
PROFILES

Strengthening Local Humanitarian Leadership





As natural disasters and protracted crises confront an increasing number of communities around the world, so too increases the urgency for philanthropic resources to address the gap between government support and humanitarian needs. One approach is to invest in local humanitarian leadership (LHL).

Local residents are always first on the scene to address any disaster -- emergency responders, nonprofits and even good neighbors. Thus, building the capacity of local leaders and organizations to prepare for and recover from disasters is one logical avenue for relieving human suffering and helping communities begin to heal. A philanthropic emphasis on LHL aims to use funding to shift power to local actors, working from the premise that those on the ground not only know best what they and their communities need, but how best to meet those needs.

As philanthropic leaders engage in shared learning around this movement toward localization, new models are emerging along with promising examples that can inform board-level decision making. These global conversations also recognize the inherent challenges in addressing the pervasive impact of disasters and conflict-driven crises on service organizations and local communities.

For the past year, a group of U.S.-based foundations has gathered to generate better information, collect and develop philanthropic tools, foster better informational exchanges and encourage improved practices for strengthening local humanitarian leadership. In the brief profiles that follow, several participants in this working group share stories of their institutional outreach to local organizations and the local recipients of funding describe their own plans to build internal capacity for responding to communities in crisis.

Mark Lindberg

Director of Disaster Relief and Recovery

Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies

Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP), seeks to address some of the common challenges communities and philanthropies face when attempting to meet the multitude of needs after a disaster or during an ongoing humanitarian crisis while at the same time fostering sustainable local resources.

MACP supports both disaster response and disaster preparedness work, with 'blue skies' work representing the majority of MACP's disaster funding. A significant amount of the foundation's response dollars supports long-term recovery work, addressing unmet needs arising months after the immediate response to the event, when relief funds and media attention have dwindled. At the center of MACP's disaster work is a focus on: "1) lower attention events, 2) natural disasters rather than complex humanitarian circumstances or conflict-driven circumstances, and 3) community-based work," according to Mark Lindberg, director of disaster relief and recovery.

MACP tends to work with larger U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs); nearly all of these service providers are working to build organizational capacity at a local level. Lindberg offered the work of [CRS](#), [OXFAM](#) and the [International Services Department of the American Red Cross](#) as examples of organizations making concerted efforts to strengthen local responders, including their capacity to seek and manage financial and technical resources.

An additional aspect of MACP's humanitarian strategy is to support [Give2Asia](#) and [Huairou Commission](#), smaller organizations that work effectively with national and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to build disaster capacity. Lindberg cited Huairou Commission's goal of ensuring that women have a voice in local decision-making about the allocation of disaster-related resources, which he believes should be an important thread in the localization movement.

MACP is a relatively new philanthropic organization, and the foundation has approached grantmaking as a learning opportunity to understand how a U.S.-based organization works with national and local organizations in international settings. With a small staff and a large corpus, MACP has

opted to make fewer but larger grants in any given year. Some grantees function as intermediaries between MACP and community-based organizations, and this approach can occasionally make it challenging to understand directly what the organizational capacity and local needs are. That, in turn, forces MACP to rely on its grantees to assist in assessing local opportunities and assets. In that context, Lindberg noted that "trust is a really important ethic we are trying to establish as part of our grantmaking relationships. This is aided by longer-term commitments and a less transactional approach to grantmaking."

He added, "As time has gone on, we've begun to look more carefully at important questions related to the capacity of our grantees to work effectively with local leaders and organizations. In that space, we've come to understand the issue is not simply one of how local organizations can get more financial resources." MACP is currently investing institutional energy to identify relevant indicators of progress in its community-based work. He said those indicators "will likely include how well community-based organizations are actively leading and 'owning' disaster preparedness and response activities."

Where will all of this lead? Lindberg desires to understand improvements in local capacity with the goal of sustainability, a process that will, over time, require the larger INGOs to assess the efficacy of their business models. According to Lindberg, ensuring there is sustainable local humanitarian leadership is not mutually exclusive of INGOs, "but the status quo won't cut it much longer." He noted that the increasing number and ferocity of disasters requires each part of the humanitarian sector to do its part to "get this right, sooner rather than later."



