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ARTICLE

Building on the capacities of crisis-affected populations: From victims to actors

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Abstract

Attempts to consolidate humanitarian actors into a humanitarian system are occurring alongside efforts to generate greater coherence between humanitarian action, development and peace-building. Whether a strengthened humanitarian system can adhere to the humanitarian principles while engaging in post-conflict societal reconstruction is unclear. This would require humanitarian action to address the victimhood mentality when dealing with affected populations and to seek out capacities as well as needs. In so doing the inherent political nature of humanitarian action and the manner in which it is prone to instrumentalization needs to be recognized. This would assist in generating the sensitivity required in order to ensure that humanitarian action would ultimately support rather than undermine reconciliation and the building of democratic institutions.

KEYWORDS
complex emergencies, humanitarian action, peace-building, reconciliation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian action has always been the poor relation in the "humanitarian–development–peace-building" aid troika (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2003; Barakat, Deely, & Zyck, 2010; Collinson, Elhawary, & Muggah, 2010). This has frequently resulted in the humanitarian endeavour

becoming subordinate to the larger aid effort, often to the detriment of the immediate needs of affected populations that humanitarians purport to address. However, the growth of humanitarian action in terms of scale and scope of operations, coupled with rising global humanitarian need, suggests that this relationship will be compelled to change. The humanitarian community needs to be more proactive in shaping the relationship with its aid counterparts in order to retain its identity and to realize its goal of saving lives, alleviating suffering and promoting life with dignity for disaster-affected populations (Collinson et al., 2010). This raises the question of how precisely these relationships ought to be reshaped. This article discusses the rationale for a shift in how humanitarian action is thought about, and it proceeds to examine how humanitarian action can retain its identity, principles and goals while complementing reconstruction and societal transformation in protracted post-conflict contexts.

2 | HUMANITARIAN TRENDS: EMPHASIS ON PROTRACTED RECURRING DISASTERS

Although the scale of global humanitarian need is unknown (UN OCHA, 2013), there is broad acceptance that the level of need far exceeds the resources available to humanitarian actors to address these needs. All indications suggest that this trend will continue. 1.22 billion people still live on less than $1.25 a day, 842 million people are hungry and 783 million do not have access to clean drinking water. Poverty is becoming more concentrated in fragile states, where over half of the world's extreme poor now live (UN OCHA, 2013). There are also new factors at play. The cumulative effect of climate change, population growth, rapid and unplanned urbanization, and food and water insecurity is increasing the risk and complexity of major crises. There is now estimated to be a total of 59.5 million displaced people worldwide, more than at any point since the Second World War, and there has been a 40% shortfall in response to UN humanitarian appeals in 2014 (WHSS, 2015). The authors argue that current estimates of global humanitarian need are grossly underestimated and fail to detect many populations that exist in unacceptable and undignified circumstances. A case in point are the millions of slum dwellers globally who live under a perpetual de facto curfew and for whom the assistance outlined for disaster-affected populations by the *Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in humanitarian response* of The Sphere Project (The Sphere Project, 2011)[1] remains desperately elusive. They are often also excluded from estimates of humanitarian need due to the bias towards humanitarian crises, as these are more traditionally understood as relating to clearly delineated areas affected by acute sudden-onset shocks caused by armed conflict or natural disaster.

Humanitarian need is exacerbated by the international community's failure to bring an end to protracted crises. Violent conflicts have decreased significantly since 1992, when the numbers peaked at over 50 (HIIK, 2014; Sundberg, Eck, & Kreutz, 2012). However, while the number of violent conflicts has stabilized over the past decade, averaging between 31 and 37, the number of people affected by conflict has increased significantly. Many violent conflicts have slipped below "violence" threshold levels, but they have not been fully resolved and there are constant threats that economic, climatic, political and social pressures will trigger the recurrence of overt violence (HIIK, 2014). The World Bank estimates that 1.5 billion people globally live in countries trapped in repeated cycles of violence, which in turn cost the global economy in the region of $14.7 trillion or 13% of global gross domestic product (GDP) (WHSS, 2015). Approximately 86% of the consolidated appeals of the United Nations (UN) from 2002 to 2013 were in support of people affected

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[1]The Sphere Project provides minimum standards to be attained in the provision of disaster relief.

by armed conflict (UN OCHA, 2013) and all evidence points towards a resurgence in international armed conflict over the next decade with the internationalization of internal armed conflict highly likely (WHSS, 2015; IISS, 2015).

