



COURSE: Accountability in Humanitarian Assistance

LEAD PROFESSOR

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TIME: Friday April 1 – Saturday April 2; 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

It is widely recognized that the humanitarian landscape has shifted over the past few decades, and that more people are vulnerable due to increased threats. At the same time, there are more opportunities than ever to meet the humanitarian needs of people. Multiple actors are capable and willing to respond to humanitarian needs, technological and innovative solutions are available to meet these needs, and host governments – especially those in middle income states – play a greater role in addressing the humanitarian needs of their citizens.

The Covid-19 response has also posed new challenges for the international humanitarian sector. Given the numbers of people affected, disruptions to conventional ways of working and the prospect of dwindling funding, 2020 re-ignited conversations about aid reform. Some things that seemed previously out of the sector’s reach were made possible out of sheer necessity: donors showing greater flexibility; international organisations taking a back seat to local leadership; and a super-charged appetite for delivering aid as cash.

But in many disaster contexts, too few people know what they are entitled to receive, and are unable actively and meaningfully participate in the planning and delivery of assistance. Since the 2005 S.E. Asian tsunami, accountability within the humanitarian system has been a topic that has garnered much attention. More actors - donors, affected people, governments - are insisting that the international humanitarian sector be held to account to the people they intend to serve. A proliferation of codes, standards and frameworks have emerged to guide humanitarian responders in promoting greater accountability. This trend has gained such momentum, that it is now essentially unquestioned as a driving concept or paradigm for humanitarian action. Yet on the ground, things still remain the same.

This course aims to introduce students to the current challenges and opportunities facing humanitarians as they work amid the complex realities of today’s crises including in response to Covid-19. The course will cover today’s main debates – including debates about decolonizing the sector, and shifting power more locally - the current shifts in humanitarian policy and practice – including around disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action -challenges and new ways of effectively responding to humanitarian crises, with a focus on the contemporary significance of accountability for humanitarian response.

PREREQUISITES

None.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course is designed to provide students the opportunity to think critically about some of the most pressing issues of today’s humanitarian landscape. Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Describe current humanitarian debates and discourses, especially those which have emerged as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and #BlackLivesMatter movement.
- Understand the origins of the accountability debate and the historical events that have led to greater demand for accountability in humanitarian action;
- Analyze the benefits and drawbacks to current innovations in humanitarian practice such as cash transfers

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING POLICY

Students' conceptual understanding and practical knowledge will be assessed through responses to questions and in class exercises, participation in class, and a final paper.

Student grades will be based on:

- **Class Participation - 50%**
Half of a student's grade will be based on participation in classroom discussions and exercises. Class attendance and contributions to class discussion and group exercises are mandatory.
- **Group Presentations/ assignments- 30%**
Throughout the course students will be expected to present in groups on a certain topic. This will be either developed during class or prepared as an outside assignment.
- **Final Paper – 20%**
Students are asked to write a final paper addressing a critical issue discussed during class. Your paper should reflect the results of research, and it should convey your own analysis and conclusions. The paper should be no longer than 5 pages in length, including a proper bibliography (if needed). All pages should be numbered. Further guidelines will be distributed in class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Students are expected to keep up with readings, attend each lecture and participate both in class and group work. The readings will be distributed before class either on line or printed and passed out.
- All assignments are to be submitted on time unless there is a documented compelling health or personal problem.
- Attendance is mandatory for the full duration of the class. As this is a condensed class students are expected to be present for all coursework.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Course concepts, skills, and field lessons are taught through lectures, class discussion, in-class exercises, video presentations, guest speakers, examination of research findings and program evaluations.

There is a no-laptop/phone policy in class as the structure of the class depends on active participation and engagement. Please bring your laptops to do in-class research and prepare presentations, but during lectures and discussion, these are not to be used. All lectures will be shared and any other notes can be taken by hand.

READINGS

Required

- Following articles in the [Rethinking Humanitarianism](#) Series, The New Humanitarian

- [This global pandemic could transform humanitarianism forever. Here's how](#)
- [COVID-19 changed the world. Can it change aid, too?](#)
- [Change in the humanitarian sector, in numbers](#)
- [“It’s time to invest for the 21st century and repurpose humanitarian bureaucracies.”](#) ODI, (10 December 2020)
- [All The Evidence We Need on the impact of community engagement approaches](#), IFRC/CDA Collaborative, May 2019
- [How the Red Cross Raised half a billion Dollars for Haiti and Built 6 Homes](#), ProPublica, June 2, 2015
- [Concerning Accountability in Humanitarian Action](#), Austin Davis, Humanitarian Practice Network, 2007
- [Future of Financial Assistance - Executive Summary](#), CaLP November 2019
- [Localisation and Locally-led Crisis Response: A Literature Review](#), Local to Global, 2016
- [Do International NGOs still have the right to exist?](#), The Guardian, March 2016

