1

Humanitarian Ethics

Ethical approach[1]

Why talk about ethics when we talk about humanitarian aid?

Humanitarian action is based on strong values, including that of 'humanity', from which its name is derived. Philosophy has often linked ethics and humanity, with ethics expressing itself as assumed subjectivity that recognises, in the single individual, all of humanity. Humanity thereby emerges as the invincible link that unites all human beings: a feeling that pushes each person to acknowledge the other as his or her equal and fellow human being.

Humanitarian action always falls within a complex framework. The situations in which it is undertaken cannot give rise to models. That's why it's difficult, in this field, to work out rules that are universally valid. This frame of action is simultaneously spatial and historical, political and economical, cultural and legal. It moreover puts into play techniques of mediation and systems of representation that involve the individuals, their emotions and their solidarities. Indeed, the action falls within a particular space, during a certain time period, and a moment of history that's collective and unique. It makes individuals belonging to given sociocultural groups intervene in a certain political, local and international context in which standards and laws are practiced. It relies on technical support and on a project and sensibility peculiar to the organisations and actors involved. Finally, it is transmitted, or not, by the media, which, when they do present it, and emphasise the scale, the stakes or the aim.

Various actors rub shoulders in this context and in this action: the aid beneficiaries, the NGOs and other solidarity organisations, the organisations that promote and protect human rights, the humanitarian workers, the donors (private or public), the governmental or inter-governmental organisations, the political powers (local, regional and international) and their supports (military, economic, diplomatic, etc.), the private businesses, the cultural and religious bodies, the administrations and services, the media, etc.

---

1. This chapter was written by Bruno M. Duffe, Senior Lecturer in social ethics, based on requests formulated by the programme's Steering Committee and on the sessions of the latter. The definitions, questions and diagrams were proposed by Bruno M. Duffe, who incorporated, as much as possible, the expectations and nuances formulated by the Steering Committee. Considerable groundwork was carried out by Thibault Le Texier, within the framework of his thesis 'Ethics and Humanitarian Actions' at Université Paris 1. Nathalie Herlemont-Zoritchak, from Handicap International, actively participated in designing this chapter.

To deal with this complexity, an attempt has been made in recent years to codify and regulate relief and solidarity actions. Today there exist a certain number of codes and standards that control the humanitarian practices within increasingly precise limits.

Nevertheless, there are always situations for which there are no rules. The humanitarian workers are then faced with their conscience, even if they have the philosophy of their organisation in mind. In these situations, in which the law, in its legal or moral sense, helps us only indirectly and can sometimes even represent an obstacle to initiative, ethics is an approach that puts into motion the conscience of each person in order to distinguish and accomplish the right action. The conscience in fact makes use of the freedom of the subjects, and of their ability for good judgment. It's based on the analytical work that helps to understand the context. Ethics is thereby the assertion of the subject. It enables our subjectivity to take on its choices, with a positive tension between an environment marked by contradictory tensions and a system of references and convictions which we can draw from.

Ethics and morality: From individual conscience to institutional position, how can ethics be integrated into the organisation?

The unique dimension of ethics does not mean that no collective ethics can exist. Ethical principles are also collective references. The two dimensions were already described as complementary by Aristotle.

- When ethics expresses the distinction between 'Good' and 'Evil', it gives rise to **moral standards** peculiar to the community or group. Thanks to these rules, the community or group expresses what suits its preservation, its future or the keeping up of social ties. We speak of moral standard (or standards) to signify this expression into rules and codes of what the group considers to be good for it.

- When a moral standard is detailed in the form of prohibitions – infringement of which leads to sanctions within the group – it transforms into **law**.

- At an intermediate level, when a moral standard is expressed as general principles, common to the members of the group, it constitutes a **charter**.

- When these principles are accompanied by obligations and prohibitions in the practice of a profession or determined function, or within life in society, we then speak of a **code of ethics** or of **codes of conduct**. These two types of codes include a strictly ethical aspect (in reference to principles) and a strictly legal aspect (in reference to the law).

