The number of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) that operate internationally and are involved in either disaster or development response has increased up to fivefold in the past two decades. This is in part due to a rapid increase in man-made and natural humanitarian emergencies affecting hundreds of million of people. Up to 19 million humanitarian workers are involved in some form of humanitarian effort, with organizations that vary in affiliation, philosophy, or mission. Some important principles of humanitarian interventions include that the humanitarian action must have good outcomes, the negative outcomes are not intended, the good outweighs the bad, interventions must be welcomed by the recipients of humanitarian assistance, and the overall humanitarian action should be governed in some form. As humanitarian assistance grows and INGOs gain more attention, so does the concept of assuring quality and accountability. In practice, however, this remains to be ambiguous and inconsistence in scope where frameworks of accountability in humanitarian aid are often limited and ineffective. In particular, an emphasis on inter-related areas of tri-partite accountability, quality measurements, and ethics in humanitarian context is lacking.

This course aims to provide a general background on accountability in aid system with emphasis on non-governmental organizations, an insight onto underlying challenges and positive and negative impact of accountability processes through the lens of organizational and social ethics, an overview of quality assessment and standard setting in humanitarian practice, a discussion of major ethical challenges in aid operations, a discussion of tripartite accountability process, and an exploration of practical and feasible ways to strengthen and improve accountability mechanism towards the intended beneficiaries.

Important questions explored in this course include: What is some ethical underpinning of accountability processes? What are competing interest/conflict of interest in designing, measuring and implementing accountability mechanism within aid industry? What would be an effective accountability framework: central versus agency level and what is the difference? In regards to complementarities, standard setting and measuring outcomes, how and at what levels are they needed or effective? What are the major implementation challenges at international, national, and local community levels? What would they mean in different contexts? Could they ever be meaningfully analyzed and compared? How do these all relate to social, public health and medical ethics?

There is an asymmetrical relationship between donors, agencies, and the intended beneficiaries in the aid system--with beneficiaries being at the bottom with minimal if any influence on decision-making process in aid operations. Upward or horizontal accountability within the aid system alone - even with the best of intentions -might be a bit blind -sighted. Further questions addressed in this course include: Could beneficiaries be effectively involved in programming, priority setting, or allocation of resources? What does this mean for reform within the aid community and its governance? What are some ways we can assure the sharing process of decision-making and to transform the current dynamic from merely connecting resources to brokering better governance, true collaboration and co-operation among communities, governments, donors, and interna

Credits: 1.5
Usual pre-requisites: 1.5
Usual required permissions: Open only to students with international background or experience.
Department requirement for:
Certificate elective for: