JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
School of Education and Communication

# Disaster Capitalism in a neoliberal era: an NGO perspective

A qualitative study of NGO practice, disaster capitalism and the privatisation of the humanitarian sector

**COURSE:** *Bachelor Thesis in Global Studies, 15 ECTS*
**PROGRAMME:** *International Work – Global Studies*
**AUTHORS:** *Charles Drury, Erik Lago*
**EXAMINER:** *Radu-Harald Dinu*
**SEMESTER:** *Spring 2019*

## Abstract

The rising number of disasters, both natural and man-made, has created a greater need for humanitarian interventions. Simultaneously, it has also created larger room for disaster capitalism, a phenomenon where certain actors use disasters to push economic interests. NGO:s are one of the main actors in post-disaster settings, which happens to be the very same sphere as the one where disaster capitalism occurs. Thus, this study will examine how NGO:s can work to counteract disaster capitalism. This is done by looking at how Swedish NGO:s implement their work and whether this is compatible with Loretta Pyles' decolonising disaster social work framework (2017), which is deemed to contain measures which can hamper disaster capitalism. Furthermore, it also delves into NGO perception of privatisation of the humanitarian sector, which consociates with disaster capitalism, which is done by looking at how Swedish NGO:s experience the expansion of privatisations into the humanitarian sphere.

The methodology is based on semi-structured interviews with representatives from a number of Swedish NGO:s active in the humanitarian sector, from which data has been qualitatively analysed.

The results show, among other things, that disaster capitalism as a concept is fairly unknown among most of the NGO:s, however central aspects are recognised by many. It also shows that Swedish NGO:s are generally in line with Pyles' framework. The dilemmas of the localisation agenda are examined, where the ambitions are high but institutional barriers hamper movement in its direction. Similarly, the pros and cons of international standards are discussed and whether these are a barrier to localisation. Resilience and the humanitarian-development nexus are highly contemporary matters and are also debated.

The position towards private actors and privatisations of the humanitarian sector is contradictive, as there is a general opinion that being private and for-profit is not a problem, but also a general opinion that actors have to work on a principle-basis and not to make profit. It became clear that some scepticism is levelled at private actors from an NGO perspective. Finally, critical aspects of the humanitarian system and potential future risks are discussed, with the main concern regarding a phasing out of Western NGO:s in favour for less principle-based actors from other parts of the world.

**Keywords:** NGO:s, disaster capitalism, privatisation, NGO practice, localisation, disasters, CHS, resilience, humanitarian work, disaster relief, post-disaster, humanitarian-development nexus, neoliberalism

# Table of contents

# 1. Introduction

Since the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War, the predominant ideology in the world has been Western-styled liberal democracies. Even though this is being increasingly challenged, it is still the hegemony (Freedom House, 2019). Since then, the world has changed greatly and Fukuyama's (1992) prediction of the fall of communism as 'the end of history' seems all the more unlikely. Climate change and natural disasters have become one of humanity's main challenges. Today, the world's predominant economic model is a neoliberal one, which values unlimited growth and unsustainable exploitation of the world's resources. This has led to "increased climate volatility and exacerbated disaster risk" (Pyles, 2017, p.1). The effects of climate change are increasingly being seen in the form of natural disasters, such as cyclone Idai in Mozambique and neighbouring countries just recently. Worse so, Mozambique was hit by another cyclone, Kenneth, barely two weeks after, exemplifying the heightened frequency of such instances. Both the frequency of extreme weather events and the number vulnerable populations at risk have increased. Disadvantaged groups are more likely to feel the consequences of disasters, and humanitarian relief plays a critical role when it comes to assisting those suffering the aftermath of them (Moseley, Perramond, Hapke & Laris, 2013, p. 181; IPCC, 2012). This all points to a growing demand of humanitarian efforts in the future.

Crises and disasters create weakened societies who end up in states of shock, and shocks of great magnitude open up windows for change. These windows are frequently exploited by actors with certain interests, who wish to push economic or political agendas in those affected societies. This phenomenon of exploiting disasters for economic purposes is called disaster capitalism. While this phenomenon has many aspects, the common denominator is that economic gains are prioritised over the interests and well-being of local people. (Klein, 2007).

Another form of disaster capitalism revolves around private actors and privatisation of the humanitarian response. What does this mean for the humanitarian standards which stress that actors should have no other agendas other than helping disaster-struck victims, and what is the perspective of NGO:s active in the humanitarian sector?

This study explores how NGO:s working in post-disaster settings experience the phenomenon of disaster capitalism. NGO:s are prominent actors in humanitarian and disaster relief work, and have proliferated since the 1980s (Lassa, 2018). Undoubtedly, NGO:s are also, together with the state, the main actor in post-disaster settings, which happens to be the very same sphere as the one where disaster capitalism occurs. Previous research on the relation and interaction between the two is almost non-existent and while much has been said about NGO:s and their work, less attention has centred on disaster capitalism, and little to no research has been done to cover the role which NGO:s play in connection with disaster capitalism. In post-disaster settings, NGO:s have the capacity to strengthen or work with civil society to counteract and speak out against instances of disaster capitalism, thus possibly becoming a counterweight to it. However, NGO:s also run the

risk of becoming pawns in the schemes of disaster capitalism, knowingly or not. Thus, it is important to learn in what ways NGO practices can work to mitigate the effects of disaster capitalism.

## 2. Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine Swedish NGO:s' perspectives on disaster capitalism. The aim is to see if there is an interconnectedness between NGO practice and disaster capitalism, how they affect each other, what practices Swedish NGO:s use and how these may or may not work to hamper disaster capitalism.

The research questions of this study are:

- How do Swedish NGO:s perceive disaster capitalism?
- How do Swedish NGO:s perceive the privatisation of the humanitarian sector and what potential risks do they detect in the future of the sector?
- Do the strategies of Swedish NGO:s in disaster response follow Pyles' framework of decolonising disaster social work and how are they affected by disaster capitalism?

## 3. Theoretical concepts

Given that this study is both inductive with the possibility of generating hypotheses and explanations out of the data analysis and deductive in the use of Pyles' framework, previous research and central concepts in humanitarian research act as a theoretical foundation. This consists of two separate categories, disaster capitalism and NGO practice, and this study aims to examine and find linkages in the area between these two.

The theoretical approach is centred around the concepts of disaster capitalism and the shock doctrine – a theory based on critique towards neoliberal economic theory. It explains how shock, manifesting itself in the form of crisis situations is used to enforce neoliberal reforms such as deregulations, privatisations and the deconstruction of social services (Klein, 2007). The other theoretical foundation is Pyles' (2017) framework of decolonising disaster social work. This framework is a collection of suggestions and strategies directed at social workers in post-disaster setting, aiming to dismantle hegemonic and colonial humanitarian practices, and counteract predatory behaviours such as disaster capitalism.

### 3.1 Definition of concepts and terms

This study contains several concepts and terms which need to be defined in order for the reader to fully understand the content and its meanings. The definitions are retrieved from Encyclopædia Britannica or from their originating source where possible.

*Humanitarian work, development work and the nexus*

Humanitarian work refers to efforts intended to mitigate human suffering. Development work, or foreign aid, is given to promote development and to take action against poverty (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019a; 2019b). The humanitarian-development nexus is a strategy to make connections between humanitarian work and development work, in order to contribute to a common vision (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.a).

*Localisation agenda*

During the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, much attention was brought to localisation. The humanitarian community made a commitment to involve national and local partners in all decision making, since the local actors often have most the understanding of the context. (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.b)

*Neoliberalism*

Neoliberalism is both an ideology and a model of policy. The focus is directed at free market solutions, economic growth and minimal interference from the state in economic and social areas. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019d)

*NGO:s*

NGO stands for non-governmental organisation. They are normally not affiliated with any government, and work to provide services or advocate public policy. The vast majority are non-profit organisations (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019c). In this study, NGO:s are referred to as non-governmental organisations active in the humanitarian sector.

*Donor*

A donor is defined as ‘one who gives or bestows, one who makes a grant’ by Etymology Dictionary (n.d.). In this study, donors are referred to as those funding organisations or projects in the humanitarian sector.

*Self-implementing and partner-implementing organisation*

Self-implementing organisations are in this study referred to as organisations who directly implement their own projects. Partner-implementing organisations are organisations who work with local partners and implement projects through them. This distinction has been made by the authors in order to find patterns between the two categories in the analysis.

## 4. Previous research

This segment of previous research will present relevant aspects and examples of disaster capitalism. It will also cover the evolution NGO:s, including background, practice, Pyles' framework of decolonising disaster social work, and contemporary trends.

### 4.1 Disaster Capitalism

The concept of disaster capitalism was coined by Naomi Klein in 2005 and evolved in her book The Shock Doctrine (2007). She describes in detail, with research and case studies, how post-disaster settings have paved the way for neoliberal agendas which brought privatisations, market deregulations and the deconstruction of social services. The notion of disaster capitalism has received both plaudits and critique in mainstream media and has gained traction in the academic world as well. Although originating from a book which is not purely scientific, the concept has evolved into a term which has established itself in academia, not least in disaster research.

One of Klein's examples comes from Sri Lanka, where the 2004 tsunami literally swept away existing resistance against privatisations, the increased price of services and rapid expansions of the tourism industry. While the nation was reeling from the aftermath of the tsunami, a task force to rebuild the nation was put in place. However, this group was composed of the country's wealthiest corporate leaders, not the elected representatives of the people. This task force was given the mission to work out a new development plan for Sri Lanka, and in 10 days presented a national reconstruction blueprint, full of measures which the population previously had fought against. Klein (2007) refers to this as a kind of corporate-led coup d'état, made possible by a natural disaster in form of the tsunami - and identifies this as disaster capitalism. However, Klein does not offer a concrete definition, and one could argue that the concept is somewhat straggly. Maldonado & Schuller discuss and advance the matter, suggesting their own definition;

> National and transnational governmental institutions' instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called 'natural' and human-mediated disasters, including post-conflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interests. (Maldonado & Schuller, 2016, p. 62)

Klein (2007), Maldonado & Schuller (2016), Pyles (2017), Loewenstein (2018), Swamy (2017) Tierney (2015) and Yee (2018) all exemplify cases where disaster capitalism has been in action, but their tendency to use the term varies. The fact that most of these articles are published in recent years points out that the subject is still somewhat new and unexplored.

### 4.2 Dimensions of disaster capitalism

Whereas Klein has a rather broad usage of the term, Maldonado & Schuller (2016) identify two main components within the concept. Profiteering among actors in the humanitarian sector, referred to as non-profiteering, is the more observed one, focusing on the increasing number of contracts given to third party actors such as non-profit organisations and especially a rising number

of for-profit corporations in post-disaster reconstruction. This is, according to the authors, justified by a systematic undermining of the capacity of the state in the name of neoliberalism. This creates an environment for long-term liberalisation and policy reform, which is seen as the second component. Furthermore, they characterise disaster capitalism by the importance disasters have to advance political, ideological and economic interests of transnational capitalist elite groups. Loewenstein (2018) claims that corporations feed off weakened governments, who in turn increasingly rely on the private sector to provide public services. He also highlights that companies are allowed to grow unhindered due to the self-interest of politicians. Another aspect of disaster capitalism is identified by Otieno (2018), stating that the phenomenon is not only a question of prioritising profit ahead of humanitarian issues, but acts as a hindrance to local participation and holding the state responsible for not fulfilling its duties towards its citizens.

