



NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of the presentation is to highlight the role of faith-based actors in conflict-related humanitarian response by drawing on specific experiences from Norwegian Church Aid's work and partnership with two of our many local FBO partners, namely The Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD), affiliated to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East (GOPA) in Syria, and the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS) in Tanzania. The presentation will take into account both the benefits and challenges of partnership, as well as setting out recommendations for increasing the engagement of local faith actors in humanitarian response and what resources would be needed for more effective partnerships in humanitarian response.

NCA's Faith- and Partner-Based Identity and Approach

NCA's global strategy *Faith in Action*¹ clearly states that Norwegian Church Aid is committed to working with faith-based actors. It affirms that "[f]aith-based actors are often the first responders to disasters at the local and national levels. Their deeply rooted social and community networks, as well as their material and social assets, enable them to provide evacuation centres, mobilise volunteers and reinforce infrastructure for humanitarian relief and communications. Faith-based actors have the potential to address the human side of crisis management and trauma healing.»

Furthermore, NCA's humanitarian strategy 2016-2020 also makes this point, saying that "NCA's added value in humanitarian response is drawn from our identity as a Faith-based Organisation (FBO) working in partnership with local and national, often faith-based, partner organisations." NCA's mandate is to provide assistance outside Norway to refugees and internally displaced, women, girls, boys and men, affected by disasters and others who suffer and are in need of humanitarian assistance. Moreover, that NCA, as an international humanitarian actor, is governed by the humanitarian imperative and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.

NCA subscribes to the Principles of Partnership, and understands partnership as a mutually empowering relationship where the partners are both challenged, open to change, and NCA and its partners learn from one another. Partnership is as such seen as a relationship in solidarity that goes beyond funding. NCA's partnership role can in general take the form of: 1) a facilitator as NCA's

¹ <https://www.kirkensnodhjelp.no/globalassets/strategiske-dokumenter-og-foringer/globalstrategy-2015.pdf>

partners often face institutional challenges in terms of organizational capacities. NCA provides support to strengthen their institutional sustainability and to be capable of fulfilling their role in civil society; 2) an accompanier: NCA's core partners often operate in fragile and politically unstable contexts, where the space for civil society is diminishing. NCA provides support to civil society partners and together with them seeks to protect and enhance the political space in which they can operate; 3) a challenger: NCA engages and challenges religious leaders and faith-based institutions to play a more consistent positive role in society.

Norwegian Church Aid is affiliated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and is a member of the ACT Alliance, as are many of our local and national partners. NCA is also a signatory to the Charter4Change², the Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action³, and certified against the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)⁴.

PRESENTATION OF GOPA-DERD AND TCRS

In the two cases this presentation builds on, NCA partnered with national FBOs. In Syria with The Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD), affiliated to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East (GOPA), and in Tanzania with Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS).

In both cases, these are rooted, faith-based organisations with extensive national networks, presence and history. Both have a history in the delivery of basic services such as water, sanitation and hygiene, food, NFIs, etc. What follows are more extensive presentations of each organisation, along with an overview of the nature of their partnerships with NCA.

➤ GOPA-DERD

The Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD)⁵ was established in 1994, and is the official development arm of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East (GOPA). GOPA is a member of the World Council of Churches.

DERD believes that faith can only be manifested in constructive actions. As a partner of local, regional and international organisations, DERD seeks to provide services to all beneficiaries in a fair and impartial way regardless of gender, nationality, political convictions or religious beliefs. With more than 1000 staff members, DERD operates in 11 main offices in 11 governorates and in 27 centres located across Syria.

Since the very beginning of the conflict in Syria in 2011⁶, DERD has implemented its Emergency and Rapid Response, Early Recovery and Livelihood and Sustainable Development programs. They offer care to conflict-affected Syrians through a comprehensive set of programs including education, vocational training, WASH, shelter, psychosocial support, health and more. These programs aim to

² <https://charter4change.org/>

³ <http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/4012>

⁴ <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/resources/faqs>

⁵ <http://gopaderd.org/>

⁶ See <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html> for updated numbers on people in need in Syria.

provide services to all affected and vulnerable women, men, boys and girls, taking into consideration the importance of covering all their needs in every way possible.

