**Lesson 1.4 – Stakeholders in Humanitarian Management**

**Part A: Introduction to Stakeholders**

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### 1. Overview

In humanitarian management, the term *stakeholder* refers to any individual, group, or organization that has an interest in, or is affected by, humanitarian action. Unlike traditional development projects, humanitarian interventions occur in contexts of urgency—conflict, displacement, natural disasters, and epidemics. In such crises, multiple actors converge, often with different mandates, priorities, and capacities.

Understanding who these stakeholders are, how they interact, and the influence they exert is essential for effective humanitarian action. A poorly managed stakeholder relationship can derail projects, waste resources, or even cause harm to affected populations. Conversely, effective stakeholder engagement can foster collaboration, transparency, and sustainability in humanitarian operations.

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### 2. Who Are Humanitarian Stakeholders?

Humanitarian stakeholders include a broad spectrum of actors that play different roles at global, national, and local levels:

- **Global actors** – international agencies, multilateral bodies like the United Nations, and transnational NGOs.
- **National actors** – central governments, civil society organizations, and national NGOs.
- **Local actors** – community-based organizations, traditional authorities, and local volunteers.
- **Affected populations** – displaced persons, refugees, survivors of disasters, and host communities.

Each of these actors holds a stake in the humanitarian process, whether as providers of resources, implementers of aid, or recipients of assistance.

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### 3. Why Stakeholder Mapping Matters

Stakeholder mapping is the systematic process of identifying, categorizing, and analyzing stakeholders in a humanitarian context. This helps humanitarian managers:

- **Identify key players** who hold influence or resources critical to the success of operations.
- **Anticipate conflicts of interest** between stakeholders, e.g., between donor conditionalities and community needs.
- **Prioritize engagement strategies** by distinguishing between high-power/high-interest stakeholders and low-power/low-interest groups.
- **Enhance accountability** by ensuring affected populations are recognized as stakeholders, not passive beneficiaries.

A common tool is the **Power-Interest Grid**, which categorizes stakeholders based on their level of influence and interest in a project. For example:

- High Power/High Interest: UNHCR, host governments.
- High Power/Low Interest: large donors (may prioritize political agendas).
- Low Power/High Interest: affected communities (desperately affected but less decision-making power).
- Low Power/Low Interest: peripheral actors such as observers or small-scale partners.

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### 4. Levels of Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholders can be engaged in different ways, depending on the context:

1. **Information-sharing** – one-way communication (e.g., situation reports).
2. **Consultation** – gathering feedback without giving decision-making power.
3. **Participation** – involving stakeholders in planning and implementation.
4. **Collaboration** – joint decision-making and shared responsibility.
5. **Empowerment** – transferring authority and ownership to local actors or communities.

For example, in disaster response in the Philippines, local communities were empowered to lead shelter reconstruction efforts, while INGOs provided technical and financial support. This not only ensured cultural appropriateness but also built long-term resilience.

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**5. The Complexity of Humanitarian Stakeholders**

Unlike in corporate or government projects where hierarchies are clearer, humanitarian management operates in messy, multi-stakeholder environments. Challenges include:

- **Overlapping mandates** – different organizations competing for leadership.
- **Divergent priorities** – donors may prioritize visibility, while communities prioritize survival.
- **Accountability dilemmas** – humanitarian agencies accountable to donors but not always to beneficiaries.
- **Coordination fatigue** – too many meetings, clusters, and frameworks without effective results.

A skilled humanitarian manager must balance these dynamics, ensuring that humanitarian principles—humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence—are not compromised.

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**Part B: Categories of Stakeholders**

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**1. Introduction**

Humanitarian crises rarely have a single solution or actor responsible for addressing them. Instead, they involve **diverse stakeholders** with varying roles, mandates, and interests. These stakeholders interact in complex environments where speed, accountability, and coordination are crucial.

Below, we categorize and examine the main groups of stakeholders in humanitarian management:

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**2. Governments and State Actors**

Governments are **primary duty bearers** for the protection and welfare of their citizens. Their role in humanitarian action is both **regulatory** and **operational**:

- **National governments**: Responsible for disaster preparedness, coordinating aid, and ensuring national sovereignty. For example, during the 2014 Ebola crisis, the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone coordinated closely with WHO and international NGOs.
- **Local governments**: Often the first responders, especially in decentralized systems. They facilitate access to affected populations, provide infrastructure (schools, hospitals), and authorize relief operations.
- **Security forces**: Militaries and police may assist in logistics, evacuation, and law enforcement. However, their involvement can raise concerns about neutrality and humanitarian principles.

**Challenges:**

- Some governments restrict access to crisis zones for political reasons.
- In conflict settings, governments may be parties to the conflict, creating dilemmas for humanitarian actors.

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**3. Intergovernmental and Multilateral Organizations**

These are organizations formed by multiple countries, often with global or regional mandates:

- **United Nations agencies** – e.g., UNHCR (refugees), WFP (food aid), WHO (health), UNICEF (children), OCHA (coordination).
- **Regional bodies** – e.g., African Union (AU), European Union (EU), ECOWAS (West Africa).