Today, many organisations have a charter. Even if the symbolic power of such a document is strong, it is not, however, an operational tool. It meets a need to express values or a spirit. It also often fulfills a function of demonstration to a public opinion that is increasingly demanding with regards to information and transparency in the sphere of international solidarity. As for the codes of ethics and codes of conduct, they came about to respond to questions concerning the conduct of actions strictly speaking. That said, they in themselves do not represent the fruit of ethical reflection in a unique context; it's indeed possible to have recourse to codes as to a toolbox. It's in the prior stages of these rules, in the decision-making process, where we must look for the meanings of these practices and the means for taking into consideration the strictly ethical dimension of the initiatives.

A decision-making process, based on an ethical approach, simultaneously incorporates the personal dimension of the subject, the values of the organisation and the analysis of the particular situation in which it is involved.

It's thus not a matter of finding immediate solutions to specific problems, but rather of starting up a methodical process for tackling the questions of meaning and the issues of aid. It's also a matter of establishing the assertion of fundamental principles that underlie the humanitarian action and the evolution of the people concerned.

Ethical approach: clarification and definitions

Ethical reflection requires a language and terms that must be clarified, even if their significance and their meaning can always be debated. This is what we propose to do in this section on clarification and definitions.

There are several ways of going into the level of reflection or of the ethical rereading, depending on whether we give priority to:

• **The discourse of values and references** by which a community, cultural, or otherwise, or a limited group, brought together by a joint project, defines the issues, horizon and limits of its action.

• **The moral conscience** peculiar to individuals, in the relationship they maintain with the ethical and legal requirements of the community which they belong to or which acts as reference for them, by conviction or by choice.

• **The expression of constraints** that enable a group to define what must be respected, what can never be done and what is best and what is preferable, in the choices to consider and

the particular situations. These constraints themselves crystallise, in terms of acts and behaviours, the principles and values that an individual, situated in a community, understands or is obliged to honour.

- **The expression of convictions** that give rise to and motivate an action or action programme, regardless of whether these convictions are personal or collective.

- **The question of means and ends** that makes an action effective and brings it within a context of reality in which one acts according to what is possible and what the desired goal is, by seeking to subject the means to the goal sought after.

It's clear that the conception of ethics, as a foundation of the bond that unites the actors to a system of representations or as an assertion of the subjectivity that seeks to take on its action, influences, in a determinant way, the discussion on the meaning and appropriateness of the project as much as on the way to reread its repercussions and effects.

The ethical approach concerns both the intention underlying a project or an act as much as the aim sought after. Contemporary Western culture, marked by the primacy of analysis (of situations) and of reasoning (institutional or behavioural), as well as by the question of means (abilities and know-how), has seen the development, within that culture of ethics whose main characteristics are legal or procedural, i.e. marked by expressions in terms of instructions, codes and modes of evaluation. The other aspect of ethics, influenced by the search for meaning or interpretation, tends to express, in the diversity of sensibilities, that which is perceived by the subjects as protecting or developing human life, in all its dimensions.

If the term 'ethics' has been preferred to the term 'moral standard' in the context of modernity marked by the secularisation of traditional references (of religious inspiration in particular), it's because it suggests the necessity for debate and discernment in the search for the meaning of the action, which neither the sociological interpretation nor the political connotation fully satisfy. That said, the two terms are never mutually exclusive, insofar as they make it possible to consider the subjective (ethical) dimension and the social (moral) dimension of responsibility.

What humanitarian action has taught us over the last 25 years, in particular the experience of the 'without borders' organisations and the accounts by emergency actors in natural disaster or armed conflict situations, is that the foremost motivation in the matter is based on the capacity of indignation and compassion with regards to the people who are wounded physically, or with regards to their fundamental rights. It's this feeling of belonging to our common humanity – as well as to a human community – that has supported many initiatives and that represents an ethical basis to many international solidarity actions.