It is very clear that challenges to reach durable solutions to conflict situations are being further complicated by stresses caused by climate change, demographic trends and, in particular, urbanization, economic growth and inequality. The compounded nature of these new stresses in addition to already existing humanitarian challenges has resulted in the aforementioned growing deficit in humanitarian resources; the shortfall in the UN humanitarian appeal in 2014 reached 40% (Development Initiatives, 2015). This growing deficit has prompted the UN Secretary General to host the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) to seek out solutions to "our most pressing challenges and set an agenda to keep humanitarian action fit for the future" (WHSS, 2014). Some optimism can be garnered from the knowledge that the WHS is part of a much bigger global agenda for change evidenced in recent global reviews/summits, such as the global peace-building architecture (June 2015); the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (October 2015); Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March 2015); the Paris Climate Conference – COP21 (December 2015). All evidence suggests that there will be increasing calls for the global aid community to seek greater coherence between peace-building, development aid and humanitarian aid, and also between climate change, development and humanitarian action (Cubie, 2014). The search for this coherence among the aid troika is not new. However, experiences over the past two decades suggests that a marriage between these three will be contentious, especially for humanitarian action. Any future efforts to link these interventions need to learn from these past experiences.

3 | THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM: A WORK IN PROGRESS

While humanitarianism is timeless and universal (Walker & Maxwell, 2009), the global humanitarian system is relatively young and is still a work in progress (Taylor, Stoddard, Harmer, Haver, & Harvey, 2012). It is only in the last generation that humanitarian aid was recognized as anything other than benevolent giving to individuals, communities and populations affected by conflicts and natural disasters. The delivery of humanitarian assistance,[2] as it was generally labelled right up to the 1990s, was the preserve of a limited number of largely western organizations frequently born out of acute need—linked to major catastrophes like the World Wars or the conflicts linked with decolonization—and that identified with the principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Remembering that the post-war period was the "golden age" of development, the very concept of humanitarian aid at the time was portrayed as involving a needy and *victimized* suffering individual on the one hand, and a *benevolent* giver of assistance motivated by charity on the other hand. Many would argue that the legacy of this form of humanitarian assistance persists to the present day.

The end of the Cold War was a significant milestone in the shaping of the contemporary humanitarian system insofar as there arose a proliferation of humanitarian actors, both in terms of numbers but also in terms of their mandate, in an unprecedented response to a significant increase in the number of intrastate violent conflicts. No longer politically paralyzed to engage directly, as they were during the decolonization wars, the UN adopted a much more direct role in humanitarian aid, as did

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[2]Humanitarian assistance is used to refer to aid that seeks to save lives and alleviate the suffering of a crisis-affected population and which is provided in accordance with the basic humanitarian principles (ReliefWeb, 2015).

many of the emerging regional global organizations like the EU and bilateral donors. These political organizations frequently sought "institutional humanitarian space"[3] within their agencies by establishing humanitarian/emergency departments to address the growing humanitarian need in line with the humanitarian principles. A good example is the European Commission which established the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) in 1992 (which, after subsuming civil protection, became DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection in 2010). Many donor governments followed suit by establishing emergency or humanitarian relief departments within their aid departments. In 1989 the humanitarian aid budget that was estimated at 2% of the total official development aid (ODA) budget (valued at $800 million) grew to over 10% of the ODA budget in 2013 (amounting to almost $17 billion) (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2013). Development NGOs found themselves obliged, by the nature of their presence in disaster-affected countries, to support the humanitarian efforts and they responded by adopting a dual mandate of both development and humanitarian assistance, again institutionalizing this function within their respective organizations. Having been the purview of a limited number of specialist organizations up to the 1990s, the number of humanitarian NGOs globally has grown exponentially in the last generation (Davey, Borton, & Foley, 2013). Other actors also emerged as important providers of humanitarian assistance but which might not be in a position or willing to be wholly guided by the humanitarian principles, such as the private sector (in 2013 it was estimated that the private sector spend on humanitarian activities was in excess of $5 billion and growing), diaspora, military and religious organizations.

