

## Introduction to International Disaster Management Ethics

International disaster management has become increasingly diverse, encompassing new areas of technical expertise not traditionally considered relevant to the profession.

—Coppola 2011, 641

The growing incidence of natural disasters throughout the world has brought new challenges to the international disaster management community. The present chapter reviews concerted efforts to create shared institutional frameworks to form a basis of collective standards and behaviors in delivering international aid in emergencies. The aim of the chapter is to consider the extent to which the international disaster management community has a moral responsibility to address the broader implications of its immediate allocative decisions and actions in the face of adversity. It is suggested that international aid allocation is only one aspect of the interface between ethics and politics in international disaster practice.

### International Disaster Management Regime

International disaster management often refers to designating the efforts of a global community of responders to assist the affected nation or nations in their disaster response efforts. The scale of the disaster dictates the range of response and recovery needs (Coppola, 2011). Extreme events overwhelm national governments' capacities to respond, and force governments of the affected nations to call upon the resources and services of the international disaster management community outside their hierarchical control. In these cases, response efforts are centered on the

international disaster coordination system to quickly mobilize response resources and assist affected populations to effectively manage disaster relief and risk reduction in such a short time frame (Comfort and Haase 2006, Comfort, Ko, and Zagorecki 2006, Drabek 2003, Kapucu 2006, 2008, Kapucu, Arslan, and Collins 2010, Kapucu, Augustin, and Garayev 2009, Kobila, Meek, and Zia 2010, McEntire 2002, Mitchell 2006, Moynihan 2012, Nolte, Martin, and Boenigk 2012, Vasavada 2013).

Since 1990, natural disasters have affected about 217 million people every year (Guha-Sapir, Vos, and Below 2012). Natural disasters result from various causes including geophysical (earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic activity), hydrological (avalanches and floods), climatological (extreme temperatures, drought, and wildfires), meteorological (cyclones and storms/wave surges), and biological (disease epidemics and insect/animal plagues).<sup>1</sup> Based on a forecasting model created by Oxfam, by 2015 over 375 million people on average per year are likely to be affected by climate-related disasters.<sup>2</sup> This number exceeds 50 percent more than have been affected in an average year during the last decade. Increased occurrence and intensity of natural disasters during the last decade have significant impact on people directly and indirectly including death, disabilities, and disease outbreaks.<sup>3</sup> Direct impacts of natural disasters refer to mortality and injury, damage to infrastructure, damage to homes and contents, damage to firms, and environmental degradation, while indirect impacts include costly adaptation or utility reduction from loss of use, mortality, morbidity, and business interruption (Rose 2004).

For example, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008 caused the death of 225,000 and 80,000 people, respectively, and immense numbers of injuries, illness, and property damage. Although estimating the full range of economic costs from natural disasters is difficult, the damages from natural disasters have risen from an estimated \$20 billion on average per year in the 1990s to about \$100 billion per year during 2000–10.<sup>4</sup> According to a recent IMF study, this trend is expected to grow due to the rising concentrations of people living in areas most vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change (Laframboise and Loko 2012, 1–31). The Great East Japan earthquake, which occurred in March 2011, caused Japan an estimated direct economic cost of 16.9 trillion yen (\$210 billion), which is also calculated at 3.6 percent of 2011 GDP. The earthquake has led to immense destruction of roads, railways, airports, schools, and other infrastructures (IMF, 2012).

Evidence suggests that there are some communities that are more prone to hazards. Since the 1960s, an estimated 99 percent of the world's

population has been affected by disasters and 97 percent of all fatalities have occurred in middle- and low-income countries (Laframboise and Loko 2012). In addition, disasters lead to annual economic losses in developing countries that amount to nearly 2 to 15 percent of their GDP (United Nations 2005, 181). The trend of rapid urbanization, for example, has led to poorer people being marginalized from safe and legal areas in many developing countries, which leaves communities at high disaster risk. The combination of increased number and severity of natural disasters with diminished coping mechanisms of an affected population raises the need for reliance on international disaster response and relief assistance. Thus, international disaster management refers to disaster as a hazard that overwhelms the response capability of an affected community. As stated by the UN, international disaster management considers disaster “[a] serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the international disaster management community involves international organizations, international financial organizations, regional organizations and agencies, nonprofit organizations, business and industry organizations, local and regional donors, the government(s) of the affected country/countries, governments of aid and donor countries, national emergency management agencies, and the affected population (Borton 1993, 188).

