# The Triple Nexus, Localization, and Local Faith Actors:

## The intersections between faith, humanitarian response, development, and peace.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.

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# List of abbreviations

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| **CRS** | Catholic Relief Services |
| **DCA** | DanChurchAid |
| **FBOs** | Faith-based Organizations |
| **HDP Nexus** | Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus |
| **IDPs** | Internally Displaced Persons |
| **INGOs** | International Non-governmental Organizations |
| **LFAs** | Local Faith Actors |
| **L/NNGOs** | Local and National Non-governmental Organizations |
| **LRRD** | Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development |
| **NGOs** | Non-governmental Organizations |
| **NNGOs** | National Non-governmental Organizations |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNOCHA** | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| **USAID** | United States Agency for International Development |

# Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the key themes and existing knowledge on the topics of the Triple Nexus, localization, and local faith actors. The intersection of these topics is particularly important to contemporary aid work because of global commitments to shift power and financing from external to national and local actors, and to commit to a new way of working that overcomes humanitarian and development silos. This is essential to streamline operations across humanitarian, development, and peace work.

This report situates the role of faith-based actors within these global policy and programmatic discussions. The specific role of faith-based actors has been little discussed within these debates. More specifically, the role of local and national faith-based actors has received almost no attention.

Although the figure can be debated and changes constantly, it is commonly cited that approximately eighty percent of people[1] in the world hold religious beliefs and follow some form of religious practice in their everyday lives. People do not lose their cultural and religious groundings in periods of crisis. Many local and national organizations in countries affected by crises are also affiliated with religious institutions. Religious institutions are one of the structures in society that have existing capital, such as networks, an infrastructure, and trust and authority in communities. Local and national faith-based actors (or local faith actors, LFAs, henceforth) are, therefore, key players in localizing and harmonizing aid.

This report is based on a review of the literature following systematic searches and an analysis of ninety-three resources from academic and gray literature. It is the first report of two, with the second focusing on results from primary research with DanChurchAid (DCA) and LFAs in South Sudan. The report covers four inter-linked sections and offers five main conclusions.

### 1. Humanitarian-development-peace initiatives: The Triple Nexus

The Triple Nexus aims at better collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peace actors, and coherence among these sectors in order to have a more effective, efficient, and adapted response to meeting people's needs. A context-specific and a people-centered approach is needed to implement the nexus. This includes understanding people's religious beliefs and practices in addition to the local actors they turn to in crisis, such as LFAs.

### 2. Localization

The humanitarian localization agenda requires changes in the relationships between donors, international, and local actors to shift decision-making and financing to national and local NGOs. In several countries, local actors are also faith-based actors. Research helps us to understand how that does, and equally does

not, make a difference to localization and the risks and opportunities that are part of partnerships with LFAs. The literature shows the capacities of local and international actors can be complementary. Moreover, it is essential to avoid the NGO-ization of local actors where possible so as to preserve their unique contributions, and to provide alternative partnership modalities conducive to local-international partnerships.

## 3. Local Faith Actors (LFAs)

LFAs can include local, regional, and national religious leaders; relief and development branches of national religious institutions; local volunteer committees and groups; national religious institutions and their committees and councils; and national faith-inspired organizations and inter-religious councils. At times, humanitarian actors partner with relief and development branches of religious institutions and other national faith-inspired NGOs. Yet, LFAs remain marginalized in the humanitarian system despite their long-term involvement and the reality that LFA and humanitarian coordination systems can operate parallel to one another. Despite negative preconceptions regarding the role of faith in humanitarian assistance due to proselytization and concerns around impartiality, many LFAs run professional operations, upholding humanitarian standards, and are quick to resolve issues following only minimal capacity building. There is a clear potential for all humanitarian organizations, not only international FBOs, to engage LFAs to achieve a relevant, appropriate, people-centered, and interconnected Triple Nexus response.

## 4. South Sudan

**The second report in this series covers findings from primary research in South Sudan.** Initial findings from the review of the literature in this report show LFAs are already working within the parameters of a Triple Nexus approach.

## Summary conclusions

**1.** LFAs already operationalize a Triple Nexus approach by
   a) responding to the needs of the communities they are located within and serve, which transcend humanitarian-development-peace silos. Community needs are rarely isolated within one categorization or the other. For example, providing livelihood support that fosters inter-community relations and social cohesion.

