

Doing well by doing good research

By the INSEAD Humanitarian Research Group

Increased case load and less funding, complex man-made disasters and pandemics, climate change and population growth - The field of humanitarian operations today requires more innovative approaches than ever before, many of which are made possible by leveraging the latest technologies. These new perspectives make it a fascinating and promising research area.

20 years ago, humanitarian and health supply chains were an underdeveloped subject. Since then, knowledge from commercial supply chains was successfully transferred, but progress should not stop here. New concepts and theories need to be established and tested for widespread applicability and feasibility. Complex disasters require novel and agile responses. Humanitarian organization and commercial firms alike need to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing environment with fast-growing uncertainties, not to mention hard to handle disruptions. Learning now goes both ways: skills and routines developed in humanitarian crises can successfully be transferred to commercial companies.

INSEAD's Humanitarian Research Group has a long experience of close collaboration with humanitarian and health organizations in disaster response as well as development settings. Learning about this field requires deep contextual knowledge, e.g. around local cultures or security issues. To this end, field projects are vital to define the problem, gather relevant data, validate the right assumptions, develop potential solutions, and close the loop by testing their effectiveness in practice. With this process goes the development of simple, robust decision rules and training of local staff. Underpinning these efforts is our conviction that we can transfer our business know-how to humanitarian and development organizations while extending our knowledge. We constantly push the boundaries of our discipline by studying these extreme situations.

Business schools not only disseminate knowledge, they also create new insights by studying uncharted territory. There is a science of health and humanitarian logistics waiting to be discovered for the benefit of both the humanitarian and business world. Doing good is not the objective of the Humanitarian Research Group. Doing good and practice-based research is. The indirect social impact that follows is a rewarding positive externality that clearly resonates with the mission of INSEAD, The Business School for the World, which is to be a Force for Good.

Ergo, we want to do well by doing good research and as such be the best humanitarian research group.

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