EILIDH KENNEDY AND MICHEL MAIETTA

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

A Manual to Foresight and Futures-Focused Thinking

ROUTLEDGE

"As a Global South leader committed to community-led structural change, I highly recommend this book to my colleagues as well as to anyone seeking a comprehensive understanding of the humanitarian sector. The historical background, the contextual framework and the strategic planning tools that it provides are invaluable to practitioners interested in making a meaningful and systemic impact."

Marie-Rose Romain Murphy, *Co-Founder of ESPWA and The Haiti Community Foundation*; and *President of RMC-Romain Murphy Consulting, USA*

"The authors artfully combine foresight theory and practical tools for designing and implementing effective aid programmes. Fundamental reading for both aid theorists and practitioners interested in innovation and transformative change, and an essential playbook for making humanitarian aid both immediately impactful and future-ready."

Christina Bennett, *CEO Start Network, UK*

"I welcome this new book by Michel Maietta and Eilidh Kennedy. It is truly easy to understand and follow, and, more importantly, use. They give a gift of relevance and accessibility. Clearly, a text and process all can benefit from that can help create a transformed tomorrow."

Sohail Inayatullah, *Unesco Chair in Futures Studies, IIUM, Malaysia; and Professor, Tamkang University, Taiwan*

"The humanitarian ecosystem faces a period of real disruption. To help humanitarian actors succeed and seize the opportunity for transformation, the authors offer a pioneering and exciting toolbox mixing structural analysis, scenarios and strategic planning. For the humanitarian sector, this book will become a key reference for both practitioners and researchers."

Philippe Ryfman, *Honorary Professor, Pantheon-Sorbonne University, France*; *and researcher and lawyer specialising on the humanitarian sector and NGOs*

"The flexibility of the approaches outlined in this book ensure its relevance for all actors involved in development work, particularly LGBTI – often left behind. The guidance for how to implement strategic foresight projects virtually makes it all the more pertinent in a post-Covid 19 world."

Vincent Kyabayinze, *Director, East Africa Visual Artists (EAVA Artists); and LGBTI activist, Uganda*

"Thoughtful, insightful and practical book; essential reading for aid and development professionals in the ever-changing world."

Anika Krstic, *Country Director, Plan International, Sudan*

"The manual you have in your hands gives you the keys to foundational strategic foresight approaches and methods adapted for humanitarian actors. Using these approaches you can create transformative narratives and build resilient strategies with communities. Eilidh and Michel have tested, piloted and implemented these tools in multiple settings, combining high professional standards with accessibility and commitment."

François Bourse, *Director of studies, Futuribles, France*

"The use of foresight methodology for strategic planning involving our local partners was instrumental for us as an ecosystem of actors to be impactful in a very dynamic operational context! I am really happy to see the toolkit is coming to the public domain for wider use and adoption in the humanitarian sector."

Nipin Gangadharan, *Country Director, Action Against Hunger Bangladesh*

Strategic Planning in the Humanitarian Sector

This book provides humanitarian practitioners and policy makers with a manual for how to apply foresight and strategy in their work.

Drawing on extensive research, the book demonstrates in practical terms how embedding futures-focused thinking into practice can help humanitarian actors to enhance their impact and fit for the future. The book provides readers with a step-by-step guide to an innovative combination of tools and methods tested and refined over the course of several years. However, it also goes beyond this, by grounding the approach within the broader ambition of making humanitarian action more effective. Overall, the analytical and strategic processes outlined in this book will accompany a decision maker through every stage of creating a robust, agile and impactful long-term strategy.

This accessible guide will be an essential point of reference for practitioners and decision makers in the humanitarian ecosystem, as well as students studying humanitarian affairs, global development, conflict studies and international relations.

Eilidh Kennedy is Co-Founder and Director of the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN). She has more than ten years' experience working with humanitarian actors providing trainings, research, foresight analysis and supporting strategic development.

Michel Maietta is Co-Founder and Director of the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN). He has two decades of experience in high-profile, strategic leadership, and has developed and turned around multiple start-ups, programmes and operations in the humanitarian and development sector.

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Strategic Planning in the Humanitarian Sector

A Manual to Foresight and Futures-Focused Thinking

Eilidh Kennedy and Michel Maietta

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Foreword

I was delighted to be asked to contribute to this book because not only have I known Eilidh and Michel for many years, but I, and my organisation, have benefitted from the work that they do via the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN). It is clear to me, after decades of working as an activist for the rights of people infected by HIV/AIDS that short-term thinking disenfranchises communities by robbing them of the right to have hope and plan for their own future. Humanitarian actors must do better.

As the president of the National Association of Support for Seropositive and AIDS Patients (ANSS), which I founded in 1993, I am keenly aware of the need to think about complexity and to consider the long term. As the first civil society organisation dedicated to the prevention of HIV transmission and improving the well-being of people infected with HIV in Burundi, we have seen how it can take many years if not decades to see system-wide change. My work has centred on challenging the structures which underpin the prejudice against those living with HIV/AIDS. It is only by unpacking and better understanding the systems in place that we can find opportunities for transformation and leverage our influence and resources to achieve change for the people we serve. It takes commitment, a deep understanding of the context in which you are working and a robust, flexible strategy to truly be able to have a lasting impact.

As a leader I am constantly faced with questions of how to best deploy our resources, to find alternative avenues of funds and to consider the big picture as I make decisions about how to structure our organisation to achieve our stated goals. I believe deeply in the value that foresight and strategic development bring to these processes. I know that I am not alone in the challenges I face; as a member of the board of numerous international non-governmental organisation (INGOs), such as Coalition Plus and Sidaction, I have clearly seen the need for greater

strategic thinking in order to be more impactful with limited resources among many organisations.

