Stealth Humanitarianism: Negotiating Politics, Precarity and Performance Management in Protecting the Urban Displaced

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Post-cold-war-era conflicts and the humanitarian political economy have driven
two disparate yet concurrent shifts within the humanitarian field. On one hand,
new public management-style reforms have increasingly focused organizations
15 on efficiency, deliverables and technical proficiency. On the other, an interna-
tional rights regime has demanded that humanitarian interventions and actions
become more explicitly political. Nowhere are the tensions between neutral
humanitarian expertise and the need for overt political engagement more visible
than for organizations promoting refugee protection in fluid, politically plural-
20 istic urban sites. Building on fieldwork in Johannesburg, Kampala and Nairobi,
we argue that neutrality, technical fixes and demands for direct and targeted
service delivery can undermine long-term urban protection. Rather, protection
requires enhanced local literacy and pursuing back routes to rights through
engagement with municipal authorities, local actors and policy sectors. In
25 other words, humanitarian organizations must work smarter, smaller and steal-
thier. But, to do this, the sector requires substantial shifts in its funding
regime—including reconsidering demands for measurable outputs, strictly tar-
geted services and rapid direct service delivery.

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Introduction: Protection and Accountability in a Precarious and Political World

Cities of the 'Global South' are increasingly prominent theatres for humani-
tarian action. As sites of passage, profit and protection for hundreds of
thousands of displaced people, they are spaces in which humanitarians

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must heed acute demands to work beyond camps, to aid those which for
many years 'the eye refused to see' (Kibreab 1996). In doing so, they must
navigate three conflicting and potentially debilitating imperatives within the
humanitarian field. The responsibility to protect those displaced, to promote
5   their legal rights and to provide them with targeted and quantifiable services.
Yet doing so effectively requires political engagements that may violate 'hu-
manitarian neutrality': a curtailed politics relying on legalism and techno-
cratic engagement. Moreover, operating in highly politicized and politically
fragmented urban spaces risks undermining donor demands for organizations
10   to efficiently deliver targeted, quantifiable outputs and services.

   Faced with widespread local government decentralization and urban de-
privation, humanitarian organizations' explicit engagement with municipal
authorities and cities' populations demand a shift in both approach and lan-
guage: a way of overcoming the competing norms currently shaping humani-
15   tarian practice. Building on original fieldwork in three long-standing
destinations for persons displaced by conflict, namely Johannesburg,
Kampala and Nairobi, we illustrate that only through 'local literacy' and
'back routes to rights' can humanitarians avoid overt and potentially costly
political blunders while remaining effective advocates for the displaced. Given
20   the nature of contemporary 'Southern' urbanism, improving protection de-
mands humanitarian organizations complement their technical skills and na-
tional and global engagements with nuanced insights into intergovernmental
relations, everyday bureaucratic practices and abilities to engage local autho-
rities across multiple policy fields. Moreover, promoting rights for refugees
25   living amongst equally poor and vulnerable host populations requires tactical
political alliances with community-based organizations and local actors. In
many instances, humanitarians need to be all but invisible, promoting rights
indirectly to avoid political ire and popular backlash. Practising such 'stealth
humanitarianism' will require substantial shifts in both humanitarians' self-
30   understanding and humanitarian financing which privileges quantitatively
measurable outputs, short budget cycles and strictly targeted services.

   Given the nature of urban protection challenges, the most effective forms
of engagement with local authorities often come when humanitarians recog-
nize local authorities' interests and incentives and develop strategies to align
35   them with protection concerns. This may take the form of direct calls for
resources to protect refugee rights. More frequently, it will mean demonstrat-
ing how the presence of refugees can be a political or financial asset by
providing enhanced revenue through taxes or attracting direct assistance to
core government departments. In almost all instances, protection will likely
40   be achieved by finding creative ways of insinuating POC (persons of concern;
internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers) into existing pro-
grammes and policies or enhancing those programmes in ways that can ac-
commodate POC. Through this kind of stealth or 'bureaucratic
incorporation' (Marrow 2009), humanitarians may avoid complex and con-
45   tentious public battles over rights, instead naturalizing the presence of

refugees in their respective communities while building solidarities with 'local' constituencies facing similar marginalization.

