

*Essentiel
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10
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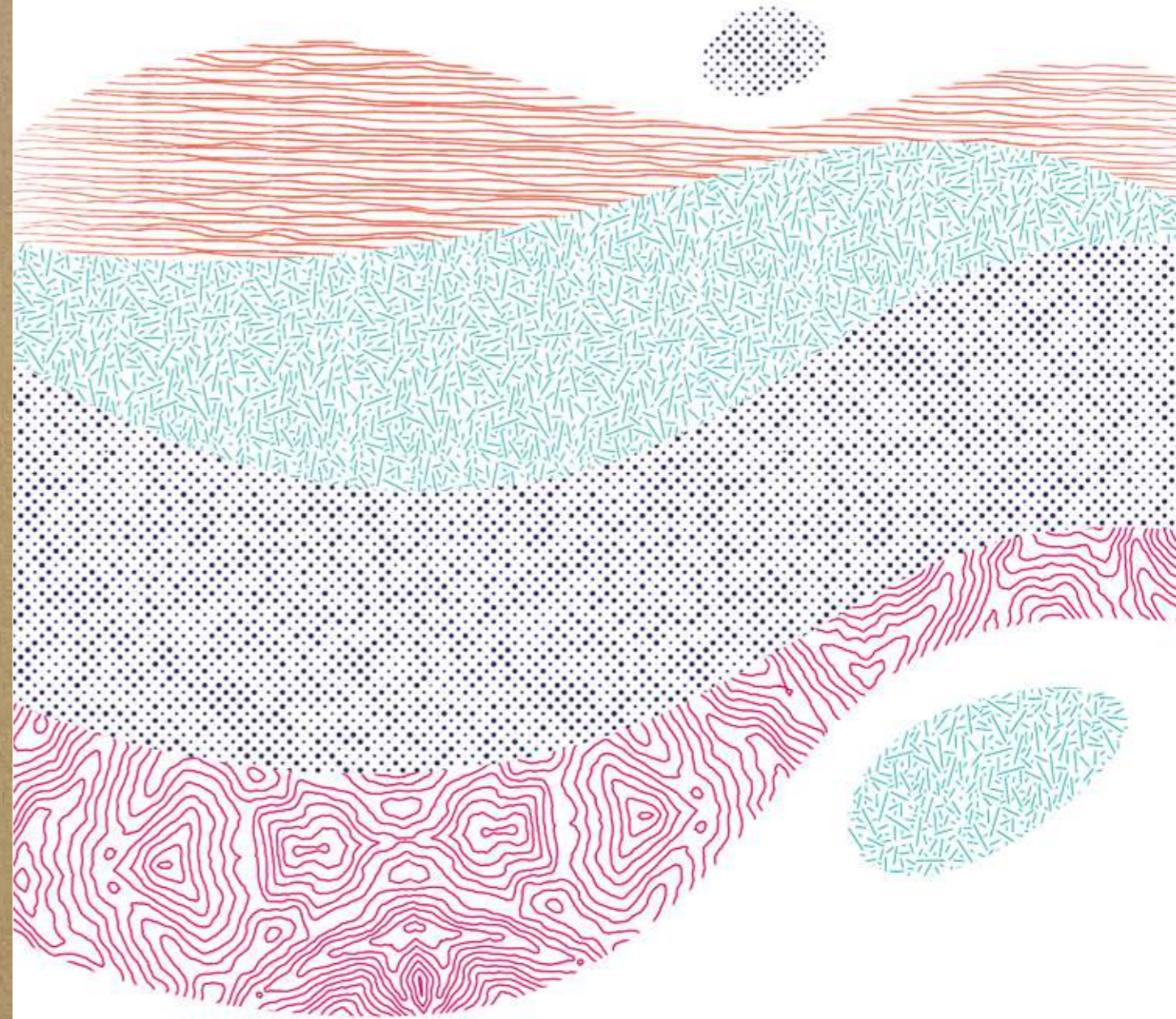
OF RESEARCH

**GOING TO THE HEART OF
VULNERABILITIES**

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1 Humanitarian Transition



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THE EMERGENCE OF A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Modern humanitarian action, conceived 160 years ago by Henry DUNANT as secular and universal in scope, has undergone crises and disruptions in its responses to the various armed conflicts and major disasters that have transformed how it conducts its mission to protect people. However, beyond the major geopolitical upheavals that have made it what it is today and its marked influence gained since the Cold War era, the humanitarian sector is now confronted with more profound transformations that could threaten its very foundation, disrupt its organisational framework, and call its practices into question.