NCA specifically supports GOPA-DERD's WASH programme in government-controlled areas in Syria. DERD works directly with the Ministry of Water Resources, as do many other WASH providers (incl. international NGOs). It also participates in the national WASH cluster. As a national NGO and church-affiliated organisation, it is however not required to coordinate its work with SARC (Syrian Arab Red Crescent) or seek government approval for initiating projects (although coordination and sharing of mutual consent was highlighted by DERD as essential). This would open up opportunities for DERD not open to other national and international NGOs.

An external evaluation of NCA's Syria Humanitarian Response WASH programme 2013-2016 found that GOPA-DERD has reported improved water access and availability to over 500,000 IDPS and war affected Syrians in 10 governorates, provided more than 50,000 people with hygiene NFIs, and reached more than 5,000,000 people with hygiene messages through small-scale sessions and mass-media campaigns. Moreover, according to one external source, the technical quality of DERD's work was in accordance with national standards. DERD have become one of the leaders in WASH activities in Syria, which is significant achievement.

NCA's technical approach in WASH has been complemented with a partner quality assurance and capacity building component addressing: cross-cutting issues such as humanitarian standards and principles; accountability mechanisms, including protection, gender issues and participation processes; partner capacity building and programme management support (i.e. needs assessment, monitoring, finance control and procurement planning).

Furthermore, the abovementioned external evaluation found that GOPA-DERD is committed to and report on international humanitarian standards (HAP, Sphere, accountability mechanisms, participation in assessments, etc.). A limit to the actual implementation of these commitments is the fact that GOPA-DERD chooses not to work in opposition areas due to concerns for the safety of its staff. Within this self-imposed restricted working environment, DERD nonetheless provides aid to those most in need regardless of any gender, nationality, political conviction or religion.

➤ TCRS

Since its establishment in 1964 until 2006, Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS)⁷ existed as the Tanzania Field Programme of the Lutheran World Federation Department for World Service (LWF/DWS), carrying out a programme of humanitarian relief and development activities with refugees and marginalized poor people in Tanzania. In January 2006, however, TCRS became an autonomous and independent Tanzanian registered NGO. TCRS is registered as a Trust Association and continues to be engaged in humanitarian, relief and development work in Tanzania on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the Christian Council of Tanzania and the global ecumenical network. TCRS is a member of the ACT Alliance.

TCRS has a long and rich history of working closely with local government and UN agencies in emergencies and in refugee response settings, including working with host communities. Over the years, TCRS has been in the forefront when it comes to building capacities of member churches for disaster preparedness, focused at minimizing people's vulnerabilities in case of potential or recurrent disasters.

⁷ <http://www.tcrs.or.tz/>

NCA is a long-term partner of TCRS on long-term WASH programmes in Tanzania. The background for the partnership experience highlighted in this presentation is the most recent influx of Burundian refugees to Tanzania since April 2015. The following months saw hundreds of thousands refugees arriving in bordering countries, the majority to Tanzania mainly through a small set of border crossings and entry points in its Kigoma region. Currently, approximately 240,000 Burundian refugees are registered in Tanzania according to UNHCR⁸.

A key feature of TCRS' work is their long-term presence and experience working in refugee settings in Western Tanzania. They have an office and compound in Kibondo in the Kigoma region, and staff with experience from previous Burundi refugee crises. They have knowledge of the camps and infrastructure and they are the largest local organisation in the area.

NCA started monitoring the refugee situation in April 2015 and early sought out a cooperation with TCRS, which started in early 2016. NCA wanted to complement and support TCRS' work on the ground in responding to the refugee influx, not replace them or provide competition for funding. TCRS is the leading agency for WASH response, as well as providing food security and protection programs, in refugee camps in the Kigoma region. The focus of the TCRS-NCA partnership has been on implementation of WASH activities in Mtendli RC, with TCRS as implementing agency with support from NCA.

An integral part of the partnership has centred on strengthening the organisational and technical capacity of TCRS within the sub-sectors of sanitation and hygiene. To that end, NCA has deployed seconded WASH staff to TCRS in Kibondo to provide emergency WASH support and technical capacity building. A focus for NCA has also been on seeking funding opportunities for both TCRS and NCA. As ACT members, both TCRS and NCA are bound by the ACT Alliance Code of Good Practice, which sets out common values, principles and commitments that will shape the humanitarian, development and advocacy work of ACT members. It outlines the minimum professional and ethical standards required from all ACT members⁹.