We can frequently distinguish what is commonly called 'situation ethics' from 'responsibility ethics', according to whether we emphasise the relationship to analysis and knowledge, on the one hand, or the freedom and involvement by the actor (or actors) on the other. This situation is evocative, because it allows us to agree that there are no ethics unless placed within a context or within a historical and cultural environment. They moreover allow us to consider the tension that is never resolved between what the ideal aims for and the unforeseen circumstances inherent in the action and in unique situations.

Affirming the frameworks of humanitarian action

Ethics remains the domain of the conscience, but cannot be reduced to an individual feeling. Leaving everyone to their own free will, without aid in the difficult question of choice, would imply that ethics is, in the final run, a 'flexible' approach. This would also risk conforming to relativism, according to which we presume that all individuals have their own ethics, without analysis or dialogue with others. But the ethical approach, especially for a humanitarian organisation, must have the aim of affirming the fundamental principles that found this action and that are not reduced to individual considerations.

Above and beyond reference documents drafted by the NGOs (charters, declarations, etc.), rich in philosophical or legal references, the acknowledgment of such principles implies an authentic work of comprehending their meaning and how they are expressed in operational terms. Attentive examination of the values underlying humanitarian action also shows that we have often, wrongly, joined notions of different natures in the discourse on the action. Coming back to the ethical foundations of humanitarian action is therefore a prioritisation of these references: identifying what is the necessity (and from which we cannot depart) and what is part of motivating or even indicative modes.

Based on a consideration of the plurality of ethics involved in the projects of humanitarian organisations, according to histories, founding convictions and specific projects, it seems that we could put forward three essential fundamental principles:

1. The principle of humanity

2. The principle of impartiality

3. The principle of independence

These three affirmations represent what we can consider the 'hard-core' of humanitarian intention.

The principle of humanity affects the foremost and invincible bond that unites the inhabitants of the planet, in the diversity of their community belonging and of their unique histories.

• *The expression* of this principle goes through the initiative of person-to-person solidarity, which seeks to provide relief to a wounded person or a victim of violence, just from the fact that it is a person and that we are affected, in our human conscience by his/her situation of vulnerability. The base of support of this conscience can be situated in the fact of seeing the other as a fellow human being, or a brother or sister.

• *The recommendations,* for a correct interpretation of this principle, will concern the reasons and motivations of the humanitarian action. By contributing to elucidation of the intentions that govern the action, we refine its issues and limits. We can also perceive, at the same time as the capacity for empathy, the need to perceive the contradictions of this humanity, capable of building as much as destroying the human being, in his or her fragile uniqueness.

The principle of impartiality comes second and, in a certain way, clarifies the first principle. This is because it's a question of affirming that the intervention to aid the endangered person does not endure ideological or partisan divisions. In plain language, a victim is a person, whatever side he or she is on. There can therefore be no question of making humanitarian action subject to one of the positions in conflict or to a power. This is a principal both central and difficult, because we well know that the Powers concerned use the victims for their own ends either by making them overexposed, or by 'marginalising' them, or sometimes by 'hushing them up'.

• *The expression* of this principle consists in recalling that humanitarian action transcends antagonisms and presupposes that dignity, like fundamental rights, must be provided to the victims and, more broadly, to all the people affected by the crisis situation, without discrimination.

This desire to preserve the dignity of the human individual can be found in the ideals of Henry Dunant, as well as in the principles inscribed in international humanitarian law. We can also consider that the notion of organic solidarity, as well as this desire to protect dignity, were the basis of demands by French NGOs, at the end of the 1980s, for the right of victims to receive aid to be honoured. The discussions and negotiations between States then transformed this demand into a right of humanitarian assistance, which was soon called right of intervention (right of States to bring relief to populations in danger).