The authors have dedicated the better part of a decade to testing and exploring the tools and methods outlined in this book. Drawing on their practical experience of delivering strategic foresight support to humanitarian actors from governments to local civil society organisations, large INGOs and global research institutions, they have curated a series of tools which are easy to use while delivering robust outputs. They have cultivated an approach to strategic foresight which is adapted to the needs and decision-making culture of humanitarian organisations while providing an avenue through which to challenge the inertias that have stalled progress towards a more representative and inclusive aid sector. Not only do Eilidh and Michel have the real-world experience to understand where the challenges lie in implementing strategic foresight projects, they have crafted ways to overcome them and have clearly demonstrated the value of futures thinking for finding new ways of working in the sector, pushing all humanitarian actors to think more collaboratively about how to achieve their missions.

After years of designing courses for both academic and professional settings, this book is the culmination of their practical and academic experience. In these pages they have demonstrated that they have the skills to communicate what they have learned effectively, creating an entry point for anyone interested in applying futures thinking to their work and building on their skills of strategic development. The pedagogic approach they employ to craft a narrative that is easy to follow while introducing the reader to complex tools is what makes this book so valuable for practitioners such as myself. By including notes for facilitation, particularly virtual facilitation, they have given readers the information they need to run a project by themselves, from start to finish.

This is exactly the kind of support that my team and so many others like us need to ensure our long-term impact. Reading this book, other leaders like myself can learn how to employ strategic foresight to help us pursue the transformation we seek.

I hope you find this text as illuminating as I have and that you use the tools it explores with your communities and partners to do your work more effectively. We do not have the time or resources to waste. We must begin to think more strategically and this book is an important step in the right direction.

Jeanne Gapiya-Niyonzima
President of National Association of Support for
Seropositive and AIDS Patients (ANSS)

Preface

This book is the culmination of nearly a decade of research into the uses of strategic foresight in the humanitarian ecosystem by the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN). The work that has comprised this experience has mostly been in the practical application of strategic foresight for operational humanitarian actors, though it has also included support to governments and academic institutions. Since its inception, and in every version of its structure, the IARAN has been working towards a vision to create a more equitable and effective humanitarian ecosystem where every actor leverages their particular skills and experiences to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The IARAN was conceived of as an operational research project at the French think tank IRIS (Institut des Relations Internationales et Strategiques) in 2012. Between 2013 and 2015 the test phase of the project was implemented with Save the Children International as the operating partner. During this time, a small team was embedded within the humanitarian department of Save the Children International with up to three analysts covering the Middle East, East and Southern Africa, and West Africa. In 2015, the project graduated to a pilot phase where it moved to Action Against Hunger and scaled up to have over ten staff members covering four regions, producing more than 50 foresight reports per year. The IARAN initiative has always worked in partnership with other academic and operational organisations, such as Futuribles in Paris, collaborations which contributed significantly to the development of the project. At the end of 2018, the operational research project was concluded and the IARAN became an independent initiative.

Now, we operate as a collaborative network of humanitarian professionals with decades of experience working for a multitude of different

organisations. IARAN is a think tank with an active fellowship and a consultancy wing through which we provide training, foresight research and strategic development support to a wide range of humanitarian actors.

For more information about the IARAN, please see our website www.iaran.org.

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The learnings in this book are built on the tireless work of IARAN staff over many years. We would like to thank the following people for all their efforts, patience and good humour throughout our time together: David Africa, Marie-Jeanne Berger, Sterling Carter, Maria Di Loreto, Ana Arribas Gil, Leonie Le Borgne, Jade Le Grand, Caelum Moffatt, Tyler Rundel, Adam Rybo, Chloe Schmitt and Victoria Watt-Smith. We would also like to thank the leadership at IRIS, Futuribles, Save the Children International and Action Against Hunger for their support of the IARAN initiative.

In addition, we are continually indebted to the IARAN fellows and supporters; many of them have challenged our thinking, helped develop our approaches and contributed to the review of this book. We would especially like to recognise Amara Bains, François Bourse, Juan Sebastian Brizneda, Giulio Coppi, Miguel Leroy, Mariana Merelo Lobo, Eva Molt, Luana Moussallem, Isabelle Pelly, Matt Thomas and Matt Twilley.

Without this community this book would not have been possible.

Abbreviations

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EC	European Commission
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGOS	international non-governmental organisations
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LMIC	low- and middle-income countries
MAO	Actor/Objective Matrix
MICMAC	Matrix-Based Multiplication Applied to a Classification
MID	Influence/Dependency Matrix
MIU	Importance/Uncertainty Matrix
NGOS	non-governmental organisations
ODA	official development assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PESTLE	political, economic, social, technological, legal and economic
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals
TOC	theory of change
UN	United Nations

1 Strategic foresight for transformation

Introduction

Strategic foresight is about creating a narrative and pathways for sustainable change and transformation. We believe it is a critical approach for anyone seeking to build resilience among people affected by crises in a rapidly changing world. This book has been written to provide an entry point for humanitarian actors to improve their futures literacy and exploit strategic foresight tools in their work. In order to use these tools in a transformative way you need to accept that you do not know everything, centre the lived experience of people affected by crises and be open to challenging your worldview (Bhagat et al. 2021). The ethos of our work is founded on creating flexible ways to mainstream collaboration between humanitarian actors and encouraging them to adopt systems-based approaches to build better futures.