Key Takeaways

- Approach initial investments in LHL as pilot projects, providing opportunities for learning, course corrections and relationship-building
- Consider investing in intermediary funders with international knowledge and humanitarian grantmaking experience
- Capitalize on the sense of urgency that more frequent and severe disruptive events present

Jennifer Poidatz

Vice President, Humanitarian Response

Catholic Relief Services

In 2018, [Catholic Relief Services \(CRS\)](#) celebrated its 75th anniversary. Jennifer Poidatz, vice president, humanitarian response, provides agency-level leadership for programming in emergency preparedness, response and recovery. She describes the mission of CRS as:

1. Putting humanity first by focusing on the most vulnerable people and by helping them help themselves. Catholic Relief Services empowers individuals, families and communities to stand strong and create productive futures.
2. Upholding the dignity that is inherent to every human being.
3. Acting in ways that transcend the desire to serve, as seen in collaborative work to bring about real improvements in peoples' quality of life and genuine engagement in building peace and justice.
4. Demonstrating results through measurable outcomes that assess the effectiveness of CRS in alleviating human suffering, removing root causes and empowering people to achieve their full potential.

"We work with local partners, we do not work through local partners. It is a crucial distinction," said Poidatz. To build long-lasting relationships, CRS starts working with local groups, including civil society organizations and with governments at the local, regional and national levels even before a crisis hits. CRS intends for the decision-making and the planning to be done by those who are closest to the issue that is being addressed, while helping make local organizations stronger, more effective and sustainable. To address the capacity of these organizations, CRS prompts a self-assessment performed by the local organization to identify where support is needed – ranging from human resources and grant compliance to proposal writing and an ability to translate standards to their context. CRS then acts to adapt and adjust their accompaniment and support as the needs of their partners shift over time.



The strength of these relationships was recently demonstrated as CRS worked on a capacity strengthening project with 40 partners in India, Indonesia, Jordan and Lebanon. Even though the project had no programmatic funding to keep groups at the table, all the participants remained committed to participating for three years. To Poidatz, this example speaks more broadly to the CRS approach. "What we bring to our donors is the relationships we build with our local partners (which go beyond a single project), along with a very flexible targeted accompaniment that reduces risk to donors, the international nongovernmental organization (INGO) and the local service providers to ensure the best outcomes to those we serve."

Poidatz emphasizes that cultural competency is paramount in the disaster and humanitarian spaces; it influences how organizations enter countries and communities. "It's not anybody who can do this work." She went on to say that partnerships are hard, requiring compromises on both sides. "We know we are doing a good job if the request for support comes from their end – that it is demand driven."

Poidatz and CRS believe that localization is a critical part of how they can lessen suffering and reach more people, doing it all through building relationships and trust while sharing expertise. CRS' end goal is to have, "the greatest impact on the people we serve while promoting local humanitarian leadership."

Key Takeaways

- Provide tools to local organizations for self-assessment and self-advocacy
- Accompany local organizations through processes that assist in building capacity
- Uphold humanitarian values of trust, self-determination, flexibility and compromise

Sheena Agarwal

Director of Strategic Partnerships

Give2Asia

In 2014, [Give2Asia \(G2A\)](#) launched the [NGO Disaster Preparedness Program](#). This program focuses on funding innovative programming to increase disaster readiness at the community level in Asia's most climate-vulnerable countries; strengthening networks and knowledge-sharing of local disaster organizations; and increasing funding of preparedness activities. At present, the program is underway in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. It is supported by a five-year, \$2.6 million grant from the [Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies \(MACP\)](#).

Sheena Agarwal, director of strategic partnerships, notes that a key objective of G2A's work is elevating the visibility of local organizations in the disaster preparedness space among individual, foundation and corporate philanthropists through strategic donor education and outreach activities such as developing disaster preparedness research and impact stories. "We continually engage with key funders to help shape their disaster philanthropy approaches to develop giving priorities," said Agarwal. In addition, G2A promotes successful local organizations in its fiscal sponsorship network during disaster event campaigns. G2A implements a 20-40-40 model for unrestricted giving during these campaigns – putting 20% of funding towards relief, 40% to long-term recovery and 40% to preparedness. This approach has a two-fold effect by funding lower-attention activities while demonstrating to donors that G2A prioritizes the long-term investment in communities. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) identified through the program have the opportunity to apply for grants, promote their programs online and engage with other disaster organizations through a community of practice. They can also participate in capacity strengthening trainings such as organizational development and Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction -- from both Give2Asia and their Philippines-based partner, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR). Give2Asia's overall strategy intends to:

- Minimize destruction by implementing activities and systems that prepare communities to respond effectively during a disaster event.
- Gather information and assess needs within the first 24 hours through in-country field staff members and vetted nonprofits to identify potential grantees so that corporate donors can localize investments in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- Support long-term recovery needs after relief funding dries up.