What the NGOs wanted to assert was the right of victims, the 'first-aid workers' (States as well as specialised organisations) having a duty of humanitarian assistance, which was then also called duty for humanitarian intervention. The French State, seizing hold of their concerns under the aegis of M. Bettati and B. Kouchner, was obliged to negotiate a compromise

position, from which the Resolutions 43/131 and 45/100 of the United Nations General Assembly of 8 December 1988 and 14 December 1990 derive; these resolutions affirm, on the contrary, the rights of the first-aid workers. Since then, the notion of right of interference has gone through developments that have broadly ceded to political motives, which does not put this notion in the field of impartiality. These two texts nevertheless strengthen the putting into practice of free access to victims and position humanitarian action within the aim of prereserving human dignity. This is because they stipulate, in their preamble, that 'the abandonment of the victims of natural disasters and similar emergency situations without humanitarian assistance constitutes a threat to human life and an offence to human dignity'.

• *The recommendations* with this regards will consist of urging a critical spirit among the humanitarian actors that will enable them to both appropriate the information peculiar to the situations, by going beyond the discourses of propaganda or discriminatory theories, to hook up with the individuals, whoever they may be, there where they are and whatever their convictions. The critical knowledge mentioned here must be understood as a capacity of detachment that does not exclude that the real possibilities and limits of the action be measured, below a level of which the life of the intervening party is itself endangered.

The principle of independence: understood as independence of initiative, the means involved and the freedom of manoeuvre in human intervention matters. But it's also a matter – and this connotation is sometimes trickier to take on – of independence with regards to donors and financial backers. Here we have a paradoxical principle, because it's quite clear that the humanitarian actors deal with those who fund them. Independence is therefore always expressed within an unresolved relationship of tension between the needs, whose formulation is required; the ability, which constantly evaluates and re-evaluates the expectations and possibilities; and the mandate, which specifies the terms of the mission.

• *The expression* of this concerns both the spirit and the technical abilities of the actors. It concerns the relationships, within the very teams as between the teams and the external stakeholders.

• *The recommendations* will thus seek to define responsibilities, all the while remaining attentive to the way in which the actors deploy the responsibilities they are entrusted with. Here, the rereading, as an ongoing practice of ethical evaluation, will be a major concern.

It will be up to each organisation – and to each individual within these organisations – to enumerate and put into perspective these three major principles, with the colour of his or her own philosophy. The importance is to constitute a basis upon which a programme, a decision, an action and a rereading of the commitment can be expended.

Other principles of a motivating type (expressing strong encouragement) or of an indicative type (giving reference points to the actors) can be mentioned, depending on the project of

the organisation and the convictions and experiences of the actors concerned. We will present these below, without classification or priority, leaving each person the care of putting them in relation and of prioritising them (according, in fact, to whether they are considered as motivating or indicative).

- **The principle of universality** calls for recognising the existence and efficiency of fundamental rights, common to all the members of the human community whatever the condition, context and culture in which each person evolves. Here, universality is to be understood as a principal of recognition between all the inhabitants of the planet.

- **The principle of commitment** is of another nature, because it's more of a dynamic expression of freedom: faced with the suffering of the other, I show my empathy towards those who are wounded or affected by injustice. This 'externalisation of myself' makes me an actor who takes the risk of intervening in History and who remains watchful with regards to all that oppresses or destroys the human individual.

- **The principle of responsibility** consists of measuring and living the tension between what we should do and what we can do. It's moreover, once the commitment made, the reminder that we are called upon to 'answer for our actions' to those who 'sent' us and to those whom we have 'rescued'.

- **The principle of neutrality** here designates the requirement for the NGO to be reserved with regards to the controversies and positions that are expressed, at the very heart of the conflicts. Neutrality is not passiveness, but an institutional detachment that is needed and required in order to maintain the freedom of intervention and to avoid any manipulation of the action to the benefit of one group of interests or a belligerent. This principle, originally thought out in relation with the sovereignty of the State, has been devoted and spread to NGOs, based on the determinant experience of the Red Cross.

- **The principle of transparency** may appear as an ideal or an aim. It's a matter of giving an 'open book' account of the action, i.e. by showing the donors, as well as public opinion, in an exhaustive way, the funds and means received and allocated within the framework of a programme or an action. The requirement for transparency is a requirement of respect towards those who financially support the actions, towards the beneficiaries and towards public opinion that, in the context of democracy, has the right to know about the destination and use of funds from civil society as much as public institutions.

