



Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers retrieving bodies from the streets of Aleppo.

Nov 16, 2017 12:51 GMT

Northumbria academic addresses global conference on humanitarian aid



Northumbria University's Matt Baillie Smith is appearing at AidEx in Brussels this week to present the latest findings of his project with the Swedish Red Cross.

[Professor Baillie Smith](#), will be discussing the Volunteers in Conflicts and Emergencies Initiative ([ViCE](#)), a joint project led by Northumbria and the [Swedish Red Cross](#), through an interactive exhibit and panel debate.

[AidEx](#) is one of the world's leading global platforms focused on improving aid and humanitarian efforts. Volunteers are critical to humanitarian and aid efforts in conflicts and emergencies, but historically academics and development organisations have paid too little attention to their needs and experiences. They are often taken for granted and can pay an enormous personal price in the course of volunteering, yet rarely receive the psycho-social and other forms of support they need. This is changing thanks to Northumbria and the Swedish Red Cross.

The [ViCE](#) Initiative is sharing its findings about these volunteers through a large interactive exhibit at AidEx, which gives people a chance to not only hear what volunteers say about their experiences, but to also engage with some of the equipment volunteers use and need. It also asks visitors to contribute to the initiative by sharing their reflections on some of the data and considering the strategic priorities for supporting volunteers in conflicts and emergencies.

Professor Baillie Smith will be sharing his research findings at the AidEx conference as part of an international panel identifying key priorities for aid effectiveness and accountability.

He said: “What we have learnt from the ViCE Initiative is that volunteers rarely feel listened to, and yet lots of claims are made for their roles and how they can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of humanitarian and development interventions. We need to pay attention to their experiences, ideas and struggles, not just to say we have listened, but to act on what we hear.

“Volunteers can and do play critically important roles, but there is an urgent need to recognise the costs that these roles can bring for volunteers and their families. We need to consider how volunteer’s voices become part of the decision making processes in aid and humanitarian efforts, rather than local volunteers largely being treated as a form of low-cost service delivery.”

To find out more about AidEx, click [here](#). [Professor Baillie Smith](#) is the Director of Northumbria’s [Centre for International Development](#). This dynamic centre brings together academics, practitioners and students to promote research, consultancy, teaching, training and public engagement on issues of global poverty and inequality, the communities and individuals who experience this, and the policies, practices and approaches that seek to address it. The centre’s specialist areas of focus include Governance, environmental resources and sustainability, Volunteering, activism and civil society, and Participatory design and digital civics. For more information about Northumbria’s Centre for International Development, click [here](#).

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