

BACKGROUND

Afghanistan, one of the world's largest and most severe humanitarian crisis, is also one of the most challenging environments for aid operations at present. Aid workers face numerous hurdles, including the ban on female aid workers, de facto authorities' interferences, international political pressures, and other obstacles that exacerbate needs and challenge principled action and engagement.

On January 10, 2024, DRC's Diaspora Programme hosted a 90 minute webinar aimed at exploring how relief and development actors can navigate complex aid dilemmas.

Three distinguished panelists shared insights based on their research and work, answering questions from moderator Hameed Hakimi (Chatham House / Fellow Atlantic Council) and the participants, mainly representing Afghan civil society in the diaspora and in Afghanistan.

This report presents some of the key questions and summarized answers.

THE PANEL



Dr. Ashley Jackson
Co-founder of Centre on Armed Groups, advisor on humanitarian access & conflict mediation.



Dr. Orzala Nemat
Activist, scholar, expert in political ethnography, founder & leader of Research Group Limited (DRG).



Adrien bory
Senior Project Coordinator at DRC's Diaspora Programme, Localization Unit.

RESEARCH

Dr. Ashley Jackson

- AAN, [Aid Diversion in Afghanistan: Is it time for a candid conversation?](#), October 2023
- AAN, [Taleban Perceptions of Aid: Conspiracy, Corruption and Miscommunication, July 2023, with Sabawoon Samim](#)
- [DRC Briefing Note: Principled Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan, May 2023](#)

Dr. Orzala Nemat

- [UKHIIH, Navigating Ethical Dilemmas for Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan, June 2023](#)

DRC Diaspora Programme

- DEMAC, [Afghan Diaspora Real-Time Reviews November 2021 & August 2022](#)
- [Report: European Conference: Diaspora Action for Afghanistan, May 2022](#)

PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM DISCUSSION WITH DR. JACKSON

What are the humanitarian principles and how is humanitarian aid different from development aid?

- The core humanitarian principles are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. They guide humanitarian action to prioritize humanitarian assistance based on need, without discrimination, political influence, or involvement in hostilities. Complex contexts often lead to operational dilemmas, as humanitarian principles come under pressure.
- Humanitarian aid aims at providing life-saving assistance, while development aid seeks to address root causes of suffering and key drivers of poverty. Today, assistance to Afghanistan is disproportionately humanitarian due to political reasons and not enough to support the multidimensional needs of Afghans.

Recognizing that humanitarian action alone isn't a panacea, how can we protect the humanitarian space?

- Aid actors can only operate in a country or territory with the consent of the authorities in place. Therefore, the best way to protect humanitarian space has always been consistent engagement and principled negotiation to obtain unhindered and sustainable access to vulnerable populations.

Can aid be used as leverage against the authorities?

- Humanitarian aid should never be instrumentalized or used as a leverage to force a behavioral and policy change. Humanitarian aid is provided to alleviate suffering and help Afghans.

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM DISCUSSION WITH DR. NEMAT

How can humanitarian organisations navigate ethical dilemmas in Afghanistan?

- There's a lack of common understanding of what are ethical issues and how to approach them. An example is the ban on female aid workers: should this ban have led organisations to leave Afghanistan, or to stay and provide aid as best as possible to the most vulnerable? There's no right or wrong answer when dealing with ethical dilemmas, but harms, needs and benefits, in the short and in the long term, must constantly be balanced.

Emergency and humanitarian aid can lead to dependency. How do we move from focusing on survival to providing a living?

- Aid workers must always keep in mind pathways to break the cycle of aid dependency, e.g. by providing livelihoods opportunities or by supporting jobs' creation. Humanitarian aid though is not a viable solution as a standalone. A proper context analysis is required to find the right way forward, while adopting a "humanitarian first, development next" approach.

What role does the Afghan diaspora play into the nexus?

- Diaspora individuals and groups are using their networks to engage in Afghanistan with their specialized knowledge and expertise. They provide direct and indirect assistance, while also having a key role in engaging governments abroad to keep Afghanistan on the international agenda and advocate for Afghans' needs and rights, which can include best aid modalities.

EXCHANGE BETWEEN AFGHAN AID & HUMAN RIGHTS ACTORS

MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM DISCUSSION WITH MR. BORY

You have recently organized an online workshop bringing together aid & human rights actors inside and outside Afghanistan, what was the rationale behind this event and key takeaways from the discussions?

- This private workshop sought to address the tensions and differences in the narrative on Afghanistan. 28 Afghan aid and human rights individuals discussed 3 main topics: Principled aid; Access; and Advocacy. Both groups expressed an interest in increased information sharing and strategic coordination to build a more cohesive narrative on Afghanistan and better support the needs and rights of the Afghan population.

Are you optimistic about the diaspora engagement?

- Absolutely. As DRC engages in documenting the work and supporting Afghan diaspora engagement, it is clear what important a role they play: being for the economy, by sending remittances and small investments; for relief work, mobilizing funds in support of the Herat Earthquakes response; and more generally for their mobilization to keep Afghanistan on the agenda.
- Another thing that brings further optimism is the rapid changes in the diaspora with all the newly arrived Afghans strengthening the diaspora and developing innovative solutions to support Afghans in needs.

For more information about DRC's Diaspora Programme:

www.drc.ngo/diaspora adrien.bory@drc.ngo facebook.com/diaspora.programme



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