Indeed, disaster capitalism manifests itself in various ways. In the wake of the earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, the World Bank, certain nation states and other large-scale actors envisioned the recovery process as an opportunity for macroeconomic development for the country. This was however in contrast to the people who largely just wanted to restore their livelihoods and well-being (Pyles, 2017). This represents disaster capitalism from a macro perspective. The aforementioned example from Sri Lanka provides a case of regional level disaster capitalism, where the government itself is the main driver of it (Klein, 2007). The same can be said about the case of the Nagapattinam district in India, where a long-term conflict between local fishermen and the state regarding the use of land came to an abrupt end due to the 2004 tsunami, resulting in displacement of the fishermen. NGO:s were tasked with building new housing for victims, but the government made sure to negotiate the terms so the new housing facilities were to be built further inland, and in order to access the new housing one had to formally abandon one's rights to the coastal land. The government then used the now vacant coastal land to introduce economic development projects such as shrimp farms, ports and industries. (Swamy, 2017)

The post-hurricane Katrina disaster relief showed local examples of disaster capitalism as the private sector and political elites used the devastation to make a profit by privatising public services. For example, before Katrina, the school board in New Orleans had run 123 public schools, and after it ran only four (Klein, 2007). Additionally, the post-disaster work was outsourced to private corporations at the expense of those who urgently needed help. Tierney (2015) exemplifies how, rather than simply receiving the help they needed, people were forced to demonstrate that they were in fact qualified to receive assistance. The 'Road Home Programme' even had people photographed and fingerprinted in order to avert fraud, showing how private corporations tended to view people as clients rather than victims of a disaster. (Day, 2013; Tierney, 2015)

Moreover, in post-hurricane Katrina, Walmart dispatched thousands of trucks to disaster-struck areas containing free merchandise and meals. The sight of so many company trucks helping

disaster victims was public relations gold for the company. Maldonado & Schuller (2016), refers to this as corporate charity in the form of disaster capitalism.

Finally, Yee (2018) shows in her case study from the Philippines how disaster capitalism potentially can lead to physical violence. In 2014, in the wake of typhoon Haiyan, the government imposed so-called 'no-dwelling zones' near beaches and chose to implement infrastructure projects where communities previously had lived. However, commercial interests such as hotels were exempt, warranting comparisons to measures imposed in certain countries post-tsunami 2004. When these decisions were met with increasingly stubborn resistance from civil society, the government branded these groups affiliates of the communist party, inviting state repression against activists. At least 13 people were killed and many more were harassed by the military. As summarised by the author:

> The militarized response to the political actions of People Surge (civil society organisation) demonstrates the role of violence in supporting the implementation of disaster capitalism (…) As disaster survivors assert their collective rights to state protection and protest the encroachment of disaster capitalism, they are met with repressive force and stealthy surveillance. The spaces of civic resistance are constricted, thereby denying the meaningful participation of grassroots communities in influencing the direction of the disaster reconstruction process. (Yee, 2018, p. 8)

There is however critique towards the phenomenon of disaster capitalism. Wisner (2009) sees the term as a "flash in the pan" and points out that for disaster capitalism to be useful as a concept, it has to be able to separate small businesses from large corporations, and one cannot simply take every benefit from a disaster and brand it as disaster capitalism. Moreover, disaster capitalism can be too broad to capture local analyses and one could question if the example of Walmart's truckloads of aid after Katrina is the same thing as transnational business groups landing big contracts in war-struck zones. (Maldonado & Schuller, 2016; Schuller, 2016)

These examples show the width of disaster capitalism as a concept, even if its initial, intended use seems straight forward. The authors all demonstrate different uses of the concept, resulting in a widening of its use.

### 4.3 The rise of NGO:s

As opposed to disaster capitalism, research on disaster management and the role of NGO:s is well documented. The rise of NGO:s in development and humanitarian work began in the 1980s due to declining financial resources and increased poverty. NGO:s were increasingly seen as a cheaper and more efficient means of development and disaster relief, which governments 'exploited' to fill their responsibility gaps. They have since kept growing and have proliferated from about 400 in the 20th century to 25,000 in recent years. (Lassa, 2018)

As alluded to in the previous paragraph, NGO:s have been seen as a complement to state responsibilities, whose capacities are often compromised by disasters, leaving vacant spaces into which NGO:s often step. Lassa (2018) argues that NGO:s have an advantage because they usually have better grassroots connections and take an inclusive and consensual approach which allows them to better understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable communities. Moreover, they are also often organisationally smaller which allows them to be more efficient as they operate in a more flexible and less bureaucratic environment.

In the post-2004 tsunami relief work, in the southern Andamans, Blackburn (2018) exemplifies how NGO:s helped locals gain increased knowledge and awareness of their rights, which led them to mobilise and raise a collective voice towards the state. They also empowered locals by implementing activities which increased their self-confidence and assisted them in legal matters. Furthermore, they highlighted government failings and called for proper implementation of the law, through negotiation and political pressure. These examples display how NGO:s can become intermediaries between locals and the state, using their knowledge to empower locals (Blackburn, 2018). However, in certain situations, NGO:s can be reluctant to engage themselves in politics, as upsetting governments might lead to them being harassed. Or in the case of international NGO:s, they might be expelled or banned from conducting work in certain countries (Blackburn, 2018; Pelling & Dill, 2010). This was exemplified during the 1999 post-Marmara earthquake relief work in Turkey, where the disaster exposed weaknesses in the government's relief response. Fearing a backlash towards their legitimacy, and in an attempt to contain criticism and mobilisation of civil society, the government started smearing NGO:s who had taken over government responsibilities in the disaster area, branding them ‘irresponsible’ and ‘embarrassing to the state’. Moreover, they also began freezing NGO:s bank accounts. These measures were of a political nature, and these actions were implemented to avoid losing political power in the following elections. (Pelling & Dill, 2010)

The findings of Maldonado & Schuller (2016), Loewenstein (2018) and Lassa (2018) points to a decrease of state functions and capacity, in favour of NGO:s.

### 4.4 Do’s and don'ts of NGO practice

While plenty of positive examples of NGO work exists, as previously mentioned, much research tends to focus on the flaws in the NGO and humanitarian sector and tends to problematise their work. Pyles (2017) notes that disaster relief work is embedded in the system of disaster capitalism and argues that principles and practices of contemporary humanitarian relief work risk to maintain, or even enhance hegemonic relationships between locals and external actors. If humanitarian workers do not have sufficient knowledge of the socio-political, environmental and economic factors that affect and contribute to disasters, and if they fail to incorporate the local traditions and cultures, this may create unintended consequences, enhancing colonial hegemonic legacies and leading to sustained vulnerability. These concerns are also voiced by Blackburn (2018), who emphasises that transformation must be approached with caution, and that critical research and

reflection of underlying values and priorities must be made by NGO:s to avoid the reproduction of neo-colonial power relations. She also points out, in congruence with Pyles, that NGO:s must start 'doing with' instead of 'doing to' citizens, and emphasises that humanitarian- and development work must support and be shaped by the worldviews and needs of communities themselves. Pyles (2017) exemplifies this problem in a situation where a group of Western humanitarian workers did not understand the local culture in Indonesia during the 2004 post-tsunami relief work. Their practices included singing and dancing to non-traditional music, which was unfamiliar to the locals. Instead, similar measures should centre around local traditions and customs. (Pyles, 2017)

At times, humanitarian aid can have unintended consequences for the local economy. Humanitarian workers affect the local system with their own needs of food, housing and water, which in competition with local needs might lead to the driving up of prices. Furthermore, an influx of food assistance might disrupt local markets, affecting farmers and vendors. Not using local products and personnel can have a negative impact on the local economy. (Pyles, 2017)

Loewenstein (2018) notes that citizens in the developing world are mostly framed in the West as 'demons or victims'. Additionally, Pyles (2017) states that humanitarian work has tended to portray the receivers of aid as an outgroup, as media focuses on humanitarian workers as heroes, echoing the image of aid receivers as the white man's burden. However, while many NGO:s have embraced the rhetoric of ownership and local participation, it is often hard to reach the point of true participation when people are in the middle of a disaster. True participation demands that Western humanitarian workers adopt cultural skills and learn to adapt to a collectivistic context. After the genocide in Rwanda, humanitarian workers were rejected after their grief management practices proved too foreign for locals. The practices did not involve existing cultural manifestations for handling grief, as being out in the sun, singing and drumming. Instead, they were put in rooms to talk with psychologists about the horrific things that had happened (Pyles, 2017).

In a neoliberal context where corporations and profiteers seek to exploit the business opportunities that disasters offer, local needs tend to be taken less into account and non-profiteering has also been identified. Further manifestations of non-profiteering revolves around how, firstly, NGO:s might see disasters almost as 'business opportunities', taking the chance to improve their brand, doing it for the sake of the organisation rather than for the victims. Second, such organisations often only provide supplies which the NGO already possesses, or those which donors have to offer, ignoring the specific needs of the local community and thereby taking a supply-driven approach instead of a needs-driven one. Moreover, NGO:s can have the tendency to favour accountability to their donors rather than to locals, and some faith-based groups approach disaster management with certain religious agendas, such as actively trying to convert disaster victims to their religion. Being bound to donors or values which are culturally insensitive can be problematic for NGO:s in the relief and development sector. (Pyles, 2017)

Often, donors expect NGO:s work to be linear, with clear cause and effect results. However, this is rarely the case, as there are a multitude of factors which interplay in humanitarian and development settings, making pre-planned, pre-budgeted agendas within a certain timeframe highly problematic. This causes NGO:s to operate at levels below their capacity, as they are forced to adapt their work to donor requirements to receive funding (Blackburn, 2018). This is exemplified by Swamy's (2017) article mentioned earlier, where NGO:s accountability towards the state and donors was prioritised over the needs of the local population in order to meet deadlines and deliver results.

Similar concerns are also brought to light by Audet (2015), when he discusses the attempts of linking humanitarian- and development work. While many wish to see a more sustainable, long-term approach to disaster management, institutional barriers hinder this as many donors are reluctant to fund programs which fall outside the usual sphere of humanitarian- or development work. This barrier leads many organisations to frame their operations and organisational structures after strict donor requirements, in order to increase their chances of access to the limited pool of funding. Even where organisations have tried going beyond their roles, he notes that structural barriers such as institutional cultures, values and bureaucracies have tended to limit their success. (Audet, 2015)

Finally, the increasing role of NGO:s in post-disaster settings raises the question of how their activities affect the withdrawal of the state from its social responsibilities, and the weakening of politics from below, as rights and entitlements are converted into gifts from NGO:s (Swamy, 2017).

### 4.5 Pyles' decolonising disaster social work framework

Pyles emphasises that the role which humanitarian workers can play in order to alter their practice and move towards a transformative disaster recovery is largely unexplored, and thereby presents her framework *decolonising disaster social work* (Pyles, 2017). This framework can be used as a countermeasure to disaster capitalism as it serves to deconstruct practices which potentially work in favour of disaster capitalism. It emphasises local participation and respect for local cultures, as well as a critical stance on predatory actions such as disaster capitalism. In this study, Pyles' framework will be used as a point of comparison when analysing the strategies of Swedish NGO:s in disaster response in relation to disaster capitalism.

The increased risk of disasters, a bi product of the climate change brought on by lifestyles promoted by an economic model focused on unlimited growth, has increased the demand for humanitarian efforts around the world. Since disasters offer the possibility to build back better, to use the reconstruction phase to increase resilience, those working within the disaster frame have to create conditions and help promote community resilience and social transformation (Pyles, 2017). This is however a double-edged sword, as one could argue that humanitarian organisations branding post-disaster reconstruction as a way of 'building back better' also justifies their own

expansion into the role of social development, which could further reduce the role and accountability of the government (Pelling & Dill, 2010).