Recommended

On localization

- [Localisation only pays lip service to fixing aid’s colonial legacy](#), The New Humanitarian, February 2022
- Save the Children. 2020. [“Accelerating Localization Through Partnerships.”](#)
- Humanitarian Aid International. 2017. [“Position Paper on Localization.”](#)
- A4EP Oct. 2019: [IASC Definition of ‘Local’ and ‘National’ Actors. A barrier to achieving Grand Bargain localisation commitments.](#)
- V. Barbelet. 2018. [“As Local as Possible, As International as Necessary: Understanding Capacity and Complementarity in Humanitarian Action.”](#) London, ODI.
- Dutch Relief Alliance. 2018. [“Putting Local Actors at the Heart of Humanitarian Crises.”](#)
- Ed Schenkeberg. 2016. [“The Challenge of Localized Humanitarian Aid in Armed Conflict,”](#) MSF.
- Christina Bennett and Larissa Fast. 2020. [From the Ground Up. It’s About Time for Local Humanitarian Action.](#) Humanitarian Policy Group Report. May.
- [“Global crises, local action: a humanitarian reset in response to Covid-19?”](#) led by Overseas Development Institute (3 June 2020)
- [Local humanitarian action in practice Case studies and reflections of local humanitarian actors](#), Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2017
- [Localisation of Aid: Are INGOs Walking The Talk?](#) Start Network, October 2017

On accountability

- Ramin Asgary and Ronald J Waldman. 2017. [“The Elephant in the Room: Toward a more Ethical Approach with Accountability Toward Intended Beneficiaries in Humanitarian Aid,](#) *International Health*, 9, 6, 343–348.
- [Humanitarian Exchange Special Feature: Accountability](#), Overseas Development Institute
- [How the Red Cross Raised half a billion Dollars for Haiti and Built 6 Homes](#), ProPublica
- [More Relevant? 10 ways to approach what people really need](#), ALNAP September 2019

On racism in aid/decolonisation

- [Taking British politics, jargon and colonialism out of our language](#), BOND (10 December 2020)

- [NGOs must decolonise aid relief, says Oxfam UK CEO](#) (8 December 2020)
- Podcast [“Emancipating the Humanitarian System in Africa: A Conversation with Degan Ali.”](#) World Peace Foundation (24 Aug 2020)
- [“Decolonizing Aid”](#) hosted by AdesoAfrica (24 July 2020). (skipping Hugo Slim and Rob Grace portions).
- ["Ep 61 - Colonialism and Covid-19: A Global Pandemic in Need of a Local Response."](#) AC4, Europe Institute, Columbia University.
- [“A Humanitarian Reset: Impacts of a Historic Year”](#) led by Overseas Development Institute (4 Dec 2020)
- [“Decolonising International Development”](#) led by Overseas Development Institute 15 Dec 2020)

On cash

- [The use of cash assistance in the Covid-19 humanitarian response: accelerating trends and missed opportunities](#), February 2022
- [Doing Cash Differently – How Cash Transfers can Transform Humanitarian Aid](#), Overseas Development Institute, 2015
- [A Locally Shaped Future for CVA](#), ALNAP (Dec 2020)

On risk reduction

- [Then and Now: 25 years of disasters, responses, and risk management](#), The New Humanitarian, 2021
- [#No Natural Disasters](#) Campaign
- [Saving Lives Today and Tomorrow: Managing the Risk of Humanitarian Crises](#), OCHA, 2014.
- [Humanitarian Crises, emergency preparedness and response: the role of business and the private sector](#), Humanitarian Policy Group, 2014
- [Better Humanitarian – Development Cooperation for Sustainable Results on the Ground](#), Center on International Cooperation 2016
- [What you need to know about risk reduction](#), The New Humanitarian, 2015.

On humanitarian effectiveness

- [Leaving No One Behind: Humanitarian Effectiveness in the Age of the Sustainable Development Goals](#) OCHA 2015
- [Time to let go A three-point proposal to change the humanitarian system](#) Humanitarian Policy Group, April 2016
- Renewing the Grand Bargain [Part I](#) and [Part II](#); The New Humanitarian
- [A new four-point plan to reform humanitarian aid](#); The New Humanitarian

If you're interested in learning more:

- [World Humanitarian Summit ‘One Humanity: Shared Responsibility](#), Secretary General’s report to World Humanitarian Summit, 2016
- [Planning from the Future: Is the Humanitarian System Fit For Purpose?](#), Kings College, 2016
- [Refugee Compacts: An Initial Framework](#), CGD -IRC Policy Note, 2016
- [Trump Team’s Queries About Africa Point to Skepticism About Aid](#), New York Times, 2017
- [What people in humanitarian crises need is cash, not commodities](#), The Guardian, 2016
- [State of evidence on humanitarian cash transfers](#), Overseas Development Institute, 2015
- [Disaster do gooders can actually hinder help](#), NBC News, 2010

