# The Expectations Gap in Humanitarian Operations: Field Perspectives from Jordan

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The Syrian refugee crisis is characterized by the gap between refugees' needs and donors' expectations as humanitarian organizations struggle to meet emergency and development needs. The perspectives of eleven field workers from three levels of field management in the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in Jordan shed light on the field dynamics that contribute to this gap. I argue that the expectations gap in humanitarian operations is widened by the inability of humanitarian organizations to accurately communicate refugees' needs to donors due to a lack of regular and professional needs assessments. Disparities within organizations regarding understanding contexts, adherence to rigid operational standards, and the need to address stressors on the ground also reinforce power imbalances within humanitarian operations and widen the expectations gap. Two effective responses for managing this gap are transparency with refugees and donor flexibility.

**Keywords**   expectations gap, humanitarian operations, UNHCR, Syrian refugee crisis, Jordan, Zaatari

## Introduction

The phenomenal expansion in humanitarian organizations and operations—in 2015, there were 4,480 organizations and over 450,000 aid workers worldwide (Stoddard et al. 2015)—has created a number of challenges and ethical considerations. The humanitarian sector operates today within a complex environment of actors, philosophies, and approaches. Analysts usually evaluate the system against different typologies of humanitarian organizations and the various codes of conduct that regulate and professionalize the sector. Together, these determine our understanding of organizations' scope of work and beneficiaries' needs, and enable us to make an overall assessment of humanitarian operations.

Several traditions and typologies are used to classify humanitarian

organizations. For example, Vaux (2006), Herman and Dijkzeul (2011), and Stoddard (2003) argue that organizations operate on a continuum between the Dunantist and the Wilsonian traditions. The former is named after Henri Dunant who established the Red Cross, a movement marked by neutrality and independence from government policies. This tradition usually characterizes European international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). The Wilsonian tradition reflects the legacy of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States and mainly characterizes American INGOs, whose programs are influenced by U.S. government donations, a factor that also impacts on their advocacy role and capacity. Another typology classifies humanitarian organizations on a spectrum of classicist and solidarist organizations with important distinctions on neutrality, impartiality, consent, and relations with political authorities (Weiss 1999).  A distinction is also emerging between needs-based and rights-based approaches: a philosophical debate that tackles concerns over conditionality and universalism in relief operations (Rieff 2002; Fox 2001; Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004).

Besides these typologies, two main codes of conduct reflect the shifting spectrum of humanitarian operations. The Red Cross Code of Conduct was developed in 1994 to enforce ethical guidelines in humanitarian operations (IFRC 1994). It had little practical impact because no compliance mechanism was set in place to monitor organizations' adherence to the code (Vaux 2006, 246). However, the code's most important contribution was to introduce a "developmentalist" approach that expanded humanitarian operations to address drivers of conflicts and meet development goals (ibid.). Ten years later, and largely in response to the gross humanitarian failure during the Rwandan genocide, the SPHERE charter introduced standards of good practice to which organizations should adhere. SPHERE emphasized a shift back to meeting basic emergency needs (The Sphere Project 2004). Other frameworks, like the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability of 2014 and the criteria developed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee in 1992, set guidelines to ensure effectiveness and accountability but have not influenced the scope of humanitarian operations.

The dividing line between these traditions and areas of humanitarian work was never rigid. Most humanitarian operations combine elements of both the developmentalist and minimalist approaches. As protracted crises have become the norm (OCHA 2016, 4), the emphasis on emergency relief has been maintained. But at the same time, humanitarian approaches are expanding again to address the growing list of drivers of vulnerability, such as natural disasters, armed conflicts, and development challenges. This expansion is based on the conviction that prioritizing basic emergency needs in humanitarian operations will no longer suffice to address humanitarian crises (ibid.), a conviction that seems to have shaped both the International Humanitarian Summit and Agenda 2030. In refugee relief operations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reflected this shift by expanding its community service units

to coordinate developmental components of humanitarian operations and to focus on community building as a key area of programing.

With these transformations, humanitarian operations are increasingly perceived as peacebuilding endeavors (OCHA 2011; Rossier 2011) that contribute to conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. In refugee relief, this perspective can be viewed within the context of the argument that frustration of human needs leads to violence (Burton 1990). Therefore, providing immediate survival needs like food and shelter contains humanitarian disasters and prevents the escalation of violence in times of crisis. Likewise, community and sustainable development efforts satisfy higher human needs—as classified by Maslow (1943)—like education, identity, and respect. On both levels, satisfying human needs prevents the eruption of violence, hence the appreciation of humanitarian operations as peacebuilding efforts.

However, in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis, the largest such crisis since World War II, the capacity of humanitarian organizations to achieve this role has been severely tested. With 4.2 million Syrian refugees in the region (UNHCR 2016b) and given the volatile political environment in the Middle East, coordinating humanitarian services offered by NGOs and host governments has put a strain on all stakeholders. The longer refugees reside in host countries, the larger their demands for education services, income-generating projects, and community-building efforts that require long-term developmental approaches. At the same time, the continuing influx of refugees means ever-increasing demands for immediate emergency relief. This strain is exacerbated by the financial shortfall. Only 58 percent of UNHCR's US$4.3 billion 2015 appeal for Syrian refugees was secured, leaving a funding gap of US$1.8 billion (UNHCR 2016b).

While this financial shortfall severely limits the capacity of humanitarian organizations to meet refugee needs, this study finds that the organizations themselves make a big contribution to the expectations gap. Their failure to conduct regular needs assessments in a professional way leads to misunderstanding of refugee needs and miscommunication of those needs to donors. Disparities within humanitarian organizations reinforce power imbalances between actors on the ground and, as a result, widen the expectations gap. Areas of disparity are poor understanding of contexts, rigid operational procedures, lack of compassion and consideration for refugee dignity, and stress and frustration among field workers. Two response mechanisms are found to be effective in managing the expectations gap: transparency with refugees and donor flexibility.

*Methodology*
This study is based on eleven semi-structured interviews with humanitarian field workers from nine organizations that operate in the Zaatari and Azraq Syrian refugee camps in the north of Jordan, and in urban areas in Amman and

Jordan's northern cities. The interviewees include five field coordinators, four field managers, and two project managers (Table 1). They represent the highest level of field management in field offices. In total, ten of the interviewees are local Jordanians, and one is an international staff member. This gives us an understanding of local perceptions of cultural differences, standard operating procedures, and related tensions. Eight women and three men were interviewed. Interviews took place in Amman in December 2015 and January 2016, and each one lasted approximately one hour. They were conducted in English and Arabic.

