



# **Icelandic NGOs and Humanitarian Aid**

A look at the Allocation Process

Þorsteinn Valdimarsson

**Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í þróunarfræðum**

**Félagsvísindasvið**



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Icelandic NGOs have increasingly engaged in humanitarian assistance in recent years with the support of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which announces funds for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in humanitarian aid biannually, and additionally in case of severe disasters. The aim of this research is to pry into the decision making process of five Icelandic NGOs when applying for such funds and the ethical implications of those decisions. The NGOs are The Red Cross, The Church Aid, SOS Children's Villages, Save the Children and ABC Children's Aid. Explored are the NGOs' connections with INGOs, their Codes of Conduct, their relations with the MFA and the factors that influence their selection of projects. The research is primarily based on interviews with NGO employees.

While there is much variety in the NGOs practices, they have a common ambition for the advancement of their humanitarian efforts. The NGOs appear prone to apply for funds if emergencies occur close to their own projects, are in the MFAs focus areas, are emphasised by their INGO contacts, are considered extensive by the NGOs and if they believe their expertise is of use. All interviewees agreed that the allocation system of the MFA should be improved, and believed that professionalism could be increased with steadier funding.

Keywords: Development studies, humanitarian aid, NGOs, Iceland, allocation, ethics, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

## ÚTDRÁTTUR

Íslensk borgarasamtök hafa undanfarin ár aukið umsvif sín í veitingu mannúðaraðstoðar með stuðningi Utanríkisráðuneytisins. Ráðuneytið auglýsir eftir umsóknum borgarasamtaka um mannúðaraðstoð tvisvar á ári og aukalega í tilfelli alvarlegra hamfara. Rannsókn þessi miðar að því að skyggjast inn í ákvarðanatökuferli fimm helstu borgarasamtaka þegar kemur að umsóknum um slíka styrki og siðferðilegar hliðar þeirra ákvarðanna. Samtökin eru Rauði krossinn, Hjálparstarf kirkjunnar, SOS barnaþorp, Barnaheill og ABC barnahjálp. Skoðuð eru samskipti félaganna við erlend móður- eða regnhlífasamtök, siðareglur þeirra og samskipti þeirra við ráðuneytið. Rannsóknin byggir fyrst og fremst á viðtölum við fulltrúa samtakanna.

Þó talsverður munur sé á starfsháttum samtakanna eiga þau sameiginlegan metnað fyrir áframhaldandi framgangi mannúðaraðstoðar sinnar. Samtökin virðast hneigjast til þess að sækja um fé ef neyðarástand verður nálægt þróunarverkefnum þeirra, er á áherslusvæðum utanríkisráðuneytisins, er sérstaklega auglýst af erlendum samstarfsaðilum, ef neyðin þykir umfangsmikil eða ef samtökin telja sérkunnáttu sína koma að gagni. Allir viðmælendur voru sammála um að bæta mætti kerfi Utanríkisráðuneytisins, og töldu að með stöðugri fjármögnun mætti auka fagmennsku innan sviðsins.

Lykilorð: Þróunarfræði, mannúðaraðstoð, borgarasamtök, Ísland, úthlutun, siðfræði, Utanríkisráðuneytið

## FOREWORDS

This thesis represents 60 ECTS units worth of my MA program in Development Studies, and was supervised by Jónína Einarisdóttir, Professor of Anthropology at the Faculty of Social and Human Science at the University of Iceland. To begin with I must thank her for her suggestion of this research topic, as well as the steady guidance provided through the period of research and writing. I also thank my other professors, whose courses provided the necessary groundwork for this research as well as my classmates, many of whom possessed experience and provided interesting insights into humanitarian work.

This thesis is mainly built upon interviews, and I thank all my interviewees for their honesty and openness. I remain hopeful this research can add something to the discourse on humanitarian issues in the local Icelandic context and ultimately be of some benefit for both the MFA and the NGOs discussed.

Development Studies became my field of choice because of the inspiration received in my work with Changemaker, the youth movement of the Icelandic Church Aid, which provided me a window into development and humanitarian work. The many I have worked alongside there, staff and volunteers, must be thanked for their inspiration. Sometimes life seems like a series of random events that lead to unexpected paths; I must thank my childhood friends for dragging me along that Sunday night in 2005, to the Church Aid youth meeting that hooked my interest in this work and in some way started a journey I am still on.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ACT – Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance)

CERF - Central Emergency Response Fund

DAC - the OECD Development Assistance Committee

HAP – Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International

ICA – The Icelandic Church Aid

ICEIDA – The Icelandic International Development Agency

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IRC – Icelandic Red Cross

IFRC – International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

IGO – Intergovernmental Organisation

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation

ISAF - International Security Assistance Force

LWF – The Lutheran World Federation

MFA – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NCA – The Norwegian Church Aid

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OECD - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OCHA - The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

SCI – Save the Children International.

UN – The United Nations

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (The UN Refugee Agency)

UNICEF – The United Nations Children’s Fund

UNRWA - United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

WFP - The World Food Program



## INTRODUCTION

I began my MA studies in September 2013. I was in many ways starting a new chapter in life, having just moved into a new apartment with my fiancé and expecting my firstborn child. When entering the department I was undecided on a topic. I obviously wanted to deepen my knowledge of development, and I came from the humanities as a philosophy major, with an inherent interest in looking at the ethical side of things. After receiving a tip from my supervisor, that it might be worthwhile to look into humanitarian aid of Icelandic NGOs, I embarked on a mission to get to know the subject. Frankly, it proved a convenient topic, since despite my interest in development work (and travelling for that matter) I did not feel I was in a position to be abroad for a long period. Doing my research at home was optimal with a new-born baby.

Which factors have an effect on allocation of humanitarian aid? In a perfect world the only answer to this question would be *need* – the aid is received where it is needed the most, period. This ideal is something many like to believe humanitarian aid adheres close to, even as trust in the development sector in general seems to be muddier. This thesis' focus is on Icelandic NGOs that have sent humanitarian aid abroad, mostly but not exclusively to low- and middle income countries in need. The goal is to analyse their decision making process when it comes to applications to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for humanitarian aid, and the ethical implications of such decisions. Considered especially are the effects of the environment around them, the framework of the MFA, their international relations and Codes of Conduct.

As will be discussed further, research elsewhere has shown that factors such as geographical proximity, cultural and historical ties, business interests, the type of emergency, scope of the media coverage, the internal situation of both the donor and the recipient countries, as well as numeral others can have an influence on where humanitarian aid ultimately is allocated to (See, Carstensen et al. 2003, Nelson 2012, Fink 2010). This offered the conclusion it would prove worthwhile in an academic sense as well as potentially useful to the local humanitarian sector to examine the process humanitarian aid goes through in Iceland.

The thesis is built on interviews with employees of five Icelandic NGOs as well as the MFA and scholarly context is used to try to unveil aspects of this process. Having a background in

philosophy, my interest in the topic comes from an ethical perspective, and my approach may reflect this. Is work being put into ensuring that the decision making process of where to provide aid and when is ethically sound? Is each case evaluated by itself or are there application quotas of how much can be spent on aid and criteria on what they should be spent on? How aware is the staff of the NGOs, many quite small, of the ethical weight put on their shoulders by selecting how available resources are spent? These are among the questions discussed. It is my hope that this thesis can lead to increased knowledge of decisions on allocation of humanitarian aid. Awareness of on what grounds decisions are made is crucial to making sure that the decisions conform to the stated goals.

In the first chapter the theoretical background of the study will be explored, with the broader concepts of development theory laid out, as well as other studies on both allocation and ethics of humanitarian aid. The second chapter is devoted to the studies' setting, the five Icelandic NGOs studied and the funding system of the MFA around them. The third chapter will recount the methodology of the study, and the fourth one will present the results. In the fifth chapter I offer discussion and finally my conclusions on the matter.

# 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STATE OF THE ART

This chapter will present an overview of the literature around the subjects of humanitarian aid, allocation and the ethical issues that can follow them. Before embarking on my examination it was crucial to have a thorough understanding of previous research on ethics and allocation in humanitarian aid. I read through a fair amount of literature, a lot of it turned out to be only loosely related to what I ultimately came to focus on. In this chapter I will summarise what I found to be the relevant highlights of the field and try to position my research within it.

## 1.1 Origins, Concepts and Context

### 1.1.1 A Short History

Davey, Borton and Foley (2013) state that the humanitarian gesture, or the will to alleviate the suffering of others, is truly an ancient global phenomenon. It can be traced through history across the globe, and the two underlying motivators seem to be religious belief, especially Christian ideas of charity, and the articulation of laws of war, which go back thousands of years. The development of the international humanitarian system as we know it today, can however be traced to the Western experience of war and natural disaster. It is now active in many forms across the globe, working in situations of conflict or natural disasters, acute or protracted crises. Over time the efforts of the most international actors – states, NGOs, international agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement – have coalesced into a loosely connected system, that links on the level of finances, operations, personnel and values (Davey et al., 2013, p. 1).

Barnett (2011) has proposed three “ages of humanitarianism”, that reflect the changing attitudes and ideologies over time. The first one he calls *imperial humanitarianism*, beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasting through WWII. *Neo-humanitarianism* came next and lasted the brunt of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lastly he identifies *liberal humanitarianism*, presently reigning since the end of the Cold War (p. 29). Davey et al. (2013) propose a slightly different categorization, and identify four major periods. The first is

from the mid-nineteenth century until the end of WWI in 1918, when “19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions drove humanitarian action”. Next are the interwar years and WWII, dubbed “the Wilsonian period, when international government was born and reasserted”. Third, the Cold War period, where humanitarian actors turned more concretely towards the non-western world, and the development paradigm emerged, and lastly the post-Cold War period, “when geopolitical changes again reshaped the terrain which humanitarians worked” (p. 5).

It is worth mentioning The Lisbon earthquake of 1755, in which Europe’s then fourth largest city was devastated and an estimated 60.000 people were killed. It is said to mark the first time the government accepted responsibility for emergency response and reconstruction. The event also had a notable effect on European culture and philosophy in many ways, including discussion on religion and theodicy and ultimately the early development of seismology. Notably, the government tried to study the earthquakes with future preventions in mind, sending a questionnaire to priests in every parish. The new downtown was subsequently designed to resist future earthquakes. The city suffered no epidemics of disease, and rebuilding was under way in less than a year. Of note, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is quoted having said “nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six and seven stories there, and that if the inhabitants of the city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less and perhaps of no account”. This line of thinking that has carried through to this day in disaster risk analysis (Strömberg, 2007, 199).

The origin of organised international humanitarian aid is otherwise often traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Red Cross was founded in 1863 by Henry Dunant after the Battle of Solferino in 1859. Its mission from the beginning was to train volunteers in peacetime to provide neutral and impartial help in times of war (British Red Cross, 2015). Over a decade later, Davey et al. recount (2013, p. 6 -7), the Famine Relief fund was set up in the United Kingdom, intended to assist in the Bengal 1876-78. Other charities followed. The 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw advances in military medicine such as the practice of triage, refinement of medical transportation, evacuation, and care. Many of these initiatives were local or national in their focus. The foundation of the international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863 stood however on distinctly international legs, with an emphasis put on standing

international legal agreements such as Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, which was ratified in 1864. Natural disaster response was also developed further internationally in the period, regulations began to be codified in the mid-1800s, through laws on emergency communications, disease control and vessels in distress. Three large earthquakes; San Francisco (1906), Kingston, Jamaica (1907) and Italy (1908), were early examples of international assistance being a major part of the response. The first International Congress of Lifesaving and First Aid in the Event of Accidents was held in Frankfurt in their wake in 1908.

The devastating impact of the First World War was unexpected. Despite the growing expertise, the humanitarian challenges were enormous, and although the ICRC was never officially appointed to the task, it bore the brunt of caring for prisoners of war. Davey et al. (2013, p. 7) state that “While many accounts see the Second World War as the beginning of a new age for humanitarian action, it can also be regarded as being in continuity with the major reforms that took place in the aftermath of the First World War”. For the first time there rose an international humanism, envisioned to be permanent, transnational and institutional, aimed at understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering. The treaty of Versailles in 1919 instigated the creation of international organisations to address humanitarian issues, and the League of Nations objective was to maintain world peace. Issues dealt with in the interwar period include the influenza epidemic of 1918, and the creation of an office to deal internationally with refugee problems led by former explorer Fridtjof Nansen (Davey et al., 2013)

The modern development project is often said to be rooted in the context of post-WWII and the Cold War, and to have begun with President Harry S. Truman’s inaugural address in 1949. In it he laid out his “Point Four Program”, a technical assistance program for developing countries:

[W]e must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to

more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people" (Truman, 1949).

The program followed in the footsteps of the Marshall Plan, which had successfully helped reconstruct Europe and strengthened its ties to the U.S. after the War. Iceland famously reaped benefits of the plan despite escaping the war largely unscathed (Gunnarsson, 1996).

After the Second World War, the humanitarian project expanded and changed. Humanitarian needs were perceived more globally, as the focus gradually shifted from helping Europeans in need to helping all people in need. Western charities had limited interactions with "the second world" – or the eastern bloc, so the people of the "third world" became the main object of the humanitarian system. The image of starving African children came to dominate Western conceptions of humanitarian aid. Concurrently decolonisation happened, creating a body of newly independent nations, which had a big impact on the development of aid. The Biafra famine in 1967-68 proved a formative experience for humanitarian NGOs, with Oxfam, CARE and a coalition of church agencies airlifting supplies despite the lack of official authorisation, thus proving the ability of the third sector to provide assistance in contexts where the UN or the ICRC could not. More recently the enterprise has been criticised for prolonging the Nigerian civil war and thus contributing to the deaths of thousands. Another formative experience was the severe 1970 cyclone in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), where the UNHCR was appointed a "focal point" for coordination of all UN assistance. This can be seen as a precursor to the UNs post-2005 cluster system. From these and many more experiences in conflict responses and natural disaster in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a global humanitarian system emerged. Understanding grew immensely in the period, and the action evolved rapidly as mistakes were made but progress as well, and efforts have been constantly refined up to this day. (Davey et al., 2013, p 10-11). Salm (1999) points out that globalisation has undoubtedly changed thinking on foreign relations and had an effect on the practices of the northern relief and development sector in the previous two decades. All but one of the organisations researched in this thesis have ties with larger INGOs, which shows the increasingly international environment they operate in. A much more thorough account could be written of how this process unfolded, but for our purposes this overview must suffice.

### **1.1.2 Definitions of Humanitarian Aid**

As Davey et al. (2013) point out, the meaning of the term “humanitarian” can vary and be slightly unclear. Its origins can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although it was only in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it gained the prominence and stature it currently has. Therefore a historical account of the use of the term becomes difficult. In its current context it has been defined as the “impartial, independent and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate danger of harm” (p. 2). International aid is generally divided into two broad categories; official development assistance and humanitarian assistance, sometimes called emergency aid. The primary purpose of humanitarian aid is considered to be to save lives, reduce suffering, under conditions that respect and maintain human dignity. It is most commonly associated with responses to natural or man-made disasters or complex humanitarian emergencies but could also be construed to mean aid to others in need such as the homeless. OCHAs financial tracking service has put together a definition of humanitarian aid for tracking purposes. The logline considers humanitarian aid “an intervention to help people who are victims of a natural disaster or conflict meet their basic needs and rights” (OCHA, 2004). In a 2008 glossary of humanitarian terms made by OCHAs specialised digital service Reliefweb, humanitarian assistance is defined as following:

Aid that seeks, to save lives and alleviate suffering of a crisis-affected population. Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. [...] In addition, the UN seeks to provide humanitarian assistance with full respect for the sovereignty of States. Assistance may be divided into three categories - direct assistance, indirect assistance and infrastructure support - which have diminishing degrees of contact with the affected population (Reliefweb, 2008).

Humanitarian aid is thereby differentiated from development aid, which consists of financial flows to developing countries with the long-term goal of economic stability, establishing infrastructures and a sustainable society in mind. To qualify for receiving ODA, countries need to be thusly classified by DAC. But the divide between the two is not as simple as it seems, witnessed by the fact that all of the Icelandic NGOs this thesis studies do both in some capacity, and many have what are considered development projects as their

main priority. Furthermore in practice, the question of when the emergency ends and the humanitarian aid transitions into development aid is a difficult one. As Fink and Redaelli (2010) observe, emergencies like civil wars and draughts can last for months, if not years, and it is not clear how medical facilities established during such events can be distinguished from generic investment into health infrastructure typically a part of ODA programs (p. 742).

The IFRC defines a “disaster” as “a sudden, calamitous event that seriously disrupts the functioning of a community or society and causes human, material, and economic or environmental losses that exceed the community’s or society’s ability to cope using its own resources. Though often caused by nature, disasters can have human origins” (IFRC, 2012). Verchick (2012) points out the difficulty to differentiate between natural disasters and others, with some claiming no disasters are completely natural. He adds that in his view a natural disaster is a calamitous event that is triggered at least in part by a natural force—an earthquake, a flood, a hurricane or a drought.

A paragraph will be spared to discuss the categorisation of states that has followed the development project, and its humanitarian ventures from beginning. “The Third World” is a concept once commonly used to differentiate those countries receiving aid from the ones giving it. Its roots can be traced back to the French revolution, when there were three recognised social classes defined, the first two being tax exempt clergy and noblemen, the third being everyone else (Einarsdóttir and Sigurðardóttir, 2007). The term became popular during the cold war, as a way to describe countries that were neither aligned with NATO or the Communist bloc. Those countries happened to cover most of Africa, South-America, and Southern Asia, and were considered to be on an economic periphery, as they were largely ex-colonial and newly independent. Other collective descriptions of these countries have been “the south”, “the less developed world” and “developing countries” – as opposed to the “developed” countries of the western world. Tomlinson (2003, p. 307-308) argues that such denominators were more about what those places were not, rather than what they were. Differences between various countries in size, political ideologies, social structures and economic performance, to name a few factors, could vary greatly. While the academic use of these classifications are less common, they remain present in the public discourse. A more practical terminology more often used today in the development sector is the categorisation of countries into low-income, middle-income, and high-income economies.



These definitions originated with the World Bank, and are calculated regularly using the so called Atlas Method, and are currently the most prominent within the development sector (World Bank, 2015). All these terms can have negative connotations in certain contexts but will be referred to in this thesis as they, especially income categorisation, are a part of the discourse of development and humanitarian aid.

### **1.1.3 Humanitarian Actors**

The actors that participate in the global humanitarian aid process can broadly be categorised into States, Intergovernmental agencies and NGOs, which are the main topic of this thesis. In the reading material I came across, the international Red Cross / Red Crescent movement was often categorised separately from other NGOs which demonstrates their prominence in the field. For this thesis' purposes the Red Cross is considered an NGO, albeit a large one, as here in Iceland it receives humanitarian aid from the same MFA fund as the others.

A Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) is a term that describes what its content is not, rather than what it is. NGOs are by nature, not run by governments, and as organisations are not conventional for-profit businesses. They are difficult to define as their structures and operations can differentiate greatly, they may be political, religious or even revolve around hobbies. They tend to be better suited than businesses to deal with long-term goals and difficult subjects such as environmental issues, civil rights struggles, or indeed development and humanitarian projects. The concept can be traced back to the founding of the United Nations in 1945, itself an intergovernmental organisation, which granted "specialised non-state agencies" observer status in its assemblies. Since then the concept has been used regularly, but not always consistently. Vakil (1997) confronts the classification problem that has followed the concept of NGOs (and the similar and sometimes interchangeable terms Community Based Organisations, Non-profit Organisations, Civil Society Organisations and Private Volunteer Organisations). She forms a framework of essential- and contingent descriptors, and suggests classifying organisations by these attributes. She names orientation and level of operation as essential descriptors; contingent descriptors include sectoral focus (health, agriculture, etc.), and evaluative factors. Vakil claims that a deeper understanding of the concept would be beneficial to the organisations in achieving what many of them consider their primary goals: improving the quality of life for the vast majority

of the worlds' peoples (p. 2068). Certainly the NGOs being researched in this thesis show great variety despite working in the same relatively small field.

Interestingly, NGOs are increasingly being funded by governments, a fact which strains the definition further, as the original ethos of the concept included financial and organisational independence from the government. Macrae (1996) points out that many NGOs ways of working have evolved and they now play integral roles in the complex system of international assistance, which also includes official national development agencies, and the various intergovernmental UN-agencies. Shortly before her writing, the voluntary Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements and NGOs in Disaster Relief had been developed (more on that later). Macrae mentions that as an important step in identifying the role and place of the NGO in the humanitarian sector, as there is a fear that "if a significant proportion of their income comes from official government channels, NGOs will resemble more an instrument of foreign policy and less a force for change and advocacy" (p. 19). It is worth noting that following this pattern Icelandic authorities did not start collaborating substantially with NGOs on humanitarian projects until the late 1990s, and are now a major contributor to their projects. In report made for the MFA in 2003, it is stated that while no numbers are kept on the development- and humanitarian aid of NGOs, according to the authors' loose calculations, they gave 300 million ISK to aid projects in 1999 and 2000, and about 320 million ISK in 2001. These funds, they say, were almost exclusively gathered by the NGOs themselves; as the funds allocated to NGOs by the MFA in these years varied from five to 20 million ISK (Ingólfsson and Haralz, 2003, p. 37).

At this juncture it should also be made clear that the UN itself runs various agencies committed to development and humanitarian issues such as The UNs Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), The UNs Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The World Food Program (WFP) to name a few. They are, of course, intergovernmental organisations, and not NGOs. The distinction however is not always clear to average citizens, as in Iceland UNICEFs and UN Women's operations and awareness levels seem similar to those of the Red Cross or the Church Aid. UNICEF for example, relies exclusively on donations to fund their projects, and does not receive grants directly from the UN. They are still excluded from applying to the humanitarian fund this

research covers, as that is reserved for Icelandic NGOs. However, the government of Iceland works extensively through other means with the UN agencies when it comes to humanitarian aid, often contributing directly to them in times of urgent need.<sup>1</sup> This way of contributing precedes the states relatively recent cooperation with the local humanitarian NGOs. The larger INGOs themselves also cooperate with the IGOs, and even have specific roles to play within the UNs coordination strategies.

It is worth taking note of the UN Cluster System that currently coordinates most major humanitarian aid initiatives. Kovács and Spens (2011) suggest that after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, outcries over poor logistics of the humanitarian efforts showed a clear need for inter-agency coordination, which resulted in the UNHRs establishment of topical clusters for NGOs alongside UN agencies. The challenge lay in the saying that “everybody wants coordination, but nobody wants to be coordinated” (p. 34). Balcik et al. (2010) note that the humanitarian relief environment has a variety of actors, with different missions, interests, capacities and experiences, and feel that while the cluster system was a positive implementation, coordination in humanitarian relief has a long way to go. The UN cluster system mainly divides tasks among the UNs own intergovernmental organisations, but also includes prominent NGOs, such as Save the Children in the category of education. While for reasons of impartiality the Red Cross chooses not to participate in it, in most cases it works right alongside it.

## **1.2 Ethics in Humanitarian Aid**

Looking over the field of ethical questions faced by humanitarian aid, it becomes clear that many and quite different issues spring up around that discussion. Questions like how medical services should be triaged during an emergency; the difference between offering a helping hand as a way towards rightfulness or solely meant as an act of good will. Why should states interfere with each other in the first place? How do Codes of Conduct affect the inner workings of NGOs? How should unavoidable ethical dilemmas be dealt with and looked at? What about the obvious fact that the heaviest burden of disasters tends to fall on

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Iceland, for example, has a funding contract with the Icelandic State, in 2014 it received 183 million ISK for various projects (Unicef, 2014).

the weakest members of society? Can the responsibility for suffering in some cases be placed with those who let the situation of the most impoverished grow out of hand? In this overview there is no room to properly present the nuances of those questions, let alone attempt to give a satisfying answer to them. They are brought up simply for appreciation of how vast even this seemingly fairly limited topic proved to be.

### **1.2.1 Justice and Fault**

According to Geale (2012) ethical enquiry can be divided into three categories; meta-ethics look for the nature and origins of ethical valuing and asks where these laws come from. Normative ethics are more practical and deal with finding ethical standards to regulate our behaviour. Applied ethics involve looking at specific hard cases that require an ethical interpretation. All these can be applied to humanitarian aid, we need to define right and wrong, how those definitions can be applied on the field, and finally evaluate the merit of ethical decisions made in emergency situations (p. 446). This chapter is devoted to looking over the vast field of ethics in humanitarian aid, while an attempt will be made to hone in on issues relevant to the subject.

Allen (2013) is interested in the term “justice” and how it can be applied to natural disasters, aid and reconstruction work. She finds that justice too often remains undefined in environmental literature, becoming an intuitive expression to be figured out by each reader. In her article on gentrification and rebuilding of two heavily damaged poor and minority neighbourhoods in post-Katrina New Orleans, she avoids falling into the same trap, by making an overview on contemporary ideas of justice, and how it is expressed in the policies and works of NGOs. She quotes the American philosopher John Rawls, who coined the term *distributive justice*. He assumed the qualities of justice were universal and untied to culture, and that official agencies must remain neutral and objective for justice to have its way. Allen ends up recommending justice as measured by *capability*, the term made famous by the development economist Amartya Sen. The approach uses the capability to live a life you find worth it as a measurement for justice. In a multicultural world care is taken not to define that life, but leave it open for the individuals’ interpretation. It is not a one-size-fits-all theory for a perfect society, but a toolbox of ethical ideas to use for change (Allen, 2013).

Slim (1997) discusses the ethical side of the presence of NGOs in the disaster situation, where dilemmas can arise. What kind of responsibility can we lay on their shoulders?

Mistakes will inevitably be made, but sight must not be lost of the fact that humanitarian agents are responding to the violence of others, and the morally difficult decisions they must take often arise because of immoral decisions others took previously. Blame should be placed where it belongs. He writes in a time where field workers and their agencies are increasingly in spots of civil war or political unrest, and have had to review the ethical component of their operations. Even though the extensive international ethical codes are ever present in humanitarian NGOs line of work, decisions are often made in essentially lawless circumstances. They can face situations where a choice needs to be made between two bad options, and where ethical codes conflict, which constitutes a true dilemma in Slims opinion. Decision making seems simpler for single-mandate NGOs, e.g. to save lives. Most NGOs however have multiple mandates, human rights, justice, safety of staff etc. A divide can occur in the prioritization between humanitarianism and human rights. He advocates for two factors necessary in this work, deliberation and mitigation. Do not make rash decisions, and do everything possible to reduce harm, no matter how trivial (Slim, 1997).

### **1.2.2 Codes of Conduct**

Bearing witness to the changing and expanding role of the NGO in the 80s and 90s is the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, which was developed and agreed upon by eight of the world's largest disaster response agencies in the summer of 1994. It came into effect in 1995, and has as of writing been ratified by 565 NGOs (IFRC, 2015). It is voluntary and establishes ten principles which humanitarian actors should follow in their work. They are both classic humanitarian values like humanitarianism, independence and impartiality, as well as more recent values from the experience of development projects; accountability, cooperation, participation and sustainability. It goes on to describe how agencies should interact with donors, host governments and the UN system. Hilhorst (2005) suggests that a large incentive for the code was the failure the humanitarian community faced after the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In addition, public mistrust of the projects and practices of the development sector had grown in the 80s and early 90s. Before the codes existence every organization held their own values up as guiding lights, but there was no common principle of what constituted as good humanitarian aid. Looking back a decade later, Hilhorst polled employees of NGOs to see whether the code had any practical role to play, and found it motivates people but could be

integrated better into the daily routine, reports and such. Also she found the code too centred on INGOs, with small local NGOs having less material to connect to. Her review underlies the importance of a moral basis of any NGO to be set in advance, not rustled up afterwards (Hilhorst 2005). In the list of signatories none of the Icelandic NGOs researched can be found themselves, but excepting one they all have international partners whose names are found.

The aforementioned Geale (2012) believes a central issue in humanitarian aid is *how* funds are spent, rather than the more obvious question of how funding is obtained. Millions of US Dollars are spent on salary, per-diems and travel costs for experts, and almost all such expenditure ultimately goes back to the country that sent it. Geale dives into a discussion on how one should calculate fair allocation of relief funds after a disaster to help with recovery. What is the best way to spend the aid funding? Who deserves it the most and how can that be calculated? Different values pull in different directions. The utilitarian approach would be to divide funds so that it does the greatest good for the highest numbers. A rights-based approach would be to treat everyone equally. The fairness approach would entail those who lost the most getting the highest compensation, but they tend to be the people that owned the most before. Every one of those models has flaws.

Geale (2012) brings up the fact that humanity seems to be entering an age of increasing disasters; the numbers go up year by year. Weather-related disasters have quadrupled over the last 30 years compared to the previous 75 years (p. 454). Of course money must be spent to react to disasters when they happen, and the lives of those affected must be restored. But, Geale argues, perhaps the most ethical thing would be to spend money preparing for them in advance, with good planning and preventive measures much could be averted.

### **1.2.3 Where does the Responsibility Lie?**

A common theme in the literature on humanitarian aid is the question of where to lay the blame for the damages disasters can cause. What was the real cause for the misery in the situation? That in turns raises questions on what the correct preventive measures should have been, and how the aftermath is best dealt with.

Daniels and Trebilcock (2006) present an overview of rationales considering the responsibility of States before and after disasters. *Libertarians* would prefer as little

government interference as possible, people should be responsible for themselves. No restrictions like zoning laws or building codes should be made and the government could not be held accountable for where people built their homes. This way, states (and regions) competed with each other, offered different solutions, and people would move where it thought best. A *corrective justice* approach would suggest that the state should pay compensation for neglect in advance of a disaster. A *utilitarianist* would ask if States should correct the mistakes of the free market – when the poor gather in danger zones because of low living costs – by minimizing the danger of disasters? Or would the introduction of strict building regulations simply drive the poor from their homes? Would it be more efficient if states simply subsidise preventive measures to private companies? Can the market handle insurance in potential disaster areas? A *distributive justice* perspective would assign overriding weight to public policies benefitting the least advantaged of society.

Opinions are diverse on these issues, and Daniels and Trebilcock (2006) point out that political opportunism has a chance to thrive in such circumstances. To them it is clear the libertarian perspective is unrealistic, while a *communitarian* one, insisting on completely preserving and reconstituting pre-existing communities after recurrent disasters also seems too farfetched. The focus should be on the cost-effectiveness of various interventions, in light of utilitarianism, corrective justice and distributive justice. While they write of a state dealing with internal issues, these questions of ethical standpoints also apply when international agencies and NGOs get involved (Daniels and Trebilcock, 2006).

Verchick (2012) working with a similar theme as Daniels and Trebilcock, asks what just expectations can be put on the authorities in preventive measures before disasters. He starts with the question: should a disaster be considered an injustice or a misfortune? For it to be an injustice, someone must have been responsible for it. The heaviest burdens of disasters inevitably fall on the weakest members of society, the elderly, the disabled, children, women and the poor. In 2011 earthquake in Japan, 65% of the fallen were over the age of 60. Examples show that societal structures meant to hinder discrimination are damaged in disasters. Is it a matter of justice that states spend money lessening inequalities to prematurely dampen the effects of disasters? It becomes a hard task finding the line between reasonable expectations and reverie. Verchick uses the aforementioned term *capability* coined by Amartya Sen. It entails that everyone has opportunity to use their skills

to live a life they value greatly. Personal freedom is considered societies basic building block, but freedom without resources to make real choices and experience real consequences is an empty shell. True freedom means leading a life you value and have a reason to value, this includes being able to avoid deprivations. Verchick therefore finds the state responsible for trying to decrease social vulnerability and increasing resiliency.

Verchick (2012) mentions compensation funds that states put up in the aftermaths of disasters to provide the victims and their next of kin compensation. The funds are an expression of the reliability of government, their role is to fix damages as soon as possible, but also to save governments from getting sued. That indicates a quiet admission that the risk could have been lessened on the states part. The compensation funds make no distinction between the vulnerable and others, but should matter the most for those in most need. The most famous example of such funds was in the aftermath of 9/11, but there are many more examples of events that shook the United States. Verchick finds it incredible that no such fund was put up in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. His theory is that was because the victims were already the poor and marginal, on the periphery of society, and did not have the means to organise and litigate the way 9/11 survivors could, who were educated, rich, and still had their houses (Verchick, 2012). Naomi Zack (2009) also compares Hurricane Katrina to 9/11 and takes an example of the different treatment of body parts. In New York care was taken not to create a media fuss, firemen worked around the clock stowing the remains into containers draped with the US flag. In New Orleans images of bodies lying and swelling in the water for days were broadcast. While the lines of race and class certainly do not align completely, she finds the different responses an example of institutional racism; where individuals of minorities come to harm in their encounters with NGOs or institutes, without a single person ever meaning to cause it. The concepts of race and otherness are certainly something that affects the international humanitarian aid as well (Zack, 2009).

Laura Valentini (2013) asks the question of when we help a person affected by natural disaster, is it out of justice or only out of charity? Looking at different ethical perspectives to form an opinion upon, Valentini settles on what she calls the Autonomy View; "An agent is under a duty of justice *if and only if* she has the ability to refrain from undermining the necessary conditions for others to lead autonomous lives"(p. 496). She compares the three



earthquakes of New Zealand, Japan and Haiti. She finds not every natural disaster is a mark of injustice, clearly in the case of New Zealand the duty to help is only out of charity. But in the case of Haiti the Western world has a duty of justice to help – as they caused a big part of the injustice themselves, which the earthquake only added to. Haiti was made poor, largely by western countries. The responsibility is theirs, and it is one based on justice. The country's tragedy stems from the failure of others not to undermine Haiti's independence (Valentini, 2013).

In a discussion of medical Triage in disaster settings Báez et al. make an interesting argument. They propose changes to the most common system (called START), and in the process point out that this is not something we can start discussing in the field each time. These are ethical decisions that need to have been thought out in advance, with as many participants as possible, and not just within the medical sector. The society needs to take part in a measured debate. This is an argument to be taken in a wider context than just on medical triage systems (Báez et al., 2006).

### **1.3 The Allocation of Humanitarian Aid**

Much has been written on the allocation of humanitarian aid, mainly in the context of where states send their support and why. Even though this thesis focuses on the decisions of (state supported) NGOs, it is worthwhile to note which factors have been found to influence these kinds of decisions. It is necessary to be aware of possible shortcomings in any given practice, and a number of scholars referenced here have analysed some of its weakest points, hopefully contributing to the improvement of future humanitarian aid. The matter can be looked at in a variety of ways. What determines where money meant for humanitarian aid goes? Which factors determine the amount of aid sent? Are they the same ones? Which disasters get international attention and which do not? Is there a difference in behaviour between donor states? Do NGOs or INGOs behave differently from states? These and other likeminded questions will be given attention in this chapter.

#### **1.3.1 Which Factors Influence where Aid is Allocated?**

Drury, Olson and Van Belle (2005) describe the process of official humanitarian aid in the USA, pointing out that previous studies on military aid and development assistance have shown that there are clear domestic and international political factors that influence its allocation. They find there is a greater tendency to assume humanitarian aid and especially

disaster assistance is, as advertised, purely driven by humanitarian factors and can be considered non-political. Their findings on the other hand suggest that foreign policy and internal factors are the driving force of humanitarian aid. Their analysis points toward the first “yes or no” decision being clearly politically motivated, while the latter decision of “how much” is also affected, mainly by the current state of the national budget. It is interesting to note that they excluded complex humanitarian emergencies such as Sudan or Rwanda from their calculations, to see the influence politics would have in the *least* political situations (p. 460). They describe the process aid goes through; ambassadors, diplomats, the OFDA and sometimes elected representatives. The President has final say but rarely interferes. The three biggest issues that affect the decision whether or not to offer aid are US foreign policy, doubts of the receiving state, and finally US domestic matters. Allies of the US were assisted in medium sized crises, others only in the most severe cases.

Regarding the former decision, whether the government of the receiving country was democratic or not did not seem to have a substantial effect. Rich countries got aid more seldom than poor ones. In a year of a tight national budget, lesser amounts were given. The OFDA is not formally bound by it, but seems to follow “hints” given by the senate. The amount and scale of catastrophes at home reduced the likelihood of aid given to others. The quantity of deceased after a crisis did not affect the decisions, but the number of people who lost their homes seemed to (Drury et al., p. 467).

The magnitude of news coverage did not seem to have a deciding effect on whether aid was given or not, but seemed to play an important role in the decision of how much aid was allocated. For each news item, on average, the amount increased by half a million dollars (Drury et al., p. 496). Looking at the internal process, Drury et al. found politics had a much greater sway on the first decision, but the OFDA employees had more control of the second one. This shows that while the image of humanitarian aid is often that it is “purer” than other aid, at least in the US it does not seem free of the political agenda of the hour.

Fink and Redaelli (2010) examine the bandwagon-effect that seems to happen within the five largest donor countries, the USA, Britain, Norway, Japan and Germany. They used a sample of 270 natural disasters from the years 1992-2004 to assess how systematically the need for aid can be reflected in the global flow of aid. They show that on average donor states are more generous to geographically close, politically less affine, oil-exporting

countries. They also find a significant bias towards former colonies and evidence towards hoarding in the international aid system. The amount of bias is different between donor states, but suggest that political factors are at least as important in emergency aid as the actual humanitarian need. From a policy perspective, they thusly find governments to behave sub-optimally. Nevertheless, they also mention that developments in the international political sphere indicate that at least some countries have acknowledged the need for reforms in the allocation of humanitarian aid. In 2003, 16 major donors gathered their strength for the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, its aim to help their efficiency and credibility. Similarly, then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan unveiled CERF (The Central Emergency Response Fund) in 2006, as a measure to provide instant and impartial humanitarian aid. They conclude by declaring both initiatives' steps in the right direction (2010, p. 754).

Nelson (2012) looks at other donor states, 22 members of the OECDs DAC. He finds that disaster relief less politically driven than aid in general, as the severity of the shock and the economic situation of the receiving country are the key factors that seem to influence decision making. It is worth noting Nelsons usage of the terms around aid, which he says can sometimes be unclear in the discourse, as the more general foreign aid can sometime be taken to mean humanitarian aid. He considers the concept foreign aid to encompass "military aid", and aid that has other goals as well. Humanitarian aid is another subcategory. He considers "disaster aid", which he focuses on, a subcategory of Humanitarian aid, but mentions the DAC uses the wider term Emergency aid for bilateral assistance that is not aimed at economic advantages.

Is disaster aid solely given for "humanitarian reasons", or do politics play a role? Nelson (2012) analyses the period from 1997 - 2008 and finds that there is a distinct difference between humanitarian aid in general and aid given to states recovering from serious catastrophes, natural or man-made. He finds the allocation of disaster aid mainly driven by the severity of the disaster itself as well as the economic situation of the country in question. The humanism is dampened by several factors though, trade, colonial history, alliances and topographical position being among them. For example, the US and the UK gave markedly more to nations from the so called "coalition of the willing" from the Iraqi invasion. How

votes were cast in the International Whaling Commission influenced Japanese aid (p. 111). The Nordic Countries have the strongest tendency to follow purely humanitarian reasons.

Nelson (2012) lays out an overview of nine hypotheses he concludes might be factors in aid allocation. The first three have to do with the needs of the receiving country. Firstly, the more impact a natural disaster has, the more likely the country is to receive aid. Secondly, donor states are likely to give aid in response to political emergencies. Thirdly, the more wealth the affected country has, the less aid it can expect to receive. The latter hypotheses have to do with donor interest. Economic interests include trade relations and the importance of oil to the donor state. Strategic and military interests include alliances, colonial history, simple geographic distance, and the type of regime in the recipient state. He tested those hypotheses using regression models. The first three receiver oriented hypotheses showed strong significance. The economic interest hypotheses also seemed consistent, but oil-production never measured as a positive factor for donors. The strategic interest hypotheses had mixed results. His key finding is that disaster aid is different, although humanitarian aid is sometimes accused of being bereft of humanitarianism; the more specific category of disaster aid seems indeed driven by humanitarian concerns.

### **1.3.2 How is Aid Delivered and How Much is Given?**

In a Danish study from 2003, Carstensen, Høyen and Olsen (2003) make comparisons between disasters to find which factors seem to influence the magnitude of humanitarian assistance. They are able to identify three particular factors; the political interest of the donor state in the area, the strength of NGOs and the UNs institutes in the area, and occasionally, the amount of media attention (which they say previously was believed to be a much greater factor). The countries and disasters they picked were not at random, but to provide variety.

First they compared a hurricane in India in 1999 to Mozambique floods in 2000. The media attention was fivefold in Mozambique, which also received seven times more assistance. More died and were affected in India. They theorise that a contributor could be that the cameras got immediate access in Mozambique, but not until five days later in India (p.115). It could also be argued though, that India (a middle-income country) was better equipped to deal with the situation than Mozambique (a low-income country), as in recent

years it has begun to assert itself as a donor country rather than receiver of aid (Chanana, 2009).

Next Carstensen et al. compared the emergency in Kosovo to the Sudan and Angola, both considered complex humanitarian crises. Ten times more was written on Kosovo in Danish media than the African countries combined, and the aid figures showed a clear correlation with the media attention in these cases. Of course, proximity to the EU, with security concerns etc. is probably an important factor in the difference (p. 117). Interestingly, North Korea received double the aid that Sudan and Angola did in the years 1997-2001, despite as low media attention. They speculate it is because of security concerns, famine in the “last communist state” could upset a balance, send millions of refugees to neighbouring states or the nuclear weapons they are suspected of having. Finally they mention the then fresh Afghanistan invasion and the flow of aid that follows as an example of security interest of donor countries clearly having a great impact on allocation. These examples, they find, support their ground theory of three factors that influence allocation. They are differently applicable to different scenarios, but seem to be equally important. The “CNN effect” seems at the least to have been overstated. (Carstensen et al. 2003)

An interesting point was to be found in Francken, Minten and Swinnen (2012), a smaller scale study of the response to hurricane Gafilo on Madagascar in 2004. Madagascar is a low income country, where almost half of children under the age of five are undernourished. In the aftermath of Gafilo 214.260 people lost their homes. Francken et al. compared amongst other things the assistance given by the government and the assistance by humanitarian NGOs, many of whom were already in place before the emergency. No coordination existed between the two in the effort except an unofficial pact to try to avoid duplication of work. Their comparison included details of how much aid various Madagascar communes received, including variables like previous wealth, damage done, support of the current government and easy access to the community. They found media and political factors had less effect on NGOs than the government, while NGOs were also likelier to work in easy-access poor communes, which were not necessarily very affected by the hurricane. Over all, easy access territories that were not affected received aid, while hard to access affected areas did not to the same extent.

Raschky and Schwindt (2011) look at how aid is delivered, and why donors prefer certain methods over others. Is aid mainly sent through multilateral agencies or bilateral contact? Is money sent directly or is aid sent in kind? They apply a dataset of international post-disaster assistance between 2000 and 2007. It includes information on the channel and type of aid. The results indicate that donor interest seems important in the decision in what kind of aid is given, and how it is delivered, along with institutional quality and the humanitarian aspects themselves. If an emergency is simple, it is likelier that the country will receive a direct cash transfer (i.e. if the administration is working efficiently). The odds of receiving cash also increase if the receiver does business with the donor country, or has a political stake. Even though donors say need and merit are the only variables in deciding *where* and *how much* aid is sent, their own interest can be found in the decision *how* it is sent (Raschky and Schwindt, 2011).

## **2 SETTING**

This researches field consists first and foremost of five Icelandic humanitarian NGOs and their relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), along with their connections to larger INGOs. Many of them are quite small, but most have various ties to larger international umbrella-organisations. These NGOs operate in quite different ways and have different thematic emphases. Some specialise in humanitarian aid, some only engage in it as an extension of their development projects, while others mostly focus on domestic projects, but engage in humanitarian aid on a small scale through their international connections. What they have in common is being eligible to apply for funds from MFA for humanitarian aid. The MFA has a Code of Practice (Icelandic: verklagsreglur) that dictates when and how funds are allocated from the government for humanitarian aid. This chapter will look briefly at the history of Icelandic humanitarianism, introduce the application rules of the MFA the NGOs work under, and finally introduce each of the five NGOs looked at.

### **2.1 Humanitarianism in Iceland Through the Years**

In Iceland NGOs have operated in the domestic aid business since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is an interesting social dynamic of helping those in need, which concepts like class, gender, ability and race can play a role in uncovering, and can partly be seen in the early history of Icelandic charities. As Rice (2007) summarises, Iceland was initially settled in the 800s as a free state, but became a subordinate of first Norway and then Denmark for centuries from the 1260s. It was an agrarian society, with most of the population living on farms raising sheep, towns being rare. Throughout much of the nation's history, poor relief was a secular concern in the hands of the parish (Ice: hreppur). If families could not sustain themselves they were broken up and divided among farms whose owners received compensation for the trouble. This remained relatively unchanged until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when conjoining Iceland's resurgent claim for independence and the increased formation of fishery towns, charitable NGOs began to form. Their aims initially were very much focused on helping the poor at home.

Icelanders were granted freedom of association with King Christian's IX new constitution in 1874. In the first years it was mostly utilised by the upper-class. The Thorvaldsen's Society (Ice: Thorvaldsenfélagið) was one of the first NGOs formed, founded in 1875, and focused on assisting children and later raising funds for hospitals. It was mostly run by young upper class women (Guðmundsdóttir, 2000). Charity was linked with women in this era, perhaps as they were devoid of rights such as the vote it provided them a certain voice in society. Soon after, NGOs such as the Salvation Army and the Red Cross found their feet here. The White Ribbon (Ice: Hvítabandið) focused on providing nursing care and The Mother's Support Committee (Ice: Mæðrastyrksnefnd) was instigated after a shipwreck left 35 children fatherless in 1928. It initially fought for reforms benefitting single mothers, soon becoming more traditional charity, accepting and distributing donations (Rice, 2007, 1-4). Also founded in 1928 was the lifesaving association of Iceland (Ice: Slysavarnafélag Íslands), its purpose was at first to combat accidents at sea, and install rescue equipment (Arnalds, 2001). The associations successor (Ice: Slysavarnafélagið Landsbjörg) notably runs an international rubble rescue unit, which for example responded to the Haiti earthquake in 2010.

An early example of foreign aid in Iceland was when the Nordic Society and "Normanslaget" (The society of Norwegians in Iceland) sold badges and collected over 6000 kr. to support Norwegian refugees in WWII. Packages with warm clothing and foodstuff were also sent until 1945 through Sweden and Finland (Blumenstein, 2015). In 1939 there were great earthquakes in Chile, and for the first time the Icelandic Red Cross tried to raise funds for the emergency. The board was disappointed with the results, only \$100 was sent from Iceland. The disappointment, as well as difficulty transferring the money, meant international emergency aid did not rank highly on its priority lists in the decades to come. It did however participate in fundraisers for both Finland and Norway in WWII, with the clear caveat that it was neutral in the war effort, and could not endorse support of Norway's resistance fighters, as other parties were keen to do (Guðmundsdóttir, 2000).

## **2.2 Humanitarian Aid and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

It is important to note the cooperation between the Icelandic government and the NGOs is not mutually exclusive. As the MFAs website states, the Icelandic government contributes to emergency response and humanitarian assistance through various UN agencies. The most



important are considered: the WFP which operates in the main disaster areas in the world, CERF which enables immediate response in emergency situations and OCHA which coordinates humanitarian actions and actors. The MFA has also supported the ISAF Emergency Fund for Afghanistan. Mentioned as well are UNHCR, OCHA and UNICEF (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Interviewees made it clear that this was until the early 2000s practically the only outlet for the Icelandic Government to engage in humanitarian aid, and is still a primary one. The NGOs also engage to a various extent in humanitarian aid on their own, using their own spare funds and occasionally spearheading fundraising campaigns for specific emergencies.

The Icelandic state does not have a lengthy history of contributing to development aid. The Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) was founded in 1981, and had its roots in a ten year old parliamentary project named “The assistance of Iceland to developing countries”<sup>2</sup>. In 1970 the UNs General Assembly agreed that by the mid-70s the industrial states should contribute 0.7% of their GNP to development aid. This goal was never reached in the majority of countries including Iceland, despite a law being set in 1970 expressing that the donation should reach this percentage. In 1985 it was still 0.05%, and was at the highest 0.12% in 1992 (Ingólfsson and Haralz, 2003). According to the MFA, Iceland’s contribution rose significantly during the 2000s, topping at 0.37 % in 2008. Because of the subsequent economic crisis it was scaled back to 0.21 % in the following years. In the MFAs most recent plan for the international development cooperation of Iceland<sup>3</sup>, it is stated that the Icelandic government supports the UNs goal that industrial countries should spend 0.7% GNP on global development, and that in 2019 Iceland should achieve this goal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). However it is worth noting there has been a regime change since the plan was announced, and it is uncertain whether it will actually come through this time.

The current Code of Practice of the MFA concerning its cooperation with NGOs was set in 2012, and is largely similar to its predecessor from 2009, which is when the system of two

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<sup>2</sup> Ice: Aðstoð Íslands við þróunarlöndin

<sup>3</sup> Ice: Áætlun um alþjóðlega þróunarsamvinnu Íslands 2013-2016

application windows a year was established. A new code is being worked on that will make more drastic changes should it be approved, a sign of the rapid improvements in the field.

The recollection about the process of cooperating with NGOs with regards to humanitarian and development aid before 2009 seemed to be hazy to many of the interviewees. There was not a Code of Practice in any comparable details to the current one, many felt lobbying reigned supreme in the early 2000s, and that personal connection with people in the MFA was one of the key ways to ensure funding. It should be noted though, that the notion of the State collaborating with NGOs in the context of humanitarian and development aid did not really enter the realm of possibility until shortly before the millennium.

In my research I chose to focus on the period from 2009 to the present day, the time the current system structure has been going on. In the document “Code of Practice for cooperation between the MFA and NGOs because of emergency- and humanitarian aid”<sup>4</sup> from 2009, it is stated that the MFA aims for splitting their contributions to humanitarian aid in half, on the one hand to UN agencies and on the other hand to NGOs. The rules define two categories of humanitarian aid, for prolonged emergencies and sudden catastrophes. For the prolonged situations the MFA opened two application windows a year. According to the rules, the main objectives of humanitarian aid are to save lives, reduce suffering of the victims of natural disasters, war, or other catastrophes. Millions suffer because of draughts, floods, disease, hunger, poverty around the world, but primarily in poor countries. Important as well is to make societies stronger, more developed and sustainable (p. 1-3).

This Code was replaced with an improved one from 2012, called “Code of Practice for the Cooperation of the MFA and ICEIDA with Non-Governmental Organisations working internationally with humanitarian- and development aid”<sup>5</sup> As the title suggests it is more

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<sup>4</sup> Ice: Verklagsreglur samstarfs utanríkisráðuneytisins við frjáls félagasamtök vegna neyðar- og mannúðaraðstoðar

<sup>5</sup> Ice: Verklagsreglur um samstarf utanríkisráðuneytisins og þróunarsamvinnustofnunar Íslands við frjáls félagasamtök sem starfa að þróunarsamvinnu, mannúðarstörfum og neyðaraðstoð á alþjóðavettvangi

involving than the previous one, dealing with ICEIDA and development aid of NGOs as well as humanitarian aid.

The third chapter of the 2012 Code defines what criteria NGOs must meet to be eligible to apply for support from the MFA. NGOs should be legally registered in Iceland, Non-profits, and have operated for at least two years. They must have at least 30 members or supporters. They must have set their own laws, have a board and a chairman of the board. They must have put forth annual financial statements certified by a chartered accountant for the past two years. They must have experience working in third world states, or have close cooperation with domestic or international organizations that do. They must set democracy, human rights, and equal opportunities as a guiding light in their fieldwork (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p. 4).

Along with a filled out application form the NGOs must provide the following documents: Information on the NGO and any co-operators, a detailed description of the project including timeframe, budget and logical framework and finally, a report on practices and methods of the NGO, including information on preparation, execution and supervision. Information that the MFA only needs to be sent once, unless any of it changes, is as follows: a list of names of board members, confirmation of the legal registration of the NGO, a copy of the laws of the organization, an overview of the projects and emphasis of the NGO, which countries it operates in and in what capacity, and the annual report and the annual financial statement from last (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p. 4).

The code says the goals of humanitarian aid are to save lives, reduce suffering of those in distress, and keep up a human dignity in the area of emergency, whether it was caused by human beings or nature. The operations should focus on the protection of citizens, rebuilding of communities, and providing food, water, sanitation facilities and health care. It should work for strengthening bulwarks and preparations for catastrophes, natural disaster and war. Whenever possible, refugees are enabled to return to their homes. The criteria upon which applications will be reviewed are listed as follows:

- That the assistance is granted in order to reduce human suffering and reaches those in need
- That local knowledge is used if possible

- That the aid is impartial, needs-based and non-discriminatory on race, ethnicity, faith, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, nationality and political views.
  - That locals and other donors are consulted to prevent project overlaps
  - How the knowledge and experience of the NGO is used to execute the project
  - The agreement of local authorities, wherever possible
  - Other humanitarian aid in the country
  - OCHA distress calls
  - Yearly appeals of the ICRC
  - The project quality (goals, yield, operations, timeframe, management, costs)
  - Cooperation with institutions, NGOs and locals
  - Recognised international practices in surveillance and assessment
- (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p.4).

Written contracts are made for all projects, and they entail details of how funds are granted, how they should be treated, reports, appraisals, access to information, and a resignation clause. Final reports should be delivered six months after the project ends; if projects take more than a year, status reports should be made yearly. Any difficulties should be reported on immediately. The MFA reserves the right not to review applications from recipients that have failed to abide these terms on previous projects.

In the case of sudden catastrophes and emergencies, if NGOs request support from the MFA, the department of development aid (Ice: Þróunarsamvinnusvið) reviews the requests and suggests a response to the Minister. If the Minister decides to allocate grants, NGOs are notified of the total amount meant for the situation, the percentage meant for NGOs, and the application deadline for these grants. The applications should be appraised as quickly as possible. The MFA grant can cover 90% of the projected total costs of the NGOs project. Slightly different factors are used to evaluate the application, listed here:

- The aid should be impartial, needs-based, and non-discriminatory on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, nationality or political opinions
- Emergency appeals from the UN, ICRC and IFRC.
- Whether the state in question has asked for the help of others
- The ability of the locals to respond to the emergency themselves

- Whether others have declared their assistance to the state
- The NGOs experience and knowledge of directing operations in the situation at hand
- The approval of the government in the country or region, if possible.
- Cooperation with institutions, NGOs and locals
- Recognised international practices of supervision appraisals are followed
- That the grants are not used for missionary work
- That the grants are not used for political work. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p. 8)

The MFA has set itself a plan for development cooperation<sup>6</sup>, the most recent one valid from 2013 through 2016, in which the main emphases of the government are listed and explained. In the bilateral aid of ICEIDA, the plan names the African countries of Malawi, Mozambique and Uganda as focus areas, explaining they are among the poorest states in the world, and ICEIDA has a lot of experience there. Additionally Afghanistan and Palestine (within the 1967, pre-six-day war borders) are named as focus areas, because of difficult political situations in both places. More generally it says an emphasis is put on supporting the poorest states of the world, and the poor in states where inequality is high. Countries with weak infrastructure, weak democracy, failed states and fragile states, should also be given attention (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, 17). Also mentioned is the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative which emphasises careful work procedures and successful assistance, along with the thought that constant attention should be paid to potential reforms of the system of allocation. This document proved to be a guiding light to some of the NGOs, as several interviewees mentioned the focus areas as a factor in applying for aid.

Of cooperation with NGOs the plan says that the strengths of NGOs are their closeness to the grassroots in the societies that receive help, and they can be important advocates of minorities. From the year 2012 there was a special item in the national budget meant for cooperation with NGOs. In 2011, five percent of the authorities' contribution to development aid went through NGOs, and the plan was for that number to increase to eight percent in 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, 7).

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<sup>6</sup> Ice: Áætlun um alþjóðlega þróunarsamvinnu Íslands 2013-2016

Also mentioned in the plan is the fact that the MFA planned an extensive revision of the Code of Practice for the allocation of humanitarian and development aid to NGOs before the end of 2013. As the current rules are dated 2012, it seems that process has been delayed more than a year. Indeed, some of the interviewees from the NGOs suggested this had been a slow moving process, and the MFA might be understaffed in this department. The plan also states that a policy should be formed for emergency- and humanitarian affairs before 2014. As of writing, this has not been resolved (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, 16).

### **2.3 Humanitarian Actors in Iceland**

In this research the focus on the five most prominent humanitarian NGOs in the field. They are in alphabetical order ABC Children's Aid, The Church Aid, The Red Cross, Save the Children (Ice: Barnaheill) and SOS Children's Villages. Who are these NGOs? On what grounds do they participate in humanitarian aid? What follows will be a brief introduction of each NGO.

The Red Cross is the biggest humanitarian NGO working in Iceland, and has the biggest operating scope of those I researched. The Icelandic chapter was founded in 1924, and its first director was Sveinn Björnsson who later became Iceland's first President. The driving force of the NGO came from the medical community, and up until the 1960s there usually sat between five to nine doctors on the NGOs board. It was also a male-driven NGO, in an era when charities were considered women's domain. As stated earlier, international humanitarian aid did not become a prime concern until decades after the Red Cross was founded (Guðmundsdóttir, 2000). There are now 43 divisions across the country. On the official webpage it says: "the Red Cross works with diverse projects all around country, and the programs are decided upon by where the need is in the society at any given moment" (Icelandic Red Cross, 2015). Its operations are varied and many operated in domestic capacity. To give some idea of the scope, the NGO for example manages the fleet of ambulances in Iceland, teaches first-aid, offers strings-free healthcare to addicts, works with immigrant integration, operates four centres for the mentally impaired and runs second hand shops with the help of volunteers. In addition, the Icelandic Red Cross runs development projects in Malawi, Sierra Leone, Palestine, Belarus, Armenia and Georgia; it's by far the most prolific provider of humanitarian aid of the five NGOs, having received (by

my own informal count) 20 grants for humanitarian aid since 2010, totalling in over 200 million ISK. My count is based on data collected from announcements on the MFAs website (mfa.is). I had to make judgement calls on what to consider humanitarian aid and what development aid, as the announcements did not specify in all cases. These numbers should therefore be taken as they were meant, a rough estimate to give an idea of scale.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland founded the Icelandic Church Aid in 1969, in the aftermath of a national fundraising campaign it had initiated for the Biafra crisis. Its purpose is to lead and organise the humanitarian- and development work of the Church. It currently runs development projects in India, Uganda and Ethiopia. It also helps at home, mainly focusing on families with children that cannot make ends meet (Icelandic Church Aid, 2015). It has six full-time employees, four of whom mostly tend the domestic work along with dozens of volunteers. The domestic work grew substantially in capacity after the economic collapse of 2008. The NGOs representative said they had to define themselves after the economic collapse, and among other things created a Code of Conduct. The NGO set itself the goal of wanting to earmark at least 60% of its funds for foreign projects, and not over 40% to the domestic work and although the donor has final say in what their funds are used for, the Church Aid tries to fundraise in a way that allows those plans to hold: “we have a clear vision to uphold the foreign projects, and continue fundraising for them”. In the years 2010-2014 the ICA received humanitarian aid six times, totalling in just under 70 million ISK according to my count.

The SOS Children’s Villages Iceland was founded in 1989. It is a member of the international SOS Children’s Villages, whose purpose is to promote and raise funding for their work. It has a modest office in Kópavogur, in the suburbs of Reykjavík, with three full time staff members and one part time worker. Its operations mainly revolve around recruiting and maintaining Icelandic SOS sponsors to fund orphans upbringing in SOS villages around the world. SOS was founded in Austria after WWII because of the bad situation of orphaned children in Tyrol, in the Austrian Alps. The founder, Hermann Gmeiner, was a Catholic youth worker and a medical student, and wanted to find homes for these children. That has been the NGOs central idea ever since, to give orphaned children homes. Today there are 134 countries where SOS operates in some capacity. Most of its dependants live in what we call the third world, but there are also many in Europe. The representative of the

SOS has over 500 Children's Villages in 133 countries where over 80,000 children are being raised (SOS USA, 2015). In many cases it has decades of experience of the bureaucracy and the systems in each place, and it is self-evident that villages are often close to disasters and emergencies. Things started to evolve in that way, whenever there was an emergency, people started looking to SOS for help when they lost their homes, needed food or just shelter from the weather. The representative of the NGO mentioned: "It was engrained in people to think, there is an emergency, I will seek help from a charity". More demands are made of SOS whenever there is an emergency: "And we also feel that our sponsors want and trust us to help in an emergency, especially if we are on the site already". SOS's emergency programs have happened gradually and grown over time. According to my count based on MFA announcements, SOS received five grants for humanitarian aid in the period from 2010-2014, for a total of about 42 million ISK.

Save the Children Iceland (Ice: Barnaheill) was founded in 1989. It operates internationally in 120 countries, 30 of which are members; have offices that do both domestic and foreign work. It was founded in the United Kingdom in the aftermath of World War I in order to improve the lives of children in the country. In 2014 Save the Children responded to 103 humanitarian crises in 53 countries, including conflicts, disease outbreaks floods and cyclones (Save the Children, 2014). Only in the last few years it began taking steps towards international centralisation, as it was decided to open a permanent secretariat in London called Save the Children International, and have that centre run all the non-member country offices. Before, these offices were run by individual member countries. The office in Iceland mostly focuses on domestic projects, such as supporting children with long-term illnesses and its current campaign against bullying. It has four staff members, only one of which deals with international matters. Their representative said that the main categories they worked with in humanitarian aid were Education, Health, Child Protection and Child Rights Governance. Save the Children Iceland received grants for humanitarian aid five times 2010-2014, totalling in 58 million ISK. As of this research it was undergoing a policy review, and my interviewee, found it unlikely more focus will be put on humanitarian aid, as the domestic issues have become the most important of the NGO.

Finally, featured in the research is the Icelandic run and founded ABC Children's Aid. The NGO is unique in that it has no formal ties with large INGOs, but conducts its own



development projects in direct contact with local authorities and NGOs. It currently supports children in eight countries; India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, Liberia and Burkina Faso. The humanitarian aid grants the MFA has given ABC have been exclusive to helping when there are emergencies that affect these children. It is run on Christian values, and was founded on the initiative of a young nurse in 1988, after she had travelled around the world witnessing much poverty. ABC started out financing literacy projects for adults, eventually helping children go to school became its main focus (ABC Children's Aid International, 2009). ABC – Children's Aid has cooperated for many years with the Swedish run Children's Mission (Swedish: Barnmissionen) running schools in the Philippines. In March 2015, it was announced that the NGOs would deepen their cooperation starting in 2016, given their mutual clear focus on children and similar Christian values. They will retain their juridical entities and names, but the main office for both NGOs will be in Sweden, the general secretary for both will be Swedish, while the mission vice president will be Icelandic. It should be noted that after I conducted my interviews it became clear that this development had sparked some dissension in ABCs ranks, as disagreements arose about the schools the NGO runs in Kenya. As this went down after my interviews were conducted, and does not directly concern the humanitarian aid of ABC, it will not be referred to any further in this thesis (Jóhannsdóttir and Traustason 2015). According to my count, ABC only received a single 2 million ISK grant for humanitarian aid in the period 2010-2014.

It is worth mentioning that in the period one other NGO received MFA grants for humanitarian aid, The Association Iceland-Palestine. It is an NGO that works against all forms of apartheid in Palestine, and focuses on raising funds for emergency relief in the occupied territories. As this is a NGO working for a single cause in a specific area, many of the questions raised by this research do not apply to it, therefore I decided not to include it further in this thesis.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will feature and lay out the methodology of the thesis. Firstly there is a description of the research methods used, how the research progressed and its participants. The concept of locating oneself in social research and doing research at home will then be discussed. The execution of the research will be expounded on briefly, and finally, the methods of analysis and ethical concerns will be discussed.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the field of humanitarian NGOs in Iceland, their relationship to the MFA, the ethical side of their work and especially their decision making process when it comes to applications for grants for humanitarian aid. These objectives in my opinion would be best serviced by a qualitative research based mainly on interviews with the representatives of NGOs concerned and involved in the application process. A necessary goalpost was to be able to paint a realistic picture of the field of Icelandic NGOs, and fit the research into a theoretical context.

#### **3.1 Research Methods**

*Qualitative research* is a kind of inquiry employed mainly in the social sciences. One could say it is a common denominator for the methods made to research people's experiences and feelings. Statistical information is traditionally not emphasised, the goal is rather to gain a "deeper" understanding of fewer individuals. However a greater convergence of methods in social inquiry has happened in the last years. Mixed methods have gained more prominence, and walls have been broken down between the qualitative and quantitative (Greene, 2012). Regardless, it is safe to say this research falls into the qualitative camp. The method came under criticism in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as from a positivist perspective it lacked scientific rigour (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007). According to Esteborg (2002) qualitative research involves the scrutiny of social phenomena and events from the perspective of individuals and analyse the meaning they interject into them. Esteborg reminds one should always be mindful of the effect researchers can have on their subjects, and try to recount as neutrally as possible the comprehension and experience of the

participant. While at first glance many would consider qualitative research to be “easier” than quantitative research because of the lack of mathematical formulas and statistics, this is not actually so, as qualitative research involves complex issues of interpretation (p. 3).

Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) say that as a result of the influence of naturalism, solicited accounts are often considered less valid than those produced spontaneously. This has led many ethnographers to favour non-directive interviewing as opposed to directive questioning, the purpose being to minimise the influence of the researcher on what is said and facilitate an open expression of the informant’s perspective. They on the other hand believe it is misleading to consider the influence of the researcher simply as a source of bias that should be, or even could be, removed entirely (p.101).

Semi-structured interviews are a defining factor of qualitative research, and probably one of the most used methods. They are not bound by formal questionnaires, but the goal is to have a few set points or questions to work from. Esteborg (2002) says this gives the interviewees room to express their beliefs in their own words. The perspective of the subject is better presented, as the structure of the interview is tailored toward the subject more than the researcher. This method was the most prominent one of this research, I had a fixed set of points to bring up to each interviewee, but many of the questions were open ended and the conversation flowed freely within the topics. Interviews can be considered in-depth when the conversation is flexible and revolves around a certain topic. Ideally the interviewee does most of the talking, while the researchers’ occasionally guides the conversations in the preferred directions. This was absolutely the case with my interviewees, as they were being asked about their line of work and their expertise; they did most of the talking while I could interject with key questions. The shortest of the interviews took around one hour, the longest was almost two.

### **3.2 Collection of Data**

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period from January through April 2015, five with the employees of the NGOs in question, and two with MFA employees. Preparations had been made in the previous year, partly in conjunction with the *Methodology* course (Ice: vettvangsaðferðir), where the first project proposal was written. The fall of 2014 was spent reading background material for the theoretical framework, and gathering data from the web from the MFA and the NGOs themselves. The NGOs themselves

also provided me with various written documents from their work when I visited to have as a reference for this research. Of course, along the way informal conversations gave me tidbits of knowledge, and with some of my interviewees I had email exchanges to clarify things after the fact.

The first step was to get acquainted with comparable research that had been done elsewhere. I looked at what had been studied, firstly around ethics in humanitarian aid and development in general and secondly around allocation of humanitarian aid. This knowledge formed the framework I then planned my own research to fit into. Esterberg (2002) recommends any research project should begin at the library, studying the previous literature. Some naturalistic researchers, she says, caution against becoming too wedded to a particular viewpoint, she believes this concern is overstated, and it is better to know what others have said of your topic.

It became clear this would largely be a qualitative research, focusing on the current system of the MFA in allocating funds to local NGOs, and especially the decision making on the NGOs' part. In-depth interviews were conducted on both sides of the table, with people inside the MFA as well as those working in the relevant NGOs dealing with the issue of humanitarian aid. I talked to representatives from the Red Cross, The Icelandic Church Aid, SOS Children's Villages, Save the Children and ABC Children's Aid along with officials from the MFA.

For the most part the process of securing the interviews went smoothly, although it could take a while to find the right date and time to meet. The interviews were almost all made during office hours at the workplaces of the subjects, many of whom I think felt that informing people like myself was an integral part of their work, indeed many mentioned that being transparent and open about what they do was a key item in how their organizations operated. One interview however took place at a café. Of course, the interviews were recorded with the subjects' full consent. I had a set of thematic points about the broader themes of my research that I asked all my subjects. As the conversation developed in each case they were asked different follow up questions, letting the conversation flow around the specificities of each NGO. The main topics of the discussion became the following: Decision making within the NGOs, Ethical concerns, Connections abroad and finally the application process to the MFA. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic, as I am Icelandic just as all

the interviewees. All remarks have therefore been translated by the author, including ones presented within quotation marks. Any peculiar wording or potential inaccuracies in translation must therefore be considered the fault of the researcher.

### **3.3 Analysis of Field Data**

There are many ways to interpret data obtained through qualitative research. As Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) say, there is no formula or recipe for the analysis of ethnographic data, and no procedures that will guarantee success. They suggest detailed strategies or standard steps of data-manipulation should be avoided, each dataset is unique, and requires its own engagement. This advice I have tried to heed (p. 158). Esterberg (2002) considers *social imagination*, the ability to see individual issues within larger social contexts, a vital part of the research and states social research should not be thought of as a set of cookbook procedures.

The interviews were in all cases transcribed by the researcher within a week. I performed preliminary coding, marking the answers into several thematic categories. This was done using so-called open coding, with thorough reading of the data. Once all interviews were over, that coding was reinforced and then axial-coding was used to make reference points between the themes and to find further data in the text to carry on and strengthening the themes being presented. This method bears the name *grounded theory*, and has evolved from sociology as a tool to enable researchers to spot themes and work themselves through the data until they have a theory at the end. As Allen (2003) puts it, the method is: “a powerful way to collect and analyse data and draw meaningful conclusions” (p.9). Grounded theory was influentially described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and has had a considerable impact on the social sciences. The relationship between data and ideas is at the heart of grounded theorizing; there should be constant interplay between the two throughout the research process. It was developed in reaction against the preoccupation of many empirical social scientists with hypotheses testing. It has been criticised for many limitations, as it is common that it is taken to its extremes in such a way that all emphasis is put on coding but not enough effort is put into its interpretation (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2007). Although a literature review had been performed before the interviews were started and thus my preconceived ideas undoubtedly influenced the process, I had not put together a succinct “hypothesis” on what motivates NGOs in humanitarian aid and wished to let the data

present itself in the way grounded theory allows. As Esterberg has said; in qualitative research investigators are typically less concerned with theory testing, and use inductive reasoning. Rather than beginning with a particular theory and then looking at the empirical world to see if it is supported by “facts”, you begin by examining the social world and in the process develop a theory consistent with what you see (Esterberg, 2002).

### **3.4 Ethical Concerns**

Presenting the results proved slightly challenging. Since all of the subjects have prominent positions in their field and are by many known, at first everyone was asked if they were comfortable appearing under their own name. Indeed, most of those interviewed found it perfectly fine to appear under their own name and position in the research. I ultimately found it best to only name the NGOs the interviewees represented, as in the end the research does not touch on the individuals themselves but rather their line of work. Some subjects additionally asked for portions of their remarks to remain unattributed, which complicated matters slightly, as with many of the NGOs the options are fairly limited with who the interviewee might be, and those acquainted with the field of humanitarian work in Iceland might fairly easily be able to identify some of the interviewees. Therefore in the last of the thematic chapters presented, on the application process to the MFA, all remarks will be anonymous, and not attributed to the interviewees’ NGOs. It must be kept clear though, that the opinions the individuals share are entirely their own, not that of the NGOs they work for, unless otherwise stated, as the interviewees stressed themselves at different times during the process.

Additionally, in the presentations of the results, I decided to use the gender neutral pronoun “they” as a singular pronoun. Its use in the English language is debated and some consider it grammatically incorrect. However, in absence of a better suited pronoun for these purposes it has gained traction as a replacement for a generic “he” (or “she”) in part motivated by efforts to make language more gender inclusive (Mackay 1980). Also within the LGBTQ community the pronoun has gained popularity amongst people who define themselves outside of the gender binary norm (Wayne 2005). For my purposes, I felt that since the name and identity of the interviewees was not considered relevant, neither should their gender be. Besides, in some of the NGOs only one or two staff members deal with the issues discussed in this thesis; in some cases to state their gender would be to give away

who was spoken to. Other possibilities would have been to use variations like “s/he” “(s)he” or “he/she”, or neologisms like a Spivak pronoun (e-em-eir). In this case I decided singular “they” would be appropriate and effective.

One disclaimer must be made: I have previous ties to one of the NGOs studied, The Icelandic Church Aid. Since I was a teenager, I have been involved in the youth movement Changemaker, which is backed by the ICA. During the years 2009-2012, I worked as a coordinator for the group in a part time capacity, which involved me coming in to the office of the ICA once a week and naturally forming ties with their employees. I remain a member of and am still acquainted with many of ICAs staff. However, the work Changemaker does (youth advocacy and activism) has very little in common with my research topic, and I never came near the decisions on allocation of humanitarian aid being discussed. Therefore, I decided not to consider this an obstacle in my research, but rather let the reader be aware of a possible bias.

Eriksen (2010) reminds us that for many years, anthropology focused on small-scale non-industrial societies which distinguished it from other subjects dealing with culture and society. A generation ago it was scarcely known outside of fairly narrow academic circles. Anthropologists went about their fieldwork in remote areas and returned with fascinating analyses of “the others”. However, owing to changes in the world and in the discipline itself, this is no longer an accurate description. Practically, any social system can be studied anthropologically and contemporary anthropological research displays an enormous range, empirically as well as theoretically. Growing numbers of people have discovered that anthropology can offer insight on the human condition applicable in everyday situations at home, wherever one happens to live (195).

Peirano (1998) writes that up until recently “anthropology at home” was considered a paradox and a contradiction of terms. Midcentury came the revelation that the approach, not the subject matter had always defined the endeavour, pointed out by Lévi-Strauss among others, who warned in 1961 that anthropology might become a science without an object as the world became smaller (p. 108). Esterberg (2002) talks of locating oneself in social research, and compares it to a map, at a mall or a tourist attraction, that has a red dot marked “You are here”. It labels other places of interest and provides information on how to get there. This is similar to what must be done in social research, consider where you stand

on important issues. She lays out three questions worth pondering before embarking on research. Instead of thinking of myself as a neutral disinterested observer, I thought it worthwhile to provide short answers to them:

*What are your own biases and preconceptions?* In my case, as stated earlier, I have a bias knowing one of the NGOs from my previous work. Apart from that, my preconceptions included that while I believe everyone to be doing their best, I had the idea that not very much thought might always be put into the ethical side of allocation of humanitarian aid, as the NGOs have a very small staff and resources.

*What are your own investments in particular issues and in particular ways of seeing the world?* I cannot say I have investments in the issue, other than the interest in further development, humanitarianism and relevant topics. I believe I am an optimist, ever looking for ways to improve the world. My wish would be that while the humanitarian sector is already doing a good job, this thesis could in some way contribute knowledge to make it even better.

*What do you already think you know, and how do you know it?* I already knew many of the functions of the ICA, being familiar with it. I know for a fact the Red Cross is by far the most prolific of the NGOs. Beyond that I know only that I want to describe to the best of my abilities the process NGOs go through while applying to the MFA for humanitarian aid, get their opinions on the process and hopefully learn something.



## **4 RESULTS**

Here will be presented the findings of this research on Icelandic NGOs and humanitarian aid. For each of the five NGOs, I will account for the organisational structure, methods and outlook on international aid. The main data section will break into the following thematic chapters, which were formed as most of the interviews centred on these themes. First, a short chapter on the perspective of MFA employees interviewed will be featured. The next subchapter covers the NGOs international contacts, the third one describes how they tackle ethical issues and the fourth outlines the decision making process within the NGOs. Finally NGO interviewees thoughts on the application process of the MFA will be presented. The last subchapter will not attribute remarks to representatives of the NGOs, but summarise their arguments generally, as some of the interviewees asked for anonymity on the issue.

### **4.1 Perspectives from the MFA**

This research is primarily interested in the processes, motivations and situations of the Icelandic NGOs and its primary source are interviews with representatives of the five NGOs, which will be quoted extensively further down in the main results chapter. However, in preparing the research I also interviewed two employees of the MFA for context and their perspective on things. This preparation proved useful when it came to the later interviews, and as knowledge of the system at hand was integral to asking the right questions. This subchapter will present the views of the two MFA employees on the application process, and their views of the status of the NGOs.

The current allocation system was taken up in 2009, with rather strict rules compared to former practice. The first interviewee said that formerly lobbyism was strong, as people could walk into the Minister's office and receive grants. "Some of the Ministers were just happy to have it in their drawer", they said, but those had been much lower amounts. Although things were more professional now, lobbyism had not vanished entirely. In their

recollection, some of the NGOs were not too happy when the new rules were introduced in 2009, but their attitude had changed. Some had always been humble and asked for guidance how to apply properly. The second interviewee described how things worked prior to 2008, when all humanitarian aid came from the MFA, but support for NGO development projects came from ICEIDA. With the new rules, a single coordinated process was made, as in some cases NGOs were unclear where to seek support for what project. As the MFA had started putting more funds into supporting NGOs, a clear Code of Practice was necessary: “I think back then there were not any special rules on what was needed”.

When the Code of Practice was initiated, the MFA standardised it for all their relations with NGOs. That proved difficult, as they found the MFA staffs knowledge of development aid was much greater than their knowledge of humanitarian aid: “People in the Ministry move between jobs a lot, and it is difficult to hold on to the knowledge of the nature of humanitarian work and what it takes to support it”. It has taken the MFA some time to realise what it takes to be a good humanitarian supporter. The second interviewee was curious about the status of the NGOs:

It would be interesting to hear from the NGOs, what vision they have of humanitarian aid and specialised knowledge. Excluding the Red Cross, their weakness is that the knowledge is often maybe bound to one person, and that person tends to have knowledge of development projects rather than the humanitarian projects. So this is something we would like to fix, but we just do not – what should I say, have that much funding for these projects. If they could take funding for granted, maybe they could build up a stronger knowledge base.

The MFA has in recent years had two set application windows a year, in March and September, but only one was opened in 2015. The MFA also asks for applications in cases of emergencies it wants to support. Asked about how the MFA evaluates what emergencies it calls out for applications for, interviewee Two said there were several factors. With the recent Ebola crisis, it was regarded important to deal with quickly and locally, and everyone should contribute to that: “Bigger crises like in Syria, those are politically important to participate in. Malawi, Uganda, Mozambique, these are all countries we have had bilateral projects in, and would want to support them in times of need”. Persistent problems also catch the MFAs attention.

Once the MFAs deadline has passed an independent group of specialists is assigned to review the applications and make recommendations. Those recommendations are then reviewed by the MFAs steering committee on development cooperation, members of which are the director of ICEIDA, the MFAs undersecretary, and the head of the development cooperation field. The committee makes its comments for the Minister, who sometimes has other opinions. It has happened that the specialist group is asked to reevaluate an application it previously rejected, which might result in a contact with the NGO in question and request for an improved application. On lobbying, interviewee One said there had been much of it and still was: "If you get a rejection from the committee, and become angry and as a director of a fancy NGO you go with your team to the Minister, and use pressure. You might be a high ranking member of the community". NGOs, they added, can have a certain influence, and can become aggressive in their fundraising efforts. Informal things like who you know, and how you treat them can have sway over official decisions: "This is very important in Africa as well", the first interviewee added. The purpose of having these rules is to increase professionalism, equal treatment and fairness. Interviewee One finds the rules have to a large extent succeeded in this effort, NGOs have become more careful and professional, learned to follow the right way through the system, not directly "begging" the Minister for funds. Having an active and efficient administrative system hinders corruption: - "Of course this is partly corruption", the interviewee stated.

The specialist group reviews the applications and makes suggestions to the steering committee, and in turn the steering committee assesses the suggestions and might suggest some changes. The end of the process entails taking the results to the Minister of Foreign Affairs who has the final say in decisions on what to fund. Interviewee Two reminds that the Minister could go against the opinion of the specialists and make an independent decision, but if it is obvious the Code of Practice is being sidestepped the NGOs could complain that the rule of equality was being broken: "He can take that risk if he wants to, but it could come back to haunt him". That happens infrequently, and - "of course, the suggestions from the committee are not above all criticism. But it is easiest for the Minister to have the rules by his side", the second interviewee explained. The General Accounting Office (Ice: Ríkisendurskoðun) monitors these projects, and in that light it is comfortable for the Minister to be able to have a professional process behind decisions.

On the topic of framework agreements, which the NGOs representatives all seemed hopeful to reach, interviewee One mentioned the current plan was the establishment of a fund the NGOs could draw from immediately. The number of 300 million ISK had been thrown around: “but it will never be that high”, they pointed out. The perk is the NGOs will be able to use the money right away, and do not have to go through the current, sometimes sluggish, application process. The NGOs would have to meet certain requirements and in their view, only the Red Cross and the Church Aid seemed currently eligible, as they expressed the view that the other NGOs might not have the same international backing and quality standard. Interviewee One raised the view that if this fund were to grow evenly in the coming years, maybe more structure was needed in the MFA to handle it, not just one person, but a team to supervise it, bear responsibility, write annual reports that everyone can see, - “as this is public money we are talking about”.

The first interviewee mentioned that sometimes the applications received were not considered good enough, and some NGOs’ attitude towards the process had been less than favourable. If there were a great emergency, and the MFA received badly written applications from an NGO it still had faith in, it might tell them to improve the paperwork. If it were a pressing need they would try to prioritise that. Interviewee One mentioned that sometimes they wondered why NGOs chose to emphasise one emergency over another, and specifically remembered a case of great draughts in Namibia, which did not prompt any action of the NGOs. As ICEIDA had worked in the country, the MFA ended up reminding the NGO of the problem: “There were not as high numbers of casualties as someplace else, but we knew of it because we were connected to the country”, the first interviewee said. Interviewee Two similarly remembered sometimes thinking “why are they applying for this”, while there were other more extensive and pressing emergencies being ignored. They thought decisions on applications might be influenced by the personal interest of the people that worked in the field, and their connections to specific countries. These points from the MFAs employees resonate with many of the NGO representative’s thoughts, though on other issues they seem to contrast.

## **4.2 International Connections of the NGOs**

One of the questions I found vital in order to understand the context of the humanitarian aid the Icelandic NGOs engage in, was how their international network of contacts worked. How

their communications abroad were handled quickly proved vital factor in knowing about their international aid process. How does the relationship work between the local NGO and their co-operators abroad? Do all the NGOs have ties to larger INGOs? How does the connection inform humanitarian aid? Do INGOs have sway over the decisions of Icelandic NGOs when it comes to humanitarian aid? In this section I will summarise the international connections of each of the NGOs in turn, as each NGOs situation is unique, mainly using data from the interviews. The chapters end will offer a summary and comparison between the NGOs.

Considering the Red Cross first, it works with humanitarian issues through two separate INGOs, the international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The ICRC is an independent Swiss organisation, under the control of the Committee itself. It mainly works in war zones, where there is conflict and tension, and on developing and implementing international laws of war, mostly the Geneva Convention, but other treaties as well, collectively known as humanitarian law: "It has around 13 or 14 thousand employees globally. It is very fast to respond when needed, and quickly enters countries and exit them again. It does prison visits and such" the Icelandic Red Cross' representative told me. The IFRC on the other hand is the umbrella organisation of the 189 national societies; one of its tasks is to coordinate the actions of the national societies when it comes to emergencies, especially emergencies during peacetime or in peaceful areas. But there are constantly more examples of places where there is permanent turbulence and tension, and in those cases it tends to overlap: "When there is a natural disaster in a charged area, people have to talk. We have a detailed agreement for that which is used to decide who takes charge in each case". The treaty in question is from 1997, called the Seville Agreement, and has been called a "peace treaty" between the two organisations.

The representative said that of course the decision making process could sometimes get in the way, but that it did so less and less with more experience using the treaty. Notably the process had changed in recent years, in such a way that instead of it being obvious that either the IFRC or the ICRC takes the lead, now the larger National Societies also had greater ambitions to lead humanitarian efforts. "There is a third party at the table". This means that if there was a natural disaster, for example in Kenya, it would be likely that the Kenyan Red

Cross would take charge of the effort. The representative made clear that leading relief efforts is a very practical position, with much coordination required, and took supply provision for an example. Someone had to take care of them, as it is impractical for everyone to dabble in them: “The Red Cross is just one of many responders transporting supplies, and for the Red Cross to have sundry supply transport within its ranks would be ridiculous”. Therefore usually one party handles the matter. It is possible that National Societies can come into that system with their own transports, as the Icelandic Red Cross did in Haiti, when it had the opportunity to fill a plane the MFA had chartered: “A list of needed goods was prepared, that happens very quickly, and we see that and couple into the system what we bring. When the plane landed people were ready to receive the goods and take them into depot”. The Red Cross manages to coordinate well within its own ranks, according to the interviewee, who says it is also getting increasingly better to coordinate with all the other humanitarian actors. The Red Cross usually takes part in the UNs cluster system or works along with it somehow. There is a caveat to that though:

When we enter conflict areas it is important to the Red Cross not to be implicated with the UN, which sometimes takes part in the conflict. And especially the ICRC, who would then be in command, does not take part in the cluster system.

Even in those situations the Red Cross would still attend meetings, to get information about the current status and report on their actions: “But the Red Cross cannot be subjugated under it. Then we are touching upon the independence of the Red Cross, which is one of our basis ideals. We cannot give that up so easily”. It is especially important in places like Afghanistan that the Red Cross is not perceived as a part of the international retinue that came in after 2001, as that would eliminate the possibility of helping people who are in regions not controlled by the international party. When this is not a concern, the Red Cross fully co-operates with the system, I was informed.

The representative said that when the government of Iceland puts out a call for applications for specific emergencies, often the international Red Cross is already working there and the Icelandic Red Cross has been kept updated through conference calls. And because of the structure of the international Red Cross, it matters more to have the promise of funds as soon as possible than having the funds themselves: “As soon as the confirmation

is there, they can start using money. So whether the money itself arrives this week or next is not all important“.

The ICA also has two international INGOs with whom it collaborates. ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) is their main contact in humanitarian aid, while it also cooperates with the Lutheran World Federation - Department for World Service, more however in their development projects than in humanitarian action. The interviewee made clear that they felt the INGOs were very trustworthy: “These organisations I would say are on par with the Red Cross and these international organisations that fulfil the UNs requirements, the international Codes of Conduct and practice“. Mentioned to back the claim was the fact that the LWF: World Service is the fourth largest cooperation partner of the UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR). Further, ACT Alliance and LWF have both received certification from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. The Icelandic Church Aid bases its humanitarian aid on these co-operators, at home it is a relatively small establishment with six fulltime employees at the office: “There are two of us that have to do with foreign projects, but we have LWF and ACT to work through. We get many appeals a month from them; where they have assessed the need and seriousness of the situation“.

To take an example of how the international cooperation works and appeals are made, the representative mentioned that Act Alliance has so-called regional forums that convene a few times a year where ACT partners who are operating in the same vicinity meet: “For example, in East-Africa, The Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) has a big presence, so it would send an employee that is working with the area“. The ICA could do the same, as it has projects in the area, but it has few staff members, and it is an expensive trip. That forum, and the ACT main office in Geneva, assesses the condition in each place: “Like earlier this year when there were floods in South Malawi, more than one ACT partners in the area gave reports on where there were emergencies“. The reports go through the forum, to the main office, which will send out an appeal if needed. Every ACT partner subsequently gets an appeal with the information at hand. This process is in full cooperation with the authorities at the given place, and the appeal has an estimated price ticket on what is needed.

ACT members are mostly churches or faith based NGOs in humanitarian aid. The representative mentioned that some member NGOs of ACT felt there was room for improvement: “There is always a discussion among the members of ACT. These NGOs feel that ACT Alliance could be even quicker to react, quicker to send appeals, make reports and

do research. It can go faster“. They mention that the bigger partners are the ones giving most pressure, such as Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

The Church Aid keeps tabs on world affairs, and usually know of events, and sometimes start preparing for them before ACT sends appeals and information. The Philippines were mentioned as an example of how the process of humanitarian aid works within ACT: “There is a Philippine ACT partner, an NGO that will start right away. It has its own spare funds, and maybe gets additional funding from other ACT partners. It starts saving lives right away, without having written a report first“. This happens immediately, and is a constantly improving process. What can take too long is the big appeal with the concrete information that is sent to every ACT partner: “Maybe three weeks later the appeal shows up“. A temporary appeal is usually sent just a few days after the event, stating that the need is great even though information might be insufficient. Subsequently the full appeal shows up with all the necessary information, and is thereupon followed up with a report that analyses the need: “So this is what I am hearing around me, people think we can do better, but I think the UN gets the same criticism, as well as other NGOs. I think this is a common problem. That is the process“. But they find it the strength of ACT that there are members all over the world that get sent the same appeal. If there were to be a major catastrophe in Iceland, the office of ICA would become a relief administration centre, with foreign specialists sent in, as it is Iceland’s ACT member: “That is what happened in Haiti, many in the ACT office lost their colleagues, but they kept going, as they knew the language“. There are 144 ACT partners in 140 countries.

The ICA representative compares the cooperation to being a small fish in a big pond: “Ours are not the funds that count for everything in the big context. We are a small part of billions worth of grants“. If the ICA were sending 100 million ISK it would matter how fast it went through, but since it generally sends 10 – 15 million ISK it just goes into the common projects of ACT. And even though ICA has to wait for an answer to see if it can send their 10 million ISK, the staff knows the NCA and the large ACT partners send funds immediately and help is under way: “Even though our money is a month late, it does not matter, as the project will probably go on for years“. They said ACT partners have spare funds, the Nordic partners for instance having substantial government funding, being acclaimed development



and relief agencies. “Their process is faster, they have deeper funds, and a more reliable relationship to the state”.

When the ICA applies to the MFA, it normally only contacts ACT once it has approval. Concurrently the money is sent in a properly marked transfer with appeal number. Afterwards, ICA receives ACT progress reports on the appeals, and the report lists benefactors, so it will say how much the ICA donated, along with many others smaller and larger donors. The report will also list the status of the appeal: “for example a goal of \$150 million, and having raised \$95 m thus far”. The reports come in regularly, with a final report once the project is over, which the ICA in turn hands over to the MFA. If a humanitarian project takes one year, three months later the ICA gets a final report reviewed by an accountant, and passes that to the MFA along with an introduction letter in Icelandic.

SOS Children’s Villages International’s headquarters are in Innsbruck, Western Austria: “It is in the Alps, a very beautiful place”, the representative of the Icelandic national association said. It is an umbrella organisation of 134 SOS Children’s Village’s national associations: “We have great freedom, almost independence, so to a large degree we control what projects our money supports” the representative said, but added that of course it happens with consultation with the headquarters: “It is up to us to decide whether we want to raise funds for South America, or Vietnam or anything”. The NGOs main work is building and maintaining the titular Children’s Villages. Some country offices run entire villages by themselves, such as the Norwegian one, which is a powerful participant, having built up many villages around the world. “But if an Icelander wants to become a SOS Sponsor to a child in one of Norway’s villages, their costs will just lower slightly as a result”. Sponsors can pick which village to support, with a few exceptions. There are a few that are so well supported that the needs are being met and they have enough funding. “We saw that with Haiti after the earthquake, and I believe Gaza is popular as well”. But in most cases people can request a country or a village to support.

There are three parties that take part in that decision making process of assessing emergencies and starting the aid process. They are the NGO in the country in question, the regional office (there is one in Asia, one in South-America and three in Africa) and the head office. It is usually the regional office in question that initiates discussions with the headquarters on what prospects SOS has for helping, or, as explained by the representative,-

“It assesses the capacity of the national association in question; can it sustain the relief aid needed? If yes, good! If no, how can we support it and strengthen it to deal with this emergency”. The headquarters subsequently send members information on the crisis, the relief plans, and invite them to take part.

When the representative described the humanitarian aid of SOS the talk turned to Syria, where it has been running humanitarian aid for a few years. There, SOS provides basic assistance to families with children. They hand out food, clothes and personal hygiene products, and provide school uniforms: “These are not humongous projects; we are helping a couple of hundred families while others may be helping tens of thousands. But they are humanitarian NGOs. Our humanitarian aid is on a smaller scale”. Asked about more examples of Children’s Villages in unstable areas, the representative mentioned villages in East-Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. There have been regular famines there, there are periods of draughts, and SOS tries to help as it can. Notably it got a government grant for aid in southern Ethiopia during a famine in 2011. Additionally SOS had villages in the Philippines which typhoon Haiyan hit in 2013, and along the beaches the 2006 Tsunami hit, to name a few. In places the NGO does not operate in, like in Afghanistan, it does not interfere with emergencies: “But if we are on the spot and able to help, we will”. The representative made a clear distinction of scale, clarifying that humanitarian aid was not the NGOs primary mission: “we are not an emergency aid organisation but, we want to help when we are asked to and able to. And we are much better at it now than we were 10-15 years ago”.

Save the Children International (SCI) was launched in 2010 by the Save the Children Alliance in an effort to centralise the INGOs structure. The Alliance has 30 individual country offices, but now it runs the SCI head office in London additionally and has a director. Before, the country offices worked in their own corner and almost worked as different NGOs, the representative of Save the Children Iceland said: “One was working in this Kampala neighbourhood, another in the neighbourhood next to it, and they were not talking a lot. Norway ran the head office there, but the Americans also had operations, but no office”. The interviewee believed the centralisation was a good step for the INGO.

The head office at Save the Children International has a special humanitarian department, informed through the country offices when something happens. In 2013, it responded to 119 crises in 48 countries, both conflicts and natural disasters. Those

responses are coordinated by the emergency department. The head office also has a spare fund, which receives regular donations from the larger members, so there are always funds to react right away in an emergency. “We have not been contributing to it” the representative said, “We are such a tiny part of the INGO”. In case of larger emergencies, “like Syria, Japan or Haiti”, the head office sends out distress calls asking country offices to start fundraising. The representative was unsure of whether all 30 country offices receive these calls: “We have not had many recently, we have not had a lot of natural disasters”. It turns out the Icelandic branch does not always get an appeal, like in a recent case of a hurricane in Vanuatu: “We are told and we get the internal news, but we are not asked to participate. The Asian region is allocating both funds and people to that”. What seems to be on the agenda of SCI is continuing humanitarian aid in Syria and combating the Ebola crisis, and the Icelandic office is not being asked to participate in other projects. “SCI is very big in The Philippines for example, even though we are not contributing there”.

Save the Children Iceland, is not what is referred to as an international program member of SCI. That means it does not have the possibility to initiate projects abroad, and cannot funnel its funds directly through the head office like everyone else: “To be an international program member you need access the awards management system. All funds are extremely well looked after through that system, but it is very complicated and expensive”. The international programming director has said it is not realistic for the Icelandic branch to apply for that now, and the representative agrees: “We are working on our long-term strategy now, but I cannot imagine we will take a U-turn, jettison the domestic work and focus on the international. And as long as that is the case, I do not see us participating in that”. Instead, the NGO must find other ways to get its funds abroad, and it has sent them through other members, such as Norway to Uganda, and Italy to Syria. “We have had to share the ICR costs (Indirect Cost Ratio, overhead costs) in Uganda, hopefully Italy will not charge us for Syria”. Even though it does not have access to this system, Save the Children Iceland is able to follow up on their projects, with direct contact with Save the Children’s Middle Eastern Office, which coordinates the Syria project, and the Italy Office regarding financial matters. “And the same goes for Norway. We are just a part of a large grant that they manage; there are really stiff rules on the handling of finances in the INGO, of course just to make it safer”.

The representative says thought must be put into how the NGOs contributions are best spent. In the context of the environment the MFA and SCI provides it, it is the interviewees personal opinion that Save the Children Iceland is better off contributing funds to larger projects than to be constantly trying to make something by itself: "This is my opinion, not the official opinion of the Save the Children, mind you". In Uganda for example, the NGOs office had one little project on the side, that had a different emphasis from its other projects, which was in-school meals. It needed special supervision and administration, and all for just four schools, while SCI has projects in over one hundred schools in Northern Uganda: "They considered this too much work, and urged us to rather support the larger projects than create smaller ones". The representative thinks it is important to be involved in international aid, even though the NGO is not big: "We meet regularly, the European managers, and one of the things on the agenda of the meeting is discussing how we, the smaller members, best contribute to this large machine".

While the Icelandic office is small, they feel it is pivotal to have a large, powerful and respected INGO that they can trust with their funds: "For a tiny NGO to be doing a project by itself, say somewhere in Africa, it is incredibly demanding. You need supervision, reporting to be tip-top. But it costs!" Save the Children has a Zero Dollar Tolerance policy, which means that if there is a dollar that cannot be accounted for, the matter is looked at. "And it only takes 20-30 dollar discrepancy to go directly to the director" who makes sure the matter is solved, - "Of course this costs, but we feel it is worth it". Cutting slack is dangerous, if only for the sake of keeping up the public's trust: "People need to know everything is 100% as it should be. Even though it means money is spent insuring that".

Finally, I asked the representative of ABC Children's Aid about the NGOs international connections. Since its foundation in 1988, it has worked with various other charities on its development projects, but is unique of the NGOs being researched in not having a major INGO backer. It is however in an adoption process right now entering into closer cooperation with the Nordic Children's Mission (Swe: Barnmissionen). That process will be finalised by next year, and one project is being assessed at a time. "They are really powerful in humanitarian aid, have been assisting in the Philippines in cooperation with a German doctor's NGO" ABCs representative said. They have had humanitarian programs in both the Philippines and Ukraine: "So we will be able to participate in bigger projects after this..."

After a brief pause I interjected with “merger?” “Let us call it a closer cooperation” was the answer: “We will keep our registration and they will keep theirs. They will keep their logo and name and we will keep ours”. New projects will be initiated under the name ABC – Children’s Mission. ABC has cooperated with the Children’s Mission for 25 years, which was founded in 1983: “There was a famous entertainer who had hit wall in his life, found his faith and started working with children in Scrap Yards in the Philippines. His son is the leader today”. The new and deeper cooperation is being prepared this year, and should come into effect in January 2016.

On ABCs website an entity called ABC international is mentioned, which mainly seems like an English language extension of the Icelandic NGOs fundraising activities. That is run from here in Iceland, and has the same board as ABC Iceland. They have had offices in the Faroes, and in USA, as well as some operations in Britain, the representative said: “But we will see how that goes with the current changes”. ABC currently runs development projects in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Liberia, Senegal, Uganda, India and Pakistan. Through the years ABC has worked with various other Christian based NGOs. First mentioned is *One Child Matters*, an American NGO working in India, Cambodia and Bangladesh: “But we only have a few children left there, we are phasing out of that. Once they grow out of the schools we will be done. They will continue, they are not dependent on us”. They also cooperated with *The Uganda - Australia foundation*, which later changed their name to ABC Children’s Aid Uganda: “They wanted to connect to someone this way, and decided to become a part of ABC”. ABC also cooperates with two local NGOs in India running schools and dormitories, as well as having supported the Nordic Children’s Mission in the Philippines for a long time.

Finally the interviewee expressed the believe that ABC will be better prepared to handle humanitarian aid after this closer cooperation with the Nordic Children’s Mission comes to fruition: “We have ambition to help more, especially when things happen close to our operations”.

To summarise, ABC Children’s Aid seems different from all the other NGOs in not having a larger INGO contact that it cooperates with. It is a locally founded NGO, mainly doing its own projects, in cooperation with other similarly sized Christian based NGOs. Its humanitarian aid has exclusively revolved around repairing damage around its own establishments. It has bigger ambitions though, as evidenced by its closer cooperation with the Swedish NGO

Children's Mission, but even considering that it remains the smallest scale humanitarian operation in global context. The remaining four NGOs have strong INGO partners in common. The Red Cross and Church Aid share similarities, in that they work with two distinct INGO entities each. The Red Cross works with both the IFRC and the ICRC; the ICA works both with ACT alliance, an umbrella coalition of Christian humanitarian NGOs, but also through the national Churches membership in the Lutheran World Federation. In both cases, cooperation exists between the bigger INGOs. The Icelandic Red Cross has the distinction of being the largest of the humanitarian NGOs in Iceland and sometimes, considers running entire projects on behalf of the International Red Cross, or at least contributing significantly to them. Both the Red Cross and ICA mentioned receiving appeals for humanitarian aid regularly, much more often than they respond. SOS and Save the Children seem in a similar position to each other, each having close ties with an INGO which shares their name, focusing on children. Neither NGO sees humanitarian aid as their primary field. SOS Iceland receives regular appeals for humanitarian aid, Save the Children Iceland less so, while kept updated it is not often asked to participate, being a small office which focuses on domestic work. Differences aside, those latter four organisations have it in common to be well connected internationally to INGOs that do humanitarian aid in some capacity and to receive appeals and detailed information from them that they then take a stance on how to react to.

#### **4.3 Ethical Concerns and Codes of Conduct**

This section will summarise the thoughts of the interviewees on the ethical issues they face in their line of work. I asked specifically about Codes of Conduct and Practice, and wanted to know how they thought they affected their work, and especially the decision making on what disasters should be prioritised when they applied for funds from MFA. Other musings on ethical issues naturally came up in conversation and will be addressed.

When the discussion turned to Codes of Conduct, the Red Cross representative mentioned that ethical concerns were important to this line of work: "Your perspective on people affects how you provide assistance". The Red Cross has set itself various moral codes. As previously mentioned, The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief was made in the 1990s at the behest of the Red Cross. "Almost all NGOs considered presentable have become formal parties of the code" the representative said, and added they felt it was very

important. The seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross were also mentioned as being an important pillar of its work; they are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality: “These are general principles concerning our work, not exactly an ethical code, rather ideals that provide a compass in all our work“. In addition to that the Icelandic Red Cross has a Code of Conduct specific to the Icelandic chapter, which all board members and employees sign. It concerns personal conflict of interests and such: “We have it on a magnet, I can show you” the representative added, demonstrating that the code is kept visible in the NGOs day to day work.

Rather than saying these ethical codes and guidelines had a direct effect on decision making, the representative found that they affected all general behaviour and morale of the staff. Being aware of the ethical issues they face makes a huge difference, they found, and also in humanitarian aid. They went on describing how the gender perspective was important in their work, taking a small but obvious example of an earthquake and setting up a refugee camp: “You need to set up latrines and washing facilities. And if you do not make sure there are lights around the latrines, you are condemning women to be subjected to violence and rape“. This is something that would be easy to forget or not to put thought into. In all humanitarian work, in planning and coordination, planners need to have this in the back of their mind: “Do not create more despair from what is already there“. This goes for preventing violence against children as well, for example in how you structure refugee camps to try to avoid harm. Assisting children right after disasters has in fact been a focus of the Icelandic Red Cross’ crisis counselling: “In Haiti we ensured that children could go somewhere in the mornings and play, have a place to stay during the day“. This would prevent them from just walking the streets where they could be abused or kidnapped. The program included edifying games to help deal with what happened, as many children lost their parents, siblings or other kin: “You could call it day-care, we called it crisis counselling, psychological support“.

The Icelandic Church Aid started an internal discussion in the aftermath of the economic collapse around 2010, which resulted in the creation of the Code of Conduct of the ICA. Its representative said: “We asked ourselves what basis we build our work upon“, and added that the documents put the spotlight on their principles and primary stances, sharpening their vision and direction: “I see this as our self-image, it is what we stand for. Now we not

only know what we are doing, but why". The staff came together and using its Charter (Ice: skipulagsskrá) and other role models and guides, made a more detailed document which breaks down how employees should behave in their work. They put a lot of work into these documents, and feel quite proud of it. The interviewee additionally reference that the ICA follows international Codes of Conduct, is also bound by the rules of *Almannaheill* (English translation: "the common good"), an umbrella organisation of the third sector in Iceland, the rules of the LWF, and their Principles of Partnership". Regarding the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and NGOs, ACT Alliance is a signatory, so by proxy the ICA abides these rules in their humanitarian projects.

In addition to the Charter and the Code of Conduct, the ICA has a Code of Practice on development cooperation, and a Code on how to choose projects and collaborators. According to the latter, projects can originate with the organizations the ICA is a member of, The Lutheran World Federation or ACT Alliance, domestic or foreign NGOs and individuals. Appeals should be put before the NGOs board, which approves or rejects them. The Code also makes clear the subject must be evaluated along with the need to act, and the vision of the subject. Possible conflict of interests should be analysed, or possible conjunction to a better result, any negative impact of the project might have, the operations of others in the vicinity and harmony with the local authorities' goals and aims. "Efficiency, results, impact, it is all expounded" the representative said. The Church Aid also has separate rules that touch upon the handling of assets and volunteers, which have more to do with their domestic work: "A lot of things play a part in these rules, the frequency of payments, progress reports, how we operate, what rules are there on inspection trips and reports". Their projects should relieve poverty, work towards human rights. Those are guiding lights in their work: "If someone pitches a project revolving around something else entirely, we have those rules to fall back on". The representative stressed that these were fundamental principles, and that the ICA would not work with anyone that violated them.

The discussion turned towards the wider values the NGO aims for. Among those emphasised are sustainable communities, opportunities for women and girls, education, combatting HIV/Aids, environmental concerns, cooperation, equality and responsibility: "We want our projects to hit some of these markers". Even though ICA is the one funding projects, it wants co-operators to have a say in decision making: "We do not set ultimatums



because we have the money. We have our terms for cooperation, and within them is participation on an equal basis". The ICA also requires its partner NGOs to have roots in the community they work in, to be legally registered and have a legal board "who are not just mom and dad" and so forth. Co-operators need to have a certified public accountant and key employees need to speak English: "These are just practical things that need to be ok". The representative felt it was important that both these fundamental principles and the practical rules were all set, as it made it easy for the staff and board to reference them: "Perhaps in cases when people we know and like pitch projects, we can trust in our official documents, and not make an arbitrary decision". This they felt made professional decisions easier and gave the staff grounds to support them with arguments: "It helps us make good decisions and stay professional".

Asked whether they found it clear that the Codes of Conduct and Practice played a role in decision making the representative answered affirmatively, but admitted that they were not constantly looking through them when discussing a project the ICA has had in Ethiopia for seven to eight years now. But especially in the beginning of a project, the Codes provide a guiding hand: "With new projects, we go through this thoroughly, and try the rules with this new situation". Additionally the representative said the staff always know of the code, and if something feels dubious they can go back and reference it. In the next phase of the project, they might then change emphasis accordingly.

