

Popular scientific summary

Localising humanitarian aid – A good solution in conflict areas such as Syria or Afghanistan?

The study shows that international humanitarian organisations are reluctant to localise humanitarian aid in conflict areas. The cases of Syria and Afghanistan demonstrate that local actors are important in providing a local perspective and in understanding and navigating around the local context while international actors can provide certain outsider value.

The localisation of humanitarian aid in conflict areas goes along with a series of challenges in upholding the humanitarian principles. Humanitarian aid focuses on helping those in need and alleviating human suffering (principle of humanity) by providing humanitarian assistance based on needs alone (principle of impartiality) while remaining a neutral (principle of neutrality) and autonomous process (principle of independence). Both international and local actors face difficulties adhering to the humanitarian principles in practice, especially in conflict areas. Those challenges are related to access constraints, donor dependency, counter-terrorism measures, pressures from governments and the perception of humanitarian organisations. The findings show that in practice humanitarian organisations compromise between the humanitarian principles in order to fulfil the humanitarian imperative of helping those in need, also known as the principle of humanity. Nevertheless, there is a need for both local and international actors to ensure the best possible humanitarian assistance. Therefore, local actors need to gain more power and ownership since currently international actors and donors are in control of the humanitarian sector's resources.

It is for this reason that in 2015, donors and international humanitarian organisations set a goal to make humanitarian assistance as local as possible and as international as necessary. This localisation approach has been a strategic direction for many humanitarian organisations in providing local actors with more ownership and making humanitarian interventions more efficient. Surprisingly, although donors and international organisations set their objective to increase localisation efforts, they are reluctant to adapt to approaches that give local actors more power and ownership. The control over humanitarian resources plays an important role in the hesitancy of localising humanitarian aid.

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the discourse on the localisation of humanitarian aid specifically for conflict areas such as Syria and Afghanistan. The study was conducted triangulating data from twelve semi-structured interviews, case studies from Syria and Afghanistan as well as a literature review on the key concepts of humanitarian aid, the humanitarian principles, localisation and conflict.