

Bridging the Organizational Divide:
A Comparative Institutional Analysis of United States and International
Humanitarian Service Delivery Structures

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Abstract

Hurricane Katrina sensitized many United States citizens to several salient facts concerning how their national government undertakes its humanitarian relief responsibilities. Many learned for the first time, for example, that the federal government is a secondary responder and attends to natural disasters only when states and localities request such support and assistance. The parallels between the U.S. framework and the international relief implementation structure are remarkable. This paper compares and contrasts these two aid implementation structures with an eye to clarifying their similarities and differences and to identifying how each might better be understood for the future to secure improved coordination and more effective outcomes.

Key words: United States and international humanitarian relief systems, relief aid coordination, interorganizational policy implementation, federalism, sovereignty

Introduction

Hurricane Katrina sensitized United States (U.S.) citizens to several salient facts concerning how their national government undertakes its humanitarian relief responsibilities. Many learned for the first time, for example, that the federal government is a secondary responder to emergencies and attends to disasters only when states (and, formally, through those entities, localities) request such support and assistance. The citizenry's traditional devotion to federalism mediates the role assigned the national government in this domain. Second, citizens learned that the federal government's delivery of services via intermediaries, especially via private sector partners, made it very difficult for the nation to provide services efficiently to storm victims.¹ Third, Katrina made clear that the national government must coordinate its activities across governmental as well as sectoral lines when it seeks to provide relief assistance, but paradoxically, as it sought to address the hurricane's aftermath, it found itself providing critical support to many of the states, localities and for-profit and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on which it sought to rely. It found, its assumptions notwithstanding, that its would-be partners did not necessarily possess the substantive capacities to play the roles assigned to them. Post Katrina too, citizens found also that their national government did not possess anything like operating authority or control over the governments and organizations whose actions it sought to harness. Rather, federal representatives found themselves trying to manage a disparate array of actors over which they could not exercise control. Helton has suggested that this sort of undertaking in a disaster situation is rather...“like trying to manage a thunderstorm.”²

Nevertheless, American political leaders of all stripes have long supported these policies and the assumptions that underpin them. Together, they set up a scenario that ties the results of national action to the capacities of actors and institutions beyond the federal government's direct control. Put bluntly, when it intervenes in domestic humanitarian situations, the national government functions at best as first among equals and more typically one among many seeking to contribute to relief efforts. And among that group, the nation finds itself sharply constrained in what it may do and how it may address those responsibilities it does undertake because of the values, traditions and assumptions of its leaders and population.

The parallels between the U.S. disaster intervention policy framework and the international relief implementation structure are remarkable. That aid delivery configuration also includes a wide range of organizations and jurisdictions that cannot control one another but mutually depend on each other nonetheless to achieve effective service delivery. Aid organizations in the international context confront an environment shaped by deference to nation-state sovereignty, with results analogous to the role of federalism in the United States, and nearly always must coordinate efforts across social sectors. And, as with U.S. relief initiatives, the international humanitarian aid system has been shaped by the desire of its central donors to employ a variety of nongovernmental organizations in service delivery. While the immediate rationale for this approach differs somewhat in the two settings, policy participants in both have turned to nongovernmental intermediaries believing that these somehow can overcome the perceived deficiencies of government provision of services and more deeply, will do so in ways that are more legitimate, more efficient and more representative than their governmental counterparts.

This paper compares and contrasts the two aid implementation structures across these factors with an eye to identifying how each might better be understood for the future to secure improved coordination and more effective outcomes in disaster relief scenarios. The analysis is rooted in the international humanitarian relief and domestic (U.S.) disaster management, federalism and policy implementation literatures. The essay first treats the American political context and the conditions it creates for effective disaster relief policy implementation and then turns to the international humanitarian relief system. The effort concludes with some observations concerning how each of these milieus is informed by analogous fundamental assumptions about who should act and when, and the consequences of those choices for the possibilities of relief interventions. While these policy assumptions doubtless constrain organizational and implementation possibilities, the paper suggests it is far better to act as if they will continue to exist and to seek ways to mitigate their difficult dimensions and to build upon their positive characteristics than to pretend that alternate organizational arrangements are likely to be developed any time soon.

The Lure and Challenge of Federalism

On its face, federalism, the creation of a separate level of governance to address the needs of territorially determined sub-national populations, allows a variegated nation such as the United States (with its diverse array of landscapes, ethnicities, races, nationalities and subcultures) to fashion a vibrant mechanism by which to address the complex public needs of its heterogeneous population. And it surely does. But federalism's very polycentricity, its capacity to reflect localized imperatives and claims, implies an ongoing, if unevenly revealed, tension or set of tensions, between localized (state)

populations and any uniform claims that might be necessary on behalf of the broader national populace.³ Federalism thus embodies an enduring paradox. It at once provides space for the expression of local desires and needs while thereby simultaneously making it more difficult to secure anything like a lasting national consensus or sustained capacity for common effort. In general, federalism functions, as the nation's Founders intended, to reflect localized claims faithfully while providing a continuing political check on the possibility for potential central government tyranny.⁴

In the United States, an ongoing division in the popular culture about the nature of the union exacerbates this structural tension in the regime. Despite a bloody civil war, despite much evidence to the contrary in the history of the adoption of its constitution, a persistent strain of thought in American politics endorses the belief that the states and not the people created the union, and therefore that the nation, acting in the name of the entire citizenry, is not the supreme evocation of the people's will or sovereignty. Rather, in this view, the individual states play that role. Indeed, President Ronald Reagan famously (and controversially) embraced this point of view in his first inaugural address on January 20, 1981 by declaring that "The Federal government did not create the states; the states created the Federal government."⁵ A less radical expression of this perspective typically takes the form of an argument that national action represents a straitjacketing of localized capacity to respond to more legitimate particular needs. Or, as President George W. Bush has often framed the argument when referring to policy development, "One size does not fit all." Similarly, elected state and congressional leaders often contend that it is unfair to states to have "faceless national bureaucrats" make decisions of vital significance to their communities. In this view, responsibility for such choices is appropriately the province of

state decision-makers who know their jurisdiction's needs better than the federal government's officials do. Implicitly, at least, states, from this point of view, are seen as superior venues for policy-making as compared to the nation, because they are more likely to grasp the diverse needs of their populations and to be better positioned to represent those claims.⁶

This construction doubtless contains more than a grain of truth. It also reflects a broadly felt yearning for localized political representation. Yet, it misrepresents the realities of policy implementation in at least three important ways. First, in political terms, and perhaps oddly given the frequently fervent character of this rhetoric, voters routinely know far more about national politics, officials and activities than they do about state level policy actors or their actions.⁷ Whatever its emotional appeal, it is difficult empirically therefore to contend a priori that state actors are closer to, or somehow more in tune with, citizens than national officials. And, of course, rhetoric notwithstanding, states too, like the nation, employ bureaucracies to deliver services. Third, it is not clear that groups or individuals that enjoy rights or receive services only as a result of authoritative national action, or who benefit directly from unified federal policy prescriptions, would so fervently embrace unchecked state control as this rhetoric implies. National efforts to overcome state-level preferences for racial bigotry and discrimination provide a classic example. But so too, although less positively morally supercharged, does the example of federal policy action to regulate an industry uniformly, say automobile manufacturing, by relieving it of the financial burden of responding to the different policy claims of 50 separate state governments.

Thus, one easily may make a legitimacy claim for national action and representation. What is striking is that calls for national action and federalism related claims are each strongly politically salient with citizens, depending upon the circumstances in which they are framed. It is also noteworthy that political leaders often press each sort of claim to the exclusion of its counterpart rather than acknowledging their relationship and uneasy coexistence.⁸ Nationalists are therefore often accused of being centralizers and those interested in state level policy-making are often viewed as adopting that stance not because they support legitimate sub-national action and assumption of responsibility, but to prevent or preclude needed social change or the attainment of a modicum of national equity in service delivery. The difficulty is that while such charges may sometimes be true, they are not true per se or in principle. Voters are repeatedly given the responsibility of sorting out the veracity of such claims since this tension is a central one in American politics.⁹

Whatever else may be said of it, the enduring debate set up by the federal character of the nation does point up the continuing common sense utility of crafting national initiatives so that they are sensitive to the citizenry's diverse needs to the extent feasible. One result of this imperative is that a large share of United States domestic policy is implemented using the states as administrative agents. In practice, this arrangement implies that ultimately, these initiatives will depend for their success upon the political will and capacities of the various states to respond as national policy-makers envisaged. This is true for transportation, education, social welfare and environmental policy, for example. It is equally true for disaster relief and disaster mitigation policy. In addition, given the United States' citizenry's desire to maintain as small a national

government as possible while also demanding a wide array of public services, federal elected leaders are not politically permitted to ensure that the government possesses reserve capacity to provide services when it chooses to rely on the states and some fail to respond as anticipated. As a result, in effect, the nation is hostage to the political desires and capacities of its states when it chooses to implement national policies through them.¹⁰ Some states eagerly comply with federal aims while others choose to tarry or even actively to resist those choices in accord with their leaders' perceptions of the political gains and benefits of each course.¹¹ Federal officials must seek to muddle through notwithstanding as it is often politically quite difficult in practice to deprive a recalcitrant state of national funding. Patience is often a primary virtue for national officials charged with overseeing intergovernmental policy implementation efforts.

Federalism as Mediating Factor in the Response to Katrina

The U.S. experience with Hurricane Katrina provides a useful lens into the role of federalism in the organization and implementation of the nation's relief efforts. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had developed a national response plan for major natural disasters and emergencies prior to Katrina's landfall in late August 2005, but that storm represented its first real test.¹² The plan sought to join many federal departments and the states in a partnership under the coordination of FEMA to address emergencies as they arose. These were then to work with local authorities and private (nonprofit and for-profit) organizations to provide necessary services to disaster-affected populations. This approach viewed the national government as secondary responder in major emergencies.

Post Katrina that view has been under scrutiny, but it guided all planning before the storm. As Charles Wise recently observed in a discussion of investigations of the difficulties officials encountered in addressing the storm's aftermath:

The basic model underlying the planned role of federal agencies seemed to be at issue. That model assumes that state and local governments have the lead in disaster response, with federal forces responding to calls for assistance and arriving later.¹³

If this perspective may be said to have animated disaster planning it also guided the organizational structure and character of federal action. By design, FEMA possesses very little capacity to provide direct aid and assistance to disaster victims. Indeed, the Incident Command System of the National Management Incident System assumes explicitly that disasters will first be managed locally.¹⁴ Governors may request that the President issue a national disaster declaration, but even when such occurs, it simply requires that FEMA seek to mobilize the assets of other federal agencies and departments to help affected states and jurisdictions address their needs:

However, FEMA is not an operating agency that can mount resources on its own: rather, it is a coordinating agency that tasks other federal agencies to use their resources to assist state and local governments...In responding to disasters, FEMA and state emergency managers are embedded in a network of thousands of

nonprofit organizations, private firms, ad hoc groups, individual firms, and public safety agencies that are all responding to the disaster.¹⁵

Thus, FEMA does not itself possess resources to address disasters and does not enjoy capacity to declare when or whether the national government will assume responsibility for efforts to address such calamities. More significantly, even when the President asks that the agency respond, whether on his own or at the instance of a state governor or governors, it does not control the lion's share of the resources on which it will rely to provide that response. FEMA must instead seek to mobilize the capacities of a welter of federal, state and local entities as well as private organizations in what is, by definition, a fluid and charged context. The answer to the seemingly simple question of "who's in charge?" in American disaster relief is murky at best. As Eric Lipton noted when reporting on a recent congressional hearing into how the national government should respond to its Katrina experience:

No one from the federal government was clearly in charge of the response to Hurricane Katrina, congressional investigators said Wednesday, and in the absence of clear leadership the general federal approach was 'to wait for affected states to request assistance.'¹⁶

It is notable that for this assertion to be true, it did not fundamentally need to arise from incompetence or ill will, classism or racism (though all of these may have been operative in the response to Katrina) but more deeply from officials' strong support for

federalism and the right of local communities to be accorded a wide zone of action in which to respond to their citizens' needs. That is, a devotion to the principle of localized action guided federal decision-makers both in how they designed the national role in disaster relief and consequently in how they responded to Katrina as it unfolded.

As it happened, Katrina's fury and the consequent break in the New Orleans levee system quickly overwhelmed state and local capacity to respond and to provide effective assistance. The result was widespread devastation and post-event social confusion and chaos. As if this were not sufficiently difficult, the devotion of the nation's leaders to federalism as a guiding principle had ill equipped them to prepare for such an eventuality. For too long, there was no federal "there" there to overcome the weakness of the local and state response to Katrina and during that period thousands died or suffered.

