

## New book shines light on French versus British models of humanitarian aid

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From earthquakes and tsunamis to war and genocide which wreak devastation on millions of people around the world, human suffering is never far from the headlines. But how do policymakers, charities and medics decide how best to reach those in need and what influences their tactics and the style of humanitarian aid?

A new book co-edited by Karl Blanchet, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, with Boris Martin, brings together the perspectives of 11 British and French humanitarians and academics to reflect on key problems. By contrasting the two nations' approaches to crisis situations, *Many Reasons To Intervene: French and British Approaches to Humanitarian Action* sheds light on the nature of humanitarianism and raises important issues such as the question of independence and neutrality.

"In the humanitarian field, French doctors – first and foremost Médecins Sans Frontières and its 'little sister' Médecins du Monde – seem always to be in the vanguard, the first to arrive in a critical situation," says Blanchet, a lecturer in Health Systems Research. "They have created a style of action that combines intervention in crises with critical assessment of the human tragedies, such as wars, famines and earthquakes, in which they find themselves involved. In this book we're looking at the differences between this and the British style and asking how innovative it is."

The current practice of organised humanitarian action was devised,

through trial and error, by agencies in Britain, the United States and Switzerland. France was the last to join the group of so-called 'founder democracies' and its most prominent agencies have been more obviously independent of government. A closer examination of the history of humanitarianism reveals that it was by drawing on existing forms of action that MSF, MDM and others gradually developed their particular brand of intervention, which combines relief practices learnt from the Red Cross with efforts to mobilise public opinion using strategies invented by Amnesty International.

The contributors - who include fellow LSHTM academic Egbert Sondorp - assess the models of intervention in the hope of learning from both and formulating approaches to humanitarianism for the 21st century.

Professor Peter Piot, Director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, says: 'Many Ways to Intervene is a unique book on humanitarian aid in emergency settings. For the first time, through a series of chapters from respected academics and practitioners, the differences and similarities between the French and Anglo-Saxon approaches to the delivery of humanitarian aid are analysed from a variety of perspectives. The description of the historical foundations of international assistance both in France and in the United Kingdom brings a new light to the political role of international NGOs. This important book will be of interest to all actors in the field of humanitarian aid, including policy makers, donors, implementers and academics.'

**More information:** Many Reasons To Intervene is published by Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd on July 18 2011 (9781849041423, £17.99 paper)

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