Aid and the news agenda: Examining the forces shaping NGO-produced humanitarian media

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Abstract

This study examines the external influences that shape NGO-produced news content concerning humanitarian crises in East, West and Central Africa. Employing a thematic analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews with humanitarian communicators and a content analysis of the humanitarian press releases of four major NGOs, it seeks to establish the types of content NGO communications staff consider most effective for achieving mainstream media coverage, how they access such content, and any forces influencing their eventual production of news. In line with notions of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) and news cloning (Fenton 2010), it uncovers a reliance on hard-hitting humanitarian statistics and powerful first-person testimonies, which are considered essential for achieving news coverage. Statistics are found to be most often sourced from publicly available humanitarian datasets, often managed by the United Nations, and are considered susceptible to politicisation by authorities implicated in certain crises. First-person testimonies are usually gathered in-person by NGO staff and are affected by issues of physical access to crisis zones including monitoring by local authorities and demands for media sign-off. Additionally, a humanitarian NGO's decision on whether to speak out publicly about a crisis is found to be often weighed up against threats to staff and programme safety.

Examining these issues through a lens of agenda building theory (Cobb and Elder 1971), this study introduces the concept of agenda erosion, describing the phenomenon by which powerful actors, including host authorities and western governmental and intergovernmental donors, exert influence to undermine agenda building activities by NGOs in the context of humanitarian crises. Methods of agenda erosion might include demanding sign-off of media content, the control of physical access to crisis zones for communications staff, and the politicisation of humanitarian data. Unlike the traditional view of NGOs being producers of information subsidies (Gandy 1982), this concept recognises that, as news producers, NGOs also accept information subsidies, including humanitarian data, from other actors. These subsidies are used by NGOs to increase their own agenda building effectiveness but can also allow other, potentially conflicting, priorities to influence the media agenda too.

NGOs are now widely regarded as important players in the production of international news (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Cooper, 2011; Powers 2018) and these findings suggest agenda erosion is in-part responsible for the continuing adherence of aid organisations to established patterns of news construction (Cottle & Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Waisbord 2011; Powers 2018). Only crises with hard-hitting data or emotive personal stories are likely to achieve

mainstream media coverage but exposure to such sources is often closely guarded by the most powerful actors in certain crises. As a result, some crises continue to go underreported and NGOs risk being silenced or, worse, used as proxy mouthpieces by powers implicated in the humanitarian context to which they are attempting to respond.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In June 2023, details emerged of how a devastating humanitarian crisis in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region had taken a serious turn for the worse. Three months earlier, the United States (US) and United Nations (UN) suspended food distributions in the region following one of the largest thefts of aid stock ever recorded. The US and UN did not reveal who they believed had been responsible for the theft, but, according to the *Associated Press*, aid workers had privately accused the Ethiopian government of being implicated. Local officials and researchers later estimated that at least 700 people died from hunger in the aftermath of the suspension (Anna 2023). Things were supposed to have been improving in Tigray. Until six months earlier, the region had been at the centre of an horrific two-year war, estimated to have cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people (Naranjo 2013). Amidst fierce fighting with a separatist paramilitary group, Ethiopian authorities had restricted humanitarian access for much of the conflict (Harter 2023). News reports described doctors running out of basic medicines and children dying of starvation or easily preventable diseases (Houreld and Paravicini 2022). Multiple international aid agencies, including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), saw their operations suspended, particularly those that chose to speak out publicly about the crisis (Médecins Sans Frontières 2021; Norwegian Refugee Council 2021). Journalists and human rights researchers faced growing hostility as restrictions on media freedom increased (Mumo 2022). To some, there was a sickening sense of déjà vu surrounding what appeared to have unfolded in Tigray. Almost forty years earlier, in the same region, Ethiopian authorities were found to have been implicated in the so-called 'biblical famine' of 1984. Among the accusations levied at the government at the time had been the heavy-handed control of the press, including the refusal of visas to journalists (Moeller 1999), and the suppression and manipulation of rainfall data (Franks 2013). Equally worrying was that humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) responding to the crisis were considered to have been complicit in these atrocities too. Specifically, international aid agencies working in Ethiopia were accused of quietly accepting the government line, knowing that to dispute it publicly could lead to a restriction of their access to affected populations. According to Franks (2013), rather than addressing the complex political nature of the famine, NGOs instead focused their communications efforts on sharing powerful stories of human suffering. Those powerful stories would ultimately change the face of global humanitarianism forever. So impactful was a news report on the famine by the BBC's Michael Buerk, filmed by

Kenyan videographer Mohammed Amin, it was broadcast on 425 television channels worldwide (Franks 2014) and reached an estimated 470 million people (Jansson et al. 1990). The following year, it led to *Live Aid*, a multi-venue benefit concert and global fundraising drive including a music single which reached number one in fourteen countries. Whereas hunger crises have been depressingly common in Ethiopia in the decades since, the NGOs responding today in Tigray, across Africa, and in the ever-increasing number of disasters globally have seen their roles redefined in fundamental ways. *Live Aid* demonstrated to the world the raw power of the mainstream media in creating a groundswell of public opinion, influencing politicians, and raising millions for a humanitarian cause. It also occurred at a pivotal moment in the development of the mainstream media, which was about to undergo a series of seismic changes itself. First cable and satellite television and then the internet offered seemingly endless opportunities for innovation but would also rewrite the financial models that had supported international reportage thus-far. As advertisers and audiences turned their attentions online (Reynolds 2014; Newman et al. 2016; WARC 2023), traditional newsgathering soon faced a challenge that would eventually lead to a closure of foreign bureaux, a steady decline in international correspondence, and a wave of new actors entering the newsgathering process (Utley 1997; Sambrook 2010; Cooper 2011; Rasmussen 2012; Brüggemann et al. 2017).

Humanitarian organisations, which had come to rely on the news media to draw attention to crises like the Ethiopian famine, needed to adapt, and, over time, some of the world's leading NGOs became small but important players in the production of international humanitarian news (Fenton 2010; Cooper 2011; Powers 2018). Press offices were soon staffed by former journalists and freelancers (Fenton 2010; Conrad 2015; Wright 2016), using to their advantage advances in portable multimedia technology to craft professional-standard news content covering a range of development, human rights, and humanitarian issues. Such content was offered free of charge to newsrooms now grappling with shrinking budgets, a 24-hour news cycle, and a range of new online platforms to populate (Fenton 2010). Advocacy campaigns were ramped up, utilising these new in-house capabilities to demand ends to poverty, hunger, and war. Former politicians were offered top jobs at major aid agencies, raising NGO profiles further and bringing them closer to power than ever before (Lang 2013; Powers 2016).

The rise of NGO news professionalism would later be described as a "double edged sword" (Powers 2018). On the one hand, NGOs appear more often in the news and play a critical role in highlighting important humanitarian issues. On the other, competition for coverage has

become so intense that humanitarian organisations were accused of slavishly following the existing news agenda and producing their content in line with established norms rather than challenging convention or prioritising their communications work based primarily on humanitarian need (Cottle and Nolan 2009). This, according to some scholars, is one reason why certain crises continue to receive media attention, and, with it, additional resources, whereas others rage on outside of the public consciousness (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Fenton 2010; Powers 2018). Additionally, the common belief that western humanitarian donors, be they national governments, political unions such as the European Commission, or major private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are more likely to release funds for crises linked to mainstream news reports means aid agencies have often designed their media content to suit the industry's thirst for dramatic and timely stories rather than offering a more nuanced understanding of often complex social and political circumstances (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Powers 2018).

1.1 NGOs, agenda building, and the limitations of current knowledge

Ultimately, NGOs try to position their news content in the mainstream media because they want to change things. Usually, the changes they wish to make involve the decisions of the public or policy makers. The desired changes might also involve money being channelled towards their organisations through either public donations or governmental donor funding. NGOs know that influencing the public first can increase pressure on decision makers, and the mainstream media is seen as a the most viable method to reach both groups. In modern societies, the number of potential issues of governance is considered to extend beyond the capacities of decision-making institutions to process them (Cobb et al. 1976). In many communities, different groups can participate in the political process by highlighting certain issues to decision makers as a means by which to advocate for policy change in their own interest (Cobb et al. 1976). Cobb and Elder (1971) describe this practice as "agenda building", defined as "the process by which demands of various groups in the population are translated into items vying for the serious attention of public officials" (p16). Its study, according to Cobb et al. (1976), requires an understanding of the ways in which different subgroups become aware of and eventually participate in, political debates. Agenda building theory is linked to agenda setting theory, which examines the power of the media in influencing public opinion and determining the issues that receive attention from policy makers (McCombs and Shaw 1972).

Agenda building has often been used as a theoretical tool with which to examine NGO media practice (see, for example, Van Leuven et al. 2013; Camaj 2018; Yang and Saffer 2018). The provision of information subsidies (Gandy 1982) to journalists in the form of, for example, press releases, policy reports, and, more recently, cloned news content (Fenton 2010), is seen as the most common method by which aid organisations seek to build their institutional agendas in the mainstream news (Curtin 1999; Van Leuven et al. 2013; Powers 2018). Information subsidies help journalists by shortening the time required to evaluate information and lowering the cost of newsgathering (Gandy 1982; McPherson 2016), and, if an organisation is successful in placing one in the media, their agenda building power is increased as a result (Curtin 1999). Van Leuven and Joye (2014) found the agenda building capacities of NGOs and government institutions to have improved because journalists usually presented their information subsidies as original journalistic content. Yang and Saffer (2018) proposed that the provision of information subsidies can powerfully enhance the ability of NGOs to influence the media agenda.

Whereas the increasing capacity of NGOs to create news content and to place it in the media has been well researched, less studied have been the factors that influence their news production processes and the content they produce. This is surprising considering the politically charged environments in which humanitarian organisations often operate. Crisis zones are characterised by conflicting goals and, as aid providers, NGOs are accountable to various other actors, be they the communities they serve, the organisations funding their work, or the governments of the countries in which they are responding (Altay and Green 2006; Maxwell and Walker 2009; Donini 2010). At the same time, research has highlighted increasing cooperation between policy makers and civil society groups, signalling a move away from a cause-and-effect view of the decision-making process towards a more cooperative and involved process (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Lang 2013). The existing scholarship often fails to recognise the competing agendas and collaborations present in such spaces, or the possible impact on the NGO production process. NGOs are known to employ a practice of news cloning (Fenton 2010), requiring news content to fit the exacting standards of professional outlets. A deeper understanding is required of the information NGOs use in their cloned news content, how they gather it, and the possible impact of other humanitarian actors on the process. Lawson (2021), for example, demonstrated a reliance within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of institutional data sources, including the United Nations and large international NGOs. Using these trusted sources, which enjoy high levels of public confidence, allows journalists to

maintain credibility without the need to verify or challenge the information used, Lawson says. A deeper understanding of the information sources NGOs use in their own content is also important, including how their role as an aid provider, along with the complex range of accountabilities accompanying it, affects their selection and use of such information. Likewise, NGOs have historically helped journalists overcome the challenges of physically accessing crisis zones through, for instance, providing transport, accommodation, and access to stories (Moeller 1999; Franks 2013). Unwritten rules have often dictated that such assistance be repaid with an element of agenda building power on the NGO's side, for example with a name check in a journalist's report (Cooper 2011). We do not know whether NGO communicators also face barriers in accessing crisis zones and, if so, how this affects the information subsidies they produce. Governments in crisis-affected regions are known to practice agenda building themselves, typically through a close control of the media (Kalyango Jr and Eckler 2010; Ajakaiye et al. 2023). Journalists operating in East, West, and Central Africa, and particularly in countries affected by the most serious humanitarian crises, can face serious restrictions on their media freedom including monitoring, threats, and intimidation by local authorities (Mwenda 2007; Rubongoya 2007; Reporters Without Borders 2023). It is important to understand whether the closer social proximity of journalists and NGOs (Cooper 2009; Conrad 2015; Wright 2016; Scott et al. 2023), and the fact that NGO communicators might ultimately produce content destined for some of the same outlets as journalists, mean that NGO communicators face similar restrictions on media freedom and how this affects their media output.

1.2 The proposed study

The overarching aim of this study is to understand if and how external actors influence the humanitarian media content NGOs produce. To do this, it seeks to establish the information sources deemed most important by NGOs for achieving mainstream media coverage as well as the different forces influencing their collection and production of this content. It will examine how NGOs set media objectives and priorities regarding their communications work and analyse the information sources used in their media output. Examining these issues in relation to agenda building theory (Cobb and Elder 1971), this study aims to contribute new knowledge to this important area of communications scholarship, particularly in understanding how

external forces might shape the agenda building practices of the traditional providers of information subsidies in humanitarian settings.

The study takes place in the context of humanitarian crises in East, West, and Central Africa. These regions were chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, at the time of writing, they are home to the majority of what the humanitarian sector considers the world's worst crises (International Rescue Committee 2022), despite the eyes of western audiences often being drawn elsewhere. Secondly, African people are considered by many scholars to have been most affected by Western-led and Western-centric views of humanitarianism in the news media, particularly through representations of poverty and crisis (see, for example, Chouliaraki 2006; Bunce 2017; Sobel Cohen et al. 2017; Nothias 2018), and a deeper understanding of how NGOs produce news content in these regions might offer fresh insights into how and why such representations persist. Finally, in choosing three broad regions of Africa, this thesis will seek to examine crises in a suitable number of countries to avoid applying findings from one or two countries to Africa as a whole. In doing so, it will include certain countries largely ignored in empirical news studies to-date, as outlined by Scott's (2017) comprehensive scoping review into representations of Africa and Africans in US and UK media.

1.3 Establishing the context: African crises and today's humanitarian system

In the absence of official data, the calculations of actors including the European Union, NGOs, and academics, estimated that some 600,000 civilians died due to the recent civil war in Ethiopia, including between 437 and 914 people every day from starvation in Tigray (Naranjo 2023). Extreme levels of suffering are not altogether uncommon in the Horn of Africa, the large peninsula on the Easternmost tip of the continental mainland. At the time of writing, the region is experiencing its longest and most severe drought on record (UNHCR 2023). More than 43 million people require humanitarian assistance across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, with 32 million acutely food insecure (UN OCHA 2023). Heading west from Ethiopia across a belt of Saharan and Sahelian states, one would encounter crisis in parts of almost every country visited: Sudan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Mali are all home to some of the world's most pressing humanitarian needs. Bordering some of these to the south, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) hosts one of the most complex, protracted, and deadly humanitarian situations on the planet. According to the International

Rescue Committee (2021), seven of ten of the world's worst humanitarian crises in 2022 were in East, West or Central Africa.

One does not need to consume much news today to appreciate that Africa is not the only continent grappling with deadly catastrophes. In fact, the humanitarian system is contending with an ever-increasing number, scale, and frequency of emergencies (Starr & Van Wassenhove 2014; Villa et al. 2018). Many of these are, at least in-part, reactions to global challenges. The largest food crisis in modern history is currently unfolding driven by conflict, climate change, and a faltering economy (World Food Programme 2023). Starvation is considered a very real risk for around 45 million people across 37 countries (FAO/WFP 2022) and record high fuel prices are hitting low-income countries hardest (IMF 2022). To compound matters further, the past eight years have been the warmest on record (World Meteorological Organization 2023). Climate change and climate-related disasters are increasing risk and vulnerability, and global humanitarian funding is failing to keep pace with this rising need (Lattimer and Swithern 2017). In 2022, the United Nations' Humanitarian Response Plan for Ethiopia requested more than US$3.3 billion dollars, of which it received US$1.693 billion, or slightly more than half (UN OCHA 2023a). According to the UN, as of 2022, one in every 23 people in the world now requires humanitarian assistance and more than one per cent of the world's population is currently displaced (UN OCHA 2022). There was little surprise, therefore, when in 2021 the UN Under Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs described the humanitarian system as "overwhelmed and over-stretched," and warned that the scale and complexities of modern crises were putting it under enormous strain.

1.3.1 Defining East, West, and Central Africa

East, West, and Central Africa is a loose grouping of different regions and countries as opposed to a homogenous geographical, ethnic, or political zone. Various economic and political groupings exist in Africa including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the East African Community (EAC), and these go some way in helping to define regions of East Africa, West Africa, and Central Africa. However, not all states fall into one of these communities and some, such as Rwanda, DRC, and Burundi, are members of more than one community. In the humanitarian sector, West and Central African countries tend to be grouped together as one larger region, partly due to the spread of French as an official language in many countries. East Africa, which is predominantly Anglophone, at least officially, is usually either managed as

one region or grouped together with Southern Africa. This study is concerned with NGO humanitarian media production in East, West and Central Africa. West and Central Africa includes the countries of Senegal, (The) Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Niger, Cape Verde, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. For this study, it also includes the geographical areas of The Sahel and the Lake Chad Region. East Africa contains the countries of Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Réunion, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Somaliland, Tanzania, and Uganda. For this study, it also includes the geographical areas of the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes.

1.4 Thesis Structure

Chapters 2 and 3 will consider Africa's historical representation in the western media and how this affects audiences' understanding and perceptions of African countries, people, and crises. Chapter 4 will examine the current literature around the political economy of global news and the rise of the humanitarian NGO as an international newsmaker. Chapter 5 will explore theoretical perspectives and concepts related to NGO communications, with a focus on agenda building and information subsidies. Chapter 6 will explain the research design and approach, the data collection methods (in this case semi-structured interviews and content analysis), the sampling strategy and selection of participants, data analysis techniques (thematic analysis and content analysis), and finally any ethical considerations. Chapters 7 and 8 will include the presentation and analysis of the qualitative and quantitative findings. Finally, Chapter 9 will interpret and discuss the two sets of findings; compare these with existing literature and discuss the implications for theory and practice.

Chapter 2 – Africa in the News Media

In 2012, the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund launched *Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway*, a satirical charity fundraising campaign calling on African people to send radiators to Norway in time for winter. In a parody of the archetypal schmaltzy celebrity appeal song (see USA for Africa's *We are the World* and Band Aid's *Do They Know It's Christmas?),* an accompanying music video came with a warning that "frostbite kills too", and, at the time of writing, has been viewed more than three million times. Behind the joke was a serious message that Western audiences have been conditioned through stereotypical representations of poverty to believe that all Africans need their help – that such audiences are the active change agents and African people the passive recipients of their goodwill (Viki 2017). Whereas Radi-Aid's finger was pointed squarely in the direction of international aid organisations, others have criticised the news media for its own portrayals of Africa, which many scholars consider having often been reliant on stereotypical, over-dramatized, and decontextualised coverage (see, for example, Ojo 2014; Hammett 2014; Stavinoha 2016; and Nothias 2018). It is not a challenging task to locate stereotypical images in use by western news brands today. A quick analysis of the BBC's Nigeria live blog at the time of writing found more stories built around generalisations of Africa, including a witchcraft conference, two corruption scandals and a drive to end open defecation, than it did on business news or jobs (BBC News 2019). Nigeria's 2023 Gross Domestic Product of US$390 billion, ranked in the world's top 40 countries, ahead of, for example, the Czech Republic ($335.24 billion), Finland ($305 billion) and Portugal ($276.43 billion) (IMF 2023). And, whereas major humanitarian crises in some parts of the country meant it was the subject of a US$1.3 billion UN humanitarian appeal in the same year (UN OCHA 2023b), had all that funding been received, it would have amounted to under five per cent of the country's sizeable economic output.

Nevertheless, there remain a multitude of serious and complex humanitarian issues facing many African countries. The continent receives the largest share of global aid (Harcourt 2022) and half the countries listed in the International Rescue Committee's (2022) "Top 10 Crises the World Can't Ignore in 2023" are African states. In Ethiopia, more than 28 million people required humanitarian assistance in 2023, according to the United Nations (UN OCHA 2023a). The Democratic Republic of Congo has more people living in acute food insecurity than anywhere else on the planet (IPC 2022) and South Sudan is facing its highest levels of hunger and malnutrition in ten years (WFP 2021). As of October 2023, Sudan was home to the largest

internal displacement crisis in the world, with more than 7.1 million people now thought to be displaced in the country. Drought, conflict, and disease are affecting millions in Somalia (ACAPS 2023), and protracted violence in northern states of Nigeria is causing misery for tens of millions more (UN OCHA 2023b). However, covering eleven million square miles and home to some 1.2 billion people, Africa is the world's second largest continent in terms of both landmass and population. It is estimated that more than a thousand languages and dialects are spoken throughout 54 nation states (Ethnologue Database 2024) and its countries are the most ethnically diverse on the planet (Alesina et al. 2003). DRC alone is two-thirds of the size of Western Europe, whilst Nigeria and Ethiopia are home to both two of the world's worst humanitarian crises *and* two of the world's fastest growing economies. Africa is, therefore, a continent of contradictions. Why, then, does the western media still tend to relate events in one country to the continent as a whole (Nothias 2018), almost as if Africa was a single country in itself? According to Brookes (1995), it can be traced to the modern history of Africa, and, particularly, to narratives of primitiveness and savagery, which have had a homogenising effect on current discourses, with Nothias speaking of the adherence of news stories to a "cohesive symbolic system" of references specific to Africa as a country (p1143).

The mass media is imbued with ideology, serving as a system for communicating messages and, through its reach, has the power to affect audience values and beliefs and, resultingly, influence the public and policy agendas (Gerbner 1967; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Hall 1973). How African countries are portrayed in the western media matters in shaping views, knowledge, and understanding about African people, its countries, and its crises. This chapter sets out to explore the key findings of recent empirical research into the representation within the western news media of African countries and their citizens. The aim is to establish a broad overview of how these are represented to news audiences in western nations as well as the scope of the existing research into these matters.

2.1 African representation throughout history

According to the research to-date, for much of the last few hundred years, what western audiences have seen, read, and heard about African countries and their citizens has been largely framed by the conventional wisdom that Africa is a dysfunctional and poverty-ridden land, ruled by corrupt politicians and populated largely by the sick, the starving and the dangerous (see, for example, Gordon and Wolpe 1998; Ojo 2014; Hammett 2014; Nothias 2018). The root

causes for this can be traced back to the colonialisation of Africa between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries (Jarosz 1992; Brookes 1995; Said 1978). Dispatches from the colonial era depicted, in writing often greedily consumed by western audiences, an African populace as savage, uncivilised and sub-human. A common metaphor used in relation to Africa was darkness (Jarosz 1992; Brookes 1995). First published in 1890, Henry Morton Stanley's account of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, *In Darkest Africa*, sold 150,000 copies in its first year and was translated into French, German, Italian, Spanish and Dutch. It was thought to be the inspiration behind Joseph Conrad's 1899 story *Heart of Darkness*, a novella that can still be found in lists of the greatest books of all time (see, for example, The Guardian 2015) but now also held up as the epitome of the savage representation of Africa. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1988) labels Conrad's offering an offensive and deplorable book that dehumanises Africans. Graham Greene's *Journey without Maps*, in which the author gives an account of his travels in remote areas of Liberia, opens with Greene expressing his desire to leave civilisation behind. "A quality of darkness is needed," he writes. "Of the inexplicable" (Green 1936, p20). Jarosz (1992) says such representations helped to portray Africa as an entity to be "tamed" by Western civilisation, science, and Christianity. Said's *Orientalism* (1978) explained how cultural texts like those above had ultimately served to maintain western power through their representations of the colonial 'other'. Western impressions of distant lands, Said argued, were formed only after they had passed through the prisms of art and literature in which entertaining and exotic stereotypes were formed. Use of the darkness metaphor was later observed in news output too (Hawk 1992) and, according to Brookes (1995), its symbolic use in relation to Africa suggested qualities including evil, sinfulness, and un-enlightenment. "Africans are primitive, savage, murderous and violent," she writes. "Darkness gives a sense of anarchy and chaos that is beyond normal understanding" (Brookes 1995, p474).

2.2 Politics, violence, and poverty: Africa in the western news

Mahaedo and McKinney's 2007 paper "Media Representations of Africa: Still the same old story?" was, according to its authors, born out of the "continuing patronising and stereotyped images of people and places in the Majority World" (p1). News reporting of Africa had remained, the authors argued, largely informed by the dominant themes of corruption, poverty, tribal wars, and pessimism. According to Bunce (2017), coverage of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s was "sporadic, simplistic, racist, and overwhelmingly negative in its subject matter and

tone" (2017, p17). For example, Brookes (1995) found conflict, aid, human rights, crime, politics, and disaster to have accounted for 96 per cent of news stories about Africa in the Guardian and 92 per cent in the Daily Telegraph. Sport, in comparison, had accounted for 1 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. Subsequent research (Hammett 2014; Ojo 2014; Sobel Cohen et al. 2017; Nothias 2018) suggests much of this has continued in the decades since. Examination of the research to date for this study concluded that, despite the efforts of certain outlets and journalists, most of the news coming from Africa can still be categorised as reinforcing three broad generalisations:

1) Africa is beset by political and social instability

2) Africa is beset by violence, crime, and insecurity

3) Africa is beset by poverty and illness.

These assertions are supported by analyses of African representation in western media. For example, Nothias (2018) tracked several lexical fields in British and French broadsheet coverage of the 50th anniversaries of independence in 24 African countries. He found the four most prevalent lexical fields to be "social and political instability", "violence and death", "corruption", and "poverty." Ten years after reopening its Africa bureau with the promise of covering "much more than AIDS", Ojo (2014) analysed news topics in Canada's *Globe and Mail* coverage of Africa. He found that, between January 2003 and December 2012, the most frequent topics covered were politics, HIV/AIDS, economic affairs, and conflict, with these four topics constituting 66 per cent of overall coverage (Ojo 2013). Hammett's (2014) analysis of coverage of South Africa in four English national newspapers ahead of the 2010 FIFA football World Cup found the most regular editorial emphasis to be placed upon crime and security. The author also noted an implication in British tabloid media that Western travellers to South Africa would risk becoming endangered in a "savage and violent post-colony" (Hammett 2014, p231). Mahieu and Joye's examination of Africa coverage in Belgian television and newspapers found almost 75 per cent to be concerned with politics, crime, and conflict (Mahieu and Joye 2018), and in his (2016) analysis of British media coverage of the AIDS epidemic, Stavinoha noted how *The Guardian* could not resist "reproducing quintessential neo-colonial tropes and thinly veiled racist stereotypes" (p134).

Yet, of late, there is talk of a quiet revolution beginning to stir and a reporting of Africa which could slowly be becoming less *Heart of Darkness* and more *Africa Rising* (Bunce et al. 2017). With the emergence of more participatory information flows and a possible decrease in reliance on traditional sources, several scholars (see, for example, Nothias 2014; Bunce 2017) have

suggested that mainstream foreign news coverage of Africa may be becoming more positive in tone. Researchers have attempted to capture this apparent change in direction; something labelled by Bunce as a "seemingly seismic shift in the continent's meta-narrative" (Bunce 2017, p17). Central to this capturing of positivity, however, is the subjective definition of "positive". For some, the positive reporting of Africa may simply mean the sort that focuses on what audiences might consider to be relatively mundane topics such as business and health as opposed to the well-worn subjects of, for example, corruption, poverty, and humanitarian crisis. Academics have described such negative coverage as adhering to a framework of "Afro-pessimism", the idea that Africa is a hopeless land devoid of opportunity. In an analysis of international news coverage of Africa, Bunce (2017) considered positive stories to be those that veered away from subjects traditionally associated with Afro-pessimism. Such subjects included economic, business, and financial stories and, in a comparison of news coverage from 1994 and 2013, Bunce noted a significant increase in economic, business, and financial stories which, the author suggested, could demonstrate a more positive tone in the news reporting of Africa. During the same period, Bunce also noted a decrease in many of the topics more-readily associated with Afro-pessimism, including humanitarian crises. Contrastingly, Bleich et al (2020) analysed almost 140,000 articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post, Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* over a 25-year period between 1994 and 2018. It found articles mentioning Africa were, on average, negative in tone and had not become more positive over time. Nothias (2018) warns of the possible dangers of labelling stories about neoliberalist economics as being inherently positive and particularly of Africa's progress being linked to economic growth. This is symptomatic, say Bunce et al. (2017), of a neo-colonial framing of Africa in western media, in which the continent is presented as ripe for financial exploitation. Elsewhere, other scholars have noted wealth and economic development being held-up as a sign of more positive reporting. Joye (2017), for example, analysed a series of programmes by the Belgian public broadcaster VRT focusing on positive developments in Africa. He found the overall theme of progress to be depicted through a framework of economic growth and, specifically, images portraying "shopping malls, fashion designers, people playing golf, traffic jams, construction works, and exchange markets." (Joye, 2017, p52). So positive was some reporting perceived to be becoming that, in an interview with UNICEF, the London School of Economics African Development Chair, Thandika Mkandawire, warned of a "new malady" in the reporting of Africa in the form of "Afro-euphoria" (UNICEF 2014). Increasingly optimistic reporting of the continent, Mkandawire argued, risked disguising the multitude of problems that still exist.

Positive or not, as a continent, it can be fairly argued that Africa is neglected in Western news coverage (Sobel Cohen et al. 2017; Nothias 2018). Wilke et al. (2012) found news of Africa amounting to only four per cent of coverage on television news in European countries. A longitudinal study of *New York Times* coverage between 1991 and 2015 found high-income countries to be the focus of more coverage than low- and middle-income countries combined. Additionally, coverage of low- and middle-income countries featured 53.3% and 44.8% negative news, respectively, compared to 18.3 percent of stories on high-income countries (Sobel Cohen et al. 2017). An acute hunger crisis affecting 1.2 million people in Zambia received only 512 online news reports in 2021 (Scott et al. 2022) whereas, in 2022, the war in Ukraine was the subject of 35% of all online global news coverage (Alexander and Rozzell 2022). Eisensee and Strömberg (2007) found a requirement for forty times as many people to be killed in an African disaster to achieve the same levels of media coverage as a similar type of disaster in Eastern Europe. The CARMA report (2006) carried out a systemic analysis of press reporting in Europe, the US and Australia to compare the coverage of six major disasters including 2005's Hurricane Katrina, the Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 and the 2003 to 2005 Darfur crisis in Sudan. Despite Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Stanley causing the fewest deaths, Katrina received by far the most media coverage, representing 50% of the entire sample. Joye (2009) considers this phenomenon to represent a "hierarchy of suffering" present in news discourse which normalises global inequalities.

2.3 Rethinking assumptions about the representation of Africa

Comprehensive scoping reviews aim to provide an overview of the existing literature concerning a given topic. Martin Scott's (2017) review of African representation in the U.S. and UK media is an important step towards a better understanding of stereotypes and the promotion of a more accurate and nuanced view of the continent. Covering all empirical studies between January 1990 and April 2014, Scott discovered the scope of the existing research to be worryingly small, both in terms of the countries analysed and the media outlets and texts. For example, Scott found more than half (55%) of the 163 news studies analysed had focused on one of just six African countries – South Africa, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Somalia. Scholarship on the media representation of communities in North Africa and Francophone Africa were found to be particularly scarce, and 28 countries, more than half the number of states in Africa, were not the primary focus of any news study. Additionally, within

the small group of countries receiving comparatively frequent analysis, research has often focused on a similarly small number of news events. For example, much of the research into representations of Rwanda and Rwandans focused on the 1994 genocide (e.g. Chari 2010) and studies of Sudan were largely concerned with the Darfur crisis (e.g. Ibelema 2014). Consequentially, according to Scott, we know far less about western media representations of Africa than we may have thought. Such narrow research parameters have given rise to, and are now preserving, a myth about how Africa's people and places are depicted in the Western media, Scott says. Coverage may indeed be dominated by negative news or stereotypes, but it is impossible to be certain if we are only looking in a handful of places. Scott's review raises additional concerns about the application of findings about one or two countries to Africa as a whole, particularly if such a small number of countries are being studied. Indeed, examples of such practices can be found in research from the years covered by his review. For example, Hammett suggests that his findings about how English newspapers represented South Africa demonstrate "how media framing of Africa continues to rely upon past stereotypes and implicit racism" (2014, p231). Despite analysing one news outlet, *The New York Times*, and one news event, the Rwandan Genocide, Chari (2010) made claims about the coverage of Africa within the Western media.

Scott also found scholars to have continuously returned to a handful of media outlets and formats for analysis. For example, he noticed a clear skew towards written news. With only one of the 163 studies focusing on radio content, nearly half of all studies had instead analysed newspapers and/or magazines. Furthermore, within the 79 studies into newspapers and/or magazines, only a very small number of publications had been analysed. Studies into UK newspaper coverage of Africa, for example, were overwhelmingly dominated by broadsheet outlets such as *The Guardian* or *The Daily Telegraph* (see, for example, Brookes 1995; Hammett 2011; Nothias 2018; Stavinoha 2017) whilst only one focused on one of the UK's most popular newspapers, *The Sun.* This containment to a few outlets was also noted in his examination of research into online representations. For example, 9 of the 15 studies of UK online representations focused exclusively on BBC News content. Some scholars have attempted to gather a more representative sample of media outlets. For example, Hammett (2014) selected broadsheets *The Guardian* and *The Times* and the tabloids *The Daily Star* and *The Daily Mail* for analysis. Stavinoha (2017) was one of the comparatively few scholars of-late to analyse broadcast news material. His analysis of BBC television news coverage of AIDS

and Africa from the beginning of 1987 to the end of 2008 covered 92 *BBC News* and 28 *Newsnight* reports.

Nothias (2018) counters that what in fact emerges from an analysis of the existing research into the framing of Africa is not necessarily the acknowledgment of a myth but instead an understanding that representations of Africa are influenced by complex and competing values and structures of production which, when combined, can indeed produce generalisations and pessimistic representations but also those that empower and oppose the so-called dominant narrative. Research into the representation of Africa in Western news has tended to avoid alternative, online, or non-mainstream media texts (Scott 2017; Mahieu and Joye 2018). Kenix (2011) says an opposition to hegemony and dominant ideologies is a key feature of alternative media and, to ascertain whether alternative media sources made fewer generalised depictions of Africans, Mahieu and Joye (2018) analysed the print edition of MO*, a Belgian alternative news magazine focused on the global south with extensive coverage of Africa. It found that both Afro-pessimistic and -optimistic discourses were articulated through, for example, the story selection of mainly negative events such as the refugee crisis or terrorism. In addition, they found Africa frequently represented as inferior, with people unnecessarily described by the colour of their skin. "Children are portrayed with filthy rags, or African countries are represented as passive and dependent on the West", the authors write (Mahieu and Joye 2018, p37). This was qualified by the authors through the fact that journalists at MO* were found to report on certain issues in a more critical manner than most mainstream outlets. Ogunyemi (2018) analysed representation in the African diasporic press in the UK, seeking to discover whether it reproduced dominant negative stereotypes. He found one newspaper to have presented a range of topics including positive, negative, and mixed frames but found the highest frequency (45.68%) to be positively framed stories, attributing this to the outlet's attempts to look beyond sensationalist and unrepresentative headlines (Ogunyemi 2017).

2.4 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has examined the representation of African countries and their people in the Western news media. From the satirical lens of the Radi-Aid campaign to the critical analysis of contemporary news coverage, it has underlined the pervasive influence of historical narratives rooted in colonialism, which still contribute towards shaping Western perceptions of Africa. A persistent focus on poverty, crime, and social instability was found to be common in news coverage at the expense of covering the diverse economic and cultural

landscapes of African nations. While acknowledging the serious humanitarian challenges faced by many African countries, the chapter has emphasised the need to move beyond homogenising narratives that fail to capture the continent's complexity. The emergence of a potential "Africa Rising" narrative must be taken with caution, however, particularly due to the subjective nature of positivity and the risk of overlooking ongoing challenges. Finally, a critique of existing research has highlighted its limitations, urging for a more expansive and nuanced understanding of how African countries are portrayed in the Western media.

Chapter 3 – Perceptions and (Mis)understanding of Africa in Western Audiences

In January 2018, the *Washington Post* reported how, during a meeting on immigration at the White House, United States President Donald Trump had referred to several African states as "shithole countries" and asked why so many people from African states were being allowed to migrate to America. According to the *New York Times*, during an earlier meeting with cabinet officials, Trump had purportedly suggested that Nigerians would never "go back to their huts" if they were offered entry into the United States (Shear and Hirschfeld Davis 2017) and suggested the U.S. should aim to have more migrants from countries like Norway instead (Dawsey 2018). If Trump did make such comments, the former President was apparently not alone in western countries in favouring immigration from European countries over African states. For example, a 2017 YouGov poll concerning post-Brexit immigration policies in the United Kingdom found low levels of support by white respondents for migrants from Africa and Asia. The poll used subtle differences in wordings to hone-in on ethnic biases by comparing support for increased migration from 'outside Europe' with the same from 'Africa and Asia'. It found support amongst white respondents for increasing skilled migration from *"*Africa and Asia" was 10% lower than it was for "outside Europe" (YouGov, Policy Exchange and Birkbeck University 2016). Ford, Morell, and Heath (2012) found white European families to be consistently preferred to non-white Africans and Muslims for immigration as part of an 'ethnic hierarchy' of reaction towards migration in the United Kingdom, with Western Europeans the most popular immigrants, followed by Eastern Europeans, with "Africans and Muslims" a further 12-20 points behind. The authors highlighted tabloid news stories concerning the alleged abuse of the UK's family migration system, which had tended to focus on migrants from so-called "poorer non-white regions such as Africa and the Muslim countries of the Indian sub-continent" (Ford et al. 2012, p42). A UK parliamentary inquiry found African applicants more than twice as likely to be refused non-immigrant visas as applicants from other continents. 27 per cent of visitor visa requests from Africa made in two years to September 2018 were said to have been turned down (All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa 2019).

In the literature to-date, there is a broad consensus that media coverage has been at least partly responsible for increasing levels of ignorance and confusion about African countries and crises (Philo 2002; Monson 2017). Public misunderstanding of Africa stretches from the very basic, such as its countries' weather patterns, to the very complex such as the intricacies and socio-political contexts of humanitarian crises. A Council on Foreign Relations and National

Geographic (2016) survey of college-aged Americans found a third of respondents to be unaware that Sub-Saharan Africa is the part of the continent to the south of the Sahara Desert. 43% of respondents did not know that Sudan is a country in Africa. According to a poll conducted in 2010 by a British online travel agent, one-fifth of Britons believed it never rains in Africa and more than 70% believed it is always hot in the Sahara Desert (Pini 2010). Another survey by the same company found more than half of Britons to believe Timbuktu is an imaginary place. Whereas such examples might be considered largely inoffensive in nature, it might also be argued that they are signifiers of a wider issue of misunderstanding of Africa both fuelled by, and giving rise to, the sorts of representations outlined in the previous chapter.

3.1 News reporting and the understanding of African crises

Images of Africa in Western media are regularly linked to poverty, war, and humanitarian crises (CARMA 2006; Mahieu and Joye 2018). Despite this, public knowledge of disasters is often found to be basic at best. A 2017 poll by the International Rescue Committee found 85% of Americans to be oblivious to major hunger crises affecting Africa and the Middle East (Summers 2017). According to a 2022 poll commissioned by Christian Aid, whereas 91 per cent of the British public was aware of the war in Ukraine, only 23 per cent knew about the worsening hunger crisis in East Africa (Davies 2022). Those that are aware of such events rarely understand them with any degree of insight or in a way that accurately reflects the realities on the ground (Philo 2002). Scholars attribute this lack of awareness in part to a tendency of mainstream news outlets to focus on sensationalised imagery without offering due context or explanation to socially and politically complex events (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Monson 2017). Rather than promoting real understanding or social change, Altheide's (1997) "problem frame" concept explains the perceived requirement of the media to present news events as setbacks in need of overcoming because audiences expect to be entertained. A Glasgow University Media Group audience study aiming to identify patterns of understanding and beliefs about the global south concluded that most audience members had a very low level of understanding of events and noted widespread confusion over what takes place and why (Philo 2003). It said television coverage tended to focus on "dramatic, violent and tragic images" whilst offering little context or explanation to the events being portrayed (p185). Hall's (1973) concept of decoding explained how audiences, when faced with gaps in knowledge, actively interpret and make sense of media messages by drawing upon their own

experiences, prejudices, and preconceptions. Philo (2003) noticed how, in the absence of important contextual information about afro-pessimistic subjects, audiences tended to fill their own gaps in knowledge with "what are effectively neo-colonial beliefs about Africa and the innate faults of Africans" (p185). This suggests that when important information about African contexts is missing, the news events themselves become synonymous with their media representations and so narrow frames and sensationalised coverage becomes the reality in the minds of the audience. Indeed, Philo found that images of the global south audience groups tended to recall were "overwhelmingly negative" and representative of Afro-pessimistic subjects such as famine, poverty, war, and conflict (Philo 2003, p176). Focus group members regularly cited the media as being responsible for such images, including one participant who stated "every time you turn on the television or pick up a paper, there's another [war] starting or there is more poverty or destruction (Philo 2003, p177).

Altheide (1997) argued that the problem-frame in news coverage and the expectation that danger and risk are central features had caused fear to become pervasive throughout all levels of American society. Fear is linked to the concept of othering - the positioning, implicitly or explicitly, of a particular group of people as different from another (Said 1978; Monson 2017). Whereas stereotypes of Africa and Africans may be perceived as benign in terms of physical threat, they might also be seen as a threat to the established way of life of a group of people. Othering and the fear that accompanies it is therefore likely to be heightened by sensationalised footage that focuses on stereotypes but omits important contextual information. Monson (2017) examined American media discourses around the 2014 Ebola outbreak. She found the US news media to have utilised the audience's fear of Ebola as "other", "scary" and "African" (Monson 2017, p4) and argued it had employed a discourse of crisis and panic. This, Monson said, led to widespread anxiety amongst the American public that an Ebola pandemic might occur in the United States, as well as the stigmatisation of Africans living in the U.S. and those returning from West Africa.

3.2 Compassion fatigue and audience attitudes towards distant suffering

Research on how the media portrays human suffering and how people react to it shows that emotions, beliefs, and cultural factors all play a role. Chouliaraki's (2006) *Spectatorship of Suffering* demonstrated a hierarchal distribution of emotions towards images and narratives of distant suffering in audience responses to media and humanitarian campaigns. She proposed

that these hierarchies were influenced by how news reports on distant suffering used symbolic resources, languages, and images. Joye (2009) highlighted how the Western news media reinforces a hierarchical perspective on global suffering. This perpetuates inequalities, reflects a Euro-American-centric view of crises, and ultimately reinforces global power imbalances and divisions. Huiberts and Joye (2019) examined Belgian audiences' feelings of compassion and care in relation to the 2015 Nepal earthquake. Focus group participants were shown a news report from the day of the earthquake combining footage of Nepalese people with the experiences of a Belgian citizen who ran an orphanage in the capital, Kathmandu. They found participants encountered difficulties in empathising with Nepalese people affected by the disaster due to the suffering seeming so geographically and culturally distant. The authors labelled this phenomenon a lack of "experiential overlap" or, in other words, an inability for audiences to put themselves in another's shoes. Chouliaraki (2006) used the phrase the "domesticity of reception" to describe this increased perceived distance, which she argued, was emphasised by the ways in which humanitarian media may be consumed in Western homes, for example, in a living room. Scott (2014) conducted a large-scale audience study to examine how viewers responded to mediated encounters with distant suffering on UK television. He found substantial evidence of indifference to mediated suffering, particularly in younger people, as well as what he called "solitary enjoyment," a term used to describe the idea that audiences could witness distant events unfold with little or no moral obligation to act. Philo (2003) suggests ignorance of the global south can also be linked to a widespread belief by western broadcasters that audiences are disinterested in factual programming about such countries. Ironically, by reporting crises in a sensationalised way, as to capture the attention of news audiences, outlets may be reinforcing the sorts of representations that encourage their audiences to feel physically and culturally distant from a story, and, as a result, risk losing their attention altogether. Moeller (1999) labels such a response as adhering to the notion of "compassion fatigue" and argues that media coverage of disasters usually results not in agency or action from a concerned audience but instead in idle passivity and pity. This is, Moeller says, an unavoidable consequence of the way humanitarian news is reported through what she calls "repetitive chronologies, sensationalized language and Americanized metaphors and references" (Moeller 1999, p2). Scott (2014a) suggested new media technologies may be useful in overcoming the perceived distance between western audiences and populations suffering at the heart of a crisis in ways that traditional media cannot. Scott highlighted how such technologies have the potential to allow individuals to create content themselves and to

converse in real time with audiences through, for example, web chats, forums, and social media.

3.3 Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the relationship between media representations of Africa and the resulting perceptions and knowledge of Western audiences. Despite occasional efforts to present a more positive narrative, the prevailing image of Africa in Western news outlets remains overwhelmingly negative and decontextualised, perpetuating stereotypes of instability, crime, and poverty. The impact of such coverage is evident in the levels of ignorance, misunderstanding, and fear it fosters among Western audiences. This chapter has illustrated how gaps in knowledge can lead audiences to construct meaning based on their experiences, prejudices, and preconceptions, further reinforcing neo-colonial beliefs about Africa. The problem frame in news coverage, as discussed by Altheide (1997), contributes to a climate of fear permeating various levels of society. This fear, linked to the concept of othering, not only shapes perceptions but might also influence policy decisions, as evidenced by the struggles of African visitors to secure UK visas. The examples of the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2015 Nepal earthquake underline the role of decontextualised footage in creating a perceived distance between Western audiences and the global south.

Chapter 4 – The Political Economy of Humanitarian News

This chapter will explore the intersection of media, politics, and humanitarianism. Central to this exploration is the growing impact of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the production of humanitarian news, especially within the context of crises in Africa. Whereas the preceding chapter demonstrated the impact of media narratives on Western perceptions of the continent, this chapter examines the actors shaping these narratives. NGOs navigate the spaces between humanitarian response and media engagement and can wield considerable power in framing how global audiences understand and respond to events.

4.1 The decline of foreign correspondence

The decline and redefinition of foreign correspondence has been well documented in the media, communication, and journalism research of the last few decades (Utley 1997; Randall 2000; Sambrook 2010; Rasmussen 2012; Brüggemann et al. 2016). It has been a phenomenon driven by a range of technological and socio-economic factors which have collectively contributed to a diminished presence of dedicated international correspondents, impacting the depth and diversity of international news coverage, and potentially limiting public awareness and understanding of global events (Utley 1997; Constable 2007, Sambrook 2010; Rasmussen 2012).

The decline of foreign reporting is commonly linked to the arrival of the internet, but TV foreign correspondents were already considered "an endangered species" (Utley 1997, p2) as early as 1997 when the internet had found its way into just 18 per cent of US households (United States Census Bureau 2001). At the time, the disruptive technology considered most dangerous to the future of international news was satellite and cable television due to an abundance of newfound viewing choices which, according to producers, had caused a declining interest in foreign affairs in U.S. audiences (Utley 1997). It was a trend set to continue and by 2014 an American Press Institute survey found fewer than 10 per cent of adults describing themselves as passionate about foreign news (American Press Institute 2014). In the following years, internet penetration underwent its steepest growth in western homes, rising in the UK from 9 per cent in 1998 to per cent three years later. From there, it charted a relatively steady growth of between 2 per cent and 6 per cent per year before levelling-off at around 90 per cent in 2016 (Office for National Statistics 2016). Traditional news reporting faced its greatest

challenge; one that would ultimately lead to dwindling circulations and revenues as consumers and advertisers turned their attentions online. According to intelligence provider WARC (2023), print news remains to this day midway through a transition towards an overall dominance of digital format consumption today. Analysts identified 2014 as the year in which mobile advertising spending overtook newspaper advertisement revenue for the first time. (Reynolds 2014). By 2017, newspaper advertising in the UK was projected to have fallen to £1.9 billion, whereas digital advertising had grown to £9 billion, or a 53.8% market share (Reynolds 2014). As of 2023, Amazon's global advertising revenue of almost $38bn rivals the entire global publishing advertising market, which estimates put at $47bn (WARC 2023).

As legacy news outlets fought to weather the financial storm, major savings were required, and editors almost inevitably turned to foreign news crews for whom costs could stretch into thousands of dollars a day (Utley 1997; Sambrook 2010) and whose ways of working faced increasing competition from this new global interconnectedness. McChesney and Nichols (2010) argued the crisis of American journalism predates the internet and the rise of digital media. The prohibitive costs of foreign newsgathering had, in fact, already been becoming an increasing concern before the latest technological upheaval. In a time before self-shoot video journalists and smartphones, an international TV news crew might consist of a correspondent, a field-producer, a cameraperson, a sound engineer, plus "some 600 pounds of camera and personal equipment" (Utley 1997, p6). Sambrook (2010) put the cost of maintaining a foreign bureau at over $250,000 per year in many places and more in countries affected by conflict. At a time when profitability expectations on news outlets were increasing (McChesney and Nichols 2010), there was little evidence, too, Sambrook says, of foreign reporting generating any significant financial gains. As a result, the capacity of news outlets to produce foreign content in the unending cycle demanded by satellite and online news was brought sharply into question (Powers 2018). Utley (1997) found that, between 1988 and 1996, news reports from the foreign bureaus of the three major American television networks - *ABC, CBS,* and *NBC* - dropped fifty per cent, from 3,261 minutes to 1,596 minutes. Constable (2007) added that, between 2002 and 2006, the number of foreign-based newspaper correspondents shrank from 188 to 141, excluding the *Wall Street Journal*. In the 1980s, American TV networks each maintained around 15 foreign bureaus; by 2007, they had six or fewer, Constable added. At the turn of the century, Riffe et al. (1994) found *The New York Times* to have fewer international stories than it had two decades earlier, and, by 2011, Cooper was no longer writing of a "decline" but instead of a "vacuum" in foreign reporting. Between 1998 and 2011, at least 20

US newspapers and media outlets closed all their foreign bureaux whilst many others reduced their number of foreign correspondents and bases overseas (Enda 2011). Cottle (2008) described the demise of foreign correspondence as positioned between new forms of global interconnectedness on one side and political economy on the other. Whereas the 'economy' of 'political economy' might refer to market influences such as high costs and dwindling audience interest, the 'political', Cottle says, includes the influence of geopolitical outlooks inhibiting foreign reporting from politically distant places. In recent years, very few outlets have maintained permanent correspondents in Africa. At the time of writing, the *New York Times* still has offices in a handful of countries. Some of the larger global broadcasters, such as the *BBC* and *Al Jazeera*, maintain a relatively strong presence on the continent as do the 'big three' news agencies of *Thomson Reuters*, *Agence France Presse (AFP), and Associated Press (AP).* However, these are the exceptions rather than the rule and, particularly in the case of international broadcasters, much of this presence is aimed at catering to an African audience instead of a Western one through state-supported, soft power mechanisms such as the *BBC World Service, Radio France Internationale (RFI)* and *Voice of America (VOA)* (Ensor 2015; Scott et al. 2018). Brüggemann et al. (2016) found traditional correspondents – professional journalists working full-time for legacy media – to believe there to be almost no effective substitutes for full-time foreign correspondents, including parachute journalists, locals, amateurs, or those reporting from headquarters. Scott et al. (2018) found very few international news organisations to routinely cover humanitarian affairs today due to the high costs of producing original and regular content.

4.2 Humanitarian news providers today

Humanitarian crises such as natural disasters, wars, and famine can be considered hard news and are characterised by events that have a significant impact on individuals, communities, or populations (Checchi et al 2017; Altay and Green 2006; Colombo and Checchi 2018). Disasters can affect large groups of people and often offer the sorts of dramatic picture and highly emotive personal stories that news outlets crave. And, although audience interest in foreign news may have been waning (American Press Institute 2014), news outlets, and especially those with public service remits, may still be expected to report to some extent on certain events due to their perceived importance. From a soft news perspective, referring to news stories that are less time-sensitive and highlight human experiences, humanitarian crises also offer plenty of scope for powerful content. The emotional plight of a family affected by crisis, the brave

stories of survivors, and the heroic acts of healthcare workers are some of the well-worn tropes likely to pique the interest of tabloid newspapers and lifestyle magazines.

Nolan et al. (2019) refers to humanitarian reporting as genres and practices of reporting that focus on humanitarian issues. Scott et al. (2018) analysed the coverage of four humanitarian moments in 2016: the ongoing crisis in South Sudan; the Aceh earthquake in Indonesia; the World Humanitarian Summit; and the 2017 UN appeal for humanitarian funding. The list of news outlets that covered all four events was dominated by news agencies and international broadcasters. Only two newspapers; *The Guardian,* and *The Washington Post*, made this list. Notably, Scott et al. (2018) found almost all the news outlets making the list to be supported in some way by government subsidies or private foundations, raising additional questions about impartiality and the sustainability of humanitarian journalism funding models.

News organisation	**Type of news organisation**
Agence France Presse (AFP)	International news agency
Al Jazeera English	International television broadcaster
Associated Press (AP)	International news agency
BBC World Service	International radio broadcaster
China Global Television Network news (CGTN) (formerly CCTV News)	International television broadcaster
The Guardian	Newspaper
Humanosphere (now closed)	Digital, non-profit
IRIN News	Digital, non-profit
Reuters (including the Thomson Reuters Foundation)	International news agency
Voice of America	International radio broadcaster
The Washington Post	Newspaper
Xinhua News Agency	International News Agency

Table 4.1: International (English-language) news organisations that produced original coverage of all four humanitarian crises/events (Scott et al. 2018)

In contrast to previous studies (for example, American Press Institute 2014), which noted a decline in audience interest in foreign news, Scott et al. (2018) found audiences to be more interested in humanitarian reportage than journalists expected. In a survey of audiences in UK, France, Germany and the US, more people claimed to follow news about humanitarian disasters (59 per cent) either “closely” or “fairly closely” than any other type of international news.

4.2.1 International news agencies

International news agencies, also known as wire services or newswires, are among the most important producers of international news in Africa today (Williams 2011; Bunce 2015; Scott, et al. 2018). News agencies gather, verify, and distribute news content to media outlets. According to Williams (2011), in an era of notable declines in foreign correspondence, news agencies act as the primary gatekeepers to the supply of foreign news to the world's media. According to Paterson (2007), the decline of international reporting in richer nations led to an increasing concentration of control over the news system by global news agencies, making them more influential than ever before. The "big three" international agencies, recognised for their global reach and influence, are *Associated Press* (AP), *Thomson Reuters* (Reuters), and *Agence France-Presse* (AFP). These newswires have a significant impact on international journalism, providing news coverage, photos, and multimedia content to media organisations across the globe. They are particularly important players in the reporting of Africa's humanitarian affairs with Scott et al. (2018) finding 99 per cent of articles about South Sudan and Yemen appearing in the *Mail Online* in 2017 to have originated from news agencies. Paterson (2007) found online news portals and aggregators to demonstrate substantially no mediation of news agency content, with their texts duplicating agency text for an average of 85% of items in 2006. Such findings raise concerns over a lack of diversity in humanitarian news sources and the prevailing reporting models of news agencies may be one of the reasons why drama and timeliness remain two of the major characterisations of humanitarian reporting. Scott et al. (2018) found Thomson Reuters coverage of humanitarian affairs largely focused on breaking stories about dramatic events and reported "with a largely western audience in mind" (2018, p2). 67 per cent of all Reuters articles analysed referred to an incident, statement, or other news angle which took place within the previous 24 hours.

Williams (2011) described international news agencies as "increasingly commercial entities" (p76), existing primarily to make profits for shareholders. Bunce (2015) examined the relationship of foreign correspondents in Africa with their audiences. At *Reuters*, Bunce found editors and managers to have "almost perfect information" on the stories that clients choose to read, including comprehensive analytics on the view count of every story published and where these views came from. Bunce found *Reuters* journalists in Africa to be acutely 'data driven' and to have regularly based their news decisions on such information. Following *Reuters*' merger in 2007 with *Thomson*, a global information corporation, it became significantly more focused on financial clients (Bunce 2015). *Reuters*, Bunce found, had resultingly shifted from

a ‘reporter-led’ model to ‘journalism for customers’, the majority of whom now worked in the financial world. It might be surmised, therefore, that a recently reported more ‘positive’ focus of African news, in which financial reporting was seen as a sign of progress, may not be the result of a sea-change in attitudes towards African representation after all but instead a by-product of one of the continent’s most important news producers moving towards a model that values financial news above all else.

4.2.2 International broadcasters

The term “CNN effect” (Robinson 2002) is commonly used to describe the perceived impact of 24-hour television news coverage, particularly by satellite and cable networks, on shaping public opinion and influencing government policy around foreign crises. Whereas, originally coined in reference to the prompting of military action, the term has also been used in reference to instances in which graphic images of human suffering have led to an outpouring of shock and, often, financial support from television audiences and humanitarian donors around the world (Robinson 2002; Cooper 2009; Franks 2013; Cooper 2015). Whereas news agencies might be regarded as the gatekeepers of foreign news to the world’s media (Paterson 2007), television, it might be argued, is the medium most likely to elicit a global response. And in an era in which news agencies have dominated international newsgathering, the role of television reporters today can be seen not so much to gather the news, but to package it (Moeller 1999). Analyses of international reporting suggests broadcast outlets are increasingly limited in their humanitarian reporting functions. For example, Scott et al (2018)’s examination of international news outlets covering four major humanitarian events in 2016 found *Al Jazeera English*, the *BBC World Service, China Global Television Network* (CGTN), and *Voice of America* to be the only English-language broadcasters to have covered all four events. The state-supported Qatari outlet *Al Jazeera English* was found to be by far the most prolific provider of humanitarian reporting of those studied. All four broadcasters received government support as part of soft-power efforts overseas. According to Scott et al. (2018), this raises important questions about whether humanitarian reporting can be influenced by states and other powerful actors.

Scott (2018) carried out a survey involving individuals either directly or indirectly involved in the aid or development sector and found respondents to rely on a very small number of international outlets for their news about humanitarian crises. Only three news outlets were mentioned – the *BBC World Service*, *The Guardian,* and *Al Jazeera English*. The results also

revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with mainstream news coverage amongst those working in the aid industry. Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents agreed (47%) or strongly agreed (26%) that the mainstream news media did not produce enough coverage of humanitarian issues and crises. Qualitative responses revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the nature of mainstream news coverage, highlighting it as being selective, sporadic, simplistic, and partial (Scott 2018). However, the *BBC World Service, The Guardian,* and *Al Jazeera English* were frequently described as the exceptions to these problems within the mainstream media.

4.2.3 Specialist humanitarian news outlets

Specialist humanitarian journalists are considered a unique breed within the media landscape, purposefully defying conventional journalistic norms to deliver impactful and nuanced coverage (Scott et al. 2023). Such journalists predominantly contribute to specialist international news outlets such as The *New Humanitarian* (formerly IRIN) and *Devex*. Scott et al. (2023) studied specialist outlets and found a commitment to combinations of journalistic and humanitarian principles, even when such approaches diverged from conventional news values. In 2020, the *New Humanitarian* revealed its audience had tripled since the COVID-19 pandemic struck – with more than 600,000 users visiting the website in May 2020 (The New Humanitarian, 2020). Despite their comparatively smaller reach compared to national and international broadcasters, these journalists wield significant influence within humanitarian circles. In a survey of almost 1,400 of its own readers, *The New Humanitarian* found International NGO workers to be the most prevalent audiences, making up 35 per cent of the total readership. 40 per cent of its readers were senior professionals in such organisations (The New Humanitarian, 2020).

Whereas the news sector has been criticised in the past for sensationalist and decontextualised coverage (Bunce 2017; Sobel Cohen et al. 2017; Nothias 2018), Scott et al. (2018) found specialist humanitarian news organisations tended to do the opposite and produced more detailed features, analysis pieces, and campaigning reports. However, Scott et al. (2018) also raised concerns over funding models, with most humanitarian journalism now funded by states or private foundations. Freedman (2005) analysed coverage of three independent news sites, including *IRIN, Eurasianet,* and *the Institute for War and Peace Reporting,* concerning human rights in Central Asia. He found journalists reporting on these issues for Western-based media sometimes operated under tight constraints, including the risk of official retaliation. *The New Humanitarian's* previous title, *IRIN*, was a UN OCHA project until the end of 2014 when the

arrangement ended "as a result of growing friction between journalists and UN OCHA over questions of editorial control" (Scott et al. 2022, p10). According to Lynch (2014), the relationship soured after UN officials requested *IRIN* to refrain from reporting on the Syrian conflict in case it harmed the UN's access. It is now funded by a range of private foundations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, but also the Swiss, Belgian and Australian governments (Scott et al. 2022). Although, well respected in humanitarian circles, communications officers working for international NGOs and UN agencies suggested that news coverage by specialist news outlets was less likely to be taken seriously outside of aid worker circles than similar reporting by more mainstream news organisations (Scott et al. 2022).

4.3 NGOs as news providers

In recent decades, the rise of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as influential newsmakers has been a notable phenomenon in the global socio-political landscape. Powers (2016) spoke of a "perfect storm" (p317) of conditions optimising increased news access for humanitarian and human rights organisations in recent years. There are three main components of this storm. Firstly, as outlined earlier in this chapter, changing economic conditions within the news sector and a reduced commitment to international newsgathering have resulted in new actors entering the news production process. Secondly, NGOs have benefitted from a rise in public and official acceptance in recent years. Finally, the professionalised publicity efforts of some of the leading NGOs, including the employment of journalists and freelancers in press office roles, has led to increasing opportunities to achieve coverage in the mainstream news. (Powers 2016).