- [How to help Nepal Survivors](#), Slate, 2015
- [Please don't send your old shoes to the Philippines](#), Slate, 2013
- [Are You Listening Now?](#) CDAC Network, 2016
- [The remittance gap: key findings of a study in Tacloban City after Typhoon Haiyan](#), HPN 2017
- [Rhetoric vs reality: the challenges of delivering on World Humanitarian Summit localisation commitments](#), Christian Aid, 2017
- [The Power of Speech](#), Nigeria, Translators Without Borders, 2017
- [Making operational decisions in humanitarian response: A literature review](#). ALNAP, 2018.
- [Better Humanitarian – Development Cooperation for Sustainable Results on the Ground](#), Center on International Cooperation 2016
- [State of the World's Cash Report](#), Executive Summary, CALP, 2018
- [Local humanitarian action in practice Case studies and reflections of local humanitarian actors](#), Humanitarian Leadership Academy, 2017
- [Global Humanitarian Assistance Report](#) (Executive Summary), Development Initiatives, 2019
- [As Storms Keep Coming, FEMA Spends Billions in 'Cycle' of Damage and Repair](#), NYTimes, Oct 8, 2018
- [Engaging with People Affected by Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence: Recommendations for Humanitarian Organizations and Donors in the Digital Era](#), Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, ICRC, 2018.
- [Saving Lives Today and Tomorrow: Managing the Risk of Humanitarian Crises](#), OCHA, 2014.
- [Humanitarian Crises, emergency preparedness and response: the role of business and the private sector](#), Humanitarian Policy Group, 2014
- Information on the [Grand Bargain](#) Commitments and the [New Way of Working](#).

If you're interested in learning more:

- [World Humanitarian Summit 'One Humanity: Shared Responsibility'](#), Secretary General's report to World Humanitarian Summit, 2016
- [Planning from the Future: Is the Humanitarian System Fit For Purpose?](#), Kings College, 2016
- [President Trump's Humanitarian Agenda](#), IRIN News, 2016
- [Refugee Compacts: An Initial Framework](#), CGD -IRC Policy Note, 2016
- [Trump Team's Queries About Africa Point to Skepticism About Aid](#), New York Times, 2017
- [Humanitarian Exchange Special Feature: Accountability](#), Overseas Development Institute
- [What people in humanitarian crises need is cash, not commodities](#), The Guardian, 2016
- [State of evidence on humanitarian cash transfers](#), Overseas Development Institute, 2015
- [Disaster do gooders can actually hinder help](#), NBC News, 2010
- [How to help Nepal Survivors](#), Slate, 2015
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- [Are You Listening Now?](#) CDAC Network, 2016
- [The remittance gap: key findings of a study in Tacloban City after Typhoon Haiyan](#), HPN 2017
- [Rhetoric vs reality: the challenges of delivering on World Humanitarian Summit localisation commitments](#), Christian Aid, 2017
- [Localisation of Aid: Are INGOs Walking The Talk?](#) Start Network, October 2017
- [The Power of Speech](#), Nigeria, Translators Without Borders, 2017
- [Time to Let Go: Remaking Humanitarian Action in the Modern Era](#), ODI/HPG 2016
- [Making operational decisions in humanitarian response: A literature review](#). ALNAP, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- [ACAPS](#) Independent information provider on humanitarian needs and analysis.
- [Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action \(ALNAP\)](#) Invaluable resource for reports, evaluations, assessments related to all humanitarian topics. Publishes the State of the Humanitarian System Reports.
- [Cash Learning Partnership \(CaLP\)](#) Resources related to the use of cash during humanitarian response.
- [Humanitarian Practice Network](#): Independent think tank of the Overseas Development Institute for humanitarian policy and practitioners.
- [CDAC Network](#): Organization devoted to improving communication with people affected by humanitarian crisis
- [CHS Alliance](#): Formed in 2015 by merging HAP International and People in Aid, the alliance works with humanitarian and development actors on quality, accountability and people management initiatives.
- [ICRC Community Engagement Guide](#): Ways to effectively and systematically engage communities as a means of improving programme quality and building safer and more resilient communities.
- [One World Trust](#): Numerous articles on global accountability
- [Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#): Applied research, practical policy advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate in the humanitarian and development sectors. Humanitarian think tank, the [Humanitarian Policy Group](#): sits within ODI Think tank on humanitarian issues
- [Reliefweb.int](#): Information Source on global crises and humanitarian response. Contains thorough and up to date global job listings.
- [The New Humanitarian](#): News source on humanitarian issues
- [World Humanitarian Summit: Key Documents](#): Lists all of the documents submitted leading up to the WHS and the outcomes, including core commitments, that followed.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by Wagner's Academic Code. All Wagner students have already read and signed the Wagner Academic Oath. Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Student Accessibility

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) website and click the "Get Started" button. You can also call or email CSD (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious

obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

NYU's Wellness Exchange

NYU's Wellness Exchange has extensive student health and mental health resources. A private hotline (212-443-9999) is available 24/7 that connects students with a professional who can help them address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns.