**Meeting of Religion Faith and Forced Migration Learning**

**Hub July 11, 2016**

**Co-chairs:** Sadia Kidwai, Islamic Relief and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Reader in Human Geography, Co-Director of the Migration Research Unit, and Coordinator of *Refuge in a Moving World* (University College London)

Participants: Kat Eghdamian (UCL), Susie Snyder (U of Roehamton), Andrea Lari (Integritas), Elizabeth Frank (CWS), Julie Diallo (Oxfam), Kathrun Kraft (UEL), Amjad Saleem (Paths2People), Helen Stawski (Islamic Relief), Joey Ager (PICO), Mark Simmons (C0rd), Jean Duff (JLI)

First teleconference meeting to discuss the development of a new **Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities Learning Hub** looking at the intersection of Religion, Faith and Forced Migration.

**Objectives for the Call:**

1)    To agree the research parameters for the Hub by gauging current practical programme experience and academic interest in the impact of local faith communities on different dimensions of forced migration (including refugee protection, safe passage initiatives, solidarity with refugees, and statelessness)

2)    To agree the TOR and immediate work plan for the Hub

3)    To scope out upcoming opportunities for policy dialogue; specifically around the UN Refugee Summit in New York in September.

**Introduction to JLI. *J Duff***

JLI is a knowledge management platform that brings together academics and practitioners to generate new research and communicate action orientated knowledge and evidence concerning the impact of local faith communities and their assets in promoting community wellbeing and resilience. Its work is divided into Learning Hubs around key themes.

Key lessons from the last four year of the JLI included the importance of prioritizing communications of outputs from the Learning Hub to policy makers and of engaging voices from the Global South.

**About Learning Hubs: Example of Humanitarian Resilience Learning Hub - Helen Stawski.**

This Hub ran for 4 years from 2012 till 2016; beginning with a scoping phase (identifying current knowledge and evidence gaps); followed by engagement in policy forums (specifically the UNHCR High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Faith and Protection); and the generation of new research priorities, new research projects and continued policy engagement (culminating in the production of evidence briefs for the World Humanitarian Summit).

People participated in the hub on a volunteer basis because it added value to their work, either through policy engagement for NGOs or by providing new research opportunities for academics (for example, building upon the Resilience Hub’s Scoping Survey, Alastair Ager and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh secured two separate, and yet related, small grants from a US research foundation to conduct primary research with local faith communities providing assistance to refugees in Jordan and Lebanon respectively).

**Introduction for the R and FM LH - *E Fiddian-Qasmiyeh***

The particular urgency, and timeliness, of focusing concretely on the intersections between religion, faith and forced migration was noted. At the same time, the new R and FM LH builds directly upon existing Hubs, meaning that the new Hub has strong foundations. Attention was drawn to the “lessons learned” paper which has distilled insights from the Humanitarian Resilience Learning Hub; the lessons learned paper identifies existing evidence of direct relevance for the new Hub on Forced Migration.

A brief review was provided of the questions regarding the intersection of religion, faith and refugees and FM in the TOR document:

* What roles have faith-based actors played to support forced migrants throughout different stages and different spaces of their journeys?
* What evidence exists of faith-based initiatives to support forced migrants having had a positive impact on protection outcomes?
* To what extent, and how, are local faith communities and religious leaders promoting forced migrants’ protection and resilience?
* How do the theological reflections of local faith communities on issues around forced migration, hospitality and solidarity influence their approaches?
* How effective are current partnerships and relationships between faith communities and the mainstream humanitarian architecture/formal protection mechanisms?

What lessons can be drawn from the ways that specific faith groups/communities interact with forced migrants?

Through exploring these and other questions, the Hub’s key objective is to develop a solid, balanced evidence base and develop lessons for policy and practice.

**Open Discussion re possible focus for the new Learning hub**

**Amjad:**

Speaking of his experiences in Sri Lanka, post tsunami

People always flock to religious institutions when there is a disaster. In conflict people seek out safe, sacred space - saw this in experience in northern Sri Lanka. Evidence is important, but needs to include ‘good stories’ – human interest stories - that can be promoted on social media (e.g. facebook or whatsapp) to engage new audiences. We need to think about how we want to communicate.