Central to international disaster management is the concept of humanitarian aid regime (Bueno de Mesquita 2007). Humanitarian aid regime is defined as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (Krasner 1983, 2), through which humanitarian aid actors (NGOs, donors, national governments, INGOs, etc.) interact and engage. The explicit objective of humanitarian aid regime is to meet human needs. Within the humanitarian discourse, such objective is conceptualized in terms of the moral obligation to relieve human suffering (Calhoun, 2008, Rieff 2002).

Humanitarian aid is defined in the Preamble to the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as an aid “to relieve the suffering of individuals, solely guided by their needs,” without consideration of other criteria such as “nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions”—and to “give priority to the most urgent cases of distress” (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 1986) Catholic Relief Services (U.S.) outlines its mission as that of helping the

“impoverished and disadvantaged . . . based solely on need, regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity” (CRS, 2007). CARE USA extends its underlying goal to serve developmental goals for the sake of “the poorest communities in the world,” which emphasizes that the function of international development is just as much a function of emergency management. One of the key distinctions that should be drawn between these two definitions lies in the underlying normative assumption of development; that is, the “root causes” of human suffering, which CARE USA seeks to achieve rather than alleviating suffering in the short term.

In this context the term “humanitarian aid” is used to legitimize the party that declares its actions to be “humanitarian” as moral and political concern for human welfare, embracing a politically conscious aid strategy to achieve good outcomes (de Waal 2010, Fassin 2010, Rieff 2002, Rubenstein 2007, 2008, 2014, 2015, Slim 2013, Terry 2002) For that, what counts as a “good outcome” in the highly non-ideal contexts in which international humanitarian aid organizations operate is likely to carry intrinsic normative assumptions. According to Sudanese-born anthropologist Amal Hassan Fadlalla, humanitarian organizations by definition cannot remain neutral: “Humanitarian provision is embedded in broader political agendas, hierarchies and interests that, from the start, render unattainable the notion of impartiality and compromise the well-being of the poor and displaced” (Fadlalla 2008).

Fadlalla’s argument reflects a growing debate about the definition of humanitarian aid regimes (Eade and Vaux 2007, Smillie and Minear 2004, Bueno de Mesquita 2007, Rubenstein 2007, 2008, 2014, Slim 2013, Terry 2002). In the humanitarian assistance literature, humanitarian aid agencies are often recognized as manifestations of political power or national interests, which may lead to creation of structures that undermine local response and recovery capacities. According to Rubenstein, “. . . while INGO advocates do sometimes engage in representation or act as partners, for the purposes of normative evaluation we should conceptualize INGO advocacy not as representation or partnership, but rather as having and exercising quasigovernmental power. Correspondingly, the main normative standard to which INGO advocates should be held is that they avoid misusing their power” (2014, 208). Bueno de Mesquita provides a logical rationale for the relationship between aid and political power, seeing aid as “an instrument of national policy and as an instrument of humanitarian concerns.” (Bueno de Mesquita 2007, 252). Following Bueno de Mesquita’s argument, aid delivered from country A to country B creates pro-A policies on behalf of country B, and therefore, aid is conceived

as a form of political coercion (2007, 254). Moreover, it is claimed that each agency acts differently to each emergency event, following its own priorities and standards of behavior (Ghani, Lochart, and Carnahan 2005, 11). Winters, for example, suggests that these agencies “have incentives to quickly produce large, identifiable projects rather than to spend costly time harmonizing programming with other donors” (Winters 2012, 2).

The interface between ethics and politics within the humanitarian aid regime becomes more clearly evident in relation to “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell 1936), which builds on the values, standards, and preferences of each agency in aid allocation (Rubenstein 2007, 2008, 2009, 2014). This problem is intensified in disaster events, when humanitarian aid agencies become bound to their own standards of conduct since they operate outside the areas of established public law. Much of the existing literature that explores these dynamics in the context of emergencies views humanitarian ethics as intangible, highly contextual, not easily visible, and more difficult to codify (Rubenstein 2009, Terry 2002). The impact of agencies’ choices and allocative decisions becomes increasingly central to the international disaster management regime, highlighting the interface between ethics and politics. However, the present research suggests that there is a strategic role for the international disaster management community to reconstruct ethics on a global distributive justice foundation, evolving into a tangible and codifiable set of values that could be translated into ethics and professional training programs. If international aid agencies are to meet the needs of disaster-affected populations, the involvement of such organizations within the political process of aid distribution must be accepted as an ethical necessity. Thus, a unified ethical response in international disaster management regime is timely.

