

2022 STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM REPORT: REFLECTIONS FOR UTILISATION

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Photo: AIDMI.



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This issue was launched at the International Conference On Climate Change, Disaster Resilience and Human Wellbeing, September 16, 2023, Odisha, India; and GRRIPP South Asia Seminar 2023, September 18, 2023, Bangladesh by All India Disaster Mitigation Institute and ALNAP.

Grounding the Global Findings

Since the launch of the [2022 State of the Humanitarian System \(SOHS\) report](#) in Nairobi a year ago, ALNAP has delivered over 50 launches and tailored briefings across the world, including two launches in South Asia. These varied discussions with different actors across the humanitarian system – including local and national civil society organisations and NGOs, governments, INGOs, UN agencies, donors and academics – have provided valuable opportunities for exploring its findings and implications for different actors. This special issue of *southasiadisasters.net* captures some of these discussions and grounds the findings of the global report in a range of contexts.

Several articles in this issue explore the usefulness to different actors of a global report that assesses the performance of the international humanitarian system. As well as reflecting on ways to utilise the SOHS's findings based on events in Asia, Mihir R. Bhatt discusses the new *Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India* report and how it complements the SOHS's global view. While Vishal Pathak provides useful reflections from discussions on the SOHS report at sub-regional events in India and Manish Patel summarises COAST Foundation's overview of participant reactions at a sharing event in Bangladesh. Ayodhya Krishani Amarajeewa's article welcomes the utility of a global

overview in informing humanitarian work in Sri Lanka, and underscores the importance of contextualizing global baselines with local realities. Michael Barnett concludes the issue with a discussion of global humanitarian trends and highlights the evolution of evidence over the 15 years covered by the five editions of the SOHS.

Several articles give contextual depth to themes discussed in the SOHS. The importance of local humanitarian action and limited progress towards the localization of assistance are highlighted by several authors. Sudhanshu S. Singh explores the impact of limited direct funding to local actors and paths for institutional strengthening in India, while Miro Modrusan discusses the lack of quality funding for local actors, which inhibits their investment in administrative overheads and staff security. Complementing the discussion on increasing local agency through funding, Delu Lusambya highlights the challenge for local actors to engage in decision-making and coordination structures in DRC. While Regina S. Antequisa discusses the importance of new approaches to shifting power to local actors and accessing humanitarian assistance in the face of climate threats in the Philippines.

Other articles focus on the need to put crisis-affected people at the centre of humanitarian action, an

By Dr. Jennifer Doherty, ALNAP, UK

area of limited progress in the SOHS report. Masuda Farouk Ratna highlights the role of grassroots work that is embedded in communities in Bangladesh, taking gender and people with disabilities into account in programming. Palwashay Arba underscores the need for agencies to include women and marginalised groups in needs assessments, and highlights the move to more cash-based assistance as a means to provide greater dignity to communities in Pakistan.

The 2022 SOHS report concluded with a reflection on the future of humanitarian action and the ways it might need to adapt to meet future hazards. This is a theme taken up by Hanna A. Ruszczuk in her article hypothesizing futures for the humanitarian system, including the challenge of an increasingly blurred line between humanitarian action and development programming. Rafiqul Islam Khokan outlines ways organisations in Bangladesh are already adapting to meet the growing threat of repeated climate events by complimenting humanitarian response with improved resilience planning and strengthened early warning systems.

The reflections on the 2022 SOHS findings and the important thematic issues and approaches discussed in these articles will provide valuable food for thought as ALNAP embarks on the creation of the 6th edition of the report. ■

The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 launch in Delhi: Reflections from India

By Mihir R. Bhatt, AIDMI, India, and Dr. Jennifer Doherty, ALNAP, UK



ALNAP Research Fellow Jen Doherty delivering the keynote presentation of *The State of the Humanitarian System 2022* in Delhi. Photo credit: AIDMI.

On 24 April 2023 the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) and ALNAP held a joint event to share the global findings of *The State of the Humanitarian System 2022* with the humanitarian community in Delhi and to discuss them in relation to the Indian context. In the afternoon, WFP India presented a new report co-created with AIDMI and Sphere India focused on [Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India](#).

The following day, ALNAP Research Fellow Jen Doherty sat down with AIDMI's Director Mihir R. Bhatt to reflect on the lively discussions.

The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) is a global report that analyses the performance of the humanitarian system by aggregating information from different organisations and crisis-

affected countries. How do you see such a report being useful in the Indian context?

This SOHS report helps put the humanitarian system in India into the global context. It helps to show where India is doing well, where it is not doing well, and what it can pick up from the global context to help serve its affected citizens better, faster and more adequately. It's a significant and timely global report that also helps India as a 'new', 'Southern' donor to a few countries mentioned in the SOHS, from neighbours such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal to, most recently, Turkey. What can India do to be a better global humanitarian donor? This report will be especially helpful to India when it comes to promoting the Disaster 20 (D-20) group within the G20, of which India is the current

president. So the SOHS report is useful to India in the global, national and local contexts.

The participants in the event yesterday came from a wide section of India's humanitarian community, including local and national NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, academics and UN agencies, the private sector, tech firms and others. Based on their discussions, what themes and issues from the global report do you think resonated most with participants?

At least two themes rang true to the participants in Delhi immediately: accountability to affected populations and locally led initiatives. India is keen to ensure prompt and effective relief that means not only that citizens build back better, but that loss and damage are reduced and recovery is used to

transform risk reduction and resilience-building capacities at the local level. Any transformation can only be sustainable if it is locally led and accountable to at least the affected populations.

Why do you think those particular issues are important for humanitarian work in India?

Because India is determined to unleash the energy of its citizens, not only to drive progress in their chosen directions and through their own efforts, but also to protect that progress from shocks associated with humanitarian crises – including climate crises such as rising sea levels and high altitude glacier meltdowns. Local leadership to reduce risk and lead recovery is more effective in terms of cost, time and effort. Who better than Ladakh citizens to lead the recovery from a cloud burst or glacier meltdown, as AIDMI found out from its work in the city of Leh with the Local Hill Area Council? Who better than the Kolis of Versova in Mumbai to address the rising sea level, as AIDMI has seen in its work with Mumbai 61 under the TAPESTRY

project? Local leadership, especially by affected populations and stakeholders, is paramount in making India’s humanitarian system work better and faster.

We’re already thinking about creating the sixth edition of the SOHS and the discussions yesterday provided a lot of food for thought. How do you hope the SHS India will evolve in the coming years?