This study is limited to the perspective of field humanitarian workers in Jordan working in Syrian refugee camps and urban areas, a large segment of the humanitarian workforce whose views are rarely documented. Although their number is limited, interviewees represent the main humanitarian actors in their fields. The UNHCR community service unit and inter-sector coordinators were approached to participate but they declined. The same applies to Save the Children and the Center for Victims of Torture.

### Power and Empowerment in Humanitarian Operations
Although this article is limited to examining the field dynamics that contribute to the expectations gap, these are better understood in the context of broader

**Table 1.** Details of Interviewed Humanitarian Workers

| | Area of Service | Organization | Location | Gender | Interview Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Skills Training | ACTED | Azraq Camp | F | Jan. 17, 2016 |
| 2 | Psychosocial | CARE | Urban areas | F | Dec. 9, 2015 |
| 3 | Skills & Community Development | CARE | Urban areas | M | Dec. 8, 2015 |
| 4 | Community Development | International Relief and Development (IRD) | Urban areas | F | Dec. 6, 2015 |
| 5 | Monitoring & Evaluation | IRD | Zaatari Camp | F | Jan. 16, 2016 |
| 6 | Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) | Japan Emergency NGO (JEN) | Zaatari Camp | M | Dec. 3, 2015 |
| 7 | Youth Development | Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) | Zaatari Camp | M | Jan. 9, 2016 |
| 8 | Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) | Oxfam | Zaatari Camp | F | Dec. 2, 2015 |
| 9 | Education | Relief International | Azraq Camp | F | Dec. 16, 2015 |
| 10 | Higher Education | UN Organization and Private College | Urban areas | F | Jan. 17, 2016 |
| 11 | Women Empowerment | UN Women | Zaatari Camp | F | Jan. 9, 2016 |

considerations in the humanitarian sector. The practical implications of power imbalances in humanitarian operations have attracted particular attention. For example, the imbalance between donors and humanitarian organizations is found to reduce effectiveness on the ground as organizations struggle to meet the regular accountability demands of donors (Makuwira 2006), or to diminish trust levels between actors given the financial power of command enjoyed by larger partners (Capjon 2007). The foreign policy options of donor governments also determine the current bilateralization trend in humanitarian funding and donor earmarking (Macrae et al. 2002), influence the communication and advocacy campaigns of humanitarian organizations (Chouliaraki 2010), and impact on their neutrality and service provision in conflict zones (Douzinas 2007).

The power imbalance between beneficiaries and humanitarian actors has also generated disturbing findings. One study describes interactions between workers and beneficiaries as "in-humane" even in the context of rights-based humanitarian approaches (Harrell-Bond 2002). Refugees' anxieties and mistrust of humanitarian actors are largely influenced by the power imbalance between them and the field workers (Shrestha 2011). Dependency on aid is also found to disempower refugees (Hyndman 1996).

On a broader scale, the role of humanitarian organizations in empowering local communities is disputed. Although empowerment of beneficiaries reduces resistance and resentment toward humanitarian actors on the ground, humanitarian organizations are not ready to lose control of the sector once they succeed in their empowering role (Barnett and Walker 2015). Another study argues that most organizations in Sri Lanka follow an instrumental approach to empowerment: consultations with beneficiaries are targeted at informing baseline project design but are rarely geared toward a transformative approach that enables long-term empowerment of local communities (Boyden, Kaiser, and Springett 2002).

The power imbalance between donors and humanitarian organizations on the one hand, and field workers and beneficiaries on the other, is not disputed in this study. Its impact on the daily field dynamics that contribute to the expectations gap is rather confirmed. The findings also highlight another power imbalance, that between fieldworks and operations managers within humanitarian organizations. These power dynamics dictate how operations are run and how different stakeholders interact on the ground. These underlying power considerations lead to the discrepancy in perceptions that contributes to the expectations gap.

*The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan*
Most refugees fleeing the armed conflict in Syria have sought protection in neighboring countries. Turkey is currently hosting 2.5 million UNHCR-registered refugees, Lebanon one million, and Jordan 635,324 (UNHCR 2016b). However,

the overall number of Syrians in Jordan is 1.4 million, and only 15 percent of those registered with UNHCR live in camps. The rest are scattered in urban areas, mainly in the northern cities (Jordan Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2014, 11). This large number of Syrian refugees in Jordan has put pressure on infrastructure, water and sanitation, and local governments' health and education services (REACH 2016). This has in turn led to tensions between host communities and refugees, particularly since Jordan has received waves of refugees from Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen, as well as Syria, over the years.

The two largest camps for Syrian refugees in Jordan are Zaatari Camp, hosting 79,357 refugees, and Azraq Camp, hosting another 29,992 (UNHCR 2016c). Zaatari Camp started operating in July 2012 (UNHCR 2015b) and has since then developed into what can be described as a confined town. Entry and exit to the camp for locals and refugees remains heavily controlled by the Jordanian authorities. But the quality of services has improved as the thirty-three organizations operating in the camp have gained experience in understanding and meeting the refugees' needs. The services offered in Zaatari include basic relief assistance, educational and health services, informal vocational training, and sports and recreational activities. Nevertheless, humanitarian services still fall short of meeting needs in the camp, where, according to UNHCR, up to 50 percent of the camp population is female and 20 percent of households are female headed (ibid.). Also, 13.3 percent of all children aged between seven and seventeen in Zaatari work to meet household needs, and 26 percent of them dropped out of school to work (UNICEF and Save the Children 2014).

The situation in Azraq Camp presents different challenges. The camp was established in April 2014. Around 56 percent of its residents are children, with a total of 30 percent of households female headed (UNHCR 2015a). The camp offers shelter, food, health, education, protection, and community mobilization services. But compared to Zaatari, the twenty-three humanitarian organizations operating in Azraq offer a limited range of activities and services to beneficiaries.

Although not a signatory to the 1951 International Refugee Convention, Jordan adheres to international norms of refugee protection and has an impressive track record of generosity and hospitality toward refugees from the region (Francis 2015). But the influx of Syrian refugees has led to tensions in host communities, particularly over refugees' employment. In a country with a current unemployment rate of 12.5 percent and 3.1 percent GDP growth (World Bank 2015, 8-9), it is not surprising that 65 percent of Jordanian workers think refugees should be confined to refugee camps and 85 percent believe they should not be allowed to enter the country freely (Stave and Hillesund 2015, 113). These concerns have shaped the government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, in that refugee employment is heavily regulated. The government also blocks humanitarian projects that seek to provide professional vocational training

courses to refugees or income-generating grants, for fear that these will increase unemployment among Jordanians and encourage refugees to permanently settle in Jordan.

But as the Syrian refugee crisis enters its sixth year, and with no end in sight to the conflict, the perspectives of donors and the Jordanian government are shifting from emergency response operations toward a resilience strategy. The Jordan Resilience Plan 2015 helped coordinate the distribution of resources and contain the negative economic and security repercussions of the crisis (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2014). Later, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2016-2017 was developed for similar purposes but on a regional scale (UNHCR 2016a). It is in this context that examining the expectations gap in Jordan from the perspective of field workers can shed light on the actual challenges and broader repercussions that will result from failure to minimize that gap or to find alternative self-help ways to empower refugees.

## Needs Assessments

Since 1989, UNHCR has been trying to strengthen its role in community building and refugee empowerment. The organization's community service units integrate participatory approaches into managing humanitarian operations. The methods and strategies they use include conducting needs assessments, establishing community management structures, and reinforcing refugee dignity (Bakewell 2003, 5-8). A needs assessment is a direct empowering tool that enables refugees to guide humanitarian priorities. Several guiding principles, like Principle 6 of the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD 2013) and Principle 2 of the Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs (IFRC 1994), emphasize that funding should be allocated based on assessed needs. Nevertheless, assessing needs regularly and professionally presents considerable challenges, including overcoming organizational bias that preselects areas for needs assessments and lack of funds for carrying out regular assessments (Poole 2014, 38-50).

Methods used to assess needs on the ground vary widely depending on the type of services offered by organizations, the target groups, and the numbers of direct beneficiaries. These methods include written surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), community meetings, house visits, and ad hoc meetings with beneficiaries. For example, when a project benefits a limited number of illiterate refugees, organizations opt for FGDs. In other cases, where beneficiaries are literate and large in number, written quantitative surveys are preferred. With children and youth, a mix of FGDs and daily feedback is used to assess shifting needs and desires in educational and recreational programing.

Generally, needs assessments are a decentralized operation ruled by

project goals and individual staff motivation. Only two organizations have institutionalized the needs assessment tools to be used on a regular basis, while some organizations fail to assess needs altogether. One project has been running in Zaatari without needs assessments for the last three years. "Every six months we just change dates and send the proposal to the donor for extension," one interviewee admitted. Three other humanitarian workers referred to the ad hoc nature of needs assessments, conducted in a rush just before a project proposal is submitted in response to calls for proposals announced by donors. "In many cases we were told to submit ideas about needs in a matter of a day or two because of an approaching deadline! Why we are never told about these deadlines in advance to conduct a proper needs assessment is a mystery to me! Worse still, in some cases refugee needs were decided upon in staff meetings without discussions with refugees," complained a coordinator from a reputable international organization.

The two organizations which invest in regular and systematic needs assessments have developed these based on years of experience. I worked in one of them eight years ago. Back then, needs assessments were conducted in a rushed and impromptu way. Today, the organization has developed a separate monitoring and evaluation unit that conducts regular needs assessments with various target groups and has streamlined a mix of methodologies, including FGDs, surveys, and home visits. These regular findings are fed into project proposals and project designs without the pressure of deadlines. The other organization offers educational and vocational services. Regular pre-course needs assessments and post-course evaluations are conducted throughout the year in written format and through FGDs. These are continuously incorporated into a needs assessment database that informs future project proposals.

Ideally, needs assessments allow a participatory approach to project design with refugees. However, all interviewees, even those in organizations where needs assessments are institutionalized, admitted that the extent to which findings from needs assessments inform project design is limited. Seven interviewed workers (63 percent) estimated that only 15-20 percent of needs assessment findings are actually incorporated into project design. The highest percentage given is 60 percent. But as one worker added, "the missing 40 percent is equally important because it contributes to the expectations gap and undermines our relevance to refugees." These results clarify the failure of humanitarian organizations in carrying out a core task that is important for healthy humanitarian operations. Despite the efforts expended and the existence of international standards that emphasize the significance of needs assessments in enabling participatory project design, the actual impact of needs assessments remains minimal.

One glimmer of hope is emerging, however. One goal of UNHCR's community service units is developing community management structures (UNHCR 2007, 186). A process that has recently started in Zaatari Camp contributes to this goal by creating avenues for open dialogue between refugees

and service providers and for direct assessment of needs. From a long-term perspective, this process provides infrastructure for the community-building efforts that are necessary to facilitate the eventual phasing out or reduction of humanitarian operations in Zaatari.

A staff member closely involved with this process explained that it was co-initiated by UNHCR and IRD, and involves IRD community mobilizers randomly meeting residents in all the twelve districts of the camp to roughly gauge topics of concern to refugees. On this basis, two open-door community gatherings are organized in each district, one for males and one for females, during which one of these topics is discussed by refugees, staff members of relevant humanitarian organizations, and UNHCR representatives. Ideally, between thirty and thirty-five refugees attend to allow a two-way discussion between refugees on one side and UNHCR and the service providers on the other. "In one instance around eighty refugees attended. The meeting turned into a one-way communication from service providers to refugees because it became hard to manage the discussion."

The six interviewees working in Zaatari agreed that these meetings have facilitated open communication between refugees and implementing partners. Meetings usually end by drawing up an action plan, in which implementing partners clarify what can be done to address the concerns. "This is an empowering tool for refugees to manage and address their concerns. It also informs UNHCR and implementing partners of field needs directly and openly," one coordinator of this process noted.

Nevertheless, one shortcoming of this model is that no follow-up mechanism was put in place to monitor progress on the action plans. This can diminish the relevance of the community gatherings and create mistrust between refugees and humanitarian actors. The coordinator explains, "Implementing partners should not raise refugee expectations on action plans that are beyond their abilities, financial or otherwise. In the few instances when this happened and action plans were not implemented, we noticed a decline in refugees' attendance because there was a feeling that these gatherings will not result in addressing the issues." As will be discussed later, transparency has proved the most important factor in nurturing positive relations with refugees based on respect and mutual responsibility. This observation confirms this and highlights that humanitarian organizations have responsibilities that go beyond the operational level to the relational one. The coordinators of this process hope to put in place a monitoring system for action plans sometime in 2016.

Overall, failure to assess needs accurately and regularly leads to miscommunication of refugee needs to donors, who then fund projects based on pre-set targets. According to humanitarian workers, it is the humanitarian organizations that are responsible for this failure, not the donors. This shortcoming damages the reputation and reduces the relevance of humanitarian organizations, and adds to the challenges facing refugees.

## Measuring Success

Needs assessments are the first step in developing projects; evaluations conclude them. Instead of asking humanitarian workers how they evaluate projects and activities, they were asked to compare how donors and refugees measure their success. All the interviewees agreed that donors measure humanitarian organizations' success in terms of their ability to meet pre-set targets concerning numbers of beneficiaries, activities, and in-kind assistance items. Refugees, by contrast, consider a project successful if it meets their direct needs and if field staff treat them respectfully. On some occasions, refugees consider a project a success simply because it offers a safe space for women and children.

*Donors*

According to interviewees, donors measure the success of organizations through the final reports these organizations submit. This poses some challenges. In an effort to professionalize the humanitarian sector and improve efficiency, organizations and donors emphasize reports, checklists, and generalizable data. But this "comes at the expense of the less quantifiable forms of knowledge often possessed only by people and groups who hail from and live in the areas affected by disasters" (Barnett and Walker 2015, 139). This new emphasis on professionalization has led to prioritizing the quality of written outputs regardless of the actual outcome on the ground. "If a report is strongly written, even if it is all lies, the donor will consider the organization a successful and reliable one. If the report is weak [despite good results on the ground], the organization is judged poorly," explained one project manager.

Interviewees also appear dismissive of donors' success-measuring tools due to lack of donor monitoring of services on the ground. This is perceived as a key guarantee against corruption. For example, one project that includes distributing personal hygiene kits to refugees is funded by the country office of a UN organization in Jordan. An interviewee tells how "a sample kit was sent to the donor that meets all donor regulations and costs 2.5JDs [US$3.50]/kit. But the kit that was actually delivered to refugees costs 0.8JDs [US$1.10]. The soap was of Dettol brand as requested by the donor, but it expires in two weeks. The toothpaste includes fluoride, while donor regulations clearly prohibit fluoride-based toothpastes. If a donor representative was present on distribution day, this discrepancy would be immediately noticed and corrupt staff questioned. No donor representative was present and no one reported this!"

Corruption in the humanitarian field is the elephant in the room: everyone is aware of it, but no one mentions it. Four field workers (36 percent) referred to corruption in their organizations. In most cases, it is not raised with management because either senior staff members are involved, or subordinates fear losing their jobs. Poor donor monitoring also contributes to the perception of donors

as distant and uninterested actors. Nevertheless, "donors are the most powerful actors [in humanitarian operations]. When a refugee violates the law, s/he is sent back to Syria! But have you ever heard of a donor kicked out from the country?!" questions one field worker. Several studies argue that donors enjoy absolute power in humanitarian operations (Macrae et al. 2002; Harrell-Bond 2002; Barnett and Walker 2015), not least because accountability is "skewed in the direction of the donors who pay for the assistance, rather than the refugees" (Harrell-Bond 2002, 53). For interviewees, this power comes with a responsibility to meet refugee needs and to regularly monitor the delivery of services.

*Beneficiaries*

"Refugees evaluate us by the tangible result they get, not by our good intentions," explained one field manager. All interviewees shared the view that success is measured by whether an organization meets refugee needs regardless of limitations. And because refugee needs vary widely, no one yardstick can be used to measure success. The manager continued, "Our regulations allow us to offer only 130JDs [US$185] as one-time emergency cash assistance to urgent cases. Sometimes this amount can save someone from prison if s/he is in debt. Once I provide this amount, s/he will judge our organization as a success because we met her/his need. But when a refugee needs accommodation, we cannot offer more than this amount or offer it regularly. So even if I provide this emergency assistance once, it does not meet her/his need and this refugee will perceive us as a failure because we did not meet her/his need."

Measuring success for in-kind assistance components is easier. Refugees who receive assistance are satisfied. Those who do not, are not. This applies to winter clothing services, shelters, hygiene kits, etc. At times when no tangible service is offered, "My team and I have to be seen doing something or other in the camp for refugees. It can be maintenance tasks, home visits, or utility checks. Whatever it is, our presence and services have to be noticeable otherwise we are forgotten," reflected one project manager.

Investing in human relations with refugees has proved to be extremely important where refugees' perceptions about an organization's success are concerned. All eleven humanitarian workers confirmed that even when refugee needs are not satisfied, if they communicate respectfully and transparently with refugees, refugees will consider the organization a success. Honoring refugees' suffering, adhering to cultural norms, and respectful communication are considered key elements. This relational aspect makes up for the shortcomings in meeting needs and helps humanitarian workers manage the expectations gap as will be discussed later.

Similarly, three field coordinators argued that refugees consider their organizations a success because they offer safe learning and socializing environments. "We created a reputation as a safe space for women. Parents

and husbands do not have concerns about the environment here." Another coordinator explains, "Our facilities are very basic. We don't have heaters, electricity, or fans. Still the children choose our facilities over the better furnished and serviced ones of other organizations because we involve them in planning and allow them free space for creativity."

*Changing Needs over Time*

The overall goal of UNHCR community service units is to empower refugees toward self-help and community development. This goes alongside UNHCR's traditional role in refugee protection and meeting emergency needs. Likewise, refugee needs and concerns are shifting as the Syrian refugee crisis enters its sixth year. As one field manager explained, "Refugee needs today are based on livelihood and sustainability concerns. Refugees today think long term. This is a positive development when their focus shifts from direct emergency needs. But our abilities are limited in this regard. We have seen refugees take risky steps like leaving the camp or going back to Syria because of their concerns about long-term livelihood options."

One can understand this shift in refugee concerns given the partial but gradual satisfaction of basic survival needs. Food, shelter, and water needs have been met to some extent. So the concern now shifts to higher human needs, as per Maslow's argument on the hierarchy of human needs. Once basic needs are satisfied, humans aspire to satisfy higher needs like education, identity, and dignity (Maslow 1943). This should not create the impression, though, that the basic needs of refugees have been completely met. For instance, the distribution of winter clothing remains a standard annual operation for three organizations in Zaatari. But what this shift implies is that the expectations gap is no longer limited to quantifiable materials distributed to refugees, but extends to development needs usually measured by the quality and long-term impact of services.

The ability of humanitarian organizations to offer services that meet long-term needs is limited, mainly due to government restrictions in Jordan. Many organizations like NRC, UN Women, and IRD offer skills development courses with limited income-generating scope. For example, NRC has provided basic carpentry training in Zaatari. Those who successfully completed the training were later employed to fix and renovate school benches inside the camp. UN Women offers training in crafts and facilitates participation in charity fairs and bazaars to sell products. However, according to standard procedures, all services offered to refugees by humanitarian organizations require approval from the Ministry of Planning and another relevant ministry, depending on the type of service offered. It is not unusual for one ministry to approve a service while the other one does not.

