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**GISF Podcast Series**

**Evolving NGO Security Risk Management**

**Episode 4. The Intersection of Technology and Human Security**

**Total Time:** 42:56

**Speakers**  
Host: Tara Arthur (GISF)  
Guest: Ziad Al Achkar (Researcher, BEP, and PhD candidate at the Carter school for peace and conflict resolution)

**Transcript**

**Tara Arthur** 00:10

In recent years, humanitarian responses have been complicated by compounding crises, such as climate change epidemics and pandemics in complex conflicts, and an ever-changing humanitarian and development space. We ask, what does the security and safety of aid workers look like? And what might it look like in the future? I'm Tara Arthur, from the global Interagency Security Forum. In each episode, I'll be speaking to guests about topics, such as the localization of aid, the ups and downs of community acceptance, and the role of security and a digital world. Join me as we unpack the evolutions of NGO security risk management. Welcome, Ziad. It's nice to see you here today.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 00:57

It's nice to see you too, Tara, thanks for inviting me.

**Tara Arthur** 01:01

Yeah, well, I'm looking forward to today's episode for many reasons. But maybe before we get to that, you can tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved in the sector.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 01:11

Yeah, absolutely happy to. So first of all, Hi, my name is Ziad Al Achkar. And I currently wear a couple of hats. I'm a PhD candidate at the Carter school for peace and conflict resolution, where I'm putting the final touches on my dissertation, which looks into how humanitarian organizations peacebuilding organization, you can utilize technology as part of the work that they do, and how they pursue this notion of legibility. That's not to go into academic details, but how they use technology to implement programs, and it falls at risks that come with that the times. And then my other hat is that I do research on collecting and curating evidence of what works and what doesn't to prevent and stop conflicts, I promote peace, as part of the work that I do. I got involved was a sector back in 2000, probably 11 is when I've really got involved with this I started work with at the time, the salistre. No project, or remettre initiative was a part of the goal was to look into ways using satellite imagery and curating of other resources to potentially prevent that kind of act as a deterrent, or potential violence that might have rubbed on the border region in Sudan and South Sudan. At the time, South Sudan, or people living in Southern Sudan, were about to vote on a referendum in which they overwhelmingly decide they're going to secede from Sudan and establish their own nation. And there was a lot of concerns that there might be a return to hostilities and violence. And so consortium of organizations came together and thought, well, if we can use, you know, high resolution satellite imagery, maybe we could track potential, you know, the various activities, potential military buildups, and we could warn the world, and maybe by warning the world and being very public tool, public megaphone, that we could prevent any facilities of happening, any return to violence, unfortunately, history tells us that events unfolded. And there was a return of clashes and a lot of violence in the border regions. And what started as a kind of an early warning system became real quickly a system to document the atrocities and human rights violations. And so did this work for a while and the team that was working on we quickly realized, well, technology is amazing. This new tool is acceptable to us, like the public sector, not just, you know, government and intelligence organizations that it was also the time where it you know, we had a lot more access to new technologies, smartphones are becoming a thing and connectivity was increasing, the world is getting connected, we really started thinking about data and issues of digital tools as how they relate more to the work of humanitarians and aid workers, peace builders were doing, quickly realizing this is both really powerful and potentially democratising and has a lot of potential for good. But also there's a lot of risks, and a lot of harms that could come out of doing this work in a non professional way, not standardized way, if we don't have guidelines, and how do we follow kind of humanitarian principles to do this kind of work. And so that's kind of how I got involved in this field back in 2011. And onward, is, it's just been on this trajectory of going in and out of academia to do a graduate degree and how to do but also maintaining kind of the goals. How do you do this work? How can we learn from research that was being done to help practitioners, which is why we've got it to be on this podcast to talk to you today?

**Tara Arthur** 04:20

What a great background and exactly why we wanted to have this moment to speak with you. And maybe you can ground us with that great breakdown in a couple of questions. So, you know, we talk a lot about technology, and maybe you can guide us into how we might define technology. And then additionally, in terms of, you know, the humanitarian sector, what do you see as kind of the most important areas or, you know, training technologies from your vantage point that we should be keeping aware of?

