

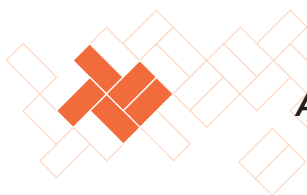
Humanitarian

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**LOCAL SOLIDARITY, MUTUAL
ASSISTANCE AND CITIZENSHIP
IN TIMES OF CRISIS**



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SPECIAL ISSUE

**by Johanna Baché
and François Grünewald**

Local solidarity, mutual assistance and citizenship in times of crisis

From the ruins of Beirut to the flooded regions of la Roya and Germany, from the villages under attack in the Central African Republic to the at-risk zones of the Sahel, from the outskirts of Mocoa in Colombia, devastated by a mudslide, to the villages in the regions where megafires have blazed, in all these places, citizens, elected representatives, and loosely formed groups of individuals have taken action to help their neighbours, their territory, or those who have come looking for refuge. In 2021, as was the case the year before, there have been as many crises as there have been examples of this local solidarity. Numerous reports have underlined how decisive local action has been in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic,¹ how primo responders and locally-led responses are often more effective in times of crisis,² and yet...

And yet, traditional humanitarian actors have a great deal of difficulty dealing with this local solidarity, which goes by many different names and includes many different types of organisation: informal mutual aid networks, organisations that are used to humanitarian standards, activist citizen-based initiatives, apolitical

neighbourhood committees, Red Cross volunteers, and local private sector bodies who also want to contribute to the response. The contours of this type of solidarity are unclear, and are very different from one context to another, and from one stage of a crisis to another. What is also unclear is the humanitarian sector's capacity to understand and support it (or its interest in doing so).

Though the debate about localisation in connection with the Grand Bargain has been useful and necessary, it has also acted as a distorting mirror. Yes, on the one hand, five years after the commitments were made, the meagre 4.7% of humanitarian funds directly allocated to local and national actors, is well below the objective of 25%. But, on the other hand, the funds injected for assistance by diasporas, local private actors, and even individuals and families to help neighbours in distress and uprooted populations, represent considerable sums, often much greater than the funds that the international aid sector is capable of mobilising. Indeed, local actors are not limited to the networks of large NGOs from the South who, justifiably, want

1- Larissa Fast and Christine Bennett, « From the ground up: It's about time for local humanitarian action », HPG Report ODI, May 2020.

2- Whether caused by conflicts, natural disasters, health-related disasters, technological accidents, etc.



— editorial

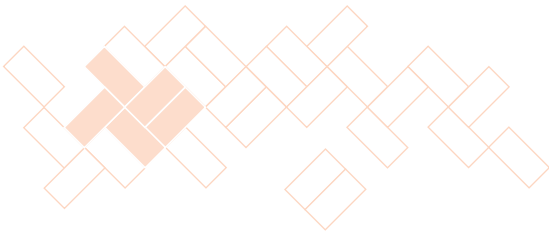
access to humanitarian sector resources. Municipal authorities, with their elected representatives and their technical services, the little mutual aid organisations who come to life and then die, referred to rather contemptuously as ‘mushroom’ NGOs, and the informal networks who come together on WhatsApp and Facebook, are also part of this category of actors. The flocks of volunteers on the Greek islands, in Calais, Beirut and Breil-sur-Roya, the assistance provided in nearby schools to earthquake victims in Haiti and Nepal, or to the refugees and IDPs in Lebanese villages, are wonderful examples of this.

These local actors have no doubt been around for a long time (apart from those established through social networks). They are only new in that there is renewed interest in them. Their speed of response, and their capacity to provide assistance to affected people ‘here and now’ are impressive compared to the cumbersome formal system. As a result, there is a lot of misunderstanding between the humanitarian sector and these new citizen-based initiatives. In our fast-changing world, they are there to remind us, if not of the failure, at least of the difficulties that the system has in taking these forms of action into account, and in reforming itself.

At Groupe URD, we have often observed these forms of action during real-time evaluations in the field in the days and weeks after crises have begun. They highlight the need to revise the paradigms that have shaped humanitarian action for more than fifty years. This is not a new idea;

we have been trying to encourage the sector to integrate itself into local solidarity ecosystems, rather than the other way around, since our work on the participation of local people in humanitarian action and our book ‘Beneficiaries or partners, the role of local populations in humanitarian action’. When we look at the image that the sector projects of itself, it clearly continues to place international actors at the centre of the response, while local organisations have to be trained in, and apply, dominant standards in order to be perceived as legitimate. In the name of good management and financial accountability, and a technical response that is compatible with our good practice guides, we appear to want to transform these local actors into clones of ourselves. In order to avoid this risk, and the feeling of being ignored, or worse, judged condescendingly, some actors prefer not to use our support and instead depend on ‘local spirit’; in other words, the solidarity and social cohesion that emerges in contexts where everything has collapsed.

New operational methods therefore need to be invented to support – without undermining – this extraordinary local solidarity, these citizen-based initiatives and these local forms of mutual aid that are often on the margins of the classic humanitarian ‘system’. This was the territory that we began to explore during the 2021 edition of the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid. We continue along this inspiring yet tortuous path, full of enriching encounters, in this new edition of *Humanitarian Aid on the Move*.



What do the sciences have to teach us about mutual aid?

by Pablo Servigne

Do disasters give rise to exceptionally altruistic and supportive behaviour? If so, why is this the case? And more broadly, what is the essence of mutual aid between human beings?

Mutual aid – which is when individuals collaborate for their mutual benefit – does not only take place between humans: all living beings collaborate in many different ways. For centuries, biologists and ecologists have been describing the collaboration between related individuals (such as within ant colonies), between individuals of the same species (such as a shoal of fish), and even between different species (for example, the pollination of plants by animals). In fact, all these forms of collaboration have existed between *all living beings* for almost 4 billion years.

There is so much collaboration, and of so many different kinds, that we can safely say that mutual aid is a basic principle of the living world. What is more, as the Geographer, Pierre Kropotkin, showed in his 1902 book, ‘Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution’, mutual aid is even a principle of natural se-

lection: those who survive are not the strongest, but those who cooperate most. The Russian scholar also showed that the environment plays an important role in the emergence of mutual aid: the more hostile the environment, the more mutual aid there is between living beings. This claim, which is counter-intuitive

for a ‘liberal subject’ (in the philosophical sense), has been rediscovered by the experimental sciences, and is easily explained: the ‘selfish’ and solitary individual has fewer chances of surviving in a difficult environment.

Thus, over the decades, the sciences have deconstructed the received idea that nature is a war of everyone against everyone else (the ‘law of the jungle’), where there is a permanent state of competition and aggression. That is just liberal mythology: in nature, mutual aid, cooperation, symbiosis, mutualism and altruism play a very important role. But how does this manifest itself within our species?



MUTUAL AID BETWEEN HUMANS IS SPONTANEOUS...

The first idea that needs to be established is that mutual aid and prosocial behaviour are generally very spontaneous. This can be demonstrated in several ways. The first is to observe what happens when catastrophic events take place, when social order suddenly disappears and the authorities momentarily lose the means of exercising control. The victims' stress and the speed of events most often prevent rational reasoning: we do what we can, and we act on our reflexes.

Contrary to received wisdom, when a disaster takes place, panic is rare: people remain calm, organise themselves and display prosocial, altruistic and sometimes even extraordinary behaviour. The analysis of victims' accounts of disasters by psychologists and sociologists has given clear results. The following is an example of the numerous studies that have been carried out: "Thomas A. Glass, of John Hopkins University, and his collaborators analysed human reactions during ten very different disasters that took place between 1989 and 1994: two earthquakes, two train crashes, one air crash, two gas explosions, one hurricane, one tornado, and a bomb explosion which caused a fire. The number

of victims ranged from 3 to more than 200. The researchers systematically found that victims had spontaneously formed groups, with leaders, had fixed collectively accepted rules and shared out roles with a view to helping as many people as possible to survive".¹

How can this be explained? What individuals who are stressed and sometimes in shock want, above all, is security – they are therefore not prone to violence. This was the case, for example, when the Twin Towers collapsed in New York in 2001, after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in December 2004, after the earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, or the Bataclan concert hall, during the terrorist attack of 13 November 2015. In addition to the great waves of solidarity that come from the outside, gripping witness accounts describe how people on the inside risked their lives to help perfect strangers. Extraordinary conditions therefore lead to extraordinary behaviour.

Another way to explore the spontaneity of mutual aid is through experiments. Researchers test the behaviour of participants using economic games where they control all the parameters, the most well-known of these being the 'Public Goods Game'. In this game, researchers ask participants (for example, ten people around a table) who do not know each other, and to whom they

1 - Jacques Lecomte, *La bonté humaine*, Odile Jacob, 2012, p. 30.



have given the same amount of money (for example, 20 euros), to put some of their money in a shared pot. Each round, the amount in the shared pot is doubled, then redistributed equally to the players. Thus, if everyone plays collectively, everyone wins (they are richer), but if only a few altruists contribute (and the selfish people prefer to keep their money), then they will end up with less money than the selfish people (who will have benefited from the shared pot)... It is a dilemma that has a great deal to teach us!

The main result of this experiment is that between 40% and 60% of the participants contribute to the shared pot during the first round, even when the players do not know each other.

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More broadly, by getting people from fifteen traditional societies to play these economic games, including hunter-gatherers, nomads, semi-nomads and sedentary peoples (such as the Machiguengua from Peru, the Hadza and the Sangu from Tanzania, or the Torguud from Mongolia), the researchers realised that, everywhere in the world, the participants spontaneously contributed to the shared pot, with extremely variable participation rates, ranging from very small contributions to the whole amount that they possessed. We are a far cry from the rational and selfish *Homo economicus*!

By measuring the time that each player takes to make a decision in the Public Goods Game, other researchers observed that the subjects who answered quickly were more cooperative than those who took time to decide. They therefore developed an experiment where they forced the players to decide more quickly (spontaneously) and observed that this led to an increase in the contributions to the shared pot! On the other hand, forcing the players to take more time to think (by encouraging reflection) reduced the contributions. When players were put in conditions that encouraged intuition, this increased contributions to the shared pot, whereas a context where they reflected made them more selfish.



These results echo the incredible stories of anonymous heroes who have shown extreme altruism by voluntarily risking their lives to try to save someone else. For a century, the Carnegie Hero Fund in the United States has been collecting these stories and honours these ordinary heroes by awarding them a medal. Psychologists asked volunteers to read these stories and evaluate if these altruistic acts were more spontaneous or the result of reflection: the vast majority of the readers thought that they were spontaneous acts. A journalist recently asked the secretary of the Carnegie Hero Fund if they thought there was a common thread running through all these acts of bravery, and the secretary replied that the majority of the people had not been able to evaluate the risks and benefits of their actions: they simply felt compelled to act...

Is this also the case in everyday life, without stressful conditions? The spontaneous provision of aid in a non-emergency situation was measured in a major social psychology experiment carried out in 23 major cities in the world in 2001. This involved, for example, telling someone in the street that they had dropped their pen, offering to help a person with a limp to pick up a pile of magazines, or helping

a blind person cross the road. The results were clear: mutual aid is common, everywhere.

The level of spontaneous mutual aid proved to be relatively constant and homogenous in each city, which suggests that each has its own culture of mutual aid. The results varied a lot between different cultures, ranging from 40% of prosocial behaviour in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) to 93% in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). The researchers noticed that these variations depended on two factors: Latin culture (Spain, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Mexico were particularly generous) and the economic productivity of the city (the more income the inhabitants have, the less likely they are to help).

Therefore, to summarise, we can safely say that people are spontaneously prosocial, as has been shown in hundreds of experiments, in dozens of countries, on every continent, and using different experiments.² Human beings therefore behave in a much less selfish manner than certain economists would like to have us think.

2- You can read more on the nature of this spontaneity (epigenetic? innate?, etc.) in chapter 2 of my book "L'entraide, L'autre loi de la jungle" (LLL, 2017), co-written with Gauthier Chapelle. The book also contains all the references to the scientific articles mentioned.



BUT FRAGILE



Mutual aid begins with an act of giving, which produces a very powerful obligation of reciprocity in the receiver. This system of 'giving – receiving – and giving back' is at the heart of mutual aid, and, by extension, of all social ties. Thus, reciprocity is the mainstay of mutual aid among humans. If this occurs within a group, human cooperation can reach much higher levels than in other species, in terms of intensity and size of group.

Nevertheless, though reciprocal aid between two or several persons can be very powerful, it tends to become more diluted over time, and as the number of individuals in a group increases. In the Public Goods Game, as in real life, there is always a small proportion of profiteers, cheats and egotists. Even though their numbers are small, they drag the group down into an egotistical and competitive spiral, which eventually takes the whole group with it. As soon as a few people only look out for themselves or cheat, and other participants realise this, numerous co-operators stop participating, which leads to the collapse of contributions to the public good. And what is the end result? Everyone loses, even though everyone thought that they would be able to profit individually from the situation.

Mutual aid is therefore the result of a fragile balance which can gradually be lost, or can collapse in the blink of an eye, especially within a group. This can happen even if the individuals have good relations of reciprocity, even if the majority of them are well intentioned, and even if everyone is aware that mutual aid benefits the group. A small number of antisocial acts are all it takes for the majority to lose their desire to be virtuous.

To counter the risk of mutual aid breaking down, humans have developed several mechanisms to reinforce and stabilise mutual aid as they have evolved:

1. Punishing cheats and rewarding

altruists. This is a feature that can be observed in every human culture. When these rules are established, cooperation, altruism and contributions to the common good increase rapidly to very high levels. This is what researchers call 'strong reciprocity'.

2. Reputation.

An altruistic act can return to the giver via an indirect channel. This is what researchers call 'indirect reciprocity': you help someone in a group, knowing that reciprocity could come from any of the other people in the group. But, for this to happen, you need to recognise the others individually. Anonymity can weaken the obligations of reciprocity (forgetting, defection, indifference, etc.), which can make the general level of mutual aid fall sharply.



The reputation mechanism helps to ensure that there is a high level of confidence by placing a sort of 'reliability label' on each of the group members, which allows the people to be recognised without knowing them. People do value their reputation... and tend to cooperate with people with a good reputation. In large groups that are still on a 'human' scale (neighbourhoods, villages, businesses, etc.), information circulates (gossip), and it rapidly becomes clear who the cheats and the profiteers are. Reputation therefore becomes a very precious piece of information, like a score that is updated with every interaction and which reveals our past actions. This score is therefore like a form of capital that can be accumulated but can also be lost. It holds the promise for each individual of a (socially) prosperous future.

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We need to renew our competencies in mutual aid, cooperation and solidarity... in a world that is dominated by the ideology of competition. Why? In order to get through this century of disasters more peacefully.

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3. Social norms and institutions. Regardless of the size of the group (family, clan, association, business, club, religion, nation, etc.), its members obey shared social norms that encourage group cohesion because they allow codes of reciprocity to be transmitted quickly and effectively in different places and at different times. However, in large groups, these norms can only be sustained via stable, long-term institutions. The latter have the disadvantage of producing a 'colder', more impersonal reciprocity ('invisible reciprocity'), but they allow it to be extended to levels that are 'extraordinary', in the original sense of the word, and to maintain social cohesion within huge groups, even between perfect strangers, which is unique in the living world.

4. Feelings of trust, security and fairness/justice. For there to be strong and generalised mutual aid within a group, there are three essential ingredients: all the members of the group need to feel secure, which depends on the constitution of a good 'membrane' (the rules fixed by the group, its reason for being, its identity); there also need to be feelings of equality and fairness, which allow the harmful effects of feelings of injustice to be avoided (anger, resentment, antisocial behaviour and the desire for punishment); and thirdly, feelings of trust, which are the result of the two previous ingredients, and which allow each individual to do their



best for the good of the group. If these three feelings are present and mechanisms allow reciprocity to be stabilised in the group, then everything clicks into place and the whole group (temporarily) becomes a living organism, and a particularly effective superorganism.

5. External factors. There are three external factors that can influence mutual aid: the presence of a common enemy (a 'big bad wolf'), a hostile environment, and the existence of an easily quantifiable and reachable shared objective. These three factors ensure that the goals of all the individuals in the group are aligned, which makes reciprocity more fluid and allows feelings of security, equality/fairness and trust to be established more easily. The introduction of a greater threat transforms former rivalries into solidarity. Danger and challenges therefore considerably encourage mutual aid.

UNDERSTANDING, EXPERIMENTING, AND PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

The aim of highlighting these mechanisms is simple: we need to renew our competencies in mutual aid, cooperation and solidarity... in a world that is dominated by the ideology of competition. Why? In order to get through this century of disasters more peacefully.

How do disasters affect mutual aid? And how does mutual aid function

when there are disasters? These are central questions for humanitarians, and there is still a lot to learn. Answering these questions will lead to others: How do we avoid conflicts? How should we establish mutual aid networks during a crisis? / or before a crisis? How do these mutual aid networks protect people from shocks?

The resilience of human communities in the face of adversity is intimately linked to these fundamental questions. Over and above understanding these mechanisms, the goal today is to apply all this knowledge in the field. But in order to do this, first we need to believe in the incredible potential of mutual aid between humans (which is by no means a given!). Only once this is the case will it be possible to establish practices and test ideas to scale in the field. The stakes are very high, because when we are faced with adversity, we always have the same choice: civil war or solidarity. ✨

Pablo Servigne

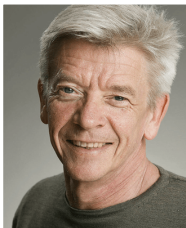
Independent researcher and author



interview

with Nils Carstensen

Nils Carstensen has been part of Local to Global Protection (L2GP) since the beginning of this initiative whose core commitment is the meaningful transfer of power and agency to affected individuals and self-help groups along with other local and national actors in crisis. To achieve this, L2GP works with and tries to influence organisations and individuals at all levels of the humanitarian system, as well as learning and policy institutions. This initiative is hosted and supported by DanChurchAid, Act Church of Sweden and Christian Aid but works as an independent and open-source collective. Nils has a background in humanitarian aid, research, journalism, photography, and filmmaking.



Words like 'localisation', 'local' and 'global' depend very much on your own point of departure, so could you start by telling us where you are seeing this from?

Nils Carstensen: As we speak, I'm looking across the open space office of a Northern European-based NGO. This is an NGO which grew out of solidarity and collaborations between like-minded churches in Europe between the two world wars. Now, nearly a century later, it is a small/medium-

sized international NGO working in development and humanitarian aid across the world. At first, it worked entirely through supporting local and national partner organizations, but from the mid-1990s onwards, it increasingly began asserting its own presence and built up a sizeable direct implementation in several countries.

Local2Global Protection (L2GP), where I work, is a small, semi-independent research and innovation initiative beholden to numerous stakeholders. But it is hosted by this international NGO and that is also where I (professionally speaking) grew up. So that's where I'm talking from today: looking across a room full of colleagues straddling, and at times battling it out across the many dilemmas, opportunities, and challenges inherent to the current practise and debate around localisation. Observing how they try to balance what may feel like 'the obvious and the right thing to do' with demands such as conflicting perceptions of how best to act quickly and effectively, individual and institutional self-interests and donor opportunities and requirements.

So from that perspective - what does 'localisation' mean to you?

N. C.: Let me start by stressing a basic but often overlooked fact: for as long as mankind has been faced with crises, people have been responding, whether



as individuals, family members, community groups, local authorities or private businesses. So, when we now use the term 'localisation' as a catchphrase for a renewed emphasis on local and national institutionalised aid, we risk missing a crucial point: local response, in the general sense of the word, is very much NOT something new.... It is very much NOT something that suddenly appeared around the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 or the associated Grand Bargain.

Affected individuals and their immediate surroundings usually are the first, the last - and often the most important - responders to a crisis. This is true in times of earthquakes, hurricanes, escalation of armed conflict, major outbreaks of diseases - or a slow onset drought. If this was not abundantly clear already, the response to the COVID-19 crisis has brought this fact to the fore again - with force¹.

Still, it seems that most professional aid actors have remained strangely blind to the value and importance of such spontaneous volunteerism and self-help - sometimes also referred to as solidarity, mutual aid or 'response

communitas'². Even if many of us probably know deep down that spontaneous mutual aid is as important for most crisis affected individuals' survival, protection, and possible recovery as any outside assistance, we somehow can't bring that knowledge into the planning and design of our responses. As professional aid workers, we often seem to be so preoccupied with our own proposals, interventions and reporting that almost anything that falls outside the scope of our Logical Frameworks/Theories of Change or proposals and reporting formats somehow just disappears from our field of vision.

Allow me to quickly point to a rather humbling fact here: according to the 2021 Global Humanitarian Assistance report³, on average, professional humanitarian actors only had USD 127 available for each individual in need - for an entire year. That figure includes the rather sizeable amounts which stay in our own systems for salaries, admin, security, quality assurance, compliance, reporting, overheads, etc. Even when recognizing that such an average figure is a crude and clumsy analytical tool, it still points to the fact that crisis-affected

1- Nils Carstensen, Mandeep Mudhar and Freja Schurman Munksgaard (2021/2022) 'Let communities do their work - the role of community mutual aid and self-help groups in the Covid-19 pandemic response' for upcoming issue of *Disasters Magazine* (Jan. 2022) - <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12515>

2- Matthewman, S. and S. Uekusa (2021) 'Theorizing disaster communitas'. *Theory and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-021-09442-4>

3- The Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2021 - <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2021/>



individuals' own resources - along with those of their neighbours, communities and local authorities - appear to be instrumental to ensure basic survival - as has also been pointed out in research by ODI HPG⁴.

This just to remind us all - again and again - that local self-help of many different kinds have always been around and remain crucial in times of crisis. And, fortunately, whatever we say and do as professional aid workers, such spontaneous local response will always happen - whether we notice and appreciate it or not.

That said, the term 'localisation' rose to a newfound prominence around 2014 -16 - very much in the run up to, during and after the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. Since then, it has moved from being a bit of a sideshow to become part of mainstream humanitarian discourse and policy making - even if not yet incorporated in practice to nearly the same level.

As I see it today, 'localisation' is often used as shorthand to describe a move towards: 1) recognizing the importance and the added value of local and national actors and their response in a crisis, 2) increasing the amount and the

quality of funding along with a greater role in leadership and decision-making around humanitarian responses for local and national actors. The latter was probably most noticeably captured in the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change 'localisation' commitments including among them to transfer 25% of all humanitarian funding as directly as possible to local/national actors.

Now - how well this has worked out in practice, despite all the global level commitments, conferences and promises, remains an entirely different story. Suffice it to say that if you track funding, quality of sub-granting agreements and real participation, the actual measurable progress towards these Grand Bargain commitments has been very modest - to the extent that you can measure it at all⁵.

So, if we go with the above understanding of 'localisation' - what is the difference between 'localisation' and terms like 'locally-led responses'?

N. C.: At L2GP, we began using the term 'locally-led' some eight years back in order to stress and distinguish a way

4-Barnaby Willitts-King, Lydia Poole and John Bryant (2018), 'Measuring the iceberg', ODI HPG Working Paper - <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12540.pdf>

5- Christian Els and Henrik Fröjmark, 'Local funding flows and leadership: recent trends in 10 major humanitarian responses', ODI HPG, Humanitarian Exchange number 79, May 2021 - https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HE-79_Localisation_WEB-1.pdf



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of working (survivor- and community-led crisis responses) where the majority of decision-making, funding and implementation is left to self-help groups formed among a given crisis-affected population (protection groups, women's associations, faith groups, etc.). We began using the term 'locally led' because we saw that words like 'participation' or 'community-based', had become so diluted, that we felt it often did not translate to anything like meaningful 'participation' on the part of crisis-affected individuals.

So, what we mean by 'locally-led' when we use it at L2GP, is that the majority of the funding, design and implementation is left to affected

individuals and community groups to decide. For us, it was about tightening up the language and trying to make sure that when we, for instance, use the term 'community-led', we mean exactly what the words say - community led - rather than the kind of 'participation' where aid professionals allow for limited user participation and then proceed to call this a 'community-based' response. Rather, we reserve the term 'community-led' for situations where a majority of the ownership and the decision-making on how a grant is spent rests, with adequate support and mentoring, with affected individuals and self-help groups.

What are some inspiring ways, for the aid sector, to support mutual aid and local solidarity initiatives, without changing their nature?

N. C.: Over the last ten years we have worked with communities, CBOs and NGOs in a number of countries to develop a way of working whereby external actors can support spontaneous self-help efforts (mutual aid, local solidarity, etc.) by individuals and groups living through a crisis. We call this way of working 'survivor- and community-led crisis response' (sclr). On our website you can find papers and videos explaining how this is

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done - including numerous concrete examples of how this has worked out in countries like Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti, Palestine, the Philippines and Kenya. Many of these key resources, including the recent ODI HPN #84 and a brand new video tutorial on sclr, are available in Arabic, English, French, and Spanish.

I could list a multitude of concrete examples of how this approach works, but instead I'll refer readers to our website - and here just mention a couple of quotes from users of the approach. A female member of a protection group in a small Bedouin village in the Palestinian West Bank saw a clear difference between the new and the old ways of working: "Previous NGOs behaved with village members as if they were teaching third-graders dictation". She went on to explain how the new approach feels different: "It is like we all gather with the NGO staff to form our own grammar rules". Users of sclr in Agusan (Mindanao) in the Philippines had this to say: "We feel in charge of our own interventions; it always feels good. Through meetings, we were able to determine if any project is destructive to our community".

In Kenya, Darare Gonche, who leads a local CBO (Iremo), described her experience working in a community-led manner in this way: "If you give a stick to someone, it means they've been given power. Empowerment means letting them make decisions, giving



them resources. Why do we hold on to the power? Release it! Let them use it!"

'Survivor- and community-led crisis response' is a practical, tested and proven way for aid actors to support spontaneous or more organised self-help initiatives by citizens, activists and groups. It does this by: 1) primarily supporting activities for the common good (collective needs and opportunities), while leaving it to household cash grants, etc. to target individual needs, 2) not destroying the positive aspects of self-help by trying to force such initiatives into becoming 'mini-NGOs', 3) helping to initiate changes in power dynamics around gender and also between individuals, communities, local authorities and aid actors, and; 4) recognising and supporting the importance and potential of spontaneous mutual aid, self-help, solidarity and community cohesion.

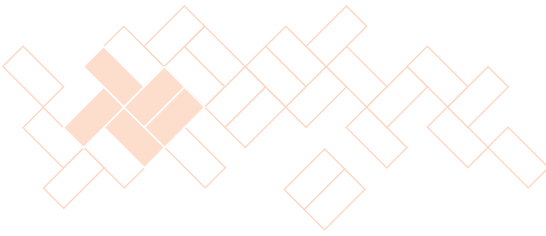
At the same time, this way of working makes it possible for external aid actors to comply with accepted humanitarian principles, standards and (donor) regulations.

In conclusion, at L2GP we believe that survivor- and community-led crisis response is a practical way for external aid actors to support people's and small groups' own responses as a crucial complement to other more traditional programming which

remains important in many situations. For us, it's not about either externally-led or locally-led ways of working. It is all about seeking complementary and mutually reinforcing ways of working - while being extremely cautious that 'localisation' does not become yet another vehicle for international actors to enforce their priorities, values and requirements on local actors.

'Survivor- and community-led crisis response' has evolved from the experience and perspective that a successful humanitarian response must recognise the importance of all relevant actors. It is about a response system which is designed and executed in a manner which recognizes and allows for all to contribute to their maximum at any stage of a response. That, in many ways, is what 'localisation' is about for me. Recalibrating the humanitarian system such that it does not only favour and privilege the big international agencies and INGOs at the expense of national, local and community-led responses. Instead, we must open up the system and significantly increase access to humanitarian funding and decision-making for local actors, including the contributions affected individuals and self-help groups have to offer in any given context. ❖

For more details, practical experience & methodology please visit: www.local2global.info



From dealing with disasters to resilience-building, what matters is local leadership

by Sarah Strack

Forus is a global network of civil society organisations representing over 22,000 NGOs all over the world. In 2019, Forus started a project to strengthen the capacities of national NGO platforms in crisis and post-emergency situations with the support of the Fondation de France. As part of this project, in 2020, Forus collaborated with the Global Network of Civil Society Organizations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR), Save the Children Switzerland and Inventing Futures to develop a practical toolkit and micro-site to strengthen the role of civil society organisations in coordinating disaster risk reduction and post-emergency interventions. The resource is available in English, French and Spanish.

“As local as possible, as international as necessary.” With these words, back in 2016¹, leaders declared that humanitarian action should be localised. Fast-forward to 2021, and the road to localisation is still arduous. There is no universal definition, yet the term often refers to the process² of “recognizing, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and deci-

sion-making of local actors in humanitarian and disaster response”.

MORE THAN LOCATION: LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The reason for promoting and protecting localisation is simple: detailed local knowledge is vital to understand how to support risk reduction, response and recovery and to build a truly more sustainable future that is centred around people’s needs. But we need to move beyond the concept of localisation towards local leadership, which implies that there is a recalibration of the balance of power towards those who are most affected and who should have the most

to say on how to best respond to crises. This includes communities, government institutions working at the national level, local authorities, and, more often than not, civil society organisations. The latter are, time and again, at the frontline of ‘everyday disasters’ - disasters that do not make the international news, but account for the vast majority of loss and damage at local level worldwide.

1- <https://agendaforhumanity.org/summit.html>

2- www.preventionweb.net/news/local-possible-study-localisation-disaster-management-during-pandemic



Everyday disasters are complex. Valuable information about them is found locally from communities and the civil society organisations working with them. As a result, relationships with external actors who have limited understanding of local contexts need to be carefully managed, ensuring local voices are heard.

As well as local consultations, local institution building allows people to express their needs and priorities, as explored in Forus' Disaster Risk Reduction toolkit³. For example, in Uganda, DENIVA⁴ have supported the establishment of 'Neighbourhood Assemblies' - or community parliaments. In Colombia, the NGO platform CCONG⁵ created 'Consejos de Gestión del Riesgo' - Risk Management Councils - which in turn developed their own plans of action for their territory. In Dhaka's slum areas, the Participatory Development Action Programme (PDAP)⁶ has worked closely with communities and has found that external partners come with short-term, project-based agendas that are not shaped by local needs. The PDAP's experience has shown that longer-term relationships based on mutuality are more effective.

Local civil society groups play a significant role in disaster response, recovery and resilience-building by building bridges between different dimensions. They are the ones who stay and continue to provide assistance when most organisations have already packed their bags. According to PDAP, "When a cyclone happens, there is lots of government action, but post-disaster, they do not reach the people."



We need to move beyond the concept of localisation towards local leadership, which implies that there is a recalibration of the balance of power towards those who are most affected and who should have the most to say on how to best respond to crises.



3- drr.forus-international.org

4- <https://asksource.info/organisations/development-network-indigenous-voluntary-associations-deniva>

5- <https://ccong.org.co/ccong>

6- www.pdapbd.org



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Through questionnaires, qualitative community consultations and citizen-based processes, organisations pushing for local leadership are not only “shifting the power”, they are also understanding the depth and perspective that this approach can bring. In Bangladesh, findings have revealed that despite the prevalence of natural hazards, the “disasters” and threats cited by respondents are primarily social and economic. These range from unemployment and drug addiction to early marriage. The data collected by civil society organisations has both increased the understanding of local contexts and challenges, while also supporting advocacy for local action,

challenging external perceptions of local realities.

Similarly, Julien Comlan Agbessi of REPAOC, the West African NGO Platforms Network, describes how working closely with local civil society «is a must” in the various stages of crisis and disaster management: “Whether in prevention, preparedness, response, recovery or reconstruction, civil society organisations, because of their operational proximity to communities and their knowledge of habits, customs, behaviours, interactions and affinities, are the most appropriate actors in terms of social mobilisation, risk awareness, observance of rules and



measures for risk prevention and mitigation, as well as capacity building.” Civil society organisations are also best placed to trigger early warning systems, to communicate and inform the public during emergencies, and to collaborate with partners to provide crucial humanitarian assistance.

THE MANY BARRIERS TO LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Yet, the level of preparedness in communities remains low, especially after a crisis has passed. Too often, external actors leave without providing the necessary assistance to uphold local support ecosystems and capacities.

Julien Comlan Agbessi explains: “Prevention should be the rule in disaster risk management. This means prevention through the adoption of individual and collective attitudes, capacity building and the acquisition of technical means.” This is particularly important in the face of the cumulative hazards West Africa is facing – both natural and man-made. “The new form of risk, unprecedented in West Africa, is the security crisis due to jihadist attacks: a crisis with variable geometry and multifaceted consequences in Nigeria, in the countries of the central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) and in the countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Côte d'Ivoire, Benin).” He argues that the current security crisis is a complex

emergency situation, with the characteristics of civil conflict: lack of authority or security throughout the territory, violations of human rights, massive displacement of populations as well as disruption in the use of infrastructures and access to the economic system. “The prolonged and extensive nature of this conflict, which is due to a complex interaction between different social, economic and political actors, requires a multi-sectoral intervention.”

However, the involvement of local actors and civil society organisations is not a given. This depends on the “level of acceptance of civil society organisations by the authorities and administrations” which are often seen as “rivals to the government, competing for funding”, instead of valuable allies. In some countries across the region, “they are targeted (...) because of the whistleblowing and watchdog role they play. This explains the government measures to suspend the renewal of NGO accreditation in some countries, or to ban them from operating in others”.

Because of the lack of willingness to cooperate with civil society organisations and local communities, REPAOC launched a call in April 2020 for solidarity and collaboration in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The call was addressed to “governments and officials of state structures, to involve, at all levels, civil society organisations and their national, regional and global networks”.



Similarly, Koffi Mickael Yameogo, Project coordinator at SPONG⁷, the NGO network in Burkina Faso, told us about the efforts the platform is making for civil society organisations to be recognised and integrated into humanitarian responses: “Faced with the pressing demands of communities affected by the humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by our country’s security situation, national NGOs and associations traditionally active in development issues seem to be insufficiently prepared to respond to them, while international humanitarian NGOs have solutions, but are coming up against obstacles. The obstacles they encounter are linked to the physical accessibility of the areas of operation, knowledge of the terrain and targets, and the failure to take development issues into account, all of which call for a collaborative strategy between local actors, namely national development NGOs/associations and international NGOs active in humanitarian issues”.

SPONG has therefore set up a Humanitarian Working Group to fill this gap and allow for synergy of action between different actors. One of the main objectives of the working group is to promote the ‘localisation of aid’. Koffi explains that, “Although more needs to be done, civil society is inevitably involved in disaster risk reduction. It has

a better grasp of what’s happening on the ground and is at the heart of the communities’ problems”.

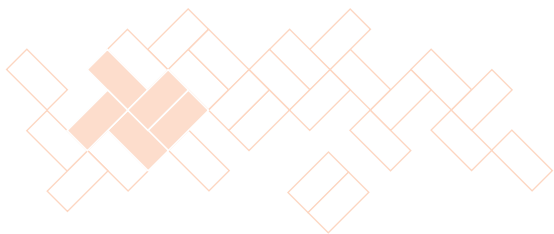
Local leadership should be the rule, not the exception. Participatory consultations should be used to gather knowledge and priorities concerning complex everyday disasters. In addition, building and strengthening local institutions can enable people to share and communicate needs and priorities. And finally, qualitative partnerships and trust-building with external actors needs to be approached as a long-term, continuous effort, so that local leadership is respected and used as a basis for action, not the other way around. ❖

For more information about Forus:
www.forus-international.org

Sarah Strack

Director of Forus

7- <https://spong.bf/>



The identity of international and local NGOs in 2021: taboos and new challenges

by Olivier Consolo

This article covers a number of points that were developed in a working document for the Forum General Assembly in November 2018.

For a decade now, we have observed a number of changes in international relations which have had repercussions for NGOs and civil society as a whole. The issues raised include: 1) the emergence of a multipolar world, which has brought opportunities and challenges for the international community, related to the end of the historic domination by 'white European/North American countries'; 2) the rise of anti-democratic ideologies – which are sometimes violent, racist and nationalistic – throughout the world, which constitutes a real threat in terms of achieving individual and universal Human Rights and 'true' democracy, and also in terms of the ability

for civil society and NGOs to take action; 3) the recognition and promotion by most international NGOs of the international agenda related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), approved in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, despite certain unresolved limitations and challenges¹; 4) the ques-

tioning of the role of states and public institutions as the principle guarantors of freedom, well-being and peace by a growing section of the global population, due to the many unfulfilled (or very partially fulfilled) – or even violated – promises by national states themselves, and due to transnational corporations who, particularly since the 1980s, have sought to bypass, discredit and weaken states in order to build international markets and financial and commercial institutions that are unconstrained by regulations.

In this complex context, there appear to be opportunities for NGOs and civil

1- The SDG agenda has not been appropriated by the majority of national governments and is not the object of political leadership at the international level (in contrast to the Climate agenda, for example). Insufficient resources have been invested, and as a consequence, it is unlikely that it will be fully implemented in line with the objectives. It remains a programme that is oriented towards experts, which reinforces the vision of its detractors who consider it to be a 'global' framework imposed by Northern countries on the rest of the world. It is also a non-binding international framework which lacks precise mechanisms to encourage, ensure and control its implementation. And finally, the SDGs do not have the support of the public, who for the most part do not even know that they exist.

society to engage in international discussions on these subjects because, despite the growing tensions between CSOs (civil society organisations)/NGOs and numerous governments, recent opinion polls in numerous countries show that public opinion trusts civil society organisations more than state institutions, religions, political personalities or even the media and journalists. The concept of 'citizenship' is crucial locally, nationally and globally, but it is difficult to promote among people who are denied citizenship and/or who live in precarious conditions. The role of local people and communities in influencing state institutions and their leaders, and in actively controlling public policies, remains central, and organised civil society needs to continue to be part of this equation. Another major challenge for civil society is to find alternatives to the current international political community (which is currently exclusively 'inter-governmental').

N GOS: A COMPLEX AND PARADOXICAL IDENTITY

NGOs are not the only type of organisation within civil society, even though they are a key part of it because they are generally the most visible, and in many countries around the world, they have the most resources among CSOs. Other civil society actors, such as trade unions, social movements, women's organisations, farmers' organisations,

cooperatives, local and community associations (which are the most numerous of all CSOs, but the least formal and with the least resources), political organisations, etc., tend to see NGOs as a 'privileged' sector which monopolises resources and access to institutions, while not being inclusive enough of other CSOs. There have nevertheless been many examples where different sectors of civil society have worked together, but due to the predominance of 'stereotypes', there is a lot of distrust of NGOs.

NGOs initially emerged in Western societies and are based on values and a system that are specific to that part of the world (where less than 20% of the world's population lives). What is more, even though NGOs from the Global North are generally critical about their own institutions and governments, they are still closely tied to the political programmes of rich western countries. Though they have spread widely throughout the world, they are nevertheless, for the most part, organised on the basis of a 'universalist' framework (in terms of values, management, practices and governance). Thus, partnerships between NGOs from the North and from the South generally reflect power and working relations from another era, defined by the flow of resources and money, an aspect that remains a taboo subject for numerous NGOs in the Global North.



NGOs have a tendency to align themselves with the international/global agendas of the international community and the United Nations. They are generally well organised at the international level, either via a small number of big, influential international NGOs, or via jointly led campaigns (such as Action4Development), or via networks or platforms that bring together a large number of small and medium NGOs (such as FORUS). What is more, NGOs are often active in promoting international agendas at the national level and in the 'field', with local populations, particularly to raise public awareness about four international programmes: 'Human Rights and Democracy', 'Humanitarian Aid', 'Development and Poverty Reduction', and 'Environment and Climate Change'. Due to the significant financial resources that the international community provides them with (mainly funded by the donor governments of the OECD), NGOs have a tendency to follow and promote the international programmes carried out by the United Nations. But this organisation remains an international assembly of governments within which the leadership is principally in the hands of the world's most powerful nations (Security Council, G8 and/or G20), and, objectively, many of its members are not very democratic. NGOs officially criticise this situation and this dependency, but they also put up with it: this is another paradox.

This state of affairs is recognised by the majority of NGOs, and accepted by some, but this leads to criticisms on the part of other civil society groups, who see themselves as being part of a broader and more diverse sector. Alternative approaches exist and include initiatives developed with the local population (and/or groups of citizens), operating at the margins of official international or national institutions. It would seem that these alternative strategies are difficult to articulate with the 'professional' NGO sector (beyond declarations and good intentions). This is made worse by the fact that alternative approaches (on the margins of the system) are faced with numerous difficulties to secure their funding. Too few NGOs invest in these alternative processes, such as actors invested in the ecological transition, the new commons, recent informal citizen-based movements sometimes based on campaigns via social networks, or initiatives that promote new forms of civil disobedience, new forms of self-organisation, etc.

The NGO community and the other sectors of organised civil society have different theories of change. Given the specific characteristics of NGOs (When, where and why they are created, the roles western societies are prepared to fund them for, the values and frameworks that are given priority, etc.), it is not surprising that the majority of NGOs are trying to 'improve' the current system rather than to transform it



'radically' (in the etymological sense of the word, that is to say, 'at the root'). The majority of NGOs apply a theory of change based on 'gradual change' (a 'step-by-step approach'), mainly via public policy reform, while carrying out mitigation work in the field with the population and stimulating social innovation locally. On the one hand, this approach is completely legitimate and provides numerous examples of good practice and short-term progress. On the other, it reinforces the view that NGOs are powerful actors (in terms of resources and potential impact), but who do not have a genuine strategy or the capacity or political weight to transform societies in depth (notably in terms of democratic rules). This criticism appears justified; behind these different theories of change is the question of the impact that NGOs have had in recent decades in their attempts to improve the living conditions of millions of people throughout the world. A broad debate on this topic would no doubt have a positive impact and would stimulate the NGO sector. Care should nevertheless be taken to ensure that the terms and results of such a debate (in the long term) should reflect the nuances and complexities of the issues discussed. The 'dualistic' views and ideological biases of different parties could quickly put an end to this kind of initiative.

THE MAIN MODELS AND PRINCIPLES OF NGOS

The most difficult issue for NGOs to address constructively and 'honestly' appears to be the question of the models that they export (knowingly or unknowingly) and which they promote throughout the world, at every level of their action (locally, in the field, but also at the national, regional and international levels). This aspect is complex because, on the one hand, NGOs acknowledge that they follow and promote the international reference frameworks that are prevalent within the United Nations system (value systems that are considered to be 'universal' and 'international' by definition). At the same time, too often they tend to underestimate the fact that these systems and global programmes were created after the Second World War, and are therefore based on the models and cultural principles of white, European and North American societies who were traumatised by the international consequences of a war in which they were the main players.

The main implicit principles on which NGOs base their activities (as do the majority of institutions and actors involved in international cooperation) would appear to be:

- Western representative democracies are not perfect, but they remain the best political system – consequently, such a



system should be pursued and applied everywhere;

- Development and progress remain 'good' concepts even though they principally depend on economic growth, technological innovations, well-being measured in terms of the capacity to buy goods and services, and to satisfy principally material needs, and extractive economic models;
- Prioritising 'effectiveness' via the implementation of western management and governance models which are considered the best suited to run organisations (of all kinds);
- Public services (Education, Health, Police, Justice, etc.) are developed based

on the models and principles of western societies (training of staff, western models of education and health, evaluation systems, sector-based specialities, etc.), overlooking other sometimes more holistic or 'preventative' approaches;

- The globalisation of the economy, of science, of diplomacy and of culture (standardised culture, melting pot, etc.) are inevitable and/or desirable, including in relation to leadership, and political, scientific and cultural elites.

And yet, these principles are rarely the object of assessments or re-evaluation within the NGO sector. What is more, the increasing constraints imposed by donors since the beginning of the 2000s regarding 'efficiency/effectiveness', 'logical frameworks', 'results-based pro-



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gramming', 'accountability', etc., have increased the tendency for NGOs to consider themselves first and foremost as 'managers' and not as 'agents of change'. This development is apparent in the professional profiles of the heads of the main western NGOs, who increasingly are managers (who have often come from the private sector). This has had a clear impact on the sector's visions and strategies in recent times.

The idea here is not to define and debate whether these principles and these facts are positive or negative for people, societies or humanity. What is important is to question how diversity and respect for other frames of reference and experience can be encouraged in development cooperation and international aid. NGOs would benefit from being more aware that through their practices, their programmes and their messages, they disseminate and promote a 'cultural' and 'technical' framework which is primarily that of 'white European and North American' societies from the end of the 20th century. By acting as they do now, NGOs do not sufficiently promote other cultural, democratic or economic practices and models (beyond the 'folksy' and 'anthropological' discourse that they sometimes use to communicate with their stakeholders and their partners). Thus, even though their intentions may often be good, NGOs reproduce and indirectly add legitimacy to the traditional discourses, terms, values and frameworks

of the dominant countries who currently lead the international community.

If NGOs were more conscious, self-critical and careful about their use of soft power, this could radically improve their way of doing things and their partnerships. This would also allow NGOs to support more alternative, radical and demanding initiatives by local communities that exist around the world (such as "Buen Vivir", "Madre Tierra", "the Commons", "the Great Transition", "Sobriety", "traditional forms of spirituality", "unpaid work", "alternative forms of governance and democracy", "Asian vegetarian philosophies", etc.). This would also be a way to reconnect NGOs with other more transformative and innovative currents in civil society. And it would also be a way to continue to innovate and to meet the current and future challenges facing our societies.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF NGOS IN RELATION TO STATES AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS?

To conclude, let us return to the difficult issue of the relationship between the roles of NGOs within society and the responsibilities and roles of state institutions (locally, nationally and internationally), an issue that is frequently mentioned, but rarely debated in a serious manner. While the vast majority of NGOs officially advocate for effective, transparent and responsible state

institutions (and work for them), certain international institutions (such as the World Bank, certain United Nations agencies and the OECD) attribute an important role to NGOs, which consists of compensating in the long term for the deficiencies of numerous states in terms of providing high quality services at the local level.

In the last forty years, NGOs have actively played the following roles: 1) service providers *vis-à-vis* international donors and national institutions, with the main objective of reaching populations in difficult conditions and/or in remote areas; 2) first responders following natural disasters and armed conflicts (at a relatively reasonable cost and within 'informal and flexible institutional and political frameworks'); 3) promoters of international values; 4) key interlocutors regarding public policy and decision-making – having established a high level of expertise, they provide analysis and solutions to national and international institutions, and frequently act as whistle-blowers; 5) promoters of innovation through social, political and economic experimentation and creation, based on 'field work' at the local level, and with the capacity, in certain conditions, of spreading good practices (such as microcredit in the 1990s); and lastly, 6) builders of solidarity between countries and regions of the world through the development and implementation of aid programmes and the establishment of partnerships between

organisations from different regions of the world (North-South, South-South, etc.).

This delegation of certain state responsibilities to NGOs can lead to a dilemma. On the one hand, it can be an opportunity for international and local NGOs to transfer sustainable and sometimes substantial resources to poor and marginalised communities. But on the other hand, it means that fragile states are less likely to take action in isolated areas (often rural areas where 'minorities' live). Over time, NGOs therefore become part of a broader 'public strategy', which consists of sub-contracting some of a state's constitutional responsibilities to both non-profit-making entities (CSOs) and profit-making organisations (consultancies, experts and the private sector). What is more, these sub-contracting procedures generally lack mechanisms to ensure there is accountability towards the local populations. We must not forget that the way NGOs define 'public goods', 'public obligations' and 'democratic control by citizens' (including *vis-à-vis* service providing NGOs) needs to be a central issue in this debate. ❖

Olivier Consolo

Freelance Activist



point of view

CCFD-Terre Solidaire: an aid localisation approach implemented for more than sixty years based on partnerships

by Pierre Bastid



At Groupe URD's latest Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid, the participants considered the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in international aid. An issue that donors refer to as 'aid localisation'. Ensuring that our actions correspond to genuine needs is an essential part of a contextualised and territorialised response to situations of great vulnerability. And who is better placed than CSOs, made up of citizens affected by these crises, to know what the most appropriate operational needs and strategies are locally?

CCFD-Terre Solidaire has been working with CSOs from all over the world for over sixty years. The organisation's approach to aid localisation, which is referred to internally as the 'partnership approach', is based on the three following principles:

- Mutual trust based on long-term relationships (often over ten years);
- Initiatives and projects that are designed and proposed by the local partners themselves, and which are therefore adapted to, and rooted in the local context;
- Support from CCFD-Terre Solidaire to establish projects that are realistic and sustainable, and correspond to the ambitions of the local partner (in terms of human, financial and material resources, and training).

CCFD-Terre Solidaire fully accepts its role as an intermediary between local realities and actors (including economic actors, funding agencies/donors, but also the volunteers and the social base of our organisation). This role also corresponds to the relationship between 'here' and 'there' that is at stake in local partnerships. Aid localisation that is limited to relocating funding channels without any involvement in the definition, management and monitoring of field operations comes with a number of preconditions (and can also bring significant risks):

- Make sure that a variety of actors on the ground are supported (in order to increase social change and impact), which means not focusing funding only on local CSOs who are capable of answering a call for proposals, given the



competition between organisations imposed by donors, etc. In order to ensure that there is diversity, it is important to also support 'smaller' CSOs who can be just as 'activist', if not more;

- Accompany projects for their duration, providing a supportive (and trusting) external point of view to help find solutions in the field and within organisations. Help to train CSOs to work with donor frameworks and demands (measures to limit money laundering, fiduciary risks, cash advances, etc.);
- Take care not to endanger certain CSOs whose economic models may not be compatible with (sometimes slow) donor processes, and which can lead to their bankruptcy (for example, the need for cash advances, etc.);
- Do not transform local CSOs into 'service providers' for the international aid system. This would be detrimental to their position as agents of change, whistleblowers and activists.
- Support the voluntary activities that allow local CSOs to exist, decide and plan in a democratic and participatory manner.

In order to limit these risks, CCFD-Terre Solidaire acts as an intermediary, which allows it to:

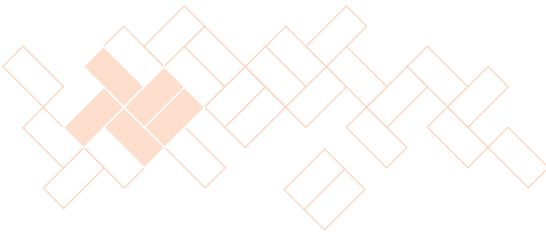
- Give a major role to local CSOs in project governance and in the territories

(in relation to international aid organisations who have far more resources);

- Support and reinforce the capacity of local actors in order to ensure that citizen- and association-based activities continue to exist in the long term, and to allow these actors to increase their competencies so that they can be autonomous;
- Help manage resources and risks (advancing funds, meeting donor demands, anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism financing procedures, etc.), as well as limit the impact of the bureaucratisation of international aid which imposes more and more procedures on local SCOs to the detriment of concrete action.

To conclude, this approach concerns 'organisations who carry out projects (to bring about change in their region)' rather than a purely project-based approach, with earmarked funds, that does not take the local CSO context into account. This organisation-based approach depends on mutual knowledge between partners and a level of trust that allows 'peer-to-peer' interaction; what we call reciprocity. In other words, a very concrete form of solidarity. ❖

Pierre Baatid
Head of Support and Institutional
Funding at CCFD-Terre Solidaire



Local solidarity: the La Roya 'laboratory'

by François Grünewald

In terms of solidarity, the valleys of the Alpes-Maritimes department, and particularly the valley of La Roya, had become known for the solidarity shown to migrants crossing the border from Italy into France via the mountains. The figure of Cédric Héroux, and the different trials that he has faced because he helped migrants, were front page news for some time. But, on the night of 1-2 October 2020, a new page was written, when an extreme climatic event hit the valleys of La Roya, La Vésubie and La Tinée, once again underlining the importance of solidarity and mutual aid. A red hazard warning was issued for this fragile, mountain territory, where there is a development crisis, on the afternoon of 1 October. Torrential rains led to power cuts and brought down communications. Roads, bridges, and even houses, were carried away by flooding of unprecedented force. After a terrifying night, the valleys awoke to devastation. The local population and their elected officials then began the response, first on their own, and then with massive support from civil society. What lessons can be drawn from this experience?

PREPARATION AND WARNING

The red hazard warning issued by Météo France for Friday afternoon in the Alpes-Maritimes department warned that there was a high risk of exceptionally intense climatic phenomena

that were a danger for people and property. A crisis unit was activated in Nice Préfecture and the Prefect issued a warning that citizens should protect themselves. However, the simultaneous occurrence of two phenomena - on the one hand, Storm Alex (a climatic phenomenon known as a « climatic bomb », which is characterised by significant drops in pressure, which had crossed the whole of France from Brittany) and on the other hand, an upwelling of hot and very humid air from the south - led to an event of unforeseen magnitude. This extreme Mediterranean episode gave rise to exceptional rainfall which exceeded 540 mm/m² in certain catchment areas, whereas on the coast around Nice, it was only 50 mm/m². There was very rapid run-off and the steep valleys in the areas led to flooding of great force and considerable height in the secondary talwegs, and then

in the main valleys. Everyone recognises how important this warning was. It was essential in raising the level of vigilance of municipal actors, and consequently municipal teams were mobilised in the evening. Nevertheless, some were better prepared than others, such as the towns in the valley of La Roya, who had taken part



in a flood risk preparation exercise two weeks earlier. This exercise focused on the maps of floodable areas produced by the departmental Syndicat Mixte pour les Inondations, l'Aménagement et la Gestion de l'Eau (SMIAGE). Crisis units had been set up within the municipal authorities of the La Roya valley, who are responsible for liaising with the Prefecture and the Departmental Authority. The exercise also involved the French Civil Defence force and other state and regional services. People in the La Roya valley said how useful this had been, whereas the municipal teams in Vésubie valley, and in the town of Saint-Martin-Vésubie, had to face the extreme event with little preparation. The preparedness exercise had underlined the importance of establishing lists of things to do before and during an event, and notably the repositioning of resources within and around the 'at-risk' area as soon as the warning is given, in order not to be taken by surprise.

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In many cases, it was through individual initiatives, such as people taking mountain trails and paths to reach isolated villages, that contact was re-established.

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THE KEY ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

The scale of the physical damage that took place on 2 October is now well known, but during the first days after the event, communication networks were down. In many cases, it was through individual initiatives, such as people taking mountain trails and paths to reach isolated villages, that contact was re-established. A former journalist living in Breil-sur-Roya, for example, managed to alert the media community by climbing to the summit of a mountain so that she could get onto Facebook and activate her networks. Despite this, the lack of telecommunications was a source of anxiety for many people as they were unable to contact their loved ones. Entering the valleys remained difficult for weeks and certain villages remained cut off for days before being joined on foot, by 4-wheel drive, by tractor, or by quad bike. Straight away, helicopters brought satellite telephones to the municipal authorities, and the arrival of specialist Civil Defence personnel to facilitate crisis units was greatly appreciated. Once the telephone networks were back up and running, a new phase of communication began involving civil society and local solidarity networks. Internet sites, and WhatsApp and Facebook groups were set up to mobilise in-kind resources and money, as well as hundreds of volunteers.



THE RESPONSE

The solidarity of the local population, mutual aid between neighbours and the mobilisation of municipal teams to help vulnerable people created a dynamic that will leave a lasting impression. The local people showed great resilience based on their familiarity with difficult conditions, their ability to improvise and their ingenuity. It should also be pointed out that elderly people, who represent a significant proportion of the population, and who bring specific medical challenges (medical stocks, energy for health centres, etc.), were of central concern. The PREDICT exercise (disaster prevention training), which was carried out in La Roya valley, which helped municipal teams to organise on Friday evening, had highlighted the vulnerability of certain establishments for elderly people. As

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The local people showed great resilience based on their familiarity with difficult conditions, their ability to improvise and their ingenuity.

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a result, preventive evacuations took place in the valley on Friday before the storm hit, thus relieving tension in terms of providing the elderly with assistance. It should be pointed out that during these difficult hours, municipal staff, local public service staff, gendarmes and municipal firefighters worked together, sometimes even in teams. They too showed a remarkable spirit of mutual aid and solidarity with the inhabitants of the area, most of them being native to the region themselves.

From the very first days, the presence of volunteers from the whole of France was one of the key aspects of the response. Removing rubble, cleaning mud from houses and installations, rehabilitating homes (particularly for vulnerable people), restoring agricultural tracks and terraces, they carried out a considerable amount of work that was essential before a return to normal life was possible. A whole system, involving municipal staff, people requiring assistance, and leaders who often spontaneously emerged, needed to be set up quickly to provide volunteers with beds and food, and to organise their activities. These efforts, which have continued for months, and are ongoing, involving volunteers and economic actors from throughout the region, and even from all over France, have played a crucial role in restoring hope. State aid (Barnier Fund, regional aid, etc.) and the intervention of insu-



rance companies should bring structural support, both at the micro and the macro levels, which is also required for the reconstruction. The creation of a 'storm prefect' role, played by a senior civil servant to coordinate relief efforts and mobilise state resources at the departmental and regional levels, helped to make things run more smoothly. And no one will ever forget the amazing solidarity that was shown at the weekends, when people used their arms and their brains to help. The same humanitarian volunteers then mobilised in Belgium after the major floods of Spring 2021.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the months that have passed since the disaster took place, older questions have come back to the fore, such as the type of development that has been chosen for the valley. In addition to these are the consequences of the disaster, as well as the desires, challenges and initiatives that have emerged. These issues will bring new challenges for citizen-based initiatives. Those who were involved in the response want to have a say about the future of the valleys and the type of develop-



Breil-sur-Roya, December 2020 © Groupe URD



BOX 1: HOUSE

Many houses were badly damaged in certain areas. An earthquake management mechanism had recently been set up with the support of volunteer architects and engineers, some of whom had already been involved in this kind of work in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Houses were classified using a colour code to indicate risks (black - to be destroyed; orange - able to be visited, accompanied by firefighters; and green - habitable).

BOX 2: IN-KIND ASSISTANCE

In-kind assistance (food, clothes, furniture, electronic goods, etc.) arrived in great quantities from all over France. As roads and the railway line were blocked, this initially had to be carried by helicopter (civil defence and the army). The municipal authorities had staff working almost around the clock sorting and distributing this aid. A brief intervention by the French Red Cross, and significant, longer-term involvement by Secours Populaire, helped to make this distribution a success. Soon, temporary crossing points were set up and the first trains arrived in Breil-sur-Roya. Further up the valley, as the work advanced on the roads and the railway line, aid was able to be distributed to those who had not yet been assisted.



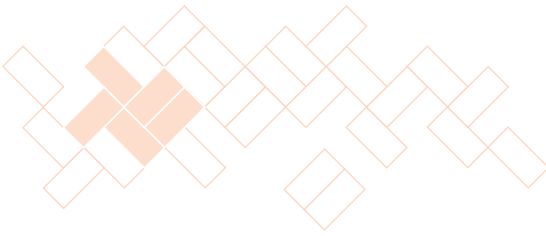
ment that is going to take place. Opinions differ within municipal councils, and between municipal authorities, citizen-based movements, those who are new to the region, those who have been present for a long time, networks based in the valley and movements who arrived after Storm Alex.

The prospects for the future are indeed worrying: the slopes have been visibly weakened at the bottom of the valley due to erosion, and will need to be closely monitored. The network of gauges and reference points that can be remotely monitored will need to be reinforced over the whole catchment area, including on the upper slopes where evidence of shearing should be identified as soon as possible. The location of new routes, the definition of areas where construction is authorised and the preparation of protection and prevention strategies will need to be debated with input from the sciences (Geology, Hydrology, Ecology, Urban Planning, Economics, etc.).

Finally, decisions about planning and development in the valleys will need to involve both elected and civil society representatives, with a crucial need for dialogue. This will require collective intelligence and determination, medium- and long-term investment, and a substantial dose of originality and imagination. Though local politicians, civil society and state administrations appear to be fully invested, a great deal of effort will be required to find common ground as their different agendas are not always fully compatible. Perhaps the legacy of the La Roya valley disaster of 1 October 2020 will be that local democracy and collective intelligence find a way to achieve harmonious development that is respectful of the human and natural heritage of the region, while also reinforcing the resilience of a fragile territory ✨

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Groupe URD*



International NGOs and the provision of assistance to migrants in France: the example of Action contre la Faim

by H el ene Qu eau

The aid mechanisms that are in place in France for migrants provide insight into the challenges of aid localisation. First of all, the context has shown how powerful citizen-based mobilisation can be in response to a crisis (the crisis here being one of lack of assistance for migrants), as well as its reactivity, its effectiveness, its limits, etc. It also sheds light on humanitarian NGO strategies, how they work with the ecosystem of actors already on the ground, and their relations with local authorities, with activist groups, etc.

This article is based on the presentation made by H el ene Qu eau, Action contre la Faim's Country Director France, at the Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid.

ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM IN FRANCE: A MISSION THAT HAS GRADUALLY TAKEN SHAPE

The question of whether to conduct operations in France is not new for Action contre la Faim (ACF), nor for any other humanitarian organisation. It nevertheless became more pressing in 2015, when we decided to conduct evaluations at Europe's borders. On

that occasion, we decided not to launch an operation: first of all, because a certain number of actors were already present and taking action, and also because when we decide to take action, it is for the long term. We needed more time to think about our operational methods, our relations with local authorities and other actors, etc. rather than arriving like a bull in a china shop. We wanted to take our time, and proceed with care and caution.

This issue came to the fore again in 2018 and we began by meeting with different actors over a number of months. We consciously made this decision to take our time despite the urgency of the situation. I was not yet in my current post, which I took up in mid-2019, and these meetings were carried out principally by a person with a

background in associations. After this very useful preparatory work, I joined the mission in order to share my humanitarian perspective, and 'translate' what had already been observed into humanitarian language.

The first lesson to emerge from that period was how important it is to take time to understand the people in need of assistance, as well as the associa-



tions involved, their language, their actions, etc. This requires time, but it is time that is crucial. Without it, very quickly, we can get things wrong. Do we always take the time that is needed in the different countries where we work?

QUESTIONING THE ADDED VALUE OF OUR ORGANISATION

This is a question that has guided us since we began taking action, and continues to preoccupy us. Of course, we quickly saw that there were significant needs: the living conditions in the camps are appalling. They are probably the worst conditions that I have seen in the whole of my huma-

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The first lesson to emerge from that period was how important it is to take time to understand the people in need of assistance, as well as the associations involved, their language, their actions, etc. This requires time, but it is time that is crucial. Without it, very quickly, we can get things wrong.

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itarian career, despite the fact that France is supposed to be a state that has the means to protect these people. The holes in the state system are being filled by associations. The latter are therefore used as operators in a highly competitive context where resources are cruelly lacking and where all the organisations involved are exhausted.

For all these reasons, associations – and citizen-based groups – often have to make do with the resources available. And, of course, from my perspective as a professional humanitarian, with my principles and my frameworks, certain things are questionable, and some are even problematic, such as food distributions that do not meet people’s needs, or decisions that place staff or beneficiaries in danger. The added value of humanitarian organisations in such a situation is perhaps the vigilance that they can bring in terms of ‘doing no harm’, or, in other words, not having a negative impact.

Based on this assessment of needs and capacities, we established our strategy. Given that those providing assistance – citizen-based groups and associations – were exhausted trying to compensate for the limits of the system, we decided to ‘assist those providing assistance’. We then defined the main principles of our action (rather than activities). Of central importance was the need to ‘work with’ rather



than working alone and organising one more food distribution. The idea was really to support those who were already providing assistance.

D EVELOPING PARTNERSHIP RELATIONS

Once we had established our strategy to support actors, we then needed to take the time to build relationships. This began with very simple and humble things like taking part in meetings held by the associations and groups involved in providing exiled people with assistance. We then carried out a number of surveys which allowed us to build working relations with other actors and learn operational lessons. This was a

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We decided to ‘assist those providing assistance’. We then defined the main principles of our action (rather than activities). Of central importance was the need to ‘work with’ rather than working alone and organising one more food distribution.

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very important process that helped us to mobilise different associations and bring people together. We also set up training activities, particularly for volunteers (on the position of the aid provider, on personal security, etc.).

Very quickly, we decided that ‘vertical’ power relations were out of the question. As was turning up with ready-made projects. It should be pointed out that the traditional tools used by humanitarian actors remain relatively vertical, as is their way of interacting with ‘local partners’. Humanitarians often operate with standard partnership agreements, but collaboration is not necessarily formalised in France as this would undermine certain dynamics and create power relations that were too vertical. In this specific context of providing assistance to migrants, I would never consider offering a standard partnership agreement to certain actors because they would take it very badly.

Another difference is the vocabulary used in France, which is not the same as the vocabulary we use on international missions. For example, we do not talk about ‘capacity building’ here: we learn from other actors as much as we ‘train’ or ‘reinforce’ them. Here, it is more a question of mutual exchange and sharing.



To conclude, there are two other important points that should be underlined. Firstly, humanitarian actors have developed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which could be applied to the activities carried out in France. This would help actors to take a step back from their work and would produce reliable data (crucial for advocacy, and to adapt activities to the context). And lastly, we can sometimes add our voices to lobbying campaigns, giving them greater reach than campaigns that are led by actors that are seen as being 'too' activist. ✨

Hélène Quéau

Country Director - Mission France
Action Contre la Faim



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interview

with Rola El Mourad

Rola El Mourad is the founding member and President of Afaq ('horizon' in Arabic), a Lebanese non-profit organisation. Created in 2005, it aims to provide assistance to the population of Akkar (northern Lebanon) where there is severe poverty and a lack of government intervention. Afaq believes that nation building should start with the development of the rural areas in the country, by providing the basic needs for a fair and sustainable life. Afaq has implemented more than 30 projects, involving access to education, the development of women's roles, the empowerment of youth and children through different cultural, educational and self-development programmes, and finally, socio-economic empowerment through entrepreneurship programmes.



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Could you summarise Afaq's activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Rola El Mourad: When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged on the local scene and became a source of fear and terror, and claimed a lot of deaths, Afaq set up a disaster management team on WhatsApp which consisted of activists and doctors from all over Lebanon, and we developed a quick rescue plan. We created a team of volunteers on

the ground under our supervision and provided them with all the protective supplies of clothing, masks, and sanitary products, and created a delivery team to provide everything necessary for the sick in their homes. We also distributed masks and sanitary products to students in several public schools as well as preventive and medical supplies to youth initiatives, NGOs and centres that were working on the ground. Finally, we provided people with a list of centres and NGOs that provided breathing machines free of charge.

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What was Afaq's role following the two blasts that devastated the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020?

R. E. M.: Afaq established a team of university students, most of whom are specialised in the social, psychological, or engineering fields. At first, we rented a bus to transport us from the north to Beirut to help clean the streets. We also set up a tent in downtown Beirut to provide meals for the affected people and volunteers and provided the necessary clothes and supplies for some of the families who lost their homes. For a period of 1 week, a team of 30 volunteers from Afaq were going from the north to the Karantina area in Beirut (next to the port), and we examined the damages, filled out questionnaires and identified their needs. After that, we moved on



to the aid phase which included the distribution of electrical appliances, furniture, kitchen supplies, medicines, diapers, milk, and food items. Moreover, Afaq formed a team of carpenters and blacksmiths to repair the doors, windows, and broken furniture so that the houses are suitable for habitation. During these interventions, we discovered several cases in need of psychological intervention and referred them to specialists or NGOs that focus on this topic. Afaq also joined several WhatsApp groups that were working on managing this disaster and we all exchanged the needs and names of those affected to facilitate our work in the intervention area. At the end of our work, we prepared a detailed report and submitted it to the Disaster Management Authority in the Municipality of Beirut, for which the Lebanese Army was responsible.

And what about the Akkar fires in Akroum Al-Qobayat (North Lebanon)?

R. E. M.: The fires hit large green areas, one of the most beautiful touristic areas in Akkar, and spread for several days to several villages and turned them into disasters. After the fires were extinguished, Afaq completed an assessment of the land and reached out to the owners and prepared a full file on the needs of the people for land reclamation. However, the required

amounts were very high and beyond our capacity, so we couldn't secure it, although we have reached out to several people who are interested in agriculture.

The Akkar region also suffered a fuel tanker explosion in Al-Tleil village. What was the response implemented by Afaq in this context?

R. E. M.: Due to the fuel crisis in Lebanon, specifically in Akkar, and the closure of petrol stations, the citizens resorted to hiding fuel in storage areas. When one of the warehouses hiding the fuel was discovered, the landowner sent one of his workers to light a tank and therefore the disaster occurred where many young people got burned, and many others died. Two days after the explosion, we developed a campaign to secure medical supplies for burns and to secure a specialist doctor. Then we started looking for the injured people to treat them in their homes because we know that the situation of hospitals in Akkar is very bad, especially when it comes to burns. The number of injured people was very high, and they were treated randomly at hospitals on the day of the accident. It is remarkable that no one has been contacted, not by the State, or NGOs or local clinics, and their health condition was very bad. For a period of 25 days, we treated the injured even though we had a fuel supply problem and had to pay extra



money to buy fuel on the black market. After we finished treating the injured, we prepared a detailed file on each patient that includes the stages and cost of treatment.

As a conclusion, based on your extensive experience, could you please share your observations and lessons learned on aid localisation?

R. E. M.: There is no doubt that local NGOs wouldn't have been able to do their job without the financial support they have received internally or externally, whether from Lebanese or non-Lebanese or from international organisations. But that doesn't mean we don't have several observations about this cooperation, especially about its mechanisms.

Many organisations focused on the administrative aspect rather than on the humanitarian aspect, so we used up a lot of energy in preparing hundreds of files and papers to the extent that 70% of our work was administrative and 30% was humanitarian. Very often, we referred to administrative experts who were very expensive, sometimes we could secure them and sometimes we couldn't, so we lost grants even though we had the required experience to implement on the ground. Here I wonder about the relationship between international organisations and local policies and how relevant and effective

it is to spend such a large proportion of funding on collecting information for situation analyses, needs assessments, etc.

The parties in power in Lebanon have always used certain NGOs, municipalities, and cooperatives to benefit from donors and other international organisations to fund their activities and buy votes. A review of the projects carried out by municipalities funded by foreign countries shows that the objectives for which they received funding have not been achieved. The simplest examples are the money spent on waste, sorting, and recycling projects, which were not implemented in more than one area. The same goes for the most corrupt agricultural cooperatives that were supposed to create jobs and sustainable development, especially for the rural regions. Unfortunately, the political parties have taken control of them and have benefited from the funds allocated to them. Political family NGOs, most of which are supervised by the wives and families of senior leaders, also received international funding officially to care for refugees or people with disabilities, or even to hold festivals in the regions.

All the above raises the issue of the transparency that is demanded by the donors, which in my opinion opens the door to many questions about transparency among the donors who indirectly support political parties.



© Afaq NGO

The third point is about the needs of communities. Who says that international organisations are more aware of the needs on the ground than local civil society organisations in the regions? Unfortunately, it is the donors who determine intervention policies and how their funds are to be distributed, without considering the different needs from one region to another. Why was so much money spent on workshops instead of spending it to counter the effects of economic collapse and the unemployment crisis? Especially since most NGOs do not need these workshops, and only attend them so that they can submit projects. Finally, from 2004 to the present, international organisations have developed a


disaster management plan, but the results have not changed. Wouldn't it be worth reconsidering the strategies, action plans and alliances that are needed to achieve better results? ❖



bibliography

Aid localisation

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS LOCALISATION?

 **Are we there yet? Localisation as the journey towards locally led practice: Models, approaches and challenges**, A. Baguios, M. King, A. Martins, R. Pinnington, ODI, 2021.


Localisation has long been discussed, but has still not been delivered. Systemic barriers have posed challenges, and the term itself is contested. Now, the last tumultuous 18 months could provide a critical juncture to finally move forward with this crucial agenda. This paper reviews the barriers and challenges to localisation and locally led practice, with a view to informing a campaign for systemic change.

<https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/ODI-SH-Localisation-Report-Oct21-Proof06.pdf>

 **Local humanitarian action during Covid-19: findings from a diary study**, V. Barbelet, J. Bryant, A. Spencer, HPG working paper, HPG, ODI, 2021.

This study aimed to identify what changes towards a more local aid model were happening in the context of Covid-19 and, where change was not happening, why this was the case. It found that change is happening, but slowly, since fundamental blockages in the system have not been addressed. As a result, there are limited efforts to trial new approaches at scale, take calculated risks and to set in motion new funding approaches.

https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/C19__localisation_diary_methods_WEB.pdf


 **Principles for locally-led adaptation: A call to action**, Marek Soanes & al., IIED, 2021.

Recovery from COVID-19 provides a historic opportunity for giving greater voice to local people and putting agency over their own adaptation into their



hands. To support this shift, this study presents eight principles for locally led adaptation and invites adaptation stakeholders on a complementary ten-year learning journey.

<https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-01/102111IED.pdf>

 **Humanitarian learning under the COVID-19 pandemic; a pathway to localization?**, Pawel Mania, LSE, HLA, 2021.

In this report the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA), working with the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics (LSE), analyse data from their online learning platform <https://kayaconnect.org/> and one of their flagship programmes to try to better understand the localisation agenda and provide insight into what the future of digital humanitarian learning may look like, as well as current and forthcoming needs.

https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Humanitarian-Learning-under-Covid-19-Pandemic_A-pathway-to-localisation-HLA-July-2021.pdf


 **A Window of Opportunity: Learning from COVID-19 to Progress Locally-led Response and Development Think Piece**, Australian Red Cross, Humanitarian Advisory Group and The Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University, 2020.

As COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and international travel restrictions, border closures and lockdowns ensued, large numbers of expatriate aid workers returned to their home countries. This significant change in the demography of the aid industry in many countries has led to a shift in roles for international, and national and local actors in humanitarian and development work. This think piece documents the research conducted over the past six months. It is intended to provide emerging evidence, and pose critical questions for international humanitarian and development actors to consider in their work across the region.

<https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Window-of-Opportunity-COVID-think-piece-24-November-2020.pdf>




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 **Local response in a global pandemic: a case study of the Red Cross response to Tropical Cyclone Harold during COVID-19 in Vanuatu and Fiji**, Red Cross, 2020.

This case study explores the double impact of Tropical Cyclone Harold and the COVID-19 pandemic in Vanuatu and Fiji, and lessons it provides on the localisation of humanitarian response. It examines the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement's experience in supporting local response leadership and seeks to contribute to wider learning and debate about localisation and the complementary roles of national and international humanitarian actors.


<https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/7c374bd0-90c8-423d-a0e4-8c0a26ea4bc5/ARC-TC-Harold-Full-report-Final-Electronic-041120.pdf>

THE PERSPECTIVES OF LOCAL ACTORS

 **Undervalued and Underutilised: Non-humanitarian actors and humanitarian reform in Indonesia**, Jesse McCommon, Kate Sutton, Puji Pujiono, Humanitarian Advisory Group, Pujiono Centre, 2021.

This report is the final output of the Building a Blueprint for Change research project. This project was designed to apply a new approach to reform efforts, one which is built entirely around the local priorities and contextual factors of one country rather than an attempt to adapt international agendas. The study focused on Indonesia because it was identified as the country with the most momentum for change in the Asia Pacific region. Indonesia has been recognised for its leadership in nationalising and localising humanitarian response.

https://humanitarianadvisorygroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/HH_Blueprint-report_-_Non-humanitarian-actors-Indonesia_Final.pdf

 **Anchored in Local Reality: Case Studies on Local Humanitarian Action from Haiti, Colombia, and Iraq**, Sabina Robillard & al., Oxfam, The Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2020.

This paper offers insight into fundamental questions of the localisation discussion in three different contexts: a region of Haiti recovering from a hurricane,



displacement and political crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the overlapping pressures of migration, conflict, and climate change in Colombia.


<https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Tufts-Oxfam-LHL-research-Anchored-in-Local-Reality.pdf>

 **Survivor – and community-led crisis response: Practical experience and learning**, J. Corbett, N. Carstensen, S. Di Vicenz, Network Paper 84, HPN, ODI, 2021.

This Network Paper introduces and explains existing knowledge and experience with an emerging way of working in humanitarian programming. The paper defines what is meant by survivor and community-led responses and places it in the growing vocabulary around ‘localisation’.

https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HPN_SCLR-Network-Paper_WEB.pdf

ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES RAISED BY LOCALISATION

 **Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study**, V. Barbelet, G. Davies, J. Flint and E. Davey, HPG, Humanitarian Advisory Group, ODI, 2021.

Understanding the impact of ‘localisation’ on strengthening effective and efficient responses to humanitarian crises continues to be a key policy and practice concern for donors and the broader sector. Criticisms of a ‘broken’ humanitarian system dominated by international actors has led to commitments, such as those in the Grand Bargain, intended to bring transformational change. These include promises to address inequalities in the system, such as the inequitable recognition given to local actors despite their frontline role in humanitarian responses. This report presents the findings of a review of the localisation literature.

https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Localisation_lit_review_WEB.pdf



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“Localisation and local humanitarian action”, Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, n° 79, HPN, ODI, May 2021.

Five years after the commitments of the Grand Bargain, this edition of Humanitarian Exchange looks at the progress that has been made on localisation and local humanitarian aid. The different articles, often based on case studies, describe the changes that are taking place, from an operational point of view and in terms of funding.

https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/HE-79_Localisation_WEB-1.pdf



Improving the visibility of local and national actors in humanitarian aid data, Mark Brough, David Megginson, Development Initiatives, 2021.

The limited visibility of local and national organisations in humanitarian open aid data adds to the challenges of meeting and tracking the Grand Bargain commitment to provide more direct support to local and national actors. Development Initiatives (DI) explored the technical options for increasing the visibility of local and national actors in International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data. In this pilot project, DI looked specifically at Somalia, examining how the activities of local Somali organisations could gain visibility and better integration in the IATI data ecosystem – without placing any additional reporting or technical burdens on those organisations. This was achieved by investigating additional data sources at the local and national levels and exploring the potential for data interoperability to enable a clearer picture of on-the-ground activities.

<https://devinit.org/resources/improving-visibility-local-national-actors-humanitarian-aid-data>



From the ground up: it's about time for local humanitarian action, Larissa Fast, Christina Bennett, HPG Report, HPG, ODI, May 2020.

Between 2017 and 2019, HPG researched local humanitarian action from a ground-level perspective across four key themes: capacity and complementarity, financing, dignity and protection. This report synthesises the results. It shows that the barrier to greater local action is not a dearth of capacity, but instead the reluctance of international actors – donors, United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organisations – to cede power. The necessary shifts in the system will require effort and will take a generation to embed, but they are long overdue.




https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/From_the_ground_up_its_about_time_for_local_humanitarian_action.pdf

PARTNERSHIPS

 **Bridging the intention to action gap: The future role of intermediaries in supporting locally-led humanitarian action,**
Humanitarian Advisory Group, GLOW Consultants, CoLAB, inSights, 2021.

This study explores the future role of organisations when acting as intermediaries in supporting locally-led response. It identifies interventions for change in three essential areas: motivation, opportunity and capabilities to support change to an ideal future role for intermediaries. The proposed future role is that intermediaries empower local and national organisations to drive, define and deliver principled humanitarian responses to needs in their communities.

https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/BTITAG_FINAL.pdf

 **Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships: Recommendations for operational practices that strengthen the leadership of national and local actors in partnership-based humanitarian action globally,**
Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, Oxfam, 2019.

This research was commissioned by the Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships programme to establish what operational elements of partnerships between local, national and international NGOs are most likely to foster localisation of humanitarian action. In-depth consultations were conducted in three locations in four countries: Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria and South Sudan.

<http://a4ep.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Accelerating-localisation-research-summary-global-1.pdf>



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FUNDING

 **Country-level Financing Solutions for Local Actors**, IFRC, 2019.

This research relates mainly to the Grand Bargain financing commitment. It identifies good practices and opportunities on country level financing within the framework of the Grand Bargain localisation commitment to provide funding more directly to local and national responders. And it provides guidance on how to strengthen national and local actors' access to greater humanitarian financing.

http://media.ifrc.org/grand_bargain_localisation/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2019/12/Humanitarian-Financing-for-Local-Actors-IFRC-Research-Report-Final.pdf

LOCALISATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

 **Women Leading Locally: Exploring women's leadership in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan**, Oxfam Research Report, N. Jayasinghe, M. Khatun, M. Okwii, Oxfam, 2020.

This report examines women's leadership in locally-led humanitarian action with case studies from Bangladesh and South Sudan. Co-authored with two women's organizations, Ashroy Foundation of Bangladesh and Rural Women for Development in South Sudan, it seeks to understand whether and how local humanitarian leadership (LHL) can promote or constrain women's leadership. The report finds that women's leadership in LHL is limited in both countries, with women's leadership facing many of the same challenges as LHL itself. However, by encouraging collaboration between women leaders, women's organizations, and LHL actors, progress toward a more gender-transformative humanitarian system can be achieved.

<https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/women-leading-locally-exploring-womens-leadership-in-humanitarian-action-in-ban-620937>



LOCALISATION AND CASH AND VOUCHER ASSISTANCE

Strengthening locally-led humanitarian action through cash preparedness, Julia Lewis, Cash Hub, CashCap, IFRC, 2021.

This study examines the links between cash and voucher assistance (CVA) and localisation, to understand how CVA can help to further localisation and strengthen locally-led humanitarian action. The findings were based on experiences from 10 National Societies across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

<https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Strengthening-locally-led-humanitarian-action-through-cash-preparedness.pdf>

TOOLS

Localisation performance measurement framework, NEAR, 2021.

The purpose of this Localization Performance Measurement System (LPMF) is to evidence progress towards achieving localisation commitments. While its focus is on local and national actors, it is anticipated that it will also be relevant to international NGOs, UN agencies and donors as well as research and academic institutions that are evaluating localisation.

<https://www.alnap.org/help-library/localisation-performance-measurement-framework>

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