

Local Solutions for IDP Response: Catholic Relief Services' submission to the High-Level Panel (HLP) on Internal Displacement

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Increasing levels of conflict and natural disasters have led to an unprecedented 41 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide as of 2019. While the number of those internally displaced by natural disaster outnumbers those caused by conflict by a factor of 1.5¹, the intractable nature of displacement caused by conflict and violence, along with the complexity of finding durable solutions for internally displaced causes the international community rightful concern. Therefore, the UN Secretary General's establishment of the High-Level Panel (HLP) on IDPs is an important signal to all stakeholders-displaced persons, host communities, and the international community, that the UN is invested and engaged in improving the international response to this pressing and growing issue. We appreciate this positioning in light of the success born of the global compacts for refugees and migrants for changing the lives of these populations.

The unprecedented number of IDPs and the prolonged duration of displacement has begun to reveal cracks in our existing response framework – which is both too short term in nature, too top-down, commands too little attention, funding and political action. Our field experiences pinpoints two main concerns:

- 1) Responses do not match displacement time frames: In terms of IDP and existing humanitarian response, we find that responses continue to be too short-term in nature, despite the average displacement time for refugees being 26 years². Without the ability to program and plan over the long term, IDPs exist in a state of limbo, even as communities move towards integration into local populations. In assessments with displaced populations, many people have no plans to return to their homes and being able to meet IDP needs in their new lives will require expansion of sustainable basic services, as well as livelihood opportunities for IDPs' in their new homes.
- 2) Lack of ownership and accountability: No single international agency has the mandate for IDP protection, and the role of national governments in IDP response can often complicate matters when they themselves have a role in perpetrating the underlying conflict leading to displacement. Furthermore, in instances like the current global pandemic of COVID-19, we have seen governments take advantage of situations, closing camps and forcing returns for individuals under the guise of public health. While the international community has developed a universal framework for national governments to assume responsibility for IDP response, and [some countries](#) do have IDP-specific policies, these efforts lack true accountability without adequate incentives or being legally binding. Without a legal framework protecting IDPs as exists

¹ According to [OCHA](#) 28 million new people became internally displaced by conflict and disasters worldwide in the course of 2018. 10.8 million of these were displaced by violence and conflict, and 17.2 million by natural disaster.

² Because we do not have clear data on length of displacement for IDPs, we can use refugee statistics as an indication of how long IDP displacement is.

for refugees, leadership by an empowered international actor with political and diplomatic heft, backed by the international community, is required to address their concerns.

CRS' VANTAGE POINT: FOCUS ON LOCAL RESPONSES

The establishment of the IDP HLP provides a crucial opportunity for the international community to evaluate how traditional IDP responses can be adjusted to account for the diverse and rapidly-evolving displacement crises worldwide. More than ever before, top-down, humanitarian approaches will not be sufficient for the kind of long-term, sustainable, and holistic responses that are becoming evidently necessary. While many local responses happen organically, the international community has a clear role to play in investing in local institutions, including them in the planning for seeking durable solutions, and funding them for their sustained work.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Core to Catholic Relief Services' guiding Catholic Social Teaching is the principle of subsidiarity—that those who are closest to the problems should be the architects of the solutions. Based on this principle, and our extensive experience in humanitarian and development response, we provide the following recommendations for the HLP geared towards improving our collective response to IDPs.

We have much to learn from the UN Global Compact on Refugees, given the many similarities a displaced person experiences, no matter if they have crossed a national border. Therefore, the changes we seek and the pathways to doing so are not dissimilar from those laid out by the Global Compact on Refugees.

1. Address the need for long-term responses

Fund local actors to respond to IDPs: We can extrapolate findings from [our research](#) looking at the role of local faith actors in refugee response, showing the comparative advantage of local institutions: extended presence in their communities, in-depth knowledge of community needs, their multi-sectoral/holistic approach, and a range of capacities to deliver results rapidly. Our field staff of IDP projects confirm that local organizations are able to reach populations and communities that larger international organizations often cannot, both due to their geographic location, but also because they are more trusted by the community where they possess deep roots. Yet international funding to local organizations is [less than 5%](#) for humanitarian assistance generally.

Therefore, we *emphasize the importance of meeting the lofty Grand Bargain commitment of localization*, to ensure at least 25% of global humanitarian aid goes to local actors. In addition, local organizations need to be *funded beyond projects, including overhead costs*, so that they can operate beyond short-term project timelines, which make it difficult for local organizations to adequately build up staff and experience in order to create effective long-term programming. Longer-term funding and overhead will also enable these local organizations to consistently invest in their communities, which will in turn increase the community's trust in them.

Utilize and support local institutions to influence social norms and state, national, and international policy: Our [research](#) shows that local faith institutions (LFIs) carry great leverage and provide a key, grassroots role in influencing the level of social acceptance between the forcibly displaced and their host communities. For example, in Lebanon, LFIs stand as frontline workers providing direct services to

people in need, no matter their religious affiliation, across their communities. They play a direct role in influencing how the displaced are welcomed and accepted in the community, utilizing their shared identities to respond to their beneficiaries, and providing services based on need, and not status.

Role in peacebuilding and the “triple nexus”: There is a growing understanding that the intersection of humanitarian response, peacebuilding and development is essential to address both the root causes and ongoing needs of protracted displacement. Local organizations are service providers, leaders in their communities, and maintain steadfast presence in their communities; therefore, they embody an ideal triple nexus response. While they are uniquely aware of the needs of the community, they have the trust to address brewing concerns, and can play an important role in national dialogues which underpin ending conflicts at the local and national levels. In our experience, both in the [Central African Republic](#) and [South Sudan](#), local interfaith leaders and communities were essential in efforts to promote peace and unity in the face of conflict, while also responding to the immediate and longer-term needs of the displaced.

