

## HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

Why risk publishing a new international humanitarian review?

*Jean-François Mattei* • French Red Cross Fund  
*Benoît Miribel* • Mérieux Foundation  
*Jean-Baptiste Richardier* • Handicap International Foundation  
*Jean-Christophe Rufin* • Action against Hunger Foundation

---

At the beginning of the 1970's, the creation of *Médecins sans Frontières* wrote the first pages of a history in which numerous initiatives sharing a renewed conception of humanitarian action are inscribed. Close to half a century later the following recognition is required: the reputation of the “frontierless” movement remains attached to the original ruptures and innovations but its voice is not that much heard on the international scene. Native English speaking actors have long been able to rely on high level publications, with no equivalent in the francophone sphere. Of course quality publications due to the initiative of specific organisations, pioneers of salutary ways of thinking, already exist; the originality of the *Humanitarian Alternatives* project is nonetheless to launch a cross-cutting initiative, carried by several foundations representing a sector in which divergent points of view, both constituent and constructive, are numerous.

For the initiators of the project, the necessity of launching such a review obviously appeared as a complement to the *Humanitarian Space Forum*. Since 2009, every 18 months and during three days, this informal place of exchange opens to leaders of the main French or Francophone NGOs as well as the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements, to reflect upon the major stakes of the humanitarian sector. The organisers are also attentive to the participation of other international aid actors and ensure that recognised academic experts are contributors.

*Humanitarian Alternatives* thus wishes to contribute towards emphasising in the international arena the original voice of a humanitarian approach with francophone roots, true bridge towards its English speaking colleagues, but also, and maybe especially between two mutually interested universes that nonetheless ignore each other too often, that of researchers in humanities and that of field practitioners.

The positioning of the review is decidedly very open, based on quality of thinking and experience, enabling to attract the contributions of researchers with an undisputable scientific legitimacy, while inviting practitioners, deriving strength from their experience as field actors, to engage in the discussion. Carried by an affirmed prospective ambition, the review will seek the contributions of authors wishing to invest the unexplored sectors of humanitarian issues, analyse the present deadlocks and put questioning and responses in perspective. The innovation fever that has seized the sector to answer the challenges of the “humanitarian transition” will in particular be the object of an attentive and critical scrutiny.

Publishing in *Humanitarian Alternatives* must represent for researchers a “breath of oxygen” by delivering papers freed from the usual constraints of academic reviews. They will, we hope, be seduced by the possibility of sharing a place to think about humanitarian action, that has become an object of social, societal and political concern. This way, the objective of *Humanitarian Alternatives* is effectively to build and animate, as time goes on, a place to meet and debate and

## HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

to give shape to a community of practitioners and researchers resolved to make humanitarian concepts progress and to establish the subjects dealt with in fields of relevance and possibility.

By having the humanitarian world and academia engage in dialogue, our ambition is to give rise to an “impact sector” as well as to an “impact factor”...The horizon of readers of *Humanitarian Alternatives* is that of decision makers and aid practitioners, financial contributors and the national and multilateral institutions dealing with the humanitarian response, just as well as academics, researchers, teachers and students in humanities and social sciences. We also wish to create interest amongst the firms already engaged or wishing to adopt, in a sincere and responsible way, an international aid policy, without leaving aside the enlightened public and all persons wishing to deepen their critical understanding of the sector. The choice of an eclectic audience is ambitious and it suggests a focus half way between a scientific approach and an accessible formulation, integrating for certain headings a more case-like or narrative approach.

Succeeding in international distribution is a challenge that we know is difficult, hence the demanding choice of bilinguism. Backed by a network of francophone universities, *Humanitarian Alternatives* will deliberately privilege the contributions of researchers wishing to have their work published both in French and English.

*Humanitarian Alternatives* will be distributed in priority fashion by a digital media, allowing immediate links with an infinite richness of expressions and complementary information. We believe nonetheless in the relevance of proposing a printed version of the review, so as to respond to the expectations and the preferences of both types of readers. Complementary actions –debates, conferences, book publishing- can also be carried out, to extend the audience of the review.

The analysis of existing publications has comforted us in the realisation that there did not exist on the international level a comparable media with a francophone inspiration, carried by a grouping of foundations coming from practitioners, nourished by the academic approaches of university partners and expressing a sharing of means, thinking and projects. At distance from operational imperatives as well as from institutional constraints, the freedom of the editorial line will be unhindered, supported by a willingly rebellious tone versus the “politically correct”, guaranteed by an editorial committee and a steering committee independent from financial sources. *Humanitarian Alternatives* positions itself nor as a breakaway or even as a competitor but as a reinforcement for existing publications, determined to contribute to the structuring of innovative thinking at the service of analyses and creative proposals.

*Humanitarian Alternatives* will be available to begin with in free access for the digital version and we pledge, by our signature, that each of our foundations will contribute financially to its launch and its distribution for the next three years.

In every adventure there are trail blazers and the authors of this issue are amongst them. With them we have elaborated a first approach that shows, modestly, what this review can be. Articulated around a main heading –here the Ebola crisis that has not yet finished delivering its lessons- it draws from the history of the “frontierless” movement, as witnessed through the prism of an English speaking author, flies towards the “Souths”, drawing inspiration from the undergoing mobilisations and looks towards ethics which are the future of the sector. Hence, the present issue is a proposal, in the strongest sense of the term: an offer submitted to deliberation. In short, this proposal is in conformity with the image of humanitarian action: a work site in perpetual renewal, anchored to its foundations, ready to venture towards new horizons.

## HUMANITARIAN ALTERNATIVES

We invite you to communicate your advice and recommendations; they will be precious because the first steps of a review that wishes to be innovative are never easy. And of course we invite you to join us to support and enrich this collective initiative, establish its influence and contribute to its everlastingness.

*Reproduction prohibited without the agreement of the review Humanitarian Alternatives. To quote this article: Jean-François Mattei, Benoît Miribel, Jean-Baptiste Richardier, Jean-Christophe Rufin, "Why risk publishing a new international humanitarian review?", Humanitarian Alternatives, Inaugural Issue, February 2016, p. 3-7, <http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2016/01/09/why-risk-publishing-a-new-international-humanitarian-review-2/>*