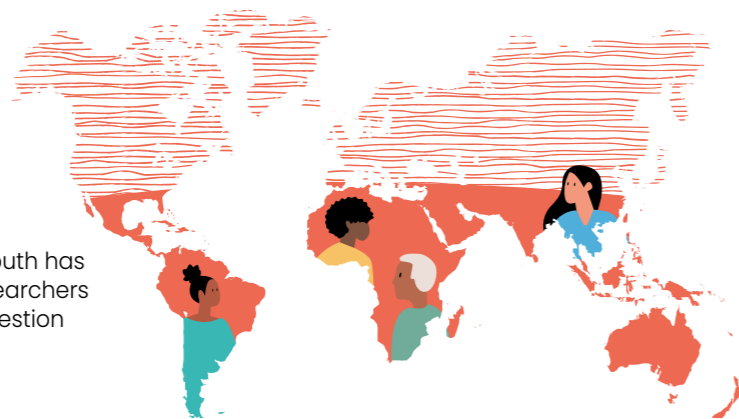
From this observation, the Foundation has therefore found the need to re-examine the concept of humanitarian transition as a research focus. This should lead to a better comprehension of the dynamics behind “the dominant Western-style paradigm of solidarity between the North and the South transitioning to one that is much more complex”¹, plus its ethical ramifications. The Foundation has made the humanitarian transition the basis of a unique ten-year-long research programme conducted through research grants, conferences, and academic publications. This programme employs various research methodologies to specifically explore the status and the role of “local” humanitarian organisations (“local” as defined by the international aid system). It initially focused on the “profound changes” brought about by introducing new actors and practices into the humanitarian sector. This was accomplished through an initial call for grant applications in 2014 entitled “Realities and prospects of the humanitarian transition in countries receiving international aid”. Researchers first examined the links between humanitarian organisations and public sector providers in crisis-impacted countries, including issues around the sovereignty of States receiving international aid, the conduct and perceptions of long-established humanitarian organisations, the emergence of funding bodies, and the greater involvement of “State humanitarian action.” Researchers then focused on the qualitative and quantitative factors of redefined needs, which call for novel practices, new forms

of funding, plus technological, social, and organisational innovations, as well as the creation of South-based organisations and networks using hybrid business models.

As soon as the Red Cross Foundation was created during the preparations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, Jean-François MATTEI and Virginie TROIT expressed the need to support the humanitarian transition initiative through scientific observations and dialogue with humanitarian practitioners. This was to be achieved through applying ethical principles, as distinct from moral principles, deontology, or law, and through the “unavoidable soul-searching arising from new situations that impose new choices”². With this approach, they proposed to examine the relationship between providers of aid and aid recipients and in so doing, transpose bioethical principles to humanitarianism as an additional complement to the known humanitarian principles that guide the conduct of practitioners and give meaning to their actions. While taking note of the unbalanced relationship between North and South, especially in the research sector, they called for a collective response to the “need for an unprecedented research effort in the human and social sciences, naturally associating humanitarian operatives, as well as anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and legal experts from various cultural backgrounds. It is a matter of better understanding the conditions required to realise the humanitarian transition.” These considerations have been critical to the research on humanitarian transition and, in 2018 resulted in a new call for research grant applications entitled “Humanitarian transition: the stakes of autonomy,” which aimed as much to develop the process of localisation as to study it. The Foundation has since endeavoured to conduct its research programme as closely as possible with academics in participating countries by awarding research grants and organising conferences in Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Lebanon, Cameroon, and Kenya.

57%

of the research in the South has been carried out by researchers from the countries in question



“No human enterprise can progress without devoting part of its efforts to research and innovation. Humanitarian action is no exception to the rule, and the challenge should be rewarding.”