Approach

This article is not a further appeal for local governments to do more or do
5 better for POC. This has been the approach of far too many studies of urban refugees worldwide and often realizes only limited positive change (Grabska 2006; Kaiser 2006; Bernstein and Okello 2007; Hovil 2007; Women's Refugee Commission 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Rather, it seeks to understand the institutional and political structures in which the urban displaced find themselves.
10 It explores how ongoing processes of local government decentralization, budgeting, vertical and horizontal cooperation and popular participation shape the wellbeing of displaced people. As many of these arrangements currently encourage local authorities to ignore or exclude newcomers (see Landau and Segatti 2013)—citizens and foreigners, voluntary and forced—it guides hu-
15 manitarians on how to recalibrate incentives through advocacy and assistance. In doing so, it also surfaces the political, institutional and financial obstacles that may prevent them from doing so.

While speaking to questions of conflicting global norms and the needs of vulnerable populations, we adopt an approach rooted in the politics of local
20 governance and humanitarian action. More specially, we build on extensive research and capacity-building initiatives in local government, urbanization and integration (see Sandercock 2003; Calavita 2005; Jones-Correa 2005; Ellerman 2006; Fincher and Iveson 2008; Daley 2009; Caponio and Borkert 2010; Mulvey 2010). There is little published work explicitly discussing local
25 authorities' roles in addressing migration and displacement in the 'global south', but what exists nonetheless offers considerable guidance into how to understand local government performance and reformability (Götz 2004; Kimble *et al.* 2012; Schoeller-Diaz *et al.* 2012; Landau *et al.* 2013; Edwards *et al.* 2014). It is from this position that we have conducted our research and
30 analysis.

Interrogating local contexts allows us to move beyond the moral and legal imperatives (however compelling) for states to protect and provide for POC. Approaching protection from the bottom up brings us into local struggles for limited resources. International and national obligations to protect refugees in
35 contexts where local populations are themselves vulnerable and poor only breed resentment and hostilities from local populations, and political backlash from leaders with local voting constituencies. It also means confronting the challenges of remaining neutral and efficient in spaces unlikely to be politically neutral or administratively straightforward.
40 Our analysis is based on findings from research in three African cities: Nairobi, Johannesburg and Kampala. Each is a trade and political centre which has become a destination and transit point for a broad range of POC. While the specific needs of refugees vary among and within the

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cities, all face the generalized challenges confronting displaced persons (and many others) living in urban centres: accessing secure housing, income, physical security and social services. In both Kenya and Uganda, the primary focus of humanitarian attention is on purpose-built camps and settlements.
5   However, there is a growing awareness of urban-based POC. In Nairobi, these include refugees and asylum seekers from Africa's Great Lakes Region as well as from conflict and persecution across the Horn: the Sudans, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and Somalia. As the Government of Kenya has initiated the closure of Dadaab refugee camps, the urban 'case
10   load' will only grow. Nairobi also hosts people internally displaced by ethnic conflicts, particularly those stemming from the 2007–08 post-election violence. As the challenges facing urban-based POC have been well documented in previous scholarly and applied research (see Palmary 2002; CORMSA 2008; Women's Refugee Commission 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Simpson 2013),
15   our analysis has been able to focus elsewhere: on improving humanitarian practice through local government engagements.

   Even if Kampala's urban refugee population is less well recognized and contentious, it too includes people from across the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa as well as considerable numbers of people displaced by long-
20   standing conflict in Northern Uganda. South Africa is somewhat exceptional in maintaining no purpose-built refugee camps, instead relying exclusively on a protection programme premised on temporary, local integration. (This may soon change, as South Africa is now considering substantial shifts in its asylum policy; see Government of South Africa 2016.) For many years, the
25   world's leader in individual asylum claims, South Africa hosts asylum seekers and refugees from across Africa and from parts of South and South East Asia and Central Europe.