SHS India is already evolving after the Delhi event, where the participants raised the need for SHS India II. AIDMI is busy inviting core groups to plan the product and process, and ALNAP is most welcome to be more directly involved. The current SHS India report will act as a baseline, and any changes – progress or the lack thereof – will be tracked in the next publication. In addition, as the consensus in Delhi suggested, new themes such as women’s access to relief, scoping emerging technologies (such as drones and AI), and examples of long-term impact will be added in the coming years. The next draft will have far more

material on civil society organisations and local initiatives such as the Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society, Unnati, the Centre for Youth and Social Development, Bal Raksha and UNICEF’s local partners. AIDMI has put the process in motion and suggestions for further focus are coming in: the changing climate, adaptation-related migration, organic agriculture, air and water pollution, green transition shelter, decarbonised logistics, the protection of the maritime infrastructure and jobs, the business continuity of the agriculture sector, anticipatory actions, forests as carbon fixers, the role of rivers and lakes, and a new humanitarian view of high altitude locations in the Himalayas such as Ladakh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

It’s exciting to already see the momentum building for the SHS India initiative. I look forward to keeping in touch and sharing learning between our organisations as we move forward with the next iteration of the SOHS and you develop the next SHS India. ■



AIDMI Director Mihir R. Bhatt addressing the audience as chair of the launch event for their report Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India and ALNAP’s 2022 State of the Humanitarian System in Delhi. Photo credit: AIDMI.

State of the Humanitarian System Report 2022 Launched in Asia Pacific

By Mihir R. Bhatt, AIDMI, India



All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) joins the panel at the launch of the State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) Report 2022 at the Regional Partnership Forum in Bangkok on December 9, 2022.

AIDMI has welcomed and started using the SOHS report since its launch in Kenya by ALNAP with and for the affected population and the following forward-looking directions for utilisation have emerged.

1. For strengthening sufficiency direct funds to build and support local alliances of the vulnerable and affected population so that they can better demand, receive, manage, support, prepare and anticipate. **Measure** not how much money is pledged, allocated, or used, but **how much money is capitalised at the grassroots with local alliances of victim populations** at the local level,

due to relief to recovery efforts. **The lower the money goes, the longer it helps with recovery**, AIDMI has found in its work with affected populations. Cash transfer is one way. The stabilisation fund is another. Social Impact Funds is yet another example. Livelihood Resilience Fund is one more example. These examples have come up from the pandemic-affected social enterprise leaders.

2. For consolidating relevance and appropriateness discussion on nature-based local humanitarian preparedness solutions and top-down solutions are important but

lateral movement of local humanitarian solutions within the system is limited and must be made more direct and vibrant across the humanitarian initiatives and actions. AIDMI is busy conceptualising this idea to make it actionable in its work with UNICEF and hundreds of local schools to have the lateral movement of pandemic recovery solutions.

3. For widening effectiveness as one heatwave victim addressing leaders from ten locations in city of Ahmedabad said, we do not want humanitarian relief or compensation or building back better, but **we want relief that transforms us and our**

condition from vulnerability to strength, now and in future. Relief now must focus on transformation tomorrow. Put transformation on the localisation agenda, **encourage national and sub-national authorities in the system to pick up transformative capacities** and skills and capabilities for humanitarian response.

4. For deepening coherence system must **localise but also decentralise** so that local centres of power—public, private, and other—do not bottleneck the relief and recovery being effective. This **decentralisation must be democratic in process** and structures, with a focus not on the majority but on the excluded minorities and groups. This direction of work has come up during a review of the humanitarian evaluation of recent flood relief in Gujarat by excellent Dalit groups.
5. For broader coverage the women victims of the heatwave demanded to **“Feminise” the Humanitarian System** all the way down to the local level and in all shelter to food to cash programmes. “Feminisation” should be as strong an agenda as localisation of the humanitarian system in coming years, suggested the drought and flood-affected group of women in a survey for GRRIPP partners in South Asia.
6. For diverse coverage **Women farmers and farm labour** are least visible in humanitarian system activities and programmes in the Asia Pacific and their role must be bigger in the system and be **mentioned in the excluded or left out groups of the system**. This direction

come up from the farmers of Asia underlying better coverage.

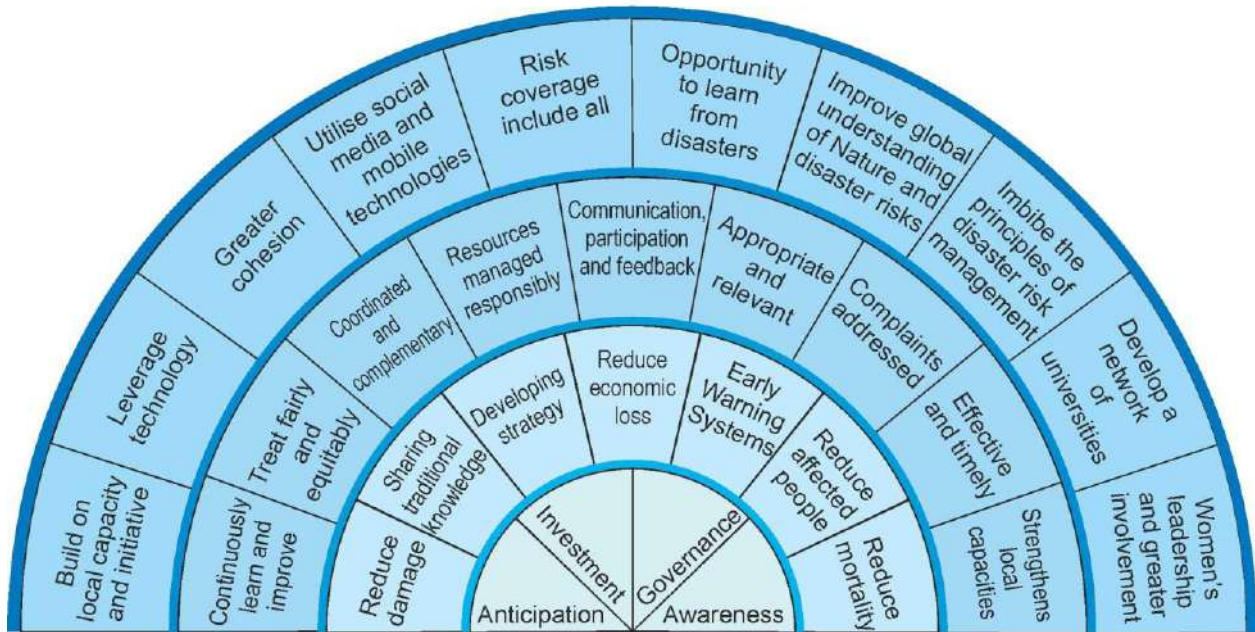
7. For suitable complementarity affected members of social enterprise for agriculture all humanitarian actions must lead to **building inclusive and sustainable victim-driven Green Economies**, and not perpetuate the economy that is on its way out, that pollutes air and heats our cities faster than shares fruits of prosperity.
8. For expanding sufficiency **universal and flexible social protection to all victims** be a first step after all relief and as a full component of all recovery programmes. Not only cover the protection of life but also the protection of livelihood, shelter, education, health, connectivity, and finance.
9. For strengthening connectedness far more recognition is needed of the local ongoing adaptation to resilience and recovery efforts within humanitarian action, as are made in the heatwave crisis this year. Victims adapt, and these **adaptations need to be funded and supported**, not ignored or side-stepped in humanitarian recovery. This direction is emerging with affected populations in family farms in three states of India.
10. For advancing relevance and appropriateness find system-wide ways to track and support long-term impact (unfolding) for example the pandemic as COVID-19 fourth wave unfolds in Europe and India but also unfolding aspects such as weak lungs or slow kidney performance. In other words, a system must track the long-term

health impact of the pandemic and other humanitarian crisis and actions. One way to do so is to underline lessons learned exercise across sectors and events but also **develop “long-term impact lessons learned” as an additional lessons learned track**. This direction has emerged from the pandemic victims and their families.