Pr Jean-François MATTEI

Honorary President of the French Red Cross

Former President of the French Red Cross Fund

A CONCEPT GRAPPLING WITH THE REALITIES OF THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

Over the past ten years, humanitarian crises have undergone significant developments primarily due to shifts in global geopolitics, the impact of natural disasters, and changes in how armed conflicts are waged. The forcible relocation of populations increased significantly on the previous decade, with a record of more than 100 million displacements in 2022³. The COVID-19 pandemic, in the wake of other major epidemics (whether infectious diseases such as Ebola, AIDS, or vector-borne infections), has brought to light deficiencies in health systems, both in the North and South, as well as in the response capacity of humanitarian relief. Finally, one of the major developments in humanitarian crises has been the increased frequency and greater magnitude of natural disasters, particularly those attributable to climate change⁴. Hurricanes, floods, and heat waves have greatly impacted populations.

Humanitarian needs have risen sharply, and according to the most recent estimates, more than 300 million people have been affected, and more than US\$50 billion will be required to provide further aid⁵. While funding has also increased in the past, it has not kept pace with rising demands.

International and local humanitarian organisations have had strained yet fruitful contacts in the past ten years. Their relations were brought to the fore at the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul in 2016 and convened by the United Nations Secretary-General. The Summit closed with the adoption of a series of measures that included the “Grand Bargain” agreement. It called for responses that would be “as local as possible, as international as necessary”⁶. It presented the essential requirement of “localising humanitarian aid” through increased direct funding allocated to local humanitarian organisations. However, this commitment has been struggling to materialise despite numerous promises, one of which was to commit donors and aid organisations to provide 25% of global humanitarian funding to local and national country providers by 2020. However the humanitarian sector today remains mainly in the hands of multilateral agencies and a few international NGOs. At the other end of the scale, national and local NGOs received only 1.2% of total international humanitarian aid in 2022⁷.

While remaining committed to its original goals, the Humanitarian Transition programme has continuously encouraged discussion on the issues and dynamics in the humanitarian sector. The programme has deviated from the traditional compartmentalisation of emergency and development to give researchers greater flexibility to review the timing, announcement, and representation of their projects. Numerous research studies have examined the work performed by local humanitarians, the introduction of new players, and what the sector has been experiencing behind the scenes in various contexts. Similarly, the Humanitarian Transition programme has been nurtured and inspired by the numerous scientific studies on international aid, both in French-speaking and global contexts. Over the past decade, the Foundation has awarded post-doctoral fellowships to over 25 researchers.

TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING: Humanitarians and Their Practices

Over the past ten years, the “Humanitarian Transition” programme has conducted research on humanitarian action, taking into account a greater understanding of its context, key players, and dynamics of power and dependence. In addition, the programme has urged a specific approach to each country receiving international aid to address the challenges and modalities of the humanitarian transition within their national framework and how aid might align with the dynamics of social action and public policies. This requires an examination of both the “public arena” and the “backstage” of humanitarian action.

1. HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS, THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND AID COORDINATION: THE NEW DEAL

As critical players ensuring the protection of their citizens, States maintain ambivalent relations with humanitarian organisations. States offering aid in the name of cooperation and international solidarity must be able to collaborate with the public sector in the countries and territories where they operate. They must be accountable for their actions and adhere to the principles of the organisations with which they work. Humanitarian organisations must understand and anticipate the underlying rationale for how a State may take charge, control or even instrumentalise aid in the name of sovereignty and contend with its geopolitical dynamics. On the other hand, States are reasserting their authority over their response to needs by deploying policies and systems designed to supplement or supplant humanitarian action.

In Madagascar, political scientist **Christiane RAFIDINARIVO** studied the emerging role of the National Office for Risk and Disaster Management of Madagascar in its response to natural disasters. She examined the rationale behind financing this recently created institution, which has been responsible for coordinating all humanitarian interventions in Madagascar and studied its collaboration with international organisations and funding bodies.

Many States are strengthening their role as critical players in humanitarian response to improve their coordination. The Red Cross Foundation has funded several research projects illustrating this point. For example, anthropologist **Jeanne SEMIN** has studied the social assistance provided to talibé children in Saint-Louis, Senegal. She examined the synergies between the public sector and humanitarian organisations that function as mediators between street people and the State through her action research involving the actors in question. Her project, which coincided with the launch of the authorities' plan to rescue children living in the streets, exemplifies collaboration challenges between the State and civil society.

