

# LOCALIZING RESPONSE TO HUMANITARIAN NEED

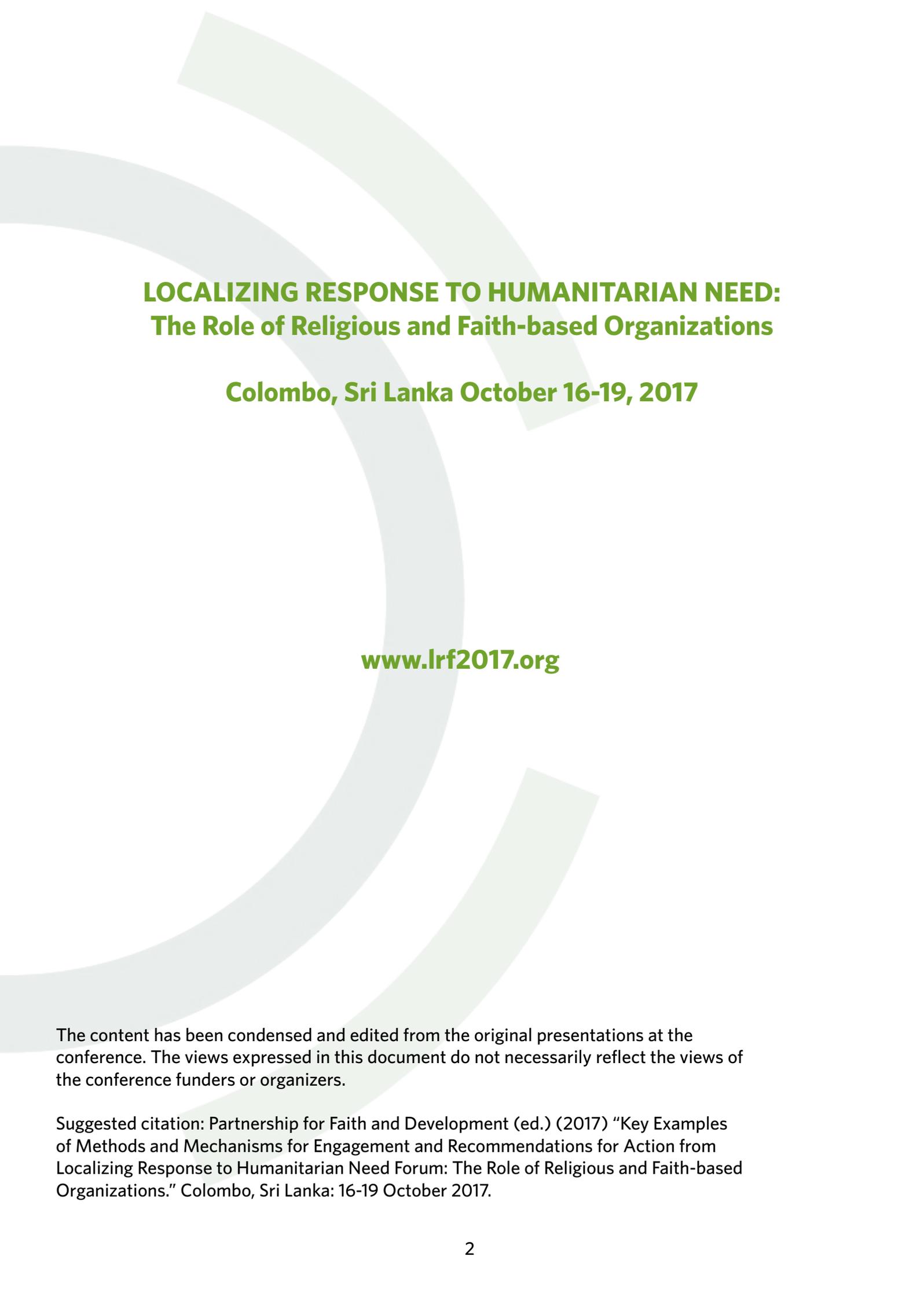
*The Role of Religious and Faith-based Organizations*

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Colombo, Sri Lanka  
October 16-19, 2017



**KEY EXAMPLES OF  
METHODS AND  
MECHANISMS FOR  
ENGAGEMENT &  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR ACTION**



# **LOCALIZING RESPONSE TO HUMANITARIAN NEED: The Role of Religious and Faith-based Organizations**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka October 16-19, 2017**

**[www.lrf2017.org](http://www.lrf2017.org)**

The content has been condensed and edited from the original presentations at the conference. The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the conference funders or organizers.

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Episcopal Relief and Development  
Soka Gakkai International  
Finn Church Aid  
Religions for Peace  
World Evangelical Alliance

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Firzan Hashim, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disasters  
Mohammed Saleem, Development Activist  
Saabira Mohideen, Logistics Consultant  
Kavitha Vijayaraj, Sarvodaya  
Urmila Selvanayagam, World Vision  
Nagulan Nesiah, Episcopal Relief & Development

### **B) INTERNATIONAL**

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Helen Stawski, in a personal capacity  
Mohamed Elsanousi, Network of Religious and Traditional Leaders  
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Monowara Gani, Muslim Charities Forum  
Deepika Singh and Mary Rose O'Brien, Religions for Peace  
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#### **CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS + KEY EXAMPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY**

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# Executive Summary



Archbishop Katanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, lighting the oil lamp during the opening ceremony

The Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need was held from 16th to 19th October 2017 in the Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka. 142 people from 36 countries assembled to learn from Sri Lankan religious leaders and FBOs and from each other about local faith engagement in humanitarian response, and to discuss how to scale up engagement.

The Forum was organized as a follow on from the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), responding to and reinforcing the localization of aid/Grand Bargain discussions, and designed to produce a body of evidence on questions of HOW to engage local faith actors, and actions to scale up their engagement as local partners.

## **Local Faith Actors (LFAs) can include the following:**

- Local faith figures (respected female and male community figures perceived as a source of moral authority such as imams, sheikhs, monks, sisters and nuns, and priests)
- Informal local faith and worship communities (informal and spontaneous social groups mobilizing in crisis to provide basic services, deriving motivation from religious sources)
- Faith networks (formally or informally linked faith groups working under a shared structure, such as zakat committees, or councils of churches)

- Local faith-influenced organizations (formal groups with strong ties to the community, from community-based organizations that are faith-inspired but not linked to religious structures to social outreach associations linked to religious institutions such as associations on mosque premises or social action centers linked to churches)
- National faith-influenced organizations – national NGOs whose work or mission are influenced by religious beliefs, e.g. Muhammadiyah

### Overall Goal

Within the context of the localization of aid agenda, to provide a platform for diverse religious and faith-based organizations to come together with secular partners to showcase and critically reflect on their respective contributions to humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery, to strengthen partnerships with local religious and FBO networks, improve delivery, and scale up interventions.

### Objectives

- *Assemble an excellent data base of evidence on the contributions of local faith-based actors to humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery for ongoing use by policy makers and practitioners*
- *Initiate an ongoing process that showcases mechanisms and methods of effective partnership between local religious and FBOs and public and private bodies, to improve delivery, and scale up interventions*
- *Stimulate new cross sector partnerships with local religious and FBO networks*
- *Catalyze advances in international policy and practice regarding engagement of local faith networks in humanitarian response*



L-R: Ash Sheikh Arkam Nooramith, Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thero, Firzan Hashim, Brahmasri Vytheeswara Kurukkal, Ven. Banagala Upatissa Thero, Rev. Ebenezer Joseph

## Lessons learned

### Rationale for LFA engagement

Reasons for prioritizing LFA engagement were similar across the varied contexts represented by the international Forum participants. They include:

- The authority and respect held by faith actors in the local community and nationally
- The resources (financial, infrastructure, personnel) held by local faith actors
- The strong motivation of LFAs, arising from religious values for human dignity and social justice
- Access to remote areas and large-scale reach of LFAs through religious networks
- LFAs immediate presence in disaster affected communities and their role as first responders in the weeks and months before external intervention, if it arrives
- Interfaith collaboration that is spurred by disaster response when communities come together to help each other in sometimes unprecedented ways
- LFA presence across all sectors of response, with LFAs having complementary specialties

### How LFAs engage

- LFAs engage through a wide variety of organizational structures and many different types of LFAs were represented at the Forum. As shown in the LFA definition, this included everything from representatives of national and regional bodies to leaders of single faith communities at the grassroots level.
- In terms of humanitarian response, but also for disaster risk reduction (DRR), the place of religious buildings as shelters and places for distributions was a means of LFA engagement. The CANDO network in Australasia maps religious assets for disaster response and works to train local churches in disaster risk reduction.
- Engagement through and with religious leaders was also a frequent method for partnership. Examples included the “game-changing” engagement with religious leaders for sensitization efforts during the Ebola response in West Africa and working with religious leaders to enhance their capacity for psychosocial response in Kurdistan, Iraq.
- Volunteers from faith communities frequently act as disaster responders. An example from Muslim and Christian youth organizations in Sri Lanka was given by the UN Resident Coordinator, Una McCauley. The extent of volunteer networks in Sri Lanka was highlighted for disaster response.
- Engagement through networks and interreligious councils was a commonly noted way in which diverse groups of LFAs form relationships with large international actors. Notable examples include the Interreligious Council of Liberia and the South Sudanese Women’s Peace Network.
- LFAs are engaged in conflict mitigation and peacebuilding work, as well as work to counter violent extremism. Efforts include District Inter-Religious Councils (DIRCs) developed by the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka to mediate local level disputes and mitigate larger scale conflict.



Halimo Weheliye,  
Somalia NGO Consortium

### Challenges and opportunities for increased engagement

- There is a challenge to include LFAs in humanitarian response processes. LFAs frequently do not know how and when to engage, and humanitarian actors may feel hesitant about who to engage with and how. This can lead to parallel systems of coordination in humanitarian response.
- LFA engagement in humanitarian action should represent true participation rather than a box ticking exercise. This means practicing restraint so as not to instrumentalize religious resources (such as using religious infrastructure or poaching staff), but truly bolstering LFA resources in a relevant and appropriate manner.
- Two-way capacity strengthening rather than top down capacity building through trainings was frequently prioritized by Forum participants. The recognition that local and international actors have capacities to share was commonly mentioned.
- To engage with international humanitarian actions, LFAs must contend with their own internal struggles. Several were noted:
  - There is a significant lack of female participation and a dominance of male voices in local religious structures.
  - Lack of interfaith understanding and tolerance between groups prior to and during disaster response can hinder collaborative efforts.
  - With a lack of training, LFAs tend to focus on response only rather than disaster risk reduction.
  - Theological teachings can affect issues related to humanitarian response, from GBV to perceptions of disaster risk.
  - LFAs lack good recording and reporting methods to track the impact of their activities.
  - Lack of registration or difficulties in becoming registered with authorities.

