HUMANITARIAN ACCOUNTABILITY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF AN INTERNATIONAL NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN SOUTH DARFUR

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the notion of accountability among aid workers working for CARE International Switzerland (CIS), Sudan. The thesis addresses three key questions: 1) What does accountability mean to aid workers and how do they translate their understanding in providing aid services to the affected population? 2) What are the specific factors that make aid workers committed to their work and the people they seek to support? And 3) What are the implications of their understanding of accountability on the overall accountability culture in CIS Sudan? I address these three questions from an ethnographic perspective by drawing on data gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted among CIS Sudan aid workers. Findings suggest that aid workers defined accountability in varied ways, and the term "power imbalance" in general and "social and economic inequalities" between stakeholders in particular were the key ideas behind their understandings of accountability. Aid workers commonly defined accountability according to their relationship with the affected population. Accordingly, they bought up questions of social and economic rights of the affected population. The study also revealed that aid workers directly working in the field tend to have improved motivation for accountability work. Some aid workers put accountability into practice through compassion, empathy, and respect for the affected people. The power imbalance and its effects on the accountability relationship were found to be key barriers to making the CIS's work culture more accountable to the affected people. In conclusion, improving the workplace relationship, both vertical and horizontal, is key to improving a culture of accountability in the CIS's workplace, but this requires a better communication strategy and participatory decision making in the workplace.

Preface

The author conducted all the research included in the thesis. The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Boards approval number is H15-01092. The author has a long background of working in the non-profit sector and this experience has helped him to conduct this research including the design, fieldwork, and data analysis. During the entire process of planning, conducting and finalizing this research, the author worked closely with his thesis advisor Dr. Vinay Kamat and committee member Dr. Jerry Spiegel who have extensive research experience in Africa. In conducting this research, the author has directly benefitted from his extensive experience of working in the non-profit sector.

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1. Introduction

I started my career in a bank, but my salary was not much. I was suffering from economic hardship….and I could not afford to have a good life. So, I was desperately looking for a better paying job. Then…the opportunity came and I got a job with an INGO. That's how I started working for an INGO in South Darfur.

These were the words of Hamid[1,] a senior aid worker at CARE International Switzerland (CIS) Sudan, an international nongovernmental organization (INGO) with whom I conducted my research. I spoke with Hamid at the guesthouse of CIS Sudan, which was located just above the CIS country head office in Khartoum. Hamid was stationed in one of the field offices of CIS Sudan, but during this interview he was visiting the head office to attend an official meeting. Hamid and I were staying in the same guesthouse, and I had the opportunity to speak with him at length about his motivation and experiences of working with CIS Sudan. Hamid informed me that his initial motivation to work with the INGO was mainly for the higher salary. But now that he has been working with CIS for more than ten years and he enjoys his work, his motivation to continue working with CIS has changed. Like Hamid, some of my other respondents at CIS Sudan mentioned that their main motivation to work with an INGO was and still is the higher salary as compared to the other jobs that they can get.

The "salary" as the main motivating factor for working with INGOs is not uncommon in developing countries. In Bangladesh, for example, after agriculture and industries, the NGO sector has become the third largest, in term of employment creation (Ahmad 2002). In 1998 when I started my own career with an INGO in Bangladesh, my initial motivation was certainly the higher salary that it offered compared to other job options I had at the time. The medical anthropologist James Pfeiffer (2004) provides substantial empirical evidence on this aspect from

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

his study in Mozambique, where he found that aid workers generally receive higher salaries compared to their counterparts working for the government. The salaries of expatriate staff are far better compared to their colleagues recruited locally for the same or different INGOs in a specific place (Pfeiffer 2004). Giving specific examples, Pfeiffer (2004) further emphasizes that the higher salary in the INGOs has contributed to the human resources "brain drain" in Africa. He argues that in Mozambique, the movement of qualified health workers from the government to INGOs for higher remuneration is common and this has actually weakened Mozambique's national health structure (Pfeiffer 2003; 2004).

Despite some contextual uniqueness, the situation of the INGOs work context in Sudan is no exception to many other developing countries in Asia or Africa. The sustained conflict and civil war along with years of economic sanctions by the United States made the country's public sector extremely weak (Malik and Malik 2015). The non-profit sector is a highly recognized employment sector in Sudan. In 2008, humanitarian agencies in Sudan employed more than 16,000 humanitarian workers in Darfur alone -- the largest concentration of humanitarian workers in the world at the time (ALNAP 2009). Since INGOs spend a significant portion of their allotted budget for the payment of aid workers' salary and benefit package, a general question for donors or aid agencies that is often posed is: What is the return from the invested resources? Under the influence of neoliberal economic model or reforms (Farmer 2005; Foley 2010; Kamat 2013), this question is mainly asked from the perspective of aid effectiveness or financial accountability, with the main purpose being to make INGOs accountable (for the invested resources) to the donors (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007; HAP 2013).

Over the last two decades, however, there has been a significant shift in the understanding of accountability in the humanitarian sector. This shift has occurred as a result of

the pressing need and challenges faced by humanitarian organizations in the intervention context (Bendell 2006; Bruen et al. 2014). Since NGOs/INGOs work with tight deadlines from donors to produce short-term gains, quickly, in a limited population (Pfeiffer et al. 2008), in addition, their work in the humanitarian setting is further complicated by many contextual factors including insecurity issues. The new shift, therefore, highlighted the need for increased accountability to the aid recipients as compared to official stakeholders or donors (HAP 2013; IASC 2015). It called attention to the improved understanding of the humanitarian work culture in general and the power relationship between aid workers and the crisis-affected populations in particular (HAP 2010; CHS 2015). The new shift placed huge interest on improving competencies of aid workers and their relationship with affected populations (CHS 2015; MacKinnon and MacLaren 2012; Bennett 2016).

However, there is a dearth of information about accountability in INGOs, particularly with regard to how aid workers understand accountability and the implications of their understanding in accountability practices within the organization and with the people they seek to support (Fisher 1997; Pfeiffer 2004; Lewis and Opoku 2006; Foley 2010). A review of the available literature suggests that current studies have mostly focused on understanding the culture and behaviors of the affected population, rather than the culture and behaviors of aid workers (Pfeiffer 2004). There are only a few detailed ethnographic studies conducted on accountability of a specific aid agency or aid agencies working in the same location. There is hardly any research conducted on exploring the meaning of accountability from the aid workers' perspective (Fisher 1997; Pfeiffer 2008). I became interested in examining the subject of accountability for my MA thesis from an anthropological perspective for two reasons: First, I had worked for more than 15 years in the non-profit sector, of which I had spent four years

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working with the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), which is the humanitarian sector's first international self-regulatory body on accountability, as a quality and accountability (Q&A) management auditor. My extensive work in the non-profit sector had allowed me to have firsthand understanding of the INGO work culture and to witness many organizational issues, concerns and challenges as an insider. Thus, I always wanted to better understand such concerns and challenges from a holistic perspective. Second, my previous background in anthropology and public health had oriented me to take a critical stance on the issue of INGO accountability. I was especially interested in understanding the cultural dynamics of the power relationship and its subsequent practice in the humanitarian sector from a critical ethnographic perspective.

Through this research for my thesis, I have explored how aid workers working for a particular INGO in South Darfur define accountability, and the implication of their understanding of aid work, within the organization and with the people they seek to support in the field. In this thesis, I seek to explore the meaning of accountability from the local cultural context paying specific attention to the following questions:

1. What does accountability mean to aid workers and how do they translate their understanding in providing aid services to the affected population?

2. What are the specific factors that make aid workers committed and or become accountable to the work they are assigned to or the people they seek to support?

3. What are the implications of their accountability understanding on the overall culture of accountability in the CIS Sudan?

I address these questions from an ethnographic perspective, examine the meaning of accountability from a cultural perspective, linking it with aid workers' beliefs, values and attitudes, and explore the implication of their understanding and its subsequent practices on the

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overall culture of accountability within a specific organization. I use a cultural perspective lens to understand aid workers' understanding of accountability. I also focus on and how the local context in South Darfur and the varied cultural backgrounds of aid workers of both foreign and local origins influence their understandings of accountability. Since accountability is about holding actors responsible for their actions (CHS 2015; HAP 2015; Bruen et al. 2014), in taking one particular INGO as a case study, in this thesis I seek to understand the cultural dynamics of accountability in CIS Sudan, and to consider how these dynamics affect the outcomes of humanitarian intervention in the context of South Darfur.

At the personal level, I see the aid workers' accountability as a moral issue: moral issue in the sense that aid workers' degree of commitment directly affects the designing, participation and sustainability and timeliness of the humanitarian intervention (Mosse 2006). I also see it is an issue of social justice or the dignity of the affected people. In both cases, defining accountability is important not only for improving INGOs interventions toward the affected people but also for redefining the aid relationship between aid providers and the aid recipients from much broader perspective. This relationship better functions through the compassionate understanding, fairness and mutual respect between both parties.

