

No easy choice:

A humanitarian's guide to
ethical, principled decision making



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Preface

This guide and tool for ethical decision making was developed following a 2023 study looking at ethical dilemmas in Afghanistan.¹ The study found that humanitarians lack a clear and structured way to have a dialogue and decide what to do when facing ethical dilemmas. The draft guide was tested in multiple workshops in January/February 2024 with humanitarian colleagues working in three contexts: Afghanistan, Libya and Myanmar. It was then revised based on their feedback. A peer review group also supported the development of the guide.

We encourage you to use the guide and tool in your organisations and/or adapt it for your needs. For further information about the guide or potential facilitation support to use the tool, please contact Humanitarian Outcomes at research@humanitarianoutcomes.org or the authors, Nigel Timmins at nigel.timmins@humanitarianoutcomes.org and Manisha Thomas at manisha.thomas@humanitarianoutcomes.org.

¹ Bowden, M., Hakimi H., Harvey, P., Nemat, O., Moosakhel, G-R., Stoddard, A., Thomas, M., Timmins, N. and Voight, T. (2023). *Navigating ethical dilemmas for humanitarian action in Afghanistan*. Humanitarian Outcomes. https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/HRR1_Afghanistan_June_2023

> 1.1 Why use this guide?

Humanitarians often face difficult ethical dilemmas: from immediate operational choices to bigger strategic questions. A dilemma is defined by the need to choose between two or more difficult options that could have negative consequences. A dilemma means that there is no obvious or ideal choice. Humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) alone do not always help us make the best decision. Principles themselves may 'create' the dilemma. When we face only bad options, or the principles are in conflict, ethical deliberation can help us decide on the best way to carry out principled humanitarian action.

This guide offers a [tool](#) and a [process](#) for structured deliberation to help organisations and individuals make better choices for principled humanitarian action. It is based on an applied ethics approach, which addresses real-world challenges using ethical theories and principles.

The guide has three parts:

1. **[Introduction and purpose](#)** of the guide and the tool for ethical decision making.
2. **[The process for ethical decision making](#)**, which is critical to the success of the tool.
 - a. **[The tool for ethical decision making](#)** provides a structured way for organisations or inter-agency bodies to think through ethical dilemmas and identify ways forward.
 - b. **[Managing the deliberation process](#)** before, during, and after using the tool.
3. The **[ethical foundation of the tool](#)**, which includes how ethics complement humanitarian principles, the concept of applied ethics, and more details about ethical dilemmas.

For more information about the ethical frameworks used, you can find a list of [further reading](#) at the end of the guide. Annexes include: two examples of using the tool with dilemmas familiar to many humanitarians ([Annex A](#)); a [blank worksheet to insert responses](#) when using the tool; and a [one-page graphic overview of the tool](#).

Following the deliberation process does not mean that the choice will be easy or that the final decision will be uncontroversial. It does not mean you will achieve consensus: it may require some level of compromise or an imperfect solution. Dilemmas may continue or new ones may emerge, requiring a continuous process of ethical deliberation. However, this process should help with:

- transparency
- the opportunity to learn over time
- the opportunity to reassess if the decision is still the right one.

> 1.2 Who is this guide for?

Anyone facing an ethical dilemma in a humanitarian context. The guide and tool help you choose the best way to uphold humanitarian principles and organisational values.

In a true ethical dilemma, each potential course of action will violate an important moral principle. Sometimes, decision making in these cases may be challenging, and even distressing. However, the difficulty of resolving ethical dilemmas is not a reason to give up trying to understand the right thing to do.²

It is often easier to delay a decision until events force an outcome. Unstructured, unmoderated discussions among colleagues can become unproductive, difficult, and even toxic. A framework for approaching these difficult decisions can help avoid such situations. This guide is primarily for organisations or inter-agency bodies (such as humanitarian country teams or NGO forums) to think through the dilemmas they face. Individuals may also find the tool helpful in organising their own thoughts.

> 1.3 What is this guide for?

This guide is designed to help the reader lead, facilitate, or participate in a structured and meaningful dialogue with relevant stakeholders. This dialogue helps analyse the dilemma from different ethical perspectives. Decision makers, in particular, may find the process of using the tool helpful to reach a decision.

As part of decision making, this guide helps you document (as a means of accountability) and explain why you made (a) particular choice(s) in terms of:

- what compromises were accepted, especially around the impact on people affected by crises
- what limitations made a better choice impossible
- any additional efforts – such as advocacy or humanitarian diplomacy.

Different organisations are likely to come to different decisions depending on their mission, mandate, or values.

NOTE: This guide is not a manual about misconduct of any form. Please refer to your organisation's values, policies, procedures, and whistleblowing systems to address such concerns.

“Many aid practitioners recognise that their job consists of a series of dilemmas. There is no way that this aspect of the work can be avoided and no way that these dilemmas can be resolved by some overall, all-embracing framework of rules or practice guidelines... frameworks only take us so far: they do not provide answers to specific cases. The trick is to acknowledge that the dilemmas practitioners face are inescapable and, more than that, these dilemmas are a reflection of the importance of the activity in which they are engaged.”

— Edkins, J. (2000). *Whose hunger? Concepts of famine, practices of aid*, University of Minnesota Press.

² Fraser, V., Hunt, M.R., Schwartz, L. and de Laat, S. (2014). *Humanitarian Health Ethics Analysis Tool: HHEAT handbook*. <https://humethnet.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/hheat-handbook.pdf>

2 The deliberation process for ethical dilemmas

The tool for ethical deliberation about dilemmas (see [Box 1 for examples](#)) uses applied ethics.³ Figure 1 below shows the main steps to follow before, during, and after the deliberation process about an ethical dilemma using the tool (see [further details about the process below](#)). The length of the process may vary according to the number of stakeholders, the urgency of a decision and the complexity of the dilemma/context. It may involve one or multiple conversations. Be mindful that people will debate the issue outside any formal process. So, it is important to make sure that you hear everyone's perspective.

There are situations where the key action already happened. In such cases, use the tool to reflect on what happened and what you should do if the situation occurs again.

The final decision may not involve everyone who took part in the deliberation. To manage expectations, be clear about who – in an institution or an inter-agency body – is responsible for the final decision.

The [tool](#) ([Table 1](#) and [one-page graphic overview](#)) consists of a series of ethical questions. By asking questions from different ethical angles, the tool helps you consider the dilemma from different perspectives, helping you understand the implications of each possible way forward.