The humanitarian ecosystem

Before we can begin to discuss strategic foresight and its uses in humanitarian action, we must first define what we mean by the term 'humanitarian'. In aid work the term 'humanitarian' is often used synonymously with emergency responses; however, for the purpose of this book we have extended its definition to include all activities which are undertaken to improve the human condition. In short, we use the term 'humanitarian' to refer to all activities along the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, as we believe that the common thread linking these areas of work must be placing humans at the centre of the system.

Building on this broad definition of humanitarian action, we consider the actors who provide humanitarian assistance at every level (locally, nationally and internationally) to be very diverse. They include people affected by crises, religious or secular movements, non-governmental

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organisations, multilateral organisations, networks, state actors (including their militaries) and, increasingly, the business sector.

Within the broader group of humanitarian actors we distinguish two categories: formal and non-formal actors. The first includes actors for whom the provision of humanitarian assistance is their primary role and who have significant decision-making power in the ecosystem, namely the United Nations (UN), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and traditional donor governments such as those in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (IARAN 2016). The second cohort, which is not new to the ecosystem but is playing an increasingly important role in the decision-making space, includes people affected by crises, local authorities and national governments in areas of humanitarian operations, local NGOs, military actors, the business sector and new donors (IARAN 2016).

All of these actors, their complex interconnections, the power dynamics between them, and the rules and norms that govern humanitarian action constitute the humanitarian ecosystem. The humanitarian ecosystem is an incredibly politicised space where norms, power and resources are contested.

The economy of the humanitarian ecosystem and the potential for transformation

The most significant dynamic that defines the relationship between actors in the humanitarian ecosystem is the flow of money. There are a multitude of financial flows funding the humanitarian ecosystem. Each of these distinct flows creates a different power dynamic depending on which actors in the system amass and control these funds. It is difficult to get a comprehensive picture of all of the funding streams which reach actors in the humanitarian ecosystem. We have tried to categorise the main flows of funding by their sources:

1. Official development assistance (ODA)
2. Private donations to humanitarian organisations
3. Remittances

The best tracked flow of money into the humanitarian ecosystem's economy is the funding provided through ODA for international humanitarian assistance.[1] In 2019, this totalled US$23.2 billion (Thomas and Urquhart 2020, p. 30). The vast majority of this funding is allocated to

multilateral institutions, INGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Thomas and Urquhart 2020, p. 30). While this figure represents the funding that is dedicated to specifically 'humanitarian' considerations, a broader look at ODA demonstrates that there is a substantial pot of resources which complements these funds through bilateral support to governments (in the form of grants or debt relief) and to a more diverse group of multilateral institutions investing in development pursuant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While international humanitarian assistance from ODA is often represented as being the core of the humanitarian ecosystem's economy, in reality it is only a small proportion of its resources.

The funding stream of private donations is not tracked comprehensively at the global level. The primary source of private donations is individuals. However, figures tracking private funding streams also include the money channelled into the humanitarian ecosystem by foundations or trusts, companies, and national societies (Thomas and Urquhart 2020, p. 39). The funds from private donations are primarily streamed through INGOs and NGOs. While it is difficult to create a full picture of how much money private donors bring into the ecosystem, it was estimated to be around US$6.4 billion in 2019 (Thomas and Urquhart 2020, p. 30).

Though it is not often acknowledged by many humanitarian actors (especially formal actors), people affected by crises engage in their own crisis response, orchestrating support from within their communities both near and far, and appealing to other humanitarian actors within the humanitarian ecosystem when it is beneficial (Brown et al. 2014). Remittances sent by diaspora communities to friends and family in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) of origin is an increasing source of support leveraged by people affected by crises, especially as transmitting money virtually becomes easier through increased global connectivity. The volume of remittances dwarfs the funds provided through ODA, reaching a record of US$554 billion in 2019 alone (Ratha 2020). However, unlike ODA, which is channelled through a small group of powerful formal actors, remittances are dispersed in relatively small amounts to billions of people. This means that while the overall amount of remittances is much greater than ODA funds, it does not translate into power.

While they do not represent the majority of actors nor do they control the majority of the resources flowing into the humanitarian ecosystem's economy, formal humanitarian actors persistently dominate decision-making in key international fora, dictate the norms and standards to which most actors in the humanitarian ecosystem must adhere and craft the narrative which defines how the humanitarian ecosystem

is perceived. The behaviours of these formal actors are defined by their history and as such it is critical to understand how they evolved to address the cultural challenges which exist today.

A brief history of how formal humanitarian actors have developed

The history of modern humanitarianism has been broken down into several distinct time periods, each depicting a different stage of its evolution.[2] While there are several interpretations of where each period begins and ends, we find Barnett's suggested three 'ages of humanitarianism' where he delineates periods of *imperial humanitarianism*, *neo-humanitarianism* and *liberal humanitarianism* (Barnett 2013, p. 29) to be the most compelling. In the following we present and adapt his categorisations by focusing on the evolution of the formal humanitarian system, a subset of the humanitarian ecosystem. With each shift that we identify there was a major evolution in the ways of working of the actors and the norms that govern the formal humanitarian system. Each period will be named Formal Humanitarian System 1.0, 2.0, etc. We focus on this small area of the humanitarian ecosystem to draw attention to its outsized power in shaping the culture of international humanitarianism and governing the resources which flow through ODA. Understanding how dominance of the formal humanitarian actors in many spaces evolved is critical to understanding the power dynamics at play in the humanitarian ecosystem at large.