The following section considers the institutional efforts made to build shared institutional frameworks for humanitarian bodies engaged in providing assistance in emergency situations.

### **The Institutionalization of International Disaster Management Regime**

Institutional structures of international disaster management systems are created by rules including formal laws, rules, code of conduct, and professional standard, which have become increasingly well-developed and well-established over the past twenty years. However, unlike armed conflicts—where international humanitarian law such as the Third and

Fourth Geneva Conventions, which regulate the provision of food and other goods for prisoners of war, and persons in occupied territories and internees, respectively—natural disasters have no legally binding set of regulations to govern the actions of organizations engaged in humanitarian aid and relief efforts.<sup>6</sup> Reference to natural disaster events in humanitarian law is made only when a natural disaster strikes during the course of an armed-conflict situation. Even the right of humanitarian organizations to offer humanitarian aid to affected states is covered only in armed-conflict situations.<sup>7</sup>

This gap has pushed humanitarian aid organizations and professional emergency management organizations to create codes of conduct and professional standards to regulate and guide their activities in humanitarian aid efforts (Coppola 2011). In 1994 the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and several major international NGOs issued a professional Code of Conduct to set out universal standards to govern the activities of relief agencies during disaster events. The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programs does not employ specific guidelines for operational strategies in delivering humanitarian assistance, but it rather seeks to maintain the high standards of independence, impartiality, and neutrality of humanitarian aid. It includes principles that all NGOs should follow in their disaster response efforts such as impartiality, aid assistance based on needs assessment, neutrality, respect for local culture and custom, building disaster local capacities, reducing future vulnerabilities to disaster, and enhancing accountability.<sup>8</sup> By 2007 more than 400 international and national NGOs had signed the Code of Conduct and, thus, have committed themselves to ensure quality management in humanitarian aid.

The Sphere Project was formed in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The vision of The Sphere Project is to secure “the right of all people affected by disaster to re-establish their lives . . . and acted upon in ways that respect their voice and promote their dignity, livelihoods and security.”<sup>9</sup> The Sphere Project introduces an accountability mechanism to ensure professional conduct by humanitarian actors to their constituents, donors, and affected populations. The Sphere Handbook Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response incorporates internationally granted principles and universal minimum standards to guide humanitarian assistance.

In 2001, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) was launched to set guidelines for “making humanitarian action accountable to beneficiaries.” The HAP encourages humanitarian agencies to be

more accountable to disaster-affected populations through self-regulation, compliance verification, and quality assurance certification. For that, the HAP addressed seven key elements of accountability, e.g., “commitment to humanitarian principles,” “capacity-building,” “monitoring and reporting compliance,” and “communication.”<sup>10</sup>

In 2003, the People In Aid, a network of humanitarian assistance agencies, initiated a Code of Good Practice to encourage professional conduct of staff and volunteers engaged in relief and development operations. The “People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel” includes seven key guidelines: “Recruitment and selection”; “Health, safety and security”; “Learning, training and development”; “Consultation and communication”; “Support, management and leadership”; “Staff policies and practices”; and “Human resources strategy.” These guidelines are assumed to improve human resources management among humanitarian aid agencies.<sup>11</sup>