**Andrea:**

Raised the issue of terminology – Hub title refers to refugees and forced migrants, and yet questions in the Terms of Reference refer only to Refugees. What is the position on IDPs? They are falling off the radar

There is a lack of interaction between FBOs and the secular humanitarian structure. Observed this in Northern Iraq, where it created huge gaps in assistance and life-saving support, as well as unnecessary duplication. Public positioning of faith leaders, and their leadership of their congregations is powerful. CAR, Mali and elsewhere offer good examples of this. Experience of working with IDPs in Columbia is relevant

**Beth**

Highlighted the important role of faith communities in positively and negatively influencing public and political discussion regarding refugees and forced migrants —examples from the US.

**Julie**

How Fragility has impact on womens’ rights. Religious discourse can have an impact. Reduction of civil society space and the role of religious discourse/religious actors. Oxfam colleagues are interested

**Susie**

Role of theology/religious law, religious thinking, teaching and/or reflection can play in shaping responses of faith communities, and sometimes in shaping public policy depending on the roles that religious actors have in those contexts. Interested to see thinking and reflection on implied or implicit theology both among responding faith groups, but also self-understanding of theology or refugees themselves. Interested in particular on the spaces where self-understandings of refugees shape or intersect with local faith communities’ self-understandings. No work yet that dares to approach this area systematically.

**Kat**

Interested in the challenges of responding to politicization of religious identity in conflict and post conflict scenarios, and addressing the question of sectarianism vs. religion. Iraq and Syria are particularly clear examples.

Positive contributions of religion beyond instrumental notions. Interactions among refugee communities themselves

**Joey**

Theological identity reflections of refugees and migrants themselves

Definition of refugees and forced migrants: is a 16 year old Salvadoran child at the Mexican border a refugee? Why, or why not? According to whom?

**Amjad**

Idea of spiritual or theological approach is the crux of the value add for faith groups

High level theological discussions need to be placed in conversation with discussions at the grassroots, with those who are affected by displacement. What drives religious leaders at the front line to look at refugees/forced migrants/IDPs? What are the drivers for supporting the settlement of forced migrants?

How do our teachings engage with the host community? How do we distinguish between hosts and refugees? Or do these become blurred?

**Helen**

Local faith communities in informal response to refugees – especially in contexts where there are no formal mechanisms in place because of the UN and international organisations being overstretched etc. E.g. In Germany: cross cultural issues with refugees, churches hosting Muslim refugees and Muslim refugees being part of a church community. Interfaith dynamics. Local faith communities picking up the slack when Humanitarian agencies don’t have sufficient capacity

How do faith leaders reinforce and challenge negative perspectives e.g. in Europe.

Lived theology - does high level theological discourse have impact on local approach to refugees?

**Mark**

Link between faith groups’ networks in EU and US , SSA contexts …to support each other in developing a shared response across local areas, including with regards to integration and local needs. Can we use the links that already exist to strengthen a collective response?

**Jean**

What are the barriers to local faith engagement at the local level, and what are the mechanisms that are now working, whereby the supposedly ‘atomised’ local community has come together with the coordinated mechanism to partner with agencies? What are the conditions necessary for this to work? This is core to understanding the challenges to localization. Mechanisms for engagement between LFCS and humanitarian agencies to realize the WHS goal of 25% resources to local and state level

Conformity of Faith groups and religious networks with core humanitarian standards re partiality and proselytizing. Presumption by the mainstream sector that few FBOs are compliant with humanitarian standards.

**Amjad**

Drawing on the example of the Order of Malta, there is an increasing need to have a firm discussion of the religious understanding of humanitarian principles. How do you create that synergy between what humanitarian principles work, and how faith communities and FBOs work?

**Joey**

Describe and understand religious communities actively avoiding and distrusting mainstream agencies. The challenges with localisation include this mistrust of the mainstream humanitarian infrastructure- how could we help communities, which are actively avoiding the mainstream institutions, bridge the gap? The challenge is not necessarily ignorance and isolation, but also an active distrust towards mainstream secular organisations.

**Helen**

UN refugee summit priorities:

1) more funding,

2) accept more refugees,

3) support long-term needs, including livelihoods and education

With regards to 2) – are faith leaders actually promoting ‘welcoming the stranger’? if so, how?