**Ziad Al Achkar** 04:53

Excellent question, I think, how do you define technology is a very big question. The reason I say that is probably academic standpoint, we don't have an agreed upon necessarily definition of what technology is, right. So if you look at your like literature of people who study this stuff, you get to come across dozens of I don't think sharing definitions, but at least definitions that are a little bit different. But what normally you come across this kind of, I think, three broad categories of things that define what technology is. And under specific technology might focus on one thing. So the three things are technology, first and foremost is about tools. It's about kind of tangible things or intangible like software that gets developed. The second thing that kind of I think comes across most definitions that I've seen from my work and research is that technology, but the knowledge that know how it's how you use the tools, and the knowledge that you how they operate. And then but also, I think the key thing that I come back to is that technology is always purposeful, meaning that it's not just a thing, it's the thing that you use to achieve something. And so I think when we think about technology, we've got to think of it as there are a set of tools, whether they're kind of the hardware, or the software or a combination of those, their set of knowledge that an individual or organizations you build up over time about the tools, and then their gold technologies, what do you do with it? And so whether it's applied to security risk management, or if it's applied to medical procedures, right, it's how you use a specific technology, whether it's collecting a survey about a needs in Beirut, Lebanon, or it's about survey for shopping desires of somebody in Arlington, Virginia, right. So it's about how you apply the technology. So as it relates, I think, to humanitarian sector, or to your question, but what is exciting, what is kind of up and coming? I think there's quite a few things, and I'll kind of hit on them. And then we can go if you want into more details, I think one of the more exciting things that the sector has been doing. And I think we'll at least the last, I say five to seven years, it's been just increased reliance on mobile banking, and cash aid, as kind of this new innovation and new technology that's been increasingly used by humanitarian aid organizations, right? So it's about how do we get things to people, it's more how do we get money to people in there, whether it's through mobile banking, or direct cash, because they were a combination of all these things, because people then could use them. And it's much more helpful, especially if the market seems as productive or biotech. And so that's been a very exciting development. And I think the role of technology is being explored more and more to it great. Like, how do you design systems that are saved? They're easy to use user friendly, other forms? You know, there's been a lot more discussion. I think, for me, that's been exciting this, I started my career on satellite imagery and remote sensing, in just about 10 years, the technology bus exploded and offensive, there's a lot more providers, and it's gotten a lot cheaper, but also the quality and kind of your refresh rate, how often do you get imagery that has gone from like, you know, you might have to wait a few days to, you know, you can just order right now on myself an image where I could do it basically for anywhere around the world. Yeah,

**Tara Arthur** 07:58

maybe you could go into a little bit about remote sensing, just for people who may not be as familiar. I think it's a great tool, for sure. And I'm sure there's some applicable uses that our audience might be interested in.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 08:09

Yeah, of course. So remote sensing, you can understand kind of what are kind of different set of tools that are collecting information remotely, and they're constantly collecting data. So it could be something like drone imagery, it could be kind of a sensor cameras placed around cities or collecting data, or it could be solid imagery that's being used other kinds of sensors that's used for like weather, for example, collecting weather data, or sensing for, like, agricultural output. So there's like different components to it. It's kind of a broad term for kind of technology that collects information by specific event or specific situation. And one of the things you know, you'll notice a lot of it's sometimes easier to kind of evolve with these more and more in depth maps, we just kind of seemed kind of crisis mapping, go through cycles, was in the sector, like being really cool early 2000s, and kind of like plateaued, and it's still very often used as part of kind of the first response to a disaster. And do you mind repeating, like a part of the question? I feel like I've loved,

**Tara Arthur** 09:07

ya know, you've actually answered it really well. And I think basically, the idea is to understand a bit from your vantage point being more on the tech side. What are these types of technologies that are most trendsetting are the ones that we should be most attentive to, in the humanitarian sector? And bonus would be for our security colleagues, where's this conversation around technology going? And what are the tools, you know, like remote sensing, for example, and some of the applicability that you foresee being useful to the sector? Yeah,

**Ziad Al Achkar** 09:40

I'll add one that I think is particularly relevant to the security folks and kind of its neuroscience, but not necessarily very new but notion of humanitarian sector. They're called humanitarian education systems. And this is where the technology is playing an increasing role in humanitarian issues systems are part of like what they call deconfliction. Right? It's about notifying armed actors that These are kind of non targetable areas, these are humanitarian facilities.