The Good Humanitarian Donorship project, which was created in 2003, provides a forum for donors with the aim of facilitating good practice and accountability in funding humanitarian assistance. Such initiatives set out twenty-three guidelines and standards to cope with challenges faced by emergency aid departments in donor governments, such as respect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disaster; strive to ensure predictability and flexibility in funding; enhance the flexibility of earmarking and of introducing longer-term funding arrangements.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the evolving codes of conduct, recognized best practices, and formal standards, most of them lack formal enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. A serious attempt is made by the International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to create a complete set of International Disaster Response Laws (IDRL). In 2001 the IFRC began its IDRL Program by reviewing studies of international norms, surveys of humanitarian actors, and regional consultations. In November 2007, the IFRC set out the “Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance” (the “IDRL Guidelines”), which was adopted by all High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions. In 2011, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the IFRC, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union conducted the pilot version of their “Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance” to examine the utilization of the IDRL Guidelines applied in national laws relating to disaster management. The

key elements of the IDRL Guidelines include respect for humanity, neutrality, and impartiality. Although these Guidelines are not legally binding nor do they govern interstate relations, they provide a platform for unified legislation across countries in a system that is characterized by different mandates and operating styles such as barriers to entry of goods and people; legal recognition of organizations to operate; and coordination among organizations and governments.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the IFRC's IDRL Guidelines, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction set up the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in 2005. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) is the secretariat of the International Strategy and mandated by the UN General Assembly to ensure its implementation. The UNISDR articulates the objective of humanitarian assistance in international disaster management as "building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development, with the goal of reducing human, social, economic and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters."<sup>14</sup>

In 2001, the GA, with resolution 56/195, considered that the mandate of UNISDR is to play a key role in the United Nations humanitarian aid system to ensure coordination of disaster reduction and to manage or oversee disaster reduction activities of the United Nations system and regional organizations. In 2005, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was the first framework document for a common system of coordination to be adopted by Governments around the world.<sup>15</sup>

The HFA outlines strategic goals to achieve disaster resilience of nations and communities to disasters by 2015:

- Enhancement of international cooperation and partnerships
- Applying a multi-dimensional approach to disaster risk reduction in policies, planning, and programming
- Identification of barriers and bias in treating vulnerable persons when planning for disaster risk reduction
- Utilization of culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions based on the gender, race, ethnicity, and age at all levels of disaster risk management policies, plans, and decision-making processes, including risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training.



The Hyogo Framework stated key areas that should be tackled such as “(a) Governance: organizational, legal and policy frameworks; (b) Risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning; (c) Knowledge management and education; (d) Reducing underlying risk factors; (e) Preparedness for effective response and recovery.”

The document concludes with emphasizing the responsibility of States, with the active participation of other actors engaged in risk reduction activities such as local authorities, NGOs, academia, and the private sector. The Hyogo Framework calls for systematic incorporation of risk reduction mechanisms into sustainable development policy, planning, and programming at all levels of regional and international communities, including the international financial institutions, the United Nations System, and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

One of the key pillars for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005–2015 is the International Recovery Platform (IRP). The IRP was set as an international source of information exchange on good practice for disaster recovery efforts.<sup>16</sup> Additional initiative to support implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) is the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR). The GFDRR is managed by the World Bank to create cooperative activities with other donor organizations to reduce disaster risk and losses. The GFDRR is targeted to enhance the disaster resilience capacity of low- and middle-income countries that are most vulnerable to natural disasters. Following the World Bank criteria, “[l]ow-income countries” receive assistance from the International Development Association (IDA) and “[m]iddle-income countries” receive assistance from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, together with IDA and the World Bank).<sup>17</sup>

Similar mechanisms to create and sustain the institution of international humanitarian aid in disaster events are used by international professional organizations for emergency managers, such as the International Association of Emergency Managers and the International Emergency Management Society.

The International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) is an international organization that aims to promote the goals of reducing human, economic, and social losses due to natural disasters or emergencies. IAEM funds the Certified Emergency Manager and Associate Emergency Manager (AEM) Program to enhance professional behavior among individual emergency managers. The Certified Emergency Manager designation is a nationally and internationally recognized professional certification for emergency managers.

IAEM has issued a Code of Professional Conduct that addresses a range of issues that impact the emergency management professional conduct. The Code aims to increase public trust and confidence in the emergency services provided by members of the IAEM. In addition, the Code is directed at increasing professional competence and ethical behavior. The Code outlines three key principles of respect, commitment, and professionalism. The principle of respect stresses the need to respect supervising officials, colleagues, associates, and aid recipients. The principle of commitment calls for fostering honest and trustworthy relationships, and enhancing stewardship of resources. By professionalism, the IAEM addresses the need to actively promote professional conduct to ensure public confidence and the reputation of emergency management practitioners.