11. For accelerating localisation, so far local leadership of the affected population is taken for granted and SOHS points this out well and ways must be found so that the system recognises and invests in the local leaders before, after, and during the crisis. At least **half the funds must be managed and used by local affected population leaders** for a wider, common, and public purpose within the system to be more effective.

Thanks to Alice Obrecht, Sophia Swithern, and Jennifer Doherty for such a useful SOHS report. The above eleven are AIDMI directions for utilisation of the State of Humanitarian System (SOHS) Report by ALNAP that is coming out of AIDMI work with and for the affected population and this is what I think will find resonance with the individuals and organisations engaged in humanitarian action and learning. And should there be any need AIDMI is always available to think through the SOHS utilisation with project, programme, or organisation. AIDMI is utilising SOHS reports in policy-shaping, capacity building, pilot project design, evaluation and learning assignments and generating more and new knowledge around our humanitarian action. ■

2022 SOHS Report: Utilisation Ideas



A wide range of individuals and institutions reached out to AIDMI during and after the launch events to suggest how they will use the SOHS report in their individual work, their organisations, and in various policy planning and programme designs. The list, more than 50 items, are arranged into four key areas of investments, anticipation, awareness, and governance to give a general sense of the nature and extent of utilisation of SOHS in India and South Asia that is unfolding. It will be good to track some of them in the long term, add more uses as they come up. ■

By AIDMI

Welcome Voices for SOHS

"Very timely report as India takes next steps towards shelter for all victims."

"Now we need a list of ten actions that will reduce deaths to half."

"How is SOHS different for women victims of crisis? Any gendered picture of SOHS can shared?"

"Time to do SOHS report in China, Bangladesh, Philippines, Sudan, Yemen, and Ukraine is due."

"How can SOHS Report will help rapidly and radically localise the humanitarian system?"

"What are the three tough colonial hangovers of the humanitarian system?"

"And will big data lead the system on the system will improve by using big data?"

"Where is the scope for social impact investment, in the system now or in future?"

"What are the best ways to transfer good work in one location, organisation, or sector to the other?"

"Why India's universities do not come on same platform to initiate similar reports for WASH, protection, and livelihood aspects of humanitarian action?"

Above are some of the striking voices in Delhi, Dhaka, and Bhubaneswar sharing of SOHS that attracted attention. ■

By AIDMI

State of the Humanitarian System Report 2022 Launched in Odisha, India

By Vishal Pathak, AIDMI, India



All India Disaster Management Institute (AIDMI) in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence on Climate Change and Disaster Resilience (CCDR), Berhampur University, Odisha organized a regional sharing of the report of the State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) 2022, developed by Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) in humanitarian action on June 21, 2023, at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Around 30 local participants from different walks of life participated in this roundtable. Photo credit: AIDMI.

A heated discussion was held among participants on the SOHS report, the role of the private sector, cost of relief, the flow of funds, cost-effectiveness, drivers of threat, and utilisation of evaluations. Dr. Shakuntala Nanda raised the

challenges of utilisation of such reports of the local level.

It was decided to do a local subnational report on Odisha and Berhampur University took the lead with UNICEF and UNDP offering support. Dr. Omkar Khare of

UNICEF welcomed such sharing efforts at a sub-national level. Dr. Abha Mishra of UNDP appreciated the coverage of challenges that are between the margins of disaster risk reduction, changing climate, and humanitarian action. ■

SOHS in Local IAG Meeting in Gujarat

The IAG Gujarat meeting was organised on August 19, 2023, at Ahmedabad, where AIDMI chaired and utilised the ideas from SOHS global and SHSI India report to set up agenda for greater accountability, more greener humanitarian action, and local corporate fund mobilisation. Focus on coastal safety, building PDNA capacity, and review of recent cyclone Biparjoy was discussed in the light of SOHS findings by local CSOs including Unnati, Red Cross, SETU, UNICEF, and others.

Gujarat remains a leading state of India where new and innovative ideas for change in humanitarian system has come up since 2001 Gujarat earthquake.

SOHS in Sphere India Annual Meeting

AIDMI was invited to make the opening remarks to set the scene for Sphere India's 2023 annual meeting on 'Strengthening The Humanitarian System in India Across Sectors' on August 18, 2023. AIDMI set the scene drawing from SOHS Global and SHS India report and set up the idea to use the two reports to build the programme capacity of the local organisations. Need for new research capacity, innovation need, and follow up of the pandemic preparedness demand was discussed as a starting point.

Sphere India is a hub of new initiatives and organisations at the grassroots leading inter-agency coordination and localisation agenda in India.

Concerns Over Humanitarian Funding Gap and Advocate for Localisation of Aid: 2022 SOHS Report Launched in Dhaka



“State of the Humanitarian System Report 2022: Bangladesh Perspective” was organized by COAST Foundation with support from ALNAP, a London-based network of humanitarian agencies, May 20, 2023. Photo credit: [COAST Foundation](#).

At a seminar held in Dhaka, concerns were raised by speakers regarding the disparity between humanitarian needs and received funds. They stressed the importance of promoting aid localization to reduce operational costs. The seminar, titled “State of the Humanitarian System Report 2022: Bangladesh Perspective,” was organized by COAST Foundation with support from ANLAP, a global network of humanitarian agencies.

Mihir Bhatt presented the sharing of the global SOHS report in Delhi and its reception by national CSOs as

well as the sharing of the SHS India report by WFP, Sphere India, and AIDMI. He called for a transfer of such methods and tools as well as SOHS report across South Asia which is one of the hotspots of innovations in and around humanitarian action.

Jennifer Doherty highlighted the global escalation of conflicts, disasters, and displacement, further exacerbated by the pandemic. Forced displacement doubled to 89.3 million in 2021, with 161 million people facing acute food insecurity. The need for humanitarian aid surged to

\$255 million in 2021, projected to reach \$339 million in 2023. Concentration of funding and limited support for UN agencies reveal vulnerabilities in the humanitarian system.

Read full article [click here](#)

Read The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 launch in Dhaka: localisation and the future of the Rohingya population [click here](#) ■

Summarised by Manish Patel, AIDMI with permission from COAST Foundation.

Reflection on the SOHS Report from the Indian Perspective

By *Sudhanshu S. Singh, Founder & CEO, Humanitarian Aid International, New Delhi, India*

The fifth edition of the State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report, published by ALNAP in 2022, while highlighting some positive trends, also presents some alarming statistics which continue to create barriers for local and national organisations. Unfortunately, the global humanitarian architecture is not changing enough despite the commitments made under the Grand Bargain, Charter4Change, and the recent framework of Pledge4Change for localisation and locally-led development.

