



CALL TO ACTION

To Scale up Local Faith Actors' roles in Humanitarian Response

Background

This Call to Action lays out a series of goals and actions to achieve greater inclusion of local faith actors (LFAs¹) in humanitarian action. The Call to Action is informed by the rich conversations that took place before, during, and after the Forum on Localising Humanitarian Response in Sri Lanka on 16-18 October 2017, attended by over 140 humanitarian practitioners, religious leaders and local faith-based organisations from 36 countries. The Call to Action was developed collaboratively by participants at the Forum and refined by an Advocacy Working Group.

LFAs are at the heart of most communities providing sacred space, spiritual care and material support. Consequently, LFAs are core to local systems of humanitarian response and resilience to crisis, mobilising hundreds of millions of people around the world, accessing the hardest to reach and most vulnerable communities, and investing their own significant financial resources in response. However, humanitarian systems often fail to engage with LFAs and opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships with a wide impact are missed.

The Forum affirmed the value of intra- and inter-religious collaboration in humanitarian response, and recognised the value of intermediary organisations providing technical, financial, and advocacy support to LFAs. It highlighted the value of women's leadership and committed to greater inclusion of women in all aspects of LFA work. It also reaffirmed the importance and role that young people play in localised action and their engagement with LFA work. The Forum developed detailed recommendations for scaling up LFA engagement in 6 aspects of humanitarian response, which can be found on the Forum website.²

The Call to Action specifies key actions towards scaling up LFA roles in Humanitarian response, at global, national and local levels to be taken by organisations including LFAs, faith-based international NGOs, and religious networks. It also identifies entry points for other humanitarian actors and stakeholders to engage with LFAs.

The Call to action lays out a framework for complementary actions that, taken together, would increase LFA engagement. The Call is directed to the Forum participants and other actors who in the course of their ongoing work will carry forward specific actions and keep each other informed of progress and opportunities.

To more fully engage local faith actors in humanitarian response, we call for the following actions:

Goal 1. Make the case

Recognising the paucity of widespread, quality evidence on the role of LFAs in humanitarian response, we call for the following actions to strengthen the evidence base.

Action 1.1. Gather, collate and analyse the evidence for the role and contributions (positive and negative) of LFAs in humanitarian response. Organize and publish the information presented at the

¹ Local faith actors (LFAs) refer to the wide range of people and institutions represented in local response who are inspired by faith. It includes local religious leaders, associations and committees connected to local religious institutions, and local and national faith-based organisations.

² <https://lrf2017.org/reports/>

Forum, including an accessible on-line repository of material, a summary focusing on mechanisms and methods of effective cross sector partnerships, and develop a research agenda around issues critical to scaling up LFA involvement in humanitarian response from this base. The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities has committed to serve as a focal point for this evidence work.

Action 1.2. Drawing on the evidence base, develop a suite of education and advocacy case materials and tools such as policy briefs, research papers, case studies, presentations, videos, and talking points. Using the findings from the Forum, conduct debriefings with key national and global humanitarian policy makers and donors regarding the role and contributions of LFAs in humanitarian response. Promote evidence of the efficacy of working with local faith actors/networks in fragile contexts.

Goal 2. Build mutual understanding

Recognising gaps in understanding the role and added value of LFAs by the humanitarian community, and the gaps in understanding of humanitarian systems and processes by LFAs, we call for the following actions to improve “faith literacy” and “humanitarian literacy” for all.

Action 2.1. Seek better understanding of what faith and humanitarian communities want and need to know about each other as a basis for effective collaboration and localisation in humanitarian response. Conduct discussions at the local and national level on points of similarity and divergence, as well as what localisation means for LFAs, and peer-to-peer learning between LFAs; host partnership and collaboration meetings between local humanitarian practitioners and LFAs. Commit to one international or regional meeting in the next 18 months that will focus on bringing religious figures together with humanitarian figures to discuss points of common interest and understanding.

Action 2.2. Map, collate and disseminate, through an online portal, existing faith literacy training resources from across humanitarian organisations of all backgrounds, identifying any gaps in knowledge and reviewing the extent of roll-out at national and local level.