Through this research, I have attempted to write an organizational ethnography that explores the meaning of accountability from the aid workers' perspective. In the following pages, I first provide a rationale for my study along with the theoretical framework. Then I describe the methodology and provide a description of the research setting. This is followed by a section devoted to exploring the meaning of accountability from the perspective of aid workers working in different positions, roles and locations in Sudan. In analyzing a variety of responses through the interviews, FGDS and informal discussions with aid workers, I explain what

accountability means to them, and to whom they are accountable. I then explain why the understandings of accountability are varied among the aid workers, and what exactly contributes to this variance or differences in perspectives. I also explain what makes and also does not make aid workers accountable or committed to their work, and what happens as a result of both (positive and negative) orientations in the aid service decision making, from the head office to the field. Subsequently, I examine the implication of the aid workers' accountability understanding, in general, on the organizational culture. I also show how the violence, insecurity and risk in the field have posed challenges for CIS in establishing a culture of accountability in the organization. Finally, I conclude the thesis by synthesizing the key findings from my research and present an outline for improving the culture of accountability in the CIS Sudan in the future.

1.1   Conflicts, insecurity and INGOs work context in Sudan

In this section, I briefly describe the INGO work context in Sudan, focusing particularly on the things that happened as a result of conflict and the circumstance in which INGOs work in Sudan. Sudan witnessed the worst humanitarian crisis in Darfur in 2003-2004 (ALNAP 2009). The intense conflict lasted for about eight years and by the year 2009; the conflict had resulted in more than 2.7 million internally displaced people. An additional 2 million residents were directly affected (ALNAP 2009). The conflict created enormous suffering in the lives of people particularly women, elderly and children in the conflict areas (UNCEF 2009).

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 provided an opportunity for humanitarian work in some parts of Sudan, but hostilities between government troops and armed groups in South Darfur, and in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, continued (JSI 2010). This posed a huge challenge for humanitarian organizations to deliver aid to the affected population (ICRC 2015). The most recent conflict in South Darfur continues to strain and put pressure on Sudan,

with more than 189,000 South Sudanese refugees having entered Sudan since December 2013 (World Bank 2015). Many crisis-affected people in South Darfur are still living in the refugee camps, where people in general and children and women in particular are still under the continuous threat of violence, as well as the possibility of exploitation and abuse. Speaking to some of the refugees and aid workers, I realized that accessing sustained food, water, shelter and health care support are the daily struggles for the affected population in the conflicted areas (ALNAP 2009; WHO 2014).

Despite the recently increased oil revenue, the government of Sudan remained weak in addressing the humanitarian need of the crisis-affected people (WHO, 2014). The government neither has enough resources nor access to much of Darfur to extend basic humanitarian support to crisis-affected people (WHO 2014; ALNAP 2009). The need for INGOs work particularly in the conflicted areas is well recognized (WHO 2014), but due to a number of reasons including strict government control and expulsions of INGOs (Felix da Costa 2012), the presence of INGOs in Darfur significantly decreased from 80 INGOs in 2009 to 10 INGOs in 2012 (ALNAP 2009).

The INGOs that continue to work in Sudan thus carry out their work in a very challenging situation (WHO 2014). Apart from socio-cultural factors, the challenges are heavily fueled by the government's bureaucratic impediments such as delays in obtaining technical permits, and in releasing equipment and resources from customs, as well as restriction on aid workers' movement in the field (WHO 2014; ALNAP 2009). It is very difficult to start any humanitarian activity in Sudan due to the bureaucratic impediments. For example, it takes a minimum of two months to start a new project including recruiting national staff and finalizing technical agreements. It takes about 27 weeks for an INGO to get an expatriate staff into Darfur.

The duration generally takes longer in other conflict affected areas where no fast track procedure exists. In addition, localized conflict and growing banditry, fear of abduction and hijacking and targeted violence against aid workers make INGO work all the more challenging. Importantly, INGOs are always fearful of being expelled by the government of Sudan. In 2009, 13 INGOs were expelled, including CARE, and this affected the livelihood of 7610 aid workers (i.e., 40% of aid workers) and the delivery of aid to more than half the total amount of aid in Sudan (ALNAP 2009).

1.2   INGOs, power inequality and accountability

In most cases, organizations, whether profit or non-profit, use the term "accountability" to define the scope of organizational compliance or standard of being transparent, legitimate, lawful, responsive to the targeted stakeholders or parties (Brinkerhoff 2003; Bendell 2006; Strathern 1999; Giri 1999). In the humanitarian sector, accountability is largely defined as holding actors responsible for their actions or making aid agencies report to a recognized authority whereby they are held responsible for their actions (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007; Bendell 2006; Bruen et al. 2014). Coupled with this, other scholars define accountability as the responsible use of power and suggest that accountability can be used as a frame to understand the power dynamics between service providers and the people being served (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007; Bendell 2006). At the individual level, it refers not only to being accountable for what one is expected to do or perform but to one's responsibility beyond legal minimalism, to the growth of oneself and the other and thus contributing to the creation of dignified relationships with the people they seeks to support (Giri 1999).

For the purpose of this study, in recognizing the asymmetries involved in linking international and national actors, I used the theoretical perspectives of several scholars such as

the anthropologist Paul Farmer who used "power inequality" as a basis for demystifying the meaning of accountability. He uses the concept of "Pathology of Power" to describe power inequality as a structural issue, which has a deep connection with the broader socio-economic and political structures. Taking Farmer's idea, I explored the meaning of accountability at CIS Sudan from the broader socio-cultural and political perspective (Farmer 2005). I also tried to understand how the broader cultural orientation influences the power dynamics of aid work within CIS Sudan, and with the affected people. Farmer (2005) argues that power inequality prevents the sharing of different opportunities with the affected populations, providing an idea that has important implications for the key focus of my study. As I will illustrate in this thesis, I found that aid-workers in the Sudan are highly privileged and their privileged conditions allow them to make important decisions on aid delivery for the affected population. In the absence of accountability, this arbitrary decision-making power may have a far-reaching impact on the life of affected populations; and can simply devastate the lives of the affected people who are far removed from the levers of power (Farmer 2005). Farmer's idea of power imbalance is highly relevant to the scope of my research interest, as one of the key research goals is to understand the dynamics of power imbalance in the INGO work culture. Farmer (2005) establishes a close link between power imbalance and human rights issues. Human rights violations, for Farmer (2005), are not accidental; they are not random in distribution or effect. Rights violations are, rather, symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are linked intimately to the social conditions that so often determine who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm (Farmer 2005). To understand the inner dynamics of the power imbalance and its subsequent outcomes in social structure, Farmer (2005), therefore, suggests examining the root causes of the social and economic injustice through the prism of "macro-logics of power" without sacrificing

ethnographic depth. He also asks for a deeper investigation of power and its connection with social suffering and structural violence, identifying not simply the victims and aggressors, rather finding true causes of suffering, deprivation and marginalization of powerlessness and their struggling for freedom within the dominant socioeconomic and political structure (Farmer 2005).

For Pfeiffer (2008), the power relationship in the humanitarian sector is caused by many factors including social and economic gaps between aid workers and the affected populations (see also Bernal and Grewal 2014; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007). Numerous other studies confirm that the power inequality can work in many distinct ways, and it can be very complex and multifaceted in the humanitarian context (Farmer 2005; Giri 1999; Pfeiffer 2008). Fassin (2007) describes this complexity as a politics of life or a bio-politics, in which agencies use power to control and manage people, information and interventions in the humanitarian context and multiple factors contribute to the complexity of this power inequality. Apart from insecurity, risk and accessibility issues, the complexities are also contributed by moribund social and economic structure and lack of political or governance system (Ferguson 2006), which is relevant to the context of my research in Sudan.

Fassin (2007) argues that the relationship between aid workers and the affected population is radically unequal and it constitutes the paradigmatic form of a politics of life. Humanitarian intervention, according to Fassin (2007), is a "biopolitics" or "politics of life" insofar as it sets up and manages refugee camps, establishes protected corridors in order to gain access to war casualties, develops statistical tools to measure malnutrition, and makes use of communication media to bear witness to injustice in the world. All these propositions are relevant for my research context in South Darfur, and like Fassin, I also see the humanitarian intervention in South Darfur as a politics of life (Fassin 2007). By using Fassin's perspective, I

seek to understand how this "politics of life" works in the CIS Sudan, and how the aid workers perceived the "politics of life" from the angle of accountability (Fassin 2007).

Farmer (2005) argues that the neoliberal economic policies and ideologies have rarely included the powerless, the destitute and the disadvantaged. They rather call for the subjugation of political and social life, and develop and promote a culture of silence in people affected by poverty or crisis in developing countries. Complementary to this, Sen's (2009) idea of social justice also offers a conceptual foundation for my research. The theory of justice serves as the basis of practical reasoning and critical scrutiny for judging how to reduce injustice and promote justice; impartiality and neutrality in the INGOs run humanitarian work (Sen 2009). As "justice" is ultimately connected with the way people's lives go, and not merely with the nature of the institutions surrounding them, so the idea of injustice may well be connected with behaviour and attitudes of aid workers toward the affected population, which is one of the central foci of my research. In dealing with poverty and suffering, Sen is less interested in looking at justice/injustice from the legal perspective; he is more interested in looking at it from the perspective of freedom from obstacles or unfreedom (Farmer 2005). However, Sen's (1981) idea of social justice proposes a clear pathway to understand how humanitarian intervention can ideally work for the affected population and how key barriers to humanitarian work can be removed. He emphasizes the importance of making people free from the structural barriers. One way to do this is to share information and engage the affected people in the process of humanitarian work meaningfully (HAP 2010; CHS 2015). Sen's idea of removing obstacles from the process of humanitarian work was a key direction in my research, as one my foci to identify factors that are barriers to developing and maintaining a culture of accountability at CIS Sudan.