FAITH ACTORS AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

The Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action makes a strong claim for the role of faith actors in humanitarian action, stating that: "Through local faith communities and grassroots NGOs, faith-based actors are uniquely placed to engage in humanitarian action: faith-based actors often enjoy close proximity to, or are part of the populations affected by wider crises, and have therefore developed special relationships of trust, as well as insights and access to community members compared to many other actors; we are often present before crises, and are first responders when disasters hit. We are key providers of assistance and protection during crises and their aftermath."

A Reflection on the Unique Role of FBOs in Humanitarian Crises¹⁰ developed by the ACT Alliance in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit makes the same point, namely that often, when state institutions collapse in conflict countries, local faith leaders and religious institutions fill the gap.

⁸ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/burundi/location/2030>

⁹ <http://actalliance.org/documents/act-alliance-code-of-good-practice/>

¹⁰ http://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WHSSubmission_ACTAlliance_Role-of-FBOs-in-Hum-Response_July2015.pdf

Furthermore, the reflection argues that in many nations and regions experiencing crises and conflict, faith is central and ubiquitous. When states become weak, people increasingly identify with, and rely upon, traditional community structures and religious identities for meaning and security. Experience has, the paper continues, shown that communities rely on faith and faith institutions as part of their coping mechanism in times of disasters, enhancing communication, sharing, and compassion, offering courage, comfort and hope.

As mentioned above, local faith communities in many cases have the ability to leverage considerable resources in humanitarian response, including social capital, human resources, spiritual resilience, facilities, logistics, and financial support. Furthermore, FBOs are uniquely situated to provide critical links to local faith communities in humanitarian contexts, facilitating rapid response to disaster and reinforcing resilience of local communities for peace building and recovery. A sense of shared identity and priorities also provides a shortcut to effective partnerships with local communities in many contexts. The ACT reflection also argues that the humanitarian principles are consistent with, and ultimately based upon, core theological beliefs of the major world religions, and thus efforts of humanitarian actors and FBOs are complementary.

Nonetheless, faith actors have historically had limited access to policy tables and suffered the distrust of secular and institutional donors, perhaps due to “poor faith literacy” within humanitarian circles. Recently, during the World Humanitarian Summit and later, the role of faith actors in humanitarian response has gained more attention, though, as witnessed by among other the Oxfam study on local humanitarian leadership and religious literacy¹¹.

ANALYSIS

Benefits of partnership

In each of the aforementioned cases, NCA and partners were able to draw on a number of benefits of partnerships, as set out below.

Presence, rootedness and the faith dimension

Both TCRS and GOPA-DERD have a significant presence of offices, centres and staff across Tanzania and Syria, as mentioned earlier. TCRS already had an office in the Kigoma region, and one key strength highlighted in NCA’s WASH assessment report from April 2016 is TCRS’s long-term presence and experience in refugee settings in Western Tanzania. TCRS has also retained staff with experience from previous refugee responses.

GOPA-DERD has as described above offices and centres in most Syrian regions, and a number of motivated and trained staff. They have been able to utilize these local networks and context knowledge to good effect, in terms of identifying needs and gaps and targeting of areas of operation and beneficiary selection. They can as such ensure that project activities are appropriate and relevant for target groups (CHS standard 1).

Furthermore, the two cases also highlight the benefit arising from avoiding arduous and time-consuming registration and permit processes often faced by international NGOs, especially in an establishment phase. This is a clear comparative advantage as compared to INGOs.

¹¹ https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-local-humanitarian-leadership-religious-literacy-310317-en.pdf

Presence and rootedness is closely related to trust and acceptance from local communities and beneficiaries. TCRS has maintained a long-term presence in the Kigoma region, working both with refugees and local communities. The refugee situation in Kibondo/Kigoma areas has been described as chronic and dating back to the early 1960s. Generations of families have moved back and forth between Tanzania and Burundi/DRC with varying degrees of severity, numbers and needs. This has led to a situation of increasing political tension between the refugees and host communities and also increasing narratives of xenophobia from local government. Local faith based actors like TCRS have been part of NCA's interfaith approach that uses religious resources to teach dialogue and respect for people of different faith, background and culture.

GOPA-DERD reports that their faith-based dimension has been a very positive factor when working inside Syria, earning trust from both Christians, Kurds and Muslims in the areas they work. In part, they report that this is the result of accountable systems, a history of providing assistance impartially to people in need, and of implementing programs of high quality (e.g. in WASH and shelter). In some areas (Rural Hama, rural Aleppo and Al-Hassakeh), DERD teams have at points been the only ones allowed to enter and help affected populations, due to the reported trust in DERD.

What is more, DERD has as a result of their wide distribution of eleven offices and twenty-seven service centres over the past ten years developed good relationships with community leader and stakeholders in several areas.

Timeliness

A key variable is that humanitarian response is effective and timely (CHS standard 2). Obviously, presence on the ground and experience with delivering social assistance to communities in many cases allows national FBOs to be somewhat ahead of the curve compared to INGOs.

This is also the case when it comes to GOPA-DERD. An external evaluation of the ACT Appeal Syr121, found that national FBOs such as GOPA-DERD compared well with other INGOs when it comes to timeliness. Their presence and network of offices and centres – and not the least their mission and identity – meant that they could respond to needs from the very start of the Syrian conflict. Moreover, DERD's establishment of frontline teams composed of outreach and mobile teams, have enabled DERD to access hard-to-reach and areas where government forces has regained control more rapidly.

As mentioned above, TCRS' long-term office and long-term experience in Kibondo/Kigoma means that they were already on the ground doing community activities, including WASH. In addition, NCA had also before the recent refugee crisis already supported TCRS in long-term WASH programs. They know the camps and infrastructure and they are also the largest local organisation in the area. Having a long-term presence in the region, TCRS has worked closely in coordination with local government structures. They had resources (logistics, equipment, staff) in place, and with their presence could early on report on and start responding to the needs of the incoming refugees. The ability of TCRS to respond quickly to the crisis, their WASH capabilities, and NCA's pre-existing partnership with TCRS made it a relatively straightforward decision for NCA to support TCRS in their response to the refugee influx.

Access

Access to hard-to-reach areas is a key obstacle for any organisation, especially in conflict settings. In the case of Tanzania, access was not an issue for TCRS. In Syria, however, the picture is a different one altogether.

Both presence, rootedness and to some extent the faith dimension – or more broadly trust and acceptance – affects an organisation’s ability to access areas that for various reasons are difficult to reach. GOPA-DERD’s being the only organisation allowed to access certain areas with assistance has already been mentioned above, which allows them a greater ability to respond to certain areas than most other organisations (within government-controlled or areas recently coming back under government control). The frontline teams established by DERD underpins their ability to access areas in need quickly. GOPA-DERD reports, as mentioned earlier, that they are relatively free from government interference with where and when they work, which is also a great advantage in terms of access.

Needless to say, NCA would not have been able to provide support to people in need within (government-controlled areas of) Syria without the access provided through partnership with GOPA-DERD.

Capacity strengthening and technical support

Humanitarian response should always seek to strengthen local capacities (CHS standard 3). NCA’s partnerships with both TCRS and GOPA-DERD have included capacity-strengthening initiatives.

In the case of GOPA-DERD, NCA’s technical approach has been complemented with a partner quality assurance and capacity building component – although not always in a systematic or structured manner – addressing a number of topics: cross-cutting issues such as humanitarian standards principles; accountability mechanisms, protection, gender issues, participation processes; partner capacity building and programme management support (i.e. needs assessment, monitoring, finance control and procurement planning).

From the outset, the TCRS-NCA partnership in responding to the Burundian refugee influx included technical support components as described earlier. NCA has deployed seconded WASH staff to TCRS in Kibondo to provide emergency WASH support and technical capacity building for this purpose.

Accountability and quality standards

GOPA-DERD is committed to and report on international humanitarian standards (HAP, Sphere, accountability mechanisms, participation in assessments, etc.). However, the actual implementation of these commitments is somewhat limited by the fact that GOPA chooses not to work in opposition areas due to concerns for the safety of its staff. Within this self-imposed restricted working environment, GOPA provides aid to those most in need regardless of any gender, nationality, political disposition or religion.

The external evaluation of ACT Appeal SYR121 also found that the local FBOs in question (including GOPA-DERD) were doing comparably well in terms of adherence and commitment to standards of accountability, quality and best practice. DERD, for instance, were found to achieve satisfactorily in terms of participation of beneficiaries. Among others, they organize separate consultations and assessment discussions groups for women facilitated by women, whereas some aspects of hygiene promotion sessions have been specifically tailored for women of reproductive age and pregnant and lactating women.