- o Local religious leaders can have trust and authority among their community, but can struggle to affect political change that is needed to promote reduced disaster risk.
  - o Yet equally LFAs are sometimes highly politically and legally embedded in a context in ways that make neutral humanitarian response difficult.
- However, there are many opportunities to work on these points and they are not mutually exclusive to humanitarian engagement. Examples include:
    - o Working with and through interfaith coalitions to act as focal points for links with international humanitarian coordination, such as the work of the Vanuatu Church Council to send representatives to each cluster following Cyclone Pam.
    - o Working through national FBOs as mediators, such as with MERATH in Lebanon whose local FBO partners are the implementers of projects but receive support in all stages of the project cycle from MERATH.
    - o Two-way literacy training can include information on humanitarian principles and standards for LFAs and information on the local cultural context for external humanitarian actors
    - o People naturally turn to their religious leaders for psychological support. Programs can be jointly developed that recognize this role and the place of the spiritual while also recognizing the latest professional advances in psychology and psychosocial response.
    - o Additional training, as well as the use of technology, can help LFAs improve their monitoring and evaluation so that more is known about their impact in communities.

### Key recommendations

Each panel devised a series of recommendations specific to their thematic area. The full list of recommendations is available in the document after the summary of each panel.

The main areas that repeatedly emerged from the panel recommendations include:

- Capacity strengthening and sharing between LFAs and other actors, such as INGOs, IFBOs, and governments. This includes two-way literacy training through which external actors can learn more about the local context through LFAs and LFAs can learn more about humanitarian principles and standards through INGOs.
- Increase inclusion of LFAs in humanitarian structures, from peace to response, and disaster risk reduction, and provide for participation that is meaningful rather than box ticking.
- Increase the evidence and communication of the evidence on the role of LFAs in humanitarian response.

The Call to Action document provides the main summary of action going forward. The full Call is at the end of this document. It is broken into 4 key areas:

- Goal 1. Make the case. Gather, collate, analyze, and share the evidence on LFA contribution to humanitarian response, including debriefing practitioners and policy makers on what the evidence demonstrates.

- Goal 2. Build mutual understanding. Through discussions, mapping of actors and actions, and developing guidance tools, build the relationships between international actors and LFAs.
- Goal 3. Educate on the role of LFAs and advocate for their inclusion. Including recognition of LFAs in the humanitarian localization agenda and engaging key standards making bodies, international policy processes, and international actors, to recognize LFAs.
- Goal 4. Establish coordinating mechanisms to support this action plan.



Group discussions on the Call to Action

### Actions going forward

Participants at the Forum discussed a draft Call to Action document outlining key goals and actions for scaling up engagement of LFAs in humanitarian response.

23 participants volunteered for an Advocacy Working Group (AWG) to finalize the Call to Action framework and an action plan focusing on specific opportunities to share with policymakers and practitioners, the learning from the Forum, and to advocate for the expanded role of LFAs in localized humanitarian response. Briefings are scheduled for International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and UNHCR Geneva.

The [on-line evidence base](#) created to support Forum presentations is an enduring and accessible initial resource for information about LFA engagement. It is a beginning and should be expanded with more detail and examples.

The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities will manage the Forum's online evidence base on LFA engagement, and provide secretariat support to the AWG for the next six months.

As a follow on to the Forum, many participants have briefed their own networks, and several are developing proposals to replicate and adapt the Forum in their own countries including China, Nigeria, and the UK.

# Goals and Objectives of the Forum

The Forum on Localizing Response to Humanitarian Need was held from October 16-19, 2017 at the Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Forum was organized as a follow on from the World Humanitarian Summit, responding to and reinforcing the localization of aid/Grand Bargain discussions, and designed to produce a body of evidence on questions of HOW to engage local faith actors, and actions to scale up their engagement as local partners.

## Overall Goal

Within the context of the localization of aid agenda, to provide a platform for diverse religious and faith-based organizations to come together with secular partners to showcase and critically reflect on their respective contributions to humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery, to strengthen partnerships with local religious and FBO networks, improve delivery, and scale up interventions.

## Objectives

- Assemble an excellent data base of evidence on the contributions of local faith-based actors to humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery for ongoing use by policy makers and practitioners
- Initiate an ongoing process that showcases mechanisms and methods of effective partnership between local religious and FBOs and public and private bodies, to improve delivery, and scale up interventions
- Stimulate new cross sector partnerships with local religious and FBO networks
- Catalyze advances in international policy and practice regarding engagement of local faith networks in humanitarian response

## Conference Participation Method

A call for presentations on methods and mechanisms of LFA engagement in humanitarian response was widely circulated through international faith based networks, academics and policy experts, targeting especially local actors. Based on a review committee's selections, invitations were sent to over 50 people to give brief presentations of pertinent case studies and then engage in peer-to-peer learning exchange to discuss with their fellow Forum participants.

The conference process itself was designed to maximize peer to peer learning exchange among the 142 diverse participants from 36 countries and many religious backgrounds. Working sessions were held around 6 specific topics at which brief presentations on aspects of LFA engagement were made: Peace and Conflict; Disaster Response; Disaster Risk Reduction; Refugees and Forced Migration; Gender-based Violence; and Children and Health. Key recommendations and practical next steps for scaling up LFA engagement in each area were developed collaboratively by participants in each session.

An [online database of resources](#) was established to provide the full and detailed evidence on their case studies to complement the brief presentations given at the conference. These resources remain on the conference website to provide a database of the evidence presented and collected at the Forum. It is meant to be used as a resource for academics, policy makers, and practitioners in the future as an easily searchable base for finding key examples of the role of LFAs in humanitarian action.

The learning exchange and working sessions were framed at the opening of the conference by remarks and challenges from governmental representatives, and by the experiences of Sri Lankan religious leaders from Buddhist, Christian Hindu and Muslim traditions. Following the 6 working sessions, participants discussed specific actions needed to scale up LFA engagement, providing extensive feedback on a draft Call to Action document, which can be found at the end of this summary document.

### **Key Methods and Mechanisms**

This document summarizes the main examples of methods and mechanisms for engagement with LFAs that emerged from the conference. More detail can be found by clicking on the hyperlinks to reach the supplementary material submitted by each panelist or by reading the full [Conference Proceedings](#) document, which provides more detail.

# Day 1

## OPENING PLENARY SESSION

### Speakers - Conference Organizers

[Ven. Banagala Upatissa Thero](#), Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka

[Ms. Jean Duff](#), Partnership for Faith and Development, USA

[Mr. Benjamin Laniado](#), CADENA, Mexico (by video)

[Dr. Rob Kilpatrick](#), Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, New Zealand

[Mr. Anwar Khan](#), Islamic Relief, USA

[Rev. Ebenezer Joseph](#), National Christian Council of Sri Lanka

### High Level Speakers

[H.E. Ayman Al Mufleh](#), Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization, Jordan

[Archbishop Masimango Katanda](#), Anglican Church, Democratic Republic of Congo

[Mr. Andrew Sisson](#), Director, [USAID](#) Mission, Sri Lanka

[Judge Mohamad Abou Zeid](#), Islamic Sunni Courts, Lebanon

[Cannon Sarah Snyder](#), Peace and Reconciliation for the Archbishop of Canterbury



Ven. Banagala Upatissa Thero and H.E. Ayman Al Mufleh lit the oil lamp. The Opening Reception commenced with a moment of silent reflection, the national anthem of Sri Lanka, and the traditional lighting of the oil lamp that signifies illumination of new life and hope for a better future.

Venerable Banagala Upatissa Thero, the co-chair of the Forum with Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, opened by underlining that the gathering was the outcome of the collective efforts of a diverse group of religious and faith-based networks. He said “Local religious organizations are well equipped, well positioned to contribute and engage in responding to need of victims, refugees, displaced people due to natural disaster and human follies. No doubt helping others will help us to discover ourselves” – Ven. Banagala

Rev. Ebenezer Joseph emphasized that Sri Lanka has a wealth of experience in localizing the work of religious leaders, faith-based organizations, and faith communities. Not all stories are positive and successful, but he stressed the need to learn from failures as well. He concluded by saying that compassion for the suffering of humanity should be the driving force for the Forum.



Archbishop Katanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, gives his opening remarks, gives his opening remarks

### Key Examples

In DRC, Archbishop Katanda highlighted how, in 1994 when Rwandan refugees came to DRC, the local churches immediately responded and filled a vital gap in the week that it took for international actors to arrive. Once they arrived, however, these LFAs were pushed aside in the continued response.

- In Jordan, there are over 3 million Palestinian and Syrian refugees. LFAs have filled gaps where government provision has not been able to provide support. LFAs are represented across all sectors and regions. They also go beyond immediate emergency relief to provide capacity building and longer term, sustainable development.
- In Sri Lanka, USAID has partnered with the National Peace Council to support its efforts to build interreligious committees in districts throughout the country to mitigate outbreaks of violence and

ease tensions among diverse religious and ethnic groups at local levels.

- The Anglican Communion works with the Mothers' Union to train spouses of clergy who often are the most senior female community leaders . Yet, these women have previously received no training on peace and conflict, such as conflict prevention and mediation, even though they are at the front lines in communities affected by violence.

*"If we are really serious about localization we must seek to find ways that will take us to the fruit stalls in the pavements of the Asian cities and the kitchen of the poor mud huts in the villages. It is not easy. We are not trying to drive faith, we are trying to open up a space for faith to drive us." - Rev. Ebenezer*



Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, National Christian Council of Sri Lanka. calls for compassion to drive the Forum

# Day 2

## CHARGES TO THE CONFERENCE

### MODERATOR

[Saba Al Mubaslat](#), Humanitarian Leadership Academy, UK

### SPEECHES

[Menique Amarasinghe](#), UNHCR, Sri Lanka

[Rinchen Chopel](#), South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIVEAC)

[Una McCauley](#), Resident Coordinator of the UN, Sri Lanka

[Michael Newman](#), Department of Foreign Affairs Trade, Australia

### PANELLISTS

[Sheikh Musa Bamba](#), Interreligious Council of Liberia

[Isabel Richardson](#), Madras Christian Council of Social Service and World Council of Churches India

[Theresa Carino](#), Amity Foundation China

[Halimo E. Weheliye](#), NGO Consortium Somalia

[Anwar Khan](#), Islamic Relief, USA

[Rev. Lucas Koach](#), Food for the Hungry, USA



Sheikh Musa Bamba, Isabel Richardson, Saba Al Mubaslat, Anwar Khan, Halimo Weheliye, Theresa Carino, Rev. Lucas Koach

As moderator, Saba Al Mubaslat, CEO of the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA), addressed the collected conference participants to focus the group on the matter of localization.