What has been the impact of this massive expansion of humanitarian aid in what the authors suggest are the formative years of the humanitarian system? In the early 1990s the potentially negative unintended consequences of humanitarian assistance were becoming increasingly evident (Anderson, 1999). The introduction of new political players to the humanitarian enterprise brought with it a new sense of political consciousness. This led to the emergence of what Fox (2001) labels New Humanitarianism, a form of humanitarianism characterized as principled, rights-based, politically sensitive and geared explicitly towards peace and stability in line with the UN philosophy of the time. The minimalist view of humanitarian aid equating to material assistance was replaced by humanitarian action to more explicitly convey a much expanded brief both in terms of mandate and agency.[4] This broader mandate includes not only assistance, but also protection in the face of the growing crises of the time; and the agency/practice to include any action that saves life, strengthens dignity and secures against the repetition of a disaster situation in what subsequently became known within humanitarian action as "connectedness."[5] The term "action" also served to address any naivety associated with the possibility of negative impacts of humanitarian aid and to engage affected populations in enhancing the quality of humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian aid continues to be characterized by the humanitarian principles and shielded by the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, which are the legacy of the Red Cross Movement. The majority of humanitarian organizations have embraced the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, and present these governing principles as differentiating humanitarian aid from its sister aid sectors of development and peace-building at the same time as they are ideals that give direction to the ultimate goal of saving lives, alleviating suffering and

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[3]The authors use the term "institutional space" to refer to a space for a department/unit within the political institution with the required level of independence to prioritize humanitarian principles over the goals of the institution.

[4]Humanitarian action can be defined as assistance, protection and advocacy actions undertaken on an impartial basis in response to human needs resulting from complex political emergencies and natural hazards (HAP, 2010).

[5]Connectedness here refers to an envisaged link to post-disaster normality—a concept somewhat related to sustainability in development discourse (ALNAP, 2003)

promoting life with dignity for those affected by disasters. However, as one might expect, it has been difficult for many of the newer humanitarian actors to embrace all of these principles in their purest sense given that the principles are designed to elevate humanitarianism beyond politics in order to strive for the humanitarian ideal of unconditionally alleviating suffering without political manipulation (de Torrente, 2004). Experience has shown that the substantive principles of humanity and impartiality are least contested (though frequently ignored), while the operational principles otherwise labelled as "derived principles," namely neutrality and independence, are often challenged openly. These challenges have come from within and outside the sector and have proved quite contentious in positioning humanitarian aid alongside development aid and peace-building. A retrospective analysis of the root causes of this contention among aid regimes suggests that over the course of the 1990s humanitarian action became part of the larger experiment to contain the new complex political emergencies (CPEs)—an experiment that proved neither ethical nor effective (Duffield, 2001). Efforts to link relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD), together with the evolution of this approach into the coherence agenda, sought to somehow merge "the political effort to bring peace, the human rights attempt to prevent impunity, and the humanitarian effort to save lives" (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2003). The resultant politicization of aid constituted a direct challenge to the humanitarian principles. A new conditionality was thereby introduced to the aid endeavour that undermined the humanitarian community's overarching foundational principle—humanity—reducing it to second place as a result of the pressures of conforming to the demands of developmental relief or "goal-oriented humanitarianism." Neutrality was viewed by political actors as naïve and even by some as amoral. In hindsight, the perceived loss of neutrality resulted in the loss of "humanitarian space," but also all sense of humanitarian immunity. This in turn jeopardized the security of humanitarian personnel (Duffield, 2001). Countries that did not conform to western political ideals were frequently excluded from development assistance and therefore had no access to associated humanitarian aid (Duffield, 2001), which is in direct contravention of the principle of impartiality. Lastly, any effort by donors to subordinate humanitarian action objectives to developmental or political objectives contradicted independence while making impartiality almost impossible.

The "Global War on Terror"[6] served to do little more than compound the problem for the humanitarian system through increased securitization. Rather than addressing the negative impacts of the coherence agenda as identified in the 1990s, the War on Terror employed new approaches to operationalizing this agenda through the comprehensive approach,[7] integrated missions[8] and stabilization.[9] Governments pursuing the War on Terror doctrine increasingly realized that they were losing the public relations fight due to the negative humanitarian effects of war, resulting in the need for alliances with the humanitarian system to contain such effects. In addition, the War on Terror led to legislative initiatives that could criminalize certain humanitarian aid activities if exploited by so-called terrorists.

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[6]An international military campaign introduced in reaction to the attacks on the US in September 2011

[7]Comprehensive approach—there is no commonly accepted definition of the "comprehensive approach," however in its simplest form it refers to blending civilian and military tools and enforcing co-operation between government departments, both for operations and more broadly in dealing with many of the 21st-century security challenges, including terrorism, genocide and proliferation of weapons and dangerous materials.

[8]Integrated missions—an integrated mission is based on a common strategic plan and a shared understanding of the priorities and types of programme interventions that need to be undertaken at various stages of the recovery process. Through this integrated process, the UN system seeks to maximize its contribution towards countries emerging from conflict by engaging its different capabilities in a coherent and mutually supportive manner (UN, 2006)

[9]Stabilization is "an approach used in violent situations where it is difficult or impossible to pursue conventional programmes. Its aims are explicitly political: to help establish and sustain a legitimate government. And it often involves a degree of military coercion to reduce violence sufficiently to allow recovery, development and peacebuilding programmes" (DFID, 2008).

This legislation, together with the relatively recent developments that impose restrictions on humanitarian actors' capacity to negotiate with all parties to conflict and also subject the delivery of aid to protection by the military, greatly impedes the principled delivery of aid, and can only be viewed as regressive to the evolving humanitarian system (Taylor et al., 2012).

There were, however, a number of positives to be taken from this generation of growth in humanitarian action—a period which could be deemed a "formative period" in the run-up to what is increasingly being described as the establishment of a "humanitarian system." The authors contend that the fragmented and piecemeal nature of the humanitarian enterprise was consolidated in 2005 when the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) took a significant step towards establishing a "humanitarian system" with the introduction of the Humanitarian Reform Agenda. It sought to enhance humanitarian co-ordination by introducing the cluster approach,[10] strengthening in-country co-ordination, sharpening advocacy on key humanitarian issues and the principles, and increasing and strengthening partnerships for humanitarian action. In 2010, following the five years of the Humanitarian Reform Initiative and armed with the knowledge and experience from the 2010 Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods, UN OCHA and the IASC reinforced this "system" by adopting the Transformative Agenda (TA). It focused on three key areas within the burgeoning humanitarian system: leadership, co-ordination and accountability, while retaining a commitment to the four humanitarian principles. The leadership and accountability espoused in the TA serves to reinforce the commitment to improved co-ordination using the cluster approach. The strong emphasis on accountability is a very welcome introduction, especially the emphasis on "accountability to affected populations." This value of accountability to affected populations, while not new, is poorly developed in comparison to agencies' well established commitment to accountability to donors through frameworks such as results-based management. The existing principles of humanity and impartiality identify with values such as respect and co-operation. However, nowhere in the foundational principles is there a reminder for humanitarian actors to be accountable to the populations they purport to serve.

In an attempt to address this lack of downward accountability, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), People in Aid and The Sphere Project collaborated in producing the Core Humanitarian Standard in 2014. The result of a yearlong consultative process involving a diverse range of humanitarian stakeholders including NGOs, governments, the UN, donor agencies and academia, the Core Humanitarian Standard proposes a set of nine commitments that can be voluntarily adopted by organizations and individuals to guide their work (CHS, 2014). Among the nine commitments and quality criteria set out in the Core Humanitarian Standard, emphasis is placed on the appropriateness and relevance of assistance (Commitment 1); rights and entitlements of beneficiaries, access to information and opportunities for participation (Commitment 4); and co-ordinated and complementary assistance (Commitment 6). Each of these commitments derives from a recognition that the humanitarian system needs to reorient itself in a manner that places affected people at the centre of humanitarian action.

This trend towards enhancing downward accountability and localization has been reinforced by the consultations ahead of the WHS, the summit itself and its outcomes. The summary of the consultations ahead of the WHS identified five major areas for action (WHSS, 2015). One of these action areas and the proposed changes concerned dignity and exhorted humanitarian actors to "adopt aid mechanisms that support greater choice and increase accountability to the people they serve" (WHSS, 2015).

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[10]Cluster approach—Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations (UN and non-UN) working in the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. shelter and health. They are created when clear humanitarian needs exist within a sector, when there are numerous actors within sectors and when national authorities need co-ordination support.

The Chair's Summary of the outcomes of the WHS itself urged that "people affected by crises are not only informed and consulted, but put at the centre of the decision-making processes" (WHS, 2016).

Together with parallel initiatives, such as the Sendai Framework and its predecessor Hyogo Framework, which are primarily concerned with natural disasters, and the earlier Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative in 2003, it is clear that the humanitarian system is articulating that affected populations are not just "victims" of disasters, but also rights-endowed "actors", and that the function of humanitarian work is to support a life of dignity for those affected by conflicts and disasters.

This emphasis on downward accountability has also been accompanied by calls for the different aid domains—peace-building and development aid in addition to humanitarian action—to co-operate more closely in addressing the root causes of crises and addressing recurrent crises. For its part, the Chair's Summary of the outcomes of the WHS itself highlighted the importance of "bringing humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts together in addressing root causes of humanitarian crises" (WHS, 2016). Furthermore, under the heading of "Changing People's Lives: from Delivering Aid to Ending Need," the Chair's Summary declared that global leaders recognized that "humanitarian emergencies can no longer be viewed in isolation from broader sustainable development efforts, while also ensuring that humanitarian action remains principled."