**2.** LFAs can struggle to operationalize a Triple Nexus approach because
   a) limited funding and donor requirements push local organizations, including LFAs, into siloed thinking.
      i. Localization requires local actors to professionalize to the requirements of the humanitarian system, which often means these local actors have to fundamentally change the ways they work. International actors can, therefore, have negative effects on the abilities of LFAs to operationalize a Triple Nexus approach.
      ii. There are a range of capacities with LFAs. Some local religious communities have developed relief and development branches to work with international donors over the years. These types of organizations are more familiar with working within the aid sector. Other types of LFA do not have this experience and would require considerable capacity building.

**3.** Religious communities are often first responders, providing for the immediate needs of communities. They are also respected mediators and peacebuilders, committed to bringing justice and reconciliation over the longer-term. In conflict contexts they are the bridge between humanitarian and peace work, but a difficulty can lie in building the stability and funding needed for development work to become part of the mix.

**4.** Alternative partnership models, financing mechanisms, and capacity building all help LFAs to integrate into the humanitarian system. In order to minimize negative effects on the ability of LFAs to keep operationalizing Triple Nexus approaches, flexibility and contextual sensitivity from international actors can help LFAs to become partners while not undermining their connectedness and their own nimble approaches of responding to community needs.

**5.** This contextual sensitivity and flexibility requires a change from international actors in their organizational culture and their ability to overcome biases from decision makers. Religious literacy is an approach that underlines the contextual embeddedness and dynamism of LFAs. It can help those unfamiliar with LFAs to become more comfortable with when and how to engage these actors and help them identify the skills and experiences of LFAs that can become part of capacity sharing and an equal partnership. ■

# Introduction

Millions of people are suffering from humanitarian crises around the world. It is estimated 131.7 million people in forty-two countries are in need of humanitarian assistance.[2] The number of humanitarian crises with an internationally-led response almost doubled from sixteen to thirty between 2005 and 2017.[3] UNOCHA estimates around 70 million people are displaced in the world, and most of them are internally displaced persons (IDPs). The number of undernourished people has also increased from 804 million in 2016 to 821 million in 2017.[4] These trends suggest the number of crises, people affected by these crises, and the length of crises have increased over the last decade. Over eighty percent of humanitarian assistance goes to long and medium term recipients.[5]

In this context, the first World Humanitarian Summit was convened in 2016 in order to "generate commitments to reduce suffering and deliver better for people caught in humanitarian crises, and to demonstrate support for a new Agenda for Humanity."[6] More than 9,000 people took part in this summit, including members of civil society, academia, government officials, and others.[7] From this summit emerged the "Grand Bargain," a commitment to address the humanitarian financing gap from more than the 30 biggest donors and international organizations.[8]

This literature review provides the first step toward answering the following research question: "How do DCA's local faith actor partners in South Sudan operationalize a Triple Nexus approach to humanitarian, development, and peace activities, and what barriers do they face?" The working hypothesis of the research, emanating from an initial workshop DCA conducted in Juba in October 2018, is LFAs are often operationalizing the Triple Nexus approach automatically. Yet, as they grow as an organization, they start working within siloed international structures, which causes tensions. The result affects the operationalization of the Triple Nexus in partnerships with local actors. The second step of this process is primary research in South Sudan, which is to be published as a separate and complementary report.

This report explores two of the main commitments made during the Grand Bargain and their implications for the future of the humanitarian system. First, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus is discussed. Based on the discussion of this nexus, the localization of aid and its implications are then analyzed. Following that, a type of local actor is studied: local faith actors. The positive role of these actors, as well as the challenges of working with them, is explored. Lastly, the intersection of topics is examined in the context of the humanitarian response in South Sudan. ■