Studies suggest NGOs continue to value the mainstream media above all types of coverage (Fenton 2010; Powers 2016a). Powers (2016a) identified three main reasons why. Firstly, governmental and intergovernmental humanitarian donors, the most important funders of NGO emergency response programmes, continue to value media coverage both as a way of learning about NGO actions and as a means by which to measure their impact. Secondly, political officials still value media coverage for learning about the demands of advocacy organisations and NGOs. Finally, the socially proximate relationship between NGOs and journalism means NGOs see journalists as a possible ally when pursuing coverage. Fenton (2010) offers two additional reasons. Firstly, NGOs believe that coverage achieved through high status news

platforms will provide opportunities for dissemination to other platforms. Secondly, NGOs believe mainstream outlets are most-trusted by the public and most-watched by decision makers.

Despite favourable conditions for increasing news access and the relentless pursual of mainstream coverage by NGOs, studies suggest that, overall, success has been mixed. Fenton (2010) reported how large, richer organisations able to employ trained professional journalists in press and public relations roles had reported increasing success in the media sphere, but that smaller NGOs had found it much harder to keep up. Powers (2016) found that, despite a noted overall rise in news access and prevalence over time, many NGOs still struggled to generate media coverage, with success mostly restricted to a few richer, media-savvy organisations. Using longitudinal content analysis of news outlets between 1990 and 2010, Powers compared the prevalence, prominence, and story location of news articles citing leading human rights NGOs. In 1990, the two richer media-savvy organisations– Human Rights Watch and MSF – had accounted for just 16.5 per cent of all NGO mentions. By 2010, the same groups received more than half (50.8 per cent) of all mentions. In their own study of 750 New York-based NGOs, Jacobs and Glass (2002) found 2 per cent of organisations to have featured in more than 100 news articles but a third of NGOs to never have been mentioned at all. Thrall's (2006) investigation into the quantity and quality of news coverage received by a sample of 244 interest groups found that, on average, 33.8 per cent of interest groups failed to make any news in any given year. Thrall et al. (2014) found 10 per cent of NGOs to capture 90 per cent of citations in a study of over 600 news outlets. They also noted a similar pattern emerging during an analysis of social media attention, with the top 10 per cent of NGOs enjoying 92 per cent of Twitter followers, 81 per cent of Facebook likes and 90 per cent of YouTube views. They also found strong support for a link between the financial strength of an organisation and its ability to generate news coverage. In his study, 78 per cent of total television news coverage went to organisations with a budget of more than $10 million. Groups with the lowest budgets, the organisations he identified as needing the media the most, were "shut out" of the news by richer organisations.

Other studies have questioned the long-term impact of the rise in NGO news access, pointing to organisations being buried low down in news content beneath other more prominent sources. Despite an increase in news prevalence over time, Powers (2016) noted a decrease in the prominence of NGOs in news articles over the same period. He found government officials to be afforded the most prominence in news articles across all time periods. In their analysis of

international content in UK broadcast news, Magee and Scott (2016) found affected individuals and vox pops to be the most cited actors, featuring in 35 per cent of bulletins analysed. In contrast, NGO voices were seldom heard, with international NGOs featuring in only 1.9 per cent of coverage and local NGOs in only 1.4 per cent. However, the authors suggested this relatively low NGO presence could be because refugee flows dominated the international news agenda at the time. Powers (2016) argued that professional norms make journalists far more likely to turn to governments and business officials as opposed to NGOs or other civic actors. Contrastingly, Scott et al. (2018)'s analysis of the coverage of conflicts in South Sudan and Yemen, found multilateral institutions, including the United Nations as most cited at 27 per cent and 28 per cent respectively with NGOs the second most cited at 19 per cent and 12 per cent. In this sample, the respective national governments accounted for only 5 per cent of sources in coverage of Yemen and 14 per cent in South Sudan. The prevalence of the United Nations and INGOs, the authors suggested, is likely the result of difficulties faced by journalists in physically accessing the crisis zones.

4.3.1 News cloning and media logic

The press offices of some major NGOs today could almost be considered humanitarian news agencies, aiming to supply a steady stream of newsworthy content to cash-strapped news outlets and designed to be lifted into news stories with little or no need for editing on the outlet's behalf (Fenton 2010; Cottle and Nolan 2009; Waisbord 2011). Fenton (2010) labels the production of such content as "news cloning", the practice by which NGOs provide content that "mimics or indeed matches the requirements of mainstream news agendas." Larger, richer humanitarian NGOs commit considerable resources to news cloning through the employment of former journalists and other media professionals (Fenton 2010; Cooper 2009; Powers 2016; Wright 2016). Cooper (2009) spoke of rich NGOs hosting large communications teams, with numerous staff from journalism backgrounds. This, say Cottle and Nolan (2009), helps aid organisations to know "exactly what the media require and incorporate this into their professional practice and communications strategies" to help their organisations stand out in a crowded and competitive field. In an expanding news space, Fenton (2010) says, the ability to news clone with consistency and rigour may be relatively simple but is also time consuming and, where online platforms are concerned, an option only available to organisations with

sizeable resources and a suitable number of trained staff. NGOs are known to employ freelance media professionals (Wright 2016) to produce content which can then be pitched directly to news outlets through existing contacts. Wright found editorial staff would justify the use of NGO-produced content due to the perceived professionalism, expertise, and integrity of experienced and well-known freelancers. In April 2021, the BBC published a series of photographs by renowned photographer Hugh Kinsella Cunningham depicting children caught up in a conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (BBC News 2021). The photographs were accompanied by text which included information on Save the Children's work in DRC and all images were copyrighted to Kinsella Cunningham and Save the Children. Wright also found examples of content originally produced for NGOs being sold on to news outlets, and vice versa. Waisbord (2011) spoke of alliances and collaborative relationships built between NGOs and journalists, and Conrad (2015) warned such collaborations meant the independence of a journalist "witness" from the "conductor" role of the NGO should no longer be assumed.

Media coverage of humanitarian crisis tends to favour dramatic coverage of distress (CARMA 2006; Cottle 2009; Van Leuven and Joye 2014; Mahieu and Joye 2018). This means the crises with the higher levels of drama or spectacle are more likely to make the news. For example, Eisensee and Stromberg (2007) found that for every person killed in a volcano disaster, 40,000 people must die in a drought to reach the same probability of media coverage. Cottle (2009) attributes such practices to a competitive media environment and the pursuit of news audiences. Altheide's (1997) "problem frame" concept explains the perceived requirement of the media to frame news events as setbacks in need of overcoming to meet the expectations of audiences to be entertained rather than promoting real understanding or social change. Moeller (1999) described the reporting of humanitarian news as "repetitive chronologies, sensationalized language and Americanized metaphors and references" (Moeller 1999 p2). Instead of challenging such representations, NGOs have been accused of adapting their content in line with media norms in order to increase their own chances of achieving media coverage. Cottle (2008) says covering crises based on professional judgements of news values can help to explain "the selection, salience and silences" of disaster reporting around the world (p49). When Scott et al. (2018) interviewed aid workers about their views of humanitarian journalism, almost three quarters of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that mainstream news did not produce enough coverage of humanitarian issues and crises. Many respondents felt that mainstream news coverage concentrated on a small number of crises, and that the story choices rarely related to the severity of each emergency, nor the everyday suffering of people caught

up in long-term or chronic issues. Others commented that mainstream news coverage neglected or forgot crises and that reportage was prone to being 'reductive', 'simplistic' and lacking in-depth analysis. Cottle and Nolan (2007) say packaging news content in a manner that conforms to known media formats constitutes a "media logic" (Altheide and Snow 1979) now institutionalised within NGOs. Such logic is, the authors argue, both indispensable to NGO aims and a threat to the practice and ideals of global humanitarianism. It is, in-part, responsible for the division of the world into an "us" and "them" or, in the authors' words, "active saviours" and "passive victims" and facilitates a Western-led view of humanitarianism. They describe NGO media logic as being predisposed to producing "fleeting, shallow or questionable coverage at best". Waisbord (2011) studied attempts by local or national organisations in Latin America to increase their media presence. In 32 semi-structured interviews with journalists and NGO officers, as well as an analysis of NGO-produced content, he found NGOs successful in securing coverage largely conformed to dominant journalistic norms. In line with this, Van Leuven and Joye (2014) found NGO press releases most often resulting in news coverage tended to discuss major crises, dramatic news events, or international events involving the country in which the news outlet was based.

The news media has been accused of being fixated on death tolls and other shocking statistics when reporting humanitarian crises (Benthall 1993; Cottle 2009). Cottle (2009), for example, speaks of a "calculus of death" institutionalised in the news values of Western media outlets. It is, the author says, a calculus "based on crude body counts and thresholds as well as proximities of geography, culture and economics" (p47). Statistical data is considered constitutive of journalistic content (Curtin and Maier 2001). However, the widespread use of humanitarian data in news reporting has been highlighted as being problematic in certain cases, with Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen (2017b) suggesting journalists rarely challenge the data they receive and resultingly often simply reproduce the narratives of the sources of such information. Latonero and Kift (2018) say the use of death tolls dehumanises disaster-affected communities into data points. Lawson (2021) found statistics to be prevalent throughout humanitarian reporting and demonstrated a reliance within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of institutional sources, including the United Nations and major NGOs. Rarely was such data verified before publication or challenged within news articles, Lawson said. Using these trusted sources, which enjoy high levels of public confidence, allowed journalists to maintain credibility without needing to verify or challenge. Scott et al. (2022) argues such sources have become the "primary definers" (Hall et al. 1978) of a crisis.

4.3.2 Acceptance in official and public circles

In March 2013, former UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband resigned as a Member of Parliament to take up a new role as the Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee, a New York-based global humanitarian aid, relief, and development NGO. Miliband had already stood down from the shadow cabinet in October 2010 after losing the Labour Party leadership race to his brother, Ed. Nevertheless, his decision to quit frontline politics altogether was seen as surprising in some quarters considering the substantial roles he had played in the governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Perhaps, however, Miliband's decision to move into the humanitarian sector should not have been unanticipated given that many NGOs at the time employed individuals once involved at the higher echelons of national and international politics. From 2010, Justin Forsyth, a former Special Adviser to the Blair and Brown governments and former Director of Strategic Communications at 10 Downing Street, became CEO of Save the Children UK, a role he would keep until 2016 when he departed to become Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF. He was joined at Save the Children UK by Brendan Cox, a former adviser on international development to Gordon Brown and husband of the late Labour MP Jo Cox. Cox became the organisation's Policy and Advocacy Director. Forsyth and Cox were not the only members of Brown's advisory team to move into the charity sector after Labour's election defeat. In fact, according to the *Daily Mail*, eleven of 25 special advisers working for Brown in 2009 later took on roles at non-profit organisations (Stevens 2014). In 2016, Save the Children International, the NGO's global arm, appointed the former Prime Minister of Denmark, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, as CEO. Schmidt's international political credentials are clear, but perhaps less obviouswas that she is married to UK Labour MP Stephen Kinnock, the Member of Parliament for Aberavon and son of former Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock, and of former UK Minister of State for Africa and the United Nations, Glenys Kinnock.

It is generally accepted that NGOs play an increasingly important role in international politics and society (Fenton 2010; Powers 2016; Lang 2013; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012). They are trusted sources of information and enjoy high levels of public confidence (Lang 2013). Critical, arguably, to this reputation is the NGO's perceived freedom from government and the political class. As important components of civil society, NGOs are regarded as potential organisers of political action (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Lang 2013; Cooper 2009; Powers 2018) and serve a

counter-voice to the mainstream media narrative. Cottle and Nolan (2007) spoke of how social theorists increasingly regarded NGOs as important agents in the transition to a "more global civil society" and various scholars (see, for instance, Hudson 2002; Cooper 2009; Fenton 2010) have highlighted increasing levels of proactive advocacy work by humanitarian organisations. Alongside this, scholars have also identified a rising acceptance of NGOs amongst government circles (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Lang 2013; Keys 2014; Powers 2016). To some, this might appear problematic. The very organisations trusted to provide a counter argument or serve as an independent moral authority are seemingly becoming ever closer to the power they are expected to hold to account. Lang (2013) does not see increasing closeness between state and advocacy organisations, necessarily, as a problem and submits that the key to a stronger civil society lies not in the stricter separation of state and civil society but in more transparent, interactive, and public relations between government and civil society organisations. Fenton (2010) suggests that NGOs have become accepted as legitimate voices and informed campaigners on public and political issues. Research suggests that the US government's use of human rights-related discourses rose through the nineties and peaked in the mid-2000s (Keys 2014). According to Powers (2016), this is a sign that both humanitarian and human rights groups had interacted more regularly with government officials through, for example, the provision of services or the reporting of human rights issues. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) concept of transnational advocacy networks - groups of actors working internationally on an issue and bound together by shared values and the exchange of information and services – also suggests a rise in collaborations between state and civil society. The goal, according to the authors, is to change the behaviour of governments and international organisations, but such networks involved not only NGOs and advocacy groups but also branches of the governments themselves, who worked alongside non-state actors. NGOs, the authors said, played a central role in all advocacy networks, particularly when pressuring more powerful actors to make changes or take positions. Thrall et al. (2014) suggested that an NGO's power to achieve publicity and visibility is central to the success of transnational advocacy networks. NGOs are now required, Powers says, to produce "a range of information materials" such as reports and policy statements for a diverse array of stakeholders including humanitarian donors, government officials and journalists (Powers 2018, p7). Such closeness, he adds, gives "official legitimation" to NGOs (Powers 2016, p318) and is a sign of their institutionalisation into what he calls "durable organizations rather than ephemeral social movements" (Powers 2018, p7). Ecker-Ehrhardt (2012) described how governments can assign authority to NGOs through their public communications. He uses the term "authority talk" to describe such occurrences and

offers the example of the passing of the first House Concurrent Resolution on the Darfur crisis in 2004 by the US Congress. The resolution text cited the United Nations Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs and quoted apparent eye-witness evidence from both Amnesty International and MSF. By employing authority talk in this way, Ecker-Ehrhardt says, the US Congress had assigned a status of competency and trustworthiness to these non-state institutions.

4.3.3 NGOs, media, and humanitarian funding

Since the Ethiopian famine of 1984, the effects of media coverage on humanitarian response have been well documented. Clear lines, for example, have been drawn between mainstream media coverage and the allocation of foreign aid funding. Donations by USAID, the United States international development agency, to Ethiopia in the financial year 1984 totalled $23 million. The figure rose to $350 million in 1985 following the outcry prompted by Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin's television report (Franks 2013). Cooper (2011) described how a 2005 UN humanitarian appeal for a food crisis in Niger had been met with 'near deafening silence' before the BBC's Hilary Andersson produced a series of reports for the UK's Ten O'clock News. Just over a week later, $17 million dollars had been committed inside and outside the appeal. Cooper added that the mass media coverage of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami meant 50 times more money was given per survivor than to those who survived the worst-funded crises the same year. Berlemann and Thomas (2019) found media coverage on natural disasters to have had a systematic impact on the amount of aid provided and Sobel Cohen et al. (2021) noted a correlation between the amount of news coverage a crisis receives and the amount of aid funding. Olsen et al. (2003) found that the only occasionally did the media play a decisive role in influencing donor governments. Instead, the security interests of western donors in a crisis and the presence and strength of humanitarian stakeholders such as NGOs and other international governments to lobby donor governments, were considered more important than media coverage. Scot et al. (2021) examined if and how news coverage influenced humanitarian aid allocations from the perspectives of senior bureaucrats involved in decision making in some of the world's largest donor countries. They concluded that most decision makers believed that sudden-onset national news coverage could increase levels of aid allocated to a crisis. Eftekhar et al. (2017) found that the impact of media exposure on NGO funding varied with the source of the donation. For example, donations from the public were found to be strongly influenced by media exposure. In contrast, donations from governmental and non-governmental entities (i.e. institutional humanitarian donors) were influenced by

media exposure, but with a one-year lag. Additionally, the authors found that operational performance was equally important to donors as an indicator of an NGO's suitability for funding. "When an HO [humanitarian organisation] applies for governmental funding, it needs to demonstrate success in previous project," Eftekhar et al, state. "Governmental and non-governmental entities who fund HOs maintain data on HOs' operational performance and use the data to determine future donations" (2017, p808). Donors were found to be susceptible to influence from an NGO's mainstream media exposure, but because performance data for on-going projects are usually not fully available at the time of a funding grant being made, decisions are often based made on the data of previous years.

4.4 Summary

In summary, this chapter has demonstrated how the current state of humanitarian journalism has been shaped to varying extents by several key factors including the decline of traditional foreign news correspondence, which has reduced the overall depth and breadth of international coverage. Humanitarian news today relies heavily on international news agencies and, to a lesser extent, international broadcasters, with overall coverage decreasing outside of major crises. Specialist outlets such as *The New Humanitarian* and *Devex* play important roles in providing more nuanced and detailed coverage but have limited influence and reach outside of humanitarian circles. Concurrently, NGOs, who, as aid providers and fundraising organisations, are both accountable to and reliant upon a variety of external actors, have increasingly taken on the role of communicating about crises, employing news cloning tactics and boots-on-the-ground to gain both attention and financial resources. This shift has reflected the growing acceptance of NGOs as credible actors in the media, public and policy spheres, and highlights a requirement for further research into how humanitarian organisations seek to influence these agenda, as well as the external factors and accountabilities influencing how they do so.

Chapter 5 – Agenda Building and the Theoretical Framework

5.1 The origins of the Agenda Setting and Agenda Building Theories

Rogers and Dearing (1988) define an agenda as a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance and time. Social systems use agendas as a means by which to prioritise problems and decide where to focus resources first. Cobb and Elder (1971) define an issue as "a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" (p32), whereas Rogers and Dearing (1988) define it as a social problem, often conflictual, that has received mass media coverage. Agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw 1972) conceptualises the power of the media in influencing public and policy agendas. It proposes that the media influences public perceptions of important issues through its daily selection of news stories, with issues receiving extensive media coverage tending to be perceived by the public and policy makers as more important (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In modern societies, the number of potential issues of governance extends beyond the capacities of decision-making institutions to process them (Cobb et al. 1976). As a result, issues can be considered to compete with one another for attention. Agenda setting theory is concerned with the intersectionality of the media, public and policy agendas. Each of these, the authors suggest, can be the dependent variable in the wider agenda setting process. The individuals or groups who advocate for attention to be given to an issue and help to determine its position in an agenda, are labelled by Rogers and Dearing (1988) as *issue proponents*. Each issue has its proponents, and an issue's capacity to continue to attract attention can come down to both the level of competition from other issues (and their proponents) as well as the ability of its own proponents to generate new information for maintaining its newsworthiness (Rogers and Dearing 1988). Issue proponents might include, for example, a journalist covering an event, interest groups and activists such as NGOs, or politicians.

Agenda building theory (Cobb and Elder 1971) is distinct from, yet related to, agenda setting theory. It suggests that the media does not operate within a vacuum and that the media agenda is shaped by the influences of powerful groups, as a form of, in the words of Lee and Riffe (2017), "a subtle form of social control". The key distinction, therefore, between agenda building and agenda setting comes down to a matter of focus. Whereas agenda setting examines the influence of the media on shaping the public and policy agenda, agenda building seeks to

understand the groups (or proponents) initially shaping the media agenda, as well as the methods with which they do so (Lee 2016). As such, Yang and Saffer (2018) describe agenda building as the 'public relations extension of agenda setting theory' (p423), and the effectiveness of an organisation's PR work can be measured by its influence on the agenda building process (Rim et al. 2014). According to Cobb et al. (1976), the study of agenda building requires an understanding of the ways in which different subgroups become aware of, and influence, the public and policy agendas. They suggest three models of agenda building: The *Outside Initiative Model*; the *Mobilization Model*; and the *Inside Initiative Model.* The outside initiative model concerns the process through which non-governmental actors put their own issues on the public and policy agenda. The second, the mobilization model, refers to issues which originate inside government and, as a result, are almost automatically placed on the policy agenda. The third, the inside initiative model, also relates to issues originating inside government, but for which supporters rely on their own ability to sufficiently influence the policy agenda without first feeling the need to influence the public (Cobb et al. 1976). Agenda setting theory suggests the media agenda plays the pivotal role in the transition of an issue from the public agenda to the policy agenda and vice versa. For example, in the outside initiative model, non-governmental groups might attempt to influence the news agenda to increase pressure on policy makers. Likewise, in the mobilization model, policy makers may attempt to use the media to put a political issue on the public agenda.

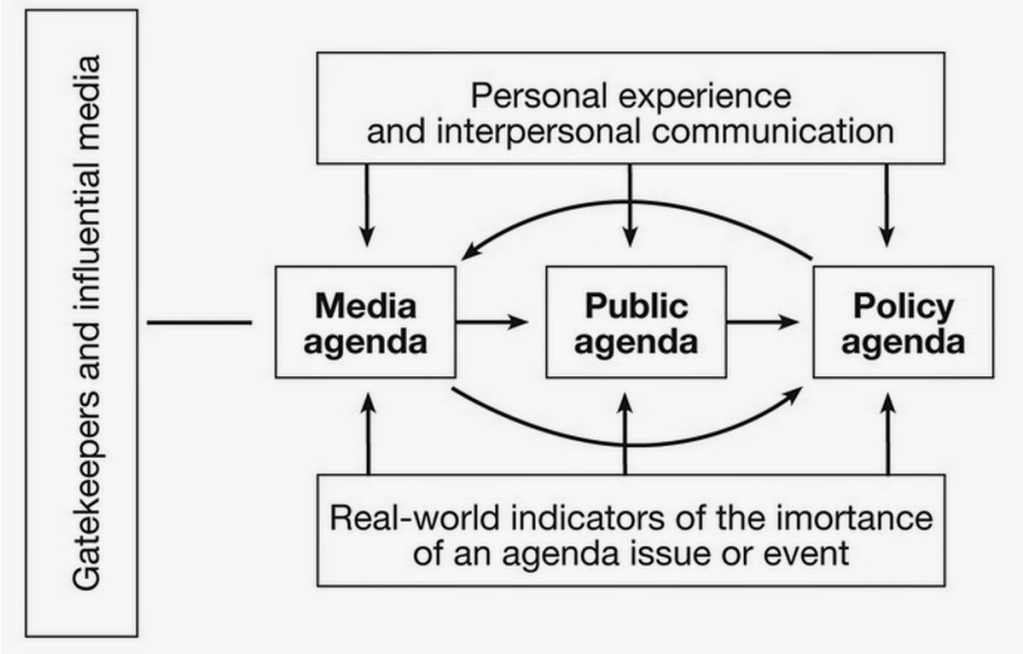


Figure 5.1: Three main components of the agenda-setting process (Rogers and Dearing 1988)

5.2 Information Subsidies and agenda building

The primary variable in agenda building is the mainstream media agenda, otherwise known as the news agenda. According to Rogers and Dearing (1988), the agenda setting process begins with an issue's inclusion in the media agenda. Agenda building can be considered the process by which individuals and groups, or "proponents," vie to position their issues on the media agenda. Typically, this is achieved by becoming news sources and helping journalists tell their stories through the provision of information subsidies (Gandy 1982). Curtin (1999) suggested agenda building occurs when groups obtain media placement of their information subsidies, and, as a result, influence the media agenda, which, in turn, can influence the public and policy agendas. Gandy (1982) defines an information subsidy as an effort to influence others by providing information in a controlled manner at a lower cost than collecting it themselves. Information subsidies typically help journalists by shortening the time required to evaluate information and lowering the cost of newsgathering (Gandy 1982; McPherson 2016). The professionalisation of NGOs into news providing and advocacy organisations can ultimately be attributed to their ability to influence the media agenda, and, in turn, influence the public and policy agendas. For this reason, agenda building theory is a suitable and popular theoretical concept to employ in relation to the examination of NGO media practice (see, for example, Van Leuven and Joye. 2014; Camaj 2018; Yang and Saffer 2018). The study of the agenda building practices of NGOs can typically be linked to the outside initiative model (Cobb et al. 1976), in which organisations attempt to promote their own issues within public or policy agendas via the media agenda. The provision of information subsidies to journalists is known to enhance the agenda building capacities of NGOs (Yang and Saffer 2018). For example, Van Leuven and Joye (2014) found the agenda building capacities of NGOs and government institutions to be improving because journalists presented information subsidies as original journalistic work in most cases. Instances, in which organisations go beyond the provision of basic information to provide the editorial framing of a news story are labelled by Jackson and Maloney (2016) as "editorial subsidies". The authors found such content to include "targeted, tailored, page-ready news copy that contains key client messages" (p763). Such practices have become increasingly common forms of public relations activity due to increased constraints on newsgathering resources and can be linked to the NGO practice of news cloning (Fenton 2010), in which communicators create content to fit the expectations and standards of professional news outlets. Press releases are a common form of information subsidy used by NGOs (Van Leuven et al. 2013; Van Leuven and Joye 2014) and are said to enhance the agenda building

capacities of non-profit organisations because journalists often present press release content as original journalistic content (Fenton 2010; Van Leuven and Joye 2014). Scott et al. (2022) found specialist humanitarian journalists to be critical of what they saw as a tendency by mainstream journalists to rely on press releases from official sources such as NGOs. Fenton (2010) found most NGO communication staff members had believed that, due to time pressures on journalists and their requirement to fill more space, press releases do get picked up and do not always get changed. Boumans (2018) analysed the extent to which organisational press releases influenced Dutch newspaper and news agency content over a period of ten years. He found one in every ten newspaper articles to have been initiated by a press release, whereas for the news agency this was slightly higher. Van Leuven and Joye (2014) found that NGO press releases most often resulting in news coverage tended to discuss major crises, dramatic news events, or international events involving the country in which the news outlet was based.

NGOs are widely considered the dependent partner in the NGO-journalist relationship meaning they are likely to be responsive to the informational and commercial needs and wants of news outlets (McPherson 2016). Previous scholars have addressed questions of power relationships in relation to agenda building and public discourse. Zoch and Molleda (2006) argue that power in the agenda building process is reliant, to some extent, on who initiated the story, as well as the nature of the story. In the humanitarian media context, this would suggest that NGOs can achieve a degree of communicative power when they generate their own story ideas. Reich (2010) suggests journalists can counter this power and generate their own leverage, by, for example, including a range of counter perspectives as a means by which to increase journalistic balance.

5.2.1 Verification subsidies, humanitarian data, and credible journalistic sources

NGOs are obliged to produce various information materials such as reports and policy statements for an array of stakeholders including institutional and governmental donors, government officials and journalists (Powers 2016). This has bestowed them with an "official legitimation" (Powers 2016; Eftekhar et al. 2017) and cemented their reputations as trusted sources (Lang 2013; Lawson 2021). Where news access is concerned, the credibility of NGO information subsidies is seen as critical to an NGO's agenda building success. McPherson (2016) says credibility can be considered a type of symbolic capital that can be utilised in the pursuit of power. Reich (2011) suggests the extent to which information provided by NGOs is perceived by journalists as credible is a key determinant of the likelihood of their obtaining news access and public voice. McPherson (2016) identified three strategies deployed by human

rights NGOs to build source credibility with journalists: credibility in inter-personal relationships, credibility via authority, and credibility via networks. All three are underpinned by a demonstration of credibility via performance over time. McPherson suggests that, by building credibility as information sources, NGOs provide a "verification subsidy" that shortens the time journalists need to evaluate such information. Fenton (2010) found most NGOs to believe that, because of the space journalists are now required to fill and the time pressures in which to do it, their copy was picked up more readily and more rarely got changed. According to Gourevitch and Lake (2012), NGO credibility exists whenever "statements are believable or accepted as truthful by one or more audiences". Both journalists and NGOs require credibility because its symbolic capital (Bordieu 1993) is central to both fields. For example, journalists require credibility to build and maintain a readership or audience (Waisbord 2006; McPherson 2016), and NGOs to underpin their relationships with, for example, journalists, the public, and humanitarian donors (Cottle and Nolan 2007; McPherson 2016). Fenton (2010) says NGOs can boost their credibility by becoming 'authorised knowers' in the eyes of journalists (p155).

5.2.2 The provision of humanitarian data

Statistical humanitarian data is an example of an important information subsidy provided by NGOs to journalists. Lawson (2021) demonstrated a reliance within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of institutional statistical sources, including the United Nations and large international NGOs. So important have such sources become that Scott et al. (2022) argue they are now the "primary definers" (Hall et al. 1978) of a crisis. Using these trusted statistics, which enjoy high levels of public confidence, allows journalists to maintain credibility without the need to verify or challenge the information used (Lawson 2021). The accuracy of the statistical data provided by NGOs to journalists can therefore be considered critical for the truthful, fair, and accurate reporting of humanitarian crises as well as the continuing credibility of NGOs. McPherson (2016) says journalists, editors, and human rights activists repeatedly reiterate the importance of credibility to the success of NGOs, and Franklin (2011) points out that public relations professionals who generate factually well-informed and newsworthy stories can enhance the plurality of sources from which journalists can construct their stories.

Powers (2016b) found NGO press officers to consider accuracy to primarily mean sharing research without distortion to the press or public. In their 2023 paper "Ten Things We Know

about Humanitarian Numbers" Glasman and Lawson cast a critical eye over what they termed a 'data frenzy' currently consuming humanitarian aid circles. The number of data sets being produced, the authors say, is continuing to rise with little sign of abating and that the one thing connecting different crises today is the need for more data about them. Bhuta et al. (2018) labelled this phenomenon "a new avalanche of numbers" purporting to create knowledge on a global scale. A wide range of studies in the field of humanitarian response have raised concerns over the politicisation of humanitarian data, particularly by host governments (Bhuta et al. 2018; Maxwell 2019; Paulus et al. 2022; Glasman and Lawson 2023). According to Glasman and Lawson (2023), certain humanitarian numbers are simply lies perpetuated by actors at the highest level. State authorities might manipulate numbers for various reasons, they say, including capturing international aid, delegitimising competing actors, and justifying military action. Bhuta et al (2018) argue that the expansion of the role of data in global governance across the last 20 years has made data increasingly political and that, as a result, indicators and rankings are increasingly produced 'from within' by individuals without the specific disciplinary knowledge to sufficiently satisfy qualities of neutrality. According to Paulus et al. (2022) the high stakes, limited resources and high cognitive load of humanitarian response means it is prone to induce biases in data and in the cognitive processes of analysts and decision-makers. They found that data analysts failed to debias data, even when biases were detected, as well as a culture of undervaluing debiasing efforts in favour of rapid results. This was found to lead to the production of biased information products and, resultingly, important decisions are made based on biased information. Glasman and Lawson (2023) say that data manipulation can occur at all levels, including within humanitarian organisations. This could be to legitimise a project, maximise funding, or minimise risk, and can be done both intentionally and unintentionally. Humanitarian organisations, the authors say, often produce poor data without being fully aware of doing so. For example, the challenging contexts of humanitarian response including a lack of access to certain areas, the urgency of interventions and the breakdown of institutions can all contribute towards the production of poor data, meaning that humanitarian numbers are "often guesstimates or rough estimations."

5.3 Agenda building and agenda setting through online and social platforms

Over the last few decades, the context in which public and political debate takes place has been transformed. Online communication and the spread of more participatory information flows

have allowed citizens and groups to become media content creators themselves. As a result, the mainstream media and politicians can no longer claim to be the sole gatekeepers of the public and political agendas, with information now distributed horizontally as well as through the traditional top-down model (Obiaje 2022). Reverse agenda-setting (McCombs 2004) suggests the public and other groups, through their production of such content, can influence the news media too and, resultingly, additionally influence public sentiment and policy decisions. NGOs are examples of groups with a certain amount of power in ultimately by-passing the requirement to influence the journalist but still able to impact the media, public and policy agendas. For example, their increasing acceptance in official circles, as discussed in the previous chapter, is one way in which they have become more influential in policy setting circles. They have also demonstrated varying degrees of success in the creation of media content through their own online platforms. One of the most high-profile examples of this was when, in 2012, the activist organisation Invisible Children released their own 30-minute documentary about the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony through its own social media channels. The film, which called for the arrest of the rebel leader, received more than 100 million views in just six days, becoming the fastest spreading online video in history (Wasserman 2012). An accompanying blog post by Invisible Children encouraged supporters to step away from their computers and into the streets, and to share photos online using appropriate hashtags (Briones et al. 2013). Supporters were also encouraged to create their own content, including video blogs that discussed their personal feelings, with the *Huffington Post* later describing the campaign as the first social media movement to capture the full attention of the West (Briones et al. 2013). However, despite its clear success in reaching a huge global audience and raising awareness of an important issue, the Kony campaign also highlighted some of the disadvantages associated with the emerging digital activism sphere. Briones et al. (2013) noted how the campaign had struggled with longevity issues associated with being based online. Social media topics, the authors said, could be discussed incessantly for days or even hours before the conversation moved on to something else. Legitimacy and journalistic quality were another concern, with the video being widely accused of oversimplifying a long-standing and complex issue (Briones et al. 2013). Others accused the campaign as misrepresenting facts to the point of being misleading and manipulative, as well as disregarding the voices of Kony's victims. Invisible Children refuted many of these criticisms, arguing the organisation had been misrepresented in mainstream media reports of the campaign. Perhaps above all else, critics noted the perceived inability of the campaign to translate online outrage to "boots on the ground" protest and ultimately, to

significantly impact the policy agenda. Writing in *The Guardian*, Carroll (2012) spoke of "paltry turnouts" at protest locations across North America, Europe, and Australia, which left the movement's credibility damaged. Reddin (2022) later labelled Kony 2012 as the 'birth of online slacktivism.' Slacktivism refers to occurrences when actions taken as part of digital activism campaigns, such as the sharing of a *YouTube* video, the signing an online petition, or the liking a social media post, are perceived as being carried out to make individual users feel good about themselves rather than leading to any tangible social or political change.

Despite the increasing ability and resources of NGOs to reach the public and policy makers through online platforms, research in the years since *Kony 2012* suggests an inability to regularly mobilise these technologies to create levels of impact in line with when the mainstream media is targeted via the traditional agenda building approach. For example, Mogus and Levihn-Coon (2018) surveyed 80 advocacy-orientated non-profits about the state of their digital teams and programmes. They found 70 per cent of digital teams to have experienced budget growth, but 37.5 per cent to be subordinated within their organisation's wider communications departments. They found NGOs struggling to integrate the use of analogue and digital campaigning tactics, and that "one-way broadcast campaigns" continued to dominate the way non-profit organisations carried out their campaigns.

5.4 African governments and control of the media agenda

The existing literature suggests that certain African governments have a history of agenda building through the close control of the media in their own countries. For example, Kalyango Jr & Eckler (2010) found agenda building tactics used by governments in East African countries undercut the contributions of the media to the democratisation process. It described how state-owned media in five countries examined were unduly influenced and coerced by the government. In a separate study of West African countries, Ajakaiye et al (2023) found the media to be subjective in their agenda setting roles due to the influence of politicians. Government influence on the media agenda was found to take various forms. This could include media intimidation, the suppression of information, and the spread of government propaganda (Mwenda 2007; Rubongoya 2007). In Uganda, Sobel Cohen and McIntyre (2020) found journalists to face challenges at almost every level. Whereas some of these stemmed from lack of professionalism or economic issues, other forces, such as government restrictions also caused significant difficulties. In some countries of East, West, and Central Africa, and particularly those affected by the most serious humanitarian crises, press freedom indicators

are worryingly low. For example, Reporters Without Borders labels press freedom in South Sudan, as being extremely precarious "where journalists work under constant threat and intimidation, and where censorship is ever-present" (Reporters Without Borders 2021). Nigeria is considered one of West Africa's most dangerous countries for journalists who are often monitored, attacked, and arbitrarily arrested (Reporters Without Borders 2021a). The intimidation of journalists and the suppression of information is, therefore, well established, but what is less clear is how African governments and other humanitarian actors influence the news content produced by NGOs, who are now also considered important players in the production of humanitarian news (Cooper 2009; Fenton 2010; Powers 2018). Do, for example, certain governments employ the same tactics of intimidation and information suppression with humanitarian communicators as they are known to do with journalists? How does the possible flow, suppression, politicisation, and control of information sources considered constructive of journalistic content (Curtin and Maier, 2001; Lawson 2021) affect the information subsidies NGO produce? And, ultimately, who is really shaping the media agenda - the NGO or someone else?

5.5 Accountability flows in humanitarian crises

"Humanitarianism" and, alongside it, "humanitarian crisis", "disaster", and "response", are typically challenging terms to define. Donini (2010) suggests the term "humanitarianism" encompasses a complex set of thoughts, actions, and institutions of which the boundaries are unclear. It is, the author says, a concept fraught with ambiguities united by a broad commitment to alleviating suffering and saving the lives of individuals affected by disaster. Crisis zones are often unstable and unpredictable environments in which to operate (Altay and Green 2006; Donini 2010; Maxwell 2009). People in such places may see sudden unplanned displacement, direct exposure to armed conflict, sudden deterioration in nutritional statuses, natural or industrial disaster, as well as a breakdown of the critical administrative and management functions of a country (Checchi et al. 2017). Humanitarian disasters can cause massive losses and disruptions to life (Altay and Green 2006), and may be both natural or man-made, slow, or sudden. Humanitarian response is a set of interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of these events on morbidity and mortality (Colombo and Checchi 2018). In addition to being an ideological and compassionate cause to help or protect at-risk populations, it is also a multi-

billion-dollar industry employing hundreds of thousands of workers and organisations, each competing for their share of the market.

Jahre and Jahre (2019) list affected people; humanitarian donors; national and international militaries; affected governments and their relevant departments; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement; NGOs (local, national, and international), the United Nations system; civil society institutions, and private companies as key actors in the humanitarian system. Together, these groups form a "complex and varied supply network of funding, materials, information and service flows" (Jahre and Jahre 2018, p4). The United Nations (UN) is considered the coordinator of humanitarian response on the global scale. Within the UN, several agencies are specifically dedicated to humanitarian work. These provide emergency relief, protection, food aid, healthcare, and other essential services in crisis situations. NGOs are the organisations most likely to be on the ground delivering a response during a crisis. To do so, they rely on humanitarian funding from governments, inter-governmental organisations, private donors, and the public. Most of this funding flows from a small group of predominantly western governments. Individual contributions fluctuate yearly but, according to the UN Financial Tracking System, the United States was by far the largest humanitarian donor in 2023, making up 39.7 per cent of global funding. The European Commission was second with 11.1 per cent, followed by Japan (8.8 per cent) and Germany (7.4 per cent). For some of the larger crises taking place in East, West, and Central Africa in 2023, similar donors dominate the top placings. In Ethiopia, the United States has contributed 72.6 per cent of all funding, followed by Germany (5.6 per cent) and the European Commission (4.9 per cent). In Sudan, the United States has contributed 56.4 per cent of all funding, with the European Commission second with 12 per cent. The same three donors are the top three again in Somalia. In DRC, the United States and the European Commission are the largest donors (UN OCHA 2023).

Studies examining accountability flows tend to be situated in humanitarian response literature rather than communications (see, for example, Minear et al. 1994; Maxwell and Walker 2008). Minear et al. (1994) proposed the "Crisis Triangle" as an analytical device for examining the influence of the media on crisis response and specifically on the interplay of influence between the media, governments, and humanitarian organisations during the 1990s. Using six crisis case studies, including civil wars in Liberia, Somalia, and Rwanda, they found that each set of institutions had its own identity and agenda, but that each also interacted with the other two in a variety of ways. They concluded that the influence of the media on government officials and

public policy tended to be more pronounced in cases where official policy had yet to be clearly defined.

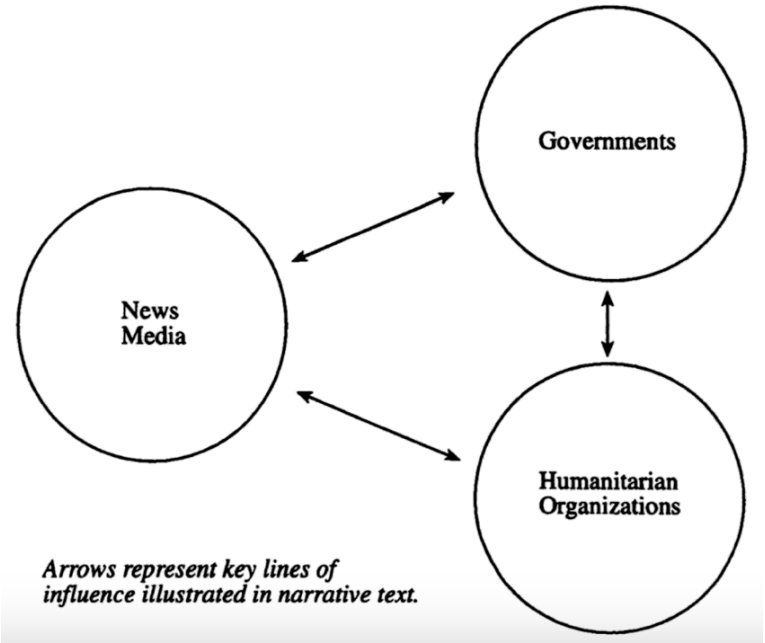


Figure 5.2: The Crisis Triangle (Minear et al. 1994)

Maxwell and Walker's (2009) attempt to demonstrate the complex system of accountabilities in the global humanitarian system did not include the media as a humanitarian actor but was, nonetheless, a useful demonstration of the complex web of stakeholders NGOs must negotiate as part of their role as an aid provider. Figure 5.3, below, demonstrates, for example, how NGOs have accountabilities to their various funders which include their donors, the public, foundations, and corporations. In addition, they are found to have accountabilities to the United Nations and its various humanitarian agencies, local community-based organisations with which they might partner as part of their humanitarian response, host states and their ministries, as well as to the people they are trying to reach with their aid, labelled in this example, as the victims. (Maxwell and Walker 2009, p4). Importantly, some of these institutions or groups have their own accountabilities to other actors too. For example, the United Nations and its agencies are shown to be accountable to host states and their ministries, various humanitarian donors, as well as to NGOs themselves and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement. Despite high demand and limited resources, Eftekhar et al. (2017) suggested humanitarian organisations typically do not share media resources or coordinate in the field due the general perception that this dilutes the media attention that individual organisations might receive, and negatively influence their opportunities to access future funding flows.

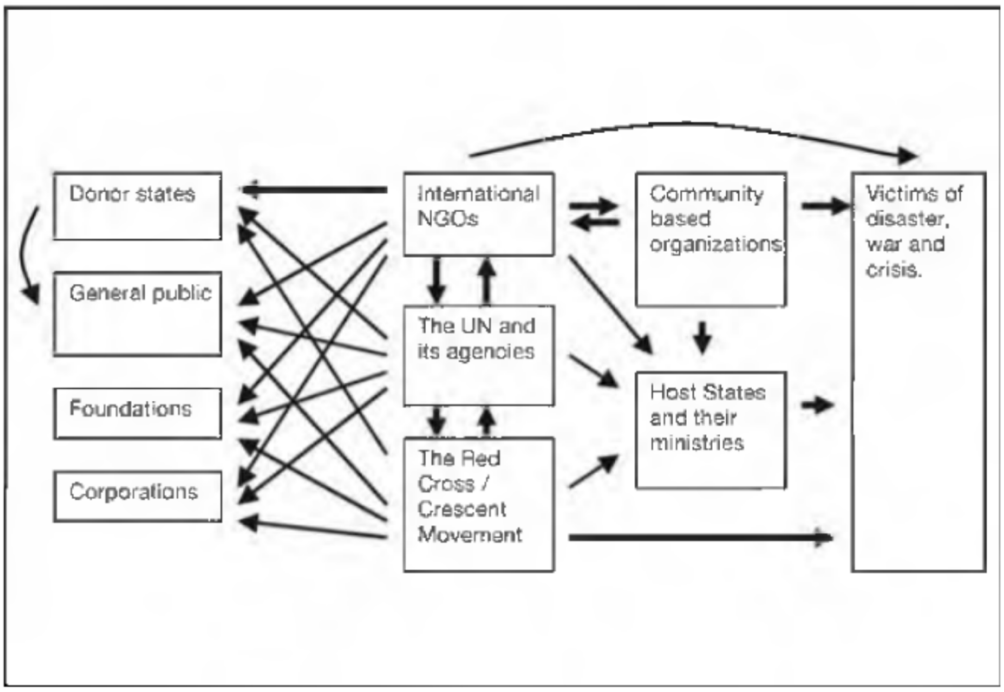


Figure 5.3: Humanitarian accountabilities (Maxwell and Walker 2009)

As well as accountabilities, Maxwell and Walker (2009) also mapped the flow of money through the humanitarian system. The diagram below demonstrates how cash can flow to NGOs from multiple different sources including donor states, the public, foundations and corporations, as well as United Nations agencies. In the case of the United Nations, this would often be funding originally received from similar donors to those listed above, but then later passed on to NGOs to implement the humanitarian response (Maxwell and Walker 2009).

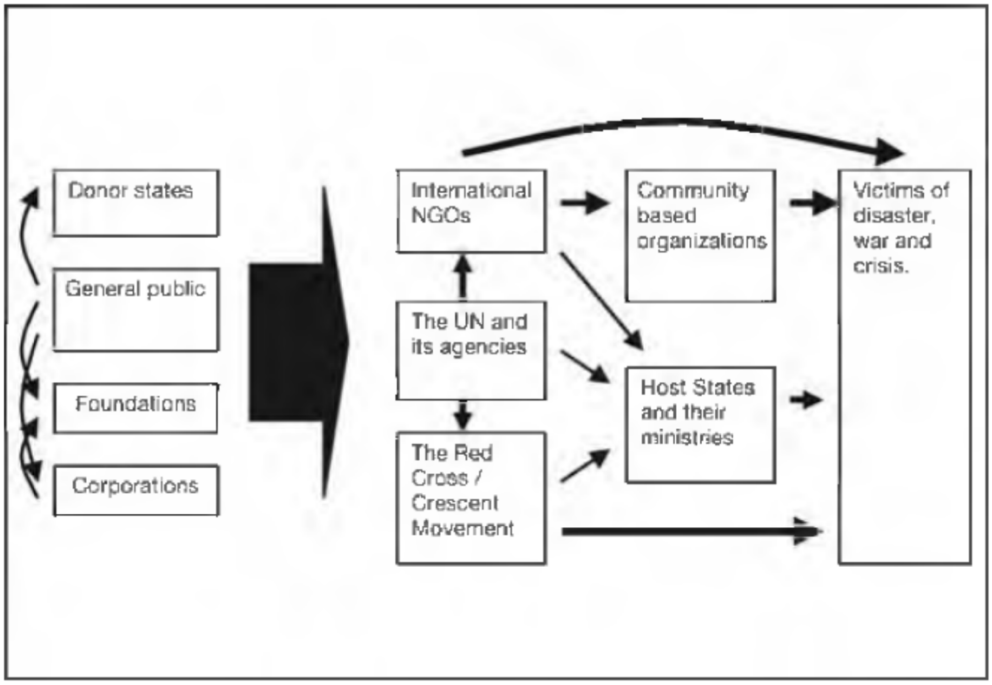


Figure 5.4: Humanitarian cash flow (Maxwell and Walker 2009)

Maxwell and Walker describe these systems as a "complex web of relationships, loosely guided by a set of principles, but principles which not all components of the web would accept, and which may sometimes by subordinated to other agendas" (2009, p4). Jahre and Jahre (2019), who list affected people, humanitarian donors, national and international militaries, affected governments and their relevant departments; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement; NGOs (local, national, and international), the United Nations system; civil society institutions, and private companies as key actors in the humanitarian system, say together, these groups form a "complex and varied supply network of funding, materials, information and service flows" (Jahre and Jahre 2018, p4). What is yet to be fully understood, however, is how this complex web of accountabilities, money flows, and competing agendas affects how humanitarian organisations form media strategies and go about the business of producing information subsidies.

In communication studies, research to date into the agenda building practices of NGOs has tended to focus on how the NGO attempts to influence the media agenda for fundraising and advocacy purposes (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Lang 2013; Van Leuven and Joye 2014; Powers 2016). Studies related to the use the media to satisfy humanitarian donors can be said to examine the large black arrow in Maxwell and Walker's (2009) humanitarian cash flow diagram (Figure 5.4), the flow of money from donors to humanitarian organisations. Fewer

studies have examined the smaller arrows indicating accountability flows in Figure 5.3 and how these might affect the media activities of NGOs. Understanding how such accountabilities affect NGO media outreach is the primary focus of this study. Whereas the increasing sophistication of NGO media is well documented, less explored are the powers and influences within the humanitarian system that shape an NGO's pursuit and production of media. Conrad (2015) says studies that focus on representation alone misses the journey by which images and stories come to be published and fail to address the range of "complexities and tensions within these structures" (Conrad 2015, p277). Powers (2015) suggests much of the scholarship to-date on NGO-media relations had failed to address the complex and difficult forces in play on both sides of the NGO-journalist relationship. Franks (2013) stressed the need for a far more nuanced understanding of the way in which aid agencies, as growing and increasingly powerful institutions, operate in crisis scenarios, and, particularly, a recognition that it may not be possible to deliver a humanitarian response without engaging in the political circumstances of the events at hand.

5.6 Summary

In summary, this chapter has outlined how agenda setting and agenda building theories emerged to demonstrate how media coverage could influence public perception and the prioritisation of certain issues. It has highlighted the role of information subsidies, provided by NGOs and other issue proponents to help them shape the media narrative by cutting the cost and time required for newsgathering and verification by journalists. For those NGOs, being credible and accurate sources was shown to be essential in ensuring success in gaining traction in the media. This chapter has also outlined some of the complex networks and flows of accountabilities and money affecting NGOs due to their roles as aid providers, including their requirements to satisfy other powerful humanitarian actors such as western governmental donors and host authorities. A more in-depth analysis of NGO agenda building practice focused on the impact of these humanitarian accountabilities is now required to better understand the diverse external influences, including political, economic, and cultural factors, that shape NGO agenda building practice as well as its impact on humanitarian communications.

Chapter 6 - Research Methodology

With the aim of unravelling some of the intricate dynamics governing the production of humanitarian media by NGOs in East, West, and Central Africa, this study adopted a mixed methods approach, combining content analysis, eighteen in-depth interviews, and two case studies. In this chapter, I provide an account of the research design, methods, and procedures employed to address the research questions. By integrating quantitative insights from content analysis with the nuanced perspectives gained through qualitative in-depth interviews and case studies, this mixed methods approach sought to offer a comprehensive understanding of how NGOs set objectives, prioritise media content, source information, access crises zones, and navigate external agendas. The chapter begins by justifying the choice of the mixed methods approach, outlining the specifics of in-depth interviews, content analysis, and case studies, before detailing the steps taken to ensure the validity, reliability, and ethical conduct of this research.

6.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were set:

RQ1 How do NGOs set humanitarian media objectives and priorities and how are these affected by other actors?

i) How does this compare to other actors within the humanitarian system?

RQ2 What types of media content do NGOs consider most effective for achieving mainstream media coverage?

RQ3 How do NGOs source the information used in their media content?

i) What are the most common sources used?
ii) Which sources are given most prominence?

RQ4 How do communications staff physically access a crisis and how is this affected by other actors?

i) How does this affect the media content produced?

6.2 Research design

6.2.1 Justification for the mixed method approach

Mixed methods research combines elements of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007; Johnson et al 2007) and is commonly used to collect and analyse a breadth of data from multiple different perspectives (Johnson et al 2007; Denscombe 2010; Hennink et al. 2011). Research problems most suited to mixed methods are those for which one data source may be insufficient, where results may need to be explained, or where exploratory findings may need to be generalised (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007). Such an approach was necessary in this instance for multiple reasons. Firstly, the mixed methods approach recognises the complexity of the humanitarian system and the networks of accountabilities and flows of money existing therein. Qualitative interview data alone would have been insufficient in determining how parts of such a system might operate and any results would have required triangulation to be mutually corroborated by a separate approach (Bryman 2006). Additionally, in this study, we are not only attempting to understand whether NGO content might be affected by other humanitarian actors but also why and how this might be happening. Semi-structured interviews and case studies help to answer the "why" and "how" of this problem because, as a qualitative method, they enable us to gain insight into complex processes such as how people make decisions and how organisations are managed (Hennink et al. 2011). This qualitative understanding arises out of collecting a range of perspectives through in-depth interviews, but employing such an approach in isolation would have risked sacrificing the ability to generalise results and apply them to the wider system (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2007). Additional methodologies allow us to exploit the strengths of the interviews without leaving us vulnerable to the weaknesses (Bryman 2006; Denscombe 2010).

The mixed methods approach has been widely used in studies into humanitarian communications to date. For example, Powers (2018) employed a range of methods to study NGO communications and news access. Based primarily on interviews with (and observations of) researchers, advocacy officers, and public relations professionals working in NGOs, the study was supplemented by an examination of primary and secondary sources such as annual reports, media accounts and memoirs. Powers also presented the results of a content analysis designed to understand whether the political economy of international news had led to increased news access for NGOs. Together, Powers claimed these methods provided the author with the necessary empirical and analytical depth to assess the role of the NGO in the changing

media landscape. In conclusion, a mixed methods approach offers the best chance of achieving a holistic and nuanced understanding of the hidden forces influencing NGO-produced humanitarian media in East, West, and Central Africa, addressing the research questions from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

6.2.2 Mapping research questions to methods

Research question	Method(s)
RQ1 How do NGOs set humanitarian media objectives and priorities and how are these affected by other actors? *i) How does this compare to other actors within the humanitarian system?*	Semi-structured interviews
RQ2 What types of media content do NGOs consider most effective for achieving mainstream media coverage?	Semi-structured interviews
RQ3 How do NGOs source the information used in their media content? *i) What are the most common sources used?* *ii) Which sources are given most prominence?*	Semi-structured interviews Content analysis Case studies
RQ4 How do communications staff physically access a crisis and how is this affected by other actors? *i) How does this affect the media content produced?*	Semi-structured interviews Content analysis

Table 6.1: Mapping research questions to methodologies

6.3 Qualitative Components: In-depth interviews and case studies

Qualitative interviews are concerned with examining meaning, experiences, and processes with reference to a particular group of participants (Rubin and Rubin 2005; King et al. 2018; Flick 2018). Participatory groups might be studied from a social perspective, such as an analysis of the experiences of a group of friends or families, or from professional one, such as analysing the experiences of a group of practitioners to understand processes and implicit knowledge (Flick 2018). Semi-structured interviews usually employ pre-prepared, open-ended questions

but also allow for a degree of flexibility in the wording and ordering of questions (Berg 2009; Corbin and Strauss 2015; Flick 2018). Questions generally reflect the fact that individuals see, experience, and understand the world in different ways (Berg 2009) and, although responses most often comprise statements and answers (Flick 2018), space is also left for unique perspectives and topics that might move away from the pre-prepared interview guide.

Two case studies were employed to describe and explain certain complex findings and phenomena in greater detail within their real-world context (Yin 2014). Creswell (2014, p. 241) describes case studies as a qualitative research design in which the researcher explores in depth a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Flick (2018) says the aim of case studies is the precise description or reconstruction of cases. De Vaus (2001, p. 220) and Flick (2018) say that the units of analysis in a case study can include individuals, families, communities, organisations, events, and decisions. In this study, the case studies were used to explore and compare the journey of humanitarian datasets from their publication in NGO press releases to their eventual republication in mainstream news outlets. Hennink et al. (2011) say a descriptive case study can provide an engaging format in which to highlight core research findings and to show contrasting experiences or outcomes.

Karpf et al. (2015) argue that the embrace of qualitative methods is an important element of building the empirical and theory building nature of political communication research. The semi-structured interview has been well-used in addressing the role of NGOs in news production. For example, Cottle and Nolan (2007) conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with communications managers and media officers working in six of the world's leading humanitarian NGOs. Fenton (2010) carried out interviews with NGO staff who reported a rise in media-related activity after an increase in skilled paid press officers from journalistic backgrounds. Wright (2016) interviewed journalists and NGO workers, including locally based translators and fixers. The interview's popularity amongst humanitarian communication scholars can be attributed to some of its salient features. Firstly, interviews are often exploited in exploring complex and subtle phenomena (Denscombe, 2010). They can also help a researcher gain access to sensitive or privileged information through contact with key players in the field (Denscombe 2010).

6.3.1 Specific research questions addressed by semi-structured interviews

RQ1 How do NGOs set humanitarian media objectives and priorities and how are these affected by other actors?

i) How does this compare to other actors within the humanitarian system?
RQ2 What types of media content do NGOs consider most effective for achieving mainstream media coverage?
RQ3 How do NGOs source the information used in their media content?
RQ4 How do communications staff physically access a crisis and how is this affected by other actors?

6.3.2 Sampling for in-depth interviews and case studies

Interviewees for this study included 19 professionals working in a range of communications roles within the humanitarian system. These included individuals working at international NGOs, United Nations agencies, and an intergovernmental humanitarian donor (European Commission). One interviewee was on a temporary contract with a governmental humanitarian donor from a major western national donor government, the name of which has been withheld to protect the individual's identity.

NGOs	UN Bodies	Humanitarian Donors
Save the Children	UNICEF UK	ECHO (European Commission)
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	World Health Organization	Unnamed governmental humanitarian donor
Care	UN OCHA	
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)		
Islamic Relief		
WaterAid		

Table 6.2: Names and types of humanitarian organisations interviewed

The selected organisations fulfill a range of roles within the humanitarian sector, including healthcare (WHO, MSF, UNICEF), child-focused activities (Save the Children, UNICEF), refugees and displacement (NRC), water and sanitation (WaterAid), humanitarian coordination

(UN OCHA) and a major intergovernmental humanitarian donor (ECHO). This allowed for a diverse range of perspectives and ensured a more comprehensive exploration of the unique challenges associated with the humanitarian context. The organisations vary in size and scope, from large international NGOs (Save the Children, CARE, Norwegian Refugee Council, MSF) to specialised United Nations agencies (WHO, UN OCHA, UNICEF) and comparatively smaller international NGOs (Islamic Relief, WaterAid). Exploring the media strategies of organisations of different scales encouraged a more nuanced understanding of the structure of an organisation influences communication priorities and approaches. The sample offered a varied representation of funding mechanisms. These included organisations that receive funding from diverse sources, such as governmental donors, private donors, and international organisations, which allowed for an exploration of how funding dynamics might influence media communication strategies. The selected organisations all have a presence in East, West, and Central Africa, providing regionally specific expertise. This ensured that insights gained from interviews were contextually relevant to the areas under investigation. Some of the selected organisations actively collaborate or compete with one another. Exploring how these dynamics shape NGO media output is a key aims of this study. Most of the organisations actively engage in policy advocacy. Understanding how their communication strategies influence policy and public perception was crucial for comprehending the broader impact of humanitarian media. Save the Children, CARE, and Médecins Sans Frontières are regularly cited as belonging to an elite group of richer, media-savvy NGOs, largely responsible for the increase in NGO news access in recent years. For example, Powers (2018) drew on interviews with these three organisations, arguing that they were among the most active in developing staff and practices aimed at contributing to public communication efforts. DeChaine (2002) highlighted MSF's emergence as a major NGO as being linked to its efforts in publicising humanitarian crises and its own aid missions. Van Leuven et al (2013) studied how MSF press releases built the agenda of Flemish newspapers. Wright (2018) and Franks (2013) both conducted interviews with Save the Children in their respective major studies. Findings from well-known and widely respected organisations are more likely to be generalisable and transferable to other contexts within the humanitarian sector.

For the case studies, textual analysis of two press releases and of their resulting media coverage was employed to explain and demonstrate certain complex findings in greater detail and clarity. Flick (2018) says case studies are employed not to make concrete statements about one specific case but because the case is a typical or particularly instructive example of a more general

problem. Therefore, the two press releases chosen for further analysis were selected because they were particularly instructive examples, demonstrating several instances of phenomena identified in both the in-depth interviews and the content analysis. Hennink et al. (2011) say using two case studies can highlight common but different experiences and explain the differences. Two press releases with contrasting approaches to the use of statistical data were selected to illustrate how the different ways in which NGOs use humanitarian data can affect the eventual mainstream media coverage achieved. In this regard, it was considered important to analyse two separate releases communicating about the same country (in this case, Nigeria) in contrasting ways. Which specific NGOs published the two releases, in these cases Save the Children and MSF, was a secondary consideration. More important was the content of the releases themselves, the resulting media coverage, and how it could be used to further demonstrate any relevant findings. In tracking media coverage globally, a *Google News* search was conducted using the headlines of each selected press release as a search term. Any unrelated results were filtered out before instances in which both press releases received coverage from the same outlets were noted. This allowed for a greater level of comparison between the two case studies and resulted in the eventual analysis of media articles from *Reuters* and *Al Jazeera*. A third outlet, the Nigerian national publication *New Dawn,* was also used to demonstrate a specific example in one of the two case studies.

6.3.3 Interview participation selection criteria

Job Title	Based In	Number interviewed
NGO Global Head/Director of Media	UK	2
NGO Regional Director of Media/Communications/Advocacy	Senegal, Kenya	2
NGO Regional Head of Media/Communications/Advocacy	Senegal	1
NGO Head of Media/External Relations	UK	4
NGO Regional Media Managers/Advisors	Senegal, Jordan	2

NGO National Media/Communications Manager	Niger, UK	2
Western governmental donor information officer	Democratic Republic of Congo	1
NGO Director of UN Advocacy	Switzerland	1
Western intergovernmental donor Regional Information Manager	Senegal	1
UN Head of Advocacy and Spokespersoning	United States	1
UN Senior Communications/Media Manager	UK, France	2
Total job categories = 11	Total countries = 9	Total interviews = 19

Table 6.3: Job titles and countries of interviewees

A major humanitarian organisation, such as many of those featured in this study, is likely to have entire teams dedicated to multiple different modes of public communication, from marketing and fundraising, branding, ambassadors, advocacy, campaigning, film, photography, media, public relations, and news. To ensure the information taken from interviews was as relevant as possible to the research questions, participants for this study were restricted to communications staff with a direct responsibility for corresponding with the mainstream news media, and staff responsible for the production of news content. These included, for example, media relations officers and managers, senior decision makers such as directors of media, and content producers such as videographers and photographers. It was viewed as particularly critical to include staff working in country and regional offices in East, West, and Central Africa. Such staff members have been largely ignored in previous research into NGO communications, which has tended to focus on head office staff, and, resultingly, risks failing to address or misunderstanding a range of intricate and complex local and national phenomena with the potential to affect the production of media content on the ground in crisis zones.

The decision to conduct 19 interviews is grounded in a careful balance between achieving depth of insight and the practical constraints of time, resources, and feasibility. Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend a sample size of 15-20 interviews for a PhD such as this one in which

Thematic Analysis data forms only one part of the project. Interviews were conducted until a saturation point was reached, which ensured that a comprehensive range of perspectives were gathered, whilst avoiding the need for an excessively large sample size.

Interviewing NGO communications staff, UN communications staff, and staff from major humanitarian donors was a strategic decision that aligned with the multifaceted nature of the research questions. NGO communications staff play an important role in producing humanitarian media content for their organisations. Interviews with such staff provided insights into the motivations, challenges, and decision-making processes involved in producing such content. Interviews with UN communications were important in gaining a deeper insight into similarities and differences in organisational objectives and of the complexities and political nuances of the humanitarian system. UN agencies often collaborate with NGOs in humanitarian efforts but also operate at a broader level within the system including collaborating closely with national governments. Insights from UN communications staff helped to provide a macro-level understanding of some of the global dynamics influencing humanitarian media. An interview with a senior donor communications staff member provided insights into how funding considerations can shape the communication strategies of NGOs, as well as some of the dynamics of power and influence in the humanitarian sector. By comparing the insights gained from these different stakeholders, the study achieved a more robust and nuanced understanding of the hidden forces at play in humanitarian media.

6.3.4 Recruitment process

Participants were approached by email or phone. Pre-existing contacts were approached for the first round of interviews with snowball sampling then employed and participants asked to identify other potential interviewees. This helped to ensure a suitable range of organisations and sectors were represented. Additional "cold" approaches were made to certain organisations where no pre-existing link could be found. These included MSF and Care. At least one interview with MSF was considered particularly important due to its significance both as a humanitarian organisation and a media savvy NGO and so multiple approaches were made to two target interviewees. One interview was eventually secured with a media director based in Africa.

6.3.5 Interview Protocol

In employing a semi-structured interview approach, questions were prepared in advance, and, as a result, I was able to maintain focus on research questions across all interviewees. I was also able to probe beyond initial answers and to clarify questions based on the individual worldview of each interviewee. This was important when interviewing staff from various organisations working in the same field but with nuanced differences between roles and objectives. Interviews are best exploited in exploring complex and subtle phenomena (Denscombe 2010) and particularly important, here, was to examine potential differences in how communications priorities are set for NGOs and how these relate to the priorities of other humanitarian actors such as the United Nations and humanitarian donors.

6.3.6 Data Collection

Most interviews took place over a period of around six months in early 2022. One interview was added later in June 2023 when the interviewee became available. Two interviews were carried out face-to-face in the UK. These were recorded using the audio notetaking application on a smartphone. The rest were carried out and recorded via video conferencing software including Zoom, Teams, or Skype, based on the participant's individual preference. This was due to either a) the geographical range of interviewees (nine countries in total) or b) concerns over meeting face-to-face due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were between 45 minutes and 90 minutes in duration.

A Participation Information Sheet was developed, as well as a Participant Agreement Form. Ethics clearance was requested and secured. Due to the sensitive nature of certain subjects, all interviewees were offered anonymity. As a result, participants are identified in the analysis and results only by job title and whether they work for an NGO, a UN agency, or a humanitarian donor. They may also be identified by the country or region in which they work. Online interviews were recorded by the video conferencing app used. Interviews were fully transcribed using a third-party (human) transcription service and subsequently re-checked by the author. An interview guide, see below, was prepared in advance relating to the Research Questions.

Section	**Information required**
Profiling	Years in profession Type of organisation Based where? Type of contract – staff/freelance etc

Setting humanitarian media objectives and priorities	How organisations prioritise humanitarian crises to publicise The external organisations or institutions influencing how humanitarian crises are prioritised
How NGOs source the information used in their media content	Main sources of information communicators use to create media content How information is gathered for humanitarian news content Which organisations, institutions, or authorities, maintain the most control in terms of access to information on humanitarian crises Any concerns of powers withholding or manipulating information related to crises How information might be used to build agendas of other humanitarian actors
How communications staff physically access a crisis	Importance of being able to physically access a crisis Barriers faced, if any Which organisations, institutions or authorities, maintain most control in terms of physical access to humanitarian crises humanitarian communicators Concerns over threats, suspensions, censorship etc
News Access	Importance of mainstream media coverage Most important qualities for humanitarian media content (press releases, multimedia news content etc) in order to make it more attractive to mainstream news outlets Importance of organisations being named in news content

Table 6.4: Interview guide

6.3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was employed. Specifically, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide to Thematic Analysis was used. Phase 1 involved reading and re-reading transcriptions of the interviews and noting down initial codes. Phase 2 involved generating initial codes and collecting data relevant to each one. Phase 3 involved collating these codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each theme. Phase 4 involved verifying that each theme works in relation to the coded extracts and the data set as a whole. Here, a thematic map was also developed. Phase 5 defined and named the themes. Phase 6 involved the discussion of the analysis relating this back to the research questions.

6.4 Quantitative Component: Content Analysis

Content analysis is concerned with the systematic quantitative examination of communications content (Berelson 1952; Smith 2000; Neuendorf 2017; Riffe et al. 2019). It is widely used in communication research, with 23 per cent of studies between 1985 and 2010 utilising the method (Lacy et al. 2015). Content analysis was used for this study for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it allowed for a systematic and structured analysis of a large volume of media content (in this case, humanitarian press releases). As a quantitative approach, it was able to provide an overview of patterns, frequencies, and trends in how NGOs communicate about humanitarian issues. It also provided a measurable basis for understanding the types of information sources NGOs use in their content, in line with the research questions addressed by this method. Additionally, it allowed for a comparison of the media output of different NGOs, and insights into how their use of information sources compared. Finally, a quantitative method complemented qualitative insights from the in-depth interviews, triangulating both sets of data to enhance the validity of the findings.

The sample was composed of humanitarian press releases and press statements produced by four major humanitarian NGOs between January 2018 and April 2022. The decision to focus on press releases and statements as opposed to other forms of media content was made for a variety of reasons. Firstly, press releases are examples of NGO media content in its rawest form before it has passed through the distorting prism of publication in a news outlet. It is the story as the NGO chooses to present it to the world and the home of the official messaging to which they assign their name and brand. For this reason, the content of releases and statements, such

as the information sources used, has particular significance when considering the external humanitarian actors influencing NGO media output. Secondly, press releases are a logical and efficient choice of text due to the significant volume produced by NGOs each year as well as their publication, indexation and archiving on many organisations' public-facing websites. Whereas, as noted by Riffe et al. (2019), online and social content can be "unlimited and unknowable and inherently unstable over time" (p168), press releases allowed for a large enough sample across different NGOs to examine consistently for similar variables. Finally, despite a rising interest in other media tactics, press releases have proven to be particularly successful forms of information subsidies in an NGO's pursual of mainstream coverage. Scott et al. (2022) found specialist humanitarian journalists to be critical of what they saw as a tendency by mainstream journalists to rely on press releases from official sources such as NGOs. Boumans (2018) found one in every ten Dutch newspaper articles to have been initiated by a press release, and slightly more for news agencies. Van Leuven and Joye (2014) indicated that journalists frequently incorporated information directly from humanitarian press releases into news articles. Fenton (2010) found most NGO communication staff members had believed that, due to time pressures on journalists and their requirement to fill more space, their content does get picked up and does not always get changed.

6.4.1 Specific research questions addressed by content analysis

RQ3 How do NGOs source the information used in their media content? *i) What are the most common sources used?* *ii) Which sources are given most prominence?*
RQ4 How do communications staff physically access a crisis and how is this affected by other actors? *i) How does this affect the media content produced?*

6.4.2 Sampling for content analysis

The sample was composed of humanitarian press releases and press statements from Save the Children, MSF, Care, and the NRC. These NGOs were selected largely for the same reasons as they were included in the semi-structured interview sample, in that they represent a diverse

set of organisations with distinct approaches and are regarded as among the most media savvy NGOs in the world. As demonstrated by Lawson (2021), a reliance exists within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of institutional sources, including large international NGOs such as the four studied here. Selecting these organisations for both qualitative and quantitative analysis allowed a greater triangulation of the results. Additionally, all had a suitable number of press releases and statements available to download from their organisational websites across a wide enough span of years. Whereas certain previous studies (see, for example, Powers 2018; Wright 2018) included human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch, I chose not to because such organisations cannot necessarily be considered part of the global humanitarian system and so are likely to be less influenced by actors therein. For example, human rights organisations with no humanitarian programming may be less likely to be influenced by the threat of having such programmes suspended or shut down.

To create the sample, every press release and press statement published by the respective organisations on their websites between January 2018 and April 2022 were examined. From these, all of those concerning countries or regions in East, West, and Central Africa were selected. From this smaller sample, all of those concerning humanitarian crises as opposed to, for example, cultural or development issues, were selected. Such texts included statements and releases related to conflict and insecurity, hunger and drought, fast spreading viruses such as Covid-19 and Ebola, climate change, displacement and refugees, education crises and attacks on schools, protracted or multiple crises, security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers, as well as sexual assault, gender-based violence and forced marriage. This selection of topics was made based on previous definitions of humanitarian crisis. People in crisis zones may see sudden unplanned displacement, direct exposure to armed conflict, sudden deterioration in nutritional statuses, natural or industrial disaster, as well as a breakdown of the critical administrative and management functions of a country (Checchi et al 2017). Humanitarian disasters can cause massive losses and disruptions to life (Altay and Green 2006), and may be both natural or man-made, slow, or sudden. The resulting sample was a total of 340 releases and statements, which provides a substantial amount of data for robust content analysis.

Year	Save the Children	MSF	Care	NRC
2018	5	11	15	38
2019	28	29	2	36
2020	29	13	9	18
2021	34	14	16	19
2022	4	7	5	8
TOTAL	100	74	47	119

Table 6.5: Press release/press statement sample size per humanitarian organisation and year

6.4.3 Coding Scheme

To address the specific research questions addressed by this method, all press releases and statements in the sample were coded in relation to the sources (human and statistical) used, as well as the prominence of these sources in the release or statement. A period of testing using a smaller sample enabled the identification of 14 regularly used statistical sources. To these, an option for unnamed or unclear sources, was added, as well as for occurrences when no statistical sources were used. Similarly, a list of six regularly used categories of human voices was identified. To this list was added an option for releases or statements containing no human voice. A coding manual (see Appendix A) was developed and a sample of 50 press releases selected for an inter-coder reliability test. Jisc online survey software was employed for coding.

6.4.4 Validity and Reliability

An intercoder reliability test was conducted using a subsample of 50 press releases (17.1% of the total sample). Wimmer and Dominick (2010) suggest a subsample of between 10 per cent and 25 per cent should be analysed by independent coders to calculate overall intercoder reliability. As a purposeful sample, the selection exercise was the researcher's choice, and, as a result, the potential existed for selection bias. Training was conducted with one separate coder ahead of the exercise. Using Krippendorff's Alpha (Krippendorff 2011) the following scores were attained for the four questions affected:

Question 4: From which humanitarian organisation did the press release or press statement originate?
Reliability Score: 0.970108

Question 5: Is the document a press release or a press statement?

Reliability Score: 0.898642

Question 6: What is the primary topic of the press release or press statement?

Reliability Score: 0.910599

Question 7: What is the primary region of focus of the press release or press statement?

Reliability Score: 1

Question 8: Which, if any, organisations are the sources of statistical humanitarian data present within the press release or press statement? (Click all that apply)

Reliability Score: 0.81067014

Question 9: What is the source of the first piece of statistical data present in the press release or press statement?

Reliability Score: 0.879052

Question 10: What is the total number of human voices present in the press release or press statement?

Reliability Score: 1

Question 11: Which, if any, of the following types of human voices are present in the press release or press statement? Click all that apply.

Reliability Score: 0.943572

Question 12: What is the source of the first human voice in the press release or press statement?

Reliability Score: 0.824783

Averaged across all questions, the mean reliability score was 0.91526957.

Chapter 7 – Qualitative Findings

The following chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis of 19 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with communications staff representing international NGOs, United Nations humanitarian agencies, and two major humanitarian donors. These findings, which address research questions 1 to 4, outline a range of external factors and stakeholders that help to shape the media objectives and activities of humanitarian organisations in relation to crises in East, West and Central Africa. The external influences identified are often closely tied to an NGO's accountabilities and responsibilities within the humanitarian system and the imperative to maintain access for effective aid delivery. Notably, host governments and western governmental and intergovernmental humanitarian donors emerge as pivotal players, exerting considerable influence over the crises NGOs choose to prioritise for media coverage as well as their decisions over whether to engage with the media at all. Additionally, the findings suggest a high prevalence of censorship activities by certain actors on NGOs, underscoring the complexity of external pressures shaping the landscape of humanitarian media engagement.

7.1 The competing stakeholders of NGO media strategy

Thematic analysis revealed five categories of competing stakeholders with influence over NGO media prioritisation, strategy, and production. These categories were: financial stakeholders, organisational stakeholders, political stakeholders, media stakeholders, and humanitarian stakeholders. The impact of these competing categories of stakeholders on an NGO's media strategy, along with their individual degree of influence, was found to be significantly shaped by an organisation's institutional strategy. For instance, NGOs heavily reliant on public fundraising may be more influenced by media stakeholders as they seek to position themselves in the audience's consciousness as a new crisis unfolds. In contrast, those emphasising advocacy targets might channel efforts into strategic communications and, as such, may be more influenced by political stakeholders or generating support for a specific campaign. According to the Head of Media at a prominent NGO, "A communications strategy would always be pegged to the corporate objectives, which usually are to drive income, change policy, and build supporters for a cause." However, these corporate or institutional objectives were frequently found to be influenced and shaped by other stakeholders within the humanitarian

system, such as host authorities and Western donors. Table 7.1, below, lays out the five competing categories of stakeholders and offers examples of some of the ways in which NGO information subsidies and agenda building practice can be affected. This chapter will examine the first four categories in detail, whilst discussion of humanitarian stakeholders will be weaved throughout the other four.

Financial Stakeholders	**Organisational Stakeholders**	**Political Stakeholders**	**Media Stakeholders**
Institutional priorities of western humanitarian donors Public and private fundraising	NGO mandates and advocacy priorities NGO operational or programmatic objectives	Host states and local authorities Intra-governmental organisations priorities Political priorities of major humanitarian donors	Media norms and existing news agenda
Humanitarian Stakeholders Scale and urgency of humanitarian need			

Table 7.1: The competing categories of stakeholders influencing NGO agenda building

7.2 Financial Stakeholders

"It's important to agree and understand what I'm calling 'the development market'. It's a market. It's a market with many agencies who are more and more dependent on the donor's funds."

NGO Regional Communications and Advocacy Director

As aid contributions struggle to keep pace with growing demand (Lattimer and Swithern 2017), the escalating scale and frequency of crises poses a considerable challenge to humanitarian NGOs (Starr and Van Wassenhove 2014; Villa et al. 2018). Aid agencies find themselves under

increasing pressure not only to demonstrate tangible impact but also to distinguish themselves before a limited pool of mainly Western governments that constitute the primary sources of humanitarian aid funding. Attracting such investment is not only a means with which to sustain NGO operations but also a strategic imperative for NGOs seeking to address the pressing humanitarian challenges in East, West, and Central Africa.

For the remainder of this study, unless otherwise stated, the terms 'donor(s)', 'western donors' or 'humanitarian donor(s)' refer specifically to Western governmental institutions such as, for example, USAID (United States), or intergovernmental institutions such as, for example, ECHO (the European Commission), which are widely considered the most important funders of humanitarian response in the regions in question. Various studies have drawn a line between media coverage and the distribution of humanitarian aid funding (Olsen et al 2003; Cooper 2011; Eftekhar et al. 2017; Scott et al. 2022). The Overseas Development Institute found media coverage to be the most important factor influencing public and political opinion on humanitarian issues, and that this, in turn, influenced donor decision-making (ODI 2011). Berlemann and Thomas (2019) found media coverage on natural disasters to have had a systematic impact on the amount of aid provided and Sobel Cohen et al. (2021) noted a correlation between the amount of news coverage a crisis receives and the amount of aid funding. This study builds on such findings with the following insights:

- Instead of humanitarian donors solely reacting to media coverage by releasing (or not releasing) funds, NGOs and donors often work side-by-side to plan the sort of media that might enable donors to release funds in future.
- Western donor influence over NGO communications activities can be as pronounced after NGOs have received funding as it is before.
- The influence of humanitarian donors on NGO communications is not limited to matters of funding. The donor's own political priorities may have as much, and, in some cases, more influence over an NGO's media activities.
- Whereas humanitarian donors have typically been viewed as incentivising NGOs to engage in mainstream media coverage, they also regularly disincentivise such activities once an NGO is in receipt of their funds.
- The degree of influence and power donors wield over NGO media activities varies significantly between staff in head offices and colleagues in country and regional offices.

7.2.1 Humanitarian donors and NGO media incentivisation

The interaction between humanitarian donors and NGOs was found to be intricate and multi-layered, particularly when it came to the use of media. Understandings, both explicit and implicit, were found to exist between the two actors that could profoundly influence how an NGO conducts its media operations. In certain situations, the collaboration was found to be constructive, with both organisations working in tandem to raise essential funds for a crisis response. Conversely, when strategic objectives diverged, a power imbalance could grant donors considerable influence over how an NGO publicly communicates about specific crises. Typically, research in this domain has portrayed the donor-NGO relationship as a linear cause-and-effect scenario (Berlemann and Thomas, 2019; Sobel Cohen et al. 2021) and analyses how an NGO's agenda building efforts can prompt (or fail to prompt) a release of funds from donors. This study suggests a more nuanced relationship, revealing substantial levels of planning and coordination between the communication teams of certain donors and NGOs designed to facilitate a release of funds on the donor's behalf. This new understanding sheds light on the intricacies of the relationship and suggests a strategic collaboration that extends beyond the conventional cause-and-effect paradigm.

"I'm in numerous conversations with big donors like ECHO and the FCDO and equivalents in other countries where they have very honestly said to us in meetings that they would like to give money to X crisis, but their bosses are influenced by what's in the news,"

NGO Director of Media

"For them to be able to give money to this, they need us to be making more noise about it. Everyone has something to gain from this, let's say. For the West and Central Africa ECHO office, they were like, 'We need to keep reminding people that the situation is serious in the Sahel, and we need to influence ECHO HQ."

NGO Regional Director of Advocacy and Communications

The suggestion that humanitarian donor bosses are influenced by the news agenda, and that they may release funds as a result, is in line with Powers (2016) who found donors to continue to value media coverage both as a way of learning about NGO activities and as a means by which to measure their impact. It also complements Scott et al. (2022), who found senior

managers at governmental donors to believe sudden-onset national news coverage could increase the amount of aid allocated to a crisis. The same study, however, suggested that annual aid allocations – the longer term, more predictable funding for crises - were largely unaffected by the media, and a lack of coverage may, in fact, be a reason to increase funding for so-called "forgotten" crises. This study suggests donor bosses may, to some extent, be unaware of certain manoeuvrings between their staff in regional positions and NGO communications staff designed to encourage the freeing up of funding for crises. This draws parallels with Keck and Sikkink's (1998) notion of transnational advocacy networks – groups of actors working internationally on an issue and bound together by shared values and the exchange of information and services. The goal of such networks, according to the authors, is to change the behaviour of governments and international organisations. However, certain government departments and international organisations are often involved in such networks themselves, working alongside non-state actors. In this study, we find elements of an international governmental organisation, for example the European Commission, working with an NGO to legitimise a change in its own behaviour. Thrall et al. (2014) suggested that an NGO's power to achieve publicity and visibility is central to the success of transnational advocacy networks.

"I would say that the key actors that we feel that there's the most funding available for us, it could be Denmark government, DANIDA, CIDA, the USAID, FCDO, and the EU, of course, not as much now. If any of the major donors, institutional donors, I would say, come and ask us why we're not doing something, then we feel we have to respond and do something."

NGO Regional Head of Advocacy and Communication

Eftekhar et al. (2017) state that, despite high demand and limited resources, humanitarian organisations typically do not share resources or coordinate in the field due the general perception that this dilutes the media attention that individual organisations might receive, and negatively influence their opportunities to access future funding flows. This study suggests those findings do not extend to coordination between NGOs and donors themselves. Such close collaborations can be seen as important to NGOs, especially when considering previous research concluded that only occasionally did the media play a decisive role in influencing donors (Scott et al. 2022). Indeed, Olsen et al. (2003) found that the strength of humanitarian stakeholders such as NGOs to lobby donors was more important than media coverage. Eftekhar et al. (2017) suggested an NGOs ability to demonstrate its operational performance, including

the success of its previous projects, was another critical factor. Therefore, it can be theorised that these close collaborations by communications teams at the regional level are designed to add another layer of authenticity and credibility to an NGO's case for increased funding.

These findings also build on previous studies that identified a rising acceptance of NGOs growing role in politics and greater acceptance in political circles (Fenton 2010; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Lang 2013; Keys 2014; Powers 2016). This interaction between NGO and donor communications teams was found to exist at the Head Office level too, but the relationships between NGO media bosses and their donor counterparts was considered more strategic and "big picture" than the intricate conversations taking place at the country or regional level. The relationships differed from person to person and organisation to organisation. Where some senior communicators considered themselves friendly with donor counterparts, others said they rarely speak to donors at all.

"Once Tim Singleton was at DFID as Communications Director, he would ring me fairly regularly and try to get me to be supportive of something that the state was announcing or he would tap me for information about how an announcement might be perceived in our sector as a whole."

NGO Director of Media

NGOs were found to employ various strategies to leverage the mainstream media to cater to the preferences of donors. For example, media coverage might be strategically planned as a public demonstration of gratitude from NGOs to donors or as an incentive for continued financial support for programmes. In line with Powers' (2016a) assertion that donors use mainstream western media coverage to learn about NGO activities, a Media and Communication Manager based in Niger emphasised the importance of engaging with major international news outlets to provide donors with information about activities beyond the local context, thus enhancing its visibility and influence.

"If we use just our local media outlets, TV, and everything, this is just local, and this is just for people living in Niger. If you have the chance to work with the big TVs, like I said BBC and CNN and all these things, these are the media outlet those donors can get access and have information from Niger."

NGO Media and Communication Manager in Niger

This is one example of how media initiatives by NGOs, influenced by donor considerations, can unfold. Such efforts are not always dictated by formal contractual processes or routine meetings but can also stem from the fundamental belief that, when one organisation funds the work, the other should endeavour to generate media coverage in response. An NGO Regional Director based in West Africa explained the rationale behind integrating donor visibility into media activities. They acknowledged the importance of showcasing the Norwegian government's contributions to a specific programme in Eastern DRC, emphasising a reciprocal relationship where donors facilitate the NGO's programme delivery, and, in turn, the NGO seeks to acknowledge and amplify their support through media efforts.

"Of course, and just to be totally transparent, and well-balanced, if we are operating in Eastern DRC, trying to do some media work, trying to gather some content, et cetera, and if you have been receiving some money from the Norwegian government on a specific programme, and this is a programme we are covering, in a way or another, we're going to try to see if we can make this visible in the programme because, at the end of the day, they're the people who are helping us to make sure that we're contributing - to make sure that we can deliver our programme."

NGO Regional Director of Advocacy and Communications

7.2.2 Humanitarian funding and the requirement for drama and intensity

In interviews with humanitarian communicators from both NGOs and the United Nations, a common perspective emerged: the intensity and urgency of media content could significantly influence an institutional donor's response to specific crises. This aligns with findings of NGOs strategically incorporating dramatic elements into their narratives (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Waisbord 2011; Van Leuven and Joye 2014) in accordance with the concept of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007). Particularly evident in rapidly evolving crises, these views also resonate with the findings of Scott et al. (2022), who observed that heightened national news coverage of sudden-onset events can lead to increased allocations of emergency aid, irrespective of the actual humanitarian needs on the ground. The authors underscored a perceived link between the intensity of media coverage and the subsequent pressure on organisations to disburse emergency aid funds promptly. According to

a Communications Manager interviewed for this study, this sentiment is reflected in the approach often taken by UN OCHA, in which an emphasis is placed on conveying the severity of a situation.

"I think OCHA is obsessed with-- OCHA is going to be like, 'Okay, we need to talk about the severity of the situation.' If the media highlights the severity of the situation, the way we see it, we're going to think it's good. It's what we want. I think that's probably the key element because probably, the idea is that the more severe, the more likely we're going to be to raise funds for it. Like if the situation is really tragic, hopefully, donors are going to react and do something about it."

UN Communications Manager

It is arguably unsurprising that humanitarian communicators endeavour to instil a sense of urgency or intensity in their portrayal of crises in these regions. Past research has demonstrated that African crises often necessitate considerable drama to capture media attention (CARMA 2006; Eisensee and Stromberg 2007; Mahieu and Joye 2018). Despite the Indian Ocean tsunami having a similar death toll to a protracted crisis in Darfur, the tsunami received twice as much media coverage (CARMA 2006). At the time of writing, the international news landscape is predominantly focused on the war in Ukraine, indicating a historical trend that does not bode well for the coverage of crises in Africa. Eisensee and Stromberg (2007) underscore this point, revealing that, for an African disaster, approximately forty times as many casualties are required to garner the same expected media coverage as a similar disaster in Eastern Europe.

In certain crisis-affected nations, this study found the relationship between donors and NGOs to accentuate a perceived power imbalance in favour of the donor. In African countries, the roles of NGO communications staff are often financed as part of a donor's support for programme work, and, as a result, they are reliant on these funds for their wages. Whereas humanitarian communicators did not believe that donor funding for these roles resulted in direct control over an NGO's media messaging, there is a recognition that it is likely to at least exert influence over the thematic focus of the communicator's work.

"In Uganda, for example, all our comms, advocacy, and media posts are funded entirely through donor-funded projects. That is ultimately where most of these positions are funded

from. If it's an education child protection project that is funding the comms role, then inevitably, that is going to be a big focus of the comms person's work. It influences it in that sense."

NGO Head of Media

7.2.3 The money-driven approach to humanitarian response and media

The institutional priorities of donors were found to influence NGO media objectives in multiple ways. At a foundational level, the humanitarian programmes implemented by NGOs are usually designed with a donors' priorities in mind. This is because they are seen as more likely to receive funding. This, in turn, was found to influence the media prioritisation of a crisis by an NGO because having programme work in operation gives the organisation more legitimacy to speak about a crisis as well as the opportunity to gather newsworthy content.

"[NGO NAME] will design an education program that is partly based on needs assessments on the ground but partly also influenced by what ECHO's priorities are because we want ECHO to fund it. It's not just about media influence, I guess, but wider in terms of us wanting to match key donor priorities. It's the same on media. If ECHO or FCDO or big humanitarian donors are interested in particular issues like, at the moment, FCDO is very interested in gender. It's one of their big, big issues, that's potentially going to steer the direction in terms of media priorities."

NGO Head of Media

On another occasion, a donor's institutional priorities might first inform the NGO's media priorities, which, in turn, might lead to the release of funding and facilitate the NGO programme design as a result.

"The second way that things are prioritised, if they're not part of the campaigning and advocacy vision, is when we have a donor who is asking us to talk about it….I think that links to when, for example, we've been talking more about the food security situation in the region where we don't have advocacy work, where our programmes are still okay but not amazing, or some of the ECHO work, which is around education emergencies. I think that was more a donor had

said, ‘We will give you money to do this.’ We said, ‘We need to do it.’ It was more influenced by what a donor wanted.”

NGO Regional Head of Advocacy and Communications

These findings draw parallels with Krause’s (2014) book *The Good Project*, in which the author asserts that, although it may be the case that relief agencies try to help people, in practical terms, the primary focus of their work is to produce projects. NGOs, Krause argues, sell projects to institutional donors, and, in the process, the beneficiaries of the project become their commodities. NGO communicator comments from this study expressed frustration at this business-led approach to media strategy.

“I’m not saying today that donors are influencing our decision, but, in many ways, if you are strictly looking at your main criteria being financial criteria, your main KPIs being your capacity to assign new projects, and new programmes, which is also a new tendency, and a new trend in many of the organisations who are very dependent, then you can definitely be influenced. Until when I’m going to have this flexibility and liberty within my organisation to do what I’m doing, which is really shedding the light on the problem, and not shedding the light of the opportunity, and the resource. I don’t know. It’s restricting every day.”

NGO Regional Director of Media and Advocacy

“We’ve learned from past crises that no matter how bold you are, no matter how outspoken you are, this government is going to take that decision based on its own interest, and that donor is going to give that money to that country or that country based on its interests.”

NGO Regional Media Manager West and Central Africa

7.2.4 MSF as a financial outlier

Where funding is concerned, MSF, which provides humanitarian medical relief, was found to be an outlier among the NGOs interviewed for this study. Unlike most other large humanitarian NGOs, MSF receives almost all its funding from individuals and private institutions rather than humanitarian donors. According to Heyse and Korff (2020), MSF obtains 95% of its income from 6.3 million non-state funders, thereby keeping government influence at a distance. This, the NGO says, ensures its operational independence and its ability to respond to crises at short

notice. As a result, its media work is considered by a senior manager interviewed for this study to be unaffected by obligations to major donors.

"We should call it a sort of separation between church and state in terms of fundraising and communication. So, most of our fundraising comes from private sources. It's like 97 per cent private sources. We take very limited institutional funds so there's no sense that fundraising – I'm going to say external fundraising – will impact on our decision making."

NGO Regional Director of Communications and Fundraising

Previous studies have highlighted MSF's institutional independence as a key factor in its media strategies. Fenton (2010) proposed that, to gain widespread acceptance in the mainstream media, MSF had to project a 'public image of neutrality' in a manner not dissimilar to the journalism ethics of objectivity and impartiality. Bourdieu's field theory, as employed by Scott et al (2023), is a helpful framework in exploring this further. Internally, Scott et al. say, fields are structured around the organisations considered 'purest' and most independent of state power, political power, and economic power, and therefore most committed to the core values of their specific fields. In the humanitarian field, Krause (2014) suggests the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and MSF are examples of such organisations because they are least dependent on external powers and commercial interests. All humanitarian organisations claim to adhere to a set of humanitarian principles and these can be considered the core values of the humanitarian field (ICRC, 1994; Heyse and Korff, 2020), Of the NGOs featured in this study, MSF's institutional independence from government influence means it is most able to demonstrate its adherence to the humanitarian principles of, for example, impartiality, neutrality, and accountability. This finding is further reinforced later in this thesis during an examination of the informational sources used by NGOs in their media products. Nevertheless, as with all other organisations featured, MSF was not found to be free from a dependence on the mainstream Western media, with a staff member interviewed for this study stressing its importance in attracting the attention of such outlets as a fundraising tool, regardless of the need to attract institutional donors or not.

"It is still hugely important. Yes, absolutely, as in for influence and fundraising and creating that civil basis support because MSF now is a much more global organisation. But the people

who support us in these countries where the radio reaches, for sure. And still as much as things have changed slightly, it's still the usual suspects that are some of the most important for us to influence."

NGO Regional Director of Communications and Fundraising

7.2.5 Monitoring, shaping, and censorship of NGO messaging by humanitarian donors

Donor influence on NGO media output was found not to be limited to questions regarding the possible release of funds. Most donors, including governments and inter-governmental organisations, are political entities, requiring consideration of their own political agendas when determining how and when to distribute resources and how to engage with the media during crises. For communication teams in NGOs, particularly those with donor-funded projects, navigating this delicate terrain was found to be imperative. Scenarios ranged from the encouragement by donors of proactive, awareness-raising media initiatives at one juncture to a demand for complete media silence the next, especially if a crisis was deemed politically sensitive.

"There are different steps, I'm just one of them, and everyone is going to distort the agenda. The priorities get distorted - not distorted but adjusted to everyone's wishes - and I'm the first to do that."

Humanitarian donor communications manager

In these delicate situations, professionals working in regions of East, West, and Central Africa note that donors can exert a significant degree of censorship over NGO media messaging, reinforcing the power imbalances mentioned above.

"I cannot write a PR without sending them the PR so that they can sign off. Or, if I would like to organise a content gathering activity, I have to seek for authorisation from USAID first, before going to the field. When the content is collected, at all the levels of every team or designation, I should seek approval from their office - at their regional office in Dakar."

NGO Communications Manager in Niger

"They were so closely involved. We were the ones involved from a safeguarding and quality and everything else, but they were seeing it before it got finalised. They were the ones that were asking to be part of the communications outreach plan. ECHO in the regional office and the ECHO HQ, I would say, had different reasons why they wanted it."

NGO Regional Head of Advocacy and Communications

"It's not a good thing, because it's like you have your hands tied and you cannot move. You cannot do things. Most of the time you suggest this kind of activities, they will say, 'Well, yes, it's good, but it's not needed now.' I don't know. Yes, this is the main challenge we have with donors."

NGO Communications Manager in Niger

ECHO (European Commission) and USAID (US government) were two institutional humanitarian donors specifically highlighted as seeking to control NGO narratives around funded projects and crises. In an interview conducted for this study, a representative from a donor organisation confirmed that political considerations can influence their organisation's media priorities, occasionally extending the impact to the NGOs they support. The interviewee provided insight into a specific instance where a directive to focus on communicating about a COVID-19 vaccination programme across Africa, as opposed to a potentially more urgent humanitarian situation in northeast Nigeria, originated from the highest echelons of the political system. Describing the decision, the staff member characterised it as a "top-down" approach.

"It was important for the Commission to show - to be perceived as - increasing its solidarity with Africans. I, for one thought it was not the way to do it and, second, the communications of it were botched, but anyway that's the directive I got. That was not from ECHO, it was from von der Leyen, the president of the Commission."

Donor Communications Manager

7.2.6 When the donor-NGO power dynamic is reversed

Whereas donors were often perceived as wielding significant influence in their relationships with NGOs, there were also instances in which these dynamics were reversed. For instance, ECHO, the humanitarian vehicle of the European Commission, does not directly implement humanitarian programmes itself. Instead, its funds are typically directed through NGOs or

United Nations agencies who are responsible for on-the-ground delivery. Consequently, a substantial portion of the European Commission's communication efforts, aimed at showcasing the impact of public funds allocated to a crisis, was found to rely heavily on the implementing NGOs or UN agencies to gather and disseminate communications content from these funded programmes. A donor staff member interviewed for this study challenged the notion that donors exert substantial control over how NGOs communicate about a crisis. According to the interviewee, NGOs usually prioritise their own institutional agendas over those of their donors. This can include NGOs being selective in sharing media content, sometimes sidestepping the expectation of close collaboration with donors in the communication process.

"Most of the communication, especially in this region, most of the communication NGOs or UN agencies do, is self-serving. We never get the photos. We're almost never mentioned. You know what? Fine, we're here to support the sector, they use it for the webpage and fundraising, and so on. Fine. It's the end goal, but we don't control much of it, we don't even see much of it on the standard basic regime, and so it's not always for a good reason, because, yes, they want to do their own thing and sometimes under our radar."

Donor Communications Manager in Africa

Building on this finding, some NGO communicators also described how they attempted to employ the media not only to encourage a release of donor funds, but also in an attempt to shape a donor's institutional priorities in line with their own so that future funding will be more suited to their own organisational objectives. This is not considered an easy task, but one interviewee described an occasion on which a donor announced a new pot of money to be distributed for protection programmes, but the NGO's own priority was focused on education in emergencies, and the protection of children, specifically. The individual believed that at least some of this money should have been prioritised for this, but there was apparently very little traction amongst the donors. As a result, the NGO faced a choice - be consistent with the ambitions and objectives of the organisation, which was likely to have little impact from a fundraising perspective, or to change direction and align with the priority of the donors. On this occasion, the NGO decided to continue to prioritise education and child protection in its regional media strategy and believe this led to an eventual change of direction from the donors.

"Interestingly, one month ago there was a senior official meeting doing the follow-up of this ministerial meeting still focusing on the same. There were 9 to 10 bilateral donors who have been putting education as a priority for them. There was a growing number of people who have been speaking about the children's crisis and the specific need for protection for children. We had been able to push out some new amount of research and analysis regarding the number of children unlawfully recruited by force. I'm sharing this example to say, in many ways donors, with their own criteria and the capacity to respond, particularly some big donors, are in a position to influence our decision in many ways. But I continue to believe that we are in a position to influence their own, not indicators, but the analysis of the indicators and the need to make a specific focus on the control to know that."

NGO Pan African Director of Media and Advocacy

7.2.7 Comparing the effects of humanitarian funding on NGO and UN media strategies

Through interviews with both NGO communicators and personnel from UN humanitarian agencies, this study facilitated a comparison of how different actors establish media objectives and priorities regarding humanitarian funding. Within the United Nations system, each UN agency employs distinct approaches to programme delivery, fundraising, communications, and advocacy. For instance, the World Health Organization (WHO) derives funding primarily from member states' dues and voluntary contributions from member states and other partners (WHO 2024). This funding model reduces the organisation's reliance on media as a fundraising tool. In contrast, UNICEF relies on voluntary contributions from various sources, including governments, foundations, the private sector, and the public. (UNICEF 2024). Some national bodies, like UNICEF UK, conduct fundraising activities on its behalf, contributing a significant portion of its annual income.

For UN agencies engaged in public fundraising, media strategies often align to some extent with NGOs also reliant on external funding. In certain cases, UN-branded organisations may even be categorised as NGOs themselves. For example, UNICEF UK operates as a registered NGO in the United Kingdom, raising funds for the global operations of UNICEF. However, UN agencies with guaranteed annual funding exhibit significantly different media strategies from NGOs. A UN media manager, formerly employed by NGOs, noted a clear shift in prioritisation upon transitioning to the UN.

“At [NGO’s name], messaging was very much about two things - advocacy or fundraising. Actually, maybe fundraising comes first because it’s a charity. It can’t function without those funds coming in. At WHO, and having moved to the UN, it was a real mind shift in terms of that prioritising because there was no need for fundraising. I found myself asking this question. You have to also remember, I’m only like 10 months in the WHO, so I’m still learning a lot as well. In the first few months, I found myself asking colleagues this question like, ‘Why are we doing this?’”

Like NGOs and humanitarian donors, UN agencies must carefully consider their political relationships when devising their media strategies. This study observed a prevailing trend among United Nations humanitarian agencies, wherein communications efforts were typically aimed at reinforcing and upholding norms rather than actively promoting significant change. For UN offices, the primary concern was found to revolve around maintaining political relationships, promoting the profile of the leadership, and satisfying member states, rather than prioritising institutional donor endorsements or engaging in bold political advocacy. Some UN workers perceived the execution of such media work as subdued and unremarkable, primarily aimed at avoiding potential disruptions to the governments to which the United Nations is accountable. While this approach aims to ensure accountability, it may not always be embraced by those responsible for its implementation. One UN media manager expressed scepticism about the communication plan he was required to implement, questioning the necessity of constantly emphasising positive interactions with governments:

“This is the communications plan. We’re going to get the RD to tweet X, Y, Z. He’s going to meet the Czech Prime Minister. We’re going to get a handshake. It’s going to go onto his Twitter feed. Then we’re going to get a big interview with Czech Television and he’s going to talk about how amazing the Czech Government is, blah, blah, blah.”

However, this pattern is not universal across all UN agencies. UN OCHA, despite primarily relying on contributions from UN member states, assumes the dual responsibility of advocating for and drawing attention to humanitarian crises to secure funding for UN Humanitarian Response Plans. Once secured, these funds are distributed among various humanitarian actors, including other UN agencies and NGOs. This dual role influences the decision-making of

OCHA communications staff in prioritising crises for media attention. Furthermore, UN OCHA's strategy may also involve advocating for the funding needs of other UN humanitarian agencies, which face constraints in speaking out due to their own political accountabilities.

"Right now, there are a lot of calls from WFP. I know they're saying that they're going to have to cut programmes because funding is not coming through. If that's the case, we're going to obviously try to shine a light on the crisis more urgently."

UN Communications Manager

Within the UN system, communicators identified stronger parallels with NGO media work for the UN agencies engaged in public fundraising. These similarities encompass both the perceived advantages and drawbacks associated with such an approach. On the positive side, the capacity for public fundraising and advocacy with less political accountability is viewed as enhancing an organisation's ability to tell compelling stories that resonate with the media. Conversely, on the downside, adhering to the media's preexisting structures may lead these UN bodies to pursue more dramatic news content, which must be gathered within the contexts of the possible bureaucratic and diplomatic wrangling of an organisation bearing the UN badge. Such content, if collected was also seen as more likely to promote stereotypical and outdated representations.

"Speaking frankly if you look at the media output of the big funds of the United Nations, the ones that are publicly fundraising, and I won't name names but they're the ones that are probably doing that media work that we would look at thinking, 'That's great.' They're getting all of this coverage, they're telling really compelling stories but are they challenging those stereotypes? Are they putting themselves in a position where they compromise the very agency of the stories they're trying to tell in order to be able to attract funds?"

UN Head of Media

"For the Maiduguri visit, gosh, it was a horrible trip taking me back. We, basically, went deep field. Oh, my gosh. We were meant to go there three days, but we only managed one day because of the wrangling. The UNHAS flight schedule was quite reliable. OCHA were quite strict about rules and who we could take. Then we also have the Nigerian government, who had originally signed off on the trip and said the military were happy with it because the military were protecting these areas from Boko Haram. so, we're only allowed able to operate

in those places because we have relationships with the government. That goes for Afghanistan and the Taliban as well. We to have relationships in place to enable us to deliver aid. Ultimately. We are never the ones in control. They are."

UN Head of Emergencies Media

This study found limited evidence of UN fundraising priorities significantly affecting NGO media outreach. Unlike with humanitarian donors, there was no clear evidence of UN agencies pressuring NGOs to focus on specific crises aligned with their own financial or strategic objectives. Instead, the primary influence of major UN bodies over NGOs communications strategy lies in the fact that, when a UN agency prioritises a particular crisis, it substantially boosts the case for news outlets to cover it, thereby assisting NGOs to raise awareness of the issue. An interviewee illustrated this dynamic with the example of the 2011 Somalia famine, where NGOs had attempted to raise awareness beforehand with minimal impact.

"It never really kicked off in as big a way as it should have done but there was a point when the UN started investing a lot of resources. In terms of their comms priorities, it became one of their biggest ones which I guess created-- if they're making a lot of noise about it then obviously there's going be more interest among journalists, among media, it's a good opportunity for us to then invest more to back that up."

NGO Head of Media

The UN's media prioritisation of a crisis was found to be especially beneficial for smaller NGOs with limited media influence and capacity. UN media activities play a crucial role in generating initial interest in a crisis, providing smaller organisations with an opportunity to align and pursue their own objectives in the wake of heightened attention.

"I guess it's that sort of reinforcement. If big agencies like UNICEF and so on are talking about an issue then it does create the noise that we can then jump on the back of I guess, particularly for an organisation like [NGO NAME] which is not as high profile as [NGO NAME] or so on. We can't always drive our own news agendas as much as a bigger organisation can."

NGO Head of Media

7.3 Organisational Stakeholders

Alongside raising funds, the other primary objective of NGO media teams is typically to help the organisation achieve its advocacy goals. Previous research has tracked NGOs' development into advocacy organisations (see, for instance, Hudson 2002; Cooper 2009; Fenton 2010) and, alongside this, a rising acceptance in political circles (Lang 2013; Keys 2014; Powers 2016). Agenda building in order to influence the mainstream media is seen as one of the most important ways in which NGOs advocate for social and political change. Just as there was largely a consensus among interviewees in this study that governmental humanitarian donors are influenced by mainstream media coverage, the same was also thought to be true for policy makers. Analysis of interview data reflects a prevailing belief within the humanitarian system that influential figures and decision-makers consume and are influenced by the mainstream Western news.

"I think it's important to have those relationships with the editors of the Six O'clock News or the editor of the New York Times, so you get featured in those places so that the people who make decisions read your articles or see your work."

United Nations Communications Manager

"We know that this government is, obviously, right-leaning, we know the Telegraph and Daily Mail, and I think, yes, we have two of the newspapers on Boris Johnson's desk every morning."

NGO Media Manager

These findings are in line with Powers (2018) who found that donors, government officials, and news organisations create incentives for NGOs to prioritise mainstream news coverage. This study found incentivisation to vary from crises to crisis and to be heavily contingent on the political sensitivities of the event at hand as well as the actors involved.

7.3.1 NGOs and the setting of advocacy objectives

At both the global and regional levels, NGO media and communications staff are typically situated within a broader communications and advocacy team. These teams set both long-term and short-term advocacy priorities, whilst maintaining the flexibility to respond to global events when necessary. The decision to place the media team within a broader advocacy department seems logical, aligning media output with the strategic political and campaigning goals of an organisation. However, for the NGOs examined in this study, such decisions were found to be often more complex than they might appear. Powers (2018) identified recurring debates within NGOs about the nature of their communication; whether the media should primarily serve fundraising, branding, or advocacy; and how these efforts align with organisational goals. Consistent with those findings, this study observes a similar level of internal debate over the accountabilities of NGO media departments.

"Although we do work with fundraising and we work with the Chief Executive and we work with Global Programmes, and we work around the organisation, the Executive Director of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns thinks she's got first call on the media team."

NGO Director of Media

A prevailing sentiment expressed during interviews was a preference among communicators to focus their media efforts on advocacy rather than fundraising. Earlier in this thesis, I highlighted a growing frustration among NGO communicators regarding the business-like nature of donor-focused media strategies, which some perceived as restrictive and, at times, in conflict with core humanitarian values. As one NGO Regional Director articulated, "Until when I'm going to have this flexibility and liberty within my organisation to do what I'm doing, which is really shedding the light on the problem, and not shedding the light on the opportunity, it's restricting every day". This desire to prioritise advocacy over fundraising objectives was particularly evident at the regional and country office level. Explaining this process further, an NGO Regional Communications and Advocacy Director emphasised the primary importance of alignment between communication priorities and advocacy objectives:

"I think the first factor that has the biggest influence is when it aligns with the advocacy vision for Western Central Africa for [NGO NAME]. That's because the comms and media sit within the advocacy team because, ultimately, the head of the department is normally an advocacy person by nature, there is a stronger focus put that the comms priorities align with the advocacy

and campaign priorities. Which means that they are basically given the first priority over anything else, to try and create a holistic approach in how we make advocacy and campaigning change happen."

NGO Regional Communications and Advocacy Director

NGO advocacy priorities were found to range from institutional mandates like Save the Children's focus on the rights of the child, the Norwegian Refugee Council's commitment to addressing displacement, and Care's emphasis on women and girls, to broader global or regional concerns such as climate change or education in emergencies, to more specific individual targets at a local or national level. If an organisation adopts a global strategy centred around an issue, such as climate change or economic inequality, its media team will then be expected to generate content that aligns with this agenda.

"We're an agenda organisation. So, we look very specifically through the lens of the needs of women and girls and particularly in humanitarian situations. So, gender in emergencies, and we advocate a lot for specific catered responses that should be more specific to women. And so, in terms of messaging, that's the sort of messaging we're looking at."

NGO Media Director

"That is, as I said, driven by our own core mandate, which is to support displaced populations as a displacement organisation. Now, the other thing which I'd say is driven by the international scene, which is the mixed migration issue, which is relevant to obviously, Europe, and the northern half of the planet, and obviously with everything that's happening now in Eastern Europe, it's very, very on-topic. This mainly focus on violations against migrants and refugees, pushbacks, policies, how policies are outlined differently when you are talking about different populations."

NGO Regional Media Manager

A strategic approach to media outreach that prioritises advocacy over fundraising can be considered an advocacy-first approach. In such a model, advocacy targets are identified before considering the priorities and influence of humanitarian donors and public fundraising. These objectives were found to be influenced by a variety of internal or external factors and may include a collaborative process involving consultations with the NGO's programme specialists,

country office teams, as well as external partners. This collaborative process was found to be most pronounced at the regional level.

"My public advocacy priorities are linked to the advocacy priorities of the region. These are based in collaboration with our programmes in countries. Basically, we have discussions with the [NGO NAME] specialists such as education, shelter, WASH, legal assistance, and so on, and discussing with them. Plus, obviously, in-country partners such as the clusters and other kinds of partner. Even sometimes governments, or at least ministers, or civil society as well."

NGO Media Manager West and Central Africa

An advocacy approach in which NGOs harmonise media strategies with the objectives of country offices and local partners, might be considered less likely to be influenced by humanitarian donors. As one NGO Regional Media Manager put it, "I would say they are much more at the end of the chain. We will decide on our advocacy priorities. Then, based on what we say, we try to trigger the reaction of our donors. It's not the other way around". However, as discussed earlier in this thesis, humanitarian programmes implemented by most NGOs are usually designed with a donors' priorities in mind. This is because they are seen as more likely to receive funding when this is the case. This, in turn, was found to influence the media prioritisation of a crisis by an NGO because having programme work in operation gives the organisation more legitimacy to speak about a crisis as well as the opportunity to gather content. As such, even when an NGO makes advocacy objectives aligned to their own programmes, these are still likely to be open to donor influence because they have probably already affected the programme design itself. Additionally, when NGOs consider larger institutional advocacy objectives, such as a wider focus on climate change or gender equality, the priorities of donors were also found to have the potential to influence such decisions.

"[It's] the same on media. If ECHO or the FCDO or big humanitarian donors are interested in particular issues, like, at the moment, the FCDO is very interested in gender, it's one of their big, big issues, that's potentially going to steer the direction in terms of media priorities."

NGO Head of Media

When NGO advocacy objectives take shape through collaborative efforts with external partners, it can allow them to share information and practices, but can also expose them to potential challenges. For example, humanitarian clusters are groups of organisations that work together in some of the main sectors of humanitarian action (UNHCR 2023a). Crisis responses are often divided into thematic areas, allowing organisations with expertise in a particular field to lead and coordinate activities. The World Health Organization, for instance, may lead the health cluster for a humanitarian response. This study found that the influence of such mechanisms can, at times, extend beyond the programmatic response to also affect advocacy objectives, and, as a result, ultimately, the media strategies of some NGOs involved. This influence was only noticeable at the regional or national level because clusters tend to be organised and communicate with each other within the country or region of response. Powers (2016) observed that NGOs engage with various humanitarian entities, including donors and government officials. This close collaboration, according to Powers, bestows "official legitimation" upon NGOs (Powers 2016, p318) but also makes them susceptible to possible adverse reactions if they later critique powerful actors within such networks, such as host governments.

7.3.2 MSF and communications as an operational tool

As was the case for its approach to fundraising, MSF stands out for the distinctive organisational arrangement of its media team and how this affects its advocacy priorities. Unlike conventional internal structures which tend to position media staff within a wider advocacy team, communications staff at MSF sit within the programme operations team, underlining how their communications and advocacy output is designed to bolster their humanitarian efforts above all else. This approach is designed to ensure that communication and advocacy decisions at MSF predominantly serve operational goals, rather than the conventional influence of wider fundraising or advocacy objectives.

"The ultimate decision makers are, in fact, our operations teams, because we see communications as something that helps our operations in most cases. So, it's almost like an operational tool rather than an advocacy one, and advocacy is another tool for operations. It's just like everything is around the operations."

MSF Media Staff Member

Communications staff at MSF were found to collaborate closely with operational teams, serving as advisors and actively engaging in strategic discussions. Their role extends to providing insights on how communications can enhance humanitarian responses. However, while the integration of communications and operations typically provides clarity regarding media objectives, it can occasionally be perceived as restrictive by the media staff.

"I'd say the biggest thing is that we have to fight as communications people, and I'm sure you have this, too, to put communications on the agenda of operations, because they're the ultimate decision-makers. They have to buy into it. They have to have been kind of educated on why that stuff communicates. What are the benefits?"

NGO Communications Director in East Africa

7.3.3 UN agencies and the setting of advocacy objectives

Advocacy strategies within United Nations humanitarian agencies were found to vary based on organisational political structures. UN OCHA, for instance, measures success in its media outreach uniquely compared to other UN entities. Achieving media coverage for OCHA was found to not necessarily be concerned with building the organisation's brand or satisfying its contributing member states. In fact, success for OCHA may come by facilitating an NGO to receive coverage for a piece of media about a crisis, rather than a direct recognition of OCHA itself. An OCHA Communications Director sheds light on this approach:

"We're not marketing OCHA. That's not the point. Nobody knows what OCHA is except people from the sector. Nobody really understands. That's fine. We just want the issues and the crises to be highlighted."

Contrastingly, the World Health Organization (WHO), funded by member states and led by politically appointed officials, operates with less flexibility in its public advocacy agenda. Communication efforts within WHO were found to largely involve showcasing how member state funds are utilised, expressing gratitude for government contributions, and executing pre-

planned media activities. The emphasis here was found to be on politically safe, pre-determined methods of media outreach, allowing meticulous control over the messaging.

"A lot of it, I'm not going to lie, is dictated by the calendar. It is very busy. Reactive events are just a pain in the ass because there are so much other proactive things because this is the UN again. We have all these UN days for every God damn thing under the sun. You have UN Tuberculosis Day. You have UN Healthy Air Day. You've got UN this, that day."

UN Communications Officer,

Most UN agencies, including the World Health Organization, who are accountable to all UN member states, are notably influenced by the imperative to uphold neutrality and steer clear of media content that could imply criticism or assign blame. Advocacy strategies for these organisations were found to often revolve around highlighting the positive contributions of member states while carefully managing and promoting the public image of the organisation's politically appointed leadership. The emphasis lies on projecting a positive narrative that underscores the collaborative efforts of member states and aligns with the organisation's diplomatic stance.

"The prioritising that I do has a political element to it now. It's like trying to see the bigger picture but also trying to place the RD [Regional Director] into a landscape with a view for his - what's the word? For his image, if that makes sense. He's hoping to become director-general one day. He wants to ensure that he is seen in the way that other member states will be like, 'Oh, yes, he's a good ticket.' That's my job now."

UN Communications Officer

"I know some UN agencies have to because they are involved. I remember at OCHA we had to do press releases about thanking Qatar for their funding because it was directly asked by Qatar to do a press release on that, so we had to write, but it's very different within NGOs."

NGO Regional Media Manager

There is limited evidence to suggest that the internal advocacy priorities of UN organisations, or the personal aspirations of their political leaderships, directly dictate NGO advocacy or media priorities to the extent that donor priorities might. Whereas the political nature of certain

UN bodies, coupled with their accountability to UN member states, including those potentially implicated in a crisis, emerged as a crucial factor influencing the UN's own media and advocacy priorities, this dynamic exerted a less obvious but still significant secondary impact on NGO media efforts. For instance, the UN's vocal stance on a crisis could create a critical mass of media attention, helping NGOs to generate their own coverage. Conversely, a UN agency's political decision to remain silent on a crisis could hamper an NGO's ability to bring attention to the same issue.

"They will not necessarily have advocacy objectives. Their main purpose will be talking about what they do. You'll see a lot of UN press releases mainly about what they are doing. Basically, the journalists, they don't give a shit about it. Sorry for my English. It's different objectives. Some UN agencies also have much less freedom of speech than we have obviously because they represent 193 countries."

NGO Regional Media Manager

7.4 Media Stakeholders

The media stakeholder category is linked to the ongoing prioritisation by NGOs of mainstream Western media and the adaptation of their content to secure such coverage. It describes how the NGO's pursuit of Western media coverage renders its content highly susceptible to influence from other powerful forces within the humanitarian system, including the media itself. The study reveals the following key findings:

- Humanitarian communicators persist in regarding the mainstream Western media as the most important type of coverage for publicising humanitarian crises.
- Although the existing news cycle plays an important role in shaping NGO media strategy, it is not seen as influential as the scale of humanitarian need.
- Powerful first-person testimonies and humanitarian statistics are identified as the most crucial content types for achieving coverage in mainstream media, in line with notions of media logic.
- A growing disillusionment among humanitarian communicators of the donor-focused approach to mainstream media agenda building is matched with a growing acceptance of the importance of new media and social platforms.

7.4.1 Prioritisation of mainstream western media

Consistent with earlier studies (see, for example, Fenton 2010; Cooper 2011; Powers 2016a), this research found humanitarian communicators to continue to prioritise the mainstream western media above all other types of coverage. This choice was justified by its perceived effectiveness in influencing decision-makers, appeasing humanitarian donors, and reaching the broadest audiences for fundraising and advocacy purposes. As succinctly put by a head of media at one UN humanitarian agency, "Maybe this is old-fashioned, but I think it's absolutely profoundly central for the very simple reason that, whether or not you're advocating for policy change or trying to raise funds, the demographics of people who are going to have agency over both of those are consuming traditional media - potentially online, but they're still going to banner news outlets and they're not on TikTok."

7.4.2 Addressing and challenging the existing news cycle

Previous studies (Fenton 2010; Cottle and Nolan 2007; Powers 2018) have demonstrated how NGOs often consider the existing news cycle when deciding on which crises to focus their resources and attention. Overall, this study found that existing levels of media coverage could influence an NGO's decision to prioritise one crisis over another, but that this was a less important factor than previously suggested. Although many interviewees stressed the importance of the news agenda in achieving media cut-through, as discussed later in the thesis, the quantitative results of this study indicate that most of the crises receiving the highest levels of attention from NGOs in their media output, were also the crises considered to have the highest levels of humanitarian need. Correlation between humanitarian need and NGO media prioritisation was only found to falter for crises deemed particularly sensitive to speak out about publicly. In fact, the more media savvy NGOs examined in this study were found to make significant efforts to challenge the longer-term news cycle, using their agenda building activities to promote the significance of lesser-known crises when the need was high. A regional media manager from one such NGO stated, "We always use the news cycle, but also, we try to come up with the news when we can. This is based on the information we have in-country or at any kind of level. That would be our strategy. That's also something most NGOs don't understand. Respect the news cycle, respect the momentum, or build it with information that you will have yourself and not the others". Nevertheless, almost all NGO communicators acknowledged the importance of existing media interest in shaping their activities, particularly

for quick onset emergencies. Crises already in the public discourse were perceived as requiring less time and fewer resources to make an impact.

"It's tricky to do forgotten crises in that sense. Like DRC, for example, is a usually important crisis, but we know that the media appetite is less for that. That's an external factor that is really important. If we don't get cut-through, there's less appetite for us, because the trips are expensive, but also within the wider organisation, to do it even though it would be demanded by country programme, the country offices in the DRC, for example."

NGO Head of Media

The existing news cycle was found to be employed to publicly position NGOs as relevant humanitarian actors in connection with an ongoing or breaking crisis. This strategic move is perceived as likely to be beneficial for both fundraising and advocacy purposes. A regional media manager from an NGO explained, "When there is a new development, an important development, like an attack on a school, an attack on an IDP camp, this is not necessarily linked to a specific advocacy objective, but it's part of our mandate in terms of protection, international humanitarian law, stuff like that. Obviously, we will position ourselves publicly."

Whereas an existing programmatic footprint might be important in terms of positioning an organisation in line with the news cycle, the opposite was also found to be a possibility. An NGO's own programmatic footprint can itself be reliant on the news cycle. An NGO may choose not to respond to a crisis at all if there is deemed to be insufficient media attention on it. This decision is driven by the perception that lesser-known crises are less likely to attract sufficient funding from donors. A regional director of media and advocacy explained this perspective, stating, "If you're in a country where there are fascinating needs but no media appetite, neither resource opportunity, nobody's going to go there. I could give an example of the recent decision which has been taken to go back to a country, and the going back to this country would need some serious investment, and the return on investment was very low".

7.4.3 The growing complementation of mainstream media and new media platforms

Whereas NGOs continue to prioritise the mainstream media, this study found a growing acceptance of the importance of social media platforms in agenda building activities related to humanitarian crises. It is important to repeat at this juncture that, whereas many major NGOs

have dedicated teams dealing with digital communications and social media output, the interview sample for this study was largely comprised of NGO staff with direct responsibility for mainstream media and news coverage. As such, findings in this study related to the use of online platforms were restricted to their use with relation to mainstream media brands, and their importance for generating news coverage. Yang and Saffer (2018) found that agenda building on traditional media and social media required different strategies. For instance, providing information subsidies, such as press releases, was found to powerfully influence traditional media coverage, this approach was less effective in influencing social media conversations. In line with Fenton (2010), this study found NGO communicators to believe targeting mainstream media coverage from well-known western news outlets would lead to a higher likelihood of their messaging being disseminated through a wider range of online platforms. National and international news outlets typically manage a variety of platforms, making the prospect of a story being disseminated across multiple channels appealing to humanitarian communicators. Consequently, it is perceived less as a competition between traditional banner outlets and new media but instead as an evolving complementation between the two.

