

Aid under fire: The dilemmas facing humanitarian actors in strife-torn Myanmar

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Myanmar is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis dating back to the military coup of February 2021, which toppled the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and triggered a massive popular uprising that has been met with a brutal junta-led crackdown on protesters and the civil disobedience movement. Thousands of civilians have been killed, thousands more detained and tortured, and severe restrictions have been imposed on internet access, media freedom, and civil liberties. All this on top of an existing situation in Myanmar in which millions of people were already suffering from poverty, conflict, displacement, and natural disasters. Aid efforts by international and local organisations have also been impeded by the junta, with aid workers facing increasing challenges and risks in accessing and assisting people in need. As international aid players pull back, local civil society organisations have stepped up to serve beleaguered communities. Yet, local aid actors are now calling for wholesale reforms as they find long-established operational practices and funding models are simply ineffective in today's environment. So how are aid providers navigating the ethical and practical dilemmas of humanitarian efforts in Myanmar? And what alternative models and approaches are emerging from local aid workers? Development researchers and Myanmar watchers Dr Anne Decobert and Dr Tamas Wells join Peter Clarke to examine how aid operates in the strife-torn nation.

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Main image: (L-R) Dr Anne Decobert and Dr Tamas Wells. Listing image: Myanmar protestors in London, August 2023. Credit: Alisdare Hickson/Flickr.