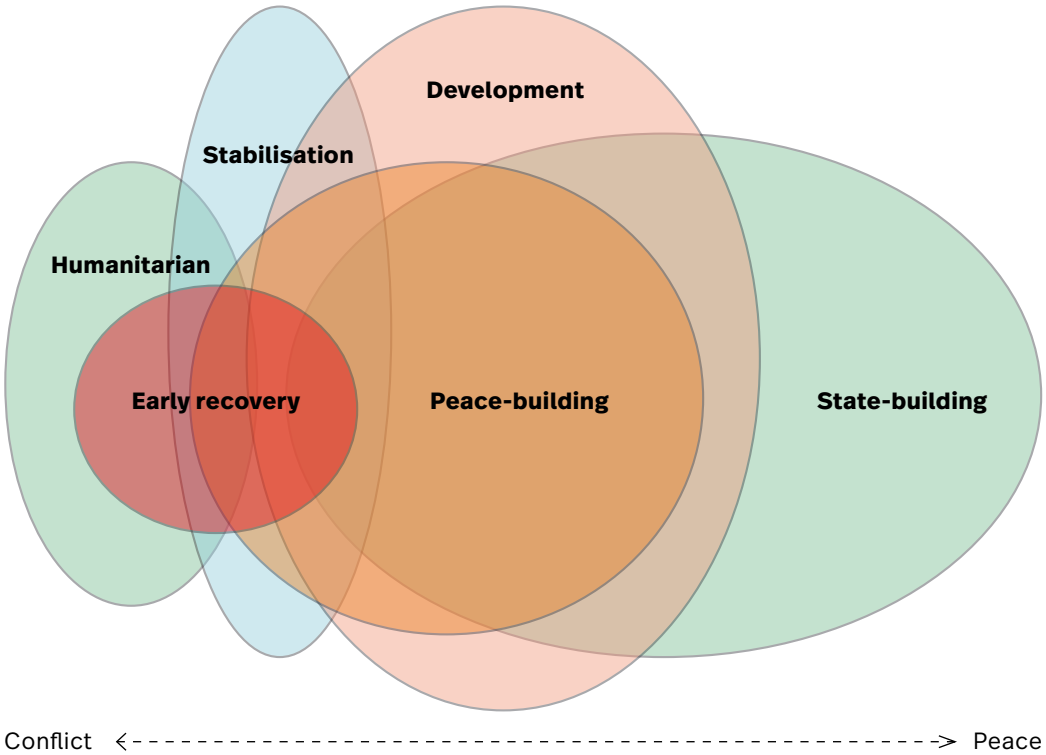
# 1.
# The Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus

Humanitarian crises result from the interaction of multiple factors affecting people already facing vulnerabilities.[9] Due to the scale of crises and the increase in protracted conflicts, humanitarian actors cannot address the needs of affected people on their own. Humanitarian, peace, and development actors must work together in order to prevent and address the root causes of vulnerability while meeting humanitarian needs, supporting resilience, and building the long-term capacities of affected population. This is what is known as the Triple Nexus or the Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus.

The aim of the Triple Nexus is for humanitarian, development, and peace actors to work together toward a set of similar outcomes in a multi-year planning process when possible and appropriate, grounding this approach in the comparative advantages of each actor to make their collective response more coherent, efficient, and effective.

The concept is not new. In the nineties, for example, aid workers spoke of linking relief, rehabilitation, and development (LRRD). The idea has been reaffirmed over the last few years through its central place in the Grand Bargain, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.[10] The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus is also referred to as the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. Ever since Antonio Guterres' call to use peace as "the third leg of the triangle" upon taking the office of Secretary-General in December 2016,[11] the nexus has included peace.

**Figure : Untagling Early Recovery (Bailey and Pavanello 2009)**



Even though the lines between development, humanitarian response, and peacebuilding are theoretically unambiguous, it is often not the case in reality, especially for people affected by crisis.[12] Figure 1[13] shows the overlaps between supposedly discrete time periods. The figure is not definitive, as these overlaps are even stronger at times to the extent they all occur simultaneously. Likewise, the inclusion of stabilization is contested and the categories themselves are a top-down, donor-driven conceptualization of the timeline between conflict and peace.

People do not experience their needs in a compartmentalized or sequential manner but rather can experience a need for humanitarian assistance at the same time as peace and development activities. For example, humanitarian aid can contribute to peace. Humanitarian agencies can lobby for a cease-fire needed to deliver humanitarian assistance that can, in turn, be used by peacemakers as a starting point to initiate a peace dialogue.[14] Crises are not linear sequences of events occurring over time but are made up of fluctuating needs and events such as violence. This requires nexus actors to be prepared for such shifts. The presence and involvement of development and peace actors in protracted crises would be a positive move for the sustainability of solutions. This can only be achieved, however, through a focus on multi-year planning and resourcing, as well as expanding unallocated funding for frontline responders. The Triple Nexus would then allow the space for "burden-sharing" among humanitarian, development, and peace actors, where they can complement and learn from each other.[15]

