

## **The time is ripe for finding practical solutions to lessen the dire consequences of disasters in conflict**

*Research on the intersection between disasters and conflicts has increased significantly in recent years. Still, efforts to lessen the devastating impacts of disasters on conflict-affected communities are few and insufficient.*

Between 2009 and 2018, four out of five conflict-affected countries in the world were also hit by disasters. The frequency of disasters are expected to increase globally, and statistics also indicate that conflicts become more complex, more intense, and more deadly. It is evident that applying appropriate and adequate disaster risk management reduces the fatal consequences of disasters. Still, these efforts are largely lacking in conflict contexts. Where attempts have been made, they are often unsuccessful.

This thesis identifies possible ways in which disaster risk management can be strengthened in conflict contexts, focusing on practices on the ground. Through a case study of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in four conflict-affected countries, the study found four pathways through which disaster risk management in conflict could potentially be improved.

The first pathway entails ensuring that efforts do not exclusively alleviate suffering after disaster has struck. These efforts should be integrated into long-term disaster risk management interventions that aim to give people capacities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. This is particularly important in conflict contexts where this disaster resilience is disproportionately low and the devastating consequences significantly higher.

Secondly, interventions should reflect the specific type of conflict in the targeted area. For example, implementing programmes in a large-scale war between governments and militias is vastly different from doing so where two communities are fighting over land rights. Even so, both could be described as conflict contexts. More knowledge about the different types of conflicts must be gained, to be able to design programmes that adequately consider and respond to the specific context.

Thirdly, conflict often makes it hard to access and operate in insecure areas. Working through the communities and local staff that are already present helps gain unique access and invaluable insights. However, having locals act as humanitarian workers in places where they are at great risk of becoming casualties of the conflict has ethical implications. To benefit from a localised approach, better processes for ensuring safety and security must be ensured.

Finally, the Humanitarian Principles form the ethical basis of all humanitarian work. Communicating that aid is given neutrally and impartially to communities and fighting parties alike can help ensure the acceptance, access, and safety of humanitarian organisations in insecure environments. To do so, there is a need to further investigate how practical, well and feasible do these principles work in conflict situations.

What sets this study apart is that it is one of still relatively few studies to investigate the issue at the practitioner's level, highlighting discrepancies with the many global strategies and commitments on the topic of disasters and conflict. The study is thus a springboard for urging increased commitments to two things: (1) More research should take on practitioners' perspectives to ensure that lessons are learned from the practical level, and (2) Global institutions and donors should fund innovative, long-term pilot programming, making space for trialing appropriate ways to strengthen disaster risk management in conflict.