**Tara Arthur** 10:04

One good thing is we actually have an episode on humanitarian notification system. So this is a perfect plug for it. That episode definitely will walk us through the ins and outs of h&s or humanitarian notification system. So that's amazing to hear that from you. Yeah.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 10:22

That's awesome to hear. And then I think the last real thing about when I think especially for security, security officials and security professionals or people who work in this field, and I think what's been exciting, is blood flow. But the technology like a new technology, I think there's more guidance nowadays about technology use and kind of how you do this in a more safer way. How do you do this in a way that compass not just like your security team, how do you pollute, like everybody else in your organization. And so I think we've seen an improvement, at least over the last 10 years of kind of a knowledge of the technology, the kind of limitation, you know, learning how, for example, that in some places, you know, low tech solution is probably the best way to go versus something that's high tech, and learning about the limitations of some tools where, you know, you might require 24/7, electricity, and high bandwidth to be able to transmit large data files. But you know, there are solutions that might be low tech, or very low tech in some cases. So I think we've improved as a sector, I think this has been kind of an exciting move, as we have more and more of these conversations, and for organizations who are engaged in this work and kind of sharing knowledge. So I think that's a very exciting development at the sector. And

**Tara Arthur** 11:35

that's great. I also, I think this is a good moment for us to kind of talk a little bit about some of the work you've also done previously on technologies, and issues like acceptance. And I'm just wondering if maybe you can take us down that trajectory a little bit on, you know, some of the practical uses of tech integrated into some of the common practices that we see in the humanitarian and security side of things. So where do you see the interplay in some of the relationship dynamics between military and security, risk management and technologies, acceptance, etc.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 12:13

That's a big, big issue. And I'm glad you bring up the notion of acceptance, because I think one of the key things that it's increasingly interplay in last few years, this notion of acceptance, largely driven by unfortunately, kind of the increase of kind of myths and disinformation that brings new risks to security workers to aid workers, because unfortunately, nowadays, it's gotten a lot easier for nefarious actors to engage in this kind of work. And so when we think about extensions, we have to also think, you know, from our, like, our SRM hat on is think about it, okay, is this kind of impacting the safety and security of our officers, deploying or using a specific technology in an area might not be kind of the safest thing or that you're to know that your reputation travels a lot faster nowadays, right? If your organization, there's been a bad moment or something bad happened with your organization in Lebanon, you know, people in Rwanda might know about this, right? So acceptance traveled by quicker International, and technology plays a big role. And on the notion of also coming back to this and misinformation, it's important for our security, or security official, the security kind of risk managers to understand that, you know, there are things to be done to make use of technology in a positive way, right. So we don't have to shy away from being maybe a little bit engaged on how these tools are used. So you can combat misinformation by engaging with local populations, engaging with groups that you want to work with having more conversations rather than kind of a one way approach that unfortunately, a lot of times happens in humanitarian sector. And so I think when it comes to acceptance, and how we think about technology, how it impacts kind of this dynamic, or like the SRM folks and humanitarian folks, I think goes back to, we've got to remember, at the end of the day, this is people talking to people and people working with people, and that the technology is really just a tool. And it's kind of a mechanism to kind of improve our ability to do things. And so we have to, I think, bring it back to kind of, okay, how do we improve kind of the human to human interactions and human human acceptance, at the end of the day, your reputation and who you are, and kind of the relationships that you're able to build from a human to human level, from organization to organization level, those play a huge role. And technology can't really do that for you, right? It's not a, I can't become more reputable or I can't become more known as kind of a an honest broker or you name it because of using like Palantir or like a data software or using standard imagery. It's about how do you interact with the people that you're looking to work with? And so I think that's important that when we talk about technology, and we think about acceptances to think about, well, how are we building relationships with people? How are we communicating with people? Why are we using you know, a survey tool To collect all this information about, and I think studying dose as kind of the basis, you know how you kind of decision for what type of technology you're going to use, why you're operating in a specific environment, it goes back to having honest conversations with people and getting their feedback, getting their buy it getting them involved, to the degree possible, because your decisions and what you're doing, and kind of what the technology that you're going to use. If it's for survey, you know, why are you collecting all that information? But what's the purpose of, you know, asking them 50 questions, and how that can impact your ability to work in this area, or provide specific aid or certainly goes back really to human to human engagement.

**Tara Arthur** 15:37

That is so well said, I think that human to human engagement is absolutely key, I want to build a little bit on what you're saying there and taking that forward, especially if we bring this conversation to some of the everyday work that some of our members in particular might be facing, building relationships with it and other parts of their organization. And I'm thinking from your particular standpoint, and considering all that you've shared, you know, what are some ideas or suggestions you might bring for security experts, both physical, and maybe even those who might straddle the fence book? What do you see as some important areas for that audience to understand, but also maybe some opportunities to better collaborate or improve collaborations?

**Ziad Al Achkar** 16:24

Sorry, that that's a really good question. One of the things that my research has has kind of come across is that we often think, especially on the humanitarian side, is that security risks are just for the security team. And cyber risks are a digital resource for the IT team, where it's about kind of typically more of a holistic approach, right? So digital security, for example, yes, there's technical components to it, maybe it's the IT team that deals with more directly, that it has impact to the organization, right, it's the person on the ground dealing with the community face to face, who the person is today, with headquarters, everybody's gonna have a role to play, everybody has to be more or less on the same page. So I think what we need more of in the sector is less the siloing kind of functions. Okay, this is like digital security. This is, you know, x y that is, how do we think about things from a holistic standpoint, how to do those things interact? Because they do, right? If you go back to this notion of acceptance, like every single component could have a negative impact on your acceptance, then it could happen, you know, whether it's digitally or even happen, like physically. And so the big thing that I come across as we did more and more conversations between the teams within organizations, building kind of cross functional capacities and training, and frankly, it's sometimes building relationships that are between the IT folks, if you have even an IT team, assume you're an organization that has an idea, right? And your security of who you are, could be one person, right? Again, not assuming that I think a lot organizations, you're you might not even have those two, and you're relying on like an external actor provides those things. I think the conversation is getting better people realizing this, I think more and more, there's work to kind of bridge the gap. Because you're choosing between those different components of an organization. I think some of the better stuff is building the training tools, the teaching, oftentimes, the security guys are not necessarily girls are not necessarily the best trained and digital tools. Right? It might be kind of an older generation. It's not bright term. But it might be kind of they're not trying to these things. They're not necessarily meant to think about digital security, more like what are the physical security? How do we share the transfer of a convoy? How would you security staff, we're thinking about this much more digital, from a political standpoint versus Well, there's a huge armies of digital security, that play a component that translates to potential physical harm or could have physical repercussions, and sometimes the to just because the way it kind of been built up over a decade, they don't necessarily take crap as well. I think breaking of siloing is naturally will happen with time. But I think whatever we can do to make it happen quicker and faster and more constructively, right. We don't want to just break silos for the sake of it, we want to make sense. And you know, there are things that the physical security folks do better than the IT folks won't be able to do, or they add MacBooks. And so how do we bridge kind of these kind of different components, but Organization is key?

**Tara Arthur** 19:14

Let me ask you about the little more, because I think that what you're saying is really interesting. And I wonder, in your opinion, do you feel like the terminologies we use are shared enough between the two. And obviously this cross cuts beyond and I think you were right to bring in something like HR and some of these other equally important parts of the organization that also needs to be interwoven into these conversations. But are we speaking on the same language? Sometimes in the field, there are other facets maybe beyond just terminology, that can really accelerate as you say, kind of the way we work together better in the future.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 19:50

Great point. I think often we don't pick the same terminology, which is an issue. Security might mean something to the IT team that means consulting completely different to SRM by Enter or a certain person. And so that's a challenge. Oftentimes, we get to and this is just a natural evolution of any organization that professionals do. We get too bogged down into our lexicons and or abbreviations like, we write reports, abbreviate things, and somebody's reading it from the outside. I say, this is like gibberish. I can understand what you mean. But I think that's natural. And that happens, not just for the material sector that happened, like globally, in any organization, I think what can be done is I think, realizing that simplified language agreed upon definitions of what our objectives are, what our terms is something that could be worked on, you could devolve agreed upon, like, what do we mean by security, and maybe you had a lot of qualifiers to date. So I think that's always a challenge, right? And, and also people be able to talk to each other. And oftentimes, people relate back to their experience, right, that people who are operating on the ground rely a lot on their experience that somebody who probably sitting back at HQ, or even maybe on a national in the Capitol, are not going to have the same experiences. And so they can make connections that you're trying to, or they might, when we talk about technology, oftentimes, the best technology breaks in the field. And so you're trying to explain, you know, that it might work in this great environment sitting in the capital or displays, but once it's close to reality, your day to day grind, and Dieter colder weather, or what have you, or slow bandwidth, like it's gonna break down and issues going to happen when you deploy it and use it. So that it becomes Okay, that's how you translate what happened to learn from it. And so I think more and more, the ability to train people and not everybody has to be extra, right? I think that's not the point. We don't want everybody to be an expert in digital security and data protection laws. They don't need to be the experts on the aspects of humanitarian principles, right, we need to know either the maker principles and how they operate, they guide our work, for example. So the notion is, how do you improve the technical capacity and literacy of both people without necessarily having them be experts, but just be able to do this work safely and be able to communicate with other components of the organization?