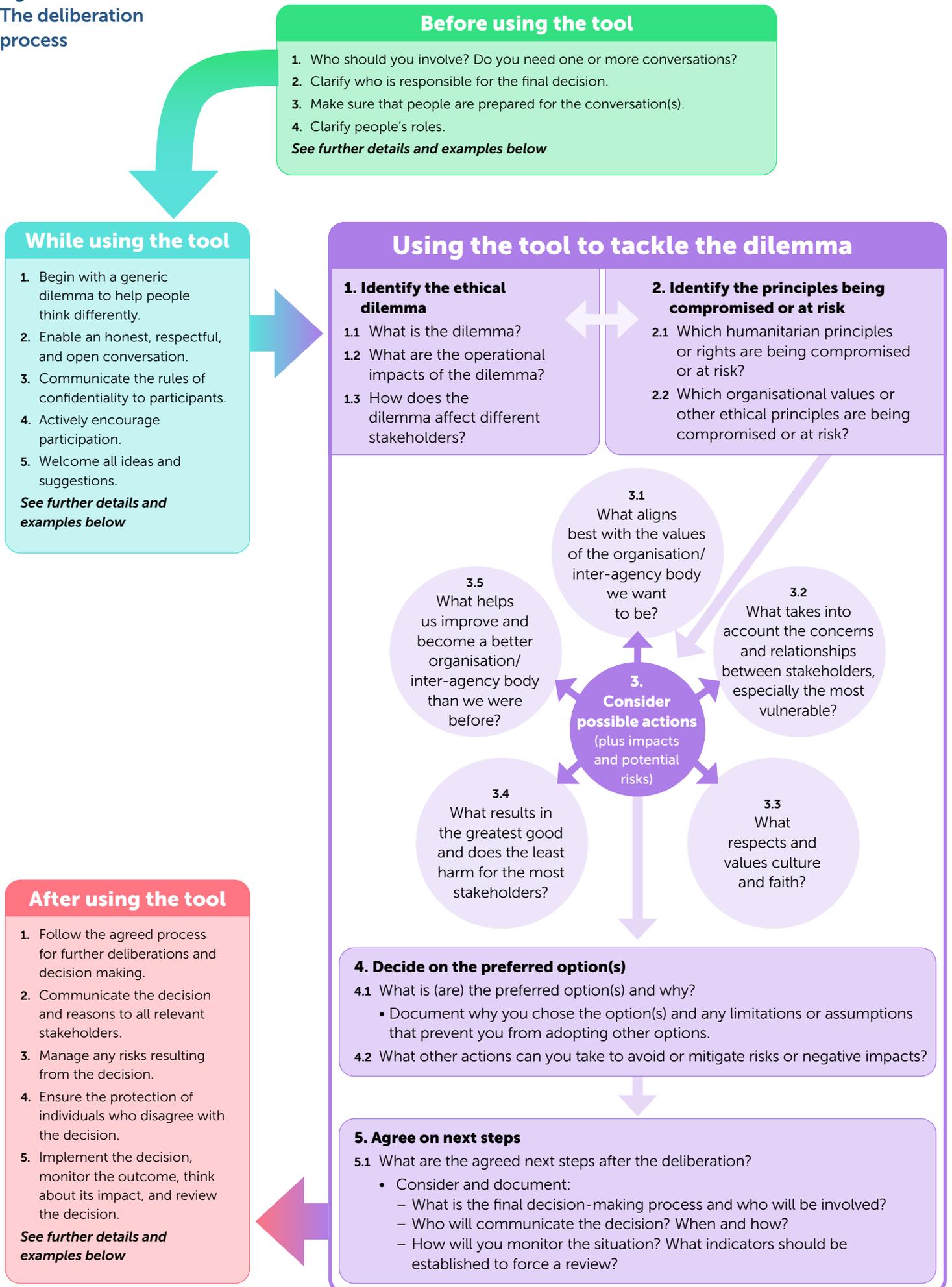
Box 1: Examples of ethical dilemmas needing systematic consideration

NOTE: *These examples are simplistic. In practice, the purpose of the guide is to invite deeper thinking about subtleties and options.*

- **Will our services cause harm?** Context: Authorities relocate a minority population into camps by force. The camps do not have enough provisions and authorities have limited the minority's freedom of movement. Should agencies offer assistance in those camps? According to the principle of humanity they should do so in order to mitigate suffering and potential abuse. But authorities are restricting services and rights. Should the principle of independence limit assistance in this case? By offering humanitarian aid, do we unintentionally support the existence of the camps?
- **Speak out or keep working?** Humanitarians often witness abuses by authorities. We have a moral obligation to speak out against human rights abuses. But if we do so, we risk having our operations shut down or suffering other consequences. These consequences may in turn reduce access and the ability to provide services. On the one hand, we have the short-term benefits of continuing to offer assistance. On the other, speaking out may achieve more profound change over time. Does the principle of humanity outweigh the value of publicly speaking out?
- **What level of compromise is acceptable to continue working?** In order to allow them to work, authorities may force humanitarian actors to pay 'taxes' or offer concessions. The principle of humanity suggests we must find a way to stay and deliver. But such 'taxes' may support a belligerent party. Also, we unintentionally enable authorities to allow only 'approved' agencies to offer aid. What should we do according to the concept of 'do no harm' in this case?

³ There are a number of frameworks that all share similar features of a step-by-step deliberative process. They include: Fraser et al. 2014; Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. (2021). *A framework for ethical decision making*. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/>; and Clarinval, C. and Biller-Andorno, N. (2014). Challenging operations: An ethical framework to assist humanitarian aid workers in their decision-making processes. *PLoS Current Disasters*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/challenging-operations-ethical-framework-assist-humanitarian-aid-workers-their-decision>

Figure 1:
The deliberation
process



2.1 The tool for ethical decision making

How to use the tool

- ❑ Before you start, read through the whole tool to check if you need additional information.
 - To save time, clarify the ethical dilemma before meeting with stakeholders to use the tool.
- ❑ Focus on the questions/actions in the left-hand 'Question/Action' column. The 'Explanatory notes' (right-hand column) offer additional guidance.
- ❑ Address the questions/actions in the given order. You may need to revisit some questions if different options come up.
- ❑ Question/Action 1 and Question/Action 2 help you fully understand the situation.
- ❑ Question/Action 3 is the main body of the tool, helping you analyse the dilemma from different ethical perspectives.
 - Answer the questions in any order, but make sure you evaluate all possible actions against each question.
- ❑ Question/Action 4 and Question/Action 5 focus on decision making, identifying next steps, and documenting the options considered and decisions taken.
- ❑ See the [one-page graphic overview](#) of the main questions/actions in the tool. You can use it as a simple handout.

Table 1: The tool for ethical decision making

QUESTION/ACTION	EXPLANATORY NOTES
1. Identify the ethical dilemma	
1.1 What is the dilemma?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different stakeholders may have different views on the ethical dilemma and why it is an issue now. Clarify what the ethical dilemma is to avoid possible confusion and conflict. Everyone should have a similar understanding of the dilemma and its context.
1.2 What are the operational impacts of the dilemma?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider operational and organisational impacts: the ability to provide humanitarian aid to the affected communities, staff safety, and how the organisation may be perceived.
1.3 How does the dilemma affect different stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are people's rights affected? (Immediately, or possibly in the future?) Consider the different impacts on different groups, especially those most affected. As far as possible, seek the perspectives of the affected people.
2. Identify the principles being compromised or at risk	
2.1 Which humanitarian principles or rights are being compromised or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the humanitarian principles, rights, or relevant legal frameworks at risk (e.g. human rights, refugee rights, international humanitarian law). Also consider the concepts of 'Do no harm' and the centrality of protection. As far as possible, seek the perspectives of the affected people.
2.2 Which organisational values or other ethical principles are being compromised or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the organisational values that are being compromised or at risk. As far as possible, seek the perspectives of the affected people.

(continued)

QUESTION/ACTION	EXPLANATORY NOTES
 3. Consider possible actions	
<p>NOTE: For each question, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one option/answer (the first answer may not be the best option) • the impact on the affected population and stakeholders • if the action would create new short- or long-term risks. 	
3.1 What aligns best with the values of the organisation/inter-agency body we want to be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the action in line with the values of the organisation/inter-agency body? Reflect on whether you are trying to find excuses not to do the right thing.
3.2 What takes into account the concerns and relationships between stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the perspectives of different groups, especially of the affected population? Try to empathise with each stakeholder group to understand the implications from their point of view and the pressure they face.
3.3 What respects and values culture and faith?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise there may be multiple cultures and faiths. You should know and understand any moral frameworks that are commonly accepted by the local population. • Consider how those moral frameworks overlap with humanitarian principles or organisational values. The affected population is more likely to accept actions that are in line with their own values.
3.4 What results in the greatest good and does the least harm for the most stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think who will benefit: those with the greatest needs should receive the greatest benefit first. • Consider programme criticality (e.g. frontline surgical services have greater programme criticality than a distribution of mattresses). • Consider the risks for the affected population ('Do no harm'). If the action relates to humanitarian services, objectively evaluate the benefit of the service and do not assume that all humanitarian efforts have equal benefit.
3.5 What help(s) us improve and become a better organisation/inter-agency body than we were before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how the organisation can get better at managing the dilemma in a principled way. Dilemmas are recurring events and you should not treat them in isolation. Dealing with dilemmas contributes to the practical development of the organisation's/inter-agency body's values, principles and culture.
 4. Decide on the preferred option(s)	
4.1 What is (are) the preferred option(s) and why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document why you chose the option(s) and any limitations and assumptions that prevent you from adopting other options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider any 'red lines' necessary. • You create a level of accountability by documenting options, assumptions and potential limitations. Documentation may highlight external factors that prevent you from adopting an option. Such external factors may include limited access, lack of funding, and headquarters or donors' rules and regulations.
4.2 What other actions can you take to avoid or mitigate risks or negative impacts?	
 5. Agree on next steps	
5.1 What are the agreed next steps after the deliberation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the final decision-making process and who will be involved? – Who will communicate the decision? When and how? – How will you monitor the situation? What triggers should be established to force a review? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the discussion ends, reiterate the next steps, especially in terms of decision making. • Decision makers should think about whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – they can safely share the reasoning behind the preferred option(s) (Question 4) with relevant stakeholders for transparency purposes – the documented reasoning creates an opportunity to negotiate.



2.2 Before using the tool: plan the conversation to enable honest deliberation

1. Who should you involve? A single conversation may be enough. But some cases require several conversations in different places, with different staff, at different levels within an organisation, or with different internal/external partners or stakeholders. Think about who to invite to which discussion(s). Consider how the outcomes of one conversation may connect with and influence outcomes of other conversations.

2. Clarify who is responsible for the final decision. The deliberation is a critical part of the decision-making process. But ultimately, a leader/group of leaders is/are responsible for making the final decision. Clarify who will make the decision to avoid upset during/after the deliberation.

→ Communicate to relevant stakeholders (e.g. internally within an organisation or inter-agency body) who is involved

at which stage(s) of the deliberation process. Such communication is essential to develop trust and gain support for the deliberation process and its outcome/decision.

3. Make sure that people are prepared for the conversation(s). Be clear about the objectives, timing and expected results of the process. In practice, the timing depends on the urgency of the issue and on the decision-making processes of the organisation/inter-agency body. (See *sample agenda* in [Box 2](#).)

→ Check that participants understand humanitarian principles, their organisation's values, and any cultural/faith values relevant to the context. If possible, provide pre-reading, including this guide and the [video introducing the guide](#) so people are familiar with the tool.

4. Clarify people's roles. Do they represent others? Do they offer their own perspective?

Box 2: Sample agenda for deliberation (3 hours)

1. Opening activity

- Welcome and Introductions. (15 min)
 - Why we are meeting, ground rules, and declarations of any conflicts of interest.
 - Who is responsible for the final decision after deliberations.
- Analyse an ethical dilemma unrelated to the context to encourage ethical thinking. (10 min)

2. Consider the dilemma

(use the [tool](#), Question 1, 2 and 3)

- Identify the ethical dilemma and the principles being compromised and at risk. (50 min)
- Consider possible actions, their impact, and possible risks using different ethical viewpoints. (80 min – including break)

3. Identify the preferred option(s) and agree on next steps

- Identify the preferred option(s) and document any limitations. (15 min)
- Next steps for decision making and communication around the decision. (10 min)

A note of caution



Discussions about dilemmas risk manipulation by some participants – either intentionally or because of unconscious bias – in order to achieve their preferred outcome.

This process is only useful if participants join with a willingness to look at things from different angles. Participants should genuinely listen to better understand people with different perspectives, and not listen in order to react or justify an approach.

Ethics are about individual and organisational beliefs and responsibilities. As individuals, we all have 'moral intuition'. So, as people with moral agency, all participants should reflect on how they choose to join the process. Opting out of this process, for example, is also a choice. The process works best when everyone actively listens and participates in a constructive way.



2.3 During the deliberation process: using the tool

1. Begin with a generic dilemma to help people think differently (see *Box 3*).

This helps people think more broadly and be more open to the dilemma in question.

2. Enable an honest, respectful, and open conversation. Consider having an (independent) facilitator(s).

→ Set clear 'ground rules' for how the conversation will develop (see *Box 4*). Recognise that some people will have strong emotions about the subject. Remind people of their own moral agency in creating a meaningful conversation. Recognise cultural/societal norms relevant to the context.

→ Ask participants if they need to declare any conflicts of interest regarding the dilemma.

3. Communicate the rules of confidentiality to participants. Decide if the discussions are confidential or if you can use the Chatham House Rule (i.e. the information discussed can be used, but without naming the person who said it). Create an environment where people feel comfortable to express their thoughts.

→ It is a shared responsibility to assure people that they can speak without fear of personal or professional repercussions, or of being quoted outside the meeting.

4. Actively encourage everyone to participate. Do not let certain individuals dominate the discussion. Find ways for quiet individuals to express their views, including anonymously (e.g. group discussions, exercises, or virtual/physical Post-it notes). Do not assume that silence equals agreement or consent. Offer language interpretation if needed.

→ Some individuals may feel unable to speak due to:

- fear of repercussions
- their level of seniority in the organisation
- their gender
- their ethnicity
- feeling others do not support their views.

In such cases, find different ways to get their views, such as dedicated spaces (e.g. women only) or ways to speak directly and confidentially to the decision maker.