Decolonising disaster social work aims to change the discourse by emphasising the strengths of local and indigenous populations and cultures and works against othering of these groups. It undertakes the strategy of constantly evaluating economic and environmental values and methods that repeat themselves in disaster settings. It is crucial that humanitarian workers have the ability to oppose practices and policies that work in favour for disaster capitalism, profiteering and other phenomena which occur at the expense of people and environment. Relief workers should be asking themselves whose vision they work for and who benefits from it. (Pyles, 2017)

Pyles (2017) offers three key recommendations in her framework which humanitarian workers should take into account.

1. *Take a critical and holistic approach to the intersections between capitalism, environmental destruction and disasters*

These measures require social workers to critically deconstruct media and policy discourses. She also recommends social workers to engage themselves emotionally, bodily and spiritually, in order to bolster resilience so partnerships can flourish.

Social workers can also assist disaster survivors to build on or create new livelihoods which are restorative and sustainable for the environment. All while having pre-disaster vulnerability, risk reduction and disaster preparedness integrated in the processes. Finally, social workers should act in solidarity with vulnerable disaster-stricken communities, speaking out against, and resisting disaster capitalism and predatory actions.

2. *Do not replicate the past: disentangle post-colonialist humanitarian practices*

Aid and social workers do not arrive in a vacuum; therefore, they must learn about the local context and the historical social production of policies, discourses and practices. And if deemed appropriate, possible and necessary, strive to undo them. Moreover, they should research historical legacies to gain more understanding of local culture, religion, politics and economics. Acknowledging hegemonies and instances of ill-implemented humanitarianism in the past can be a way of building trust with local partners.

Pyles also recommends, first of all, for aid and social workers not to bring excessive attention to themselves by e.g. wearing matching t-shirts to strengthen their own group identity, or to act as ‘heroic saviours’. Secondly, social workers who ground their work in social justice values should educate and counteract the aforementioned scenarios by educating less-aware workers about hegemonies, potential colonial histories and previous instances of ill-implemented humanitarian aid.

3. *Localise responses and centre community needs*

The very first step in any engagement in a post-disaster situation should be a participatory needs assessment in cooperation with local communities. When pre-existing partnerships do not exist, it is important to work within existing community structures, such as community associations and religious congregations. Understanding the local context, politics and other dynamics which marginalise certain groups from participation is crucial. It is also important to remember that lessons and technologies gained from previous disasters might not be applicable in another, as every situation is unique and localised.

Finally, Pyles notes that it is important to remember the individualistic-collectivistic aspect of cultures. Aid and social workers should bear in mind that the way which people create meaning, such as art, community and religious rituals and group prayer may differ depending on culture and making culturally appropriate interventions is key to bolster both individual and community resilience.

## 4.6 Resilience and its critics

Critique of the neoliberal economic model recurs throughout disaster capitalism research and on the role of NGO:s in disaster settings. Equally recurring in the disaster discourse is the term resilience, which has become prominent in disaster research of late. Resilience generally means to withstand broad disruptions without long-lasting damage or change to people and society, and the ability to swiftly bounce back from such disturbances. It has become the focal point and framework of disaster management policies around the world during the last decade. It was originally developed in other fields who had their own definitions for the term, corresponding to their respective branch. (Breen & Anderies, 2011)

When talking about resilience towards disasters, the term community resilience is often used. The definition of this differs from organisation to organisation, and there is no consensus in scientific literature or policies. There are however nine consistent themes and elements that recur in the disaster relief sector, being local knowledge, governance and leadership, resources, economic investment, preparedness, community networks and relationships, health, mental outlook and communication. (Patel, Rogers, Amlot & Rubin, 2017)

Tierney (2015) problematises the usage of the resilience concept and questions the background of its recent surge. Resilience is used in several disciplines, such as psychology, ecology and now disaster research, where its popularity is growing in both policy and practice. Tierney argues that it has become so common that there is no clear definition or interpretation of the term, making it a boundary object which facilitates cooperation between actors from different sectors of society with diverging interests. She claims we need resilience because we live in a world with constant disruptions, created by urbanisation, leading to vulnerability, potential disease outbreaks, environmental degradation and other crises. Climate change creates social and economic anxiety,

to which resilience is the answer. Globalisation and the world we have created with rapid change, complex chains of livelihoods, migration and global trade makes these disruptions stronger as people, states and economies are under constant pressure. Those most vulnerable are increasingly urged to adapt and become resilient towards those consequences which are a direct result of historical and contemporary forces of neoliberalism. Calling for people to become resilient means calling for people to accept and be part of the current system.

This way, Tierney (2015) argues that resilience itself is driving the neoliberal agenda and preserves the status quo. Individuals are urged to become entrepreneurs and make themselves adaptable and resilient actors, instead of resisting and demanding an end to their suffering through political action. Urging people to turn risks into opportunities is the same as saying that nothing can be done to change the risk environment and that adaptation of each individual is better than a collective resistance. Tierney mentions that other critics similarly claim that resilience is highly compatible with the dominating neoliberal discourse and the ideological frames that comes with it. (Tierney, 2015)

Blackburn (2018) somewhat echoes the critique towards the resilience discourse, drawing attention to the fact that not enough critical reflection has been made on inequalities, bad governance and gaps in provision which leads to increased disaster risk in the first place.

The neoliberal strategy of privatising public services and diminishing the role of the state means that NGO:s become progressively influential in planning, producing and carrying out programmes for disaster mitigation, response and relief (Pelling & Dill, 2010). Practical responses to increase disaster-resilience are increasingly shaped by neoliberal views of governance, such as the idea that all levels and sectors of society, including private actors, should be engaged, resulting in a reduction of state accountability and promotion of public-private partnerships (Lassa, 2018; Tierney, 2015). The case of hurricane Katrina that was mentioned earlier is an example of how neoliberal disaster response is carried out. The federal agencies even had to hire a contractor to assign contracts to other contractors. This highly privatised way of managing disaster opens the door to mismanagement, profiteering, corruption and reduction of transparency. A concrete example of this is, again, the consulting firm in charge of the 'Road Home Programme', accountable to their source of income and not to the public. Five years after Katrina struck New Orleans, only 55% of the more than 200.000 applicants had received assistance. (Tierney, 2015)

### 4.7 CHS, the Sphere Project and the surrounding debate

Another important aspect when examining NGO practice is international documents such as the Sphere Handbook and the Core Humanitarian Standards, commonly referred to as the CHS. These documents to a large extent govern how many NGO:s work and are imperative features of strategies, design and implementation. Many of the recommendations presented in the CHS are in line with the recommendations presented in Pyles' framework. The Sphere Project was inaugurated in 1997 with the goal of developing a number of agreed minimum standards for

humanitarian work. Behind the project was a group of NGO:s and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), seeking consensus and collectively crafting The Sphere Handbook, with the aim of increasing the quality of worldwide humanitarian response and enhancing the accountability of humanitarian inputs to affected people in crisis situations. The Sphere Standards, included in the Handbook, are generally regarded as the most well-known and frequently adopted standards in humanitarian practice. The Sphere Handbook is the flagship of the Sphere Project and consists of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. It has been published in four editions, the latest one released in November 2018. (Hooper & Pym, 2017; Sphere Association, 2018)

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability was developed conjointly in 2014 by the Sphere Project, People in Aid and HAP International who had identified a need for a more coherent set of standards. They united under the *Joint Standards Initiative* with the goal of facilitating an easier implementation of standards for aid workers. The CHS consists of nine commitments focusing on various aspects of humanitarian assistance. Initially, Sphere had their own standards, but these were replaced by the CHS after its establishment. Today the CHS is incorporated as one of the foundations of the Sphere Handbook. (Core Humanitarian Standards, n.d; Sphere Association, n.d.)

While these standardised guidelines are accepted and used by many organisations, there are also those who debate and criticise them. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders is such an organisation. The organisation was initially involved in the initiative to develop the Sphere standards but later withdrew, claiming that "Humanitarian action is too complex to be reduced to a technical performance" (Vila-Sanjuan, 2003, p. 2). Vila-Sanjuan, who at the time was the secretary general of MSF, implies that using technical standards as sole definers of humanitarian action risks to transform it into a standardised system, instead of an accompanying document, which disrespects the fact that each situation is unique. Moreover, he highlights how such standards risk to reduce the scope of humanitarian work down to assistance and technical actions, which they claim disregards issues of protection, politics and respecting principles. This would lead to losing sight of the holistic of humanitarianism, making it devoid of its ethos and risk reducing it into a business to be performed technically, side lining the humanitarian principles (Vila-Sanjuan, 2003).

Another critique is that these standards can become a mode of control over NGO:s, as many donors set these standards as a prerequisite for funding. Finally, technical failures can be used to cancel support for humanitarian action on the wrong grounds, where such failures are a direct result of external or contextual factors (Vila SanJuan, 2003). Griekspoor & Collins (2001) also raise this issue, claiming that the indicators could foster unrealistic expectations while ignoring constraints. In a similar vein, they also emphasise that standardisations apply only to ideal situations and that this will prevent relief workers from adapting in more complex situations, as they exemplify happened in Sudan during the late 90s. They also mention that the standards could be used by

politicians to obscure their responsibilities to tackle underlying causes of emergencies. Many of these concerns were reiterated in an article from MSF in 2014, showing that these criticisms were still being levelled (Brauman & Neuman, 2014)

The CHS, adopted after the Sphere Standards, have also been debated. In an article from The Guardian (Purvis, 2015), a representative of MSF claims that the standards are "too simplistic and generic to be really meaningful" and doubts that they'll have much effect. On the contrary, a representative from the ICRC claims that simplicity is the point of the CHS, and that the idea was to create a simple set of standards that everyone can relate to, or "a low hurdle that every humanitarian organisation should be able to leap over". (Purvis, 2015)

In light of the presented research, it becomes apparent that the phenomenon of disaster capitalism is not widely enough researched. Therefore, shedding further light on it was deemed a useful addition to the body of research. Furthermore, researching how disaster capitalism is perceived by organisations working in post-disaster settings, and whether their practices aim at mitigating the effects of disaster capitalism, could help to increase our understanding of such behaviours for actors in the humanitarian sector. Finally, discussing the increased privatisation in post-disaster relief with organisations who work in such settings can contribute to a greater understanding of what this trend means, or might potentially mean, for the humanitarian sector.

## 5. Methodology

To answer the research questions the authors will turn to Swedish organisations active in the humanitarian sector. These organisations have the knowledge and experience of working in humanitarian aid and are familiar with the landscape in which disaster capitalism occurs. In this sense, they are defined as organisations with offices in Sweden, with Swedish staff. They do not need to be exclusive to Sweden.

The method chosen to collect data for this study is semi-structured interviews. During a qualitative interview, the interviewees are given the opportunity to explain their thoughts, enabling the researcher to interpret the collected material and gain deeper understanding of the subject into which research is being conducted. Qualitative interviews are generally a good strategy to approach research questions where basic knowledge is still missing, and they can be structured to varying degrees. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility during the interview, without losing overall structure, as all interviewees are asked the same questions but possible answers remain open, facilitating deeper and more detailed answers. It also opens up for follow-up questions wherever the interviewer might discover themes of interest. This way the interviewer gains control over the direction of the interview. (Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014, p. 149–150, 156)

A semi-structured interview is assessed as the best method for this study given the fact that the relation between disaster capitalism and NGO practice is still unexplored and the interview will allow for the interviewees to reflect upon the subjects. In a semi-structured interview, the order of

the questions may vary (Bryman, 2011, p. 206), allowing the interviewer to sense the dynamics of the interview and adapt the order of questions to it. The introductory questions were of a more general character, serving the purpose to warm up and make both the interviewees and interviewers more comfortable and relaxed before getting to the more pertinent questions (Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014, p. 156).