"Caring for the sick, the poor and those in need, and easing their suffering are gestures of solidarity as old as humanity" (Maietta 2015, p. 53). However, the foundation of the Formal Humanitarian System, defined as organised interactions between actors operating internationally with the aim of alleviating suffering, can be traced to Europe in the 19th century and the signing of the first Geneva Convention in 1864. The Geneva Convention of 1864 was first signed by 12 Western states and the newly founded International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); it set a body of rules for the treatment and care of the wounded and prisoners of war (ICRC n.d.).

The rules that governed the Formal Humanitarian System 1.0 mainly focused on the laws of war. This system would continue to evolve and adapt from the end of the American Civil War (1861–1865) to World War I (1914–1918). The Formal Humanitarian System 1.0 reached its maturity in the aftermath of WWI when the first secular INGO was founded in 1919, Save the Children – formerly the Save the Children Fund. The Save the Children Fund would soon be joined by other humanitarian INGOs from both religious and secular traditions such as Norwegian People's Aid, the humanitarian wing of the Norwegian

labour movement, created to respond to the humanitarian crisis caused by the Spanish Civil War. In addition to the new actors joining the space, other legal initiatives would be formalised in this period, building on the body of rules of the Geneva Convention (revised in 1906) and the League of Nations, such as the Nansen Passport in 1922, that set the base for refugees' security and protection.

The first iteration of the Formal Humanitarian System was conceived and matured during what Barnett (2013) defines as the age of 'imperial humanitarianism'. At its apogee, it was a dynamic interaction between state actors, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and INGOs, navigating a set of international treaties protecting prisoners of war and the victims of war or natural disasters such as refugees. During this time, INGOs were game changers, leading the evolution of the Formal Humanitarian System itself by securing and protecting communities which fell outside the existing body of rules or supporting those that were not serviced by other actors. INGOs were critical in pushing the other actors in the Formal Humanitarian System to consider new ways of working and an ever-increasing number of people for humanitarian support. For example, in 1942 Oxfam began campaigning to force the British government to reconsider its blockade on Greece, which was creating intolerable living conditions and pushing vulnerable communities into famine (Oxfam International n.d.).

The Formal Humanitarian System 1.0 evolved into its second iteration in the second half of the 1940s. The failures of the revised Geneva Conventions to make the scourge of war less terrible, the inability of the League of Nations to broker peace effectively and manage the fallout of a breakdown in relations, as well as the continued perpetration of crimes against humanity by state actors challenged the foundation on which the first Formal Humanitarian System had been built.

The signing of the fourth Geneva Convention in 1950 along with the creation of the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies and programmes (High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Food Program (WFP), etc.) paved the way for the Formal Humanitarian System 2.0. During this period, secular and especially faith-based INGOs experienced unprecedented growth; in the United States alone nearly 200 NGOs were created in the latter half of the 1940s (Barnett 2013). The proliferation and development of humanitarian INGOs accelerated further during the decolonisation period where "the skills, material and money wielded by Northern organisations were called upon to supplement those of the newly established Southern governments … after the rapid withdrawal of the colonial power" (Davey et al. 2013, p. 11).

During this age of what Barnett (2013) coins as 'neo-humanitarianism', the Formal Humanitarian System 2.0 grew in terms of the number of actors involved, the scope of what was being attempted and the funding which was being put into humanitarian activities (Reimann 2006). This period, culminating in the Biafra War (Nigeria 1967–1970), showed how the agility and impact of INGOs could push the system forward as yet another generation of INGOs came into being. Once again, seeing the failure of many of the existing actors and structures to meet the spiralling need in Biafra, a new, more strident and interventionist generation of INGOs was born. These INGOs stand out from those that came earlier in the period by adapting their operating methods and principles to be more confrontational. Showing how the use of testimonials, advocacy and campaigns could achieve impact was in stark contrast to the discretion and silence of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Maietta 2015, p. 54). With the signing of the second protocol of the Geneva Conventions in 1977, the Formal Humanitarian System 2.0 reached maturity.

The Formal Humanitarian System 2.0 would not survive the turmoil of the end of the Cold War. The 1990s ushered in the beginning of the age of what Barnett (2013) calls 'liberal humanitarianism' and what we will call the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0, which continues to the present day. The reflection of formal humanitarian actors on their failures in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (1994) initiated the design and implementation of a new set of humanitarian standards, for example the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) and the Sphere Standards. It was intended that these measures would enhance the quality of humanitarian action, making humanitarian actors more effective in their mission.

The creation of bureaucratic processes and norms designed by institutional donors to control the way that money is spent and ensure greater oversight of funds (e.g. in the setting up of the Project Cycle Management quality system by USAID in 1971 and the European Commission in 1992) solidified the dependency between INGOs and state actors. In the Formal Humanitarian System 1.0 and 2.0, INGOs were game changers. However, during the third iteration of the system, they would gradually lose their agility and independence. An increasing need to feed their growth-oriented economic models began to overwhelm their original purpose.

The process of bureaucratisation completely transformed the ways of working for both formal and non-formal humanitarian actors who were receiving ODA funding, even indirectly. As part of this process, approaches and resources for 'strategy development' began to be

adopted from the business sector, without much consideration for how they needed to be adapted for a non-profit mission. First, UN agencies and then INGOs began designing and implementing strategies with the support of management consultancy firms like Deloitte, BCG and Accenture, a process which is still common today. This relationship is predicated on the understanding that formal humanitarian actors receiving the support believe that business strategies would make them more effective, while business sector actors hope their partnership with INGOs could "possibly lead to gains in their reputations" (CSR Europe 2004, p. 4). This shift in organisational culture where formal humanitarian actors began to behave more like businesses (particularly in terms of how they manage risk) fuelled the creation of gargantuan organisations whose economic models required them to be increasingly concerned with their financial growth and market share. Many of the formal humanitarian actors who engaged in these processes would lose their original purpose: to put people affected by crises at the centre of their mission. The result of this trend was epitomised when, in the first decade of the 21st century, most of the biggest INGOs had in place top-down strategies aimed at growing the brand of their organisations, without meaningful consideration or contribution of people affected by crises.