Box 3: Sample generic dilemma as opening activity (15 min)

- Present the dilemma – see below. (1 min)
- Have groups of 2-3 people discuss what they would do. (4 min)
- Have a plenary discussion about the decisions that people took. (10 min)

ETHICAL DILEMMA EXAMPLE 1:

- You are standing near a railway track and see a runaway trolley/train approaching.
- There are multiple people tied up and unable to move on the tracks, and the trolley is heading straight for them. You could pull a lever to divert the trolley onto a different track. On that track, there is only one person tied up – but it is someone you know and care for.
- **Do you pull the lever?**

ETHICAL DILEMMA EXAMPLE 2:

- Two friends ask you to attend their wedding as a guest of honour to give a speech. Their weddings are at the same time, on the same day, in different cities.
- One friend is wealthy, and you know it will be a big celebration in a fabulous 5-star venue, in a city you want to visit. You also know that many friends you have not seen for a long time will be at the wedding.
- The other friend is one of your oldest friends from primary school and has no one else to ask. The couple is not wealthy and you know it will be a modest wedding, but it is really important to them.
- **Whose wedding do you attend?**

Box 4: Example of 'ground rules'

- Everyone is equal, regardless of their position/role. Managers/donors/people in positions of power must make sure they follow this rule.
- Do not interrupt others.
- There are no bad ideas.
- Be present in the conversation, actively listen to others, and keep electronic devices out of reach.
- Use the Chatham House Rule to encourage people to speak freely.

5. Welcome all ideas and suggestions.

It is essential to create an environment where people can think freely and bring in different perspectives based on their personal/professional experiences. Participants should have an open mind, and avoid any negative body language (e.g. when discussing ideas they do not agree with) and think how they can constructively contribute (see [Box 5](#)).

- Recognise that everyone has strong beliefs and values, and may prioritise things differently. Someone's practical approach to a dilemma may be seen as unethical by another. When discussing a controversial issue that we care about, these moral feelings can come out strongly.
- Recognise that the final decision may involve adopting multiple options.

Box 5: What should I do *during* the deliberations?

- How can I constructively contribute to the discussion?
- What are the points I need to make according to my own ethical standards?
- Am I truly listening to understand other viewpoints?
- Am I participating with an open mind or assuming that my position is the correct one?

Good deliberation is really thought reflecting on feeling, and producing something reasonable to do.

— David Hume



2.4 After using the tool: make and communicate a decision; predict and manage consequences; implement; monitor; learn

1. Follow the agreed process for further deliberations and decision making. It is important to follow up on what you agreed during the process (see [Box 6](#) for what you can do). If, for some reason, changes are needed, inform stakeholders immediately to avoid rumours and discontent.

2. Communicate the decision to all relevant stakeholders. Communicate the limitations and reasons behind the decision to the extent possible.

- Think about whether you need to tailor the message for different internal/external stakeholders.

3. Manage any risks resulting from the decision. Find ways to mitigate any risks associated with the decision.

4. Ensure the protection of individuals who disagree with the decision.

Working against your own moral compass is emotionally draining and can affect wellbeing ('moral injury'). Discuss people's concerns and avoid blaming. Identify ways to support them, including mental health and psychosocial support, if necessary. Be aware of potential 'triggers'. Work with people so that their disappointment with the decision does not negatively impact others, programmes, or the organisation. Suggest regular check-ins and schedule them in advance.

5. Implement the decision, monitor the outcome, think about its impact, and review the decision.

After making the decision, monitor its implementation. Reflect at agreed intervals and review the decision to check if it was – and still is – the right choice based on experience and evidence. Again, using the tool can help. Modify the decision if necessary and document the reasons for the change, for accountability purposes.

Box 6: What should I do *after* the deliberations and decision?

- How can I support the decision to increase the likelihood of success considering that the situation had no good option?
- Can I accept the decision considering the compromises? If not, how can I responsibly make my position known? How can I do so in a way that is not disruptive or disrespectful?

To navigate the complex situations and dilemmas that often appear in situations of disaster, conflict and displacement, **humanitarian principles** were developed to help reach the populations in need. The principles are themselves expressions of ethical norms. The UN General Assembly (Resolution 58/114, 2003) recognised the principles, which the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) describes as:

- **humanity** – human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings
- **impartiality** – humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions
- **neutrality** – humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature
- **independence** – humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.⁴

Other relevant concepts are the centrality of protection and ‘Do no harm’.^{5, 6, 7}

In some situations, humanitarian principles alone are not clear enough to help us decide on the best course of action. Sometimes, humanitarian principles, rights, and other values and commitments come into conflict with each other. In such cases, ethical frameworks help agencies, individuals and decision makers move forward.

Ethics refer to sound standards of right and wrong. Ethics tell us what we should do in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics are reasonable standards of behaviour, like refraining from rape, theft, murder, assault, slander or fraud. They also cover positive standards, like honesty and compassion. Ethics reinforce humanitarian principles by protecting rights, such as the right to life and the right to be safe from harm.

Sometimes the humanitarian principles can come into conflict with each other. For example, when agencies face substantial humanitarian needs, donor funding helps them meet the principle of humanity. However, donors may also fund or assist one or more of the belligerents (even if not directly involved in the conflict). In such cases, does accepting funding affect the neutrality of the agency?

⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2012). *OCHA on message: humanitarian principles*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ocha-message-humanitarian-principles-enar>

⁵ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). (2013). *The centrality of protection*. Statement. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2020-11/The%20Centrality%20of%20Protection%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%20%28English%29.pdf>

⁶ IASC. (2016). *Protection in humanitarian action*. Policy. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-protection-priority-global-protection-cluster/iasc-policy-protection-humanitarian-action-2016>

⁷ Anderson, M. B. (1999). *Do no harm; how aid can support peace – or war*. Lynee Rienner Publishers.

Humanitarians get involved when duty holders – typically governments – request their assistance or expertise, or when governments are unwilling/unable to ensure people’s most basic rights and needs. We can find the universal rights,⁸ and other rights and provisions of international humanitarian law in the Humanitarian Charter of the Sphere Handbook as follows:

- the right to life with dignity
- the right to receive humanitarian assistance
- the right to protection and security.⁹

The Humanitarian Charter notes that “dignity entails more than physical well-being; it demands respect for the whole person, including the values and beliefs of individuals and affected communities, and respect for their human rights, including liberty, freedom of conscience and religious observance.”

Ethics also means developing our own ethical standards, which are distinct from personal feelings. We cannot always base ethical decisions on what we would like to do. For example, you may want to have more than your fair share of chocolate cake. Ethics also involve studying our own beliefs and conduct, and making sure that we and the institutions we help shape, follow ethical standards.¹⁰

3.1 Applied ethics

This guide and tool draw on ‘applied ethics,’¹¹ which applies ethical theories and principles to real-world situations and dilemmas. It encourages you to consider a dilemma from different ethical viewpoints. These viewpoints are not totally separate, as they share certain perspectives and each has its own value.

The ethical frameworks (*see Further Reading for more details*) used in the [tool](#) are as follows.

 **Duty-based (or ‘deontological’) ethics** emphasise the **values and obligations of the decision maker, and the ‘inherent rightness or wrongness’ of an action** over the consequences. This approach prioritises respect for human rights and the dignity of affected people, even if it means less assistance in the short term. Some humanitarians invoke the importance of humanitarian action simply because some sort of response is ‘the right thing to do.’ Others argue that a conflict would be less protracted if they suspend humanitarian assistance. (*Question 3.1 in the [tool](#)*)

EXAMPLE The authorities banned you from working with certain groups of people and only allow you to assist others who are also in need. So, you choose not to carry out humanitarian operations.