The International Emergency Management Society (TIEMS), registered in Belgium, is another international non-profit NGO. TIEMS serves as a Global Forum for Education, Training, Certification, and Policy in Emergency and Disaster Management. TIEMS's objective is to develop and employ modern emergency management tools and techniques into disaster management practice through information technologies. For that, TIEMS provides a forum for policy guidance to government agencies, industry leaders, academics, volunteer organizations, and other emergency management experts regarding the management of emergencies and disasters. The TIEMS Board of Directors has developed and approved a Code of Conduct for TIEMS. The Code guidelines include protection from discrimination with respect to nationality, race, or creed of any TIEMS member or outside partner, ensure that compensation is disclosed to the TIEMS membership in the annual report to the General Assembly, and the duty of members to report to the TIEMS board about any offer for participation in paid research or similar projects they receive.<sup>18</sup>

Within the European context, in 2001 the European Union (EU) adopted the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection. The Mechanism aims at mobilizing resources and services at the outbreak of disasters requiring urgent response. The Mechanism was created by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection.<sup>19</sup>

The Mechanism operates in a way such that any country inside or outside the Union affected by an intense disaster can make an appeal for assistance through the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), Common Emergency and Information System (CECIS), and Civil protection modules that play a coordination role. The ERCC maintains coordination amongst all the participating states in disaster response

efforts by pooling the civil protection capabilities of the participating states and maintaining communication channels for useful and updated information on disaster response activities. The Common Emergency and Information System (CECIS) acts as an updated web-based alert and notification designed to provide disaster risk and need assessments. A training program is also part of the Mechanism, which aims at improving the coordination of civil protection assistance interventions. This program involves training courses, joint exercises, and a system of exchange of experts of the participating states to share best practices. Civil protection modules are also mechanisms to facilitate providing national resources from one or more Member States on a voluntary basis.

Drawing on the brief overview of the institutional aspect of the international disaster management system supports the view that the rules, norms, best practices, professional guidelines, and Codes of Ethics/Conduct become a management tool to direct international aid practitioners' ethical obligations in disaster response. Despite differences in institutional structures, standards, and operational strategies, international humanitarian aid organizations share the responsibility of fulfilling the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable communities they serve. As such, the role of international aid actors relies heavily on interventions based on need assessment. In other words, the humanitarian aid activities have implications for aid recipients: who does and does not receive humanitarian aid, which aid services or resources they get, how much, for how long, in what ways resources and services are distributed, and with what unintended implications. For that, the decision-making process held by international humanitarian aid organizations foregrounds issues of distributive justice. The underlying assumption behind the apparent link between institutional structure and global distributive justice is by providing immediate relief; the system of international humanitarian aid ignores the likelihood that later stages of the disaster will affect aid recipients' lives. The objective of international humanitarian aid to alleviate suffering makes it a normative framework; it comes with a commitment to consider unintended consequences of international aid distribution. These assumptions led to the emergence of what is termed the "new humanitarianism." The new humanitarianism is "‘principled,’ ‘human rights based,’ politically sensitive" (Fox 2001, 275). Responding to human suffering with links to human rights and broader political issues is addressed by the Catholic Relief Services: "When considered through the justice/human rights lens, the mere provision of foodstuffs or medical support is an insufficient response to a humanitarian crisis" (Fox 2001, 278). Viewed

in this way, new humanitarianism goes beyond the immediate relief of suffering and engages in capacity building, development assistance, and finding long-term solutions to the causes of suffering. Such integration of relief actions and normative discourse generates a tension within new humanitarianism.

