



Sister Amira Tabet hugs a Syrian refugee student at the Community Center of the Good Shepherd Sisters in Deir-al-Ahmar. Photo by Ismail Ferdous/CRS

The Missing Link: The Role of Local Institutions in Refugee Response

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Contents

ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
BACKGROUND AND FRAMING	11
International efforts towards addressing unprecedented humanitarian need	11
US government efforts towards localization.....	11
Challenges	12
Catholic Relief Services' unique vantage point.....	13
CRS' PEER PROJECT.....	14
RESEARCH QUESTION	15
METHODOLOGY	15
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY	16
CASE STUDY: LEBANON	17
Lebanon and international refugee law	17
The Syria Crisis in Lebanon	17
Why support Local Faith Institutions in Lebanon?	17
FINDINGS	18
CONCLUSIONS	24
RECOMMENDATIONS	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY	28
FOOTNOTES	30

ACRONYMS

CI	Caritas Internationalis
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organization (domestic)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LFI	Local Faith Institution
LHSP	Lebanese Host Communities Support Project (LHSP)
LHF	Lebanon Humanitarian Fund
PEER	Preparing to Excel in Emergency Response
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive Summary

BACKGROUND AND FRAMING

An unprecedented 68.5 million people are currently displaced globally, including 25.4 million refugees,¹ who spend on average 17 years in exile. This state of protracted displacement is increasingly the norm for people that are neither able to return home or resettle in a third country. While humanitarian agencies historically took on the role of assisting refugees, the sheer number of those displaced today, coupled with the protracted time, has increasingly pointed to refugees living outside of camps, among host countries and communities. Yet host communities and countries, 85% of which are middle to low income countries themselves, struggle to meet the needs of the displaced while meeting the needs of their own population.

It is under this context the global community has convened a series of international for attempting to transform the humanitarian system to better meet the needs of an increasing number of people, while funding and political support for such efforts are shrinking. The Grand Bargain, the Global Compacts on Refugees, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework all point to a desire to elevate the role of local institutions in a shared response. Similarly, US-specific reform efforts have made similar refrains towards increasing the role of local actors in providing assistance.

Core to Catholic Relief Services' guiding principles is that of *subsidiarity*—that local organizations and communities who are closest to the challenges of poverty are also the architects of their own development. CRS believes that strengthening the capacity of local partner organizations—whether they are faith based or secular—is important for advancing human development. Through its PEER (Preparing to Excel in Emergency Response) project, funded and implemented by CRS over three years in four countries, the project combines critical best practices with technical expertise to professionalize knowledge, skills and attitudes of

local emergency first responders through three pillars: financial and institutional systems, human resources management and adherence to SPHERE standards. The research focuses on those local institutions engaged with the PEER project in Lebanon.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can efforts to strengthen local partners take us farther in our quest to respond to unprecedented global displacement?

METHODOLOGY

A rapid literature review and a primary research field visit to Lebanon which included four components:

- i. 7 key informant interviews with directors or deputy directors of local faith institutions
- ii. 7 focus group discussions, including with Syrian refugees
- iii. 5 key informant interviews with staff from UN agencies in Lebanon
- iv. 4 key informant interviews with peer agency experts

Questions were offered to investigate the role of strengthened local actors in four areas of inquiry:

1. the **quality of direct service provision** by local institutions;
2. the role of local institutions in building **social acceptance** between refugees and host communities;
3. the role of local institutions and direct **donor engagement**; and
4. **engagement and influence of local institutions** with policy makers, donors and other relevant stakeholders.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In Lebanon, the benefits of bringing LFIs to the table should not be missed. Despite the Lebanese government's position against the formal integration of refugees, local institutions who are in daily contact with refugees play a significant role in their social acceptance, however informal and unsolicited. As a cohort, LFIs are adept at listening to their community's needs, including them in decision-making, and attuned to addressing needs of both the person and community holistically.

1. LOCAL ACTORS MATTER

The **comparative advantage of local institutions**, particularly faith institutions are many, and the international humanitarian community has a lot to learn from these institutions—unbound by the same donor requirements, pre-set sector-based responses—able to focus on those in need, including non-physical needs.

Extended presence: LFIs extended presence in the country and the faith-based trust built up amongst local communities are keys to their success. Their extended presence and long-standing relationships, often through direct connections to the broader faith community, have formed organizations that are embedded in and grown from the communities they support.

Attuned to community needs: LFIs are well attuned to the complex needs of their communities, possessing a nuanced understanding of the context, and can trigger emergency assistance rapidly through existing connections. Needs assessments carried out by LFIs, however informal, have allowed them to identify needs and target their assistance to match.

Provide multi-sectoral assistance: LFIs have traditionally provided multi-sectoral assistance (except for specialized medical centres). Often the LFI was the only available resource for the most marginalized members of a community. In providing

multiple types of assistance (clothes, cash, fuel, healthcare) based on need, the beneficiary rarely approaches multiple agencies.

Long-term assistance and beneficiaries' dignity: Maintaining dignity in a time of need is critical to the well-being of the beneficiary. Where there is a vacuum in the provision of social assistance by the state, the risk of impoverishment amongst the most marginalized becomes a reality and LFIs can find themselves the only lifeline.

Rapid, individualized response: When resources are available, LFIs can provide rapid, individualised response. LFIs can play a critical role when refugees face challenges accessing international support, including confusion around available services, services that are provided too far away, or unable to access services due to prohibitive costs.

2. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING IS WORTH THE INVESTMENT

Capacity strengthening is neither a short-term nor uniform procedure and efficacy is best found through tailored, long-term investment in each organization.

Capacity strengthening takes time: The success of PEER lies in the long-term effort of over 3-years, building an essential element of trust, which made LFIs more comfortable opening accounting books, beneficiary rolls and other sensitive documents that were the subject of internal process improvements through PEER. Despite this lengthy period, gaps still exist in institutions' more complex technical standards.

A model that goes beyond training: Going beyond one-off trainings helps to ensure that capacity and knowledge transfer was institutionalized in organizational policies, practices, and implemented with sufficient leadership, know-how and follow-through. PEER's use of an accompaniment model, including peer-to-peer coaching, mentoring, training, guidance, and field visits was critical to the success of the project and beyond.

Addressing program AND management quality: A detailed and broad range of Finance, Management, Human Resources and Emergency Response procedures and policies were put in place across all 14 LFIs. Focusing on both internal policies, but also educating partners on the international norms and standards were both necessary and complementary, so that LFIs could become viable organizations in terms of accountability, norms and standards.

Enhancing the humanitarian system: The upstream benefits of engaging local civil society in the humanitarian system must be recognized. Strengthened local institutions can only improve the delivery of assistance by the whole system.

Defining their own futures: Strengthened LFIs are now able to engage more strategically and systematically in the humanitarian ecosystem, particularly at the local level. LFIs have been able to develop their engagement and broaden their impact, as well as help define their role in the ongoing humanitarian response.

