






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Duncan Green

March 3rd, 2025

How do senior aid people influence governments, policies, laws or the aid system itself?

*Duncan Green introduces a series of short interviews with senior humanitarians about how they try to influence policy and practice. The conversations provide a rare insight into the often opaque world of insider advocacy within the humanitarian system.*

How do senior aid people influence governments, policies, laws or for that matter, the aid system? Usually, their efforts go on behind closed doors, but over the past few years we've had a fascinating glimpse of the combination of smarts, bravery and luck that can make change happen.

That's because we've now completed 12 rounds of the Global Executive Leadership Initiative (GELI) course for senior humanitarian leaders on **"Influencing for Senior Leaders: Analysis, Strategy, and Practice"**. What that involves boils down to the graphic quote from a senior UN person we interviewed right at the start (see title of this post). We try and get people thinking about how they make that transition from delivering stuff to influencing the system.



But it turned out that a lot of the people who came on the course already had amazing experiences of influencing governments, policies, laws or the aid system itself in a bewildering range of contexts. So I started recording short (10 minutes or less) **GELI Stories** podcasts to capture them. If you want a taste of how the big cheeses in international development, working amid conflicts, disasters etc go about their daily task of trying to make life a bit more tolerable for people on the ground, these are well worth a listen. They give a rare insight into the often opaque world of insider advocacy within the humanitarian system.

## How senior humanitarians influence policy and practice

Here they are, with their respective blurbs:

## Influencing within closed political systems such as Eritrea

Vincent Omuga, Head of Office at OCHA in Eritrea, on how to operate as an outsider, (Vincent is from Kenya), in closed political systems where nobody talks in formal settings. Top tips include attending funerals, listening to your driver and being ready to drink a lot of coffee!

## Getting Early Childhood Development into the SDGs

Pia Brito of UNICEF on how she and others influenced the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process to include specific targets on early child development. To achieve this, a loose community of academics, development partners and civil society partners worked together. Winning required relationships, research, big name champions (Michelle Bachelet) and a last minute intervention by Shakira!

## The power of chance encounters with national leaders in Iran

Negar Garami of WFP describes how she seized the moment of a chance encounter with the President of Iran during Ramadan to unblock \$m of food aid stuck in customs.



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## How to persuade armed groups in Syria to stop using children

Panos Moutmtzis , the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syrian response in 2018, tells us how he persuaded the Kurdish forces to stop using children. This required identifying allies within the

Kurdish command structure, which international actors they listened to, and being ready to have secretive meetings in Beirut basements to avoid publicity!

### Advocating for girls' right to education in Benin

Djanabou Mahonde from UNICEF Benin describes her influencing work on girls' rights. In particular working with (and influencing) the government to reduce the prevalence of early marriage, which is a serious obstacle to girls' education. Other targets included investment in water and hygiene facilities in schools. Djanabou puts success down to building broad and respectful partnerships, and making both the economic and moral case for ensuring girls' rights to an education.

### Winning military reform in a nation returning to democracy

Anthony Ohemeng-Boamah, then UN Resident Coordinator in Guinea, on how he worked to make sure the government implemented a reform of the army after the return to democracy. This meant understanding the military and political networks, building relationships, understanding who people fear or respect and recruiting them as your messengers, and then taking advantage of the political moment.

### How INGO advocacy won better protection for aid workers in Syria

Federico Dessi of the Humanity and Inclusion NGO describes how his organization worked to establish minimum standards for duty of care to national staff in organizations involved in the Syria response. Within four years, the campaign went from a conversation amongst a small number of INGOs in one conflict to a UN Security Council resolution on the protection of UN personnel.

### Building coalitions within UN & Eswatini for school feeding

Cissy Kabasuuga describes her work at the WFP in Eswatini, where she revived a defunct school feeding programme using locally-produced food. This required lining up the politicians and senior civil servants in different government departments, marshalling the evidence, and building on the relationships of different UN bodies to different arms of the government.

### Securing vital changes in disaster response legislation in the Caribbean

Jill de Bourg, the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross, discusses how she worked with the new CEO of the government's disaster response team to get vital changes in legislation.

### Using LinkedIn in your influencing and advocacy

Celine Schmitt from UNHCR Afghanistan discusses why LinkedIn is the new Twitter, and the benefits of using LinkedIn as a social media platform rather than just a space for storing your CV. Schmitt, a 'top voice', shares her experience of this platform as a space for collaboration and participation and her top tips for how to influence and advocate for your organisation's issues and goals.

## How Lions and Ghosts became a protection issue in Central Africa

Tom Kirk speaks to Margarida Loureiro – currently UNHCR representative in Panama – about lessons learnt on the DRC / Angola border. The story illustrates why protection often involves listening, understanding and responding to the concerns of affected populations, as much as it does the delivery of vital services. It also covers the importance of understanding how local authorities perceive issues and the powers they have to create change.

This is just the tip of the iceberg – there were loads of other stories I did not have time to capture, or where the content was simply too sensitive to make public. Now we've got this blog up and running, I promise to try harder – this stuff is gold dust.

### About the author

#### Duncan Green

I am a Professor in Practice at the LSE's International Development and Director of the Global Executive Leadership Initiative's Influencing Programme. From 2004-2024, I worked for Oxfam GB, first as head of research, then as Strategic Adviser, where I ran the From Poverty to Power blog. I've joined the Xodus, and am on @duncangreenlse.bsky.social as well as [d.j.green@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.j.green@lse.ac.uk)

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