In Niger, as in the whole of the Sahel, conflicts and population shifts have impacted mainly the security response of the States concerned and the international community. These issues have implications for humanitarian activities due to the needs they generate and the impact of security-related responses on humanitarian workers. The work of anthropologist **Tatiana SMIRNOVA** carried out in Niger in 2018, describes how security matters have been assured in response to population shifts caused by conflicts by focusing on inter-actor relationships, emphasising, emphasising implemented methodologies of population governance.

In another region of Niger, formulating national and international regulations has led the country to become an essential player in migration policies. More stringent border controls have further weakened Niger's already fragile socio-economic situation, prompting young people in Niger to emigrate from areas like the Agadez region. In approaching this situation, sociologist **Aissata ISSANE IGODOE** explored the strategies of local and humanitarian actors in response to the migration problem. She examined the role of local NGOs in comprehending migratory flows and explored the underlying socio-economic and cultural issues.

In East Africa, several countries are experiencing armed conflicts, which have intermittently led to contentious relations between States and international NGOs.

The research project of anthropologist **Alice CORBET**, funded in 2017, focuses on the interaction between actors in response to the influx of South Sudanese refugees into the Gambella region since 2013. Her work addresses the realities of refugee management.

In another part of the world, political scientist **Danielle TAN** studied similar dynamics in Laos. To maximise the effectiveness of development projects in a context with limited resources and personnel, the author uses geographic information systems (GIS) to map the organisers, their activities, and their modes of governance.



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RESEARCHER FOCUS

Free Play and Drawings as Devices for Anthropologists

In her research on the vulnerability and care management of street children in Saint-Louis, Senegal, Jeanne SEMIN uses several methodologies, one of which is observing free play and organising drawing classes.

The study of free play as a technique used in childhood anthropology is a window into the reality that children experience. *“Free play is incomparably beneficial for children regarding their personal construct. Free play is ubiquitous and characteristic of childhood. During my observations, I sought to determine the extent to which the street children of Saint-Louis truly play, how they play, and what their games can teach us about their world. They play, in fact, in an open space of freedom represented for them by the street.”*

Jeanne Semin also set up drawing workshops for 10 to 15 children provided with assistance by non-profit organisations. The talibé children aged between 6 and 14 were given three instructions: *“1-Draw the person you love most in the world; 2-Draw your daily life; 3-Draw the job you would like to have in the future. For each drawing, including those that were done freely, the child was asked to comment what he or she had wished to draw.”* This activity was not intended to be an evaluation but a fun way to better get to know the children attending the organisations. As Françoise Dolto wrote, free drawing is *“an expression, a manifestation of the depths of life”*. From a large number of drawings, Jeanne SEMIN was able to *“discover some shared characteristics that provide insight on the way children position themselves within society and in their relationship with adults, teachers, family, friends, etc.”*.



Jeanne SEMIN
Doctor in Anthropology

2. NEW ARRIVALS IN HUMANITARIANISM AND AID COORDINATION

In recent years, the humanitarian sector has seen the arrival of key players and the formulation of new models, especially in the South. Transnational NGOs, coalitions, and networks are all organisational innovations that are part of the humanitarian transition movement and offer new ways of doing things and new modes of governance that can be exemplary for other sectors.

Beyond the paradigm shift between North and South, one of the distinguishing features of the humanitarian transition movement lies in the emergence and development of new organisational forms of humanitarianism, particularly in the South. Wishing to “do a different kind of humanitarian action”, the organisation studied is structured, for example, around a new organisational model founded mainly on providing support to local humanitarian organisations. Research by anthropologist **Marion PECHAYRE** in Niger shows how this NGO, which grew out of Médecins sans Frontières’ breeding ground of ideas and practices, progressively morphed into a symbiotic collaboration benefiting both local NGOs and ALIMA itself. Her study also shows that this ongoing collaboration has led to the revamping of behaviours and action strategies in such a way as to circumvent the paternalistic approach that is characteristic of partnerships between NGOs of the North and African NGOs.

Alongside these new humanitarian professionals, citizen movements are emerging and making themselves heard in the public arena without necessarily adopting a conventional organisational framework. **Kelly POULET**’s research studies the development of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in Senegal, a rural-based peasant movement and a key player that has emerged in a context where the State’s agricultural policies have mixed results. FONGS-action paysanne promotes a less formal form of organisation and is set on upholding the interests of civil society, especially those relative to peasant autonomy.