One ethical issue the representative brought up was the thought of donor oriented aid, in the realms of what determines which emergency is supported and how the projects are planned. Having a Code of Practice definitely helped in that regard, informing their work: "So we are not just following the latest trend, we are working towards the five goals that have been set". Having a fixed course helps, the representative added, in steering away from media coverage or popularity as a sole motivator determining what projects to take on. The emphases of the authorities can have a big effect on decision making within the NGOs: "If the authorities say they are primarily stressing work in these particular countries, well then we will apply for those countries. The application is more likely to succeed". That might be a part of the reason they have development programs in Uganda rather than Zaire or Mozambique – not because the distress there is any more exigent: "So that is an example of the donor influencing it". The MFA is the biggest single source of income for the ICAs

humanitarian projects, so its influence is felt. NGOs have a tendency to look at what the MFA is stressing and creating a project around that: "It increases the odds of getting support. Now, I am not saying people try to do whatever it takes, but it factors in".

The interviewee from SOS Children's Villages shared a different opinion on the role and importance of Codes of Conduct. The Icelandic National Association has not set itself a specific code: "We haven't seen the need to". "We are all morally perfect here" they uttered in jest shortly after. In all seriousness, they felt it was better to have unwritten rules, than to have complex codes that are not followed: "I have seen NGOs set themselves a Code of Conduct and then ignoring it". It is better to count on having honest people who know what they are doing, the interviewee added and assured me that SOS Iceland respects all the international rules it is supposed to. The Austrian SOS Kinderdorf International is indeed on the list of signatories of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (IFRC 2015). SOS internationally also subscribes to the INGO accountability charter, which deals with transparency and finances: "So SOS Iceland is a part of that by extension". SOS international has additionally set itself additional rules the Icelandic national association does not work with on a day to day basis, that deal with the care of children, something the Icelandic fundraising office is not doing: "We are not brushing teeth and putting kids to bed, or helping with homework. We are here to fund these projects". They mention they have a myriad of handbooks from SOS international that deal with how to communicate with sponsors, how to fundraise, and "practically anything". These books can be found and flicked through when the occasion rises, some are revised regularly and the national associations take part in that process. These are a certain guiding light in their work,- "but it would not fit to put them on the internet and claim them a Code of Conduct, as they are hundreds of pages".

The interviewee expressed certain reservation on Codes of Conduct in general: "I have seen NGOs with very slick and comprehensive Codes of Conduct, and there are no NGOs that go as far, being aggressive, approaching certain boundaries and walking certain tight ropes". They put a big question mark next to such codes, remarking that the more detailed and complicated they are, the more likely they are to be broken. This was the personal opinion of the interviewee, not necessarily of the SOS Iceland.

Also made clear was the representative's view that society has set itself unwritten codes, and if they go too far, people let them know, regardless of whether they are breaking their own Code of Conduct or an international one. "We are under constant scrutiny and supervision from the public, completely independently of any rules we set ourselves". The public lets them know, comments or stop them if their morals gives them a reason to: "We have started fundraising and gotten observations. There have been incidents where people feel we have made mistakes, and it is good to get these comments". This is something they try to learn from, but in most cases there is an element of misunderstanding to it. An example is optional claims they distributed via online banks, which not everyone liked. SOS was among the first to embark on that field of fundraising, and got negative comments. But many simply misunderstood what was going on: "Some people thought these were invoices, others thought that we had access to their bank accounts, could see their balance and such. This really is just the modern way of mailing a giro to people". People did not understand the process and that is the case in a lot of complaints.

Save the Children Iceland have on the contrary set itself a specific Code of Conduct that its employees must undersign, along with handing over their criminal record at the start of employment. Additionally it undergoes the INGOs Code of Conduct, which the NGOs representative calls "very strict". As an example the interviewee mentioned that a Child Safeguarding Audit was being made in the whole INGO at the time of the interview, where an independent party makes sure member NGOs have proper rules on specific matters; in this case that child treatment is correct and their rights and protection are always secured: "If we do not follow our own gospel, who will?" These kinds of audits are also regularly made regarding finances and other matters.

The insurance that no child is put in harm's way is an ethical issue that is difficult to tackle, even in an NGO revolving around children's rights: "We are all different, and it is just a known fact that if you gather an X amount of people, there will be some rotten apples. Statistically". The representative acknowledged it would be foolish to maintain that with 25.000 employees nothing bad could happen. But as in Iceland they run an advocacy office, and are not in much direct contact with children, much of this current audit does not apply to them, while in many other countries they say it is extremely important.

They say that the Code of Conduct is probably in the back of the employee's minds every day, and they have been trained to consider "what is best for the child or children". In that spirit they now have a policy not to publish pictures from visitations to kindergartens or their friendship projects without not only the parent's approval, but also the children's consent: "It is a development taking place, listening to what the child says. We have to be careful to practice what we preach, and listen to children's voices".

ABC Children's Aid has a Code of Conduct dated from 2012 and when asked, the representative of the NGO said they felt it was an improvement, as it did not have one before: "Each project had its own rules, but then we decided to write one as ABC international and send to all the places". The Code was written in Icelandic and then translated into English. Before there was always an unwritten code that shaped their work, they say, but having it on paper makes a difference. Also mentioned are the five fundamental principles of their work; transparency, dignity, learning, sustainability and participation. It was emphasised that those were not made to be kept in a drawer: "They are meant to be active, and everyone is conscious of what they stand for. We have yet to integrate these principles further into our working culture, as we have had them for a shorter period". ABC's employees had some input, but mainly they were the work of the Nordic Children's Mission. The representative feels the principles and the Code of Conduct compliment and support each other.

I also inquired on what status religion had in the work and whether it had ever been difficult to locate the boundaries of missionary- and aid work. The answer was a resounding no: "Regarding humanitarian aid, it is not a question, you're just saving lives". As ABC deals mostly with schools, in many of their operating countries there is a clear mandate from the government to teach a specific religion: "You need to state whether you are a Christian school or a Muslim school". ABC runs Christian schools in Pakistan, and only has Christian students attending: "Christians are around one percent of Pakistan. They are a minority and have it difficult. The children do not thrive well in Muslim schools, they become untouchables like the Dalits". They say ABC is focusing on these children, not on turning other children Christian. In Kenya, they mentioned this was a potential issue for the MFA, so ABC inquired about it: "We found out this was mandatory. Schools do not get an operating permission without showing how they will deal with the spiritual needs of the students". The

school in Kenya is in a predominantly Christian neighbourhood. So clearly from their perspective, having religion taught in schools is not the same as doing missionary work.

All of my interviewees had different grasp on what ethical issues were key to their NGOs, and quite reasonably, as they engage in quite disparate work. The representative from the Red Cross mentions how gender perspectives in projects are important and how one's personal values affect one's work, and thinks having a Code of Conduct rather affects one's general behaviour than specific decisions. The ICAs representative mentions that Codes of Conduct help them keep their work focused and professional: "We now know not only what we are doing, but why". They also mention donor-oriented aid as a concern, implying there exists a bias to apply for the focus areas of the MFA, as they are likelier to get support. SOS's representative expressed a unique opinion, as they felt the importance of Codes of Conduct are overstated and were sceptical towards too complicated and lofty codes. SOS international does have stiff regulations however, significantly on dealing with children. They mention the unwritten codes of society, and that they feel public pressure inspires their best behaviour. On the contrary, Save the Children Iceland was required to set its own Code of Conduct that all employees must sign, but similarly to SOS the INGO has very strict rules on how to work with children. What SOS and Save the Children have in common is that while the NGOs most important rules deal with the care of children, those rules do not concern the employees here as much, as they are almost exclusively working in fundraising and advocacy, not in direct contact with children. Finally ABC's representative found that having one Code of Conduct instead of various rules for different projects simplified their work. Also mentioned were the values of the NGO, giving employees' inspiration and supporting the code. They mention the "unwritten rules" the NGO follows, similarly to SOS's representative musings on the rules of society.

#### **4.4 Decision Making Within the NGOs**

In this chapter I try to examine the decision making process of each NGO as expressed by their representatives, while drawing some parallels and making comparisons. As mentioned earlier, the Red Cross is by far the biggest of the NGOs working in the humanitarian aid field in Iceland. It has, as detailed above, many departments and far reaching agendas, the ones I am dealing with mainly fall under the division of Humanitarian Aid Division (Íce: hjálpar- og

mannúðarsvið), as well as the Emergency Response Division (Ice: neyðavarnarsvið). While some of the other NGOs looked at had only one or two employees dealing with these issues, in some cases along with many other concerns, in the Red Cross each of those departments has a team working on these matters, which offers greater specialization. According to their website, the Icelandic Red Cross has just under 90 employees in all their projects combined.

The Icelandic Red Cross stands out in its internal decision making processes, simply because the infrastructure is that much larger. The representative talked at length about the process and what factors in the decision making around international humanitarian aid: “Almost always when we act, it is in response to an international appeal. But we receive those appeals much more frequently than we act on them”. A recent exception, he says, is when 20.000 euros were sent to Cyprus to help Syrian refugees. That came about following a cooperation between the Red Cross in Iceland and Cyprus. “We have recently put an emphasis on refugees, especially from Syria, and the Red Cross in Cyprus needed financial help after their economic collapse”. The authorities were closing a refugee camp and IRC simply decided to step in and support the Cyprus Red Cross to provide the assistance needed: “We felt it was important because helping Syrian refugees is a part of our goal set”. In Cyprus there were people who they knew of, in a worse situation than many other refugees: “And we just made this call. It is not a large sum, but it can make a difference for those 200 people”.

Generally, answering an international appeal is one criterion for humanitarian aid though, as that means the situation has been checked and evaluated, and the International Red Cross has determined that the response needed is bigger than the local Red Cross can handle. The appeals come from both the ICRC and the IFRC, depending on circumstances. Another criterion is whether many are doing the project and whether there is need for the Icelandic Red Cross to step in. The Red Cross also checks whether its expertise might be useful, for example an expertise it has built up in the field of crisis counselling. If the affected area is a country that the Icelandic Red Cross has been working with specifically, that increases the chances of it responding to an appeal. Also estimated whether there is a need for delegates of the Icelandic Red Cross to be sent to the field: “That increases our chance of sending money as well, as then we have become part of the project”. Lastly mentioned are

forgotten places, humanitarian crises in places that are not heard from in the media and are especially in need of assistance for that reason.

The representative said that in the 1990s the Red Cross would answer every single appeal it received, roughly 30-40 times a year, with a token amount of about maybe 200.000 ISK each time. Gradually the response evolved into sending money more rarely, but sending higher amounts. “Now we will consider if we are able to handle the entire project for the IFRC”. An example of this was a recent case of draughts and crop failures in the SAHEL area. The Icelandic Red Cross took over management of one country in the area, Gambia, with which it had a long relationship with and knowledge of: „We provided all the funding needed, and sent a project manager to oversee the project, while the Gambian Red Cross executed the plans“. The representative said it was around 2000 that the emphasis change was made, and that it happened gradually. After 2008, the progress is more in the direction of the IRC taking control of, or becoming big partners in single humanitarian projects.

The representative described what happens indoors in the IRC in the case of an emergency: “We almost always react to emergencies before we apply to the MFA” they said, and added that it usually takes a long time to apply. The MFA has tried to be quick but still the IRC almost always react first with its own funds. It then receives funds from the MFA later that either replenish its own funds, so it can react as quickly next time, or more often, are added to what the Red Cross initially contributed. The IRC has a Code of Practice for what should happen in a sudden emergency, an arrangement that is activated in the case of natural disasters and the like. The system changed recently with the founding of an Emergency Response Division, which mostly does domestic work, but now handles international emergencies in some cases as well. Either the head of the Humanitarian Aid Division or the head of the Emergency Response Division immediately contacts the director and contact person for IRC delegates and tells them what is going on. This happens as soon as news breaks of the disaster, hopefully within an hour. In the following hours a memo is put together. The representative stated the Red Cross knows of earthquakes very early thanks to the U.S. Geological Survey, and can see how large they are:

Take Haiti as an example, in the first minutes we knew what had happened, looked at the U.S. geological Survey, saw on maps how shallow, how hard and how close to Port au Prince it had been. So in 10 minutes we knew there was a city of millions, one

of the poorest in the world, with badly constructed buildings, we knew it was big. So the process starts immediately.

After the memo has been written, there is a meeting where it is assessed whether the disaster is likely to warrant a response from the Icelandic and the International Red Cross, and a decision is made on what to do. Attending this meeting are the project manager of the country in question if applicable, and the relevant department heads; from emergency response, help- and humanitarian and communication. That is for assessing whether there is a need for a fundraising campaign to the public: "In case of a large disaster, there would likely be a decision making meeting within 12 hours, on the yes or no decision. Is it big enough for us to jump-start everything, should we start fundraising?" Through the whole process the IRC communicates with the International Red Cross. Before it decides to send out an international distress appeal, it assembles a team to assess the situation, and the need for help from the International Red Cross: "It can be very different. An earthquake is not the same as an earthquake. Haiti called for one response, Japan for an entirely different one".

Made clear was that this system has been defined in-house, and that the immediate response can be different based on circumstances: "When the Earthquake hit Haiti, we responded immediately. When there were floods in the Balkans there was not a rush, we were not sending boats to save people". What the Icelandic Red Cross sent were experts to train volunteers in crisis counselling, which happened weeks later. Earlier the international Red Cross had sent a fact team for field assessment, and IRC has people qualified for that as well.

Asked if the process was in any way different when it came to long-term emergencies, such as civil wars, as in the Central African Republic which the Icelandic Red Cross has responded to, the representative said that in those cases it is normally the ICRC that responds. The IFRC almost always needs to raise funds first, and then reacts using that money, although it has a specific emergency fund that makes first responses possible. In the case of the ICRC, it almost always has people on the spot and is very independent in the way it works. When a situation occurs it reacts with its own staff, but also cooperates with the National Societies. It is able to call for specific means of help that have been pre-negotiated; hospitals, teams to set up camps and so forth. The Icelandic Red Cross specialises in crisis



counselling teams, first aid teams, and communication officers to ensure good liaisons with the given national society:

So we simply get an appeal, and have committed to be ready to send these specific people within 48 hours. An example of this was the Gaza bombings in July 2014, they asked us if we had a surgical nurse, we got the message Friday, and that person left Saturday morning.

The extent of the Icelandic Church Aid's domestic work has grown considerably after Iceland's economic collapse in 2008, and now the majority of the staff deals mainly with that. The representative of the NGO says the process of emergency appeals is mostly on their desk, although other staff is consulted, especially those with experience in international development work. The staff often talks informally over a cup of coffee, where any input is welcome, but: "at the end of the day, I am the one who knows the current financial status, I know the history of our humanitarian aid projects, and the status of our development projects". The ICA receives several appeals for humanitarian aid a month via email. The final decision remains with the ICAs central board, but the staff does not notify the board of every appeal, mostly the ones they feel are connected to their work or, - "concern one of those world-shaking events".

The appeals are quite detailed, and expertly present the level of emergency and the estimated needs: "If I see immediately that does not fit with what we are doing, the appeal will not move off my desk". If in doubt, the rest of the staff is consulted, and might come to the conclusion that this has relevance to the ICAs work and present it to the board. If the ICA decides to move forward, it sends an application to the MFA: "This would usually happen after a board meeting where the decision is confirmed, but in some cases we feel are urgent, we will call the Chairman of the board and talk to board members and get preliminary approval". The board would then officially approve the application the next time it convenes: "In the case it would not approve, we would simply withdraw the application". That is not something that is likely to happen, as the board puts its trust in the hand of the employees. The staff is in touch with ACT alliance and the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) especially, and if the staff feels something is urgent, the board will nearly always agree. Board members might inquire for more information on financial situation or the project proposal, but they almost never veto decisions: "But I repeat, many appeals never reach

them. I just see this is not ours. If the NCA is strong somewhere, what good will it do to send extra three million ISK?” The representative reminds that the funds they have are limited, both internally and at the MFA. For example, once they applied to support both the Philippines and Syria in 2013 they did not have the means to support many appeals after that.

When describing the process of how appeals for humanitarian aid are reviewed and on what terms, the general rule is the staff and the board assess the situation “We receive many appeals a month, and it is a little bit about choosing; where should we participate? You cannot back them all”. Whether the emergency is in their project countries has an effect, as they feel they are closer to them: “It is just human nature”. Large international events, “something like Syria, The Philippines, or Haiti” which they consider world class crises, ICA is likelier to participate in: “When there is global awareness of a crisis everyone wants to chip in”. What also has some weight is the fact that sometimes the MFA requests applications for certain things. Once in a while they will emphasise in messages to NGOs where they think the need is greatest. This is seriously considered and can influence decisions. Sometimes, they might conclude that it is not for them to apply for, “as we are not doing anything in the Central African Republic”, to take an example. Something else might connect better, and then that will be discussed: “If we get appeals from two places, we will likely choose the one that the government prioritises”. Following such a request from the MFA, the ICA might contact its foreign associates, who might provide an insight contributing to the decision to apply or not to. Sometimes it also receives big outcries from ACT pleading for support of an urgent project, and that might lead them to apply. Occasionally ICA also contacts the MFA for advice, to ask whether it would make sense to apply for a certain thing: “There is nothing official about it that decides whether we apply or not, but it can be good to consult”. Apart from those things what mostly concerns the ICA is the connection: “Do we have knowledge of the area, or partners working close to the emergency? That might lead us to apply”.

The representative mentions the discourse on “donor darlings” and says this is a conversation ACT alliance is having: “In meetings the sentiment is expressed that we should not swing by the latest trend or fashion, but rather try to make professional decisions”. And they try to be aware and avoid falling into those traps. Sometimes the ICA has to choose between appeals, some of which are getting a lot of attention while others fly under the

radar. If the projects are close to its work, e.g. in Ethiopia, it might support those. Also, ACT will send repeat notices on appeals that are not doing well, and sometimes the ICA is able to support those. The ICA also takes note what other NGOs in Iceland are applying for, and if another NGO is allocated a lot, for example for Syria, the staff will think about applying for something else, that is not in the public eye but they might have credible professional information about: "What I am saying is it sometimes helps to pick the unpopular choice. Sometimes ACT has that as an argument for getting better support for something". Sudan is an example of this, a place that the discussion has left a little behind but still has a lot of distress. The NCA is strong there, and the ICA get appeals that remind them that while it was popular to support some years ago, the need has not vanished: "So I guess we are in the similar tracks as others, certain things become more popular and as a result discussion and encouragement to support the others pops up". ACT members are a part of this, lobbying to their governments as well, the NCA does much advocacy and is an example of how NGOs can be watchdogs: "Watching that authorities are not just doing the popular thing, and reminding of other things that need attention". The representative stresses that in both development and humanitarian projects, it is plainly urgent need that drives the work, and these are all important projects: "ACT and LWF, these are professional INGOs, and they clearly prioritise based on needs".

SOS Children's Villages Iceland runs a small office with a staff of four. The main goal of the Icelandic office is to promote the work of the international SOS Children's Villages and procure sponsors for its projects. The task of processing appeals for humanitarian aid from the INGO is mostly on the interviewee's desk, along with another employee with whom they discuss things and make decisions. In the event of a humanitarian crisis the SOS headquarters sends the national associations information on the crisis, the relief plans, and invites them to take part. At first they receive a notification stating that SOS is preparing emergency aid there and a plea to start raising funds. At this point there are not any detailed documents. Supervening is a program proposal with a budget and a description of the project: "Then we see the cost of the project and we can assess whether we want to participate or not. We look at each case independently, and in some cases we decide to fund them". SOS Iceland has an emergency fund, which they can allocate from with a moment's notice. That fund is mostly comprised of donations from people, part of which are put into the emergency fund: "If the crisis is extensive and situated in the focus areas of the MFA

then we will look at the possibility to apply for government funding. That is our process in a nutshell“. They were quite clear that the MFAs preferences were a deciding factor in determining whether to apply for humanitarian aid, and normally SOS would not apply for humanitarian aid unless the emergency was inside the MFAs focus areas. An exception to that would be if the MFA called for application for a specific need, which might be independent of the focus areas: “Like with the Philippines. The region is not a focus area of the MFA, but when the earthquake hit, the MFA announced it was taking applications, we applied and got allocated funds“. Their representative also made clear that the structure of the INGO only allows it to apply for countries where SOS has operations: “If there is an emergency in a country like Afghanistan, where we have no operations, we do not get involved – we are not on the field“.

The representative of Barnaheill – Save the Children admits right of the bat that it is not the strongest when it comes to humanitarian aid: “You are focusing on humanitarian aid, and we have been doing really little in that area. We have focused on Syria“. Additionally they have sent funds to Haiti, Japan and Somalia, because of draughts, but in the last couple of years only applied for Syria: “We opened for donations for the Philippines, but unfortunately the income was so low we never sent it there“. Instead the funds, less than 500.000 ISK, went to an internal account marked “humanitarian aid“. Save the Children Iceland did not push the matter in any way, just offered a way to donate through their NGO. Others pressed the issue, the representative says, and collected vast amounts: “We are not a fundraising battery in the way I would say UNICEF is. That is its core, constantly raising funds, and that is why it is good at it“. Meanwhile, they say, Save the Children mostly raises funds for domestic projects and has not been running big campaigns. It has applied and received humanitarian aid grants from the MFA several times in the past years though, most recently for Syria in 2013: “We regularly apply to the MFA, because we get 90% and only have to procure 10% ourselves. So if we have a humanitarian aid project that costs 10 million, we can apply for nine from the MFA“. This lessens the burden of such a project, while for development projects the ratio is 70/30.