According to one project manager, funding was granted for a project that would offer skills development courses and follow-up grants to enable refugees to

start income-generating projects. The Ministry of Planning approved the project, but the Ministry of Labor denied the necessary approval and the project was stillborn. Similarly, a UN body and a private higher education college initiated a project that would have given local Jordanians and refugees an opportunity to take a one-year diploma course in one of six fields of study. Again, the Ministry of Planning approved the project, but the Ministry of Education withheld its approval, thus depriving three hundred refugees of this opportunity.

The government restricts vocational training services to refugees in terms of both quality and diversity because unemployment levels and economic concerns are on the rise in Jordan. This prevents humanitarian organizations from meeting the long-term needs of refugees in education and skills development, contributing to the expectations gap between refugee needs and available services. Humanitarian organizations are limited in their scope for negotiation in this regard, and a shift in government regulations would be tied to economic, political, and security conditions in the region. Meanwhile, humanitarian organizations try to make do with what is available and operate within the scope permitted by the government.

## Disparities in Perceptions

Disparities within humanitarian organizations reinforce power imbalances between senior staff and field staff and between beneficiaries and field workers. Poor understanding of context and organizational procedures and poor project design widen the expectations gap. In their efforts to manage this gap, field workers suffer personal conflict in relation to respecting beneficiaries' dignity, adhering to codes of conduct, and managing their own stress and frustration. Overall, these factors are accentuated by a failure to institutionalize needs assessments. In organizations where needs assessments are regularly and professionally conducted, the impact of these disparities remains minimal.

*Contextual Factors and Indirect Needs*
Field humanitarian workers rarely interact with donors. This is a task for senior staff, usually based in head offices in Amman away from the field. When senior humanitarian staff members are distant and disconnected from field realities, they misrepresent needs due to their poor understanding of contextual factors and indirect needs. According to seven interviewees (72 percent), this distance between field and senior staff members within humanitarian organizations contributes to the expectations gap. When regular needs assessments are conducted, the impact of this distance is minimized. But when needs assessments are not systematized, as in most organizations, direct engagement of senior staff in field operations and increased involvement of national staff in project design is

imperative to help bridge the expectations gap. A few examples below clarify this point.

One field manager complained that "the international staff member at the main office who deals with donors never comes to urban field offices, or joins home visits and activities. How can she communicate refugee needs to donors if she does not see the situation firsthand? As a field manager, I understand refugee needs and the overall context well, but I never meet the donors." This common phenomenon in humanitarian organizations raises questions about their ability to communicate needs, particularly in organizations that conduct ad hoc needs assessments, if any. Another field manager described how when community kitchens were no longer in use in Zaatari, some senior staff members from different organizations suggested in a meeting that refugees heat water in these kitchens for bathing/showering and then carry it to their caravans/tents. "Apparently, the seniors have not visited the inner areas of the camp and did not realize that between caravans and tents it is all basecourse; carrying boiling water means a stark risk of refugees tripping and burning their skin." He then added, "These are the basics about Zaatari! Anyone who visited Zaatari two or three times and cared to walk around will be able to understand these simple things."

The distance of senior humanitarian workers also limits their ability to understand frustrations on the ground. "My managers are protected from the daily pressures and frustrations I deal with in Azraq Camp," one field coordinator complained. "Every day I have refugees complaining, shouting, or expecting services that I cannot offer. My managers have only to face me once a week when I go to the main office and express my own frustrations. But sitting in Amman, they don't understand what I am talking about and do not see the despair among refugee children because of lack of services or simple items needed for their education."

These problems are also related to discrepancies in understanding of local contexts between national and international staff. A project manager at a leading organization stated, "I attribute our success to the fact that most of our staff in both field and management levels are either nationals or Arabs, who understand the local context very well. They understand the needs, and are able to work around the hostility of host communities towards refugees. Locals also appreciate the security concerns of the police, and government's concerns when it comes to restrictions on vocational training and income-generating projects." This deeper understanding, he argued, allows managers to develop project proposals that respect the concerns of different stakeholders, including refugees, and at the same time work within the available space for humanitarian organizations.

This perspective seems to have gained ground lately among other humanitarian organizations. An organization operating in Zaatari is currently nationalizing its management positions, according to one employee there. Similarly, six interviewees (54 percent) said that they had more trust in needs

assessments and project designs conducted and developed by locals, as these are based on a good understanding of the cultural, legal, and operational context. "We had needs assessments conducted by international experts. I respect their expertise. But poor understanding of the context led to misrepresentative samples of target groups, or having questions and indicators that do not serve the [legal] scope in which we work."

The fact that managers are disconnected from contextual factors also impairs their understanding of indirect needs. This is best explained through the case of one project as detailed by its coordinator. The project was designed by a UN body and a private college to offer one-year diploma scholarships in graphic design, hospitality, media skills, urban engineering, and architecture to 400 beneficiaries: 120 refugees from Zaatari, 280 Syrian refugees from urban areas, and 100 vulnerable local Jordanians. Urban refugees and Jordanians were selected from four different cities in Jordan. For the beneficiaries, this represented a rare and valuable educational opportunity that had the potential to open doors to future employment.

However, certain important considerations were not taken into account when designing this project. Refugees from Zaatari would be spending between eight and eleven hours away from home, during which time they would have to buy snacks. No budget was allocated for pocket money within the project. Likewise, the cost of clothing and other materials was not taken into account. The coordinator argued that "this will affect refugees' confidence and dignity on campus." Another field coordinator in Zaatari said that refugees were eager to seize this opportunity but were unable to do so because they could not afford the other costs involved. As for transportation, the college provided buses to collect refugees from Zaatari camp and the four cities and to drop them back again. However, this generosity was not extended to the 100 local Jordanians benefiting from the same project. Needless to say, this created tensions with local beneficiaries. Given the rising hostility in host communities toward refugees, this kind of preferential treatment can harm refugees and demonstrates a lack of sensitivity to the equally vulnerable locals.

The shortcomings discussed above illustrate the unintended negative impact a valuable project can have when there is a failure to consider the overall context of beneficiaries' lives. Do No Harm is a principle followed in humanitarian operations to ensure that services offered do not cause psychological and material harm to direct beneficiaries, or undermine peacebuilding and stabilizing efforts in the context of conflict (Wallace 2014). The project design described above failed to take this principle into consideration. "If a needs assessment was conducted in advance, these challenges [and potential negative impacts] would have been anticipated well in advance, and we could have developed alternative plans," noted the coordinator. Today, the project is facing many obstacles despite its tremendous value to refugees because managers did not understand the overall

context.