Likewise, numerous research projects funded by the Foundation have highlighted new humanitarian organisations. Sociologist **Emeline UWIZEYIMANA** in Burundi describes a local NGO and introduces its founder. She demonstrates that the activities of this organisation, created in the 1990s, are designed for the long term and are intended to redefine the relationship with beneficiaries. This NGO has succeeded in collaborating with international organisations and public service providers thanks to its vigorous action in the field. It seeks to diversify its activities beyond emergency humanitarian aid (training, microfinance, etc.). Humanitarian action is increasingly open to non-traditional players from the private and public sectors.

Finally, the Foundation also finances research projects that study the emergence and empowerment of local actors and the localisation of aid from the viewpoint of local organisations. This is the objective of **Jean Emile MBA's** project, which studies "humanitarian transition from below" in Cameroon based on the experience of community-based organisations funded by international NGOs, as well as bilateral and multilateral funding bodies. Taking this same perspective, sociologist **Diane ALALOUF-HALL** examines an international cooperation organisation based in Montreal and operating in Africa, the Americas, and Asia. Her project focuses on the organisation's "country offices", to investigate the organisational change brought about to internationalise its governance and programme management. It should progressively delegate greater autonomy to these country offices, which are considered locally based.



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3. BEHIND THE SCENES OF HUMANITARIANISM

Exploring the international humanitarian system and its relationship with local organisations and societies prompts a shift in focus from the international stage to behind the scenes. What occurs "backstage" is a necessary and stimulating component for observing what is unseen or disregarded by research. It can also help revisit uncomfortable or stimulating situations. It can provide an opportunity to closely re-examine the nature of the relationship with other key players and their underlying mechanisms.

The work of sociologist **Emeline UWIZEYIMANA** carried out in a Burundian refugee camp goes behind the scenes of humanitarian aid and how beneficiaries perceive it. She describes the compatibility issues between the local culture of the beneficiaries and the projects implemented by international NGOs, as well as the lack of participation of local communities. Her study focuses on the actions of a local NGO that offers an alternative mode of management that empowers local people. Her findings are promising. This research clearly shows that the humanitarian transition is a real phenomenon in Burundi but also necessitates a shift in the relationship between NGOs and local populations.

This structurally imbalanced relationship between humanitarian personnel and local populations also manifests itself on a lesser scale. Criminologist **Arnaud DANDROY** studied the unequal and paradoxical nature of domestic relationships developed in Haiti. He describes a more specific social situation: the mutual dependence of humanitarian workers and their housekeepers. The result is a process of otherisation, followed by an essentialisation and devaluation of the other person. The researcher hypothesises that the problems of insecurity of humanitarian personnel could be resolved by eliminating the unequal distribution and recognition that marginalised social groups must endure.

Anthropologist **Amalia DRAGANI** describes the intimate relationships between expatriate staff and local people. This study aims to examine the political, social, and symbolic issues that lie at the heart of mixed marriages between development officers and local representatives. Based on her observations in Niamey, she

explores how the sociability between spouses contributes to “humanitarian transfer”, a fundamental notion and current challenge of humanitarian action which consists of transferring skills to locals to enable them to act as effectively as possible in the field, particularly regarding major humanitarian issues.

Sociologist **Verena RICHARDIER** focused her research on the relations between professionals from the South and North through her study of the rapport between “expatriate” and “local” personnel. Indeed, the newly configured relationships brought about by the humanitarian transition can sometimes be bound by limitations from a professional, geographic, and symbolic perspective, particularly regarding the mobility of humanitarian aid workers. Through her research conducted in Senegal and Niger, she investigates the ethnicisation of skills in an increasingly pluralistic professional environment, taking as an example the case of successful graduates from a renowned training centre.



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ACTING MORE EFFECTIVELY: Ethics as a Guide for Action

The “Humanitarian Transition” programme encourages research that considers the recognition of dilemmas, applying standards, ethical considerations, and institutionalisation of humanitarian aid. Starting from the biomedical ethical principles of autonomy and those of beneficence, maleficence, and justice⁸, the programme presents novel perspectives for the study of the practices and governance of humanitarians. They should guide the actions and the innovations that serve the most vulnerable. This positioning makes it possible to address the transmutations and transformations of contemporary humanitarian action, both from a descriptive and a normative approach.