Since the beginning of the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0, the ways of working and laws guiding humanitarian action have not significantly evolved. Humanitarian actors' value chains, meaning the sequence of strategic activities of an organisation (Kaplinsky and Morris 2001), are mostly unchanged since the nineties. Worse, the economic models of many have cemented, creating disturbing (and paradoxical) dependencies between INGOs and the state actors that are their primary donors. Moreover, the dominance of formal humanitarian actors over the proportion of ODA spent on humanitarian endeavours has created significant barriers to entry for non-formal actors to key decision-making spaces and impedes the ability of new actors from communities affected by crises to set standards and norms. This bottleneck protects the colonial structures that define the roots of formal humanitarian actors and has been imbibed into each iteration of the system since its foundation (Davey et al. 2013, p. 6). The dependence of INGOs on the state actors that fund them directly and indirectly make it more challenging for them to address the deep-rooted causes of modern poverty and vulnerability, which are fundamentally political.

Often humanitarian action still saves lives in the short term. However, the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0 as it currently operates has become expensive, ineffective and can be disruptive to local resilience (Spiegel 2017). A new iteration is not only needed but is imperative in a world

that is regionalised, affected by complex crises, and where addressing inequality and injustice are necessary for success.

High-level decision-making (e.g. the setting of standards and guidelines or the prioritisation of resources) is still heavily dominated by formal humanitarian actors. Despite some progress towards the commitments made in the Grand Bargain (signed in 2016), for a participation revolution and to channel funds more directly to local organisations (IASC n.d.), these objectives are still far from being realised. Signatories to the Grand Bargain themselves reported that while there had been gains in localising aid, "progress remains at the normative level – there is as yet no system-wide shift in practice" (Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2020, p. 54). Given the lack of progress by formal actors to make the space more inclusive, it is necessary that the change in the dynamics of power will be driven by non-formal actors who create parallel systems, making formal actors obsolete, or who force a change of practice on formal actors.

The Formal Humanitarian System 3.0 has become a very conservative structure and is incredibly resistant to any change and transformation that challenges its underlying power structures. In biology and medicine, the condition that causes the stiffening of a part or parts of an organism is called 'sclerosis'. The only way to fight against the sclerosis of the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0 is to incept change and transformation from the outside, namely from non-formal actors in the ecosystem. Non-formal actors – mainly communities and people affected by crises – are the new potential game changers. Actors in the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0 need to begin to see their roles differently. The humanitarian ecosystem is on an evolutionary journey towards a new age of humanitarianism, where formal actors must embrace humility, understand that complexity can only be faced collaboratively, and that their ultimate goal is not growth (or even their own existence) but to leverage their investments and expertise into transformation for the benefit of others.

What is strategic foresight?

Strategic foresight is a process that enables actors to use collective intelligence to build their understanding of possible futures and identify pathways to achieve their vision: "it is about understanding the whole landscape of a particular situation and the options that a decision maker has in it" (Kuosa 2011, p. vii). We break down strategic foresight into three discreet phases: foresight, strategic development and planning. This book will focus on the first two phases of foresight and strategic development.

Foresight

Foresight is not a prediction. It is a process of looking forward in time and using collective intelligence and imagination to consider a range of possible futures (definition derived from Lustig 2017). The exact origin of foresight is disputed, as roots of futures thinking can be found the world over dating back centuries. However, there is a general consensus that in its modern form it developed in Europe and America in the late 1940s and 1950s (Hines 2020). Though there are many institutions from a variety of countries that each brought different approaches to the development of the field, many give credit of the institutionalisation of foresight and futures studies to the formation of the RAND Corporation, which grew out of a partnership between the United States Air Force and Douglas Aircraft Company signed in 1946 (Dreyer and Stang 2013, p. 9). Since then, foresight has been used for decades by military organisations to achieve a strategic advantage, by governments to try to ensure long-term efficacy and by business sector actors to maintain their competitive edge. The foresight phase of strategic foresight as we define it includes two stages: structural analysis and scenario building. There are a few key tenets of foresight which have guided our work that we feel are important to highlight.

The first is that the future does not evolve in a linear fashion (Godet 2006, p. 13). There are many dimensions of complexity in the systems in which we live and work, and it is not reasonable to simplify the full array of uncertainty generated into a single, unique version of the future. There are no facts about the future, and foresight requires managing the discomfort that comes with having to deal with incomplete information. Although foresight will not tell you what the future will be, through the process of exploration it builds an understanding of the multiple ways a system could evolve and "gives us increased power to shape our own future even when times are unsettled" (Lustig 2017, p. 12).

The second, related concept is that the degree of uncertainty grows as the length of your outlook extends. As is represented by the futures cone in Figure 1.1, the scope of possible futures widens as time passes. With fewer fixed parameters, a longer time frame often offers more opportunities for change and transformation.

Finally, foresight provides simple tools for complex problems (Godet 2006, p. 14). The purpose of foresight is to provide you with a way to unpack complexity, not to add to it. As a result, useful foresight tools must be easy to engage with.

