

Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Contexts of Humanitarian Crisis

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The potential role of local faith communities (LFCs) in promoting resilience in contexts of humanitarian crisis has, despite recent policy interest, been a neglected area of study. This article reports on a structured review of evidence regarding such contributions based on an analysis of 302 publications and reports, supplemented by 11 written submissions from humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and 10 stakeholder interviews. Analysis is structured with respect to three major humanitarian processes—disaster risk reduction; emergency response; and facilitating transitional and durable solutions—relevant to the promotion of resilience in populations that are displaced, at risk of displacement or refugee-impacted. Major themes emerging from the analysis concern: the diversity of stakeholder perspectives on the presence and influence of LFCs on local humanitarian response; the resources—material and non-material—potentially made available through LFCs to crisis-affected communities; and the opportunities—and substantive challenges—for greater LFC partnership with humanitarian organizations.

Keywords: disaster risk reduction, emergency response, secularism, transitional and durable solutions

Introduction

Resilience—the ability to anticipate, withstand and bounce back from external pressures and shocks—is an increasingly important construct in shaping humanitarian strategy by the international community (DFID 2011; UNICEF 2011; USAID 2012). Local faith communities (LFCs)—groupings

of religious actors bonded through shared allegiance to institutions, beliefs, history or identity (Samuels *et al.* 2010)—are often central to local processes of identity and connection that comprise the social fabric of communities disrupted by disaster or conflict. Although their role in individual and community resilience is thus potentially of major significance, until recently there has been little attention paid to appropriate means of engaging with LFCs in the context of responses to humanitarian situations, including processes of displacement. However, there are some indications of the international humanitarian community acknowledging the case for more effective engagement with faith-based institutions, especially with regard to their potential reach into local communities (e.g. DFID 2012). Notable in this regard is the convening of the recent United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) High Commissioner’s Dialogue on Faith and Protection (UNHCR 2012).

UNICEF defines religious communities as ‘both female and male religious actors and . . . systems and structures that institutionalize belief systems within religious traditions at all levels from local to global’ (2012: 7). In turn, UNAIDS identifies three levels of faith-based communities: ‘formal religious communities with an organized hierarchy and leadership’, ‘independent faith-influenced non-governmental organisations . . . and . . . networks’ and ‘informal social groups or local faith communities’ (Samuels *et al.* 2010). Religious and faith-based communities therefore comprise diverse actors and networks situated across diverse sites. As defined for the purposes of this study, *local* faith communities—such as congregations, mosques and temples—are those whose members reside in relatively close proximity, such that they can regularly meet together for religious purposes, often in a dedicated physical venue. Within more secularized societies, a wide range of local, civil society structures will not be religious in nature. In such contexts, LFCs may be meaningfully distinguished from other local groups, allowing for some conceptual distinction between the capacities brought by locality and those brought by faith-engagement. However, in the majority of humanitarian settings, with high levels of religiosity and with faith-related structures comprising the significant majority of civil society, such a distinction may not be particularly meaningful (El Nakib and Ager 2014).

In consequence, although LFCs may have contested or conflictual roles within their villages or neighbourhoods, much of the existing literature depicts them as well rooted within local structures: ‘Congregations and their leaders have deep community roots and serve as regular gathering places for congregants [and] local faith leaders are often trusted community figures’ (UNICEF 2012: 9). This embeddedness suggests that there is significant potential for LFCs to play an active role in responding to humanitarian crises. However, what evidence is there regarding the realization of this potential? There are clearly many potential barriers to establishing a more effective working relationship between humanitarian agencies and LFCs, including the established secular framing of humanitarian response and

concerns over compromising humanitarian principles such as neutrality (Ver Beek 2002; Ager and Ager 2011; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011a). However, discussion of such issues clearly needs to be conducted within a context better informed with respect to the contribution of LFCs in humanitarian contexts.