The implementation of this nexus nonetheless comes with challenges. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies identified six main challenges including "1) the lack of engagement of civil society..., 2) no common and agreed understanding of problems and definitions of terms..., 3) a lack of alignment of plans..., 4) security funding is difficult because donors... rarely fund multi-year projects that fit the HDP nexus, 5) ...no systematic implementation of this new way of working..., and 6) there is a fear that mixing humanitarian, peace, and development activities will politicize humanitarianism.[16] Some of these challenges for nexus implementation are framed heavily from a humanitarian perspective and underline continued barriers that do not take into account the realities of local actors. For example, local actors already bridge supposed divides but are not able to access funding in any domain because of strict donor requirements. These internal inconsistencies within some of the challenges for the implementation of the Triple Nexus encourage reflection on who is the nexus for and how it should be used. Better evidence is still needed to understand the ways in which this nexus can be operationalized and the ways in which it already exists, such as through LFAs. Better evidence will help demonstrate to donors the need for multi-year funding that supports localization and the Triple Nexus approach rather than short-term funding that co-opts local actors.

Humanitarian action should ideally contribute to peace and development while preserving its distinctiveness as principled action. Consequently, humanitarian action should not be considered as a peacebuilding instrument. Rather, it should adopt a conflict-sensitive strategy, enabling aid delivery respectful of humanitarian principles, while laying the foundation for development and peace activities,[17] avoiding negative impacts, and maximizing positive ones.[18] This would enable actors to understand the drivers of (potential) conflicts, to have "a net assessment of the capabilities and intentions of the relevant parties, and specific recommendations for possible entry points for conflict prevention or for adjustments to ongoing preventive activities."[19]

Many toolkits have been created to help humanitarian and development actors be more conflict sensitive and faith literate in their programming (e.g., the Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding toolkit by USAID,[20] the Faith-Based Toolkit for Working in Conflict developed by Islamic Relief,[21] the Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience Handbook of the Start Network,[22] and the Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding Analysis guide.[23]) Conflict sensitivity and analysis enables actors to take "other needed perspectives into consideration"[24] and connect humanitarian, development, and peace actors together.

Operationalizing the Triple Nexus does not necessarily mean humanitarian, development, and peace actors have to work under a single and common framework

or focus area. Rather, it promotes a context-specific approach that must be people-centered and empowers local actors, as will be discussed in the next section of this report. In sum, the Triple Nexus aims to improve collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peace actors for a more effective, efficient, and adapted response to the needs of people. Despite challenges, this approach is a real opportunity to change responses for the better and become part of a new way of working.

## Implementation of the Triple Nexus, some examples.

**1. Caritas**
Caritas, the "helping arm of the Catholic Church," implements humanitarian, development, and peace projects through its 160 member organizations. These partners are present before, during, and after a disaster.[25] In South Sudan, the Caritas network, through Caritas South Sudan, has provided humanitarian response, capacity building, and development programs, as well as supporting peacebuilding initiatives such as peacebuilding broadcasts on radio stations.[26]

In Ghouta, Syria, through an interfaith partnership with a local Muslim organization, Hifz Al Neema, Caritas distributes food, vouchers, and non-food items (NFIs). According to Davide Bernocchi, Caritas' Advisor on Interfaith Partnership, this partnership has given "a powerful message of hope for the future of this country," [27] playing a role in peacebuilding and social cohesion within and between communities while also delivering humanitarian aid.

**2. Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work**
The Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work is a faith network implementing projects to support Palestinians, but also 400 Syrian families in Irbid, Jordan. They implement projects from distributing NFIs and hygiene kits, to supporting higher education with trainings and loans, and providing psychosocial support, mother support groups, civic engagement classes, in addition to addressing medical needs. All these projects aim to address the humanitarian needs of communities. The Near East Council of Churches Committee for Refugee Work also envisions long-term development with their education programs and through peaceful cohabitation.[28]

**3. DanChurchAid in South Sudan**
DCA and its partners implement the "Generating Sustainable Livelihoods and Leadership for Peace" project in South Sudan. This project is comprised of interrelated, long-term outcomes, including resilient livelihoods and food security; social cohesion; and peaceful conflict resolution. These are three essential components for an HDP nexus approach. This project aims to address the root causes of conflicts in South Sudan by supporting local communities to create or reinforce existing mechanisms for conflict management, while simultaneously building resilience to food security and economic shocks.[29]