Foresight is a foundation on which better decisions can be made by developing an understanding of the system in which you are operating

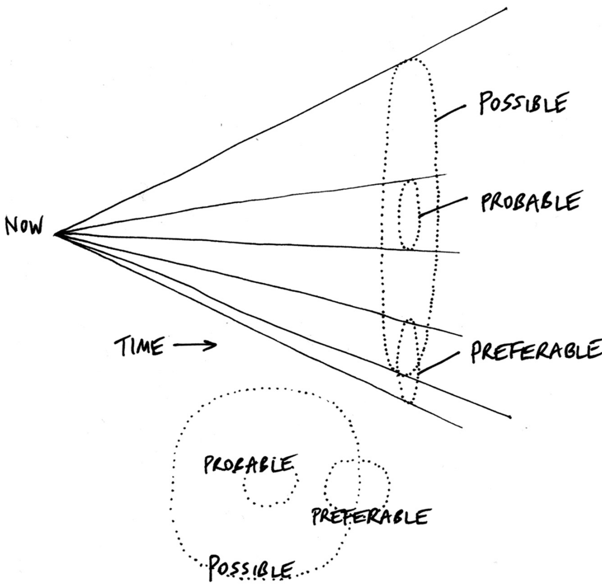

Figure 1.1 Possible, probable and preferable futures as subsets of possibility space (Candy 2010, p. 35)

and the myriad of ways that it may evolve, as well as what the role of your organisation is within it. Foresight can help make actors more impactful when it is paired with strategic development.

Strategic development

Strategic development is the second phase in strategic foresight. It is a process which articulates possible futures with a strategy. Through the process of strategic development actors evaluate their strategic options, consider choices and decide which strategy to implement. A strategy defines an overall objective and its underpinning hierarchy of objectives. Before we can discuss what the term 'strategy' means for humanitarian actors, we must first understand how the concept evolved.

The concept of strategy is rooted in military culture and it is even older than the word 'strategy' itself. The concept has evolved across centuries of history and its interpretation has changed through transculturation. Sun Tzu (2014), Machiavelli (1961) and Clausewitz (2007)

are widely recognised as the leading thinkers in strategy and warfare. The concept of strategy we embrace in this book, and in our work, is more in line with the roots of Sun Tzu's teachings, which, over time, have been enriched by the approaches of the Arabic schools of strategy.[3] Both schools of thought believed that the goal of war was to dissuade the enemy without even engaging in combat. Sun Tzu advanced an approach using misdirection, espionage and agility, while the Arabic schools added the values of embracing patience and wisdom. Ultimately, they are about engaging higher-level systems, thinking to understand your opponent and adapting your strategy to discourage him.

We find Sun Tzu's work and the Arabic schools of strategy more applicable to humanitarian action, as they are founded more on systems thinking and persuasion, considering all dimensions of engagement rather than focusing narrowly on the tactical dimensions of combat and prevention (Handel 2005, p. 24 and Khawam 2010, pp. 9–10). For our use, we transpose the thinking of these eminent strategists from winning wars to achieving equity and justice.

The strategic development process operationalises collective intelligence. It shapes an organisational culture enabling decision-making and agility, containing risk, and finally enhancing actors to a higher level of performance. The utility of strategic development, recognised by governments and business actors for decades, has still not been adapted and systematically implemented by the majority of humanitarian actors.

Actors, and particularly formal humanitarian actors, have the tendency to be focused on their identity and performance. Strategic development offers actors the opportunity to think differently about how they work. The strategic development process opens the possibility to converge with other actors uniting around a common vision. It has the potential to enable them to align their actions to increase their agility and impact. Developing a strategy is a process through which teams build a collective understanding of the journey that an organisation is undertaking towards a shared vision. A strategy does not determine the future (Mackay et al. 2020) but is a journey towards a possible one. When strategic development is associated with solid leadership, it enables decision makers to build high-performing teams.

Why humanitarians need strategic foresight

Many humanitarian actors are focused on delivering lifesaving aid, meeting the immediate needs of the communities they serve. While such interventions are certainly necessary, they do very little to build local

resilience and can have deleterious effects on communities in the long term.[4] The majority of organisations and funds channelled through formal humanitarian actors are directed at responding to crises rather than preventing them or alleviating the structural causes of vulnerability. Humanitarian actors are largely reactive in nature (McGoldrick 2011, p. 968).

Strategic foresight has huge potential for all actors in the humanitarian ecosystem seeking to increase their long-term impact and create a more effective and equitable system. Here are just some of the particular ways that strategic foresight can support better decision-making in the humanitarian ecosystem.

Strategic foresight can help humanitarian actors to think beyond the real-time challenges that they face and to consider how they can better contribute to the achievement of long-term goals, such as the SDGs. There are few, if any, challenges faced by humanitarian actors and the communities they serve which can be overcome in a matter of months or a year. Moreover, there are many protracted crises which have lasted multiple decades. Not addressing the root causes of a crisis, but solely focusing on the immediate needs that are created by it, considerably reduces the impact of humanitarian action. The creation of parallel systems which are predominantly funded by external sources can create dependency and disempower communities. Without thinking long term, humanitarians cannot support communities to address the structural dimensions of a crisis. Foresight studies and strategic development can lay the groundwork to challenge the short-termism which has become a stumbling block to genuine impact and transformation.

