Transformation in the aid and development sector?

Leadership & diversity

CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

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When disasters strike, or a country is recovering from effects of crisis, "local people spring into action to save lives, perform search-and rescue operations and first aid, and make sure there is food and shelter for their neighbours". [1] Local and national responders are well versed and can communicate in the local language, and understand the cultures, history, and geography of the disaster or crisis-affected areas. Further, pooled funds "locally designed and managed" can "reduce bureaucratic delays and strengthen local leadership". In the era of COVID-19, there are continuing calls for humanitarian response to be led by local actors whenever possible, and the response to the 2020 Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu further highlights the role of local leadership. [2]

Research indicates that "women remain underrepresented in leadership positions" in the workplace across the globe and across sectors at all levels. This lack of women in leadership has impacts around the world, not only on productivity and performance within the workplace, but also "national health, education, political and socioeconomic effects". This disparity rings particularly true for women in the aid and development sector, where "women are increasingly underrepresented, at leadership levels and even on boards". [3]

Nonetheless, this section presents several examples, approaches and networks that are beginning to shift the needle, as well as several initiatives that are promoting and enhancing local leadership and influence.

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[1] See Local Humanitarian Leadership. Accessible at: https://www.localhumanitarianleadership.net/
[2] No turning back: Local leadership in Vanuatu's response to tropical cyclone Harold, Humanitarian Advisory Group (2020)
[3] Women in Humanitarian Leadership, Humanitarian Advisory Group & Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (2017), p. 13

Case study 1: The Network for Empowered Aid Response's work to increase local influence

The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) seeks to increase local influence on decision-making at all levels through advocacy, networking, and communication. The Network has a focus on "genuine local participation at all levels of development and disaster management" and includes local and national CSOs from the global South.

NEAR seeks to play "an active role in agenda setting in global policy processes and institutions", such as with the Grand Bargain, Charter for Change and involvement in working groups on localisation (e.g., sub-group on Localisation of the IASC), as well as operational and technical settings (e.g., Global Protection Cluster, national consortia) and academic and policy settings (e.g., think tanks, universities and INGOs).

Case study 2: Exploring Southern-led models of humanitarian action

The Southern Responses to Displacement research project looks at the ways some global South countries, civil society and refugees have acted to support Syrian refugees displaced by crisis. Using a participatory approach, the project "purposefully aims to centralise refugees' own experiences of and perspectives on these Southern-led initiatives", and largely engages local and national actors, particularly refugees, local communities, and civil society groups.

Case study 3: Nexus – Stronger together

Nexus is a Somali-owned and led platform for Somali civil society leadership, with nine member organisations conducting initiatives across the Federal Member States and Somaliland. The organisations' mission is to "address persistent barriers to achieving sustained impact by pushing the boundaries of what is thought to be possible". Nexus works to promote Somali-led research, produce annual reviews of lessons learned from activities and initiatives, and seek to build bridges between religious and clan leaders, influential actors in Somalia and Somaliland and international actors.

📍Case study 4: Embedding relationship building as part of the grant process

Women's organisations have been working to demonstrate the benefits of funder–grantee relationships aiming to embed long-term relationship building as part of the grant process. FRIDA and AWID are examples of feminist networks working to achieve this, and to support and sustain "young feminist visions" and to "achieve gender justice and women's human rights", respectively.

📍Case study 5: Women's humanitarian leadership

- *Women leading locally: Exploring women's leadership in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan,* Oxfam Research Reports (Jan. 2020)
  This report looks at women's leadership roles in locally-led humanitarian action, and is authored by two women-led CSOs, the Ashroy Foundation of Bangladesh and Rural Women for Development in South Sudan. The paper aims "to better understand whether and how local humanitarian leadership (LHL)—with its transfer of resources and power to local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs)—can promote or constrain women's leadership". The report concludes that "women's leadership in LHL is limited in both countries, with women's leadership facing many of the same challenges as LHL itself", but also highlights that "by encouraging collaboration between women leaders, women's organisations, and LHL actors, progress toward a more gender-transformative humanitarian system can be achieved".

- Pacific Women's Leadership
  Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) seeks to "harness resources that service gender equality and women's empowerment in the Pacific". Over a 10-year period committed by Australia's DFAT, the initiatives support "170 gender equality initiatives implemented by over 160 partners across 14 Pacific Island countries", which has a dedicated Pacific Women's Support Unit that aims to provide "technical, knowledge sharing and convening support to the portfolio of partners".