**4. Mercy Corps in Yemen**
In its work in Yemen, Mercy Corps decided to use humanitarian aid to address protracted local tribal conflicts and bring villages together in the Haymah Dakhliyah district. Unarmed villagers distributed aid and provided education sessions "across lines of division." By doing so, they aimed to rebuild trust between villagers and reduce violent outbreaks experienced in the area.[30] ■

# 2.
# Localization of aid

Localization was a commitment made during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 as part of the Grand Bargain.[31] The long-term goal of localization is to improve local capacities and build resilience among affected communities. This is done by creating links with development actors.[32] The term localization is widely used, but there is no globally agreed definition in the literature. The term localization is generally

> used across the sector to refer from everything to the practice of increasing numbers of local staff in international organizations, to the outsourcing of aid delivery to local partners, to the development of locally specific response models. The term often also encompasses work that originates with local groups or is in support of local initiatives.[33]

Based on this, the understanding of localization and local actors is, as a consequence, extremely fluid and diverse and must be considered on a contextual basis.[34] Much of the debate around localization has remained limited to international circles and has been criticized for the lack of local partner involvement.[35] Though the need for an international response remains and, particularly in conflict-driven crises that make up the majority of today's humanitarian interventions,[36] international aid must reinforce already existing systems and mechanisms rather than replacing them.[37]

The argument for shifting from subcontracting to partnering with local actors, including LFAs, is based on seven advantages. First, they can respond quickly. These actors are typically already on the ground when a crisis occurs. Second, they have access to areas and localities often inaccessible to international actors. Third, they have a better understanding of the local context, including the culture, religion, language, and politics. Fourth, they are better placed to link preparedness, relief, development, and peace. As such, they are better situated to operationalize the Triple Nexus as they are in situ before, during, and after the crisis, unlike external actors. Fifth, their humanitarian response is cost-effective. The salaries of local actors are not as high as those for international staff. Moreover, local actors have a pre-established network they can tap into.[38] Sixth, activities implemented by local organizations have a higher and more beneficial impact on local communities, especially when a truly participatory approach is adopted. For example, protection initiatives are often "either unknown or perceived as relatively unimportant by people at risk"[39] because they were implemented by external agencies rather than local actors. Finally, most humanitarian crises happen in a conflict context that is highly insecure for international organizations. Consequently, international organizations often turn to remote management in partnership with local actors.[40] However, this also transfers risk to local actors that do not have the same mitigation and exit strategies as international actors in the event of security incidents.

From an international perspective, there are advantages to including local actors in humanitarian, development, and peace activities. These advantages at the international level are coupled with advantages for local actors that come in the form of being treated as equals and having the opportunity to build their organizational capacity to respond to crises.[41] The humanitarian system is complex and increasingly standardized, which makes it difficult for local actors to adhere to its requirements. It could be a mistake to ask local actors to follow the same norms, standards, and procedures as international organizations. Doing so, may undercut their ability to work flexibly and in remote regions, some of the very attributes international actors seek. Strict donor compliance regulations can result in a loss of diversity and a lack of long-term thinking; two criticisms leveled at international humanitarian aid organizations.[42] The comparative advantage and

complementarity of local actors are lost. This issue is also characterized by a lack of understanding and shared common "language" between international and local actors.[43]

There is also a fear local actors will not respect humanitarian principles and, particularly those of neutrality and impartiality. Local actors "are rooted in their historical, cultural and religious constituencies and have to report back to them in formal and informal ways."[44] When local actors receive international funding, local power dynamics shift and military and political groups can become more interested in them.[45] However, recent research has demonstrated international humanitarian actors are not as neutral and impartial as they are perceived.[46] Often, they must build relationships with governments and disaster affected people view other actors, including LFAs, as more impartial. Local actors, such as LFAs, have other reasons, including continued local acceptance and religious motivations of respect and compassion for all driving their need and ability to maintain neutrality and impartiality.[47] There are also ways in which intermediary organizations are working with local actors to provide training on humanitarian principles and standards, and how to navigate these requirements with donors.[48]

Localization requires "a shift in power relations between actors, both in terms of strategic decision-making and control of resources."[49] As highlighted by the Shifting Power Project,

