



A Quest for Humanitarian Effectiveness?

Debating the Evolution of Humanitarian Action: History, Practice, Politics and Performance

International Conference, 14-16 September 2015
University of Manchester

Introduction

What does effective humanitarian action look like?

How effective is humanitarian action?

How can humanitarian action be more effective?

These questions have received increased attention over the last twenty years partly because anxieties about the state of humanitarianism – about ‘politicisation’, ‘remoteness’ and powerlessness – have intensified. The rise of managerial culture, with its focus on efficiency, accountability, performance and results, has also compelled humanitarian agencies to give more importance to evaluation of their activities and measurement of outcomes. Indeed, efforts to elaborate a common agenda on humanitarian effectiveness have contributed to, and grown out of, the professionalisation and bureaucratisation of humanitarian aid. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that improving the effectiveness of humanitarian action has been treated primarily as a technocratic exercise.

This conference, jointly organised by the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) and Save the Children’s Humanitarian Affairs Team (HAT), will reflect on the evolution and consequence of existing approaches to understanding and improving humanitarian effectiveness. But it will also explore effects of humanitarian action (in historical and contemporary context) that tend not to be captured by the conventional discourse on effectiveness. Indeed, this conference will use the theme of humanitarian effectiveness to frame a critical and constructive interdisciplinary conversation on the politics and practice of humanitarian action. It will provide an opportunity for scholars, practitioners and policymakers to propose innovative research- and evidence-based alternatives to conventional approaches to improving humanitarian effectiveness. In doing so, it will contribute to informing and influencing the outcomes of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, for which humanitarian effectiveness is one of the four thematic foci. The conference will also offer a platform for furthering the study of humanitarianism and for strengthening the relationship between theories and practices of humanitarian action.



Call for papers:

We welcome paper submissions and presentation proposals from practitioners, academics and policymakers from across the world and from a wide spectrum of disciplines and perspectives on the history, practice, politics and performance of humanitarian action. Papers should address the following (or related) themes:

- Humanitarian governance and the political economy of humanitarian aid: The politics of financing, allocating and regulating humanitarian aid.
- Knowledge, evidence and best practice: How the generation and use of knowledge and evidence shape understandings of humanitarian effectiveness and humanitarian practices; and how the management and ownership of information relate to the development of 'best practice'.
- Security management, remoteness and performance: The evolution of humanitarian aid, and managerial approaches to improving its effectiveness, in difficult-to-access and insecure regions.
- Between the global and the local: How the relationship between international and local institutions and norms shapes the effects of humanitarian action.
- Humanitarian aid and peacebuilding: What should be the role of effective humanitarian action in the pursuit of peace?
- Professionalisation – improving humanitarian action through the development of expertise and competitive advantage: The implications of professionalisation, particularly for improving the quality of humanitarian aid; the role of technical proficiency in effective humanitarian action.
- Voice and perspective: Whose voice shapes the way humanitarian effectiveness is understood? What efforts have been made to consider other voices, particularly those of crisis-affected populations? Can the humanitarian effectiveness agenda be democratised?
- Resilience – solution or submission? Is building the resilience of people, institutions and systems the solution for the shortcomings of humanitarian action or is it a concession to the inevitability of shortcomings in the face of crisis?

The deadline for submissions is 15 May 2015.

For further information please visit www.humanitarian-quest.org or www.hcri.ac.uk/events.

Please contact Betty-Ann Bristow at hcri@manchester.ac.uk with any inquiries or to submit a paper.