Pacific Women's Network seeks "to advance gender equality and women's empowerment" across the Pacific in Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia by amplifying the stories and achievements of Pacific women; promoting learning, professional development; and girls' education through creating platforms for peer-to-peer support and online publications.

Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance is a network of international, regional, and locally based member organisations, with the goal of "working with and for young women leaders across the Pacific region" and providing a platform for young women to share information, good practices and resources.

Moana Pacific Women's Network (Sept. 2018). The Moana Pacific Women's Network provides a platform to "connect, celebrate and empower emerging and established Pacific women leaders".

Useful resources

Research, reports & policy papers:

• *How diverse leadership shaped responses to COVID-19 within the International RCRC Movement*, HAG & International RCRC Movement (June 2021). This study sought to deepen understanding and contribute to the evidence base for demonstrating the "value of diverse and inclusive humanitarian teams". In doing so, the research considered the actions and decisions made during the COVID-19 pandemic as a framework to "analyse how diverse leaders shape humanitarian responses".

• *CEO Survey Report: NGO leaders on current and future*, InterAction (May 2021). This report consolidates the responses of ninety-five executives to the NGO Futures 2021 annual survey on their perceptions and responses to the changing operating environment.

• *Time for a better bargain: How the aid system short-changes women and girls in crisis*, CARE (Mar. 2021). This report looks at shortcomings and opportunities around better supporting women and girls in crisis settings, including around funding resourcing for women-led organisations and institutions and gender equality and empowerment programming, as well as "elevating leadership and equal participation of women and women's organisations in humanitarian responses and crises". It also highlights several shortcomings in the aid system, and recommends that "funding and influence must flow into women- and girls-led crisis response, for effective, long-lasting, intergenerational impact" and offers recommendations to donors, UN agencies, INGOs and the IASC on ways to achieve this.

• *Having more women humanitarian leaders will help transform the humanitarian system: Challenges and opportunities for women leaders in conflict and humanitarian health*, *Conflict and Health* BMC, 14(84), Patel, P, Meagher, K, El Achi, N, Ekzayez, A, Sullivan, R, & Bowsher, G. (2020). This paper looks at the "barriers of women's leadership domain at societal level and organisational level" and offers recommendations for advancing women's leadership in conflict and emergency health.

• *The State of Humanitarian Professions 2020*, Bioforce (2020). This study is the result of a year-long consultation with more than 1,500 humanitarian professionals, which gathers and analyses recruitment practices and professional development in the sector. It focuses on answering the following questions: How is the way Human Resources structured preventing localisation? What role can leaders take in helping to nationalise leadership and empower teams?

• *Preliminary Research Summary: A feminist exploration of women-led localisation in the Central Sulawesi response*, Action Aid UK (June 2019). Partnering with women-led organisations and local women, ActionAid conducted "a qualitative feminist research study" with the aim "to understand the challenges and opportunities for women-led localisation of the Central Sulawesi response". The paper gives an overview of the study's initial findings and offers recommendations for donors and governments to help overcome the identified barriers and capitalise on the opportunities created by Sulawesi's unique response to the crisis.

• *The Localisation of Aid and Southern-led Response to Displacement: Beyond instrumentalising local actors, Southern Responses to Displacement*, Refugee Hosts, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (July 2018). In this blog post, the author argues that responses to displacement by local communities "has historically been overlooked in academia and policy". But, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh also explores how in more recent times, "the international humanitarian community has taken steps to support local humanitarian actors responding to displacement".

• Humanitarian Advisory Group's *Diverse Leadership research project* seeks to "unpack the relationship between diverse and inclusive leadership and effective humanitarian action".
  – *Data on Diversity: Humanitarian Leadership under the spotlight*, Blackney H, Giri S, Henty P, & Kate Sutton (Oct. 2019). The largest global survey of its kind in the sector, the *State of Diversity* survey presents data on the types of individuals in humanitarian leadership roles, and looks at the impact this has on organisational performance and "what this might mean for the future of the sector".

- *Diverse and Inclusive Leadership Workshop Report* (May 2019). At this workshop, HAG convened a range of representatives from across the humanitarian sectors to discuss "how diverse and inclusive leadership can contribute to tackling key challenges faced by the humanitarian system" and discussed a range of potential methodologies and approaches for the further research.