In responding to such challenges, the new humanitarianism draws heavily on the discourse of human rights in order to resolve this tension. It refers to the relationship between individuals and their states, and therefore directs humanitarian aid toward protection of human rights. According to Slim: "Rights dignify rather than victimize or patronize people, they make people more powerful as rightful claimants rather than unfortunate beggars. As rights bearers, vulnerable individuals claim for relief assistance as part of their rights as humans. Rights reveal all people as moral political and legal equals" (Slim 2002, 16). The emphasis of human rights doctrine leads to viewing international humanitarian aid as part of a political (universal) project to transform the world into a better one in which human rights are realized and protected. This imperative is entrenched in both the international humanitarian law (IHL) and the international human rights law (IHRL). The IHL is a set of international rules created by custom or treaty that addresses humanitarian problems arising from international or non-international armed conflicts. The IHRL is also a set of guidelines established by treaty or custom intended to uphold and protect human rights at the international, regional, and domestic levels. Both laws aim to ensure that the lives, health, and dignity of individuals will be protected, while the rules of IHL deal with issues that fall outside the purview of IHRL, such as the conduct of hostilities, combatant and prisoner of war status, and the protection of the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems. Similarly, IHRL deals with aspects of life in "normal times" that are not regulated by IHL, such as freedom of the press, and the right of assembly, to vote, and to strike. This institutional framework defends human rights by providing a moral foundation and a set of standards to guide international humanitarian aid practitioners.

Although the human rights approach is offered as an answer to questions of distributive justice, difficulties also arise within the rights-based approach concerning the call for a universal community of justice that challenges that state's claim to exclusive national sovereignty over its people. Thus, the decisions shaped in part by the institutional structure of international humanitarian aid in defense of human rights represents a political as well as moral intervention because it is a claim to constrain and hinder state activity. In addition, the human rights approach

to humanitarian aid provision ignores the difference between what counts as just during or after natural disasters and what counts as just under circumstances of normal times. For example, since aid resources are scarce, wasting them leads directly to fewer lives saved; cost-effectiveness and efficiency judgments might gain priority over other social justice values such as the efforts to ensure equality of resources or equality of outcomes. By broadening the scope of humanitarian aid provision to encompass the unintended impacts of international aid allocation decisions, ethical responsibility must be reformulated to take into account global distributive justice demands.

In disaster events, when aid recipients are viewed as vulnerable, international humanitarian aid is understood as possessing legitimate authority over resource allocation. In a way, the practice of humanitarian aid is likely to generate a sense of superiority on the part of the aid providers, who are in a position to supply immediate resources and services for relief. The recipient is apparently incapable of relying on his own capacities and therefore the superior aid provider should be beneficent toward him. This practice creates conditions for inequality and power relations. Thus, humanitarian aid “undermines the idea that people are the subjects of their own survival and [of] equal worth to their benefactors” (Slim 2002, 6). The implications of this aspect of international humanitarian aid practice are that aid providers gain the power to decide what “counts” as an emergency as well as to make use of the “windows of opportunity” created by disasters to promote longer-term objectives such as how to help communities become more resilient in the face of future disasters. Consequently, the humanitarian aid system may influence the way need is assessed and measured.

The institutional structure of international humanitarian aid systems constitutes the process by which humanitarian aid organizations make allocative decisions that affect the life-prospects of people and nations receiving humanitarian aid. For that, the institution of international humanitarian aid is necessarily required to mediate the relationship between universalizing and particularizing practices. While the right-based discourse refers to a universal duty to assist those in need, the global distributive justice discourse incorporates the understanding of our associational connectivity in a complex and globalized world and the justification of ends and means by which such responsibility should be enacted. Distributive justice discourse points directly to how universal duty to assist should be practiced: that is, on the rules and norms that shape the distribution of aid resources and services by the international humanitarian aid system

as a whole. In the disaster management context, international humanitarian aid actors have multiple principals whose interests and priorities are multiple as well. The principal that is foundational to the legitimacy of international humanitarian aid is social justice itself. The duty to assist people in emergency situations addressed to the institution of international humanitarian aid steps beyond the realm of new humanitarianism by making the members of such institutions moral agents embedded in a complex structure of global interconnection. Although the distributive justice discourse is imbued with power by engaging in decisions of who is accountable for what and when, it is the ethical setting most conducive to and predictive of responsible moral conduct and therefore meant to be strikingly depoliticized in its application. This highlights how the ethics of global relational embeddedness reformulates the ethical responsibilities of international aid actors in ways that raise their awareness and sensitivity of ethical dilemmas and how international aid actors can reclaim control over their professional evolution.

By drawing on what ethical responsibilities the international humanitarian aid community has in times of disaster to make the institution of international humanitarian aid more just, ethical dilemmas related to distributive justice come to the fore. In the following chapter we address the dilemmas of international humanitarian aid provision arising from aid allocation in disaster events.