Agarwal came to Give2Asia following work in the international development sector, and acknowledges the challenges in the public sector's risk-aversion in the humanitarian landscape where multilaterals and UN organizations provide the major share

of support for relief and response activity. Comparatively, she said, "[I]t has been really refreshing to see the way that private funders are getting into this space and are interested in taking risks and being innovative by doing things that more bureaucratic institutions cannot."

Agarwal believes the shift in funder focus to supporting local humanitarian leadership recognizes the challenge of getting grant resources to local actors. "As an example, MACP is really trying to change the way that power dynamics are present in relationships where money is involved . . . it is energizing to see that happening."

While MACP is approaching the work differently, Agarwal acknowledges the need for local actors to do things differently also. "[I]f people don't know what local actors are doing, they are less likely to fund them." Organizations providing services in their communities, regions and nations have an opportunity to raise their profiles by sharing the impact they are making and advocating for themselves, thereby demonstrating that local actors do not always "need INGOs (international nongovernmental organizations) to be in the middle of every relationship."

At the same time, "INGOs are put in a difficult position because they are known and are funded with the understanding that they are experts. . . ." To her mind, there are existential questions facing the humanitarian system at present:

- What is the role of these intermediary organizations?
- How should their important point of leverage be utilized?
- Can shared power and decision-making be realized?

As the humanitarian response financing mechanisms work to answer these questions, it is vital both to include INGOs in the conversation and to be reflective about where the current model falls short. In her experience, Agarwal noted INGO practitioners are smart and compassionate. "[T]hey know that bottom-up models are what work and that it is important to empower local leaders . . . but the entire funding ecosystem currently reinforces a top-down approach."

Key Takeaways

- Work across the lifecycle of a disaster
- Include INGOs in the funding conversations about supporting local leaders
- Be alert to the realities of power and money in the humanitarian system



Britt Lake

Chief Program Officer

Global Giving

Britt Lake is the chief program officer at [Global Giving](#) which works to connect local actors directly to donors through their crowdfunding platform. At its inception, Global Giving did not target funding to support disaster relief or recovery, but the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami altered their approach when partners in the affected area explained that although they had heard about disaster dollars dedicated to the area, the flow of funding was basically nonexistent. During that time, Global Giving also received requests from their individual and corporate donors to complement their investments in large international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) with support directed to local organizations. This spurred Global Giving to begin addressing the existing gaps in funding to local groups on the ground. Today, the organization continues that work, targeting funds for recovery and rebuilding efforts while strengthening civil society.

Lake described Global Giving's approach to disaster grantmaking as an effort to get money into the bank accounts of organizations via initial smaller grants to address the greatest needs in the immediate aftermath of the event. This type of quick-transfer grantmaking is possible because Global Giving has vetted these organizations in advance and has built long-term relationships with local humanitarian leaders. This is especially crucial, because, as Lake noted, “. . . immediately after disaster things are quickly shifting. Many donors have specific priorities that they will or won't fund,” exacerbating the needs of these first responders. Global Giving works to build resilience in local groups and communities; they also work with donors to define success “in terms beyond the standard outputs and outcomes.”



There are significant challenges facing donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alike to build local humanitarian leadership (LHL) capacity. Addressing this struggle, Lake noted, “. . . [I] feel like every time I go to a conference or a meeting that talks about localization the refrain I hear again and again is: ‘it’s just so hard, it’s too hard, it’s not possible’. . . but it is possible.” A partial solution to this set of challenges is building trust and relationships not just between donors and NGOs but among donors, NGOs and the broader community as a core function of grantmaking.

One of the most rewarding and effective result of this style of grantmaking is getting to know residents of the affected community.

Lake observed, “. . . [I] think there our grantee relationships are different when they are based on trust, especially with organizations that are used to dealing with a more typical funder/grantee relationship. The goal and challenge of this trust-based grantmaking is shifting the grantee perspective from ‘How can we deliver on what our funder wants?’ to ‘What is the best use of the money for our community?’” The Siegel Family Endowment models this innovative approach. The program officers meet with potential grantees to discuss mutual goals, with the program officer then writing up the grant proposal. This frees the NGO staff members to focus on the implementation of programs rather than spending hours crafting a proposal. It also shifts the power dynamic between donor and grantee in a meaningful way.