- **The principle of information and of bearing witness** has been put at the heart of some humanitarian organisation projects. Bearing witness consists of giving an account of a situation. More than a simple stating of facts, it consists in heightening the awareness of those who can have an impact on the reality observed, through strong and supported positions when it turns out to be needed.

Tools to help in decision-making

Ethics in the decision-making processes

The decision-making processes provide a privileged object to ethical reflection – understood here as a process of discernment (of the stakes and of what's possible) and as an attempt to define responsibilities (individual and collective). These decision-making processes involve presuppositions, acquired knowledge and experience, statutes and ties by which the people concerned are involved or exposed.

Several 'figures' emerge; these constitute and define the chain of decision:

• the figure of the scout, who urges, warns or notifies;

• the figure of the analyst, who establishes a diagnosis and works out an intervention plan based on an interpretation of the situation;

• the figure of the decision maker, who puts a programme into motion;

• the figure of the performer, who accomplishes the programme and turns it into action;

• the figure of the evaluator, who measures the effects of the action undertaken.

With the help of the diagram below, we can consider the links that unite these different figures and, through it, seize hold of a representative pattern of a decision-making chain.

→ Notification	→ Evaluation
→ Analysis (diagnosis)	→ Execution (actions)
→ **Decision**	
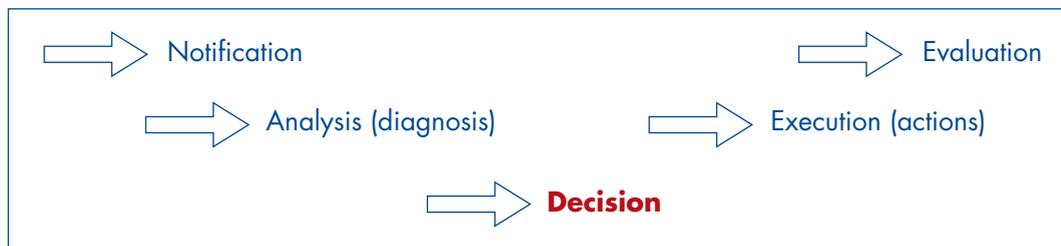
The decision-making aid consists in enabling each of the figures to appropriate the principles, to express them and to measure the inferred effects of the decision – and of its justifications – in the field and on all the people concerned.

Aid in decision-making therefore applies to all the actors, prior to and after the act of decision and the act of execution strictly speaking. Here, helping in decision-making means:

• giving a reminder of the bases of support and of what's at stake;

- taking into consideration the stages and decisive levels of the execution;

- considering what has become of the people concerned (actors involved in the action and beneficiaries);

- learning a lesson (and possibly giving an account internally or publicly) from the actions undertaken.

Here we will emphasise that the decision cannot be limited to the strict technical level (know-how and means) if we want to measure their effects and signification in the history of the people ('beneficiaries' and 'actors').

One way of assessing the chain of decision-making consists of decentring the act of decision strictly speaking, by linking it to the approach that we have for the needs. We thus have the following diagram:

What situation?

What means available?

For what **needs**?

What contract (with whom)?

What **decision**?