GOPA-DERD also provides each beneficiary registered in their system with a complaints card that be filled out any time at their own convenience and report back to GOPA-DERD on (CHS standard 5).

Furthermore, as an ACT member, TCRS is bound by the ACT Alliance Code of Good Practice, which sets out common values, principles and commitments that shapes the humanitarian, development and advocacy work of ACT members. It outlines the minimum professional and ethical standards

required from all ACT members. Established relationships with local community leaders and hiring of project staff from the camps helps facilitate TCRS' accountability commitments.

Cost efficiency and effectiveness

A joint end line KAP (knowledge, attitude and practices) survey conducted by NCA, TCRS and UNHCR in December 2016 shows that the results of TCRS's WASH intervention in Mtendli camp was largely effective and efficient. The project is still running and as of yet, no further evaluations have been made of the intervention in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

In general, the operating model of local and national FBOs and faith actors – which includes the use of functioning and already-existing community and grassroots links, networks and involvement – allows such actors an added advantage.

When it comes to GOPA-DERD, the external evaluation of NCA's Syria Humanitarian Response WASH Programme 2013-2016 found that they reported improved water access and availability to over 500,000 IDPS and war affected Syrians in 10 governorates, provided more than 50,000 people with hygiene NFIs and reached more than 5,000,000 people with hygiene messages through small-scale sessions and mass-media campaigns (in addition to other interventions not supported through the partnership with NCA, in e.g. early recovery and livelihoods, health, psychosocial support, child protection, GBV, vocational training, etc.). According to one external source, the technical quality of GOPA-DERD's work was in accordance with national standards. GOPA-DERD claims to have become a leader in WASH activities in Syria, which would be a remarkable achievement given that at the start of the conflict WASH was not an area of technical expertise within DERD. This is clearly an achievement in terms of effectiveness. Partner procurement systems largely achieved value for money, which also underpins the cost efficiency of the interventions.

Challenges of partnership

The benefits of partnership in these cases have been substantial. Partnerships do not come without challenges, however, some of which are described below.

Administrative and donor requirements

One key challenge of partnership that often comes up are the various administrative, application and reporting requirements asked by donors and (funding) partner organisations. Donor requirements, and in some cases added requirements from the funding partner, are passed on implementing local partners. This implies more risk for the local partner in many cases. Obviously, this will have effects on both the timeliness and effectiveness of humanitarian response.

One issue highlighted has been lengthy application and reporting processes, and a lot of back and forth between NCA, partners, and sometimes donors, which sometimes has hampered the work of our national FBO partners. In the case of Syria, the external evaluation of NCA's Syria Humanitarian Response WASH Programme 2013-2016 found that NCA's business processes at times hindered cooperation. This included the duration of project approval process, causing implementation delays, out-of-date needs assessments, partners' inability to procure items, which in turn meant that delivery schedules had to be adjusted in an already volatile context.

Capacity to implement

The external evaluation of NCA's Syria Humanitarian Response WASH Programme 2013-2016 confirms that NCA is committed to supporting its partners and use expertise to build capacity. At the

same time, it observed that variations in the organisational capacity of each partner rule out a standard approach with each partner facing a particular contextual, institutional and technical challenges. A challenge is as such that there is difficult to use a uniform method and structure to working with partners on supporting and strengthening capacities. Such efforts must always be adapted to each specific context.

Our local faith partners also face internal capacity challenges, often due to lack of sufficient funding. Any organisation responding to a rapid and massive influx of refugees would experience a constraint in terms of already stretched technical capacities. For instance, TCRS expressed early on that they have some capacity challenges regarding technical implementation and strategic planning. More specifically, too little staff and/or too junior staff, in addition to a tight budget. Underfunded and understaffed in logistics and finance capacities, resulted in some delays or insufficient procurement of needed items, lack of sufficient logistical procedures, and some delays in payments to casual workers. Lack of sufficient logistical and financial procedures and staff could also ultimately lead to questions about accountability, underpinning the need for investment in capacity and systems.

Another and related concern that applies in particular to newly emerging actors, or those relatively new to working in humanitarian emergencies, relates to partners' programmes developing faster than their management systems and business processes are able to keep up with. The external evaluation of NCA's Syria programme brought up the issue, acknowledging that GOPA-DERD has had to learn and scale up quickly.