The benefits of relationship-building are especially critical in disaster contexts, as was painfully evident in Puerto Rico immediately after Hurricane Maria when the banking systems were inaccessible. Thanks to the deep relationships between Global Giving, a local NGO and their food distributor, the NGO was able to secure a line of credit to distribute food to homeless and low-income populations. Of late, Global Giving has been furthering their recovery work on the island by partnering with [La](#)

[Red de Fundaciones de Puerto Rico, translated as The Puerto Rico Funders Network \(PRFN\)](#). This collaboration is centered on building the capacity of the local NGO sector to acquire resources and implement creative approaches to address the challenges facing communities across Puerto Rico.

Key Takeaways

- Build relationships with organizations before the onset of a crisis
- Develop “work-arounds” where the financial infrastructure is poor or negatively impacted by an event
- Re-think grant applications and grantee reporting indicators

Janice Petrovich

Executive Director and Vice President

The Puerto Rico Funders Network

In 2017, Hurricane Irma devastated Puerto Rico. Just two weeks later, Hurricane Maria made landfall as a Category 4 storm, the worst natural disaster in the island's history. It caused an estimated \$90 billion in damage and resulted in a blackout that lasted 328 days, the longest in U.S. history. In the wake of these catastrophic storms, [Global Giving](#) approached [La Red de Fundaciones de Puerto Rico, translated as The Puerto Rico Funders Network \(PRFN\)](#) as a potential partner.

Janice Petrovich is the executive director and vice president of PRFN and a veteran philanthropic leader. She describes the three priorities of the organization:

1. To increase philanthropic investment, strengthening local nonprofit organizations that are implementing promising initiatives to address Puerto Rico's challenges
2. To promote social justice and equity, and to increase participation of civil society in constructing a better future for all Puerto Ricans
3. To expand collaborative efforts and partnerships to stimulate Puerto Rico's recovery

At the core of the success of PRFN is their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable populations with needed services, crucial in the aftermath of Irma and Maria. In these types of circumstances PRFN is challenged to develop program investments that solve problems in a relatively short timeframe and that have long-term impact. Because it is not clear whether funding that arrives following a disaster will continue beyond a few years, PRFN makes every effort to strengthen relationships with funders by educating them about ongoing needs.

The hurricanes and their aftermath attracted new foundations and donors to Puerto Rico. Yet complicated foundation application processes often delayed or prohibited securing the resources necessary for recovery. Where electronic application forms were required and were accompanied by an extensive and lengthy review, grant approvals could take up to ten months. Petrovich described, "For me to be able to have conversations with [the funders], I was forced to go to the roof of my house, the only place that I could get a signal. Remember, we had no electricity either so I couldn't stay on

[the phone] for long periods because I had no way to charge my cell phone regularly."

In contrast, Global Giving proved to be an exemplary partner. "They were quick to respond, share and make opportunities available. They also helped open doors, recommended us to many other funders and have done a variety of things to make sure that we take advantage of the opportunity that their platform offers."

Funders often cite the lack of data about the impacts of local humanitarian investments as a barrier to advancing the localization agenda. Building a body of evidence is necessary and is in its nascent stage. In the interim, stories of those directly affected by humanitarian crises are a form of information that is plentiful. Speaking about the importance and power of personal narratives coming from survivors, Petrovich said, ". . . If you don't tell the story, people don't know what's happening, and you won't be able to get the support from funders to benefit the recovery." In recognition of the fatigue and re-traumatization survivors experience as they are asked to tell their stories again and again, PRFN has collected the stories of local needs and resilience and made them available to multiple funders.

Puerto Rico's recovery is not going to be completed in a year or two. "If you look at New Orleans, funders have been there for 13 years and have been very active throughout the recovery. [PRFN] is trying to follow the New Orleans playbook; we have been in touch and communicated with the funding community in New Orleans who has helped to advise us on how to create long-term relationships," said Petrovich.



Key Takeaways

- Simplify application processes
- Experiment with funding platforms and funding networks
- Learn from disaster-savvy funders
- Use accurate information sourced from trusted local actors
- Lead with stories of resilience
- Allow conditions on the ground to determine funding priorities

Katherine Potaski

Chief Advancement Officer

Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO)

Over 2.5 million people live in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya with more than 250,000 making their home in the neighborhood of Kibera. It is here where Kennedy Odede founded a grassroots movement seeking the transformation of urban areas and named it [Shining Hope for Communities \(SHOFCO\)](#). In 2018, SHOFCO was awarded the [Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize](#), the world's largest annual humanitarian award.