Unlocking synergies: Through PEER's approach of cross-agency capacity strengthening, LFIs became colleagues rather than unknown strangers and competitors, and enabled opportunities to learn from each other. Participating LFIs were encouraged to coordinate, share best practices and, in some cases, refer beneficiaries to each other.

3. LOCAL ACTORS IMPROVE REFUGEE RESPONSE AND EXPERIENCE

Local actors have an important role in helping build social acceptance: LFIs carry great leverage and provide a key, grassroots role in influencing the level of social acceptance between Syrians and Lebanese. LFIs stand as frontline workers providing direct services to people in need, no matter religious affiliation, across their communities. They play a direct role in influencing how refugees are welcome and accepted in the community, utilizing their shared identities to respond to their beneficiaries, and providing services based on need alone.

Promoting inter-faith collaboration and bridge-building: LFIs play a key role in countering hate and extremism through their provision of humanitarian aid to people of their own faith and of other faith groups. Their local identity helps influence their own communities while building bridges with others, through their volunteer networks, cross-community projects and the actual integration of Syrians into LFIs' work.

Utilizing shared identity: Where racism and bigotry are used to divide communities, LFIs influence their own communities by communicating the importance of treating all alike, regardless of their faith, particularly in the provision of assistance. Syrian refugees settled in neighbourhoods of their own faith tradition, and that existing link has helped LFIs create social acceptance across different nationalities. Sharing common places of worship have provided disparate communities with a place to interact and to share their faith, which has enabled direct, regular connections between them.

New and old together: leaders and volunteers: LFIs have a very limited turnover in both volunteer and staff structures.* Employees are committed to their faith and in turn, committed to the work of their organizations. Such consistency in staffing and programming enhances the opportunity to build social acceptance over the long-term. Further, traditionally relying on Lebanese volunteers, some LFIs have now created volunteer opportunities for Syrians, which helps them play a role in the communities in which they are living.

Accessing media: LFIs recognize that a community's perception of refugees can be heavily influenced by media and have had a varying degree of relationships with the media, through publish community news regarding community fairs or public health drives which affect both Lebanese and Syrians.

Local actors can advocate their governments for better responses: Across the country, LFIs' engagement with, and influence on, the government

* All 14 LFIs that joined CRS' PEER program remained committed for the three-year program it. Of the focal point staff in LFIs, only one changed during the three-year program.

administration (notably Municipalities) in which they work, media, Social Associations and Unions is possible due to their existing political and religious affiliations.

Local actors can facilitate better connections: LFI leadership and staff are well-respected community members whose presence in the community are recognized as long-standing pillars of support and providers of assistance. Embedded in the community, their contextual knowledge is of great comparative advantage, resulting in a capacity to identify needs and build bridges where outsiders might not.

Local actors support all vulnerable people: With human dignity in mind, LFIs respond to people based on vulnerability rather than status or nationality, something the international community has more recently identified as a best practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS:

Honour the Principles of Partnership (2007) and go deeper with the Grand Bargain (2016). Moving towards a more holistic, integrated approach will require additional culture and mindset changes on the part of donors, the UN and implementing agencies alike. The process of implementing the Grand Bargain needs to be more inclusive—elevating and carrying out the participation revolution, but also including local institutions, by breaking down barriers that keep local institutions from engaging in the grand bargain.

Engage in pre-crisis mapping of local partners where feasible and elevate the role of local responders. To facilitate the success of the Grand Bargain approach of localization, pre-crisis identification, mapping and certification of local institutions present in communities who could be supported to participate in the emergency response should be undertaken in disaster-prone areas. This can be done in conjunction with existing DRR

planning activities. The map should be utilized to engage local actors at the beginning of a crisis.

Engage local actors in needs assessments. Including local actors in needs assessment at the beginning of a response can address the needs of refugees more appropriately and holistically. Local actors are also able to identify community needs, addressing aspects of social acceptance and other softer needs that have not traditionally been captured by the international community.

Design innovative partnership modalities. Designing new partnership modalities that account for the unique and specific capabilities of local institutions and help reduce existing barriers to their inclusion can help ensure greater involvement of such actors. They should be built with a long-term time frame in mind, which will not only help build capacity over time, but allow for building trust and understanding for greater efficiencies. Donors can help facilitate piloting such approaches, including public-private partnerships, to help drive innovation and help produce further evidence and learning.

Build more evidence around the role of local institutions. Understanding the true extent of local institutions in humanitarian and refugee response can help to further elevate their importance and make the case for strengthening their work through capacity building. Relevant research institutions, including local universities, should decide on common indicators and targeted research topics to better leverage the role of local institutions.

TO DONORS (INCLUDING SUB-GRANTOR INGOS WHERE APPLICABLE):

Invest in capacity strengthening before the emergency onset stage, and through development channels. Comprehensive refugee responses should include capacity development as part and parcel of a long-term response, through long-term, multi-year funding. Prioritizing strong local institutions at the start and throughout a comprehensive refugee

response increases the likelihood for refugees to carry out a normal way of life within their host community.

Invest in local institutions and treat them as true partners.

Increase the level of humanitarian funding going as directly as possible to local and national responders to improve outcomes for affected people. A critical aspect of this objective is ensuring increased funding covers local organizations' indirect costs, which are essential towards enhancing local and national actors' ability to strengthen their internal standards of programming, transparency and overall accountability of humanitarian programming. Contractual partnership agreements should provide the same support to local organizations as is received by INGOs. INGOs who are providing sub-grants to local institutions should follow suit.

Develop clear capacity strengthening strategies which includes an increase in support for multi-year investments in the institutional capacities of local and national responders.

The metric for localization should not solely be direct funding to local institutions, but include necessary steps to achieving this goal, including increased funding for multi-year capacity strengthening initiatives that address both program and management quality. Creating pathways for achieving localization will reduce the binary nature of our understanding of localization and demonstrate over time the value of processes including mentorship and accompaniment, rather than solely one-off trainings. Reporting for such outcomes will frame localization with more achievable milestones.



Background and Framing

An unprecedented 68.5 million people are currently displaced globally, including 25.4 million refugees,² who spend on average 17 years in exile. This state of protracted displacement is increasingly the norm for people that are neither able to return home or resettle in a third country. While humanitarian agencies historically took on the role of assisting refugees, the sheer number of those displaced today, coupled with the protracted time, has increasingly pointed to refugees living outside of camps, among host countries and communities. Yet host communities and countries, 85% of which are middle to low income countries themselves, struggle to meet the needs of the displaced while meeting the needs of their own population.

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TOWARDS ADDRESSING UNPRECEDENTED HUMANITARIAN NEED

It is under this context the global community has convened a series of international fora in attempts to transform the humanitarian system to better meet the needs of an increasing number of people, while funding and political support for such efforts are shrinking.