**Tara Arthur** 21:57

I would love to you did raise this earlier, but this important conversation about humanitarian principles monitoring law and technology, I would just love to get your thoughts on that. In general,

**Ziad Al Achkar** 22:09

it is increasingly a topic of discussion, right? We've seen if we remove the waves per second from technology, humanitarian principles, I think, for decades have been debated the notion of neutrality continuously as question, we different organizations look at humanitarian principles and apply them maybe slightly differently. They kind of look at them. But we've had kind of this kind of split in the seven years, right, like humanitarians ought to be more engaged politically, and not just kind of be like Silent witnesses, like they actually have to be like advocates. So we have this, like split was in the humanitarian sector. But I think, increasingly, we've seen kind of questioning of like, neutrality, for some, like the ICRC is a is a prominent very important principles, because it allows them operationally to do work. Right? It allows them to be able to meet and talk to people and talk to governments have actually the President didn't have access to be able to get aid to specific areas, because they fundamentally halted at the neutrality of operational principles. Right for other organizations might not be the same thing. So before we put on like the lens of technology, and how technology plays out, fundamentally, the principles are continuing to debate it people talk about whether we need to kind of establish new principles or do all the things and for me, I think the principles work, and I think it's more of operational neutrality is 100%. I think an operational in my mind principle. And impartiality, I think, is unquestionable. And when we think about technology, what I often go back to now there's just nothing humanity. Further, we can't forget about like, they're actually humans that we're working with, and we're talking to working with them for that. I think the notion technology is sometimes corporate image, right? We become focused on statistics, right? 500,000 people or 50,000 people have died in, in Turkey can kind of take the abstract, because an earthquake, but this actually does an individual person and individual people and technology, sometimes word or image. And I think that for me, when I think about what are the dangers to take the principles, I think, like humanity is the biggest one, right? Like there are other like operational concerns about other ones. But for me, it's humanity can't forget people because it's very easy to get just laughed and in numbers and data. And technology allows us to do this. It allows us to be separated from the ground from the reality of what's happening. Right. Like, it's great. We're sitting in different offices around the world talking right now, technology is wonderful, but we're not having particularly maybe you'd like the same level of interaction we'd have in person. So I think when we think about the principles, and how they relate to kind of a digital world is fundamentally going to be kind of, you know, adding a new layer of concern, right, like when we think about independence, you know, independence is awfully been taken sort of a you know, as a relation between organizations and the interstate war. Today, we are talking about organizations and the private tech sector because they're the ones that provide why in a lot of posts of our software and hardware, and they're an incredible agents in kind of the workplace. veterans do. We could talk about as like service providers, we could talk about partners. They're huge in our work. And so do we have to rethink independence as a principle now as it relates to the private sector, baby, I think that that's a source of conversation. We might have talked about this in the past, but I think we've seen increasingly kind of this interest in developing these digital envelopes for humanitarians kind of like mimicking like the way we have like the ICRC emblem, or the Red Cross of blood or other ways that humanitarians in the physical realm make themselves present that you know, this is a humanitarian or aid person or entity or facility. While a lot of our work is happening right to Julie. And we've had a lot of concerns. And we've seen over the last couple years, you know, increasingly humanitarians being targeted digitally as well, right databases, of humanitarian organizations being hacked, systems being compromised, increasing kind of surveillance humanitarians and their work ethic online. So there's this incredible push increasingly by by the ICRC And primarily, or at least as the leader, this kind of conversation, this notion of, could we kind of create a digital cyber copy of kind of our approach to physical emblems and all the protection that it provides so that we can then say, well, you know, this is a humanitarian server, humanitarian database, not a target, kind of sad that we have to do this, right. It shouldn't be like plaintively, this is my turn, I'm not a target, whether it's politically or digitally, it should be the case. But it's harder. Some cases, because oftentimes, we're using technologies that get used by potentially the military and governments will, in some cases could be under IHL, like legitimate targets. But then although they're still kind of infrastructure that sometimes humanitarians use, and so you know, they might be in the military necessity to target server installation, or something like cyber installation. But he might have complete repercussions on the way humanitarians deliver aid. I'm not an age, I'm not in traffic law, professional or like lawyer, so I can't like tell you like, well, I guess this still kind of qualifies or not. But I think it's open, there's an important discussion to have. So I think as Sean and is something that we're more conversations are happening, there is kind of in part of the work that matters was this notion of like, we need a digital Geneva Convention, and got pushback, I think, one time from an ICRC person, very rightfully, it says, you know, the Geneva Conventions also apply, like they apply. And usually it's not just, but I think there's an emphasis, I think, or a push from humanitarians that we clarify, we're not just talking about the physical world, we're talking about digital and cyber protections apply there to clarify that better.