If you can get a slot on BBC Six O'clock News, that is still the holy grail or Channel 4 in the UK or the New York Times or anything like that. Also, because they have an amplification on social media. Their stories get shared more on social media than other things."

NGO Head of Media

"For me, to be on the BBC with the possibility that something that we do in one studio will be used in different channels of the BBC in the UK, but also, if we do something on the World Service, it might cross over into UK coverage. That is probably the best exposure we can have."

NGO Director of Media

Whereas NGO media managers acknowledged an increasing investment in social media, particularly for fundraising purposes, the use of social media was found to not yet have reached a level where a digital or social teams holds equivalent power and influence as a traditional media team in an NGO. The media team was found to be central in setting media objectives and priorities. Aligned with theories of path dependence (Powers 2016a), this dynamic is likely to be rooted in the belief that, whether an organisation is advocating for policy change or raising funds, the actors perceived to have the capability to bring about such outcomes are still more likely to consume information through traditional media rather than social platforms. However,

in tandem with a growing sense of apathy and dissatisfaction among communicators regarding the donor-led focus of mainstream media strategies, there is an acceptance that alternative forms of coverage can also bring about the impact humanitarian communicators hope to achieve.

"I do think it's changing. I think, when I had earlier jobs, then the ultimate goal was always the Today programme and News at Ten, and a nice piece in The Times. People put much more emphasis on print media. It was the classics or broadcast slots that everybody really wanted to be on. Whereas I feel like now that's obviously still a big game, but it has become more diversified, I think, in terms of what the key targets would be. It's no longer just about the Today programme, there are plenty of online outlets and podcasts and AJ+ type video outlets and so on, that are big priority targets as well."

NGO Head of Media

"BBC Instagram is equally as relevant, as is the app, as is the Six o'clock News these days. I think the reach is so much higher on Facebook for BBC than it is for the Six and Ten."

NGO Head of Media

7.4.4 Rising dissatisfaction with the mainstream media focus

Scott et al (2018) conducted interviews with aid workers to explore their perspectives on humanitarian journalism. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that mainstream news falls short in producing adequate coverage of humanitarian issues and crises. Many respondents expressed the view that such coverage tends to focus on a limited number of crises, with story choices often unrelated to the severity of each emergency or the everyday suffering of individuals trapped in long-term or chronic issues. The results of this study align with these findings, revealing a dissatisfaction among some communicators regarding, for example, the ongoing adaptation of content to meet the media's requirements for drama. "The media quite often go for sensational, dramatic stories," observes a UN Communications Manager. "I think, for us, when you get a story that also shows again that, yes, okay, the situation is dramatic and these people have been displaced for eight years, but at the same time, you get in the story, a quote or two of the camp representative who was a young guy of 25, who's doing his studies at the same time as representing people. That sense of a bit more nuanced storytelling in terms of who these people are and the fact that yes, they are in

need, but they also have a lot of potential. I think when the story does manage to highlight that, I think we consider that it's a good media story. Unfortunately, that happens very rarely."

7.4.5 Humanitarian data and powerful human stories: the key ingredients for NGO agenda building success

NGO communicators almost unanimously agreed that two specific types of media content were particularly effective in garnering mainstream media attention. Aligned with the concepts of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) and news cloning (Fenton 2010), first-person testimonials and humanitarian statistics were deemed the most important content types for achieving mainstream coverage. While this finding is, itself, new, it aligns with established patterns of NGO communicators tailoring their content to meet media requirements, as observed in prior studies (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Powers 2015). Waisbord (2011), for instance, indicated that NGOs successful in securing media coverage largely conform to dominant journalistic norms.

Previous studies have criticised the news media for a regular focus on death tolls during humanitarian crises (Benthall 1993; Cottle 2008). Cottle (2008) described this phenomenon as a "calculus of death" embedded in the news values of Western media outlets, based on crude body counts, thresholds, and proximity factors such as geography, culture, and economics. Latonero and Kift (2018) argued that the use of death tolls dehumanises disaster-affected communities into data points. Despite such criticisms, this study finds humanitarian NGO communicators to rely on hard-hitting statistics such as numbers of displaced people, and numbers of starving children. This preference stems from the perceived significance of such information in catering to the news media's preferences. This preference is substantiated by studies into Reuters articles on the Nepal earthquake, where updated figures or estimates for those affected were commonly featured as primary news hooks (Scott et al. 2018)

"It's important to have some sort of data and statistics that we can talk around, I think, both in terms of something to make a catchy headline and something that's going to grab journalists' attention and grab the public's attention."

NGO Media Director

"Within the press release, we cannot stick to a personal story. We need also to have some, what we call "key effects". We need to have some clear and new data. We need to find the data that's

going to illustrate what we are speaking about, because the story will be difficult to reflect into a code. You can reflect that into a code, but this is not what's going to speak the most. The story is something that you're going to come with into a bureau or a story with a video, with a portrait and something like that, but the pressure is, if you want to have news hook, I think most important is to being able to explain the big picture in one simple sentences or one simple figure."

NGO Regional Director of Media and Advocacy

Glasman and Lawson (2023) assert that today's humanitarian sector is engulfed in a "data frenzy," and express serious reservations about the reliability of many figures now circulating in connection to crises. Their research recalls instances where various state authorities manipulated numbers as a means by which to capture international aid, delegitimise competing actors, and justify military intervention. Importantly, as discussed later in this paper, both NGO and UN communicators also expressed significant concerns regarding the collection, manipulation, politicisation, and withholding of some of the humanitarian data commonly utilised in NGO media products. Despite these concerns, the data frenzy outlined by Glasman and Lawson can be said to extend to media outreach, and the persistence of such practices is, perhaps, understandable. After all, capturing the attention of the mainstream media is often deemed a thankless task for communicators covering certain parts of Africa, where crises tend to be neglected by Western outlets (Wilke et al. 2012; Sobel Cohen et al. 2017; Nothias 2018). Furthermore, in cases of prolonged, protracted, or intricate crises, such as some of those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, identifying comprehensible and newsworthy angles that can continuously capture and recapture media attention can pose considerable challenges. The use of humanitarian data is seen as one of the few ways to make such crises more appealing.

"We've become obsessed with making sure that we have a new number to throw out there. It's still the name of the game really, original data and personal stories which complement each other."

NGO Media Manager

7.4.6 The combinations and manipulation of humanitarian data by NGOs

As outlined later in this paper, NGOs were found to rely primarily on secondary statistics rather than their organisation's own primary data when crafting their media content. Such statistics are considered constitutive of journalistic content (Curtin and Maier 2001) but communicators well-versed in media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) recognise that second-hand data inherently possesses lower news value compared to freshly acquired data. Consequently, some NGOs were found to try to find ways to present second-hand statistics used in their content as being newer or distinctive from their original form, described by one interviewee as engaging in "media maths". Such calculations can come from a questionable empirical basis, with techniques including combining two or more distinct data points to fabricate a "new" statistic or breaking down a larger numerical value into a more compact figure.

"There's the big picture, top-line data, which normally we get from the UN. It'll be '25 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in Somalia or Afghanistan', or whatever. Those will come from the UN to be honest because NGOs don't have the capacity to do that data for themselves. Then [NGO name] will then divide it by two or multiply it by whatever and say this is how many children are in need."

NGO Head of Media

"You either crunch UN statistics and try and go into them in a bit more detail to get a regional stat or a country stat or then divide it by 365 or whatever or you just have to go with more color. Then if you've only got color, that color alone doesn't really make a story."

NGO Head of Media

Powers (2016) found NGO press officers to consider accuracy to primarily mean sharing research without distortion to the press or public. NGO media staff spoke of the importance of checking facts with researchers. Several humanitarian communicators interviewed for this study expressed unease at some of the apparently crude mathematical processes by which NGOs can generate these new statistics. According to Glasman and Lawson (2023), humanitarian organisations have been known to manipulate humanitarian data for various reasons including to legitimise a project, maximise funding or minimise the risks. This can be done intentionally or unintentionally, but the latter is more common than the former. As a result, humanitarian numbers are often guesstimates or rough estimations. The findings from this study suggest that attracting the media can be added to the above list of reasons.

"To me, just the fact that you are bringing different elements from different sources and putting them together and building a narrative about it, that is questionable to me."

NGO Media Manager

"It's purely guesswork based on the number of children per family and so on. It's not just [NGO name]. I'm saying [NGO name] because that's an obvious one, but others will do it for the number of elderly people or the number of whatever. It's always surprised me how often we would do that and get loads of coverage out of it."

NGO Head of Media

UN communicators were found to have far less freedom to combine datasets or breakdown the primary data for which their organisations were often the original publishers. One UN worker suggested that as soon as a piece of data has been manipulated in some way, it was in danger of losing its perceived neutrality. The same interviewee suggested that UN bodies are slower, more thorough, and less reactive than NGOs, never manipulating primary data without a long fact-checking process, even though they recognise such techniques as a helpful way of gaining media attention.

"It just won't get pushed through. For example, when the UNHCR stat came through, I was thinking, 'Oh, I wish I could really break this down and be like one child a second is--' I was told 'you have to wait'. That data has to be verified. It did come from UNICEF about two weeks later. That's another part of working for the UN. Again, I know [NGO] are a lot more agile and quick and putting out data, but have also come under criticism from the sector and the UN for putting out incorrect data."

UN Emergencies Media Manager

7.5 Political stakeholders

The final category of stakeholder is concerned with how political factors within crisis-affected regions or countries affect NGO media output. It particularly examines the challenges of the intricate triple role sometimes played by major humanitarian NGOs, acting not only as aid agencies but also as news providers and advocacy organisations (see, for example, Cooper 2009; Fenton 2010; Powers 2018; Scott et al. 2023). As established earlier in this thesis, NGO

communicators rely on humanitarian statistics and compelling first-person testimonies to secure coverage in Western media. Lawson (2021) demonstrated a reliance within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of statistical sources, such as the United Nations and large international NGOs. Scott et al. (2022) asserted that such sources have become the "primary definers" (Hall et al. 1978) of a crisis. This gives additional importance to the validity, quality and trustworthiness of humanitarian data used by NGOs in their media outreach.

7.5.1 NGOs and the use of second-hand humanitarian data

As triangulated by the quantitative results still to come, this study found that most humanitarian data used in NGO information subsidies was not collected or originally published by the NGOs themselves. Instead, it was most frequently sourced from publicly available humanitarian datasets, factsheets, or situation reports (sit-reps). Often, as outlined earlier, separate data sets are combined or basic mathematical equations are applied to this secondary data to make it appear newer and, as a result, both more unique to the NGO publishing it and more attractive to news outlets.

"Most of the data are from several organisations being put together. I would say a third of my data comes from ReliefWeb or online platforms, but for humanitarian actors, I would say that's also something surprising. All the information is out there and accessible to every journalist if they dig in a little bit. Sometimes I go to ReliefWeb, I will take the latest sit reps. I will combine them with our information, and I will do a topic on them. The journalists could do the same, but they are not. This is also surprising. This is good for us because we still have new information, but I always ask myself, 'Why are the journalists always calling me asking me for information?' Because two-thirds of the information are being posted online already."

NGO Regional Media Manager West and Central Africa

When we consider previous research, there are two most plausible explanations for why journalists do not seek this information themselves. Firstly, they do not have time. The primary reasons journalists accept information subsidies are to shorten the time required to evaluate sources of the information and to lower the cost of newsgathering (Gandy 1982; McPherson 2016). Fenton (2010) found most NGOs to believe that because of the space journalists are now required to fill and the time pressures in which to do it, their copy was picked up more

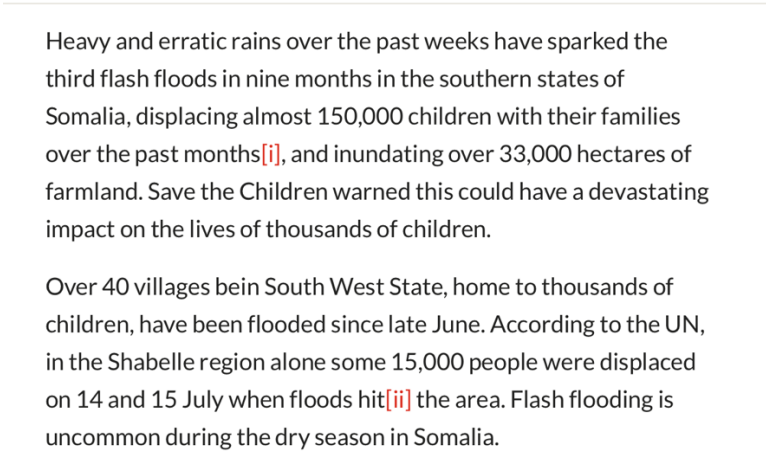
readily and more rarely got changed. The second reason is that NGOs and other humanitarian organisations are perceived as trusted sources of information (Lang 2013, Lawson 2021). It is considered part of the service they provide to produce a "range of information materials," including reports and policy statements for various stakeholders such as donors, government officials, and journalists (Powers 2018, p7). As such it might be considered pointless for journalists to do this digging themselves. Indeed Lawson (2021), says using data provided by NGOs and the United Nations allows journalists to maintain credibility without needing to verify or challenge the information used therein. Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen (2017) highlighted how journalists rarely challenge the data they receive and resultingly often reproduce the narratives of their sources.

Most humanitarian communicators interviewed considered the United Nations to wield substantial control over the collection, distribution, and flow of data within the humanitarian system, often in collaboration with host governments and other partners. This is confirmed by the United Nations humanitarian agencies themselves, who all list data collection and sharing as among their primary institutional roles. NGO communicators expressed a reliance on UN data for creating newsworthy angles. They said they often incorporated UN data into their work to increase its newsworthiness and legitimacy in the eyes of the media. As revealed later in this thesis, a content analysis conducted for this study confirmed that the UN is the most common source of humanitarian data used in NGO press releases.

To illustrate the use of UN data in NGO media output, the headline and opening paragraph below, taken from a 2020 Save the Children press release, demonstrate the utilisation of UN statistics by an NGO to enhance the news value of a humanitarian story. To most readers, it might reasonably be assumed that Save the Children is the owner or originator of the statistic shared in the headline – that the information might, for example, stem from recent data collection efforts by teams on the ground in Somalia or are derived from Save the Children's programme activities in the country.

23 JULY 2020 - SOMALIA

150,000 CHILDREN FLEE WITH THEIR FAMILIES AS FLOODS HIT PARTS OF SOMALIA



Heavy and erratic rains over the past weeks have sparked the third flash floods in nine months in the southern states of Somalia, displacing almost 150,000 children with their families over the past months[i], and inundating over 33,000 hectares of farmland. Save the Children warned this could have a devastating impact on the lives of thousands of children.

Over 40 villages bein South West State, home to thousands of children, have been flooded since late June. According to the UN, in the Shabelle region alone some 15,000 people were displaced on 14 and 15 July when floods hit[ii] the area. Flash flooding is uncommon during the dry season in Somalia.

Figure 7.1: Save the Children Somalia Press Release: July 2020 (Save the Children 2020)

In fact, UN OCHA was the original publisher of these statistics, as revealed by a footnote on the press release. In a manner similar to how a journalist might search for new humanitarian stories, NGO press officers said they use public datasets to search for statistics that enable them to develop a fresh perspective on a crisis to which they are responding. Despite a widespread preference to do so wherever possible, NGO communicators said they seldom used their organisation's own data because very few NGOs have the capacity to collect it regularly or, at the very least, at the levels required to craft impactful news angles such as the one illustrated above.

"It's really hard for most organisations, even the bigger ones. If you don't have your systems in order to really easily get programme data or cluster data out of the country, then it's tricky."

NGO Head of Media

For communicators working in African countries, where drama and originality are seen as even more important for achieving news coverage (Wilke et al. 2012; Sobel et al. 2017; Nothias 2018) the use of second-hand data has become embedded as standard NGO media practice.

"I'm working in a region where most of the crises are neglected by the media and the international community. It's an important matter to make them attractive to the media for more coverage. What we do usually is we always try to find an interesting hook or media angle. We try to think in a journalistic way. We come up with new figures. We come up with news, and if we have news that we will be able to get in a few advocacy messages, such as, '160,000 new

displaced within a month in Burkina Faso, blah, blah, blah. Situation is very bad, blah, blah, blah,' then what do we need to do?"

NGO Regional Media Manager

7.5.2 The questionability and credibility of humanitarian data

In addition to its role in generating compelling news angles, UN data was also identified as being politically safer for use by NGO media teams, whose output might otherwise risk upsetting local authorities in certain countries and endangering access for aid provision as a result. The perceived safety of using UN data was attributed to two primary factors:

- NGO communicators believe UN agencies to frequently collaborate closely with host authorities in collecting or publishing data, leading to the perception that it has received government sign-off for public and, as a result, is less risky to use.
- The UN brand is widely recognised for its reputation for fairness and accuracy, establishing credibility for an NGO in the eyes of journalists, the public, and other relevant stakeholders.

"When you're looking at a typical humanitarian situation, the data we're going to, in terms of quantitative data, we're going to OCHA. The role of OCHA is to coordinate all the information and to gather all the information and to put that into an accessible way somewhere. We assume that the data from OCHA are a result of a process, internal and external, with the government, giving you the right picture."

NGO Regional Media and Advocacy Director

UN communicators interviewed for this study spoke of the crucial importance of data to the perceived sectoral expertise of UN bodies which allows them to speak from a viewpoint considered grounded in evidence, which offers UN bodies a degree of agenda setting power without the need to resort to drama and emotion in the ways that some NGOs might. Furthermore, the additional value of being the producers of the data often adopted and used by NGOs in their own communications means this agenda setting power can stretch beyond the original press release or report produced by the UN bodies, into various NGO information subsidies too.

“We use UNHCR data to talk about the refugee crisis because we know that they are the most trusted. In turn, we did a press release last week around the fact that-- it’s probably gone up again, but one in two children from Ukraine is now a refugee. That has been what I noticed, and I don’t think we’re the only organisations that do this, but that stat is being used everywhere, whether we’re featured in the coverage or not. Save The Children might use it, CARE International might use it, we have a great advantage I suppose of helping shape messaging and the zeitgeist beyond us, like in the core of the coverage. Although often we are at the core of it, as well. Yes, it’s great. It also means, I think that position comes with responsibility as well.”

UN Emergencies Media Manager

Interviews for this study found workers at multiple UN humanitarian agencies, including UN OCHA, to express concerns over the quality of some of the datasets their organisations made available in the public domain.

“The UN still has a very strong brand. It has weight and it has legitimacy. The thing is, when you’re on the inside, and you see how these figures are put together, you’re like, ‘What the hell? Seriously.’ Because it is imperfect, because it is complicated, because the UN does things the way they’ve done it for the past 40 years, and they need to change and we’re slow to change.”

UN Communications Manager

Franklin (2011) says public relations professionals that generate factually well-informed and newsworthy stories can enhance the plurality of sources from which journalists can construct their stories. Glasman and Lawson (2023) say discrepancies in data can occur due to poor training, lack of technological infrastructure or human error. The efficiency and accuracy of the initial data collection process can present multiple challenges, especially in the hostile environments prevalent in many African humanitarian contexts. Crises quickly increase the demands for numbers Glasman and Lawson (2023) say, but at the same time, make the production of numbers more uncertain than ever. An NGO Director interviewed for this study,

with extensive experience in West and Central Africa, raised serious doubts about the accuracy of data collection in humanitarian settings.

"I don't think anybody today, is able to say with accuracy, how many children have been recruited by force in Nigeria, how many children have been leaving school in DRC, how many children have been dying from malnutrition in Somalia. By combining different sources of information, you can give a story with something which reflects more or less the reality, but no one in these countries have a sophisticated system which could allow them to publish some very solid data. Not one of the systems supporting these countries, like the UN system and a regional system and so on, will be in position today to cover all the geographical space and needs to give accurate information, which is up-to-date and reflecting footings or reality."

NGO Regional Director of Media and Advocacy

The use of big numbers like the example above, Glasman and Lawson (2023) say, risks representing disasters as an intrinsic characteristic of the groups of people who have been quantified into the statistics, and not because of factors beyond their control. If not taken with caution, the authors say, humanitarian numbers tend to naturalise inequalities and depoliticise injustice.

The politicisation of humanitarian data emerged as a significant concern among interviewees for this study. Altay and Green (2006) stress that a disaster only becomes a disaster when someone who is authorised to declare it as a disaster does so. "In other words, declarations of states of emergency and disaster are political and legal acts with specific requirements and authorities" (Altay and Green 2006, p 477). Glasman and Lawson (2023) point out that data discrepancies can often arise due to politicisation by humanitarian actors, including host states. UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office identified the politicisation of data, especially concerning mortality and famine, as a fundamental issue leading to suboptimal data collection, analysis, and utilisation (Urquhart et al. 2022). Manifestations of data politicisation can vary, including denials of movement for data collectors, prolonged approval processes, the need to renegotiate results in-country, and the censorship of findings (Urquhart et al. 2022). It's important to recognise that the United Nations, often tasked with disseminating such data, is answerable in some capacity to nearly every government worldwide, including those implicated, to various extents, in the suffering of individuals affected by a given crisis. Some

communicators interviewed expressed concerns, particularly when local authorities are involved in data collection or distribution, about the potential for humanitarian data to be influenced by national or local agendas.

"Data is political. Very political. WHO runs a number of online data dashboards. There's a COVID one. It's got a map and you can click. It's slightly interactive. You go to Turkey and there's nothing there for COVID vaccination. Why is Turkey like that? Because they aren't telling us. They don't want to report it. It is power."

UN Communications Officer

"In some countries, the data is gathered by the authorities or the government themselves, and then they share it because they don't want us to collect it. Obviously, we don't know if this is real data, or this is politically arranged."

NGO Communications Manager in West Africa.

In any of the modern institutional roles of major humanitarian NGOs, be it news provider, aid provider, or advocacy group, serious concerns might be raised if one of the most common means of communicating about a crisis is considered by a wide range of experts, including NGO and UN staff themselves, as being susceptible to politicisation. This is particularly true when such content is considered the "primary definer" of humanitarian crises (Scott et al. 2023). McPherson (2016) reported how journalists, editors, and human rights activists repeatedly reiterated the importance of credibility to the success of NGOs. Powers (2015) found NGO press officers to consider accuracy to primarily mean sharing research without distortion to the press or public. NGO media staff spoke of the importance of checking facts with researchers.

"Some countries don't report on-- they don't present the data. They don't want to say that their maternal death rates are so high. They don't release the information because they know that that paints them in a bad light and they don't offer access and any journalistic permits because they don't want that information to be told."

NGO Head of Media

Concerns over the politicisation of data were found not to be limited to one country or region. Huge food security issues still plague various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including in South Sudan, where various interviewees believed there have been famine-level hunger situations in

recent years. One NGO Head of Media expressed concern that, despite joint-agency assessments and data collection having been carried out, the government had been reluctant to release the results due to the perceived ramifications of having presided over such a catastrophe. According to Maxwell (2019) the government-led analysis of data in South Sudan made even discussing the possibility of populations experiencing famine a taboo topic. International agencies feared potential reprisals, such as denial of work permits and programme suspensions, if the analysis became too political, Maxwell said.

"They're hugely politicised and the government in South Sudan has refused to approve them. As a result, they don't get publicised. It's that really difficult situation. Everybody knows that there's a problem, but nobody can actually publish the data to share it."

NGO Head of Media

Such remarks were not limited to South Sudan but extended to nearly all countries currently embroiled in a severe hunger crisis gripping East Africa. South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia were all cited as experiencing critical needs while also contending with limited information flows.

"When we're talking about famine and hunger and food security and so on, in places like Ethiopia at the moment, parts of Somalia, then humanitarian agencies in general have lots of anecdotal data of starvation and malnourished children and really terrible situations, but, because of security or because of government restrictions and so on, it's really hard to get accurate up-to-date data. The situation is really bad, but we just don't have the data to prove it."

NGO Head of Media

7.5.3 Famine, political sensitivity, and the inability to speak out

The term 'famine' has long been recognised as politically charged. Amartya Sen (1999) famously argued that famines do not occur in democracies because democratic governments are incentivised to avoid them to maintain public support. Conversely, some might now suggest that famines are less frequently acknowledged in East Africa due to governmental suppression of data confirming famine conditions, coupled with hesitancy from other actors to address the issue openly. NGO communicators noted a tendency to avoid using the term directly in public

communications, opting instead for phrases like “famine-like conditions.” This cautious approach partly stems from NGOs’ efforts to maintain positive government relations and is also influenced by internationally accepted protocols regarding famine declarations.

“Sometimes there is concretely a famine somewhere, like IPC Level 5, but saying that there is a famine is very political, and most of the government will not be willing to admit that there is a famine on their soil. That’s why IPC 5 now has two different categories like Catastrophe and Famine. They can say it’s IPC 5 Catastrophe, but it’s not Famine. You see, it’s just sometimes a matter of political dialogue.”

NGO Regional Media Manager

Marcus (2023) identifies four degrees of what he labels ‘faminogenic behavior’ by governments. The first, ‘intentional’ infliction of mass starvation, refers to when governments intend to kill large parts of the population en masse. The second, ‘recklessness’ refers to occasions when government pursue and implement policies that cause famine despite knowing the associated risks The third is ‘indifference’ is when a government takes no real action to prevent or divert a famine it has not caused. The fourth, ‘indifference’ is when a government is unable to respond or prevent a famine through lack of capacity to do so. According to de Waal (2024), most modern famines fall into category two, reckless. ‘In other words, when a famine occurs, we have good reason to assume that its cause is political agency,” de Waal says, adding that the creation of famine by political or military action can be considered a crime against humanity.

“There’s been a lot of discussions about the use of the world famine and there was a big push in the region to say, “By the way, there’s an almost famine situation happening in some countries in the region.” The countries where you cannot talk about that, you can change the wording. You can talk about malnutrition centers. You can tell a different story in the story, but you cannot tell the story as it is. The influencers there who stopped us telling the story of the government and also the fear from the country director and whatever they’re hearing from decision-makers at the national level, I would say.”

NGO Regional Media Director

"The UN is really dependent on what national governments, where they work, allow them to put in the datasets. Ethiopia, for example, doesn't accept some of the UN data, so that makes it really tricky for us to work with UN data there. Also, they say yes or no, for example, on IPC numbers, basically the food shortages. That is a global trusted system. It's UN-run, basically, but it's also a political decision to yes or not declare famine, which is IPC 5. We can't say something's IPC 5 even though our people on the ground see children dying. We can't say it's famine even though our people see children dying of hunger in Sudan or in Somalia, if the UN hasn't declared it."

NGO Head of Media

Powers (2015) outlined a series of primary values guiding NGO media efforts, including a dedication to accuracy and evidence-based reporting. According to Powers, NGO press officers prioritise accuracy by ensuring research is shared with the press or public without distortion, a sentiment echoed by his interviewees who emphasised the critical importance of fact-checking with researchers. McPherson (2016) highlighted the repeated emphasis placed by reporters, editors, and human rights activists on the significance of credibility for NGO success. Fenton (2010) argued that NGOs could enhance their credibility and be perceived as 'authorised knowers' by journalists. However, this study suggests a shift in the culture of humanitarian NGO press offices, with a potentially diminished focus on accuracy and a heightened emphasis on safeguarding programmes, personnel, and media access.

"When it is not deteriorating from a security point of view, sometimes we are also facing some internal difficulty with the country where we are operating, which are some countries who don't want to hear about food insecurity. Because the image of the country was going to be deteriorated, so don't speak about that. Whatever you say, don't speak about that or there is few words that you cannot use. Don't use the word famine at all. There is some countries, if you operate there, don't use the word famine. There is some country where if you operate it in and you want your license to continue to operate, don't speak about the children recruited by force."

NGO Regional Director of Media and Advocacy

Such comments raise memories of some of the darker moments of the past, particularly in relation to countries like Ethiopia, where NGOs were previously accused of being implicated in the 1984 famine due to their alignment with government narratives around the crisis (Franks 2013). It might be considered naive to assume that humanitarian data is immune to the same forces that affect other sectors where the control of information means power. As one UN worker remarked, "I actually would argue that the humanitarian sector, probably more so than many others because it has the capacity to make or break the image of countries, nations, regions, individuals so much. Humanitarian data can, in an instant, make a tourist destination seem like 'forget about it.'"

In certain complex and insecure humanitarian environments, accuracy was found to not always be the foremost concern for NGO communications staff when using humanitarian data in their media output. This study found that assurances that UN data is often agreed with and signed off by host governments makes the use of such figures in media outreach to be both institutionally safer and personally reassuring for individual communicators. This might hold true regardless of whether the communicator is completely comfortable with the data's veracity or not.

"Particularly in sensitive countries, like in Ethiopia, for example, it's much less risky for us to quote a UN figure than for us to come up with our own. There's safety and security sense."

NGO Head of Media

"This is the official data. That's why, to me, it is not a problem. There is no risk for me, and I'm protected, because even if somebody says, 'Oh, where do you find these data?' I know where the data is from. You can go to OCHA and check and even on the website you can find it."

NGO Communications Manager in West Africa

"I guess it's seen as the most credible. It's the most widespread. They are our partner in many parts of the world and so therefore I think it's seen as legitimate to use theirs. If they get it wrong, 'Oh, it's a UN stat.'"

NGO Head of Media

"Anytime I use data from OCHA, to me, it is okay. It is okay because OCHA is working with the government, and coordinating everything with the government. To me, there is no risk. If

the data is not accurate, there is no risk because we consider that OCHA is the first organisation to produce, or to control or to coordinate all the response within a country."

NGO Communications Manager in Niger

7.5.4 MSF and the use of programmatic data in media outreach

As was the case for its fundraising and advocacy priorities, Médecins Sans Frontières was found to be an outlier when it came to the use of humanitarian data. A communications director interviewed for this study underlined an MSF's organisational policy to avoid using data from external sources where possible.

"It's never other organisations'. No, it's always our end because that's something we don't do. We don't subcontract our work. We like to go all ourselves. So, yes, it has to come from our projects and that's where we only feel like we have legitimacy to speak on what we're doing ourselves."

NGO Media Director

These qualitative insights were triangulated by the quantitative findings discussed later, which revealed that most humanitarian statistics featured in MSF's press releases were derived from clinical or hospital data obtained from their own humanitarian programmes rather than from secondary sources. This preference may be partially attributed to the organisational structure discussed earlier, where communications workers are situated within the operations team at MSF. However, one interviewee highlighted that the primary reason for relying on the organisation's own data was the trust placed in its own methods and the integrity associated with it. Furthermore, the staff member expressed scepticism regarding some of the broader UN statistics utilised by other NGOs.

"Sometimes what those figures claim is different to the reality that we see in the field. Sometimes it's like 'this many people are at risk of starvation' and we'll be like 'Oh. In our projects why are we not seeing this? And we're not seeing that at the moment. Yes, in three months' time we might see that and we're worried about that possibility. But that's not the reality that we face now."

NGO Media Director

7.5.5 Threats to NGO staff and programme safety

Politicisation was found not to be limited to accessing information about crises but extended also to physical access to crisis zones for communicators as well as monitoring and intimidation of communicators once present in these areas. Physical access to crisis zones was considered crucial by humanitarian communicators, primarily because it was seen as essential for gathering first-person accounts and professional-standard news content. It was also perceived as part of the role of some communicators to bear witness to crises as they unfold. Each humanitarian crisis zone is inherently unique, often with fast-moving and highly complex contextual factors, sometimes including volatile security situations and a lack of infrastructure such as transportation and accommodation options (Altay and Green 2006; Donini 2010; Jahre and Jahre 2018). As a result, it is near-impossible to generalise findings that capture the complexities and idiosyncrasies of accessing different sorts of crisis zones without resorting to simplification (Minear et al. 1994). However, thematic analysis identified certain challenges that most NGO communicators suggested they had to overcome to achieve access for many crises. Threats to staff and programme safety were identified as two of the biggest challenges faced by NGO communicators working in East, West and Central Africa. According to the Aid Worker Security Database, 124 humanitarian workers were killed in 2022 (Humanitarian Outcomes 2022). Almost all the major crises currently playing out in East, West and Central Africa involve elements of insecurity or armed conflict. Crisis response teams and communications staff must grapple with very real threats every time they make a strategic decision over whether to speak out about a crisis. For some crises, access for communications staff, especially international workers, was simply seen as too risky much of the time. Speaking out about a crisis considered too sensitive can also be off the table if those with the power to veto such communications consider the security risk is too great. In-country security advisors, operations directors, and country directors were seen as playing an important role in assessing and managing risk. Their decisions can often lead to friction between themselves and communications teams who often consider highlighting wrongs, acting as a watchdog, and being outspoken as important parts of the identity of the organisation.

“With Boko Haram in Nigeria. We had a country director who didn’t want us to mention Boko Haram at all, at all, because he thought our office will be blown up if we did. That meant that when the girls were kidnapped from Chibok School, we didn’t talk about it. Which we look back on now with horror, but in an opposite reality at the time, when somebody’s telling you

that security and safety of staff is the top priority, you can't really argue against that. The perceptions of risk might be very different in different places. We might think we need to talk about Boko Haram, and they probably won't blow up our office. If you're the country director, all you care about is not having your office blown up."

NGO Director of Media

For most humanitarian organisations, the primary operational objective of their work is to deliver a humanitarian response and to maintain access to affected populations. This can be for both ethical and financial reasons. Speaking out in the media was seen by many interviewees as having the potential to jeopardise this core objective, particularly when coverage may appear critical of local authorities who can, and sometimes do, suspend NGO activities based on the content of press releases or public statements (Médecins Sans Frontières 2021; Norwegian Refugee Council 2021). Both NGOs and UN agencies must step lightly in their relationships with governments and authorities in areas in which they are delivering aid and communicators said this can manifest in speaking out less about crises in countries where the risk of intervention was perceived as high.

"I think the big issue is around governments because ultimately most NGOs' primary objective is to deliver programmes, and whatever form that takes for different organisations. For a lot of country teams and programme teams, obviously, the foremost priority is to maintain access, and if they think that us speaking out in the media or hosting journalists or someone is going to threaten that, which it often can, then that's the big restricting factor, and it restricts both what countries or crises we choose to focus on."

NGO Head of Media

Minear et al (1994) examined the influence of the media on crisis response and specifically on the interplay of influence between the media, governments, and humanitarian organisations. They concluded that the influence of the media on government officials and public policy tended to be more pronounced in cases where official policy had yet to be clearly defined. Previous studies have found western governments to incentivise mainstream media coverage from NGOs, who see it as an important tool for reaching decision makers with advocacy messaging (Cooper 2009; Lang 2013; Powers 2016). Contrastingly, in this study, and in certain

sensitive cases, host authorities were found to counteract the incentivisation measures of international governments by taking measures to *disincentivise* media activity on the ground through the threat of withdrawing access for aid delivery. Nigeria was consistently highlighted as a country in which the media messaging of NGOs was strongly influenced by both perceived risks to staff safety and concerns over the possibility of a heavy-handed government response to coverage.

"There are quite a few examples of that in the Sahel at the moment where, with the conflict situation, we are very careful what we say around recruitment of children, what we say about security challenges, how much we talk about the kidnappings in Nigeria because we know the government's interlinked into that. How much we would talk about funding or corruption or things like that. We don't talk about a lot of things because we know that the government would be annoyed with us if we do. Therefore, we just don't talk about it."

Regional Head of Media and Advocacy

"Nigeria is the worst country by far. I've been once in Nigeria. It's, there's no point for me to go to Nigeria to produce content because any kind of public advocacy will not be possible. The government will just kick us out straight away, so, this is an impossible country for me to do any kind of public advocacy, for example."

NGO Regional Media Manager

Fears over staff and programme safety have created a tangible climate of fear underpinning media activity at some of the world's largest NGOs operating in East, West and Central Africa. As important components of civil society, NGOs are regarded as organisers of political action (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Lang 2013; Cooper 2009; Powers 2018) and, in theory, serve as a counter-voice to the mainstream media narrative. Alongside this, scholars have identified a rising acceptance of NGOs amongst government circles (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012; Lang 2013; Keys 2014; Powers 2016). However, the results of this study suggest that, due to the possible risk to staff and programmes, such advocacy efforts will only really take place in relation to subjects and crises considered less likely to upset governments in certain countries. In one example, media power was even found to be used to flatter a government in order to open up access.

“There was one product we did to particularly appease that particular government and there was a clear pro-government agenda that we wanted to advance in order to gain more space, more access, on the ground. We were happy to basically run that. We had a similar conviction to the general government policy at the time but there was a lot of back and forth, and pushback back from both the regional and the country office. There was quite a clash because the country office was, to them they deemed it critical that they speak about this particular issue. I can’t give the concrete example here, I’m sorry. It was particularly to make that government happy so they can gain more ground and gain more access.”

NGO Regional Media Manager

The climate of fear was not found to be restricted to the NGO space. Host governments were also found to be able to exert their influence over UN agencies and humanitarian donors too, and this could, occasionally, be passed on to NGOs in different ways, such as through politicised humanitarian data or silencing by donors on projects deemed politically sensitive.

“There’s a massive issue also of security. The EU funds weapons. The EU is training military missions and so on. We support governments. The EU is not neutral in these conflicts. We, ECHO are, but not the rest of the institution. Many, most partners say, ‘Can we please, under security, have a delegation and not use your logo.’ We don’t discuss it, which I find fantastic because then we get onto the real stuff. What’s interesting. Talk about the crisis, describe the response and then mention us and that’s it.”

Donor Communications Manager

7.5.6 Monitoring, sign-off, and censorship of media content by local authorities

When an NGO communicator is given clearance to physically access a crisis, the influence of local authorities can still be an important factor on the content they produce. This study uncovered various examples of authorities further seeking to control the narrative, including by demanding to view and edit NGO content before it was released. An NGO communications worker producing stories in Sudan noted how the humanitarian commission monitoring NGO activities at the local level established a rule that any NGO communications material had to first go to them for sign-off.

“I worked in Sudan during the Darfur crisis and Bashir’s government - very restrictive, very controlling of visas and permits and I got into trouble with the government department quite

often for what we said publicly, and I got pulled down to their offices and shouted at on a fairly regular basis and so on. But they never insisted on signing approval and signing stuff off. I don't know, I feel like they would have done if they thought they could, but that wasn't an issue. We put stuff out and then got into trouble afterwards. Whereas now, it's been technically a more progressive government and supposedly more open to NGOs and so on, and yet, in that sense, it's actually got worst in terms of the level of approval that's needed and so on. I do wonder whether some of these governments are becoming bolder in how much they can enforce this kind of stuff."

NGO Head of Media

Scott et al. (2018)'s analysis of the conflict in South Sudan found multilateral institutions such as the United Nations to be most cited at 27% with NGOs second most cited at 19%. The higher prevalence of the United Nations was attributed to difficulties faced by journalists in accessing the country. The results of this study suggest that the relatively low prevalence of NGO citations might also be due to difficulties NGOs face in speaking out in South Sudan and that this may well be the case in other countries in the region too. Power imbalances between local staff and authorities can accentuate these issues further.

"There's some self-censorship, but then there's also direct censorship, where they get to approve the content that goes out, which is something that we would generally push back on as a principal, but does definitely happen, particularly when it's produced by local teams who have to have day-to-day relationships with these bodies and rely on them for access."

NGO Head of Media

These issues draw parallels with the reported treatment of journalists in many countries affected by crisis. Tactics employed may include media intimidation, the suppression of information, and the spread of government propaganda (Mwenda 2007; Rubongoya 2007). Reporters Without Borders (2023), for example, found press freedom in South Sudan extremely precarious and said journalists in Nigeria are often monitored, attacked, and arbitrarily arrested.

7.6 Summary

In summary, this study's qualitative findings have demonstrated, to varying degrees, the influence and impact of external humanitarian actors on NGO media strategy and production. The results suggest an often-unwinnable scenario in which the dual roles of NGOs as aid providers and news providers can clash, occasionally compromising the fundamental values of impartiality and credibility underpinning both fields. NGO communicators grapple with these external factors, ranging from the tailoring of their content to meet the priorities of international donors to seeking outside approval on their media messaging. The politicisation and control of the core content required to generate mainstream media coverage, coupled with the possibility of physical threats to NGO staff and programmes, have created a pervasive climate of fear underpinning humanitarian communications in these regions. It is a problem with the potential for far-reaching consequences, including the compromised impartiality and accuracy of humanitarian news outlets reliant on NGO information subsidies to shorten the time and cost of their newsgathering; the limited autonomy of NGOs in shaping their own media messaging; and the public and political misunderstanding and misrepresentation of crises. It is now important to gain a degree of measurable, quantitative insight into the extent of these external influences on NGO media output. To do so, the next chapter presents the results of a content analysis of more than 300 NGO press releases designed to establish the most prevalent and prominent information sources used therein as well as two in-depth case studies used to demonstrate and explain some of the more complex findings.

Chapter 8 – Quantitative Findings

This chapter presents the outcomes of a content analysis involving 329 NGO press releases concerning humanitarian crises in East, West, and Central Africa published between 2018 and 2022. It specifically addresses research questions 3 and 4 whilst also aiming to triangulate many of the qualitative findings shared in the preceding chapter. Those qualitative results revealed that communicators deemed humanitarian data and compelling personal stories to be the most important content types for achieving mainstream media coverage. However, obtaining and using such content was found to be frequently impacted by political factors such as the control and manipulation of data, threats to physical and programme safety, and restricted access to crisis zones. External humanitarian actors, especially governments and major donors, were found to influence the NGO narrative on crises through, for example, censorship, access restriction, and the approval of media products.

The quantitative findings outlined in this chapter include:

- United Nations bodies emerge as the most prevalent and prominent sources of statistical humanitarian data in NGO press releases.
- Crises perceived by communicators as being the most politically sensitive due to risks to staff safety and programme suspensions are spoken out about less often by NGOs
- NGOs typically prioritise humanitarian need over the news agenda when publicising crises, except for ultra-sensitive crises where the threat of suspension is deemed particularly high.
- In general, NGOs give significantly greater prominence and prevalence to their own staff in press releases and statements than they do to affected citizens and other humanitarian actors.

8.1 Contextual findings

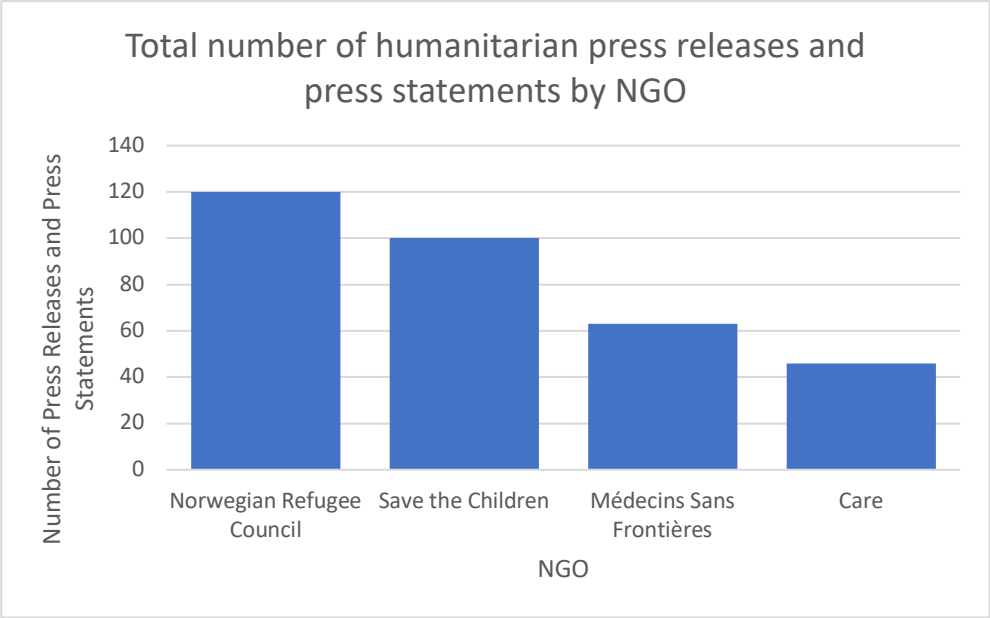


Figure 8.1: Total number of humanitarian press releases and press statements on East, West and Central Africa by NGO

A total of 329 press releases and statements were analysed. During the period of study, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) was found to be the most productive communicators on humanitarian crises in East, West and Central Africa with 120 press releases or press statements published, constituting 36.5% of the total sample. Save the Children was the second most productive with 100 press releases or press statements, constituting 30.4% of the total sample. MSF were third with 63 releases or statements (19.1% of total sample) and Care fourth with 46 (14% of total sample). This variation in sample sizes among different organisations introduces a potential source of representation bias into the study. For example, the higher number of NRC press releases could disproportionately influence certain themes or trends identified in the analysis. Therefore, when making comparisons between organisations, it is important to recognise this disparity. To address this and to enhance the robustness of the analysis, much of the data was normalised by calculating percentages to account for the differences in sample sizes and this allowed for a more equitable comparison between organisations. Additionally, the triangulation of quantitative findings by the qualitative insights discussed in the previous chapter allowed findings related to each of the organisations to come to the fore, irrespective of the volume of press releases.

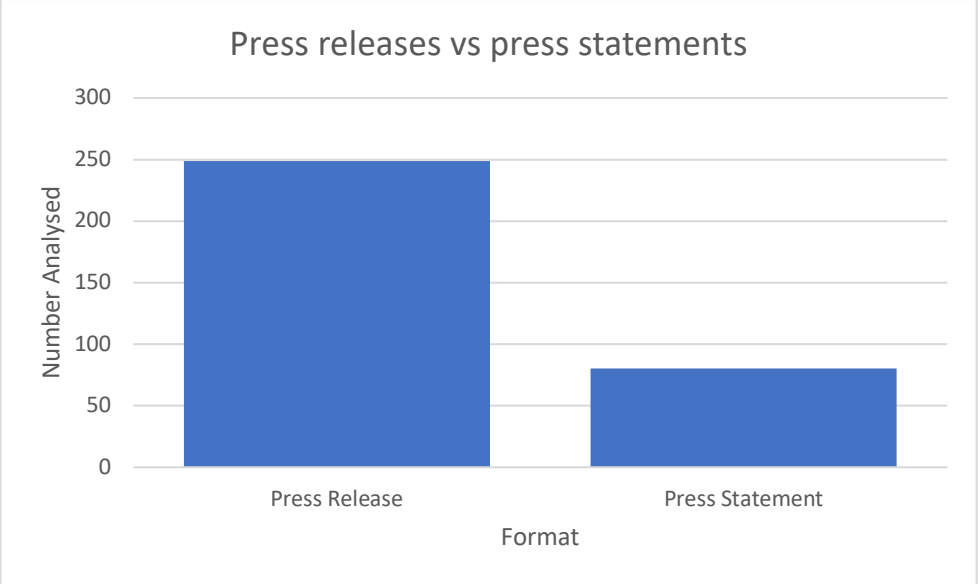


Figure 8.2: Breakdown of total number of press releases and press statements published

The sample was comprised of 249 press releases (75.7% of total sample) and 80 press statements (24.3% of total sample). Both formats are considered forms of official communication issued by organisations to convey information to the media and the public (ACE, 2024). A press release tends to involve proactive communication announcing significant developments related to the organisation in question. A press statement is typically reactive and addresses a specific event, development, or issue (The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2024). The results displayed in Figure 8.2 suggest that NGOs were more focused on proactive media outreach by a ratio of around three to one during the period studied.

8.2 Primary topics of press releases and statements

Concerning the primary themes addressed in the press releases and statements, four dominant topics emerged: displacement and refugees; conflict and insecurity; hunger and drought; and security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers. The most prevalent topic of press releases and statements was “displacement and refugees” (N69), comprising 21% of the total sample, followed by “conflict and insecurity” (N55) with 16.7%, and “hunger and drought” (N52) at 15.8%. These topics aligned with the prominent major crises playing out in East, West, and Central Africa during the study period, which were characterised by events involving hunger, conflict, and the consequential or pre-existing displacement of affected populations. These

included major malnutrition crises affecting multiple countries in East and West Africa, as well as civil violence and displacements in countries such as Sudan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia.

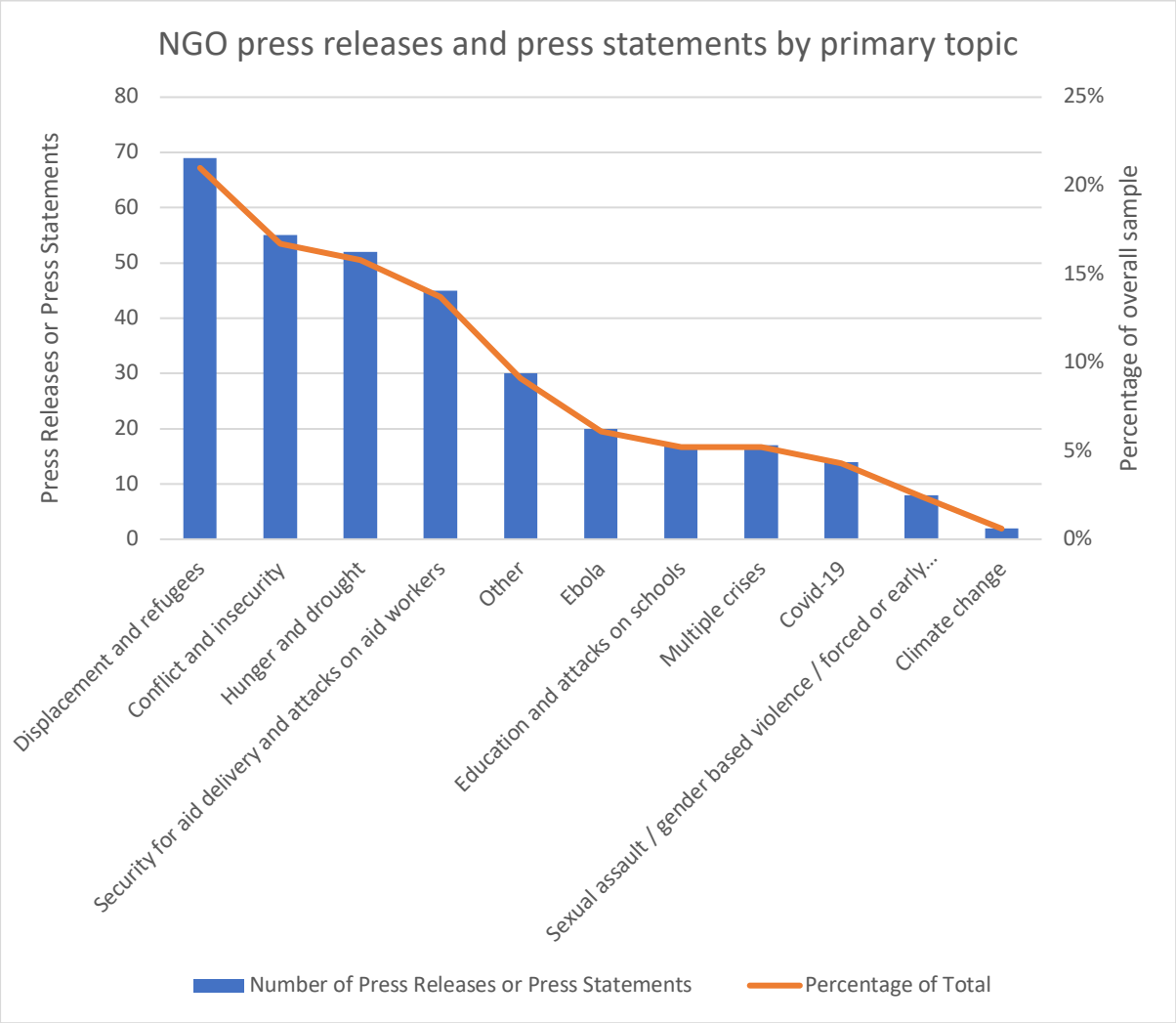


Figure 8.3: Primary topics of NGO humanitarian press releases and press statements

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Norwegian Refugee Council had the highest number of press releases and statements in the sample and, in its programmatic and advocacy work, is primarily focused on displacement and refugees. Hence, there was a risk of representation bias in the high proportion of stories covering this topic. A closer look at the data finds that N39, or 32.5% of the total number of NRC press releases or statements, were primarily concerned with displacement or refugees. In comparison, for Save the Children, the total for this topic was 14 press releases or statements, comprising 14% of the organisation's total output. For Care, the total was 7 press releases or statements or 15.2% and for MSF, the total was 9 press releases or 14.3% of the organisation's output. Resultingly, it is reasonable to conclude that the higher number of NRC press releases or statements has led to an element of

representation bias here, and any reading into the results should keep this in mind. Another point to consider is the potential intersectionality between these three main categories of crisis. For example, both conflict and extreme food insecurity typically lead to displacement. Therefore, these results should be considered holistically and to align with the complex nature of the major crises studied in countries including Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and DRC, all of which, for example, included crisis responses involving conflict, hunger, and displacement. These findings, to some extent, align with previous research suggesting NGOs achieving news coverage tended to focus on dramatic coverage (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Van Leuven and Joye 2014).

8.3 Prevalence of security for aid delivery as a press release topic

Notably a significant number (N45) of press releases or statements were found to focus on security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers, with this topic constituting 13.7% of the entire sample. Strikingly, this ranked as the fourth most prevalent topic overall, surpassing the combined mentions of Ebola, Covid-19, and climate change. This finding reflects the underlying levels of conflict in major crises mentioned above but also appears to triangulate qualitative findings that a climate of fear surrounds NGO media activity in these regions. This suggests that concerns related to the security of aid workers and ensuring access for aid delivery are increasingly important considerations for NGOs. However, these results also present a fresh perspective, challenging some of the qualitative findings and previous studies which suggested that NGOs tend to avoid discussing sensitive issues or crises, due to the threat of suspension or retaliation from other actors (Riffe 2002; Kennedy 2004). While this avoidance can still be seen in many cases, this study identified instances where organisations proactively used their media outreach to appeal directly for safer access and, on occasion, to critique the management of crises by local authorities. This suggests a more diverse approach by some NGOs in using media output to address security concerns and advocate for better crisis management. For example, a press statement from MSF issued in response to the prevention of an ambulance from passing a military checkpoint in Cameroon reminded all parties of their humanitarian responsibilities. Further scrutiny of the data suggests that this outspoken approach to public communications regarding security for aid delivery was primarily driven by two of the four NGOs analysed. MSF, particularly, stands out in this regard as this category constituted the most prevalent topic across all the organisation's press releases or statements during the study

period, totalling 24 releases and accounting for 38.1% of its output. NRC published 14 releases on this topic, constituting 11.7% of its total output. In comparison, Care issued 5 press releases or statements (10.9% of total output), and Save the Children, 2 (2% of total output). NRC, whilst registering a similar percentage to Care in terms of press releases or statements on this topic, also contributed substantially to the overall prevalence due to NRC's higher number of press releases and statements overall. NRC publicly asserts its commitment to humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality, emphasising the need to speak out when required. In interviews conducted for this study, a staff member based in West and Central Africa reiterated the organisation's role as not only a traditional humanitarian NGO but also as a watchdog. The staff member acknowledged the associated risks but emphasised that being outspoken is integral to the organisation's identity.

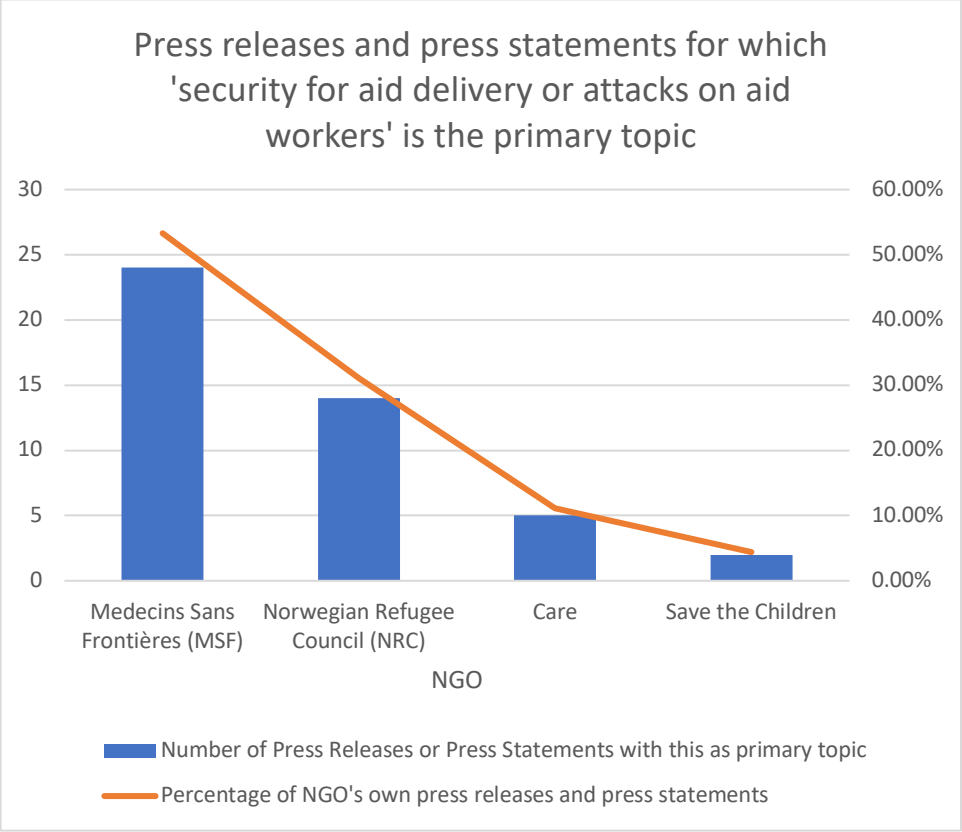


Figure 8.4: Number and percentage of NGO press releases and press statements in which 'security for aid delivery or attacks on aid workers' was the primary topic

The fact that MSF, an NGO providing health and medical services, spoke out more than twice as frequently about security for aid delivery than any other topic can be connected to qualitative comments from this study, explaining how communications staff at MSF sit within the organisation's operations team and that communications is primarily used as a tool to support programme delivery. Figure 8.5, below, demonstrates how issues related to conflict such as

"security for aid delivery or attacks on aid workers", "conflict and security", and "displacement and refugees", were the three primary topics of all MSF press releases and press statements, ahead of, for example, health-related topics such as Ebola, malnutrition, or Covid-19. This reinforces the idea that media outreach is primarily being used to advocate for the safe delivery of MSF programmes and access to affected populations. As MSF receives very little institutional funding from humanitarian donors, it can focus its media output on issues that matter to its own programmes, rather than prioritising its media to attract donors. However, as discussed later in this chapter, the tendency by MSF and NRC to critique local authorities more frequently in their public statements has led to suspensions to aid delivery for both organisations. These findings are in line with Van Leuven et al (2013) who found that MSF press releases were often used to counterbalance the "official" message coming from political representatives or contending parties. Fenton (2010) stated that MSF's projection of a 'public image of neutrality' had helped it to gain widespread acceptance in the mainstream media as a credible source, and Krause (2014) said MSF can be considered one of the 'purest' examples of organisations in the humanitarian field because they are least dependent on external powers and commercial interests.