   As no reliable data is collected on the number of displaced people in each of the cities, it is impossible to provide anything but the crudest estimates of
30   these diverse and dynamic populations. In Kampala, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has conducted an urban refugee registration exercise and indicated that, as of December 2014, there were 72,019 refugees in the city, contributing to the 1.72 million people living in the city (in 2012 according to the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics). No data was
35   available on the number of internally displaced people (IDPs). In Kenya, a 2015 UNHCR report puts the number of registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country at 584,989. Of these, 51,757 were estimated to live in Nairobi, making up a significant portion of the city's 3.36 million residents (Central Intelligence Agency 2015). Again, no data was available on the
40   number of IDPs.[2] The UNHCR indicates that, in December 2014, South Africa hosted 576,133 POC including 112,192 refugees and 463,940 asylum seekers. However, it offers no information on spatial distributions that could indicate how many live in the city. While the 2011 census indicates that 12.7 per cent (562,952) of the city's population (4,434,827) were born outside
45   South Africa, it provides no details about their legal status. While we may

not have all of the details we would like on the displaced population's size, needs or activities, the three cities each feature prominently within the scholarly and applied literature (Campbell 2006; Landau 2006; Bernstein and Okello 2007; Pavenello *et al.* 2010; Women's Refugee Commission 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Drummond and Crawford 2014). This affords the opportunity to rely heavily, if imperfectly, on a pool of secondary sources that would be unavailable for other less-well-researched locales.

In evaluating the three municipalities' responses to their urban-based POC, a team comprising locally based researchers working in collaboration with scholars elsewhere developed and tested a purpose-built diagnostic tool developed to assist humanitarians on four fronts:

- to assess who holds formal and de facto responsibility for POC;
- to understand the obstacles, abilities and incentives for local authorities in responding to POC;
- to assess the 'reformability' of local authorities—the degree to which discretion, resources and institutional configurations may allow improved policy and practices;
- to identify non-state actors (e.g. non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, religious bodies) who: (i) are providing or prohibiting opportunities for POC; (ii) are working effectively on behalf of people sharing similar interests with POC; (iii) may be enlisted in providing services or pressing for positive changes in local authorities' policies and practices.

To these ends, the team conducted key informant interviews with local, national and provincial governments as well as international NGOs and local community organizations, over a period of six weeks in each site. Many of these organizations worked directly with refugees as service providers or advocates. Due to limitations of time and focus, we did not conduct formal interviews directly with refugees or community representatives. Instead, we relied on published materials to ascertain the challenges refugees faced in accessing substantive protection. As noted, the interviews sought to assess local government's formal and de facto responsibilities for the health, housing and economic development of displaced populations. In addition to interviewing sector officials, we examined local government budgeting, community participation, planning processes and intergovernmental relationships. Looking within local governments revealed the cognitive, financial and political incentives that work for and against a positive, proactive protection response for refugees. Our interviews proceeded alongside secondary analysis in each site.

The results of our efforts are manifold. Most importantly, we use the case material to develop considerations for humanitarians navigating the complexities of a precarious political environment while restricted by demands for neutrality and accountability. This cannot offer specific advice for actors

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working in a site or situation, but rather presents broad considerations that may help explain existing behaviour patterns while improving interventions aimed at enhancing protection.

Conflicting Imperatives

5   Humanitarians working in urban areas must confront and navigate three competing imperatives. The first is the need to improve humanitarian practice within the world's urban areas. Working against realizing this goal are two further and potentially more powerful demands: the first is the perpetuation of a technocratic humanitarian politics—what we term 'neutrality', although 10   it is anything but; the second is the need for humanitarianism to be delivered efficiently, on schedule and with measurable (usually quantifiable) effects. Within the confines of a short article, we cannot offer more than a few explanatory words about each. (For more on the varied sources on norm emergence, see Barnett 2005; Mills 2005; Rieffer-Flanagan 2009.) Rather, the 15   article is largely intended to highlight their essential qualities and contradictions, while identifying means to broaden protection spaces wherever possible.

Protecting the Urban Displaced

While, for many years, the UNHCR resisted calls to work in urban spaces, 20   often citing expense and an implicit belief in encampment, the organization and its partners have embraced the need for urban-oriented action (see Zetter and Deikun 2010; Women's Refugee Commission 2011a, 2011b; also Lyytinen and Kullenberg 2013). As the UNHCR notes on its webpage on 'urban refugees', 'only one-third of the world's 10.5 million refugees now live 25   in camps' (http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4b0e4cba6.html; see also UNHCR 2009). While the figures are necessarily inaccurate and dated, as of 1 December 2015, there were approximately 2.2 million Syrian refugees in Turkey (*ibid.*). Of those, just over 10 per cent were being housed in purpose-built camps or settlements. Similar proportions almost certainly hold 30   for countries throughout the region. Across Africa, there is a growing awareness that the majority of refugees and other displaced people live and seek protection in what are often deeply impoverished, unequal and under-capacitated urban centres.