Katherine Potaski, chief advancement officer for SHOFCO, describes their work as having three specific focus areas:

1. Providing critical services for all, including quality healthcare, adult literacy classes and access to clean water
2. Community advocacy platforms through community organizing and mobilization training and voter registration
3. Education and leadership development for women and girls by operating two tuition-free leadership academies, Pre-K through 8th Grade, that serve more than 450 students

"We see ourselves as the next phase of development in terms of an organization that is community-driven and truly grassroots," Potaski said. Over 90 percent of SHOFCO's funding goes directly to Kenya and SHOFCO reinforces its community-driven model by employing residents of the neighborhood. Of their nearly 500 employees, almost half are from their urban service areas or the rural settlements in the region.

A core part of SHOFCO's model is community mobilization and organizing. Community residents are defining the direction of their economic development. "Once a community is empowered; once they have been mobilized, whether it is for healthcare or voter registration or education, you don't lose that [capacity] and seeing that has been very, very powerful for us," said Potaski.

The success of SHOFCO's model has led to challenges — now there is an expectation that the organization will be able to respond to increased demand for its services. "We've had interest from five other neighborhoods where people want us to come and work," said Potaski. "We are taking a strategic approach to how we move forward into new communities across all of Kenya within the next five years."

As an example of attempting a strategic and flexible approach to community resilience, SHOFCO took preemptive actions during the 2017 national elections, anticipating "post-election violence in the slums." Potaski reported that this awareness had a significant impact on SHOFCO's program implementation. By working with their community mobilization platform before the elections to organize peace marches and rallies with more than 5,000 participants, the area survived the polls with no fatalities or destruction of property. Transparency with funders about the anticipated outcomes of this outreach garnered support and helped to strengthen trusting donor/grantee relationships.

SHOFCO takes a similar adaptive approach to program evaluation. Potaski recounted that early on ". . . every grant had a different set of indicators. At one point we had 166 indicators that we were expected to track." This led to staff members spending a majority of their time collecting data as opposed to delivering programs. In the future, she hopes funders will share data and best practices from their own grantmaking experiences to lessen the burden on service providers. "There is a huge opportunity in the funding/philanthropic spaces to gather data in a way that is not extractive of the communities being served."



Potaski spoke of a shift she sees in the thinking of donors away from the typical return on investment model to a space that is more responsive to the impact of external factors on humanitarian work. With this different type of approach, the fear of not being able to produce a grant deliverable might then lead to a conversation about innovation in which funders can encourage grantees to be creative. "Let's fail fast together, learn and move forward."

Key Takeaways

- Make decisions with residents of affected communities in the lead
- Build local capacity through employment opportunities
- Adapt to changing historical and administrative realities
- Share data and best practices
- Foster transparency between funders and service providers

Pilar Pacheco

Program Officer

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Pilar Pacheco is a program officer working on Emergency Response within the Global Development Division at the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation \(BMGF\)](#). The work of the emergency response team centers on disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The team uses two types of grants: one for immediate response and relief in a disaster or emergency, another for larger scale capacity building of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The immediate response and relief grants transfer up to \$500,000 to pre-approved grantees within 48 hours of an event. The grants focusing on capacity building more closely resemble traditional foundation grants, and on average take six months from proposal invitation to grant disbursement.

In spite of the sharp focus and strategy around disaster grantmaking, the Foundation is working to undergird this work with a body of evidence that it is an effective approach. “Something I’ve learned in the humanitarian space is that there are a lot of anecdotes that locally driven response works well, but there isn’t a whole lot of data around to support those stories,” said Pacheco.

It is her contention that more robust data collection and analysis are needed to develop models for cost-effective investments in local organizations. This would benefit communities to establish emergency operation centers on a local scale rather than through international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), potentially increasing the capacity and impact of these first responders.

Given the lack of empirical data, it is challenging to make a case for larger grant portfolios, at a time when the needs within the local humanitarian leadership space are growing. Pacheco believes donors should collaborate to invest in data to build the case for a stronger local humanitarian system. “We need to think more about getting the system ready before the disaster hits. We could be supporting the capacity building component of the humanitarian system in a country or region so that our investment is not always in response to an emergency event.”

Pacheco identifies the typical questions funders ask when seeking to fund local NGOs as:

- Can they manage the funds?
- Do they have a good track record as a trusted organization?
- Do they have adequate staffing?
- Will the amount of the grant change the NGO’s tax status?