I used culture in this study as an apparatus for understanding accountability. I used "accountability" as the condition of aid workers being responsible and answerable to the affected people. This condition is for meeting performance or services, measured against a set of standards or commitments that the CIS Sudan tries to use in its organizational context. I took a broader perspective to demystify the meaning of accountability, linking it with the broader socio-economic and political context of Sudan. My main goal was to unfold the meaning of accountability from a holistic perspective, exploring the dynamics of CIS's organizational culture in the unique humanitarian context of Sudan.

1.3   The study context and the epicenter of conflict

I focused my research on CIS Sudan, which is CARE International's program office in Sudan. CIS in Sudan works mainly in South Darfur and South Kordofan, with a focus on saving lives by providing humanitarian assistances to internally displaced people and conflict-affected populations. The current activities in the fields include primary health care, nutrition, water and sanitation, hygiene education and livelihoods support (CARE International 2016). CIS Sudan runs two hospitals in South Darfur for providing health care services to the affected population; many of them are women and children living in the refugee camps (CIS Sudan 2014). Organizationally, CIS is well known in Sudan. The country programs are aligned with international standards, policy and framework, and the operation in the fields are developed, planned and implemented by a diverse group of aid workers. CIS aid workers can be divided into three categories. In this thesis, I will name them as foreign aid worker, local aid worker and seconded (from the government of Sudan) aid worker. CIS has ten foreign aid workers in Sudan, nine of them are based in Khartoum, and the role of foreign aid workers is mainly to manage, oversee and provide timely technical and monitoring support to the field operation. CIS Sudan

has about 200 locally recruited and seconded aid workers, who are involved in a range of activities including the delivery and monitoring of aid to the affected population in Nyala, Kordofan and Kass, the epicenters of conflict (CIS Sudan 2014). For my fieldwork, I was able to travel only to Nyala and Kass. The conflict and security situation in the Kordofan had worsened during my stay in Darfur, and I was not allowed to travel to Kordofan, but I was able to interview some of the aid workers from the Kordofan office while they were visiting the Nyala office. My travels to Nyala and Kass provided me with an opportunity to witness firsthand the security situation and challenges of INGOs work in South Darfur. I travelled to Nyala on a UN plane and to Kass on a UN helicopter. For aid workers, this was the safest option to travel to these places. During my travel in the plane and the helicopter, I noted that prior to take off and the landing of the UN aircraft; all passengers were repeatedly warned not to take any photograph inside or outside the aircraft.

Arriving in Nyala, I first met Wali, one of the field staff of CIS in Nyala. He and two other local aid workers, in two vehicles, were waiting for me at the airport. One car with the logo of CIS Sudan was there to pick me up, while the other car was just to guard the first car. The CIS field office in Nyala is located in the middle of the Nyala city, about 20-25 minutes by car from the airport. On the way, I was able to see vehicles carrying people with arms. Some of those vehicles belonged to UN peace keepers, while others, according to Wali, belonged to either the Sudanese army or government-backed militia. I found the safety situation in Nyala close to that of being in the middle of a war but Wali differed from my opinion regarding the security situation. He said:

> *Nyala's security situation is better now. But still there are lots of risks. Foreign nationals are not allowed to go out alone and without a car. They are one of the targets of the bandits or armed groups. There is targeted violence and car hijacking everywhere.*

Snatching of mobile phones and moneybags is common. Please don't keep too much money in your pocket or your bag. Also don't keep your moneybag empty. In case you are stopped, don't resist, offer them whatever they ask for, and make sure that you have something to offer them.

Despite Wali's assurances, I felt very insecure every day during my fieldwork in Nyala and Kass. In talking to the aid workers of CIS Sudan and of other INGOs and UN agencies, I found that they too expressed the same fears about their life in Nyala. They mainly identified the risk associated with hijacking, abduction and banditry. In addition to the above risk, I also faced difficulties in getting a visa and government approval for my travel to the field. It took almost three months to get the visa from the Sudanese authorities for my entry into the country. And for my trip to Nyala and Kass, I had to get a separate approval from the Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC), a government agency that regulates the work of INGOs in Sudan. However, I observed the process of both approvals (one with Nyala and other with Kass) closely, and I got the impression that the role of HAC was not exactly to coordinate or facilitate the work of humanitarian organization, but to directly control the work of INGOs in the field. I found that CIS's work in the field largely depends on its relationship with HAC. CIS Sudan has recruited an aid worker in Khartoum, also in the field, whose main responsibility is to keep good relationship with the HAC – which often involves fulfilling their financial demands.

2. Research Context and Methods

The data I use in this thesis are drawn from a variety of methods including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participant observation and informal discussion with aid workers. I spent two months in Sudan for data collection. I started my fieldwork first in Khartoum, where CIS Sudan country head office is located, and then I moved to the field offices in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur, and Kass. Arriving in Khartoum, I first conducted a desk review to understand how the policies, guidelines and other documents of CIS Sudan reflect the key concept of accountability, and later I started to conduct interviews and FGDs with the aid workers. During the desk review I also took the opportunity to meet informally with a variety of aid workers including the country director, member of senior management team (SMT), head of each sector/department, to inform them about my research and also to build rapport with them. The document review and the initial meetings with aid workers helped me to understand CIS's organizational structure, policies and programs and the profile of the aid workers in Sudan.

I conducted a total of 23 interviews and 3 FGDs for my research. I purposefully selected the interviewees and FGDs participants, as I wanted them to represent diverse groups and sectors in terms of their gender, professional level, and place of work and categories of employments. However, all my respondents were Muslims. I interviewed them on the basis of their availability. Prior to the interview or FGDs, I informed all the respondents about the purpose of the research, duration and confidentiality issues. Since most aid workers did not want to be identified, I did not include their names or any other recognizable identity in the field notes or research record. I conducted the interviews and FGDs in an informal manner, by exchanging greetings, and then asking questions pertaining to my research. This approach worked well as my research participants felt comfortable to share information with me. Since I conducted interviews in an

informal manner, I did not obtain any written informed consent from the interviewees, but I requested their consent for taking notes prior to each interview. I wrote all my field notes along with interviews and FGDs in Bengali, my mother tongue, as I wanted to maintain confidentiality and safety of the data. I spent an average of one hour for each interview or FGD. I developed an interview and FGD guide, which included a set of typical questions on the research purpose. I used those typical question as a thematic guide, rather than rigid questions for conducting interviews or FGDs. Since all CIS aid workers in the headquarters and in the field offices could speak English, I used English to interview them (both local and foreign). I conducted the interviews with seconded aid workers or a few aid workers of CIS who could not speak English, in Arabic, with the help of an interpreter. The interpreter was oriented on his role and confidentiality issues prior to conducting the interviews and FGDs. The Ethical Review Board of the University of British Columbia for research in human subject approved the Ethics permission for my research (approval number: H15-01092). I also received a letter (signed by CIS Sudan Country Director dated 1 May 2015) from CIS Sudan confirming their endorsement and administrative support (for my visa and travel approval to the field) for this research.

2.1   Interviews with CIS Sudan aid workers and seconded aid workers

I conducted 15 interviews, of which five were with foreign and ten were with locally recruited aid workers. I used a general guideline to the conduct interviews, but because of different work context between headquarter and field offices; I had adjusted some of the questions according to their work context. The key accountability questions for the Khartoum based aid workers focused mainly on their role to support the field offices, and the questions for the field based aid workers focused mainly their role in relation to aid delivery or work with the affected population.

All seconded aid workers were from the Ministry of Health, but they were paid by CIS Sudan. I interviewed eight seconded aid workers who were working in CIS-funded hospitals in Kass. I selected them in a manner to represent a diverse group. During the interviews, I found out that all of them did not have a formal employment contract with the government. I heard some complaints about the selection of the seconded aid workers. Two aid workers at the hospital informed me that the selection process was unfair: some of them were selected because of their close connection with local Sudanese authority. Nonetheless, interviews with the seconded aid workers provided important insights about their own motivation to work with CIS, and how they evaluate their work with CIS in comparison to their work with the government in South Darfur.

2.2   FGDs with seconded aid workers and community gatekeepers "Shiekhs"

I conducted three FGDs: two with the seconded aid workers and one with the refugee camps leaders or "Shiekhs". I conducted all FGDs in Kass, where CIS field based aid workers closely work with "Shiekhs" to deliver health, livelihood and water and sanitation services to the refugee camps. All participants of FGDs with the seconded aid workers were female and they were working in the CIS Sudan-funded hospitals in the capacity of paramedics, nurses and support staff. Each FGD included about 6-8 individuals. I conducted FGDs with the seconded aid workers in the hospital, in the rooms that were readily available. However, the rooms I selected initially were quiet and empty but as the FGDs progressed, the attendees or visitors started to gather around the group and patients started to look for nurse or paramedics. The presence of other people at the hospital, during the FGDS affected the quality of the discussion. However, this situation was inevitable, so I tried to be focused and time-bound regarding the FGDs and its outcomes. Since none of the FGDs participants were fluent in English, I conducted all the FGDs in Arabic with the help of a local interpreter. The interpreter was oriented on the subject and the

flow of the question along with the rules of the FGDs. In addition to the interviews and FGDs as the main methods of data collection, I also engaged in participant observation (PO) and informal discussions with aid workers to collect data from the field in an informal manner. I sometimes engaged as an active participant observer and sometimes as a passive observer. I mainly observed the day-to-day interaction of aid workers at all three offices of CIS Sudan (Wolcott 1999). I engaged in informal discussions with aid workers whenever they were available during the working hours, but I also spent time with them informally out of work, during coffee or tea time or having lunch or dinner with aid workers on one-to-one or on a group basis.

