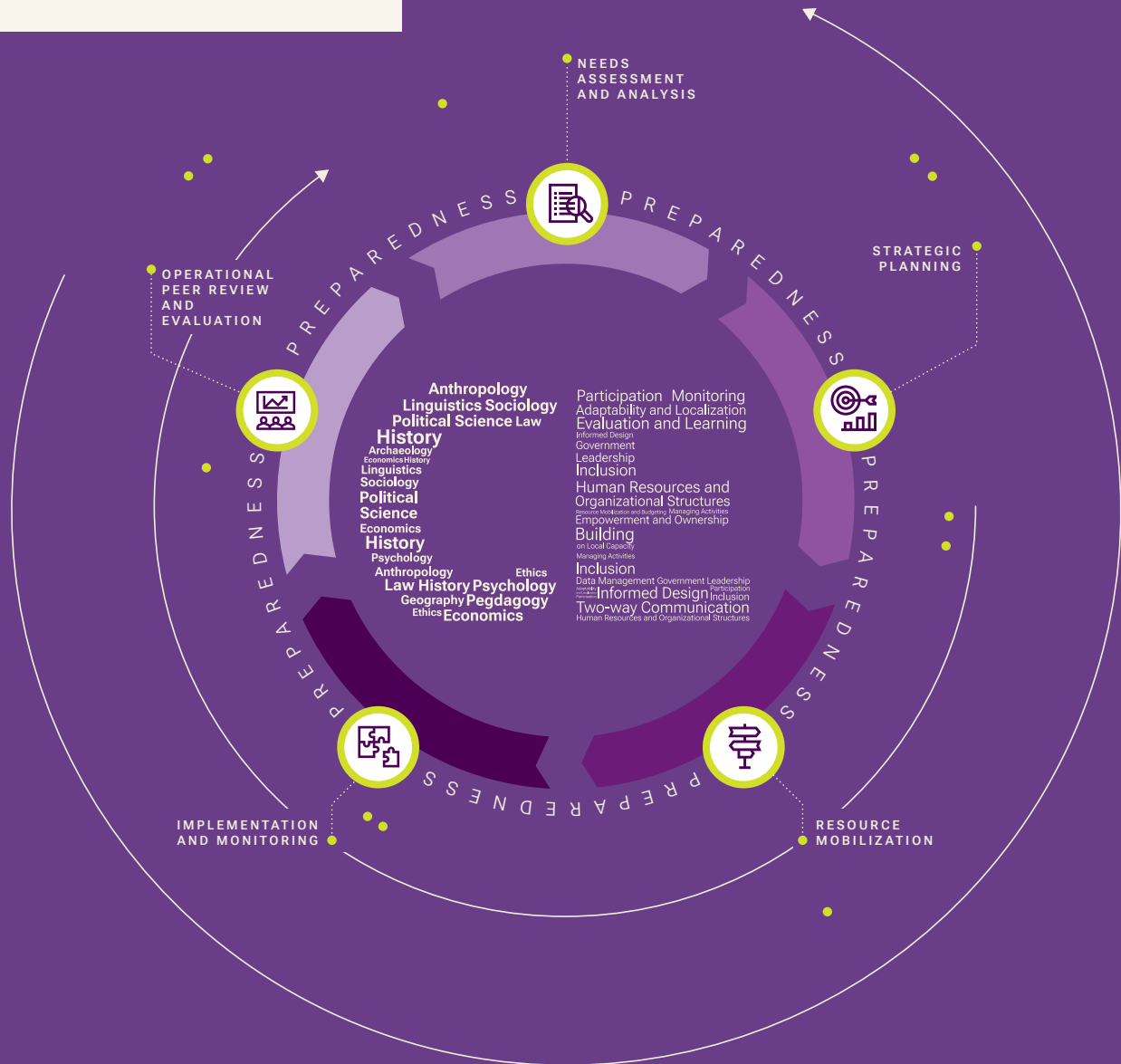


SOCIAL SCIENCES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

CODES OF CONDUCT MAPPING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Introduction

Humanitarian action (HA) provides assistance to communities at risk of or affected by disasters such as flooding, earthquakes, disease outbreaks and conflict. The humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) is a coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver humanitarian response. It consists of five elements coordinated in a seamless manner, with one step logically building on the previous step that, in turn, leads to the next. Successful implementation of the HPC is dependent on effective emergency preparedness, constructive coordination with national/local authorities and humanitarian actors, and information management.

The social sciences (SS) contribute to the different stages in humanitarian programming, providing evidence to inform decision making, ensuring affected peoples' participation throughout the cycle, aiming at more effective and efficient humanitarian action.

Community engagement (CE) is a key participatory process, inclusive of political, institutional, societal and communal relationships which need to be adequately inscribed into different social, political, and cultural contexts. Active participation, mutual respect for different knowledge systems and co-creation are essential characteristics of CE. Stakeholders such as donors, academics, humanitarian practitioners and representatives from at-risk and affected communities — among other actors involved in humanitarian action — need to ensure the provision of needed services and protection without amplifying misrepresentation, discrimination and power asymmetries.

