issue, therefore, for humanitarian network coordination concerns understanding better how and why network organizations develop patterns of communication and reciprocal claims given the diffuse authority environment in which they function. Again, it seems clear that such are indeed necessary if these networks are to function effectively without central coordination. A strategic contingency model of these networks must, therefore, include not only structural elements but also network specific factors that serve to create opportunities for increased cooperation based on mutually perceived positive material as well as solidary claims<sup>5</sup>. We identify certain of these as well as test the utility of the list of environmental or contextual factors outlined above in the following brief overview of the character and dimensions of three recent humanitarian crises.

Taken together, these two sets of factors, common environmental or structural claims and those factors that encourage cooperation that are more specific to different contexts, combined in an analytical model, should help interested observers understand better whether there are recurring conditions or factors that should

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<sup>5</sup> We use solidary in its traditional sense of joint and several obligation or coincidence of interests. These interests may be of several sorts but ultimately must contain a strong and strongly shared normative component or components if shared purposes and objectives are to be developed and pursued among an array of network actors across organizational boundaries.

always concern them despite the manifest uniqueness of each humanitarian crisis. In short, exploring humanitarian network dynamics in this way should help analysts chart the similarities and differences among them over time and thereby, over time, possibly develop a typology of types of network forms that recur.

### **An Overview of Factors Influencing Inter-organizational Coordination in Three Cases of Humanitarian Intervention: Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Afghanistan**

This section highlights three humanitarian crises that captured international attention in the last fifteen years:

- The break-up of Yugoslavia and the ethnic wars that followed from that national dissolution during 1991-1995
- The 100-day genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and
- The US-led war in Afghanistan in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

We do not provide detail about the history of these conflicts here or seek to evaluate the performance of primary actors in each emergency. That task has been undertaken effectively elsewhere (e.g. Borton et al., 1996, Donini and Niland, 1994, Johnson, 2003, Minear et al., 1994). Rather, we provide a short description of events just prior to each crisis and a similarly brief depiction of humanitarian efforts related to each scenario. This analysis is followed in each instance by a more specific accounting that illuminates a number of specific actors, conditions or factors that either fostered or hampered humanitarian aid coordination in each case: key network actors, the status and role of the governments of the affected nations, the role of UN donor nations, the media salience of the humanitarian situations in the major Western nations most likely to affirm an intervention and to determine its character, the characteristics of network leaders and the forms of leadership they evidenced during each crisis.

#### *Former Yugoslavia*

On June 25, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Slovenia broke free without incident while the situation in Croatia escalated into a war between Croatia's Serb minority and its majority ethnic Croat population. Similarly, in April 1992, Bosnia-

Herzegovina declared its independence. The resultant conflict pitted ethnic Serbs, Croats and Muslims against each other (Young, 2001). Whatever the origins of the conflict, and these are still hotly disputed, the war shortly became a struggle for territory with human displacement a central aim.

The initial international community response to these events was to offer humanitarian aid rather than military intervention. At the local level, “the parties to the conflict regarded the humanitarian players as protagonists in the political process” (Young, 2001, 788). Since siege and starvation were weapons of the war, “the delivery of humanitarian relief was not seen as a neutral humanitarian act” (Young, 2001, 789). Similarly, the preventive protection policy of UNHCR directly contradicted the displacement aims of the warring factions. It was difficult therefore, for that agency as well as other INGOs and NGOs to intervene “neutrally” to provide humanitarian aid.

Table 1 summarizes the international humanitarian aid network participants and the central factors that shaped their response to the crisis in Yugoslavia during the 1991-1995 period.