*Operational Procedures*

Operational procedures and bureaucracy within humanitarian organizations can hinder the smooth implementation of plans and subject workers to avoidable stress. Interviewed field workers argued that procedures and bureaucracy cause two kinds of constraints. The first relates to cases of procedures that are insensitive to cultural norms, which place field workers in embarrassing positions. The second relates to procedures within humanitarian organizations that delay delivery of services.

The Cash for Work program in Zaatari Camp provides refugees with a regular monthly income in exchange for tasks in administering camp services. A system was developed to avoid duplication and streamline the process among all service providers. Employing refugees in cleaning and garbage collection tasks is a main component of one water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) project there. A field manager recollected one case that placed him in an embarrassing position. "A sixty-year-old refugee, who suffers from a knee problem, is employed to collect garbage. Rules for the Cash for Work program prohibit swapping tasks among family members to avoid duplication. The refugee came to explain his health condition and requested that his son replace him so that the family continue to earn the money. However, the rules prevent me from allowing this, and I have no capacity to offer him a physically less demanding task. I found myself insisting that a refugee as old as my father collects the garbage himself despite his knee problem." Two similar incidents were recounted by other interviewees. The frustrations caused by these situations play heavily on them, as they feel conflicted between respect for elderly refugees and the regulations in place, especially when they find themselves unable to offer alternatives.

Likewise, bureaucracy within humanitarian organizations can seriously impact the quality of services and add to refugee frustrations. A field coordinator clarified this. "Our needs are simple: pencils, notebooks, markers, whiteboards, and stationery items. On average, it takes six weeks to get requested items as the purchase request runs from one department to another for approvals. Most often we end up getting poor quality items because they are cheaper. Rules do not authorize me to go personally and get what is needed to protect against corruption, which I understand. But [with the current system] we get poor quality items way too late, our activities suffer, I get stressed and embarrassed, and refugees become frustrated and indifferent to our services."

Operational procedures and centralized regulations add to the expectations gap simply because the delays in service provision and rigid structures influence the respect and trust dynamics in the field. This reinforces the vulnerability of refugees and increases the frustrations of field workers who appear to be in control of a power imbalance vis-à-vis beneficiaries, when in fact they are

powerless in the face of organizational procedures.

*Beneficiary Dignity versus Donor Expectations*
This study finds that in some cases project design fails to respect the dignity and/ or abilities of target groups. This causes field workers "shame," "embarrassment," and "frustration" in the words of seven interviewees (63 percent). Most field workers attribute this problem to failure to conduct satisfactory needs assessments. Without these assessments, space is left open for donors and senior staff to make assumptions about refugee needs. Five field workers (45 percent) note that the details of certain projects reveal that donors assume they are operating in a context of extreme poverty and illiteracy. As a result, field workers find themselves offering "embarrassing services that do not respect the dignity and knowledge base of refugees," according to one of them.

Two examples of "embarrassing" services are described by two field workers interviewed. One field worker described how "in one story-reading activity for kids aged ten to fourteen years, I was shocked to realize that all that the activity offered was reading Red Riding Hood in less than ten minutes, and then offering a simple beverage. First, this is a story we tell to five-year-olds. It does not respect the abilities and creativity of the target age group. Second, it is a well-known story in our culture and does not offer any new knowledge. ... I looked at the parents waiting in the next room and I just felt ashamed at the level of disrespect to their time and to their children's abilities." Another worker provided an example of informative lectures that do not respect the context of refugees: "The lecture topic was healthy eating habits. The lecturer had absolutely no clue about the purchasing power of the refugees and the poverty in which they live. She was talking to refugees about eating steak, red and yellow capsicum, and exotic vegetables that are expensive and well beyond their limited financial abilities!" These failures are not the responsibility of donors but of humanitarian organizations who coordinate the activities and select lecturers.

Such activities destroy the trust and respect between refugees and humanitarian organizations. These examples cannot be generalized, but the negative impact they create reverberates widely in the refugee community. As many as ten of the interviewees (91 percent) agreed that the refugee community is extremely prone to negative rumors and perceptions about service providers. Although their organization's reputation is important to workers, what affects them most is the personal humiliation they feel when activities underestimate refugees' knowledge base or undermine their dignity.

To avoid these feelings, five interviewees (45 percent) said they try to overcome these shortcomings by adjusting planned activities. A field coordinator in an urban area explained that one project's funding included allocations for workshops to teach refugees about personal hygiene, like washing hands, flushing toilets, and taking baths. "The specified activities fail to respect the education

levels and hygiene standards of refugees. I felt ashamed to stand in front of them and teach them how to wash hands. There were highly educated men and women attending. I found a way out by upgrading the workshop into 'how to read your water bill'. In this way, refugees received new and helpful information about water bills in Jordan and ways to conserve water. Only in this context did I refer to personal hygiene, washing hands and flushing toilets, as demanded by donors. I think this was my way of meeting donor expectations and also respecting the refugees."

When field workers assume responsibility for adjusting implementation plans, it adds to their workload and stress levels. But at the same time, it enables them to respect refugees' abilities and needs. They can save face and improve trust levels between them and the refugees. In cases where it is not possible to modify existing plans, daily frustrations increase. So field workers who are concerned about this kind of thing are faced with a choice between increasing their workload and suffering frustration and embarrassment.

*Codes of Conduct and Human Compassion*
Besides tweaking implementation plans to reduce the expectations gap, a number of humanitarian workers offer personal charity to refugees in extreme need. Interviewees describe two ways in which they feel conflicted about this approach. First, they feel trapped between refugees' urgent needs and a failing humanitarian system incapable of satisfying those needs. Second, they are torn between a code of conduct that prevents them from offering personal help to beneficiaries and their own compassion toward fellow human beings who are suffering. One humanitarian worker described how personal charity covers gaps in the system thus:

> There was a young refugee in his twenties, who suffered from e*pidermolysis bullosa* and needed to apply three packs of ointment per day to prevent complications. His condition was in an early stage and curable. He went to the UNHCR implementing partner for medical services, but his scheduled appointment to diagnose his problem and prescribe medication would have taken months because of case overload there. I helped him in the beginning by paying for his ointment because his condition was difficult. Three months later his parents informed me that he had died. He died because of a failing system. If he had received the medical attention on time, he would have been alive today. ... I could not have left him to suffer more just because he was poor.

Similar efforts were described by other field workers. In most cases, they offered money for medicines or for formula milk for babies.