 **Care-based (or ‘feminist’) ethics** emphasise the **importance of care and empathy, the relationships of stakeholders and being responsive** towards and between all people, regardless of gender or other identities. We apply this perspective to decision making by putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes and responding empathetically. This approach means considering perspectives different to our own (inclusivity), reflecting on our own bias, and becoming aware of power imbalances. (*Question 3.2 in the [tool](#)*)

EXAMPLE You prioritise depth of relationships with local communities over scale. Or you prioritise inclusivity in decision making – even if slower – over a ‘command and control’ approach.

⁸ Universal human rights are an individual’s ‘basic rights and fundamental freedoms’, which are inherent, inalienable, and applicable to all human beings. As set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, these include the right to life, liberty and security (Art. 3), and to not be subject to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Art. 5). See: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁹ Sphere Association. (2018). *The Sphere handbook: Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in humanitarian response*. Fourth edition. <https://spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/>

¹⁰ Based on Velasquez, M., Andre, C., Shanks, T., S.J. and Meyer, M.J. (2010). *What is ethics?* Markkula Center for Applied Ethics. <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/what-is-ethics/>

¹¹ Based on Markkula Center (2021) and Clarnival and Biller-Andorno (2014).

Ethical frameworks relevant to the affected communities receiving humanitarian aid.

All peoples and cultures have their own ethical frameworks and moralities (which relate to particular cultures, faiths, or communities). It is important to include these in any deliberation process. For example, for many people around the world, faith strongly influences the values they know and believe in. (*Question 3.3 in the tool*)

The purpose is not to decide who is 'right' or who has the 'better' ethical code or morality, but to be inclusive and respectful of the culture of the crisis-affected people.¹² It is essential to respect cultural norms and moralities,

but sometimes such norms are against universal human rights or values. Recognising similarities can create opportunities for dialogue (see *Box 7 on Maqasid al-sharia and Ubuntu*).

Utilitarian (or 'consequentialist') ethics focus on achieving the '**greatest good for the most people**'. In humanitarian action, a consequentialist approach prioritises the outcomes of an intervention. In this case, ethics are assessed by whether the greatest number of lives of the most vulnerable people are saved, and/or their suffering is reduced. The means or reasons of the intervention are less important. (*Question 3.4 in the tool*)

EXAMPLE Accepting funding from one of the belligerents to a conflict in order to be able to assist more people.

'Virtue ethics' focus on the importance of **cultivating positive virtues, such as compassion, honesty and integrity, in order to become a better person and guide decision making and actions**. If a person is virtuous and actively seeking to improve, then these character traits will naturally help them choose the right course of action. (*Question 3.5 in the tool*)

EXAMPLE An organisation creates an ethics committee in order to constantly evaluate its decision-making process, learn how to make better judgements in difficult situations, and intentionally improve its organisational culture to become the kind of organisation it wants to be.

Box 7: Maqasid al-sharia and Ubuntu

Maqasid al-sharia requires verdicts to promote justice, fairness, and the individual's/society's wellbeing. This allows for judgement based on the context and impact on people's wellbeing instead of a rigid application of Shari'a law. This enables dialogue instead of debate on whether different legal codes are right or wrong. (See: Kamali M.H. (1999). Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah: The objectives of Islamic law. *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 193–208. Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad.)

The sub-Saharan concept of Ubuntu means 'I am because we are' and emphasises humanity, compassion, and social responsibility. Its set of values includes reciprocity, common good, peaceful relations, human dignity, the value of human life, consensus, tolerance and mutual respect.

¹² Principle 5 of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief (1994) states, "We shall respect culture and custom." See: <https://www.ifrc.org/our-promise/do-good/code-conduct-movement-ngos>

3.2 Types and levels of dilemmas

We all make ethical choices every day: ethics are not a special exercise. But some ethical dilemmas and choices are more important than others and deserve deeper thought. Ethical dilemmas can occur at different levels, such as in the following examples.

- **Individual/personal:** Humanitarian workers' daily interactions with people and communities in crisis, authorities and parties to conflicts.

EXAMPLE

External circumstances force an individual to act beyond their expertise, which may cause harm. Their refusal to act may also cause harm.

- **Operational national/sub-national level:** Negotiations with authorities and those holding power at local and project levels.

EXAMPLE

Authorities often want control over key decisions around hiring or targeting. What degree of control should a humanitarian organisation accept?

What levels of aid diversion or taxation are acceptable? How transparent should we be about this with senior management and/or other organisations?

- **Strategic or HQ levels:** Funding allocations, programme design and appeals, strategic coordination, and balancing institutional and other interests.

EXAMPLE

Whether or not to pause or suspend operations. When to implement red lines?

How to balance speaking out/advocacy and staying quiet in order to keep operating?

Do a donor's requirements endanger the core values/principles of the organisation?

The table below uses Hugo Slim's categorisation of dilemmas. It gives examples of the risks humanitarian actors face, and the dilemmas those risks create.¹³

Table 2: Categorisation of dilemmas

TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS	EXAMPLES OF RISKS
<p>Potential harm caused by humanitarian action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If agencies want to meet humanitarian imperatives and continue to offer aid but authorities are abusive, corrupt, or coercive: what degree of harm is unavoidable ('residual risk')? • What level of unintended harm is acceptable or balanced by the positive contribution of aid (i.e. saving lives and alleviating suffering)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing corruption or violence because authorities fight over, seize, tax, or corruptly divert aid. • Not holding governments accountable and undermining social contracts – by replacing state and local authority responsibilities with humanitarian services. • Enabling discrimination, exclusion or abuse through how aid is targeted or delivered. • Risks to people receiving assistance by sharing data with authorities.
<p>Risks of association, complicity and moral entrapment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agencies must communicate with authorities to get permission to work. But what level of association is unacceptable or enables the negative actions of the authorities? • How to balance speaking out and silence/ quiet diplomacy to maintain access? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearing to legitimise and empower abusive regimes by working with them or seeking permissions to operate. • Enabling wrong-doing – e.g. facilitating concentration camps, forced displacement, or silence in the face of rights abuses. • Whether to accept funding from donors who are indirectly contributing to the conflict.
<p>Duties of care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to balance responsibilities to staff with humanitarian imperatives to respond in insecure situations? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising presence over safety or vice versa.

(continued)

¹³ Slim, H. (2015). *Humanitarian ethics: A guide to the morality of aid in war and disaster*. Hurst Publishers.

TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS	EXAMPLES OF RISKS
<p>Moral risks of humanitarian power and growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet increasing due diligence requirements and safety standards versus maintain presence and proximity with people in crises. • Political dilemmas caused by misusing the humanitarian sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complicated processes and protocols around aid delivery and distance from crisis affected people. • Prioritising organisational interests over those of people in crisis. • Using aid to 'feed people over there so they don't come here'. • Aid being seen as keeping the conflict and rights abuses going.