*Table 1: Network Stakeholders and Conditions in Yugoslavia, 1991-1995.*

Characteristics	Description
Key Network Actors	<p>UN goals overall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to an analysis by Minear et al., the UN’s actions in Yugoslavia were hampered by the lack of an overall strategy. Movement of relief supplies (principally food) “was given priority to the detriment of other indispensable activities such as social services, rehabilitation, and the protection of human rights, including the right to seek asylum” (Minear et al., 1994, ix).</li> </ul> <p>UNPROFOR (UN Protection Force):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Originally established by the Security Council in December 1991 “in an attempt to maintain the fragile cease-fire negotiated by the European Union in Croatia” (Duffield, 1994, 10).</li> <li>• While UNPROFOR was established to assist in patrolling features in Bosnia its role continuously expanded throughout the crisis to provide more humanitarian assistance, including, finally, security for UNHCR (food) truck convoys (Pugh and Cunliffe, 1996).</li> <li>• The crisis presented a new setting—many participating troops/armies had never before provided protection to humanitarian operations in a war zone.</li> </ul> <p>UNHCR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its mandate was expanded to cover not only refugees but also internally displaced persons (IDPs), and those at risk of displacement but not yet displaced. (Minear et al., 1994, 11).</li> <li>• UNHCR engaged in preventive protection that “proved to be among the most controversial elements in its entire humanitarian operation, largely because it embraced a new approach” (Minear et al., 1994, 18). Prevention entailed protecting</li> </ul>

	<p>people by establishing so called safe areas for civilians who had not yet left their homes in an effort to prevent ethnic cleansing.</p> <p>ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross):  Early in the crisis, ICRC worked with the war-affected in combat zones. However, as needs increased, UNHCR began to perform some of these duties as well. At one point, ICRC pulled out of Bosnia when one of its delegates was shot, requiring thereby that UNHCR assume its responsibilities (Young, 2001).</p> <p>NGOs:  Nongovernmental organizations were less likely to operate in insecure areas, so that the majority of NGOs in the area by 1993 were operating in Croatia rather than in Serbia or Bosnian-Serb areas.</p>
Status/Roles of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN peacekeepers worked in an environment in which local “military and especially paramilitary elements called their own shots, regardless of what had been negotiated with higher authorities” (Minear et al., 1994, 3). Indeed, as Minear et al. (1994) argue, “the blatant and routine disregard by belligerents for humanitarian principles and the outright defiance of established international norms became the hallmark of this particular crisis” (pg. 5).</li> <li>• Young (2001) has described the war as an “unconventional one, waged by militia and irregulars who were not particularly sensitive to outside scrutiny or sanction and who blatantly used civilians and international relief activities as pawns in the conflict” (pg. 787).</li> </ul>
UN Donor Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian efforts were substituted for political action and decision-making on the part of the international community and governments to end the warfare and “unconscionable violence” (Minear et al., 1994, ix, Cunliffe and Pugh, 1996, Young, 2001).</li> <li>• The Security Council granted UNPROFOR the ability to use “all measures necessary”, short of force. That stance proved especially difficult in the face of the systematic defiance of international norms and laws among the various parties (Minear et al., 1994, 6).</li> <li>• UNHCR’s work in the crisis was made especially difficult by the fact that some member states were unwilling “to accept larger numbers of refugees or provide sufficient ground forces to prevent attacks on the so-called ‘safe areas’” (Cunliffe and Pugh, 1996).</li> <li>• One report argued that the UN should have “put as much effort into stopping the war as into distributing food” (Minear et al., 1994, 10).</li> </ul>
Media Salience And Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The major Western media helped fuel expectations that UNHCR would not only help refugees but also assist the victims of conflict in their own country (Young, 2001).</li> <li>• Media attention had two results for UNHCR: a gain in profile and a loss of independence since the agency’s every action became open to public scrutiny (Young, 2001).</li> </ul>
Characteristics of Network Leaders and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR interpreted its role to mean direct operational control, rather than delegation. Additionally, it did not effectively mobilize other organizations, in part due to an incomplete understanding of the lead agency concept. (Minear et al., 1994).</li> <li>• UNPROFOR lacked a uniform approach to its charge; so various national contingents of troops approached their humanitarian tasks differently. The multinational troops did not have training in areas such as human rights and refugee law, so they “did not always exhibit the ability or commitment to respond well to the needs that confronted them” (Minear et al., 1994, 2).</li> <li>• NGOs were unwilling generally to “work in areas, or take up positions which [were] politically out of favor with donors or where international sanctions [applied]” (Duffield, 1994, 17).</li> </ul>

### *Rwanda*

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying the president of Rwanda, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, was shot down. For the next three months Rwanda was ravaged by a gruesome and pre-planned genocide, allegedly guided by Colonel Bagosora and his followers. It is difficult to know exactly how many Rwandans were slaughtered during this short period but estimates range up to 800,000. In addition, two million Rwandese fled into neighboring countries and an additional one million were internally displaced (Borton et. al., 1996). The UN had a leading role in coordinating the vast humanitarian assistance effort in Rwanda throughout most of 1994 since that nation's government lacked the competence and resources necessary to coordinate the number of organizations that became involved in the country (Seybolt, 1997).

