

Anti-racism & Localisation Community of Practice

Theme 7 - Risk Inequality

November 2025

*We can think of **risk inequality** as the unequal management of risk linked to one's power and privilege.*

Resources

The Shocking Inequity in Foreign Aid Nobody Talks About explores the higher risk exposure yet lower pay local aid workers are subjected to.

"When you're appointed as a national staff, you know that if anything happens, if there's war, the organization will evacuate the Western staff and leave you behind."

The Bond article, **Racism in the humanitarian sector endangers aid workers' lives**, calls out the implicit hierarchy of humanitarian staff, including prioritising the security of international aid workers over national aid workers, and prioritising white staff over staff of colour. The brief article concludes by offering seven steps to address the security implications of racism.

The 20-minute New Humanitarian Podcast episode, **Double standards leave local aid workers unprotected**, interrogates why the same duty of care is not extended to all aid workers and why this double standard persists in our sector.

Key takeaways:

Below is a collection of key takeaways from community of practice (CoP) members discussing this theme in the NiE sector, along with practical strategies to navigate these challenges. Please note, they do not necessarily represent the views of any specific organisation or the Global Nutrition Cluster. Further, we acknowledge that the resources shared and CoP discussions are currently exclusively in English.

1

Risk inequality is not really shocking because it's not hidden. It is business as usual and how the entire humanitarian sector operates.

- The 2022 State of the Humanitarian System reported that the number of attacks on aid workers has risen year on year between 2015 (149 attacks) and 2020 (283 attacks), and that the rate of direct attacks on international staff fell over this period while they rose for their national and local counterparts. In 2020, 95% of attacks were against national staff.
- CoP members had observed the double standards around duty of care throughout their careers.
- CoP members felt that energies seem to be put more into justifying or minimising the double standards of security rather than addressing it.

2

How the humanitarian sector is organised makes security measures and information top-down: with information and security measures flowing downstream and becoming more diluted as they go from regional offices to country offices to field offices.

- Even where there are security trainings or briefings, they start out quite robust at higher levels, and become watered down at lower levels, so a 2-week security management training at HQ level can become less than a one-day briefing among staff in the field.
- Often, field staff are put into very vulnerable positions. The volunteers who live in the community are often the most vulnerable.

3

In addition to higher risk for national staff, there is the added burden of lower pay, and lower recognition of their expertise and experience.

4

Treating national and international staff differently, in terms of care, appreciation, and recognition, creates tension across organisations and aggravates divisions between staff.

- Protection and safeguarding norms and policies can separate international and national staff and erode collaboration.
- Power imbalances create a culture of silence, where issues around risk inequality aren't easily raised by national staff out of fear of backlash, even where whistleblower policies are in place.
- National staff may turn to quietly quitting or leaving the organisation altogether, sometimes reporting problems only after they leave the organisation if they no longer fear backlash.

5

When national staff work in these challenging contexts without proper security management, it affects their ability to do their work whole heartedly. In addition, national staff are connected to the affected population. When they are not treated well the community also feels it and this reflects poorly on the organisation.

6

In emergencies, not only are national staff exposed to more risk, they can also be tasked with more responsibilities when international staff are evacuated or in lock down.

- One CoP member shared an experience early in her career of being the only international staff in a city affected by catastrophic flooding, directed by leadership to flee the city, and assigned a land cruiser to get her out despite needing vehicles for all staff to evacuate. Additional work, responsibility, and burden was put on the office of national staff by her presence.

7

From a localisation perspective, there is also the unequal transfer of risk between international organisations and local and national organisations.

- “Local organisations often rely on project-based funding that prioritises short-term, output-focused aid delivery, even in protracted crises that demand longer-term engagement. This funding model limits local organisations’ ability to provide a ‘duty of care’ to their staff by investing in comprehensive safety and security protocols, equipment, insurance coverage, mental health support, and other critical elements of staff welfare.” [The Status of Frontline Workers 2024 Research Study](#)
- An unequal transfer or risk arguably violates the Global Humanitarian Platform Principles of Partnership, especially the principle of equality which states that “Equality requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments.”
- The [2022 State of the Humanitarian System](#) reported that the increased attacks on national humanitarian staff is also part of a wider phenomenon of risk transfer to local and national NGOs.

8

There is also a cost component. Organisations invest much more in travel and security management for international staff, when they could likely provide a strong duty of care for multiple national staff for the same cost.

- Example shared from Afghanistan, about the high rates of traffic accidents when national colleagues go into remote areas, but when international staff go to these same areas they are provided a much higher level of security.

9

Black humanitarian specialists are more likely to be stationed in Africa, because they can “blend in”, while white humanitarian specialists can be sent virtually anywhere and are supported by robust security management.

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How do we bridge the gap between staff who feel powerless and are facing high risks, and sharing their experiences and needs to higher levels where policy change is possible? We talk about complaints and feedback mechanisms for the people we serve, but we don't necessarily have it for staff.

11

Are there promising practices that can be adopted? One member shared that in some organisations security measures are becoming more inclusive. For example, Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) is becoming more prioritised for in-country staff.

12

Leadership and staff involved in security management should be trained on power, privilege, anti-racism, and inclusion to ensure an intersectional lens is applied to policies and activities.

13

We need to speak up when we recognise risk inequality in our work, as part of an ongoing process to improve the sector.

- Example of one member recently traveling for a training, and asked why the driver was staying in a different hotel than the staff when they were all nationals of the country and all traveling for the same objective.

14

There needs to be a major mindset shift, increased awareness to enable change around risk inequality. Opening up conversations about risk inequality is an important first step.