The Ebola crisis came up in discussion, and the representative said that while Save the Children International had been doing a lot of work around the incident, in Iceland the NGO had not received many appeals for that, so it had not applied for it to the MFA: “It seems

only the bigger Save the Children members are working on that. But we have been focusing on Syria, and the children there“. When I asked if that meant that SCI felt enough effort was being put into the Ebola crisis, the representative answered that SCI probably felt it was never enough, it just did not target the Icelandic office as such: “We are probably not at the top of the list of who to call when more is needed, being one of the smallest offices. Our amounts will not make or break anything“. The Icelandic office does get reminders to contribute in circular letters sent to all country offices.

Because of its relatively small size, the NGO has to pick and choose what its effort amounts to: “We just do not have the battery to start grand campaigns. So right now we are looking towards Syria and focusing on fundraising for that“. It is practical for Save the Children Iceland to have only one humanitarian project going at a time: “You have to remember, our focus is very much on our domestic work. We do not have anyone in the staff dealing with this. This is just something I do on the side. And I have all the foreign projects on my hands“. Additionally the NGO has two employees doing domestic projects exclusively and one who does publicity and fundraising. The staff discusses these matters occasionally, but ultimately the responsibility falls on one person.

Save the Children Iceland has a central board comprised of 10 people that convenes monthly. Right now the NGO is in the middle of a policy forming process: “Sitting down and deciding on a path for how to manage our foreign projects“. As a tiny component of SCI they want to find out how they can maximise the usefulness of their contributions. Asked if the central board is consulted on issues like humanitarian aid, they said that once the NGO has set their policies straight; that is the kind of process they would like to have: “Right now it is kind of spontaneous, I will answer right away that we want to apply. Then I will discuss the matter later in a board meeting“. The representative added that they consider it a part of their job to make that call: “It is always a question on how to finance the difference, I have a budget, and I need to find those 10% somewhere“. The budget allows for certain flexibility when it comes to humanitarian aid, and they know that if the funding from the MFA does not come through; it will nullify both the revenue and expenses side of their accounts. In that case, would they still send the one million they were required to obtain as 10% balance to the MFAs 90%? “No, we had not really obtained that yet. Had we gotten the government grant, we would have been able to find the one million in unmarked donations“. The NGO

receives monthly donations to a fund which is primarily marked for domestic use, but in these cases it can pull from it. But it has also happened that Save the Children sends aid without the MFAs involvement, last year the students of Hagaskóli High School raised 1.1 million ISK for the refugee camps in Syria, which they sent along with their own contribution: “That is great to be able to do. But these are not large sums, the MFA is crucial in that aspect”.

Asked of the NGOs speciality the representative said that it was strong when it came to refugee camps, setting up schools and child friendly spaces for them to plug out of their bad situation while getting social and psychological support: “That is one of our strengths. We regard the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guiding light”. As soon as a child is put in a position where it is unable to attend school, its rights are being violated. Save the Children wants to help them get back in the position to claim that right: “To take Syria as an example, we are seeing a generation losing out several years of their education”.

Mentioned as well was the feeling that people become immune to tragedies rather quickly: “If something new happens there is more response. The hurricane in the Philippines got lot of attention, even though other catastrophes are just as terrible, and continue to be so day after day”. This is partially why Save the Children Iceland wants to keep its focus on helping Syria, even though other tragedies happen every day: “But as I said we are in the middle of a policy making process, figuring out the steps for the future. Right now the MFA is calling for applications for a summer window, and I will apply for Syria again. We are not stopping”.

As stated earlier, the Christian charity ABC Children’s Aid is unique among the NGOs researched here in not having a larger international operation around it, being only in direct contact with its various development projects. However, it has received humanitarian aid from the MFA, and I talked to its representative to see what the process was like: “We have had floods and hurricanes in Pakistan, close to our schools. I cannot remember if we applied for humanitarian aid once or twice”. The NGO also has operations in the Philippines, but has not applied for humanitarian aid for those. But, with their closer cooperation with Barnmissionen in Sweden, in the future they probably would: “When we are sure we have the means to help. It is a big responsibility to be handed money. You want to be able to use it properly”. Also mentioned is the fact that it is a prerequisite for applying for humanitarian

aid to have an emergency fund you can draw from immediately, and then add more: “Since the economic collapse the operating costs of our schools almost doubled when the Icelandic króna collapsed. So we have not been able to save up for an emergency fund, we use all our money each month”. That has dissuaded ABC from applying for humanitarian aid: “But we have done that in the development aid, applied for certain projects, and then raised funds to meet the goal”.

One time it engaged in humanitarian aid was in the wake of a hurricane in the summer of 2010, which severely damaged a security wall that was around one school, meant to shield against possible attacks. A big part of it collapsed and needed rebuilding: “It should have held any normal weather”. The importance of having such a wall became apparent, as the school could not guaranty the safety of the children without the wall all the children were sent home immediately: “I believe there was around one school attack a week in Pakistan in 2010. Malala of course, is a famous example”. The wall was eventually rebuilt and reinforced. Also that year the NGOs other schools in Pakistan suffered damage from the severe floods in the country: “There were damages in several schools, both the roof and walls. This was a separate time from the other wall”. ABC applied for humanitarian aid from the MFA and received a grant to fix the damages.

School attacks remain a great threat to the operations in Pakistan where ABC runs 13 schools. The interviewee mentioned that after a 2014 attack on a military school, where 132 children of soldiers were killed, Pakistani authorities set a certain security standard for all schools: “This is on my desk right now, this issue, we need to fulfil these standards”. The requirements included cameras, scans for the gates, an armed guard, a handheld metal-detector and an eight feet (2.4 m) high wall around, with barbed wire on top. The estimated cost was 2.1 million ISK: “I got these conditions in January, and we cannot afford this. We were just discussing this morning what to do”. The NGO will not take chances, as there are Talibans there whose targets are police stations and schools. But it is a one-time only cost as ABC has had guards in most schools for many years: “But sorry I got of topic. I do not know if this warrants being called humanitarian aid”. I expressed the fact that a thesis such as mine would have to address that the boundaries between humanitarian and development aid are not always clear cut, and this story would shine some light on that. Asked if this was something they would try to apply to the MFA for they answered that they had not thought

of it that way, but could try contacting it. Along similar lines another issue came up, whether inoculation could count as humanitarian aid, as in a way it is prevention of an emergency. ABC is currently dealing with that in Burkina Faso, where they have 400 children in school. Last year one died, and this year another one. One from jaundice, one from hepatitis: “We decided to inoculate all the children for those two deceases. And it is quite expensive, probably 2 million ISK. The Government has just started to inoculate infants but we have to cover the older children in our schools”.

Although ABC had not received grants for humanitarian aid on more than one occasion during the last five years, I asked whether it had experienced other disasters hitting close to its operations. ABC has done work in the Philippines, in cooperation with the Nordic Children’s Mission, where there have been bad hurricanes and floods which the Swedish NGO has responded to. Its operations in India are also close to Chennai, where the Tsunami hit in 2004. Also mentioned was the 2007-2008 crisis in the aftermath of Kenya’s presidential elections: “The situation in the slums were terrible. We were trying to hand out food, because people could not go out, everything was closed”. The schools in the slums were closed, and it was on the initiative of the local staff that they started the food aid. Emails were sent to sponsors asking for donations: “I do not recall talking to the MFA about applying for humanitarian aid in that case”. On how the decision is made what project ABC applies to the MFA for, they say they try to use the application deadlines for development aid twice a year, and it really is a matter of prioritisation: “We have a list of very urgent projects. So the question is just which is the most urgent”. At the time of the interview ABC was setting up schools for street children in Kenya, and that was their current priority in fundraising. The next project in line was a dormitory for girls in Pakistan.

I was hesitant to ask whether ABC Children’s Aid had any specific emphasis in humanitarian aid, given that its humanitarian efforts have not been its main focus. The answer was grounded, the emphasis being on the help becoming permanent. That it will not get stuck in the humanitarian process, and will obtain some form of sustainability: “Building a school that will then continue to run. The humanitarian part cannot last for too long”. It is safe to say that the current involvement of ABC Children’s Aid in humanitarian projects is just when something happens to their operations, their children, although the representative felt that could change with the increased cooperation with the Nordic



Children's Mission, which will come into effect starting in 2016. ABC raises some interesting questions, as although it is clearly a development aid oriented NGO, many of its projects border on counting as humanitarian.

To summarise, the Icelandic Red Cross receives many appeals and chooses not to respond to them all with a token amount but to choose which ones it will contribute significantly towards. It assess factors such as whether their expertise can be used in the crises, whether it has been working in and has knowledge of the area in question, and whether there is a need for Icelandic delegates there. Its employees also check if needs are being met sufficiently by others, and emphasise spotting "forgotten areas" that do not receive enough attention. Although rare, it engages in humanitarian aid on its own accord without involvement of the International Red Cross, as demonstrated by the Cyprus project.

The Church Aid has fewer people and less structure, but similarly gets many appeals for humanitarian aid a month. The board has final say on applications, but the employees discard most appeals, as they vastly outnumber those they could support. Factors that increase the likelihood of the NGO picking up the appeal include if it is in the MFAs focus zone, close to the Church Aid's own operations, a world class catastrophe, or perhaps if their foreign contacts send repeat notices emergencies they consider neglected. The representative said effort is made in professional decisions and not letting trends sway their work.

The camp of SOS Children's Villages also has few staff members, with two people collaborating on decisions regarding humanitarian aid, which is not the NGOs main focus. The main factors that increase the likelihood of it appealing are if the emergency is in the focus area of the MFA, if there is an advertisement from the MFA about a specific emergency outside their focus areas, or if the crisis is considered extensive. SOS notably uses its existing structures in the countries affected, and would not apply for aid in countries it does not operate in.

Save the Children Iceland does not prioritise foreign aid, and is not as fundraising oriented as other NGOs regarding humanitarian projects. It does not receive many humanitarian appeals from abroad, as the head office rather targets the larger country offices. In the last couple of years it has picked Syria as their project to focus on and it has ambitions to continue to stand by that, while it has previously collected and sent funds to Haiti, Japan and

Somalia in some capacity. The representative expressed the opinion that the NGO should stick to what it knows, having built up contact with the project in Syria. Its future policies were being revised when we spoke, but it seemed unlikely more emphasis would be put on international humanitarian aid.

ABC Children's Aid applied for and received humanitarian aid when floods and hurricanes damaged schools in Pakistan the NGO runs. As it is not a member of an INGO, it does not receive appeals and actively take part in international humanitarian aid. Their representative expressed a desire to do more in that capacity after entering a closer cooperation with a larger Swedish NGO. They also raise the issue of what can be considered humanitarian aid, as working in the difficult situations they sometimes face is sometimes close to providing humanitarian aid. Examples include fortifying schools in Pakistan because of a terror threat, inoculating entire schools in Burkina Faso to prevent epidemics, and even distributing food in turbulent times in Kenya.

While every NGO is different, only the first two mentioned really considered humanitarian aid one of their main focus areas, and the first three shared the same issue of how to pick and choose from appeals while they each had a different approaches and priorities in tackling that. The latter two NGOs do not focus on humanitarian aid in the same way. Save the Children mainly focuses on domestic work, while Save the Children international is a formidable humanitarian actor, and ABC on their development projects. They still have both engaged in humanitarian work, Save the Children has picked Syrian children as their project, and would like to keep supporting them through their INGO. ABC deals with difficult conditions around their development projects that can sometimes be considered humanitarian.

#### **4.5 Communications with the MFA and the Application Process.**

During the process of taking interviews it became clear that this thesis would need to devote a section to a discussion of the MFAs current system of cooperation with NGOs. A fair portion of each interview with the NGOs representatives went into discussing how they felt about their contact with the MFA, and what they felt could be improved. As some of the interviewees requested anonymity on this topic, remarks will not be attributed to the NGO in question as in the other chapters. For some cohesion, in this part of the discussion the

interviewees from the five NGOs have been designated letters A, B, C, D and E in no particular order. This decision was ultimately easy to make, because as will be seen the interviewees from the organisations felt similarly on many of the issues that were raised.

Interviewee A reminisced on the early days of cooperation between state and NGOs: “Before the application rules became so stiff, it was much easier to get assistance”. Humanitarian NGOs could write a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and either got a yes or a no for an answer: “The Minister had elbow room to use for something like this”. After the new rules it is a bigger deal, having to put up a certain percentage, and a detailed plan. Still, they feel overall having stricter rules is an improvement: “There is no question that it is more professional, and it has led to those applying working more professionally. But it was not easy to adapt too, not at first. We are over that hill, and these are changes for good”.

Interviewee E said that around the turn of the century, it was not common that the MFA supported NGOs in good deeds. The money largely went to the UN institutes: “I still remember a decision to give 600.000 ISK to some great emergency, and it took the Government to approve”. However in the last decade great strides have been made inside the MFA, both generally in the development sector and especially with humanitarian aid: “A lot of good work has been put into it, and care taken to do it in a professional way. These allocation rules are a part of that”. The rules are reviewed regularly to find better ways to utilise the funds Iceland wants to put into Development and Humanitarian projects: “I believe the next logical step is to design these framework agreements with the larger NGOs. And I think the MFA agrees, this is something our neighbouring countries have done quite a while ago”. When asked to describe the current system of the MFA they said that it was ever changing. “There have been two application windows a year, the 15<sup>th</sup> of March and the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, and we have applied then for the more protracted emergencies”. For those projects, they say, it is not a problem to have these two windows, “but obviously they do not fit when we are talking sudden catastrophes. And sometimes they decide, either the MFA or the government itself, to support an emergency, maybe sudden like Haiti, or manmade as Ukraine and Syria”.

Interviewee D explained that for the development projects the NGOs get 70% funding, and need to provide 30% themselves: “In the emergency aid category, we apply as the emergency happens. And it has happened that the MFA has the initiative of calling for

applications“. For humanitarian aid, the NGOs receive 90% and have to provide 10% themselves: “We are grateful for that, as it does not become too burdensome, we do not have to provide huge amounts of money each time we apply“. They believe the system has gotten better, now the MFA earmarks money that is meant for NGOs: “It used to be under the same hat as the ICEIDA and we really had to scrounge its funding, which then got less for its own projects“. They say they fought to get this earmarked fund established for a long time: “It is better now, there are earmarked funds for development, and earmarked funds for emergency aid, and these funds are meant for NGOs“. They add that the system is changing, as this year there was only a single application window, in May/June, instead of the previous two.

When asked to describe the process of application for humanitarian aid Interviewee D said in case of emergencies they get appeals from their INGO contact, and once they have good enough information they write an application, using a form made by the MFA. The form has specific categories, 250 words about the situation, and 250 words on what will be done and with whom: “It is standardised of course and in Icelandic. And along with it we will attach the relevant appeal and report from [the INGO] in English“. The MFA then has to review this all, applications from many parties, for a much higher number than they can allocate. And then they have to pick and choose:

As I see it, sometimes there is delay in answers, and it is probably because there is a committee meeting, and everyone in the committee has to read the documents, find time to meet - the process just takes time. And too much time we feel.

But, they add, it can also take the NGOs a while to apply if the INGO does not send the appeals and details right away: “So there are opportunities on both sides to improve. And they are being taken“.

Interviewee C had mostly good things to say about the communication with the MFA: “It is O.K. to get a rejection. You can never assume you are entitled to anything“. The MFA often gets applications that total in way higher amounts than they can afford to allocate, so they felt it is perfectly understandable that they have to pick and choose: “And its O.K. to prioritise. So I am not dissatisfied with getting a rejection“. Sometimes questioned is the logic behind specific decisions though. Generally, they felt that the communication was very good, and based on mutual trust, with everything put on the table, immediately informing the MFA if there are any difficulties in their projects, or changes that matter: “It is better to

notify of too much than too little, and I think there might be many reports unread in the MFAs shelves on our projects. But that is fine". In addition to the main reports, which are in English, the MFA receives summary reports once a year in Icelandic: "I would guess they read the summaries, and browse through the main reports". If the MFA sees any reason to, it can ask for more information which is then made accessible for them. Interviewee A on the other hand said that they did not communicate with the MFA a lot: "It is mainly around these applications. But we have felt they have a helpful attitude, and want NGOs to learn the right methods".

All the NGO representatives felt that the MFA had a problem, taking too long reviewing the applications. Interviewee A said they had trouble meeting their set dates: "We have to apply by a certain fixed deadline, but they keep pushing the date of the answers". Asked if this had ever caused problems they added that of course they always felt their projects were pressing and important: "But I do not think this has caused us any specific harm". They felt it was worse to get a rejection after a long wait instead of immediately. "Then a lot of time has passed without us making other arrangements, we feel we cannot be applying for corporate grants at the same time, as then we could have double funding for a project".

Interviewee E similarly felt there were things that could be fixed with the current allocation system of the MFA. "We, and others, have made several comments on the arrangement". The main criticism is that it can be too slow. According to the current guidelines there are two application windows each year and the MFA allots itself six weeks to review the applications, to say yes or no. "And this time has doubled, and gone over three months, even without being accounted for" Interviewee C said, also stating that "everyone knows that the MFA has not followed its own guidelines, which they set on their relations with NGOs. And that has to do with the time taken to review applications". This creates difficulty for the NGOs, as they have a project proposal ready to go, they have to advertise jobs, hire the right people, and the longer it drags to start, the longer the program start drags.

"Let us say we plan on having our answer in the end of October, and plan to use November and December to hire people, and then start the project in January. That all goes haywire if we do not hear from the MFA until mid-December, and in some cases it has caused serious trouble. So this is something that needs to be fixed".

Interviewee B had similar thoughts, stating that according to the rules it should take six weeks to provide answers, which had not been the case. And apparently it has been a consistent problem: “It is very bothersome when we have ongoing projects, and we are of course always scheduling them, and maybe even have seasonal projects timed to something special”. They went on to describe how a project had been aimed at winterisation, which ultimately did not happen the way it was supposed to, as they received no answer until the end of December, long after winter had arrived.

Asked if the same applied to humanitarian projects or if they went quicker, Interviewee C responded: “I cannot say I see a palpable difference in the time it takes. I know of NGOs that applied for humanitarian aid and got delayed answers”. They added that this had caused some trouble. They found a delay of answers was the rule rather than the exception: “It is almost always prolonged, whether it is for humanitarian or development projects. But we have never had to put off any projects. We are often a small part of financing a large project, so it does not stand and fall with us”. This is something everyone knew and was concerned about, something this research clearly showed, as it could cause inconvenience in their work. They thought people might be a bit afraid of offending the people in the MFA, who work under a lot of pressure and are doing their best: “The critique could get a bit personal against someone in the MFA who is doing a great job, but simply has too much on their plate”. By and large the MFA was doing a good job, the head of the department would probably like to have more employees to delegate tasks: “The criticism is not pointed at any person, it is more of an organizational issue, I feel this category needs to be better manned and financed. It costs to do a good job”.

Interviewee D also commented on how it could take long to receive answers to their application, especially with development projects: “It has sometimes taken the MFA too long to reply. I do not remember the specifics, but I think it has sometimes been two months”. In emergency projects they felt it was their INGO contact who could be faster to get the appeals and the reports to them: “Because we cannot apply without having good information”. While they acknowledge it was difficult not to be able to respond to a sudden catastrophe until two months later, they reminded that their strength was that they are a part of a larger context, which is very quick to react: “They have larger funds so they are able

to react immediately, and then wait to replenish their funds. Of course we do not have the resources to send out millions immediately, apply, and then get a refusal“.

Interviewee C exposed another insecurity of the current allotment system, especially towards development projects. They told a story a development project meant to last for some years which had received an MFA grant to begin with, when one year they got a rejection, so the project had to be stopped or at least slowed down: “That is extremely uncomfortable, and we are all in this position, if we apply for a development project, we never get funded more than one year“. And development projects generally are not carried out in a year, the NGOs can only assume they will get additional funding: “And if it fails, pretty much everything is ruined“. They felt the best way to address this problem would be to establish framework agreements. The MFA would simply perform an assessment on a given program and if it fulfilled all conditions, it would allot the project fixed amount a year.

Interviewee E voiced a similar opinion, saying that establishing framework agreements was something that was being worked on, but they did not know exactly what the process would be: “As we see it the agreement would enable us to react immediately. That would increase flexibility and the MFA would simply make a contract with us for a certain amount that the Icelandic parliament has decided will go through NGOs“. The MFA would issue broad recommendations on how the money should be spent, but the NGOs would be trusted to assess where the need at any given time, in concordance with the MFAs general terms: “So in case of a sudden catastrophe, the contract is there, the money is there, and it can be used immediately“. It would presumably be a fixed amount each year, although the arrangement has not been decided.

Interviewee D elaborated, saying that in Scandinavia framework agreements have made humanitarian aid a whole other environment: “We have it difficult here when it comes to this. I never know for humanitarian or development projects, I have to apply each year, and I could get a refusal on a three year project any time. It is very insecure“. Having the framework agreements would be a great progress as with them would come the ability to support projects for more than a year at a time: “There have been positive changes, but compared to the Nordic countries we have a long way to go. “

When asked to clarify if such framework agreements would cover both development and humanitarian aid as well, interviewee D was not sure: “I am mainly talking the development

projects“. They felt it should be made clearer what funds were available in humanitarian aid, but were not sure how framework agreements between NGOs and the MFA would work: “The details have not been worked out, but they are in discussion and this is what I would expect: Multi-year support for development projects and a fixed amount that we could allocate to humanitarian aid“. This arrangement would spare them the long decision making process, as applications could be approved almost immediately.