While many analysts have concluded that the political response to the Rwanda crisis was far from exemplary, this emergency does provide an opportunity to explore the cooperation of various United Nations agencies and to examine the manner in which the UN attempted to coordinate the efforts of the hundreds of international humanitarian relief actors that sought to provide aid in the Great Lakes region during 1994 (Seybolt, 1997, Borton, 1996).

Table 2 highlights the major stakeholders and conditions that shaped the humanitarian relief activities of the international community in response to the crisis in Rwanda.

*Table 2: Network Stakeholders and Conditions in the Rwanda crisis, 1994.*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Key Actors	<p>UN Organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UNDHA (UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs) was responsible for coordination of humanitarian aid efforts within Rwanda.</li><li>• UNREO (UN Rwanda Emergency Office), an agency of UNDHA, primary responsibility was to support the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Rwanda.</li><li>• UNAHT (UN Advanced Humanitarian Team), a unit of UNDHA, was sent into the capital, Kigali, before UNREO established offices there. It was comprised of staff from several UN agencies including WFP, UNICEF, WHO and UNHCR.</li><li>• UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) took the role as the lead agency outside Rwanda, coordinating refugee assistance in countries surrounding Rwanda.</li></ul> <p>ICRC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ICRC operated in Rwanda before the genocide erupted and was one of the few INGOs to remain in the area throughout the crisis. It did not sponsor any</li></ul>

	<p>coordination efforts of its own, but ICRC staff members “participated in cooperative forums at all levels, from UN headquarters strategy meetings down to field office implementation meetings” (Seybolt, 1997, 20).</p> <p>ECHO (European Community Humanitarian Office):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This Office provided funding and technical assistance to European NGOs and the ICRC.</li> </ul> <p>NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International NGOs mostly participated in activities in the Great Lakes region, assisting refugees who had fled to Tanzania and Zaire.</li> <li>• Most of the few indigenous humanitarian NGOs were local chapters of the national Red Cross.</li> <li>• The NGOs voluntarily coordinated their efforts through the NGO Liaison Unit for several months starting in August 1994.</li> </ul>
Status/Role of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The country was ruled by extremist Hutus determined to eliminate the remaining Tutsis from April until July.</li> <li>• Beginning in July 1994, Rwanda’s current President, Mr. Paul Kagame, and his army of Tutsi exiles were able to stop the genocide and take control of the government.</li> </ul>
UN Donor Governments (Political Will)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still reeling from events in Somalia the previous year, the international community was reluctant to become involved in the crisis in Rwanda. The UN Security Council and the General Assembly ignored the genocide and concentrated its efforts on attempting to obtain a cease-fire. Humanitarian aid substituted for political action once the genocide was acknowledged.</li> <li>• Within Rwanda, ECHO preferred to work with the ICRC rather than UNREO because “it perceived the ICRC as more competent and as playing the critical role in relation to IDPs” (Seybolt, 1997, 20-21).</li> <li>• Outside Rwanda, ECHO supported UNHCR’s activities in the refugee camps by channeling its funding through that agency.</li> </ul>
Media Salience And Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although media coverage of the killings began on April 8, the images at first did little to spark international political action. Humanitarian aid replaced military and political intervention.</li> <li>• The coverage of 250,000 refugees crossing into Ngara, Tanzania on April 28 triggered “planeloads of donor government officials, eager to support the humanitarian response” (Sommers, 2000, 16).</li> <li>• In July, 850,000 refugees flooded into Goma, Zaire. This dramatic event overshadowed the already unfolding drama in Ngara.</li> </ul>
Characteristics of Network Leaders and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In August, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) attempted to establish an NGO coordination unit but the NGOs rejected it as unduly “bureaucratic”. Eventually, UNREO and ICVA created an NGO Liaison Unit that offered a facilitating structure rather than a directing one (Seybolt, 1997).</li> <li>• The head of UNREO operated by consensus, which NGOs appreciated, but he also had military experience that lent credibility to his interaction with UN peacekeepers (Seybolt, 1997).</li> <li>• While many NGOs, particularly those with less experience in Rwanda, found UNREO’s efforts to assure information-sharing among relevant parties useful, the larger NGOs were critical of that agency’s “lack of technical personnel to provide an informed base for operational coordination” (Borton, 1996, 308).</li> <li>• Depending on the caliber of the personnel in the field at the time, UNREO had varying levels of effective coordination abilities in Rwanda. More experienced personnel moved beyond information sharing and participated in “formulating strategy and encouraging other UN agencies and NGOs to collaborate in implementation” (Borton, 1996, 310).</li> <li>• UNHCR reached an agreement with the government of Tanzania and ECHO to limit the number of NGOs providing assistance in the Ngara refugee camps, enabling a well-coordinated effort there.</li> </ul>