How these twin exhortations to greater downwards accountability and greater coherence between the various aid domains, both initiated by and directed towards the humanitarian community, can be reconciled with principled humanitarian action is not fully clear. Ensuring that an appropriate balance is struck between these seemingly competing ends must be one of the key objectives of the post-WHS agenda for humanitarian action.

4 | FUTURE AGENDA OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION VIS-À-VIS DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE-BUILDING: MOVING FROM STABILIZATION TO CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The experiences of humanitarian action alongside its development and peace-building partners in integrated missions, in adopting the "comprehensive approach" or in pursuing the stabilization agenda has proved difficult to say the least. Collinson et al. (2010) describe the participants in this marriage as "uneasy bedfellows," while Barakat et al. (2010) describe the developments involving greater linkage between the different aid regimes as "missteps." A shortcoming of the aid troika is that there is no coherent humanitarian paradigm illustrating the role of politics, the military, development or judicial action to achieve humanitarian action (Collinson et al., 2010). Arguably, humanitarian action has tended to be subordinate to the bigger development/aid agenda of "saving societies" as opposed to the immediate humanitarian goal of "saving lives, alleviating suffering and supporting life with dignity." The authors contend that central to any humanitarian paradigm to empower humanitarian aid in the aid troika should be the placing of affected populations at the centre of the humanitarian effort. The substantive humanitarian principles, namely humanity and impartiality, need to continue to govern the humanitarian endeavour, and humanitarian action should not allow itself to become subordinate to development aid's wider political agenda.

The challenge will be for humanitarian action to build on the capacities and abilities of affected populations to provide assistance and protection to vulnerable populations in their own communities and societies. This will require the humanitarian community to recognize that its action is subsidiary to the people it purports to support and not simply a tool of aid donors. Moreover, it will require the humanitarian community to recognize that humanitarian space is a metaphysical space, not one fixed in time and space, but rather originating where beneficiaries perceive it and want it to materialize

(Herman & Dijkzeul, 2011). This line of reasoning will first and foremost require true acknowledgement of the capacities of affected populations. While these populations are victims, they invariably have resources that, when placed in context, could change both the form and content of humanitarian support for the benefit of the self-esteem and dignity of beneficiaries, and the effectiveness of humanitarian aid as demanded by the donor community. The recognition of the resources and capacities of beneficiaries invariably requires close engagement with affected populations and the building of a sense of empathy with victims that recognizes their agency as they bid to recover and return to normality.

In applying this thinking to the varying types of disasters, this logic is eminently justifiable in the case of so-called natural disasters where there is broad recognition that local people are invariably the "first responders" and external actors increasingly respect the need to support local efforts. A good example of this is the response to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013. It is less clear how it can be applied to complex political emergencies and other crises involving violent conflict. After humanitarian disasters, whether coming to international attention abruptly, as in Rwanda, or after gradual and accumulating challenges to fundamental life conditions for significant segments of society, as in Colombia or Northern Ireland, the principles of humanity and impartiality set out the ideals that all affected populations that are not party to the conflict are deserving of humanitarian aid, and priority is given to those most in need without discrimination. In other words, the most deserving victims are identified and prioritized. This demands some form of ranking on the basis of need. There is also the given that the first and most immediate response is to secure the physical survival of affected populations before assessing their capacities, composed of both pre-disaster resources and current capacities, in a new situation. The purpose of *humanitarian aid* combines the "humanitarian" mandate (quantity and quality) and the method is "action," meaning in practice any action that saves life, strengthens dignity and prevents the immediate repetition of a disaster situation.

All too often this process of identifying the most deserving "victims" bestows a lasting self-perception on individuals and/or groups so identified. There is a growing perception among conflict resolution practitioners and researchers that the earlier a process of victimization can be broken the better (Ewald & Turković, 2006). The aforementioned historic legacy of humanitarian aid and its linkage to charitable giving, of a *giving–receiving–relationship,* is a hindrance. It is neither a respectful nor effective approach towards realizing the aim of humanitarian action itself. Putting the affected population at the centre requires the recognition of the rights and agency of the persons concerned, breaking any process that tends towards victimization. Victimization can be manifest in a number of ways—as a "relationship" (dependence) or an "identity" (helplessness)—by meeting, seeing and encouraging/supporting any individual or group in such a situation, is a key humanitarian action initiative. When such an approach is taken, it would be a process whereby victimhood is transformed, through co-operation and empowerment, into responsibility, action and dignity. Viewed from this perspective, humanitarian action is an empowering process promoting a shift from "victim/victimization" to "actorship"/"empowerment."

5 | A HUMANITARIAN PARADIGM THAT INCORPORATES DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE-BUILDING

Galtung's (1969) influential model of conflict, violence and peace provides a suitable framework to review the positioning of humanitarian action alongside development and peace-building. Galtung argued that all full conflict is constituted by the following key elements: conflict issues/contradictions,

conflict behaviour and conflict attitudes. These elements can be portrayed as a "conflict triangle" as can be found in Figure 1.

"Conflict attitudes" refer to the mental stereotypes and prejudices that block a multi-faceted and reasoned view about "the other," be this a relatively unknown group, an explicit enemy or just a person passing by on the street but immediately judged. "Conflict behaviours" refer to those actions that either directly deprive an enemy of things of value (through destroying them) or the threat to do so, as well as preparations for being able to do so. This dimension, together with the attitudes dimension, is the most visible dimension of conflict, and therefore more subject to media attention. It is in these dimensions that the shooting and killing and the hatred are displayed.

The "conflict contradictions" refer to those issues that are at the root cause of the problem. However, in practice they are often vaguely articulated and poorly presented. This can be a sign of political prudence as well as of lack of analysis and understanding. The critical aspect is the incompatibility of the claims of parties to the conflict. Without resolving or managing this dimension of the conflict, there can be no settlement.

Complex political emergencies that frequently involve armed conflicts are among the most complex and challenging social situations because they combine physical destruction and broken social relations, with challenged norms, political dreams and, very often, grave and protracted violations of fundamental human rights. All conflicts, be they symmetric or asymmetric, evolve over time. They sometimes become protracted stalemate situations with intermittent overt violence (conflict behaviour) as in Colombia or Northern Ireland. At other times conflicts are settled, if not resolved relatively promptly, as in Georgia, while others tend to never reach the level of a political settlement even after a very long time, as the conflict over Kashmir between India and Pakistan demonstrates (Ramsbotham, Miall, & Woodhouse, 2011).

For the field of humanitarian action to employ a victim transformative approach, a comprehensive political settlement is not essential. It may be sufficient that overt violence be reduced to a level at which it does not completely close all possibilities for civilians to live and act, albeit under difficult and unpredictable conditions, such as during the siege of Sarajevo. It is this space for civil society action that determines the nature and extent of humanitarian initiatives oriented towards breaking victimhood and giving space for empowerment. In many cases the introduction of an agreement, however flawed, provides scope for the engagement of humanitarian actors in such transformative processes. The challenge is to address all corners of the conflict triangle as depicted in Figure 2 in order to transform the conflict triangle into a peace triangle.

Taken together, the three dimensions might spur each other into a vicious circle, where a problem in one dimension sparks problems in another. To break such a vicious circle, it is necessary to address each of the three points of convergence in the conflict triangle. The conventional point of entry is to address the conflict behaviour—the killing and bombing—through a variety of means, often through a cease-fire. This leads to the required level of security to create space for an agreement to settle the contradictions or issues at the heart of the conflict. In theory these contradictions or disputed issues
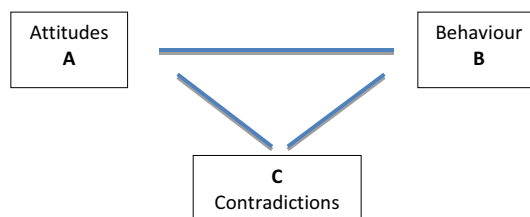

FIGURE 1   Galtung's Conflict Triangle (Galtung, 1969) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
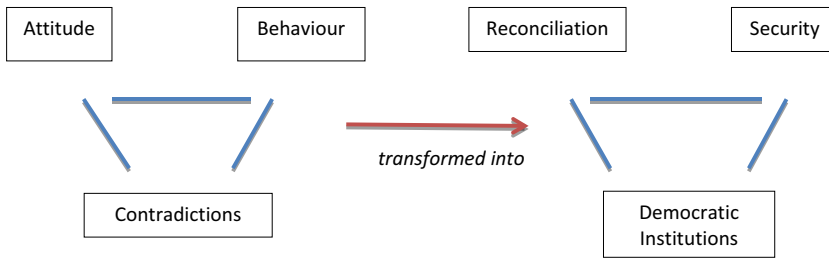
FIGURE 2   Transformation of Conflict Triangle to Peace Triangle (Galtung, 1969) [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

should be transformed into *democratic institutions*, which by definition require the active engagement of affected populations. The third corner of the triangle requires that the attitude or polarization within the divided society be reconciled to allow individuals and groups to live together and empathize with "the others."