*Is there genuinely a place for local faith organizations around the table? Are they part of the discussion? Are they part of the debate? If not, then why? What can be done to make sure that their participation is not a simple box ticking exercise...? – Saba Al Mubaslat*

Speakers from 4 different governmental organizations – UNHCR Sri Lanka, SAIVEAC, UN, and the Australian Government – spoke of their experience and the position of their organizations regarding local faith actors, challenging Forum participants to address specific realities and concerns

*“The real challenge for the Forum is to explore how unique assets in religious based organizations can be harmonized and mainstreamed with other organizations providing assistance, including the private sector”. – Michael Newman*



L-R Sheikh Musa Bamba, Interreligious Council of Liberia, Isobel Richardson, World Council of Churches India, Saba Al Mubaslat, Humanitarian Leadership Academy

## KEY EXAMPLES OF METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT

- In Sri Lanka, UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Una McCauley, recounted the story of two youth organizations, one evangelical Christian and the other Muslim, that came together to provide effective coordination during the 2016 flooding in the country. The success of the collaboration outshone many more established coordination structures. The UN held discussions with 9 young people from these organizations to discuss the response.
- The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIVEAC) is in the process of establishing an Interfaith Platform to build the role of interfaith actors in child protection in South East Asia. The first meeting will be held in early 2018 and they are currently undertaking a mapping exercise to invite more partners to the platform.
- In Bhutan, Dr. Rinchen Chopel described his work to establish a Child Care and Protection Institution within the structures of national Buddhism. They now have monastery heads from all over the country forming part of an expert committee who are trained both in the country and in international visits on the rights of the child and international standards.
- In Liberia, the National Muslim Council of Liberia joined with the Liberian Council of Churches to create the Interreligious Council of Liberia during the country's civil war. Their work during the war to act as a united voice against violence perpetrated on innocent civilians raised their profile in the country. They are now the number one partner of the Liberian government in peacebuilding, have started other such bodies in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, and they recently mobilized 22 political parties to sign a pledge to deal with conflict through the courts rather than on the streets.
- In Somalia, the NGO Consortium coordinates over 85 local and international organizations. 89 percent of the monetary needs of the organizations are provided for through international humanitarian aid and up to 90 percent of the population need relief, which has led to donor fatigue. Religious leaders were called upon to mobilize funds that resulted in millions of dollars of funds in the first six months of the effort, from various governments, businessmen and foreign FBOs. The influx of funds has rendered these religious organizations better placed to immediately respond to those affected by drought. The leaders had managed to bring people of different tribes together, united by their faith. However, there were concerns raised by other civil society organizations about the limited technical knowledge that these religious leaders have in dealing with a humanitarian crisis, the participatory levels of women, transparency and ad-hoc administrative structures. The financial resources of the leaders meant that these concerns were not always heeded. It shows that no one group can be responsible, and harmonies must be found for collective work.

*I am a learning humanitarian coordinator and I am very humbled by these young people in interfaith coming together to save vulnerable populations. - Una McCauley*



Una McCauley, UN Sri Lanka Resident Coordinator

Saba Al Mubaslat concluded the session by summarizing the charges to the conference from the speakers:

1. Faith and religious organizations do exist whether you choose to acknowledge and recognize them or not. How can they become part of the organic ecosystem of humanitarian action or how are they excluded so that they create parallel systems that lack coordination with other humanitarian actors?
2. Capacities strengthening is not a one-way street. It does not go from the global to the local, but it moves both ways. LFAs can help educate international actors to include reflection on aspects of culture and religion in humanitarian action and then there is capacity strengthening for LFAs so that they understand and abide by standards of the humanitarian system.
3. Many resources already exist at the local faith level. Mosques, churches, and temples regularly act as shelters, for example. How should the secular and non-religious organizations engage with the positive assets that are already there?

*How can we localize the global learning and globalize the local learning? - Saba Al Mubaslat*



Anwar Khan, Islamic Relief USA

*What I found was we can build walls, or we can build bridges. I think bridges are more useful than walls. They take the same amount of energy, cost, and money ... but [only] one helps you to get along.*

- Anwar Khan

# Perspectives of Sri Lankan Religious Leaders

## MODERATOR

Firzan Hashim, Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Management

## SPEAKERS

[Ash Sheikh Arkam Nooramith](#), Matara Jumma Masjid

[Brahmasri Vytheeswara Kurukkal](#), Sri Vishnu Kovil

[Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thero](#), Walpola Rahula Institute for Buddhist Studies

[Rev. Ebenezer Joseph](#), National Christian Council

## PRESENTERS OF CASE STUDIES

[Faizer Khan](#), Muslim Aid

[Thoumiyan Soundaram](#), National Christian Evangelical Alliance

[Kavitha Vijayaraj](#), Sri Lanka Jathika Sarvodya Shramadana Sangamaya

[Theivendirarajah](#), Caritas Sri Lanka



L-R Ash Sheikh Arkam Nooramith, Ven. Galkande Dhammananda Thero, Firzan Hashim, Brahmasri Vytheeswara Kurukkal, Ven. Banagala Upatissa Thero, Rev. Ebenezer Joseph

Mr. Firzan Hashim gave an overview of the denominations of the faith communities in Sri Lanka, with Buddhism amounting to 70 percent of the population and Hindu, Islam and Christians amounting to 12.6 percent, 9.7 percent, and 7.4 percent respectively. He highlighted the major conflicts and crises in Sri Lanka including the riots in 1983, the 27 year long civil war, the tsunami of 2004, and the floods of May 2016 and 2017. The speakers then described their experience in humanitarian response and the perspectives of their religious traditions.

## KEY EXAMPLES

- In the civil war, Rev. Joseph worked with Ven. Upatissa Thero in an interfaith collaboration to obtain access to refugees in highly restricted camps and to arrange for Muslim Aid to provide education for displaced children.

- Sheikh Nooramith underlined that success is not achieved through one faith group alone and times change. Therefore, the ability of a religious community to respond to a crisis might change when they are overwhelmed by another disaster. He shared the example of a Buddhist FBO building 526 houses for Muslims after the tsunami in 2004.

- In 2012 and 2013, hate speech began to escalate. Ven. Dhammananda Thero explained how a group of young Muslims used social media to counteract these tensions and rallied support from a large number of people.

- In Colombo, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance has worked to build understanding with a Buddhist temple to access the local population near the temple who were at risk of flooding and alligator attacks.

- Caritas have worked in the country for 50 years. They have a North-South Dialogue Program, which is a community live-in training program conducted over 3 days to bring communities together. The challenges in setting up the program were resolved through negotiations for permission with a variety of local leaders, religious, and others.

- Brahasri Vytheeswara Kurukkal underlined the diversity of Hindu religious practice and also stated that Hinduism has recognized the rights of women since its earliest incarnation, with love and compassion equally existing as fundamentals that push people to help each other.

## Challenges

In the following Q&A, forum participants recognized some of the challenges in working with religious leaders and communities in humanitarian response. These include:

-The dominance of male voices among religious leaders and the lack of female participation in religious hierarchies.

-The challenges of coordinating across religious institutions and working to unite different faith traditions.

-The challenge for LFAs to focus on disaster risk reduction and preparedness rather than just response.



Rev. Ebenezer Joseph, National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, tells of his humanitarian work in Sri Lanka

# Thematic Sessions

## PANEL 1: PEACE AND CONFLICT

### MODERATORS

[Dr. Imrana Umar](#), [International Interfaith Peace Corps, USA](#)

[Dr. Laura Payne](#), [Coventry University, UK](#)

### PANELISTS

[Rose Wright](#), [Anglican Church, UK](#)

[Thoumiyan Soundaram](#), [National Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka](#)

[Prof. Anne Kubai](#), [Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Finland](#)

[Moussa Sangara](#), [World Vision, Central African Republic](#)

[Sheikh Mohamad Abou Zeid](#), [Adyan Foundation of Lebanon](#)

[Arne Naess-Holm](#), [Norwegian Church Aid, ACT Alliance](#)



Moderator Laura Payne, Coventry University, with panelists Moussa Sangara, Sangara, World Vision Central African Republic, and Anne Kubai, Evangelical Lutheran Mission of Finland

The moderators invited the panelists to give short presentations, before re-organizing the room to allow for audience participation through small group discussions. Each small group was given a series of questions to discuss. The whole room then came back together to formulate a series of recommendations to further engagement of LFAs in international humanitarian response.

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- [South Sudanese Women's Network for Peace \(SSWNP\)](#) - peace architecture struggles to include women's and grassroots level perspectives. Between 1990 and 2010 only 16 percent of peace agreements referenced the specific needs of women. This network provided the necessary coordination to bring women's voices to the fore through the "Women's Agenda for Peace." (Rose Wright)
- Give Peace a Chance campaign, Sri Lanka - working with young people to put them in each other's shoes helped bridge regional, religious, and ethnic divides. [The campaign included exchange visits between Sinhala and Tamil youth](#). Interfaith peace programs should not forget the important place of dedicated youth work. (Thoumiyan Soundaram)
- [Religious Leaders in Psychosocial Response](#), Iraq - people naturally gravitate towards their religious leaders for psychosocial support. Yet, these leaders also need support and training to provide the best care for their community. The program in Iraq helped religious leaders in this work. (Anne Kubai)
- [Interfaith Peacebuilding, Central African Republic](#) - standardized operational responses can work negatively so it is important to create customized response plans taking into consideration ongoing dynamics and focusing on trust building. Given the complexity of conflict dynamics, programs must be interactive and prepared to change course if and where necessary. (Moussa Sangara)
- Prevention of Religious Extremism, Lebanon - The influx of 25,000 Syrian refugees in the town of Saida (Sidon) highlighted a lack of experience in interfacing with other organizations from a variety of backgrounds between LFAs. An increased awareness of Sunni Muslim religious discourse about the Syrian crisis was also required to utilize as a tool for peacebuilding rather than violence. [By cornering and stigmatizing radicals or extremists, one cannot address the roots of their ideology](#). However, through constant engagement it is possible to shift paradigms. (Sheik Mohamad Abou Zeid)
- [Norwegian Church Aid reviewed work with LFAs in conflict-related humanitarian response in Tanzania and Syria](#). In Syria the work was with the Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development (DERD) of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East (GOPA). The work focused on WASH programming and in three years improved water access for over 500,000 people and reached 5,000,000 with hygiene messaging. DERD have become a leader in WASH in Syria. In Tanzania, the partnership was with the Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service in their response to Burindian refugees. The review showed that national and local organizations are the best positioned for a timely and effective response. The review also showed that capacity strengthening is one of the main contributions that global FBOs can make to LFAs. (Arne Naess-Holm)