- **International financial institutions** – e.g., World Bank, IMF, which may provide recovery loans and reconstruction funding.

**Strengths:**

- Provide large-scale funding and technical expertise.
- Offer legitimacy and convening power for coordination.

**Limitations:**

- Bureaucratic delays.
- Sometimes criticized for top-down approaches that sideline local actors.

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**4. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs are among the most visible actors in humanitarian settings. They operate at **international, national, and local levels**:

- **International NGOs (INGOs)** – e.g., Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Save the Children, Oxfam. These have strong funding bases, rapid deployment teams, and technical expertise.
- **National NGOs** – Often more culturally sensitive and embedded within local contexts. They may act as implementing partners for INGOs and UN agencies.
- **Community-based organizations (CBOs)** – Volunteer groups, faith-based associations, and grassroots movements with strong local legitimacy.

**Contributions:**

- Deliver life-saving services (shelter, food, water, health).
- Advocate for human rights and accountability.
- Bridge gaps between affected populations and international actors.

**Limitations:**

- INGOs sometimes dominate at the expense of local actors ("localization gap").
- Dependency on donor funding, which may influence priorities.

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### 5. Donors and Funding Agencies

Humanitarian response requires massive financial resources. Key donors include:

- **Bilateral donors** – e.g., USAID (United States), DFID/FCDO (UK), ECHO (European Commission).
- **Multilateral donors** – pooled funds managed by UN agencies or the World Bank.
- **Private donors** – philanthropic foundations (e.g., Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation), corporate CSR initiatives, and individual contributions.

**Roles:**

- Provide funding for humanitarian programs.
- Set conditions for accountability, reporting, and compliance.

**Tensions:**

- Donor interests may prioritize political visibility over local needs.
- Short-term funding cycles hinder long-term resilience building.

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### 6. Affected Communities

Affected people are not just *recipients* of aid—they are **central stakeholders**:

- **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)** and **refugees** – often the most vulnerable in crises.
- **Host communities** – share limited resources (water, land, schools) with displaced populations.
- **Local leaders and volunteers** – play critical roles in mobilizing, distributing aid, and maintaining social order.

**Principles:**

- Humanitarian actors must prioritize **accountability to affected populations (AAP)**.
- Affected people must be seen as partners with agency, not passive victims.

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**7. Private Sector**

Private companies increasingly play a role in humanitarian operations:

- **Logistics and supply chain actors** – e.g., DHL and Maersk supporting aid transport.
- **Telecommunications companies** – e.g., mobile money platforms enabling cash transfers.
- **Insurance and financial services** – supporting risk financing and disaster preparedness.
- **Local businesses** – provide goods and services that sustain communities.

**Advantages:**

- Efficiency, innovation, and scalability.
- Partnerships can boost sustainability and resilience.

**Risks:**

- Profit motives may conflict with humanitarian principles.
- Over-commercialization of aid delivery.

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**8. Media and Communication Actors**

Media plays a **dual role** in humanitarian action:

- **Informing the world** about crises, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing international solidarity.
- **Communicating with communities (CwC)** – ensuring affected populations receive accurate information and can voice their concerns.

**Examples:**

- Social media platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp have been used for early warning, fundraising, and real-time crisis updates.
- Humanitarian radio programs broadcast information to displaced populations (health advice, aid schedules, safety alerts).

**Challenges:**

- Sensationalist reporting can distort realities.
- Disinformation may undermine trust.

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### 9. Academic and Research Institutions

Universities, think tanks, and training institutes contribute by:

- Conducting needs assessments and impact evaluations.
- Providing evidence-based recommendations for humanitarian policy.
- Training humanitarian workers (e.g., Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative).

Their role ensures humanitarian action is guided by **data, research, and ethical standards**, rather than assumptions.

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### 10. Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)

Faith-based actors (churches, mosques, temples, religious charities) are often **deeply embedded** in communities:

- Provide shelter, food, and psychosocial support.
- Mobilize volunteers and donations.
- Offer moral and spiritual support during crises.

They often enjoy **high trust levels**, though they must avoid exclusion or discrimination based on religion.

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### 11. Key Takeaway

Stakeholders in humanitarian management are **diverse, interconnected, and sometimes conflicting**. Effective humanitarian leadership requires:

- Recognizing each stakeholder’s strengths and limitations.
- Building collaborative partnerships while safeguarding humanitarian principles.

- Placing **affected populations at the center** of humanitarian action.

**Lesson 1.4**

**Part C: Case Studies, Activities, and Assessment Questions**

**Case Studies**

**Case Study 1: Government & NGO Partnership in Disaster Response (Philippines, 2013 Typhoon Haiyan)**

When Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines in 2013, the government faced logistical and resource constraints. Local NGOs and international humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam, CARE, and the Red Cross collaborated with government ministries. The government provided policy frameworks and national security, while NGOs ensured the rapid delivery of food, medical care, and shelter. This case illustrates how governments and NGOs must complement each other: one offering legitimacy and coordination, the other flexibility and proximity to communities.