What evaluation?
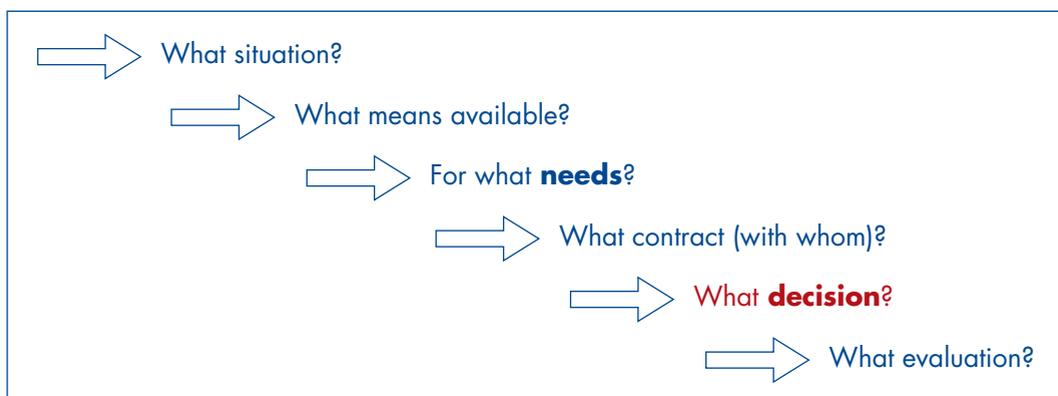
One of the decision-making aids, independently of the necessity for expertise and as far as the formulation and definition of needs is concerned, can be seen in a methodical and critical rereading of the action, carried out by the actors themselves, with required detachment from the field of execution strictly speaking.

Ethical rereading of humanitarian action

Ethical rereading consists in measuring our commitments in a project, after the event, and of considering its follow-ups and consequences. It's a going over the path of the action, from the initial decision up to the stage that leads us to stop it, suspend it, or correct it. In this spirit, we can start in on the topic from the following questions:

- To go or not to go?
  There's no lack of requests for solidarity actions. Upon what criteria and in what perspectives is the decision to intervene in the field made?

- What are the terms of our commitment in a project?
  Who does what? With whom? For whom and to do what? Until when?

- To continue or not to continue?
  Is an evaluation of the action planned? At what stage? With whom?
  Is it possible to put into question or correct the project?
  What about what will become of the people involved?

- Can the 'terms and conditions' of the project be updated?
  Action always calls for action: there's always and still something to do. Can the 'terms and conditions' be taken up again and clarified depending on the environment and the evolution of the context?

- Between ideal and possible, what gap can we live with?
  Personal (and possibly shared) convictions give shape to a horizon for action.
  The experience of the real, with its ambiguities and its cumbersomeness, can discourage those who are most convinced: How can we live with the gap, not as a paralysis, but as a call for realism and concrete effectiveness?

- Are there 'minimal conditions' for action?
  Between 'boundless generosity' and 'the conditionality that strictly defines the possibility of helping', what path to take for significant and 'useful' action?

- What position to take between ethics and politics?
  Humanitarian action, which is always grappling with the powers that be and the conflicts of power as much as with cultural and moral representations, ventures in the narrow space between 'duty to intervene' and 'respect for unique histories'. How can we consider, in rereading the path taken, human dignity and the freedom of individuals?

In order to clarify the different dimensions of the ethical rereading of a project, we could take inspiration from the following diagram, which links ethical approach and what becomes of individuals:

Four areas of reflection for carrying out the ethical rereading of a project

Convictions and inspirations of the people working in the field		Terms of the NGO's project
	Responsability: effects of the project and what becomes of individuals	
• Abilities • Means available • Analysis of context		• Account given by actors involved in the project • Listening to the beneficiaries
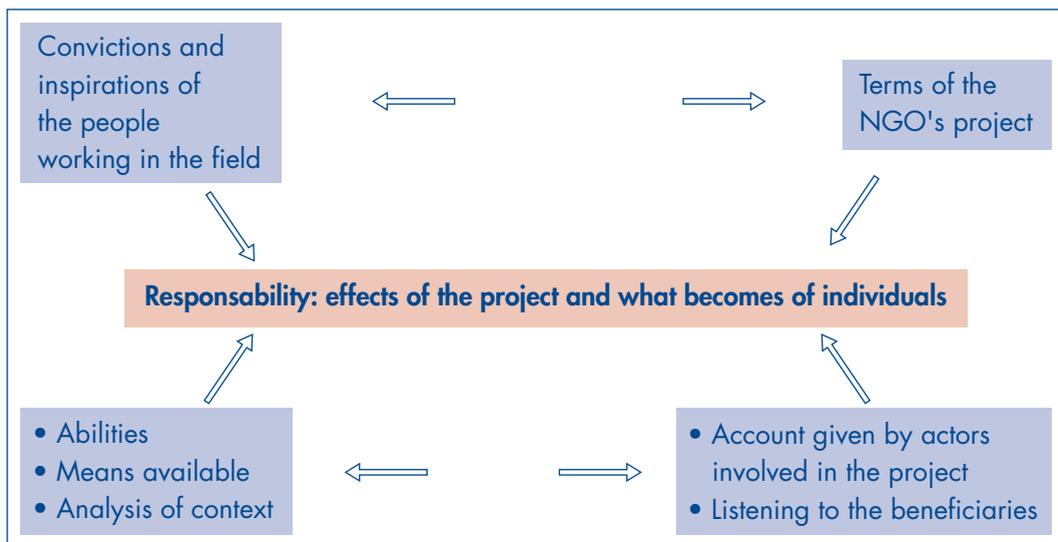
It's a question of seeing what links exist between the four areas (convictions, NGO project, abilities, account) and what importance is given to each of them.