L-R Panelists Rose Wright, Anglican Church UK, with Sheikh Mohamad Abou Zeid, Adyan Foundation of Lebanon, with moderator Imrana Umar, International Interfaith Peace Corps

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE LFA ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

1. Improve partnerships between FBOs/religious organizations and others.
  - a. Encourage recognition of FBOs/religious organizations by others.
  - b. Educate others on FBOs/religious organizations and ask them to publicly commit to be more inclusive of faith-based actors.
  - c. Advocate for more equal partnerships that avoid subcontracting and recognize FBOs/religious organizations as architects of their own approaches. Align with existing localization campaigns.
2. Improve partnerships between FBOs/religious organizations.
  - a. Encourage coalition building and collaboration to increase the voices of underrepresented actors.
  - b. Tackle competitiveness over religious authority/who is best placed to respond and find common ground based on principles/standards.
  - c. Recognize and address power imbalances between faith-based organizations, which can be well resourced, networked and capacitated, and religious organizations/local faith communities.
  - d. Recognize and address the fact that faith-based communities include people who incite

conflict and violence and offer training for contextualized interpretation of scripture/ hermeneutics.

- 3.** Address the chronic underfunding of faith-based peacebuilding.
  - a. Equip FBOs and religious organizations with capacities and tools to search and compete for donor funding.
  - b. Encourage donors to provide funding mechanisms to specifically support FBOs and religious organizations in peacebuilding.
  - c. Encourage FBOs and religious organizations to join international initiatives such as the JLI and PaRD to map resources.
  - d. Encourage FBOs and religious organizations to join and campaign for the Charter for Change and other localization initiatives.
- 4.** Ensure meaningful representation, inclusion and participation of all groups, especially within conflict to peace transitions.
  - a. Include women, youth, children, people with disabilities as potential intervenors/actors as well as beneficiaries.
  - b. Be inclusive of indigenous knowledge, local languages, and customs.
- 5.** Provide capacity building opportunities for FBOs/religious organizations and others to understand faith-based peacebuilding.
  - a. Create companionship between local faith-based actors and international (non-faith-based) actors to support mutual learning.
  - b. Compile a compendium of resources to support capacity building of faith-based actors using shared standards.
  - c. Empower FBOs and religious organizations to initiate work by relying on their own assets, without waiting for external support

## PANEL 2: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

### MODERATORS

[Mihir Bhatt](#), All India Disaster Mitigation Institute

[Dr David Boan](#), World Evangelical Alliance, USA

### PANELISTS

[Nobuyuki Asai](#), Soka Gakkai International, Japan

[Hiruy Teka](#), Samaritans Purse, UK

[Mark Scheffer](#), Baha'i International Community

[Alice Banfield](#), Deakin University, Australia

[Raghu Balachandran](#), Alliance Development Trust, Sri Lanka

[Rosa Carmargo De Bravo](#), Tearfund, Colombia

[Thir Bahadur Koirala](#), Micah, Nepal

[Irfan Khan](#), Muslim Hands, UK



L-R Mark Scheffer, Baha'i International Community, Mihir Bhatt, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, David Boan, World Evangelical Alliance, USA

Dr. Boan commenced proceedings by reminding the audience that 60 percent of disasters in the world go unnoticed in the West. It is therefore essential to recognize the strengths and resources LFAs already possess and help equip them better to respond to disaster. Each panelist then shared their perspective in turn.

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- [Flood response with LFAs in the Balkans](#) - following the 2014 floods, Samaritan's Purse local partners, Tabita, Love Your Neighbor, and Bread of Life, organized 14 churches to provide for 3,200 people. In recognizing the challenges of partnering with LFAs, such as the ways they can be politically, legally, and socially embedded, Samaritan's Purse emphasized the need to work with these organizations on humanitarian guidelines and principles. (Hiruy Tekla)
- [Religious representatives for humanitarian coordination in Vanuatu](#) - 90 percent of the population is Christian, which means it is very important that the state works closely together with the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC). The VCC formed a 'Church Working Group' and had representatives assigned to each of the sectoral clusters (e.g., logistics, health, shelter) in the government's coordination mechanism following Cyclone Pam. This allowed grassroots voices to reach the clusters equally for information about the humanitarian response communicated at the grassroots level. (Alice Banfield)
- Registration and coordination with local and national authorities in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and [Myanmar](#) - LFAs in these three countries had, at times, struggled for recognition by the formal authorities which hampered their humanitarian efforts. In Sri Lanka, dialogue with the government helped to ease tensions and led to partnership between the national authorities and the Interfaith Forum. (Ragu Balachandran, Thir Koirala, Irfan Khan)
- In Japan, 80 percent do not believe in any religion, which can affect the unity needed for disaster response. They found that some local officials even believed that it was prohibited to talk with LFAs for disaster response. Soka Gakkai worked to build partnerships between all kinds of organizations following the April 2016 earthquakes. Their program demonstrated that new partnerships, both interfaith and from faith partners to non-faith partners, are increasing and this is encouraging other stakeholders such as the government and private sector to engage further as well. ([Nobuyuki Asai](#))
- During the cyclone that hit the islands of Vanuatu in 2015, 90 percent of structures were destroyed. Mark Sheffer stressed the importance of understanding the role FBOs can play beyond the role of a NGO. [Community building activities were undertaken by Bahá'is in the area, but greatly aided the capacity to organize following the cyclone.](#) FBOs can draw help from religious history and function for the higher purpose of humanity. This re-contextualizes the meaning of relief, promoting the idea of resilience in disaster as a fundamentally human thing. (Mark Sheffer)
- Churches responding to disaster in Latin America, with reference to the 2016 Ecuador earthquake. Churches provide immediate response to the disaster in the form of material goods, even though they have received no formal training. These LFAs need support to enhance their response in the future. This should include training on counselling from [a spiritual and psychological perspective](#), as well as coordination for material provision. (Rosa Carmargo De Bravo)

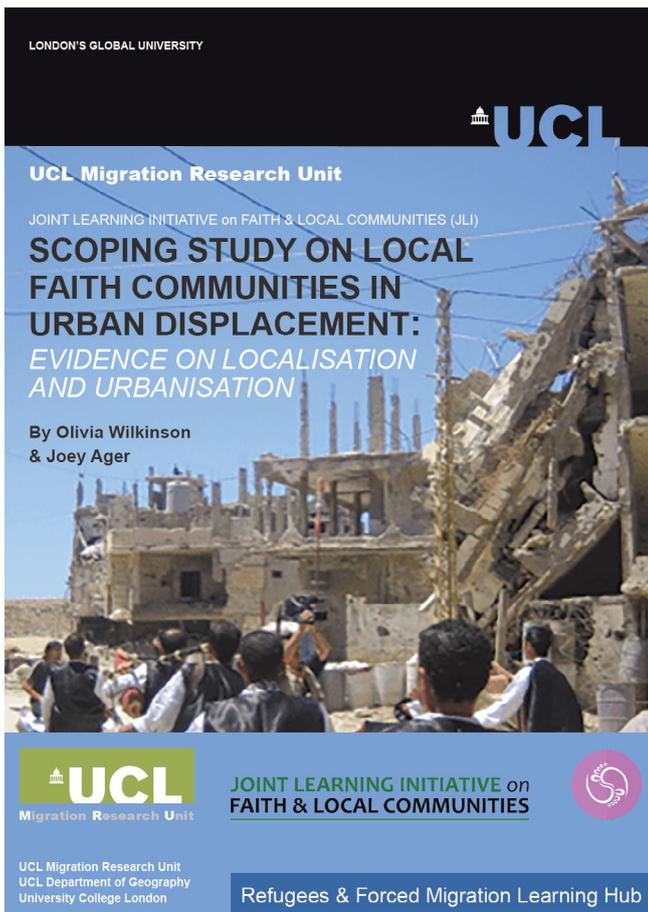


Alice Banfield, Deakin University, Australia , Nobuyuki Asai, Soka Gakkai International, Japan, Thir Koirala, Micah, Nepal

The group split into smaller groups for discussion before coming back together to formulate key recommendations emerging from the panel.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE LFA ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

- Support hazard specific co-creation of knowledge on local role of FBOs.
- Event specific piloting of innovative FBO engagement mechanisms.
- Sustained investment in capability raising of FBO teams and partners.
- Promotion of community service as foundational to resilience and DRR
- Better understanding is needed by NGOs of LFA needs, functions and language.



## PANEL 3: REFUGEES AND FORCED MIGRATION

### MODERATORS

[Dr. Olivia Wilkinson](#), Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, USA  
[Faizer Khan](#), Muslim Aid, Sri Lanka

### PANELISTS

[Rachel Stephens](#), Middle East Revive and Thrive, Lebanon  
[Rev. Mark Obi](#), Evangelical World Mission, Gambia  
[Dr. Estella Carpi](#), University College of London, UK  
[Johanna Fadipe](#), Mothers' Union, Burundi  
[Menya Balonde Muhammad](#), Muslim Supreme Council, Uganda  
[Usman Bola](#), Future Prowess Islamic Network/ Islamic Green Club Initiative, Nigeria

After a brief introduction from the moderators, the panelists gave their presentations. Before breaking into small groups for discussion, Dr. Olivia Wilkinson also launched the latest scoping study from the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, entitled [Scoping Study on Local Faith Communities in Urban Displacement: Evidence on Localization and Urbanization](#). The scoping study was authored by Dr. Wilkinson and Joey Ager and was produced by the JLI in collaboration with University College London's Migration Research Unit through the JLI Refugee and Forced Migration Learning Hub's co-chair, Dr. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. Findings from the research demonstrate the nuances of engaging with LFAs in refugee response in urban settings.