I completed the detailed writing on each interview and FGDs immediately after the interview or FGD was conducted. Sometimes, I took notes while I was also observing and participating in the event, but in most cases, I took detailed notes immediately after the event. My field notes included text not only on my observational and informal discussions with the aid workers, but also description on the surrounding and environment and local vocabulary or terms used by the aid workers. My interest was not only to get the knowledge but also to understand the context or the process of getting the knowledge (Hastrup 2004). While analyzing the narratives, this information was very useful for understanding the contextual and communication meaning of the data generated from the interviews and FGDs (Altheide 1987). I analyzed the narratives from interviews and FGDs and filed notes by using coding techniques for finding and marking the underlying meaning of each idea and also by grouping similar ideas and information together in categories and relating different accountability related ideas and themes to one another (Emerson et al. 1995). I started the analysis of the data with the open coding, and then I did the focused coding. During the open coding, I read all narratives line by line to find issues, themes, ideas related to key themes of my research. I found many distinct ideas about aid

workers' understandings of accountability during the open coding and I used them to develop or categorize concepts. In focused coding, I thoroughly read and recorded all narratives to find thematic focus of my research interest on accountability and its connection with key cultural dynamics. Apart from open and focused coding, I also categorized varied ideas from the narratives to develop common concepts on the meaning and implication of the accountability and presented them in the main findings. I used many direct quotes in my thesis to support key arguments on my key research topics. During closed coding I also used memos to draw major conclusion on different chapters of my thesis, including final conclusion.

There are a few limitations in this study, and one of them is that the duration of the interviews with some aid workers in the field was relatively short. This was mainly because the field-based aid workers were very busy with their routine work. The discussions in some of the interviews with field-based aid workers took an interesting turn and as a researcher I was very tempted to go deeper into the subject, but because of the priority of their work and agreed inflexibility, I had to cut the length of the discussion within the time pre-set for the interview. Additionally, the venues, where I conducted FGDs, were not very conducive and the quality of discussion was sometimes affected by the interference of the visitors or people surrounding the group. Although I collected sufficient data during my stay in the field for about two months, the duration of stay in the field could have been little longer so that I could have engaged myself more deeply with the aid workers in the field and their interaction with the affected population. However, because of the security situation in the field and risk associated with my presence as a foreign visitor, CIS Sudan wanted me to complete my fieldwork within the agreed timeframe.

3. Understanding Accountability

Defining accountability is important for the work of INGOs, because the meaning clarifies the underlying roles and responsibilities of aid workers: who is accountable for what and to whom (Ebrahim 2010)? It also provides guidance to the INGOs on how it should ensure the timely implementation of targeted goals and outcomes. In the context of my research, I found that aid workers in Sudan use a wide range of words or terms to express their understanding of "accountability", and the most frequently used words or terms were "respect", "dignity", "responsibility", "duty", "honesty", "commitment", and "promise." Aid workers mostly use these words to explain the meaning of accountability in relation to their work, role and relationship with the people they work with or for. Hamid, for example, relates accountability with "self-respect" or "respect for other" and expresses his understanding with the following examples:

> *To respect others is to respect myself. Unless I respect myself I can't respect others. I can't respect my colleagues unless I respect myself. My respect to myself depends on many things. For example, as a manager if I don't come to office in time, I can't expect my staff to come to office in time. If I (as a manager) don't visit (refugee) camps and know the real situation, I can't expect my staff to do so.*

Some aid workers use the term "responsibility" to explain their understanding of accountability. By responsibility, they mean responsiveness or taking responsibility for the task they are assigned to deliver to the affected population. Ali, one of the aid workers in the field, said to me that being a fellow Sudanese he feels a strong sense of responsibility for his work to support the affected refugee population. He said, *"They (refugees) are our own people (neighbour), I know them personally. To support them… with food, water is my responsibility*." Ali said to me that his experience of witnessing suffering of the affected people made him responsible. Hosna, (a female aid worker seconded from the government and she works as a nurse in the CIS funded

hospital in Kass also expressed similar understanding. She said, *"I am responsible for my work. I help them (women and children) whenever they come. I am always ready to help them".* She added, *"If I don't help them, they will suffer. There is no other place to go for them."* Some aid workers described "honesty" or "integrity" as the most important virtue to work with the affected population. Noor, an aid worker in the field, said to me that to be honest means to speak truth and be genuine to the affected population. He expressed his understanding of accountability as follows:

> People (refugees in the camp) are very aware of us (aid workers). They always observe us and judge us. They see our clothes …also see if we have an expensive watch, phone, etc. They think we are rich (privileged) and they are poor (disadvantaged). They always make this comparison. They also judge our behaviours and attitudes. If we are not sincere and honest to them, they don't trust us.

A few aid workers defined accountability in relation to integrity and they said integrity has deep connection with aid workers' personal behaviours and attitudes. Samad, an aid worker in the field, said, *"When I go to the field, I try to be simple. I use simple language… so they feel respected."* He added, *"Without being honest one can't be respectful and simple to them (refugees)."* Laila, a female aid worker in the field, said that for her accountability means to be obedient to her duties, the job descriptions that CIS Sudan has outlined for her. She said, *"I have some specific duties. I have to deliver those duties. I am committed to delivering those services to the community."*

Keeping a promise is very important in Sudanese culture, and the subject of promise came up many times in my discussions with aid workers. Many aid workers in the field mentioned that keeping their promise with the affected population is immensely important. Hamid said, *"Unless you have something to offer them (refugees), never promise them. If you promise them, you must deliver it to them."* Coupled with this, Musa said, *"Promise creates*

expectation in refugees and if you don't deliver them ...as you promise to them, they don't trust you. Once you fail to deliver your promise, they don't trust you anymore." Wali said, *"It takes a lot of effort to build relationship with HAC, but sometimes one simple mistake can ruin everything. Keeping and delivering promise is important."*

In my discussions with the aid workers, they frequently uttered the word "commitment" in relation to accountability. Laila said, *"I work for the people (refugees). I am committed to my work, I try to do my job and I try to complete my task in time."* Noor said, *"I express my commitment through my work. I work hard and comply with the rules (of CIS Sudan). I am committed to helping them (refugees)."* Nazmul, a senior manager in the field, mentioned to me that keeping a promise is important in Sudan because of Islamic faith. By citing a Hadith (the tradition of Prophet Mohammed) he said, *"There are three signs of a bad person: lying, not keeping the promise and not returning an item that someone has asked you to take care of."*

There were also other opinions regarding the commitment. During FGDs, a group of aid workers mentioned that it was the health condition of the affected people (mostly women and children) in the camps that made them committed to the health service work. By giving specific examples of living conditions in the refugee camps, one nurse said, *"They (refugees) in the camps live in inhuman conditions and they have been living in such condition for many years. They hardly can depend on government health services. This clinic (CIS assisted) is the main hope for them for getting support on the health care."* Another midwife said, *"If we don't serve them, they will die."* During FGDs, health workers repeatedly said that they worked with many limitations. One hospital administrator said, *"Sometimes medicine is not available, electricity is not available. We don't get our salary in time. But we keep on serving people."* Some health

workers during the FGD indicated that they personally knew many affected people, and this had compelled them to be committed and sincere in their work for the refugees.

During interviews and FGDs, aid workers discussed accountability taking into consideration the local culture and context. Insecurity was one of the key considerations for the accountability discussion among aid workers in the field (CHS Report 2015). With few exceptions, most of the aid workers in the field informed me that lack of security was the key barrier to making aid workers accountable to their work. Nazmul and Aziz opposed this view. Nazmul, an aid work in the field, said, *"The issue of security is not a problem. It is an excuse for some aid workers. They don't want to go to the field: it is hard work for them. I go to the field regularly and I enjoy it. I have good relationship with people (the affected people). They accept me."* Aziz, a foreign aid worker, said, *"Both foreign and local aid workers sometime use security as an excuse for not traveling to or working with the affected populations."* Giving specific examples of two senior aid workers (one of them is local and both are based in Khartoum) he said *"None of them have visited the field in the last six months."*

The personal orientations (upbringing, education, rural-urban etc.), both local and foreign aid workers, had significant influence on their accountability understanding, so was the influence of faith and family orientation (CHS Report 2015). I found significant variations in the understanding of accountability, mostly between the aid workers working in the field and the head offices, and also between local and foreign aid workers. I noticed that the aid workers in the field had a tendency to define accountability in relation to their work with the affected population, whereas aid workers stationed in the head office had a tendency to define accountability from the broader organizational compliance such as management, transparency, information sharing, communication, decision making, etc.