**Tara Arthur** 27:27

That is very interesting. And I think that in itself is, as you said, a very important and deeper conversation to continue to explore. And I'm just wondering, I mean, you've shared so much interesting facets for us to really think through and something I know that you've said, and I just want to maybe go there briefly, which is I know you've said technology is a tool, not a solution. And it's humans helping humans. And I think that is very well said. And just take us to that concept, which I hear us talking through today and share with us, are there things that we should zone in further on, given everything you've shared, are there some more considerations that we need to be thinking about, to make sure that we understand where technology fits at the intersection of humanitarian work, but also security, risk management and the most important element, which is the everyday human?

**Ziad Al Achkar** 28:25

I'll start off by saying that in one of my dissertation work out a conversation was a private sector, person who worked was a humanitarian, they put it I think very nicely in it, that's what's been stuck with me for a long time is that technology is a tool, the cloud is never going to feed a hungry child, it's not going to protect humanitarian hospital, it's not going to do all the things that they've learned humans helping humans, but what can technology do is that it could increase our ability and our impact, to provide more opportunities for humans to improve to increase their impact. And I think that, for me, has been stuck my head as I do more important work on technology and how we can use it in our field and do it in a way that is safe, but to build on kind of what are the opportunities. And I think I always go back to what is the problem we're trying to solve? And I think that is fundamentally and might seem like simple, but I feel like oftentimes, we flip the question, we don't think about what is the problem we're trying to solve? Like, what are the roots of the issue? Right, I put my PhD in conflict resolution head on, we always start with conflict math, we always designed these like, brilliant, expensive math, but these are the issues, they're the symptom of the problem. These are the roots of the issue. These are kind of like where they come from different actors involved. And oftentimes, we just think of it as well, here's the technology how do I apply it? Or oftentimes, like we get rushed into like not to throw like a lot of people under the bus nowadays, but like we get, get very excited about technologies like shout GPT and say, Oh, it's gonna change the way humanitarians do work or change the world and you know, maybe it will, who knows? You know, people are saying the same about Bitcoin for decades and, or crypto. MCs, who knows, right? Like a take, like society don't change that quickly, or like, you know, there's a slow path. And oftentimes, unfortunately, more often than not in the meta sector, there's more examples of innovations failing than succeeding. So going back to this notion, okay, what is the problem we're trying to solve? The way to realize is, is to understand the problem is to talk to people is to be able to understand the state of the environment, the best thing we can do as humanitarians, people who care is listen, really listen, and engage the people whose lives are most impacted by whether it's the conflict, whether it's disaster, whether it's lack of economic development, whatever the issue is, listen to the people get them involved from the get go. You care about this country, you care about working in this place, you want to do good, that's all fine and well. But if we don't engage, if we don't kind of use the buzzword of the humanitarian sector, like we don't localize it, if we don't have this localization, then all of this is a little bit away a little bit, maybe meaningless. So we've got to start off by engaging with people whose lives are mostly impacted by this, the people who know better the people who have the local knowledge, the local relationships, it's going back to acceptance, right? We need the local relationships often to operate. And then we think about, okay, like, these are the issues. We know, these are what the symptoms look like, of this issue. We know what are the root causes? What can we do, right? Oftentimes, it might not be a technology issue, it might be a governance issue, it might be an education, whatever it might be, but then we can think about, okay, well, how can technology help us user solve this issue, or help us engage in this issue differently, or look for new approaches, and I think that is a much more comprehensive, and I think, a better way of approaching a lot of the work that we do. And I realized, oftentimes we're much more short term focused. And that's fundamentally kind of like the extent of humanitarian action is that we always think about, well, this crisis happened, we got to respond, got to do this, we got to like, and we don't often spend the time to kind of think long term, primarily, you know, we have funding constraints and mandates from organizations that don't necessarily allow it. So we have to kind of put, we have to be able to build these relationships and think a little bit more long term. Think we talked previously, like, notion of like, the poor reaction, and kind of having more conversations and thinking about, well, these are things that could trigger more conflict or more violence or more disasters, how do we do something about it to be more preventive?