**PANELISTS :** [L to R: Johanna Fadippe, Rev Mark Obi, Faizer Khan, Dr Olivia Wilkinson, Rachel Stephens, Dr Estella Carpi, Usman Bola Risikatu, Menya Balonde Muhamed]

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- [Bridging between international and local actors for Syrian refugees in Lebanon](#) - MERATH reaches roughly 10,000 households and supports 1,200 out of school children by actively partnering with over 50 LFAs who are the implementers of all the projects. In the education programs, they achieved an 89.1% completion rate in 2016-17. MERATH is a mediator between LFAs and international donors, allowing LFAs to access funding and working with LFAs to attain donor standards. They connect the two and help with understanding between different perspectives. This enables them to equip LFAs for response by connecting them to funds from international donors. (Rachel Stephens)
- LFAs act regardless of awareness and attention from international actors - In the Gambia, [local religious leaders came together in interfaith unity to encourage young people to avoid joining the conflict](#). This was not recognized or supported by international actors, showing that there are missed opportunities for engagement and support of local efforts. (Rev. Mark Obi)
- [Interfaith collaboration increases effectiveness and access to funding](#) - in Nigeria, working with women's organizations across faiths and with local actors with knowledge of both Christian and Muslim faiths has enabled more effective programs. This is especially relevant in reaching out and in harnessing collective power to increase their representation to the government and international actors. This also builds more partnerships because of an increased awareness of interfaith activities among key donor partners. (Usman Bola)
- In comparing perceptions of Shi'ite FBOs in Beirut's southern suburbs providing emergency relief during the July 2006 war and Arab Gulf FBOs providing aid to Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon from 2011-2014, [Dr. Carpi found that the Shi'ite aid providers were considered locals even though their headquarters were in Iran, while the Arab Gulf FBOs were portrayed as external actors even though they were politically aligned with locals](#). This demonstrates the difficulties in defining the exact terms of localization. (Estella Carpi)
- In Burundi, [Mother's Union worked with 24 local Burundian researchers to evaluate their impact](#). They found that LFAs brought positive change and that INGOs received negative feedback from locals for not understanding the local culture. The researchers recommended that LFAs need empowerment to articulate local capacity and create the change in their communities. For example, the Mothers' Union program has now evolved to include mechanisms that focus on peacebuilding and GBV. (Johanna Fadipe)
- The [Uganda Muslim Supreme Council](#) was founded in 1971, and now works to ease suffering in their country regardless of faith. Uganda has the second largest refugee population in the whole world, with 1.2 million refugees, largely from South Sudan, DRC, Burundi and Tanzania. The Muslim Supreme Council encountered young women forced into early marriage among the refugee population. They now work with local leaders of churches and mosques and train them how to handle issues of early marriage in humanitarian crisis. (Menya Balonde)

*"The challenge is that the number of refugees are increasing tremendously, day by day. But as much as we have our weaknesses, as a country we are doing something to solve this crisis."* - Menya Balonde



L-R Rachel Stephens, Middle East Revive and Thrive, Lebanon, Estella Carpi, University College of London, UK  
Usman Bola, Future Prowess Islamic Network/Islamic Green Club Initiative, Nigeria

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE LFA ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

- Promote Two-way literacy - LFAs <-> humanitarian system
  - o Create tools that explore religious language on migration and find alignments between humanitarian principles and religious values
- Require mandatory inclusion of LFAs in refugee response structures
  - o Capacity building for LFAs to operate in clusters, for example
  - o Encourage the creation and continuation of coordinating structures/consortium of LFAs to act as focal points for engagement with the humanitarian system
- Build respect for LFAs from the humanitarian system
  - o Use evidence-based research conducted by trained local faith actors to communicate to decision makers
- Include LFAs in decision making
  - o Resources for LFAs to attend international policy fora
  - o Increased inclusion in Global Compact on refugees, such as High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges
  - o Responsibility for change with INGOs to include LFAs in decision making
- Enhance the humanitarian business process for LFAs
  - o Evaluate LFA capacity before crisis, including LFA capacity for mitigation
  - o Facilitate LFA reporting, transparency, and accountability
  - o Micro Grants for small LFAs - increase financing structures for smaller organizations
  - o Human Resources - keep staff in LFAs to reduce brain drain when external actors arrive

## PANEL 4: DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RESILIENCE

### MODERATORS

[Nagulan Nesiah](#), Episcopal Relief and Development

[Atallah Fitzgibbon](#), Islamic Relief Worldwide, UK

### PANELLISTS

[Bob Mitchell](#), Caritas, Church Agency Network, Australia

[Roshan Mendis](#), LEADS, Sri Lanka

[Andrew Smith](#), The Feast, UK and Lebanon

[Umair Hasan](#), Islamic Relief, Indonesia

[Catriona Dejean](#), Tearfund, UK

[Douwe Dijkstra](#), Tearfund, Nepal

[Archbishop Katanda](#), Anglican Church, Democratic Republic of Congo



L-R Atallah FitzGibbon, Islamic Relief Worldwide, UK, Bob Mitchell, Caritas, Church Agency Network, Australia, Catriona Dejean, Tearfund, UK, Roshan Menids, LEADS, Sri Lanka, Andrew Smith, The Feast, UK and Lebanon

The panelists were asked to respond to set questions from the moderators to spark diversity of discussion. Following the panelists' presentations, the room split up into small groups for discussion and to formulate the panel recommendations.

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- In the Pacific, [the Church Agencies' Network for Disaster Operation \(CANDO\)](#) has built a network to effectively spread disaster risk reduction methods through church hierarchies, including a mix of [theological and technical reflection on disaster risk reduction](#). CANDO conducted workshops and created awareness among church leaders about disaster risk reduction and prevention. It was crucial to build ecumenical networks to gather the support of the hierarchical structures of church organizations to get the message through effectively. Network partners responded in 100 locations in Fijian islands following Cyclone Winston in February 2016. (Bob Mitchell)

- In Sri Lanka, there has been flooding (as seen in 2016 and 2017) and widespread drought across 20 of the country's 25 districts with 300,000 households lacking sufficient food. LEADS work with LFAs to overcome their lack of awareness about humanitarian standards and occasional unwillingness to work in interfaith environments. [Village level disaster response committees include religious leaders and interreligious alliances](#). [DRR is an opportunity for inter-faith interaction and dissolving prejudices](#). LEADS recommend working on building relationships and networks between LFAs as a form of disaster preparedness so that they are more effective when disasters occur. (Roshan Mendis)

- In the UK and Lebanon, [The Feast has focused on a youth-focused interfaith dialogue](#) methodology. It encourages young people to talk about issues of faith and identity in constructive environments with other young people of different backgrounds. This level of mutual understanding can be used to build resilience within communities. (Andrew Smith)

- In Indonesia, [Islamic Relief worked on improving DRR practices through religious building and connected communities](#). The project trained 150 community grounds in disaster preparedness. There was an appetite for this and the communities demonstrated a great ability to mobilize resources for disaster response. However, they had to make a special effort during the project to communicate to communities that disasters are not punishment from God and that the effects of man-made disasters can and should be mitigated. (Umair Hasan)

- In the Philippines, Tearfund and ICM ran a project that trained 3,295 pastors in disaster preparedness over three-day sessions. The pastors in turn disseminated what they learned in their own communities. Although 66 percent of the participants claimed that they increased their knowledge in disaster preparedness through the workshop, the application of the principles was mixed. [Research found that training pastors meant DRR messages could reach a wide number of people through the pastors' congregations](#). However, pastors also struggled to implement DRR practices through lack of funds and volunteers, and influence local government, which is needed for more comprehensive risk reduction measures to take place in their communities. (Catriona Dejean)

- [Theology can influence people's perceptions of risk](#). For example, in Nepal in 2015, there were reports of a village that sold everything they owned in the aftermath of the earthquake, thinking the disaster was as sign of Jesus' second coming. A similar incident happened in Kandahar, Afghanistan where disasters were considered "Allah's will." A useful way to work on these ideas is to find counter examples in scripture, with the story of Noah being a prime example of one shared by the Qur'an and in biblical texts (inclusive of Jewish and Christian texts) demonstrating preparedness to disasters. (Douwe Dijkstra)

- Resilience to disaster includes people's spiritual life. LFAs can particularly help with this. In DRC, Archbishop Katanda has spent time working to reach people affected by disaster and provide spiritual support. He recounted a time where he walked for two days to reach a group of people who had been internally displaced due to substandard mining operations. He found that these people did not have as many immediate physical needs as spiritual and psychological needs. These needs can be addressed in part by the engagement of LFAs.



L-R Umair Hasan, Islamic Relief, Indonesia, Douwe Dijkstra, Tearfund, Nepal

*“One piece of advice we always give them is not to think of the other person as a spokesperson for their faith, and you are not a spokesperson for your faith either... It is also vital that they do not judge them for things that other people in their own faith do.” - Andrew Smith*

## Recommendations

- Humanitarian system should formalize local faith actors into coordinating bodies for action
- Curricula, evidence, language, mapping, representation
- Develop evidence and literacy around the place of faith and faith institutions for resilience
- Spiritual capital, faith literacy, [DRR theology](#), psychosocial support
- Create a transparent and integrated space between the secular and the faith in contextualizing humanitarian 'standards'
- Dialogue, professionalization, localized international standards

# Day 3

## PANEL 5: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

### MODERATORS

[Prabhu Deepan](#), [Tearfund](#), Sri Lanka

[Kavitha Vijayaraj](#), [Sarvodaya](#), Sri Lanka

### PANELLISTS

[Rev. Betty Kazada Musau](#), United Methodist Church, Democratic Republic of the Congo

[Dr. Jennifer Desrosiers](#), University of Otago, New Zealand

[Dean Pallant](#), Salvation Army, USA

[Desiree Majambere](#), Tearfund, Burundi

[Chitra Kulati](#), Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network, Thailand

[Rangeen Shokpi](#), Tearfund, Kurdistan, Iraq



L-R Dean Pallant, Salvation Army, USA, Desiree Mujumbere, Tearfund, Burundi, Chitra Kulati, Asia Pacific Women of Faith Network, Thailand