An interview guide was created where the questions were separated into two categories, being NGO practice and disaster capitalism. This will serve to strengthen the connection to the research questions and increase the validity of the study (Bryman, 2011, p. 249). The goal of the interviews is not only to gain answers about official strategies and practices of the organizations, but also to see how the respondents themselves experience the strategies in practice. This will provide data that will grant insights into the entire design of strategies of the organisations, from theory to practice. This data will be analysed and compared to previous research on NGO practice and disaster capitalism in order to find answers to the research questions.

The interviews were initially limited to 80 minutes to gain a manageable amount of data and avoid them reaching a length which would require extensive transcribing. This limitation was in some cases disregarded due to the flow of the interviews and the exhaustive discussion that followed certain questions which were considered to be of value to the study.

Mild modifications to the questions were made after the first interviews, in order to make the formulation of these less ambiguous and more to the point. Follow-up questions were put forward where it seemed relevant to gain more information.

Since a majority of the relevant actors in the sector of Swedish humanitarian organisations are represented in this study, generalisations are considered to be possible to make. The respondents are considered capable to answer for their organisations, even though they are talking from their own perspective. They are also considered to have sufficient knowledge and insight to answer the research questions.

As with every method, interviews too have their flaws. The researcher, during an interview, always runs the risk of the interviewee choosing not to share certain aspects which might be pertinent to the study, as they might view this as sensitive information and feel uncomfortable or not in a position to share this information (Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014, p. 152). This is hard to counteract as a researcher and is a risk which is taken during interviews. The data collected in this study is however deemed credible, although a greater number of interviews obviously would have given more weight to generalisations and the possibility to make even more.

As Bryman (2011, p. 368) states, there is a critique towards qualitative studies as a whole that the researchers become subjective in regard to what is important for the study. Further critique includes difficulties to replicate a qualitative study since it is dependent on the researcher and his or her vantage point and considerations as a tool for the study. What is deemed relevant for the

study is up to the researcher, which makes it harder to replicate (Bryman, 2011, p. 369-369). To facilitate replications of this study, measures have been taken to be transparent throughout the whole procedure. To act as a base for replication, the interview guide is attached to this document and the sample of organisations is accounted for.

### 5.1 Sample of organisations and respondents

The interviews are aimed at individuals representing NGO:s working with humanitarian relief in post-disaster settings. There are many Swedish NGO:s but only a handful of them are working in this specific context, making the selection for this study somewhat limited. As a result of this, no delimitations were necessary to sift through the sample. In order to find organizations relevant for the study, a purposive sampling was chosen. A purposive sampling allows the researcher to strategically choose participants who are applicable to the research questions (Bryman, 2011, p. 434).

In order to find relevant organizations, internet searches as well as the university network of the global studies programme was used. Given that Médecins Sans Frontières has chosen to stand outside of international strategic documents such as the Sphere Minimum Standards and the CHS, they were prioritised as part of the sample since their point of view regarding strategies can potentially be different than that of other organisations.

Multiple attempts were made during the course of writing to gain access to a relevant representative from the ICRC's Swedish Branch (a.k.a. Röda Korset) for an interview, but without any success. As they are arguably the largest humanitarian actor in the world, this would have been a highly useful source of information, and further increased the credibility of the study.

In total, nine Swedish NGO:s working with humanitarian relief in post-disaster settings were found and all of them were contacted in order to provide a width of organizations that would facilitate comparisons and the search for patterns in their strategies. The participants were people working within the organizations with direct involvement in the work and strategies of NGO:s active in disaster relief. They were found in various ways, being through the university network, by being forwarded to the right person by other employees and reaching out to them directly. One additional participant with broad experience from different organisations was found and interviewed. The interviews were done in both Swedish and English.

The participants were first contacted via email with an inquiry of an interview. It included the purpose of the study, the main themes of the interview, information on anonymity and the possibility to decline the interview at any time. Out of the nine organisations, three declined the interview or did not respond after repeated attempts. Six organisations accepted the inquiry, however one of them did not have the possibility to do the interview within the timeframe of the study.

The final number of organisations thus became five, with one extra respondent from one of the organisations. In total, six interviews were successfully completed. The five organisations represented in the study are presented here, divided by categorisation:

- Self-implementing – Respondents A and B.
    - Doctors Without Borders (MSF)
    - Save the Children

- Partner-implementing – Respondents C, D, E and F.
    - Act Church of Sweden
    - Diakonia
    - Eriks Development Partner

After initial contact, the interviews were booked without problems. They were done both in person and via online video feeds. One of the interviewees chose to be anonymous, leading to the decision to make all the respondents anonymous for practical reasons. Moreover, when analysing the data, we did not deem the respondents' organisational belonging, other than the difference between self-implementing and partner-implementing organisation, matter for the analysis. In the text, the respondents will be denoted as respondents A, B, C, D, E, and F.

### 5.2 Recording

All of the interviews were recorded in order to capture the answers of the interviewees in their right nature, to include what is said as well as the manner in which they say it, and to assure the data would not be lost (Bryman, 2011, p. 428). The participants were informed and approved the recordings. Both of the authors were present during all of the interviews and the two themes of the interviews were divided between them in order to have one leading and one taking additional notes and making sure that nothing was missed.

### 5.3 Limitations

This study is limited to Swedish NGO:s working with humanitarian aid. Since disaster capitalism occurs in disaster settings, actors in this sector are relevant. Organisations working with long-term development alone were deemed of less relevance to this specific study. Initially, an analysis of policy documents was planned, to serve as a complement to the interviews. However, this was discarded after a combination of difficulties to attain such documents from interviewees and the limited time frame for the study. The decision was taken after interviews had been conducted and presented a greater amount of data than initially had been expected.

### 5.4 Analysis of data

A qualitative analysis of the collected data was made in order to find answers to the research questions. All of the interviews were transcribed and coded. The coding process of the

transcriptions was done according to a coding scheme created from categories based on previous research and the research questions. The categories were marked by colour in order to make the coding process as clear as possible. An observation that was made during interviews was that depending on how the NGO:s implemented their work, we received slightly differing answers. This has led to the distinction between self-implementing and partner-implementing organisations being made in the analysis.

After the fifth interview was conducted, a lot of similar information was being conveyed, a level of empirical saturation was reached. The sixth interview was conducted regardless of this intuition as it had already been planned and agreed upon. The interview did indeed provide by-and-large similar information but had a few new interesting points of view.

Also, as many of the interviews were conducted in Swedish, a majority of quotes presented in the results and analysis have been translated into English. While translating, maximum regard was paid to assure that these translations truly conveyed the purpose and context of the quotes.

# 6. Results and analysis

First and foremost, the majority of the interview questions were formed in relation to the previous research and many of them were based on the recommendations put forth by Pyles (2017) and others. The reasoning behind this was to shed light on the way in which Swedish NGO:s work in humanitarian situations, and if their methods could be aligned with these recommendations. Working in accordance with these is regarded as a means to resist the effects of disaster capitalism. The interviews provided an ample amount of data, showing many ways in which Swedish NGO:s working in humanitarian situations could be aligned with the aforementioned recommendations. Broadly, we found that Swedish NGO:s do reflect on, and address the issues brought up in the previous research. However, the following few headings will go into this in depth.

In a broader sense, as Pyles' recommendations are aimed at relief workers in post-disaster situations who are not local, applying them on Swedish partner-implementing NGO:s made them slightly less relevant, since their local implementing partners are the ones doing the work on the ground. However, the recommendations were nevertheless considered important and relevant.

## 6.1 Pyles' first recommendation

Pyles' first recommendation regards having a critical and holistic approach in their work, as well as engaging emotionally in order to strengthen local partnership. It also mentions creating restorative and sustainable livelihoods and speaking out against disaster capitalism (Pyles, 2017).

This recommendation is one of the trickier ones to relate to, especially considering that many organisations only implement projects through partners and that many of the recommendations are less substantial and harder to 'see' without observing first-hand. Nevertheless, the respondents did present a few examples which could be linked to the recommendation, such as the bolstering of

mental resilience. Respondent F highlighted that "you have to work with softer components like the social and psychosocial aspects in order for a response to be truly resilient." The importance of psychosocial work was echoed throughout the interviews. Respondent E mentioned using sewing groups, cooking classes or cafés as meeting places as a means of psychological help, in line with the recommendations of Pyles.

A few respondents also talked about ways to help make livelihoods more sustainable, however, this was at times difficult to find, as such measures are traditionally deemed to belong to developmental work. Examples include growing crops more sustainably, and also how one organisation worked with integrating environmental impacts and aspects in their context and needs analysis. Moreover, Pyles recommends having measures of resilience integrated in strategies, such as addressing pre-disaster vulnerability, risk reduction, and preparedness. Many respondents highlighted how resilience was to be integrated into the overarching strategy of their organisations, and not a separate strategy or project. There was a consensus regarding resilience as a way to strengthen individuals and societies and help them survive everyday life, which is more in line with what Pyles (2017) suggests than Tierney's (2015) critique of resilience as way of maintaining the status quo and turning individuals into reinventing entrepreneurs. Both Pyles and the respondents were leaning more towards a resilience-friendly agenda than the one Tierney represents. A higher level of resilience would signify less time and space for actions of disaster capitalism and predatory actions to manoeuvre in, as people would withstand or recover from disaster more quickly.

As already briefly touched upon, a few of the recommendations in this segment are those which situate themselves between humanitarian- and development work, making them harder to see as many donors make clear demarcations between these two fields. Also, partner-implementing organisations might not experience the concerns presented by Pyles first-hand, making it harder for them to see and relate to. These two factors might help to explain why so little data was found on this recommendation.

### 6.2 Pyles' second recommendation

Pyles' second recommendation revolves around colonial legacies and power structures. Workers should be aware of this and learn the local historical context in order to undo harmful discourses and practices. They should not put themselves in the spotlight and bring unnecessary attention to themselves (Pyles, 2017).

The recommendations put forth here are also less problematic for organisations implementing through partners, as these know their own contexts and are less prone to be seen as outsiders. However, issues concerning hegemonies and certain cultural practices are still necessary to be aware of and work with.

All interviewed organisations were aware about the power imbalances and the history of humanitarian work and described how they work to avoid such instances. Respondent F said that it is necessary to know which background one comes from and acknowledge that humanitarian work, historically, comes from a paternalistic point of view:

> Historically, it [humanitarian work] originates from a paternalistic point of view, so that's something one has to grapple with constantly. It's not just this system, it's almost all international relations, where such legacies exist. So, it's about being aware of where one comes from. – Respondent F

Respondent B agrees to the legacy that respondent F testifies to but puts it slightly differently by saying that "it lies in the nature of humanitarian work that a stronger party goes to help a weaker receiver". Thus, entailing that it is inevitable to end up in a position of power imbalance, but that it's important to be aware of this and not to misuse that power. Moreover, the importance of reflecting on, not only how the context affects humanitarian work, but how one's work affects the context was also brought up.

Pyles also mentions undoing harmful cultural practices if deemed appropriate, possible and necessary. Respondent E mentions how they try to cautiously approach delicate issues such as child marriage and women's rights by using culturally sensitive and appropriate methods such as song, dance and theatre.