The transformation from the "conflict triangle" to the "peace triangle" envisions the move towards a peaceful social structure. When conflict behaviour is changed into *security* it speaks about the *prevention* of destructive behaviour, its *mitigation*—should it occur—and the *preparation* for alternative means of action. In the new humanitarian paradigm that places affected populations at the centre and prioritizes a principled approach to humanitarian action, the extent of humanitarian organizations' engagement with its counterparts in the development and peace-building domains is gauged on how local and national actors respond as opposed to the international community's larger security agenda. Humanitarian actors will need to negotiate at local level their access to humanitarian space, based upon the realization that humanitarian principles and human rights are but two of many determining variables facilitating the active engagement of local populations. Preconceived notions of humanitarian organizations and aid beneficiaries are no longer dominant; the realization of local power dynamics and acceptance of the local definition of what humanitarianism ought to be in a given situation comes to the fore (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010). Thus, humanitarian actors will face dilemmas, as experience has shown that the chances of a willing international community, a capable and legitimate state and a co-operative civil society all working in concert towards stability and progressive human welfare is rare. Humanitarian actors may benefit from the military to enhance security if these efforts support the provision of humanitarian space for affected populations while securing humanitarian organizational space for humanitarian actors. A people-centred approach to humanitarian action requires a minimum level of engagement. The experience of past efforts where humanitarian organizations have chosen to put powerful actors' security objectives at the centre over local and national actors has proved detrimental to the security of humanitarian actors and the populations they have sought to support. The new humanitarian system post-WHS might provide a critical mass of humanitarian actors with the capacity to affirm their identity and bolster their stance in favour of the principled delivery of humanitarian action without fear of reprisal from their paymasters, and yet engaging in interventions that are duly sensitive and sympathetic to the role of local actors in promoting peace-building and sustainable development.

The role of humanitarian actors in supporting the transformation to democratic institutions is also fraught with difficulty. Past experiences, especially in Afghanistan, Somalia and Pakistan, have shown the tendency of the international community to equate societal reconstruction with state building. A humanitarian paradigm placing affected populations at the centre will require humanitarian actors to prioritize saving lives even where this might undermine security. The danger here is that humanitarian actors may find it extremely difficult to maintain a presence if their aid counterparts or the national

authorities believe they are working against their reconstruction plans. The "quick fix" solution of state building has been highly problematic. Securing a society can only be achieved if that society sees that the contradiction and issues at the heart of the conflict are not disputed, but are taken seriously in a democratic institution. This means that there is a legitimate governing structure that ensures the protection of fundamental human rights. A strengthened humanitarian system that puts people at the centre will be empowering for marginalized individuals and groups who are frequently lost to the reconstruction process and will ensure that the rights of civilians take precedence over societal engineering.

Finally, the transformation of conflict attitudes into a situation of political reconciliation means that there is both an acknowledgement and respect characterizing relations between all social groups, and a degree of reconciliation both within groups (i.e. vertical reconciliation—when armed resistance measures inadvertently take hold within one particular constituency) and between groups (i.e. horizontal reconciliation—when armed resistance exists across socioeconomic strata in opposing groups, for instance between leaders of (former) contending groups and/or between grass-roots on different sides in a conflict). This corner of the triangle is frequently less visible and receives less attention from the media and from academia than the previous two. During the conflict process, individuals and groups are victimized either abruptly or gradually. Nevertheless, during conflict a variety of local/regional semi-official institutions form that can be seen as a threat (a hindrance to renewed national statehood) and as an opportunity (room for local populations to negotiate for beneficial institution building bottom-up). It is thus envisaged that the transformation process will be an empowering process that provides affected populations with responsibilities as well as rights and tangible opportunities as soon as the direct violence of an open conflict has abated—at best within the framework of a peace agreement. The new humanitarian paradigm must give this corner of the peace triangle more attention, ensuring that its actions are supporting the empowerment of affected populations to become actors in their recovery rather than perpetuating their victimhood.

The challenge to applying such a "people centred" approach to humanitarian action that incorporates development and peace-building is probably greatest in fragile and failed states experiencing protracted conflict. One might contest, however, that these are the very contexts that require a humanitarian paradigm shift from viewing humanitarian action as "delivering aid" to "ending need." While the "responsibility to protect" doctrine represents progress in terms of the international community's readiness and willingness to engage in conflicts (Aliyev, 2011), many would contend that the political powers of today need to up their game to end and prevent conflict (WHS, 2016).