> if International NGOs are serious about shifting power, then they must invest in organizations, networks, and movements that they do not control. Individuals and institutions need to move beyond their preoccupation with organizational survival. The reality is that the shifting of power will happen at varying speeds according to the domain and context. INGOs operate in a multipolar, uncertain world and stable contexts can quickly become fragile.[50]

The humanitarian system must rethink its approach for localization to happen, while not placing the entirety of the burden on local actors. It requires consequent changes in the way donors, international, and even local actors work today. There is no one size fits all approach to localization. Rather, tailor-made, context specific approaches are needed that are cognizant of the role local actors can play in humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, and development.[51] Much can be learned from how international FBOs have been working with LFAs through transnational religious networks for decades and how they have instituted tried and tested methods for engaging and overcoming barriers with local faith partners.[52] The next section explores the role and place of these LFAs.

### Some examples of localization with local faith actors involved

**1. The Anglican Diocese of Makamba**
Peace committees were created in 2005 by the Anglican Diocese of Makamba in Burundi. The aim of these committees was to reintegrate IDPs and refugees who fled to Tanzania in the local communities. Food and clothes were gathered and distributed to the new families. With the help of Christian Aid, new homes for hundreds of returning families were also constructed. The Anglican Diocese of Makamba was the implementing local faith partner.

**2. DCA in Jonglei, South Sudan**
Together with local leaders, local flood task forces "whose members were selected by some community representatives, were mobilized and trained to work with risk assessments, risk management, early warning, flood mitigation and dyke repair and maintenance."[53] They later formed a network that was able to raise awareness among the local population but also to local authorities. Thanks to their work, they convinced the latter to finance part of the rehabilitation of the main dyke. The rehabilitation directly benefitted around 65,000 people whose houses and crops were no longer subject to flooding during the rainy season. ■

# 3.
# Local faith actors

The localization debate has resulted in a growing awareness among international humanitarian actors of LFAs and the possible advantages and opportunities to be had from partnering with them.[55] Recent discussions around civic space have created new ways to consider the involvement of LFAs in development, peace and humanitarian activities. Restrictions on religious freedom ultimately leads to reduced civic space, especially when faith actors are actively involved in the protection of human rights, empowerment of persecuted minorities, and the defense of civic and political liberties.

The concept of faith actors includes different types of groups such as international faith-based organizations (FBOs) and local faith actors (LFAs). The former are better integrated into the humanitarian sector, while the latter are still marginalized or working in parallel. This marginalization is due to the fact that "they are local in an internationally dominated sector and (...) they are faith-based in a secularized system."[56] Research from Oxfam has highlighted both international faith-based and secular organizations clearly lack religious literacy[57] and, therefore, do not adequately engage with LFAs.[58] This has resulted in the sidelining and underutilization of LFAs in humanitarian aid.[59] Field of research on LFAs is relatively new and as they are usually operate outside the formal humanitarian system, there is a clear lack of empirical data on their activities.

In their research in Irbid, Jordan, El Nakib and Ager[60] identified six main faith actors providing humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. Even though their research was confined to Irbid, their typology can easily be applied to a broader context. The main faith actors include

1. international faith-based organizations;
2. national faith-influenced organizations that are registered NGOs in the national capital;
3. local faith-influenced organizations that are formal groups but closely tied to the community and at the forefront of service delivery;
4. faith networks that have some formal structure, but are not full organizations, such as zakat committees;
5. informal local faith and worship communities who may spontaneously come together to provide support in a crisis;
6. and local faith figures or leader.

This typology demonstrates the wide breadth and depth of faith actors. Moving beyond a concentration on "high up members of a religious structure"[61] or internationally-based FBOs, this typology further demonstrates local priests and imams can play a significant role in development, peace, and humanitarian aid.