During desk reviews, I found that CIS has a strong commitment to its accountability to the affected population issue. The international office of the CIS has developed a number of important documents on accountability. Some of the aid workers in the head office and a few in the fields informed me that they had attended a brief orientation session on accountability, but they were interested in knowing more about the subject. However, I noticed that those aid workers, who had received an orientation, described their accountability understanding from the organizational compliance perspective. Kerem, a foreign aid worker, said, *"Accountability is my right to decision making."* Farid, an aid worker in the field, said, *"CIS management doesn't share information with field office."* Ayesha informed me that the management and leadership over the past few years changed frequently and it affected the organization negatively. She said, *"We need strong and stable leadership. Our management also should be fair in decision making."* Ayesha also indicated that there is a culture of favouritism (both ethnic and regionalism) and unfair practice in the CIS Sudan workplace, and this discouraged her to be committed or accountable to her work with CIS. Indicating a relationship between a manager and a local female aid worker, she said, *"This kind of relationship destroys the work culture. Everyone knows about it but no one can do anything."* Along with Ayesha, a few other aid workers in the field as well as in the head office discussed accountability in relation to favouritism and unfair practice, and they pointed out that these negative practices are the key barrier to the culture of organizational accountability. An aid worker in the field told me in confidence that despite all the qualification, he had not been selected for an international training program. He said, *"The person who was selected for this training… was close to our manager (both belonging to the same ethnic group). I was upset and unhappy about it."* Noor, an aid worker in the field, mentioned to me that over the last few years many aid workers were fired on

the basis of quick management decision. He said, *"Not that all of them (who lost their jobs) were bad, or some of them were good. They are not given the opportunity to defend. It was unfair."*

3.1 "Accountability is my relationship with others": The case of Hamid

Hamid, a senior aid worker with whom I spent considerable time discussing his experiences of working with CIS in general and issues of accountability in particular, had this to say:

> *I have been working with INGOs for more than 10 years. During my work with INGOs, I saw how people suffered in Darfur. I saw how children, women and elderly people suffered in the refugee camps: they are still suffering. They are still without enough food, their children can't go to school ... and they don't live in proper houses, my work does not need me to visit the refugee camps frequently, but I visit the camps quite often for the purpose of monitoring. I go there to make sure that medicine (for clinics), fuel (for water pump) and other product (solar system, food, etc.) reach the community in time. When I see them, I think of my own family. My family could have been in their situation.....my children could have been in this situation...When I visit the camp, people in the camp offer me food or drinks. They are poor, they don't have much to offer, and sometime what they offer is also not hygienic but I accept it. I eat it. Just to respect them. If I don't eat it, they will be offended. I like the way they respect me. I feel obligation to support them. I feel a deep connection with them. This connection is important for all aid workers.*

Hamid told me that he had been working with CIS for the last 6-7 years and had witnessed many challenges and changes in the organization over the past few years. Being a local resident, he also witnessed the whole crisis in South Darfur. He shared how he and his other colleagues in the INGOs played their role in supporting humanitarian work for the crisis-affected populations. He said that some of his neighbours were directly affected by the Darfur crisis and he saw their suffering very closely. He said, *"I saw them....before they had everything....and now they live in the camps. Their children can't go to school. Their women live in the camps. This is unfortunate, this is their fate."*

According to Hamid, the building of relationships with the affected population is immensely important for humanitarian work. He said to me that this feeling for - and his connection with - the affected population encouraged him to be committed to his work. But

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unfortunately, he said, not all aid workers were equally sensitive or empathetic to the suffering of the affected people, and CIS also could not do anything unless the aid workers felt the need for the affected population. He said, *"If we hear, we forget, but if we see them, we can remember them, we can understand them."* Like Hamid, Saim, another aid worker in the field, mentioned that his experiences of working with the refugee have changed his mindset. He said, *"I am happy that I am able to help them. I know many of them (refugees) personally: I have good relationship with them. They always respect me. I enjoy working with them."*

Regarding the accountability to the affected population, several aid workers mentioned that one of the key challenges of CIS' work in the field is to find qualified aid workers. For Hamid and others, qualified aid workers are those who are committed, empathetic and willing to work with the affected people. This is, for them, immensely important, as CIS work in the field is difficult due to lack of security and risks. Like Hamid and Saim, a few other aid workers in the field emphasized the need for being respectful, genuine and sensitive to the need of the affected population. They expressed the need for better understanding of the affected population in relation to their need, expectation and cultural orientation.

3.2   Faith, family and the local culture on accountability

Islam is not a state religion in Sudan, but the influence of Islamic faith and Arabism is strongly evident in the culture of North Sudan or Darfur (Francis 2001). The faith had a strong influence on the accountability understanding of many local aid workers who follow Islam as their religious faith. I noticed the direct influence of the Islamic faith on some local aid workers' accountability practice. Noor said, *"Even though I work for an NGO my true motivation is Allah."* He added, *"My faith motivates me to do good work."* Nazmul, a manager in the field, said, *"I pray five times. I am fasting now (this was the month of Ramadan). I try to be*

responsible…. because my religion (Islam) teaches me. It teaches me how to be kind even to my enemies." Musa, another aid worker in the field, told me that he sees Islam (the teachings he received from the Islamic school) as a way of life. The teaching of Islam motivates him for his current work with CIS. He said, *"It (Islam) teaches one how to be fair…with the poor and vulnerable. It promotes hygiene (gave example of mandatory washing of body prior to five times prayer in a day)."* Along with faith, the family orientation also had strong influence on aid workers' understanding of accountability. Some aid workers mentioned that they were motivated for their good work by their parents and family members. Hasan said, *"My father taught me how to be independent, work hard, and how to respect other people. He is not alive, but I follow his words."* Abir, a technical advisor in the field, said:

> *I always try to serve people. I try to help people. I share my knowledge with my colleagues. I also share my knowledge with people in the camp (when he visits them). I like my work ... I like the way I work with them (refugees) in the camp. I learned all these from my family. My parents were very supportive to us (he and his other siblings). They motivated us.*

Nazmul, a manager in the field, said, *"I learned how to work with other people and how to accept the other from my father. He (his father) taught me that the easiest way to be accepted by the other is to learn how to accept the other."* Nazmul told me that he uses the lesson that he learned from his father in all aspects of his life including work. Giving specific examples of his working relationship with fellow workers, he said, *"I try to be fair with everyone….I treat all my coworkers equally."* In fact, some aid workers including a senior manager praised Nazmul for his friendly attitudes and good relationship with aid workers in the field office. But a few aid workers were also critical of him for being too friendly (and biased) to some aid workers. One local aid worker accused him for not being fair on an important management decision. However,

because of the small workplace and sensitivity of the issues, I was not able to verify the truth behind the claim.

The local culture and traditional norms also had an influence on the aid workers' understanding of accountability. During interviews, many aid workers indicated that they always remain aware of the culture of the affected population, particularly about the impact on their interaction (attitudes, behaviours, dress-up, etc.) with the affected populations. Hamid said:

They (affected people living in the camps) are generally very sensitive to us (aid workers). They always observe us. They also have certain expectations from the aid workers." Noor said, *"Some affected people in the camps see foreign aid workers' behaviours as threat to local culture. That's why we always train them (aid workers). We inform them prior to going to the field.*

Similarly, Musa had this to say:

We ask our people (local aid workers) to wear simple dress, and warn them not to show their wealth (such as mobile phone, watch, etc.) to them (the affected people). Ismail said, *"One of our foreign aid workers bought traditional Sudanese clothes and sandals, and whenever he visited the camps, he wore them. People in the camp liked him a lot. They used to make fun of him. He was very popular.*

The "cultural sensitivity" and "protection and respect for the affected population" are not new issues in the humanitarian sector (HAP 2010; FAO 2011). Over the last two decades, humanitarian guardians produced a number of standards, policy and code of conduct (CoC) on the subject. And many NGOs or INGOs used those standards or CoC to improve efficiency of aid workers in general and the attitudes and behaviours toward the affected population in particular (CHS 2015; HAP 2010). Being an active member of Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance, CIS adopted CoC in its workplace. One human resource manager said to me that according to Human Resource Policy, all newly recruited aid workers should read, understand and sign the CoC, but a few aid workers in the field informed me that they never read it. None of the seconded aid workers (who were working in the CIS funded hospital) that attended in the

FGDs were familiar with the CoC. They said no one gave them the copy of this document or asked them to read or sign it. One aid worker informed me that he read the CoC in English but he never saw a copy of this document in Arabic.

4. Culture of Accountability

Delivering humanitarian aid in an effective and timely manner in a highly insecure environment is a common challenge for INGOs. In the crisis context, the risk and lack of security affects the delivery of aid to the affected population and can also create mounting challenges for an organization regarding its management, project or aid operation and decision making issues. I found that INGO work in Sudan is extremely challenging, and lack of security is the main contributing factor to this challenge. Apart from the violence between groups, conflict and targeted attack on the aid workers, the challenges were also largely caused by the government's policy to control the work of INGOs. However, the aid workers who participated in this research indicated a range of security and risk-related challenges in their work within the CIS office and, in the field, with the affected population. I will explain how the lack of security and risk affected the aid operation and the overall culture of accountability at the CIS workplace.

In Nyala, I received the first update on the field security situation from Wali, a local resident, who has been working with CIS for the last two years. I spent a good amount of time with him in the field and he shared important information about the general security situation and specific challenges for CIS work in the field. I found him to be an easygoing and light-hearted person, who generally stayed positive. In my initial discussions with Wali, he was reluctant to confess that the security situation in South Darfur was bad, but with additional discussion, he gradually shared many concerns and issues about the security situation and how the lack of security affected the CIS work in the field. Wali mentioned that aid workers work under extreme threats in South Darfur and lack of security is the main barrier to implement projects on time in Nyala. Citing example of Janjaweed, an ununiformed militia group backed by Sudanese

government, active particularly in the South Darfur, he explained his concern on the security situation in the field as follows:

> *They are militia (widely believed to be responsible for killing of black ethnic groups) who are loyal to government and the government authorizes them with certain power. If something happens against government they can kill anyone anywhere some time even without reason. Carjacking is a big problem. Local militia also affects the schedule of our program from time to time. There are some clashes between government and rebels in rural areas, especially in dry season. During rainy season it is relatively less because the roads are muddy and it is difficult to move.*

In my discussion with Hamid, he also expressed his concern about the security situation. He mentioned that because of lack of security, it is difficult to get access to the refugee camps. He said, *"We work in the community through 'Sheikhs', local refugee leaders. Sheikhs look after our security in the camps. Without their support, it is difficult to reach the affected population."* A large majority of these affected people in the camps are Black African Muslims (who are eliminated by Arab Muslims known to be supported by Sudanese government) and they include both internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnee refugees. Due to the protracted conflict, insecurity and trauma aggravate fears of return; IDPs have become long-term residents in many camps in South Darfur and have grown accustomed to dependency on free aid and a more urbanized lifestyle (CARE Sudan 2013)

Saim, another aid worker in the field, indicated that lack of security is a general challenge for the CIS work in the field, and aid workers' ability to cope with the security challenge depends on a number of factors including their seriousness and commitment to the work, personal motivation and relationship with their supervisor. Giving specific examples, Saim added that the supervisor-supervisee relationship greatly affects the aid workers' commitment to the work. Hamid said:

The relationship is important in our society. If we want to work together, we must respect each other. I am a manager and when I come to office, the first thing I do, I try to understand the behaviour of my (subordinates) staff. I try to understand their mind. It helps me to develop a good relationship with them.

During interviews at the Nyala field office; most of the aid workers informed me that they were unsatisfied with their general working relationship at the office and the relationship with their respective supervisor in particular. I also found that there were several factions or groups among aid workers at the Nyala office. In this regard, one of the groups, according to some of the aid workers, is loyal to the government of Sudan, while the other group is known to be loyal to the CIS. It was reported that those aid workers known to be loyal to the government were recruited (with the influence of HAC), and they always try to serve the interest of government. Aid workers loyal to them generally enjoy certain power because of their close connection with the Sudanese authority. They, according to a senior manager at the Nyala office, are unproductive at work; they don't uphold CIS mandate or organizational policy.

Aziz, a senior manager at Khartoum office, indicated that making local aid workers accountable to the job to which they are assigned is the key challenge for the organization. Specifying the name of an advisor, who is based in Khartoum, he said, "*He doesn't come to office in time. He hardly visits the field office. He has been working with us about a year, and he has never visited the field. He is also not supportive of other staff in the office.*" Aziz added some of the local aid workers are very arrogant because of their close affiliation with the local authority. Giving example of the same advisor (as indicated above) he said:

He is arrogant. He hardly has any respect for our (organizational) mandate. We are seriously thinking of (firing) him. But the problem is that we can't take any immediate decision against him. In Sudan, there is a funny law for NGOs, if we (INGO) want to fire a local staff; we need to pay him a six-month salary. This is a problem.

A section of aid workers, mostly foreigners, informed me that government was responsible for creating many bureaucratic challenges for INGOs. They said that the government always tried to find fault of NGOs on many issues and occasions. One foreign aid worker indicated that the government tried to control some NGOs by using "divide and rule" tricks. He said, *"They (government) tried to create friction among NGOs and try to get benefits from this conflict".* Jara, another foreign aid worker, said that the government did not like NGOs to talk or work on a number of issues including women's right, human rights, and advocacy issues. She added:

> *I am generally very careful with my words. When I go to attend any meeting outside (with government or NGOs) I always try to be aware of my words. Sometimes I even do not talk, I just listen, because my words can be misinterpreted. It is better to be silent. They (government) also don't want to see women to be leading a discussion. They want to see women to be submissive.*

One of the aid workers in Nyala said, *"You can't trust those security guards or radio operators[2]. They are recruited by HAC and they belong to government. They pass on information to the government. We can't hide anything. Anything that happens inside (in the compound) is shared with outside authority (HAC)."* Another aid worker in Nyala said, *"You can't trust anyone here. I don't share anything to anyone. It is risky to share or trust."*

Apart from the anecdotal evidence presented above, the issue of security was clearly evident during my stay in the field offices in Nyala. I stayed in Nyala at the CIS guesthouse, which was located in the CIS office compound. The office compound was tightly secured with high fences and a fulltime security guard guarded each entrance. The security officer in the field and CIS management at the head office strictly regulated the movement of all foreign aid

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[2] They are local Sudanese, and they are accused spying for the government (such as sharing information about people and assets of CIS Sudan).

workers. During my stay at CIS guesthouse, I took the opportunity to speak to several local aid

workers informally and they shared several incidents of the security issue. Hasan, a local aid

worker, informed that some rival group attacked Nyala offices. He said:

> *This group is basically led by a few old aid workers of CIS, who were fired because of some corruption allegation. They are unemployed, and try to do harm to CIS. They are loyal to the government, but they also have connection with staff inside our office."* Another aid worker indicated the existence of this rival group saying, *"Here (at the CIS office) we can't trust anyone. It is also a problem for our work in the field. They are everywhere……and they (rival group) don't like us to be professional at our work. They think we are loyal to CIS.*

Gulzar, an aid worker in Nyala who witnessed the attack on the Nyala office, identified the

following reason behind the attack on the CIS office:

> *The issue of the budget and money caused the criminal attack on the office. The information that we discuss easily goes out, particularly information about money. The information spreads and it brings high risks. That is why we do it (financial dealing or maintaining money) in a different way. We keep it secret. We plan for five things and we do one thing.*

The aid workers' loyalty to government, according to some foreign aid workers, is a key

management and workplace concern for CIS Sudan not only in the field but also in the Khartoum

office. During my interviews with Khartoum-based foreign aid workers, a section of them

indicated that the government was responsible for making aid work challenging for INGOs. They

said that government was using local aid workers as a means to exercise power. Aziz said,

"Some local aid workers are also using their connections with the local authority as an

opportunity to sustain their work with the respective INGO." Another foreign aid worker, who

is part of CIS management team, said, *"The government of Sudan tries to put pressure on us.*

They do it by the help of those aid workers (who are loyal to them). They influence staff

recruitment. They recruit people who are loyal to them and serve their purpose."

Apart from lack of security and risk, the culture of work across all three offices I visited

was affected by inter-personal conflicts. Even though it was not the focus of my study to unfold

the reason for the conflict, the interview narratives clearly show that the inter-personal conflict

was fueled by many underlying factors including lack of information sharing, lack of fairness

(mostly by supervisor) and the negative attitudes. Overall, all these factors affected the culture of

teamwork and aid delivery decision-making in the field. It was clearly evident that there was a

significant lack of trust in team works in all three offices. One aid worker in the field expressed

deep frustration about his working relationship in the office. He said the situation was worse

now. Sharing his past experiences of working with CIS, he added:

> *We had a good team in the past. I will never forget those days. We used to celebrate CARE day. Sometimes we used to go for the picnic (yearly retreat) with families. It helped us to socialize. In Ramadan (Muslim month of fasting), CIS used to organize Iftar party (breaking of fasting). Frankly speaking, CIS now spends zero money for the staff. We are not happy about it. Two to three years ago, the office used to supply tea and snacks at work. These little things used to make us happy. But now nothing is provided.*

Overall, the risk, lack of security and inter-personal conflict established what I call a culture of

complaints at the CIS workplace, and complaints were equally evident in all CIS three offices I

visited. I noticed a pattern of complaints among the CIS staff, in which most of the complaints

from the field offices and head office were directed towards the manager, senior manager and

international staff.

4.1   Loyalty, injustice and the culture of silence

The impact of workers' job insecurity and associated fear on the overall work culture in general

and the productivity of the worker in particular is common (Reisel et al. 2010). I noticed the

constant fear and worry of losing jobs among many locally recruited aid workers I interviewed in

all three offices. Several factors caused this worry, including funding shortage, disliking or being

not favored by a boss and the potential allegation of misuse of resources and lack of productivity. Referring to past experiences of those who lost jobs, some aid workers also indicated that some of those workers who lost jobs in the past were not only alleged to have involvement in corruption or productivity issues, but also had unprofessional or unlawful connection with the government. By unprofessional or unlawful, they meant that those aid workers were loyal to the government and they were sharing information with government, and some aid workers used this loyalty as a means to exercise power in the CIS workplace. My interviews with aid workers revealed that the fear or worry of losing jobs had deep connection with aid workers' state of commitment to and motivation for the work at CIS. Noor, a field-based aid worker, mentioned to me that he always remained in fear of losing his job and he developed this fear from his direct experiences of working with CIS Sudan. He said:

> *A few years back there was something wrong. I can't remember what it was exactly. But we saw one colleague was fired because of some allegation. Most probably it was related to corruption. It was so quick. SMT (Senior Management Team) took immediate decision against him. He was fired. He lives in this area and he is still jobless. I don't know how he survives.*