1. LOCAL HUMANITARIANISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF AUTONOMY

Originating with the 2016 *Grand Bargain*, the concept of aid localisation has had a significant impact on the humanitarian sector in recent years. However, despite the numerous pledges to increase direct funding to local organisations, these commitments are struggling to emerge. Many researchers have studied the dynamics at play and localisation as a practice or discourse in a more general understanding of local humanitarianism.

A Doctor in International Development, **Stéphanie MALTAIS** studied this localisation process in Guinea in the context of numerous epidemics, including Ebola and COVID-19. She highlights the multiple ongoing barriers to the empowerment of Guinean organisations in relation to their technical partners and international financiers. While the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions could have led to a more localised approach in responding to crises, the impacts on technical support and local ownership of the response to epidemics must still be finely reviewed, even if progress has been made in terms of the empowerment of national and local organisations.

The historian **Anicet ZRAN** has closely examined the sustainability of these local developments and competencies. In the north of Côte d'Ivoire, ravaged by a decade-long conflict, he analysed the modes of intervention and the subsequent withdrawal of international humanitarian organisations. He shows that their actions, which were primarily focused on the health sector, required the participation of local actors throughout the conflict and as a result prompted the formation of new NGOs and the mobilisation of existing ones. At the end of the conflict, and due to transitioning to a more development-oriented context, many NGOs withdrew, encouraging local actors to employ resilience strategies to reposition themselves. His work sheds light on the deliberate construction of the health system, the public sector at its core, and local NGOs occupying a strategic role.

In other contexts, researchers present more nuanced findings about the localisation process, underscoring the constraints of local organisations and the preference of beneficiaries for international aid. Anthropologist **Georges DJOHY** in Benin studied the transfer of power from international humanitarians to local actors in the frequently flooded northern region of the country. His work reveals a somewhat conflicting institutional arrangement that reinforces the authority and the sway of local political figures at the expense of the quality of aid, which is meant to be apolitical. His work shows that the perceptions and practices of aid recipients also indicate important issues surrounding the localisation of aid. He demonstrates a preference of locals for Western aid that is perceived as less biased, less partisan, and more respectful of international humanitarian values and principles, in contrast to local assistance that is viewed as more partisan, biased, and subservient to electoral, clan, ideological, and territorial interests.

Reflecting on the emergence of new insurance actors in preparing for and responding to natural disasters, agronomist **Mariama NOUHOU KOUTCHA** in Niger studied the protection of farmers against the risks of drought in the region of Tillabéry. Her work examines how affected populations perceive various forms of emergency assistance after a disaster, including insurance payments. She demonstrates that farmers primarily value aid programmes that are as generous and prompt as possible, and they seem to prefer the aid provided by international organisations over that provided by the local country or national NGOs.



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2. TRANSFER OF STANDARDS AND MODELS WITHIN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

Social science researchers frequently highlight the short comings and adverse effects of development aid and humanitarian aid programmes. Socio-anthropologists and political scientists offer a critical perspective and explore concepts around the circulation of standards and the transfer of policies. The intent is to scrutinise the compatibility or incompatibility between the various intervention strategies, commonly regarded as standard models, and their implementation in low-income and crisis-affected countries. Several research projects report on the various inconsistencies, circumventions, and innovations of what Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan has conceptualised as “travelling models”.

Through research conducted in Casamance, Senegal, anthropologist **Alvar JONESANCHEZ** studied peace-building programmes, particularly the elements that promote “community participation” typically demanded by funding bodies. After examining peace committees and conflict management mechanisms presented as being locally based, he concludes that these programmes result from standardised strategies designed explicitly for peacebuilding. In fact, according to his research, the need for response developed at local level has systematically originated from the top, and objectives are externally defined. As a result, he notes that local populations exhibit a limited sense of ownership of these systems, and even become depoliticised because these models have been imposed.

As part of this same critical approach to community participation, sociologist **Edouard Kouassi KOUADIO** studied the implementation of a Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) programme in Côte d’Ivoire, with the active support of an international organisation. His findings indicate that this programme, which originated in Southeast Asia, encountered significant resistance and limited adoption within the local community. People’s perceptions and beliefs associated with hygiene and sanitation remain strong, and they have impeded the implementation of these practices. His study reports on the repercussions of an overly large disparity between the intervention strategies of an imported programme and the reality of local situations.