This article presents a structured review of existing evidence as a means of addressing this situation, in addition to highlighting key areas requiring further analysis by academics, policy-makers and practitioners. We draw on a major scoping survey conducted in 2012 which focused on three major humanitarian processes relative to the promotion of resilience in displaced or refugee-impacted populations or populations vulnerable (through conflict or natural disaster) to displacement. These processes comprised: disaster risk reduction; emergency response (considering both response to basic needs and psychosocial support); and facilitating transitional and durable solutions. The survey engaged with humanitarian agencies through the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI), a network of intergovernmental agencies, non-governmental agencies and academic institutions (JLI 2013).

Methodology

A structured search of online databases using the terms specified in Table 1—complemented by requests through the JLI network to humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to share relevant materials—yielded a body of 252 academic publications and 50 practitioner and policy reports. All documents were reviewed by research assistants who abstracted key details for collation and analysis regarding the role of LFCs in supporting or undermining processes of resilience in the context of humanitarian crisis. Where reports documented activities with respect to a specific religious tradition, these most frequently involved Christian groups. However, a significant amount of material documented Muslim religious engagement, with Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu also well represented.

This material was supplemented by 11 written submissions from humanitarian NGOs affiliated with the JLI network documenting their experience of engaging with LFCs in humanitarian contexts. Submissions were received from both secular and faith-based agencies, the former including UNHCR, Oxfam and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the latter including organizations with Christian, Jewish and Islamic affiliations. These responses were reviewed and material abstracted and collated with respect to emerging themes of analysis.

A final source of data was semi-structured interviews with key informants. Interviews were structured with a focus on eliciting practical examples of engagement with LFCs in humanitarian contexts and on learning regarding the implications of such work for individual and community resilience. A total of 10 interviews were completed with representatives of agencies within the JLI network and with field contacts, the latter comprising

Table 1

Overview of the Humanitarian Processes Addressed in the Study

Processes	Keywords (for literature search)	Rationale
Disaster risk reduction	Risk mitigation/reduction/management and disaster risk response (DDR), preparedness, participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments (PVCA), early recovery, adaptation, strengths-based approach	Captures value of local networks for information sharing and behaviour change before, during and after a disaster; ability to plan and mitigate in advance (proactive) rather than just respond (reactive); ability to learn new methodologies (accountability and transparency) and to integrate items such as child protection
Emergency response	Basic services, health, education, food items, sanitation, emergency shelter, protection spaces, protection by presence, community resilience Psychosocial support; pastoral care, spiritual care, accompaniment, counselling, healing, psychological resilience, forgiveness, transformation	Recognizable contribution within mainstream sector; demonstrates physical assets and use of sacred spaces to deliver services; draws out social capital/trust and its impact on service delivery; engage with advantages and limitations of conceptualizations of the relief-development continuum Looking at the distinctive contribution of LFC/FBOs given their holistic mandate (including spiritual capital); expectation of existing data; entry point into wider work of LFCs and the concept of faith as transformative beyond social capital gains
Facilitating transitional and durable solutions	Conflict mitigation, peace-building, arbitration, peace conferences, advocacy statements, reconciliation, justice, integration, resettlement, diversified livelihood strategies, drought cycle management, etc.	Captures holistic approach, social/political capital; long-term engagement/solutions, connection between humanitarian crisis and conflict; role of faith leaders and interfaith coalitions

principally humanitarian actors, clergy and other religious leaders from the global south.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) defines DRR as:

The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through *reduced exposure* to hazards, *lessened vulnerability* of people and property, *wise management* of land and the environment, and *improved preparedness* for adverse events (OCHA 2009, emphasis added).

This definition reflects the prevailing wisdom that hazards become disasters when they occur in a context of human vulnerability. Framed positively, human action to prepare for hazards can significantly mitigate the extent of impact of a disaster. Gaillard and Texier (2010) argue that there has been little investigation into the relationship between religion and disasters, and that media accounts of religion in disaster gravitate towards ‘alleged “acts of God” or the religion-related fatalistic attitudes of victims’. This study, by contrast, suggests that DRR is an area with growing LFC involvement and impact. Examples of LFCs’ involvement in community-based DRR were identified in relation to three areas: community formation, religious narratives, and physical or social assets.

Firstly, LFCs can potentially contribute to DRR efforts by combating the vulnerability of populations through forming cohesive community-level relationships. Since DRR requires joint reflection, decision and action by community members, in highly fractured situations (e.g. urbanization, conflict) where social fragmentation is a major contributor to disaster vulnerability, LFCs’ narratives, values and contribution to establishing personal identity may provide a basis for ‘community formation’.

For example, when Typhoon Ketsana struck Metro Manila in the Philippines in 2009, a Catholic-faith-inspired NGO, Socio-Pastoral Institute (SPI), applied its distinctive approach of ‘community formation’ in two neighbourhoods that had been badly affected by the floods. Through this approach, SPI aimed to help the communities overcome their differences and problems by working together to bring about both a more effective response to the floods as well as lasting solutions that would enable individuals in the communities to achieve fullness of life, security and resilience to disasters. By focusing on *stewardship*, a concept found in both Islam and Christianity, individuals have been encouraged to move away from straight-forward self-interest—a typical behaviour in complex environments like cities—to become ‘social stewards’ who look beyond themselves towards improving conditions for the wider community (Survey Response, Christian Aid).

Secondly, the religious narratives that frame the interpretation of disaster may have an effect on DRR. Western academic discourse on the causes of disaster defines itself by the move away from ‘acts of God’ to focus on ecological, geological and (increasingly) social root causes (Furedi 2007). However, despite the common view that ‘supernatural interpretations of natural disasters are historical curiosities’ (Chester and Duncan 2010: 87) and lead inevitably to guilt and the undermining of resilience, distinctively religious explanations for disaster remain very common in humanitarian situations.

It appears that belief that a disaster was caused by God or *karma* can indeed *potentially* spur passivity in the face of disaster, but does not *necessarily* do so. Specifically, belief in supernatural causes may be accompanied by, or even encourage, addressing their practical outworking. For example, many evangelical church networks in Zimbabwe, such as Trumpet Call Zimbabwe, believe in a ‘spiritual context’ that explains drought and food crisis, but have also engaged in a practical nationwide campaign to promote drought-resilient ‘conservation agriculture’ techniques (Trumpet Call 2012).

In his response to the 2004 tsunami, the influential Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, demonstrated the central role of religious leaders in interpreting religious values, and the potential impact this has on community response, responsibility and resilience:

I have the feeling that our planet Earth is suffering, and this tsunami is the cry of the Earth as it writhes in pain: a lament, a cry for help, a warning. We have lived together so long without love and compassion for each other. We destroy each other; we abuse our mother Earth. So the Earth has turned back on us, has groaned, has suffered . . . We have to see that and wake up (Falk 2010).

While such religious language may create discomfort for secular (and, indeed, many religious) humanitarians, the ‘sin’ narrative can serve in such circumstances to enhance a sense of human responsibility and the requirement of collective reflection and change of behaviour. Consequently, religious narratives may operate in favour of DRR action, rather than against it.

Thirdly, LFCs may have natural assets that can impact DRR efforts. In many communities, LFCs have material assets that can significantly support disaster preparedness or mitigation, with mosque loudspeakers and church bells being a staple of many local early warning systems, and religious buildings often playing a key role in community disaster plans. Recognizing this trend, prominent DRR scholar Ben Wisner appeals to LFCs to ‘assure that their meeting places, schools, and other buildings are located safely in relation to possible flood, landslide, and wildfire hazard and constructed to resist seismic and wind energy’ (2010: 130).

Such material assets are generally complemented by significant social assets. These may include existing volunteer networks and productive

relationships with other LFCs and wider civil society actors. The relationship between local communities and wider networks or denominations can lead to effective integration and communication of DRR strategies. For example, from 2005, a group of Protestant churches in Malawi began promoting DRR (specifically, drought-resilient agricultural techniques) through their relief and development arms, which work with and through local congregations. An external cost–benefit analysis of this work by Tearfund showed that

for every US\$1 invested the project activities delivered US\$24 of net benefits for the communities to help them overcome food insecurity while building their resilience to drought and erratic weather (Tearfund 2010).