**Tara Arthur** 32:23

It's interesting what you're saying, because I think of Nexus issues and where the intersection goes. And I think sometimes, we use the term humanitarian, all encompassing to mean what we do. And that's okay, but just spinning off a little bit on your comment about going long term, and the need to look longer term, you know, when you look at the intersection of Nexus issues, whereas technology's role in influencing, particularly when you referenced earlier, a lot of innovations tend to happen in these crisis moments. So what about like you said, the long term the longer development thinking, the more advocacy, human rights conversation? Where are these kind of Nexus issues aligning us in this technology conversation?

**Ziad Al Achkar** 33:07

That's an issue. And I think it's a very complicated proposition. And again, maybe I'll split it off, I think from a peacebuilding, still kind of also developing so in our relationship to technology, but maybe it looks like humanitarian development. Answer is one of the things that come back is the lack of better term, most often needed is less so like capacity building, right? Like people in a lot of places have knowledge about technology, what's needed is kind of support and not coming in, and necessarily like, assuming that, you know, the same computer before her with a date, you know, often places where unfortunately, a lot of disasters and conflicts happen, you know, they have better like, a mobile banking or mobile banking systems that we have here in the US. And so what's often needed is kind of more humility from us to think of these issues. What we like to think of us also is for long term is how do we help? What is our role as kind of international partners and travel institutions? How do we help local organizations or national organization build up their systems potentially have more sustainability and our approach, one things that kept coming up and in some of the interviews that I've done is that unfortunately, a lot of times, national governments will offer an international like private key, like an international person or international, private tech company versus like a local one, because they just assume that international is better than local. And so one of the things that we could do there's a whole community or truffle, Oryx is how do you change that model? How do you change kind of the perception that like credential visit? Like how do you partner more with local organizations so that their own national institutions will will go up or down rather than go for like, you know, the Microsoft of the world, to how to do that? I think one of the things that we can we ought to be doing and thinking about long term because that's how we really don't move away from like this notion of like, internal accurate comes in every time to do something. And then it comes more About, we're able to build local capacities and improve kind of the reputation and help maybe like, the financing. And then that helps us also be able to kind of build long term because they're the ones who will stay there. For years on like humanitarians will come in for four to eight weeks and then leave. But also, I think that this notion of gotta think long term, there are things we can do, right, we can develop partnerships with people so that we know when a disaster hits, like, who to respond to who to connect with, we can predict technology allows us, for example, in some cases, when it comes to flooding, the famine, potentially tracking of like drought, we're able to kind of predict all the stuff like 369 months ahead of time, was often lacking this kind of infrastructure for response. And so what happens is that we kind of wait too long and undefended happens. And it's like, well, now we're rushing to provide like food parcels or something to minimize the harm rather than say, well, we knew that this was going to happen, because we knew there was a drought. And when there's a drought, more often than not, there's gonna be lower, you know, in next six months, that we have to kind of do something about it. Now. I think a lot of times, you know, technology allows us to not only be able to do 100%, like write about predicting, but at least be better at waiting until disaster happens. And to be fair, I think humanitarians are getting better at this. But I think those early warning is often not linked to early response. We just have early warning. And then we're saying, Well, look at this, this happened nine months later, great. Who knew? Like somebody's yelling at a computer, that you've

**Tara Arthur** 36:26

been collaborating with security in it on these intersection can maybe help improve that?