During the interviews, some aid workers in the field indicated that their immediate source of fear was their line manager or supervisor, who they found not always fair and considerate. One aid worker in Kass indicated that working in the field was too difficult for him. He said professionalism and productivity were not the only criteria by which he could make his supervisor or line manager happy. He said, *"Unless I am loyal to him, whatever hard work or amount of work I do will bring no result. I have to say yes to him for everything. He is a good person, but when it comes to the question of liking, he only likes those who are loyal to him."* Another aid worker in the field said to me that he hardly had any decision making power. His supervisor who was the head of office made all decisions in the field office. He said, *"We (all*

aid workers in general) are not involved in any decision making. SMT or head of office makes

the decisions. We just follow them." I found similar reflection from other aid workers I

interviewed in Nyala and Khartoum. These reflections, in my opinion, portray a sort of culture of

silence at the CIS workplace, in which general aid workers are not encouraged to raise or ask

question about the decision made by their supervisor or managers. Both local and foreign aid

workers indicated that loyalty to the supervisor was one of the key criteria for securing job at

CIS. Some aid workers interpreted the loyalty as the obeying of what the supervisor said without

questioning. Several aid workers expressed their frustration about this practice. Hasan, an aid

worker in the field, expressed his frustration regarding his supervisor in the following words:

> *I don't know how he (his supervisor) got this job. He is too young to get this job. He
> doesn't have enough experiences or skills. The only skill he has is… he can speak Arabic.
> But does it suffice to make good decision? In his position, we need a different person. A
> person who can guide us, lead us….who can make good decision, I don't think he is a good
> manager.*

As the above quote suggests, while aid workers may be frustrated over their relations with their

supervisors, few would dare to engage in an open confrontation with them for fear of losing their

jobs. In other words, their job insecurity contributes to the perpetuation of what I have called the

cultural of silence in this thesis.

5. Accountability and Power Inequality

The power inequality between aid workers and the affected population is well documented in the anthropological literature. There are scholars who have shown how the inequalities of power in the humanitarian setting prevent sharing of different opportunities with the affected population (Farmer 2003; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007). There is also evidence to show how job insecurity and competition for career growth among aid workers (fueled by funding shortage) affect the workplace relationship. In the following section I explain what constitutes the power disparity among aid workers and how it affects the aid delivering decision-making process at CIS Sudan.

From the interview narratives and informal discussion with aid workers, I found significant power disparity among aid workers in the CIS workplace. This power disparity existed not only between foreign and local aid workers but also between the local aid workers of different strata. I found that the power inequalities at the CIS workplaces were caused or fueled by several intrinsic factors including hierarchy, income, local-foreign status, affiliation with government, etc. Laila, an aid worker in the field, informed me that the aid workers are immensely powerful in the field, compared to the affected people living in the refugee camps. She said, *"The people in the camps are helpless. When I visit them in the camps, I can see them…how vulnerable they are. Compared to them, we have better life. We have house…food…our children go to School."* She added that the aid workers were powerful and this power was clearly manifested in their life-style (dress-up, use of expensive mobile phone, etc.) and the way they communicate with the affected population.

Musa, another aid worker in the field, informed me that the affected population is very helpless in the camps. He said, *"We mainly work with the camp leaders or 'Sheikhs'. We hardly have any direct communication with them (the affected population). The camp is controlled by*

the leaders." However, the FGDs with camp leaders or 'Sheikhs' revealed that some of the camps leaders have direct communication with the CIS management and they consider this relationship as mutually beneficial. During FGDs, a Sheikh said, *"I have the phone number of the manager and I can talk to him any time. He is a nice person. He always talks to me and takes my advice."* However, the comparison between the FGDs (with Sheikhs) and the interview (with aid workers) narratives show that there are ignorable power imbalances that exist between aid workers and camp leaders. Some aid workers indicated that the camp leaders, on the issues of accessing the camps and ensuring security of aid workers in the field, were more powerful than the aid workers. My observation on the life-style of the camp leaders also confirms that they are powerful because of their social and economic status and their connection with influential groups including local authority or government and INGOs. I found one of the camp leaders was working as an administrative officer in the CIS supported local clinic.

However, during interviews and informal discussions with aid workers, I found the presence of strong power inequality among aid workers themselves. Many aid workers reported to me that they were subject to injustice and or mistreated by their immediate supervisors or aid workers senior to them in terms of position. Aid workers from all three offices indicated that misuse of power; autocracy and arbitrary decision-making by their supervisor or senior managers were the key barriers to establishing a culture of accountability at the CIS workplace. They also identified the same factors as the barriers to establishing teamwork, better working relationships and specifically improving the relationship between the aid worker and the manager at the CIS workplace. Hamid, one of the managers in the field, informed me that one important challenge for CIS' work in the field was the conflict between the supervisor and the supervisee. Many field level aid workers are de-motivated because of their bad relationship with the supervisor. He said,

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"There is a gap between the supervisor and the staff (supervisee). They are too powerful. Their vision is narrow. They dictate on many things. This makes us unhappy. We lost our interest in work."

Regarding the power exercised by the supervisor, an aid worker in the field informed me that being a technical person, he is supposed to attend a monthly meeting at the local health authority but he was not able to attend the meeting because of his supervisor. He said, *"Even though he (his supervisor) is not the right person (technically health expert), he doesn't know many things (about health projects), and....he attends the meeting. I do not help the project."* He also added that it was difficult for him to argue with his supervisor regarding this issue, as he was afraid that it might make his relationship with his supervisor worse. It might be more difficult to work with his supervisor. However, overall, the inter-personal conflict was the most commonly identified problem in the CIS workplace. Aid workers, regardless of their types, strongly identified conflict between aid workers as the key barrier to the teamwork in all three CIS offices. Hamid, a manager in the field, said, *"The conflict destroys commitment of aid workers. It creates unhappiness and chaos in the workplace"*. Another aid worker in the field said, *"I do a minimum job. I know my hard work won't make him (his manager) happy. He doesn't like me. It affects my happiness at home (with his family)."*

Overall, I found that aid workers at the CIS workplace were visibly divided and or in the conflicting relationship to each other. This conflicting relationship had huge impact on their accountability relationship and commitment to work. Some aid workers expressed deep concern regarding the attitudes, behaviours and management style of their supervisors. They were clearly unhappy with their supervisors. At least three aid workers admitted to me that they had a very difficult relationship with their respective supervisors but they could not leave the job or could

not do anything to improve the situation. One aid worker said: *"I have no choice. I need to support my family. It is not easy to get a job. I just follow what he (his supervisor) asked me to do. I adapted myself to the situation…I am here just working for money."* Other aid worker said, "I am trying to survive here". For the latter, the meaning of survival was to involve him in survival politics. He said: *"I created good friendship with X (a field manager), as I know he has good relationship with Y (a senior manager) at the CIS office in Khartoum."* In the following section I present two case studies of how the general aid workers work with their respective supervisors who they found very difficult to work with, and how they involved themselves in the survival politics to secure their job or maintaining reasonable working relationship with their supervisors.

On the discussion around work culture issues, I received contrasting responses from aid workers. A large section of aid workers, many of them foreigners, related the discussion on accountability and the work culture issues in relation to the role of government. They blamed the government for being responsible for creating INGO work cultures challenging or below the general standard. They said that government always tried to put pressure on them and or made the INGO work unnecessarily challenging. One senior manager said, *"They always try to control us and divide us for their own benefits. This has resulted in mistrust, conflicts and lack of teamwork in the INGO."* An aid worker in the field said, *"There is misunderstanding between government and NGOs … there are gaps in communication."*

Another section of aid workers, many of them local, blamed the CIS senior management in the Khartoum office (most of them are foreign aid workers) for being responsible for many ongoing management, communication and relational problems at the CIS workplace. They said it was the senior management who made the ultimate decision regarding the organizational issues

and they should be blamed for the current situation. The aid workers of both origins (foreign and local) from all three offices indicated that the current management practice had many limitations that needed to be overcome. They indicated the importance of improving information sharing and decision-making, and the promotion of fairness, justices and accountability through policy and practices. They also wanted to see their managers to be fair, supportive, and easy-going and open to criticism on all aspect of their work.

5.1   Job insecurity and survival politics

The role of NGOs/INGOs can be motivated or driven by particular philosophy, ideology or faith, but generally INGOs are apolitical organizations. Malkki (2015) says the practice of politics in and around INGOs is common in any given context. Bernal and Grewal (2014) in their book "Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism" claim that the everyday politics of NGOs may be simultaneously local, national and transnational. INGOs face a range of political challenges in the humanitarian setting. During interviews, several aid workers, both local and foreign, shared with me that the funding shortage or funding cuts by the western donors had a direct relationship with Sudan's relationship with the western governments. One aid worker said, *"Following the expulsion of INGOs in 2009, the presence of INGOs and funding markedly decreased in Sudan."*

Some aid workers in the field informed me that the resulting shortage of funds increased internal competition among aid workers for securing their jobs at CIS. Many local aid workers said that sustaining a job at CIS became increasingly difficult for them. They faced enormous challenges from their supervisors to sustain their job. Some said that they try to engage themselves in the politics (this is what I call a survival politics) just to secure their job. The following section presents two case studies of survival politics, in which two aid workers from

the fields shared their experiences of survival politics with me: why and how they engaged in the survival politics.