LFCs' integration into such wider networks, including connection to regional and global Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs)¹, may enable more effective coordination and dissemination of information (Ferris 2005; Goldsmith 2006; Ferris 2011). To this effect, Muslim Charities Forum has helped establish, and has partnered with, a number of local organizations working with faith groups in a humanitarian capacity, helping to develop the Somali Relief and Development Forum and Yemeni Relief and Development Forum. Both groups were able to reach communities which were inaccessible to large external organizations due to the degree of insecurity in the areas affected, underlining the potential 'value added' by LFCs in such contexts (Survey Response, Islamic Relief Worldwide).

Emergency Response: Basic Services

There are many examples of LFCs meeting the basic needs of displaced persons, such as providing shelter, registration, food and non-food items. As LFC assistance is decentralized and informal, it is challenging to reliably estimate the total annual value of basic services provided by LFCs (Religions For Peace 2010). However, as noted by Ferris:

The contributions of these initiatives, such as soup kitchens organized by local religious organisations or volunteers helping disaster victims, are not recorded anywhere in the UN's statistics on humanitarian contributions. Nonetheless, the sums of money mobilized by these small mosques and congregationally-based charitable organisations are undoubtedly substantial (Ferris 2011: 601).

Indeed, LFCs are often particularly well situated to respond within the first 24–96 hours of an emergency, when access to remote or disaster-affected areas may be physically impossible for external actors, or in contexts of weak, fragile and dysfunctional states (Ferris 2005, 2011). As noted by one interviewee:

In response to the earthquake in Haiti, one of the first places that people started setting up tents was on church grounds until camps were set up and people moved on (Stakeholder Interview, Alison Schafer, World Vision).

Furthermore, in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, Tearfund found that small church groups in Myanmar had ‘responded spontaneously’ to the emergency, with one church leader from the city of Bogale sheltering 30 neighbours in his house before it also collapsed (Bulmer 2010: 14). When Burundian refugees fled into western Tanzania, the local Lutheran NGO Tanganyika Christian Refugee Service (TCRS) was able to respond rapidly to the influx, whilst international agencies took days to organize and arrive (Survey Response, Helen Stawski, Archbishop of Canterbury’s International Development Secretariat). As one senior religious leader commented:

when these things happen...religious communities can always easily mobilise and you don’t need infrastructure, you could make a call and you start working immediately (Stakeholder Interview, Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili).

Not only are LFCs potential first responders by virtue of being already present in the locality of an emergency, but there is also evidence that they are increasingly organizing, in coordination with faith-based organizations, to anticipate and prepare for crises. For example, in Palu, Indonesia, ‘Compassion in Action’ teams established as part of a Salvation Army initiative known as Faith Based Facilitation have been trained and prepared for disaster response (Survey Response, Salvation Army). This preparation enabled the teams to respond to a flash flood and mudslide in Kulawi District in 2011:

The team...immediately responded with a ten person team...and went to the major disaster site. They put out a call for food and supplies to corps, the government, NGOs and local businesses, also utilising the Salvation Army radio station to call for donations. They provided post-trauma counselling (for which most had been trained), food, care, and any support necessary by visiting disaster-struck homes (including normalisation ‘play’ activities for children) (Salvation Army 2012).

LFCs may be equipped with key resources for effective response. These resources may be physical, including buildings used for storage, information hubs, shelter and protection, or social, including the ability to mobilize human and financial resources quickly from displaced, local or host communities. It is now widely recognized that having a ‘faith label’ can help build trust among those LFCs serve (e.g. Palmer 2001; Kirmani and Khan 2008; De Cordier 2009), offering the potential to extend the reach and efficiency of humanitarian response. The now extensive literature on Hurricane Katrina also demonstrates how local church leaders from African American communities were able to quickly and consistently mobilize reconstruction efforts and recovery needs for survivors of the disaster (see Cain and Barthélémy 2007; De Vita *et al.* 2008; Hilton 2008; Marks *et al.* 2009; Elvey 2010; Tausch *et al.* 2011; Putnam *et al.* 2012).

Beyond quantifiable services provided, LFCs’ intrinsic characteristics may also play an important role in providing effective assistance. Religious

communities often share common characteristics that can be seen to motivate involvement in basic service delivery, including active ethical teaching that instructs adherents to care for and meet the needs of the vulnerable. In some circumstances, there is evidence that this ethos of service has contributed to high service quality (World Bank 2008). Furthermore, LFCs may be particularly well situated to recognize the extent to which the definition of ‘basic needs’ may transcend secular organizations’ expectations: are prayer mats or food more ‘basic’ for a Muslim community during Ramadan? Documented examples include the case of Muslim women affected by the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, for whom headscarves were essential to maintain their dignity and a prerequisite to being able to access other services in public fora:

As the Tsunami struck in the early morning, women were dressed in whatever they were wearing indoors, in their homes. Some of them were very, very unhappy with the way that service delivery was provided: having to line up, and stand in a queue without having a headscarf to wear was very uncomfortable for them to do in front of other members of their community... It was very important, when we were designing what we call ‘dignity kits’ or ‘hygiene kits’, for us to put scarves in the kits. This made sure that they would at least have something that they could put on when they go out, in order to physically be able to access other services (Stakeholder Interview, Henia Dakkak, UNFPA).

However, while external actors may gain relevant insight to local worldviews through partnership with LFCs, the priorities of LFCs may not in every case be supported, or supportable, by secular humanitarian agencies (Herson 2014). Operational partnerships between LFCs—concerned with enacting their faith—and secular international agencies—concerned with principles of neutrality, impartiality and accountability—may be strained by divergent priorities. The process of navigating such complexity can be challenging (Ager and Ager 2011).

Emergency Response: Psychosocial Support and Related Provision

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ (IFRC’s) Psychosocial Reference Centre (2012) notes that ‘Psychosocial support... aims at easing resumption of normalcy and to prevent pathological consequences of potentially traumatic situations’. LFCs’ understanding of the complexities of psychosocial issues and their situation within the community, often combined with an existing track record of pastoral care, serves as a potentially strong foundation for provision of such support. It has been suggested that LFCs are particularly well positioned to provide ‘psychological first aid’ (Aten 2012), promoting resilience by building on existing coping strategies in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

The contributions of faith to psychosocial wellbeing can be placed in two categories: intrinsic beliefs or ideas, and extrinsic behaviours and rituals. With

regard to the former, there is a well-established body of literature documenting how religious beliefs can operate in support of resilience. Specific religious beliefs have been observed to foster resilience factors as measured on the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), including *control* (Pargament and Cummings 2010; Au *et al.* 2011), *strong will/commitment* related to religious views or *karma* (Fernando 2012) and *adaptation* (Buikstra *et al.* 2010; Bulkley *et al.* 2012). *Positivity and motivation* (Ai *et al.* 2005; Bowland *et al.* 2011) are further identified as vital elements of most religious worldviews, alongside the ability to interpret challenging situations in the form of opportunities or gifts from God (Greef 2008).

The role of faith through such mechanisms is beginning to be recognized within the humanitarian world (Walker *et al.* 2012). For instance, with reference to different ways of supporting refugees with mental health issues, UNHCR recognizes that

sometimes their belief in god is more therapeutic than other interventions and they can better express their issues through their religion—through their spiritual beliefs we can help them find solutions (Survey Response, Urban Refugees Evaluation Yaounde, UNHCR).

A 2009 study on resilience in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina found that 50 per cent of respondents said that their faith in God was critical in helping them cope with the aftermath of the hurricane: ‘When things became aggravating, confusing, or depressing, they found solace in believing that there is, in fact, some greater design’ (Glandon 2009: 54). Similarly, a 2011 study by Fernando and Hebert found that ‘faith in God and religious practice were described as the most significant resources for the seven women survivors of the Tsunami’ (2011: 6), with a woman describing her coping in the immediate aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 as follows:

What helped me survive the first 12 hours was prayer and faith because both my children were missing for that time. Then I was told that they were both found and that they were uninjured. I praise God for His goodness to me (Fernando and Hebert 2011: 7).

In some cases, however, religious worldviews can promote specific claims that may hinder resilience, for example, by promoting fatalism, guilt or blame. As noted earlier, the belief that a crisis, either natural or conflict-based, exemplifies divine punishment or testing of the affected community is widely held in religious communities globally. In his contribution to the scoping survey, Khalid Roy of Islamic Relief commented ‘This understanding is central to our world-view and yet it is totally unacceptable in academic and humanitarian discourse because it is seen as judgemental and/or superstitious’.

The effect of this belief on psychosocial aspects of resilience and recovery is unclear. The feeling of responsibility for a natural phenomenon may contribute

to feelings of guilt, punishment and apathy. However, the commitment to respond to perceived punishment may equally lead to motivation and commitment. Rabbi Yossi Ives, Chairman of Tag International Development, suggested that the beliefs of religious communities are powerful factors in a community's response to crisis, and the idea of punishment for sin, though 'commonly derided by Western ideas', may encourage communities and individuals to take responsibility for response to disaster (Survey Response).

Beyond intrinsic beliefs, the contribution of faith may also emerge through extrinsic behaviours and rituals. Behaviours that can be seen to support psychosocial wellbeing are often embedded deeply in the practice of religious communities: rituals and rites mark passage through phases of life, communities united by belief systems offer mutual support to one another, and respected leaders offer interpretations of life's challenges and advice on the means of surviving them.² According to one interviewee, Sister Mogdala, the continuing performance of key rituals such as weddings and funerals during a humanitarian situation in Zambia was a crucial aspect of her religious community's contribution to community resilience.

Other key practices that can operate in support of resilience include counselling, prayer and therapeutic narrative. Father Herbert Fadriquela, an interviewee from Negros Oriental in the Philippines, recalled an example of local clergy providing counselling in the aftermath of a landslide:

[the clergy] provided counselling to those families affected... celebrated a holy mass in memory of those who died because of the landslide, and offered mass in the community where the landslide happened.

Prayer, practising peace and compassion are identified as contributing to resilience and may be appropriately seen as a form of psychosocial response by religious communities to disasters (Greeff and Loubser 2008; Fernando and Ferrari 2011). Ofra Ayalon's 1998 study of children traumatized by war found that religious rituals can act therapeutically in recovery and resilience. Prayer can encourage children to tell their traumatic stories to God. Memorials, even metaphorical ones, for the dead are important psychosocial means of moving on after death of loved ones (Van der Hart 1986; Dyregrov and Raundalen 1995; Ayalon 1998). Werner and Smith (cited in Walsh 2003) also found the act of prayer to be a source of resilience. In these terms, Holton, based on extensive fieldwork with the Dinka in Sudan, argues that:

the ability of a community to see their own role in the story of God in the world, especially in times of tragedy, provides a deep well of resilience that fosters hope and may help mitigate the damaging effects of trauma (Holton 2010: 71).

Although such evidence supports the potential contribution of religious resources, beliefs and practices to psychosocial wellbeing, reports also documented numerous examples of actions that worked against such

contribution. This included acknowledgement that patriarchal structures within religious communities and organizations frequently undermined the agency of women and girls by denying them planning and decision-making roles with respect to humanitarian action. The manner in which such conservatism may be addressed through suitably sensitive, religiously informed dialogue remains a key research question (El Nakib and Ager 2014).

It is also relevant to consider the question of whether religious communities and organizations are *necessarily* more conservative or patriarchal than secular organizations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, forthcoming). For example, drawing upon a recent surveys by the Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration, UNHCR notes that FBOs' views on providing services to lesbian, gay, transgender and intersex asylum-seekers and refugees are *no better or worse* than the attitudes held by secular institutions (Survey Response, UNHCR-Geneva). Issues such as gender-based violence generally elicited varying evidence regarding the contribution of LFCs. Some reports indicated that LFCs may have access to issues that are considered too sensitive, taboo or stigmatized to openly share with external actors. For example, Parsitau, discussing the role of LFCs and personal faith in the lives of Kikuyu victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Kenya, suggests that faith communities were one of the few actors able to provide trauma counselling:

Christian churches across Kenya provided prayers and free counselling to people traumatized by the crisis. In my view, this is where the uncelebrated role of both FBOs and individual faith in the lives of people traumatized by crisis lies (Parsitau 2011: 507).

Other accounts, however, suggested gender-based violence was an issue where LFCs often do not provide appropriate support to survivors. One respondent observed that faith communities

usually let down victims of rape—where a woman is traumatised by an overwhelming event and receives no mitigation from those around her in the form of sympathy, empathy and (sometimes) even no punishment for the perpetrator. This is a tragic example of a faith practice making things worse for the victims of disaster (Survey Response, Islamic Relief).

Recent initiatives mapping faith-based responses to gender-based violence (e.g. UNFPA 2014), in addition to studies examining the *assumptions* which characterize mainstream accounts of the relationship between faith-based humanitarianism and gender (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, forthcoming), are to be particularly valued in these circumstances.

Transitional and Durable Solutions

In the aftermath of a crisis, when the majority of emergency and basic service has been completed, humanitarian agencies, governments and organizations

consider the complex question of finding solutions to meet the long-term needs of the affected communities. In addition to the three traditional ‘durable solutions’ commonly discussed in the context of forced migration—voluntary return, local integration and resettlement—it is recognized that there are a wide variety of transitional processes, such as conflict mitigation, peace-building, and reconciliation and justice, that contribute towards the resolution of displacement (UNDP/UNHCR 2010).

LFCs frequently serve as operational partners assisting larger agencies, using their social and spiritual capital to support key operations. While such activities are often poorly documented, the recent special issue of *Forced Migration Review Faith and Responses to Displacement* served to illustrate examples ranging from community peace-building (Nzapalainga *et al.* 2014) and mediation (Mahony 2014), to advocacy for local integration (Hampson *et al.* 2014) and promoting cross-community relationships among hosts and refugees (Kidwai *et al.* 2014), through to advocacy for asylum-seekers with governments enacting restrictive asylum policies (Campbell 2014). LFCs can be particularly well positioned to engage in such processes: they are typically embedded and established within a community, rather than external to it; often ‘benefit from a high level of trust among local communities’ (Gaillard and Texier 2010: 83); and may be better attuned to the needs of a community than external actors supporting the development of locally tailored solutions (Survey Response, Christian Aid; Ferris 2005).

For example, Fountain *et al.* highlight the role of the Catholic Diocese in the process of reconstruction following the 1998 Aitape Tsunami, arguing that, because the diocese was an established local institution, it was able to coordinate local infrastructure development more effectively than the absent local government:

[The Roman Catholic Diocese] became the major...organisation...with the Aitape Catholic Diocese Relief Committee even carrying out work that was traditionally reserved solely for governmental authorities, including funding the construction of basic infrastructure, such as roads and bridges (Fountain *et al.* 2004: 330).

In Ghana and Liberia, UNHCR reported that refugees had established relationships with host communities through shared religious beliefs and praying together (Survey Response, UNHCR), highlighting a mechanism for building cross-border networks that may ease recovery and integration, especially in urban, non-camp settings. Reports from the Anglican Diocese of Makamba in Burundi further exemplified this phenomenon. Peace committees were formed in 2005 to help repatriates from Tanzania and those returning from internal displacement to reintegrate into local communities. This involved mobilizing local support for them, often gathering food and clothes for newly arrived families from the community, directing them to the Land Commission and local authorities in cases where there were issues related to land, and showing people the boundaries of their land. They also constructed

new homes for hundreds returning families, through a partnership with Christian Aid (Survey Response, Helen Stawski, Archbishop of Canterbury's International Development Secretariat).

Notwithstanding these contributions, both surveyed literature and survey responses identified concerns regarding the role of LFCs in supporting transitional and durable solutions. A recurrent concern was religious groups being seen to take advantage of crises for proselytizing fragile communities (Gaillard 2006; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011b; Desta 2014; Fine 2014). The threat of coercion reflected in such practices clearly challenges the value of unconditionality of provision. Although it is unclear how widespread such practices are, it poses such a threat to the credibility of LFC engagement in humanitarian contexts that it has become a major focus for standard-setting (DFID 2012; UNHCR 2013, 2014).