Strategic foresight can help humanitarian actors to address complexity. Some of the underlying dynamics which drive complex crises are exacerbated by the world's inability to resolve the protracted social discord created by inequality (in all aspects – income, gender, race, etc.), the continued scourge of conflict, our failure to manage the demands of economic and social progress in balance with the environment, and the increasing strain of climate change. Many of the structural problems which have underpinned longer humanitarian crises are likely to be intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in 2020 there was an increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty for the first time in over 20 years (UNOCHA 2021, p. 9). Humanitarian actors need to grapple with these structural challenges if they are going to be successful in alleviating suffering in the long term. The fact that humanitarian actors see their funding rising incommensurately with the needs that they seek to address adds even more pressure to be strategic with the resources we have.

Not thinking with a long-term or systemic perspective means that humanitarian actors are more likely to do harm and waste money in complex crises. If the actor is not local to the context in which they are working, they must consider if and how they can bring value and continue to question themselves as time passes so they understand when they should leave. Operating in the same way year on year without thorough reflection can use up precious resources at best and yield damaging results at worst. All organisations (local or international) either need an exit strategy, a medium-term strategy (three–five years) or a long-term strategy (five–ten years) to be able to really consider how to have an impact on communities. Strategic foresight is critical for all of these processes.

Strategic foresight can help humanitarian actors to be more agile. By understanding the complexity of the systems in which they intervene and the ways in which they can evolve, humanitarian actors can learn to better manage uncertainty. Strategic foresight provides humanitarian actors with the tools to develop strategies for multiple futures, providing them with the ability to be prepared to make rapid changes in a volatile context. Having multiple strategies that are fit for different futures already designed is a significant advantage for operational actors that are trying to maintain their impact while having to respond to everyday challenges in humanitarian action.

Strategic foresight can help humanitarian actors to evolve. Strategic foresight can encourage actors to question their value chain and transform it – i.e. to find where they have the greatest added value in intervening in complex crises and how they can complement other actors in the space. Humanitarian actors (particularly formal humanitarian actors) have not changed their view of what strategic activities on the value chain they should invest in since the beginning of the Formal Humanitarian System 3.0, predominantly focusing on fundraising, programming and operations. This has resulted in many organisations maintaining a structure which has not kept pace with the changes in the world around them. Formal humanitarian actors continually overestimate their own importance as they do not take the time to truly understand and appreciate the capacity of the other actors they engage with. This means that many humanitarian organisations often do not complement the strengths and support systems of local communities and people affected by crises but rather overrun them. This is an incredibly inefficient use of resources, which could be improved by transforming their value chain. The commitments to the participation revolution, to ensure that funding more directly reaches local organisations and to making equitable partnerships, could all be more easily realised if humanitarian leaders systematically

used strategic foresight to visualise possible paths of transformation and had the managerial courage to pursue change.

To properly review their value chain, formal humanitarian actors need to question their mental models and the 'white saviour' complex which infects many aspects of humanitarian action. Collaborative intelligence and inclusive decision-making could be used to challenge the Western bias that dominates structures in the formal humanitarian system, to integrate more and different perspectives, and to challenge the plethora of assumptions that underpin both large and small decisions. Strategic foresight can help individuals and organisations to break out of their worldview and consider the systems they intervene in from different angles. Approaching humanitarian action from a different vantage point is key to changing the underlying structures which perpetuate the imbalances that deny affected communities a voice in decisions about their own lives.

Non-formal humanitarian actors can use strategic foresight to challenge the dominance of their formal humanitarian counterparts in key decision-making fora. In addition, strategic foresight can help local actors to challenge their existing structures, consolidate their value chain and enhance their economic model to become more independent and influential. Strategic foresight tools can support non-formal humanitarian leaders to channel their knowledge, culture and experience into change and transformation.

To achieve sustainable change, the goal of humanitarian action, humanitarians need to break from their path dependence – basing what they will do next on what they have done in the past rather than a critical evaluation of what would be most effective in the future. Path-dependence reinforces a broken system, as "the system, to a large extent, causes its own behaviour" (Meadows and Wright 2008, p. 2). Strategic foresight is a critical tool to support humanitarian decision makers in reflecting on their role within the humanitarian ecosystem.

This book focuses on how to respond to the strategic and existential questions that humanitarian actors face. It does not comprehensively cover how to implement a strategy on a tactical or operational level, i.e. it does not include the planning phase of strategic foresight. This is because most humanitarians are good tacticians, skilled at taking a strategy and transforming it into a plan. Humanitarian organisations are routinely comprised of technical experts, logisticians and managers who have varying levels of experience in implementing programming in a myriad of contexts. Where organisations seem to struggle is in figuring out which strategic questions they should be trying to address, how to break down complexity without falling into siloed thinking and how to prepare to be effective in multiple futures.

Toolkit approach

The development of the approach we put forward in this book is built on the outputs of an operational research programme titled the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN) in which a team of analysts and strategists were embedded in an international think tank and two networked INGOs. Lasting over six years, this programme explored the use of different methods and strategic foresight tools for humanitarian actors. The approach we propose here has been tested and refined through over 150 projects carried out with a plethora of different organisations of a variety of sizes and mandates working across the globe, principally in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Over the course of the test and pilot phases of the IARAN project, the different approaches and methods that we explored coalesced into a set of flexible, accessible tools to deliver quality strategic foresight support with limited resources and on tight timelines. Though the research which underpins this book spans more than six years of operational work, the context in 2020 and 2021 when this text was being drafted made the value in a flexible approach all the clearer as the COVID-19 pandemic changed working patterns and perspectives.

