

**Popular scientific summary**  
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**Exploring localized humanitarian innovation through a scoping study and case study.**

*Humanitarian innovation* (HI) has emerged as a means of increasing effectiveness and efficiency of the resource scarce humanitarian system. However, current efforts have met criticism for being top-down driven and Northern biased. Consequently, there appears to be a need to localize HI. However, this research suggests a terminological and conceptual ambiguity, hindering the opportunity to manage localized HI. Despite this, a few core traits of localized HI emerged, such as: inclusion of local actors throughout the entire innovation process; acknowledging local innovative capacity; equitable partnerships, and; local decision-making power. This research also identified a disproportionate focus on enhancing involvement, inclusion and participation of local actors in innovation processes, rather than on decentralizing innovation capacity and reallocating decision-making around these processes from headquarters to local levels. Yet, it also showed that it is as important to establish equal partnerships. As part of such partnerships, discussions about who is considered local should be explicit, as this was found to be a highly relative concept. To conclude, this research suggests that without a clear and shared understanding of *what* localized HI is and *why* it is needed, the *how* of localized HI will likely remain vague.

Alongside the ‘innovation turn’, localization is described as part of a wider paradigm shift within the humanitarian system. While there appears to be strong evidence suggesting that innovation is needed, and that local actors and communities are uniquely positioned to innovate in ways that are relevant, effective and culturally and contextually appropriate, localized HI is under-researched and lacking practical guidelines, despite the global commitments stemming from the World Humanitarian Summit five years ago.

Localized HI was explored through a combined scoping study of scientific and gray literature, in combination with a qualitative case study of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The findings showed diverse understandings of whether localized HI happens organically or needs to be facilitated. This might be a challenge, as working towards common objectives and aligning ways of getting there necessitates a shared understanding of how change happens. This, as it will likely dictate what resources are dedicated and which efforts are made. The findings also show that localizing HI is rarely criticized. Moreover, questions around defining the local, existing power imbalances at local levels and the occasional need for support by international actors while ensuring ownership, are vital to consider. Not asking these questions means that the localized HI agenda will likely remain misdirected, scattered and vague. This research attempts to explore the concept in order to clarify the *what*, the *why* and the *how* of localized HI going forward. Although limited in scope, the findings are believed to contribute to the broader discussion within the humanitarian system.