5.2 Case one: "I know my boss: He wants everyone to listen to him"

Through the following narrative, one aid worker shared how he improved his relationship with his manager, who was the head of one field office, after having a difficult relationship with his boss for some time. The aid worker said:

> *I have been working with this manager for about one year. I did not have a good relationship with him. A few months ago, my relationship with him was very bad. One day I argued with him. It was a difficult time for me. I could not sleep….. I was upset and very afraid of losing my job. I thought I would leave my job. I spoke to my wife and she told me not to leave the job. She said, 'we have a family, children'. I also thought about it. And it is not easy to get a job here. I then tried to understand him… he liked to control. He liked everyone to listen to him. Even though a person (an aid worker) who does not work hard, or does not go to the field, he or she still can be favoured by him (liked by his manager).*

Accordingly, he changed his strategy to work with his manager. Now he has a relatively better relationship with his manager. He said instead of working hard, he now tries to keep good relationship with him. He added, *"Even though it is difficult to accept him totally, unless I get a new job, I have to listen to him. I have to accept him."*

5.3 Case two: "I know I have to find my own way to secure my job"

Through the following narrative, another aid worker in the field shared his experiences of how he established a good relationship with a senior manager based in the Khartoum office as a means to secure his job. He said:

> *When the new head of office joined, many of us were not happy about him. He was too young to be a manager. His attitude also was not likeable. I did not have bad relationship with him. But I was always afraid of his motive (decision making). Since he was my manager (supervisor) and my job (promotion, salary increment, etc.) depended on him, I was afraid of him. I felt I should develop good relationship with X (a senior manager based in Khartoum). I always informed him about my situation. I know he will protect me, if anything goes wrong.*

He also added that by having a good relationship with the senior manager he was able to have good access to the head office. He said, "*When I visit the Khartoum office, I tried to spend time with the senior manager, to update them about the field situation.*"

In addition to the above cases, a few other aid workers, both in the field and Khartoum office, informally shared with me that having good relationship with the senior manager or their positive image to the senior manager are very supportive not only to secure their position or job but also to get other opportunities (such as promotion, training, etc.) from the CIS management.

6. Conclusion

Improving accountability of humanitarian organizations can be a general expectation, and this expectation may not provide any clear guidance or goal to achieve. This is especially true for many INGOs that are mandated to provide shot-term relief or recovery services to affected populations (Pfeiffer et al. 2008). In the context of INGOs, defining accountability is important not only for the aid effectiveness purpose but also to guide the INGOs with regard to achieving the target or the aid implementation process and outcomes: who is responsible for what and to whom (HAP 2010; CHS 2015). A clearly defined accountability framework for each INGO is also important for ensuring the quality, coordination and effective implementation of humanitarian work (Ebrahim and Weisband 2007; CHS 2015; Noor 2015). Keeping the above in mind, I present the key conclusion of my thesis on aid workers' accountability understanding and its subsequent implication in the CIS work in South Darfur.

In relation to my first research question, my research revealed that even though aid workers defined accountability in varied ways reflecting their cultural and contextual positioning, the term "power imbalance" in general and "social and economic inequalities" between stakeholders in particular were the key ideas behind their discussions on accountability. A large majority of aid workers in the field defined accountability from rights-holder perspective linking their role or relationship with the affected population. In describing this relationship, they bought up the question of social and economic rights issues of the affected population, which is clearly supported by Sen's (2009) idea of social justice and Farmer's (2005) idea of pathologies of power (HAP 2010). Both scholars see power inequalities as a broader structural issue and as a basis for violating human and or social rights of the affected people (Farmer 1999; Sen 2009; Bendell 2006). The notion of political and cultural rights was also reflected in some aid workers'

discussion on the accountability and they highlighted the need for deeper understanding of the culture of affected people (CHS, 2015; Fassin 2007; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007). Apart from power, politics and rights issues, the personal orientation of aid workers and insecurity in the field influenced their accountability understanding (Felix da Costa 2012). The on-site training or briefing for the aid workers also had significant influence on their accountability, and this research found that a small section of aid workers who had received training on accountability had explained accountability from the organizational compliance perspective, paying attention on organizational decision making, communication and information sharing, complaints and feedback mechanism, participation and representation in the organizational meeting etc.

In regard to how the aid workers translate their understanding in providing aid services to the affected population, this research found that the practice of unequal power relationships, particularly between supervisor and supervisee, is heavily institutionalized in the CIS work culture (Smith, 2010). Authoritative management and lack of open communication between supervisee and supervisors mainly caused this. The worsening security situation and gradual fund shortage in the CIS Sudan further complicated the workplace relationship, as this created immense competition among aid workers for sustaining their job with CIS Sudan. The fate of many aid workers' job was largely depended on the relationship with their respective supervisor. However, the power or authority practiced by some supervisors was not always guided or regulated by organizational policy, and this resulted in arbitrary decision-making, and lack of communication and information sharing in the CIS workplace.

The dynamic of power relationship between foreign and local aid workers was highly complicated in the CIS workplace. This was clearly reflected in the way aid workers of local and foreign origin opposed each other on different cultural and ideological issues. One of these

issues, for example, was gender relationship at the CIS workplace. It was also mirrored in the way some local aid workers supported the government's interference in INGO activities, and the way some local aid workers used government's connection to sustain their employment opportunity with CIS Sudan. This research confirms that while working with the affected people, maintaining fair and unequal power relationship and respecting their dignity and culture should be the key agenda of the INGO accountability and its practice in the workplace (CHS 2015; HAP 2010).

In relation to my second research question, my research confirms that the aid workers' directly working in the field tends to have improved motivation for accountability work. It shows that apart from participatory management practice and healthy workplace relationship, the practice of compassion, empathy, and respect for the affected people is the way to put accountability truly into practice. The research confirmed power-imbalance between stakeholders and authoritative management practices as key barriers to improving and or maintaining accountability relationship and practice in the CIS workplace. This research also identified a range of issues as the sources of power inequalities, and these issues, among other, included the higher income, higher status/position, and level of education and the foreign-local status of aid workers (Pfeiffer 2003; Smith 2010). However, there was also exception to this. Despite lower income and subordinate position, some local aid workers were found to be relatively powerful because of their close affiliation with the government of Sudan. Like other social or economic condition, the connection of the aid workers with the people in power (in this case government of Sudan) makes them powerful or authoritative (Pfeiffer 2003, 2004).

This research found that the power or authority in general had close link with the decision-making ability, and in most cases senior management or manager had the privileged to

exercise this state of power. The (misuse of) power created frustration and a culture of complaints among aid workers in the CIS workplace. Most of the allegation was from general aid workers to their respective supervisors and this applied to both local and foreign aid workers. There was a huge power imbalance between the supervisee and supervisors and this imbalance of power was mainly fueled by poor organizational governance factor. This included the weak coordination, line-management and reporting system, and the lack of complainant response mechanisms in the CIS workplace (ALNAP 2015). Overall, the lack of appropriate governance and compliance systems resulted in many negative outcomes, including delay in decision making, poor quality outputs, lack of team work, in the CIS workplace (ALNAP 2009).

The research found that many aid workers were frustrated with their job with CIS Sudan, and this had forced them to be involved in micro-politics or survival politics. The power imbalance and its effects on the accountability relationship were found to be one of the main barriers to making aid workers more accountable to the affected people (Altahir 2015). Improving the workplace relationship and trust, both vertical and horizontal, is the key to improving a culture of accountability in the CIS workplace (Ezekiel and Linda 1996; Pfeiffer, 2003), but this requires better information sharing and communication strategy, and participatory decision making in the workplace. The research also confirms that the power dynamics have direct influence on the overall culture of the organization and its management practice (Felix da Costa, 2012). The power relationship within the CIS work cultures had intrinsic relationship with the power relationship outside CIS Sudan, and they influenced each other and interacted in complex and multifaceted ways (Altahir 2015; Noor 2015). The power relationship between aid workers and the affected people also can cause far-reaching impact on the community. It may directly cause more suffering of those affected by crisis (Farmer 2005; Smith 2010).

In relation to my third question, my research revealed that high performing organizations create and sustain a culture of accountability systematically (Bustin 2014), but this requires a set of well-defined policy, guidance note or principles to follow. Organizationally, CIS Sudan is highly committed to accountability issues and it has developed many organizational policies and guideline including an accountability framework (CARE International 2010), but these policies and framework are yet to be put at the country level practice. Working closely with the affected people has been found to be a great way to improve accountability understanding and its subsequent practice, but to put accountability understanding in systematic practice the organizational needs appropriate training or briefing, explaining key components of organizational accountability issues and how to use them, for the aid workers (HAP 2010). The study found only a handful of aid workers were trained in accountability understanding.

To conclude, most INGOs in Sudan or in any other crisis affected countries work with short-term mandates and with many underlying challenges. Most of these challenges are structural and are difficult to address within the short span of time (Wachter 2012). Moreover, it is also difficult to find an immediate solution to locally grown and deep-rooted challenges within the context where INGOs work. Finding internal mechanism for improving culture of accountability on the basis of in-depth understanding of local context (both in and outside the workplace) is an effective means to improve accountability practice in the organization (Audet 2011; Bustin 2014). But this requires significant effort to better understand the organizational culture and develop appropriate policy and procedure and put those policy and procedures into practice through effective and timely monitoring. It is my hope that this thesis provides modest, but empirically grounded, insights into the culture of accountability in the humanitarian aid sector.

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