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- A [review of FBOs in preventing and responding to SGBV](#) found that collaborative partnerships, multi-faceted programming including education, justice, and health, and group based interventions were some of the most important ways that FBOs can help counter SGBV.
- In DRC, the Methodist Church has worked with the local minority [of Pygmy women who have been affected by GBV](#). By working across minority boundaries within society, the project has helped bring marginalized women into forms of community healing with others. (Rev. Betty Musau)
- In Iraqi Kurdistan, Yazidi women have been abused as sex slaves in the conflict with the Islamic State. [In research with survivors](#), it was found that, after God and the family, these women put trust in their religious leader who could reduce the stigma of their experience among their Yazidi community. (Rangeen Shopki)
- Faith actors can improve their impact by learning from the secular standards in the humanitarian system. In the Salvation Army in the UK, the Sphere standards and the Humanitarian Charter have been particularly influential in recognizing everyone's right to receive humanitarian assistance. Yet raising the question of issues such as GBV within religious communities must also be done with the support of scripture. Secular values and religious beliefs can both be harnessed for change. (Dean Pallant)
- In Burundi, an app has been used to increase the amount of information collected on GBV in communities (1,638 surveys so far) with indicators developed by the communities, such as security levels, robberies, drinking, food availability, physical and sexual violence and harassment, and intimidation. It was initially implemented in 15 areas and is scalable to a larger populace. [The participation of church leaders and women's groups](#) equipped with smartphones allowed the weekly surveys to be feasible without undue travel costs or time. [This increased data has helped reveal the underlying causes at play](#), as well as identify future steps to promoting culture change in the public's mindset. Smartphones have been a dynamic and flexible way to access the most up-to-date information. (Desire Mujumbere)
- In Thailand, [a network of women of faith](#) has been helping support other women affected by GBV during conflict. They also work across faiths to ensure that women in marginalized religious and ethnic groups are included in their activities. (Chitra Kulati)



Rangeen Shopki, Tearfund, Kurdistan, Iraq

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop strategic partnerships to support female and male faith leaders in the implementation of the Principles for Global Action, Sphere Standards, the humanitarian charter on preventing and addressing Gender-based Violence in humanitarian needs.
- Respond practically- Involve faith groups in community-based referral pathways, document and disseminate examples of good practice and promote linkages between service providers and faith groups including those concerned with HIV and AIDS.
- Build evidence for faith-based responses and prevention of GBV through rigorous evaluation of program interventions and commissioning of research studies on program impact and sharing of lessons.
- Prioritize the needs of survivors and respond to their demand for equipping faith leaders and communities in GBV response, with the understanding that survivors are not a homogenous group.
- Work with faith-based agencies to better equip local faith leaders to respond to GBV, particularly in tackling root causes to reflect and challenge their own religious understanding of harmful gender norms, power, violence and how they can meaningfully respond.
- Understanding that women's empowerment is not only addressing gender-based violence issues, but also enabling women's agency and engagement in society and the economy.

## PANEL 6: CHILDREN AND HEALTH

### MODERATORS

[Urmila Selvanayagam](#), [World Vision Sri Lanka](#)

[Dr. Rinchen Chopel](#), South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)

### PANELLISTS

[Oenone Chadburn](#), Tearfund, UK

[Dr. Hannah Albanna](#), Global One, UK

[Jo Sadgrove](#), United Society Partners in the Gospel and the Centre for Religion and Public Life, University of Leeds, UK

[Dr Janice Proud](#), Anglican Alliance, UK

[Rev. Peter Kainwo](#), Mission 4 Salone Ministries, Sierra Leone

[Rev. William Zulu](#), Reformed Church in Zambia

[Wathsala Jayamanna](#), UNICEF, Sri Lanka



Rinchen Chopel, SAIEVAC

## EXAMPLE METHODS AND MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL FAITH ACTORS

- During the Ebola Crisis in 2015, [the importance of including LFAs in the response](#) became [self-evident](#). Both in [research from Tearfund, Islamic Relief, and Christian Aid](#), and in the personal experience of Rev. Kainwo in Sierra Leone, the trusted position of faith leaders was critical. Faith leaders reassured the concerned and confused populace, provided guidance from medical standards and dissuaded them from practicing certain traditions that would continue spreading the disease. (Oenone Chadburn and Rev. Peter Kainwo)

- In Zadari refugee camp in Jordan, the [Anglican Alliance](#) has partnered with a local disability network, started by the [Holy Land Institute for the Deaf and Deaf Blind \(HLID\)](#) with 50 years of experience in the region and the sector, to provide daily services for 75 children with disabilities and their families. Partnering with these local networks has enabled, cost efficiency due to their established relationships, that is not possible in large international bureaucratic structures. (Janice Proud)

- In [Zambia, Rev. Zulu](#) noted that local faith communities are involved with a wide range of social justice issues. This includes food security work in promoting sustainable agriculture with the inclusion of child-headed households. Water and sanitation work helps prevent waterborne disease among children. The church steps in to provide education in areas where quality public education is not available. Finally, the church also advocates towards the government on child rights, health, and food security along with other partner organizations. (Rev. William Zulu)

-In Lebanon, Syrian women were not being sufficiently served in accordance with their daily needs by humanitarian organizations. A [survey](#) of 863 women demonstrated a lack of hygiene products for their menstrual health and a lack of cultural and religious understanding about standard WASH practices for these women. (Dr. Hanna Albanna)

- LFAs are impactful, but can struggle to measure and demonstrate impact as required by donors. In [research on mission organizations](#), USPG found that these types of organizations are adept at creating relationships at the local level, but do not achieve visible outcome measures. USPG implemented a new program called "[Hands on Health](#)" that worked from these findings to build the relationships between mission agency hospitals and the communities by increasing the number of hospital staff visits to community members in their households and on the streets. (Dr. Joanna Sadgrove)

- Collecting disaggregated data about child casualties and the experiences of children in disaster is vital, but not a regular enough practice. LFAs can play an important role in improving this data by using their local access to help data collection. (Wathsala Jayamanna)



L-R Rev. William Zulu, Reformed Church in Zambia, Rev. Peter Kainwo, Mission 4 Salone Ministries, Sierra Leone, Oenone Chadburn, Tearfund, UK

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Internal capacity needs to be built within the local faith communities and should include children at the center of activities, including psychosocial support
- Establish a platform to communicate with faith leaders to discuss sensitive issues
- Training on child protection and establishment of referral mechanisms
- Resources to be developed in local faith languages
- Ensuring the genuine participation of children and youth in the decision-making process
- During a disaster, advocate for affected children to stay within the family and local community
- Support organizations to engage in meaningful partnerships with local faith communities
- Mobilize religious leaders in educating children on the overall wellbeing and not just spiritual learning
- Develop connections with professional agencies with contextual knowledge

# REPORTS FROM THE ADVOCATES FOR WOMEN & CHILDREN

## ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN, CHRISTO GREYLING



Christo Greyling, World Vision

Christo Greyling stated that children often suffer most in humanitarian crisis. They face multiple vulnerabilities and have fewer coping mechanisms, support networks, or protective resources. Apart from being affected by the initial humanitarian crisis itself, children are often targets for further exploitation and abuse. Humanitarian actors have a responsibility to continue to work together to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

This includes collaborating to utilize our collective and diverse resources to:

- Establish and expand child-safe spaces - whether in sacred spaces or public spaces.
- Pre-position psycho-social support for children that meets their holistic needs - including their needs for spiritual nurture.
- As part of disaster preparedness, implement evidence based and scripturally founded programs for faith leaders and faith communities to address social norms and harmful practices which directly affects children.
- Support local faith communities to make these interventions on child protection, GBV, and DRR part of the lifeline of faith communities and communities, not that of the lifetime of grant funded projects or NGOs.
- Do better at gathering child-specific data and evidence to learn more on how all actors, including and especially faith communities, can meaningfully end violence against children in humanitarian crises.

- Remember that interventions done for children must also be done with children - plan to intentionally listen to children, and develop our programming accordingly.
- Invest in youth to raise up a new generation of social movers. Many young people are currently tolerant and have a high sense of volunteerism, but lack the vision and skills to proactively engage in humanitarian coordination and social cohesion work.
- All humanitarian responses from faith organizations should consider to intentionally include age appropriate child focused programming and advocacy - both as secondary beneficiaries (such as peace building, health and protection and gender) but also primary recipients/focus of interventions.

### **ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN, REV. BETTY MUSAU**

Rev. Musau commented that women in humanitarian crisis are, most of the time, victims. They are targeted for sexual abuse and their voices are not heard, because of cultural and religious perspectives. For instance, in some religions women cannot be religious leaders. Their leadership is limited. In some cultures, women are men's possessions. But if you take women away you see the problem as they take care of homes and children. These jobs should be respected, recognized, valued, and appreciated. Respect should begin in the household, then it can flow into the community. Especially in local response, women have shown to be highly positive agents whenever they have the opportunity. Women should be included in local interventions/ community planning/crisis response, particularly with religious leaders. Women should be challenged to speak up about their own rights, in a respectful and peaceful manner.



Rev. Betty Musau, United Methodist Church, DRC

## WHAT IS NEEDED? WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE? WHAT IS NEXT?

### MODERATORS

Canon Sarah Snyder, Peace and Reconciliation for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Church of England, UK

### PANELISTS

Saba Al Mubaslat, Humanitarian Leadership Academy, UK

Sheikh Musa Bamba, Interreligious Council of Liberia

Dr. Kathryn Kraft, World Vision and University of East London, UK

Akash Asthana, Catholic Relief Services, India

May Jarrar, East Jerusalem YMCA

Dr. Jehan Perrera, National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

Bikkhu Mandala Lankara, Myanmar

Sofie Grundin, Church of Sweden





L-R Akash Asthana, Sheikh Musa Bamba, Dr Jehan Perrera, Bikkhu Mandala Lankara, Canon Sarah Snyder, Saba Al Mubaslat, Dr Kathryn Kraft, May Jarrar, Sofie Grundin

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD FROM THE PANELISTS

- Ms. Saba Al Mubaslat invited attendees to gain further knowledge by accessing an online platform created by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy named [KAYA](#) which contains more than 4000 courses for humanitarian learning. She also called for the prioritization of contextualizing humanitarian action.
- Sheikh Musa Bamba explained how the [Interreligious Council](#) could take an advisory and accountability role to the nascent government after the war due to its credibility from the wide representation of Liberian religious groups. For example, they were widely respected enough to conduct anti-corruption workshops, culminating in a communique to highlight government and state corruption.
- Dr. Kathryn Kraft highly recommended the engagement of religious leaders from the start or at earliest possible chance during a crisis or commencement of a program. She called upon all actors to navigate intra-religious resistance to reaching out by clearly stating the facts and humanizing the so called 'others' to create dialogue within the community. She noted that encouraging faith leaders to set an example helps soften and open attitudes towards inter-religious cooperation in the general public. These emerged from [findings on the Amores Interfaith Forum](#) during the conflict and return to peace in Zamboanga, Philippines.
- Ven. Mandala Lankara from Myanmar stressed that regular communication strategies, tools, and

willingness to engage should be nurtured in promoting interfaith dialogue in general and interfaith cooperation during humanitarian crises. Misunderstandings and non-cooperation during a crisis can lead to more damage as there will be extreme delays in response and an unbalanced distribution of relief care.

- Mr. Akash Asthana focused on professionalizing skills of [local emergency first responders](#). He expressed a firm conviction in the need to build capacities in LFAs with no or minimum international support up to that point.

- Ms. [May Jarrar](#) called for comprehensive inclusivity including as many vulnerable and marginalized groups as possible in the given [locality](#).

- Ms. Sofie Grundin from the Church of Sweden reaffirmed the utmost importance of proper research which will enable response to reflect local priorities. She suggested that one of the best methods to build resilience is to involve the local communities and entities in the entire development process.

- Dr. Jehan Perrera stated that [interfaith collaboration takes place at shallow and deeper levels](#), which require a huge amount of time, space and concerted effort. He noted that special attention should be given to identify in which languages interfaith activities are carried out and so that outreach activities can reach the wider public for peacebuilding.

- In the Q&A session, James Cooper from the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia recommended that language in interfaith dialogue should be very clear, concise, simple and non-threatening, especially regarding words like 'crusade' and 'jihad'.



Dr. Kathryn Kraft, World Vision, speaking

## LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT AND WHO IS NEEDED TO FULLY ENGAGE LOCAL FAITH ACTORS?

Saba Al Mubaslat, led a charge to the groups to think outside their usual boxes. She noted, that first, humanitarian organizations are not charities begging for money. Organizations should not seek funding but proactively reach out to be co-investors. Likewise, the idea of beneficiaries needs to be rethought. People are not dependent. They will continue to exist with or without organizations, so they must be full partners in humanitarian work. Finally, capacity building is another term that requires re-evaluation. Who is building whose capacity? All of us present have equal things to share with each other. Capacity exchange is a more respectful term when working with partners. Accompaniment, hand in hand with humility and recognizing each other's values while trying to ensure a relevant end product, is what localization is about. Concluding her remarks, Ms. Al Mubaslat urged the participants to let faith leaders remain faith leaders, but for LFAs to act with a business model in mind, to act professionally, and to seek sustainability.

Conference organizer, Ms. Jean Duff, invited participants to review and strengthen the draft Call to Action Document in two respects: first, the international or global advocacy point of view, and then the local faith actor and national perspective. The Draft was prepared by a group of advisors preceding the conference and amended during the conference to reflect ongoing discussions.



Usman Bola from Nigeria addresses the room

## CALL TO ACTION GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The three questions the groups were asked to answer:

1. What opportunities and challenges do you see around implementing Call to Action?
2. What resources are available in your organization and networks to support the Call to Action?
3. What actions can you commit to as you leave the Forum?

### Local and National Perspective

The primary opportunity reiterated was to create common goals for all humanitarian networks irrespective of the secular/ religious differentiation. The foremost challenge in the implementation of the 'Call to Action' was the dynamics in two separate relationships. The first, was between FBOs and the government and the second, between FBOs belonging to different denominations or religious affiliations. Of note regarding the relationship between the government and FBOs were real fears of the government taking over after the hard work already done. Furthermore, some participants found the language of the draft communique to be too top down and western oriented and they believed may cause a problem in mobilizing eastern voices around it.

Recommendations were made to forge stronger relationships between LFAs themselves, where it was prudent to organize peer learning workshops on a national scale. This initiative could strengthen interfaith dialogue as well as broaden existing networks for more people to benefit. Such ventures would hopefully transform into an apparatus promoting interfaith dialogue in times of crisis. Another recommendation was to differentiate between LFAs and FBOs and how the relationship dynamic would play out according to the draft communique.

The credibility LFAs have within their respective communities, their ability to communicate effectively with the local population, the existing network structures and the past experiences that LFAs have in dealing with many disasters proved to be most useful to address these challenges.

### International Perspective

There was broad recognition that international organizations need the local knowledge and the organizational power that LFAs bring. This need based relationship is the ideal entry point to let LFAs play a larger role in coordinating and planning humanitarian responses, while LFAs that lack capacity can learn from the larger international organizations on how to adopt best practices in their operations.

Language is a major challenge to cooperation between LFAs and major international organizations such as the UN, who use a very formal and specific vocabulary which tends to alienate LFAs. In addition to language, differences in culture is also an important dynamic in the relationship between secular organizations and LFAs. Another major challenge is lack of funds for LFAs. Although such issues may be rectified by novel initiatives such as the determination at the World Humanitarian Summit to dedicate 25 percent of the total funds towards local and national actors, the LFAs themselves need to have higher capacity to handle the reporting and monitoring needed for international donors.

Recommendations to improve the Call to Action included an emphasis on retaining the bonds forged between the actors present at the conference. There were multiple recommendations to continue and expand the capacity of the small resources database created for the conference. It would constitute a database with evidence on the effectiveness of LFAs in humanitarian crisis and lessons learned for other LFAs around the globe. To improve the effectiveness, it was suggested that LFAs need to frequently partner with academic institutions to bring their expertise in building compelling evidence. Two recommendations focused on language, such as an increase in gender inclusive terminology and using a broader term than “faith literacy,” although the idea of improved education in international organizations was generally supported.

It was also recommended to start a centralized funding campaign for LFAs that provides access to large international institutional donors, on the same model as the existing PaRD network. This was suggested as an effective method to leverage the aftermath of the Grand Bargain. Another idea was to implement a certificating system to promote professionalism within LFAs. This would reduce the friction between secular multinational organizations and LFAs in collaborating with each other. Finally, the increased incorporation of modern technology in interfaith activities could be effective in forming bonds between faith actors, faith based organizations, and the secular humanitarian world.

All these recommendations focused on the desegregation of the international humanitarian community to more effectively help those who are in need in times of crisis.



Call to Action Group Discussions

*Following the Forum , the excellent inputs and recommendations from the Call to Action discussion groups were reviewed and incorporated into a revised draft document. This document in turn was subject to further revisions and editing by members of the Advocacy Working Group , and presented to the AWG group for review and approval.*

*The version attached below has been approved by the AWG and is now being used as a guide for further action on behalf of increasing LFA engagement in Humanitarian response. The AWG will meet periodically to exchange information on local activities to promote LFA engagement, and to coordinate advocacy. Please contact one of the co-chairs for information or to join the group.*

For more information please contact:

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Amjad Saleem, Advocacy Working Group Co-Chair

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## **CALL TO ACTION**

### **TO SCALE UP LOCAL FAITH ACTORS' ROLES IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

#### **Background**

This Call to Action lays out a series of goals and actions to achieve greater inclusion of local faith actors (LFAs) in humanitarian action. The Call to Action is informed by the rich conversations that took place before, during, and after the Forum on Localizing Humanitarian Response in Sri Lanka on 16-18 October 2017, attended by over 140 humanitarian practitioners, religious leaders and local faith-based organizations from 36 countries. The Call to Action was developed collaboratively by participants at the Forum and refined by an Advocacy Working Group.

LFAs are at the heart of most communities providing sacred space, spiritual care and material support. Consequently, LFAs are core to local systems of humanitarian response and resilience to crisis, mobilizing hundreds of millions of people around the world, accessing the hardest to reach and most vulnerable communities, and investing their own significant financial resources in response. However, humanitarian systems often fail to engage with LFAs and opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships with a wide impact are missed.

The Forum affirmed the value of intra- and inter-religious collaboration in humanitarian response, and recognized the value of intermediary organizations providing technical, financial, and advocacy support to LFAs. It highlighted the value of women's leadership and committed to greater inclusion of women in all aspects of LFA work. It also reaffirmed the importance and role that young people play in localized action and their engagement with LFA work. The Forum developed detailed recommendations for scaling up LFA engagement in 6 aspects of humanitarian response, which can be found on the Forum website.

The Call to Action specifies key actions towards scaling up LFA roles in Humanitarian response, at global, national and local levels to be taken by organizations including LFAs, faith-based international

NGOs, and religious networks. It also identifies entry points for other humanitarian actors and stakeholders to engage with LFAs.

The Call to action lays out a framework for complementary actions that, taken together, would increase LFA engagement. The Call is directed to the Forum participants and other actors who during their ongoing work will carry forward specific actions and keep each other informed of progress and opportunities.

To more fully engage local faith actors in humanitarian response, we call for the following actions:

### **Goal 1. Make the Case**

Recognizing the paucity of widespread, quality evidence on the role of LFAs in humanitarian response, we call for the following actions to strengthen the evidence base.

Action 1.1 Gather, collate and analyze the evidence for the role and contributions (positive and negative) of LFAs in humanitarian response. Organize and publish the information presented at the Forum, including an accessible on-line repository of material, a summary focusing on mechanisms and methods of effective cross sector partnerships, and develop a research agenda around issues critical to scaling up LFA involvement in humanitarian response from this base. The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities has committed to serve as a focal point for this evidence work.

Action 1.2. Drawing on the evidence base, develop a suite of education and advocacy case materials and tools such as policy briefs, research papers, case studies, presentations, videos, and talking points. Using the findings from the Forum, conduct debriefings with key national and global humanitarian policy makers and donors regarding the role and contributions of LFAs in humanitarian response. Promote evidence of the efficacy of working with local faith actors/networks in fragile contexts.

### **Goal 2. Build Mutual Understanding**

Recognizing gaps in understanding the role and added value of LFAs by the humanitarian community, and the gaps in understanding of humanitarian systems and processes by LFAs, we call for the following actions to improve “faith literacy” and “humanitarian literacy” for all.

Action 2.1 Seek better understanding of what faith and humanitarian communities want and need to know about each other as a basis for effective collaboration and localization in humanitarian response. Conduct discussions at the local and national level on points of similarity and divergence, as well as what localization means for LFAs, and peer-to-peer learning between LFAs; host partnership and collaboration meetings between local humanitarian practitioners and LFAs. Commit to one international or regional meeting in the next 18 months that will focus on bringing religious figures together with humanitarian figures to discuss points of common interest and understanding.

Action 2.2 Map, collate and disseminate, through an online portal, existing faith literacy training resources from across humanitarian organizations of all backgrounds, identifying any gaps in knowledge and reviewing the extent of roll-out at national and local level.

Action 2.3 Map existing humanitarian training resources tailored to local actors and explore how they can best be adapted to the specific needs of LFAs, for example from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

Action 2.4 Develop guidance (guidelines, standards) for governmental bodies, international organizations-both faith based and secular, local authorities and donors on partnering with LFAs towards improving the localization of aid and in fragile contexts. These guidelines are to focus specifically on local faith actors

Action 2.5 Secure commitments from organizations and networks (including secular and faith based, international, regional and national) to intensify sensitization and awareness about and on humanitarian principles, systems, processes and standards for LFAs.

### **Goal 3. Educate about the role of LFAs and advocate for their inclusion**

Recognizing the importance of the Grand Bargain commitments and the localization agenda to faith-based organizations, the Forum acknowledges the capacities of LFAs to deliver on the localization workstream. We call for greater inclusion of LFAs in planning and decision-making processes in pursuit of localization principles to ensure sector wide efforts to localize humanitarian response capacity are inclusive of LFAs. We plan to seek to collaborate with Forum organizing partners and others in carrying out this work.

Action 3.1 Engage and brief signatories to and parties involved in the Grand Bargain process, including the localization work stream, such as its co-conveners IFRC and Switzerland, and others including the European Commission (EC), other government signatories, the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), towards the inclusion of LFAs as part of the official process and actions in the future.

Action 3.2 Inclusive in the Grand Bargain commitment on direct funding to local and national actors to fund local actors at 25%, assure predictable, flexible and multi-year funding of LFAs. Advocate for the disaggregation of contributions to LFAs from global donors, INGOs, and FBOs.

Action 3.3 Engage humanitarian standard setting bodies, including the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Sphere Standards, and IASC Guidelines, to include the voices of LFAs in standard-setting processes at global, regional, national and local levels. Increase the contextualization, accessibility and relevance of standards to LFAs.

Action 3.4 Following through Priority 4 of the Sendai Framework on DRR to get “engagement from all of society” and “empowerment of local communities”, consult with governments to assure LFA participation in enhancing disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Brief and engage other global processes such as the Global Compacts on Refugees and Migration, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Action 3.5 Engage UN agencies, including the office of the UN Secretary General, to strengthen system-wide UN recognition of the contributions of LFAs in humanitarian response. Brief Resident Coordinator/

Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in fragile contexts with evidence for why and how to engage LFAs.

Action 3.6 Work with South-South networks, such as NEAR and others, to ensure broader inclusion of LFAs in humanitarian networks and policy processes at all levels.

Action 3.7 Engage with IFRC, ICRC and National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies on engaging with LFAs in humanitarian response.

Action 3.8 Engage with IGOs and other multilateral organizations around LFAs in humanitarian response.

#### **Goal 4: Establish coordinating mechanisms to support this action plan**

To affirm the role of LFAs in humanitarian response, and to add value to ongoing advocacy we wish to recognize and align with the many ongoing complementary processes such as Charter 4 Change (C4C) and the Charter for Faith-Based Humanitarian Action,

Action 4.1 A Working Group on Advocacy for the Inclusion of Local Faith Actors in Humanitarian Response was established at the Forum, as a coordinating mechanism for on-going advocacy and programmatic interventions. 23 people volunteered to participate, with Arne Naess-Holm of Norwegian Church Aid representing ACT Alliance as co-chair, with Amjad Saleem, working in a personal capacity. The Working Group (WG) was charged to develop a detailed plan to accompany this Call to Action, to be taken forward by Forum participants in their respective organizations, networks and in their own countries and regions.

Action 4.2 The WG will meet quarterly to exchange information, to review opportunities for action, and to track progress. Limited staff support to the WG will be provided by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities through June 2018. In-kind contributions, staff secondment and additional funding raising may also be needed if the WG judges there is utility in proceeding and scaling up.

Action 4.3 The WG commits to an annual review of progress, specifically tracking actions taken by Forum Participants and other actors.

Action 4.4 The WG commits to holding a bi-annual meeting to assess and promote progress on LFA engagement.

# CLOSING CEREMONY

## MODERATOR

[Rev. Ebenezer Joseph](#)

## SPEAKERS

[Scott Pohl](#), Senior Community-based Protection Advisor, UNHCR

[Una McCauley](#), UN Resident Coordinator, Sri Lanka

[Michael Leavell](#), Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, USAID, USA

[Rev. Emmanuel Lemi](#), Episcopal Church of South Sudan

[Dr. Rangeen Shokpi](#), Tearfund, Iraq

[Nobuyuki Asai](#), Soka Gakkai International, Japan

[Halimo Weheliye](#), Somalian NGO Consortium

[Dr. Mohammad Saleem](#), Sri Lankan Conference Organizing Committee



Scott Pohl

Nobuyuki Asai

Mohammad Saleem

*But you never come to me. I say my door is open... I would challenge you... the imams and the pastors and the priests and the monks who do humanitarian work to say, "Listen, when was the last time we went to see the UN? To say this is what we do, this is what we can do, this is how we want to continue working with you..." I would say, in your action plans, go back and plan to see the resident coordinator of the UN system... And I don't think many resident coordinators will turn you away. – Una McCauley*

## KEY REFLECTIONS

- Scott Pohl: International FBOs are consistently represented in the top twenty percent of UNHCR's closest and strongest partnerships. The relationships are less systematic with local actors, but they work closely with LFAs on the ground.
- Una McCauley: To increase partnership opportunities, Ms. McCauley encouraged LFAs to systematically dialogue with humanitarian actors and agencies, establish memorandums of understanding for example, and link in with others so that humanitarian energy is not wasted. She suggested a Sri Lankan platform of local FBOs to meet with her.
- Michael Leavell: Religion matters to USAID because it has the potential for increasing the sustainability and impact of their programs. Engaging appropriate local faith actors and directly including local communities in decision making makes good development sense. Important recommendations from the conference to achieve this include improving faith literacy or understanding ways in which to engage local faith actors, as well as having well-designed donor mechanisms to partner with such actors.
- Rev. Emmanuel Lemi from South Sudan: There are 4 takeaways from the Forum: First, the Sri Lankan experience of teaching leaders to work together for peacebuilding and disaster response is a very good example. Second, we must continually acknowledge the challenges of religion in humanitarianism, including how religion is often an instrument of conflict. Third, the local actors presenting emphasized the "assets based approach" for assessments, to show that the local community does have skills and resources to contribute and external actors should listen to them. Finally, the conference provided a network and demonstrated the importance of making and maintaining connections so that LFAs can share knowledge. He emphasized his enthusiasm for such a Forum to also take place in Africa at some point.
- Rangeen Shopki: As a woman from the Yazidi community, she recounted the trauma experienced by her community. Many were forced to convert to Islam, women were victims of sexual slavery, and threatened with death and/or rejection by their families if they tried to escape. She explained the importance of religious leaders among the Yazidi. After hearing rumors of shame among families of returned sex slaves, the religious leaders came together and formulated a decree to welcome, celebrate, and reintegrate the women once they returned home.
- Nobuyuki Asai: Mr. Asai related how he has long tried to work with the Japanese development agency and Japanese embassies to highlight the strength of faith-based actors, but are still reticent, largely due to a lack of knowledge. He will continue his advocacy efforts based on what he has learned at the conference, particularly focusing on the importance of local faith networks.
- Halimo Weheliye: As coordinator of a local NGO platform in Somalia, Ms. Weheliye knows the opportunities and challenges of working with local actors, as well as the perceptions of each other between local and international actors. From the international perspective, it is now increasingly mandatory for international actors to have local partners. The reason why they should partner is to build the capacity of that local actor for future sustainability. Though it often feels as though capacity building is not sincere and international actors do not want to share the power with others.

*There is no way that we can use any more capacity building, but what we should do is capacity sharing. – Halimo Weheliye*

- Dr. Mohammad Saleem: Sometimes the power of religion is what remains when all other possibilities are exhausted. He hoped the younger generation would now harness the unifying force of religion for the future of Sri Lanka.

## **REV. EBENEZER'S STORY**

When he was a young clergy member, Rev. Ebenezer experienced the 1983 riots, during which he witnessed horrific death and destruction around him. They kept their church open during the riots because he thought his faith would keep him safe. But on the fifth and worst day of the riots, the building where he stayed was set on fire. He was trapped in the building with a few others for two hours while there was a mob at the door with swords trying to enter. He said, "we realized that our gods are not so powerful as we thought they were." But then an ordinary person, the caretaker, stood in front of the mob and said, "I am a Buddhist. If you want to enter here, you will first deal with me." This person was willing to give up his life to save Rev. Ebenezer and the other people inside the building. Rev. Ebenezer said, "Because of this encounter I am here to speak to you today."

They were eventually rescued from the building and sent to refugee camps. They went to five refugee camps, but they were all full. Finally, they were taken to the Sri Subramani Hindu Kovil temple in Colombo. It was also full, but the Hindu priest still allowed them in.

Two days later, a Navy officer came into the camp and asked if there was a priest present. As Rev. Ebenezer had not identified himself as a priest to the other people, he was nervous to speak up for fear of repercussions. The officer said there was a visitor for the priest, so Rev. Ebenezer went to the front gate of the camp and saw a man with a long beard. Rev. Ebenezer recounted,

"he looked at me and said, "Father can I bring you a tea?" He was a beggar who daily slept on our church steps and each time we walked by, he would say, "Can I have some money for a tea?"

But the man had learned about the burning of Rev. Ebenezer's building and went from place to place looking for Rev. Ebenezer to help him. That man was also a Muslim.

Rev. Ebenezer said,

*"I believe that was my turning point about faith relationships. Despite all the chaos that happened, it was a Sinhala Buddhist caretaker who saved our life, it was an ordinary Hindu priest who gave shelter, and it was a Muslim beggar who was the first person coming in search of us. These are not qualified people who had doctorate plates in their religion. They were the simplest people, but they lived by their faith. And that faith made them... So, don't look for faith leaders among the people who have titles, don't only look for faith leaders among those ordained. But look for faith leaders who have credibility within the community and there you will find hope."*



Rev Ebenezer

# ADVOCACY MATERIALS

## All Forum Resources

<https://lrf2017.org/resources/>

## Other Resource Platforms

<https://jliflc.com/resources/>

<http://www.partner-religion-development.org/resources/knowledge-center/>

<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/religion-and-development-database>

[https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index\\_60543.html](https://www.unicef.org/about/partnerships/index_60543.html)

## World Humanitarian Summit Evidence Briefs on Religious Engagement

<https://jliflc.com/2016/05/jliflc-evidence-briefs-key-messages/>

## Suggested Reading List

<https://jliflc.com/resources/the-evidence-base-faith-religion-and-humanitarian-action-annotated-bibliography/>

## Newsletters

- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities: <https://jliflc.com/newsletter-sign-up/>
- USAID Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: <https://www.usaid.gov/faith-based-and-community-initiatives>
- Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD): <http://www.partner-religion-development.org/service/newsletter-sign-up-and-archive/>



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[www.lrf2017.org](http://www.lrf2017.org)  
[www.jliflc.com](http://www.jliflc.com)