Source: Slim 2015.

Ethical dilemmas appear at different levels, so organisations and individuals need appropriate processes. Some require personal reflection, some a short team meeting at the local level, others more complex processes. But we can apply the principles and approaches of ethical deliberation to each of these cases.

Examples of how organisations can implement ethical approaches include:

- making ethics part of regular meetings/processes
- providing staff training
- involving ethicists
- referring dilemmas to (internal/external) ethics boards to help think through the issues and options.¹⁴

4

Final note

This guide and tool are not a magic formula to make ethical dilemmas easy to resolve. Even after careful consideration, many ethical dilemmas make humanitarians lose sleep over whether they made the right decision.

By regularly using a framework to address dilemmas from different ethical viewpoints, we can make decisions based on what seems best, even when there is no good option to choose from. Such a process and the resulting documentation – including the option(s) taken and why, and limitations considered – can contribute to more accountability in humanitarian responses over time.

¹⁴ McGowan, C.R., Baxter, L., DuBois, M., Sheather, J., Khondaker, R., Cummings, R. and Watkins, K. (2020). Preparing humanitarians to address ethical problems. *Conflict and Health*, 14(1):72. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-020-00319-4>

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Worked examples using the tool for ethical decision making

These two examples show how the tool might be used. They do not present the “right” answer for such contexts.

Example 1: An organisational example – relocation of staff

QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
 1. Identify the ethical dilemma	
1.1 What is the dilemma?	<p>The organisation is delivering humanitarian assistance – food aid, cash, and primary health care – to a population in severe need. There is a strong humanitarian imperative. However, one of the belligerents has intensified their attacks. The staff are mostly members of the community in need and under attack. They are concerned for their safety and asking to be relocated. The humanitarian imperative to ‘stay and deliver’ is in conflict with the organisation’s duty to protect its staff.</p>
1.2 What are the operational impacts of the dilemma?	<p>The organisation’s coverage has already reduced as the security risk makes different areas inaccessible. Civilians in those areas are trapped without access to humanitarian aid or are moving for their own safety. The local office is still relatively secure, but the future is uncertain. Other organisations are also debating what to do.</p> <p>To relocate staff requires thinking about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where would staff be taken and what is the organisation’s level of responsibility if they are moved to a city without accommodation or their families? • How long does the organisation provide for them while unable to do their jobs? • Would only staff be relocated, or their dependents as well? How narrowly or broadly will the term ‘dependent’ be interpreted? <p>Relocating staff will suspend the humanitarian programme. Consider that materials and assets left behind (e.g. vehicles) could be stolen.</p>
1.3 How does the dilemma affect different stakeholders?	<p>Staff: At risk of physical harm if they stay. If they relocate, they may feel guilty as the organisation can only assist their immediate dependents. At the new location, they will need to find accommodation and, depending on the length of time, other key services (e.g. schooling for children). Some staff will prefer to stay – to be close to their families and/or out of solidarity with the community. Not all staff will feel the same way or be willing to take the same risks.</p> <p>Affected communities: Reduced essential humanitarian services means they will probably suffer greater food insecurity, hunger, and reduced health services. Seeing aid agencies withdrawing may have a psychological effect on them.</p> <p>Other humanitarian actors: As one agency withdraws and relocates staff, other agencies may be under pressure to do the same. This may have a wider negative impact on humanitarian services.</p> <p>The organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of harming our reputation with the affected community. • Risk of damaging trust of staff if it appears we do not treat them well. • Need to inform donors about suspending activities. • Challenges when re-negotiating access, as the organisation’s actions may impact how parties to the conflict see us.

(continued)



QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
2. Identify the principles being compromised or at risk	
2.1 Which humanitarian principles or rights are being compromised or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The humanitarian imperative. • Right to receive assistance. • Centrality of protection: the presence of humanitarian agencies can limit belligerents' excesses.
2.2 Which organisational values or other ethical principles are being compromised or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty of care to staff. • Accountability to the affected population.



3. Consider possible actions

NOTE: For each question, consider:

- more than one option/answer (the first answer may not be the best option)
- the impact on the affected population and stakeholders
- if the action would create new short- or long-term risks.

3.1 What aligns best with the values of the organisation/inter-agency body we want to be?	<p>We take care of our staff, so we want to offer relocation and support their dependents. However, not all staff will feel the same, and we should offer them other options and allow them to make their own decision.</p> <p>If they relocate, we must be transparent about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the limitations of the support we can offer, if they relocate. • how long we can continue to offer salaries while they are not able to practically work. <p>We also want to stay and deliver. We are willing to take managed risks, so can invest in our security management and in regular communications.</p>
3.2 What takes into account the concerns and relationships between stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable?	<p>The affected community is experiencing trauma from the belligerents. We offer essential services. Removing them would expose the most vulnerable individuals to even greater risk of hunger and medical problems. We have positive relationships with community leaders and we know they want us to stay and operate.</p> <p>Our staff are nervous and very worried for their dependents. They want assurances that if they are taking risks for the organisation, when the time comes, the organisation will look after them. One option could be to relocate their dependents so staff feel more comfortable knowing their families are safe while they work. We should offer confidential opportunities for staff to share their feelings in this respect.</p> <p>Donors and local leaders will want us to continue operating for as long as possible.</p> <p>Belligerents want us to leave because there will be fewer reports about their conduct, and they might be able to take our materials (e.g. vehicles).</p>
3.3 What respects and values culture and faith?	<p>It is a rural area where most people follow traditional beliefs, with strong values of solidarity and equal treatment of all community members. The community expects young men to defend their ancestral land.</p> <p>Local leaders need to approve all important decisions, as community leadership is a very serious matter for them.</p> <p>Evacuating only a part of the staff – particularly younger men – without the leaders' approval will harm the relationship between the organisation and the community because it would not honour and respect their position. There is also a risk of long-term social challenges for the relocated staff families. However, the idea of protecting families and the more vulnerable in the community from harm is strongly endorsed.</p>

(continued)

QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
3.4 What results in the greatest good and does the least harm for the most stakeholders?	<p>The most important services cover food aid, cash to the most vulnerable, primary health care (including medical services for survivors of gender-based violence), and are essential. We might need to reduce some other non-essential services.</p> <p>Evacuating staff will directly help them. However, being able to respond to the affected community's needs will result in the greatest benefit to the most people.</p> <p>As the conflict continues, we need to be responsive in order to keep offering aid. If insecurity and reduced access mean we cannot deliver services, staff evacuation may be the greatest good to the most people. We need to implement triggers for such a situation.</p>
3.5 What help(s) us improve and become a better organisation/ inter-agency body than we were before?	<p>We should consider lessons from previous conflicts where we had to suspend activities and care for staff. The senior management team overseeing this situation must keep learning and reflection as a standard agenda item at their meetings.</p> <p>We should actively consult staff who have detailed knowledge of the context, even if not directly affected. We see them as a resource to test ideas.</p> <p>If we relocate staff, we need appropriate processes to help them and their families integrate at the new location.</p> <p>We need a process to continuously listen to staff who are at risk. This may involve confidential spaces where they can offer us honest feedback without worrying about consequences to their careers.</p> <p>We need to clearly document our choices and the reasons behind them. This will enable future learning and accountability to staff.</p>