For good and ill, federalism mediated the nation's response to this disaster. Yet, it is a testimony to the depth of attachment to the role of federalism in the U.S. political system that vigorous debate continues nearly a year after the storm over whether and when the nation should step in to provide services in lieu of its states and localities in major disaster scenarios. While Katrina may have represented a bruising blow to long-standing beliefs about the role of various levels of government and private organizations in disaster management, these are so strong that it is by no means clear that a different view will replace them. Certainly, there is no consensus to change the basic premise that states and localities should serve as first responders.

The Influence of Neo-Liberalism on U.S. Organization for Humanitarian Relief

If a devotion to federalism set up a policy implementation situation in which national officials looked to state and local authorities as primary responders to major

disaster events, that disposition was reinforced in recent decades by the relative triumph of neo-liberal claims concerning the appropriate role of government in the broader political economy. This is not the place for a full analysis of this worldview, but it is relevant to the extent that its assumptions and underpinning values have helped to create an exceedingly complex organizational environment for disaster relief implementation efforts. For perhaps a quarter century and more, the reigning political orthodoxy in the United States has been that the private sector, in the guise of both nonprofit and for-profit institutions, should play a larger role in American public policymaking. In this view, the national government particularly is seen as far too unwieldy to adapt its implementation efforts to local contexts successfully. Moreover, it is seen as less efficient and/or less representative and legitimate than these other entities. Those jurisdictions or organizations should, therefore, in this view, enjoy pride of place in public service delivery. While all of these assumptions are contestable, they have nonetheless strongly shaped public policy with the result that many national government services are delivered via complex interorganizational and intergovernmental networks comprised of national government executive organizations, their counterpart state level entities and local jurisdictions¹⁷ To these are joined, very often, many for-profit and nonprofit organizations that deliver nationally funded (or federally and state funded) services under contract. In short, if federalism disposed national lawmakers to implement disaster relief via the states and their localities, neo-liberalism suggested a strong rationale for further decentralization of national policy effort via reliance on private institutions wherever possible.

As with federalism, the practical result for policy implementation of neo-liberal assumptions was increased reliance by governments at all levels, but especially at the national scale, on a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations to deliver relief services. Notably, however, no public entity let alone the federal government, possessed direct authority and control over the others in the service delivery networks that resulted from these aims. Instead, operating authority and accountability were diffused across levels of government and many organizations and very often, across sectors, before services could be delivered to those requiring them. Instead of one institution possessing hierarchical power and authority to compel other jurisdictions and organizations to act, the situation in practice was actually far more diffuse and uncertain. The national government's decision to act through states and localities and also via a variety of private organizations implied a mutual dependence among these implementers rather than a command-and-control scenario. Indeed, even when the federal government employed its own assets, it often did so on the basis of planning and communications initiatives developed by other network participants. For disaster relief efforts, the upshot of these arrangements was:

- Uncertain and unclear lines of authority across levels of government.
- The need to secure a modicum of cooperation or coordination among a web of mutually dependent, but also at least partially autonomous, organizational actors drawn from multiple levels of government and all three social sectors where none of these could control the actions of the others.

- The need, further, to secure cooperation and coordination among parts of organizations rather than discrete organizational or jurisdictional entities.
- National dependence on the so-called “weakest link” state, local or nongovernmental organization. Relief services could only be so effective as the weakest of those organizations in the implementation structure proved.
- A lack of willingness among the various organizational participants to accord any single institutional participant an authoritative operational role or claim over the others involved.

As noted above, as events unfolded, the scope of Hurricane Katrina shortly overwhelmed state and local government capacity to react and the national government was found ill equipped both internally and across the federal system to address concerns that its nominal partners could not. While one may point to many different contributors to this breakdown, for present purposes it is important to emphasize its relationship to basic assumptions about the legitimacy, character and reach of public authority. Federal officials turned to the states believing that those entities were somehow closer to the people and therefore somehow more representative than the national government could be. Similarly, at a time when the American populace holds virtually all things public in low regard, national leaders turned to nongovernmental organizations as policy implementing agents arguing that these were both more legitimate and more representative of the populations they served than the nation could be. Lawmakers also

were increasingly open to privatizing services by involving for-profit organizations on the view that these were per se more efficient than public entities.