Many also problematised previous methods of humanitarian work, where foreign relief workers would come to help, but did not pay heed to cultural aspects. Respondent D called this the 'cardinal-sin' of humanitarian work, as it risks doing more damage than good. Due to this factor, most respondents said they would not respond to humanitarian situations in areas and contexts which they did not already work in or were familiar with. Instead they could channel funds to organisations which have more knowledge of the affected areas.

Naturally, this aspect differed depending on whether the organisation was partner-implementing or not. The self-implementing organisations had different ideas, where one of them was more geared towards development work, and therefore only responded to humanitarian situations in countries where it already was present, while the other responded to humanitarian situations wherever they emerged. This respondent explained how they conduct analyses of contexts, employ local staff and implement policies against the abuse of power, indicating that they are aware of the concerns presented by Pyles.

### 6.3 Pyles' third recommendation

Pyles' third and final recommendation is simple but perhaps the most relevant for Swedish organisations. Its' focus is on localisation, implementing through existing community structures and basing one's work on the local context. It also emphasises the inclusion of marginalised groups (Pyles, 2017).

This is the recommendation on which most data was gathered, and understandably so. Many of the organisations interviewed only implemented through partners, which almost per definition heeds to the aspects of this recommendation. Local actors are already integrated in the disaster-struck community, and themselves conduct relief work, which in itself localises efforts. Perhaps the only concern which remains is paying attention to marginalised groups. This factor is something which local organisations potentially could overlook.

Pyles recommends a needs assessment to be the first step of responding in a post-disaster situation, and all the interviewed organisations follow this step in one form or another, even organisations who specialise in certain aspects of humanitarian work conduct needs assessments. Respondent D described how they try to assess existing needs from multiple points of view:

> Do women have any particular needs, do children have any particular needs, do women who nurse or are pregnant have any specific needs, do the elderly have certain needs? Are there power structures in this society, where certain people who in ordinary circumstances are richer and possess more power and how do we relate to that? Are there any conflicts dimensions related to this? – Respondent D

This displays how rigorous this needs assessment is, and all respondents place special emphasis on this facet. As respondent C put it: "So one does not come with blankets, if that's not what they need" and respondent A claimed: "Yeah it won't work without having proper consultation with the community". It was simple to see that this step was paramount to the interviewed organisations. Pyles also talks about using community structures, and such strategies were also suggested in interviews, with respondent F describing how they looked for "if there is any sort of village leadership".

Local participation is one of the major facets of this recommendation, and as previously mentioned, this is almost per-definition solved for partner-implementing organisations. While most organisations advocated for local participation, one of the self-implementing organisations particularly stood out. Specializing in medicine, they emphasised the importance of seeking acceptance for their work from locals instead of necessarily incorporating participation. This was derived from the fact that a lot of their work is conducted by personnel who require lengthy educations, which might not be available in situations where they respond.

Being culturally aware is a theme throughout Pyles' recommendations, but it is emphasised particularly in this one. All organisations note the importance of being culturally aware and sensitive in their work. Often, respondents described how taking cultural aspects into account was part of the needs assessment. The cultural aspect was brought up especially from a gender perspective, where respondent C stated that it is important to have female employees who can talk to women about their specific needs. Respondent F explained that in a context as Afghanistan, it's important to have female medical staff, as women might find it difficult to be treated by males. Culture is also integrated in other ways, as respondent E described how sensitive issues often are

approached through theatre, song or dance. In this way, implemented actions are made to be more culturally appropriate, in line with the recommendations of Pyles (2017).

### 6.4 The localisation agenda

In relation to Pyles' recommendations, an increasing trend being pushed in the humanitarian sector is the localisation agenda. This subject was brought up in almost all of the interviews. Respondent F explained how only a tiny amount of funding in the humanitarian sphere goes directly to local NGO:s, but how this has been observed and is now changing. Respondent A mentions that donors increasingly have localisation on their agenda. Many respondents claimed it was an attempt and a means of shifting the balance of power in humanitarian work. This awareness has led to organisations starting to channel more funds directly to local organisations. However, respondent A noted the contradiction in this, stating:

> It's a shift of power, so you're asking those powerful organisations to shift their power to more towards national based [NGO:s], which is… It's like you're asking them to stop existing sometimes. – Respondent A

As expressed, this puts pressure on the organisations, as calls for localisation eventually becomes a question of survival of international NGO:s, and especially for those who do not implement through partners.

Another interesting contradiction which came up during the interviews was the fact that while many are pushing for localisation, including many donors, certain mechanisms exist that prevent local actors from gaining an increased role in the sector, as two partner-implementing organisations witnessed to. When talking about coordination meetings in post-disaster situations, they commented that these meetings are usually very high-level and dominated by 'the big players'. Local actors might be forgotten or not even be invited, or meetings might take place in cities far away. Sometimes other issues such as language barriers exist as well.

While all acknowledge the logic behind localisation and involving locals to a higher degree, some respondents also highlighted potential downsides in connection to this. Respondent A explained how having non-local staff can be useful in situations when you're dealing with complex and culturally sensitive issues, such as sexual violence. Foreign staff potentially runs a lower risk of being threatened or even harassed than someone local who permanently lives within the affected communities, the respondent concluded.

### 6.5 Supporting local markets

Another of the recommendations brought up in previous research was for NGO:s to attempt to use local markets as much as possible in their relief work, to avoid negative impacts on the local economy (Pyles, 2017). This is an additional strategy which Swedish NGO:s can employ to counter aspects of disaster capitalism. While questioning respondents about this, almost all

mentioned cash distribution as a way of supporting local markets. Instead of giving disaster victims goods, they give them cash to spend in local shops, and depending on the NGO, with differing amounts of conditionality connected this cash. This stops NGO:s from bringing in foreign goods which might disrupt local markets. However, a majority also brought up issues in connection to cash distribution, emphasising the ever-present contextuality of situations. Actors must analyse and make sure that people have access to markets, that those markets haven't been disrupted by a disaster, that recipients are not exposed to risks while trying to access the these and that local markets can handle the increased demands. This shows that there are constantly multiple aspects to take into account.

Another aspect brought up was that of time. The time it might take to find and support local markets might jeopardise lives, as respondent A mentioned: "… it's a race between saving lives and then exploring local markets that might take longer time, so, they might find it easier to just get a plane from somewhere". Other respondents also mentioned that local markets might not possess the necessary materials, or those available might not live up to the standard of quality set by the organisation, again highlighting the highly contextual nature of each disaster, and that it all depends on where it hits and which preconditions exist.

### 6.6 CHS and Sphere – not a straightforward axiom

As previously mentioned, much of the content presented in the CHS is in line with the recommendations presented by Pyles. An even closer connection to these recommendations could help NGO:s design practices able to repel disaster capitalism. During multiple interviews parables were made as respondents discussed their methods in relation to the CHS. As respondent F stated while discussing the CHS, "Focus is so much on participation", which is also one of the paramount ideas of Pyles. Respondent A says that: "going with those principles will automatically make you open to the culture of that place where you're working". Both these quotes show clear connections between the CHS and Pyles' framework.

Overall, there is a collectively uncritical view on international guidelines from all organisations apart from MSF, as stated in previous research. The general impression is that CHS is something that everyone can support and try to follow as much as possible. There are mixed messages regarding these standards, however. It is considered by some as a guideline or something that they should strive to achieve. You should be pragmatic in the interpretation of it, according to respondents C and D. If a certain project or effort does not entirely meet the standards, you would still do the next best thing, meaning that standards are something to strive for rather than the minimum it is claimed to be in some contexts. The Sphere handbook is, even more so, seen as a benchmark or ambition rather than something tied to reality. On the one hand, respondent C claims that it is the bible of humanitarian work, but respondent D says that "it is often a utopia". Many respondents also claim that working along the lines of CHS is an increasing demand from many donors, adding to the ambiguous nature of them.

Another rising question mark is how organisations working with implementing partners handle it. What is the point of being CHS-certified or working along the lines of CHS if your implementing partners, the ones who work on the ground, do not take these documents into account? The organisations themselves claim to work this way in order to strengthen their partners and raise them to the appropriate level in terms of adapting to different standards, but the fact remains that many of the implementing partners do not meet them even if the supporting organisation does. There is clearly a gap between local partners and supporting organisations when it comes to these documents.

The gap seems even bigger given the fact that the process of being certified according to the standards is both extensive and very expensive. The respondents explain that because of this, local organisations are often excluded since their resources are very limited compared to their counterparts in the Western world, all meanwhile language of participation and how local organisation should be given a more central role is promoted through initiatives such as the localisation agenda. The interviews paint a sort of canvas of contradiction, as the humanitarian community is pushing for more participation, bottom-up perspectives and localisation, but on the other hand favouring organisations which have these expensive stamps of approval, which local organisations cannot afford.

More critique includes operationalisation. While these standards are agreed upon, there is also a consensus that there is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' when it comes to humanitarian efforts, but rather that everything needs to be seen in its specific context. This makes it impossible to find a standard which is applicable to every scenario. The humanitarian sector still seems to be searching for a 'golden method' according to respondent F. Is it not contradictory to standardise something that is so highly dependent on context?

Additionally, there is critique towards the whole process from respondent B:

> There is a whole bunch of consultants, think tanks and aid organisations who do not really do the work on the ground, they just talk about how it should be done. It's an enormous industry. And there is probably quite a lot of scepticism within our organization if it really requires so much resources for this instead of doing the job on the ground. – Respondent B

Furthermore, having to align all resources collectively forces you to dilute some of what can reasonably be expected with the available resources, respondent B claims. There are also doubts regarding the gap of having the standards present and implementing them in strategic documents, and actually complying to them in reality.

### 6.7 The role of donors

Many respondents iterate what Audet (2015) presents, in that the funding system is bureaucratic and institutionalised. Attempts to link humanitarian and development work, which was an

occurring theme among most respondents, was lifted as increasingly called for in the sector. This linking is being hampered by these rigid rules, and donors often want clear delineations between the two disciplines. Being too bound to donors potentially makes organisations pinioned and less flexible, forcing organisations to adjust their projects after donor requirements. Organisations not tied to specific donor requirements are more free in this sense.

Furthermore, one aspect which became clear during the course of the interviews is that Swedish donors are considered to be good, or at least better in comparison to other donors around the world. There is an understanding from Swedish donors regarding the complexity of the humanitarian sector, according to the respondents. While NGO:s in other countries are pressured to show clear cause and effect results, as Blackburn (2018) states, Swedish donors recognise that this is not always the case, putting more trust in NGO:s. They are not as guided by particular interests, and while NGO:s might take donor interest into consideration, they do not let them influence their work. As respondent A puts is:

> It's not something that we, kind of, struggle with here in Sweden, but if you look at maybe, other donors, that's definitely more political and it's just the fact that you, for example, get money from the US government to work in Afghanistan will kind of, threaten your presence there because naturally you'd be a target. – Respondent A

Smaller NGO:s are more bound to donor requirements as a result of their more limited resources and closer relationship to the donors. In this case, if there is a disaster which engages their donors, they might be forced to start a fundraising campaign or create a project proposal in order to stay relevant. Moreover, certain disasters in various places around the world might be more or less relevant from the perspective of their donors, according to respondent C. Does this mean that smaller NGO:s have to pick which disasters they want to act in, given that their resources are more limited? These examples highlight how NGO:s might be forced to prioritise their donors wishes over their values or what they deem relevant simply to survive.