Humanitarian workers are overwhelmed by the urgent needs of some refugees that cannot be met in a timely manner by existing humanitarian services. Their knowledge of the gaps within the humanitarian system is what drives

field workers to offer personal help when necessary. This has also convinced some humanitarian workers to expand the scope of their personal efforts. One coordinator added, "In the beginning my colleagues and I used to gather money and give it to the most urgent cases. Now we think of broader initiatives. A few months ago, my friends and I organized a campaign entitled 'A Loaf of Bread and a Chicken' on Facebook. We gathered donations from friends and family, and were able to provide bread and chicken to 2,317 families or 9,635 individuals. This was a personal effort to help." This initiative was driven by disillusionment with the humanitarian system and a desire to help refugees in any way possible.

However, individual efforts come at a cost. In their interviews, eight field workers (72 percent) referred to a conflict between the code of conduct and the compassion they feel toward vulnerable refugees. As one field manager said, "I feel torn between my humanity [sympathy with refugees and the desire to help] and the code of conduct that prevents me from offering any personal help. This is a very difficult feeling and a constant stressor."

Perceptions of the code of conduct illustrate one area of discrepancy between local and international staff. Local field staff consider some international senior staff members to be insulated from the daily pressures in the field that force them to breach the code of conduct. But one international worker offers a different view: "Most international staff are here because it is a career choice. We have studied development and international studies, and are convinced about the overall value and relevance of the several rules and standards that regulate our work, even if they cause stress and frustrations in daily interactions. Local staff members, however, are here because these are the jobs available given the high unemployment rate in Jordan. They come from different academic and professional backgrounds and do not necessarily appreciate the overall and overarching value of certain standards." This view has some merit, but it misses the fact that local staff rarely receive adequate training that explains the international standards and their overall impact on humanitarian operations. Also, the generalization about the career choices of local staff, although possibly true, needs further examination to verify the argument made here.

It is interesting to note, though, that the interviewees who frequently resort to providing personal charity are those who work for organizations that have not institutionalized needs assessments. During the interviews, it became clear that staff members from organizations where needs are regularly assessed are more at peace with the code of conduct and more capable of handling daily stress because they understand their roles and limitations. However, this did not prevent one of these employees from commenting that he feels he has "two personalities: outside the camp I am very different from who I am in the camp because of the code of conduct."

To summarize, field workers resort to charity on a small personal scale or through broader initiatives because of their awareness of the gaps within the

available humanitarian services. They feel the urge to step up personally when needed. But this approach to managing the expectations gap is creating inner conflicts for field workers as they attempt to abide by the code of conduct. Organizations that invest in systematic needs assessments appear to have protected their staff from this conflict by identifying and responding to actual needs, as well as by improving staff awareness of individual roles and limitations.

*Stress and Frustration*

When asked how the gap between donor and refugee expectations affects them, eight interviewees (72 percent) reported high levels of stress and frustration caused by their inability to satisfy refugee needs. One study argues that "stress and burnout among social workers [in UNRWA refugee camps] result from difficult to meet expectations, complicated requirements and onerous duties" (Soliman and Gillespie 2011, 791). Likewise, interviewees in this study argue that the factors discussed above concerning field dynamics place them under tremendous psychological pressure. Most interviewees appeared to be too overwhelmed even to start discussing this particular question.

As will be discussed shortly, field workers try to be transparent with refugees to involve them in bridging the expectations gap. However, two field workers (18 percent) confess that previously they would just lie to ease the stress of the moment when refugees asked for urgent help that they could not offer. "I would just tell refugees I will check if I can help and get back to them. Sometimes I got back saying I cannot help, at other times I just ignored the matter. ... This is a horrible feeling when you realize that lying is your only option. [In such cases] you know the system is unable to meet their urgent need, but you are concerned about blocking the hope a refugee has." Through their body language and words in the interviews, some field workers appeared to be at a total loss as to how they should handle these pressures. They are unable to cope with their feelings of helplessness when it comes to addressing the needs they see on a daily basis in the field.

External factors also add to field workers' stress. As the link between donors and refugees, humanitarian workers often have to receive visitors who are either potential donors, political/public figures, or government representatives. Not all visitors are sensitive to context. "Dealing with these [insensitive] visitors is more frustrating than the expectations gap and dealing with refugees," noted one field worker. "I live in constant frustration. From last June till last December, every day one donor contacts us asking to visit our centers in Zaatari. This is exhausting for us and for the refugees. I don't get why donors whose mandate does not support ours and who refuse to fund our projects come to visit in the first place! As an organization, we cannot reject a donor's request to visit. But donors need to be considerate. This becomes very humiliating for the refugees when we have different visitors daily who come to look around and take photos. Refugees often

ask me 'is this a zoo? They come to see us and take photos!'" This frustration is doubled when visitors come for media publicity, "All that they care about is a photo with smiling refugee children!"

None of the interviewees mentioned that their organization offers them psychological support to help them cope. I am unaware of services within humanitarian organizations operating in Jordan that offer regular psychological support to employees. UNHCR has developed some tools in this regard designed for humanitarian workers (UNHCR 2005). But it is unclear to what extent these and similar tools are available to field workers. More efforts are urgently needed. Interestingly, the study again finds that the three field workers who reported minimal negative impact of the expectations gap on their psychological well-being work in the two organizations that have systematic needs assessments and standard evaluation tools. Their stress is reduced by a clear understanding of their role and the scope of their ability to help refugees with their various needs. How field workers react to stressors depends to a great extent on their individual personalities, but here I have made an effort to clarify how the different causes and impacts of the expectations gap affect field workers' mental health.

## Overcoming Shortcomings in Humanitarian Operations

Field workers argue that there are two other factors  that help them manage the expectations gap: transparency with refugees and donor flexibility. If these can be encouraged within humanitarian organizations, refugees will be empowered to participate in running humanitarian operations despite the financial, legal, and organizational limitations. They can also empower field workers to negotiate with donors when needed in order to deliver better quality services.

*Transparency*
All the interviewees stressed that the expectations gap damages trust between humanitarian organizations and refugees, and as far as the interviewees are concerned, that trust is an indicator of success. The personal contributions discussed above are made precisely in order to protect this trust. But field workers have gradually come to realize that transparency with refugees about funding, timelines, roles, and limitations also builds trust and empowers refugees. Once they are informed of the challenges faced by the humanitarian organizations, refugees are willing to play their part in managing the expectations gap and to use their creativity to make the best of a difficult situation. Earlier studies have similarly argued that ambiguity concerning contexts and roles leads to mistrust between refugees and humanitarian institutions (Daniel and Knudsen 1995; Hynes 2009).