Action 2.3. Map existing humanitarian training resources tailored to local actors and explore how they can best be adapted to the specific needs of LFAs, for example from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

Action 2.4. Develop guidance (guidelines, standards) for governmental bodies, international organisations-both faith based and secular, local authorities and donors on partnering with LFAs towards improving the localisation of aid and in fragile contexts. These guidelines are to focus specifically on *local* faith actors

Action 2.5. Secure commitments from organisations and networks (including secular and faith based, international, regional and national) to intensify sensitization and awareness about and on humanitarian principles, systems, processes and standards for LFAs.

Goal 3. Educate about the role of LFAs and advocate for their inclusion

Recognising in particular the importance of the Grand Bargain commitments and the localisation agenda to faith-based organisations³, the Forum acknowledges the capacities of LFAs to deliver on the localisation workstream.⁴ We call for greater inclusion of LFAs in planning and decision making processes in pursuit of localisation principles to ensure sector wide efforts to localise humanitarian

³ Localisation refers to shifting financing and power towards local actors, as detailed in the Grand Bargain Commitments and emerging from the World Humanitarian Summit. For more information, see: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc> and <https://www.icvanetwork.org/resources/grand-bargain-explained-icva-briefing-paper-march-2017>

⁴ And also to contribute to other workstreams such as Participation Revolution, Needs Assessments and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus.

response capacity are inclusive of LFAs. We plan to seek to collaborate with Forum organizing partners and others in carrying out this work.

Action 3.1. Engage and brief signatories to and parties involved in the Grand Bargain process, including the localisation work stream, such as its co-convenors IFRC and Switzerland, and others including the European Commission (EC), other government signatories, the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), towards the inclusion of LFAs as part of the official process and actions in the future.

Action 3.2. Inclusive in the Grand Bargain commitment on direct funding to local and national actors to fund local actors at 25%, assure predictable, flexible and multi-year funding of LFAs. Advocate for the disaggregation of contributions to LFAs from global donors, INGOs, and FBOs.

Action 3.3. Engage humanitarian standard setting bodies, including the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Sphere Standards, and IASC Guidelines, to include the voices of LFAs in standard-setting processes at global, regional, national and local levels. Increase the contextualisation, accessibility and relevance of standards to LFAs.

Action 3.4. Following through Priority 4 of the Sendai Framework on DRR to get “engagement from all of society” and “empowerment of local communities”, consult with governments to assure LFA participation in enhancing disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Brief and engage other global processes such as the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Action 3.5. Engage UN agencies, including the office of the UN Secretary General, to strengthen system-wide UN recognition of the contributions of LFAs in humanitarian response. Brief Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in fragile contexts with evidence for why and how to engage LFAs.

Action 3.6. Work with South-South networks, such as NEAR and others, to ensure broader inclusion of LFAs in humanitarian networks and policy processes at all levels.

Action 3.7. Engage with IFRC, ICRC and National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies on engaging with LFAs in humanitarian response.

Action 3.8. Engage with IGOs and other multilateral organisations around LFAs in humanitarian response.

Goal 4: Establish coordinating mechanisms to support this action plan

To affirm the role of LFAs in humanitarian response, and to add value to ongoing advocacy we wish to recognise and align with the many ongoing complementary processes such as Charter 4 Change (C4C) and the Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action⁵,

Action 4.1. A Working Group on Advocacy for the Inclusion of Local Faith Actors in Humanitarian Response was established at the Forum, as a coordinating mechanism for on-going advocacy and programmatic interventions. 23 people volunteered to participate, with Arne Naess-Holm of Norwegian Church Aid representing ACT Alliance as co-chair, with Amjad Saleem, working in a personal capacity. The Working Group (WG) was charged to develop a detailed plan to accompany this Call to Action, to be taken forward by Forum participants in their respective organisations, networks and in their own countries and regions.

⁵ Developed for the World Humanitarian Summit: <http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/4012>

Action 4.2. The WG will meet quarterly to exchange information, to review opportunities for action, and to track progress. Limited staff support to the WG will be provided by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities through June 2018. In-kind contributions, staff secondment and additional funding raising may also be needed if the WG judges there is utility in proceeding and scaling up.

Action 4.3. The WG commits to an annual review of progress, specifically tracking actions taken by Forum Participants and other actors.

Action 4.4. The WG commits to holding a bi-annual meeting to assess and promote progress on LFA engagement.

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