



## TUFTS UNIVERSITY

### ACTION RESEARCH ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE HUMANITARIAN ENTERPRISE by the Humanitarianism and War Project

For the past decade, the Humanitarianism and War Project has conducted reviews of the effectiveness of the international humanitarian response to major complex emergencies. Much of our work has been carried out with and for practitioners, focusing on best practice at the levels of policy and field operations. Our new research examines the broad context in which humanitarian action operates and the relationships between available resources and the realities that influence their allocation and use.

“Political economy” describes the relationship between available resources and the prevailing realities of power. The political economy of humanitarian action involves the power relationships in which bilateral and multilateral agencies, Northern NGOs, and their Southern counterparts operate. Cross-cutting pressures are brought to bear by host governments, international and domestic political processes, and diaspora communities. Public opinion and the media can be powerful motivators or inhibitors, with significant impact on program quality.

The research will examine trends and issues in types, levels, and locations of humanitarian activities. It will explore the impact of political economy on service delivery and advocacy, agency specialization, competition and market share, learning, and reform. Encompassing bilateral and multilateral institutions as well as Northern NGOs and Southern civil society, the study will take a multi-layered approach to get beyond abstractions and simplifications, offering working examples and practical alternatives to political economy-induced distortions.

The political economy research also incorporates a specific review of donor behavior that comprises one of three elements in a multidonor study of global financing of humanitarian assistance. The other two elements – on global humanitarian assistance flows and on needs assessment in practice – are being carried out by Development Initiatives and the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute respectively.

The Humanitarianism and War Project's workplan envisions two outputs: a policy-oriented report on donor behavior, including recommendations, for the global financing study, to be completed by April 2003; and a book to be published commercially in 2004 on the political economy of the humanitarian enterprise for practitioners, policy-makers, and a wider readership.

Plans call for bringing the political economy analysis to bear on three emergencies: Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and East Timor. Less detailed case studies, probably without field work, will be conducted on Somalia, Azerbaijan, Haiti, and the Southern Africa drought and food crisis of 2002. Researchers will visit ten capitals for discussions with donors and NGOs: Bern, Brussels, Canberra, Dublin, The Hague, London, Ottawa, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Washington, as well as New York and Geneva.

Financial commitments have been received to date from OCHA, four governments (Australia, Canada, Sweden, and Switzerland) and four NGOs (Care Canada, Oxfam-US, Trocaire, and World Vision Canada) and Aga Khan Foundation Canada. More detailed terms of reference are available at [hwproject.tufts.edu](http://hwproject.tufts.edu)

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