Although it is unclear whether refugees' presence in cities is as novel as many suggest—people have flagged the existence of urban refugees for decades (see Rogge and Akol 1989; Cooper 1992; Malkki 1995)—strong normative, political and financial motivations have recently captured humanitarians' attention. Urban refugees have emerged as an object of intervention located within broader efforts to 'visibilize displacement': to identify and expose the vulnerability of varied groups in ways that make them suitable objects of humanitarian action (see Polzer and Hammond 2008; Lubkemann 2010). This

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has produced a particular kind of analytical blindness in which scholars and practitioners focus on the displaced and their specific vulnerabilities in ways disconnected from broader questions of urbanism, precarity and resilience. That characterizing social realities in rapidly transforming urban centres is difficult, without the added difficulty of hunting down new arrivals potentially seeking invisibility (see Jacobsen and Furst 2012), only exacerbates these gaps. If nothing else, this article suggests there are compelling normative and intellectual reasons for sustained attention to both cities and the people seeking protection within them. However, engaging in the city more broadly will require addressing competing imperatives: 'neutral humanitarian politics' and new public management drives for targeted efficiency and quantifiable outputs.

Humanitarian Neutrality

Questions of how humanitarians can reconcile the necessity of political engagement with the demand for political neutrality raise significant debate amongst practitioners and scholars (see Rieff 2003; Stein 2005; Lischer 2006; Barnett and Weiss 2008). At issue is whether humanitarians' original position of neutrality, impartiality and independence (Mills 2005; Barnett and Weiss 2008) is realizable or even appropriate given the challenges necessary to realize protection (Rieff 2003). Many humanitarian organizations and their employees remain dedicated to founding beliefs that protecting relief workers and vulnerable people require aloofness from conflicting parties' political interests. Amidst polemic cold war politics, relief organizations needed (or believed they did) a neutral stance to be effective. Under such conditions, engagement outside official diplomatic channels or straying beyond carefully and often legally delimited policy spaces was considered practically and morally risky (Barnett and Weiss 2008: 4). Indeed, the UNHCR was founded on principles of neutrality and, to this day, remains hesitant to publicly critique, let alone try to shape, domestic or local policies.

By the end of the twenty-first century, global politics had shifted. So too had the funding environment and the nature of conflicts. Within this context, humanitarian organizations had greater freedom to act and often felt compelled to broaden their engagements given the increased competition in limited donor resources. This has generated a growing appreciation that the humanitarian space is intricately intertwined with global, national and institutional politics (Barnett 2005; Mills 2005; Belloni 2007; Leebaw 2007; Rieffer-Flanagan 2009; Subotic 2009). In this 'neo-humanitarian' (Mills 2005) era, organizations previously focusing on relief have become more strident advocates for refugee and asylum seeker rights and protections (Minear 2002; Barnett and Snyder 2008). Backed by international laws and treatises, their work, like that of political activists and watchdogs, seeks to ensure state compliance in the protection of populations displaced in conflict. But, even as rights advocates who are now more overtly political, their efforts remain

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constrained: limited to demands and strategies outlined in international or domestic law and focused on achieving the seemingly 'neutral' and technocratic standards outlined by the Sphere Project and others. Even with a growing recognition that effective protection can only be achieved through political action, the ethos of neutrality remains strong within humanitarian organizations that often cling to legal and technical fixes to avoid political entanglements. Elsewhere, the performance of neutrality remains important to maintain access to displaced populations or to satisfy the self-image of humanitarians (Fassin 2012). These tensions continue to shape the nature of political engagement.

Quantifiable Efficiency and New Public Management

Accompanying the limited shift in humanitarians' engagements is a strong move towards the professionalization and institutionalization of humanitarian organizations (Barnett 2005; Stein 2005). This has been accompanied by a far greater emphasis on market-based solutions as a means of both improving protection and limiting seeming unnecessary spending on top-heavy bureaucracies (see Binder and Witte 2007; Hopgood 2008). Following global patterns in public administration that might be loosely termed a shift to 'new public management', humanitarians have been increasingly asked to see the displaced as clients (see Kapucu 2006). Moreover, humanitarian agencies' primary 'shareholders' (i.e. donor states) are levying pressures to improve efficiency and timeliness despite the heightened complexity of their operational environments. Coupled with decreasing resources for many kinds of assistance, this has generated a field ever more fixated on quantifying the number of beneficiaries and creating outcomes that can be measured and compared across a diversity of settings. This is evidenced in the almost universal push for humanitarian standards, evaluation and reporting. Even if the Sphere initiative is primarily an effort to improve the lives of the displaced, it is—together with a strong emphasis on private-sector engagement—perhaps more importantly a donor strategy for ensuring that humanitarian resources are more efficiently and effectively deployed (see Dufour *et al*. 1994; The Sphere Project 2016).