Although the SOHS report largely reflects on the global humanitarian architecture, which is not completely relevant in the contexts like India, yet, quite a few system flaws are impediments in India, too. We shall particularly be focusing on the following three points, identified in the SOHS report:

1. Fatigue among the affected population:

People, living in disaster hotspots, are tired of surviving on perpetual humanitarian aid. They are more desperate for economic empowerment and normalcy which the current humanitarian system doesn't prioritise, and this scenario underpins the necessity of a nexus approach with a strong mainstreaming of climate angle. To work on that, HAI has established a Tech4Aid platform to integrate technology in all phases of disaster management. HAI believes disasters are manifestations of accumulated

and unresolved problems exacerbated by climate change. Therefore, each disaster response should be taken as an opportunity to understand underlying causes through drone mapping, historical satellite imageries etc., to appropriately plan humanitarian and development interventions. At the national and global levels, HAI is also advocating to have more focus on seeking durable solutions. A paper Shrink the Needs¹ has been authored in this regard.

2. Poor access to funding:

Grand Bargain and Charter4Change, inter alia, committed to pass on at least 25% of funding to local and national actors as directly as possible by 2020. However, according to the SOHS report, 1.2% of direct funding reached the local and national actors in 2021 at the global level. The situation at the India level is not clear

as we do not have a mechanism for country-level reporting. HAI is trying to address this problem at several levels. At the global level, HAI is engaged with the Grand Bargain as one of the sherpas to influence the next phase of the Grand Bargain, which thankfully now emphasises on shrinking the needs and more localisation actions at the country level. HAI is also engaged in the coordination group of Charter4Change and is a supporter of Pledge4Change to promote locally-led development.

At the country level, HAI has constituted a platform LOCAL (Local Organisations Coalition for Advancing Localisation), which as of now comprises of 20 grassroots organisations from 12 states of India. Through this platform, collectively we are trying to strengthen each others' capacity and thereby have



¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/shrink-needs-grander-bargain-no-longer-option-necessity>

better access to funding. The Accountability Charter² of LOCAL is binding on each member to demonstrate the highest level of accountability and transparency. The LOCAL platform is also in the process of establishing a National Dashboard for publishing financial data. It is expected, this national dashboard will help to measure the percentage of funding reaching the affected population through local organisations and the quality of it.

3. Institutional strengthening of local organisations:

The SOHS report observes, “On average UN staff gets paid more than double their INGO peers, and staff of INGOs on an average get paid more than six times of L/NGOs staffers”. This is a serious problem facing the L/NGOs and constantly eroding their institutional capacity. Frontline workers, often working in odd

conditions, rarely get paid reasonably and often lack social security benefits. L/NGOs find it difficult to attract and retain proper humanitarian resources, that can help them for organisational intellectual growth and thereby lead the process of transformation. HAI has constantly been raising this issue at all levels and succeeded in getting it included in a few Grand Bargain documents. Through the LOCAL platform, an open letter³ was sent to the country offices of INGOs, donors, and UN agencies in India to understand the progress made by them on the localisation commitments. The response to this letter has been lukewarm, as the majority of the country offices do not share the global commitments made by their headquarters. Therefore, this issue needs further follow-up and

advocacy, which HAI will continue in the years to come.

Most of the documents, including SOHS, show the urgency for system reform in the humanitarian sector, yet the sector fails to reform adequately. The needs are constantly growing. The funding is also growing but not in the same proportion and not being utilised efficiently. According to the Passing the Buck report, even if 25% of the funding is passed on to L/NHAs, it would help save \$4.1 billion because of their operational efficiency. This is why, the system needs to change and the L/NGOs have to be at the forefront of humanitarian responses. The North-South model has taken substantial time and produced little results. This is the time to look for a South-South framework and solutions within. ■

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Opinion on Practices Global Humanitarian Utilization of SOHS Report in Bangladesh

By *Masuda Farouk Ratna*, Executive Director, Gram Bikash Shohayak Shangstha (GBSS), Dhaka, Bangladesh

Gram Bikash Shohayak Shangstha, popularly known as GBSS, is a female-headed non-government organization GBSS has a country as well as a global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to assist people to build better life. GBSS actively participate as a member in regular meeting, workshops, seminars; exchange views and ideas, share information

and best practices; review priority issue, recommend a practical and realistic solution to problems.

GBSS is working with the vision to organized distressed males, females and the disabled into groups for participatory self-reliance. i.e. a society promoting Political, Social, and Economic empowerment of the disadvantaged citizens. GBSS has a group of the well-experienced and skilled core staff for running the core

program of the organization related to humanitarian program.

GBSS is gathering evidence to highlight their socio-economic and human rights situation and bring it to the attention of policy-makers, development partners and general public to influence policy formulation, planning and implementation.

The organization is unique in that it address the causes of the PWD's/ (person's with disability) with

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/india/local-accountability-charter>

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/india/open-letter-international-actors-committed-reforming-aid-architecture-locally-led-development-and-humanitarian-response-india>



simultaneous interventions in the live of organized groups of disadvantages and poor.

In the regard of ALNAP State of the humanitarian system report 2022 (SOHS) Bangladesh perspective launched in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 20 May 2023 I was in there. Report was undoubtedly very good and informative with statistical data including Bangladesh case study: COVID-19 in COX'S Bazer. Author: local researcher, Bangladesh. There is no author's mane withheld to protect the author's identity.

As a representative of Gram Bikash Shohayak Shangstha (GBSS) observation is that the State of the Humanitarian System Case Study in SOHS only focused on the issues of Rohingya and also the COVID-19.

Three decades of working experience in the ground of Humanity we would like to share the utilization of SOHS Report in Bangladesh and how to contribute locally. Gram

Bikash Shohayak Shangstha (GBSS) believe in the process of localization that is we would like to see the reflection of Localization and Charter 4 change in the local disaster-affected community.

Localization system/process of implementation towards cost reduction to give the roles and responsibility to the local administration and to take part local NGO's act to take the active participation.

- The Joint Response Plan should be considered an ongoing document. i.e., a document can be used to identify new problems and add solutions as time and time require. This important document should be reconsidered in relation to the Grand Bargain commitment. There is little reflection of all these promises.
- Similar labor pool should be determined for local communities and Rohingyas.

There should be no discrimination in this matter.

- There is no gender sensitized in Rohingya rehabilitation program.