4. Decide on the preferred option(s)

<p>4.1 What is (are) the preferred option(s) and why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document why you chose the option(s) and any limitations and assumptions that prevent you from adopting other options. <p>4.2 What other actions can you take to avoid or mitigate risks or negative impacts?</p>	<p>Decision: To stay and maintain essential services as much as possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This decision assumes that some level of community access is still possible, even if geographic areas vary and access is irregular. As we cannot relocate extended families, staff evacuation will create relationship issues for them. We cannot guarantee support to staff for more than a few weeks at their new location. If we suspend operations, there will be limitations in paying their salaries. Actively invest in security management and equipment for better communications and transport. This change will require donor support to reallocate our budget. Suspend activities not directly involved in life saving.
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5. Agree on next steps

<p>5.1 What are the agreed next steps after the deliberation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the final decision-making process and who will be involved? Who will communicate the decision? When and how? How will you monitor the situation? What triggers should be established to force a review? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the decision to staff, community leaders, and donors. Make sure previous learning is available to the senior management team overseeing the situation. Implement confidential mechanisms for staff on the ground. Establish protocols for record keeping in order to track decisions and systems to receive anonymous feedback from staff. Evacuation is a last resort, but evacuating the families of staff may allow some staff to stay and deliver. Prepare for such evacuations to avoid challenges and put in place triggers for the last resort evacuation of staff.
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Example 2: An inter-agency example – working in a camp of forcibly displaced persons



QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
1. Identify the ethical dilemma	
1.1 What is the dilemma?	<p>Humanitarian organisations provide food, water and sanitation, and medical services in a large camp with thousands of people that the government displaced by force. Many organisations working in the camp for several years were never able to assess needs properly and only offer materials that the authorities running the camp ask for.</p> <p>In the last few months, authorities denied aid workers access to parts of the camp, so they are not able to speak with a great part of the affected population. Aid workers heard many accounts of physical and sexual abuse by authorities, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • denying food • stealing materials provided by aid organisations (like blankets) • putting people in solitary confinement for no clear reason. <p>It seems there is little chance that authorities will allow people to return home.</p> <p>As access has declined, more members of the inter-agency body think it is time to withdraw. Others – especially agencies dependent on donor funds – want to continue working in the camp.</p> <p>The inter-agency body needs a united voice in order to be able to influence the government.</p>
1.2 What are the operational impacts of the dilemma?	<p>Staff in all organisations are worried about the abuses. The increasing denial of access to parts of the camp means that there may be many more serious cases. These reports and lack of access to large parts of the population obstruct any protection programmes.</p> <p>We are worried that materials from aid agencies may not reach the affected population. This can affect how donors view the organisation.</p> <p>Human rights groups continue to campaign for the closure of the camp. These groups criticise humanitarian agencies and their donors for continuing to work there and contributing to the denial of people's rights. This causes even more reputational issues.</p> <p>Some donors question why organisations work in a camp without doing needs assessment and with limited access and known rights abuses.</p> <p>Being an inter-agency body, there are concerns that some agencies will take over services stopped by other agencies, as one donor offers plenty of funding.</p>
1.3 How does the dilemma affect different stakeholders?	<p>The affected population experiences a limitation of rights. If agencies suspend all services, there will be even greater hardships.</p> <p>Reduced humanitarian presence will make life easier for government security, but local government wants agencies to stay. They do not fully support the actions of the central government but have limited powers. They recognise that the humanitarian presence benefits those in the camp.</p> <p>Human rights organisations see the withdrawal of agencies as a successful outcome to their campaign. They believe it would force the government to rethink their actions.</p> <p>Some organisations could relocate elsewhere in the country, so withdrawing would not affect their operations as much. This could enable them to tell a more positive story to the media.</p> <p>For some civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs working in the camp, the loss of funding would be critical. They also have a strong sense of solidarity with the people in the camp. They do not believe the withdrawal will have any positive impact and consider it contrary to their moral obligation to stay with the affected population.</p> <p>The inter-agency body risks becoming dysfunctional, which will affect the work carried out in other parts of the country. Not having a shared approach among members also undermines the inter-agency body's credibility with the government and donors.</p>

(continued)



QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
2. Identify the principles being compromised or at risk	
2.1 Which humanitarian principles or rights are being compromised or at risk?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The humanitarian imperative to offer life-saving aid is in tension with the principle of independence. • Centrality of protection. • Rights to freedom of movement and freedom from arbitrary detention and torture.
2.2 Which organisational values or other ethical principles are being compromised or at risk?	In addition to the humanitarian principles, the inter-agency body recognises the Principles of Partnership: equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. All these values are at risk.



3. Consider possible actions	
<p>NOTE: For each question, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one option/answer (the first answer may not be the best option) • the impact on the affected population and stakeholders • if the action would create new short- or long-term risks. 	
3.1 What aligns best with the values of the organisation/inter-agency body we want to be?	<p>The inter-agency body must be united and principled. So, either all agencies leave to make a strong statement, or they all stay. Some leaving and some staying is the worst outcome.</p> <p>The decision-making process must be equitable and transparent, clearly showing who is influencing the conversation. There must not be any secret meetings with larger or well-funded agencies.</p>
3.2 What takes into account the concerns and relationships between stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable?	<p>International agencies will suffer less financially if they suspend operations but are already facing damage to their reputations for staying. Some are under pressure from headquarters to withdraw because of the global consequences on their reputations for continuing to operate and the precedent it may set for other contexts. Other members do not seem to appreciate the impact on reputations.</p> <p>Other national and international members think that agencies that want to leave have not done a realistic analysis of the impact of such a decision and are exaggerating the effect that withdrawing will have on the government's policy. They also think that larger organisations are not properly evaluating the impact of withdrawing on organisations with significant/existential funding linked to camp services and on the affected community, which will remain alone.</p> <p>Local government is worried that the situation will become worse if all agencies leave. In this case, the central government may become even more aggressive, causing more political problems for the local government.</p> <p>The affected community must have a representative in the decision-making process. Available evidence and knowledge from previous situations involving this government and the camps must be part of a shared analysis. This analysis will help all parties see that all viewpoints were considered.</p>
3.3 What respects and values culture and faith?	<p>The affected community is from a minority faith and the government often fails to recognise their identity.</p> <p>Members of the inter-agency forum must understand how the community interprets these events, based on how religious leaders understand them in the context of their holy texts and any relevant cultural traditions.</p> <p>Either decision – withdrawing or staying – must acknowledge and respect the identity of the affected community. To be able to do this, we must find out more about their culture, traditions, and faith, and how they vary across the community (e.g. gender, age and sub-groups of the community).</p>

(continued)

QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
3.4 What results in the greatest good and does the least harm for the most stakeholders?	Short term, staying to offer services where possible and requesting more access results in the greatest benefit to the most people. Long-term, the best outcome would be for people to return home voluntarily and to close the camps. A strong advocacy campaign might achieve this, creating the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
3.5 What help(s) us improve and become a better organisation/ inter-agency body than we were before?	We must avoid members blaming each other and undermining each other's credibility. Instead, all stakeholders must have the opportunity to speak, especially the affected community. This way all participants stay involved in the process even if worried about the final decision. This is the best way to ensure unity. In order to avoid feeling excluded, all participants must be able to present new evidence or insights as the deliberation develops.