LFAs are usually excluded from the humanitarian system for three main reasons. First, as local actors in general, they are thought to lack knowledge and capacity about humanitarian standards, practices, and formal processes. They experience all the challenges noted in the section above about localization. It is true for many LFAs they do not have experience with international financial compliance requirements,[62] but they have different experiences such as fundraising through transnational religious networks.[63] A study about inter-

mediaries in humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon highlighted the difficulty LFAs had to understand and meet the expectations and requirements of international organizations.[64] This underscores how LFAs and international organizations do not share the same language and

> large secular humanitarian organizations often lack the language to discuss complex faith motivations as they emerge through everyday practices. Where faith appears explicitly, operating in sectarian or political ways, it likewise becomes difficult to discuss for fear that engaging with faith may promote an image of exclusivity and exclusion in organizational responses.[65]

Building the capacities of LFAs in order for them to be able to receive international funding is a real possibility, but this must be balanced by an imperative to avoid their NGO-ization. If not avoided, these actors could see their identity shift toward a more secularized one and there is potential for the instrumentalization of LFAs as subcontractors of INGOs.[66]

Second, donors and other international actors are concerned LFAs are partial and do not respect humanitarian principles because they prioritize co-religionists and conversion. As with all local actors, LFAs are "partial by definition, often politically entrenched,"[67] as they are socially, culturally, and politically embedded in their contexts. LFAs may also be misunderstood because they use religious language to express their goal and priorities, making them seem unknown and suspicious even though they respect the concepts behind humanitarian principles.[68] The agency of people affected by crisis to ignore and resist proselytism should not be underestimated either.[69] Oxfam's research confirms LFAs are still regarded as actors that do not uphold humanitarian principles and cases of proselytism exist and lead to the creation of harm, resulting in "obstacles to the provision of aid to those most in need."[70] Conversely, some scholars argue there is "donor proselytism," – that is, international actors also attach ties to their humanitarian aid by conditioning their partnerships with local actors to professionalize their operations to international frameworks or by implementing activities not in line with the LFAs' priorities.[71]

Third, the possible role religion plays in conflict is deeply complex and, therefore, highly unattractive for international actors looking for local partners. Even though many conflicts have a religious aspect, it is only one of many factors. The identity and motivations of conflict protagonists are shaped by "multiple competing identities and loyalties."[72] Faith leaders and communities can promote and lead positive change at the community level and "many indigenous cultures and each of the world's faith traditions, teachings, and practices embrace the concepts of peace and reconciliation."[73] Faith-based approaches to peacebuilding and conflict transformation have proven effective[74] and its possibility should be examined on a case-by-case basis.

As local actors, LFAs are the first to respond because they are already on the ground. Thanks to collaborations with international actors, LFAs are also increasingly trained and prepared to anticipate a crisis and respond to it. More than being the first, they can also more easily mobilize volunteers, provide basic services such as food and offer shelter thanks to their infrastructure (e.g., mosques, churches).[75] LFAs have also been shown to protect displaced people from xenophobic attacks and discriminatory practices.[76] Their position of trust means they are "persuasive voices to promote behavior change, reduce stigmatization, and mobilize local people – an area that other humanitarian actors had struggled to positively impact."[77] LFAs can be a strong resource when it comes to sharing information after a disaster. They often use simple and effective communications methods to reach every member of their community, even those in rural areas.[78]

Religious leaders can help make sense of a disaster, offering advice as to how to overcome the disaster,[79] and offering spiritual counseling that respects the local culture and beliefs.[80] The psychosocial aspect of their work is highly significant, as LFAs' "understanding of the complexities of psychosocial issues and their situatedness within the community, often combined with an existing track record of pastoral care, serves as a potentially strong foundation for provision of psychosocial support."[81] Religious practices and rituals also support the psychosocial recovery of affected people and can promote resilience, such as adapting burial procedures for cases of Ebola.[82] Recognizing the importance of faith for many affected people in their psychosocial recovery, "a faith-sensitive approach in humanitarian response: Guidance on mental health and psychosocial programming"[83] was published in

June 2018. These guidelines aim to provide practical support to humanitarian actors willing to be more faith-sensitive in their humanitarian response, mainly through the prism of psychosocial support.

However, it would be wrong to think religious leaders are "natural vectors of local needs and desires."[84] Indeed, they do not inevitably or always adequately represent their own local community.[85] Moreover, they are not the only ones representing a local community. Engaging religious leaders in a standardized way or as a "quick recipe for success"[86] has the potential to exclude some people affected by crisis. Communities are not homogeneous, LFAs can be "subject to political, sectarian and ethnic affiliations, and are often also affected by the disaster themselves."[87] Here again, there is a need to be profoundly aware and carefully understand the context when engaging LFAs.