### *Afghanistan*

By the time the US-led bombing campaign began on October 7, 2001, millions of Afghans were already refugees in Iran and Pakistan due to decades of war with the Soviet Union, internal conflicts, and efforts to flee the Taliban, or to escape food shortages caused by the drought affecting vast areas of the country. In order to prevent terrorists from escaping and to avert massive refugee influxes as a result of the air strikes, Iran and Pakistan each officially closed their borders in late 2001. While over 100,000 refugees did manage to make it to neighboring nations and relative safety, close to one million Afghans became IDPs (Cohen, 2002, 23). Once the Taliban was defeated and an Afghan Interim Authority was established at the end of December 2001, the process of repatriation began. Even as Coalition forces continued to pursue the Al-Qaeda network, Afghans began to return to their homeland. The rapid rate of Afghan return soon overwhelmed the capacity of the international aid community and the government of Afghanistan to respond effectively. UNHCR in particular requested a slow-down in the repatriation rate in order to ensure that it would have the resources to assist effectively all the individuals and families involved. The reconstruction and development process did not proceed as rapidly as the rate of repatriation, a situation that forced many returnees to live in temporary shelters, sometimes in insecure areas, with few prospects of employment.

Table 3 summarizes the dimensions and factors that shaped the international humanitarian aid community's response to the refugee crisis in Afghanistan.

*Table 3: Network Stakeholders and Conditions in the Afghan crisis, 2001-2002*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Description</b>
Key Actors	UN Organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNHCR tended to the needs of the refugees during the air strikes, leaving no single entity responsible overall for the 2 million IDPs. Not until January 2002 did a special unit of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs become the focal agency responsible for IDPs.</li> <li>• WFP led the activities of relief agencies with Western military and political support to move food into the country (Cohen, 2002, 26).</li> <li>• The Security Council established UNAMA (UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) in March 2002 to provide a facilitative coordination role.</li> <li>• ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operated under a UN mandate in</li> </ul>