On the side of NCA, high turnover of NCA staff in the Syria programme in particular, and in some cases a lack of understanding of the context, inhibited the development of partnerships. NCA does not either have an adequate system of tracking expenditure (time, money) on partner capacity support initiatives.

As we shall see below, donors are in addition often unwilling to adequately provide funding for capacity strengthening and administrative costs. Most of our NCA's funds come from institutional donors who earmark funding to specific projects that do not include longer-term partner institutional strengthening, which could exacerbate this challenge.

Funding gaps

According to the latest Global Humanitarian Assistance Report for 2017¹², a mere 0.3 % of all funds spent on humanitarian aid goes directly to local and national NGOs. As indicated above, the funding gap for partners is also associated with both a high turnover of staff (who are often poached by INGOs who can in most cases offer higher salaries), as well as finding and keeping senior technical staff. For TCRS, it has been a challenge that during the initial phase of the refugee influx there were not that many experienced humanitarian technical staff in place due to insufficient availability of funds.

Another aspect is that the delay by governments declaring the arrival of refugees and with it a response plan, which has happened in Tanzania, delayed the release of funding to TCRS from the likes of UNHCR as they could not start work until the government declaration. TCRS have also expressed that it is a challenge when international organisations enter into the response with funds for the initial period but has no long term perspective in the response.

For GOPA-DERD, a challenge when it comes to funding has been the international sanctions regime imposed on Syria. This has translated into funds not reaching DERD on time, due to money transfers

¹² <http://devinit.org/post/global-humanitarian-assistance-2017/>

having to take place via Lebanon, thus delaying work implementation at times by weeks or even months.

Barriers to access

Although local and national actors have a level of access not always afforded to international organisations, they too experience challenges particularly in conflict settings. GOPA-DERD reports that they in general do not face too many challenges when it comes to implementation of work and reaching targeted areas. The main challenge that arises is usually the security situation; that is to say if roads are blocked due to fighting or if areas fall under the control of e.g. IS. In that case, DERD – as well as the vast majority of humanitarian actors – would not be able to have access. Sometimes that would mean difficulty with land transportation to certain areas, necessitating transport by air.

Independent monitoring and verification is of course an issue in most areas of Syria due to access restrictions. NCA's Syria Humanitarian Response WASH Programme 2013-2016 also pointed this out finding that NCA had not been able to verify the results of GOPA-DERD-implemented projects apart from one monitoring visit in February 2014 (at the time of the evaluation). The evaluation also lacked independent verification of beneficiary perspectives, due to the same access restrictions.

In general, it would be important to be realistic on what can be achieved when operational security and protection are very much dependent on military strategy (in the context of armed conflict).

Resources needed to enable more effective partnerships in humanitarian response

Access to funds for local faith actors

With only a fraction of available humanitarian funding finding its way to local humanitarian actors, including faith actors, it goes without saying that this is one key resource issue that needs to be addressed in order to enable more effective partnerships in humanitarian response. Initiatives like the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change includes commitments to increase the funding passed on to local and national partners. It is key that such initiatives are followed through. It would also help greatly if more funds were not only increased, but also provided as multi-year investments in the institutional capacities of local and national FBO responders, including on preparedness, response and coordination capacities.

Funds for capacity strengthening and support

As highlighted earlier, there is a particular gap in the financing of capacity strengthening and support (on institutional capacity, CHS, Sphere standards, humanitarian principles, and so on). In addition, it has so far seemed difficult to measure and track how much is actually spent. For instance, C4C commits us to increase support for partner capacity strengthening. Nevertheless, some INGOs, including NCA, struggle to find the funds to do this – and to track the time and amount spent on capacity strengthening work with partners. We also need to persuade donors to fund the organisational support and capacity strengthening that is required.

In Syria, as an example, the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) has been working with GOPA since 2002, focusing since the start on capacity building to be able to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. Thus, GOPA-DERD with the support of IOCC already had many of the technical and administrative foundation blocks in place to allow for an effective response to the Syria crisis. This in turn made GOPA-DERD a very attractive implementing partner of e.g. UN, and ACT members such as NCA.

Sufficient number of trained staff

Closely related to access to funding and capacity, is the question of hiring, training and retaining staff for local (faith and non-faith) humanitarian actors. This is a key issue highlighted by both TCRS and GOPA-DERD. Availability of contingency funding from partners would be a useful resources in order for local and national faith partners to be able to quickly add the number of qualified staff they would need to initiate a response in a humanitarian emergency.