With a positive response to these questions, the Foundation has funded the Central American pilot of the [Regional Forum for Disaster Risk Management \(CRGR, acronym in Spanish\)](#) in Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras; the members of the network are civil society organizations. The work of CRGR members in Guatemala after the volcanic eruption helped farmers who were no longer able to farm by training them for other economic activities. One outcome of this type of work is increased resiliency on the local level. While gaining experience in disaster risk reduction and management within each community’s context, the network is also assisting with training to allow those affected to improve their lives.

With the success of CRGR, the Foundation has moved to test the model in a different part of the world by investing in the [Asian Disaster Preparedness Center \(ADPC\)](#) to build the [Asian Preparedness Partnership \(APP\)](#), made up of disaster

response and recovery organizations from six countries in South and Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Nepal, Philippines, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. APP proposed a multi-stakeholder approach, “so that each country joins the partnership with representatives from the public sector, the civil society sector and the business or private sector.”

Pacheco described members of APP crowdsourcing solutions to disaster response and recovery challenges faced throughout Asia in real time. A WhatsApp group shares their work with descriptions of what they are accomplishing, asking each other questions and seeking answers to the challenges they face. “[It’s] really wonderful

to see how these local actors are empowering themselves saying, ‘I can share what I’ve learned’ but also being able to say, ‘I need some help here. Can anyone give me any ideas?’”

For the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, local humanitarian action is proving to be efficient and effective. “We [donors] need to invest in local organizations . . . the peer learning process and the knowledge exchange . . . so that we can advocate for all of these local actors on different international platforms where these local actors, even (the local) government institutions, are often not present.”

Key Takeaways

- Support research to build the case for local investments
- Work with pre-approved grantees
- Build local networks for knowledge sharing
- Advocate for local international actors on a variety of platforms



Zaira Catota

Regional Communications Officer

Regional Forum for Disaster Risk Management

The [Regional Forum for Disaster Risk Management \(CRGR, acronym in Spanish\)](#) is a network of 126 civil society organizations that constitute an autonomous, independent, open and permanent initiative. Currently made up of National Risk Management Committees from four countries (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua), all participants share a common focus on disaster preparedness and a common commitment to humanitarian principles and values.

Zaira Catota, regional communications officer, said, “It is estimated that in Central America 25 million people live in poverty and 10 million live in areas of high vulnerability.” The disaster preparedness work of CRGR in this environment is complicated by the lack of international cooperation and the lack of funding around integrated risk management. Most funders in the region are presently prioritizing other issues such as the prevention of violence towards women and children.

In spite of these challenges, CRGR actively works to build leaders on the local community level, thereby increasing the resiliency of the people and communities they seek to serve. Local participants are involved in leading decision-making that impacts them directly. CRGR strengthens this, in part, by developing courses and teaching local leaders about emergency management, strategic decision-making, emergency logistics, water sanitation and mitigation of disasters without further damage to the environment.

The network is also collaborating with universities in the United States and around the globe to design, implement and evaluate Central American disaster risk management to increase its efficiency. George Washington University and others provide courses and skills focused on risk management and resiliency that allow local leaders to earn certificates from the universities.

Catota said, “While some national and local governments are eager to work together for the common goal of resilience, some are reticent. CRGR advocates for the collaborative efforts of civil society organizations in negotiating and partnering with governments to make sure that the voices of vulnerable populations inform the policies, plans and programs being created in that sector.”

In response to the range of emergencies faced in Central America, CRGR has worked with funders to gain flexibility to move resources where they are most needed. This openness enables CRGR to respond to events ranging from hurricanes and earthquakes to volcanic eruptions in a quick manner. This establishment of trusting relationships with donors is a result of sharing the experiences of CRGR around project and program design and the success of the network.

Trust among its participants is also an essential part of what makes this vast network function well. This is fostered by transparency about the funding each receives, which has the added benefit of reinforcing organizational accountability to the network. Moving forward, Catota hopes that “More cooperative relationships can be built between CRGR and local and national governments to increase the resilience of people and their communities.”



Key Takeaways

- Consider local and national governments as potential partners in humanitarian work, where possible
- Increase impact through networks of local organizations
- Require financial transparency and accountability of individual member organizations to the network

Carlos Mejia

Director for Humanitarian Programs & Policy

OXFAM

In his considerable work in the humanitarian sector, Carlos Mejia has observed shifts in how funders and humanitarian leaders understand themselves and the system within which they exist. “I think it’s happening... since the Grand Bargain and the Charter4Change in 2016, there has been a trend toward more support for local and national actors... As funders invest in practices that effectively strengthen local humanitarian actors’ capacity for effective institutional leadership, there is a positive impact -- saving lives, protecting communities, and balancing power.”