Seek development finance for IDP response: Similar to refugees, the length of displacement for IDPs can be decades, if not a permanent state. Therefore, the international community should start to plan for and fund recovery and development responses, 6 months to a year into a displacement. While the World Bank has successfully contributed substantive development finance to the refugee response through sub-windows of its IDA, its role in funding IDP response is more complex. In IDP situations where national governments are part of the problem, *funding should be administered directly to the stakeholder(s) on the ground that remain apolitical-* including local organizations, local governments, and INGOs. Modeling funding streams on things like the START network or other pooled fund mechanisms in humanitarian response can help manage large tranches of funds, avoiding problematic actors who should not benefit financially from perpetrating violence and conflict. The [World Bank](#) should expand its funding of small- and medium-sized enterprises in IDP countries, through its Community Driven Development Approach, which will help to create jobs and develop the local market economy.

Development financing should focus on livelihood opportunities, a lack of which can often keep communities in cycles of conflict and displacement. International financial institutions (IFIs) and the like should work to de-risk private sector investments in such environments, where displacement remains high, to provide employment for IDPs as well as members of the host community, which can be an effective mechanism to address root causes of conflict. For example, in CAR one of the major drivers of continuing conflict and unrest was a large percentage of unemployed, dissatisfied young men who were easily recruited into armed militias due to their lack of alternative economic opportunity. The conflict is ongoing, displacing [over 600,000](#) people since 2012.

CRS successfully implemented a livelihood project in Burkina Faso (with [838,000](#) IDPs as of March 2020) which supported livelihoods all along the value chain around the first organic cotton gin in West Africa, generating increased income for over 8,000 small cotton producers, 58% of whom are women. CRS invested in all parts of the value chain: from providing seed capital for a joint venture with the National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso, to developing management practices with associations, to supporting the research and development to improve crops, to providing networking opportunities for farmers. This could serve as a model to replicate in other high-displacement communities, where IFIs can provide sustainable economic support for IDPs, as well as the host community.

2. Elevate Protection by Local Actors to Do No Harm

Elevate local actors for protection: “[H]umanitarian protection is largely centered on the international community’s protection presence, actions and efforts... despite the reality that affected communities actively engage in their own protection before, during and after a humanitarian crisis; before, during and after the entry and exit of external humanitarian actors.”³ Top-down approaches to protection that ignore the important role of local actors can be harmful to communities, failing to include community actors in protection approach planning. In other instances, international protection actors perpetrate their own acts of violence against vulnerable populations. Inherent biases against local actors’ inability to remain neutral must be countered by including them in protection planning, demonstrating their unique contributions to the field, and simultaneously building the capacity of local implementers to operate more explicitly under international humanitarian principles. To create bottom-up solutions, national and international partners must [incorporate input from IDPs themselves](#), where local partners and organizations can act as liaisons to do so.

3. Address Accountability and Ownership Gaps through Strengthened Local Stakeholders

Along with an empowered international body that can bring the diplomatic and political heft to address IDP situations head on, we focus on bottom-up approaches that can improve accountability of national governments to IDPs.

[Essential](#) for successful IDP policy implementation are strong state capacity, government accountability to the domestic population, and government accountability to domestic institutions, particularly the courts. Efforts to increase accountability of national governments to their IDP populations should seek to enhance these three characteristics, through increasing capacity and funding, while also making space for their representative voices.

Where state capacity is the issue, the *international community and IFI’s should support countries to build their institutional capacity* – a process that, based on [CRS’ extensive experience](#) in the area, should include assessing assets, resources, and goals; identifying gaps; designing and implementing interventions; and ensuring sustainability to ensure new developments become standard operating procedure. Tapping development funding to do this will enable long-term approaches that can benefit domestic responses as well.

Local organizations also have a role to play in increasing accountability of national governments to the domestic population. Local partners can help elevate IDP voices to all levels of government, through consultations and advocacy work. They are also an important disseminator of information, which is also an important piece of the accountability puzzle, making sure information on [IDP policy](#) and programs are widely known and understood.

Coupled with strengthened local institutions, the international community can increase its incentives for the *creation of enforceable IDP policies*, including through additional and conditional financing. IFIs should use funding as leverage to push governments to develop specific IDP policies, which can improve

³ <https://odihpn.org/magazine/making-space-for-community-based-protection-in-the-humanitarian-protection-landscape/>

accountability by ensuring there are clear standards that can be upheld in domestic institutions and courts.

Generating and analyzing data: Collecting and analyzing data is an essential element of preparing for future displacement and adequately responding to current IDPs. [The majority](#) of IDPs live outside of traditional camps, and [about half](#) of the world's IDPs live in urban areas – both of which present challenges for collection information and ensuring individuals and families receive the resources they need. Local actors are critical in gathering this much-needed information as they have the intimate understanding and trust of the local community. Local leaders can engage communities in “[c]ommunity-led data collection, needs assessments and risk analysis (in informal settlements, at risk neighbourhoods and other urban areas) [which] have shown success in facilitating sustainable approaches to urban integration and resettlement efforts.”⁴

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⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/the-role-of-local-and-regional-governments-in-protecting-internally-di/168097f950>