Recommendation:

1. Increase direct funding to southern-based NGO's for humanitarian action reaffirm the principal of partnership increase transference around resource transfer to southern-based national and local NGOs.
2. Stop undermining the capacities of local NGOs, CBOs and philanthropic participation.
3. Rise to voice Emphasize the importance of local NGOs and CBOs voices in communication to the media and the public about the partner's activities.
4. We will try to form a dynamic and descent, accountable, gender-balanced civil society as a watchdog. ■

Resilience and Early Warning in Bangladesh

By Rafiqul Islam Khokan, Founder & Executive Director, Rupantar, Bangladesh

Rupantar is a non-government organization (NGO) that has been working in the development field of Bangladesh since 1995. Rupantar carries out its activities under a long-term programmatic vision articulated in its strategic planning from 2019 through 2023. As per the strategic plan, Rupantar focuses all its initiatives under five programmatic areas, i.e., Democracy & Political Empowerment, Peace & Tolerance, Disaster Management & Climate Change Adaptation, Children and Youth Rights, and Popular Media & Folk Theatre. Rupantar operates all over Bangladesh and has a strong presence in the coastal region. Rupantar believes its humanitarian system is crucial in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations affected by various emergencies and ongoing challenges. Rupantar aims to ensure the protection, well-being, and resilience of the affected communities through its humanitarian interventions. Also,

several fundamental principles are followed to ensure effectiveness and maximize the impact of humanitarian interventions, including local leadership, avoiding harm, and ensuring dignity.

Bangladesh's government's proactive approach to disaster preparedness and robust coordination mechanisms have played a pivotal role in saving lives and minimizing the impact of natural disasters like cyclones and floods. Additionally, the government's commitment to building resilience and investing in early warning systems has enhanced the effectiveness of disaster response efforts. International humanitarian organizations are also very active in Bangladesh to make a sustainable, resilient community. Rupantar's humanitarian efforts continually improve to maximize effectiveness and align with the government and other humanitarian organizations' initiatives. Thus, rigorous needs

assessments, beneficiary mapping, evidence-based programming, and outcome-oriented monitoring and evaluation processes are involved. Rupantar practice transparency and accountability in the operations, ensuring that resources are utilized efficiently and results are measured and communicated to stakeholders. Besides, the mechanism focuses on community engagement and empowerment has also yielded positive results, enabling affected communities to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to their recovery actively.

Recognizing the importance of local knowledge, expertise, and ownership, the humanitarian system of Rupantar emphasizes a locally-led approach through a collaborative effort involving and empowering communities, civil society organizations, youth volunteers, local elected representatives, and government agencies in the planning, implementing, and evaluating humanitarian initiatives. Rupantar, as a local actor, is best positioned to understand the socio-political context, cultural norms, and specific needs of affected communities, thereby enabling more targeted and effective interventions. Moreover, Rupantar thoroughly follows Bangladesh Government policy Standing Orders on Disaster (SoD), Disaster Management Act, and Sphere Standards in its humanitarian intervention mechanism.

Respecting and upholding the dignity of individuals and communities is a fundamental aspect of the humanitarian response



Participatory Ward Vulnerability Assessment by the Community people, local elected leaders.



Beneficiary Mapping by the Community leaders, local Leaders, CS for livelihood support.

mechanism of Rupantar. Efforts are made to assist in a manner that preserves people's privacy, cultural identity, and self-respect. Rupantar humanitarian actors strive to create safe spaces that promote inclusivity, gender equality, and non-discrimination, providing access to essential services, such as clean water, food, healthcare, and shelter,

in a dignified manner and supporting activities that restore people's sense of agency, self-reliance, and resilience.

The humanitarian system strives to prevent and minimize harm to affected populations by adopting Rupantar's "do no harm" principle, which made its humanitarian actors

carefully consider the potential negative consequences of the particular interventions. These principles ensure that assistance does not inadvertently exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, create dependency, or disrupt local economies and social structures. Measures are also taken to mitigate potential risks, including safeguarding the protection and rights of marginalized groups such as women, children, and climate refugees.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist within the humanitarian system in Bangladesh, including funding gaps, complex emergencies, climate change impacts, and population displacements. However, through a commitment to these principles, continuous learning, and adaptation,

Rupantar's humanitarian system aims to address these challenges and work toward the practical and dignified support of affected populations in Bangladesh. ■

SRI LANKA PERSPECTIVE

Use and Usefulness of SOHS to Local Organisations in Sri Lanka

By Ayodhya Krishani Amarajeewa, Manager – Marketing & Communications, Janathakshan GTE Ltd., Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has been facing a unique humanitarian crisis since the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the debt default which impacted the country right after the Pandemic. A country in economic, social and political crisis, the years 2019 to 2022, Sri Lanka's projected development has reversed irrecoverably. While investing on health of the population during the Pandemic, the country later struggled to provide the basic necessities to the people like food,

gas and fuel the main veins of a country's survival. With this came the political crisis in 2022, during which the general public took to the streets to protest against the then government and parliament itself. Overthrowing of the then President for making wrong decisions including tax wavier and shifting from chemical fertilizers to organic fertilizer created an economic crisis and a food insecurity in the country. With 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attacks, country was already on the

verge of a regression as the tourism sector completely hit by the government's inability to ensure personal security of those who visit the country as well as those who live in the country. This plethora of internal problems in the country intensified the economic downturn, and as of now the country is facing a critical inflation situation with government facing challenges to prove that they are corruption-free to obtain assistance from international entities.

This background sets a humanitarian crisis in the country requiring local organizations like Janathakshan GTE Ltd. to mobilize its technical expertise and development interventions to recover the economy and provide instant solutions in terms of addressing food insecurity and other grassroots level economic crisis. In this context, SOHS is very much useful to map the local context against the global unfolding. The key facts and figures presented in SOHS reflect how the local organizations should seek humanitarian assistance from international organizations and how the strategy to develop humanitarian interventions at the local level needs to be formulated accordingly.

SOHS lay the foundation to local organizations who are working in humanitarian sector to identify global contributors, their evaluation of the needs of the countries in crisis and localization of the humanitarian assistance with extended support from international organizations. The briefings on different thematic

Sri Lanka at a glance

Sri Lanka is going through its worst economic crisis in more than 70 years. Protesters are angry over unprecedented shortages of food, fuel and medicine.



areas identified by SOHS could be expanded with the inclusion of other political and economic crisis that developing countries like Sri Lanka face and how to respond to them. The Briefing on Locally-led action

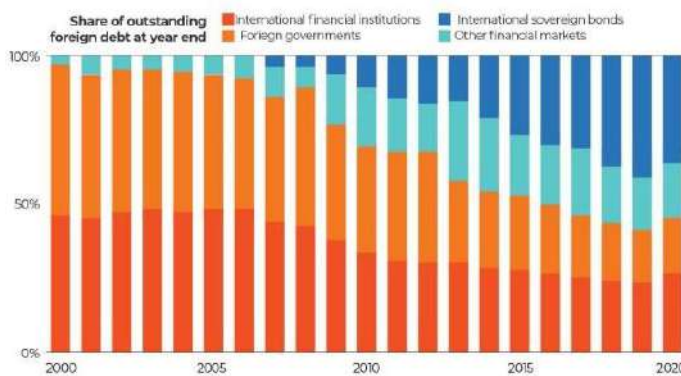
provides guidance to local organizations to bring back the lost confidence in facing the local challenges with limited support from elsewhere.