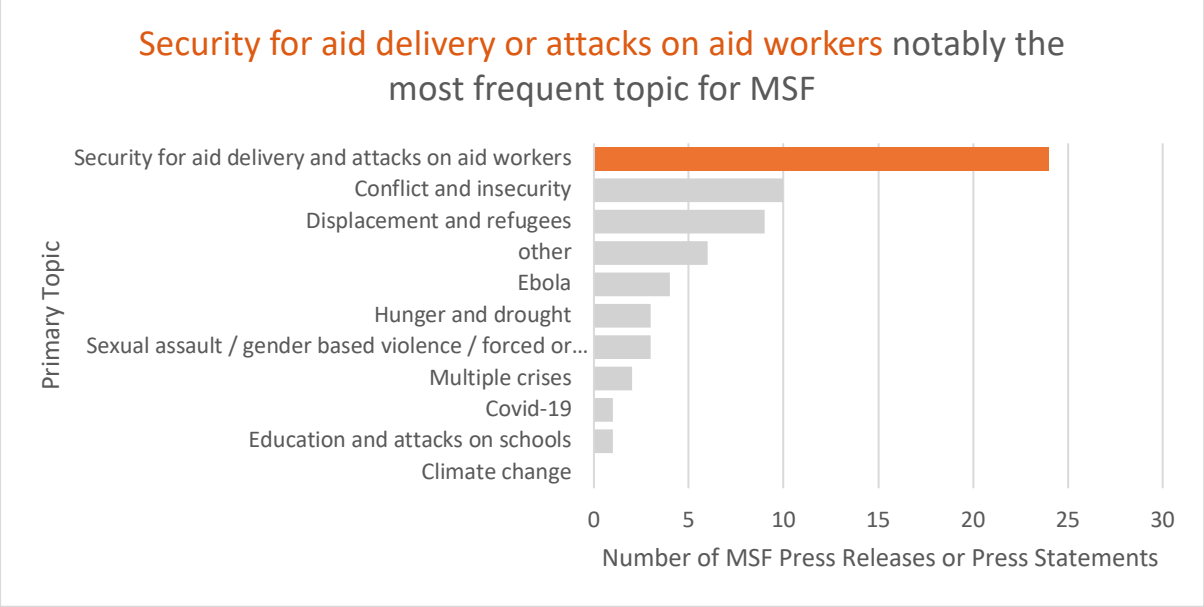


Figure 8.5: Primary topics of MSF press releases and press statements

8.4 Statistical source prevalence in NGO press releases and press statements

Consistent with the qualitative findings, the results of the content analysis confirm that United Nations agencies and related bodies are the most prevalent identifiable sources of statistical humanitarian data in NGO press releases and statements addressing crises in East, West, and Central Africa. Figure 8.6, below, presents the prevalence of all statistical data sources, ranked by the number of press releases with at least one identifiable instance of each source. Two noteworthy observations immediately emerge. Firstly, the number of unnamed or unclear sources significantly surpasses any identifiable sources. 175 press releases or statements, constituting 53.9% of the total sample, contained at least one piece of humanitarian data without an identifiable source. This points towards a culture of poor data sourcing practices within NGO press offices. Secondly, among all identifiable sources, UN OCHA stands out as significantly more prevalent than any other, including the NGOs that published the press releases themselves. At least one identifiable instance of UN OCHA data appeared in 97 press releases, or 29.5% of the total sample. This figure is realistically likely to be higher due to the substantial number of statistics with unidentifiable sources. These findings emphasise the prominent role of UN OCHA in shaping NGO communications on humanitarian crises.

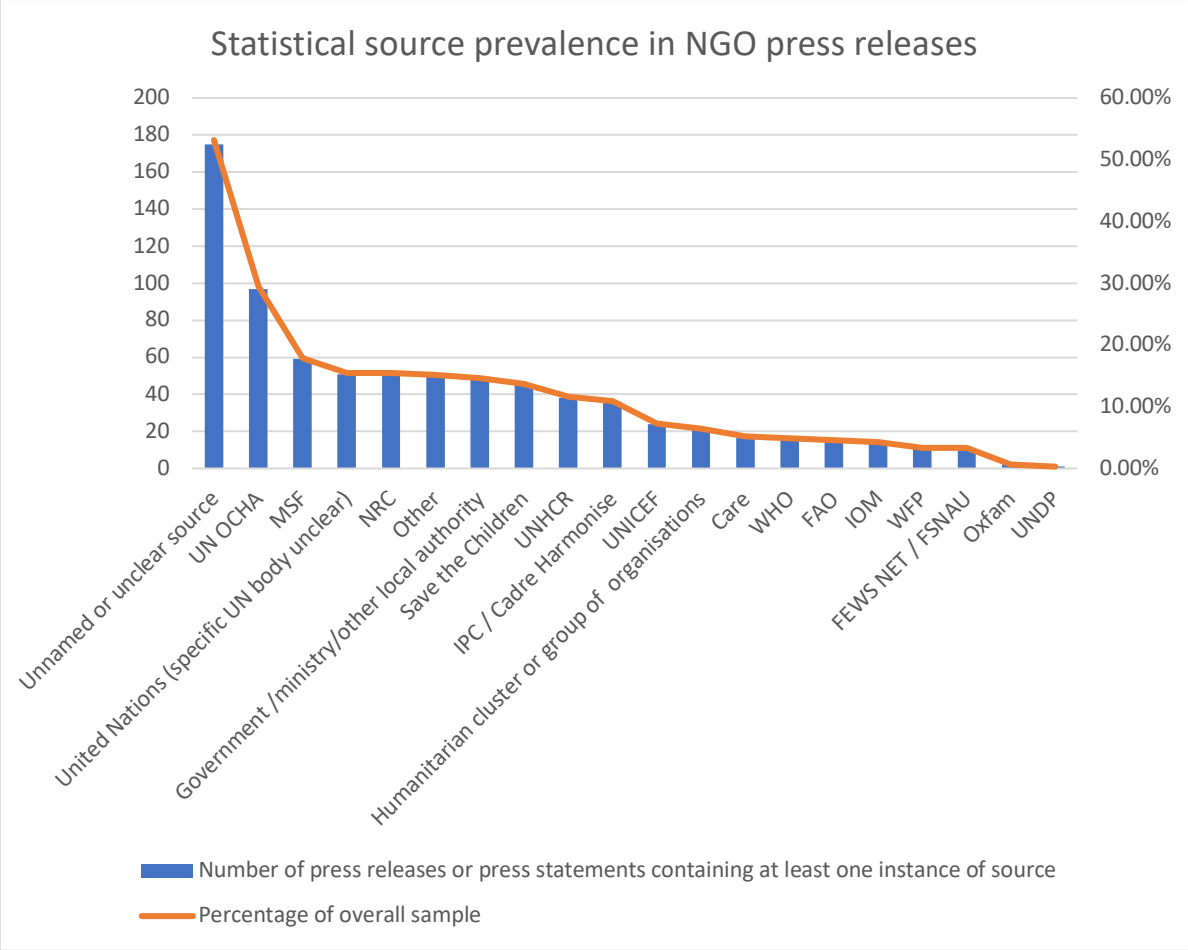


Figure 8.6: Sources of statistical humanitarian data in NGO press releases and press statements

Findings regarding poor sourcing practices brings into question certain elements of previous literature concerned with the increased professionalism of NGO media teams. Various scholars have charted increases in the media logic of NGO news teams (see, for example, Cottle and Nolan 2009; Waisbord 2011). NGOs have been said to commit considerable resources to their communications activities and to facilitate news cloning (Fenton 2010) through the employment of journalists and other media professionals in press office roles (Cooper 2009; Powers 2018; Wright 2016). According to Cottle and Nolan (2009), this helps aid organisations to know "exactly what the media require" and to incorporate this into their professional practice. This finding, and others yet to come, suggest that the widely reported rise in NGO news professionalism may have reached the peak of its upward curve. It also draws further similarities between NGO communicators and journalists. For example, Lawson (2021) demonstrated a reliance within humanitarian news coverage on a narrow range of institutional sources such as the United Nations. Using these trusted sources, which enjoy high levels of public confidence, allowed journalists to maintain credibility without needing to verify or

challenge the information used therein, Lawson says. Fenton (2010) says the ability to news clone with consistency and rigour may be relatively simple but is also time consuming. This finding, when triangulated with the qualitative results, suggests NGO communicators are likely to rely on similar second-hand sources to journalists and to take a similarly lax approach to source verification.

Interestingly, MSF was found to be the third most prevalent statistical source across the entire sample, despite the fact it published far fewer press releases and statements than both NRC and Save the Children (see Figure 8.6). MSF was a statistical source in 59 press releases, constituting 93.65% of its own sample and 17.9% of the overall sample. In line with comments from the qualitative chapter, these results confirm that MSF frequently uses its own data within its media output. NRC appeared as a statistical source in 51 press releases or statements, which is 42.5% of its own sample, and 15.5% of the overall sample. Similarly, Save the Children appeared as a statistical source in 45 press releases and statements, which is 45% of its own sample and 13.7% of the overall sample. Care appeared as a source in 17 press releases, which is 37% of its own sample and 5.2% of the overall sample. This triangulates qualitative findings that these NGOs typically rely on second hand data sources.

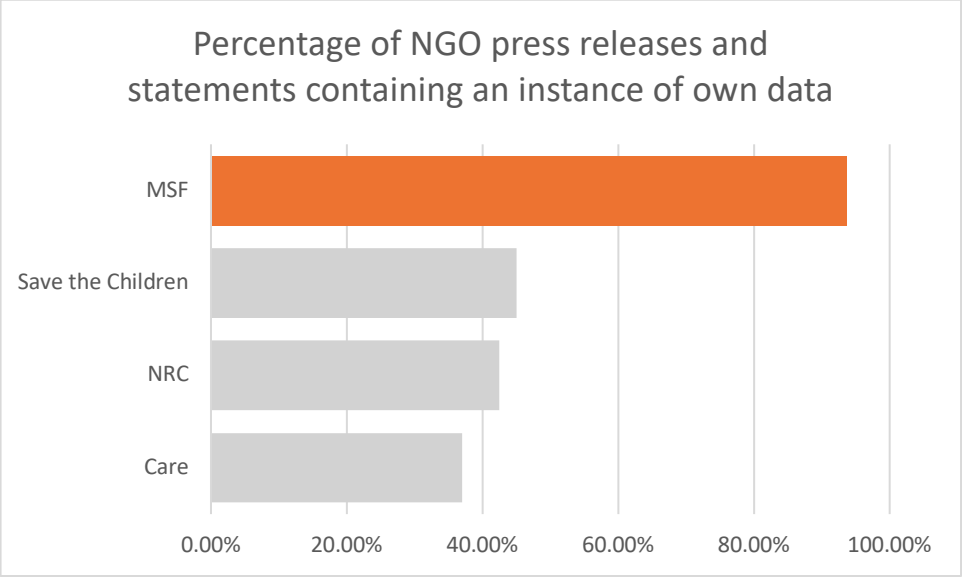


Figure 8.7: Percentage of NGO press releases and statements containing an instance of own data

Comparatively, Figure 8.8, below, presents the percentage of NGO press releases or statements containing at least one identifiable instance of UN OCHA data. MSF emerges with a very low usage of UN OCHA data, using it in just 2 press releases or statements, which is 3.2% of its

sample. In contrast, all three other NGOs demonstrated a far higher reliance on OCHA, with usage rates of at least 30% in releases or statements.

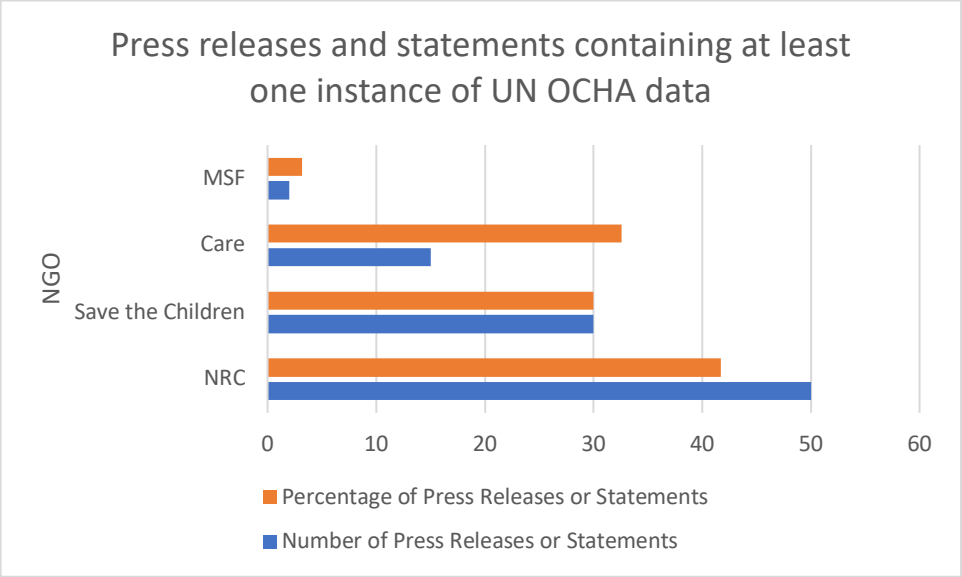


Figure 8.8: Number and percentage of NGO press releases and statements containing UN OCHA data

Consequently, considering the concerns raised by communicators reported in the qualitative findings of this study, it can be argued that MSF is less susceptible than the other NGOs studied to the influence of humanitarian data considered vulnerable to politicisation, censorship, and manipulation by external actors within the humanitarian system. However, this assertion carries a significant caveat. This study did not include interviews with non-MSF experts able to provide an accurate assessment of the quality of MSF's own data or its susceptibility to external influence. Nevertheless, an observed pattern was that MSF releases tended to involve smaller datasets related to individual regions or health centres, contrasting with the larger statistics favoured by some NGOs. One of the concerns raised over certain United Nations statistics was that, given the scale and complexity of certain crises, it was impossible to guarantee accuracy of some of the larger humanitarian statistics being used. This should not be such a concern for clinical and programmatic data collected by MSF.

NGO staff members from all organisations, except MSF, acknowledged the frequent use of UN data in media output, primarily citing the challenges of collecting sufficiently large datasets to generate newsworthy content. Despite this, all organisations expressed a preference for using their own data whenever possible. Figure 8.9 below illustrates that, when all UN agencies and associated bodies are combined, more than half, specifically 52.28%, of all NGO press releases or press statements featured at least one identifiable instance of United Nations statistical data. This percentage was calculated by tallying all press releases or statements containing statistical

data from any UN agencies and affiliated bodies (refer to Figure 8.6 for a comprehensive list of organisations). Again, the actual figure is likely to be higher, given that 175 press releases or statements (53.19% of the entire sample) included at least one unnamed or unclear source. This grouping of UN bodies together is relevant due to a common practice amongst NGOs and journalists of labelling instances of data from a specific UN agency as "UN" or "United Nations" data. This is further supported by the observation that 51 press releases, or 15.5% of the total sample, contained a source identifiable as being from the United Nations, but with no specific agency mentioned.

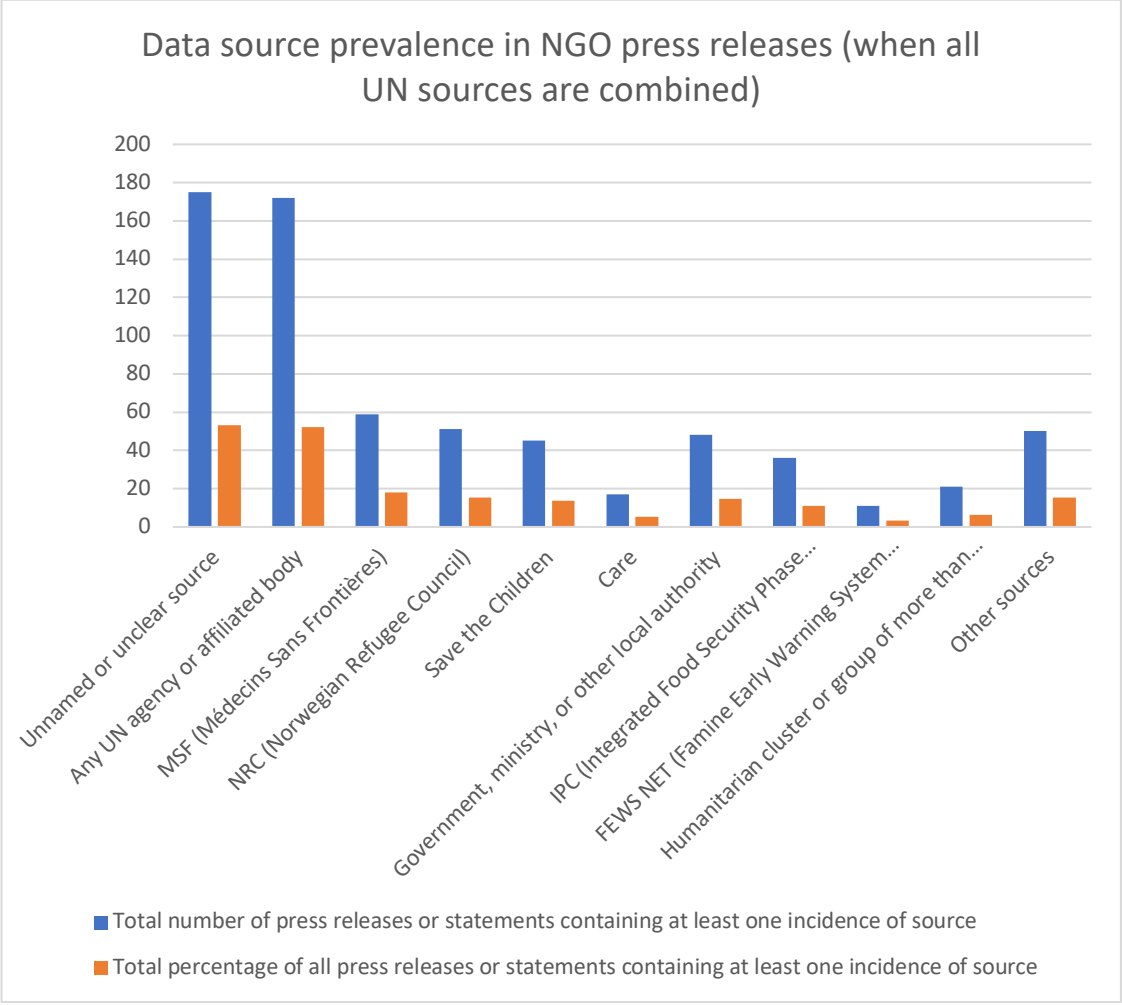


Figure 8.9: Sources of statistical humanitarian data in NGO press releases and press statements when all UN sources are combined

These findings draw further comparisons between NGO communicators and journalists and confirm qualitative results that suggested NGOs are reliant on the same narrow range of institutional sources as outlined by Lawson (2021). This study finds that, much like news outlets, NGOs themselves are reliant on these external sources to produce their media content. And, unlike the traditional view of NGOs being producers of information subsidies, this study

recognises that, as news producers, NGOs might also accept information subsidies, such as secondary humanitarian data, from other actors. For much the same reasons as journalists, the use of such information by NGOs is to reduce the time and cost of their media production.

"The gold standard is to be able to build our own report on a specific topic. This requires weeks of assessment, investigations, content gathering. Most of the time, we don't have this capacity or this time, so we don't. When we are able to come up with our very own data, this is usually good news, and this can be only attributed to us, which is gold obviously.

NGO Regional Media Manager

The collection and dissemination of humanitarian data are well-established functions within the humanitarian system, extensively carried out by various United Nations agencies. Nearly every UN humanitarian agency explicitly outlines the collection and sharing of data as a core organisational function, with the primary aims of supporting effective humanitarian responses and providing relevant information to policy makers, aid providers, and the public. Particularly noteworthy is the role of UN OCHA in information management within the humanitarian sector. UN OCHA is tasked with consolidating and publishing information across many different crises and responses, facilitating informed operational decisions by all stakeholders (UN OCHA 2024). Consequently, it is unsurprising to find regular instances of UN OCHA data in NGO press releases and press statements, especially for the purpose of providing contextual information in accordance with media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007). However, when considering some of the qualitative comments from the previous chapter, the high prevalence of UN statistics in NGO press releases, may be considered problematic when the quality and neutrality of such data has been brought into question. As one UN OCHA staff member put it:

"The UN still has a very strong brand. It has weight and it has legitimacy. The thing is, when you're on the inside, and you see how these figures are put together, you're like, 'What the hell? Seriously.' Because it is imperfect, because it is complicated, because the UN does things the way they've done it for the past 40 years, and they need to change and we're slow to change."

UN Communications Manager

The widespread prevalence of secondary data in NGO media output emphaises significant concerns expressed by humanitarian communicators in interviews for this study, as well as in a range of previous studies (see, for example, Bhuta et al. 2018; Maxwell 2019; Paulus et al. 2022; Glasman and Lawson 2023). These tended to revolve around the perceived vulnerability of such figures to politicisation and manipulation by humanitarian actors. The preceding chapter revealed three primary reasons why humanitarian communicators harbour concerns about the accuracy of certain UN datasets:

- Accountability to governments: The United Nations is perceived as being accountable to governments, raising the possibility that certain data may be withheld from publication, compromising the transparency and rigour of the information.
- Complex humanitarian context: The humanitarian context in East, West, and Central Africa was deemed exceedingly complex, making the collection and verification of accurate large datasets challenging, if not impossible.
- Manipulation or combination of datasets: Humanitarian communicators expressed concerns about the manipulation or combination of datasets by NGOs to create "new" statistics aligning with news values.

Previous studies in the field of humanitarian response have also raised concerns over the politicisation of humanitarian data, particularly by governments (Bhuta et al. 2018; Maxwell 2019; Paulus et al. 2022; Glasman and Lawson 2023). Glasman and Lawson (2023) warned that states can manipulate numbers for various reasons including delegitimising competing actors and capturing international aid. Paulus et al. (2022) found that data analysts failed to debias data, even when biases were detected. This leads to the production of biased information products and, resultingly, important decisions are made based on biased information.

8.5 Statistical source prominence in NGO press releases and press statements

To examine the prominence of different statistical sources, the content analysis recorded the source of the first instance of statistical humanitarian data in each press release studied. This is particularly important because the first source of statistical data is more likely to have been used to shape the overall angle or news line of a press release. This is in line with qualitative

comments which pointed to the importance of humanitarian statistics for attracting the attention of journalists.

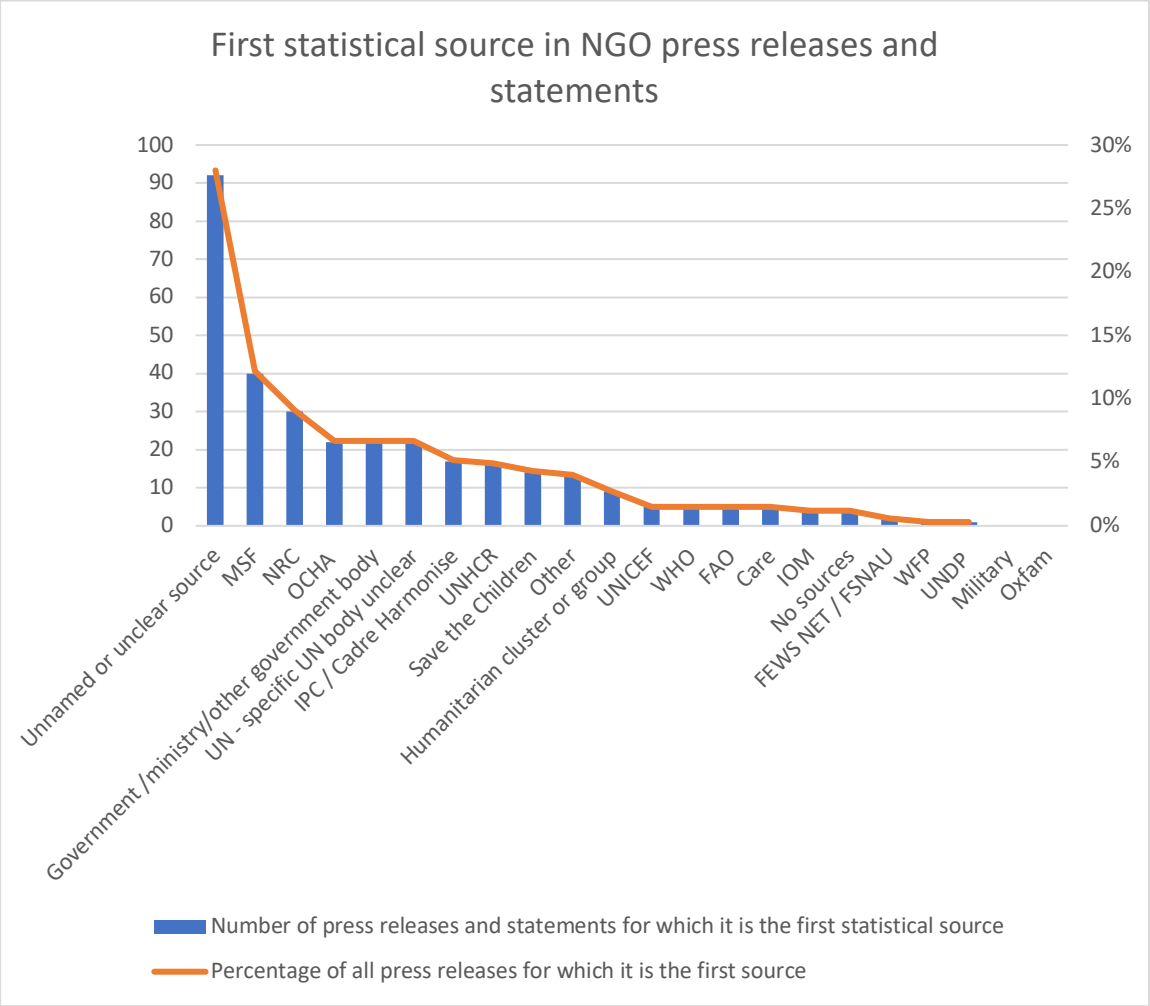


Figure 8.10: Source of first piece of statistical data in NGO press releases and press statements

Figure 8.10 shows that unnamed or unclear sources are by far the most common category of first statistical sources in NGO humanitarian press releases, appearing in 92 press releases or statements, constituting 28% of the entire sample. MSF emerges as the second most common first source in the overall sample, despite publishing considerably fewer press releases than both NRC and Save the Children. MSF is the first source in 40 press releases or statements, making up 63.4% of its own sample and 12.2% of the overall sample. In comparison, NRC is the first source in 30 press releases, constituting 25% of its own sample and 9.1% overall. Save the Children appears as the first source in 14 press releases or statements, representing 14% of its own sample and 4.3% of the overall sample. Care appears as the first source in 5 press releases or statements, making up 10.87% of its own sample and 1.5% overall. These findings demonstrate that MSF is more inclined to feature its own data prominently at the beginning of its press releases or statements, a practice far less common among the other three NGOs.

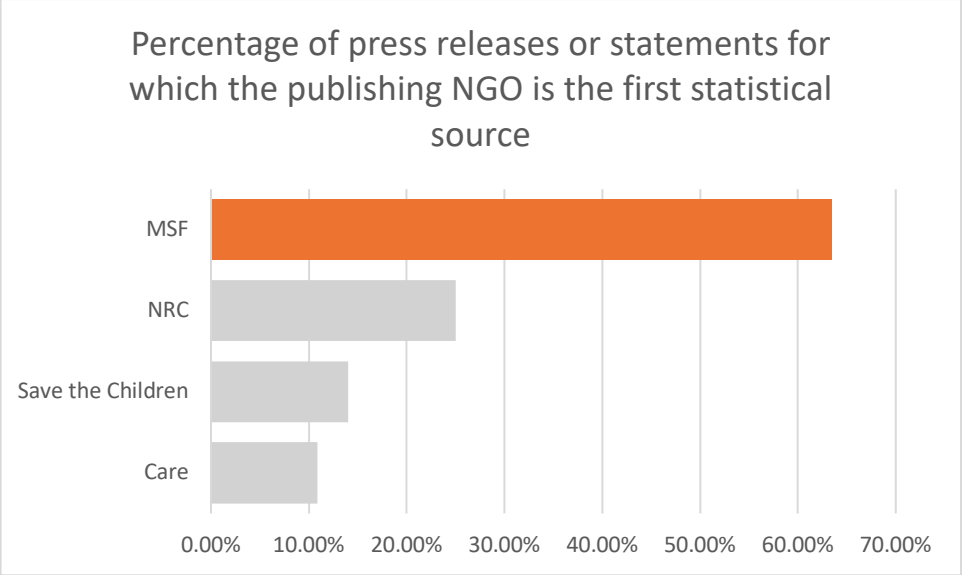


Figure 8.11: Percentage of NGO press releases and press statements using NGO's own data first

MSF can, again, be considered an outlier in comparison to the other NGOs examined, particularly in terms of its approach to data use in media products. These findings reinforce qualitative insights gathered during this study, in which an MSF staff member revealed a deliberate avoidance of using humanitarian data from other organisations and a clear preference towards information originating from MSF's own projects. The same staff member emphasised the perceived legitimacy of MSF's own data and the trust placed in primary data collected from its own programmes. MSF's distinct approach, as reflected in both qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study, emphasises a commitment to the credibility and reliability of MSF data sources, aligning with its organisational values and priorities.

Elsewhere, in addition to the high prevalence of UN data within NGO press releases and press statements, the prominence of UN statistics can also be considered relatively high. For instance, when the results for UN agencies and affiliated bodies are combined, UN data serves as the first source in 81 press releases or statements, constituting 24.62% of the total sample. This positions the UN ahead of all other identifiable first statistical sources. Again, this is likely to be higher still, considering that the source of the first piece of data remained unclear or undefined in an additional 92 press releases or statements, or 28% of the total sample. This again underlines the important role played by UN statistics in shaping the news angles of NGO communications on humanitarian issues, in line with qualitative findings from this study. The first source of humanitarian data, which might be used in a headline or the opening paragraph of a press release or statement, is typically be used to construct a news angle designed to capture the media's attention. As a result, one might assume that such data would predominantly

originate from the organisation issuing the release or statement, as these are commonly used to communicate new events or research related to the organisation. However, in more than half of all NGO press releases studied, the first statistical source was either the United Nations or was unidentifiable, suggesting that NGOs rarely use their own data to shape their messaging about humanitarian crises. Save the Children staff said they often rely on UN data for framing media angles. This is triangulated by Figure 8.12 below, which shows that UN bodies were the most frequent first source of humanitarian data in Save the Children press releases, constituting 36% of the organisation's sample.

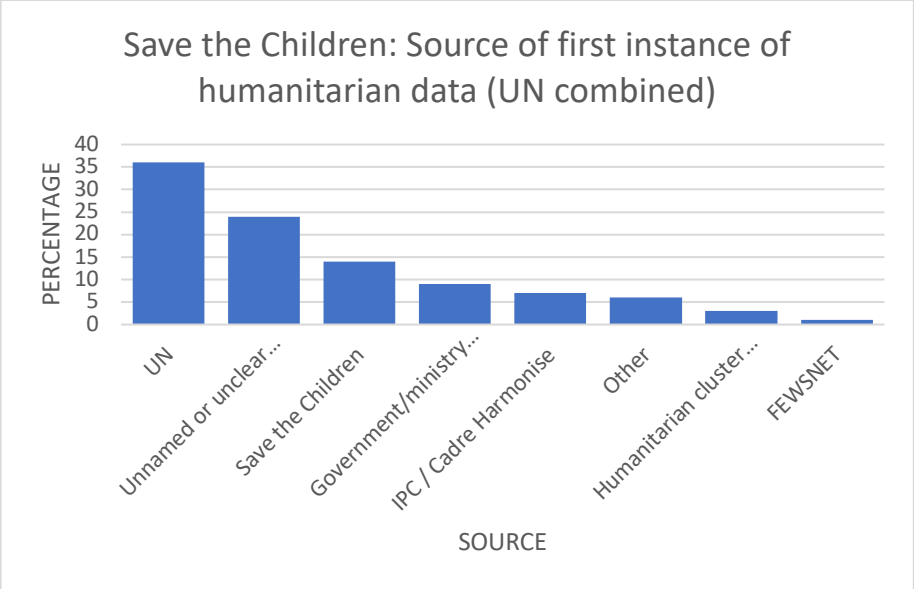


Figure 8.12: Source of first instance of humanitarian data in Save the Children press releases (with UN sources combined)

8.6 Sourcing quality and NGO journalistic practice

Source identification is an important method through which journalistic and public-facing content can uphold values of accuracy, reliability, and transparency. According to the American Press Institute (2014), journalism's primary obligation is to the truth, involving the uncovering of verifiable facts attributed to trusted sources. However, the quantitative results of this study point to serious shortcomings in the journalistic practices of NGOs, particularly regarding the source identification of statistical humanitarian data in press releases and statements. For instance, as illustrated earlier in Figure 8.9, more than half (53.2%) of all press releases and statements examined contained at least one instance of statistical data for which the source was not immediately identifiable. Additionally, when focusing on the first instance

of statistical data in a story, which can significantly shape the angle of the press release or statement, the source was not immediately identifiable in 28% of all examined press releases and statements. This raises a pertinent question: whether this lack of source identification is solely a result of poor journalistic practice or of a deliberate attempt to leave the source open to misinterpretation by the media or public. Drawing on qualitative insights from this study, it is evident that NGO communicators would generally prefer to use their own data when possible.

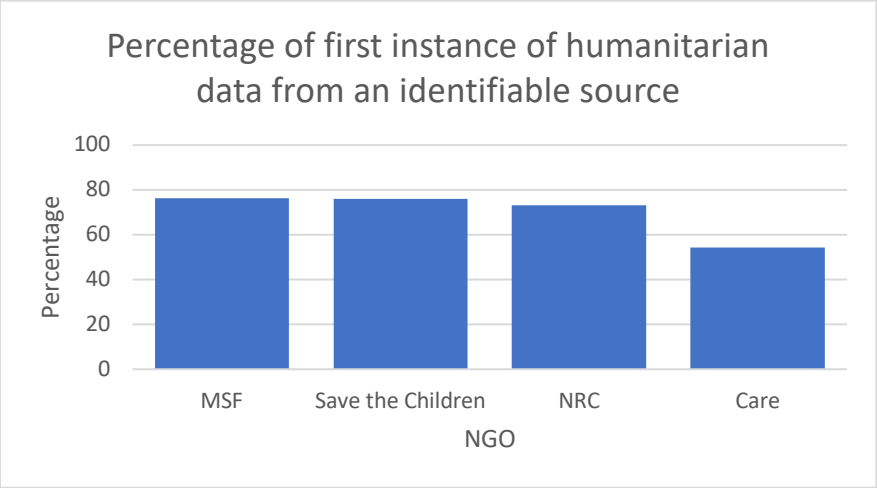


Figure 8.13: Percentage of NGO press releases and statements in which the first instance of statistical data comes from an identifiable source

When comparing the four NGOs studied, overall, the quality of source identification was found to be relatively similar for three of the four organisations. For example, when we take the first piece of data in a press release, which is more likely to appear in the headline or first paragraph, MSF demonstrates the highest standards of source identification, with 76.2% of press releases containing an identifiable first source of data. Save the Children is the second highest with 76%, closely followed by NRC with 73.3%. Care has a considerably lower source identification than the other three NGOs, with just over half (54.3%) of press releases or statements containing an identifiable first statistical source. This appears to be in line with comments from the interviews, in which a Care staff member suggested a unique approach to finding news angles due to a perception of the organisation being less skilled in using data for media purposes than some other NGOs.

"One area, obviously, is data. It's important and useful. But Care is not like Oxfam or others who do these really clever, kind of things. We always wish we were, but we're not. But we do work in a slightly different way and I think what we tend to try to do is get all sorts of unique

and interesting angles from the ground, so that could be, you know, one of our partners saying something interesting and being right in the heart of something and we can start pushing that out to the media or what our country director or some of our staff from the ground say."

NGO Media Director

The Care press release in Figure 8.14, below, is symptomatic of how poor sourcing practices can lead to confusing narratives developing in relation to crises. The release, dated 3 January 2018, is concerned with a long-running and protracted crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its second paragraph contains the first two instances of statistical data and reads: "Across the country, more than 8.5 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, a figure that's expected to increase to 13.1 million in 2018." These figures are unsourced but share similarities with the sorts of broader statistics commonly found in UN OCHA humanitarian overviews or other United Nations publications. The 2017 UN Global Humanitarian Overview estimated 7.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance in DRC. In 2018, the same document reported a 79% increase in this figure, from 7.3 million to 13.1 million. A United Nations Population Fund webpage from the same time mentioned people in urgent need in DRC rising from 8.5 million in 2017 to 13.1 million in 2018. This variation in statistics introduces uncertainty as different humanitarian sources use varying estimates. Despite this, Care's unattributed statistic is used in the phrase "8.5 million *are* in need of humanitarian assistance," eliminating any sense of this being an estimation.

Further analysis of DRC releases and statements from 2018 in the studied sample reveals numerous similar statistics. For example, three months later, Care also used the widely quoted "13.1 million people" figure in its own release. A subsequent release in April 2018 by NRC, also without attribution, cited the 13.1 million figure and added, "more than 5 million people have fled their homes and are internally displaced or have sought safety in neighbouring countries." Another NRC release in December 2018 asserted, "more than 13 million people depend on humanitarian assistance," alongside other sizable statistics such as "Over 13 million people in the country are living on one meal or less per day." These instances underscore how significant data and statistics are casually presented by various humanitarian actors without cross-checking or consistency. Furthermore, the origins of certain figures repeatedly used by various NGOs can, on occasion, be extremely challenging to locate.

“What we have now is all the ingredients for a humanitarian catastrophe”

(Kinshasa, 3 January, 2018) - The people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are facing an uncertain 2018. The humanitarian situation deteriorated dramatically in 2017, and the country is now facing a crisis of massive proportions, says CARE International.

Across the country, more than 8.5 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, a figure that’s expected to increase to 13.1 million in 2018.

A surge in violent conflict and intercommunal tensions forced over a million people to flee their homes in 2017. More than 4.1 million Congolese are now displaced, with 620, 0000 seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Over 7.5 million people do not have enough food to eat, an increase of 30 per cent over 12 months.

“What we have now are all the ingredients for a humanitarian catastrophe,” says Pierre Bry, CARE’s Country Director for the DRC. “If the international community doesn’t react quickly, it will be too late”

Violence in the Kasai region displaced over 1.4 million people in 2017, many of them women and children. Together, North and South Kivu account for almost 40 per cent of the total IDP population in the DRC. Schools, health centres and infrastructure have been destroyed, and farmers have missed planting seasons.

The DRC is a complex and challenging environment, but the single biggest impediment to the humanitarian response in the DRC is the shortage of funding. The UN’s humanitarian appeal for the DRC struggled to meet half its target for 2017.

“Without funding, we can’t reach people,” says Mr.Bry. “It means we can only reach a few of the millions of people who don’t have enough to eat. It means more children will go hungry. It means that not all survivors of the horrific sexual violence that marked the conflict in the Kasai will receive the help they need.”

“2017 was a bad year for the Congolese. 2018 will only be worse,” added Mr.Bry.

About CARE International in DRC. CARE has been working in DRC since 1994, initially responding to a refugee crisis following the Rwandan genocide. Our programs focus on the empowerment of women and young people, support for the resilience of vulnerable communities, and community involvement for good governance.

For more of our work in Democratic Republic of Congo, click here.

Date: 05.01.18

CARE International

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Press release | Crisis Response

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Figure 8.14: Care International DRC press release (Care International 2018)

Equally worrying is that, according to Glasman and Lawson (2023), large figures like these often depict poverty as an inherent trait of the referenced groups, rather than as the outcome of power dynamics or wrongdoing by powerful actors. Failing to approach them with caution can normalise inequalities and strip injustice of its political context.

The example in Figure 8.15, below, shows the initial paragraphs of an MSF press release from August 2021, demonstrating the use of its own statistical data. Consistent with insights from interviews, the emphasis here is on smaller, programmatic figures rather than headline-grabbing large numbers. For instance, the third paragraph reads: "Since July, MSF teams have treated four times more patients with hepatitis E than in the previous months. Of 186 cases reported in 2021, over 60 per cent were recorded over six weeks between early July to mid-August."

> JUBA - An alarming jump in the number of patients with hepatitis E and acute watery diarrhoea has been seen in the camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Bentiu, South Sudan. The situation is critical, with two deaths already registered within a month since the end of July, says Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).
>
> "We have repeatedly warned of the health risks of inadequate water and sanitation service provision in the Bentiu camp," said Federica Franco, MSF country director. "A failure to address these issues, with agencies actually reducing their water and sanitation services over the past year, has now resulted in this avoidable situation."
>
> Since July, MSF teams have treated four times more patients with hepatitis E than in the previous months. Of 186 cases reported in 2021, over 60 per cent were recorded over six weeks between early July to mid-August. Amongst the patients who passed way, one was a pregnant woman, as the Ministry of Health called attention to on 15 August. Hepatitis E is a highly concerning disease for this group, as pregnant women are more likely to experience severe illness and the mortality rate can be as high as up to 30 per cent.

Figure 8.15: MSF South Sudan press release opening paragraphs (MSF 2021). For full press release, see Appendix F

Contrastingly, the example in Figure 8.16 shows the initial paragraphs of a Save the Children press release, also concerning South Sudan, released in July 2021, a month earlier than the MSF example. The Save the Children release, focusing on malnutrition rather than communicable health issues, notably relies on larger numbers. For instance, it highlights that 7.2 million people, including millions of children, are on the "brink of or in famine." In this case, the source of the "7.2 million people" is not Save the Children but is revealed to be the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), to which the figure is hyperlinked.

The world's newest country, South Sudan, is facing its worst ever hunger crisis as it marks its 10 year anniversary, with 7.2 million people, including millions of children, on the brink of or in famine, Save the Children said today.

The number of people in grave danger of starvation has risen by 50% compared to the same season a decade ago with figures released in 2012 showing 40% of the population was experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity of IPC 3 or higher at that time.

Save the Children is warning this situation will most likely deteriorate in coming months due to ongoing violence, high food prices, climatic shocks, and barriers to humanitarian access, unless urgent national and global action is taken. An estimated 1.4 million children are already suffering from acute malnutrition.

Figure 8.16: Save the Children South Sudan press release opening paragraphs (Save the Children 2021) For full press release, see Appendix G

The IPC describes itself as a multi-partner initiative, aiming to enhance food security, nutrition analysis, and decision-making through collaboration among governments, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society, and other stakeholders (IPC 2023). This, according to the IPC, means its analysis is less likely to be influenced by the agenda of any single actor. However, Maxwell (2019) notes that in-country, the IPC often operates as a government-led analysis and is often housed within the offices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). While this arrangement generally functions well, Maxwell says, challenges can arise in regions where the government is party to the conflict driving food insecurity, making it difficult for these systems to operate independently from political influences. In this study, the IPC is not classified as a UN agency or associated body, but questions regarding the credibility of its data remain pertinent, similarly to those raised elsewhere. The third statistic in the Save the Children press release, which states "1.4 million children suffering from acute malnutrition," is sourced from UNICEF, the United Nations children's agency.

Poor sourcing practices were observed to be more prevalent for certain types of crises. Figure 8.17, for example, illustrates that the topics of "conflict and insecurity" and "displacement and refugees" had the highest numbers of press releases containing unidentifiable statistical data, as indicated by the red line. However, an examination of the topics with the highest percentage of press releases containing unidentifiable sources reveals that "Covid-19," "multiple and protracted crises," and "security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers" are the three highest, as indicated by the blue bars.

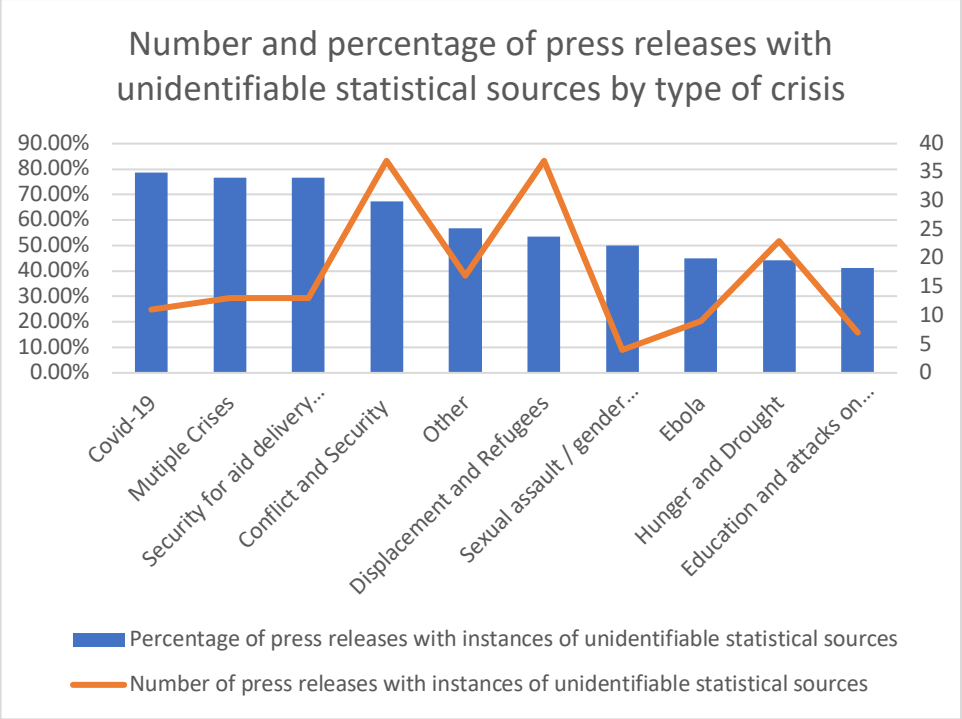


Figure 8.17: Number and percentage of press releases with unidentifiable statistical sources by type of crisis

78.60% of press releases or statements concerning Covid-19 contained at least one instance of unsourced statistical data. The percentage was 76.5% for press releases or statements each for the topics of "multiple or protracted crises" and "security for aid delivery or attacks on aid workers". Possible reasons for this might include the fast-moving and unprecedented nature of a new viral disease such as Covid-19, and the complexity of multiple and protracted crises. However, Ebola, another viral disease, demonstrated far higher levels of source identification than Covid-19, with 45% of press releases or statements containing at least one instance of unidentified statistical data. This disparity is likely to be at least partly because Ebola was, by the time of this study, a well-established crisis in parts of Africa, with a peak that had already passed during the 2014-2016 outbreak that preceded the dates of this study. As a result, reporting systems would have been established several years previously. Health ministries and the World Health Organization regularly released updated Ebola figures, which NGOs used in media outreach, and organisations responding to such crises would likely have had access to clinical data from their own programmes. This assertion is supported by Figure 8.18, below, which demonstrates that government, health ministries and other government bodies were the most common identifiable sources of data in press releases and press statements concerning Ebola.

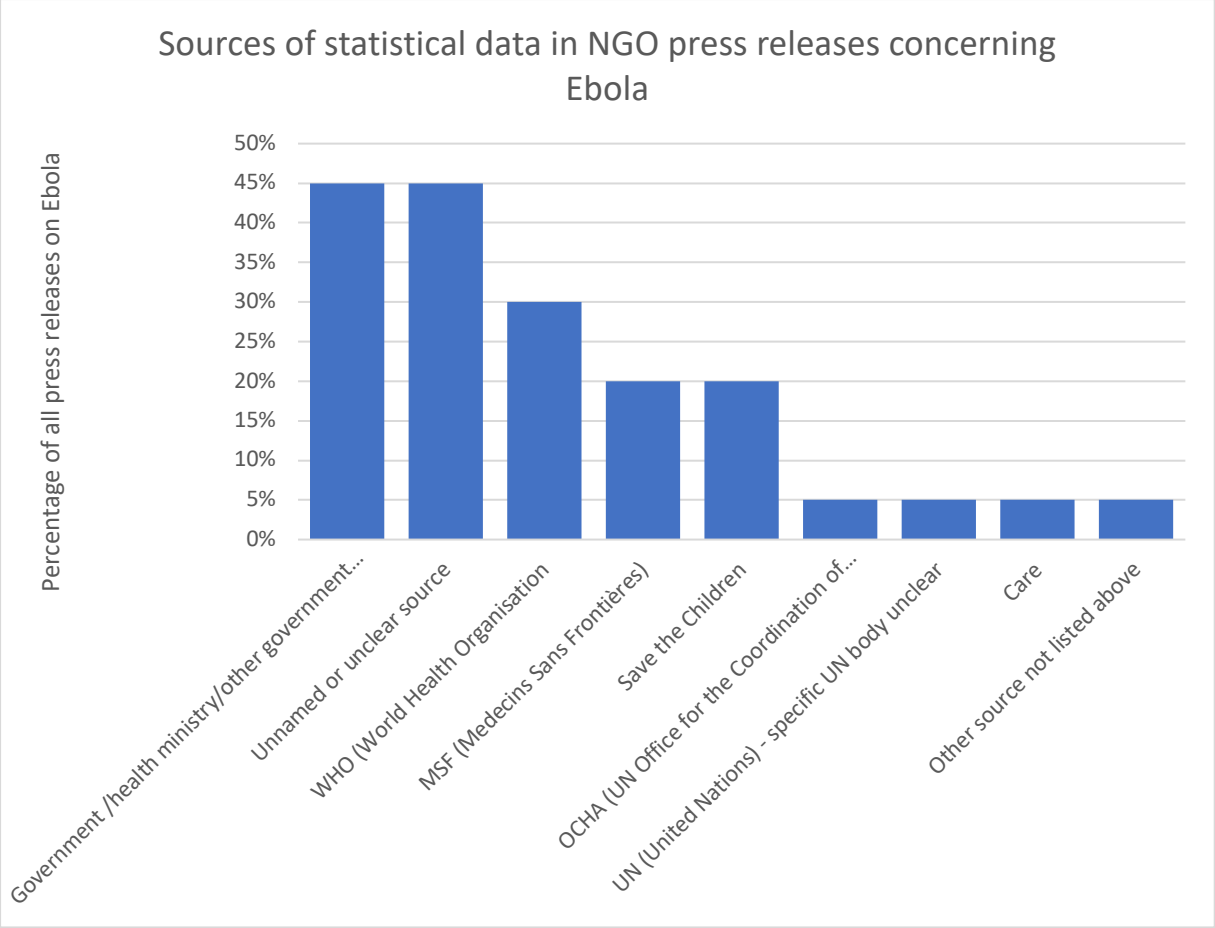


Figure 8.18: Sources of statistical data in NGO press releases concerning Ebola

8.7 Tracking the journey of statistical data to the mainstream media

To better understand the potential impacts of incorporating statistical humanitarian data into NGO press releases and statements, this study will now examine two case studies. The case studies will trace the trajectory of specific data points, from their inclusion in a press release to their subsequent coverage in the mainstream media. These analyses will take place in the context of a long-running crisis in northern Nigeria, fuelled by civil conflict and unrest.

8.7.1 Case Study: Save the Children press release, 5 August 2021

5 AUGUST 2021 - NIGERIA

‘MILLIONS OF CHILDREN GOING HUNGRY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA AS ATTACKS DEVASTATE LIVES’ – SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children is deeply concerned to find that an estimated 2.3 million children and youth, including some 700,000 children under five[1], are going hungry in North-East Nigeria.

A recent UN report found that 4.4 million people in the area are facing food shortages as attacks by militants are forcing farmers from their lands. Save the Children strongly condemns the reported attacks and displacement of farmers and other civilians.

An estimated 2.2 million people have fled their homes because of the violence, leaving families and children wanting food, a safe place to live and, for many children, education.

Figure 8.19: Save the Children Nigeria press release opening paragraphs (Save the Children 2021).

This case study examines a press release issued by Save the Children in August 2021, addressing the impact of a prolonged conflict on child hunger in northeast Nigeria. The press release opening paragraphs, see Figure 8.19, offer an example of an NGO using a piece of United Nations data to frame the angle of a news story, as well as an incidence of a phenomenon outlined in the qualitative chapter, in which NGOs apply rudimentary mathematics to a piece of data with the aim of creating another statistic that appears newer or more unique. The press release includes the headline, “Millions of children going hungry in north-east Nigeria as attacks devastate lives – Save the Children,” which appears to attribute the revelation that

millions of children are going hungry to Save the Children. The first paragraph then provides two specific statistics, indicating that "an estimated 2.3 million children and youth" are going hungry in North-East Nigeria, including "some 700,000 children under five." The language used, such as "Save the Children is deeply concerned to find...," suggests an organisational discovery of this information. However, upon closer examination of the second paragraph, it becomes evident that one of these pieces of data is sourced from a recent United Nations report. The press release includes a hyperlink leading to this document, a joint report by the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), revealing it as the original source for the "2.3 million children" figure. A [1] notation beside the "some 700,000 children under five" figure directs readers to a footnote at the bottom of the press release which reads as follows:

"According to UN data, around 16 per cent of all children in Nigeria are under five. Around 53 per cent is 19 or younger. 53 per cent of 4.4 million of the people in need in North-East Nigeria is around 2.3 million children of 19 or younger, 16 per cent of 4.4 million is around 704,000 children under five."

This footnote appears to clarify the origin of the "some 700,000 children under five" figure and explains that this figure is not a standalone humanitarian data point collected by Save the Children, nor a figure derived from the same UN report responsible for the "2.3 million children" statistic. Instead, it is the outcome of a calculation performed by Save the Children, utilising various UN figures from distinct datasets to generate an entirely new statistic. Notably, some of the UN figures employed in this calculation are estimates rather than precise figures, introducing a considerable margin for error in the final statistic, particularly after such figures are combined. Furthermore, the footnote's inclusion of the phrase "children of 19 or younger" appears to define the age range of childhood, which deviates from common definitions, including the humanitarian system's standard, which considers individuals aged under eighteen as children. Indeed, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically states that a child is every human being below the age of eighteen, unless majority is attained earlier under applicable law. As a result, the 700,000 figure should be considered an elevated estimate due to its calculation as a percentage of the overall number of children, including those up to nineteen years old. Moreover, it relies on UN datasets that have been frequently questioned by humanitarian experts due to a) their propensity to politicisation by other actors and b) the unlikeliness of collecting accurate data in such challenging humanitarian contexts. The qualitative findings from this study, reported

reservations about the combination of different datasets such as this, with one interviewee describing it as "guesswork".

"There's the big picture, top-line data, which normally we get from the UN. It'll be '25 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in Somalia or Afghanistan, or whatever.' Those will come from the UN to be honest because NGOs don't have the capacity to do that data for themselves. Then [NGO name] will then divide it by two or multiply it by whatever and say this is how many children are in need."

NGO Head of Media

Glasman and Lawson (2023) warn that data manipulation can occur at all levels, including within humanitarian organisations and that this can be done both intentionally and unintentionally, meaning that humanitarian numbers are often guesstimates or rough estimations. By the following day, the press release had been picked up by *Reuters*, the world's largest international multimedia news provider and one of the most important producers of humanitarian news in Africa. The headline of the *Reuters* report: "Millions of children go hungry in insurgency-hit northeast Nigeria – NGO" again appears to attribute the UN's figure on the number of hungry children to the NGO, Save the Children. In the fourth paragraph, the article also includes the "700,000 children under five" figure, attributing it as an estimate to Save the Children.

Millions of children go hungry in insurgency-hit northeast Nigeria - NGO

Reuters

August 6, 2021 12:41 PM GMT+1 · Updated 2 years ago

Women wait with their children under a shed for food rations at a internally displaced persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria June 6, 2017. REUTERS/Akintunde Akinleye/File Photo

KADUNA, Nigeria, Aug 6 (Reuters) - At least 2.3 million children and youth are going hungry in northeast Nigeria where an Islamist insurgency has forced farmers to flee their fields and put the region on the brink of critical food shortages, humanitarian groups have warned.

Attacks by Islamist militants have been intensifying in northeast Nigeria in recent months, with dozens of soldiers and civilians killed and farmers targeted in some attacks. read more

The more than decade-long conflict has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions, but it is now joined by food inflation across Nigeria that has meant millions nationwide can no longer reliably feed themselves or their families. read more

Save the Children estimated that 700,000 children under five are among the 2.3 million children affected, and called on the government to protect farmers and dedicate more resources to the region.

Figure 8.20: Reuters Nigeria news story opening paragraphs (Reuters 2021).

The story was further disseminated by *Al Jazeera*, possibly picked up from the *Reuters* article. Again, the larger "2 million children" figure appears to be attributed to Save the Children in the headline: "Over 2m children go hungry in conflict-hit northeast Nigeria: NGO." A sub-heading directly below the headline reads: "Save the Children says 700,000 children under five

are among the 2.3 million children affected by crisis." Notably, there is no mention of this figure being an estimate or a result based on a combination of multiple estimates from various humanitarian organisations, none of which originate from Save the Children. In fact, any sense of this figure has being an estimate has now disappeared - 700,000 children under five *are* among the 2.3 million children, the subheading says. Glasman and Lawson (2023) assert that "information travels fast: numbers travel faster" to describe how big statistics can spread rapidly in the public discourse. They offer the example of how, at the beginning of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the UNHCR claimed that 'over 4 million people could flee from Ukraine." This shocking figure quickly circulated through the international media due to its ability to stand out in a wave of non-numerical noise including geopolitical analysis, speeches, and testimony. So powerful was the number, the authors argued, that the qualitative context surrounding it was excluded when circulated, and, crucially, that the UNHCR had emphasised that this was a guesstimate. This case study demonstrates a similar occurrence in that the combination of separate datasets, the broad definition of 'children' and the fact that the primary figures used were estimates themselves are omitted from the news coverage. Glasman and Lawson (2023) suggest that the reason the important qualitative context is omitted in the news, or indeed disguised in the press release, is because numbers are a universally understood language which require no context. "It was presumed that for someone in England, Cameroon or Seychelles, '4 million' was a number that could be immediately understood – even if these people did not have a proper sense of its scale, they could appreciate how this number represents 'hugeness'" (2023, p5). This, the authors say, give numbers a special power as numbers will almost always travel further and faster than any other language.

Figure 8.21: Al Jazeera Nigeria news story headline and subheading (Al Jazeera 2021).

Later the same day, the story is featured by *New Dawn*, a national news outlet in Nigeria. However, concerning changes to the original press release text have begun to occur by this point. The "2.3 million children" figure is once again attributed to Save the Children in the headline, but now the phrase "Attack By Militants" had been added, therefore directly associating the NGO with the idea that militant attacks are the cause of the starving children. In the initial press release, the connection between food shortages and militant attacks was linked to the UN report, not asserted by Save the Children itself. However, it appears that the organisation's efforts to present certain findings as their own has inadvertently led to a link between the NGO and a politically loaded statement, which may be considered dangerous to its staff working in the country. According to Gourevitch and Lake (2012), NGO credibility exists whenever "statements are believable or accepted as truthful by one or more audiences."

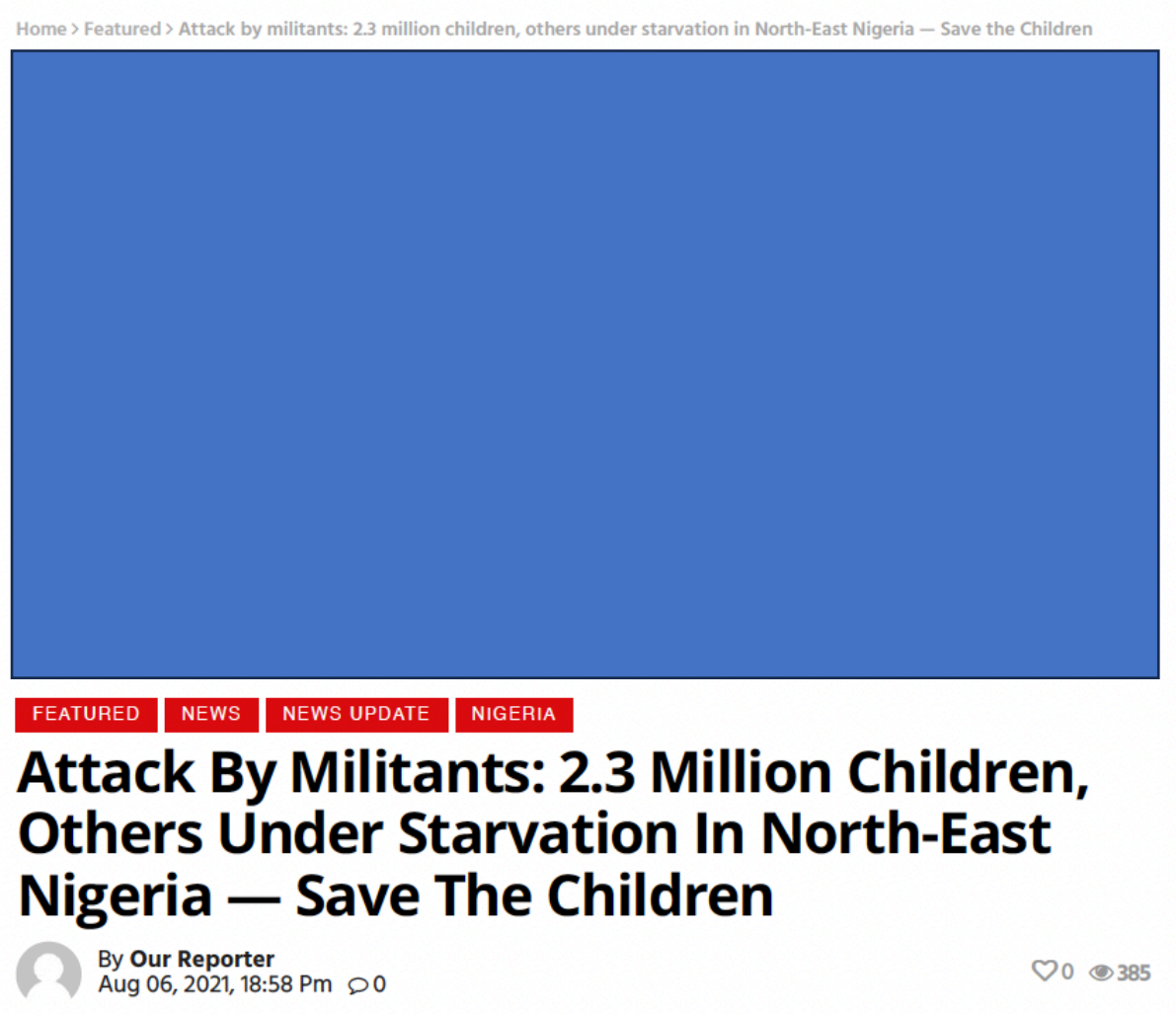


Figure 8.22: New Dawn Nigeria news story headline (New Dawn 2021).