4. Decide on the preferred option(s)

4.1 What is (are) the preferred option(s) and why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document why you chose the option(s) and any limitations and assumptions that prevent you from adopting other options. 	<p>The preferred option is to have senior representatives from all member organisations share their knowledge and analysis of the short-term and long-term effects on the affected community of either decision – to stay or to leave. All agencies will have an equal opportunity to speak.</p> <p>Representatives from several agencies will meet with the affected community, the local government, and the central government security to get as much information as possible on the situation and report back to the group.</p>
4.2 What other actions can you take to avoid or mitigate risks or negative impacts?	<p>We will invite human rights organisations to give presentations to the inter-agency body, answer questions about their theory of change, and give their perspective on what should happen if the withdrawal does not trigger any change in the government's approach.</p> <p>The inter-agency coordinator will emphasise the importance of unity. Reach out to other inter-agency coordinators for lessons learned in other situations.</p> <p>Create opportunities for developing trust and relationships between inter-agency members – e.g. shared meals and peer-to-peer visits.</p>



5. Agree on next steps

5.1 What are the agreed next steps after the deliberation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the final decision-making process and who will be involved? Who will communicate the decision? When and how? How will you monitor the situation? What triggers should be established to force a review? 	<p>Create a clear process with next steps for the inter-agency body and seek support.</p> <p>Make sure you have enough time to address this issue thoughtfully, as described above.</p>
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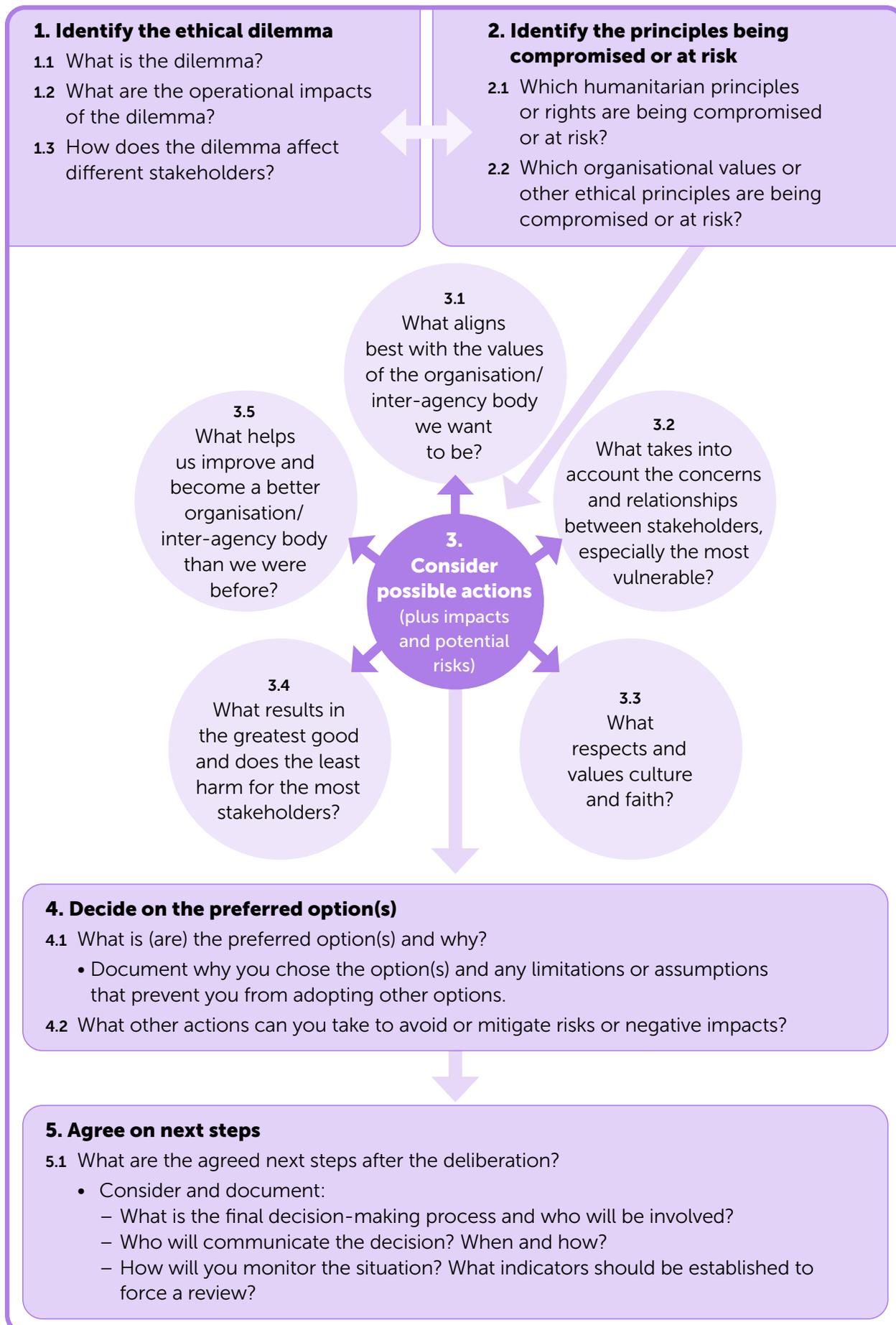
The tool for ethical decision making – worksheet for responses

QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
 1. Identify the ethical dilemma	
1.1 What is the dilemma?	
1.2 What are the operational impacts of the dilemma?	
1.3 How does the dilemma affect different stakeholders?	
 2. Identify the principles being compromised or at risk	
2.1 Which humanitarian principles or rights are being compromised or at risk?	
2.2 Which organisational values or other ethical principles are being compromised or at risk?	
 3. Consider possible actions	
<p>NOTE: For each question, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one option/answer (the first answer may not be the best option) • the impact on the affected population and stakeholders • if the action would create new short- or long-term risks. 	
3.1 What aligns best with the values of the organisation/inter-agency body we want to be?	

(continued)

QUESTION/ACTION	YOUR RESPONSES
3.2 What takes into account the concerns and relationships between stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable?	
3.3 What respects and values culture and faith?	
3.4 What results in the greatest good and does the least harm for the most stakeholders?	
3.5 What help(s) us improve and become a better organisation/ inter-agency body than we were before?	
 4. Decide on the preferred option(s)	
4.1 What is (are) the preferred option(s) and why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document why you chose the option(s) and any limitations and assumptions that prevent you from adopting other options. 4.2 What other actions can you take to avoid or mitigate risks or negative impacts?	
 5. Agree on next steps	
5.1 What are the agreed next steps after the deliberation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the final decision-making process and who will be involved? – Who will communicate the decision? When and how? – How will you monitor the situation? What triggers should be established to force a review? 	

One-page overview of the tool for ethical decision making





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