Respondent D explained how they are working with a private donor who makes certain requirements on the content or focus of specific projects. These requirements do not interfere with any policy and are in line with the views of the organisation, but the fact remains that the organisation makes itself dependent on the donor in this case. The focus is to find a project that suits the donor, rather than having the needs on the ground as the outset. This is one example showing that the humanitarian sector is donor-driven, which is also voiced during several of the interviews. One example which appeared was how US donors and even the EU requests you not to buy products from China. USAID [the US federal development agency] is also mentioned on multiple occasions, much because of their ban on projects regarding abortion, leading NGO:s who accept funding from them to become restricted from even talking about abortion. As an NGO you have to make an ethical assessment of the donor and the demands, and USAID is one example of a donor which interviewed organisations decline funding from.

### 6.8 Private actors – which rules apply?

One of the main features of neoliberalism, as well as disaster capitalism, is privatisation. In previous research, both Pyles, Tierney, Maldonado & Schuller, Loewenstein and Lassa highlight how privatisation of humanitarian efforts is expanding, which is confirmed during the interviews. It is agreed upon as a fact, and there are no doubts that the humanitarian sector has become a business. It is repeatedly expressed in the interviews how the talk in many NGO:s is that the private interest of the sector is growing. There is a clear increase since the beginning of the 2000's, according to respondent B, who explains that the World Bank has taken a larger role in disaster response and that they want to influence the economic market according to their own ideas, which has favoured private actors. The EU also wants to focus on private actors, which is sometimes seen as a threat among NGO:s. Even in Sweden, SIDA [Swedish international development agency] is channelling funds through Swedish corporations, which has been debated in the sector. Respondent E has not seen this rise of private actors from their own perspective but has noticed it in various discussions in the humanitarian community. One example of this is the 2019 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and how the theme of the platform is the *resilience dividend*. To talk about resilience, disasters and dividend in the same spirit is a misplaced discussion – no one earns a dividend when a disaster hits. This shows a stream of economic ambitions in humanitarian work that many NGO:s might have missed, respondent E states.

An important point on the agenda of NGO:s, is how to ensure that private actors are in line with the principles of humanitarian work. One concern is that private actors do not have to work along the same rules and demands as NGO:s, in terms of transparency and practice:

> It is demanding a lot from us. We have to report, we need to have certain types of transparency, methods, and things like that. Which is good, we should be monitored. We have to deliver good results and we have a responsibility. But we do not feel that the same thing applies to private actors. We do not feel that private actors have equal responsibility to live up too, methods to work according to or make sure that they have early analyses of what is done in order to have it done right. We do not see that it is necessarily rights-based but more based on what is best in order for the corporation to make profit. – Respondent D

The problem is not that these actors are private per definition, but rather the surrounding frameworks, or perhaps the lack of them. Respondent D suggests the introduction of a framework which includes private actors in humanitarian efforts, given the intrinsic value which they possess, such as technical solutions regarding telecommunication and other infrastructural solutions which are important in post-disaster settings. There are many NGO:s who are really poor at what they do, just as private actors can be really good, respondent B argues. No one really contradicts the positive aspects a private actor can bring.

The issue seems to be that private actors deviate from working need-, principle- or rights-based. Judging from the interviews, what bothers many NGO:s is the purpose driving private actors in humanitarian responses. You cannot disregard them simply because they are private actors, but the

issue lies in that they do not work solely for humanitarian intentions. Another problem is the enormous amount of actors in general – NGO:s, private, religious and governmental – who find themselves in post-disaster settings. Everyone wants to have a share of the pie and everyone wants to work, respondent A claims. Respondent B goes even further in his critique:

> It's a circus. Everywhere in disaster settings, it is like an army of all kinds of NGO:s, some Christian evangelical from the US who comes to pick up converters, and there are indeed the ones who have a purpose which is more than just looking after the locals, paid by certain entities. As an organisation, we are very sceptical about this, and there are many examples of efforts being carried out by actors who look like NGO:s, they have websites with laughing children in front of a water hose and they drive around in white jeeps with a logo on it. But they are private companies. It is pretty common in the US. So, it is private money, and they earn massive amounts. Many governments pay them to respond to humanitarian situations, it is not unusual in the US. And they do not explain that they are private companies. They act like NGO:s, they look like NGO:s, but they are simply private contractors. Not seldom in the security sector, so called private-military companies who have increased explosively after the war in Iraq, since George Bush had some powerful buddies who were very good at drawing this up. I do not want to say that they do a bad job, that is not it, but the fact is that they are not there for pure humanitarian reasons, they are there to make money. And that is a difference. – Respondent B

Thus, being a private, for-profit actor is per definition not a problem, but not working principle-based is. In this sense, the respondents are contradicting themselves, since being a private for-profit actor means that one works for profit and not purely out of principle. Respondent F also suggests that the humanitarian principle of independence contradicts being for-profit, since for-profit means having an agenda – making profit. Several of the respondents underline that they believe that it is important not to be for-profit when responding to humanitarian situations.

Another aspect which is contested is the transparency, that some private actors try to look like NGO:s. They have to be open about what they do, which is selling a service, but they are not. The same factor applies to faith-based organisations, who may not only work to ease the needs of disaster-struck victims, but also to recruit converts to their church or religion. According to respondent A, almost every single church in the US had travelled to Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 to try to help, and it was a nightmare to organise everything and make sure that everyone followed the standards. Respondent B elaborates the critique of private actors:

> What bothers us, as a movement, is the silence around these trends and few people ask the critical question – is everything okay with these companies? Who are they, why are they working in this way? For example, when private military companies manage a large part of the security for UN-operations, who are they, what interests lie behind their work, who are these men driving around in their SUV:s? It is a healthy but critical debate on how this develops. – Respondent B

The discussion regarding privatised humanitarian work is tricky. It is clear that private actors are needed for technical solutions and that no one can dismiss an actor on the sole basis of it being private. Respondent D does not think it is impossible to work on a for-profit basis when working in the humanitarian sector, but that it complicates and makes things more unclear. Respondent F states that it seems hard to share basic values given that companies are profit-driven while NGO:s see it as a zero-sum game.

One additional dimension which was highlighted was the relationship between organisations and local populations. One example that arose was Afghanistan, where a lot of suspicion and allegations are directed at NGO:s for being agents for the US or Israel. The ICRC and MSF are seen as more neutral, while the UN is more politicised. Respondent B exemplifies this issue:

> There is a reason why the humanitarian aid community is becoming a target by different aid groups [recipients], it's because of, they don't see the point of having these big organisations, and the way they work and the way they associate themselves with the communities has been quite questioned in too many countries. – Respondent B

As the previous quote emphasised, if you are not completely transparent with what you do, you might be blamed as being a pawn of a broader geopolitical agenda. If your intentions are not clear enough and the locals get suspicious, it might even be dangerous to work there. These adverse effects can potentially spill over to other actors as well, whose actions might be completely genuine and transparent. Having actors who are not completely dedicated to the humanitarian work and its principles risk affecting all actors in the field.

### 6.9 The state from an NGO perspective

One dimension connected to disaster capitalism is the declining role and capacity of the state (Maldonado & Schuller, 2016; Lassa, 2018; Loewenstein, 2018). The number of actors has risen, but what does the role of the state look like? Respondent D acknowledged that the role of the state has indeed declined around the world, but the others were not so sure, showing that there is no unanimity regarding this. One possible explanation suggested by several respondents is that contemporary disasters and conflicts are both longer and more difficult, and that they often take place in countries or regions where the states are already weak. There is a broad consensus among the respondents that the role of the state is important and that NGO:s must not work to replace it, although, often the state lacks the required resources to respond to humanitarian needs in post-disaster settings.

As mentioned in previous research, resilience has become a trend and priority among NGO:s. Respondent E problematised the resilience surge and emphasised the role of the state, stressing that the state should be involved in resilience-building, and that a sub-goal of working with resilience should be to strengthen the state, so that they can ultimately be responsible for this.

In the post-cold war era, there was an assumption that governments were corrupt, and in order to bypass them you would work with civil society instead, respondent A explains. Nowadays governments are more present, both in accountability and how they want the aid to be structured. They are involved in determining and coordinating, practically telling NGO:s what they can or can't do. Respondent F elaborates, resembling this handling of governments to a minefield that differs a lot from country to country, but needs to be adapted to.

Respondent E highlights how there is a shrinking space for NGO:s to operate in in many parts of the world, especially in Latin America and in parts of east Asia as Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The democratic space is diminishing, leading to NGO:s being more controlled: "Your applications become meticulously examined and you have to report back every six months. NGO:s working with human rights are… not persecuted, but they are controlled even more."

Indeed, NGO:s avoid working with the governments in some situations, as when there are issues regarding human rights in the country. There is a balancing act between involving or not involving the government in these cases. South Sudan is one example where certain groups are deprived of their human rights:

> Like South Sudan for example, how would you do that? Where the government is quite involved in human rights-issues and how would you bring the government to coordinate aid related… without being discriminatory against other groups – Respondent E

The state should have the common interest of the people in mind, but if it does not, NGO:s have to be able to bypass it, according to the respondents. If NGO:s are scrutinised and restricted in their freedom of movement, this shrinking space might lead NGO:s to be cornered and less effective, weakening their ability to act as a counterforce to interests such as disaster capitalism. There are many attempts to manipulate humanitarian efforts, which NGO:s have to be aware of. They need to be able to manoeuvre their way through the system, as respondent B explains.

### 6.10 Disaster Capitalism – a furtive process?

An interesting aspect regarding the knowledge and experience of disaster capitalism seems to be that self-implementing organisations have a much larger awareness and understanding of the concept, of what it is and what it means. Certain features of disaster capitalism were only recognised by self-implementing organisations, who had seen these in play themselves. Partner-implementing organisations did not show the same insight into the issues of disaster capitalism. This suggests that a large portion of insight and observations presumably get lost between the implementing partner and the NGO, making them secondary sources in this case.

The term disaster capitalism was new to all of the respondents, with one exception. The phenomenon as such was not unknown, and on one occasion respondent D recounted an example of disaster capitalism without having been asked about it:

> When it comes to private and for-profit, there are a number of variables which create interest for a company to establish themselves in a specific country, and by engaging in humanitarian efforts, gain an additional push or gain contacts with the state, facilitating investments or purchase of land. So, I am not saying it is impossible, but it is a little bit like opening Pandora's box. There can be several good bits in there, but there are also things that should never be allowed to leave the box. – Respondent D

The same respondent claims to be familiar with the phenomenon and what it means but has not come across the term. Respondent A claims to be familiar with the discussion surrounding how to use disasters for various types of interests, which is shown in the aforementioned quote. Respondent B claims that certain features of disaster capitalism, such as non-profiteering, are already well known:

> Everyone knows it, it is a circus. It is huge, in many countries you can make money if you start an NGO. You can take part of the UN-budget, which is bigger than ever, you can become an implementing partner for a UN organ. So, for many people, this is a job. It is an industry, it is not a secret, there is nothing strange about that. – Respondent B

The manifestations of disaster capitalism are known, but in what way are the NGO:s affected by it? Respondent B states that there are always interests in the humanitarian sector that you need to manage your way around, but whether you can claim that humanitarian response as a whole is affected by this is more doubtful, pointing out a very important aspect in that no such analysis has been made. The respondent does not believe you can claim a majority of humanitarian efforts to be part of imperialist conquests by the Western world but points out that the debate needs to exist, and potential controversies should be out in the open and questioned.

