

International Development Committee Inquiry into the Philosophy and Culture of Aid: Call for Evidence for Scoping Terms of Reference

March 2021

The British Red Cross is an auxiliary to the UK Government in the humanitarian field. We provide life-saving humanitarian assistance and expert advisory support on core humanitarian themes, in the UK and internationally and work closely with government departments, including the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). We are part of the world's largest, independent humanitarian network, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement). In collaboration with our Movement partners, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), with its 192 National Societies, BRC works to meet the needs of people affected by humanitarian crisis. Unlike its UK operations, in which the British Red Cross is a service provider, the international work of the British Red Cross is realised through a range of partnerships within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

When scoping the terms of reference for its inquiry into the philosophy and culture of aid, we suggest the International Development Committee consider including the following topics:

- i) Localisation– building capacity and empowering local action
- ii) Safe and inclusive programming– ensuring the safety of those vulnerable to risk
- iii) Cash and voucher assistance– transforming the way aid is delivered
- iv) Community engagement and accountability– the process of and commitment to providing timely, relevant and actionable life-saving and life-enhancing information to communities
- v) Anticipatory action– acting before a crisis
- vi) Investing in resilience and disaster risk reduction
- vii) Supporting humanitarian actors to reduce their environmental impact

i) Localisation – building capacity and empowering local action

1. The British Red Cross endorses the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation and promotes humanitarian assistance that is as local as possible and as international as necessary. Humanitarian responses should identify and build on the comparative advantages of local, national and international actors, all of which have important roles and strengths to offer during an emergency response. It is through the innovative alignment of these comparative advantages that we achieve a truly appropriate, efficient, and principled humanitarian response.
2. Local actors are the first to respond when a disaster strikes and are often the last to leave. They frequently have unrivalled access to communities, community trust, and an understanding of local needs, perceptions and capacities. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the centrality of, as well as the challenges faced by, local humanitarian actors. Working alongside local actors to adapt and respond is crucial, and much more needs to be done to support local humanitarian responders and address the challenges they face.
3. Despite global commitments, much more needs to be done to put this into practice, to address global power imbalances in funding, resourcing, decision making and the burden of risk which undermines local response. By supporting national and local humanitarian institutions to develop, donors enable more independent, national and

local responses to disasters, thereby reducing dependency on aid. Institutions are not resilient if they depend on aid and efforts must be made to diversify funding bases from national sources.

4. The British Red Cross is partnering with a global team of researchers with significant sector-leading experience in the fields of localisation and anti-racism to look at the interplay of localisation and institutional racism in the COVID-19 humanitarian response. We believe it is important to better understand the relevance of localisation, the opportunities, risks, successes and shortcomings in the Covid-19 response and its intersection with racism and anti-racism in the humanitarian sector, and to look at these issues through the lenses of local and national actors. The research findings and recommendations will be relevant for policymakers and humanitarian organisations.

ii) Safe and Inclusive Programming – ensuring the safety of those vulnerable to risk

5. It is vital that programming is safe and inclusive and that targeting, and service delivery points are planned to include the most vulnerable and to keep people safe. This involves gender and diversity analysis, protection risk assessments, training, awareness raising, codes of conducts, safe feedback and complaints mechanisms and clear referral pathways. We have been supporting the development of specific prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse policies and mechanisms for use across the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
6. Women and girls often face specific risks and vulnerabilities in times of crisis, including increased risk of discrimination, abuse and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Gender-based violence includes sexual violence and exploitation, forced and child marriage, FGM, so called 'honour' based violence and intimate partner violence. It is vital that support is scaled up to prevent and address SGBV. This support must be survivor-led, ensuring that interventions are guided by the principle of survivor well-being, based on survivor-led design, with clear protocols in place founded in 'do no harm' principles.

iii) Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) – transforming the way aid is delivered

7. CVA is recognised as an important lever in creating transformational change in the humanitarian aid system, particularly in helping to enable people overcome crisis with dignity and able to exercise choice. CVA can provide a more timely, efficient, effective, flexible and appropriate form of humanitarian assistance, when the conditions are right, including in conflict situations. Hence, in most contexts, aid recipients indicate a preference for cash to other forms of assistance.
8. As well as making aid more efficient by reducing the needs of the major humanitarian logistics machine, it also allows local markets to recover more quickly after a crisis and plays a vital role in preserving the dignity of affected people. It can help restore the economic resilience and livelihoods of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities; facilitate ongoing and early access to key basic services, including healthcare, water and education; reduce the use of damaging and irreversible coping mechanisms; and kick-start markets' functionality.

iv) Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) – the process of and commitment to providing timely, relevant and actionable life-saving and life-enhancing information to communities

9. CEA is integral to the delivery of quality programmes and services, internationally and in the UK. It encompasses engaging with people in crisis, especially the most marginalised, in an ongoing dialogue in which their voices are heard, responded to and acted upon, whilst respecting fundamental humanitarian principles. Better community engagement is a long-held aspiration in the humanitarian sector, but the demand for it and potential of it, have never been greater than today. We believe that people in crisis should be able to influence decisions affecting them and hold all relevant stakeholders to account.
10. To ensure truly local responses, affected populations need to be at the centre of decision-making, activities and monitoring. CEA leads to more effective responses and commits donors and the sector to provide timely, relevant, and actionable lifesaving and life-enhancing information to communities. By using the most appropriate communication approaches to listen to communities' needs, feedback and complaints, we can ensure they can actively participate and guide services.
11. CEA also enables people in crisis to become more skilled and empowered to lead and shape positive, sustainable change in their own lives, to influence decisions that affect them, and to hold all relevant stakeholders to account. Local and national actors, including frontline workers and volunteers, should be supported to develop, grow, and build their capacity including their understanding and capacity for CEA.

v) Anticipatory action – acting *before* a crisis

12. It is now known when and where the majority of weather-related emergencies are likely to strike, due to much better access to weather forecasts and risk analysis data that allows us to predict the impact of weather events with a good degree of accuracy. Resources should be allocated in advance to make sure the most vulnerable are protected and actors on the ground have better capacity to act early and respond effectively. Despite this, the vast majority of relief is reactive and provided after the emergency/disaster has taken place and very small amounts are put towards preparedness. Actors need to reposition, act and invest in advance.
13. Great strides in focus and investment to enable anticipatory action have been made in recent years, but more needs to be done to invest in risk-informed early warning systems and early action capabilities linked to crisis finance instruments. This is especially the case given the increased humanitarian cost of climate change and extreme weather.

vi) Investing in resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) – helping communities prepare for disasters

14. Investing in resilience strengthening activities such as DRR and preparedness is an effective form of support. For instance, communities who are affected by the impacts of climate change and extreme weather face increasing risks such as drought and flooding, but investing in community resilience can reduce the impact and be more cost-effective and ethical than supporting disaster response.

15. Investing in local disaster risk reduction and preparedness pays off. Savings from DRR investments may take the form of saved lives, livelihoods, property or money. The greatest value of community based DRR continues to be in supporting and empowering local communities who are the first to respond to disasters.

vii) Supporting humanitarian actors to reduce their environmental impact – making humanitarian aid more environmentally sustainable

16. Humanitarian aid should not do harm by undermining the longer-term environmental sustainability of local ecosystems and the global climate. Whilst lifesaving interventions must always remain the priority aim of any emergency response operation, humanitarian and development aid investments must promote actions that minimise the adverse impacts on the surrounding environment and eco-systems.
17. This ranges from a greener response that takes into account environmental considerations in the selection of relief goods and delivery mechanisms – for example procuring solar lanterns or handwashing units locally – to promoting climate-smart solutions and the protection and restoration of environmental assets in resilient programmes – for example through the promotion of agroforestry and diversity of indigenous drought-tolerant crops that better preserve soil moisture and the local ecosystem.