Further, if SOHS can demonstrate the success of the local organizations in partnering with international bodies in the provision of humanitarian assistance while ensuring corruption is either zero or insignificant, and that international organizations are conscious of the corruption in the governments in developing countries like Sri Lanka that would set the standards for local organizations who are independent of the governments to act upon to engage in responses during crisis minimizing the government's corrupted system from misusing humanitarian assistance.

SOHS sets the stage to local organizations to refer to a standard as they build their modalities to fit the needs of the local communities in countries like Sri Lanka against the global set up. ■

Sri Lanka's foreign debt

Borrowing from capital markets is Sri Lanka's largest source of foreign funding.



Foreign Debt Summary (as of April 2021)



By the end of April 2021, total outstanding external debt of the Government was **\$35.1 billion**.

\$981.0 MILLION TOTAL DEBT SERVICE PAYMENTS FROM 1ST JANUARY TO 30TH APRIL 2021
\$520.6 MILLION PRINCIPAL REPAYMENTS | \$460.4 MILLION FOR THE PAYMENT OF INTEREST.

Source: Reuters, Department of External Resources | Date: April 5, 2022



From Evidence to Action: Using the SOHS 2022 Report to Evaluate and Improve Humanitarian Performance

By *Palwashay Arbab*, Head of Communications and Gender Justice Focal Point, CWSA, Karachi, Pakistan

ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) is a great tool to help shape strategic plans, design proposals and more importantly provides evidence and analysis for learning and evaluation so as to effectively identify gaps and challenges. For Community World Service Asia (CWSA) and its various stakeholders, it has reiterated some of the learnings we have experienced through action on the ground. It has also paved a way towards how best to adapt to changing contexts where we must diversify funding sources, enhance quality and learning and increase meaningful community engagement.

Over the last three years, we have faced unprecedented challenges in our operational context in Afghanistan and Pakistan, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change impact, economic uncertainty leading to rising poverty and shrinking humanitarian space. Exhibiting resilience and innovation in responding to these crises, CWSA engaged primarily in increased cash-based assistance, which helped reduce management costs, enhanced participation and contributed towards a more effective humanitarian response by enabling affected communities to spend on what they needed the most. We have also identified gaps and weaknesses that still exist in sector-wide local coordination, accountability, inclusion and localization in its true essence while struggling to survive in a sector that has now become too competitive.



CWSA's Afghanistan Crisis Response.

As supported by the SOHS 2022 findings as well, we have seen through our humanitarian efforts in multiple crisis responses in Afghanistan and the Pakistan Floods 2022 response that cash programming (CTP) can be more effective and efficient than in-kind aid in such situations. It gives people more choice, dignity and flexibility to meet their needs. It can also support the local economy and markets by increasing the demand for goods and services. We have also seen that cash programming can improve food security, dietary diversity and quality, feed into household savings and asset ownership (livestock or tuck shop businesses in most cases) among people affected by disasters.

While CWSA has invested in updating their systems, skillsets and

processes to make the best use of CTP, it believes that in emergencies more time and resources are needed where the response time frame is short, and routinely engaging with communities at the field level to ensure programme relevance and quality becomes challenging. This goes back to the needs assessment stage as well; the short time frames for developing the proposals that design the project cycle, followed by short-term funding that does not include time or resourcing for deeper assessments. However, CWSA has made a particular effort to ensure women and more marginalised voices are included in needs assessment phases as well as throughout the project phase either through investing in thorough complaints and feedback systems or close engagement with long-term community-based structures. ■

The 2022 State of The Humanitarian System: Locally-led Actions

By *Regina S. Antequisa*, Executive Director, Ecosystems Work for Essential Benefits (ECOWEB), Philippines

The 2022 edition of The State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report provides a comprehensive overview of the global humanitarian landscape. Although the case studies are confined to specific countries, their implications reverberate significantly with the state of the humanitarian system in the Philippines and numerous other nations, as underscored by firsthand accounts from local actors engaged in the localization movement.

As a proactive local actor dedicated to reshaping the humanitarian system into one genuinely centered around the people affected by crises, the ALNAP SOHS 2022 report, despite its limited dataset and case studies, constitutes compelling evidence that strengthens the drive for the localization of aid. The featured case studies resolutely endorse our advocacy for a community-driven and locally-guided approach to humanitarian endeavors—an approach that we have substantiated as more cost-effective and demonstrably aligned

with the principles of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).

Remarkably, the report explains that while there exists a commendable commitment to AAP among humanitarian leaders, tangible actions within the humanitarian system are regrettably scarce.

In this regard, I wish to highlight two pivotal aspects from the report that hold immense relevance to our context and undertakings.

Aspect 1: Survivor / Community / Locally-led Humanitarian Actions—AAP in Action

The report has brought to light persistent gaps in need fulfillment and satisfaction, even among recipients of aid. While 56% of ALNAP's survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of aid, but notably:

- merely **34%** thought aid met their most pressing needs.
- **39%** of survey respondents said that they were satisfied with the amount of aid they received.
- just **36%** thought aid reached the people who needed it the most.

The survivor and community-led crisis response (SCLR) approach, as examined in the research and actively promoted by entities like ECOWEB, CLEARNet, and our allied partners, has already furnished on-the-ground proof that locally-led humanitarian action that empowers crisis-affected self-help groups to devise, prioritize, and execute their own relief initiatives, effectively addresses their pressing needs. Although resource constraints are often a reality, the locally-led approach significantly optimizes the utilization of available resources, ensuring that aid reaches those most in need. Moreover, this approach extends beyond mere assistance provision; it also encompasses the dignity-preservation of crisis-affected populations—an aspect the report identifies as a key concern within the humanitarian sphere.

In essence, the SCLR approach treats crisis-affected individuals as agents capable of aiding themselves and their communities. By doing so, it reinforces the inherent dignity of people facing crises—a pivotal facet acknowledged by the report.

Aspect 2: Slow actualization of Grand Bargain commitment on Localisation of Aid despite strong evidence on the crucial role of Local Actors as revealed during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As underscored in the report, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly heightened awareness within the international humanitarian system about the indispensable role carried out by local actors. Nonetheless, despite an augmented acknowledgement of local actors and an amplified reliance on



The SCLR approach activities conducted in crisis-affected communities.

local/national NGOs during the pandemic, meaningful change within the system remained elusive.

The commitment outlined in the Grand Bargain to allocate 25% of funding directly to local and national NGOs has, for the most part, fallen short of realization. It peaked at 3% in 2020, owing to the escalated reliance of international players on local capabilities due to COVID-19, subsequently plummeting to a mere 1.2% by 2021.

Notably, a mere 27% of surveyed humanitarian practitioners provided ratings of 'good' or 'excellent' in relation to the involvement of local and national NGOs in decision-making. This clearly indicates a deficiency in significant transformations concerning decision-making and power dynamics.

The key findings of this research strongly align with the narratives among local actors involved in the Alliance for Empowering Partnerships (A4EP). This collaboration comprises southern actors who are passionately advocating for the localization of humanitarian aid and actively participating in the Grand Bargain processes.