Respondent E also talked about the manifestations of disaster capitalism and emphasised how economic development often is prioritised over local interests, perceiving it as a force too large for many NGO:s to combat:

> On a country-office level you might not dare to bring this up for discussion against the giants and the economic interests (...) so you are battling with a giant which you will not be able to affect. – Respondent E

To summarise, the respondents generally had some difficulties to answer if they believed disaster capitalism had had a direct effect on them. As respondent D states:

> It is hard to answer that. I would put it like this – everything that negatively affects the people in places where we are present affects us and the context we work in. The needs are driven in a specific direction and we have to adapt to that. So yes, it affects us. – Respondent D

### 6.11 Critique of the humanitarian system – how it is used and what the future might bring

As previously stated, NGO:s need to manage their way around certain interests all the time. The interviews make it obvious that there is critique towards the humanitarian system. Humanitarian efforts are indeed used as pawns in a political game, as Swamy (2017) exemplifies, but few choose to question and write about it. The war in Afghanistan and Iraq has shown in a very clear way how the US used humanitarian response for political purposes and as a force multiplier for military efforts, respondents B and C both exemplify. This kind of humanitarian imperialism can open the door to disaster capitalism, if the political purpose is to impose neoliberalism and to open up markets.

The situation in Venezuela is accentuated in another example. It is obvious that the US has enormous political interests in the way that the humanitarian situation is described. Respondent B is convinced that the reason that some voices who are calling for the expulsion of Maduro [president of Venezuela] and the initiation of a humanitarian intervention, do not want it because they care about the situation of the Venezuelan people. They want it for a whole different purpose, showing that the risk of being manipulated as a humanitarian organisation is always present.

Respondent A has a similar way to explain it:

> Look at how the aid business has been managed in Afghanistan for example, or Iraq, after the war there. You go, you destroy, and then you send the NGO:s to build up a certain resiliency, and then you send the companies like Halliburton and then practically you're preparing the country to embrace more neoliberalism. – Respondent A

This same case is also exemplified by Naomi Klein in the Shock Doctrine (2007), which the respondent was unaware of.

There is also critique towards the NGO community and how they all strive to grow bigger, which goes against what they believe in, according to respondent A. Many NGO:s are constantly striving for growth, but simultaneously their mandate is to fill a temporary need, when it appears, and then disengage when they are not needed anymore. Respondent A emphasises the contradiction in this desire, and says how this, in a broader sense represents how the aid situation is not improving. NGO:s have to be conscious that they are working towards eventually being phased out, and that this imperative is incompatible with a desire to grow.

The same respondent expresses further concerns, believing the sector is not working and calling for an evolution or revolution of it, with key issues regarding how to deliver aid, how to take into consideration the bigger political questions and make sure that organisations are not a branch of vested political interests. At the same time, there is a trend within the sector, advocating for a complete change in the way they work. At some point it will reach a tipping point where things will start to change, and the respondent hopes it will be in a direction where it moves away from

being driven by capitalisation and more towards the humanitarian imperative, and is encouraged by trends such as the localisation agenda.

Additionally, many respondents voice concerns in regard to new upcoming donors with enormous resources, such as China, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and large scale companies who are becoming increasingly powerful. These donors have different strategies and conditions tied to their aid, and there is a lot of uncertainty about what consequences a potential power shift may have, respondent D explains. How much focus do these new donors put on equality? And what happens when they offer something, such as funding, worth twice as much as what the Swedish NGO can offer? The work the organisation has done for women's rights and equality during the last 20 years might regress 15 years in just five years. No one knows what might happen and there is a lot of concern about that.

## 7. Discussion

This study has delved into the interconnectedness of disaster capitalism and humanitarian actors, with the aim of finding ways in which NGO practice can counter disaster capitalism. The relation and interaction between the humanitarian sector and disaster capitalism has not been widely researched, which makes this study, not only an addition in the research on the broad implications of disaster capitalism, but also to increase NGO:s understanding of this phenomenon. This study deviates from previous research on disaster capitalism in the sense that it, unlike most other research, is not a case study. It is based on interviews with actors who are directly or indirectly in contact with situations where disaster capitalism might manifest itself. Therefore, it offers a different point of view on how disaster capitalism operates, from the vantage point of actors who might have the power to stand up against and stop it.

One of the overarching discoveries from the interviews is that the partner-implementing organisations represented in this study were not as aware, directly or indirectly, about the phenomenon of disaster capitalism. This is arguably because they do not have the same first-hand experience of disaster-struck areas as representatives of self-implementing organisations. It would be interesting to see if future research conducted on this phenomenon would have garnered different results if only local NGO:s working in disaster-struck areas would have been interviewed, and also if this is applicable only to Swedish NGO:s.

The localisation agenda is also a highly interesting aspect of this study. If local NGO:s were to become increasingly empowered, a possible outcome would be that resistance towards disaster capitalism would increase, as the interests of local NGO:s would most likely oppose predatory actions. Also, empowered local NGO:s would also have increased capacity to stand up to governments and companies trying to exploit disasters. However, this is not a guarantee, as local NGO:s might just as easily be manipulated, bribed or corrupted into becoming complicit actors.

The empowerment of local NGO:s would lead to bigger international NGO:s being disempowered, and perhaps eventually phased out. The question naturally springs to mind whether international NGO:s would try to stop the push towards localisation, or try to affect its trajectory in some way. Respondents noted that humanitarian work has become an industry with a lot of money in circulation. This factor, coupled with the dilemma of growth mentioned earlier, would indicate that international NGO:s would have little interest in promoting localisation. In that case, these organisations might have to do some soul searching and contemplate on what actions are most appropriate and whose vision one is truly trying to work towards. There is also critique towards the system as a whole, and some claim that it is dysfunctional. Perhaps because it is too institutionalised and tied, with thresholds too steep for local NGO:s to be included amongst Western NGO:s, and with donor requirements too rigid to be compatible with the complexities of reality.

Another aspect, which was explained by respondent A is how the whole humanitarian sector is underfunded. Not enough money is being granted in order to meet the needs. This is worrying in itself, because humanitarian needs are set to increase in the future. The insufficient funding might also be a potential explanation to the sector being more and more donor-driven, since NGO:s have to cater their projects to access the limited available funds, moving the power from NGO:s to the donors. In extension, NGO:s risk compromising their principles in order to receive funds and stay alive.

While the sector has always been more or less donor-driven, the issue appears when the imbalance between donors and NGO:s becomes too great, when NGO:s risk losing their independence and become steered into certain ways of implementing their work. This risks amplifying the mismatch between local contexts and donors, potentially leading to situations where NGO:s working 'on the ground', express the need for certain solutions or means, but where these are dismissed for alternatives which might suit donor interests better. Looking at it from a disaster capitalism perspective, allowing donors to gain increased control over NGO:s would limit their capacity to speak out against predatory actions.

Furthermore, one of the outcomes of the increased significance for resilience is that it seems to be pushing the nexus debate. The methods involved in resilience work could, arguably, be positioned in between humanitarian- and development work. Respondent E highlighted that the state should have a stake in resilience and should be partly responsible for building this for their citizens. This is interesting in relation to the debate concerning the decreased role of the state, and what Pelling & Dill (2010) said about humanitarian organisations expanding their role into social development. A debate should exist of whether expanding 'too far' into resilience pushes the state away from its obligations toward its citizens. Having organisations take over their responsibility in these areas would mean further neglecting the role of the state.

In relation to the two previous paragraphs, given what has been said in the interviews about Swedish donors and their tendency to have an understanding of the complexities of working with humanitarian efforts and in the nexus, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study in other countries where the donor situation is different, such as the US, where actors as USAID often work according to specific agendas. Though nothing can be guaranteed, it is not hard to believe the results of the study would have been different than the ones presented here with a different donor structure in mind.

The increasing prevalence of private, for-profit actors in humanitarian aid, highlighted in previous research was also acknowledged during the interviews. An interesting example of this emerged, regarding how private actors wish to be perceived as NGO:s, using material and communicative platforms to depict themselves as something they are not. Why do they feel the need to present themselves in this way? Is it connected to the idea that less genuine actors run the risk of being dealt with suspicion? Future research could examine how the context affects private actors in disaster settings, and it can also look at the agenda of these companies, as proposed during one of the interviews.

Similar to what Otieno (2018) accentuates, another concern with the increase of private, for-profit actors is the accountability dilemma. If these companies do not perform adequate work, who do they then answer to? A government is accountable to their population, and if they perform inadequately the population should be able to punish them somehow or oust them if necessary. Arguably, however, a private actor answers ultimately to their owners or shareholders. The same debate could be raised with non-profit NGO:s, as they are ultimately responsible to their donors. Yet, the addition of working for-profit, reinforces reasons for concern. It is therefore credible to contend that an increase in for-profits in the humanitarian sector would ultimately move power even further away from recipients or rights-bearers. This aspect is another which must be further researched and added to the wider debate around humanitarian aid and the increase of for-profit companies in the sector.

Proceeding, many believe that NGO:s are not supposed to be political. However, if one is to speak out against disaster capitalism, as Pyles advocates, then one might have to take a political stance. Doing this as an NGO is a risk, as it might lead to being cut off from funding or branded as too political. During the interviews, the necessity for NGO:s to be brave in certain situations was discussed. Respondent D said that it is impossible to remain completely non-political, since you work to advocate for people to live a dignified life. This however broadens into a much bigger question, since the humanitarian principles state that actors must remain non-political. Should organisations follow these principles blindly, or is there perhaps a need to overhaul the principles given the climate in today's humanitarian sector? If you see that a certain system keeps people in a state of poverty, if you see a system that takes advantage of disasters in order to make profit on behalf of people's interest, should one not speak out against it? Right now, it would seem that NGO:s are working within the status quo.

Disaster capitalism seems to be a process that often takes place on a macro level, as Swamy (2017) and Pyles (2017) exemplify, where those in power use a natural disaster to relocate people. NGO:s working on micro levels, in local contexts, often miss or do not see these processes, even though they feel the consequences of them. Is the gap between macro- and micro levels what hides disaster capitalism and makes it hard to detect? Judging from the interviews, certain aspects of it were recognised, acknowledging its existence. However, the reflection does not extend beyond this. There generally seems to be a lack of reflection regarding the larger processes acting in- or around the humanitarian sector. Therefore, the sector needs to pay more attention to disaster capitalism, and more specifically, on why not enough attention is being paid to it, as this is clearly something that interplays with actors in the sector.

## 8. Conclusions

As stated in the results, Swedish NGO:s do predominantly follow the recommendations put forth by Pyles (2017) in her framework. The weakest link was found in the first recommendation, but as noted, this seems to be because these recommendations situate themselves more in the nexus than purely in the humanitarian sphere. Also, it could be due to the higher level of abstraction in this recommendation. The main reason that Swedish NGO:s follow these recommendations were because they had a high focus on participation and especially localisation. While working directly with local partners is one way of ensuring this, self-implementing organisations also emphasised the importance of these aspects, proving that they are aware of these issues. Another reason is the fact that a majority of interviewed NGO:s follow the CHS, which contains many elements present in Pyles' recommendations.

Notably, NGO:s seem to be largely unaware of disaster capitalism. The term as such was unknown to all but one respondent, but some aspects of it, such as large-scale economic development being prioritised over local interests, was recognised by many. Respondent E perceived this as a force too large to combat, suggesting that NGO:s might not dare to bring up this discussion against the 'giants' and the economic interests, meaning they are sometimes dealing with a counterpart they cannot affect.

This would suggest that, even though this is not a case of disaster capitalism, similar forces of disaster capitalism might be deemed too large to grapple with. As many respondents were not familiar with the concept, it was hard to determine if their strategies were impacted by disaster capitalism. However, as stated by respondent D, what affects the context ultimately affects them as well.