In each of these cases national officials could argue in political forums that services would be provided, could defray their cost in whole or in part from national taxes, but also could contend that private organizations perceived broadly as somehow “better” than federal ones, were actually responsible for service provision. Federal leaders could also argue that the national government had not grown in size. Narrowly construed, this was partly true since many of those now involved in nationally funded programs were not technically U.S. employees. But the plain and paradoxical fact was that these privatizing efforts resulted in the federal government becoming far more widely and deeply engaged in the nation’s political economy. The national government was made neither smaller nor less far-reaching in its impacts or significance by implementing its programs via intermediaries; its efforts were sharply decentralized or better perhaps, de-centered, and thereby made far more complicated in character. Provision of disaster relief proved no exception.

The International Humanitarian Relief System

If anything, the international humanitarian relief service delivery organizational framework is more complex than that found in the United States. International relief/disaster services are provided or overseen by a host of United Nations (UN) organizations including, among several others, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations World Food Programme, the United Nations International Children’s Education Fund and the UN Office for Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Relief services are also provided by a number of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) by interested nations, by the governments of the nations afflicted by disasters or emergencies and often by nongovernmental and civil society organizations from those countries.

If devotion to the principle of federalism shapes the organization of disaster services in the United States, state sovereignty underpins international humanitarian relief. This is true directly and indirectly. In direct terms, whenever possible, interested parties seek to defer to, and join forces with, the affected nation as it seeks to assist its own citizens. In this sense, the international community may be said to acknowledge the sovereignty of the state confronting the emergency and to operate within its bounds only at its sufferance and hopefully with its cooperation. National governments are thus routinely viewed as first responders. As a result, as in the United States, international relief effectiveness is tied in considerable measure to the political will and organizational capacity of the local government(s) addressing a disaster to respond to it.

As with the relationship of the federal government to the various states within the United States, if affected nation states are corrupt, weak and ill developed, or themselves complicit in the emergency affecting their citizens (as in Darfur or Rwanda, for example), the international community faces difficulties overcoming those challenges. As with the United States government and its states, at base, assisting organizations want first as a matter of principle at least, to honor the efforts of those they serve. Overall, just as in the U.S., the various aid organizations involved constitute a maze of capacities and interests. And just as in the United States, no one organization can be said to be in charge. There is no single UN entity authoritatively charged with directing that body's relief efforts,

though the Office of Humanitarian Coordination Assistance, like the Emergency Management Agency in the U.S., is charged with securing operational coordination among United Nations relief organizations and the INGOs and NGOs often associated with them.¹⁸ As with FEMA, OCHA does not possess authority or power to direct its UN partners, let alone the local government or other organizations operating in an emergency, but it is charged with trying to achieve a coordinated disaster response on the ground anyway.

State sovereignty also indirectly shapes the framework by which humanitarian services are delivered. The international community is organized around individual sovereign states whose representatives participate, as they perceive it in their national interest to do so, in the United Nations, in multilateral institutions, in bilateral treaties and agreements and so on. Accordingly, the UN may only offer such services as its members are willing to provide and may possess only so much legitimacy and authority as its members voluntarily accord it.

This fact becomes important for humanitarian relief in several ways. First, it is perhaps an ugly and lamentable fact, but a fact nonetheless, that all disaster situations are not created equal. Donor nation state officials are not always willing to accord attention to humanitarian emergencies and it is not always clear why, but one key factor may well be whether they perceive the affected nation as significant in their strategic national calculus.¹⁹ In addition, funder state attention does appear to be tied in some measure to media salience and so those events receiving more journalistic attention may gain more assistance—at least among democratic donor nations.²⁰ Third, as a direct consequence of its dependence on its sovereign members and the vast differences in wealth among those,

the United Nations relies on the generosity of a limited number of its richer member states to provide aid when it calls for funds to address a disaster or other complex emergency. On average, such appeals generate only about 60 percent of the amount requested.²¹ Moreover, pledges rendered go unpaid with fair frequency and for reasons that are not always clear. The key point is that donor nations can and do proceed as they wish in this domain and with considerable impunity given their sovereign claim.