Transparency transforms refugees from passive beneficiaries into active

partners. As one interviewee reflected, "Earlier we had a huge trust crisis because of delay in receiving funds. ... My relationship with refugees was embarrassing and unclear as they did not understand my limitations. Later, I started informing them transparently about funding details. At times when we were short of money or uncertain about future funding, I told them so. Only then did the dynamics change completely. Refugees became more creative, assumed responsibility for running activities, and helped manage the limited resources available." Once the limitations are clarified, refugees work together to channel their efforts and resources into meeting their needs. Similar advances were noticed in skills development activities and informative workshops. In one project, refugees decided to cut costs by identifying qualified crafts trainers from within their community who volunteered to teach others. The organization had only to provide the space and raw materials.

From a different perspective, transparency contributes to the participatory approach envisaged by the UNHCR community service units through the dissemination of knowledge. Knowledge is power, and power is dispersed among all actors (Foucault 1980). Transparency empowers refugees as stakeholders in humanitarian operations, in contrast to the current situation in which donors have absolute power on account of their financial leverage, as mentioned earlier. Refugees are not passive; they often demonstrate extraordinary willpower in their efforts to meet their needs (Harrell-Bond 2002). In an unpublished field needs assessment study conducted in Zaatari in early 2015, I interviewed 255 refugees with vocational skills. All of them said they were willing to help themselves without relying on humanitarian services and donations. But the legal environment in Jordan restricts their mobility and employment opportunities, and the overall discourse and approach of humanitarian operations reduces refugees to weak recipients (Bakewell 2003, 15–16). In this context, transparency with refugees becomes a moral duty and an operational necessity.

*Flexibility*
Eight interviewees (72 percent) asserted that donor flexibility can help bridge the expectations gap. Organizations that develop monitoring systems and invest in positive relations with donors enjoy the latter's trust and flexibility. Trust is understood here as "the expectation that an actor (1) can be relied on to fulfil obligations, (2) will behave in a predictable manner, and (3) will act and negotiate fairly when the possibility for opportunism is present" (Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone 1998, 143). Trust not only allows for effective coordination between partners (Stephenson 2005, 343), but can also increase donor flexibility in meeting emerging needs within a project cycle.

For example, a project manager explained that one project offered vocational training to 400 women, but upon completion, it provided kits of raw materials to 100 women only. "I was uneasy with this plan. ... I wrote back to the donor and

explained why this should be changed. The donor accepted my argument and agreed that we should provide kits for all 400 women. In this way, I minimized the expectations gap without stressing or damaging my relationship with the donor." This manager invests in open communication with donors, and works on strengthening the trust his organization enjoys with them. He is also a Jordanian who understands the cultural impact of certain gaps in project implementation and consults regularly with refugees. These four factors give him noticeable confidence in addressing relations with donors.

Other organizations have built barriers between donors and staff, which reduce mutual trust and result in rigid implementation plans. As mentioned earlier, donors are perceived as distant and uninterested providers of money. Senior managers within humanitarian organizations instill this perception. One field manager complained, "My senior colleagues block new ideas, arguing that the donor will not accept changes. They create a very negative image of donors that cannot be true. Donors want to ensure that funds are utilized in the areas we committed to implement. If explanations are offered when we request changes, we can either get these approved or at least help donors understand our challenges. But I feel donors are the excuse used to block creativity." This deliberate distancing of donors is also evident from the fact that seven field workers (63 percent) had never met donor representatives. Likewise, most interviewees have no access to the final reports sent back to donors. This low level of transparency makes them uneasy; field staff are unaware of how their work and expenditure is reported to donors.

Organizations could also make up for lack of flexibility on the part of donors by including an unexpected needs and/or complementary services item in the budget. "This particular budget item will require strict monitoring to prevent any corruption," a field manager noted. "But it is important. It will allow us to meet necessary unanticipated needs. For example, in Azraq we did not have any playground or sports facilities for teenage girls. It would have been easy to buy simple plastic sheeting, create this space, and provide a few items to play with [jumping ropes, basketballs, and volleyballs]. It is not ideal, but will serve the purpose. Sadly, I did not have any budget heading under which I could buy these materials. They were simple and inexpensive needs; yet we failed to provide the girls with the space they wanted." It is unlikely that any donor would refuse funding for simple items like these. But as mentioned earlier, field staff cannot communicate directly with donors, and senior staff rarely visit the field to gain an understanding of these frustrations. Therefore, it is advisable for organizations that do not enjoy open and flexible relations with donors to request budget items that would grant field staff this flexibility.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that humanitarian organizations largely exacerbate the existing gap between refugees' needs and donors' expectations in two ways. First, accurate and professional needs assessments are rarely institutionalized. As a result, organizations misunderstand refugees' needs and miscommunicate them to the donors who fund projects based on pre-set targets. Therefore, humanitarian organizations have a responsibility to invest in regular professional needs assessments if they are to carry out their work successfully. In this regard, the differences between donors' indicators of success and those of refugees also affect how humanitarian organizations prioritize needs. Similarly, the necessity of addressing changes in refugees' needs presents significant challenges for organizations.

The second factor that contributes to the expectations gap is disparities within humanitarian organizations between local field workers and international senior staff members. These disparities reinforce the power imbalance between humanitarian organizations and beneficiaries, and between field workers and senior staff members. There are disparities in understanding of contextual factors, indirect needs, and operational procedures. Senior international staff also fail to understand the tension that exists between refugee dignity and donor expectations, and between the code of conduct and considerations of human compassion. All of this adds to the stress and frustration experienced by field workers. Overall, these factors accentuate the expectations gap as services fail to fulfill the material and relational needs of actors on the ground.

In addition to institutionalizing needs assessments as the main means of bridging the expectations gap, field workers recommend two more responses that have proven effective in managing the gap. Transparency with refugees is found to empower beneficiaries and enhance their role as agents of change. This reduces frustrations on the ground and also empowers field workers to manage the stress involved in meeting emergency and development needs. Investing in relations with donors to enhance trust and open communications is also found to offer field workers the flexibility they sometimes require to address unexpected needs or make up for shortcomings in project design. The distant relationship imposed by managers between field workers and donors severely impacts on this flexibility and creates mistrust between managers and field staff who are not offered access to final reports.

This article has offered an account of the microdynamics that contribute to the expectations gap that afflicts humanitarian organizations working with Syrian refugees in Jordan. The findings have also highlighted the power imbalances in humanitarian field operations. These are to be viewed within the larger context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and the overall shifting spectrum of humanitarian operations between emergency needs and development goals.

Exposing these operational and relational dynamics enhances our understanding of the peacebuilding impact of humanitarian operations in Jordan and elsewhere through UNHCR services. Factors discussed in this article deserve more detailed examination. Future studies may employ a larger research sample for each factor in order to gain a better understanding of variations. Examining the expectations gap from the perspective of both refugees and donors can equally help stakeholders empower refugees to meet their own needs.

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