**Ziad Al Achkar** 36:33

Yeah, for sure. That's where I think collaborations comes into play, because they're the people who oftentimes have this mindset, especially, I think the security folks oftentimes are the ones who are also think about, well, we have to think about these things for more long term purposes, or they're more geared for like scenario thinking, like, if this happens, then we have to do this. Or if this happened, then maybe we respond that way. So there's a mentality, I think, for the security folks to the scenario at different situations and build up appropriate mechanisms for response. And I think we need the same model applied to kind of just a general humanitarian, humanitarian Nexus. And I want to make also kind of a quick note, we also need better evidence, we need better evidence about what's worked, what hasn't. We need better mechanisms of sharing this knowledge across, not just being siloed within like our own organization, or even our own sectors, I think there's a lot we can learn from a peacebuilder conflict resolution person who spent decades working on negotiation that could help the humanitarian actor negotiate for access, or can help develop and after negotiate better with like the private sector for long term, like loans or something. So I think there's this important notion of, there's a lot of knowledge that gets generated, we just need to be better at sharing it, and be able to better operationalize it into practice. Again, not to offend anybody, but not just build his long list of indicators, a long list of things that they're great at, like evidence of like, what's happened in the past of what like, the situation is, but like, they're rarely help us operationalize what we know they're the corruption. Okay, what do we do about it? Like, we know, there's like, all these different economic indicators, human rights indicators, or like humanitarian dictators collect a lot of data or in the sector, but oftentimes, and we just collect data for the sake of data now, and we don't really think a lot. Okay, how do we operationalize this? You know, what does this mean, for planning purposes? What does this mean for developing specific program intervention? We're good at collecting things, collecting data, I think we're not as good as operationalizing it. But I think that even with all the technology that we have, it's still something that fundamentally we're not curated.

**Tara Arthur** 38:34

Wow, I think that is a very important point you're making and one that I think many of us will probably have some reflections on, I imagine. It'd be interesting to hear what others have to say about that. And we'd love to stay in touch with you on how you think the sector is doing in response to that, as well as to many of the other things you really will laid out for us today. I've want to give you a moment to just maybe leave us with a couple of tokens from our conversation and you've shared so many valuable inputs for us to walk away with, but maybe just give us some key essence of what we need to make sure that we knew leave us with today.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 39:18

If you take one thing from like this conversation is to be critical about both the impact of potential technologies and the harms of technology, I think it's important to be fundamentally especially people who work in security environment is to be critical in kind of questioning of what the technology is doing, or can do to us or for us, actually, to important section to us and for us. Because oftentimes, when we're critical, and when we sit back and think about okay, like is this the right approach is the right tool or just the right click the appropriate operationalizing of a specific tool, then we can realize, well, there's a better way to approach this or no, we actually shouldn't do that. So I think being critical. It's important for you as a security risk manager or humanitarian As you think about technology, the second thing that they say is make use of your networks make use of the people that are part of this broader humanitarian sector. I've realized this during my dissertation work, there's so many people who are willing to talk to you, who are actually eager to talk to you to have these conversations that we're having today. They are going to be able to help you think about, you know, whatever issue you're having about technology. And if they don't have the right answer, or come to realize, they will know that people to talk to you, right, they will tell you go talk to this person operate working at this company, and they'll connect, you said, you know, I think we oftentimes operate in silos, not just like within our organizations and all that, we just forget that we're part of this larger ecosystem of people are extra cryptocurrency that pretty humanitarian response, or they're experts about physical security training for for like, people going into the Civil War stricken countries and responding, right. Again, there's the know how, within kind of this broader system of people, one of my biggest hopes is that we're able to share, and be able to bring people in these settings to talk about these issues, to share. And oftentimes, I say this is that we don't talk about failure, think enough, I think from failure, we can oftentimes learn. And you know, things don't always work out. And it's fine. But we have to learn and the only way to learn is to talk to people, and to learn from their experience and to connect with them. And so I think that my second token is taught to people reach out and make use of that a lot of smart, very friendly, very welcoming people that are willing and are there to help. And it's just a matter of sending an email or tweeting.

**Tara Arthur** 41:39

That is absolutely wonderful. I know that you know, you've been a great resource and help to GSF and definitely agree with your reflections. We just really want to thank you for taking the time to be with us. And we'll make sure that some of the resources you you've been a part of and any others that you'd like us to share will be part of the resources in the episode as well. Thank you so much for being with us. And we look forward to continuing this conversation ahead.

**Ziad Al Achkar** 42:07

Thank you so much, Tara.

**Tara Arthur** 42:08

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