This mapping report documents existing codes of conduct (CoCs) in HA, SS research, CE and the intersection of the three SS4CE in HA. The report analyses the process of creating such codes, their application and compliance as well as existing gaps. The report provides recommendations to address identified gaps in the creation of a CoC for the application of SS4CE in HA at the different stages of the HPC.

Methodology

- **Scoping review:** A Scoping review of published and grey literature, related to CoCs in HA, SS research, CE and for the application of SS4CE in HA was conducted. Twenty-six CoCs, as well as national guidelines, covering SS research and other regulatory organization documents comprised the main literature reviewed.
- **Technical working group (TWG) meetings:** A TWG was convened to provide technical guidance and advice. The group consisted of 20 members, representing academic institutions, non-Governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and civil society. The group met monthly during 2022. This CoC TWG discussed working methods, and CoC-relevant aspects as developed over time from information emerging in the literature review and discussions. The TWG also provided detailed feedback into the final analysis and draft versions of this report.
- **In-depth interviews:** A total of five in-depth interviews with TWG experts were conducted. The qualitative interview guide focused on the participant's knowledge and experience in CoC and the application of SS and CE in HA. All interviews were recorded and stored on a secure cloud accessible to the CoC team for reference during analysis.
- **Online contributions (Padlet):** TWG participants were also invited to contribute via Padlet (an online platform used as a discussion forum). <https://padlet.com/babylonia00/am3rd1i03665kc9u>

A codebook and a matrix for reviewed CoCs were developed, using MS Excel, detailing key themes: source document, key focus of the CoC and identified gaps.



Findings

The review identified several existing CoCs linked to the humanitarian system, as well as to the applicability of SS research, but no specific CoC linked to the application of SS4CE in HA at the different stages of the HPC were found.

The findings showed that humanitarian organizations, as well as academic institutions and national research councils, outline their own general CoCs relevant to their disciplines and mandates. Humanitarian CoCs are linked to European humanitarian principles and the notion of 'do no harm'. Conducting SS research in humanitarian crises remains relatively unregulated beyond basic Western ethical guidelines and norms developed for research in general, with no link to the different approaches to the application of SS in the different stages of the HPC. The findings also showed that existing CoCs do not address issues linked to the colonial legacy, power dynamics and racism between the global north and global south. The documents reviewed did not address the issue of co-creation, co-construction and co-leading research processes with communities. In general terms, research and/or data collection initiatives are visualized and planned in northern institutions with a colonial mindset – people affected by humanitarian crises are objects of research, not co-researchers.

Existing codes have been created based on ethical and moral conceptualizations connected with European values, no CoC was found that allows for local principles and values to be considered and systematically included in the creation and implementation process.

The literature points at challenges in uptake, implementation, and compliance of existing CoCs. A limitation of CoCs is that a signatory can simply break them. Considering that the *raison d'être* of CoCs is the commitment of organizations and individuals to be held accountable to humanitarian principles and to communities affected by crises, the consequences of breaking the code are important. One of the challenges is that compliance mechanisms are triggered only when a complaint is placed, there is no surveillance or monitoring of the fulfilment of a CoC. At the same time, it is not evident that organizations have internal compliance mechanisms set up to deal with breaches of a CoC, this is even worse in the case of inter-agency CoCs (e.g. the Red Cross CoC) compliance mechanisms.

Conclusions

The mapping on CoCs asserts that there is no standalone CoC specifically tackling the application of SS4CE in HA in the different stages of the HPC, nor is there any existing humanitarian or research organizational CoC which makes explicit reference to this dimension.

Ethical frameworks and CoCs in humanitarian action help shape how the relationship between stakeholders in the humanitarian arena are defined and how interactions should take place. These forms of 'moral imaginations' have recently been criticized for articulating and upholding historically-constituted Eurocentric (colonial) structures of power. This includes the disempowering ways in which knowledge is produced about racialized, often distant, and vulnerable others and the dismissal of other worldviews/culture or paradigms. Hence, there has been a growing conversation about the need to decolonize ethics and CoCs within modern humanitarianism. For a CoC to be considered global, it needs wide participation in its development and opt-in.

There are three key questions raised by the mapping exercise. The first query points at how to shift the paradigm and create spaces for negotiating different practices and value systems in ways that foster inclusion without subsuming them into one world or another. This in turn will allow grounding humanitarian action in the everyday realities of people who experience and live with crisis. It is important to ponder how to do this in a systematic manner, as an integrated way of working for humanitarians and researchers. Second, the application of SS in HA, begs the question of the role they play, either perpetuating or challenging the colonial legacy and power imbalances when engaging with communities in humanitarian contexts. Finally, in order to create an applicable, fit for purpose, practical and meaningful CoC, there is a need for organizations to review internal mechanisms of compliance and commit to holding the staff accountable for possible breaches of the code.

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