Humanitarian donors invariably seek to delegate agency in a bid to support principled humanitarian response and to preserve the notion of non-political humanitarian action. In theory, international humanitarian organizations (such as UN OCHA and DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection) provide "agency" with the required level of delegated authority, expertise, moral authority (in line with the humanitarian principles) and rational–legal authority. However, sociological institutionalism challenges any assumption that principals (donors) and agents (international organizations) are rational actors whose strategic decisions are beyond their own political interests, and suggest a level of interference in what they judge to be "appropriate" action in what has been referred to as a "logic of appropriateness" (March & Olsen, 1983). Thus, agents in humanitarian action grow and expand on the basis of wider societal support rather than their efficiencies and/or other functional virtues.

Agency theory is also divided as to the capacity of large bureaucratic organizations to address the diverse needs of disparate contexts. Principal–agent theory may well suggest that autonomous action can be pursued in an impartial and technocratic manner in line with impersonal rules. However, social institutionalism suggests that such organizations invariably develop a bureaucratic culture that very much determines the behaviour of the organization that shapes the way aid is delivered. These

bureaucratic cultures, coupled with the aforementioned legal and moral authority, serve to define such fundamental issues as: what is considered to be a crisis, which actors are responsible for dealing with associated problems, and how agency staff are trained to deal with these issues (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). These bureaucratic cultures are not unique to international organizations. There are increasing calls for the NGO sector to adopt a new business model to improve the humanitarian system. According to Audet (2011), if the humanitarian movement is to maintain its purpose, preserve its value and respond to criticism of the impact of its action, it must broaden its response through sincere and deeper consideration of local humanitarian capacity building (Audet, 2011).

The challenge posed to humanitarian actors in achieving this paradigm shift in practice may well also depend on the particularities of the mandate of humanitarian actors. Hilhorst and Pereboom highlight that single mandated humanitarian organizations are the exception rather than the rule within humanitarian action. INGOs with dual humanitarian and development mandates tend to have a comparative advantage in promoting this new humanitarian paradigm due to their development expertise and how likely they are to have a pre-existing presence in the conflict context (Hilhorst & Pereboom, 2016). While the increase in the number of agencies with competing interpretations of the principles, especially of neutrality, is often represented as a problem (Bernard, 2016), the likes of the solidarist NGOs (defined as organizations that reject impartiality and whose humanitarian aid programmes follow a clear political point of view) and the "new humanitarians" may be deemed to be already operating on the basis of such a paradigm. In relation to local actors, while their capacities tend to be underestimated by international actors (Hilhorst & Pereboom, 2016), the potential repercussions for principled humanitarian action of engaging with local actors ought to be recognized. These repercussions derive from the possibility that local actors may be unable or unwilling to adequately abide by the principles of neutrality and impartiality given their relationship to groups within the conflict context. Such repercussions might not in every case off-set the benefits to be gained from the adoption of the new paradigm. Balancing the upholding of the humanitarian principles with an explicit recognition of their role in generating transformative conflict outcomes corresponding to the three corners of Galtung's peace triangle is likely to continue to be one of the key dilemmas to be negotiated by humanitarian actors.

While alternative models, such as that provided by the sustainable livelihoods framework, might be of relevance in promoting local capacity, Galtung's model is particularly suitable given its orientation towards outcomes, rather than actors, within conflict resolution. Such an orientation allows conceptual space for actors not traditionally engaged in conflict *resolution* in the strict sense, such as humanitarian actors, to understand how their initiatives can either contribute to or undermine the broader process of conflict resolution that is ultimately dependent on the leadership of local actors.

6 | CONCLUSION

While the rationale for greater coherence from the humanitarian, development and peace-building aid sectors in responding to disasters is well established, a mechanism to enable this coherence remains elusive, especially in complex political emergencies. Efforts to date have tended to be skewed in favour of development or peace-building, with humanitarian actors frequently required to compromise the very principles that characterize humanitarian action. However, there are reasons to believe that a strengthened humanitarian system could make a significant contribution to supporting the post-conflict societal reconstruction process. This will nonetheless require the humanitarian system to be more proactive in shaping its relationship with its aid counterparts.

The shift from humanitarian assistance to humanitarian action has been significant in progressing the humanitarian endeavour from one based on charity to a needs-based undertaking where affected populations have recognized rights. While such a shift is most welcome, humanitarian actors have tended to seek out victims' needs and neglect the capacities of this population to become actors in shaping a future for themselves and their larger societies. The paradigm advocated in this article proposes breaking the cycle of victimhood at the earliest opportunity and to engage affected populations in the reconstruction process. This will require humanitarians to have a greater appreciation of the larger conflict resolution process while staying true to the humanitarian goals of saving lives, alleviating suffering and promoting life with dignity in line with the humanitarian principles.

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