With regards to 3) How are inter-communal tensions and harmonies exacerbated and ameliorated by local faith communities? Faith leaders go beyond service provision, they are also opinion formers.

**Elena**

Prioritize meaningful engagement in discussion with diverse actors from across the global south and global north.

Engage voices at grassroots level

Intersection between religion gender and forced migration

**Sadia**

Focus on Spiritual needs of refugees – what is the value of local faith communities beyond their material influence and capital? What are the spiritual needs of refugees and their hosts, and how can they be met, whilst respecting humanitarian principles re: proselytization? How does this tie into psycho-social support?

Urban dimension – the majority of forced migrants now reside in urban areas as opposed to camps. What have the roles of local faith communities been in hosting and resettlement?

**Summary of open discussion (Helen)**

* What is the scope for the Hub? Just Refugees or also Forced Migrants (including IDPs). Definitions of terms requires tightening and consideration should also be given to the political decisions behind categorization and labeling of forced migrants and the implications for their respective human rights.
* What is the impact of the public voice of religious leaders with respect to 1) local advocacy within communities to support welcoming of refugees; 2) public advocacy to change the negative narrative around refugees (or reinforce it); 3) political advocacy to challenge negative legislation or uphold IHL (and contributing towards maintaining civil society space).
* Local faith communities responding to informal (non-camp) responses to displaced people, urban and cross border settings. Considering how the social capital of local faith communities can respond when the mainstream humanitarian architecture is lacking.
* Considering the increased support for local faith communities as part of the broader localization agenda ,exemplified by the Charter for Change (launched at the WHS) which committed to increasing funding for local partners from around 5% to 25%. Looking at current barriers and opportunties for partnerships between local faith based providers and the wider humanitarian system, including concerns of proselytization.
* Identifying where religious values and the advocacy/leadership of religious leaders both supports and undermines the rights and resilience of female refugees and IDPs.
* What is the role of theology/spiritual discourse/implied & lived theology in 1) motivating people to support forced migrants; 2) providing resilience to forced migrants (including consideration of the extent to which the spiritual needs of forced migrants are being met)? What is the impact of increasing politicization of religious identity for this spiritual discourse?
* Emphasis on engaging the voices of global south service providers and refugee communities themselves to ensure the dialogue is not dominated by a Euro-North American lens.
* Personal stories and narratives are essential for communicating the innovation and diversity of experiences from LFCs and forced migrants. Social media is a great way to communicate such stories and these should complete any more formal academic reports and policy papers!!

**Thematic Subgroups - is this of interest?** Members indicated yes!

Gender

Local faith communities

**Suggested Timeline for the *Hub***

Scoping study with sub groups TBD

Public policy forum early on in the Hub is helpful for organizing the Hub and getting feedback about policymakers needs .For Resilience Hub this was the UNHCR dialogue on Faith and Protection

Timeline:

* Agree a TOR by 18th July - so this can be circulated to potential hub members with the notes

Establish subworking groups around the agreed framing questions in July and begin to scope relevant case studies and evidence

* Over August pull together a small Brief on the Learning Hub for input to the
  + UN Refugees summits in New York 19th September (Hub members asked to advise re their attendance UN Sept 19th -22 meetings)
  + the Moral Imperative meeting of FBOs on September 22nd, to review Faith-based Action Framework , with possible focus in the afternoon on Refugees and FM.

Use opportunity of New York meetings to convene an in person meeting to launch the new Hub and recruit additional Hub members

Hub to convene another meeting in a few weeks time to plan more specifically for Refugee Summit?

**Julie:** recommends LH be present at the Commission for the Status of Women meeting in March

**Sadia:**

Call for suggestions on additional Participants – asks members to submit suggestions over email

**Jean**

* Will require active outreach one to one to recruit diverse participation in the Hub
* Does the Hub want to engage policy makers in the Learning Hub?

**Helen:**

Some of us could do some stakeholder scoping on cutting edge of policymaking with suggestions re: whom to approach

E.g. Jemilah Mahmood

**Julie** will share TOR of LH with Oxfam humanitarian policy team. Suggests we include UNFPA and UNICEF also