Grand Bargain: The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit resulted in the Grand Bargain, which summoned international commitments from stakeholders in the international humanitarian system to transform the way we work, agreeing on goals aimed at making our approaches more effective and efficient. Organized among 10 workstreams, the move towards improving local responses is reflected in not just workstream two that aims to support and fund local responders but will also be impacted by the other nine workstreams.[†]

The Grand Bargain has built upon the 2007 Principles of Partnership, which identified

equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity as principles that could work to fill the gaps in prior humanitarian reform processes, which had largely neglected the role of local and national humanitarian response capacity.

Global Compact on Refugees: The subsequently adopted 2016 New York Declaration, focusing on the issues of displacement and migration, in turn, set out new paths forward to address the needs of such populations, expanding the scope of those involved in reform, with considerable overlap with the Grand Bargain in its objectives. The Declaration will culminate in two Compacts- one oriented towards shared responsibility for refugees, and the other around the safe and orderly migration of people, both to be completed by 2018 year's end.

Both efforts, in furtherance of bettering refugee response, point to the need for “durable solutions,” particularly expanding out that of integration of refugees into host communities. Similarly, there has been a shift towards addressing global humanitarian needs from as locally as possible—to achieve the approach laid out in the Grand Bargain: “principled humanitarian action as local as possible and as international as necessary.”

US GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TOWARDS LOCALIZATION

The US is a signatory to the Grand Bargain, the New York Declaration and a participant in the Global Compact on Refugees. USAID and the State Department Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration have both reported towards the US' Grand Bargain commitments,³ noting efforts to track funding to local and sub-grantees, build capacity for local emergency responders, and direct its UN partners to direct funds to local entities.

[†] For more information on the Grand Bargain, a good reference is: The Grand Bargain Explained: An ICVA Briefing Paper (ICVA, March 2017) https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICVA_Grand_Bargain_Explained.pdf

USAID TRANSFORMATION⁴ (2018–): The Trump administration, under the leadership of Administrator Mark Green, is undertaking a reform process called USAID Transformation. Under various strands, such as procurement reform and “The Journey to Self-Reliance,” similar efforts are underway to orient funding towards local and diverse institutions, including reducing reporting requirements, lowering barriers to accessing USG funding and creating mentorship opportunities among organizations.

USAID FORWARD (2010–2016): Under the Obama Administration, the USAID Forward initiative intended to improve the USAID’s delivery of foreign assistance by embracing new partnerships, investing in the catalytic role of innovation, and demanding a renewed focus on results. Of three areas of focus, one was to promote sustainable development through high-impact partnerships and local solutions, with a singular goal of directing 30% of its mission funding to go towards local entities.

While USAID never reached this goal, many other indicators of possible success were not captured, including leveraging co-financing from local institutions, achievement of shared goals with local and national governments, and other indicators towards true country ownership.⁵

CHALLENGES

While only two years have passed since these global efforts have taken place, challenges remain. Many argue that the Grand Bargain and the Global Compact on Refugees, like reform processes before them, are not sufficiently transformative, particularly of the UN institutions themselves. The challenges include:

- **Ongoing turf battles** “While there have been UN and donor achievements globally, progress towards meeting Localization commitments is slow.”⁶ The rhetoric remains distanced from field reality. “Donors, INGOs and UN agencies are reluctant to relinquish their control over the lion’s share of power and resources in the system, and risk

aversion, internal rules, staffing constraints and due diligence present ongoing challenges.”⁷

- **Donor restrictions** Donors are ever-increasingly constrained (owing to a variety of factors including parliamentary pressure, the extended duration of the Syria Refugee Crisis, rising global humanitarian challenges and commitments), which limits the implementation of localization commitments. This is trickling down to the UN, their partners, and to the partners of partners. UN agencies state they are encouraged to localize yet face low levels of unrestricted money. Some UN agencies state it is difficult to understand donors’ bilateral work with a perceived failure to coordinate in the strategic direction of localization. The level of dedication to abide by donor rules requires, according to one UN agency, “an entire system change” with the current system “not made for wants and needs.” Systematic constraints require significant innovation on behalf of donors, UN and INGOs to seek out grey areas in contractual obligations to ensure the embedding of the Principles of Partnership and the Grand Bargain commitments are met. Cognizant of commitments made at the global effort to rally support for localization, notably increased funding, direct partnerships and capacity strengthening of local actors, international agencies continue to attribute blame to other actors implicated in decision-making.
- **Too many institutional layers** Tiered funding decreases local actors’ access to the donor and prevents them from seeing and participating in “the big picture.” Few entry points to engage result in isolation and risks of parallel programming with subsequent missed opportunities,⁸ potential multi-layered and time-demanding program reporting, and, most critically, result in a distance between strategy and implementation. Improved, quality, direct partnerships and multi-year funding can counter today’s culture of contractual implementing partnerships, the associated power relationship, and the lack of indirect costs and support for capacity strengthening.



Syrian refugee patients receive assistance at a temporary medical clinic supported by Caritas Lebanon. Photo courtesy of Sam Tarling for Caritas Switzerland

- **Risk** Risk aversion, internal rules, staffing constraints and due diligence concerns are preventing donors from finding it easy to fund national and local actors.⁹ Risks associated with humanitarian programming will never disappear, however, acknowledging them and ensuring all actors share an appropriate level of risk makes localization more viable. Innovative funds, including the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (OCHA), uses a risk-based approach to ensure that a thorough analysis of risks is undertaken and that adequate assurance modalities are identified to mitigate these risks, linking principles of due diligence, performance and capacity assessment throughout the project cycle.¹⁰ Communicating and consulting,

monitoring and reviewing allows for treatment of risk but, consequently, requires significant additional resources.

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES' UNIQUE VANTAGE POINT

Core to CRS' guiding principles is that of *subsidiarity*—that local organizations and communities, who are closest to the challenges of poverty, are also the architects of their own development. CRS believes that strengthening the capacity of local partner organizations—whether they are faith based or secular—is important for advancing human development.

While CRS is one of many actors in the humanitarian and development space, we are built on a local partnership model approach, in which we work alongside the local Catholic Church and other local grassroots organizations. CRS prides itself on its grassroots focus and presence—we are of the people, with more than 90 percent of staff from the countries in which we work. This brings a rich, grounded and trusted perspective to our work. While we are global in our size, influence and standards, we are local in our daily impact. We benefit from our partners' long-term presence in their respective countries, their knowledge and experience, and their trusted network of relationships. It is from this grounded perspective that CRS has made its own commitments as a signatory to the Grand Bargain,[‡] which seeks to get more resources into the hands of local and national organizations that are implementing programming in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

CRS' PEER PROJECT

PEER (Preparing to Excel in Emergency Response) was developed, funded and implemented by CRS, with the aim of working towards achieving sustainable, localized methods to address emergencies. The three-year (2016-2018)

project, supports Local Faith Institutions (LFIs) to be equipped to provide a quality and timely humanitarian response that meets the immediate, life-saving needs of disaster-affected populations.