It is also interesting to note the contradiction in interviewed NGO:s opinion towards the privatisation of the humanitarian sector. Since the general impression seems to imply that being for-profit is not a problem per se, but not working based on humanitarian principles, which emphasise that an actor should have no underlying agendas, in fact was. However, in their defence,

the more the subject was covered during the interview, the more they seemed to reflect, gradually becoming more sceptical as they took more aspects into account, and as they viewed it in the broader light of things. This displays the uncertainty of how NGO:s really perceive private actors. At best there seems to be a scepticism, even though many believe they still have a role to fill, warranting that rules exist which govern them as well.

Two concerns were brought into light regarding the future of the sector. One was identified as new donors, possibly being China, the Arab States and large multinational companies, who do not have the same strict demands on certain aspects, such as women- or human rights. The fear is that Western NGO:s cannot compete with these new donors if they step further into the humanitarian sector in the future, and that they will take over the sector with larger budgets and fewer demands on the stakeholders. This could lead to the phasing out of Western NGO:s and potentially a stagnation or even regression of the work for women's- and human rights.

Another concern, as mentioned in the analysis, was brought up by respondent A who argued that the sector is reaching a tipping point where "things unavoidably has [sic] to be changed", showing more concern regarding the future of the humanitarian sector. The respondent raised the issue of the humanitarian sector becoming increasingly competitive, but how many voices are advocating for a change away from the increased monetisation, stating that it goes against what they naturally believe in. Similar concerns were brought up by respondent E, who claimed that these tendencies might have gone unnoticed by NGO:s.

As stated earlier, to remain non-political while trying to oppose disaster capitalism is challenging. It becomes a balancing act, as it demands one to speak up in certain situations which might indirectly jeopardise political neutrality. However, strategies such as the localisation agenda can serve as a counterweight to disaster capitalism. As previously alluded to, while no outcome is certain, one way for NGO:s to counter disaster capitalism and other harmful phenomenon could be to further push localisation, introducing strategies centring even more agency to the affected populations. This would likely counteract manifestations of disaster capitalism, while leaving one's political neutrality unaffected.

## 9. References

André, G., & Collins, S. (2001) Raising standards in emergency relief: How useful are Sphere minimum standards for humanitarian assistance? *BMJ, 323*(7315), 740. doi: 10.1136/bmj.323.7315.740

Audet, F. (2015) From disaster relief to development assistance: Why simple solutions don't work. *International Journal*, *70*(1), 110–118. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0020702014562595

Blackburn, S. (2018) What does transformation look like? post-disaster politics and the case for progressive rehabilitation. *Sustainability*, *10*(7), 2317. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su10072317

Bowen, G. (2009) Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *9*(2), 27–40.

Brauman, R. & Neuman, M. (2014) *MSF and the aid system: choosing not to choose*. Retrieved 2019-04-17, from https://www.msf-crash.org/en/publications/humanitarian-actors-and-practices/msf-and-aid-system-choosing-not-choose

Breen P. M., Anderies J. M. (2011) *Resilience: A literature review (Bellagio Initiative)*. Brighton, England: Institute of Development Studies.

Bryman, A. (2011) *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*. Malmö, Sverige: Liber AB.

Collins, S. & Griekspoor, A. (2001) Raising standards in emergency relief: How useful are Sphere minimum standards for humanitarian assistance? *British Medical Journal*, *323*, 740–742.

Core Humanitarian Standards. (n.d.) *History*. Retrieved 2019-04-16 from: https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard/history

Day, C. L. (2013) Katrina seven years on: The politics of race and recovery-- notes on a roundtable organized for the 2012 APSA annual meeting. *PS, Political Science & Politics*, *46*(4), 748–752. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096513001017

Foreign aid. (2019a) In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/foreign-aid/34854

Freedom House (2019) *Freedom in the world 2019*. Retrieved 2019-05-27 from https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf

Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The end of history and the last man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Harper, D. (n.d.) Donor. In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=donor

Hjerm, M., Lindgren, S. & Nilsson, M. (2014) *Introduktion till samhällsvetenskaplig analys*.

Malmö: Gleerups.

Hooper, M & Pym, M. (2017) Humanitarian standards in urban, post-disaster contexts: a study of Sphere shelter standards in Haiti. *ODI HPN*.

Humanitarian intervention. (2019b) In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/humanitarian-intervention/600942

IPCC. (2012) *Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation. A Special Report of Working Groups I and II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Field, C.B., V. Barros, T.F. Stocker, D. Qin, D.J. Dokken, K.L. Ebi, M.D. Mastrandrea, K.J. Mach, G.-K. Plattner, S.K. Allen, M. Tignor, and P.M. Midgley (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, and New York, NY, USA, 582 pp.

Klein N. (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York, Metropolitan Books.

Lassa, J. (2018) Roles of Non-Government Organizations in Disaster Risk Reduction. *Oxford Encyclopedia of Natural Hazard Science*. Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199389407.013.45

Loewenstein, A. (2018) Making Money from Misery, *Peace Review, 30*(2), 127–134, DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2018.1458939

Maldonado, J. & Schuller, M. (2016) Disaster Capitalism. *Annals of Anthropological Practice, 40*(1), 56–66. doi:10.1111/napa.12088

Moseley, W., Laris, P., Perramond, E., & Hapke, H. (2013) *An introduction to human-environment geography: Local dynamics and global processes.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell

Neoliberalism. (2019d) In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/neoliberalism/600983

Non-governmental organization. (2019c) In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/nongovernmental-organization/395824

Otieno, A. (2018) Promoting Human Rights to Resist Disaster Capitalism, *Peace Review*, *30*(2), 206–214, DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2018.1458952

Patel, S. S., Rogers, M. B., Amlot, R., & Rubin, G. J. (2017) What Do We Mean by 'Community Resilience'? A Systematic Literature Review of How It Is Defined in the Literature. *PLOS Currents: Disasters*. doi: 10.1371/currents.dis.db775aff25efc5ac4f0660ad9c9f7db2.
Pelling, M. & Dill, K. (2010) Disaster politics: Tipping points for change in the adaptation of sociopolitical regimes. *Progress in Human Geography*, *34*(1), 21–37. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0309132509105004

Purvis, K. (2015) Core Humanitarian Standard: do NGOs need another set of standards? *The Guardian*. Retrieved 2019-04-16 from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/jun/11/core-humanitarian-standard-do-ngos-need-another-set-of-standards

Pyles, L. (2017) Decolonising Disaster Social Work: Environmental Justice and Community Participation, *The British Journal of Social Work*, *47*(3), 630–647. doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcw028

SanJuan, R. V. (2003) *MSF position vis a vis the SPHERE Project*. Retrieved 2019-04-18, from https://www.msf.fr/actualites/letter-sent-to-missions-to-explain-what-is-msf-position-vis-a-vis-the-sphere-project

Schuller, M. (2016) *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Sphere Association. (2018) *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*. 4th edition, Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved 2019-04-16 from: www.spherestandards.org/handbook

Sphere Association. (n.d.) *Core Humanitarian Standard*. Retrieved 2019-04-15 from: https://www.spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/core-humanitarian-standard/

Swamy, R. (2017) Humanitarianism and unequal exchange. *Journal of World - Systems Research*, *23*(2), 353–371. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.5195/JWSR.2017.681

Tierney K. (2015) Resilience and the neoliberal project: Discourses, critiques, practices—and Katrina. *American Behavioral Scientist* , *59*(10), 1327–1342.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (n.d.a) *Humanitarian Development Nexus*. Retrieved from: https://www.unocha.org/es/themes/humanitarian-development-nexus

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (n.d.b) *Localization*. Retrieved 2019-05-20 from: https://www.unocha.org/lebanon/localization

Wisner, B. (2009) The Grocer's Daughter and the Men in Suits: Who Exactly Capitalizes on Catastrophe? And Why the Question Matters. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. *20*(3), 104–112

Yee, D. (2018) Violence and Disaster Capitalism in Post-Haiyan Philippines. Peace Review, *30*(2), 160–167.

## 10. Annex: Interview guide

The purpose of this study is to examine Swedish NGO:s' perspectives on disaster capitalism. The aim is to see if there is an interconnectedness between NGO practice and disaster capitalism, how they affect each other, what practices Swedish NGO:s use and how these may or may not work to hamper disaster capitalism.

The research questions of this study are:

- How do Swedish NGO:s perceive disaster capitalism?
- How do Swedish NGO:s perceive the privatisation of the humanitarian sector and what potential risks do they detect in the future of the sector?
- Do the strategies of Swedish NGO:s in disaster response follow Pyles' framework of decolonising disaster social work and how are they affected by disaster capitalism?

**Questions:**

1. How did your organisation start?

1. How has your organisation evolved since then?

2. What was your path into your current role here?

**NGO practice in disaster relief**

3. When you find out that a disaster has occured, what is the first thing you do?

4. What does the decision making process look like, concerning whether or not to take action?

5. What preparations are made before a humanitarian intervention is carried out?

6. Who grants you the mandate to be present during a disaster?

7. When on site, how is the disaster relief work coordinated between organisations?

8. How do you decide what kind of aid is required, psychical and non-physical?

9. To what degree are locals involved in the decision-making process?

10. To what degree are cultural aspects taken into account?

11. To what extent do you use the local market to acquire necessary aid items?

12. How do you work to make sure that your actions are sustainable in the long-term?

13. In relation to the previous question, is there any relation between humanitarian or disaster relief and longer-term development work?

14. In your opinion, how do you think one can avoid forming paternalistic relationships in humanitarian or disaster relief work?

15. How do you relate to, and work with power- structures and inequities in your humanitarian work?

16. Donors usually have requirements or demands, or have particular interests linked to funding. What are your thoughts concerning this?

17. How do you as an organisation relate to this?

18. In your experience, have bottom-up procedures gained larger traction in humanitarian work lately?

19. What are your views on resilience?

20. Do you find that the term resilience is problematic in any way?

21. What international documents or strategies (e.g. Sphere Standards & CHS, etc.) do you follow?

22. To what extent do you utilise or follow such documents?

23. Do donors demand from you as an organisation to utilise or follow such documents?

**Relation to disaster capitalism**

24. Do potential requirements from donors influence strategies and ways in which you conduct your work?

25. Do donor requirements differ from private- and public donors? (If they receive private funding)
    Do private actors set requirements/demands on their grants? (Do private donors have demands?)

26. In your opinion, how does one relate to donors with particular interests?

27. To what degree do states monitor the work which you conduct in their countries?

28. How does one act if the locals will does not concur with what the state demands?

29. How does one balance the responsibility dilemma which one has towards locals, the state and donors?

    *Follow-up question or clarification: Whose vision does one work for and who benefits? Is this being contemplated?*

30. What is your view on the role of the state in disaster relief?

31. Have NGOs gained a greater-ever role in disaster-relief work?

32. Have you noticed any change in the number of for-profit actors active in disaster relief work?

33. Are there any particular prerequisites which the locals must meet to gain access to aid in a disaster scenario? *Clarification: Explain demands set by for-profit actors in the wake of Katrina. Should everyone in demand gain access to aid or only those which meet certain demands?*

34. What do you know about the phenomenon ‘disaster capitalism’?

35. Do you reckon that this has had any implications on your work?

36. Is it important that actors working with humanitarian/disaster relief work aren’t doing it for profit?

37. Is there any other aspect you would like to highlight concerning humanitarian or disaster relief work, or your organisation?