

**Book Launch at the UN Library Talks – People at the Core:  
Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development agenda  
Palais des Nations, Geneva, 26 January 2016**

**UN Library Talks Geneva**  
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**Book Launch**

**People at the Core**  
**Humanitarian Work Psychology and  
the Global Development Agenda**



People are at the core of organizations whose mission is to deliver aid, through local communities working to generate income, and through national and international leaders working to shape policies and create good governance. At various levels, these interventions aim to lift people and communities out of poverty and ensure a decent standard of living.

We invite you to get an insight into the new field of Humanitarian Work Psychology (HWP), which, through the scientific study of the workplace, offers expertise about the well-being and performance of people in their work environment. Find out how HWP benchmarks against the developmental goals set out by the United Nations in Agenda 2030 as the most pressing issues of our age, ranging from the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and the achievement of universal primary education, to gender equality and empowerment, the reduction of child mortality, greater environmental sustainability and global partnership-building.

Copies of the book available at the event:  
Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: case studies and interventions / edited by Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard and Mary O'Neill Berry. Routledge, 2016

<https://www.routledge.com/products/9781148723889>



**Tuesday 26 January 2016**  
**1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.**

**Library Events Room (B-135)**  
Palais des Nations, Building B, 1st Floor

**Welcome Remarks:**  
**Francesco Pisano**, Chief, UNOG Library

**Introductory Remarks:**  
**Michael Moeller**, Director-General, UNOG

**Speakers:**  
**Telma Viale**, Director, Organizational Development, SRI  
**Chakib Belhassan**, Senior Officer, UNOPS Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, Geneva  
**Lichia Yiu**, President, Centre for Socio-Economic Development (CSEND),  
**Raymond Saner**, Professor em. in International Relations & International Management (University of Basle), Co-Founder of CSEND

Invitees not in possession of a UN badge should register on the UNOG website at [www.unog.ch/librarytalks](http://www.unog.ch/librarytalks). Bring a valid ID and a copy of this invitation on the day of the Program Gate, located at 8 - 14 Avenue de la Paix, 1211 Geneva 10.

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List of speakers:  
Telma Viale, Director Organizational Development, SRI  
Chakib Belhassan, Senior Officer, UNOPS Europe and Central Asia  
Lichia Yiu, President, Centre for Socio Economic Development (CSEND)  
Raymond Saner, Professor Em. In International Relations and International Management, University of Basel and co-founder of CSEND

## Introduction of the field of Humanitarian Work Psychology

Ms. Telma Viale, moderator and author, began with a brief history of Humanitarian Work Psychology (HWP), which evolved from the field of Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology, the study of human behavior in the workplace. HWP applies the theories, research, and expertise of I-O in a pro-social way, improving human well-being and addressing complex issues in the workplace, including discrimination, the treatment of marginalized and vulnerable populations (e.g., the disabled, migrants, the poor, etc.), decent working conditions, and fair and equal pay. The Global Organisation for HWP (GOHWP) now numbers over 300 members in over 30 countries.

The book “Humanitarian Work Psychology and the Global Development Agenda: Case Studies and Interventions,” edited by Drs. Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Douglas C. Maynard, and Mary O'Neill Berry (2016. London: Routledge) illustrates HWP in action across a wide range of topics and global locations; it connects the case studies to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and lays the foundation for how HWP can assist in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Global Agenda 2030.

## Work environment and psychology of the humanitarian/development work

**Chakib Belhassan** was in Tunisia during and after the Arab Spring events, and has operated in such Middle East countries as Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. He has also covered African countries such as Somalia, Libya, and Congo, as well as countries in transition both in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. His perspectives on humanitarian

and development workers included a keen awareness of the impact on them of the working environment – crisis, transition, recovery, and development modes. The psychological issues, which may result from these kinds of work experiences, include powerlessness, guilt, isolation, demotivation, emotional burnout, stress, grief, etc. He also discussed some of the interventions which support the well-being of workers and help to minimize the negative impacts of these difficult work environments, including teleworking; staff rotation to lower stress environments; and access to psychological support not only in emergencies or during crisis. Further examples of how HWP could help included (i) inclusiveness of workers in decision making; (ii) closing the gap between HQ and field offices; (iii) strong backstopping and support to workers not only in work-related matters but in personal matters more broadly; and (iv) concrete measures aimed at encouraging workers and recognizing the value of their contributions.