Helton has memorably summarized the international humanitarian relief framework:

If we were today to design a system for delivering humanitarian assistance to needy populations around the world, we would surely not choose the current arrangement. At present, the broad moral and ethical imperative to meet the basic needs of vulnerable people around the world is carried out by a crazy quilt of bilateral and multilateral initiatives and entities. At the universal level, the United Nations system comprises a variety of offices that raise funds from donors, principally governments, and spend money, sometimes on direct operations and more often in sub-contractual arrangements with NGO implementing partners. ...The various international institutions involved in such efforts are divided by sector, comprising categories such as refugees, children, food, or health, among others. These groups populate a bureaucratic universe in which agency heads vie for attention and publicity, which translates into funding, and which can dictate in important respects the nature of the programming offered to beneficiaries.²²

The Influence of Neo-Liberalism on the Development of the International Relief System

Many international institutions and international relief organizations more particularly, have also embraced the central premises of the neo-liberal policy agenda by turning to nongovernmental actors to implement aid efforts.²³ As in the United States, this turn in policy has been driven by the view that somehow these organizations are closer to the people they serve, and therefore more representative and legitimate than the governments of their nations. This political rationale has been supplemented by the organization-scale claim that these agents are more efficient and effective in implementation than their state and international counterparts. More deeply perhaps, proponents of this turn in policy see INGOs and NGOs as a means to secure community engagement in relief efforts while circumventing the frequent challenge of state corruption or insufficient capacity. And as in the United States, this set of initiatives reflects a deep and abiding skepticism of the capacity of the state to secure efficient and effective outcomes. Like neo-liberals in the United States, proponents of these policies at the international level have advocated for broad scale privatization of services.

As in the United States, and whatever its ultimate animating rationale, this set of policies has had several marked consequences. First, it has involved many more organizational actors in an already crowded program implementation field. Second, it has done so very often via contract arrangements making contractors dependent on third parties or intermediaries for final services delivery. Third, this engagement of new players has been accompanied by growing skepticism of collective action (in this case via

international institutions) in favor of more privatized service delivery. Among leading donor nations, the United States, whose policies often serve as a trendsetter, appears increasingly disposed to rely on the philanthropy of its citizenry to provide a significant measure of its national response to emergencies. The high profile effort led by former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to raise funds for Katrina and South Asian Tsunami relief and recovery provides an excellent example of what appears set to become a trend. To the extent that such funds are seen as “from us,” (which seems to be the case) this approach may allow nations to elect not to provide aid on grounds that it will be provided privately anyway. This policy turn could conceivably result in major nations eschewing responsibility for all or a good share of what has been their moral and ethical responsibility to respond through international institutions to disaster scenarios.

Taking Stock

Viewed as an organizational system, the international relief framework exhibits an almost identical set of characteristics to its United States counterpart:

- No single organization or entity is operationally in charge of what is a complex multi-level interorganizational network of implementers.
- The national government of the U.S. and the UN find themselves in oddly similar situations in that neither possesses operating control over its implementing partners but instead must devise other means and methods to secure their cooperation and coordination. This is true even when the United States government

or the UN is primary funder so long as neither possesses independent reserve capacity actually to replace those organizations with which they have elected to contract or on which they are otherwise relying for other reasons.

- Participating organizations and parts of organizations must find ways and means to coordinate their activities at the operating scale since none can assure strategic coordination. The latter is likely to occur only infrequently and only when the major state players elect jointly to assure it.
- Ultimately, all actors involved, in principle, if not always in practice, aim to defer to the sovereignty of the states whose populations require aid. This fact implies a situation in which the effectiveness of participating organizations will be strongly shaped by the capacities of the national government they are seeking to assist. When these are corrupt or incompetent, it is difficult for international actors to overcome that fact.
- Accordingly, relief implementation is often not simply an issue of how most effectively and equitably to deliver services (as difficult as those aims may be), but also one of how, almost continuously, to negotiate conditions and agreements under which that aid may be rendered.
- Because participating institutions are only loosely coupled and no participant is authoritative, accountability across the relief system

is diffuse and uncertain and transparency extremely difficult to attain.

- OCHA, like FEMA in the United States, faces two real constraints as it confronts its responsibilities: it must do so without operating capacity and with no authoritative control over those organizations whose cooperation and assistance it is seeking to elicit.

Conclusions

Both the international and domestic humanitarian relief implementation structures are composed of interorganizational networks of loosely coupled parts of organizations. These networks typically cross not only the boundaries of multiple institutions, but also social sectors. Moreover, neither the international nor the United States relief system may fairly be described as possessing an operationally authoritative head organization or lead agency that can issue directives and assume that these will be followed. Instead, each relief organizational structure is best viewed as a purposive management network, but one whose participants cannot assume strategic hierarchic coordination.²⁴ As Donley and Pollard have argued concerning the U.S. domestic disaster and homeland security response organizational framework:

Finally, this means the homeland security challenge is primarily a challenge of interagency and intergovernmental affairs. In this instance, the concept of putting a single official in charge of homeland security and holding him or her accountable is a management and organizational pipe dream.²⁵

Instead, those charged with attaining operating coordination must devise ways and means to bring the various organizations providing services to at least a minimal level of cooperation.

While the complexities of the phenomena being addressed make this a daunting prospect, the extraordinarily intricate organizational structure by which services are rendered makes the task a truly intimidating one for both the United States and international contexts. But several factors suggest that these difficulties may be ameliorated, if not completely overcome. First, it is important for policy-makers to understand that implementers do not control their operating or strategic environments or their collaborators. Organizational structures and policies should be devised accordingly. This is especially significant since it appears highly unlikely that the Westphalian international order or the American federal system is likely to be scrapped or superseded in the foreseeable future though, to be sure, both frameworks now involve a greater variety of actors than ever before.

Another way to state this point is to suggest that policy-makers must acknowledge the fact that their conceptual understanding of how humanitarian response should be organized must be brought into alignment with their values. One may not de facto assume hierarchic integration of disaster related activities while operationally making that aim a mirage. This cognitive disjunction makes for poor policy design and difficult, if not impossible, policy implementation. Assuming that policy-makers are willing to act on their values rather than on unrealistic assessments of what they believe must be so, they may then support field operatives in their efforts to secure responsive and effective network arrangements. Since trust is known to be a critical variable in securing

interorganizational coordination and cooperation, leaders should support efforts to develop those shared bonds across organizations that typically are involved in disaster response—including UN personnel, INGOs and representatives of nations in the international system and federal state, local and NGO officials in the United States.²⁶ DHS might be given explicit responsibility for developing such forums for ongoing dialogue in the United States, while OCHA might work with Interaction, the Humanitarian Accountability Project, the Spheres standards group and others toward similar ends for the international system. It will be important, as those efforts proceed, for their participants to consider what they take optimal disaster relief standards to be and how those aspirations are related to longer term development or quality of life goals for populations affected by humanitarian emergencies and disasters.

Second, policymakers (read donors for the international system) must recognize that if they truly value community engagement in response efforts via nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, they must assure funding, planning and response processes that encourage that result. This requires that such officials and implementing agencies alike think hard about how best to elicit community involvement and how best to provide opportunities for citizen groups and NGOs to offer their perspectives and local knowledge, as well as participate in relief and recovery operations. It may be that international organizations will need to take time, when disasters occur, to confer with local officials and civil society leaders before moving into “relief mode.” Such efforts could allow those affected by a disaster a genuine voice in how it is addressed.²⁷ It might also help to overcome oft-repeated concerns that would-be angels of mercy behave in practice more like uncaring automatons or worse.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, those leading institutions involved with humanitarian relief must themselves adopt the mind set that there is no single best way to respond to these dynamic contexts and, instead, they will need to develop organizations that can learn and adapt to the swiftly changing environmental and institutional conditions they are likely to confront.²⁸ They must also develop organizations peopled with professionals who not only are relentlessly optimistic without being Pollyanna-ish, but also willing to take risks and to build bridges with individuals involved with other organizations in their interorganizational network, even when this requires the extension of trust and therefore the assumption of risk. The challenges are many but the United States and international experience with organization for provision of relief assistance suggests that they should be addressed forthrightly and on the basis of experience, rather than against abstract criteria that bear little relationship to organizational implementation realities.

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⁴ Samuel H. Beer, *To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993): 1-25.

⁵ Samuel H. Beer, *To Make a Nation: The Rediscovery of American Federalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993): 2.