Similarly, sociologist **Sadio BA GNING** has reported on group dynamics and the paradigm of good practices through a study of a consortium consisting of 178 national and international NGOs in Senegal that upholds the interests of NGOs and other civil society organisations. Her work shows that, despite wanting to move towards empowerment and professionalisation, local actors must still contend with international organisations demanding “good governance”. Such well-meaning intentions, coupled with matters related to financial dependence, can undermine NGO networks and institutions and even encourage competitive relationships between NGOs. Her work shows that standards, principles, and ethical frameworks, which are shared between organisations in the North and South, are not necessarily adapted to meet the needs of the South.

Lastly, the transfer of standards through partnerships between humanitarian organisations from the South and North is a crucial aspect of relationship-building. It provided the starting point for anthropologists **Jacky BOUJU** and **Sylvie AYIMPAM** to examine the disparities in financial resources between partners from the North and local partners in Burkina Faso, which have resulted in imbalances in the contributions and compensations typically exchanged within the humanitarian sector. The authors reflect on the “symbolic violence” of aid, which is inherently asymmetrical in North-South relationships. This violence is now ingrained within the established norms dictated by the managerial culture of the bureaucracies of major international organisations. It has taken the form of a profoundly ethnocentric model that is mainly unsuited to the realities of societies in the South, and this paradoxically restricts opportunities for the localisation of aid.



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Travelling Models

For more than forty years, anthropologist **Jean-Pierre OLIVIER DE SARDAN** has documented, analysed, and conceptualised the different dimensions of social engineering of development in West Africa. As the recipient of an honorary award from the Foundation, his work has strongly influenced generations of social anthropologists. In his most recent publication, *La Revanche des Contextes*⁹, he reiterates the concept of “**travelling models**”, which can be defined as follows :

Developed by international experts and supported and financed by development institutions, travelling models are exported massively to low-income countries as “turnkey” solutions. A travelling model, often derived from an experience from the organisation’s inception, is produced around an inherently efficient system with the operational means required for its implementation. The travelling model is then disseminated via networks of professionals and decision-makers in various contexts. The confrontation with local players, i.e. field operatives, inevitably produces implementation gaps, numerous unforeseen effects, and results that are disappointing or far from hitting their initial targets—as exemplified by the multiple case studies presented in this publication and

based on original empirical data gathered from around the world.

Travelling models:
“Une ingénierie sociale du développement,” Revue internationale des études de développement.

Beyond the issues of community participation, several researchers funded by the Foundation have taken an interest in the response provided by the for-profit sector and the promotion of social entrepreneurship. In Burkina Faso, anthropologist **Roberta RUBINO** studied the effects caused by income-generating activity programmes widely promoted by NGOs. Focusing on the food processing sector, she shows that these activities, designed to strengthen the financial autonomy of beneficiaries, can also tend to lock them into a “survival economy” and keep them ensnared in a web of traditional social relationships.

To establish a new mode of economic action that is grounded in and strengthens the social bond, social entrepreneurship accordingly appears to be a concept applied by development agencies in the North and widely promoted by locally based intermediary organisations. Sociologist **Anastasia-Alithia SEFERIADIS** looked at women’s social entrepreneurship in Ghana. She demonstrates that the prevailing promotion of the entrepreneurship model leads some women to reclassify their NGOs as social enterprises despite the absence of financial results. When this engagement is requalified as such, it generates a reliance on external aid to compensate for shortfalls in a market characterised by unequal competition.



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RESEARCHER FOCUS

The “Dual Perspective” of a Former Humanitarian Turned Anthropologist

Before earning his doctorate in social anthropology, Alvar JONES SANCHEZ worked for nearly ten years in humanitarian aid and development in Africa, where he directed numerous intervention programmes.

“I worked as an international volunteer between 2005 and 2014, mainly for the Spanish Red Cross in Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, Senegal, and Tunisia. I initially studied anthropology, believing that this subject would be useful to me as an overseas volunteer. But this was not the case because my volunteer work was rushed, dealt with administrative tasks, required formal posturing, etc. Instead, an anthropologist needs time, fieldwork, and informality. A decade on, I felt the need to go back to basics and resume my research work. I believe it’s important to deconsecrate humanitarian aid to make it more effective, especially since I’ve worn two hats, both as a humanitarian and an anthropologist, which has given me a better understanding of the field.”