“For philanthropic organizations to make investments in local actors requires a deep commitment,” said Mejia. “Legal regulations, compliance requirements, and a variety of common practices can make the grantmaking process hard for both funders and grantees. It’s complicated further when armed conflict and terrorism are in the mix, along with worries about corruption and misuse of funding. The grantmaking process requires rigor – and in many cases a risk analysis – but it also requires that donors and grantees understand and believe in one another. Moreover, it requires speed.”



As many funders have learned, in the midst of a crisis, it is essential to streamline the flow of resources. “The key ingredient to simplifying the process is a relationship of trust,” said Mejia. [OXFAM](#) has also attempted to shorten time to receipt of funding by initiating a conversation with local NGOs to determine interest in developing a one-page concept note written by the potential grantee, and then an internal review process which may take only a few days. In extreme

circumstances, grant funds are exchanged in hand-to-hand transactions with grantees in conflict zones, such as Yemen. This particular type of disbursement requires relationships steeped in trust and an acceptance of personal risk for those delivering the funds.

OXFAM works to balance power between funders and on-the-ground service providers through regular communication via phone calls and email, and by visiting grantee partners in the field. OXFAM finds it helpful to use the monitoring process as a learning opportunity for the funder. During a site visit, OXFAM participates in a variety of activities that grantees host to interact with staff members who implement programs and to increase understanding of the communities they serve.

“The reason we [humanitarian actors] do this work...is that it’s a moral imperative. It’s because the disaster-affected communities belong to local actors, not to donors... And because this is a matter of power, if we transform the power, we are effectively inclusive. We create an enabling space for real partnerships, cooperation, and collaboration,” said Mejia.

Key Takeaways

- Take the time to understand power dynamics – and when they’re unfair, work to shift them
- Learn from failures
- Redefine roles to build collaboration between INGOs, government and local actors
- Embrace the moral imperative to move this work forward

Sisira Madurapperuma

Director

Asian Preparedness Partnership

The [Asian Preparedness Partnership \(APP\)](#) was established in collaboration with [Asian Disaster Preparedness Center \(ADPC\)](#) and the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation \(BMGF\)](#) to improve preparedness and emergency response to disasters in Asia by strengthening humanitarian leadership and technical capacity of national governments and local humanitarian organizations. The objectives of APP are:

1. Improving humanitarian leadership and coordination through systematic and local institutional assessment of the current context and engagement of national governments, local NGOs and civil society organizations in response in each country.
2. Bettering coordination of humanitarian actions by enhancing humanitarian information management and knowledge exchange through an online platform, a “one-stop knowledge hub,” for the sharing of information regarding disaster preparedness and emergency response in the countries.
3. Establishing more effective partnerships among national and local humanitarian actors by undertaking training needs assessments for national and local humanitarian NGOs and civil society groups.

Sisira Madurapperuma, director, counts preparedness partnerships in Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka as among the accomplishments of APP. Working across the governmental, humanitarian and private sectors, APP’s strategy aims to promote coordination and real-time information sharing during the emergency period of natural disasters. This strategy responds to the realization that lessons from the previous disasters are not retained. APP is creating a space to hold reports, research, policies, procedures, and lessons learned on one platform.

A representative steering committee guides the work of APP. This presents challenges as “natural mistrust exists between the civil society groups and the government, and government and international organizations, although the private sector

usually sees disaster as an opportunity for work,” he noted. This distrust is exacerbated when government officials issue declarations that humanitarian aid is not needed, as this is seldom the case, according to Madurapperuma.

“Funders should know the whole financing story, not just the progress reports of any sector of the humanitarian system. How much money is getting to local groups? How much do INGOs take in? What are the actual dollars that hit the ground?” he said. There is an increasing acknowledgment that local organizations may be able to accomplish disaster preparedness and recovery functions with greater financial efficiency, but training and cooperation with other sectors is often necessary to equip these organizations and their leaders.”



On the whole, Madurapperuma is optimistic about the future of local humanitarian leadership. “I feel like in the international community [OXFAM](#) is an example of a major international humanitarian organization trying to make genuine change.” According to Madurapperuma, the ideal situation is a space, “. . . where local partners, with some training and capacity building, can take the lead and engage the international community in discussing the needs of the community, and INGOs then come in to assist responding to those needs.”

“A couple of years ago there was almost no commitment [to LHL]. The Grand Bargain is helping to develop a discussion, but there is not a uniform commitment across all sectors yet. It will happen.”