The project combines critical best practices with technical expertise to professionalize knowledge, skills and attitudes of local emergency first responders through three pillars: financial and institutional systems, human resources management and adherence to SPHERE standards. LFIs participating in PEER capacity strengthening in Lebanon did not receive any funds for project implementation from CRS. Program participants include more than 40 diverse Christian, Muslim and Druze organisations partnering with CRS in India, Indonesia, Jordan and Lebanon. 14 LFIs (Muslim and Christian) participated in Lebanon.

PEER: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING METHODOLOGY

Though all participating CRS country programs aim to provide a combination of accompaniment (coaching and mentoring), technical trainings, on-the-job support both during and between emergency responses, documentation of standard emergency operating procedures, and interagency sharing of

PEER Project

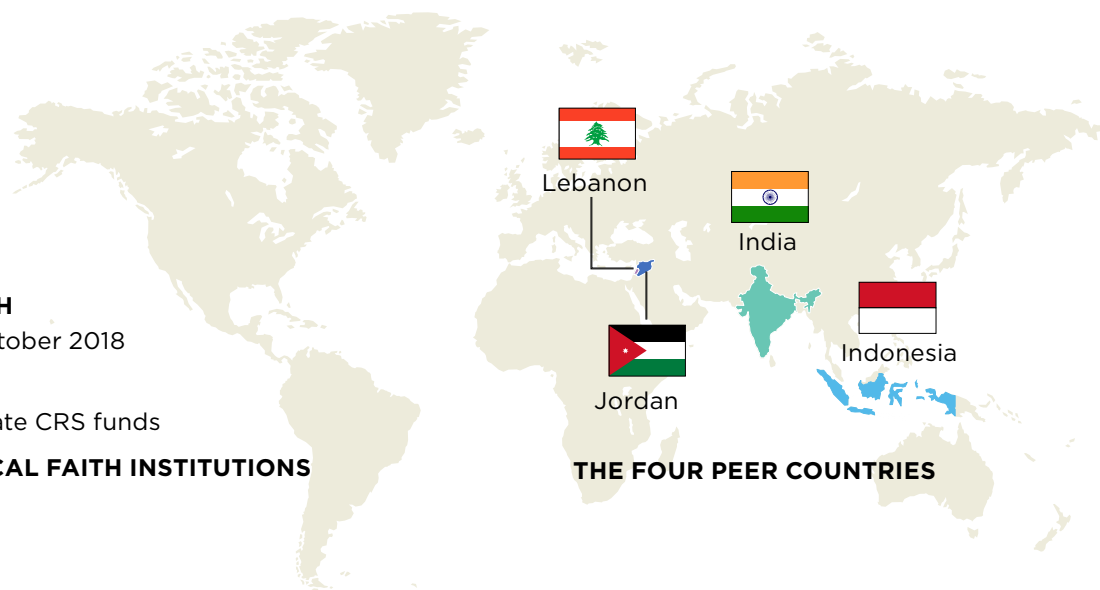
PROJECT LENGTH

October 2015–October 2018

FUNDING

\$2.87 million private CRS funds

TOTAL OF 41 LOCAL FAITH INSTITUTIONS



[‡] See CRS' full list of commitments here: https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/crs-files/crs_commitments_for_world_humanitarian_summit_may_2016.pdf

CRS' **Institute for Capacity Strengthening (ICS)** is a "one-stop shop" for Partnership and Capacity Strengthening learning and resources. The site provides a way for individuals to learn valuable knowledge, skills and attitudes related to partnership and capacity strengthening via online learning, face to face trainings, coaching and mentoring, as well as access helpful tools, guides, studies and other learning and practitioner resources.

For more information, please visit: <https://ics.crs.org>

experiences and learning, the methodology was adapted in order to meet local capacity needs and build on existing systems and organizational strengths.

INITIAL SUCCESSES OF PEER[§]

- **Timeliness:** LFIs have demonstrated improved timely emergency response capacity including conducting emergency needs assessments, distributing assistance and reporting.
- **Implementation of internal and external policies:** PEER helped organizations identify gaps and implement a detailed and broad range of Finance, Management, Human Resources and Emergency Response procedures and policies.
- **Increased engagement the international humanitarian system:** Where gaps existed, LFIs have a better grasp of key components of emergency response including coordination, sectoral approach, donor funding, humanitarian principles, and topics including Protection, Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Psychosocial Support.
- **Enhanced collaboration and coordination:** New programmatic partnerships have been forged between LFIs participating in PEER, often bringing together diverse communities and expertise, and between LFIs and local government and international counterparts.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research links the two distinct yet related global efforts of the Grand Bargain and New York Declaration, with a focus on a grounded experience of Lebanese Local Faith Institutions (LFIs) providing assistance to displaced Syrians and other refugees that they host. The research aims to understand the role that such local partners play in the response, how strengthening their capacity has impacted their response, and ultimately the impact on their support to refugees to carry out a normal way of life within their host community.

The research seeks to answer: *Can efforts to strengthen local partners take us farther in our quest to respond to unprecedented global displacement?*

METHODOLOGY

A rapid literature review was conducted, followed by primary research in the field with four components:

- 7 key informant interviews with directors or deputy directors of local faith institutions
- 7 focus group discussions, including with Syrian refugees (4 men, 36 women)^{||}, Lebanese host community members (7 men, 13 women), and volunteers and staff of LFIs (6 men, 11 women)
- 5 key informant interviews with staff from UN agencies in Lebanon
- 4 key informant interviews with peer agency experts

[§] These initial successes have been identified by an internal project mid-term review. The final evaluation of PEER with a full analysis of outcomes will be issued in November 2018.

^{||} Two of the FGDs took place for women only, one in a women's shelter and another a group of mothers who have children enrolled in the local school. In both cases more women chose to become involved than CRS had asked the organization to invite.

Questions were offered to investigate the role of strengthened local actors in four areas of inquiry:

1. the **quality of direct service provision** by local institutions;
2. the role of local institutions in building **social acceptance** between refugees and host communities;
3. the role of local institutions and direct **donor engagement**; and
4. **engagement and influence of local institutions** with policy makers, donors and other relevant stakeholders.

The paper provides recommendations to the international community, donors and stakeholders on how to better achieve global targets for localization through the Grand Bargain and optimize implementation of the Global Compact for Refugees through prioritizing capacity strengthening of local organizations, including local faith institutions.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The term ‘refugees’ in this paper follows that of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan¹¹. Quotes included in the text are direct statements made by Local Faith Institutions interviewed but are not attributed to specific LFIs to protect their identity. Any further quotes are directly sourced.

On discussing national civil society organizations in Lebanon, the term Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) is used. Local Faith Institutions (LFIs), the focus of this study, are one component of the broader category of Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon.

Case Study: Lebanon

LEBANON AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE LAW

Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its accompanying 1967 Protocol. Accordingly, Lebanon does not have the legal obligation towards refugees to guarantee individuals' rights to freedom of movement, employment, fair treatment under the Lebanese justice system, and other forms of protection unless captured by other international treaties.¹² The rationale behind not signing the 1951 Refugee Convention was partially to prevent the full integration of displaced peoples and encourage their eventual return to their country of origin.¹³

THE SYRIA CRISIS IN LEBANON

Lebanon has welcomed around 1.5 million refugees fleeing war-torn Syria.¹⁴ Refugees are treated as 'guests' in the eyes of the Lebanese government. During the first few years of the Syrian Civil War, Lebanon had an open border policy with Syria, however as the numbers of Syrians fleeing to Lebanon grew, tighter restrictions were put into place and in May 2015, at the instruction of the Lebanese government, UNHCR stopped registering Syrian refugees.¹⁵

In March 2017, the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri said Lebanon was close to a "breaking point" owing to the protracted nature of displacement.¹⁶ According to the United Nations, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are more vulnerable than ever, with more than half now living in extreme poverty and over three quarters living below the poverty line. Nine out of every 10 refugees state they are in debt and food insecurity remains critically high. Lacking the ability to obtain legal residency, refugees are exposed to an increased risk of arrest, hinders their ability to register marriages and births, and makes it more



Country map of Lebanon and location of PEER-participating Local Faith Institutions. The map shows the headquarters of the 14 LFIs. Some of the organizations have programs that spread across the country, and in some cases, are present in Syria as well.

difficult to find work, send their children to school or access needed health care.¹⁷

"More than ever, international solidarity needs to match the hospitality of Lebanon as host country. No country in the world can—or should—carry alone the challenge that Lebanon is facing. Responsibility-sharing with Lebanon is key."¹⁸

WHY SUPPORT LOCAL FAITH INSTITUTIONS IN LEBANON?

An initial contextual analysis carried out by the PEER project revealed that many Syrians originally

approached faith-based organizations for aid when they arrived in Lebanon; that these organizations tended to approach aid as best they could but without the requisite knowledge (e.g. of humanitarian principles) or structure to scale-up to the demands placed upon them and had not previously engaged in capacity strengthening; that they were powerful potential partners for international actors; and that they had a key opportunity to play the role of peace-builders across faiths in the faith mosaic of Lebanon. LFIs were also identified as having influence on social acceptance between Syrians and Lebanese as participating organizations spanned ten different sects, distributed between organizations of Christian, Muslim and Druze faiths.

Findings

“Lebanon is a message more than it is a country.”
—Pope John Paul II

1. LOCAL ACTORS MATTER

Civil society in Lebanon has an undisputed and essential role carrying out humanitarian and development assistance, due to the sheer enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis. Over the past 8 years, Lebanese civil society organisations have strengthened, gained in number and networks, as evidenced by the second Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’, which was marked by a high level of participation by civil society organizations.

The number of registered Civil Society Organisations in Lebanon fluctuates; with some of them becoming dormant and others emerging during various crisis the country has faced.¹⁹ Registered NGOs have proliferated in Lebanon since the start of the Syria crisis,²⁰ with most people estimating the existence

of around 5,000 CSOs, of whom 1,000 are currently active. Long-established LFIs, however small, believe they can identify the quality of new organisations and differentiate between ‘the good and the bad.’ Whilst most of those interviewed state that the majority of CSOs work in good faith, there are still “those who are competing for funds to satisfy their own needs.” International actors new to the context are less able to differentiate.

The comparative advantage of local institutions, particularly faith institutions are many: they have extended presence in their communities, in-depth knowledge of community needs, take a multi-sectoral approach, possess a range of capacities to deliver results rapidly, and influence social acceptance of refugees through programming to meet the needs of both Lebanese and Syrian communities. The international humanitarian community has a lot to learn from these institutions—unbound by the same donor requirements, pre-set sector-based responses—able to focus on those in need, including non-physical needs.

Extended presence: LFIs in Lebanon perceive their extended presence in the country and the faith-based trust built up amongst local communities as key to their success. Their extended presence and long-standing relationships, often through direct connections to the broader faith community, have formed organizations that are embedded in and grown from the communities they support. Their continued presence, in some cases dating back as far as the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrates their persistence and importance in their communities. Despite facing funding challenges, LFIs’ enduring presence has been able to continue supporting those in need, even when international support dwindles: “we believe we should take the lead, so it does not remain at an international level, so we can continue when the INGO leaves.”

Attuned to community needs: LFIs are well attuned to the complex needs of their communities, possessing a nuanced understanding of the context,

and can trigger emergency assistance rapidly through existing connections. Needs assessments carried out by LFIs, however informal, have allowed them to identify needs and target their assistance to match. “We can differentiate between the really poor and those who claim to be poor and where we have limited resources, this is critical.” LFIs state that were this knowledge optimally utilised, it would reduce the number, and respond better to the needs, of beneficiaries, potentially freeing up funding to assist the most vulnerable. Given the overwhelming needs of refugees in Lebanon, both overlaps and gaps in programming is perhaps to be expected. However, LFIs continue to state that this occurs more often than is necessary, and that the consequences cause great frustrations and ruptures in social acceptance between Syrian and Lebanese beneficiaries.

Provide multi-sectoral assistance: LFIs have traditionally provided multi-sectoral assistance (except for specialized medical centres). Often the LFI was the only available resource for the most marginalized members of a community. In providing multiple types of assistance (clothes, cash, fuel, healthcare) based on need, the beneficiary rarely approaches multiple agencies. LFIs state that if referrals are needed, “they are easy to do because of the connections that already exist, so it takes less time to manage with quicker results.”

Long-term assistance and beneficiaries’ dignity: Maintaining dignity in a time of need is critical to the well-being of the beneficiary. The LFI is often the only service in the community, and “becomes like family: the only one who cares for us”. Where there is a vacuum in the provision of social assistance by the state, the risk of impoverishment amongst the most marginalized becomes a reality and LFIs can find themselves the only lifeline. Eight of nine Lebanese women in a widows’ project run by an LFI lamented that no other organisation had assisted them. To this end, the LFI played a fundamental role in the women’s dignity and survival through personalized support.

Rapid, individualized response: When resources are available, LFIs can provide rapid, individualised response. Familiarity with the location and its residents allows for personal connections: Whatsapp or a telephone call inform the LFI of the problem and are then used again to trigger assistance. In the words of one LFI staff, “I have the access, I have cars and staff, good facilities, good relations with local authorities: all of these help me.” LFIs can play a critical role when refugees face challenges accessing international support, including confusion around available services, services that are provided too far away, or unable to access services due to prohibitive costs.

2. CAPACITY STRENGTHENING IS WORTH THE INVESTMENT

Capacity strengthening is neither a short-term nor uniform procedure and efficacy is best found through tailored, long-term investment in each organization. The case study focused on LFIs that participated in CRS’ PEER project, which was tailored to focus on the needs of the individual organizations in the areas of both program and management quality, over a significant period.

Capacity strengthening takes time: The success of PEER lies in the long-term effort of over three years, engaging with organizations that were not previously partners with CRS. Over this time, an essential element of trust was built between CRS’ PEER staff and LFI staff, a process that took more than six months, through an initial stage of assessments, communication and training. As an American Catholic faith-based agency, with no grant money attached to the project, CRS had to overcome LFIs’ scepticism by creating shared vision and mission, to ultimately help the LFIs reach their capacity strengthening goals. “Working in capacity strengthening is like being a doctor: trust is the most important factor, since if they don’t trust you they won’t tell you where it hurts the most and you won’t be able to prescribe the correct medicine.”²¹ Trust was essential before LFIs would open up accounting

books, beneficiary rolls and other sensitive documents that were the subject of internal process improvements through PEER.

A model that goes beyond training: Going beyond one-off trainings is an essential ingredient to the success of institutional capacity strengthening efforts like PEER, helping to ensure that capacity and knowledge transfer was institutionalized in organizational policies, practices, and implemented with sufficient leadership, know-how and follow-through. PEER's use of an accompaniment model, including peer-to-peer coaching, mentoring, training, guidance, and field visits was critical to the success of the project and beyond. PEER provided expert capacity strengthening through tailor-made, targeted support based on a self-declared assessment. "[T]hrough PEER we set policies and procedures that would govern our work internally and with external organisations. We worked on a volunteer basis and were not professional. Now we understand how to work better."

Addressing program AND management quality: A detailed and broad range of Finance, Management, Human Resources and Emergency Response procedures and policies were put in place across all 14 LFIs. Focusing on both internal policies, but also educating partners on the international norms and standards were both necessary and complementary, so that LFIs could become viable organizations in terms of accountability, norms and standards.

Strengthening LFIs in their understanding and approach to the international humanitarian system helped LFIs to institute internal policies and align management quality procedures to help them achieve such standards, particularly that around neutrality. Where 'common sense' had once prevailed, LFIs recognize the importance of implementing key commitments and standards including the Humanitarian Principles²² and the Nine Commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.²³ "We used to have no regulations in the medical centre: now we have them

printed and posted publicly. When patients argue that they are not being treated fairly, we show them our regulations." More work in understanding and implementing more complex technical areas of the standards is still needed.

Capacity strengthening through PEER also helped several LFIs broaden the reach and arguably, the quality of their programs⁴. "Thanks to PEER and the amendments we made to internal rules and protocols we were able to establish partnerships with different international organisations." Other LFIs stated that their knowledge of the international system had increased dramatically: "regarding proposal writing, we learnt new methods to identify external projects: where funding is going and what the allocations are for: there is a website for tenders that we can now use."

Lastly, PEER provided LFIs with tools to improve their capacity and standing as an actor in emergency responses, being able to take more systematic and time-tested approaches. Such tools included utilizing a service map highlighting different services and areas of interventions, implementing various policies around child protection and data security, and learning to author reports. After PEER, some LFIs have been able to increase their individualized services to Syrians in need, for example accompanying them to General Security interviews, assisting in burials, or finding hospital care in emergencies. "As you know, Lebanon is a country that has lots of crisis and most actions that are taken are improvised: that is why we are now working to anticipate any natural emergencies or conflict."

Enhancing the humanitarian system: Capacity strengthening is often framed as a river flowing one way, but the upstream benefits of engaging local civil society in the humanitarian system must be recognized. One PEER participant authored a Beneficiary Targeting and Verification guide, minimizing exclusion errors: "our organisation was founded 25 years ago, so we had experience, we know how to do case studies and pinpoint their

⁴ The final evaluation of the PEER project will be issued in November, 2018. This statement is based on both self-reporting of the LFIs interviewed, as well as the objective increases in internal rules and protocols, among other things.



Young Syrian refugees take part in a “fun day” at a CRS-supported school in Zarqa, Jordan. Photo by Andrew McConnell/CRS

needs, but the selection of beneficiaries depended on the employee in the field.” Another LFI, having authored and adopted a Child Protection policy, set up an internal committee on child protection standards, to regularly review their programming and to discuss options for improving their work by, for example, attending trainings. Another LFI, became a reference point on SPHERE across the whole region.

Defining their own futures: Strengthened LFIs are now able to engage more strategically and systematically in the humanitarian ecosystem, particularly at the local level. Where before they limited themselves to responding to needs with the available resources, now one LFI is preparing to submit a comprehensive recommendation to the Ministry of Social Affairs to expand the scope of their collective remit: “We had random responses that

were only linked to the security situation, we were just meeting direct needs with God’s help. We are now engaging in strategy development, expanding our reach to help more people.” Another LFI was able to apply for full accreditation as a health dispensary, and yet another LFI had begun to petition the government to obtain legal employment rights for volunteers after three months of service. Each of these efforts served to develop the LFI’s engagement and broaden their impact, as well as help define their role in the ongoing humanitarian response.

Unlocking synergies: The disparate faith backgrounds, policies and practices of individual LFIs had previously kept organizations from working together. Through PEER’s approach of cross-agency capacity strengthening, LFIs became colleagues rather than unknown strangers and competitors,

and enabled opportunities to learn from each other. Participating LFIs were encouraged to coordinate, share best practices and, in some cases, refer beneficiaries to each other, a practice previously seen as “taboo”.* Now, some LFIs have expanded networks across both Lebanese and Syrians, in some cases amounting to thousands of volunteers, to engage their shared vision of providing a more dignified and peaceful future for Syrians upon their return.

3. LOCAL ACTORS IMPROVE REFUGEE RESPONSE AND EXPERIENCE

The Lebanese government formally rejects the local integration of refugees into Lebanese society,²⁴ yet informal integration, namely social acceptance, offers a pathway for refugees to pursue dignified lives while waiting to return home or resettle in a third country.²⁵ Whilst the crisis in Syria continues and refugees continue to seek safety and protection in Lebanon, Lebanese civil society organisations have strengthened, gaining in number and networks. They play a key role in responding to the needs of the displaced, through providing direct assistance, engaging local policy makers, influencing public opinion through the media, and offering moral faith-based leadership at the local level.

Local actors have an important role in helping build social acceptance: LFIs carry great leverage and provide a key, grassroots role in influencing the level of social acceptance between Syrians and Lebanese. Yet this capacity has been only partially realized, limited by the public’s misunderstanding of LFI’s scope of reach, which are not limited to their own faith group. In one example, because of the LFI’s religious name, “our aid [was] not...perceived as neutral and being given only to people of the same faith, whilst in reality 60% of our beneficiaries are not from our faith.”

In direct contrast to such perceptions, LFIs stand as frontline workers providing direct services to people in need, no matter religious affiliation,

across their communities. They play a direct role in influencing how refugees are welcome and accepted in the community, utilizing their shared identities to respond to their beneficiaries, and providing services based on need alone. Whilst return to Syria remains a distant dream for many refugees, LFIs remain on the ground, able to exert influence over the relationships that enable refugees and Lebanese to continue to live alongside one another.

Promoting inter-faith collaboration and bridge-building: LFIs play a key role in countering hate and extremism through their provision of humanitarian aid to people of their own faith and of other faith groups. “We don’t build castles, we build bridges.” With their local identity, they can influence their own communities while building bridges with others. Helping to frame the importance of dignity and peace, “[w]e help others to understand how we are part of the Middle East mosaic.” This is done through volunteer networks, cross-community projects and the actual integration of Syrians into LFIs’ work. In some cases, expanded networks across both Lebanese and Syrians amounted to dozens to thousands of volunteers. Using networks to counter hatred and revenge has traditionally been a fundamental component of their work and is proving to be even more important following the arrival of the Syrian refugees.

.....
“We don’t build castles,
we build bridges.”
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While “[p]oliticians are not helping...: they are heightening the hate, pushing this scenario that we have to be afraid,” LFIs are using their power and resources to counter inter-faith fear and anger that damages broader community relations and social acceptance. LFIs now directly linked through formal partnerships, can offer support to each other, refer beneficiaries to each other and build peace amongst LFIs of different faiths, which has extended

* The LFIs themselves were most surprised by this result.

through their message and example to the broader community.

Utilizing shared identity: Where racism and bigotry are used to divide communities, LFIs influence their own communities by communicating the importance of treating all alike, regardless of their faith, particularly in the provision of assistance. “We treat people as individuals and not as a group, and we are a voice against hatred, especially amongst children.”

Syrian refugees settled in neighbourhoods of their own faith tradition, and that existing link has helped LFIs create social acceptance across different nationalities. Sharing common places of worship have provided disparate communities with a place to interact and to share their faith, which has enabled direct, regular connections between them. One church built an interior balcony to accommodate all the newcomers from Syria.

The role of religion in the conflict in Syria has also affected social acceptance between refugees and Lebanese communities. One LFI stated that in their community, “the easy way is racism: you have to hate these people because these people did that.” In response, LFIs have identified specific and targeted activities to counter hatred, including bringing communities together in theatre or summer camps, trainings or income-generating activities to offer opportunities for people of different faiths together, and to provide support to people of all faiths in their community. LFIs have played key roles in humanizing the individual refugee through these interactions, building bridges between communities.

New and old together: leaders and volunteers: LFIs have a very limited turnover in both volunteer and staff structures.[†] Employees are committed to their faith and in turn, committed to the work of their organizations. Such consistency in staffing and programming enhances the opportunity to build social acceptance over the long-term.

Traditionally relying on Lebanese volunteers, some LFIs have now created volunteer opportunities for Syrians. This has overturned the traditional provider-recipient dynamic which can create tensions among the two groups. “We think that they are here to take our resources, but now we see a refugee helping someone who is not a refugee.” LFIs offer a key opportunity for refugees to play a role in the communities in which they are living and working together creates compassion for Syrians’ plight and a deeper understanding of their needs with such interactions. Volunteerism creates links between different groups of people and has improved social acceptance between the two communities, with one volunteer noting “when we give a service we learn from them.”

Accessing media: LFIs recognize that a community’s perception of refugees can be heavily influenced by media and have had a varying degree of relationships with the media. One LFI stated that they regularly used local media outlets to publish community news regarding community fairs or public health drives which affect both Lebanese and Syrians. Another LFI stated, “we invite media to come and cover big events” to promote the work of the LFI and publicize big events. The media, both news and entertainment, has broad power to influence public perceptions in the stories they choose to tell, the language they use, and how they portray refugees.²⁶

Local actors can advocate their governments for better responses: Across the country, LFIs’ engagement with, and influence on, the government administration (notably Municipalities) in which they work, media, Social Associations and Unions²⁷ is possible due to their existing political and religious affiliations. The size of the organization, its breadth of projects and position in the community also affects such relationships. As described above, one LFI is discussing submitting a comprehensive recommendation to the Ministry of Social Affairs to increase the work of charities in Lebanon. Another LFI was also able to influence the Municipality to

[†] All 14 LFIs that joined CRS’ PEER program remained committed for the three-year program it. Of the focal point staff in LFIs, only one changed during the three-year program.

ensure that future projects were non-discriminatory and available to all members of the community. While some LFIs have been directly able to advocate and garner support on issues that affect their communities, others lament the need to have personal relationships with decision makers to have influence.

Local actors can facilitate better connections: LFI leadership and staff are well-respected community members whose presence in the community are recognized as long-standing pillars of support and providers of assistance. Embedded in the community, their contextual knowledge is of great comparative advantage, resulting in a capacity to identify needs and build bridges where outsiders might not. In addition, they bring to the table a group of people who can think differently, engage eagerly and be a reliable resource participating in the humanitarian response.

Following participation in PEER, LFIs improved coordination among local partners, principally in shared geographic areas of implementation. Strengthened through PEER, they are also actively making “network[s] or link[s] that would be established with the government.” Some LFIs also believe that their strengthened capacity will positively influence their external relationships for the future: “the Ministry of Social Affairs should now be more willing and ready to cooperate with us because we have gained this knowledge and professionalism.” While challenges and barriers are still quite prohibitive for LFI participation in the international humanitarian coordination system, LFIs could play key roles in helping to better facilitate conversations between international actors and local communities.

Local actors support all vulnerable people: With human dignity in mind, LFIs respond to people based on vulnerability rather than status or nationality, something the international community has more recently identified as a best practice. With fewer constraints on their programming than INGOs (due to private voluntary contributions, a broad volunteer

team, and pre-existing community spaces), LFIs “do not say no to anyone,” while the international community is still often limited by donors, responding to people based on category (refugee status and country of origin), fuelling tensions among different groups.²⁸ LFIs in Lebanon continue to meet the needs of Palestinians who live in camps or among the lower-income Lebanese: “We don’t want them to think that we only help the Syrians.” Not only does such an approach reduce tensions, such an approach mitigates the perception that the international community is responding only to Syrian refugees and demonstrates to marginalized communities that assistance will continue to be delivered, not diverted.