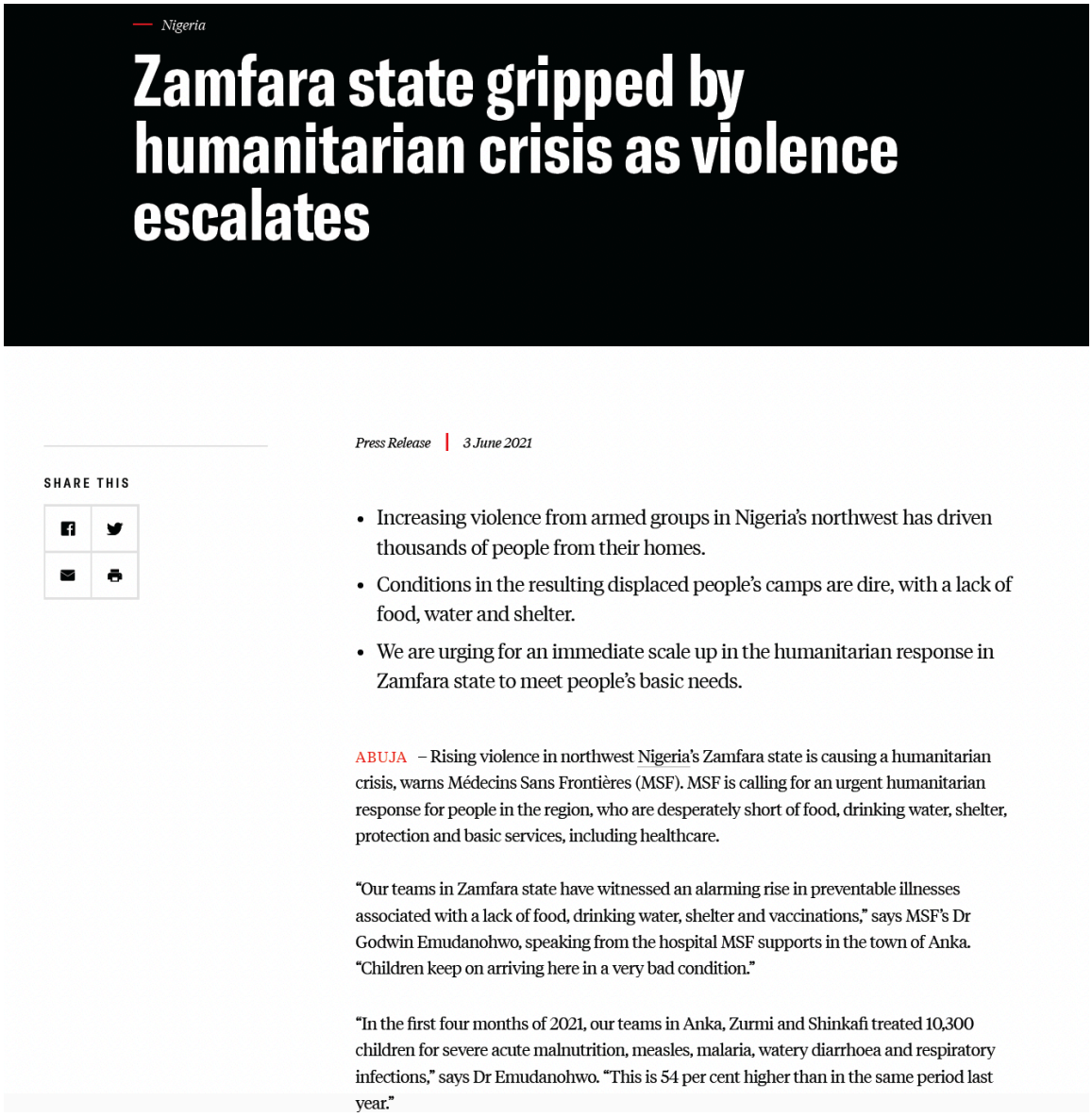
Below the headline, the text of the *New Dawn* article itself clearly links Save the Children to both the data and the idea that militant attacks are causing the hunger. Furthermore, the article refers to both the "2.3 million children" and "700,000" figures as "its findings."

> Save the Children, an international humanitarian organisations has expressed concerned over its findings that an estimated 2.3 million children and youth, including some 700,000 children under five are going hungry in the northeast of Nigeria.

This case study underscores several notable concerns associated with both the utilisation and manipulation of UN statistics by humanitarian NGOs in media output. To its credit, Save the Children provided sources for all the statistical data in this press release, as well as its methodology for calculating the "700,000" figure. To some extent, this safeguards the organisation from potential repercussions by actors involved in the crisis because all original data used is grounded in UN statistics, which, qualitative comments found, are generally

considered safer for use in media communications. However, the connection to allegations against militants poses a concerning aspect in terms of possible threats to staff safety, especially given that the link between the original UN report and these accusations is largely obscured by the time the story reaches the Nigerian press. Furthermore, the spread of questionable humanitarian statistics has the potential to mislead journalists and the public about the true extent of the crisis. Paterson (2007) found online news portals and aggregators to demonstrate substantially no mediation of news agency content, with text duplicating news agency text for an average of 85% of the content studied.

8.7.2 Case Study: MSF press release, 3 June 2021



Nigeria

Zamfara state gripped by humanitarian crisis as violence escalates

SHARE THIS

Press Release | *3 June 2021*

- Increasing violence from armed groups in Nigeria's northwest has driven thousands of people from their homes.
- Conditions in the resulting displaced people's camps are dire, with a lack of food, water and shelter.
- We are urging for an immediate scale up in the humanitarian response in Zamfara state to meet people's basic needs.

ABUJA – Rising violence in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state is causing a humanitarian crisis, warns Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). MSF is calling for an urgent humanitarian response for people in the region, who are desperately short of food, drinking water, shelter, protection and basic services, including healthcare.

"Our teams in Zamfara state have witnessed an alarming rise in preventable illnesses associated with a lack of food, drinking water, shelter and vaccinations," says MSF's Dr Godwin Emudanohwo, speaking from the hospital MSF supports in the town of Anka. "Children keep on arriving here in a very bad condition."

"In the first four months of 2021, our teams in Anka, Zurmi and Shinkafi treated 10,300 children for severe acute malnutrition, measles, malaria, watery diarrhoea and respiratory infections," says Dr Emudanohwo. "This is 54 per cent higher than in the same period last year."

Figure 8.23: MSF Nigeria press release opening paragraphs (MSF 2021).

Two months before the publication of the Save the Children press release, Médecins Sans Frontières issued its own release addressing conflict in northern Nigeria. Notable distinctions can be observed in the structure and language of the two releases. Firstly, the MSF headline does not feature a statistical figure, instead reading, "Zamfira state gripped by humanitarian crisis as violence escalates." A humanitarian statistic is used in the first subheading, indicating that "increasing violence from armed groups has driven thousands of people from their homes." Although the immediate source for this statistic is not provided, it is clarified later in the release to be from the UN-affiliated International Organization for Migration (IOM). There is no attempt to generate a new statistic from this original figure. In fact, the use of "thousands" in the subheading, if anything, downplays the original figure of 124,000 people. Given such a figure, it might have been considered acceptable to use a term such as "tens of thousands" or "more than a hundred thousand." Furthermore, no version of this figure appears in the initial paragraphs of the release, which instead concentrates on qualitative observations by MSF staff regarding living conditions in camps for internally displaced people. The third paragraph employs MSF's own programme data, directly attributing this to an MSF doctor within a quotation: "In the first four months of 2021, our teams in Anka, Zurmi, and Shinkafi treated 10,300 children for severe acute malnutrition, measles, malaria, watery diarrhea, and respiratory infections," states Dr. Emudanohwo. "This is 54 percent higher than in the same period last year." As the press release progresses, additional MSF programme data is shared to illustrate specific points. For instance, the third paragraph provides a broader contextual understanding of the number of displaced people using IOM data but then incorporates MSF figures for one region to present further evidence: "In Anka town alone, our teams have counted more than 14,000 displaced people, with around 1,599 arrivals in the past month."

‘There’s hardly any food’

“There’s hardly any food to give to my children,” says Halima, two of whose children are being treated for severe acute malnutrition by MSF in Anka hospital. “We can no longer grow crops because criminals attack our farms.”

“Two of my children got measles and they were growing very thin. The roads are very dangerous, but I had to risk our lives and bring them to hospital,” says Halima. “Last time, when their elder sister got measles, I decided too late to travel by road and bring her to hospital. She had complications and now she is blind.”

In February 2021 there were more than 124,000 displaced people living in in Zamfara state, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – an increase of more than 12,000 since August 2020. In Anka town alone, our teams have counted more than 14,000 displaced people, with around 1,599 arrivals in the past four months.

Figure 8.24: MSF Nigeria press release middle paragraphs (MSF 2021)

The organisation’s own humanitarian programme work appears to be so wide ranging, that it allows it to share more data later in the release, including the number of victims of sexual violence it has treated in the region.

Rise in kidnapping and sexual violence

As the violence spirals, reports of kidnappings, killings, armed robbery and sexual violence have multiplied.

“From January to April, our teams in Zamfara have received over 100 victims of sexual violence,” says Dr Noble Nma, MSF medical activity manager in Shinkafi, where we run a clinic for survivors of sexual violence. “Women and sometimes men are abducted by armed men and subjected to violation for a few weeks before being returned to their community. This is in addition to the violence faced by women within the community itself.”

Fear of travelling along dangerous roads means that rape survivors often seek support late, or not at all.

“The survivors are afraid to take the roads, so they usually arrive at our clinics too late to prevent sexually transmitted infections, with serious mental trauma and in desperate need of protection,” says Dr Nma. “They tell us that there are more survivors out there who are afraid to travel here, so we fear that we’re only seeing the tip of the iceberg.”

Figure 8.25: MSF Nigeria press release later paragraphs (MSF 2021)

As with the Save the Children document, the MSF release was later picked up by *Reuters*. On this occasion, however, there was no statistic in the headline or first paragraph. This suggests that, despite a common belief by humanitarian communicators interviewed for this study that big statistical data is crucial for attracting the attention of journalists and achieving mainstream media coverage, affording such data a high level of prominence in a press release may not always be necessary.

Africa

Violence in Nigeria's northwestern Zamfara state spawns humanitarian crisis -MSF

Reuters

June 4, 2021 8:40 AM GMT+1 · Updated 2 years ago

LAGOS, June 3 (Reuters) - Rising insecurity in Nigeria's northwestern state of Zamfara has spawned a humanitarian crisis, International aid group Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said on Thursday.

Gunmen, often riding motorcycles, have attacked towns in the northwest in recent years, forcing thousands to flee across the northern border to Niger. Attackers have attained global notoriety through mass kidnappings at schools, abducting more than 800 students since December.

Figure 8.26: Reuters Nigeria news story opening paragraphs (Reuters 2021)

The headline in the *Reuters* article closely mirrors that of the MSF press release, with the initial line nearly identical. This aligns with the findings from previous studies which indicated that journalists frequently incorporate information directly from NGO copy into news articles (Fenton 2010; Van Leuven and Joye 2014). However, the second paragraph of the *Reuters* article deviates slightly from the press release content by mentioning gunmen on motorcycles attacking towns. This specific detail was absent in the MSF release, although discussions of attacks and abductions were frequently highlighted. Moving down the article, some more MSF programme data is quoted in the Reuters piece.

MSF, also known as Doctors Without Borders, said the security situation had worsened in the last few months. It referred to an increase in reports of kidnappings, killings, armed robbery and sexual violence in the region.

The medical group said its teams in Zamfara, one of the states worst hit by the violence, treated 10,300 children in the first four months of 2021 for ailments including severe malnutrition, measles, and respiratory infections. It said the number of children treated was 54% higher than in the same period last year.

Similarly to the Save the Children press release, following the Reuters article, the release was also picked up by *Al Jazeera*. A pattern emerges here, where, for both MSF and Save the Children, the news article headline closely aligns with the press release headline, directly attributing the main angle of the story to the NGO. The main distinction between the two organisations lies in the fact that the original observation in the MSF release originates directly from the NGO, while in Save the Children's release, the statistical data used in the headline did not.

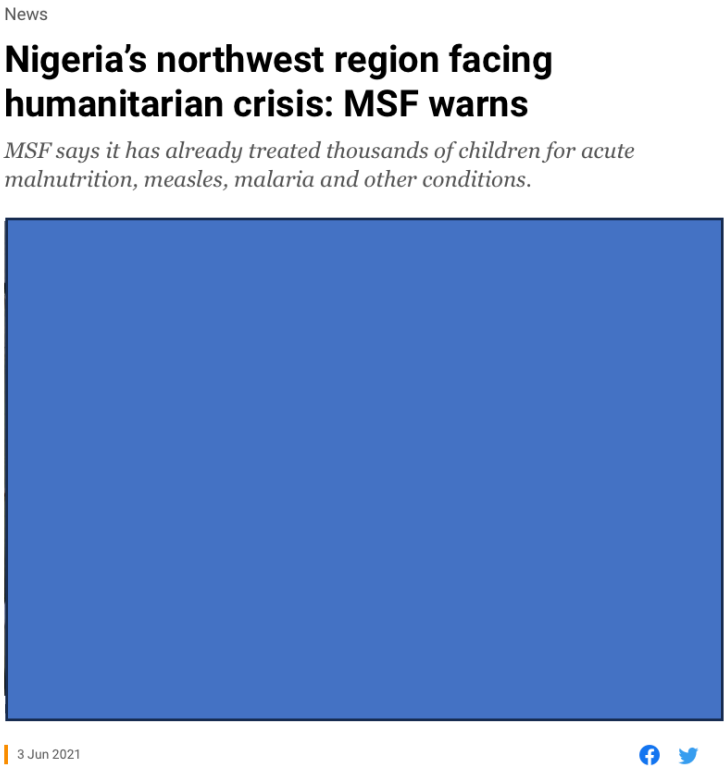


Figure 8.27: Al Jazeera Nigeria news story opening headline and subheading (Al Jazeera 2021)

The two case studies above lead to several points of discussion regarding the possible impact of these contrasting approaches by MSF and Save the Children. For Save the Children, the

twisting of UN data and representation of dubious 'new' figures as its own raises questions about transparency and credibility. The importance of accuracy and credibility is seen as critical to NGO media success (McPherson 2016; Bhuta et al. 2018) and, although all sources were given, and the calculation explained, the organisation may risk reputational damage if audiences or journalists come to understand and contest how humanitarian data is being used in this way. By primarily using its own, smaller, programme data, MSF arguably demonstrates higher levels of transparency whilst also maintaining its credibility. Furthermore, the practice of combining various data sources which were themselves drawn from estimates, introduces a risk of inaccuracies in Save the Children's media output, and, consequently, in the mainstream media whereas MSF's use of IOM data and its own programme statistics appears more straightforward and accountable. MSF avoids creating new statistics through such calculations, thus reducing the risk of inaccuracies. MSF's release, with a focus on qualitative observations and clear attribution of statistics, may lead to more accurate and nuanced media coverage and the framing of the story is less likely to be distorted during dissemination as a result. For example, the connection between the UN report and accusations against militants, while not initially made by Save the Children, might have exposed the NGO to possible retaliation once it appeared in the Nigerian media. Nigeria was consistently highlighted in interviews as a country in which concerns over retaliatory violence to NGO staff due to media coverage were high. By maintaining a more factual and transparent approach, MSF may mitigate potential risks associated with the politicisation of data, better ensuring the safety of its staff and the organisation's standing where it works.

8.8 Regions and countries of focus of NGO press releases

Previous research has addressed the underrepresentation of Africa in Western news coverage. Studies, including Nothias (2018) and Sobel Cohen et al. (2017), highlight the neglect of Africa in media narratives. In 2008, African news comprised 4% of television news coverage in European countries. Notably, Belgium, a former colonial power, allocated only 2.2% of its television news and 7.6% of newspapers to African news (Wilke et al. 2012). This deficiency is said to be one of the reasons why previous research has found NGOs to strategically focus their media efforts on countries already featured in the news cycle, neglecting regions perceived as less attractive to media interests. Interviewees in this study, particularly those from UK-based NGOs, echoed this sentiment, noting, for example, the likelihood of crises in Francophone West and Central African countries receiving less coverage in the UK compared

to those in East Africa. The latter, with English as a national language and historical ties to the UK due to colonialism, were said to often garner more attention. Despite these findings, the quantitative findings of this study offer a more complex picture of how such considerations impact NGOs' media prioritisation. For example, Figure 8.28, below illustrates that West and Central African crises were the focus of slightly more press releases or press statements than their East African counterparts during the examined period. West and Central Africa was the primary region of focus for 171 press releases, comprising 52% of the total sample. East African countries or crises were the focus of 158 press releases, or 48% of the sample.

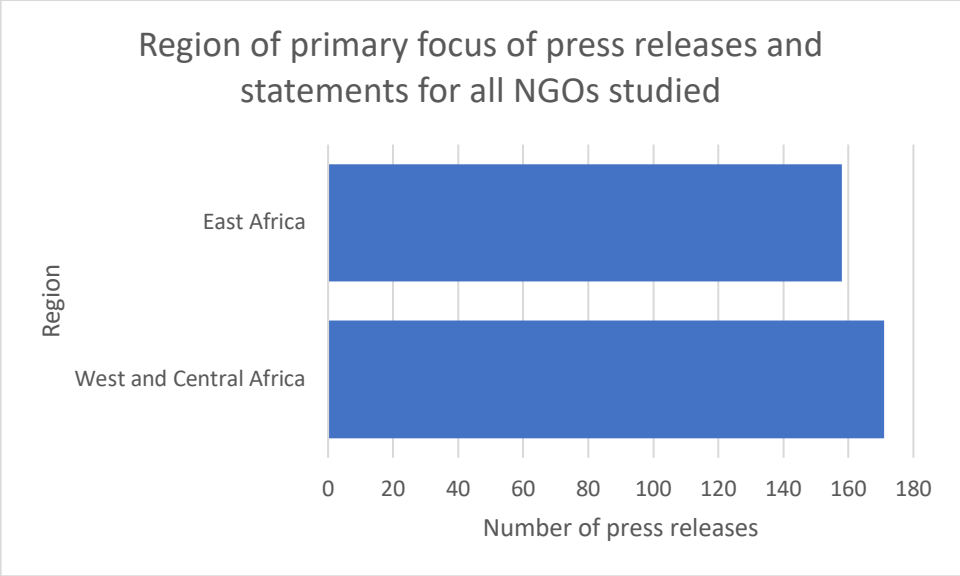


Figure 8.28: Region of primary focus of NGO press releases and statements

There are several possible explanations for this pattern. Firstly, the NGOs examined in this sample originally hail from different countries, and as such, their priorities may be influenced by diverse perspectives on the Anglophone-led Western news agenda. For instance, MSF, originating from France, maintains its international headquarters in Geneva, situated in Francophone Switzerland, along with operational centres in Brussels and Paris. This organisational context may be reflected in the distribution of regional focuses in MSF press releases and statements, with 65% concerned with West and Central Africa, a predominantly Francophone region.

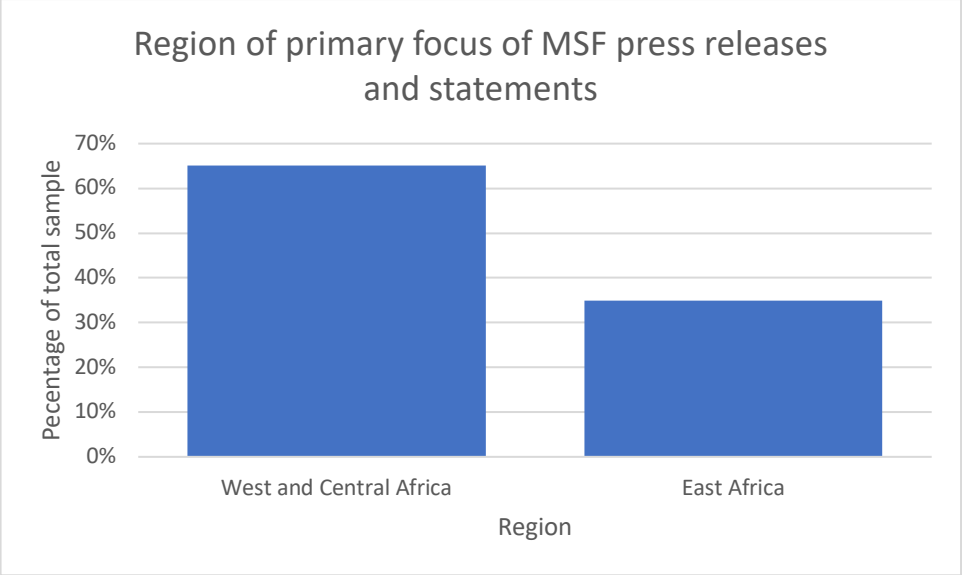


Figure 8.29: Region of primary focus of MSF press releases and statements

Contrastingly, Care, originally an American organisation designed to provided food aid to people in Europe following the second world war, demonstrates a greater focus on Anglophone East Africa, by a percentage of 56.5% to 43.5%. There is a similar breakdown for UK-based Save the Children, which was found to focus on East Africa, with 60% of its press releases and statements primarily concerning this region. This means that NRC, which is headquartered in Norway, which has no colonial or linguistic ties to either region, is the deciding factor in the overall breakdown. NRC was found to focus more on West and Central Africa, with 58% of its releases primarily concerning this region.

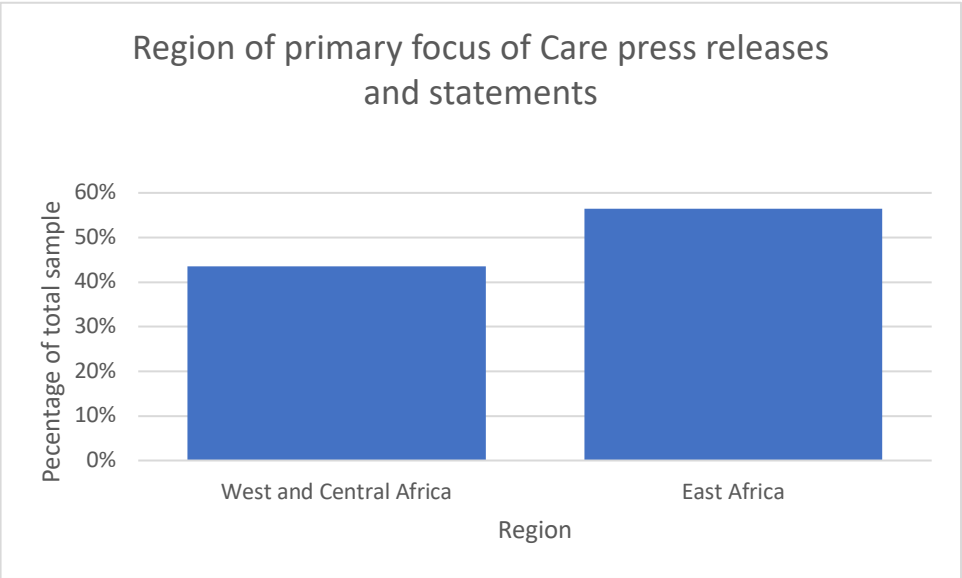


Figure 8.30: Region of primary focus of Care International press releases and statements

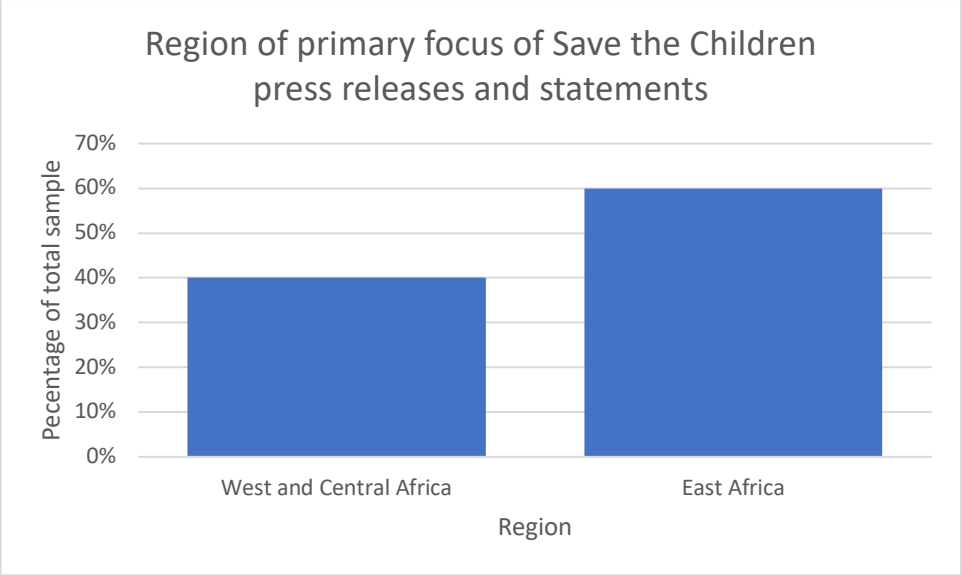


Figure 8.31: Region of primary focus of Save the Children International press releases and statements

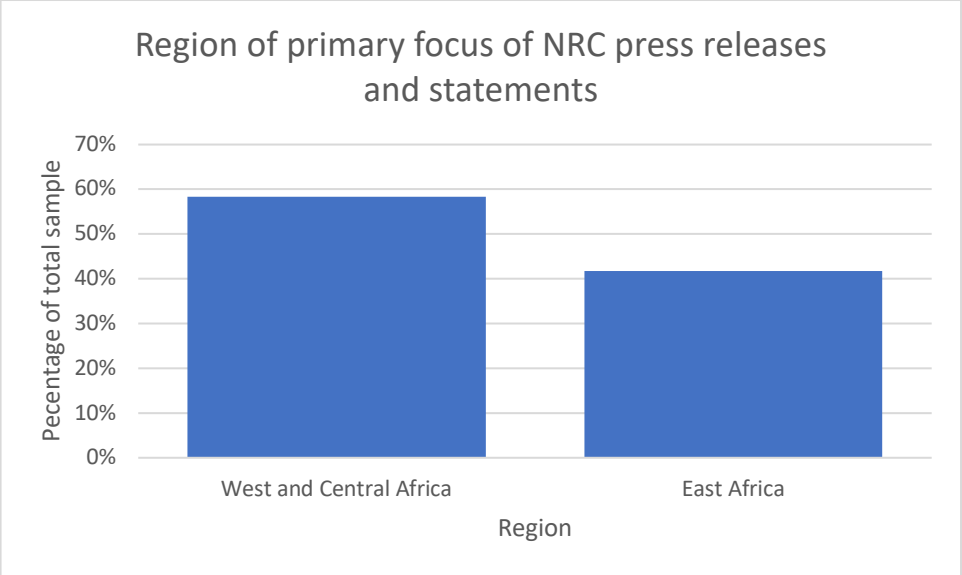


Figure 8.32: Region of primary focus of NRC press releases and statements

Another potential explanation for the slightly higher prevalence of statements and releases focused on West and Central Africa may be associated with the levels of humanitarian need in crises within this region. During the examined period, one of the most significant crises in West and Central Africa was in Nigeria, a former British colony with English as an official language, despite being otherwise surrounded by Francophone states. The complex crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, part of West and Central Africa, emerged as the most substantial crisis in Africa in terms of average UN humanitarian funding appeals throughout

the studied years. The top six crises in East, West, and Central Africa, based on average UN humanitarian funding appeals during this period, featured four countries in East Africa: South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia. These findings underscore concerns expressed by humanitarian communicators in this study, indicating that certain crises in East Africa, particularly those in Sudan and Ethiopia, are deemed too sensitive for NGO media teams to engage with on a regular basis. This reluctance was attributed to the perceived risk of having aid operations suspended by local authorities or of exposing their staff members to significant personal risk.

To investigate how political sensitivity might influence NGOs' media prioritisation, this study compared crises' overall humanitarian need with their prevalence in NGO press releases over the studied period. The Global Humanitarian Overview, published by UN OCHA, serves as a suitable comparative figure to represent humanitarian need. Described as "the world's most comprehensive, authoritative, and evidence-based overview of the current state and future trends in humanitarian action" (UN OCHA 2021), it outlines the UN's humanitarian funding requirements for the world's most pressing crises. For the sake of the comparison, the annual funding requirements for crises in East, West, and Central Africa were aggregated for each year of the study (2018–2022), and an average funding requirement was calculated for each. The crises were then ranked based on the size of their mean annual funding requirement compared to other countries in East, West, and Central Africa.

8.9 Comparing humanitarian need and press release prevalence

Country	Ranking in East, West and Central Africa by average UN annual funding requirements	Ranking in East, West and Central Africa by press release prevalence in this study
DRC	#1 ($1.816)	#1 (18.2%)
South Sudan	#2 ($1.696)	#2 (15.5%)
Ethiopia	#3 ($1.4696)	#5 (7.7%)
Sudan	#4 ($1.422)	#6 (6.3%)
Somalia	#5 ($1.334)	#3 (11.3%)
Nigeria	#6 ($1.0178)	#4 (8.3%)

Table 8.1: Comparison of average UN funding requirements (2018-2022) and NGO press release prevalence

Table 8.1 reveals that, when all press releases and statements examined in this study were categorised by their primary country of focus, the Democratic Republic of Congo received the highest level of attention from NGOs overall, constituting the focus of 18.2% of all press releases. Following the DRC were South Sudan (15.5%) and Somalia (11.3%). Nigeria (8.3%) occupied the fourth position, while Ethiopia (7.7%) and Sudan (6.3%) occupied the fifth and sixth spots, respectively. Moreover, Table 8.1 also illustrates that the top six countries with the highest average humanitarian funding requirements coincided with the top six countries in terms of NGO press release prevalence. Put simply, for most of the biggest crises in East, West and Central Africa, an NGO's media prioritisation of a crisis can be directly linked to the size of the crisis's humanitarian funding requirements. This finding prompts two potential interpretations: Firstly, NGOs may be prioritising crises for media attention based on the possible availability of future humanitarian funding. Alternatively, NGOs might also be prioritising crises based on the perceived scales of humanitarian need. The most plausible scenario is likely a combination of both factors, each of which speak to an argument that, despite previous research suggesting otherwise, NGOs do in fact prioritise humanitarian need above all other factors when choosing which crises to highlight. Of course, these press releases of (subjectively) less newsworthy crises might not actually get picked up by the media, but NGOs cannot be accused of failing to try.

Following closer examination of the rankings of individual countries in both columns of Table 8.1, significant insights emerge. Firstly, the Democratic Republic of Congo was identified as having both the highest humanitarian funding requirements and the greatest prevalence of press releases throughout the study period. South Sudan occupied the second position in both humanitarian funding requirements and press release prevalence. The case of DRC is noteworthy, as humanitarian communicators emphasised in interviews for this study that the country is often overlooked in the media despite its substantial humanitarian needs. This was because the DRC, a long-running and protracted crisis, was rarely considered to align with the western news agenda. NGOs have repeatedly faced accusations of tailoring their publicity efforts to suit the existing news agenda rather than highlighting crises seen as less interesting to the mainstream press but equally worthy as those that do receive coverage (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Powers, 2018; Waisbord 2011). These findings cast a degree of doubt that this is in fact the case and aligns to certain extents with Moon (2017)'s notions of compliance and bargaining which pushed back on the idea that mainstream media practices are uncritically assimilated into NGO communications strategies. While these results also appear to challenge that

argument, a comprehensive analysis of press coverage concerning the DRC over this period is necessary to determine the presence of a pre-existing news agenda. It's important to consider that the high prevalence of press releases related to the DRC was likely influenced by the presence of the Ebola virus in the country during this period. Additionally, as outlined earlier in this chapter, the availability of government and World Health Organization data for this crisis might have encouraged NGOs to use such data in their media output. Whereas this study has not gone on to track which of these crises ultimately achieved the most coverage, they do suggest that previous research finding successful media outreach by NGOs tended to focus on dramatic coverage (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Van Leuven and Joye 2014) does not impact an NGO's output or prioritisation as much as previously thought.

The findings for both the DRC and South Sudan suggest that NGOs felt relatively free to speak out about the crises in these countries. This is despite the qualitative results of this study highlighting challenges to NGO and media freedom in South Sudan, including instances of local authorities requiring approval of communications materials and the close monitoring of NGO media activities. Therefore, the prevalence of press releases does not necessarily indicate complete freedom or the lack of fear for personal safety on the behalf of NGO communicators. Humanitarian data regarding hunger in South Sudan was described by one interviewee as "hugely politicised," with the government accused of refusing to approve certain datasets, leading to challenges in publicising critical information. The Aid Worker Security Database also reported South Sudan as being the country with the most attacks on aid workers for most years covered by this study, highlighting the complex environment NGOs face when operating in such contexts.

Perhaps most notable in Table 8.1 are the cases of Ethiopia and Sudan, especially considering interviewees often described these countries as particularly challenging for NGOs to speak out about. Interestingly, both Ethiopia and Sudan ranked lower in press release prevalence compared to their positions in average humanitarian funding requirements. In contrast, Somalia and Nigeria exhibited higher press release prevalence than Ethiopia and Sudan but lower average humanitarian funding requirements over the study period. These findings align to some extent with the qualitative results of this study, indicating that Sudan and Ethiopia pose greater sensitivities and, as a result, were more difficult to speak out about. Moeller (1999) and Franks (2013) both highlighted the tight control of media messaging by the Ethiopian government, which was also reported in news correspondence throughout the Tigray war, parts of which align with the timings of this study. The Tigray war was an unimaginable human tragedy

resulting in an estimated 600,000 civilian deaths (Naranjo 2023). In comparison, in Yemen, the UN put the death toll by the end of 2021, after six years of conflict, at 377,000 (Naranjo 2023). Both NRC and MSF were suspended from operating in Ethiopia in 2021, after being accused of spreading "misinformation." In July, Ethiopian authorities ordered NRC to suspend all operations for three months, citing allegations of disseminating false information on social media. The suspension was lifted after five months, accompanied by a "strict warning" to the organisation regarding their advocacy work. In all of 2021, at the height of the deadliest war of the 21st Century (Naranjo 2023), Care International released one press release on the Tigray crisis stating it was "deeply concerned" about it. MSF released two press releases. One was to report the suspension of its programmes, the second was to announce the death of three staff members who had been murdered in Tigray.

"The current situation in Tigray and what's happening in Ethiopia is a massive crisis, but hardly anybody is speaking out about it, because the government's perspective and NGO face being kicked out if they talk about it publicly, or support journalists or whatever on the ground."

NGO Head of Media

Equally concerning was the lack of attention given by NGOs to certain countries, despite their significant humanitarian needs. Chad, for example, was the primary focus of only two press releases from all four studied NGOs over the entire period. Examining the stakeholders of NGO media strategy, as outlined in the qualitative findings chapter, potential explanations for this oversight can be suggested. Firstly, in terms of organisational footprint and programmatic involvement, only MSF and Care list themselves as having programme work in Chad. Correspondingly, one release each on humanitarian crises in Chad came from these two organisations. As outlined in the previous chapter, programmatic footprint is one of the key drivers of media prioritisation by NGOs, and organisations are very unlikely to speak out about a crisis if they do not have operations in the area. However, the qualitative comments also highlighted something of a "Catch-22" situation in this regard, because they suggested NGOs were unlikely to commence working in a country or region unless a pre-existing media agenda was present because this would make it more likely to make donor funding become available. This is in line with Krause (2014) which asserts that the primary focus of NGO work is to sell projects to institutional donors, and, in this process, the beneficiaries of the project become commodities. The Central African Republic (CAR) appears to be a country with low project value to NGOs. Despite NRC declaring the CAR the world's most neglected crisis in 2017,

and condemning international efforts as inconsistent, with insufficient aid, CAR was the subject of only twelve press releases or statements during the study period. Again, all releases came from either NRC or MSF, the only organisations reporting work in the country. The lack of NGO media attention to crises in CAR can be attributed to a combination of factors identified in the previous chapter. Rising insecurity and threats against staff make aid delivery challenging, let alone collecting media content for public communication. Only two of the four major NGOs deliver programmes in CAR, despite the country facing serious humanitarian needs. The lack of interest from the mainstream western news cycle can be both a consequence and a potential cause of this situation.

Burkina Faso, identified in interviews as another sensitive country in terms of speaking out, received minimal coverage during the study period despite its substantial humanitarian needs. Only eight press releases or statements addressed the situation in Burkina Faso, with five coming from NRC and three from Save the Children. However, all four NGOs were listed as working in Burkina Faso. Similarly to Ethiopia, NRC's decision to speak out in the country appeared to impact its aid access. A press release expressing concerns over local authorities' struggles to register a growing number of displaced people was cited by the NGO as the reason for the government's order to suspend humanitarian operations. The release emphasised a delay in registering affected individuals and called for government cooperation to facilitate relief efforts. Subsequently, the NGO linked its eventual suspension directly to media coverage of the release. One NRC staff member interviewed for this study highlighted the challenges of operating in Burkina Faso under the scrutiny of local authorities. The interviewee described difficulties in accessing displaced camps, with both journalists and humanitarian communicators facing restrictions. They noted the need to be secretive about their activities, sometimes resorting to deception to overcome authorities' resistance, particularly when trying to document and communicate about sensitive topics.

"When the camp is managed by authorities, then they don't necessarily want me to cover a certain topic. Sometimes I'm just being a bit elusive about what I'm doing, and sometimes I even have to lie and say, 'I'm here just to do visibility, institutional communication,' because, otherwise, in Burkina Faso, for example, they won't let me take pictures of people."

NRC Media Manager

Collectively, these findings depict an NGO sector lacking confidence in conducting media activities focused on some of the world's most critical crises. A diminished eagerness to secure

media coverage for certain crises appears to be developing, reflecting a sector more cautious in its approach and, arguably, less intense in its pursuit of media attention. Cottle and Nolan (2007) previously noted NGOs' "constant pursuit" of media coverage, resulting in sensationalised representations diverting attention from their primary mission. In contrast, this study suggests a more reserved sector, possibly influenced by recent events.

8.10 Human sources in NGO Press Releases

The next section of this chapter examines the prevalence and significance of various human voices in NGO press releases and statements. As outlined in the qualitative segment of this thesis, NGO communicators underscored personal stories as one of the two most important types of content for achieving mainstream media coverage, alongside statistical humanitarian data. The qualitative findings also suggested that personal stories are primarily gathered in person in crisis zones, a process which is itself susceptible to influence from several external factors. These included donor restrictions on access, monitoring by local authorities, as well as logistical, administrative, and financial hurdles associated with reaching crisis areas. The United Nations, as a significant gatekeeper to many crisis zones due to its regular control over transport routes, refugee camps, and security, emerged as an influential actor. However, there was limited evidence to suggest that this power was routinely utilised to directly shape NGO media output. Both qualitative and quantitative findings have indicated a growing apprehension among NGO staff regarding communications in the studied regions, often leading to cautious messaging on sensitive crises. This caution is further underscored by the prevalence of press releases and statements appealing directly to local authorities for safer access for aid delivery. Powers (2015) found NGO communicators to value pluralism, both in their reporting practices and the content they produced. This value was described as a way with which to include voices often excluded from public debates, whilst also ensuring that conflicting viewpoints are given opportunities to discuss issues. Figure 8.33 outlines the prevalence of different categories of voices in NGO press releases and statements. Unsurprisingly, NGO staff members emerged as the most prevalent voices, appearing in 298 press releases or statements, constituting 90.6% of the total sample. Individuals affected by the crisis constituted the second most prevalent category, appearing in 90 press releases or statements, or 27.4% of the entire sample. Conversely, other categories of speakers had minimal representation. For instance, United Nations staff members appeared in only 7 press releases (2.1%) of the sample, and political or

government representatives appeared in just one instance. Notably, there were no celebrity ambassadors featured in any of the press releases or statements directly linked to humanitarian crises in East, West, and Central Africa.

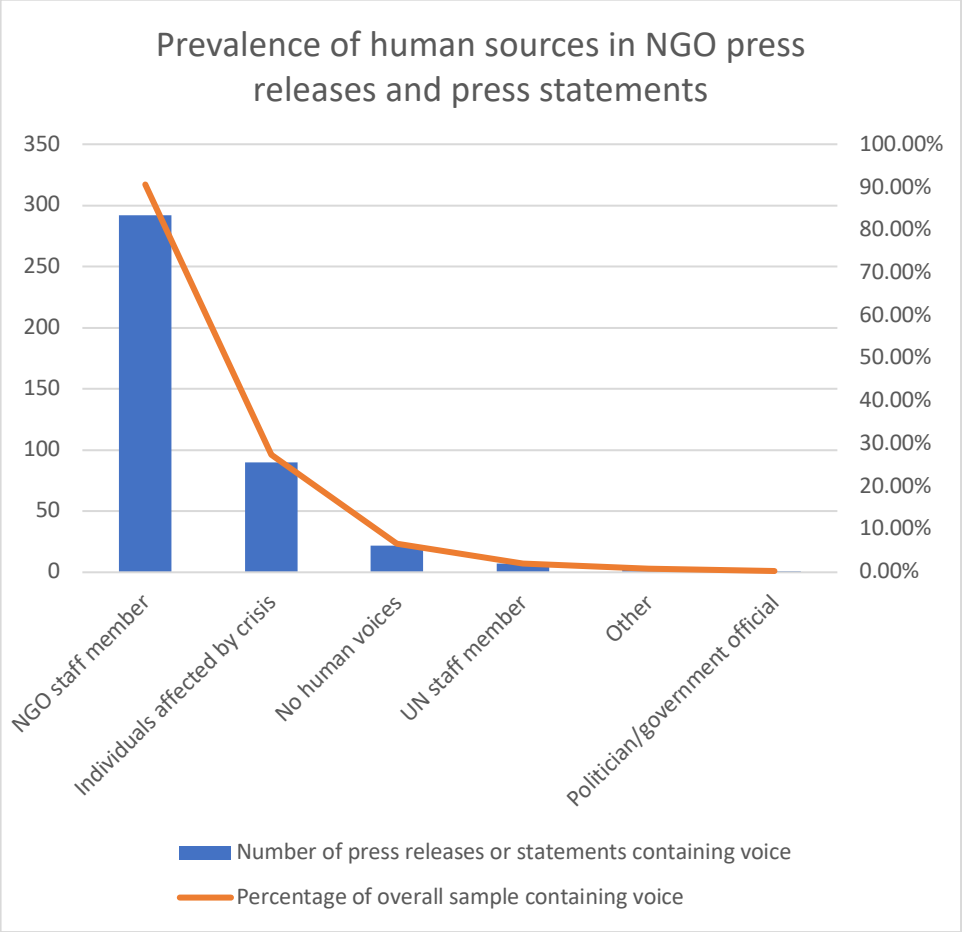


Figure 8.33: Sources of human voices present in NGO press releases and statements

A preliminary analysis of this data suggests that Powers' (2016) findings indicating the value of pluralism among NGO communicators can be both qualified and disqualified for distinct reasons. The fact that only two categories of speaker are responsible for the large share of quotations in press releases, and that the NGO itself is by far the most prevalent, go against the suggestion by communicators interviewed by Powers that NGOs use their products as a way with which to ensure conflicting viewpoints and a range of voices. In Powers's study, press officers acknowledged that the organisation's perspective was the most important to convey but claimed to have increased their efforts to bring additional voices into their press releases. However, the fact that this study identified one of the two main categories of human voice as being individuals affected by crisis, suggests that the importance NGO communicators placed on including voices often excluded from public debates is upheld to some extent.

The study finds a clear delineation between the origins of statistical sources and human sources in NGO press releases and statements, with the United Nations being the predominant source for statistical data but entirely absent as a human voice in NGO communications. Several factors may have contributed to this scenario. Firstly, NGOs might perceive themselves as appearing more credible and relatable when they prioritise their own staff and beneficiaries over UN representatives. Using institutional voices allows NGOs to project a sense of independence and autonomy, particularly when using other actors as sources for statistical data. Additionally, emphasising the NGOs direct involvement and expertise in a humanitarian response may be perceived as beneficial from a fundraising and advocacy perspective. Arguably, this autonomy is less important for statistical UN data, which NGOs may even adapt to make it look like their own, which is likely to be perceived as increasing the credibility of the media content in line with notions of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) and news cloning (Fenton 2010). These findings suggest that NGOs persist in prioritising institutional voices despite evidence suggesting they will rarely be used in the news. Magee and Scott (2016) found affected individuals/vox pops, local government representatives, and experts accounted for 74% of all speakers on average, with NGO voices seldom heard. Broadcasters interviewed were not surprised by these results, saying they reflected a greater drive for authenticity through inclusion of the voices of those directly affected by humanitarian crises. Magee and Scott (2016) warned that increasingly professional content from NGOs appeared to have created a heightened awareness of their agenda building practices.

8.11 Effects of Covid-19 on NGO practice

Based on the qualitative findings, which indicated the importance of powerful personal stories, people affected by crisis might have been expected to feature more often in NGO press releases and statements. However, as Figure 8.33 demonstrates, individuals affected by crisis appeared in only N90 (27.4%) of all releases and statements for the studied period. At this point, it is important to address a possible influential contextual factor concerning such findings. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous countries and regions implemented measures such as quarantines, entry bans, and other travel restrictions. For example, in March 2020, Sudan declared a state of emergency and closed all airports and land borders (IFRC 2020). This study was concerned with press releases published between 2018 and 2022 and so the pandemic can

be assumed to be an influencing factor for certain results, particularly those affected by physical travel. To understand more the extent of how this might have affected the prevalence of affected voices in NGO press content, Figure 8.34 below shows the prevalence of affected citizens in releases and statements pre-pandemic in 2018, and those at the height of the pandemic, in 2020.

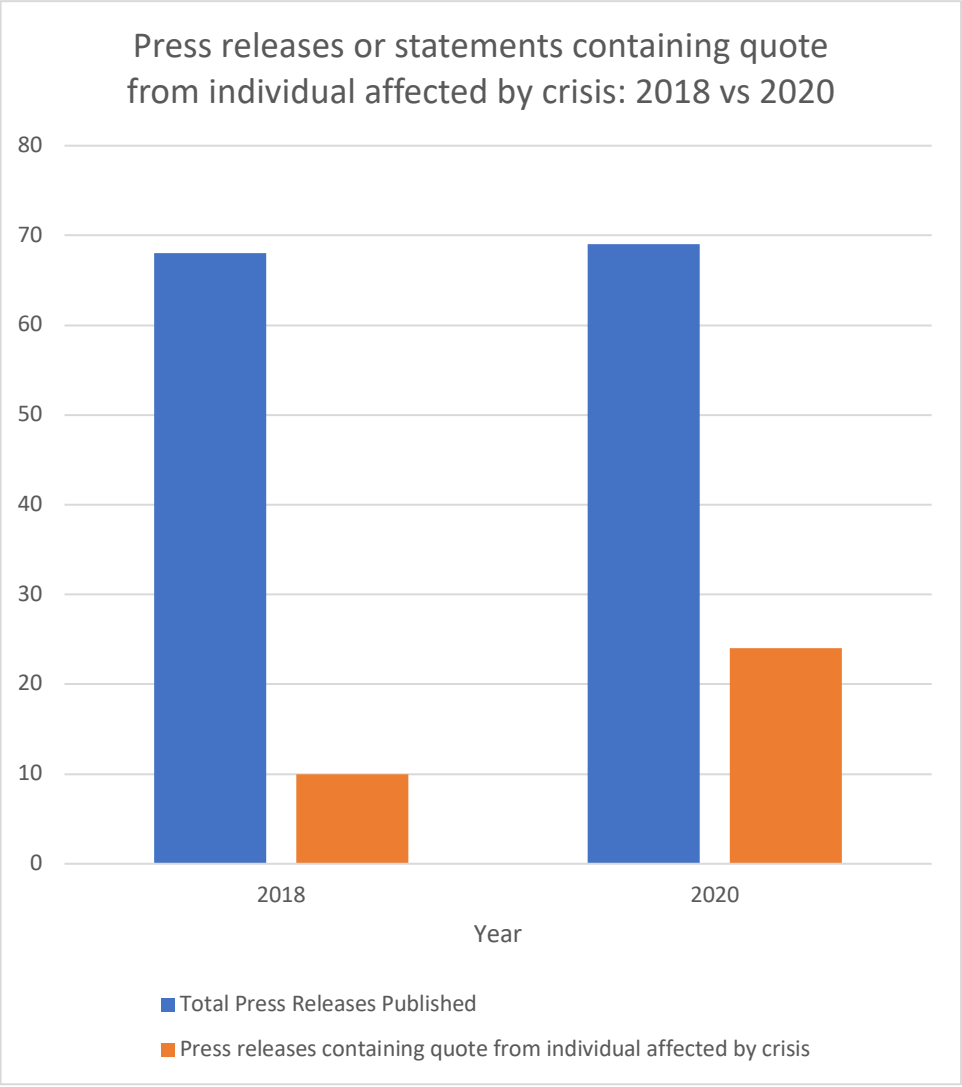


Figure 8.34: Press releases or statements containing quote from individual affected by crisis: 2018 vs 2020

A total of 68 press releases and statements concerning humanitarian crises in East, West, and Central Africa were published by the four studied NGOs in 2018. Of these, 10 releases or statements, or 14.7%, included the voice of a citizen affected by crisis. Contrastingly, in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, 69 press releases or statements were published, of which 24 (34.8%) included the voice of a citizen affected by crisis. Perhaps counterintuitively, these

findings tell us that the voices of individuals affected by crisis were heard significantly more often in NGO output during the pandemic, than before it. Qualitative comments from the interviews for this study point to a noteworthy change in working patterns during the pandemic that appears to have had implications for the content produced. For example, one Global Director of Media said:

"The pandemic has created an enormous change of mindset. Before the pandemic, I think we used to think that we had to get there on the ground as quickly as possible. We had to get the video, we had to get the human stories, and we had to drive the press release for their own content. Now, because we haven't been able to do that at all for a couple of years when we haven't been able to travel, we've been trying to create this capacity within country offices."

NGO Global Director of Media

This reliance on country office staff to gather content instead of flying people in from overseas, was found to be the main way in which the Covid-19 pandemic affected NGO humanitarian media content creation.

"You know, we couldn't get anyone on the ground, and everyone was stuck at home, including all the journalists, and it was at a time when, you know, the news desks were just loaded with COVID. So that was really weird - to really adjust a lot of our practices around that in terms of how we, how we were kind of engaging the media and trying to sort of bring attention to the rest of the world when everyone was becoming very domestic and inward looking."

NGO Director of Media

This additional reliance on local staff, which is one possible reason for the greater number of affected voices in press releases in 2020 compared to 2018, is a practice that appears to be continuing post-pandemic, raising the possibility of a sea-change in attitudes towards media outreach in large western NGOs, and with the potential to have a profound impact on the content they produce.

"I think the type of people collecting the content is beginning to change, and we want to see that happening a lot more. The other thing that's changing is that, because of the debate over

white saviourism, we are creating a roster of nationals who can take the pictures and get the video and gather the content for us. So that we are not constantly seeing everything in Africa through what some people call a white gaze."

NGO Director of Media

"We were more and more reliant on colleagues on the ground, who are already in-country, who could travel, and they did really good. They did really well. For that reason, you will see less and less people being flown in from London, and more and more people, and capacity building also, in countries. They're already there. They have the access, they speak the languages, and they're quite good."

NGO Head of Media

"I think people are getting better at getting the stuff on the phone through necessity, and it's also created a great reliance on the country office staff. Sometimes that's resented because they think, 'Well, why should we be doing this stuff for the media when our job is to educate these children or save these people from wasting.' We have to use powers of persuasion, and we have to use intermediaries sometimes to get what we want. It's become logistically, more complicated. I think it will have a permanent impact because we'll never go back to the amount of travel that we used to have for the cost and environmental reasons that I mentioned. I think there will have to be a halfway house now where we have to justify every trip to higher-ups in a way that we never used to."

NGO Director of Media

"We've done virtual visits for ambassadors through the pandemic. For example, Mo Farah did a virtual visit to Somalia I think he was sitting next to our chief executive in London or something, they were connected. Digitally, they were teamed up with people showing him things in Somalia. He was able to ask questions and hear the answers and get a sense of what our program was achieving. I think that's the future. It's one of those things that the pandemic has accelerated that probably would've happened already because we need to spend less on travel. The increasing focus on carbon emissions in organizations like [NGO NAME] means that there is also an environmental reason not to travel."

NGO Director of Media

Magee and Scott (2016) found news editors demonstrating support for the prominence of the affected citizens due to its perceived authenticity. Cottle (2008) says embedding personal experiences and accounts in news coverage of humanitarian crises is an attempt by the media to invoke a perceived human reality of the events in their aftermath. These results suggest that, although powerful human stories may be seen as important for achieving media coverage, or perhaps as the appropriate thing to do because they may be considered to give greater agency to affected populations, this agency not achieved in most cases over the duration of this study. In addition to variation in this regard based on the year, the prevalence of individuals affected by crisis was found to also vary considerably amongst the analysed NGOs.

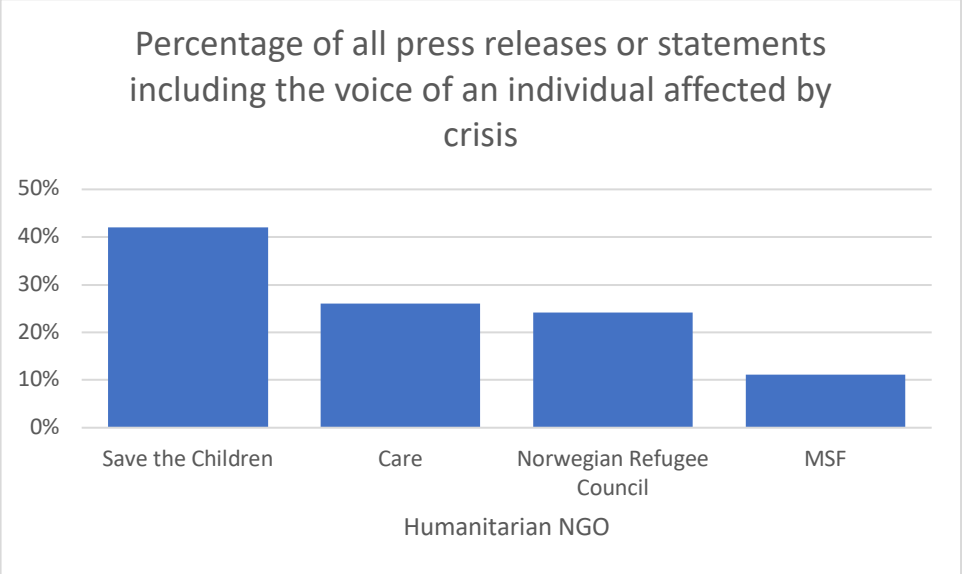


Figure 8.35: Percentage of NGO press releases or statements including the voice of an individual affected by crisis

Figure 8.35 demonstrates this variation. Save the Children was found to have the highest percentage of press releases or statements containing the voice of individuals affected by crisis, with an affected citizen featuring in 42 press releases, which is also 42% of its total sample. Care featured an affected citizen in 12 press releases or statements, which is 26.1% of its overall sample. For NRC, the total was 29 press releases or statements, which is 24.2% of its sample. Finally, MSF featured an affected citizen in only 7 press releases or statements, which is 11.1% of its sample. Interestingly, the two organisations that relied most on statistical humanitarian data from other organisations, were also the two organisations who used the voices of affected citizens the most. One possible explanation for this might be the perceived authenticity offered by having real people in press releases or statements. Whereas NGOs are unable to regularly

collect large enough data sets of their own to use in their press releases, they are able to increase the authenticity of these releases by finding and sharing the voices of real people caught up in the crisis. A Save the Children director working in West and Central Africa pointed to the importance of qualitative comments for guiding the feel of a story if there is less confidence in some of the statistical data.

"I think we need also to acknowledge the limitation of this data and agree to work with some data which are not as solid as we would like, which are not perfect, but, if I'm right to say this, perfect is the enemy of the good. We prefer to focus on the good and making sure that we are telling a story which is close to the qualitative analysis we are doing, instead of staying with a story which is perfect from a quantitative point of view, but it does not reflect the reality. Because the time for the story to be perfect will be three years after the story is told."

NGO Media Director

8.12 Voice prominence in NGO press releases and statements

To measure the prominence afforded to different voices in NGO press releases and statements, the content analysis noted the category of the first human quote. Figure 8.36 shows that NGO staff members were afforded by far the most prominence of all types of voice, appearing as the first quote in 260 press releases or 79% of the entire sample. Comparatively, individuals affected by crisis appeared as the first quote in 43 press releases, which is 13.1% of the entire sample.

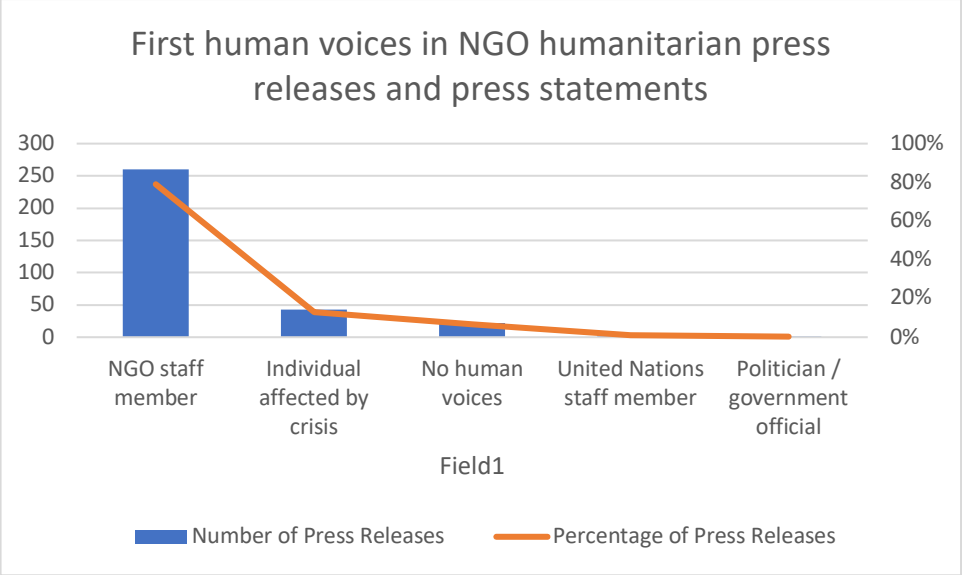


Figure 8.36: Source of first human voice in NGO press releases and press statements

When we look at the results for each NGO, Save the Children gave far more prominence to individuals affected by crisis than any other NGOs, with around a third (32%) of all releases featuring an affected individual as its first quotation. The lowest scoring NGO in this regard was NRC, with 1.7%.

Humanitarian NGO	**Percentage of press releases or statements in which the first voice is an individual affected by crisis**
Save the Children	32%
Care	13%
MSF	4.8%
Norwegian Refugee Council	1.7%

Table 8.2: Percentage of NGO press releases and statements in which the first human voice is an individual affected by crisis

Interestingly, in the case of MSF, which is known to gather most of its statistical humanitarian data from its own programme work, the organisation has not shown a similar desire to do so for personal stories. Save the Children, which tended to rely on United Nations statistical data, has a far greater prevalence and prominence of affected voices in its content. Referring to the qualitative comments, one reason for the low percentage of MSF press releases containing the voices of affected citizens might be the specific model of crises media the organisation uses.

For example, one interviewee noted a tendency to release programme data in a press release but then to follow up with more feature-style media, including patient stories.

"You firstly have the release of numbers, and then maybe a broader context piece, and then we aim to like to have more first-person pieces from the field, describing the situation and what is it really like, and that generates loads of media coverage."

MSF Media Director

"I think we we've been going through this internal process. We're 50 years old, where are we aiming to be? And one of the things is patients having more of a voice in our operations, our organisation more generally and definitely thinking about what that means for communications."

MSF Media Director

The results over the prevalence and prominence of human sources within NGO press releases builds on previous findings around the issues of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) and the adaption of NGO media content to suit the media norms. This study suggests the primary demonstrations of media logic and news cloning (Fenton 2010) in NGO press releases comes in the forms of the statistical humanitarian data used to attract the media's attention, rather than the human voices. The use of human voices is found to be more in line with typical PR content, which values the organisational voice as the most important. In Powers (2015), government officials were found to be the most prominent sources in actual news articles about human rights, ahead of NGOs. However, in this study, a quote from a government official appeared in only one single NGO press release or statement across all studied years.

Chapter 9 - Discussion and conclusion

This final chapter will pull together the range of issues introduced through the literature review, the methodological considerations discussed throughout, and the empirical data collected through the interviews and content analysis. First, the key findings from the project are summarised and contextualised. This is followed by a reflection of the study's contribution towards agenda building theory, and where further research might follow. Thirdly, the findings of the study are considered with reference to two general questions: What implications does the study have for NGO media relations and what can NGOs and journalists take from the study regarding future practice?

9.1 Discussion of key findings

This study has illustrated the complex web of accountabilities and competing agendas humanitarian NGOs must navigate in order to plan, prioritise, and produce professional standard news content. It has identified how the intersecting demands of donor priorities, political and security-related sensitivities, and the obstructed flow of information, as well as the requirements of the media itself, can influence important decisions over which crises to prioritise, the framing of messages, and the extent of an NGOs engagement in media activities.