Key Takeaways

- Approach preparedness and recovery efforts regionally rather than taking a country-by-country approach
- Attend to the relationship of INGOs to local NGOs
- Build decision-making processes on needs assessed by the affected residents
- Record and share learnings from prior disasters

Heba Aly

Director

The New Humanitarian

For nearly 25 years, [The New Humanitarian](#) (formerly IRIN News) has been a critical news source for original, on-the-ground reporting with expert analysis of humanitarian crises and the trends that shape them. Their work focuses on events that threaten the lives, safety, livelihoods and access to essential services of large groups of people — particularly in fragile, unstable and vulnerable environments -- as well as the resulting needs of affected populations and the humanitarian response to those needs.

Director Heba Aly suggests that the most pressing challenges in the humanitarian system are sustainability, legitimacy and relevance, “. . .the system cannot keep up at present. There are more needs and those needs are growing faster than the traditional forms of humanitarian relief can address.” She also argues that the drive to strengthen local humanitarian leadership confronts the reality “. . . that as the humanitarian system has been professionalized, some of the soul that used to be a big part of this work has been lost. The distance between a humanitarian organization and the people they are meant to be helping has grown. No longer can there be a response where someone just jumps on the back of a truck and goes into the Bush to help people.”



The machinery and the bureaucracy of humanitarian aid are not always set up to support funding local actors. Aly has observed a power struggle created in spaces where international groups seek to devolve power and build resilience, while at the same time recognizing they have a smaller role to play. At the heart of it all she said, “. . . the more you prioritize your local partners, the less funding your international non-governmental organization might receive. This works against the push for institutional survival.”

The New Humanitarian seeks to create a broader understanding of global challenges moving forward. This reporting requires commitment to the principle that the engaged general public deserves quality information about the world, so they can make informed decisions that affect and impact their own lives. Aly describes the need for this

type of journalism and the interconnected world in which we live saying, “. . .[some] might think that these topics are not relevant for them, when in fact, they are -- climate change will affect every person on this earth, in this generation. The war in Syria has had an effect, from nearly tearing apart the European Union to resettling refugees in the United States.”

Public service journalism addressing humanitarian crises requires funding that is nimble and acknowledges the constraints of working in conflict zones. Yet, this knowledge gap has been especially challenging for some donor relationships. Aly noted, “We’ve had people asking for physical receipts from conflict zones or requiring individual bank accounts for each grant. After all of that, it can sometimes take months for donors to complete their own paperwork before [the grant] becomes a reality.”

Ultimately the goal is, “that humanitarian action is more effective and accountable as a result of our journalism,” said Aly. The reporting of The New Humanitarian aims to inform the prevention of and response to humanitarian crises by sharing accurate factual accounts and timely situational awareness reports with decision-makers and practitioners in the humanitarian sector; by holding those responsible to account; and by transmitting the urgency and importance of these issues to a wide audience.

Key Takeaways

- Rely on accurate information and situational awareness to make strategic investments
- Turn to independent public service journalism as a source for data-gathering about local humanitarian organizations
- Increase knowledge of the shifting landscape of money, funders and the structures of civil society

The way forward

For the foreseeable future, the needs of communities affected by natural disasters and complex humanitarian crises will not decrease, and the majority of funding to address these protracted problems will come from governments and multi-lateral institutions. The philanthropic sector's contribution, though small in relation to that of the public sector, is more important than ever to bridge the gap in humanitarian support and must be strategically invested for maximum impact to alleviate human suffering.

The persons interviewed here believe strongly that the proper and smart role for philanthropy to play is in support of local humanitarian leadership — to elevate the visibility and voices of leaders on the ground, to be guided by their analyses of the problems they face and the solutions they propose, and to address the challenges that these leaders and funders face with honesty and humility.

Among the many philanthropic opportunities

evident in this collection of interviews are:

- Support research for funding local actors
- Share data and best practices across sectors and organizations
- Build networks that promote knowledge transfer and collective action
- Increase transparency in relationships between funders and grantees
- Advocate for local actors in a variety of venues and on multiple platforms

It is our hope that these profiles will inform and inspire all stakeholders in this arena to acknowledge the urgency, necessity and promise of strengthening local humanitarian leadership. For additional resources on philanthropic efforts to strengthen local humanitarian leadership, please see <https://disasterplaybook.org/collaboration/strengthening-local-humanitarian-leadership-philanthropic-toolkit/>

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