⁶ Authors on federalism seem enduringly to fall into one or another of two distinct normative camps that mirror those found more broadly in the nation's popular culture. Some celebrate the energy and multifaceted innovation that the individual units of government can bring in a federal system. Others worry far more about the issue of national identity and effective and equitable service delivery. These are not so prone to lament national government power or to express concern over its reach. For an example of the first, see David B. Walker, *Slouching Toward Washington* Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1995. For a nationalist perspective see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The*

Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society New York: Whittle Books, 1991.

⁷ Derek C. Bok, *The Trouble with Government* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002): 213-221.

⁸ Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones treat the question of the role of non-contradictory policy argumentation in their study, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. American policymakers and would-be policymakers appear to practice this sort of electoral mobilization around the central question of the role of federalism in the regime.

⁹ It is by no means clear that adoption of one or another normative perspective concerning federalism will, by itself, address the knotty policy problems that democratic self-governance creates for a citizenry. Nor, is it clear that either stance by itself would equip those citizens with the capacities and habits of mind to address those concerns judiciously and effectively.

¹⁰ Martha Derthick, *Agency Under Stress: The Social Security Administration and American Government* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990).

¹¹ Michael Hill and Peter Hupe, *Implementing Public Policy: Governance in Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 2002).

¹² U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), 2004a. National Response Plan. www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NRP_FullText.pdf (accessed June 3, 2006).

¹³ Charles R. Wise, “Organizing for Homeland Security after Katrina: Is Adaptive Management What’s Missing?” *Public Administration Review* 3, No.66 (May/June 2006): 304.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), 2004b. National Incident Management System. www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NIMS-90-web.pdf (accessed June 3, 2006): 7.

¹⁵ Charles R. Wise, “Organizing for Homeland Security after Katrina: Is Adaptive Management What’s Missing?” *Public Administration Review* 3, No.66 (May/June 2006): 307.

¹⁶ Eric Lipton, “Investigators Criticize Response to Hurricane” *The New York Times* February 2, 2006: A18.

¹⁷ Rupert F. Chisholm, *Developing Network Organizations: Learning from Practice and Theory* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, Co., 1998).

¹⁸ Max Stephenson Jr., “Making Humanitarian Relief Networks More Effective: Operational Coordination, Trust and Sense Making,” *Disasters*, 29, No.4 (December, 2005): 337-350; and Max Stephenson Jr. and Marcy Schnitzer, Forthcoming: “The Role of Trust and Boundary Spanning Behavior in Humanitarian Assistance Coordination,” *Non-Profit Management and Leadership*.17, No. 2 (December 2006).

¹⁹ Volker Heins, “Democratic States, Aid Agencies and World Society: What’s the Name of the Game?” *Global Society* 19, No.4 (October 2005): 373.

²⁰ John Cosgrave, *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition: Initial Findings* (London: ALNAP and Overseas Development Institute, 2005): 7.

²¹ John Cosgrave, *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition: Initial Findings* (London: ALNAP and Overseas Development Institute, 2005): 9.

²² Arthur C. Helton, "Bureaucracy and the Quality of Mercy," *International Migration Review* 1, No. 35 (Spring 2001): 219.

²³ Michael Edwards and David Hulme (Eds), *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post Cold War World* (Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1996).

²⁴ Max Stephenson Jr., "Toward a Descriptive Model of Humanitarian Assistance Coordination," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 17, No.1 (April 2006): 2; and Charles R. Wise, "Organizing for Homeland Security after Katrina: Is Adaptive Management What's Missing?" *Public Administration Review* 3, No.66 (May/June 2006): 313.

²⁵ Michael Donley and Neal Pollard, "Homeland Security: The Difference between Vision and Wealth," *Public Administration Review* Special issue 1, No.62 (2002): 138.

²⁶ Max Stephenson Jr. and Marcy Schnitzer, Forthcoming: "The Role of Trust and Boundary Spanning Behavior in Humanitarian Assistance Coordination," *Non-Profit Management and Leadership*.17, No. 2 (December 2006).

²⁷ Theodora-Ismene Gizelis and Kristin E. Kosek, "Why Humanitarian Interventions Succeed or Fail: The Role of Local Participation," *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, 40, No.4 (2005), 363-383.

²⁸ Charles R. Wise, "Organizing for Homeland Security after Katrina: Is Adaptive Management What's Missing?" *Public Administration Review* 3, No.66 (May/June 2006): 314.