	<p>Kabul.</p> <p>NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By November 2002, the number of NGOs working in the region to provide assistance swelled from 200 to over 1,000. Some of these organizations had little prior “knowledge of the country, its culture or of the previous structures for planning and implementing programs” (Bryer, 2004, 11). The small international and indigenous agencies that had long established programs in Afghanistan suffered from staff poaching by larger NGOs and the UN agencies that offered higher salaries. This resulted in their “inevitable reduction in their capacity to perform efficiently” (Bryer, 2004, 12).</li> </ul>
Status/Role of Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Taliban rule collapsed and another government did not quickly supplant it, warlord-led groups and others attacked aid convoys and staff and took over critical supply routes, seriously hampering humanitarian aid efforts.</li> <li>• The Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) took power on December 22, 2001, headed by Chairman Hamid Karzai. It had little resources and no real national army or security forces beyond Kabul. Human resource issues have affected the Afghan government—it is the last option for employment after UN, bi-lateral, INGO and local nongovernmental agencies.</li> <li>• The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, supported by the UN and NGOs, has guided the return of refugees from neighboring countries.</li> <li>• The AIA formally requested that aid be used to “enhance the credibility of legitimate authorities and not to promote the visibility of respective countries or agencies” (Grandi, 2002, 13).</li> </ul>
UN Donor Governments (Political Will)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under the aegis of fighting terrorism and in response to the events on September 11, the Afghan crisis reflected “a new willingness [among donor governments] to respond in concert” (Minear, 2002, 190). Substantial food aid was provided for the Afghans but asylum for refugees was not so generously ensured.</li> <li>• Despite numerous requests of the Interim Administration to provide more security to civilians throughout the country, the international community was unwilling to expand the presence of the security forces beyond Kabul. The result was that aid could not reach many areas, “refugees and internally displaced persons were hesitating to return home, and large-scale reconstruction and development could be planned but not carried out” (Cohen, 2002, 27).</li> </ul>
Media Saliency And Treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scant media attention during the war to the plight of the Afghani civilians seeking refuge in neighboring countries allowed Pakistan and Iran to keep their borders closed.</li> <li>• After Kabul fell, many agencies rushed to return to the country, feeling “strong pressure to respond to the high level of media coverage of Afghanistan in order to position their work visibly in the new order” (Johnson, 2003, 55).</li> </ul>
Characteristics of Network Leaders and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous NGOs were “regarded by the United Nations, aid agencies and international NGOs as contractors rather than full partners” (Thompson, 2002).</li> <li>• Once UNAMA’s assistance pillar was established, coordination between UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP improved. This is credited to the fact that the Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General “was committed to coordinating by building consensus” (Johnson, 2003, 58).</li> </ul>

### Reflections on Humanitarian Networks as Program Implementation Structures

In an especially perceptive and hard hitting report on “Strategic Coordination in Afghanistan” published in late 2002 by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit with funding from the European Commission

Humanitarian Aid Office, Nicholas Stockton argued that previous studies of humanitarian agency coordination were flawed in a very basic way:

What all of these studies seem to have in common is they assume that an effective coordination outcome can only be achieved through the application of ever more hierarchical structural integration and ever greater degrees of authoritarian control. That failed coordination may be due, for example, to the absence of universal strategic objectives amongst assistance agencies, or to weak or dysfunctional policy instruments, are possible explanations that are overlooked or ignored (Stockton, 2002, 11).

Later in that same analysis Stockton suggested:

This study found no widely held consensus on shared objectives, no sense of national or organizational subsidiarity to a universal international strategy and no shared understanding of the locus of strategic coordination. This does not augur well for the achievement of harmony and coherence either within the international assistance effort or across the totality of the instruments of international relations.... (Stockton, 2002, 13).

While we come to the questions that Stockton treats from the vantage point of organization theory and theory of policy implementation, we nonetheless agree with this assessment based both on our meta-analysis of the published literature on humanitarian coordination theory and of the three cases just outlined. We think it makes empirical sense to acknowledge the fact that participants in these networks do not share organizational aspirations per se and that nation states are unlikely to devolve the necessary authority upon the United Nations or its agencies to demand such agreement any time soon. Indeed, Security Council members have shown no inclination either to increase real UN authority to command these complex networks of action or even to sort out the mandates of the various United Nations organizations separately charged with portions of the humanitarian aid mission. We note, for example, that UNHCR played different roles in each case outlined here despite its long acknowledged expertise in refugee work. In former Yugoslavia, for example, UNHCR's mandate was expanded to assist IDPs and to provide preventive

protection to civilians in combat zones, yet its mandate in Rwanda shortly thereafter did not cover IDPs. Even today, the agency's authorization to provide support to these populations is uncertain and its willingness to seek to provide such aid therefore equivocal. So much for sorting out, let alone, rationalizing, agency roles. Given these realities, we suggest that effective coordination of the actions of the agents in humanitarian networks by command is highly unlikely to develop in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, we argue that analysts should instead grapple with what is rather than continue to argue for that which seems decidedly unlikely to evolve any time soon. And "what is", to summarize, is not pretty:

Humanitarian aid networks are animated by organizations with disparate stakeholders, few common claims, a high need to demonstrate salience to ensure continuing fund raising support and capacity, and marked differences in orientation. And these are unlikely to change in their fundamentals. Assume, for example, that the UN elected finally to place all of its human aid agencies under a single authoritative agency actor. That change, while perhaps welcome to some would do nothing to structure how governments might be positioned to respond, whether INGOs would cooperate more fully or whether NGOs or INGOs would show an improved disposition to pursue UN articulated goals. Both forms of nongovernmental organizations would still be independent of UN reach and therefore possess substantial leeway in determining how and whether to respond to UN political or financial overtures. Even in those instances in which UN agencies possess financial leverage over INGO and NGO partners through contract funding, the scenario is one of mutual dependence or interdependence rather than control as, in most instances, the affected UN agency does not possess the resources, the mandate or the desire to deliver the contracted service itself. In short, let us accept the fractious and fractionated governance structures our international community has wrought and begin to build our analytic understanding upon how we might make them, as now operating, more effective instruments for common or coordinated—and therefore more effective—humanitarian action.

We recognize that this approach raises a reasonable concern: is coordination even possible and even if so, worth the cost without more centralized authority? We think so but not as traditionally understood. We contend rather that the issue must be approached far more humbly and in light of the fact that neither

strategic goals nor complementary objectives may be assumed among organizational members enmeshed in humanitarian networks. As we argue above, we think instead that shared goals and claims must be the product of long-term interaction around the principle of what Stockton dubs “voluntary complementarity” (Stockton, 2002, 3, 39). We differ with Stockton, however, on the question of whether only organizations that already can exhibit complementarity may be expected to evidence even rudimentary coordination of their activities in humanitarian networks (Stockton, 2002). We think that institutional leaders can encourage such behavior and eventually create the conditions necessary for improved cooperation even in chaotic environments if they think longitudinally and seek to encourage organization learning as part of their respective management/organizational cultures.

This theoretic stance causes the analyst to ask: what instruments are available to network organization leaders interested in effective service delivery in humanitarian networks to improve the potential that these organizations will come to share common goals or at least not wind up working at cross purposes? Our brief case analysis provides some insight into both the common characteristics of humanitarian implementation networks as well as some distinguishing features and leverage points for marshalling improved inter-organizational awareness and shared strategic understanding. We have already outlined some salient characteristics that are likely to be similar in each case of social network implementation (the inter-organizational network itself, diffuse authority, uncertainty of mandate and resources, competition for salience and resources, key role of leadership to outcomes) and some that are likely to differ with circumstances (role and capacity of local government, political and fiscal will of international donors and governments, nature of political and organizational leadership, forms of inter-organizational cooperation).

We are struck that the single most significant strategic imperative after international political will to intervene in the first instance, is the need to develop boundary spanning communication patterns among organizational participants across the humanitarian social network. We also believe that leadership is critical and that it indeed, may be considered either an environmental variable or a contingent one. Leadership is a primary form of agency and its exercise a symbol of how an organization chooses to relate

to its environment. But, just as surely, organizational leadership deeply influences how an organization's actions will shape its environment (Kouzes and Posner, 2002)

### **Communication Paths in Networks may be the Key to Effective Coordination of Network Agencies**

We have argued above that in many instances, stakeholders are drawn together by contract obligations but that these are generally insufficient to guarantee effective organizational cooperation. They do, however, provide a first order opportunity for institutional leaders who may use the interactions they require to develop more robust forms of information sharing and exchange with other entities in the network and around normative claims related to both the aid process (who to assist, how to help them, what to do to provide aid) and to the desired outcomes of those efforts (feed the hungry, assist the displaced in the near and longer terms with their need for shelter, clothe and house those without homes, assure educational opportunities for the dispossessed).

Information must be shared before common operational, let alone, strategic goals or objectives may be established among/across participating organizations. Similarly, potential conflicts may not even be identified, let alone managed, if organizational actors remain oblivious to the ends and direction of other organizations in their network. So, leaders should encourage multiple forms of information sharing that cause employees at all levels of their organizations to interact with one another to discuss implementation aims, actions and programs/processes and the reasons for them. This strategy seemed to produce higher levels of cooperation and coordination of actions than otherwise would have occurred among NGOs in Rwanda, for example. It implies that network leaders should seek to enlist their counterparts in sustained discussions and if contract negotiations can serve as the starting place for such efforts, all to the good. But such discussion should be seen as mutual learning opportunities rather than opportunities to scapegoat or blame cast if true cooperation is to be constructed on their basis. In the longer run, the aim would be to establish ongoing relationships among organizational principals across relevant networks so that coordination of activities occurs without central power and absent top-down control. In this sense, communications and dialogue beget actions that in turn beget more dialogue and action which may finally

result in relational norms of trust and therefore of relatively open communication and the development of shared norms under girding common claims of action.