9.1.1 The mainstream media agenda: still the priority but NGO confidence weakening

Despite widespread acknowledgement of the increasing importance of online platforms for advocacy and fundraising purposes, humanitarian NGOs continue to prioritise influencing the mainstream media agenda, an approach driven by the common belief that traditional news coverage is preferable to all kinds of humanitarian donors and is the most effective way to influence political decision makers. More than a decade on from *Kony 2012,* the online campaign that might have momentarily threatened to re-write the communications models of advocacy organisations worldwide, NGO media practice continues to be largely in line with traditional notions of agenda building and agenda setting theory which identify the mainstream news as playing the pivotal role in the advancement of an issue onto the public and policy agendas (Cobb and Elder 1971; McCombs and Shaw 1972). Although the prioritisation of the media agenda was near-unanimously acknowledged across the interviews, signs were also uncovered that the confidence in this approach by humanitarian communicators is weakening.

This wavering is not, as perhaps might be expected, driven primarily by the growing appreciation by communicators of the influence of online platforms and participatory information flows, but rather by an increasing disillusionment regarding the prevailing donor-focused approach to media engagement, in which outreach is treated as a financial opportunity rather than a means with which to highlight humanitarian need or fight social injustice. Such an approach has been criticised in the past due to, for instance, a propensity for dramatic and decontextualised representations of crisis (Cottle 2007; Latonero and Kift 2018; Glasman and Lawson 2023), the selection and silences of certain crises in relation to others (Cottle 2008; Cottle and Nolan 2009), and the commodification of suffering (Krause 2014). In addition to varying degrees of concurrence with such critiques, some interviewees additionally expressed scepticism about the actual impact of donor-focused media strategies, including the ability to achieve funding. For example, one interviewee suggested donors will almost always make decisions based on their own institutional priorities regardless of the communications efforts of NGOs. These findings resonate with previous studies, such as Scott et al. (2022), in which governmental donor bureaucrats suggested longer-term aid funding for crises was minimally affected by media coverage, Eftekhar et al. (2017) who found donors to be more concerned with an NGO's operational performance when determining future donations, and Olsen et al. (2003) who found that only occasionally did the media play a decisive role in influencing donors.

The demands of creating news content impactful enough to influence the media agenda in the face of competing issues and their proponents, means NGOs - the traditional providers of humanitarian information subsidies to journalists - were also found to use information subsidies themselves to shorten the time and cost of their own newsgathering. In line with notions of media logic, the content deemed most critical to influencing the media agenda was found to be statistical humanitarian data and powerful first-person stories, the collection and publication of which were considered susceptible to the influence of other actors. For instance, NGOs were found to mainly use secondary humanitarian data to generate newsworthy angles and journalistic context, but such statistics were seen as liable to politicisation by local authorities. Likewise, physical access to crisis zones could be restricted and humanitarian communicators closely monitored by western governmental donors and local authorities. Ultimately, this means the NGO agenda building process is susceptible to outside influence and, as a result, a likelihood exists that NGO media messaging is either watered down or skewed by the competing priorities of other actors within the humanitarian sector. The humanitarian NGO's

role as an aid provider is often the critical factor here because the high degrees of visibility associated with mainstream media coverage means decisions over when and how to speak out publicly about a crisis are usually weighed up against the possibility of resulting threats to staff and programme safety or funding.

Contextualising these findings within the existing research into the representation of Africa in the news media suggests that the continuing NGO prioritisation of the media agenda, ultimately as a means through which to influence the public and policy agendas, can be considered at least partly responsible for the continuing decontextualised and stereotypical representations of Africa reported in the Western news media, but that this is uneven and varies from crisis to crisis. Only crises with hard-hitting data or emotive personal stories are likely to achieve mainstream media coverage but exposure to such sources is often closely guarded by the most powerful actors in certain crises. As a result, some crises continue to go underreported and NGOs risk being silenced. The fear of speaking out over the most sensitive crises means agenda building efforts are largely restricted to those seen as less threatening to programmes and staff. When there is an ability to publicise sensitive crises, the danger remains that the information sources upon which NGOs rely to achieve mainstream coverage, such as secondary humanitarian data, means their messaging is at least still partly controlled by other actors. Such findings echo concerns regarding how the pursuit of media can detract from an NGO's core objectives because it erodes the norms at the heart of their logic (McPherson 2016), including their impartiality and commitment to "universal humanitarianism" (Cottle and Nolan 2007 864; Fenton 2010).

9.1.2 Humanitarian donors and the close control of NGO media messaging

The donor-NGO relationship concerning the use of media in humanitarian crises was found to be multi-layered and complex, characterised by close collaboration and partnership at one juncture and notable power imbalances the next. The link between media coverage and the distribution of humanitarian aid funding is well established (Olsen et al 2003; Cooper 2009; Eftekhar et al. 2017; Scot et al, 2021) and, just as NGOs face increasing pressure to stand out before a limited pool of international governmental donors, so too their communicators face pressure to design and implement media strategies that satisfy these paymasters in more ways than one. One of the most important findings of this study revealed how intricate and complex this process of satisfaction can be – a process that stretches well beyond the conventional cause-and-effect paradigm of employing the media to encourage a release of funds (Berlemann and

Thomas, 2019; Sobel Cohen et al. 2021) to navigating the sensitive, often political, dynamics of working alongside donors once funding has been received. Indeed, donor influence over NGO media strategy was found to be as pronounced after NGOs have received funding as it was before. Critical to this new understanding were the insights of NGO communications staff based in field positions in Africa, where the sensitivities of working with donors were found to be more pronounced than in head office contexts.

On the positive side, the study revealed new insights into collaborative efforts between communications staff at NGOs and donors. Complementing the prevailing view that humanitarian donors *incentivise* NGOs to use the mainstream media (Powers 2016) as a means by which to learn about NGO activities, NGO and donor communicators were also found to work side-by-side to plan the sorts of media that might *enable* donors to release funds in future. These collaborations were found to largely occur at the regional and national levels and were characterised by donor staff informing NGO staff that their bosses wished to release funding in certain areas but required an NGO to raise awareness in the media to facilitate this. This drew parallels with the notion of transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998) in which an NGO's power to achieve publicity and visibility was considered central to a network's success (Thrall et al. 2014). It also aligns with Eftekhar et al. (2017) who suggested an NGOs ability to demonstrate its operational performance, including the success of its previous projects, was critical to it receiving donor funding. Another finding regarding donor-focused media activities was the perception among humanitarian communicators from both NGOs and the United Nations that the intensity and urgency of media content could significantly influence the likelihood of a donor releasing funds. This aligned with previous research finding NGOs to strategically incorporate dramatic elements into their narratives (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Waisbord 2011; Van Leuven and Joye 2014) in accordance with the concept of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007). Scott et al. (2022) also noted a perceived link between the intensity of media coverage and the subsequent pressure on organisations to disburse emergency aid funds promptly.

Whereas the incentivisation by donors of mainstream media coverage clearly does exist, as illustrated above, once funding has been received by NGOs, various other dynamics were found to come into play. For example, for cases in which crises were considered politically sensitive to the donor, a close control of the media narrative could be exercised. Again, this was mostly visible at the regional and national levels in which communications staff were found to be more aware of the power imbalance between their organisation and the donor, and political

sensitivities were more obvious. For instance, a communications manager in Niger spoke of being unable to publish a press release without sending it to the relevant donor for sign-off and being unable to visit a programme to collect content without seeking donor authorisation first. These requests, the staff member said, were often rejected. Donors, therefore, were also found to *disincentivise* mainstream media in certain scenarios and, in such cases, a notable power imbalance between the donor and NGO became more pronounced. The fact that humanitarian donors regularly fund national NGO communications positions in East, West and Central Africa has the potential to reinforce this imbalance in field contexts. If such funding is linked to a specific theme, such as gender equality, then the likelihood exists that the communicator will prioritise this to various extents in their work.

A donor's institutional priorities were found to regularly impact an NGO's media priorities. This could manifest itself in multiple ways based on various possible dynamics in-play and could be both a direct and in-direct influence. For example, an NGO might design a humanitarian response programme based on a donor's institutional priorities because they expect future funding to be made available in that area. Because an NGO's programmatic footprint then influences its own media priorities, when this programme is eventually operational the crisis in question is likely to be elevated in the NGO's media priorities. Alternatively, a donor's institutional priority might instead first influence an NGO's media strategy and the resulting coverage might prompt a release of funds from the donor to the NGO, which would then result in the NGO implementing a humanitarian response programme. Once NGO programmes are operational, various levels of narrative control can then be exercised by the donor, as outlined above. Contrastingly, on certain occasions, a power imbalance was also found to exist in favour of the NGO, particularly after donor funding had been received. This is because donors do not typically implement humanitarian projects themselves and so are reliant on NGO communications staff to gather and collect media content about their funded programmes, which the donor can then use in its own media output. On some occasions, such work is carried out willingly and proactively by the NGO as a sign of gratitude or to demonstrate to the donor the success of the funding received. However, on other occasions, a lack of willingness and perceived capacity of NGO communicators in field positions to gather content to the standards expected by donors can create frustration on the funder's behalf.

9.1.3 Questionable data, source credibility, and NGO media professionalism

This study extended the examination of information sources in the humanitarian news media to analyse those used by NGOs in information subsidies and revealed the diverse ways in which humanitarian organisations employ statistical data in their public communications. A key finding was that the statistics featured in NGO press releases or statements were seldom originally gathered or published by the NGOs themselves. Instead, they predominantly originated from other humanitarian actors, most notably those within the United Nations system. The primary rationale behind this practice was attributed to a lack of capacity within NGOs to independently collect and verify datasets at a large enough scale to be deemed relevant to the mainstream media. However, interviewees also spoke of the perceived safety of using United Nations figures, which were seen as being less controversial because they were often gathered or signed-off in partnership with governments. Communicators were found to search publicly available datasets or situation reports for newsworthy statistics. In some instances, communicators applied mathematical techniques to infuse these figures with a sense of novelty or uniqueness, thereby enhancing the news value and perceived authenticity of the NGO's message. On other occasions, the original source of the data was not identified, leaving its origin open to misunderstanding or a possible presumption by audiences that it was originally collected by the NGO publishing the press release. In fact, unsourced data emerged as the most common category of data in NGO press releases or statements, including in the first instances of statistical data, which are more likely to be used to craft news angles. This raises questions about whether such occurrences are down to poor journalistic practice or whether there might have been an intention to deceive. The prevalence of United Nations data in NGO media output is noteworthy, especially considering serious concerns raised both by professionals interviewed for this study and in previous literature (Bhuta et al. 2018; Maxwell 2019; Paulus et al. 2022; Glasman and Lawson 2023) about the frequent politicisation of such data, particularly by host governments, as well as the professional challenges of gathering accurate large-scale datasets within some African crisis contexts. Indeed, one experienced senior interviewee based in West Africa suggested that nobody can say with any degree of accuracy how many children have been recruited by force in Nigeria, how many children have left school in DRC, or how many children are dying from malnutrition in Somalia. Glasman and Lawson (2023) warned that states can manipulate numbers for various reasons including delegitimising competing actors and capturing international aid and that data manipulation can occur at all levels of humanitarian response, including within humanitarian organisations. This could be to legitimise a project, maximise funding, or minimise risk, and can be done both intentionally and unintentionally. Humanitarian organisations, the authors say, often produce

poor data without being fully aware of doing so. For example, the challenging contexts of humanitarian response, including a lack of access to certain areas, the urgency of interventions, and the breakdown of institutions can all contribute towards the production of poor data, meaning that humanitarian numbers are "often guesstimates or rough estimations."

Previous research has suggested that leading humanitarian NGOs such as those profiled in this study provide 'boots on the ground' (Powers 2015) reporting to complement the work of journalists whose international work has been curtailed by budgetary restraints and the wider implications of the political economy of international news (Utley 1997; Sambrook 2010; Cooper 2011; Brüggemann et al. 2017). NGOs provide information subsidies to journalists to lessen the cost of newsgathering and the need for verification (McPherson 2016), thus enabling a degree of agenda building on the organisation's behalf. Curtin (1999) suggested agenda building occurs when groups obtain media placement of their information subsidies, and, as a result, influence the media agenda, which, in turn, can influence the public and policy agendas. Statistical data is considered constitutive of journalistic content (Curtin and Maier 2001; Van Witsen 2018) and humanitarian data is a well-documented information subsidy provided to journalists by NGOs, so much so that Scott et al. (2022) argue such sources have become the "primary definers" (Hall et al. 1978) of a crisis. The presentation of statistics in the form of editorial subsidies (Jackson and Maloney 2016) or cloned news content (Fenton 2010) further reduces the time and resources required, with journalists reported to rarely challenge the data they receive and to reproduce the narratives of their sources (Van Leuven and Joye 2014; Lugo-Ocando and Nguyen 2017; Lawson 2021).

Whereas the politicisation and questionable quality of humanitarian data each present their own challenges, the significant prevalence of unsourced statistics revealed another concern related to NGOs' use of numbers. As highlighted in the quantitative findings, 53.2 per cent of the entire sample, comprising 175 press releases or statements, contained at least one instance of statistical humanitarian data for which the source was not immediately identifiable. In terms of the first item of statistical data, which might shape the angle of a news story, the percentage was 28 per cent. These findings varied notably among NGOs, with MSF, which largely avoids external data sources, having a more respectable position than other organisations in terms of source attribution. Several possible reasons could explain why NGOs might not attribute a source of statistical data. For example, there may be a lack of capacity or media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007) in an NGO's news team, diminishing the perceived importance of source attribution in media output. Churnalism, a type of journalism that relies

on reusing existing material such as press releases and news agency reports instead of original research is a well-established practice among journalists reporting on humanitarian crises. For instance, Van Leuven and Joye (2014) found journalists frequently incorporating information directly from press releases into news articles. Scott et al. (2018) found 99 per cent of articles about South Sudan and Yemen on the Mail Online in 2017 to have originated from news agencies. Paterson (2007) found online news portals and aggregators to demonstrate substantially no mediation of news agency content, with text duplicating news agency text for an average of 85%. The findings of this study suggest NGO communicators engage in a form of data churnalism, as evidenced by both the number of organisations using figures from the same sources, such as UN reports, as well as the prevalence of unsourced statistics circulating among different NGOs.

A large body of academic research has charted the rise of the NGO as modern-day international newsmakers (for example, Cooper 2009; Fenton 2010; Powers 2018). This rise was considered to have been driven by multiple factors, but the acquiring of media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Cottle and Nolan 2007), partly through the employment of former professional journalists and freelancers (Fenton 2010; Wright 2016; Powers 2016) was seen as a means by which richer, media-savvy NGOs could news clone (Fenton 2010) to the required standards and frequency to achieve cut through in the mainstream press. Central to an NGO's success was its reputation as a credible and accurate source (Franklin 2011; McPherson 2016; Bhuta et al 2018) and the findings of this study suggest NGO media professionalism and credibility is under considerable threat. According to Glasman and Lawson (2023), large humanitarian statistics can depict poverty as an inherent trait of the referenced groups, rather than as the outcome of power dynamics or wrongdoing by powerful actors. Latonero and Kift (2018) say the use of death tolls dehumanises disaster-affected communities into data points. Failing to approach such figures with caution can normalise inequalities and strip injustice of its political context (Glasman and Lawson 2023). Bhuta et al (2018) warn that the expansion of the role of data in global governance across the last 20 years means indicators and rankings are increasingly produced 'from within' by individuals without the specific disciplinary knowledge to sufficiently satisfy qualities of neutrality. According to Paulus et al (2022) the high stakes, limited resources and high cognitive load of humanitarian response means it is prone to induce biases in data and in the cognitive processes of analysts and decision-makers. The possible impacts of the continuing over-use of such datasets, therefore, could include the diminished credibility of humanitarian NGOs, a lack of source pluralism in humanitarian journalism, the

misrepresentation of crises and their victims, and a failure on behalf of both the news media and NGOs to hold power to account - a role considered to be at the core of both institutional fields.

9.1.4 Humanitarian communications, media freedom, and the climate of fear

NGO humanitarian communications activities in East, West, and Central Africa were found to exist in a climate of fear due to the close monitoring of NGO communicators, the ever-present threat of suspensions to aid delivery, and the perceived physical dangers to NGO staff. This climate of fear affects both the humanitarian media content produced and decisions over whether to produce it. For example, one of the reasons United Nations humanitarian data is used so often in press releases is due to the perceived safety of the UN brand and the UN's accountabilities to national governments. Specifically, data published by the UN was considered to have received government approval and was therefore considered less risky for NGOs to use. Concerns about the physical safety of NGO staff led programme teams to restrict communicators from speaking out about crises in sensitive cases, and the fear of aid suspension results in NGOs being less vocal about certain issues or crises. The importance of physical access to crisis zones for humanitarian communicators was consistently emphasised in interviews, and the enduring impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased reliance on in-country staff for content collection. In some countries, NGO media activities were found to be subject to close monitoring by local authorities. Humanitarian communicators said they sometimes employ tactics to avoid detection, such as presenting content collection as institutional communication rather than destined for the mainstream media. The most significant factor preventing NGOs from speaking out about a crisis was found to be the threat of a suspension to aid delivery, especially in challenging contexts in countries including Burkina Faso, Sudan, and Ethiopia. This fear was found to have had a direct impact on media prioritisation, with large crises in Sudan and Ethiopia under-reported by NGOs compared to others in the regions studied.

Various studies have explored the blurring boundaries between NGO communicators and journalists (Cooper 2009; Conrad 2015; Powers 2018; Scott et al. 2023). The climate of fear faced by both humanitarian communicators and journalists in some countries in East, West, and Central Africa expands these comparisons further. For example, in Sudan, journalists critical of local authorities or involved in publishing compromising documents concerning the government can operate under constant surveillance, requiring a special government-issued

media pass and permits for access to most regions (Reporters Without Borders 2024). This study revealed instances of information control by Sudanese authorities, including a local humanitarian commission's mandate that all NGO communications material undergo their approval process. The conflict in Tigray has triggered an escalation in journalist abuse in Ethiopia, where Reporters Without Borders states that journalists deviating from the government narrative face serious charges and detention. This study identifies a parallel authoritarian grip on NGO messaging in Ethiopia, with communicators saying the looming threat of programme suspension or closure influences their decisions over speaking out. This threat has materialised on occasion, resulting in suspensions for both NRC and MSF due to their media messaging. When MSF programmes resumed following a suspension, a stringent warning from the Ethiopian government about the organisation's future advocacy work accompanied the reopening.

Various studies have examined press freedom in East and West African countries and the use of the media as an agenda building tool by governments (Mwenda 2007; Rubongoya 2007; Kalyango Jr and Eckler 2010; Sobel et al. 2020; Ajakaiye et al. 2023). In South Sudan, press freedom is deemed "extremely precarious" by Reporters Without Borders (2024), citing censorship, intimidation, and information suppression. Journalists, both South Sudanese and from overseas, were found to face grave risks, including execution, torture, abduction, arbitrary detention, poisoning, and harassment for attempting independent reporting. NGO workers are confronted with similar dangers in South Sudan, with the Aid Worker Security Database confirming it as the country with the highest number of attacks on aid workers throughout the study period. Humanitarian data related to hunger in South Sudan was characterised by communicators in this study as "hugely politicised" with accusations against the government related to obstructing certain datasets, resulting in challenges in disseminating critical information. Nigeria is classified by Reporters Without Borders (2024) as one of West Africa's most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists, who are often monitored, attacked, and arbitrarily arrested. The country is home to most of West Africa's violent attacks, arbitrary detentions, and shooting deaths of journalists (Reporters Without Borders 2024). Likewise, Nigeria was consistently highlighted as a country in which the media messaging of NGOs was strongly influenced by serious risks to staff safety and concerns over the possibility of a heavy-handed responses to coverage. Restrictions on media freedom common to both journalists and humanitarian communicators in crises in East, West and Central Africa include:

- Close surveillance and monitoring

- Intimidation and threats
- Political interference and censorship
- Politicisation of media content and sources

The impact of the climate of fear surrounding NGO humanitarian communications in these regions is likely to be significant. Studies commonly draw a line between media freedom and the state of democracy, with a free and independent media considered to be in a better position to inform the population and hold leaders to account. Without this, citizens are unable to make informed decisions and abuses of power go unexposed. This study finds host governments to have a worrying level of control of NGO media messaging about the crises in which they may be implemented. This can stretch from the control of the media agenda itself to the influencing of some of the key information sources informing it.

9.1.5 The contrasting media strategies of NGOs and UN humanitarian agencies

The study compared how different actors, including NGO communicators and personnel from UN humanitarian agencies, establish media objectives and priorities regarding humanitarian funding. Previous findings regarding increased news access by NGOs have commonly been tempered by the fact that NGO media cut-through has often been found to rely on riding the existing news agenda (Cottle and Nolan 2009; Waisbord 2011; Van Leuven and Joye 2014). However, the findings of this study suggest NGOs are less influenced by the news agenda than previously thought. For example, when the primary countries of focus of NGO press releases were examined, the DRC was found to be the country NGOs covered the most in their press releases and press statements, despite the fact it was identified in interviews as a crisis for which it is often challenging to capture the media's attention. In fact, the scale of the humanitarian need was found to be, in most cases, the primary driver of a crisis's prioritisation. Cottle and Nolan (2009) say that media logic enables NGOs to know "exactly what the media require and incorporate this into their professional practice and communications strategies" to brand their organisations in response to an increasingly crowded and competitive NGO field. When Scott et al. (2018) interviewed aid workers on their views of humanitarian journalism, almost three quarters of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that mainstream news did not produce enough coverage of humanitarian issues and crises. Many respondents felt that mainstream news coverage concentrated on a small number of crises, and that the story choices rarely related to the severity of each emergency, nor the everyday suffering of people caught up in long-term or chronic issues. Cottle (2008) says covering crises based on professional

judgements of news values can help to explain "the selection, salience and silences" of disaster reporting around the world (2008, p49). The findings from this study suggest NGOs are, as a minimum, attempting to raise the profile of some crises outside of the primary news agenda and primarily basing their media priorities on humanitarian need. However, this study also identified several serious crises in the region receiving very little to no attention by NGO communicators despite their significant humanitarian needs. These included crises in Chad and the Central African Republic. This highlights another important concern over NGO advocacy practice, namely that if an NGO is not delivering programme work in a country, then they will very rarely, if ever, talk about it in the media. This study suggests this is more likely to affect the "selection, salience and silences" (Cottle 2009) of disaster reporting around the world than prioritising crises based on judgements of news values.

UN humanitarian agencies were each found to employ distinct approaches to fundraising, communications, and advocacy dependent on the political and financial structures of the organisations. For instance, WHO relies primarily on member states' dues and voluntary contributions, reducing its reliance on media for fundraising, while UNICEF relies on voluntary contributions from various sources, including governments, donors, foundations, and the private sector. UN agencies engaged in public fundraising often align their media strategies to some extent with NGOs, while agencies with guaranteed annual funding exhibit different strategies. Overall, there was found to be a generalised focus on reinforcing norms rather than promoting significant change in communications efforts among most UN humanitarian agencies. This was aimed at maintaining political relationships, promoting leadership profiles, and satisfying member states. However, UN agencies like OCHA, despite primarily relying on contributions from member states, plays a dual role of advocating for humanitarian crises and securing funding for humanitarian response plans. As a result, UN OCHA can prioritise crises for media attention based on overall funding needs and advocacy requirements.

A perception was noted among communicators that UN agencies engaged in public fundraising have greater similarities with NGOs in their media work, which was considered to have both advantages and drawbacks. While it was found to enhance the potential for more engaging storytelling and advocacy, it could also lead agencies to pursue dramatic news content within the bureaucratic and diplomatic constraints of the UN. The study found limited evidence of UN fundraising priorities significantly affecting NGO media agenda building. However, when a UN agency prioritises a crisis, it boosts media coverage, assisting NGOs in raising awareness of the issue. This prioritisation was considered especially beneficial for smaller NGOs with

limited media influence and capacity, as it provides them with an opportunity to align their objectives with heightened attention.

Advocacy strategies within United Nations humanitarian agencies were also found to vary based on organisational political structures. For the UN agencies with a politically appointed leadership, the emphasis was found to be placed on politically safe, pre-determined methods of media outreach, allowing meticulous control over the messaging. These included highlighting the positive contributions of member states while carefully managing and promoting the public image of the organisation's leadership. In navigating the media landscape, the emphasis lies on projecting a positive narrative that underscores the collaborative efforts of member states and aligns with the organisation's diplomatic stance.

9.2 Theoretical reflections

9.2.1 Information subsidies and agenda building

Information subsidies produced by humanitarian NGOs in the shape of press releases and press statements were found to be susceptible to the influence of various powerful external stakeholders. Such influence might be direct, in terms of affecting the specific sources used in NGO information subsidies, or indirect in terms of affecting the issues selected for promotion by NGOs as part of their agenda building practices. This raises important questions regarding power and accountability in relation to humanitarian response and public discourse.

One line of discussion necessary at this point concerns the definition of an information subsidy, and whether it might be proposed that NGOs, typically considered providers of information subsidies, can, as modern-day news producers, also be considered recipients. Returning to Gandy's original 1982 definition, information subsidies are namely "efforts to reduce the prices faced by others for certain information, in order to increase its consumption" (1982, p8). According to Turk (1985) public relations professionals provided information subsidies to the media to distribute information on behalf of their clients. In 1980, Gandy had spoken of 'subsidy efforts' by organisations, such as maintaining a list of key reporters, which suggests subsidies or, more appropriately, 'subsidisation' can be considered a process too. Other scholars have added contemporary additions to the concept including the coining of the terms "editorial subsidies" (Jackson and Maloney 2016) and "verification subsidies" (McPherson 2016) to describe expansions in functions to lessen the additional pressures of time,

verification, and editorial direction. This study has established that NGO media content is largely reliant on information - humanitarian statistical data for example - provided by other humanitarian actors. This information can certainly be considered to lessen the time, cost, and verification required by the NGO communications staff in producing journalistic content. This content is ultimately likely to be crafted into recognised news formats, in line with notions of media logic and news cloning. Therefore, within these definitional parameters, we can propose with a degree of confidence that NGOs both receive and use information subsidies as part of their news production process. However, another important consideration is the proactivity of the subsidy provider, also known as the issue proponent, in terms of its role in reaching out to the news producer. Typically, studies of information subsidies also consider the inter-personal relationship and negotiations between journalist and proponent, as well as the balance of power shaping these interactions. For example, Zoch and Molleda (2006) argue that power in the agenda building process is reliant, to some extent, on who initiated the story, as well as the nature of the story. Reich (2010) suggests journalists can counter this power and generate their own, by, for example, including a range of counter perspectives as a means by which to increase journalistic balance. Other scholars depict a continuous negotiation between journalists and proponents, in which, typically, the provider trades data and opinion with journalists in exchange for a degree of agenda building power (Jones 2008; Jackson and Maloney 2016). In the case of NGO news production, in this study, the provision of humanitarian data to NGOs by, for example, the United Nations, was not found to follow a similar proactive pattern of outreach or negotiation. United Nations agencies produce humanitarian data for multiple reasons, with media outreach unlikely to be the first reason on the list. UN OCHA says its information management function is designed to inform a rapid, effective, and principled response, and to underpin coordination, decision making and advocacy. UN agencies were not found to reach out directly to NGO communicators to help them tell their stories, with the responsibility instead assumed by the NGOs communicators themselves to locate such data in, for example, publicly available datasets or situation reports. According to Curtin (1999) when practitioners obtain media placement of their subsidies, they influence the media agenda, which, in turn, can influence public opinion and the public agenda, and this is the process in which agenda building occurs. As discussed in previous sections, the symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993) of credibility is critical to this process in the case of NGOs, and a demonstration of credibility can be an effective subsidy, according to McPherson (2016). Therefore, it might also be proposed that NGOs do not receive information subsidies but rather serve as an agenda building vehicle for other organisations through their own. Due to the

increasing dominance of international news agencies, Moeller (1999) described the role of television reporters at the time as not so much to gather news, but to package it. And whereas, NGOs do indeed gather and produce original content, comparisons can be made in this regard with the NGO's use of data provided by the United Nations or other actors. NGOs collate and package humanitarian information into news content, much like modern day journalists. According to McPherson (2016), one of the most useful aspects of the information subsidy concept is that it highlights the connection between the ability to provide information subsidies and the possession of other forms of capital, and thus between pluralism and power. McPherson proposes that human rights NGOs' information subsidies hold promise for pluralism and accountability in the public sphere, but NGOs' ability to provide such subsidies is unequal and maps onto the general distribution of power amongst them. Ultimately, most important is whether the information subsidies NGOs produce are influenced by external actors, and, if so, what the possible implications are for issues of plurality and power. This study has demonstrated with little doubt that this influence is clear and present and that it most often emanates from political actors, be they host national governments, local authorities, United Nations agencies, or humanitarian donors. Therefore, the symbolic and social capital afforded by providing such subsidies is diluted on the NGO's side and redistributed proportionally amongst the contributing actors.

9.2.2 Introducing the concept of agenda erosion

Building on existing agenda building theory, the concept of agenda erosion describes the processes by which powerful actors, including host governments and humanitarian donors, exert their influence to undermine the agenda building efforts of NGOs in the context of humanitarian crises. Such undermining typically occurs through the direct or indirect influence of NGO-produced information subsidies via methods including: the surveillance and monitoring of humanitarian communicators; narrative control and silencing tactics; the politicisation of humanitarian information sources; and the control of funding and access for NGO humanitarian response. Agenda erosion is related to the complex flow of accountabilities present within the humanitarian system and the dual role NGOs assume as both aid providers and news providers.

Foundational agenda setting research demonstrated how social systems use agendas to prioritise problems or 'issues' and allocate resources (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Rogers and Dearing 1988). It conceptualises the power of the media in influencing the public and policy

agendas and proposes that the media influences public perceptions of important issues through its daily selection of news stories, with issues receiving extensive media coverage tending to be perceived by the public and policy makers as more important. Both agenda setting and agenda building theories suggests the media agenda plays the pivotal role in the transition of an issue from the public agenda to the policy agenda. Agenda building (Cobb and Elder 1971) proposes that the media agenda can be shaped by the influences of powerful groups, as a form of social control (Lee and Riffe 2017), with Gandy (1982) identifying information subsidies as the primary method through which this influence takes place. The successful placement of subsidies in the news media is indicative of an organisation's agenda building effectiveness (Curtin 1999). NGOs are widely considered to have improved their ability to successfully place their information subsidies in this way through their increasing news professionalism and practices such as news cloning (Fenton 2010) and media logic.

Rogers and Dearing's (1988) visualisation, below, of the three main components of the agenda setting process, demonstrated the complex interplay between the media, public, and policy agendas, as well as the external influences likely to contribute towards shaping them. In this diagram, the agenda building process can be said to occur along the line connecting the 'gatekeepers and influential media' section and the media agenda, at which point information subsidies are presented to the news media. In addition to the influence of the media agenda on the policy agenda typified by agenda setting theory, this diagram also acknowledges the possible influence of the policy agenda on the media agenda. Cobb et al. (1976)'s mobilization model, describes how issues originating inside government can be placed on the policy agenda. For example, national governments in certain crisis-affected countries are reported to wield a close control of the media agenda by influencing or coercing journalists and undercutting their contributions to, for example, the democratisation process (Kalyango Jr & Eckler 2010).

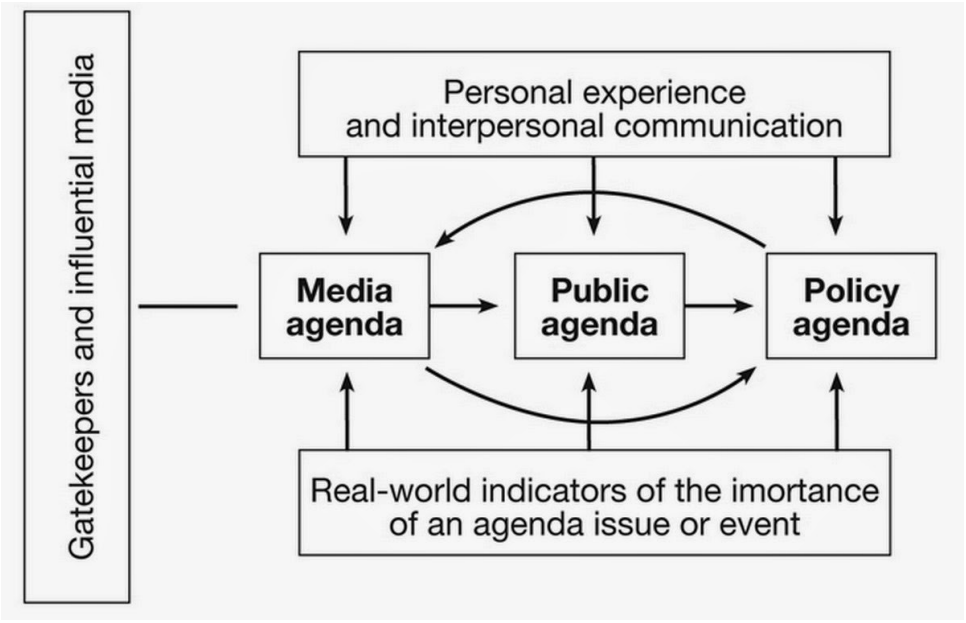


Figure 9.1: Three main components of the agenda-setting process (Rogers and Dearing 1988)

Agenda erosion, as visualised in the adapted diagram below, demonstrates how proponents of the policy agenda, including host governments and humanitarian donors, can undermine the agenda building process of external gatekeepers, in this case humanitarian NGOs, through their obstruction and influence of information subsidies destined for the mainstream news media, ultimately leading to a diluted or eroded version of the originally intended message.

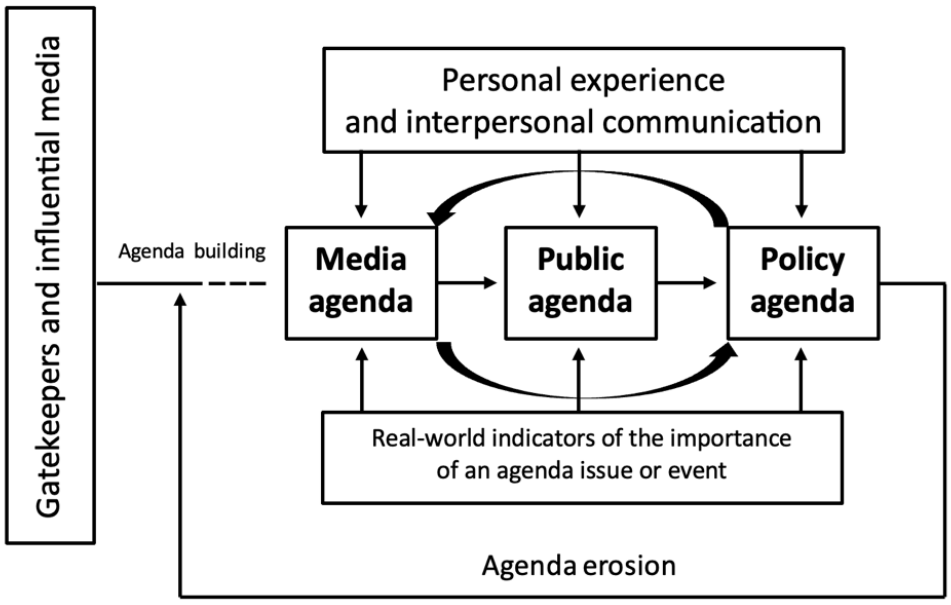


Figure 9.2: Visualising the effects of agenda erosion on NGO agenda building (an adaption of the three main components of the agenda-setting process by Rogers and Dearing 1988)

Close comparisons can be made between agenda erosion and existing restrictions on media freedom common in the contexts of humanitarian crises, such as the intimidation of journalists, the suppression of information and the spread of government propaganda (see, for example, Mwenda 2007; Rubongoya 2007; Ajakaiye et al 2023). The climate of fear identified in this study as undermining most humanitarian communications in East, West and Central Africa, is symptomatic of the pressures faced frequently by NGO communicators and journalists alike in such settings. For example, largely enforced by host authorities, with humanitarian donors also able to wield control of physical access, agenda erosion can occur through restricting the capacity of humanitarian communicators to access the information and voices required to produce news content to the demands of the mainstream media for affected crises. It can manifest in perceived threats to staff and programme safety, with the fear of retaliatory attacks on staff and the possibility of programme suspensions by local authorities meaning NGOs speak out less and soften their messaging about crises seen as politically sensitive. Agenda erosion occurs when powerful actors demand approval of NGO media content or politicise, manipulate, and withhold statistical humanitarian data, deemed critical for achieving media coverage. The funding of NGO programmes allows the institutional priorities of humanitarian donors to shape NGO media messaging in certain scenarios. For example, NGOs design humanitarian response programmes in accordance with donor priorities which later influence their own media strategy. The mass media provides the space for political debate, for making policies, and for holding power to account (McQuail 2010). The impact of agenda erosion, therefore, both correlates with and contributes to the restrictions on media freedom faced by many crisis-affected countries.

Incorporating the concept of agenda erosion into agenda building theory can provide a more comprehensive framework for analysing the dynamics of power and influence in the media landscape, particularly in the context of humanitarian crises and the role of humanitarian organisations and governments. Future research may consider how it can be measured and assessed in different humanitarian contexts. Comparative analyses might examine how the extent and impact of agenda erosion varies across different regions, countries, and crises. Studies might also discuss the strategies NGOs employ to resist or mitigate agenda erosion, and how effective these are in preserving their agenda building capabilities. The application of agenda erosion to other sectors involved in the production of information subsidies might also be explored, with particular relevance to countries in which authorities are known to exercise close control of the media agenda.

9.3 Implications for NGO policy and practice

The results of this study into the communications practices of humanitarian organisations could quite fairly be perceived as depicting NGO communications as being in crisis both literally and figuratively. The most basic conclusion to draw, perhaps, would be an assertion that 'aid provider into news provider doesn't go,' because, to various extents, the major challenges NGOs face within their humanitarian communications are closely linked to the responsibilities, accountabilities, and funding models to which they are tied as aid agencies. Of course, this would be resorting to oversimplification. The growth of humanitarian NGOs into news providers has long been considered a 'double edged sword' (Powers 2016). Yes, NGOs face a range of challenges, including agenda erosion, but are also widely considered to play an important role in highlighting humanitarian issues. There can be no straight forward solutions to many of the issues raised herein. Crisis zones are, by their nature, unique and unpredictable environments (Altay and Green 2006; Donini 2010; Maxwell 2009). Actors can be affected by fast-moving and highly complex contextual factors, including volatile security situations, a lack of infrastructure, and even the breakdown of critical administrative and management functions of authority (Altay and Green 2006; Donini 2010; Jahre and Jahre 2018). So, too, can humanitarian NGOs differ in their own functions, principles, and practices. MSF, for example, was found to protect its independence far more robustly than most, refusing funding from humanitarian donors and avoiding the widespread use of secondary humanitarian data in its media output. As such, MSF can be considered less susceptible (but certainly not immune) to the impacts of agenda erosion. And, with all of this in mind, caution should be exercised in making 'one size fits all' recommendations.

Recognising the power of the media as a tool with which to support people affected by humanitarian crises could be considered a positive step. MSF practices this by aiming to ensure its communications primarily function as an operational tool to support programme delivery. This is aided by the positioning of communications staff within the operations team and reinforces the idea that the communications can be used to deliver a humanitarian response as well as fund one. According to BBC Media Action (2024), the media can provide vital information to people during emergencies but can also help them cope with the situations they are facing, through, for example, providing psychosocial support and connecting them with others. During the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, BBC Media Action produced a weekly pre-recorded radio progamme and a weekly two-hour live broadcast called *Kick Ebola*

Nar Salone (Kick Ebola out of Sierra Leone), which were syndicated by more than 35 local partner stations across the country. The shows included national and district government response centres, district chiefs, religious leaders, local entertainers, and Ebola survivors. It also trained governments, media practitioners, and humanitarians in 'lifeline preparedness' - how to use the media as a tool to help prevent the spread of Ebola (BBC Media Action 2024). NGOs might consider the need to engage with donors and host governments to advocate for media freedom, emphasising the importance of independent journalism in humanitarian crises. This might involve diplomatic engagement, policy advocacy, and coalition-building with other stakeholders. Humanitarian NGOs should consider community media an important element of humanitarian response and consider how they can support its growth and sustainability in countries in which they operate. This can help NGOs reach a wider audience and mitigate some of the risks associated with reliance on mainstream media channels. The Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Studies (2021) proposes that communication is an integral element of operations, and thus should be guided by humanitarian principles, namely, to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters. Supporting initiatives that promote independent journalism and the protection of journalists' rights is one possible method. NGOs might consider greater collaborations with local media outlets and journalists, recognising their expertise and understanding of local contexts. This can involve sharing information and resources, providing media training and support, and amplifying the voices of local journalists in NGO communications.

NGOs should aim to prioritise transparency and accountability in their communications practices, ensuring wherever possible that information released to the public or media is accurate, verified, and attributed to reliable sources. This includes clearly citing the sources of statistical data used in press releases and statements. This is particularly important when such information can be considered a 'verification subsidy' (McPherson 2016) by journalists and reproduced in the media without fact checking (Lawson 2021). This could have important ramifications for NGO source credibility, which is a critical factor in NGO agenda building (Franklin 2011; McPherson 2016; Bhuta et al 2018) and would go some way to addressing the findings of this study, which suggest that NGO news professionalism and credibility is under threat. Investing in building the capacity of communications teams in data mining, management, and verification can also help ensure that staff are equipped to make informed decisions about data use and dissemination. The widespread use of numbers with the potential for politicisation in media output warrants careful reconsideration. The humanitarian sector is

consumed in a so-called ‘data frenzy’ (Glasman and Lawson 2023). This makes it increasingly difficult for NGO communicators to escape their use as these numbers are considered both the primary definers of crisis, and critical for NGO agenda building practice. However, Bhuta et al. (2018) argues that the expansion of the role of data in global governance across the last 20 years has made data increasingly political and that, as a result, indicators and rankings are increasingly produced ‘from within’ by individuals without the specific disciplinary knowledge to sufficiently satisfy qualities of neutrality. Glasman and Lawson (2023) warn some humanitarian numbers are simply lies perpetuated by actors at the highest level and that state authorities might manipulate numbers for various reasons. And, while laudable efforts have been made to enhance the quality of humanitarian data, many challenges persist. FEWS NET, an independent project providing early warning and analysis on acute food insecurity globally, appeared in seven press releases or statements on hunger and drought in this study. FEWS NET uses “scenario development”, a methodology that develops a most likely scenario on future food security issues. However, concerns have been raised about its potential influence by US interests as it is funded by USAID (Maxwell 2019). The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) was found to be the second most common source for hunger and drought releases in this study, appearing in 24 of 52 releases or statements in total. The IPC is a multi-partner initiative designed to improve food security and nutrition analysis. Despite its aim to provide “rigorous, evidence- and consensus-based analysis of food insecurity and acute malnutrition” (IPC 2023), Maxwell (2019) warns that in-country, its data analysis is often government-led, and its teams often housed within the offices of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, raising questions about independence, especially in conflict-driven food insecurity scenarios. “In many cases, all of the above works fine,” says Maxwell. “But where the government is party to the conflict driving food insecurity, these systems have difficulty functioning independently from political influences” (Maxwell 2019, p8). In South Sudan in 2017, the government-led analysis of data made even discussing the possibility of populations experiencing famine a taboo topic. International agencies feared potential reprisals, including a denial of work permits and programme suspensions, if the analysis became too political, according to Maxwell (2019). Even exercising extreme caution in the choices of publicly used data can be problematic in countries where information is often missing, sometimes resulting in incomplete analyses. ACAPS, which describes itself as an independent information provider free from bias or vested interests, says it is unaffiliated with the UN or any other organisation or agenda. It asserts that this ensures its analysis is objective and evidence based. Although part-funded by the Norwegian Refugee Council, which used ACAPS

as a data source in a some of the press releases in this study, ACAPS says it remains committed to maintaining objectivity and independence in its analysis. However, for its Severity Index Indicators, ACAPS says its data collection process involves six information analysts who monitor the globe daily through secondary data reviews, utilising reports from international non-governmental organisations, UN agencies, international and local media, and other sources. Therefore, despite asserting its independence from the United Nations, ACAPS is likely to rely on and share much of the same data in its own dashboards and analyses. The Norwegian Refugee Council operates the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, which says it aims to "provide high-quality data, analysis, and expertise on internal displacement to inform policy and operational decisions, with the goal of reducing the risk of future displacement and improving the lives of internally displaced people worldwide" (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2021). However, its practical approach involves consolidating existing data or estimates of the number of internally displaced people or those at risk. In its 2021 Internal Displacement Index Report, the centre acknowledges that the presented analysis relies on publicly available information and should be complemented with more granular details at national and sub-national levels, along with in-depth research into the drivers and impacts of displacement in each context (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2021). Glasman and Lawson (2023) offer further examples such as Action Against Hunger's Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition (SMART) and UNHCR's Standardised Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS), which are both used to produce numbers concerning malnutrition. However, the authors argue, the quality of data produced is dependent on factors including the qualification of local staff and the quality of local bureaucracies including the cooperation of local authorities.

MSF were found to counter the possibility of politicised data appearing in their communications content by deliberately avoiding the use of statistics from other organisations and prioritising smaller scale statistics originating from its own programmes. A staff member emphasised the perceived legitimacy of MSF's own data and the trust placed in primary data collected from its own programmes. Other NGOs might consider investing in increasing their capacity for capturing smaller scale programmatic data for use in media content and public messaging. Such data is likely to be more credible, less politicised, and potentially more acceptable in the eyes of local authorities than the commonly used larger humanitarian numbers such as estimated numbers of displaced people and malnutrition rates. NGOs should aim to avoid presenting new analyses or combinations of existing data sources as original data. This

practice has the potential to mislead both journalists and the public regarding the data's origin, creating an impression of independence from political influence, which may not be accurate in certain cases. More importantly, it also has the potential to misrepresent the scale of crises in the media and, as a result, could divert resources away from emergencies with greater need.

NGOs should also be mindful that using United Nations-branded data as a protective measure against government retaliation could, at times, pose a risk of putting the communities they serve in greater danger if the data is politically compromised and fails to accurately portray the unfolding events. This could lead to the production of biased information products and, resultingly, decisions being made based on biased information (Paulus et al. 2022).

9.4 Limitations of this study

The results reported in this study should be considered in the light of certain limitations. The first set of limitations concerns issues with sample sizes and selections of press releases and press statements for content analysis. Specifically, a variation in press release and press statement sample sizes between the four NGOs studied introduced the likelihood of representation bias into the qualitative results. The NRC sample contained 120 press releases or press statements, constituting 36.5 per cent of the total sample. The Save the Children sample contained 100 press releases or press statements, constituting 30.4 per cent of the total sample. The MSF sample contained 63 releases or statements or 19.1 per cent of the total sample and the Care sample contained 46 press releases or statements or 14 per cent of total sample. This variation might be considered helpful in certain respects because it helps to demonstrate the productivity of each NGO in terms of their humanitarian communications. However, it is also likely to have disproportionately influenced certain themes or trends identified in the thematic analysis. When making comparisons between the four organisations, it was important to recognise this disparity. To address this, and to enhance the robustness of the analysis, much of the data was normalised by calculating percentages to account for the differences in sample sizes, with the hope of enabling a more equitable comparison between organisations. The triangulation of quantitative findings with qualitative insights was also designed to allow findings related to each of the organisations to come to the fore. The total interview sample contained 19 in-depth interviewees recruited from across NGOs, UN humanitarian agencies, and humanitarian donors. This resulted in a relatively large number of different organisations

represented overall (11 in total) but smaller individual sample sizes for each. Every organisation had a maximum of two staff members represented in the sample, except for one international NGO, which had five. The specific sample sizes of each organisation have not been included to protect the identities of individuals involved but qualitative findings should be taken with an understanding that a degree of representation bias is likely in these results too. The necessity to speak to a range of different organisations with different roles across the humanitarian sector, as well ensuring a fair representation of staff based in countries in Africa (6 interviewees in total) was deemed most critical for addressing the research questions around understanding the external influences affecting NGO agenda building practice. Each interviewee was asked to outline their employment history during the interviews, and most were able to demonstrate significant experience working for a range of different organisations regardless of their current position. For example, all UN agency workers interviewed had also previously worked for international NGOs and most NGO workers had also previously worked for other humanitarian organisations. All were encouraged to speak to their experiences from across their recent career rather than restricting comments to the situations at their current employers. This was hoped to lessen the possibility and impact of representation bias in the results.

Although in-depth interviews took place with a wide range of humanitarian actors, these were limited to communications, media, and advocacy experts. Whereas this had the advantage of helping to address research questions around NGO media strategy, in hindsight, it would also been beneficial to have spoken to experts in certain other areas, for example about data collection and management, as well as with representatives from hosts government ministries or other local authorities. The findings around politicisation have raised serious concerns over the quality and politicisation of humanitarian data, and whereas this study is focused on the effects of such issues on media output, this is only one way in which humanitarian data is used. To be more certain about the quality and manipulation of data, future studies might aim to observe the life cycle of certain pieces of humanitarian data and to track its journey from collection to its publication in the news media. This study mapped some of that journey within the two case studies included in the quantitative findings chapter, but observing how the data was initially collected (if it was collected at all) would make the findings more credible and robust. The same can also be said for areas which examine accountabilities and the flow of

money through the humanitarian system, where interviews with non-media specialists would also have been useful.

The second limitation concerns data collection techniques. Some potential for confusion was noted over the topics of press releases and statements identified in the content analysis. As discussed in the quantitative findings, four dominant topics emerged during the content analysis: displacement and refugees; conflict and insecurity; hunger and drought; and security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers. The most prevalent topic of press releases and statements was found to be displacement and refugees, comprising 21 per cent of the total sample, followed by conflict and insecurity with 16.7 per cent, and hunger and drought with 15.8 per cent. During coding and analysis, the overlapping nature of these conflicts became more apparent. For example, both conflict and extreme food insecurity typically lead to displacement. Therefore, these results should be considered holistically and to align with the complex nature of the major crises studied in countries including Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and DRC, all of which, for example, included crisis responses involving conflict, hunger, and displacement. Additionally, despite an appropriate period of testing and the inter-coder reliability test of a sub-sample of press releases, another primary press release topic became apparent during the final coding process. This was for crises related to flooding. As no code had been developed for flooding, press releases or statements for which flooding was clearly the most prominent issue (as opposed to, for example, climate change) were coded under the 'other' option for this variable. This topic eventually accounted for 30 press releases or 9.1 per cent of the total sample. It is therefore possible that the attention paid to flooding by NGOs in their media output is underrepresented in the results.

The comparison between the average humanitarian funding appeals of different countries in East, West and Central Africa with NGO press release prevalence should be read in the knowledge that the mean humanitarian funding appeals were calculated using the total UN humanitarian appeals for every full year covered by the content analysis (2018 - 2021), but that the press release sample ended in April 2022 rather than the end of 2021. A total of 24 press releases were published by the four NGOs between January and April 2022.

9.5 Conclusion

This thesis began with reflections on the civil war in Tigray, including a description of how humanitarian access and media freedoms had been restricted for much of the crisis. The nine chapters between those introductory passages and these concluding ones, I hope, have gone some way to demonstrating how a crisis that would ultimately be identified as the deadliest human conflict of the 21st Century to-date could also be considered a 'forgotten war' in the eyes of western audiences. Like all wars, the conflict in Tigray played out amidst a climate of extreme fear for many. This was the case not only for the people unfortunate enough to have been affected by the fighting, but also for the humanitarian organisations attempting to reach them. NGOs who chose to speak out about the conflict did so with the ever-present threat of restricted access to affected populations, a warning that was eventually realised for both MSF and NRC who saw their programmes suspended in the light of poorly received media statements. This study proposes that a climate of fear underpins almost all humanitarian communications, not only in Ethiopia, but throughout the regions of East, West, and Central Africa. In countries such as Burkina Faso, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Somalia, whether it is due to concerns over aid suspensions or the physical safety of themselves and their colleagues, communicators working in crisis zones consider these threats to be real and dangerous. It is little surprise, therefore, that the crises in which these issues feel most pronounced receive scant attention from NGOs in their media activities. When crises are deemed safe enough to speak about, NGO messaging can be controlled in various other ways. Despite their much-vaunted rise in news professionalism, even the richest NGOs lack many of the resources or capacities required to collect the content they consider most essential for achieving mainstream media coverage, specifically big and shocking numbers. Resultingly, instead of collecting and publishing their own data, NGOs often rely on the only figures available to them: publicly available humanitarian datasets, usually published by the United Nations and widely regarded as susceptible to politicisation, misrepresentation, and bias at various junctures along the publication process. So, it turns out that NGOs, the trusted sources providing journalists with the information they need to write their news reports, are often sharing the same primary datasets to which journalists themselves have free and unfettered access. Some NGOs might attempt to make these figures feel more unique through some crude mathematical trickery but this, arguably, is only likely to make possibly-suspect data even more likely to be flawed.

To visit crisis zones and collect human stories, NGO communicators can face different challenges. The fact that western humanitarian donors, each, of course, with their own political agenda, fund most NGO projects means public messaging must be carefully considered and physical access for communications staff potentially requiring negotiation with programme funders. The commercial nature of modern humanitarian aid means NGOs must plan much of their media outreach around donor priorities, and conversations between the two sides at various levels can encourage an organisation to focus on certain crises or issues at the expense of others if the tempting possibility of donor funding is proffered. MSF, the one NGO studied able to continue its work without governmental funding was found to be able to protect its independence far more effectively than others. This was reinforced by a reluctance to use secondary data in the organisation's media output, preferring instead to use smaller numbers collected from its own humanitarian programmes, the accuracy in which it could have far greater confidence.

With major NGOs now considered important players in the production of humanitarian news, and with core values of both humanitarianism and journalism outwardly concerned with neutrality, impartiality, and independence, these findings raise significant concerns over the possible abuses of power by governments - be they host governments, donor governments or inter-governmental organisations, implicated in crises in these regions. Certain crises go underreported and NGOs risk being silenced, or worse, used as proxy mouthpieces by powers implicated in the crises to which they are attempting to respond. It also raises questions over the structures of humanitarian reporting which determine the crises receiving attention and those which do not, how these crises are represented in terms of the data and information used, and the responsibilities of all humanitarian actors driven at least partly by vested financial and political interests in human suffering.

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Appendix A - Content Analysis Coding Schedule

1. CODER ID

2. STORY ID

3. DATE OF PRESS RELEASE OR STATEMENT

4. HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION

1. NRC
2. Save the Children
3. MSF
4. Care

5. PRESS RELEASE OR PRESS STATEMENT

1. Press release
2. Press statement

6. PRIMARY TOPIC OF PRESS RELEASE OR PRESS STATEMENT

1. Conflict and insecurity
2. Hunger and Drought
3. Covid-19
4. Ebola
5. Climate change
6. Displacement and refugees
7. Emergency education and attacks on schools
8. Multiple crises
9. Security for aid delivery and attacks on aid workers
10. Sexual assault /gender-based violence/forced marriage in crisis
11. Other

7. PRIMARY REGION OF FOCUS (note one)

1. West and Central Africa
2. East Africa

8. SOURCE(S) OF STATISTICAL HUMANITARIAN DATA PRESENT (note all that apply)

1. UNICEF
2. UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees)
3. WFP (World Food Programme)
4. WHO (World Health Organisation)
5. OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) - Includes a country's Humanitarian Response Plan / UN humanitarian appeal
6. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organization)
7. IPC / Cadre Harmonise (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification)
8. FEWS NET / FSNAU (Famine Early Warning System Network)
9. IOM (International Organization for Migration)
10. Government /health ministry/other government body
11. Military Humanitarian cluster or group of more than one organisation
12. UN (United Nations) - specific UN body unclear.
13. Care
14. MSF (Medecins Sans Frontières)
15. Save the Children
16. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
17. Unnamed or unclear source

18. Other source not listed above

9. SOURCE OF FIRST INSTANCE OF STATISTICAL HUMANITARIAN DATA (note one)

1. UNICEF
2. UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees)
3. WFP (World Food Programme)
4. WHO (World Health Organisation)
5. OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) - Includes a country's Humanitarian Response Plan / UN humanitarian appeal
6. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) FAO (UN Food and Agriculture Organization)
7. IPC / Cadre Harmonise (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification)
8. FEWS NET / FSNAU (Famine Early Warning System Network)
9. IOM (International Organization for Migration)
10. Government /health ministry/other government body
11. Military Humanitarian cluster or group of more than one organisation
12. UN (United Nations) - specific UN body unclear.
13. Care
14. MSF (Medecins Sans Frontières)
15. Save the Children
16. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
17. Unnamed or unclear source
18. Other source not listed above
19. No sources

10. TOTAL NUMBER OF HUMAN VOICES

11. SOURCES OF HUMAN VOICES PRESENT (note all that apply)

1. NGO staff member
2. United Nations staff member
3. Politician / government health official / other government official
4. Individual affected by crisis
5. Celebrity ambassador
6. Other
7. No human voices

12. SOURCE OF FIRST HUMAN VOICE (note one)

1. NGO staff member
2. United Nations staff member
3. Politician / government health official / other government official
4. Individual affected by crisis
5. Celebrity ambassador
6. Other
7. No human voices

Appendix B - Example of press release coding

137,000 people forced to flee their homes this year in Somalia

Published 11. Apr 2019
Somalia Internal displacement

Primary region of focus. Code = 2
Primary topic of press releases or press statement. Code = 6
Source of first instance of statistical humanitarian data. Code = 2

Displacement of families is rising with evictions, conflict and drought the top causes.

“We are seeing a tragic trend this year, with more and more people displaced by drought and conflict in Somalia. Seeking aid to survive, families flee to urban areas, erecting makeshift shelters wherever they can. This leaves them vulnerable to evictions, adding to their already desperate situation,” says Kennedy Mabonga, Regional Programme Director for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

Sources of human voices present. Code = 1
Source of first human voice. Code = 1

Over 137,000 people fled their homes in the first quarter of 2019, according to the UNHCR led Protection Returns Monitoring Network. The number of people displaced has increased month by month, with 51,000 fleeing in March alone. Overall 2.6 million people are currently displaced within Somalia.

Sources of statistical humanitarian data present. Code = 2

Across the country, different regions have been hit by different crises, forcing thousands of families to leave their homes. Drought has been worst in Somaliland, Puntland, Mudug and Galgaduud regions. Conflict continues in the Middle and Lower Shabelle regions. Evictions are an ongoing problem in Mogadishu and other cities. Additional displacement causes include flooding, insecurity and lack of livelihoods, among others.

Sources of statistical humanitarian data present. Code = 7

The drought has caused an increase in clean water prices in affected areas. In Somaliland the Ministry of Water Resources Development declared a state of water emergency, with plans for government supported water trucking to several regions.

In parts of Puntland the price of water rose as much as 25 per cent, which many vulnerable families cannot afford.

Sources of statistical humanitarian data present. Code = 10

“Conflict, drought and evictions are a triple threat to Somali families. We’re alarmed that the number of Somalis forced to flee is rising month after month. Conflict and airstrikes has forced thousands to flee in fear. Drought has hurt farmers and pastoralists, causing migration to cities. Meanwhile, forced evictions in urban areas are rising,” says Mabonga.

The 2019 UN humanitarian aid appeal for Somalia is asking for $1.08 billion for humanitarian programmes, but only 13 per cent of the appeal is funded to date. Previous funding shortages in Somalia have led to deteriorating crises. Without sufficient aid, programmes necessary for their survival will be under threat, such as for food, clean water and medical care.

Sources of statistical humanitarian data present. Code = 5

NRC urges the international community and donor agencies to scale up their support for Somalia, to save lives and prevent the current crisis from deteriorating.

Notes to editors

- NRC has spokespersons available for interviews in English and Swahili.
- Photos of displaced Somali families are available for free use: https://bit.ly/2XuNgEm
- Statistics: In Jan. 2019 – over 42,000 people were displaced. In Feb. 2019 – over 43,000 people were displaced. In March 2019 – over 51,000 people were displaced.
- UN aid funding appeal statistics for Somalia are available here: https://fts.unocha.org/
- NRC programmes in Somalia include food security, livelihoods, water, sanitation, shelter, education and legal assistance. NRC has worked in Somalia since 2004.

Sources of statistical humanitarian data present. Code = 5

Appendix C - Participant Information Sheet

Bournemouth University

Participant Information Sheet

The title of the research project

Exploring the key forces controlling media coverage of humanitarian crises in West and Central Africa

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research sets out to explore the key forces influencing the reporting by Western news media of humanitarian crises in West and Central Africa. It is particularly interested in examining the ways in which journalists and humanitarian communications professionals access crises both physically and remotely in this region. This research is relevant to important global issues such as journalistic independence, governmental, intragovernmental and military policy, representation and intercultural relations, as well as the global flow of people and money.

Why have I been chosen?

As part of my research, I aim to carry out semi-structured interviews with journalists and humanitarian communications professionals working at national news outlets, leading NGOs and relevant United Nations bodies. I am particularly keen to speak to professionals who are involved in the reporting and publicising of humanitarian crises in West and Central Africa. You have been chosen because I believe you fit some or all of these criteria.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a participant agreement form. We want you to understand what participation involves before you decide whether to participate.