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“More than ever, international solidarity needs to match the hospitality of Lebanon as host country. No country in the world can—or should—carry alone the challenge that Lebanon is facing. Responsibility-sharing with Lebanon is key.”²⁹

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Conclusions

The basic humanitarian needs of refugees in Lebanon remain enormous and are only partially fulfilled. Displaced Syrians living in poverty rose from 71 to 76 per cent since 2016; shelter conditions deteriorated and 91 per cent have a level of food insecurity.³⁰ According to UNHCR, self-reliance opportunities for refugees are extremely limited. In Lebanon, 28% of Lebanese now live below the poverty line,³¹ (200,000 additional Lebanese than pre-crisis figures) and host communities continue to struggle to manage both their own needs and support the needs of Syrian refugees. Amidst this reality, the international community has recalled and responded to the fundamental importance of providing support to

both refugee-hosting communities, recognizing that failing to contribute to the broader infrastructure and development of the host country will cause tensions, decrease social acceptance, and ultimately reduce the likelihood that refugee and host populations can live a full life.

In Lebanon, the benefits of bringing LFIs to the table should not be missed. Despite the Lebanese government's position against the formal integration of refugees, local institutions who are in daily contact with refugees play a significant role in their social acceptance, however informal and unsolicited. As a cohort, LFIs are adept at listening to their community's needs, including them in decision-making, and attuned to addressing needs of both the person and community holistically. Their failure to partner with international donors is not always due to their failure to meet donor requirements, as is the common refrain, but also lies with their decision not to access funding that is too restricted and too proscribed: "They [donors] have an agenda I don't agree with and I cannot influence them. For example, they want to do hygiene programs and they don't look at the overall picture outside their narrow spectrum: you have a puzzle which does not fit."

Recommendations

While humanitarian needs continue unabated, reforms of our global systems are ongoing. Despite agreed upon goals and ways to achieve these goals, more can be done to truly take full advantage of the rich and deep experience of local institutions. Our recommendations include:

TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS:

Honour the Principles of Partnership (2007) and go deeper with the Grand Bargain (2016): The Principles of Partnership and the Grand Bargain are efforts of humanitarian reform that recognize the need to better utilize the expertise and knowledge of local institutions. While the localization workstream

of the Grand Bargain uplifts the importance of local and national institutions as key parts of a humanitarian response, other streams are equally important to achieving this primacy, including joint needs assessments, creating more multi-year, less earmarked funding, as well as simplifying reporting requirements and linking humanitarian and development actors. These workstreams work to break down silos of a heavy bureaucracy, while many LFIs already take a human-centered, rather than siloed approach. "In Lebanon, we learnt that we have to be more active with problems that face the whole of society in order to have impact."

Moving towards a more holistic, integrated approach will require additional culture and mindset changes on the part of donors, the UN and implementing agencies alike. To start, the process of implementing the Grand Bargain needs to be more inclusive-elevating and carrying out the participation revolution, but also including local institutions as those who must be included. Breaking down barriers that keep local institutions from engaging in the grand bargain process include proactively seeking their input, making milestones and reporting more transparent and in various languages, and supporting INGOs and other networks that have existing links to local partners with the specific aim of bringing them into the process.

Engage in pre-crisis mapping of local partners where feasible and elevate the role of local responders.

To facilitate the success of the Grand Bargain approach of localization, pre-crisis identification, mapping and certification of local institutions present in communities who could be supported to participate in the emergency response should be undertaken in disaster-prone areas. This can be done in conjunction with existing DRR planning activities. The map should be utilized to engage local actors at the beginning of a crisis.

Engage local actors in needs assessments. Currently the Grand Bargain workstream on joint and impartial needs assessments fails to mention the importance

of tapping into local institutions' knowledge and expertise, not to mention their existing and ongoing processes for needs assessments (however informal). Including local actors in needs assessment at the beginning of a response can address the needs of refugees more appropriately and holistically. Local actors are also able to identify community needs, addressing aspects of social acceptance and other softer needs that have not traditionally been captured by the international community.

Design innovative partnership modalities. Currently, handover strategies often lack clarity and adequate funding to ensure sustainability, and local solutions are rarely funded directly. Yet this is an essential aspect of achieving longer-term sustainability, where the provision of essential services will ultimately be undertaken by local government or civil society. Designing new partnership modalities that account for the unique and specific capabilities of local institutions and help reduce existing barriers to their inclusion can help ensure greater involvement of such actors. They should be built with a long-term time frame in mind, which will not only help build capacity over time, but allow for building trust and understanding for greater efficiencies. Donors can help facilitate piloting such approaches, including public-private partnerships, to help drive innovation and help produce further evidence and learning.

Build more evidence around the role of local institutions. Understanding the true extent of local institutions in humanitarian and refugee response can help to further elevate their importance and make the case for strengthening their work through capacity building. Relevant research institutions, including local universities, should decide on common indicators and targeted research topics to better leverage the role of local institutions.

TO DONORS (INCLUDING SUB-GRANTOR INGOS WHERE APPLICABLE):

Invest in capacity strengthening before the emergency onset stage, and through development channels. A common challenge to capacity

strengthening during an emergency response is an argument that priority should lie with saving lives. Investing in capacity strengthening of local actors must be done *before* an emergency hits, particularly in crisis-prone areas, through existing DRR strategies.

This same approach is not always straightforward in the case of man-made crises, often the source of large refugee flows. However, the New York Declaration communicates the need for comprehensive refugee responses, which includes development-focused approaches to a traditionally humanitarian lens. In these instances, capacity development should be part and parcel of a long-term response to humanitarian response to refugees and host communities, through long-term, multi-year funding. By prioritizing strong local institutions as an outcome of a comprehensive response, the likelihood that refugees and host communities can carry out a normal way of life will be more feasible. Engaging with development planning, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and USAID's Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) process, can be an important avenue in understanding existing capacities and gaps within national and local partners.

Invest in local institutions and treat them as true partners. Despite humanitarian reform processes by donors and the global system, "[a]ccess for [LFIs] to the international system is not easy, and to direct them to where to work is very hard." Most LFIs continue to perceive that they remain outside of the international humanitarian response system, and that little value is attributed to them by international actors (UN agencies and INGOs).

One important aspect of including local institutions is to increase the level of humanitarian funding going as directly as possible to local and national responders to improve outcomes for affected people. A critical aspect of this objective is ensuring increased funding covers local organizations' indirect costs, which are essential towards enhancing local and national actors' ability to strengthen their

internal standards of programming, transparency and overall accountability of humanitarian programming. Contractual partnership agreements should provide the same support to local organizations as is received by INGOs. INGOs who are providing sub-grants to local institutions should follow suit.

Another area of improvement is donor's clear communication of performance issues to local partners, and supporting them directly, or providing support to work with an external organization, in addressing those issues. This will change the dynamic between donors and local institutions from one-off project implementers to long-term partners.

Develop clear capacity strengthening strategies which includes an increase in support for multi-year investments in the institutional capacities of local and national responders. The metric for localization should not solely be direct funding to local institutions, but include necessary steps to achieving this goal, including increased funding for multi-year capacity strengthening initiatives that address both program and management quality. Creating pathways for achieving localization will reduce the binary nature of our understanding of localization and demonstrate over time the value of processes including mentorship and accompaniment, rather than solely one-off trainings. Reporting for such outcomes will frame localization with more achievable milestones.

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