In sum, interactions around implementation plans and how the activities of one network entity might complement another can often lead to improved understanding of others' approaches and aims and where these meet or augment or complement one's own. Building these shared understandings among actors at multiple levels of organization among network players can elicit a broader and deeper dialogue on the nature of operations and missions and how best to realize them. Over time, it is just this set of questions that must successfully be addressed if humanitarian network participants are to remain "headless" while also active and effective in assisting those in crisis. The development of shared organizational norms is never ordained but it is far more likely to occur when employees interact and learn about the aims, purposes and programs of their counterparts in other network organizations.

Can such activities be left to chance or can managers and leaders structure opportunities for dialogues that elicit these sorts of interaction more systematically? We think that network leaders can convene what Daboub and Calton (2002) have labeled "stakeholder learning dialogues" among common organizational stakeholders with the aim of eliciting just these sorts of discussions and the shared goals and aspirations that can grow from them. Participants may come to the table with only an incentive to further their own aims and claims and need not imagine, at least at the start, that they share much with other network participants, though it would be helpful if parties already trusted and legitimated the other participants in the dialogues (and network). The dialogues provide all stakeholders an opportunity to understand more completely how their own operations are affected by those of other network participants. As Daboub and Calton note:

An important feature of such dialogues is the potential for *joint learning* as different perspectives on the shared problem as well as preconceptions about relationships between "selves" and "others" are tested and recast. McNamee and Gergen (1999) argue that such stakeholder dialogues can generate a sense of "relational responsibility" that builds commitment to continue in a dialogic

relationship as it also builds a shared understanding of the respective rights and obligations of moral agents who are embedded in an evolving set of relationships (2002, 96).

Relational responsibility may lead to both individual and organization scale learning and such learning is certainly helpful to each participant organization in any case. We think that these dialogues can avoid artificiality by being structured around reflection on such case examples as those we employ here. In each case, the aim of the dialogues should be to elicit shared awareness rather than to apportion blame or credit for specific outcomes or process characteristics. Such self-conscious opportunities for reflection and shared learning may help participants to evolve common codes of behavior and of ethical action as well as shared organizational purposes that are particular to their operating environments. This contextual claim distinguishes these slowly derived norms from existing codes of conduct for humanitarian relief that are surely valuable for themselves but oriented differently than those referents of trust and relationship we believe necessary for long term successful coordination without command authority. Indeed, codes of conduct may prove a helpful platform for dialogue to the extent that they allow network stakeholders to hold certain norms in common (ICRC). We note that to succeed, these opportunities for joint exploration of common challenges and claims will need to be convened by a trusted network partner. We think that the ICRC is neatly equipped to play this role. It is not saddled by the political and bureaucratic baggage of UN entities, is typically operating in many crisis afflicted nations even before emergencies arise and maintains principled neutrality even in the face of civil war. We do not believe this role would be easy but we do not doubt its necessity given the strategic constraints that accompany humanitarian network coordination.

## **Conclusions**

We have offered an alternate view of how one might conceptualize humanitarian relief coordination, suggested a range of conditions and factors that are vital to such efforts and begun to build the possibilities for an informed strategic contingent analytic framework of humanitarian network analysis. We have also begun the process of sorting the conditions and factors that may be said to be present always in these implementation efforts and those that appear to vary with context or circumstance. Finally, we have suggested that stakeholder learning dialogues may help network organization leaders and managers to build

the sorts of relational norms necessary for increased cross boundary cooperation and trust and thereby the foundations for improved coordination without imagining that these could be overcome with a simple or single structural change. Indeed, our analytic approach offers the advantage of conceiving of humanitarian networks as dynamic inter-organizational environments whose principals may evolve and learn from both experience and from one another through time.

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