In writing this book our overarching goal was to synthesise our learning into a manual for humanitarian practitioners interested in integrating strategic foresight into the culture and the practices of their organisations and their decision-making processes. To this end, we have identified the following aims:

- To demonstrate how foresight and strategic development can enhance long-term impact and transformational change
- To provide humanitarian actors with a suite of foresight tools that they can use to analyse the complexity of the contexts in which they operate and project themselves into the future, in collaboration with other stakeholders
- To equip readers with the approach and the method to design agile and robust strategies

To achieve these aims, we have adopted the structure of a toolkit to ensure that what you need to know to use the approaches which we recommend is communicated as clearly and as practically as possible. The toolkit contains 13 files, each of which explores a particular tool; we outline its uses, the expected outputs and give you a step-by-step guide of how to do it. These tools can be combined to support you through the phases of foresight and strategic development from the selection of a strategic question, through the creation of exploratory scenarios and finally onto developing an agile strategy for your organisation or context (see Figure 1.2).

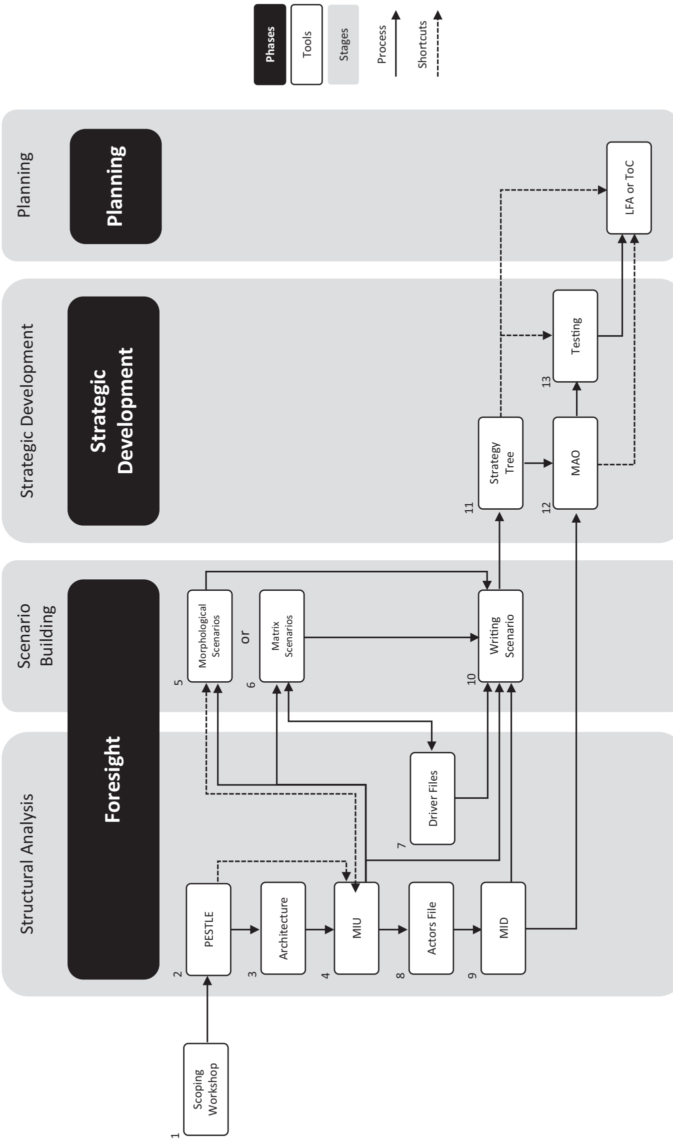

Figure 1.2 Toolkit contents and flow

The toolkit itself is preceded by a narrative section which, building on this introduction, discusses the ways in which strategic foresight can be used in the humanitarian space and weaves together a process to create a set of detailed, contextualised scenarios, and an agile and robust strategy. If you are already familiar with strategic foresight, you can turn directly to the toolkit in Chapter 4 for practical guides on how to implement our tools.

This book is laid out according to the following outline.

Chapter 2, "Embracing uncertainty with foresight", deepens the introduction into foresight methodologies and outlines how to combine the tools explored in the toolkit to formulate a set of exploratory scenarios, using two different scenario approaches. This chapter introduces ways in which you can support the 'uptake' of your scenarios by decision makers by proposing several communications methods/workshops which you can explore. Finally, Chapter 2 closes by highlighting two complementary approaches to scenario development and providing sources for each for further reading.

Chapter 3, "Developing a strategy for effective change", discusses the current ways of planning in the humanitarian ecosystem, their origins and limits. This chapter will explain how the approach to strategic foresight presented in this book can enhance strategy design and decision-making to concretise your vision in effective and agile strategic plans for change and transformation. It covers both how to build a robust, futures-oriented strategy and how to optimise a strategy that you already have.

Chapter 4, "A toolkit for humanitarian action", includes guides on how to use and implement the 13 individual tools. These guides give a step-by-step process of how to implement each tool in the foresight and strategic development phases, and provide details of how these tools can be used collaboratively in a virtual setting.

Notes

1 For details of how international humanitarian assistance is measured, please see A Thomas and A Urquhart (2021) *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020*, Bristol, Development Initiatives, pp. 85–86.

2 Eleanor Davey *et al.* describes them exhaustively in *A History of the Humanitarian System: Western Origins and Foundations* (2013, p. 13).

3 The Arbabic schools of strategy are excellently summarized in *Le Livre des ruses: La strategie politique des Arabes* (Khawam 2010).

4 For specific examples, consider the investments in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Smith 2018, p. 1), the response to Rohingya (Khaled 2021) or the lack of investments in Somaliland (Moscovici 2021).

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