More generally, the particular identity, defined worldviews and membership limitations that characterize most LFCs may be seen as barriers to working with respect to general principles of humanitarian engagement (Vogt and Colsell 2014). Where institutionalized humanitarianism seeks to be impartial, independent and neutral, LFCs may be considered far from neutral in their understandings, often politically associated and not infrequently actors themselves within the humanitarian situation in question. In such circumstances, caution regarding engagement with LFCs is clearly warranted. Humanitarian assistance in an age of plurality requires mechanisms for managing and balancing diverse interests and values (Ager 2014).

The challenges of working through such interests and values at a local level were highlighted by one survey respondent. A country director working with a faith-based humanitarian organization highlighted four specific barriers to effective humanitarian engagement that they had observed in working with embedded religious communities: politicization, nepotism, corruption and internal conflict (Survey Response, Anonymous).

Certain LFCs may also hinder gender inclusion in planning for and implementing diverse transitional and durable solutions (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, forthcoming). For example, some informants to this study recognized that certain religious leaders in Pakistan and Afghanistan had restricted women's involvement in recovery and reconstruction, with cultural barriers being invoked to limit women's work in this area (Survey response, Islamic Relief Worldwide). A Christian organization also highlighted that church hierarchies could pose a specific challenge, particularly with reference to gender and minority group inclusion in decision-making (Survey Response, Christian Aid).

Conclusions

Reflecting on the preceding analysis, conclusions may be drawn with respect to three major themes regarding LFCs and the promotion of

resilience in humanitarian contexts. These concern, respectively, the presence and influence of LFCs at the community level, their role in promoting resilience and the potential for LFC partnership with humanitarian organizations.

Respondents varied widely in their assessments of whether LFCs were inherently part of local community structures in predominantly religious societies, or whether such partnerships should be defined by engagement with religious specialists (clergy, scholars) or distinctly religious institutions (temple, church, mosque). In many settings, the community's religious life is not readily distinguishable from its broader social and cultural life. Further research is therefore required to map and analyse the multiple informal ways LFCs are already contributing to the protection of displaced persons. This would appropriately include the documentation of perspectives and experiences from the global south not fully explored in this analysis, as well as participatory research conducted in real time.

In terms of their impact on resilience, LFCs utilize their pre-existing local networks and buildings, in addition to their shared identity, social vision, religious narratives and public leaders, to mobilize, coordinate, register, train, console, encourage and help resolve conflict. This approach builds on existing community coping mechanisms and assets, harnesses social capital and thus strengthens community resilience. Further inquiry is required into the added value of working with LFCs, including the use of social capital in community-based responses, the importance of religious values and beliefs for responding to and preparing for disasters, and the comparative cost effectiveness of building on existing structure and networks. More detailed investigation is also essential to understand the processes of inclusion and exclusion—especially around issues such as gender—by LFCs, and to critically assess generalized assumptions about LFC conservatism or exclusivity (Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, forthcoming).

While many partnerships clearly exist between LFCs and humanitarian organizations, a number of barriers to fully utilizing such engagement regularly surfaced in the research. These include conflicting secular and religious worldviews, issues of technical competency and concern over lack of independence from local political dynamics. Examining the diverse barriers to partnership, such as the extent to which LFCs are already meeting international standards in delivery and their levels of access and engagement with humanitarian coordinating mechanisms, is urgently needed. Such work should reflect two poles of analysis. One would involve exploring mechanisms to strengthen 'religious literacy' within the humanitarian sector, an area in which UNHCR has become significantly active following the 2012 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Faith and Protection (UNHCR 2012). The other pole would relate to issues of local capacity, another strongly emerging agenda (IOM 2013; Brown *et al.* 2014), in examining means to strengthen the capacity of LFCs for more effective engagement with national and international humanitarian actors.

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1. FBOs can broadly be defined as ‘any organisation that derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith’ (Jennings and Clarke 2008: 6).
2. Indeed, as noted by Allen and Turton (1996), displaced communities often prioritize ‘saving a way of life’ over ‘saving a life’, allocating limited resources to ensure that key rituals continue to take place throughout different phases of displacement.

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