

Popular Scientific Summary

Safety and Security in Sudan: Humanitarian Aid Worker's Risk Perception

Protection of humanitarian aid workers is a challenging task. They differ in who they are and what they come to work with. This together with various external factors create specific views on what is "a risk". And these views need to be considered to ensure their holistic protection.

Each year, tens of thousands of humanitarian aid workers are deployed globally. They vary in their experiences, background, physical and mental characteristics as well as values, views on the world. There are many challenging environments these workers operate in. Sudan remains one of the key dynamic, fragile contexts for humanitarian aid worker's operation, both historically and now. This study uses in-depth interviews with various humanitarian aid workers in this context to reveal factors influencing risk perception. These include 8 different individual characteristics – age, sex (gender), race and ethnicity, nationality, religion, understanding of risk, knowledge, values, and interests – and 4 different external factors – country context dynamics, place and time, humanitarian aid worker's organization and risk information. They also mutually intersect and contribute to the final risk perception. Although an exhaustive list of all influential factors should be adjusted based on the workers within an organization, they are a good departure point for any current security risk management to strengthen possible protection measures, notably for contexts similar to Sudan. This can include namely those with similar hierarchic, nationalistic, religious, socio-cultural norms or political situation, such as other Arab contexts.

The study also points to the role of individual thinking and usage of mental strategies, bringing important views on what these workers value, both in their work or their personal values. The research also features prominent role of *biases* (causes to favour something) in thinking of *security* risks first (intentional violence against HAWs) compared to the *safety* risks (accidental event risks). Big role seems to play the common proverb: "out of sight, out of mind"; for example when comparing possible risks within the dry season (time of the interview) vs. the rainy season (coming in the future).

An important part also plays the socio-cultural environment humanitarian aid worker is based in. This research shows many might not necessarily feel targeted for their work but rather for being part of an unstable, changing environment. However, especially the local Sudanese workers express worry over access which can be restricted depending on their tribal affiliation compared to the communities they work in. Similarly, those from more marginalized groups or with lower power within the society, such as women or of other religion than Islam, report higher fear of certain risks. So, despite working within the same context, they do not experience the risk equally. This shows the need to include the humanitarian aid worker's view, including all intersecting roles creating a unique identity to ensure their holistic protection. This is to bridge the gap, as it is usually the organization holding the power in defining what are the risks and protection measures, whereas the workers' perception might not correspond to these views.