



LOCALISATION IN COVID19 - Experience of Caritas national organisations with humanitarian funding, partnerships and coordination in the Covid19 pandemic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document summarises findings from a survey and interviews with over 60 Caritas national organisations regarding their experience of UN agency, donor and INGO approaches to localization in the Covid19 crisis. The main section of this paper is structured around findings on the following issues: Funding; Partnerships; and Coordination; and concludes with recommendations to donors, UN agencies and Caritas confederation members.

National and local faith-based organisations (FBOs), including Caritas national organisations, have played important frontline responder roles in the Covid19 pandemic. Donors, UN agencies and INGOs recognised this at a policy level, and guidance was generated on engagement of faith leaders in critical aspects of the response, like risk communication and community engagement. Yet the international response struggled to translate a recognition of their role into meaningful or at-scale partnership on the ground. As of June 2020, approximately only 1 percent of Covid19 funds channelled through the UN system were reaching national and local NGOs, and a tiny fraction of that reached local FBOs.

Some national FBOs which had longer-term partnerships with UN agencies and institutional donors described positive experiences in terms of negotiating flexibility to pivot programmes towards Covid19 response. However, this was not consistent and this flexibility sometimes came at the cost of cutting into funds for longer-term, underlying humanitarian and development priorities. Likewise, efforts to channel funds to national NGOs through UN country-based pooled funds (CBPF) and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) were appreciated. But only a small number of Caritas national FBOs benefited from the CBPFs, and none benefitted from the CERF NGO grants. Funding from the CERF via UN agencies or INGOs generally frames the local partner as a sub-contractor, and therefore is not framed to promote local leadership of humanitarian action. The UN CBPFs tend to default towards prioritising international agencies as the process is linked to cluster processes in which they dominate, unless deliberate steps are taken to prioritise local actors.

In terms of enabling a timely and effective response, the best experience with quality funding and partnerships was through country-level funding mechanisms, which involve national NGO leadership or co-leadership, including the Start Network and LIFT Fund in Myanmar. Yet institutional donors largely failed to adequately resource these mechanisms. Over the past year, Caritas national organisations have started to see some international partners who receive multi-year, flexible funding passing on benefits from this to them (eg Caritas Denmark as intermediary for Danish funding), but this is not yet the norm.

A significant number of national NGO members of the Caritas confederation criticised the top-down and bureaucratic approach of international agencies to engaging with national NGOs. Mainstream humanitarian agencies prefer national partners that most closely mirror their own institutional form and ways of working, and their partnership approach erodes the character and rootedness of civil society groups in local communities. The approach to risk management appears often more driven by donor and international agencies' concerns about their own reputation than understanding risks faced by local NGOs and supporting them to manage those risks; supporting survivors of any wrong-doing; or strengthening the quality of assistance to crisis-affected communities.



Caritas Indonesia supports local faith leaders to undertake risk communication and community engagement action. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

Overarching recommendations:

- 1. Scale-up support to country-level funding platforms that promote local NGO leadership, preparedness and timely funding to frontline responders.** Longer-term partnerships before crises occur are essential to enable the potential of local actors across preparedness, resilience and response. NGO-led platforms are best placed to foster holistic approach to institutional and technical sector-specific capacity-strengthening of local NGOs (eg through south/south capacity-sharing and 'learning by doing').
- 2. Go beyond quantitative tracking of localization to assess the quality of funding and partnerships with local NGOs.** Short-term projects, which keep local NGOs trapped into sub-contractor roles, do not foster local leadership or resilience. In protracted crises and beyond the 3-month phase of rapid on-set emergencies, international agencies should be held accountable for effective exit strategies and promoting local leadership of the response. UN agencies & INGOs receiving multiyear funding should be held accountable for cascading the benefits to local partners.
- 3. Recognise and address risks faced by local NGOs; including through a fair and consistent global approach to covering the overheads of local NGOs.** Longer-term quality funding and country-level platforms, as outlined above, are key to effective partnerships with local NGOs in managing risk. The policies, procedures, training and organisational culture required to manage risk cannot be funded on short-term projects with no overheads support. Zero tolerance for a failure to address wrong-doing should replace the current reactive approach, which centres managing donor reputational risks over addressing risks faced by communities or local NGOs in crisis situations.
- 4. Engage diverse local civil society actors, including faith based organisations, without 'NGOizing' them into replicas of international agencies:** Priorities to strengthen participation by local actors in coordination and wider inter-agency efforts include addressing language barriers, strengthening sub-national engagement (including through area-based coordination) and establishing more systematic steps across the UN Humanitarian Programme Cycle and coordination structures (ie HCTs, clusters and sector working-groups) to engage a more diverse range of local actors; including local faith groups, women's rights organisations, disabled peoples organisations and youth networks. National CSO forums should be funded, and INGOs should act as 'allies' to national NGOs in coordination processes; including through accompaniment to their participation, information-sharing and profiling their input to joint work, including advocacy.



Caritas Bangladesh hosts a Covid19 hygiene session prior to a distribution.
(Caritas Internationalis/2020)

ABOUT THE CARITAS CONFEDERATION AND THIS RESEARCH – CHALLENGES IN THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM’S ENGAGEMENT WITH NATIONAL FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

The Caritas confederation is formally linked to the Catholic church and groups 162 member organisations; most of which are national FBOs, and a sub-set of which work both domestically and operate also internationally.¹ As such, the Caritas confederation represents the second largest network of national civil society organisations working in the world; after the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. In 2018, the confederation adopted a set of commitments describing how Caritas members with both domestic and international mandates will work to shift power and resources to Caritas national organisations, as well as other national NGO partners.²

Many Caritas affiliates do not consider themselves as ‘NGOs’, but rather as ‘FBOs’ (faith-based organisations established by and accountable to the national Catholic bishop’s conference) and ‘NGO’ is a construct they need to fit into for legal recognition and access to funding. Across all contexts, it is important to emphasise that Caritas national organisations work on the basis of humanitarian principles; supporting assistance and protection efforts based on an impartial and needs-based approach. They are not spreading the Gospel, indeed proselytism is strictly and formally forbidden, but rather living out the mission of service inspired by the Gospel and by the Catholic Social Teaching.³ In some contexts, Caritas national organisations are also not legally registered as NGOs or perceived as such by the Government, and indeed this can sometimes facilitate their work and access to crisis-affected populations which NGOs are denied access to.

Caritas national organisations are founded in contexts where there are Catholic communities, and they are governed by the national bishops conference in their country context. Unlike other Christian denominations (eg Anglican, Evangelical, etc), Caritas national organisations are the social action arm of the local Catholic Church and, hence, they are the preferred partners for humanitarian work. As such, a bowl to collect donations for humanitarian work through the Caritas national organisation will be found at the back of most Catholic churches. Most commonly, Caritas national organisations are comprised of a secretariat at national level and diocesan Caritas organisations at the local level. Each of these levels is connected to the national and local Catholic church structures, and those relationships are essential to the organisation’s effectiveness and legitimacy.

“Caritas national organisations are founded in contexts where there are Catholic communities, and they are governed by the national bishops conference in their country context. [...] Most commonly, Caritas national organisations are comprised of a secretariat at national level and diocesan Caritas organisations at the local level. Each of these levels is connected to the national and local Catholic church structures, and those relationships are essential to the organisation’s effectiveness and legitimacy.”

The Caritas national office is generally based in the capital and tends to have a relatively small staff number mandated with internal coordination and liaison with the Catholic bishops conference, ecumenical, inter-faith and government processes at national level. The weight of humanitarian programming is often led and implemented by the diocesan Caritas organisations, which sometimes function in practice as autonomous local NGOs (even having a separate legal status). This can also reflect how Church structures and communities of faith are embedded in wider social and political dynamics in a given context, which can be quite different to the ways in which secular NGOs (national or international) are structured. Whilst the wider Church structure varies in different contexts, many countries also have bodies involved in social action such as a Catholic Health Commission, a Catholic Education Commission, Catholic Migration Commission and a Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, with which the Caritas national organisation will coordinate.

Whilst Caritas national organisations are often well-known in their national and local context, especially in countries that have a significant Catholic population, at the global level they are sometimes poorly understood. In some contexts where Christians are a minority faith community, then populist nationalistic politics and divisions between faith communities have sometimes resulted in discrimination and/or harassment of both the Christian community and Christian FBOs. At times, these have been risks faced by Caritas national organisations and their staff unfortunately. However, where there is no Catholic community, then there is no Caritas national organisation, but sometimes Caritas members working internationally either support other national NGOs in the context or set up their own country programme. For example, Caritas Poland has established a presence in Yemen, which is not branded Caritas Yemen, but is rather Caritas Poland operating in Yemen. This example is very much an exceptional case as the autonomous and national character of Caritas national organisations is the norm.

Amongst Caritas national organisations there is a vast spectrum in terms of experience in engagement with UN agencies, INGOs and bilateral donors. For example, 19 respondents to our survey indicated that they are accredited to the UN Partner Portal and 21 indicated that they are not, even if they have an ongoing partnership agreement with one or more UN agencies. At one end of the spectrum, there are national NGOs like Caritas Honduras, which sits on the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), Karuna Mission Social Solidarity in Myanmar, which has sat both on the HCT and strategic advisory board to the UN country-based pooled fund; and Caritas Bangladesh, which is a major partner of UNHCR in the Rohingya crisis response, as well as playing a lead role in wider humanitarian and resilience efforts in the country. At the other end, there are Caritas national organisations, which have little or no current engagement with UN humanitarian agencies or institutional donors; relying primarily on funds they raise domestically or channelled from partner organisations in the Caritas global confederation. For these reasons, Caritas national organisations and Caritas INGO affiliates came together to undertake a survey and interviews to understand better the current status of efforts on localization in the Covid19 crisis response. This paper summarises our findings and recommendations.



Staff and volunteers from Caritas Bolivia delivering assistance to prison ministry support reaching prisoners during Covid19. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

Unique access to assist prisoners through Caritas Bolivia links to Church ministry role in prisons

With the exception of the ICRC, most humanitarian agencies are denied access to the prison service in most contexts. In some countries, thanks to the Church's longer-term role in providing prison ministry services, the Caritas national organisation has an entry-point to provide both psycho-social and material forms of support. For example, the Covid19 crisis has stretched Bolivia's national healthcare system beyond its coping capacity. Food supplies to prisons have been drastically reduced and relatives have not been able to visit inmates to provide much needed food or hygiene products. Pastoral Social Caritas Bolivia (PSCB) targeted its Covid19 response to the most vulnerable sections of society, who face discrimination from the wider population and are less likely to receive voluntary or state support, and this has included support to prisoners, alongside migrants, Venezuelan refugees, children in orphanages and elderly people in care homes. UNHCR has worked with PSCB as an implementing partner due to Caritas' ability to gain access to this vulnerable population through its prison ministry, as well as its nationwide networks of local diocesan teams able to mobilise a volunteer base. As a consequence, food and hygiene supplies have been delivered to prisoners in nearly every prison in the country, both male and female. This has included support for one meal a day as well as essentials such as toilet paper and hand sanitisers, and medicines where possible.

FUNDING

Responses to our survey indicated that the biggest challenges in funding related to inadequate support to overheads, the short length of grants and the inflexibility of grants and partnerships. Of the 55 survey respondents, 36 had experienced at least one of these issues, with the length of the grant and inadequate support to overheads both being reported 18 times.

Short-term projectized funding and lack of support to overheads costs

– Lack of adequate support to overheads costs emerged as a serious challenge for Caritas national NGO members. Whilst every UN agency had provided overheads cost coverage to at least one survey respondent, this was not consistent and the amounts provided were perceived as very low in contrast to the support provided by private donors (eg from Catholic supporters) or bilateral donor direct funding. Only 7 respondents reported receiving overheads costs coverage from UNHCR and 4 from WFP, only one or two respondents reported receiving this coverage from other UN agencies. Changes in UNICEF’s global policy on overheads appears to have led to some confusion and inconsistent implementation on the ground. One respondent reported that the UNICEF country office did not allow coverage of overheads, although “they knew UNICEF HQ is committed to providing ICR to partners.” Inadequate support for overheads costs took various forms and had various consequences. In some cases, funding for important issues (eg vehicle maintenance) ran out before the end of the programme. In other cases, the amount agreed did not reflect the true cost of running the programme.

“We benefit from UNHCR’s 4 percent contribution to our overheads, which is better than other UN agencies. But whilst we appreciate it, this is actually a very low contribution to these costs and does not actually cover our actual overheads. It covers staff training related to the project, basic utility costs and some support staff costs. But other international partners provide 7 or 10 percent. As such, we and other donors are effectively subsidizing the UNHCR-funded programmes.”

Caritas national NGO staff person

Several respondents also linked the lack of support to overheads costs to wider challenges arising from short-term projectized funding. Both mean it is hard to maintain support for staff salaries with inevitable consequences in terms of struggling to retain qualified staff. In some cases, staff left for UN agencies and INGOs that poach staff through higher salaries; in other cases staff stay on but working on a voluntary basis forgoing their salary in-between projects. Caritas partners highlighted how some donors, like the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, have started to insist that INGO partners cascade overhead costs to their local partners. Caritas INGO affiliates themselves have diverse approaches to overheads. Providing low or zero overheads is seen as an especially acute manifestation of failing to deliver on localization commitments. Caritas national organisations called on donors, UN agencies and INGOs – including Caritas affiliates – to agree a harmonised and aligned global approach to this.

Lack of timely funding through the UN system – Timeliness is of critical importance to saving lives during emergencies like the Covid19 pandemic. Across all the majority of respondents to our survey, ‘private funding’ was cited as the most timely source of finance to their Covid19 response, and the highest number of funding applications were made to private donors, including supporters in the Catholic community and appeals for support to other partners in the Caritas confederation. In several contexts, Caritas national partners, and other local partners of theirs, described delays of several months in funding reaching them from UN agencies (in one case, a UN agency had issued public statements that it had provided PPE supplies to local women-led NGOs, which it had not done).



Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (KMSS) meet with Township Authority to discuss Covid19 pandemic preparedness and response. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

Learning from the ‘timeliness’ of humanitarian funding and the mix of funding mechanisms in Myanmar

Experience in Myanmar illustrates the good practices and challenges in mobilising timely disbursement of humanitarian funding to national NGOs. Karuna Mission Social Solidarity (Caritas Myanmar) is a well-respected national NGO working with a network of 17 diocesan Caritas covering the country, which play a leadership role in crisis response efforts across different parts of the country responding to conflict, natural disasters and longer-term resilience issues.

Three weeks before the first Coronavirus case was identified in the country, KMSS had rolled-out a national and sub-national Covid19 preparedness and response plan; and implemented training of staff and procurement of goods relevant for the response. All of this depended on KMSS’ ability to draw on its own private funding and support from longer-term INGO partners, who in turn drew on their own privately raised emergency response funds and multi-year, flexible funding from institutional donors.

At the same time, KMSS worked with other national NGOs that partnered on longer-term resilience and emergency capacity-building supported by ‘LIFT’ (a country-level funding mechanism supporting food security and livelihoods efforts) to lobby donors on the LIFT board to mobilise funds to support them. This was successful and the LIFT donors agreed to release 1.5 million USD to support national and local NGO programmes in under 10 days. Long-standing direct dialogue between national NGOs and donors had established the trust required both between the national NGOs themselves to collaborate, as well as with the donors. Funding through the UN system was slower. The Myanmar UN country-based pooled fund launched a Covid19 call in April; followed by a first standard allocation in June; and a second standard allocation in October; and a final third allocation is currently in process. These usually take between one to one and half months to process from submission to grant disbursement and roll-out. Smaller local NGOs are excluded from accessing these funds due to the onerous due diligence requirements, but they can become sub-contracting partners to others.

Amongst UN agencies, the most applications were submitted by Caritas national organisations were to UNHCR (7), followed by UNICEF (5) and then WFP (5). At least one application was made to every UN agency listed. In some contexts, including Argentina and Namibia, the Covid19 crisis has meant that Caritas national organisations are starting to engage with UN agencies for the first time on humanitarian response. 49 additional funding allocations were reported as having been granted. 22 of these were under \$100k, 20 of these were between \$100k and \$500k, 2 were \$500-\$1m, and five were over \$1m (including one from UNHCR and one from UNDP). UNHCR approved seven grants, which means they approved every application reported. UNICEF and WFP both only approved 3 grants of the applications reported. All UN agencies had approved at least one application, aside from the FAO. Steps taken by the UN system to start providing NGO grants from the CERF via IOM were recognised as progress, but Caritas national organisations were not able to access any of these funds, which were mainly allocated to UN agencies and INGOs.

Decision-making on allocations under the CBPF was described as being driven by cluster coordinators and influential international agencies in the clusters, and national NGOs often have little influence despite their involvement in the CBPF strategic advisory board.

The UN Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) are frequently cited by donors and UN actors as a primary mechanism for channelling funds to local actors, yet the experience of Caritas national organisations with these varied highly from context to context.

In Ukraine, for example, the Caritas national organisation provided very positive feedback on grant management and flexibility under the CPBF (*"The CBPF works through an on-line Grant Management System that is the best operational tool during all steps of project cycle I've ever worked with"*).

Yet in several contexts, decision-making on allocations under the CBPF was described as being driven by cluster coordinators and influential international agencies in the clusters, and national NGOs often have little influence despite their involvement in the CBPF strategic advisory boards. Caritas national organisations called for a more systematic and strengthened role for national NGOs in their CBPF advisory boards at country and global levels. Scope for linking up the national NGOs across all CBPF advisory boards to identify shared priorities for influencing the over-arching global Pooled Funds Working-Group, which takes decisions on the CBPF globally, was also highlighted.

Concerns over longer-term impacts of Covid19-related cuts in funding – For Caritas confederation members, fundraising is rooted first and foremost in support from the Catholic community and in-person outreach centred in churches and associated institutions. As such, the impact of lockdowns and social distancing measures on fundraising has been huge. Numerous Caritas partners have taken steps to mitigate these impacts, and the most common of these included: reallocating existing funds (34); reducing operation costs (31); followed by implementing a hiring freeze (15). Most of the qualitative responses to this question concerned salaries; highlighting how staff have had to cut hours, not renew contracts and furloughing. Several respondents also emphasised concerns over the short-term nature of government furlough schemes and longer-term implications of the economic impacts of the crisis. The fear is that Covid19 will result in a perfect storm coming in 2021 of both donor funding reducing and temporary furlough provisions being no longer available.



Caritas Jordan staff work with local private sector to facilitate sustained delivery of medicines to patients during the Covid19 lockdown. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

Multi-year, flexible funds enable innovation & humanitarian/development Nexus collaboration with government in Jordan

Since 2018, Caritas Jordan has benefited from multi-year funding from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs channelled through Caritas Denmark. Prior to this, only one-year humanitarian programme responses could be submitted, which presented challenges in terms of planning and implementation in what has become a 10-year protracted crisis.

Longer-term funding allowed for learning and innovation, including the piloting of new approaches to repeat prescriptions for chronic health conditions, which had not previously been common practice by health practitioners in Jordan. It is now scaled-up and used by Caritas Jordan, the Ministry of Health and UNHCR, and has enabled the safer provision of medicines to patients during lock-down and in the context of social distancing efforts.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement supported by Denmark also facilitated greater collaboration between humanitarian and development actors. For example, it enabled a Study Tour visit of Caritas Jordan and Jordanian Ministry of Health officials to Denmark, which has informed discussions with Jordanian health authorities on more viable and sustainable approaches to primary healthcare in the country. These investments paid off early in the Covid19 response, whilst other agencies struggled to respond. For example, in April, Caritas Jordan was able to negotiate with the government, local pharmacies and a private sector delivery company (UPS) to implement a system for delivery of medicines to patients. Speed of action on this was possible because of our INGO partners and certain back-donors allowing for flexibility. Following very positive patient feedback from the first UPS deliveries in April funded from our INGO partners, UNHCR allowed us to use this approach supported by UNHCR funding in May.



Caritas Jordan staff working in a primary health facility support families to access healthcare during the Covid19 pandemic. (Caritas Jordan/2020)

PARTNERSHIPS

Our research suggests that the most significant challenges facing Caritas national organisations in partnerships during the Covid19 crisis response were the following:

Inflexibility – During the Covid19 crisis, UN agencies adopted an important set of commitments at the global level on extending new forms of flexibility in their funding and partnerships to their implementing partners. CAFOD, CRS and Caritas national organisations like Karuna Mission Social Solidarity in Myanmar played important roles in advocating for these commitments in the IASC Results Group 5 on Humanitarian Funding, the IASC Principals meetings and in other discussions with UN agencies and donors.⁴

However, respondents to our survey found that whilst private donors and bilateral donors that provided direct funding were highly flexible, the performance of UN agencies on the ground was more variable. Where Caritas national organisations were receiving direct funding from bilateral donors or through funding arrangements that allow for dialogue with donors, there was greater flexibility in terms of allowing adapted programming, flexible budgeting and a relaxation of reporting timelines. It appears that the guidance generated at global level through the IASC was not clearly disseminated or followed through in a consistent way by UN agency partners on the ground. Of our 60 respondents, only 5 described the UN agencies as being satisfactory (ie clear and proactive) in providing guidance on funding flexibility.

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In terms of the kinds of funding or partnership flexibility that respondents highlighted as used:

My organisation has not sought financial amendments or allowances	12
No-cost extension	16
Budget modifications (for example, adjusting budget category/line item amounts)	27
Program modifications	17
Expansion of allowable costs (coverage of activities that did not take place because of Covid-19, cancelled travel, staff salaries during lockdown/restricted movement, staff overtime etc)	12
Purchase of PPE for staff or beneficiaries with existing funds	19
Increased coverage of staff benefits, or additional costs associated with human (travel/visas of staff, health care, additional sick leave/time)	2
Other (please specify)	5

Examples of positive experiences include UNHCR being cited as very efficient in approving budget realignments in Burundi, and the END Fund (which supports work on neglected tropical diseases) proposing programme adaptations themselves, rather than waiting to be asked. ECHO was also singled out as being “flexible in the face of the economic situation following the COVID-19 emergency, and accepting of extensions in the time of the projects, modification of some items and extension of the budget.” Just over half of the respondents received some form of training to adapt their programmes or undertake new programming in response to Covid19, and the majority of them found this very or quite satisfactory.

In terms of challenges, multiple respondents reported approval processes not adapting to reflect changing circumstances, delays in funding disbursements, a lack of extensions, programme inflexibility and taking too long to feedback on adapted proposals. For example, one project supported by UNICEF was singled out as having carried out an unsatisfactory preliminary assessment, which did not reflect the reality and caused additional work of Caritas staff and budget deviations, which UNICEF then did not recognise in their funding flexibility.

Ineffective approaches to risk management, which fail to support national NGOs in coping with the risks they face. – Caritas national organisations described multiple complex risks in the Covid19 response and the challenges in mitigating these; ranging from access to PPE supplies to navigating different ways that armed groups and other power-holders sought to use the pandemic as an excuse to prosecute political and conflict agendas.⁵

“Donors assume NGOs should be in a position to address any kind of risk in case anything happens, and when an issue happens they withdraw funding and the project isn’t delivered.”

Caritas Africa member organisation staff

Their capacity to manage these risks came primarily from the creative thinking and learning by doing of their own staff, as well as technical support and funding from INGO affiliates in the Caritas confederation, and/or other INGO and national partners. In contrast, only approximately one sixth of respondents affirmed that UN agencies and/or donors had been of assistance in addressing these threats. Positive examples shared included UNHCR’s implementation of online training on risk management in the Covid19 response, which addressed protection, safety and security, community acceptance and duty of care issues. Other positive examples included the provision of funding to initiatives aimed at addressing risk (either directly to the Caritas national organisation or to initiatives engaging the government or other stakeholders involved in perpetrating or managing the risk), advocacy in support of principled humanitarian access, provision of security, coordination and information sharing services, and support to planning.

Questions about international agencies, donors and risk management quickly provoked responses highlighting how dysfunctional their current approaches are. Caritas national organisations recognised the importance of programme quality and accountability, but the perception is that current approaches of international agencies reflect their need to exercise control. In contrast, several respondents referenced Catholic Social Teaching and Pope Francis’ *‘Laudato Si’* encyclical, which centres the importance of holistic approaches to foster the voice, dignity and agency of crisis-affected people and communities. OCADES (Caritas Burkina Faso), for example, emphasised principles of subsidiarity and participation: *“Humanitarian action must not substitute for action by the affected people and communities. It should seek to accompany people as they cope with a crisis, rather than default to doing to or for them.”*

In terms of practicalities, whether in relation to safeguarding, financial management or other aspects of risk management, Caritas national organisations strongly emphasised the importance of investing in comprehensive capacity-strengthening and support to overheads costs. Quality funding which enables national NGOs to invest in their institutional systems and staff capacity to effectively manage risk was highlighted as especially important. They also emphasised the importance of a dialogue between donors, international agencies and national NGOs to understand risks and identify partnership approaches to addressing them together. Different kinds of violence, intimidation and harassment that manifest in humanitarian programmes are often also driven by wider political or economic dynamics, and the exercise of control by other powerful actors in the context. Local civil society and frontline responders are also amongst those most at risk. Some respondents highlighted that international actors should give greater attention to how these dynamics impact on national NGOs, and strengthen efforts through humanitarian diplomacy to address them. Unfortunately, however, with a few exceptions, the general model in the sector at present is one of ‘risk transfer’ or ‘risk avoidance’, rather than ‘risk sharing.’

Importance of longer-term support to capacity-strengthening grounded in partnership – Whilst the ability to access ad-hoc trainings through clusters was appreciated by some, numerous Caritas partners highlighted the importance of a longer-term approach to capacity-strengthening, which bridges organisational development in core functions (eg financial administration, safeguarding, accountability) and thematic- or sector-specific technical capacity-strengthening. One good practice highlighted was the Caritas confederation commitment to systematically allocate at least 2% of funds raised by any Caritas member for a given crisis to capacity-strengthening priorities determined by the Caritas national organisation in the context. However, our research did not reveal if all Caritas partners are actioning this commitment. Likewise, there is clearly room to strengthen collaboration between Caritas partners operating internationally and others in capacity-strengthening support to Caritas national organisations. Duplication of effort and gaps are the consequences of this not happening. Support for local-to-local (south/south) ‘capacity-sharing’ approaches and allocating funds to enable pilot initiatives were highlighted as especially important.

Preference for national NGOs that 'look most like internationals' – In various ways, donors, UN agencies and most secular INGOs are perceived as gravitating to national organisations that most closely resemble their own institutional form and ways of working. In several contexts, there was a perception that UN agencies prioritise a select number of national NGOs, and the weight of their funding and influence undermines the local character, identity and legitimacy of those organisations. One informant described this in terms of UN agencies essentially creating local NGOs in their own image, with other national NGOs rooted in local norms and ways of working being excluded from their funding. Parallels were also highlighted with the so-called 'NGO-ization' of social movements in the occupied Palestinian territories and other contexts. Several Caritas national organisations surveyed for this research called for a shift towards funding mechanisms and partnership models, which can avoid these pitfalls.

"UN agencies are essentially creating local NGOs in their own image. Other national NGOs rooted in local norms and ways of working are excluded from the funding and partnership opportunities. This especially hits local faith-based groups, who do not fit neatly into the boxes of international agencies or mirror their secular mandate or institutional form."

**Caritas national organisation
in Africa**

Partnerships to 'green' Covid19 response and recovery: Agroecology approaches that centre local knowledge and leadership

COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, passed from animals to humans. The evidence points to zoonotic diseases being more likely to spread when animals and humans are in closer contact, e.g. through habitat loss, deforestation, intensive agriculture and livestock practices. As such, several Caritas partners who contributed to this paper highlighted the links between root causes of the crisis and the importance of adopting locally-led 'green' approaches to Covid19 response and recovery.

Smallholder farmers currently provide up to 80% of the food consumed in many parts of the developing world. Yet the international community and governments frequently focus longer-term development investments primarily on large-scale agri-business and agricultural exports; with much less support for or attention to smallholder farmers. As borders closed and lockdowns were imposed during the pandemic, the consequences for food security were manifold and devastating in many countries. In this context, numerous Caritas partners invested in responses that drew on agroecology principles to support subsistence farmers, small-scale food producers and cooperatives. At the heart of agroecology is a commitment to the science, principles and know-how behind sustainable agriculture, which aims at promoting healthy, resilient ecosystems and communities. At such, it looks at the farm and brings together insights on the local ecosystem, biodiversity, and farmers' knowledge; promoting crop diversity and biodiversity.

Caritas national organisations worked in partnership with local farmers groups, cooperatives, livelihoods and environmental specialists to support Covid19 response and recovery programmes informed by agroecology approaches and centring local leadership. One practical example of this was support by Caritas partners for access to open pollinated seed varieties (OPV), which in contrast to the hybrid seeds often distributed by humanitarian agencies, can be saved for use in the next harvest. The front-cover of this report features a photo of a woman farmer that benefitted from such support in Nicaragua through a project implemented by a national organisation called Asociación de Mujeres Productoras (ASOMUPRO) funded by CAFOD. ASOMUPRO also provided support to female farmers to use solar powered irrigation systems to water their crops, and to participate in savings and loans groups.

COORDINATION

Half of our survey respondents indicated some level of engagement in inter-agency decision-making, priority-setting and strategy development processes on Covid19 at the national level. For many Caritas national organisations, this focused more on engagement with national and/or sub-national government coordination, rather than the UN-led cluster or sector working-group processes. The most common UN cluster for respondents to contribute to was Food Security (25), then WASH (19), Health, Protection and Shelter (all 17). Logistics (5), Early Recovery (5) and Emergency Telecoms (0) were the lowest.

"I would summarise the challenge and the opportunity we both face – international organisations and national groups as this: More participation, the better localisation; less participation – more isolation."

Caritas national organisation

Our research suggests that the most significant challenges facing Caritas national organisations in inter-agency coordination during the Covid19 crisis response were the following:

Lack of faith literacy and instrumentalist approach to FBOs – From an early stage of the Covid19, there was a recognition at the policy level by UN agencies and donors about the important contribution of FBOs and national faith leaders to the Covid19 response. Yet whilst global statements and guidance on engaging faith actors in the pandemic response were issued, this was not translated into systematic or meaningful action on the ground.

Health specialists working for Caritas contributed to the development of guidance on engaging national faith leaders facilitated by the World Health Organisation, which built on previous engagement with WHO on the SARS and HIV/AIDS pandemics.⁶ Of the 51 respondents to questions about engagement with the WHO or Ministry of Health on Covid19, there was an even split of respondents who did (20) and did not (21) participate regularly in coordination with them on the WHO/host government Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan on Covid19 or wider health response to the crisis. When it comes to coordination with the WHO and Ministry of Health, several respondents highlighted the role of the Catholic Health Commission, which plays this liaison role on behalf of the Caritas national organisation. A couple of respondents highlighted that they perceive WHO as very government-focused, and not interested in engaging with civil society despite the WHO-Civil Society Task Team recommendations for enhancing collaboration between WHO, Civil Society and Member States at global, regional and country levels.⁷ In a couple of cases, Caritas national organisations had been invited into one meeting at the outset of the Covid19 crisis, but this engagement did not continue. Several respondents highlighted that Caritas national organisations tend to rather engage at a lower 'working level'; in particular through seeking Government approval, guidance and programmatic cooperation on programming.

Under the global, regional and national UN Covid19 coordination structure, UNICEF established its lead on 'Risk Communication and Community Engagement' (RCCE); including attention to the role of faith actors. However, as explained in the box below, UNICEF has a way to go in terms of bridging that aspiration to coordinate on engaging national and local faith leaders, and reality on the ground. All 60 participants in our survey were involved in work of relevance to Risk Communication and Community Engagement, but only 9 respondents referred to having existing relationships on this with UNICEF. This ranged from programmatic collaboration to use of translated materials produced by UNICEF. In three cases, respondents highlighted that during the Covid19 crisis, discussions had started internally or directly with UNICEF about wanting to establish a relationship.

Overall, most respondents described UN agencies as still having an instrumentalist approach to faith actors. They recognise that faith actors are amongst the most respected and trusted institutions at the national and local level; deeply rooted in communities affected by crisis. However, the complex nature of how faith actors are positioned in terms of local politics and social norms, and the fact that FBOs "do not look like" international agencies, represented obstacles to effective engagement. For Caritas national organisations that had long-established partnerships with UN agencies, some described scope to shape the partnership in a meaningful way. For others, especially those that did not have pre-existing strategic partnerships with UN agencies, the scope for engagement during the Covid19 response until now was constrained or non-existent.

Ecumenical and Inter-Faith coordination on Covid19 crisis response



“People have special respect for men and women of God. When you start to talk, people come out of their houses and they pay attention. So whenever we go there, they really listen to us. [...] The people really responded to me because I used our local language. I took the time to talk to our market sellers, even the women who sell fish and used the language that they understand... CAFOD’s intervention was very timely.”

– Rev. Abu Kargbo

Rev. Abu Kargbo undertakes community engagement in Sierra Leone (CAFOD/2020)

Caritas national organisations and INGOs in the Caritas confederation played lead roles in support to ecumenical and inter-faith collaboration on the response to the pandemic. For example, in Sierra Leone, CAFOD supported the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone was provided training by the Ministry of Health informed by WHO guidance on messaging, prevention and information around COVID-19, which religious leaders could then take back to their respective communities. Over 500 religious leaders were trained. With the closure of churches and mosques, these leaders then embarked on a megaphone sensitization campaign, reaching every District in the country. Messages were shared in local languages and religious leaders were able to speak to their communities and answer their questions. This included work to increase knowledge about symptoms, prevention, and reduction of stigmatization, including through engagement of traditional healers. This in turn involved channelling support onto a local NGO called Kambia District Development and Rehabilitation Organization (KADDRO). A national radio and television campaign was also undertaken, with jingles translated into 7 of the major languages and being played on a network of community radio stations and weekly TV shows being aired with prominent faith leaders and representatives from the health community to field the public’s question, and ensure that they have complete access to information. Work was also supported by IRCSL to engage with state authorities to address concerns over human rights abuses that arose as a secondary impact of the crisis, as well as to support on troubleshooting issues that arose through a joint planning and coordination platform.

Within the UN system, UNICEF took on a lead role to facilitate coordination and liaison with faith-based actors under efforts on ‘Risk Communication and Community Engagement’. In doing so, UNICEF emphasised its strategic partnership with Religions For Peace, an NGO facilitating networking amongst national-level inter-religious councils primarily on peacebuilding issues. Religions For Peace channelled small grants to these councils, which facilitated small-scale training efforts. However, a Religions For Peace representative recognised that its work was mostly small-scale and built on existing, nationally-owned and driven efforts in which national FBOs, including Caritas national organisations, were often working at larger scale and providing the secretariat capacity to the inter-religious council.

A majority of respondents to our survey participate in ecumenical and/or inter-faith working-groups, platforms or networks at the national level.⁸ However, a smaller percentage of these have worked through these platforms to engage with the UN agencies on coordination, funding and decision-making until now. Examples were given of Caritas national organisations leveraging these partnerships to apply for funding from UN agencies, including the WFP and UNICEF. Several that have not engaged in this fashion expressed an interest in doing so. One issue arising from the responses is the question of if and how Caritas national organisations can be proactive in engaging at different levels of ecumenical and inter-faith coordination/networks at national level. In some contexts, for example Democratic Republic of Congo, the Caritas national organisation and the Justice and Peace Commission, play a leadership/facilitation role to the national inter-faith working-group. They have leveraged this role to gain strong access and influence to decision-makers both in the Government of DRC, UN agencies and donor governments. In other contexts, the Caritas national organisations are less engaged or only indirectly and inconsistently informed about inter-faith work, which is led by their Bishops Conference or other actors.

Dominance of international actors and local actors treated as mere sub-contractors

– Responses to our survey and interview questions highlighted that Caritas national organisations perceive humanitarian coordination as predicated on and promoting ‘as international as possible, as local as necessary’ rather than ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary.’ Several respondents suggested that current coordination processes default the channelling of funds to UN agencies and INGOs, rather than national and local actors. One Caritas national organisation in Latin America described how they: “occasionally attended some meetings as an invited guest, but without the possibility of participating in decision-making, or establishing priorities or strategies.”

“Our technical inputs to processes like needs assessments are appreciated, but our role is then not acknowledged when the priorities are presented to donors or others. It feels like an extractive relationship and a top-down one, not a partnership.”

Caritas member organisation in Latin America

A number of respondents also emphasised how momentum in Covid19 coordination appeared primarily focused on health aspects of the response, rather than its wider secondary impacts. They described how the coordination efforts were therefore framed in terms of specialists (eg WHO and other health actors) playing the leading role. National NGOs, including Caritas national organisations, were perceived as recipients of training or technical guidance, rather than having insights to bring to the coordination table.

Language barriers and turnover in international agencies’ coordination staff

– Across all regions, Caritas national organisations described challenges that arise from international staff responsible for coordination lacking local language skills, or other means to engage with local actors in local languages. Turnover in international staff responsible for coordination was also cited as a significant obstacle to understanding or engaging with local actors. In Venezuela, for example, the nutrition cluster had been led by four different cluster coordinators over the past year.

Lack of support to national NGOs to understand and influence coordination processes

– Engaging in coordination processes represents a challenge in terms of the constraints on human resources and financial capacity. As such, Caritas national organisations share in the same challenge facing many national NGOs in terms of ability to recruit and retain senior staff able to navigate and influence inter-agency coordination spaces at the same time as their intensive ‘day job’ at management or senior programmatic level.

Some positive examples of support were cited. For example, Karuna Mission Social Solidarity in Myanmar has been able to contribute at a strategic level to discussions and decision-making through the advisory board to the UN country-based pooled fund and the Humanitarian Country Team. However, Caritas national organisations that have engaged at this level also describe how they have limited space for influence. National NGOs that ask challenging questions about the level of overhead costs that UN agencies or INGOs absorb, before then sub-contracting national NGOs to implement the programmes with less support for their overhead costs, become persona non-grata. Of the respondents to our survey, Caritas national organisations currently participate in the UN/NGO Humanitarian Country Teams in Malawi and Honduras. Support from INGOs to accompany them in navigating these processes, as well as in translating documents and sharing information in a timely and strategic fashion, were all cited as good practices.

Joint advocacy with other national and local NGOs was seen as important, and requiring increased attention and resourcing to become more effective in promoting localization. Global networks, like Charter4Change, were also seen as important. Through participation in Charter4Change, Caritas national organisations and other local partners have been able to bring their insights into global deliberations on localization; including in the Grand Bargain, IASC and through virtual roundtables hosted by influential think-tanks in the UK, Germany and elsewhere. Unless and until national NGO forums, or similar platforms, are strengthened, then the voice of national and local NGOs will remain fragmented and weak.

Capital city dominance in decision-making and inconsistent engagement at sub-national level

– Critical feedback on coordination processes emphasised that these processes are experienced as top-down and instrumentalist – ie UN agencies using the processes to legitimate funding for their programmes, rather than a space for genuine partnership bringing together different stakeholders on shared priorities. Critical feedback was also received on the quality of coordination, which was described as ‘poor’ at sub-national level, including by the Red Cross national society in one context. Respondents also highlighted how they have advocated for multi-sectoral and geographic ‘area-based’ approaches to analysis and programming, as means to enable more holistic engagement of local NGOs. However, the sectoral approach of clusters and duplication across the 4W mapping in each cluster obstructs this.

Challenges to humanitarian/development 'Nexus' coordination with local civil society – In terms of engagement with the host government and development institutions (eg World Bank, UNDP or other) on the Covid19 response, there was an even split of respondents who did (20) and did not (20) contribute to inter-agency coordination, planning or strategy processes on the development impacts of the crisis.

Those that engaged highlighted the primary benefit as being information-sharing and the identification of gaps in collective efforts. Priority issues raised were livelihoods, food security and resilience. Various challenges were cited. For example in one context, up-coming elections and related political dynamics complicated and obstructed decision-making on the allocation of development funding and programming. This reflects wider challenges facing efforts to work across the Humanitarian/Development/Peace 'Nexus' as development programmes are intrinsically more shaped by, and contingent on, the political priorities of government at different levels than independent and impartial humanitarian assistance. At a more practical level, a couple of respondents highlighted how their Caritas national organisation lacks a strategic partnership agreement with the international or national development agencies driving these processes, and that therefore these processes do not translate into funding opportunities for them.

Several Caritas national organisation staff emphasised that their work is already driven by a holistic understanding of the complex development, peace, humanitarian and other issues facing communities. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* encyclical speaks of the need for an 'integral ecology' approach to understanding the inter-connectedness of challenges facing people and communities. In some contexts, the 'Nexus' agenda as driven by institutional donors and UN agencies appears driven by a UN-centric and/or government-centric approach, and commitments to put 'people at the centre' are yet to translate into strategic engagement with national and local FBOs or other community representatives that our partners work with.



Caritas Bangladesh staff person undertakes door-to-door registration of beneficiaries as part of the Covid19 response. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)



Caritas Venezuela facilitates health outreach and referral by medical experts in the poorest neighbourhoods. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)



Caritas Chosica Lima in Peru implements Covid19 safety training for women working in an establishment providing food to people in need. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)



Caritas DRC supports women-led initiatives to sustain livelihoods, including amongst disabled people, during the pandemic. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

CONCLUSION

The Covid19 pandemic has shown, once again, that if international agencies attempt to engage national faith actors only when crises occur, then this is leaving it too late. The international humanitarian system is centred in secular norms, as well as institutional structures and processes that are largely blind to the ways in which faith shapes the lives and worldviews of the majority of people around the world. Caritas national organisations do not expect donors, UN agencies or secular INGOs to compromise on their principles, but they do hope for a more effective and meaningful forms of partnership; recognising the different respective strengths and contributions of diverse national and local NGOs, including faith-based organisations. For Caritas national organisations, the localization agenda often appears as a technocratic exercise revolving around competing business models that too often replicate or impose international agency priorities and institutional forms onto local institutions. They advocate instead for a more holistic approach to support local leadership centred on empowering crisis-affected communities themselves.

To shift towards a more effective approach, international and national FBOs, including Caritas national organisations, can play an essential role in mediating the top-down and compliance-driven approach of UN agencies and other traditional humanitarian actors with national and local faith actors. The decentralised character of Caritas national organisations and diocesan Caritas organisations reflects and is embedded in church structures at national and local level. They can and do play a 'bridging' partnership role between the humanitarian system and national faith leaders and religious institutions. Strengthening these efforts requires work on both sides.

Recommendations:

Donors:

1. Scale-up longer-term support to country-level funding channels, platforms and consortia which promote leadership and/or co-leadership by diverse national civil society actors themselves. Mechanisms like the Start Network and/or other country-specific models for funding should be supported; and informed by a contextualised analysis of local civil society's preparedness and capacity to address resilience and crisis response.
2. Establish mandatory expectations on international intermediary organisations, both UN agencies and INGOs, in terms of their approach to effective partnership and their cascading of quality funding; in particular fair and consistent support to overheads of local partners. Any intermediary agency receiving multi-year, flexible funding should be expected to articulate clear global and country-specific roadmaps to promote local leadership in emergency preparedness and humanitarian action.
3. Take steps to ensure faith literacy of foreign office and donor agency officials, and establish a systematic approach to consultation with national faith actors; leveraging the knowledge and partnerships of humanitarian FBOs. Direct resources to those FBOs best-placed to support meaningful engagement of faith actors at country-level.



Health worker from Caritas Ukraine assisting an internally-displaced person. (Caritas Internationalis/2020)

UN agencies:

1. Provide timely reporting on UN agency cascading of quality funding to national/local NGOs; through establishing systems that enable at least quarterly disaggregated reporting of the pass-through of funding.
2. Establish a consistent and fair cross-agency approach to providing overheads costs to national and local NGOs.
3. Ensure consistent representation by national NGOs in key decision-making processes, in particular the HCTs and CBPF strategic advisory boards. Provide funding to national NGO forums and encourage models of accompaniment between international agencies and national NGOs to foster effective engagement.
4. Build on learning from efforts to strengthen funding to national NGOs through UN agencies, the UN country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) and the CERF NGO block grant to scale-up funding to national and local NGOs. Where international intermediary agencies sub-grant to national/local NGOs, they should clearly articulate their added-value in terms of support to financial management or technical issues. In protracted crisis situations or after the initial 3 months of a rapid on-set crisis, they should articulate their exit strategy and contribution to building local leadership over the longer-term.
5. Establish a longer-term approach to engaging national and local faith actors; leveraging the knowledge and partnerships of humanitarian and multi-mandate FBOs. Direct resources to those FBOs best-placed to support meaningful engagement of faith actors at country-level.

Caritas confederation members:

1. Undertake agency-specific reviews of implementation of the Caritas confederation commitments on localization to baseline good practices, challenges and opportunities. Identify and prioritise internal gaps and weaknesses in shifting the power, as well as external obstacles that might be addressed through advocacy or other means.
2. Establish clearer agency-specific and partnership-based metrics for localization. Particular attention should be given to delivering on Caritas confederation commitments to support overheads costs and capacity-strengthening. Metrics should also be established to establish timebound milestones for Caritas INGO partners handing over leadership of consortia and programme design and management, as well as technical leadership in different sectors, to Caritas national organisations.
3. Strengthen coordination between Caritas members with an international mandate operating at country-level in support of longer-term capacity-strengthening and preparedness efforts of Caritas national organisations, as well as a joined-up approach to supporting Caritas national organizations to engage with and influence donors and inter-agency coordination and funding processes.
4. Strengthen support to and participation in wider national and local NGO advocacy efforts, including through NGO forums, and ecumenical and inter-faith coordination efforts.
5. Explore scope for establishing international or national memorandums of understanding with UN agencies and other relevant actors to facilitate longer-term partnership and emergency preparedness.
6. Strengthen and systematise approaches to engaging with other local civil society and community structures representing the most at-risk and marginalised sections of society; including through partnerships with women-centred organisations, disabled peoples organisations, youth networks and others. Embed action on this in wider organisational culture efforts addressing inclusion and diversity.

NOTES

¹ Seven Caritas members are not engaged in relief in their own country and by mandate only operate internationally: Caritas Australia, CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development England and Wales), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CORDAID (Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid, Netherlands), Development and Peace (Canada), Trocaire (Ireland) and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF).

² Caritas confederation commitments on localization (2019): <https://www.caritas.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CIPositionOnLocalisation.pdf>

³ Cfr. Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est, n° 31 and al., http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html

⁴ The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is a unique inter-agency forum for coordination, policy development and decision-making involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. The IASC was established in June 1992 in response to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the strengthening of humanitarian assistance. General Assembly Resolution 48/57 affirmed its role as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance – <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org>

⁵ In terms of challenges, threats and obstacles faced from government, armed groups or other powerful actors, 37 respondents highlighted various concerns about impacts of this on their ability to work safely and independently. Over a third of responses highlighted that violence and political unrest has negatively influenced Caritas members' ability to respond to Covid19 and other on-going humanitarian needs. Approximately one quarter attributed limits their work to ineffective government policy or poor application of policies, including corruption. Numerous respondents also highlighted that the approach of governments to implementing lockdowns had been detrimental to their operations serving those in need. Conversely, some respondents also cited examples of how national NGOs had been given special clearance to carry on operations as 'key workers', but this was sometimes not accompanied by the support required for this work to be undertaken safely (eg adequate provision of personal protective equipment).

⁶ WHO Practical Considerations and Recommendations for Religious Leaders and Faith-based Communities in the Context of COVID-19: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

⁷ Cf. <https://civilsociety4health.org>

⁸ Examples of such networks cited included CEDES (Ecumenical Social Development) and CCM (Christian Council of Mozambique, the South African SACBC - Episcopal Conference, which links to the council of churches, the Christian Health Association Sierra Leone (CHASL), the Ecumenical bodies of Episcopal Conference of Malawi, Malawi Council of Churches and Evangelical Association of Malawi, Inter Religious Council of Kenya, Liberia council of churches, the inter-religious council network in Guinea, the Platform of Religious Confessions in the Central African Republic, the COVID-19 platform of the Congo Episcopal Conference, the Cameroonian Association for Inter-religious Dialogue.

Frontcover photo: Extreme weather such as droughts, floods and landslides mean farming in rural Nicaragua is difficult, but Coronavirus and lockdown measures pushed some families into crisis. CAFOD, a member of the Caritas confederation with an international mandate, supported a national organisation called Asociación de Mujeres Productoras (ASOMUPRO) to assist female farmers to access good quality seeds which are resilient to climate change and can be planted in the next harvest season.

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For more information about Caritas Internationalis, go to: <https://www.caritas.org/>