Aspect 3: Increasing Humanitarian Needs, plateauing funding and greater challenges for the crisis-affected to access humanitarian assistance

Important figures to note from the report:

- From 2012 to 2021, twelve countries consistently requested humanitarian aid, and the total financial needs for these ongoing crises more than doubled over the period.
- In 2021, the humanitarian system was able to assist around 106 million people, which accounted for 46% only of those estimated to require support and 69% of those targeted for assistance.
- During the peak of the humanitarian crisis in 2020, the

total appeal requirements amounted to \$39.3 billion, but only 51% of this sum was met.

- While international humanitarian assistance has nearly doubled from \$16.4 billion in 2012 to \$31.3 billion in 2021, funding has hit a plateau in recent years, failing to keep pace with the growing needs. The annual growth rate between 2012 and 2018 averaged 10%, but by 2021, this rate had dropped to 2.5%.
- According to the report, UN-coordinated appeals highlighted that the number of people in need increased by 87%, reaching 255.1 million individuals in 2021 from 2018. The year 2020 saw a significant peak due to the impact of COVID-19.

This statistic holds particular significance for countries like the Philippines, which, being classified as a "middle-income" nation, has gradually slipped down the priority list of numerous humanitarian agencies. Several international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have taken the step of closing their country offices in the Philippines. Although this might have indicated progress towards a localization agenda, the departure of these international agencies often brings about a cessation of funding as well. This is a paradoxical situation given the Philippines' vulnerability to climate change, regularly grappling with typhoons, as well as a plethora of other climatic and geologic hazards. Evidently, the Philippines occupied the top spot in The World Risk Index 2022 (released in September) among 193 nations worldwide.

Over the past five years, a concerning trend has emerged wherein numerous individuals affected by crises have faced formidable challenges in accessing humanitarian funding. This predicament has persisted even in the aftermath of the

latest major catastrophe—Super [Typhoon Rai](#) which hit the Philippines in December 2021. This devastating typhoon impacted 16 million people, displacing over 3 million, claiming the lives of more than 400 individuals, and causing damage to a staggering 1.9 million homes.

SOHS reported that throughout the reporting period, the demand for assistance has surged due to a confluence of factors, including conflicts, climate-related disasters, and the ongoing ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. In conjunction with financial constraints, an array of practical obstacles has impeded the effective distribution of humanitarian aid to those who are most in need. These challenges encompass an escalating authoritarian environment, persisting COVID-19 restrictions, stringent anti-terrorism legislation, and ongoing conflicts, collectively exacerbating the hurdles in reaching and supporting affected populations. This holds true in many vulnerable communities in the Philippines.

In conclusion, the data and narrative presented in the 2022 SOHS report offer compelling evidence in favor of continuing efforts to establish a more inclusive and impactful humanitarian paradigm. The case studies illuminate existing gaps and provides a roadmap for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system, especially in light of growing needs amidst relatively stagnant humanitarian resources. With a collective commitment from advocates driving humanitarian transformation, there is a promising opportunity to translate the findings of the report into tangible initiatives by major humanitarian agencies to shape a humanitarian system that genuinely prioritizes the well-being of those it aims to assist. ■

Imagining a Future: The Things to Come

By [Hanna A Rusczyk](#), Institute of Hazard, Risk, and Resilience, Department of Geography, Durham University, UK

The SOHS 2022 is an invaluable resource for all actors involved in the many different aspects of humanitarianism. The SOHS aims to provide an independent assessment of humanitarian action, providing a multiscale and layered perspective on the complex humanitarian system. It is also a valuable resource because it provides a stock taking exercise on a range of issues that are plaguing the sector. It is clear that people in the system are passionate about the humanitarian sector and are vested in creating a better future and a better humanitarian sector (but for whom?). Could the SOHS 2022 be more assertive in places? Of course.

Thinking about the “SOHS 2022: Research and Study Agenda Items” leads me to *imagining a future*. The word ‘future’ comes from the latin root *futūrus* “going to be, yet to be” (Online Etymology Dictionary 2022) and it refers to **things to come**. Google (2022) suggests synonyms for future including words such as prospective, forthcoming, inevitable, anticipated, impending as well as imminent.

These are my reflections on *the things to come*:

- I am wondering about the **scope** of humanitarianism given the fact that increasingly it overlaps with the development sector, especially in cities with a multitude of actors each of whom claim a vital space. What should be the scope of the humanitarian sector? There is now a challenge of legitimacy of the international humanitarian sector. How do we define its terrain. This will diverge based on the region and crisis in

How do we think about the future, the “going to be, the yet to be” with our eyes wide open to the multiple futures that await us?

Hanna A Rusczyk



Created by Nilanjana Mannaprayil.

question. Is it overstretched due to its own (misplaced) undertakings? The system is trying to do more and in more places. The humanitarian sector, when properly resourced, does a good job in the short term but not when it moves outside of the short-term future (in my opinion). The humanitarian sector will struggle even more in the future unless the architecture of the system is changed.

- People (survivors, not beneficiaries or target groups) **do not want to be dependent** on aid. Thinking about accountability to affected populations and specifically cash assistance, it should be easy to receive and not from multiple agencies. Thinking about cash as an aid modality requires the system and all the actors to think outside of the existing practices to capitalise on opportunities being made available by

technology while being mindful of dangers associated with it.

- How is **digital technology** changing the sector and what we think about? Technology and digital are often intertwined with a sense of inevitability and being imminent. Almost as if there is no point in struggling against it. I think about how technology will redefine how humanitarian work is conducted. How do we consider the future, technology and digital innovation without sliding into a post humanitarian future? How do we think about the future, the “going to be, the yet to be” with our eyes wide open to the multiple futures that await us?

For more reflections on the state of the humanitarian system and its future, please see **Futures of Humanitarian Aid: Cash Assistance to People on the Move** (Martin, L.L. and Rusczyk, H.A., 2023) ■

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A View from Congo

By Delu LUSAMBYA, PhD Researcher, Humanitarian Governance at International Institute of Social Studies of the Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

The ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which started in the early 1990s after the Rwandan civil war and genocide, have created one of the longest-running and dreadful humanitarian crises in this country. In September 2022, the International NGO Forum (2022) reported that 27 million people needed humanitarian assistance and protection, among them, 5.53 million were internally displaced persons. This situation ranks the country with the most extensive caseload in Africa (UN Security Council 2022), and the second-world country with the largest displaced population, after Syria. In addition, the increased number is also reinforced by disease outbreaks such as cholera, measles, bubonic plague, Ebola, and covid-19 (OCHA 2020a).

Given the fragility of the Congolese state and the government's incapacity to respond to people's social needs, when crises unfold, its functions are mainly assumed by non-state humanitarian sectors under the coordination of OCHA. The assistance includes safety and protection from food insecurity, shelter, cash, medical care, and water. It also includes children's education and sanitation-focused humanitarian aid (toilets and hygiene education). However, despite the millions of dollars mobilized by humanitarian actors and various approaches applied to assist affected people in DRC, the gap between humanitarian needs and the level of funding is still huge in all sectors (International NGO Forum in DRC 2022).