Shifting Spaces, Shifting Norms: Navigating Competing Imperatives

As they work in urban spaces, humanitarians are called into a delicate balancing act between their normative, political and institutional imperatives. Demands for increased accountability are further complicated by the changing nature of politics with which humanitarians need to engage. This is not just the transition from old to new wars (see Kaldor 1999) which diversified the number of state and non-state combatants. Rather, it is a shift in scale. Increasingly international organizations are being asked to work locally, in the messy politics of urban spaces with a range of actors that may have little

interest in, knowledge of or capacity to protect the displaced. Rather, they may have every interest in not doing so.

The remainder of this article offers a series of suggestions for reconciling the competing imperatives and complications of engaging in new spaces and funding environments. It works from the position that policy changes most likely to result in improved protection for displaced people in urban areas may have little to do with migration, immigration or asylum per se. People moving into cities due to war or persecution are, by definition, 'displaced', but this status does not define them. Rather, POC are also parents, traders, students, clients, service providers, consumers and potential investors. As such, their lives and economic impacts are shaped by policies and practices that intersect with but are not framed by protection or migration concerns.

Although there is no best approach or standard for engaging local authorities, humanitarians can benefit from using a systematic approach to assess and understand municipalities. Within a single country, municipalities are distinguished by the nature of their institutions, political priorities, resource bases, population and geography. Working across a region or on multiple continents further highlights the need to understand the varied institutions, interests and abilities likely to shape responses to POC. Providing incentives in the form of resources, prestige or opportunities for professional advancement are likely to be central to achieving any objectives. However, the specific language of one's approach or appeals needs to be tailored: what works well to mobilize sympathy and support in one setting may prove ineffective or potentially harmful in another. Similarly, appeals to principles—rights, inclusivity, justice, efficiency, obligations—will generate divergent results amongst planners and politicians steeped in different traditions, priorities and institutional or political incentives (see Donnelly 2003; Elias 2008). This analysis and recommendations below draw attention to precisely these variables. The goal is enabling humanitarians to build strategies for expanding the protection space by identifying points of engagement; the language to use in framing these engagements; and the types of incentives and interests to which one should appeal.

Transcending Competing Imperatives

The research conducted for this article illustrates one unmistakable (if predictable) finding: in almost every circumstance, POC are almost universally low political priority for local authorities. While displaced people continue to be used as political tools across a range of settings, their protection is rarely at the forefront of local political agendas. This may seem obvious, but it nonetheless bears emphasis to temper humanitarians' expectations and approach. This is especially important in instances of widespread scarcity—a condition that describes the majority of refugee-hosting municipalities across the world—where simply highlighting humanitarian needs is unlikely to elicit a strong response. Ironically, the more democratic and participatory local

governments become, the less likely they may be to dedicate scarce resources to POC. Unless there is a strong local constituency concerned with refugees' rights and welfare, politicians will do as little as possible to promote refugee rights, especially when they need to win popular support. Where local popu-
5   lations are hostile to POC—as they are in Nairobi and Johannesburg—local authorities may win points through policies that explicitly exclude or deny POC (see Landau and Misago 2009; Hopkins 2010; Landau and Misago 2016). Under such circumstances, overt or public demands for refugee rights to services and opportunities may only provide fodder for populist
10 politicians.

Local Literacy

The first principle of effective engagement is to develop a high degree of 'local institutional literacy'. Building on the recognition of refugees' limited political caché means moving beyond appeals to blunt principles or interna-
15 tional protocols. Rather, it requires deep engagement in the kind of local politics that often unsettles 'neutral' accountable humanitarian actors. Such anxieties are in part due to the need to stray from humanitarians' legalistic and technocratic expertise. Indeed, engaging effectively is premised strong understandings of varied institutional configurations, the language of urban
20 development and the politics surrounding diversity, poverty reduction and immigration. Recognizing that 'human/refugee rights' and 'protection' are only powerful terms for mobilizing authorities and populations under par-ticular circumstances, humanitarians must develop nuanced understandings of the political language, institutional capacities and interests informing local
25 government policy and practice. Moreover, there is a need to recognize that protection occurs when humanitarian and political/institutional interests align.