### Political and social context considerations in poverty reduction programmes

**Raymond Saner** spoke about the need for humanitarian aid workers to think and act in a multi-foci manner and to expect work to often be non-linear. The two examples given were an aid worker who tries to deliver food to villages in Columbia who have been cut off food supply because of the ongoing armed conflict between the two guerilla groups (FARC, ENL) and the armed forces of the government. Different parts of the surrounding of the hypothetical village are controlled by either of the three groups. The food aid humanitarian helper has to find ways to be in touch with the three groups and negotiate access. Without such agreement, no food aid can be delivered. The second case example was the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) which followed the failed Structural Adjustment Program (both led by the IMF and the World Bank). In contrast to the SAP, the PRS requires social dialogue between the government and a country's multi-stakeholder groups. SAP could be "ordered" by the experts consisting of IMF-WB officials and officials of the poor countries' key ministries namely Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Planning. The PRS in contrast demands negotiations between all of the governments' ministries themselves, and then between the ministries and the national stakeholders (chambers of commerce, labour union, NGOs- foreign and domestic, political parties). In addition, the government has to negotiate with IMF/WB and with different donors who might be willing to provide financial support for the implementation of the country's PRS plans. A humanitarian aid worker interested in, for instance, providing help in form of education, health, water etc., needs to know the country's PRS in order to fit into the overall framework defined by the country's PRS. Offering financial support and some specific sectoral experience will certainly be welcome but would need to demonstrate complementarity to the country's PRS. Contradictions or duplications of effort would not be welcome. But if the humanitarian aid worker does not know how a PRS functions, how they are being negotiated and how the implementation is being organized, he/she might experience lack of cooperation by government and key stakeholders which if not correctly understood could lead to demotivation and under-performance of the humanitarian aid worker.

## Insights on areas addressed by Humanitarian Work Psychology

**Lichia Yiu** explained how HWP as an emerging sub-field of psychology continues to evolve in terms of its scope and shared scientific domain. It straddles individual psychology, organizational psychology, social psychology and clinical psychology typically present in humanitarian work environments affected by manmade (armed conflict) or natural disasters (earthquakes, inundations, drought). Serving to provide protection and humanitarian assistance in emergencies, the frontline workers are called up to deal with not only the needs of the victims but have to also cope with the complex dynamics when reconstituting a transitional “normality” and re-creating a sense of sociometric equilibrium so that victims of the disasters can find inner strength and resilience to heal and to rebound. HWP provides the theory for frontline humanitarian workers to make sense of the situation they work in and to provide guidance in managing the crisis situations which are often fluid and with ill-defined social and political boundaries. HWP can also contribute to the pre-departure preparation of frontline humanitarian actors to help them be better equipped to deal with the multiplicities of the stakeholders in the field and to learn how to conduct situational analysis in order to formulate intervention strategies in an effective manner so lives can be saved and services can be provided for instance in the camps for displaced persons, refugees and migrants.

## Reaching out to Minds and Hearts

**Telma Viale** spoke about potential contributions by HWP to the SDGs and the broader Global Agenda 2030, both in content and in form. On content, she highlighted the unique opportunity to play a leading role in “building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions” (SDG 16), and to “revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” (SDG 17). On form, she emphasized the often daunting and overwhelming narratives around the global development agenda. Hence, to do a better job in engaging stakeholders at all levels, she proposes to look at decision-making processes, tackling both minds and hearts. She reflects on the work of Tversky & Kahneman (Nobel Prize in Economics) and the *framing effect* when constructing key messages and narratives. Based on their research on cognitive bias, people respond to choices depending on whether presented as a loss or a gain. His experiments support that when an issue was positively framed, 72% chose it, while this dropped to 22% when presented negatively. Based on behavioral economic theories, Kahneman distinguishes two phases of decision-making, one being framing, but also a phase of evaluation. In his theory of the *fast mind* (intuitive) and the *slow mind* (analytical), he argues that when making so-called rational decisions our mind continues to rely on impressions, heuristics, most recent things that impacted us, emotions, and biases based on personal experience. Hence, in that analytical phase he establishes a cognitive basis for human error. The discussion centered around tracking engagement and reflecting on the issue of positive framing and on the intangibles behind human actions, the *fast mind*, inviting I-O and HWP psychologists to a multi-disciplinary approach, reaching out to the traditional territory of behavioral economics and cognitive psychologists and seeing how their theories can help in the ambitious transformative 2030 global agenda and the SDGs.