If you or any family member have an on-going relationship with BU or the research team, e.g. as a member of staff, as student or other service user, your decision on whether to take part (or continue to take part) will not affect this relationship in any way.

Can I change my mind about taking part?

Yes, you can stop participating in study activities at any time and without giving a reason.

If I change my mind, what happens to my information?

After you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any further information from or about you.

As regards information we have already collected before this point, your rights to access, change or move that information are limited. This is because we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. Further explanation about this is in the Personal Information section below.

What would taking part involve?

Your interview will last between 45 minutes and one hour and you should only need to participate once. Where possible, I aim to carry out interviews in-person. When this is not possible, I will use a video conferencing tool such as Zoom. If your interview takes place in-person, I will aim to meet you at a place convenient to you (this could be a private room at your workplace or at a mutually convenient location). If we are using video conferencing software, I will agree a time with you beforehand and request that you find a quiet and private space. The interviews will take place one-on-one. You will not need to prepare in advance.

Will I be reimbursed for taking part?

You will not be compensated for taking part in this research and you will not be reimbursed for any expenses. However, I aim to limit any potential expenditure on your

behalf by traveling to you or using video conferencing software when this is not possible.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits to you for participating in the project, it is hoped that this work could help to identify ways in which the reporting of humanitarian crises could, if required, become more effective, more independent and more representative of the realities facing the communities involved.

Whilst we do not anticipate any risks to you in taking part in this study, you will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research. Your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable. Should our discussions lead to any trauma or anxiety on your behalf, due to, for example, reliving painful experiences, then support can be found through the Dart Centre at https://dartcenter.org.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

The interviews will aim to establish how journalists and communications professionals access humanitarian crises both physically and remotely and, additionally, who has influence over this access. For example, you may be asked how you go about financing travel to crisis zones, how you secure visas and press accreditation if required, how you travel within a country, where you stay and how you might gain entry into hospitals, camps or disaster sites. This information will help me to establish a picture of the key organisations influencing physical access to humanitarian crises for both journalists and humanitarian communicators. I might also ask how you might access crises remotely when travel is not possible through, for example, press releases, humanitarian data and reports. This will help me to establish they key organisations influencing remote access to crises.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The interview will be recorded. Only audio recordings will be used for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. Any video recordings will be deleted after the interview. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

How will my information be managed?

Bournemouth University (BU) is the organisation with overall responsibility for this study and the Data Controller of your personal information, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university.

Undertaking this research study involves collecting and generating information about you. We manage research data strictly in accordance with:

- Ethical requirements; and
- Current data protection laws. These control use of information about identifiable individuals, but do not apply to anonymous research data: "anonymous" means that we have either removed or not collected any pieces of data or links to other data which identify a specific person as the subject or source of a research result.

BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your personal information.

Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in the Privacy Notice or this Information Sheet. To safeguard your rights in relation to your personal information, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible and control access to that data as described below.

Publication

You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research. Your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable.

Research results will be used in my doctoral thesis and may be used in further published academic papers and writings.

Security and access controls

BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a password protected secure network and/or hard drive where held electronically.

Personal information which has not been anonymised will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of

the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to BU staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

Sharing your personal information with third parties
As well myself as the primary staff member working on the research project, we may also need to share personal information in non-anonymised forms with certain BU staff members, such as my doctoral supervision team.

Further use of your information
The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. To enable this use, anonymised data will be added to BU's online Research Data Repository: this is a central location where data is stored, which is accessible to the public.

Keeping your information if you withdraw from the study
If you withdraw from active participation in the study we will keep information which we have already collected from or about you, if this has on-going relevance or value to the study. This may include your personal identifiable information. As explained above, your legal rights to access, change, delete or move this information are limited as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. However, if you have concerns about how this will affect you personally, you can raise these with the research team when you withdraw from the study.

You can find out more about your rights in relation to your data and how to raise queries or complaints in our Privacy Notice.

Retention of research data
Project governance documentation, including copies of signed **participant agreements**: we keep this documentation for a long period after completion of the research, so that we have records of how we conducted the research and who took part. The only personal information in this documentation will be your name and signature, and we will not be able to link this to any anonymised research results.

Research results:

We will keep your personal information in identifiable form for a period of six months after completion of the research study. Although published research outputs are

anonymised, we need to retain underlying data collected for the study in a non-anonymised form to enable the research to be audited and/or to enable the research findings to be verified.

You can find more specific information about retention periods for personal information in our Privacy Notice.

We keep anonymised research data indefinitely, so that it can be used for other research as described above.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact me at msunderland@bournemouth.ac.uk

In case of complaints
Any concerns about the study should be directed to Professor Dinusha Mendis, Deputy Dean Research and Professional Practice, Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix D - Participant Agreement Form

Ref & Version: EKF2 v1
Ethics ID number: 38883
Date: October 2021

Participant Agreement Form

Full title of project: ("the Project") Exploring the key forces controlling media coverage of humanitarian crises in East, West, and Central Africa
Name, position and contact details of researcher: Mike Sunderland, Senior Lecturer, Department of Communication and Journalism, msunderland@bournemouth.ac.uk
Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Professor Dan Jackson, Department of Communication and Journalism, djackson@bournemouth.ac.uk
To be completed prior to data collection activity

Section A: Agreement to participate in the study

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (EKF 1 v1) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy).
I have had an opportunity to ask questions.
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).
I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:
• being audio recorded during the project
• my words will be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs without using my real name
I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study **except** where my data has been anonymised (as I cannot be identified) or it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed.
I understand that my data may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.
I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

Section B: The following parts of the study are optional

You can decide about each of these activities separately. Even if you do not agree to any of these activities you can still take part in the study. If you do not wish to give permission for an activity, do not initial the box next to it.

	Initial boxes to agree
I agree to being filmed during the Project.	

I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	Signature

Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)	Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	Signature

Once a Participant has signed, **please sign 1 copy** and take 2 photocopies:

- Original kept in the local investigator's file
- 1 copy to be kept by the participant (including a copy of PI Sheet)

Appendix E - Interview transcript example

Interviewer: Thank you for all of that. What would you say have been your levels of seniority in these positions? Would you say that they have given you decision-making power in terms of setting media and communications priorities and influence over how your organization goes about producing news content aimed at the UK news media?

[Interviewee]: Yes, I'm quite lucky because the experience I had before I came to [NGO], made people trust my experience. To some extent my judgment when difficult news stories particularly came up. I had been for a long-time foreign editor at the Sunday Times. Did that job for 15 years and went on to do the digital editions of the Sunday times as associate editor. Also, I was running campaigns. That combination of experience was quite useful to [NGO]. When I came in, we were quite weak digitally. You may remember. [laughs].

I think I put Louise in charge of making us really good digitally, and we gradually increased the resources we were giving to digital content as the audience on digital platforms increased including through mainstream media. That was a basic strategy when I started and everyone was on board for that. Then when it comes to crises, when we have a difficult situation such as the allegations of sexual misconduct against senior executives that hit us in 2018. The Charity Commission of Inquiry, they did look to me for guidance on how to minimize the reputational damage. They also looked to me for things like the current looming crisis in East Africa.

We are expecting something close to famine in parts of East Africa, between March and the summer to set in. We had a meeting yesterday where we were working out what the media would need to cover that because they might just shrug their shoulders since we've been going on about starvation in Afghanistan for months on in now. Starvation in Africa might seem quite dull to them. We were working out whether I was saying statistics are not enough. They said we've got very strong analysis showing 250,000 lives are at risk. I said, "That won't be enough. We need human stories, we need video, and we need things that we can create shareable content through.

We need country offices to be primed to prioritize content gathering and to make sure that we are not being constrained by too many restrictions in the way we work, in the pictures that we take, in the language that we use, because all these are sources of argument within the movement, as you may remember.

Interviewer: I think we'll definitely come back and pick up on some of those points a little bit later on. As you know, this study is aiming to examine the different influencers that might exist on how an NGO produces news content. We’re going to look at it in a few different ways. Firstly, I'd like to understand how NGOs set their communications priorities and whether there's any external influencers or internal influencers on that that might be necessary to discuss. Secondly, I want to look at how NGO communication staff, physically access a humanitarian crisis. Again, to understand if there's any influencers on that.

Thirdly, I'd like to understand how NGOs access a crisis remotely when physical access is either not possible or not desired. The sorts of resources or information sources that they might use to create media content when they can't travel. Again, if there are any external influences on that. Does that all sound all right to you?

[Interviewee]: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: Good. Okay. Let's start with setting communications priorities. Now, this is something you've presumably personally done quite a lot of in your position. When you are setting objectives and priorities and targets in terms of media coverage at the start of the year or so, or whenever you do that. What have been in your experience, some of the factors internal and external that might influence how you prioritize certain humanitarian crises?

[Interviewee]: There are a range of factors. One is global strategy. We've just adopted a new global strategy, which will prioritize climate change and inequality. That means that I'm beholden really to produce stories that promote that agenda. The global agenda is reflected in the UK [NGO]agenda, but the UK agenda has other aspects to it as well. We are very keen to promote our work in the UK under our new chief executive. The way that we are doing that is by highlighting child poverty in particular and the recent campaigns on universal credit levels and the energy price cap, and the fact that lots of parents are choosing between heating and eating.

The fact that children are turning up to school too hungry to learn properly, have given us quite strong media material to speak to that gender. It's set by the fact that the director of UK impact at [NGO], is very knowledgeable about these areas and very savvy when it comes to turning them into media stories. That's an idea of the range of internal inferences. Then one of the external inferences is of course events. When the Taliban took Kabul, it was clear that that was going to be an enormous story for several months. I had a bit of a battle to get people into Kabul at a time when lots of other people from the organization were surging in to help.

I had to negotiate for space in the guest house so that we could get our head of news into Kabul. Luckily, we were eventually able to do that, and that really helped with our coverage. It meant that we could get our acting country director Fiona McSheehy. I don't know if you remember her onto Panorama and BBC Breakfast and Sky News. It also meant that we had somebody who could run some of the properties where [NGO]does its best work and where the problems were most acute in the Northern areas. For example, Jazz Jan, where Dan Stewart head of news went.

He could generate material there for our own digital channels, but also for journalists who were interested in what was going on outside Kabul, which in turn influenced where they went. Events are a second influence. There are fundraising priorities. [NGO]International declared last summer that we run our biggest ever appeal and it would be in relation to hunger because there were 20 countries where severe acute malnutrition was looking bad and it was looking like the worst hunger crisis of this century. Unfortunately, the campaign was launched before we'd really had time to get the media materials into place.

The people running it thought that statistics about the numbers of children vulnerable to the hunger crisis would be enough to create global needs. We released our figures saying that 5 million children were at risk of dying from malnutrition in these 20 countries on the same day that the World Food Program did a story out of Madagascar saying that children were eating mud and leaves, cactus leaves to fill their bellies. You won't be surprised because you understand how these things work Mike. That several children got zero coverage anywhere in the world, and the World Food Program was everywhere.

That was a real lesson to people internally. That you need to listen to the likes of me and my team in terms of what makes a story, what will work for the media to support your

fundraising. The fundraising imperative is, of course, very important influence. Then we have an advocacy imperative. The media team in [NGO]UK is part of the policy advocacy and campaigns division. Although we do work with fundraising and we work with the chief executive and we work with global programs and we work around the organization, the executive director of policy advocacy and campaigns thinks she's got first call on the media team.

If she wants to hire vaccine equity because she used to be special advisor to Gordon Brown and Gordon Brown is a UN Envoy on vaccines, then that's what we will do. We've done that and that's been quite successful because we've been able to translate the issue into sharply angled news stories with strong human interest. We've got influencers and celebrities involved as well. Tell me if I ramble. Two weeks ago we had a petition for Afghanistan and the petition was designed to get governments to lobby the World Bank and various other sources of billions for Afghanistan, where the country's assets have been frozen or aid have been frozen.

Gordon Brown led on this in the media but constantly said, sign over [NGO]'s petition. Gordon Brown's celebrity mates and he has a remarkable number of celebrity mates. Stephen Fry and Hugh Grant and all sorts of people weighed in on social media, and that helped us create an enormous reach. It was the fastest-growing petition that [NGO]has done. There are political influences like that. I would never underestimate the importance of getting artists and influences on board because they make issues that most editors think is quite dumb into stories that you can see on the page because you can see picture of the celebrity on the page and you can get good quotes from the celebrity.

Sometimes celebrities will drive their own agendas. An example of that would be Mo Farah. He's an Ambassador for [NGO], obviously, he's from Somalia. He met our Chief Executive recently and they've been talking about how he can help to publicize what seems to be a looming famine in Somalia along the lines of 2011 when 2,206-people died. I was there in 2017, which was when the signs were similar to now, but there was an enormous effort from the international community to prevent famine. The funding available now is a 10th of what it was in 2017, so the signs are bad. We hope that Mo Farah will help to draw attention to the crisis in his own country so that would be another source of influence sometimes. We are looking to publicize partnerships, so that's some other influence.

We have a partnership with GSK, for example, you're probably familiar with. We've done stories with GSK about, for instance, a gel that they developed from mouthwash, which can be put onto a new mother's tummy button and prevents infection. It's been very widely used after a pilot in Kenya, and it saved an enormous number of lives apparently. We team up with GSK on the pilot because they had the medication and we had the people that they could do the pilot with and when it was successful, we publicized that, and that's helped to sustain our partnership with GSK.

We do similar things with other large companies and with governments. If the government is giving us money for education in, I don't know, say, Kenya, then we try to publicize the results of that and show the impact of the aid, and because aid has become unpopular in certain quarters and the general public support for aid has declined in recent years, we are increasingly focused on demonstrating impact so that people can see that the money is well spent and doesn't end up in dictators pockets and isn't wasted on fat cat salaries and all the things that the *Daily Mail* says are going on.

Interviewer: Wow, brilliant. I could spend the rest of the interview, just unpicking that first answer because there's so much in there that's relevant and worth discussion. That's perfect. Thank you. I suppose if I'm being focused in the interest of time, you mentioned a few there that we might unpick a little deeply and I'm particularly interested in the external ones. You mentioned the governments who might be funding some of your programs. You mentioned corporate partners. It sounds like there are occasions when external influences in terms of your obligations to funders or donors does influence how you prioritize your media aims. Is that fair to say?

[Interviewee]: Yes, these are not written into contracts with the funders, but we want to maintain good relations with the big funders. Staff who work directly with them will come to me and say, "We got this great result on program funded by The Gates Foundation on stunting in Northern Nigeria. Do you think there's any media interest in that?" Then I ring up the development editor, *The Telegraph,* and to my amazement, he's really interesting, and so we try and work on a story like that.

It's not a contractual process. It's not a formal, regular meeting sort of process within the organization, but I think it's just a pragmatic approach to say if people are funding our work, is there something we can give in return? Sometimes you can get something into a specialist outlet, media outlet that is more than Unilever or whatever it might be was expecting, and they're pleased with that and it makes them better disposed to us the next time we are negotiating our contract.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

[Interviewee]: Another example would be Arsenal. We have a partnership with Arsenal, which does a program called Coaching for Life, with us in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, which is for Syrian refugees. Coaching for Life has meant that Arsenal coaches have trained coaches in the camp to teach the children, boys, and girls, particularly girls to play football. The girls who would normally spend literally all their time in corrugated iron huts, or under canvas, are coming out and playing football and learning team skills and getting confident, and the football has become a hub for education and health. It's a terrific program.

Interviewer: Wow.

[Interviewee]: The Chief Executive of Arsenal wrote a joint op-ed with our Chief Executive in *The Telegraph,* about this program as it was being showcased at Davos a couple of years ago. That's the sort of thing where we can see media interest and we can see media value coming out of a partnership, and it's part of the overall picture, but it's not a case of partners making demands and saying, "Well, if you don't get this coverage, then we won't renew our partnership or anything of the kind."

The relationship is all very friendly and constructive, and we look for the opportunities really to add this little element of reward to our partners that come in.

Interviewer: Would you say that there's any influence on the content that's produced in these cases? Do you have to run things past them or do they have editorial input?

[Interviewee]: Yes, we tend to have these press releases signed off by both the partner and ourselves, and make sure that the information is accurate. I can't recall any argument in the five years that I've been doing the job, where the corporate partner has said, "You need to say

this." It's run between their communications team who understand media and my team who obviously understand media, and they can see what's newsworthy and what is to our mutual advantage. Again, it's an informal friendly process. It doesn't give big pharma a sort of-

Interviewer: An agenda [crosstalk].

[Interviewee]: -a healthy crossover of our NGO.

Interviewer: No, I understand. Are there any other humanitarian organizations, humanitarian actors, if you want, that might influence how you prioritize certain crises? I'm thinking particularly around emergencies, humanitarian emergencies. You mentioned the looming East Africa hunger crisis, anything like that. I'll give you an example, I remember at least at the regional level, the annual UN humanitarian appeal in which they prioritized the funding obligations for each crisis and ranked the crisis in terms of how big they are on the global scale. Does things like that, or the UN more widely or other big humanitarian organizations ever influence how you might prioritize something?

[Interviewee]: I'm not actually aware of that ranking process. It's interesting to hear about it. I suppose the answer is no, but I have a friendly relationship with my opposite member at OCHA. She might sometimes call me and say, "Oh, we're putting out a release on this problem in Haiti, or this problem in West Africa or whatever it might be. Just so you're aware." Then I can take that into account when I make judgments about what to encourage the global media unit to cover.

The Disasters Emergency Committee, the DEC, is the forum where we all get together on a particular crisis. Afghanistan is the most recent example of that. We've raised £36 million quite quickly for Afghanistan. There was a lot of uncertainty about how well that would do. I thought it would do well because it was launched just before Christmas, and it was unusual, secure time in Afghanistan when the Taliban had just come to power and you could move around the country, the **[unintelligible 00:19:31]** weren't in yet. I thought the goodwill of Christmas and the access that we would have would mean that would be a lot of very motivational coverage and that has proved to be the case.

We've had some people worried that some of the money would end up in Taliban's hands, and government ministers have used that as a reason up to put their own money into Afghanistan at the moment, but we are very confident that the money just goes to us and it's spent by us on our projects independently if the Taliban and we can show that. The DEC coming together on Afghanistan, it's a recognition that there is a humanitarian crisis we need to tackle together. We hope that they'll do the same with the whole of Africa, that remains to be seen. Our humanitarian director Gareth Owen, you may remember.

Interviewer: I do.

[Interviewee]: Hopes that after an East Africa DEC appeal, there will be a DEC appeal for the Sahel, because there's a big problem coming in the summer in the Sahel.

Interviewer: It's maybe how cyclical it is, isn't it?

[Interviewee]: I'm afraid it's depressing me sick.

Interviewer: Yes, I remember doing press release around just basically calling the Sahel, and it's unending hunger crisis with spikes, and mostly spikes and doing a lot that they do around that.

[Interviewee]: Sorry, I'm just going to **[inaudible 00:20:49]** [crosstalk].

Interviewer: Yes, no worries **[inaudible 00:20:51]** [crosstalk].

[Interviewee]: [inaudible 00:20:50].

Interviewer: The transcribers will enjoy it.

[Interviewee]: You have to transcribe this?

Interviewer: Yes. I get to pay somebody to do it for me, which is great. Louis thought it was a baby. Even though it's a dog, they'll be having fun.

[laughter]

[Interviewee]: Yes.

Interviewer: That's really interesting. This is my last point on the priority setting. You mentioned the organizational strategy and the advocacy strategy as being important influencers on your own media strategy. I suppose it's perfectly possible that there are additional influences on those that don't come at the media team level. For example, those rankings or those UN priorities that we talked about may well influence that agenda before it reaches your own agenda-setting if that's fair to say.

[Interviewee]: I think this is what's happened with East Africa at the moment because I think the UN has come up with lots of indicators that big trouble is coming, and our humanitarian experts have taken their cue from that. They are using the information to mobilize the organization, so it's a category one, emergency already in some parts of East Africa, category two for other parts. I think sometimes the UN sets the agenda because it produces the basic data that the rest of us can use to do the fundraising and do the advocacy that we do. Then it becomes a cooperative arrangement.

Interviewer: That makes a lot of sense.

[Interviewee]: I was in Somalia 2017 and I was in the Baidoa in the south besieged by Al Shabaab, and a very difficult situation where people were coming in from the countryside in enormous numbers to the city because the wells had run dry and the crops had failed. Well, the rest of it needing to be fed. The UN was coordinating some of the relief operation, and having to make some really difficult judgements about, for example, when food and water were being trucked in through areas held by Al Shabaab, should we pay the Al Shabaab toll? That is technically illegal, and UN having to decide whether to be pragmatic and just make it happen because otherwise people would die or they had to comply with the letter of the law.

I met one of the UN coordinators who was having those discussions with some of the organizations, like my own on the grant, and we relied to some extent on them to facilitate the delivery of relief as they saw fit.

Interviewer: We'll pick up on this a bit later. I suppose there are also occasions when you rely on them to provide safe passage for your communication staff as well, whether it's via aid flights or via security convoys or things like that.

[Interviewee]: Yes. While I went to Somalia, it was on a UN flight. It was from Nairobi and we went to Wajir and then Baidoa and then Mogadishu and then back, and we wouldn't have been able to get to Mogadishu had it not been for the UN flight. It didn't create any obligation on us because we just paid the price of the flight. I think it's a useful sign of how organizations link up when it's needed to and when you can get a better result if you work collectively than in competition.

Increasing, that's a big trend in our sector that we are not talking about our competitors in all that. We're encouraged to talk about our comparators, and even if we won't use the word comparators, which I'm reluctant to use, I do spend a lot more time now talking to my opposite members in other organizations. I was speaking yesterday to my opposite members in Oxfam and Care, for example, about how we're going to take a different view of diversity and inclusion strategy together in the future. That's an example of us teaming up more increasingly that we absolutely eradicate the duplication that you had after the Haiti earthquake or the international tsunami.

Interviewer: That's interesting. Louis mentioned something similar to that. We'll dig a little bit deeper into that, but that's interesting to hear. It seems like something of a sea change in attitude from NGOs that the kind of cutthroat, elbows out approach to getting the exclusive maybe being reigned back in a little bit. How important would you say mainstream news coverage still is to NGOs? Is it still the number one priority for you?

[Interviewee]: For me, it is, yes. For me, to be on the BBC with the possibility that something that we do in one studio will be used in different channels of BBC in the UK, but also, if we do something on the World Service, it might cross over into UK coverage. That is probably the best exposure we can have. The research I see says that television has the biggest impact in these situations. That's really important.

This week I met the news editor of ITV News, and we talked about things that we could do when the 6:30 bulletin is extended until 7:30. They're looking for ways to get people who come on for Emmerdale at seven o'clock to stay with the news until 7:30, which I think is a tall order and they're very confident that they can do it, but they want to do it by really focusing on ideally celebrity involvement in human interest stories. We were talking about how we can do that. I think that's a great opportunity for us.

I suggested, for example, we get Paul O'Grady, one of our ambassadors to go back to his childhood home and talk about UK poverty and how it was when he was a child and how it is now and how some of the problems are the same, and they love that idea. That's the thing that I hope we will do with TV.

Then the mainstream papers, we are trying to influence the so-called marginally engaged or the center-right people who are interested in what we do, but they're not really committed. They might be a bit skeptical about how some of the money is spent by aid organizations. They're people who might read *The Times* and the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun.* We target those publications particularly to try and get positive content out there and show people how the money will be spent if they give us money.

Interviewer: Yes. Not preaching to the converters, I suppose. The more valuable, arguably media coverage by convincing new people to take those.

[Interviewee]: Exactly. We can't neglect the so-called converted because is *The Guardian,* for example, went through a phase of being very skeptical about big charity and big aid, and gave us a harder time as the *Daily Mail* over our sexual misconduct scandal, not surprisingly and rightly said you could say. We carry on getting stuff into *The Guardian* and *The Mirror.* We have a special partnership with *The Mirror,* which today has done a massive spread that we've been working on them for months on. We're trying to get children to do more reporting, to give children a stronger voice on the big issues. We've got a partnership with *The Mirror* where children reports on the impact of climate change in different countries. We did one in the Solomon Islands talking about sea-level rise, and we've done one today with them on the melting of Mount Everest.

Interviewer: Wow.

[Interviewee]: There's a piece by 15-year-old, a child who's interviewed shepherds about the shrinking grasses and this brings snow and the fact that bodies of climbers disappeared long ago are now sort of emerging, so a sign of global warming. All these mainstream media are very important to us, but that's not to say we neglect the likes of **[unintelligible 00:29:35]** *Post* and *Buzz Feed* and **[unintelligible 00:29:38]** because we are reaching different audiences through all of these different outlets.

Interviewer: Sorry, Ted.

[Interviewee]: Transcriber, Teddy is now coming back in.

Interviewer: Honestly, I could unpick each of these points and go into so much more detail about them. I just want to pick on one of the things you've said before we move on because a lot of the more recent research has suggested the media if you want, it's becoming wiser too. I say that not accusingly to NGO media tactics that they're saying actually, what's more important is not NGOs on the news, but affected people. We're becoming wiser to the branding tactics.

I read something in a piece of research, Tim Singleton, particularly suggesting that. What you're saying seems like actually, they're coming back more in search of content and partnerships. Is that fair in your mind?

[Interviewee]: Tim Singleton **[unintelligible 00:30:51]** the story. [laughing] Yes, I think it's right that there is a degree of skepticism now and it comes partly from the amazingly efficient analytics. I was with *The Guardian* development editor, Tracy McVeigh. She was explaining to me that if a story is not performing by eleven o'clock in the morning, she drops it. The fact that she is dropping certain stories, and seeing that others doing really well is teaching her every day what is going to work and what is not going to work.

This is the death of the doll or pet from an NGO CEO. It's very hard for the NGO CEOs who have been used to walking into *The Guardian* and *The FT* and all the rest of the to find that that way, is not bad to them because it's clear that not everything they say is so interesting to the audience that we want to target through those publications. There's also skepticism because I think the scandal of 2018 with Oxfam and to a lesser extent, [NGO]has made people skeptical about the principles and the values of large aid organizations.

People have been looking very closely at how the money's been being spent. There are some high salaries in the sector. As you know, there are examples of fraud and waste. Of course, there are programs that we thought would work and didn't work. We have to learn from those. I think if any editors were seeing charities as just good people doing good things, 20 odd years ago. I suppose I would see charities like [NGO]foreign editor at the *Saudi Times*, I did three Christmas appeals with to [NGO]so I thought they were great. I would now be much more circumspect in what they were proposing to me. I think that's a healthy thing. I think it probably is effectively raising standards in our sector.

Interviewer: What things do you think makes, and again, I'm thinking more of humanitarian emergencies. What do you think makes a crisis newsworthy? What are you looking at in terms of newsworthiness? I think you mentioned some of this earlier when we're first starting. If you're wanting to do the first piece of coverage about the East African crisis or another crisis, what are you looking for?

[Interviewee]: Video would be my first priority. Under our previous chief executive, we had a big push on pneumonia which is quite a dull subject to most people. You say pneumonia to average journalists and they'll shrug their shoulders even when you say it's the biggest killer of children on the fly, they'll shrug their shoulders.

I got a little bit of video from my head of PR Digital, he was in South Sudan. She just filmed a child struggling for breath. I texted a 42nd clip to the editor of *The Daily Mirror*. He rang me immediately, there's a guy called Peter Willis, sadly now no longer with us, and wanted to do something. He called the chief executive in for a meeting, and he wanted to do a campaign, so a little bit of video could make an enormous difference in bringing subjects alive.

Another thing that we'd be looking for is a surprising or shocking angles. The activities of an ISIS-related group in Northeast Mozambique, for example, wouldn't necessarily make headline news. They beheaded some children, and we publicized that and it was an enormous story. I focused a lot of attention on the activities of that group and its battles with the local officials and the French oil company in the area and all the rest of it. Sometimes it's just an angle that stands out.

The same would go for a children eating mud in Madagascar because I've never heard of that. That helped focus a lot of attention on Madagascar, which was interesting for a UK audience anyway, because of the cartoon and because of the fact that vanilla for children's ice cream comes from Madagascar and the fact that there are limos and tourism in Madagascar. There's a relevance to the country from Madagascar, as there is with Afghanistan because British troops were in Afghanistan for 20 years.

Sometimes you're looking for a relevance to the audience in the UK, from that. Sometimes it's just the scale of it. Often, the scale will mean amazing pictures. The Haiti earthquake and tsunami in 2006. More recently, the Indonesian volcano and related tsunami and even that tsunami the other week from the Tonga volcano led to some lovely bits of film which I retweeted from people in Tonga, who just picked out their phones and looking at the water flooding through the streets.

Where you have a mixture of images and human stories, the British woman who slipped up through the-- trying to save her dogs, for example, in Tonga. You have, ideally, something

that relates what's happening in a faraway place to what's happening in Britain so that we can relate to them. Those are the factors that we take into account.

Interviewer: That's really helpful. When you're talking about scale, earlier you mentioned how you prioritize human stories over data now. About X number or 100 children are going to die and stuff like that. Does data still play an important role in news value in your mind for what you do?

[Interviewee]: It does because I can say, is a story about a man in Somalia who's had to walk 100 miles with his pregnant wife to get water and food. Two of his children died along the way, but his wife has given birth **[unintelligible 00:37:22]** which is a thing I saw in Baidoa. Beneath that is the substance of the fact that some 750,000 people were on the move in Somalia at that time. That gave me the chance to show *The Guardian* journalist that I was with work with something **[unintelligible 00:37:42]** human interest stories, but to provide him with the context which made it a very saleable story for him. He got that so onto the front page of *The Guardian*.

We have £20,000 of unsolicited donations as a result of that. The data are there to provide backbone and substance and context. The idea of data in headlines I think, is becoming a little bit wearing to some journalists. Some **[unintelligible 00:38:12]** developers for *The Guardian* has asked me never to send her another press release with a bit of data in the headline-

Interviewer: Interesting.

[Interviewee]: -because she's bored with them.

Interviewer: Wow.

[Interviewee]: She won't look at them.

Interviewer: That's fascinating. Very interesting. In your mind, whether it's in the headline or not still essential for publicizing a humanitarian crisis or--

[Interviewee]: I think journalists are always going to say, we're always going to ask the questions that require you to have some data.

Interviewer: You would imagine the W's of journalism would require arguably-

[Interviewee]: Exactly.

Interviewer: -some context there.

[Interviewee]: I'm struggling to think of an example of where we had a human interest soar in low data. I think we always learn something about what's going on. You need data to understand. There's no excuse for not having the data because a lot of the work in our programs requires data to be collected for the donors.

Interviewer: Well, that leads me on to our next point then. How would you normally find the data that you use in your media content? Is it your own data as you mentioned, the UN had access to a lot of data earlier and things like that, where does it normally come from?

[Interviewee]: It comes partly from the UN body, from UNICEF. We are trying to create our own operation to produce more data. We have a data person who's moved from [NGO], UK to [NGO]International to try and to build that up. To build up a team that can do that because there's a lot of data around our organization that is just sitting in the control offices on the regional offices, which we could really make something off if we had a central view of what was going on there. Stunting would be an example of that would fairly scare some of these people but we have lots of good data on something. There came a time when as I mentioned that **[unintelligible 00:40:18]** was suddenly interested in that. We also have two very clever people. You can take other people's data, is that going to be okay?

Interviewer: Yes. I just like to periodically check I've got all of this gold.

[Interviewee]: We can take other people's data and crunch it into a form that is particularly relevant to us. There might be some UN data that we can disaggregate so that we can see what's happening to children under five and have a study of what's happening to people in general.

Interviewer: You mentioned primarily UNICEF and the general broader UN where a lot of your data comes from. You mentioned then crunching it. Is it then that it could-- Is it presented as being crunched, as being secondhand data? Or is it always overtly presented as UNICEF data given to you by [NGO]?

[Interviewee]: We always carry an explanation on the editor's notes at the bottom of a press release to say how we've arrived at a certain conclusion. Even if we don't credit UNICEF in the intro to [NGO]press release which might seem a bit strange to some people what does happen. We will explain that we've got this figure for the number of children affected by a problem, out of broader UNICEF data amongst older children or broader UN data among the community as a whole.

Interviewer: Is it fair to say then that humanitarian data is one way in which another humanitarian actor like UNICEF, for example, might deliberately or not deliberately but in some way hold an influence over the news coverage or the news content that you generate? Seemingly by what you're saying if that data wasn't there it might be difficult for you to create the content?

[Interviewee]: Yes. Migrants would be an example of that. There was some very good UN data about the numbers of migrants reaching Libya and the number stuck in Libya. The number going across to Southern Europe, especially Italy. This data from international organizations and the governments of countries is stuff that we take and use to highlight a problem. If there's a sudden increase in the number of children crossing the Mediterranean or drowning in the course of trying to cross the Mediterranean that becomes a story for us. Yes, that is driven to a large extent by the data. Of course, we'll watch it because we're looking for angles to try to publicize the plight of children, child migrants.

Interviewer: Is it, therefore, possible that a UN Office such as UNICEF can have a success via your media coverage? Can it help them, for example, set their own agenda? Because that content that data is being used in your content?

[Interviewee]: Yes, occasionally, I wouldn't say this is something that happens every week or even every month necessarily, but if my counterpart at **[unintelligible 00:43:47]** rings me and says, "We're doing a release on this because we think it's a big issue." Apparently our

Chief Executives have discussed it and **[unintelligible 00:43:59]** he says, "This is important for us to do something on." Let's put out a release a couple of days later with a slightly different line to get a bit of an agenda going on it, then that's a constructive degree of cooperation.

I don't see anything sinister in this, and I'm not sure if you're even trying to imply that the UN is setting **[unintelligible 00:44:22]** for us. It's just that we are cooperating, we're talking to each other. I told them I've only been in the sector for five years but I'm told we're talking to each other as never before. That that is producing a more concerted effort to raise certain issues to public consciousness and campaign to get certain things done. For example unfreezing assets that could be saving lives in Afghanistan at the moment.

Interviewer: What do you consider as the director of your team to be a success, full outcome for the media coverage that you produce for the traditional media **[unintelligible 00:45:03]**.

[Interviewee]: We measure a few things. We measure volume which is okay but it's not the most significant indicator. We try to measure impact and that's really hard to do. So, we can see from our fundraising that piece of media coverage sometimes coincide with a beacon fundraising. We know that we're having an impact on the amount of money raised. We can't qualify precisely but we know it's having an impact. The other day we were doing this petition for Afghanistan, which I mentioned earlier.

We had an hour by hour analysis of the numbers of people signing the online petition. It coincided to a remarkable degree with Gordon Brown or going on breakfast TV or Stephen Fry putting out a tweet or something like that so we can measure impact to that extent. Sometimes the impact is more anecdotal. We'll know that something that we've produced a press release on is raised by an MP in the comments with the foreign secretary so that she's obliged to say something about an issue that we think is important. That's another way of exerting our influence. Sorry, am I straying from your question?

Interviewer: No, that was absolutely perfect.

[Interviewee]: We measured something called sentience, it's based on an artificial intelligence analysis of the language in stories. It's a bit problematic, but it gives you a broad sense so that we know whether [NGO]there's a bit in the headline, or the intro, or the first three paragraphs. We know from the nature of the language used whether it was a positive story or a negative story, and that gives us a net score for the month on how we're doing for sentience.

A huge amount of use of this because I know that sometimes you get lots of negative language and a story about a famine say and that corrupts the figures. It's not an entirely reliable measure. It's a way that we're trying to keep on top of how people perceive us.

Interviewer: I suppose that's an important point. From your personal-- In your role then when you say things like the sentient and the hits and things like that. Is it still fair to say that you're measuring your own performance on coverage, brand awareness, brand building, not saying that it's not being covered, but prioritizing that over advocacy impact or something like that? Or a decision being made at the global level to do that, or is it the difference.

[Interviewee]: I wouldn't say quite like that because I suppose I feel that we need to show what the organization is getting for the investment it makes in the media team. The things I've

mentioned are useful ways for me to say to the Finance Director, "Here's what you got for your money this year," when it comes to budget negotiations and that sort of thing. Ultimately media is only part of-- It's not an end in itself, it's a means to an end. Whether that's fundraising or advocacy or promoting programs so that partners want to partner with us again in the future. All these things are more important than the figures that I've mentioned.

Interviewer: That's clear. If I was to summarize that section what I think I'm hearing is that NGOs are moving. The United Nations are moving to closer cooperation in that there are a variety of different things that can affect how you prioritize crises. It's not necessarily done in isolation from you or any kind of secret powers that are trying to influence what you do. But more a sign of close cooperation between different actors in the humanitarian sector?

[Interviewee]: That's how I see it. As you say that I'm just wondering whether I'm being naïve, because I'm just pausing for thought. I think that's okay. I would be a bit circumspect if somebody was piling on the pressure to get something done for a corporate partner or if the government-- Once in Singleton the aforementioned was at DFID as communications director. He would ring me fairly regularly and try to get me to be supportive of something that has the state was announcing or he would tap me for information about how an announcement might be perceived in our sector as a whole.

That was I suppose one example of somebody perhaps throwing his weight around a little bit because he knew that DFID at that time was a big donor of [NGO]. Because we'd been mates for years, because we were foreign entity **[inaudible 00:50:32]** certain times when we cooperated at various crisis where our correspondents have been killed or injured. We were mates, I didn't regard that as, in any way, sinister. I regarded it as just the two of us having a candid chat and him wanting me to help him do his job, and vice versa. That's the nearest I can think of to anybody trying to exert an influence. It doesn't happen now. Now we've got the FCDO on DFID. Nobody from the FCDO ever rings me.

Interviewer: Right. Okay. That's perfect, thank you so much. Let's move on to physical access to a crisis. How important would you say it is, and this might have changed recently, I don't know. How important would you say it is for a communications team member to be able to physically access a crisis zone, an emergency?

[Interviewee]: I think this is changing a bit. The pandemic has created an enormous change of mindset. Before the pandemic, I think we used to think that we had to get there on the ground as quickly as possible. We had to get the video, we had to get the human stories, and we had to drive the press release for their own content. Now because we haven't been able to do that at all for a couple of years when we haven't been able to travel, we've been trying to create this capacity within country offices.

In Yemen, for instance, there are people in the country office who can make really good little films on their phones, and they're nothing to do with me. They're just people who are out there getting access to areas of Yemen that have been affected by airstrikes, or hunger, or whatever it might be, and it's quite good some of the content. Some of it is terrible and unusable. I really wish when I see that stuff that we have had our own people on the ground, but I think we have to be practical. There is an opportunity there for people who are local to maybe get better access to clinics than some White person coming in from London, for example.

I think the type of people collecting the content is beginning to change, and we want to see that happening a lot more. The other thing that's changing is that because of the debate over white saviorism, we are creating a roster of nationals who can take the pictures and get the video and gather the content for us. So that we are not constantly, seeing everything in Africa through what some people call a white gaze.

I think, ultimately, we'll end up with a lot more of the work being done say in Sierra Leone by people from Sierra Leone. There will still be times I think when people will go from London because they need to capture the images that will work for the Western media. There are times when you hear an editor of the *Sunday Times Magazine,* for example, only wanting a known photographer, who might be White or Black or anything. It's a known photographer that they want to go and photograph a particular thing. Otherwise, they're not interested.

We did a thing on women in war, girls in war where we had three well-known female photographers covering three different crises one of which was Gaza. If we tried to get a Gaza photographer to do it, we probably wouldn't have achieved the quality of the famous photographer who flew in from somewhere in Asia to do that story. That's the whole white saviorist debate has altered the way we see the business of content gathering. We're keen to be working in partnership and with people in places like Central West Africa where we used to work rather than deciding things in London about how programs are going to be done. In the same way, relying more on local people or nationals to help us with the communications.

Interviewer: Excellent. If you or a team member was preparing to travel to a crisis zone in order to physically access it, what are some of the logistical considerations that you might need to take into account? What do you need to do? Who might need to help you with those sorts of things?

[Interviewee]: We do those things in close cooperation with the country offices. I'm sure you remember if we go to- think of somewhere I've been to. If I'm going to Syrian refugees in Jordan, it's the Jordan country office that will set up that trip. We'll say what we want and who we want to bring, and then they'll come back to us with an itinerary. I'm not saying you can't have that many people, we can only have this number of people because we've only got two vehicles available, and we've only got one translator. Then we agree on what is a pragmatic way to get this done.

Interviewer: If I was to understand the different influences that. I suppose influences the wrong term, the different organizations involved in facilitating access to a crisis and in my experience physical access to a crisis is rarely granted by one single organization. Even for a journalist, if a journalist comes to [NGO], you might go to the country office. The country office then may have conversations with, for example, the Ministry of Information for press accreditation or visas or security and transport like we discussed earlier, aid flights those sorts of things. If I wanted to find out those "influences" it's best to speak to people in the country office and the regional offices?

[Interviewee]: I think so, yes. I'm giving you my perspective and from my perspective, the country office get things done, but I know that, of course, they do talk to the government. In Jordan, the Ministry of Education is very interested in how our work in the camps will be covered. They have a particular view on people being-- I don't know. Something undiplomatic. If you're in the camp, it's quite hard for you to move to the community and send your children to a local school, for example. That's quite a sensitive issue.

They'll want to know what coverage might come up about the nature of education in the camp? That discussion will go on with that ministry. They won't send a minder or anything as heavy-handed as that but they'll take an interest.

Interviewer: Would that influence, editorially, how you produce the work?

[Interviewee]: No, I don't think. I think we have said-- When I was in **[unintelligible 00:57:51]**, a lot of very well educated parents who'd come from very good jobs in Syria were demanding very vocally proper teaching of physics in the refugee camp because, "My child is going to be an engineer." We would report that. We won't report that the education of the camp is more rudimentary than-- Well, we will report that though the education is not as sophisticated as the parents would like, regardless of whether that ruffles feathers at the ministry, for instance.

Interviewer: Can you think of, well, in your experience, we just discussed a few there, but any obvious hurdles and organizations that might be important? You mentioned the government and people who manage camps and stuff like that. Are there any obvious things that spring to mind?

[Interviewee]: Yes, I mentioned going to Myanmar and that was a chairman's visit with a couple of donors. We wanted to take the *Sunday Times'* deputy editor, who really wanted to go, and the organizer of the trip was a Muslim woman. The *Sunday Times* **[unintelligible 00:59:18]** and the Muslim woman didn't get visas, and the rest of us did. I'm sure it was no coincidence, so they didn't want somebody coming into coverage that they couldn't control. They didn't want a Muslim woman that they didn't need to have because that's the nature of this very divided society.

Interviewer: I'll give you an example. I remember working in Northeast Nigeria, and it'd been a very dangerous part of the world, and UN OCHA were the only organization who could get safe access to certain people for a helicopter. Either for me as a content producer or the journalist, they really, at that point in time, controlled the physical access to certain parts of that crisis. Did you have any memories of something similar throughout your own experiences?

[Interviewee]: We recently had a trip to Burkina Faso by Inger Ashing, the Chief Executive of [NGO]International, and Lindsay Hilson from *Channel 4 News* was going to Burkina Faso at the same time. We thought it would be great to team them up and get them up together to camps in the north of the country if I recall correctly where things were bad. In the end, there were a number of obstacles and *Channel 4 News* couldn't get up to the area that we would've liked them to publicize. They did something else instead.

The flight logistics as you know can be very complicated. There aren't a lot of options. I don't think **[unintelligible 01:01:18]** is restricting access for its own sinister manipulative purposes. I just think there might be one flight in a week, and it's only a tiny plane. That's more the reality I think.

Interviewer: Again, I suppose if I go back to that overarching thing I'm genuinely not trying to suggest it's something manipulative or sinister or anything. Is it fair to say then that control of the logistical elements of humanitarian responses, for example, whether purposely or unpurposely can have some influence on the content that you produce?

[Interviewee]: Yes.

Interviewer: Or don't produce.

[Interviewee]: Yes. A very recent example of that would be Afghanistan. Dan Stewart, now our Head of News went to the airport in Kabul for three days on a road to get the UN flight up to I think it was **[unintelligible 01:02:14]**. The plane didn't turn up. Clearly, he couldn't get there and he couldn't do their stuff. Lindsay Hilson again, she went to Ukraine in the end, but she was planning to go to Afghanistan at the same time that Dan was there. She was assuming that she would be able to use the UN fights. We had to tell her that there was a problem with the UN fights, and it wasn't that simple. That may have been a factor in her decision not to go to Afghanistan at that point.

Interviewer: Understood. Okay. Brilliant. Right. Final section, remote access. When you can't physically access a crisis zone for whatever reason, or don't physically access a crisis zone. How do you access it remotely, from researching and learning about it, to producing content about it?

[Interviewee]: We've done virtual visits for ambassadors through the pandemic. For example, Mo Farah did a virtual visit to Somalia I think he was sitting next to our chief executive in London or something, they were connected. Digitally, they were teamed up with people showing him things in Somalia. He was able to ask questions and hear the answers and get a sense of what our program was achieving. I think that's the future. It's one of those things that the pandemic has accelerated that probably would've happened already because we need to spend less on travel. The increasing focus on carbon emissions in organizations like [NGO]means that there is also an environmental reason not to travel.

To save costs and save carbon emissions, we will be doing more and more, virtual visits of that kind. That's okay. I still think as an old journalist that there's no substitute for getting on the ground and meeting people and finding the unexpected. Getting the human stories, and getting that video firsthand, but there is a bit that you can do remotely.

Interviewer: I suppose we might have answered this earlier when we got into discussions around personal stories and data and stuff. What would you say are the main sources of information communicators use to create news content? That could be from as basic as a press release to a piece of multimedia content when travel is not possible?

[Interviewee]: You mean what the journalists use?

Interviewer: No, what you use as communication staff or your team uses. You want a publicize a crisis, you can't go. What do you do?

[Interviewee]: It's mainly done through the country offices, by the regional media managers who know the people in the country offices. Whose arms they can twist to go and get useful stuff or to give them anecdotes. In Afghanistan, we have mobile health units at the moment, which are saving lives by delivering emergency food supplies and water and vaccinating people, and so on. It's possible to get some information about what they're doing, and who they're meeting, whether you're in Kabul or London. We need to have that relationship and that connection set up.

When a British person became the acting country director in Afghanistan, while the country director went away to recover from the traumas of the Taliban take over Kabul and catch up on some time off from you. She was very good at making sure that these connections were made because she really understood how important the media coverage was to raising the money during the DEC appeal. That would be one example of how we try and get things done. It often doesn't work. We're often frustrated, we're often disappointed. Either the information doesn't come through at all, or it comes through in a language that we weren't expecting.

When we don't have a translator ready to turn it into something that we can use, or it comes through terrible. It's possible to get some stuff out, and there's usually something you can salvage. An example of that would be that one of our emergency mobile teams told us that 40 children that they referred to the local hospital had died before reaching hospital in Afghanistan, and that became a story. It was mentioned in a story in the *Sunday Times* by Christina Lamb in a great piece of campaigning journalism. That's a small example of how you can get valuable stuff through. Of course, it is difficult and doesn't always work.

Interviewer: You are reliant on your teams on the ground, as opposed as the key message when you can't physically get there yourself?

[Interviewee]: Yes. We tend to publicize the plight of farmers that we are involved with and helping as I'm sure you'll remember. Personally, I don't have a problem with going a little bit beyond that, but some people think that we should stick to telling the stories of people we are helping. We would have to carry out checks on consent, and we would have to verify stories that reached us by any other means. In practical terms, it's simpler for us to go through our own teams to people that we are working with.

Interviewer: Presumably, when you spoke earlier about those personal stories as impactful stories, backed by the important journalistic context and data and stuff like that. In this case as well when you're speaking to your country officers, the statistics and data is also a way that you access it? Or is important for you in accessing the story or understanding the story?

[Interviewee]: That's true but the story then becomes a bit dry. Or the risk of being too dry, if it's not accompanied by some human content. We do often have to rely just on data and somebody warning about something that might happen, but it's less interesting to journalists.

Interviewer: I haven't asked this one. I'm just interested. If you're only going to choose one, you could only have one for the rest of the time. Would you choose access to amazing personal stories or access to the data if one had to exist alone?

[Interviewee]: The amazing personal stories without question.

Interviewer: That's really good to know. Brilliant. My final question, and thank you so much for your time, is around just something you mentioned. The pandemic and how it's disrupted everything. Just how much and how has it disrupted how you produce content about humanitarian crises?

[Interviewee]: The massive effect we used to have one or two people traveling in any given week, getting important stuff on the ground, interviewing people professionally. It's not easy to interview a child. Getting that done by somebody who's got the training and is following the guidelines is a very valuable thing. Somebody who can shoot, somebody who can get the

video that you need, somebody who can get the pictures that you need, somebody who can give you a real sense of place with the way they describe a situation. We've lost all that. We're down to what you can get on the phone.

I think people are getting better at getting the stuff on the phone through necessity, and it's also created a great reliance on the country office staff. Sometimes that's resented because they think, "Well, why should we be doing this stuff for the media when our job is to educate these children or save these people from wasting." We have to use powers of persuasion, and we have to use intermediaries sometimes to get what we want. It's become logistically, more complicated. I think it will have a permanent impact because we'll never go back to the amount of travel that we used to have for the cost and environmental reasons that I mentioned. I think there will have to be a halfway house now where we have to justify every trip to higher-ups in a way that we never used to.

Interviewer: Is there anything about the possible influences on how you produce news content that you think is important to discuss that I might not have asked you about here? Something that shapes [crosstalk].

[Interviewee]: The only thing we haven't discussed is where you can't be outspoken, because it's unacceptable to the government, in the country where you have a valuable program. Speaking privately, lots of things are happening in Ethiopia that we can't talk about at all. We can't talk about Tigray, we can't talk about it at all because we would be in danger of being thrown out. The work that we do there is helping so many people. We have to set that against the value of freedom of speech.

In Myanmar, after the coup, we were very outspoken, and we got enormous amount of coverage for opposing children being shocked, and our own offices being set on fire, and all the rest of it. Two of our staff were killed in a massacre by the Myanmar military, and the guidance from the country office changed to, we can't say anything, because our staff are terrified and we can't add to their fear and up to the risks that they're already running.

Interviewer: There is an, obviously, massive thing, isn't it? To some extent, you can't publicize crises because your beneficiaries, your staff, and even your programs could be ended, are at risk.

[Interviewee]: You must have come across this yourself. With Boko Haram in Nigeria. We had a country director who didn't want us to mention Boko Haram at all, at all, because he thought our office will be blown up if we did. That meant that when the girls were kidnapped from Chibok School, we didn't talk about it. Which we look back on now with horror, but in an opposite reality at the time, when somebody's telling you that security and safety of staff is the top priority, you can't really argue against that. The perceptions of risk might be very different in different places. We might think we need to talk about Boko Haram, and they probably won't blow up our office. If you're the country director, all you care about is not having your office blown up.

Interviewer: You can probably reel off. I'm not asking you to but it's fair to say that's a relatively regular thing that you have to deal with not being able to speak out because of perceived risk in the country itself?

[Interviewee]: I've given you two current examples. Tigray and Myanmar. Was usually one like that, where we've decided, in principle, to be more outspoken but in practice, there's

always somebody giving you some reason why operationally, that would be counterproductive.

Interviewer: That's it, brilliant. Thank you so much. **[unintelligible 01:13:52]** I was [sound cut]

Appendix F - MSF South Sudan Press release 25 August 2021

South Sudan

Hepatitis E on the rise among poor sanitary conditions in Bentiu camp

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Press Release | *25 August 2021*

- A lack of soap and open sewers are among the deplorable sanitary conditions in Bentiu displaced people's camp, South Sudan.
- MSF has repeatedly warned of the health risks of the terrible conditions, as a sharp rise in watery diarrhoea and hepatitis E cases was recorded in July.
- The outbreak of the viral liver disease has resulted in the deaths of two people, including a pregnant woman.

JUBA - An alarming jump in the number of patients with hepatitis E and acute watery diarrhoea has been seen in the camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in Bentiu, South Sudan. The situation is critical, with two deaths already registered within a month since the end of July, says Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

"We have repeatedly warned of the health risks of inadequate water and sanitation service provision in the Bentiu camp," said Federica Franco, MSF country director. "A failure to address these issues, with agencies actually reducing their water and sanitation services over the past year, has now resulted in this avoidable situation."

Since July, MSF teams have treated four times more patients with hepatitis E than in the previous months. Of 186 cases reported in 2021, over 60 per cent were recorded over six weeks between early July to mid-August. Amongst the patients who passed way, one was a pregnant woman, as the Ministry of Health called attention to on 15 August. Hepatitis E is a highly concerning disease for this group, as pregnant women are more likely to experience severe illness and the mortality rate can be as high as up to 30 per cent.

Residents collecting and storing water in containers at water point, in Bentiu camp. South Sudan, August 2021.

DAMARIS GIULIANA/MSF

SHARE

MSF teams have also witnessed an exponential growth in the number of people with acute watery diarrhoea. While we were treating an average of 230 patients per month throughout the year, we saw 1,454 in July - a 50 per cent rise in the number of patients seen in June. The most affected are children aged under five years.

"We don't have water containers in our house," says camp resident Nyaker Deng Bol. "Sometimes my children go to bed without showering because the one jerry can we have is not enough for showering the five of us. We just use it for drinking."

A lack of soap and latrines, as well as open sewers, are among the poor hygiene issues contributing to the appalling situation for over 100,000 people who live in the camp. During a survey MSF teams conducted this month, less than 27 per cent of the sampled households could show a piece of soap while being interviewed in their shelters. Additionally, only around 13 per cent of people have access to hand washing points with water and soap close to the latrines.

RELATED

HEPATITIS E

REFUGEES, IDPS AND PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

SOUTH SUDAN

> **We don’t have water containers in our house... Sometimes my children go to bed without showering because the one jerry can we have is not enough for showering the five of us.**

NYAKER DENG BOL, RESIDENT IN CAMP BENTIU

SHARE

An earlier MSF assessment in April showed that the number of functional latrines in the camp was 10 times below the minimum international standard for the size of population.

“The deplorable water and sanitation situation in the Bentiu camp is not a new phenomenon,” says Samreen Hussain, MSF deputy medical coordinator. “But the situation has continued to drastically deteriorate in the last two years, leaving an already vulnerable population at high risk of outbreaks, as we are currently witnessing.”

While MSF has mobilised a medical response, organisations that provide water and sanitation in Bentiu camp have been increasing services to address the unacceptable conditions. Desludging, cleaning and rehabilitation of existing latrines, construction of new latrines, and distribution of soap and water containers should urgently continue, as the water and sanitation conditions are still extremely poor.

Hepatitis E is a viral liver disease prevalent in environments with poor water supply and sanitation. It is most commonly spread through the oral-faecal route, when people ingest water or food contaminated by an infected person’s faeces. The symptoms are acute jaundice, which turns people’s eyes and skin yellow, as well as fever, reduced appetite, nausea and vomiting, dark urine and enlargement of the liver, though people may not show symptoms at all.

Working in Bentiu since 2014, MSF currently runs a 136-bed hospital with inpatient department, emergency room for children and adults, and surgery. We provide maternal care for complicated obstetrics, care for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, treatment for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and Kala azar, mental health care, inpatient therapeutic feeding centre, outreach programme within the IDP camp and post-exposure prophylaxis for rabies. We also provide water and sanitation services.

Appendix G - Save the Children South Sudan Press Release 9 July 2021

9 JULY 2021 - SOUTH SUDAN

SOUTH SUDAN: NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN CRISIS LEVELS OF HUNGER INCREASES BY 50% IN 10 YEARS

The world's newest country, South Sudan, is facing its worst ever hunger crisis as it marks its 10 year anniversary, with 7.2 million people, including millions of children, on the brink of or in famine, Save the Children said today.

The number of people in grave danger of starvation has risen by 50% compared to the same season a decade ago with figures released in 2012 showing 40% of the population was experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity of IPC 3 or higher at that time.

Save the Children is warning this situation will most likely deteriorate in coming months due to ongoing violence, high food prices, climatic shocks, and barriers to humanitarian access, unless urgent national and global action is taken. An estimated 1.4 million children are already suffering from acute malnutrition.

The organisation is calling on the government of South Sudan to curb communal violence and fast track the implementation of the peace deal, to address some of the root causes of the hunger crisis and enable children to look towards a brighter future.

The current total hunger figure includes 2.47 million people at emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC 4) and 31,000 people who facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity (IPC 5) or famine-like conditions. Save the Children is particularly concerned for the wellbeing of some 1.4 million children who are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition this year, the highest figure since 2013. Malnutrition can cause stunting, impede mental and physical development, increase the risk of developing other illnesses, and ultimately cause death.

The warning comes after Save the Children said last month that more than 5.7 million children under five are on the brink of starvation across the globe, with the world is facing the biggest global hunger crisis of the 21st century.

Mary*, 36, is the mother of Aluel*, 1, from Akobo county in South Sudan. Aluel has suffered from severe hunger since birth, which has impacted Mary's mental health. Save the Children is now supporting them both. Mary said:

"I came to Akobo to receive medical services for my child, who has been sick for over a year now. Where we are, we are starving because there was flooding that destroyed our crops and left us hungry and dependent on aid. Now there are no cows because they were raided by neighbouring communities. Even if someone's child is sick or hungry, there is nothing we can feed them. There is completely nothing."

Across South Sudan, Save the Children is treating thousands of children with acute malnutrition, with staff reporting increasing numbers of babies arriving at clinics in life-threatening situations. In the past three months alone, Save the Children diagnosed 7,342 infants with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases, of which 4,219 infants were admitted into hospital for treatment.

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Rama Hansraj, Save the Children's Country Director in South Sudan, said:

"The birth of a new nation is often a time of hope and joy for many of the people living within it, but sadly this promise is yet to deliver for South Sudan. In so many ways, things have gotten worse for children since the country was formed in 2011. Civil war and climate shocks have all played their part in pushing South Sudan away from where it should be, ten years on.

"South Sudan is not just a story of conflict. It is a story of generations of deliberate displacement of civilians, destruction of livelihoods, and land occupation, compounded by climate shocks like unprecedented flooding and locust plagues, and a story of COVID-19 and its obliteration of already-vulnerable social infrastructure. It's only by addressing the root causes of this crisis, as well as mitigating the devastating effects of the pandemic, will we be able to prevent a generation succumbing to the immediate and long-term consequences of malnutrition."

Save the Children is calling on donor governments to fully fund the joint-agency Humanitarian Response Plan for South Sudan, and invest in social protection schemes and services for children. To truly put an end to hunger in South Sudan, the international community must address the root causes of the acute food insecurity, including finding a sustainable solution to the conflict, tackling global changing climate, and building more resilient communities.

Save the Children has been working with and for children, their families and communities in South Sudan since 1991. We provide children with access to education, healthcare and nutrition support, and families with food security and livelihoods assistance. Our child protection programmes support vulnerable children including unaccompanied and separated children and those affected by violence, as well as advocating for children's rights at national, state and community levels.

In response to the current crisis, Save the Children is supporting hunger-affected households and livelihoods with cash transfers, promoting positive nutrition practices and infant and young child feeding practices, and distributing emergency food assistance. We are also providing breastfeeding support to new mothers, deworming and Vitamin A supplementation, and nutrition campaign and promotional activities on better feeding practices.

**Names changed to protect identities*

Content available here.

For more information and interview requests, please contact:

Appendix H - Calculation of mean humanitarian funding appeal per country

2018

Country	UN Humanitarian Appeal
South Sudan	$1.72 B
DRC	$1.68 B
Somalia	$1.50 B
Nigeria	$1.05 B
Sudan	$1.00 B
Ethiopia	$895.0 M
Chad	$558.1 M
CAR	$515.6 M
Niger	$338.0 M
Cameroon	$305.7 M
Mali	$255.5 M
Burundi	$113.4 M

2019

Country	UN Humanitarian Appeal
South Sudan	$1.72 B
DRC	$1.68 B
Somalia	$1.54 B
Ethiopia	$1.18 B
Nigeria	$1.05 B
Sudan	$1.01 B
Burundi	$546.6 M
Chad	$543.8 M
CAR	$515.6 M
Niger	$338.3 M
Mali	$329.6 M
Cameroon	$319.7 M

2020

Country	UN Humanitarian Appeal
DRC	$1.82 B
South Sudan	$1.54 B
Sudan	$1.40 B
Somalia	$1.03 B
Ethiopia	$973.0 M
Nigeria	$789.0 M
Chad	$500.0 M
CAR	$387.8 M
Niger	$373.5 M
Mali	$365.6 M
Cameroon	$317.0 M
Burkina Faso	$295.0 M
Burundi	$104.0 M

2021

Country	UN Humanitarian Appeal
DRC	2.0 B
Sudan	1.8 B
Ethiopia	1.5 B
South Sudan	1.5 B
Nigeria	1.1 B
Somalia	1.1 B
Burkina Faso	607.4 M
Niger	500.0 M
Mali	498.0 M
CAR	444.7 M
Cameroon	360.0 M
Mozambique	254.4 M

Mean UN Humanitarian Funding Appeals (Top Six Countries over four years)	
DRC	1.816
South Sudan	1.696

Ethiopia	1.4696
Sudan	1.422
Somalia	1.334
Nigeria	1.0178