**Key Learning Point:** Governments cannot act alone during crises; partnerships amplify reach and impact.

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**Case Study 2: The Role of Donors in Shaping Aid (Haiti Earthquake, 2010)**

After the Haiti earthquake, billions of dollars were pledged by international donors. However, a large portion of the funds was tied to donor priorities rather than local needs. While some projects were successful, others failed to address urgent community requirements. This highlights the tension between donor-driven agendas and community-led priorities.

**Key Learning Point:** Donor involvement must be balanced with contextual sensitivity and accountability to affected communities.

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**Case Study 3: Community Leadership in Refugee Response (Uganda, South Sudanese Refugees, 2016–Present)**

Uganda's open-door policy towards South Sudanese refugees allowed host communities to play a central role. Community leaders facilitated land allocation, while refugees were given the right to work and farm. NGOs supported capacity building, but the sustainability of this model depended on the active involvement of both host and refugee communities.

**Key Learning Point:** Community ownership strengthens the sustainability and dignity of humanitarian interventions.

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**Case Study 4: The Private Sector in Humanitarian Aid (COVID-19 Pandemic, Global)**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, private companies, from tech firms to pharmaceutical giants, became critical stakeholders. Microsoft supported digital learning for displaced children, while Pfizer and Moderna provided vaccines. Logistics companies like DHL ensured medical supply chains reached vulnerable areas. This demonstrated the vital role of private sector actors as innovation and logistics partners.

**Key Learning Point:** The private sector contributes unique expertise and resources that traditional humanitarian actors may lack.

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**Activities**

**Activity 1: Stakeholder Mapping Exercise**

- **Objective:** To analyze and categorize the stakeholders in a humanitarian emergency.
- **Instructions:**
    1. Choose a recent humanitarian crisis (e.g., the Syrian civil war, Pakistan floods, or local flooding in Nigeria).
    2. List at least five different stakeholders (government, NGOs, donors, community leaders, private sector, media).
    3. Map their roles and responsibilities in a two-column chart: *Strengths* vs *Challenges*.
- **Outcome:** Students gain practical understanding of how diverse actors collaborate and sometimes conflict in humanitarian settings.

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**Activity 2: Role-Play Simulation**

- **Objective:** To understand power dynamics among humanitarian stakeholders.
- **Instructions:**
    - Divide students into small groups and assign roles (e.g., government official, NGO director, donor representative, community leader, media journalist).
    - Scenario: A flood has displaced 200,000 people in a local town. Each group must negotiate a coordinated response plan.
    - Debrief: Discuss how interests aligned or clashed, and identify compromises made.
- **Outcome:** Students develop negotiation, empathy, and critical thinking skills.

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**Activity 3: Media Monitoring**

- **Objective:** To analyze how media influences humanitarian responses.
- **Instructions:**
    - Select 2–3 major crises (e.g., Ukraine conflict, Gaza humanitarian crisis, Sudan conflict).
    - Track media coverage using news articles and humanitarian reports.
    - Assess: Did media amplify needs? Did it lead to donor engagement? Were certain communities overlooked?
- **Outcome:** Students recognize the role of media as both a catalyst for aid and a potential source of bias.

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**Assessment Questions**

**Section A: Short Answer (5 marks each)**

1. Identify three ways in which governments differ from NGOs in humanitarian response.

2. Explain one risk of donor-driven agendas in humanitarian aid.
3. Why is community ownership essential in long-term humanitarian recovery?
4. Provide two examples of how the private sector supports humanitarian interventions.
5. How does the media influence donor and public perception of humanitarian crises?

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**Section B: Essay Questions (15 marks each)**

1. *Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of government-led humanitarian responses compared to NGO-led interventions. Use real-world examples to support your argument.*
2. *Discuss the tension between donor priorities and community needs, drawing from at least one case study.*
3. *Evaluate the role of the private sector as a humanitarian stakeholder during the COVID-19 pandemic. What lessons can be applied to future emergencies?*

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**Section C: Applied Exercise (20 marks)**

- **Scenario:** A major earthquake has struck a developing country, leaving 1 million people homeless. The national government is overwhelmed. Donors are pledging funds but insist on strict reporting requirements. Local NGOs are under-resourced, while international NGOs are rushing in. Communities are demanding inclusion in decision-making. The media is criticizing delays.
- **Task:**
    1. Identify five main stakeholders.
    2. Outline their potential roles.
    3. Analyze at least two conflicts of interest likely to arise.

4. Propose a coordination mechanism to ensure efficiency and accountability.

**Marking Rubric:** Clarity (5), Stakeholder identification (5), Analysis (5), Practical solutions (5).

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**Conclusion**

This part of the module emphasized that **humanitarian stakeholders are interdependent actors**, each with strengths and limitations. By studying real-life cases, engaging in participatory activities, and applying critical analysis through assessments, learners gain the ability to:

- Map key players in humanitarian action.
- Understand the power dynamics and ethical dilemmas involved.
- Propose solutions for more inclusive, accountable, and coordinated responses.