

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 the 28th of November 2023, DRC's Diaspora Programme hosted an online workshop with 28 Afghan participants based inside and outside Afghanistan. The aim was to exchange on how relief and development organizations in Afghanistan are navigating complex aid dilemmas and how these dilemmas are perceived externally, in order to foster mutual understanding and find ways to bridge the gap in narrative from actors inside and outside the country.

Discussions & Main Takeaways

The workshop delved into three main topics to set the scene for a common understanding of the context of aid dilemmas in Afghanistan: (1) The current landscape of regulations on aid and how they are being implemented. (2) The commonalities and differences in the focus on protecting human rights between aid and human rights actors inside and outside Afghanistan. (3) How humanitarian principles look like in practice.

Group discussions confirmed that actors with different mandates are driven by the same imperative to protect and support vulnerable Afghans. It was also clear that their rationales and strategies differ, and that this can be at times complementary or counter productive. Both groups expressed an interest in increased information sharing and strategic coordination.

1 Principled Aid

- Aid actors' technical engagement with de facto authorities is necessary and has proven to be successful. Western countries' technical engagement with DFA remains controversial within diaspora human rights activists.
- More aid, including beyond humanitarian funding, is needed in Afghanistan and can be delivered in a principled manner.
- There is a need to find the right balance between flexibility for aid actors to find localized solutions, and accountability mechanisms to limit aid diversion.

2 Access

- The ban on women aid workers severely hinders the ability of aid actors to adequately assess and respond to women's needs. However, ways of navigating this restriction differ a lot across the country.
- There is a need for increased dialogue between aid and human rights actors to understand such nuances related to access and delivery of aid.
- Support to marginalized groups requires more attention and collaboration between actors inside and outside Afghanistan.

3 Advocacy

- There is a need for storytelling to bring Afghanistan back on the agenda.
- Human rights and aid actors' advocacy efforts for the protection of Afghan people need to build more on joint messages and be better coordinated, drawing on the strengths of each group.
- There is a need to advocate beyond humanitarian assistance to address economic challenges, for women in particular, as well the consequences of climate change.

For more information about DRC's Diaspora Programme:

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