We can see that the ethical rereading considers both the **effects of the action** and **what becomes of the individuals** that the action has called upon and, for some, 'transformed'.

It's important to emphasise that the four reference points of the diagram do not close the figure in on itself but seek to put into perspective four areas where the humanitarian experiences and their interpretations are expressed and compared:

• the convictions area that gives meaning to the investment by the actors in a project;

• the area opened up by the NGO project, itself broken down in terms of programs and issues;

• the area of abilities, understanding of the context, and available means;

• the area opened up by the accounts by the actors involved in the action.

At the heart of the diagram, the introduction of the theme of responsibility suggests that ethics cannot be reduced to just discourse on the analysis of the situation, of abilities, of means implemented, or on the account by the actors. Nor are ethics only at the same level of the NGO projects or of the convictions that give form and strength to the principles. Ethics puts into play the four areas and, by doing so, calls for responsibility for them with regards to these major principles (humanity, independence, impartiality).

Keys for writing a reference text on ethics

This section proposes to deal with the writing of a reference text on ethics. Such a text can be considered for each project carried out by the organisation. This is because **we consider there to be a plurality of ethics involved in the humanitarian organisations: according to the histories, the founding convictions and specific projects.**

For an organisation, drawing up a reference text on ethics in humanitarian aid implies taking into consideration the affirmations that constitute its projects. It's thus a matter of starting off from what could be called an 'archaeology of projects', i.e. the major intuitions and ideas that make up the vector of the projects. To give shape and precision to these elements, we'll ask ourselves the following questions:

• Generally, in what terms do the organisations express the major principles and the priorities that preside over their approach as well as the unfolding of their projects?

Here we are talking about organisations 'in the plural' because it's essential to consider the diversity of abilities, analyses and projects. This recognised and valorised diversity is in fact a condition for complementarity and effectiveness of concerted action in the field, with each organisation providing a specific contribution.

• In what terms are the aid requests formulated to the organisation and in what perspectives are they considered?

Clarifying the aid requests – in terms of means as well as in terms of ends – and what we seek to do by intervening in a context of catastrophe or conflict, contributes to determining the starting point and the aim of the humanitarian action. With this respect, we will observe how the emergency is expressed, who evaluates its and how the action fits within time.

• Is it possible to identify the stages and evolutions in the explanation of principles and in the strategic orientations of the organisation?

It's indeed possible for an experience or the consequences (positive or negative) of an under-taking, in a country and over a certain time, to mark the actors so much as to modify or reorient the action. The rereading, on the strategic just as well as ethical levels, turns out to be essential for thinking out the future of the organisation and the individuals.

• Do the requirements of professionalisation, which have marked the recent evolution of the 'humanitarian professions' have consequences, in ethical terms (common values, convictions and personal responsibilities of the actors), on the priorities and practices implemented by the organisation?

What do we include in this notion of professional skills? The professions of health care, reconstruction, management, or psycho-social support obviously require increasingly stronger skills. But we can also see the importance of experience in knowledge of the cultures, social structures, representations or beliefs. How is this link between skills and responsibilities thought out, debated and evaluated in accordance with the project and the organisation's referential values?

The keys to drawing up a reference text on ethics, in order to clarify the bases and what's at stake with the projects of an organisation, deals with what can be called the 'before' and 'after' of the undertaking. The following are to be clarified:

• the **'fundamental elements'** of the projects: the principles and the bases of support; this involves explaining the reason for being of the initiative or the intervention;

• the concrete and effective **'expressions'** of these fundamental bases, in the field; this involves describing what we want to do, what can be done and what is aimed for, step by step according to the available means;

• the **'recommendations'** – i.e. the advice and the reference tools, so as to better understand the goals sought after. This involves defining the precautions to apply, and calling for watchfulness with regards to the ambiguities in which we evolve and to the possible traps that must be avoided.

To link up the approach in terms of principles (cf. page 13) and the drawing up of this reference text, the following crosswalk table may be used:

The essential principles, how they are expressed and recommendations

Essential fundamental principles	Expressions: strategic and behavioural applications	Recommendations for the organisation
Humanity	Consideration of individuals, their aspirations and their conditions… never reduced to the situation in which they are found.	Need for (prior and continued) awareness-raising in the psychological and anthropological fields, on situations of traumatisms and and/or conflict (or post-conflict consequences).
Impartiality	Requirement for considering all persons, without discrimination… Aid and care provided to all victims, according to needs.	Call for watchfulness with regards to any manipulation or possible misappropriation of the aid to the benefit of one 'side' or 'clan'… Permanent reminder of fundamental human rights and of international humanitarian law.
Independence	Freedom in the choices and modes of intervention, with regards to the individuals as with regards to groups and authorities.	Constantly updated rereading of the relationship between the possible and impossible: protection of the meaning of the action with regards to the organisation's mandate; analysis of the influence of the constraints of the environment.

Establishing such a 'crosswalk' provides an aid to building a reference text on ethics. In fact, for each principle laid down, we can consider the strategic and behavioural applications as well as advice required, before and after a concrete undertaking. And this can be done for each unique context. What is developed in the table above for the three principals qualified as essential can similarly be applied to the motivating and indicative principles. There exists a difference of authority and insistence between the so-called 'essential' principles and those that we will present, according to the projects and philosophies of the organisations, as motivating (whose application is strongly recommended) or indicative (that will be presented as useful points of reference).

The motivating or indicative principles, how they are expressed and recommendations

Motivating or indicative principles	More or less determined and/or determinant expressions	Recommendations for the organisation
Universality	Consideration of any context of action and any human group without distinction or hierarchy.	The principle of universality calls for a conception of the world in which all the inhabitants of the planet have the same rights and the same (mutual) obligations.
Commitment	Availability and contractual requirements.	A commitment that's taken on involves knowledge of oneself and ability to work in a team, with complementarity of skills and know-how.
Responsibility	Awareness of the stakes of the commitment. These commitments are made with regards to the beneficiaries of the action or with regards to the donors and financial backers.	Responsibility is both personal and collective; the linking between the two levels of responsibility presupposes defining and explicitly determining the roles.
Neutrality	The act of not taking sides with pressure or interest groups in play or in conflict. Neutrality can be an institutional position.	Neutrality sometimes goes through the experience of resistance with regards to ideologies and with regards to its own affects.
Transparency	Clarity in the intention and the means committed.	The requirement for transparency is based on the daily experience of dialogue and critical discussion between actors and between partners.
Information and giving an account	Agreement to give an account to public opinion of the presence in the field (of its effects and of what it was able to reveal about a context or a conflict).	It's essential to measure the reliability of information and to detect the importance of an account.

As we have seen, the essential principles represent the sources of meaning for the action. The motivating principles encourage behaviours and the choices in the meaning of the aim sought after.

The indicative principles provide beacons and aid for facilitating the very accomplishment of the action.