- *Drawing on our Diversity: Humanitarian Leadership*, Sutton K., Giri S., & Berg F. (Aug. 2018). This paper proposed and tested the hypotheses that "humanitarian effectiveness is hindered when leadership does not draw on its diversity potential".

- *Promoting Localised, Women-led Approaches to Humanitarian Responses – A Briefing Note*, ActionAid (June 2017). This briefing note outlines the organisation's commitment "to devolving humanitarian responses from international to national and local levels", looking at the "barriers to a more localised humanitarian system". The paper also proposes approaches for donors, the UN, INGOs and governments to advancing a localisation agenda that is inclusive of women and "transforms gender roles and relationships".

- *Women in Humanitarian Leadership*, HAG & CHL (2017). This report assesses "what is known about the disparity between men and women in humanitarian leadership, and to what extent women are being marginalised in leadership and with what impact". It also looks at lessons from other sectors on women in leadership and explores the extent to which these can be applied in the humanitarian sphere, or to help inform future research.

Conceptual frameworks, guides, resources & practical tools:

- *2021 Humanitarian Leadership Conference*, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (April 2021). More than 1,000 delegates from across 80 different countries came together to discuss "where change is needed and what a reshaping of the humanitarian ecosystem might look like". The conference sought to "challenge traditional humanitarian systems, actors, and perceptions" through looking at the themes of decolonising aid in the humanitarian ecosystem, leadership, ways of working and the political economy of aid and solidarity. See the virtual presentations and discussions here.

- Firelight Foundation is a multi-donor public fund helping community-based organisations (CBOs) serving children, families, and communities. Firelight undertook a 'learning journey' to listen to its grantee-partners and understand how better to support them in creating lasting change at the community level and to share CBO leaders' insights and learning as a guidance resource to funders, INGOs and practitioners. To view the report and access the resources, practical tools, and templates for supporting community-driven systems change see here.

Other interesting reads:

- *Meet 5 women leading on humanitarian work who share their average day and ideas for you to get involved*, Women's Agenda (2019). This blogpost highlights a number of Australian women working and leading on humanitarian initiatives.

- *The gendered leadership gap and the humanitarian sector*, DevPolicyBlog, Black, A. (2017). This blogpost considers how and examines the challenges as to why, despite there being some progress, women continue to "remain underrepresented in leadership positions".

Podcasts, conversations & platforms:

- Aid for Aid Workers Leadership Podcast: *How to Localize Leadership Positions in the Humanitarian Context*, discusses how coaching can help "empower individuals and prepare them for taking on more responsibility and leadership".

- Local Humanitarian Leadership (LHL) platform is "built on the premise that humanitarian action should be led by local humanitarian actors whenever possible".

• #SheLeadsInCrisis, CARE's global campaign which draws attention as to how women and girls are distinctly affected by crises, advocating that "when women and girls lead, entire communities' benefit and sustainable solutions prevail".

• WHF Forum Podcast Equality Series. These podcasts from the World Humanitarian Forum include interviews with leaders, private sector executives and other global influencers, discussing the "issues that are transforming the international agenda and people's everyday lives".

• DevProWomen2030 audio series:
  – *Episode 1: Helen Clark on the need for more women in global development leadership*
  – *Episode 2: Nasra Ismail on the barriers to increased female leadership.*

• What's all this talk about feminist leadership? (Feb. 2021). This interview with Abby Maxman, CEO of Oxfam America discusses 'Feminist Leadership' and its potential benefits, impacts and limitations.

The RINGO Project is a systems change initiative that seeks to transform global civil society to respond to today's challenges, aimed at reimagining the role of the international non-governmental organisation.

As a part of the project, this thematic series maps various initiatives under key areas that cover decolonisation, finance and funding models, technology, leadership, ways of working, partnerships, and business operating models.

The purpose of this resource is for the use of practitioners in keeping up to date with the evolving discussions in this area, and promoting greater awareness of actions, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration among humanitarian actors of the role of INGOs in spearheading, facilitating, or supporting change in the sector.

The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership is an innovative collaboration between Deakin University and Save the Children that combines good humanitarian practice with academic rigour. Our mission is to lead and influence change within the humanitarian system through critical analysis, transformational and disruptive education and research, and meaningful contributions to policy and practice.

Rights CoLab is an open platform for facilitating collaborative efforts to advance human rights, among experts with diverse perspectives in the fields of civil society, technology, business and finance.