In illustrating local literacy's value, we can take differences in political priorities between Johannesburg and Nairobi. For South African municipa-
30 lities, authorities typically measure success by their performance in countering economic and social exclusion. While authorities may not universally consider POC among the marginalized groups deserving assistance, advocates have found ways of using the language of inclusion to help refugees be inserted into policy. Rather than making appeals to their rights as refugees, municipal
35 authorities have responded to arguments about POC's general economic and physical vulnerability. The substance of the appeals may differ little, but the rhetorical shift matters greatly.

Counter this with Nairobi. In the Kenyan capital—and to some degree in Kampala—officials have little direct responsibility and express little moral
40 commitment to providing the kind of inclusive, transformative services avail-able to some Johannesburg residents. As such, demands for inclusion or access to state services are unlikely to garner support or an effective response. This is so even where residents may be legally entitled to such services. Where

refugees are a low political priority and states provide little to their own citizens, few gains will come from demonstrating that POC have unmet protection needs. Similarly, remonstrating officials for falling short of their legal obligations to POC will accomplish little where officials and citizens expect little in this regard. Rather, Kenyan officials see their role as fostering opportunities for business formation and self-reliance. Under such conditions, appeals to improve conditions for entrepreneurialism (i.e. improved physical security, licensing and market access) may be the most effective way to expand the protection space. This need not mean abandoning quests for improved health care, housing or other services, but rather it means bringing one's strategies into line with Kenya's market-based ethos.

Smaller, Smarter, Stealthier

The illustrations above lead us to a series of ancillary principles that humanitarians should consider in developing strategies for municipal engagements. Most critical here is that de facto protection will be negotiated outside refugee law. Even where refugee law explicitly entitles refugees to a range of services—under South Africa's Refugees Act (1998), they are entitled to public health care, work opportunities and potentially public housing—claiming those rights may well require incentivizing local authorities or modifying sectoral regulations and practices. In Johannesburg, refugees may already be formally eligible for varied forms of subsidized housing but are excluded due to rationing or ignorance on the part of officials and advocates. By providing limited support to the city's department of housing or even to specific housing schemes, it may prove possible to negotiate access to secure accommodation. In Nairobi, the assessment tool identified ool of resources dedicated to disaster management while there were no funds set aside for assistance to POC. Under such circumstances, working with officials responsible for disaster management can unlock funding for refugee-related initiatives that would otherwise remain untouched. The more decentralized the institutional configurations, the greater the need to engage across a range of levels and sectors.

Where rights to services and/or markets are not clearly delimited in refugee legislation, authorities may be similarly persuaded to create environments in which POC are empowered as citizens and long-term residents to access opportunities. This can be done through small-scale engagement to amend by-laws, trade licenses and other regulations. Indeed, the most rapid change in protection outcomes can be achieved through highly localized, sectorally specific advocacy. In politically hostile or contentious environments, a stealthy approach may be the way to go. Although working against the grain of those striving for legal recognition and protection, positive change in local regulations or by-laws can be achieved without making explicit reference to the inclusion of refugees or other POC. Removing provisions that provide free access to public services only to host populations (as is the case

with Nairobi's public 'Iko' toilets) at least formally enables refugee access. More significantly, rights to services flow from being urban residents, not refugees.

5   In all three cases, the most effective forms of protection are also those that rely on legal and social 'invisibility'. Secondary research in Johannesburg, for example, highlights the degree to which some people eligible for legal protection may instead prefer invisibility (see Kihato 2013). Understanding how POC integrate into markets and services may ultimately lead humanitarians to pragmatically adopt strategies of 'benign neglect': allowing people to ne-

10   gotiate their own ways of accessing urban services and economic opportunities. This falls short of guaranteeing universal access, but it may be quicker, cheaper and more politically and economically sustainable than making such universal demands. This may be done while working to open legal spaces for protection for those needing such avenues, but organizations must not pre-

15   sume that legal status is a gateway to other substantive needs (see Landau and Duponchel 2011).

Our research illustrates a further insight that should assuage many humanitarian organization's fears about working in urban areas: while engagements must be smart and locally tailored, they can and should also be affordable.

20   Direct service provision in urban areas is expensive and typically unsustainable. However, unlike camps or other purpose-built settlements, municipalities often come equipped with existing networks of service providers, security mechanisms and markets. These may be imperfect, even for long-term residents, but are likely to be more cost-effective to reform, expand or supple-

25   ment than building parallel systems. RefugePoint's clever actions in Nairobi illustrates how this may work: rather than paying for health services or supporting refugee health clinics, RefugePoint worked to incorporate legally recognized refugees in the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). Instead of making this a national issue, which may have resulted in a par-

30   liamentary backlash resulting in refugees' ineligibility for coverage, the organization worked with a mid-level bureaucrat to quietly enrol refugees into the system. By completing the paperwork themselves, they secured care for hundreds of people at almost no cost, with little publicity and with no political backlash. In aligning their incentives (health care for refugees) with the

35   bureaucrat's (achieving performance targets), they achieved a double win. Without a sophisticated understanding of local policies and a sound reading of performance incentives, such success would have likely remained elusive.

Support for existing mechanisms can also win popular political favour for populations that would otherwise be stigmatized or scapegoated. This can

40   come by providing additional resources to health providers to expand services; vouchers or supplements to housing programmes already established for the poor; or technical assistance to city planners so that their initiatives better serve long-term residents and POC. Such technocratic engagements also open multiple spaces for engagement. Rather than relying on rights to

45   'trickle down' from national policy pronouncements—although this may be

required in highly centralized systems like Kampala—a sectorally specific approach opens multiple spaces for engagement. Engaging with municipal or sub-municipal bureaucrats may do little to change national policy, but appeals to professional values can often do more and do it more quickly than high-level policy reform. Wherever possible, humanitarians should build on the possibilities for 'bureaucratic incorporation'.

This does not mean abandoning humanitarians' traditional focus on documentation, legal status or reform to refugee and immigration laws. Such campaigns remain important symbolically, even if documentation and formal rights translate into practical protection far less directly than advocates often presume (Landau and Duponchel 2011). Instead, the approach presented here suggests that, in engaging with local authorities, humanitarians look for opportunities to build local solidarity with citizens and officials by appealing to interest beyond immediate humanitarian needs. Doing this requires a perspective recognizing the decentralization and privatization of political authority (cf. Soysal 1996: 21). Marrow's (2009: 758) work on bureaucratic incorporation of immigrants into the United States can provide one route. She speaks about how 'bureaucrats' responses to immigrants' interests precede those of elected officials and are driven by strong professional norms'. Elsewhere, appealing to more generalized interests around housing, crime or other concerns (i.e. not rights) can help appeal to local political incentives in ways that do not draw lines or make references to discourses which are seen as foreign, threatening or unwelcome. In all cases, the language must resonate locally, the interventions be locally legitimate and the approach gradual and cautious.

No strategy is guaranteed to produce results. As such, humanitarian effectiveness requires diversified expertise and points of engagement. Without abandoning efforts to sway national policies (especially where systems remain highly centralized), municipal savvy opens multiple spaces for engagement in ways that can avoid contentious public politics. Small shifts in by-laws, performance incentives or small-scale alignment of interests can produce immediate, positive effects. Such initiatives require considerable up-front effort and expertise, but they need not demand extensive or sustained expenditures. By reconsidering how we understand successful protection—by shifting from legal rights to practical access—humanitarians may ultimately be more successful in creating local authority protection allies.

Conclusions: Confronting Norms through Stealth Humanitarianism

The pages above describe complex and varied operational environments for contemporary humanitarian actors. Negotiating protection in purpose-built settlements or camps is neither simple nor straightforward. Urban environments nonetheless demand an even more nuanced, politicized and manifold approach. In spaces often characterized by fluidity and socio-political fragmentation, there can be no single 'best practice'. Nor will appeals to universal

rights, international law or even domestic policy ensure or even expand pro-
tection. Moreover, focusing on legal instruments and internationally accepted
protection principles may disguise the analytical specificity and nuance
needed to work by creating unhelpful binaries: protection versus vulnerabil-
ity; legal compliance or failure. Using legal rights and policy pronouncements
as our measure of protection may also distract us from the varied strategies
people are already using to access protection. These may include market
mechanisms, bureaucratic incorporation or non-legal claims that may be
interrupted by ill-informed interventions. Indeed, a blunt appeal to rights
may disrupt de facto systems of protection while alienating people and pol-
iticians needed for expanding protection and human security.