Following the UN-led humanitarian reform process from 2006 in DRC, there has been a growing awareness to strengthen collaboration between humanitarian actors through accountability mechanisms in DRC (OCHA 2020b). Many aid organizations' codes of conduct and intervention manuals focus on the involvement of affected communities in humanitarian governance and integrate various participatory methods, tools, and approaches to encourage and frame local participation in humanitarian crises. The ultimate aim of improving the engagement of affected people in the reform process was to enhance the effectiveness of the humanitarian response with more predictability, accountability, and a strengthened partnership



During my research in Goma DRC.



During my research in Beni DRC.

between humanitarian stakeholders in DRC (OCHA 2005).

However, despite good intentions and all measures and dispositions initiated by the UN, many Congolese NGO actors are critical and disappointed with how the cluster approach functions in DRC (Barbelet et al. 2019). They feel circumvented mainly by the international community, and many state actors have almost the same feeling as Congolese NGO actors: they feel they are ignored by the international community (at the expense of national NGOs) (ibid 2019).

The poor collaboration with local actors and lack of involvement of affected communities in humanitarian activities was underlined as a significant weakness of humanitarians in DRC and the leading causes of the project's failures and poor impact (Mowjee 2008; Autesserre 2014; Charles, Luras, et Tomasini 2010). As a result, affected communities fail to know who is doing what, how, where, when, and for whom. They develop mistrust leading in some cases to protest against actions in

their favor and the poor impact on the ground.

Ensuring aid effectiveness and impact in DRC must be seen as a collective responsibility, where affected communities are put at the center and would play in addressing their needs.

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Localisation: Putting Commitment into Practice

By *Miro Modrusan*, INTERSOS, Representative & Policy Advisor, Geneva, Switzerland

The decades-old international humanitarian assistance is the ultimate demonstration of international solidarity when communities and local and national governments are overwhelmed by the sheer scale of their challenges. At the same time, the frontline humanitarian response has always been led by local communities and organisations. Countless stories from streets, villages, and towns around the world remind us that local actors are part of their community before the humanitarian disaster occurs and will remain there long after the initial emergency. Logically, being directly affected, they know best what their needs are; they are responding to those needs and appealing to receive aid that they cannot source themselves.

Yet only in 2016, through the Grand Bargain and WHS, has the international humanitarian system recognised the essential importance of local communities and organisations responding to their own needs. Strong commitments and the coinage of the term localisation led to progress in enhancing the resources and support to local organisations, including through partnerships with INGOs, and via pooled funds by the UN and NGOs. Over the past years, several UN agencies have gradually prioritised their funds to local organisations.

However, the progress is still very slow. There are multiple barriers faced by local organisations, including their limited ability to engage in bloated coordination

mechanisms, comply with challenging donor requirements, and navigate cumbersome and complex administrative and bureaucratic impediments, both national and international. Due to limited financial opportunities, as just 1.2% of direct funds went to local actors in 2021⁴, they cannot employ expertise to address financial or internal procedures gaps, fuelling the old “limited capacities” stigma. Quality of funding is another issue, with local organisations often being pressured to reduce budget lines related to security management or administrative overheads, denying them the essential ability to manage their activities better, and often even exposing them to potential security risks.

In a recent event organised by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) we heard from a leader of a women’s led organisation in Afghanistan who explained how after investing countless hours working on a complex funding proposal, she failed to obtain funding, she was unable to fulfil a donor box regarding policy on vehicles. Her organisation does not have a car policy, as her organisation does not own a car. This would have been funny, had it not been told by a hardworking woman, fighting for every dollar to help her own communities, in a country that faces some of the worst humanitarian challenges in its history.

INGOs that are supporting the capacity strengthening of local organisations fully understand how

such processes require time and resources that are often very limited. Donors should enable such skills-sharing practices by providing sufficient financial resources.

INTEROS provides protection, health, nutrition, WASH, and other humanitarian support to forcibly displaced populations in protracted crises. In most places, INTEROS collaborates with local actors, from small community groups to structured national NGOs, based on principles of complementarity of skills and expertise. INTEROS supports the joint analysis and identification of needs with local partners, as one effective way of putting Accountability to Affected People in concrete action. INTEROS aims at strengthening, rather than replacing, existing local response - as was recently the case in CAR where INTEROS supported the existing volunteers’ network during their mobilisation to assist Sudanese refugees in Am Dafok.

Partnership with INGOs cannot be the only solution to promote localisation. It is encouraging to see donors developing their localisation policies, as was recently an example with ECHO. However, donor policies stop short of providing funding directly to local organisations. Although international donors should continue contributing to pooled funds, the true scale-up in localisation will happen when government donors start investing in the direct funding of local organisations. ■

⁴ ALNAP, 2022, page 230 : <https://sohs.alnap.org/2022-the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs-%E2%80%93-full-report>

How Humanitarian Studies Students Can Use SOHS Report for Research and Beyond

By *Michael Barnett, University Professor of International Affairs and Political Science, George Washington University, Washington, DC, U.S.A.*

I began teaching courses on the humanitarian system over twenty years ago, several years before the launch of the State of the Humanitarian System in 2010. I wanted students to come away with an understanding of the basic concepts that oriented humanitarian action, some of the major trends that were occurring since the end of the Cold War, and an appreciation of the ethical dilemmas that routinely challenge the delivery of assistance, and especially during war. There was no shortage of materials on the first (concepts and principles) and a small but growing literature on ethical dilemmas. But when it came to discussing and documenting trends, I had this queasy feeling of crossing a tightrope without a net.

My impressions about trends were pretty much that - impressions because the observed trends were more anecdotal than systematic and there was little data to fill out claims regarding the size and scale of humanitarian action. The sector was growing, but how much? How much money was sloshing through the system? How many aid organizations were there at the beginning of the 1990s and how many were there today? How many of them were headquartered in the U.S., Europe, and the non-Western world? There were more staff than ever before, but how many and where did they come from? Aid work seemed to be getting more dangerous, but what was the



evidence for this claim? I could not satisfactorily answer these basic questions. Data and descriptive statistics were scattershot and often lacked validity. I was constantly qualifying my observations regarding trends and growth because of the lack of data and systematic evidence. Humanitarianism had not yet entered its “evidence-based” phase for either practitioners or teachers.

Things began to change beginning in the second decade of this century, and the publication of the SOHS was a milestone in this regard. The first “pilot” annual offered lots of caution regarding the

figures it presented, but this was a major leap in the attempt to put some meat on the bone. And it did more than simply let the data “speak of themselves” but offered expert commentary. From here on out I anticipated the next issue and increasingly relied on the State of the Humanitarian System as a major reference and guide.

And while there are now more data sources than ever before, it remains one of the most authoritative and carefully constructed source books in the sector. Thanks to the SOHS, many of us now know what we are talking about. ■

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