Recommendations for increasing the engagement of local faith actors in humanitarian response

There is a number of recommendations that can be made on how to increase the engagement of local faith actors in humanitarian response, some more general in nature and some more specific. What follows are some of the recommendations that have emerged not only from studying the two cases in questions, but also from NCA's broader experience working with local partners:

1. **Stay true to the Principles of Partnership.** Sub-contracting should be avoided at all costs when partnering with local faith actors. Aim for genuine mutual partnerships in line with the PoP.
2. **Stick to the Core Humanitarian Standard.** All humanitarian response should be planned according to the Core Humanitarian Standard, and particularly standard three on strengthening local capacities.
3. **Sign or endorse the Charter4Change.** C4C is an influential initiative, led by both National and International NGOs, to practically implement changes to the way the Humanitarian System operates to enable more locally-led response. More signatories and endorsers are welcome.
4. **Make coordination mechanisms more accountable.** Coordination mechanisms should be made lighter, and more seats opened up for local and national actors, especially faith actors. This would enable more equitable decision-making, as well as facilitate more locally led response.
5. **Remove barriers to access from existing humanitarian funding streams.** The UN could for instance allocate at least 50% of Country Based Pooled Funds directly to national and local NGOs, including faith actors. Regulations and legal restrictions posed by donors should be revised to allow local actors to be eligible for partnership.
6. **Increase quality and quantity of funding to local faith actors.** Grand Bargain signatories should live up to their commitment of passing 25% of humanitarian funding on to local and national actors. Identify opportunities and mechanisms to scale up funding to national NGOs. One solution would be to support locally managed and governed funding pool available for local actors (ACT Alliance Rapid Response Fund as one example).
7. **Invest in capacities with a long-term perspective.** Donors and international NGOs need to develop new funding mechanisms and streams to enable increased funding that would strengthen the capacity of local and national actors, focusing on preparedness and disaster risk reduction.
8. **Donors and humanitarian actors (including UN) need to be sensitive to religious affiliation and ethnic background.** Recognize and reaffirm faith-based organisations and local faith communities as unique stakeholders in humanitarian relief, and consult with local faith leaders when designing humanitarian response and delivering humanitarian aid, recognizing that each stakeholder has particular strengths and contributions to make in building sustainable communities. Religious groups are differently affected by the conflict and by humanitarian

assistance. They are vulnerable in a different way and the humanitarian community cannot turn a blind eye. Local faith actors can play an important advisory role in such cases.

9. **Representation and visibility.** Local and national actors should always be present when localisation is debated and decisions taken. This goes equally for faith actors who historically have had limited access to policy tables, suffering the distrust of secular and institutional donors. FBOs have renewed calls for inclusion by governments and donors, as the critical role they are serving is well demonstrated.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Local presence enables local actors to be first responders. Local faith actors, such as members of the ACT Alliance or WCC member churches, are among the first to respond to humanitarian crisis, both natural and man-made, providing assistance to all people in need regardless of age, gender, faith, political affiliation, sexual orientation or ethnic background.

As faith actors and faith-based organisations, they are often uniquely situated to provide critical links to local (faith) communities in humanitarian contexts, facilitating rapid response to disaster and reinforcing resilience of local communities for peaceful co-existence and recovery. They have particular characteristics that provide benefits in specific contexts, particularly where pre-existing reservoirs of trust provide access to facilities and operations, and local, motivated staff and volunteers, reducing duplication of aid and services. Local faith actors, including FBOs, have an additional advantage in that they can quickly mobilize existing and broad networks of volunteers/constituencies, and that they by virtue of this rootedness have a good contextual awareness.

ACT has numerous examples of the roles local members have played as first responders and rapid mobilisers, and of delivering aid in conflict settings, and on example has been showcased in this presentation. Examples of good practice include local faith actors' ability to provide timely response, mobilise volunteers and staff, rapidly access affected populations and areas, delivering cost-effective and efficient responses, providing appropriate and relevant aid, and of adhering and committing to standards of accountability, quality and best practice. Challenges faced by these organisations include among others crowding out by international NGOs, few seats at the table when it comes to national and regional coordination mechanisms, and lack of access to funding.

In summary, we have highlighted the importance of investing in sustainable local faith capacities as a vital prerequisite for rooted, timely, effective and cost-efficient life-saving humanitarian response according to relevant standards and best practice.