His research, funded by the Foundation, deals with “participatory” or “community-based” dynamics, a popularised notion in the development sector. It has allowed him to return to Casamance and gain a greater awareness of his new position concerning the people he had worked with as a volunteer.

“So, I returned to Casamance, where I was a volunteer. I realised that my new status made it hard to schedule interviews and that I was taken less seriously. No one in the field was listening to me. This prompted me to reflect on the necessity to structure meetings between operational staff and researchers and develop new modes of cooperation.”



Alvar JONES SANCHEZ
Doctor in Anthropology



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AND TOMORROW?



Interview with...

Dorothea HILHORST
Professor of Humanitarian Studies

Dorothea HILHORST is Professor of Humanitarian and Reconstruction Studies at the International Institute for Social Studies (ISS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Wageningen University (Netherlands). She is also President of the International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) and Honorary Director of the Centre de recherche et d'expertise Genre et Développement (CREGED) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her research focuses on the relationship between humanitarian aid and society. She is particularly interested in the interaction between humanitarian aid and development and with peace-building. In 2020, she was awarded a research prize by the Foundation.

How can we address humanitarian organisations' insufficient capacity to adequately meet the growing needs of populations?

Global humanitarian needs are growing ever faster, given the current context of escalating world conflicts, persistent global tensions, and the tangible effects of climate change and its alarming prognosis. At the same time, accessing communities to deliver humanitarian aid is becoming increasingly problematic, thereby driving up the costs of humanitarian interventions in many world regions. This makes our task more complex and more perilous.

In the face of these growing challenges, a new approach is required. There is a need for what I call "resilient humanitarianism". It's an approach that stresses the need for continuous adaptation of humanitarian action to sustain its effectiveness and relevance.

In light of this, greater emphasis should be placed on the role of national authorities and the support of national service providers, whether they operate in humanitarianism or other sectors. This aspect is essential.

Another crucial aspect is our perception of beneficiaries. We are accountable to them. We must hold them in the utmost regard and recognise their autonomy. However, external constraints may occasionally limit their autonomy, even though it may be desirable in certain situations.

The Nexus approach interconnects humanitarianism, development, and peace-building and has many advantages. But it also exposes humanitarian action to a greater risk of being politicised, which raises multiple concerns, including the difficulty of accessing needy populations. At the same time, another Nexus approach exists between humanitarianism, resource security, and the fight against illegal immigration. However, these novel trends must be cautiously treated and critically examined to ascertain their value to populations. Finally, a crucial question that merits consideration concerns the localisation of humanitarian assistance. We must question whether the international humanitarian community is making any real headway in this regard.

Aside from the issues already mentioned, are practitioners and researchers giving sufficient consideration to the challenges anticipated over the next ten to twenty years? Are any essential aspects being overlooked that would necessitate further research and intervention?

The key recommendation for future research in humanitarianism relates to acquiring a deeper understanding of the significance of diversity. It is essential to recognise that humanitarianism takes on different forms depending on the context in which it evolves. Humanitarian action is deeply impacted by the social realities and political economics of the regions in which it intervenes. In-depth investigations must be conducted to determine how these factors affect the evolution of humanitarian action. In pursuing this train of thought, it is crucial to formulate middle-range theories that can explain the plurality of contexts and their commonalities. From this,

models and approaches can be developed that are more suited to meet the needs of people in various environments effectively. I therefore use the term “humanitarianisms” in the plural form to better convey the diversity of systems.

How do you envision the involvement of the social sciences and other disciplines in supporting NGOs and members of civil society as they reflect on their mission and seek to facilitate research and the sharing of information?

I believe that research must be firmly grounded in local realities, and it must also be carried out in close collaboration with local actors and stakeholders. This collaboration is essential. In the context of humanitarian crises, researchers must assume a more proactive role. It is therefore imperative to establish a dialogue between researchers, humanitarian practitioners, journalists, critical observers, and local representatives of civil society. This will enable us to understand local needs better and find appropriate solutions. The initiatives of humanitarian observatories, such as the one promoted by the International Humanitarian Studies Association, are richly dynamic, particularly in Africa.



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