Recognizing this, humanitarians will need to move beyond the narrow
forms of neutral political work towards a kind of a complementary politics
informed by a spatial, social and political understanding of rights violations
and potential for protection. At the heart of this is the need to find 'back
routes to rights' and social solidarity with locally legitimate actors—local
officials, businesspeople, landlords, service providers—who have the power
to bring about immediate positive change. As rights are increasingly nego-
tiated 'horizontally' (cf. Kabeer 2005) with neighbours, not states, a state-
centred language of rights can be impotent and potentially perilous.

The paragraphs above outline the possibilities for working in urban areas
and point to strategies that engage within the localized institutions and in-
centives that structure urban life. However, such engagements are not easily
reconciled with imperatives for humanitarian neutrality and quantifiable out-
comes tied to time bound improvements among a subset of the urban popu-
lations. Indeed, the processes described above not only require a level of local
literacy and knowledge, but will often demand engagement in political pro-
cesses that are long, convoluted and with uncertain outcomes. This is an
existential challenge for bodies responsible for quick, quantifiable actions
undertaken in ostensibly neutral forms.

In some instances, the approach called for here may mean all but aban-
doning the language of rights and protection embedded in humanitarian law
and guiding principles. Such instruments may continue to inform and guide
humanitarians' work, but through locally appropriate language informed by a
close reading of politics, interests and opportunities. This will not be easy for
agencies and individuals steeped in the humanitarian status quo. As Fassin
(2010) so trenchantly notes in discussing reforms to the humanitarian sys-
tems, there are great institutional and personal interests invested in preserving
both the universal language and mechanisms long used in mobilizing for
rights. People have almost religious faith in past approaches and principles
and may be deeply unsettled by needing to think in new, more pragmatic
shades of grey. Organizations built around a rights discourse may fear for
their relevance and funding. Indeed, the kind of political approach called for
here may be used against organizations like the UNHCR or its partners, who
are expected to remain politically neutral. But there is a place for all these

strategies in the kind of advocacy strategies described in the pages above. The diversity of spaces in which we push for social justice demands as many strategies and appeals.

As much as the humanitarian mindset may resist a break from norms of neutrality, it is perhaps the political economic of humanitarianism that continues to present the most thorough obstacle to effectively achieving urban protection. Throughout the research, humanitarians expressed numerous concerns about an approach based on political engagement and pragmatism over providing direct assistance in line with established protection principles. While these anxieties are in part rooted in discomfort of breaking from the norm, they also stem explicitly from funding regimes. As long as humanitarian funding is almost exclusively predicated on direct service delivery, quantifiable outputs and measurable impacts, the politicized approach outlined here is unlikely to succeed. While donors need not abandon the quest for accountability, any change in approach will require a number of fundamental shifts. These include, inter alia, the need to:

● *develop funding strategies that do not demand only quantifiable, service delivery outputs.* Rather, donors should dedicate some element of humanitarian funding to support assessment and advocacy while encouraging humanitarian actors to qualitatively explain their engagements and effects. It should be noted that such approaches are relatively inexpensive when compared with ongoing direct service provision.

● *support humanitarian assessments and interventions that consider 'local' populations and institutional capacities/opportunities.* Many of the tools used to assess urban refugees' vulnerabilities and needs exclude long-term residents and/or citizens. In spaces where all residents face considerable insecurity and vulnerability, this is an important shortcoming. Inclusive assessments and analysis not only help to determine realistic service delivery standards, but can also identify areas of shared concern and interests among displaced persons and long-term residents.

● *develop humanitarian funding initiatives that can support inclusive, developmental local government.* Such an approach may require occasionally blurring boundaries between humanitarian and developmental spending and programmes. However, if donors are concerned with long-term protection of displaced persons, they need to support mechanisms that foster inclusion in communities' markets and service delivery mechanisms. By conditioning support for universal service delivery on the inclusion of displaced persons, donors will not only improve direct protection, but can provide long-term political incentives for welcoming refugees.

All of these are theoretically possible, but shifts in any of them will require broader recalibration of both mindsets and institutions.

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