Interviewee B shared an observation that they felt the application form was not good enough: “It felt unclear, and I was not always sure whether an attachment was needed“. They had offered their assistance reviewing the form, just as the NGOs get to review new application rules. Otherwise, the communications are good, but: “sometimes when you ask a question, I feel people do not quite know how to answer them, like the knowledge just is not in place“. They mentioned that it had been good to turn to ICEIDA in those cases: “both we ourselves and the MFA look to them for an opinion“.

Interviewee C felt the way applications are treated in the MFA could be improved, hinting that there was still a certain level of lobbyism involved: “There are many NGOs applying for grants, frankly some of them are less professional than others, and try to use their personal connections to influence after the application deadline has passed“. They said there were examples of people calling the Minister, who formally has no role but to approve the grants in the end, and lobby for their projects: “This is something that needs to be addressed in the MFAs Code of Practice“. They said that in their opinion, after NGOs send applications they should not initiate any contact with the MFA: “The MFA can contact you if they have questions, or need clarifications, but you should not bug them“. This, they said, was something they would like to see in the new application rules which were being drafted at the time of interview, and was something they had discussed with the MFA: “It is a problem we are all aware of. We need to be a little more professional in this“. But overall, they felt, the MFA is doing a good job, and that there had been much progress from 2009. The rules have been developed, they said, and the current ones are from 2012 are more comprehensive than the previous were: “Things are improving in the MFA, but we have not quite reached where we want to be“.

Interviewee D had a strong opinion what a systematic change with the institution of framework agreements could mean for them, stating it would simplify the process, make it



more sustainable, safer and ensure the grounds for development and humanitarian aid: “We hopefully would be able to hire more people, having access to these funds would mean there would be room to create more expertise within our ranks in the development sector”. They could do more, attend meetings abroad, and have a stronger staff, if the grounds of their operations were secure: “I feel this is a fundamental point. Why should I hire an employee for a project, if I just know about financing one year at a time? It is too unreliable”. They also felt that if the percentage of the NGOs in development aid could be reduced to 20% in development projects, which would enable them to use more funds to become experts, and enhance their knowledge: “When we have this short-range funding, it is difficult to defend the decision to invest in people, as the grounds are so weak. So this is a fundamental issue, and I am hopeful this is happening”. That way, they said, society would be using the strengths of the NGOs, as they are members of INGOs which have great knowledge and professionalism in store. Not just at the head office in Europe, but all over the world, as there are experts in the field that the money from Iceland can go directly to, and be utilised even better: “Because we are a part of an international professionally recognised NGO”. If the NGO is constantly in limbo about their capabilities, contributing 10 million now but nothing the next time, it creates uncertainty: “Every year I have to confirm to our office in [a development project in Africa] that they can extend the contracts with their staff, because we have secured financing for the next year”. Instead they would like to just be able to have steady financing until the mission is over. The staff would have secure contracts and they would not need to worry about them looking for other options. “We will be more professional and focused in what we are doing”. Interviewee B had similar thoughts: “What we also see, is that the development projects that are ongoing are still being applied for a year at a time. It creates uncertainty, there is a great number of people working in each and every project, and it is all in limbo, waiting for the paperwork in the MFA”.

Interviewee B comments that they feel things are in a state of uncertainty, as this year, 2015, the MFA decided to open only one application window, in June, instead of the previous two in March and September. They feel a bit out of the loop on the development of the new application rules: “We cannot just stop because the application rules are being changed. There are still humanitarian crises all over the world”. Regarding the application rules they say nothing has changed since this year, and they still have not seen the new draft

at the time of interview: “But the 2012 rules are valid until any change happens”. The rules are now going through a process inside the MFA, they will then be given over to us for review, and hopefully our comments will be noted. So I think they will not be ready until at first next fall. We will see”.

Interviewee B had been privy to discussions of making long-term contracts and lowering the percentage of the NGOs, but had not seen the proposal in any details: “We first heard about it early last year – or was it last fall - I do not remember. We sent a letter in January asking about the progress and were told there were still some committees it needed to go through”. They felt it was taking a long time, and suggested the MFA might be understaffed.

As this gathering of opinions shows it is evident that the representatives of the five NGOs largely agree on the faults of the current application system in the MFA, and have similar hopes for adjustments to be made. Every single interviewee mentioned that it can take the MFA far too long to review the applications, with some fearing that lobbying still played too big a part in the process. Other concerns include the perpetual limbo long-term projects are put in with the current system of year-by-year financing, and the inability it causes to build up a stable environment for employees, both of the projects abroad and of the NGOs themselves here, which would like to be stronger, more knowledgeable and more reliable. Steadier funding would help in that regard. It is evident the NGOs have been part of conversations on how things should evolve, as most agreed that framework agreements for both humanitarian aid and long-term development projects would be the way to go. There clearly was a difference in how much people felt they were “in the loop” in regards to the MFAs decision making, which seems logical as the extent of the NGOs’ foray into humanitarian aid varies greatly. Collectively, everyone seemed to agree that in the relatively short time the MFA has been allocating humanitarian grants to NGOs, great strides have been made towards more professionalism, and most of the interviewees seemed hopeful that with the upcoming revision of the Code of Practice, the shortcomings they now feel plague the system would be addressed.

Even as the general feeling was that the future of MFA and NGO cooperation in Iceland looked brighter with the communications and allocation systems being constantly refined through trial and error, one key question was whether the financing would increase concurrently. Several of the NGOs representatives hinted they felt that the MFA might be underfunded and understaffed, even as they agreed the staff there did the best they could.

Others expressed the hope that with the introduction of framework agreements the finances of their NGOs would become steadier, helping them being more professional in their work. Also expressed was the hope that with a reduced percentage of perhaps 20% funding for development aid, and down to 5% for humanitarian aid, the NGOs would have more leeway for their own growth. It remains obvious that these funds will not appear out of thin air, and unless the Icelandic States contribution to the category increases thoroughly in the coming years, not all of the NGOs will be able to fulfil their ambitions of growing their operations. Interesting to note will be how the framework agreements everyone looked forward to will differentiate between the NGOs, as they all hoped to reach such agreements, while some thought it likely they would only be made with the largest NGOs, at least to begin with. How this will affect the funding of the smaller ones, remains to be seen.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this research has been to peer into the decision making process of Icelandic NGOs regarding humanitarian aid and its ethical implications. Considered were the effects of the environment around them, especially the framework of the MFA, their international relations and Codes of Conduct. Results show that apart from ABC, which is the smallest humanitarian actor of the five, the NGOs have it in common to receive appeals from larger INGOs that inform their decision making substantially. How they chose from the appeals varies, the Red Cross focused on whether their knowledge of the area in question, expertise on certain topics or the specialisation of their delegates could be of use. Closeness to the ICAs development projects increased the likelihood of it applying for a crisis. SOS only applies for aid if it has operations close to the emergency, and preferably if it was situated in the MFAs focus areas. Save the Children receives fewer appeals and, for now, is keeping its focus on Syria. Many of the organisations mentioned severity of the crisis as a deciding factor. All the INGOs discussed are signatories of the Code of Conduct for the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, but it did not seem to have made a substantial impression on many of the interviewees, much more obvious were the influences of the NGOs own Codes of Conduct, which only SOS did not have. Everyone, the MFA employees included, thought the current allocation system of the MFA could be improved, while great strides had already been made towards better practices. The MFAs Code of Practice on allocation to NGOs was being reviewed as of this research and all my interviewees were hopeful its next iteration would address many of the qualms they currently had.

Vakil (1997) named descriptors as a way to solve the classification problem that follows NGOs; the simple question of “what exactly are they?” As has been stated before, the NGOs researched not only all have unique characteristics; they operate in different manners and on different scales. Yet we recognise them all as humanitarian NGOs. The orientation of the NGOs, which Vakil suggested as a useful descriptor, are quite different yet all touch upon

humanitarianism in one way or another, be it through religious zeal, commitment to protecting minors or belief in impartiality and philanthropy. As has been shown the NGOs deal with widely different themes as well, various domestic issues, differently directed development projects, and work in different manners, from the Red Cross having dozens of employees to others relying on voluntary work in some cases. In the end, they all fulfil the MFAs criteria of being non-profits legally registered in Iceland, having over 30 members or backers, laws, a board and a chairman, an audited annual account and experience in working in development countries. Additionally they meet the requirement of operating with democracy, human rights and equality as a guiding light in their work.

As Salm (1999) pointed out, Globalisation has undoubtedly had its share in the evolution of foreign relations in the last decades. This seems evident considering the NGOs being researched. The oldest one is the Red Cross, founded in Iceland in 1924, the next oldest is the Church Aid founded in 1969 after the Biafra fundraising campaign organised by the church. The three other NGOs covered were all founded in 1988-9, two of which (SOS and Save the Children) as branches of older international NGOs. It is worth noting that additionally in 1989 the Icelandic national committee of UNIFEM was founded (which later changed its name to UN Women), while UNICEFs national committee was launched in 2004. The field of humanitarianism in Iceland has visibly grown extensively in the last two and a half decades, with most of the NGOs expressing hope to grow and establish their operations further. All the INGOs discussed take some part in the UNs Cluster System, which was established in 2006 and further tightens the global net between humanitarian actors as Kovács (2011) discussed.

A key point to take away is humanitarianism and NGO and State relations in Iceland are young fields, and as with many others lagging a bit behind our neighbouring countries, as several of the interviewees noted. There is not a long experience of the state working with NGOs and the NGOs themselves are also still building up experience working in an international context. The ICRC and the IFRC made the Seville agreement in 1997 in an effort to end the “turf wars” that could grow tense between the NGOs, and are still making improvements to their system. ACT Alliance was formed in 2007, immensely strengthening the international network of the ICA and over 100 other church related charities. The Save the Children Alliance formed the more centralised Save the Children international and

opened a head office in 2010. SOS Children's Villages have only in recent years become more prolific in humanitarian aid, which per the NGOs name was not its original focus, but they have ambition to help in the local context whenever something happens around them. Even the relatively isolated ABC is entering into more international cooperation, and see opportunities to provide better humanitarian aid through their not-quite-merger with Swedish charity Barnmissionen. The infrastructure of these international NGOs is in many cases only recently formed and in all still being refined, the same can be said of the larger UN body of NGOs. The current Cluster Coordination System of the UN was set in 2005, and while a decade might seem like a long time, all those systems and structures are still being tested, and as the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative suggests, they should continue to be improved for as long as they exist. Balcik (2010) felt that coordination in humanitarian relief chains was in many ways still in its infancy.

This relative inexperience also applies to the ways of the Icelandic government and its cooperation with the third sector. As has been stated, the experience of this cooperation is not very long. The current system of the MFA was being revised as this research was made, which is a testament to the young and fertile state the process is in. The insights the interviewees have made into the current process might not apply next year, or the year after, as the system is likely to have changed by then. What will likely follow is another process of trial and error in the ever-present pursuit of improvement.

Rashcy and Schwindt (2011) raised concern over how aid is sent rather than where, and found that the means might often be donor orientated. In most cases the Icelandic humanitarian aid is in the form of funds sent through large INGOs to contribute to a project. The Red Cross has made exceptions to this, e.g. filling a government plane with goods in the wake of the Haiti earthquake. In that case the supplies brought could be integrated into the supply system of the international Red Cross. It has also increasingly wanted to take over coordination of entire projects on behalf of the international Red Cross. The Red Cross also has experienced delegates to send on its behalf to disaster sites. Meanwhile, Save the Children Iceland is so small it does not get access to the INGOs tight awards management system, and has to send their funds through other country offices. They naturally feel that for them it is better to contribute to larger projects than try to make their own with their

limited capability. The other NGOs only mentioned contributing to INGOs appeals with a transfer of funds, the simplest and most reliable method in their context.

Hilhorst (2005) found that the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, could be integrated better into the daily routines of NGOs, while it still had a motivating effect. It is worth noting that in all cases, the INGOs discussed were signatories of the code, not their Icelandic counterparts. While all the NGO representatives seemed aware of that Code, there wasn't much evidence of it influencing their organisations work. Only the representative of the Red Cross seemed to know in details the history and role of the code. ABC is the one exception to this, which is understandable as they are working on a different scale than the rest of the NGOs, and don't have an INGO counterpart. With the exception of SOS – Children's Villages the Icelandic NGOs had all set their own Codes of Conduct, which seemed to be better known and utilised. I echo the sentiment of Hilhorst that it would be positive to see these kind of documents, and especially this Code of Conduct that all the INGOs have in common integrated into their work. While all the NGOs had put effort into securing and thinking a moral basis for their work, knowing and caring about this common ground they share, seems it would strengthen the resolve to do better. Having your own values is important, but knowing and recognising the common ones is as well. A lot of work has been put into defining common goals in humanitarian aid, and even in such small NGOs as those featured here it should count.

The question of ethics in disasters and where to lay the blame is as old as the modern humanitarian effort, as Strömberg (2007) showed when he quoted Rousseau pointing out that nature didn't construct the vulnerable city of Lisbon, a line of thinking that carried through to this day in disaster risk analysis. Verchick (2012) similarly pointed out the difficulty to assess whether disasters could ever be considered "completely natural". If it counts as an injustice, someone was responsible, if not it was a mere misfortune. He finds that by and large the state is responsible for trying to decrease social vulnerability and increase resiliency. By extension this applies to NGOs in development aid as well, and ties interestingly ties into questions of the NGOs work, as ABCs representative pondered what really counted as humanitarian aid. They mentioned examples of preventive measures made in their development programs such as the inoculation of children and the guarding of

schools. The representative of the Red Cross also mentioned as an ethical issue how important it was to be aware of the potential pitfalls of any project they undertake, taking the example of gender issues in refugee camps. Valentini (2013) similarly asked the question whether there was a difference between helping out of justice or charity, finding that while New Zealanders deserved help out of charity, the western world had a duty of justice to help Haiti, because of their previous failure not to undermine its independence.

Much of the research regarding allocation of humanitarian aid, such as Drury, Olson and Van Belle (2005), put considerable effort into analysing not only the decision where aid is sent, but also how much. It seems in the case of Icelandic NGOs that the second decision is simply a matter of budget. The funds of the NGOs themselves, who must put up 10% for humanitarian aid, are limited, while the pool fund of the MFA allocates from is also limited. The former decision, on whether to apply or not, is the more interesting one in this context, as it turns out the NGOs rely on official policy and advice from the MFA to know what emergencies are considered priorities, and hence what they should apply for. Some NGOs also mentioned they were likelier to support emergencies close to their long-term development projects, while also taking cues from their INGOs on which appeals were important or ignored and needed support. Many mentioned the extensiveness of the crisis itself as a factor.

Worth mentioning is the amount of news coverage on each case. This thesis did not go the route of counting stories in various media to try to find a pattern. Previous studies such as Carstensen et al. (2003) indicated that the importance of media coverage for allocation had been overstated. None of my interviewees mentioned explicitly that they followed the media and took cues from what seemed to be grabbing attention. But certainly that might not be the sort of thing people do consciously, or admit to easily. As Carstensen's et al. case vs case comparison showed, it is difficult to pinpoint overall trends in motivations and reasoning for humanitarian aid, as each case is different.

As Fink and Redaelli (2010) examined bandwagon effects that can occur within the largest donor nations, a worthwhile question would be if similar effects occur in the small environment of Icelandic NGOs engaging in humanitarian aid. It seems that the NGOs remain committed to professionalism, and to providing aid to where it is needed. However the tendency to mention the MFAs focus areas as their own priorities, drives home the



conclusion that sometimes NGOs will apply for what they find is likeliest to get funded. After all, a considerable amount of work goes into these applications, and they know the MFA receives more applications than it can fund.

Fink and Redaelli (2010) also hit another relevant point, observing that emergencies like civil wars and draughts can last for months, if not years, and that it is not clear how medical facilities established during such events can be distinguished from investment into health infrastructure generally found in development aid. The reflection of ABCs representative on where the line between development and humanitarian aid is interesting in that context, as sometimes they find themselves in working in difficult circumstances doing projects that border on counting as humanitarian. Examples include fortifying schools in Pakistan because of a terror threat, inoculating entire schools in Burkina Faso to prevent epidemics, and even distributing food in turbulent times in Kenya. The rest of the NGOs discussed of course do both humanitarian and development projects.

Interesting to note is the will of most the NGOs' representatives to deepen their connection to the government and rely more heavily on its funding, citing neighbouring countries in Scandinavia as a role model. This is clearly in tune with Macrae's (1996) suggestion that the function of NGOs in society has evolved, as financial independence from government no longer seems to be as crucial an aspect of their work. Macrae wondered if this could have a negative effect on the institutional freedom of the NGOs, a danger that they might become more of an instrument of foreign policy than its own voice of change and advocacy. When asked of Codes of Conduct, most of the NGOs seemed to have rules meant to prevent that. It is interesting to note though, that some of them clearly stated that they would rather apply for an emergency if it was in the focus area of the MFA. The NGOs balance of cooperation with the state while maintaining a healthy agenda of their own in many ways remains to be found, as the cooperation between the fields is still evolving and by all accounts growing. The NGOs at least didn't seem to be overtly political when it came to choosing which emergencies they support, as Nelson (2012) showed States had a tendency to be. Francken et al. (2012) similarly found that political factors had less effect on NGOs than governments.

Nelson (2012) found that the Nordic countries seemed to have the strongest tendency to follow purely humanitarian motives when granting disaster aid, while other donor countries

seemed to be more prone to be influenced by their own foreign affairs policies and economic interests. He does not specify whether Iceland is included in that generalisation, but I would suspect not; being a small player on a big field in the grand scheme of things. Even so, the interviews established that people in the Icelandic development sector look to Scandinavia and especially Norway as a role model, and the looming changes in the Code of Practice of the MFA with the establishment of framework agreements, indicate there is a truth to that.

Both the MFA and several of the NGOs seemed doing the best they could with what they had, but underfunded is clearly a word that can be used to describe them, in the sense that everyone wished they could be doing a better job. Apart from the Red Cross, all the NGOs mentioned size as a limitation in some sense, and some felt the MFAs faults, in answering applications late and such, came from underfunding of the department. This was in a sense also true of the MFAs representatives interviewed, as they expressed inability to currently fund the NGOs to such an extent they could build up a steadier knowledge base for both humanitarian aid and development projects.

I took especially to heart the point that Báez et al. (2006) made in a discussion only tangentially related to the topic of this thesis. When arguing for how medical Triage procedures worked best in the disaster setting, they hit the point that such a discussion is not something that we can start discussing when the disaster hits each time. Rather society needs to take part in a measured debate in advance. I believe this argument holds true to the topic of the allocation of aid as well, decisions must rest on firm ethical grounds before the disaster hits. While Geale (2012) noted that every model of calculating the best way to spend aid funding is bound to have flaws, we must acknowledge those shortcomings and be open to improvements. That is something both the representatives of the NGOs and the MFAs staff spoken to seemed to agree with. As one interviewee put it: “There are opportunities on both sides to improve. And they are being taken”.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis' overall aim has been to give an overview of the current conditions of the MFAs relations with NGOs when it comes to the allocation humanitarian aid, with special regards to the decision making process of NGOs and its ethical implications. In order to do this the paper has explored the MFAs current Code of Practice, presented the context of each of the five NGOs work internationally, their ethical concerns and thoughts on Codes of Conducts, their decision making process on applications for humanitarian aid to the MFA and finally their thoughts on the current allocation system.

Results show that the NGOs are fairly unequal in size and capacity, but save one, they all have it in common to cooperate with an INGO on their foreign projects and especially humanitarian aid. In most cases the INGO sends appeals for humanitarian aid regularly, and might in some cases lobby the NGOs on what crises need support. ABC Children's Aid was the exception to this rule, and is smallest actor in humanitarian projects of the five NGOs considered, exclusively focusing on damage done when their own development projects are close to disasters.

All the local NGOs have set themselves a Code of Conduct except for SOS Children's Villages Iceland. The NGOs representatives mostly found having such a Code was a safety net, and thought it affected the way employees thought of their work on a day to day basis, rather than influencing specific decisions that they could name. Also mentioned was that this simplified their work, while keeping them focused and professional. Several of the NGOs have additionally set themselves certain values that they named as an inspiration. SOSs representative expressed a unique opinion, as they felt the importance of Codes of Conduct is overstated and were sceptical towards too complicated and lofty codes. All the INGOs discussed are signatories of the Code of Conduct for the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, but it did not seem to be very visible in the local NGOs work.

When it comes to the decision making process on the allocation of humanitarian aid, the NGOs seemed to have different approaches. The Red Cross, Church Aid and Save the

Children all shared the same issue of receiving appeals regularly and picking the ones which to back. They had different criteria in their selection process, the Red Cross focusing on how its expertise can be of use, the Church Aid mentioning that closeness to their development projects increased the likelihood of them picking up an appeal. Both additionally mentioned wanting to support forgotten emergencies. SOS Children's Villages would almost exclusively apply if the emergency was in the MFAs focus areas or if the MFA specifically called for applications for that disaster. Save the Children receives appeals less frequently, as the head office seems to rather target the bigger national members. It currently focuses on the Syria crisis, as that is still extensive and the NGO has built up knowledge of it. ABC deals with difficult conditions in many of their development projects, and some of their initiatives can be considered of humanitarian nature.

No one thought that the current allocation system was perfect, while everyone seemed to agree great strides had still been made in the last decade towards more professionalism and better practices. The Code of Practice is at the time of writing being revised and all of the interviewees were hopeful that it will introduce framework agreements between NGOs and the MFA, which would allow for steadier more reliable funding, addressing most of the qualms of the current allocation system while allowing the NGOs to build up a greater expertise with a more secure founding.

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