In many contexts, "[a]...community's religious life is not readily distinguishable from its broader social and cultural life."[88] Moreover, "beyond other local grassroot NGOs, LFAs are frequently an integral part of a community's social structure and may have existed for decades or even generations in the same location in a highly visible facility."[89] Participants of the World Humanitarian Summit pointed out there is a real potential for partnerships between faith-based and secular actors when their goals converge.[90] Despite negative assumptions regarding the role of faith in humanitarian assistance, there is a clear potential for all humanitarian organizations, not only FBOs, to engage with LFAs when appropriate in order to create a "meaningful response" informed by faith.[91]

## LFA Triple Nexus examples

**1. Irbid, Syria**
A 2015 report about Syrian refugees in Irbid highlights the positive role LFAs had in the acceptance of Syrian refugees by the host community. Indeed, the arrivals of refugees created a huge strain on the infrastructure, leading to rising tensions between the refugees and the host community. However, LFAs were able to manage these tensions by recalling the religious duty of offering sanctuary to refugees. Thanks to the work of both imams and priests in their sermons in which they encouraged the welcoming of refugees or led prayers for them, social cohesion between the refugees and host community improved.[92]

**2. World Vision's Church Refugee Engagement Fund (CREF) in Lebanon**
World Vision is working with seventeen local faith partners, including churches in Lebanon to provide a wide set of peace, development, and humanitarian services from food assistance to education support, youth-based reconciliation, and trauma counseling. They came to two important conclusions regarding their work in the Church Refugee Engagement Fund. First, "time is needed to earn trust, engage religious leaders and develop a collaborative planning process with them."[93] Second, a "strong joint planning with churches is beneficial to ensure that the churches' needs are taken into consideration."[94]

**3. The Central African Inter-Religious Platform**
The Central African Inter-Religious Platform was founded in 2012 by the Evangelical Alliance, the Islamic Community, and the Episcopal Conference of CAR. In a particularly tense conflict, they partnered with CRS and USAID to launch a national campaign encouraging social cohesion and peace. They trained hundreds of religious leaders, civil society members, government officials and even armed group representatives to become "ambassadors of peaceful co-existence."[95] LFAs are particularly influential in the country and they can help implement peace activities with a positive long-term impact on the conflict, reducing the needs for humanitarian aid in the future and enable the implementation of more sustainable development activities.[96] ■

# 4.
# Local faith actors, the Triple Nexus, and localization in South Sudan

After years of civil war, the new state of South Sudan became independent in July 2011. It "marks the successful outcome of a long-time struggle, encompassing a wide spectrum of local and international activities."[97] However, new conflicts erupted in the country and another civil war began in December 2013. The last peace agreement was signed in September 2018.[98] South Sudan is ranked 187 out of 189 in the UN's Human Development Index[99] and first out of 178 states in the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index.[100] Over 7 million people are in need in the country and 4.2 million people are displaced, including 2 million IDPs.[101]

The South Sudanese case is illustrative of the Triple Nexus. The involvement of local church actors in humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding have helped minimize internal fragmentation and secure peace through "the IGAD peace process by conducting public messaging and awareness campaigns and community-level peacebuilding, pioneering a 'people-to-people' approach to peace."[102] Their key role in peacebuilding was also due to their involvement in humanitarian assessments, their support of resilience, and in trauma recovery.[103] For example, the South Sudan Council of Churches has an action plan for peac[104] and the Episcopal Church of South Sudan has a Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission[105] along with other humanitarian and development activities.[106] Church leaders are also said to be the only ones "left standing with any credibility and national recognition, enabling them to effectively lobby the international community to support the southern cause while also brokering peace between communities torn apart by war and ethnic strife."[107]

To respond to humanitarian needs in South Sudan, OCHA works with 183 partners: eleven UN agencies, sixty-seven International NGOs, and 105 (fifty-seven percent) local organizations.[108] There is a diverse and important civil society community in South Sudan, with more than 200 national organizations registered with the NGO Forum, but there are hundreds more outside this official platform.[109] Of the international NGOs, the ICRC received the most funds in 2018, followed by CRS and World Vision, two international faith-based organizations.[110] In 2017, South Sudanese organizations only received point three percent of direct funding, with this total reaching five percent when indirect funds are added,[111] yet far from the twenty-five percent goal. The number of national and local organizations receiving funds in South Sudan has dramatically increased but the total amount they receive has not grown at the same rate.[112]

Previous research on local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) in South Sudan summarizes their value in seven key ways:

1. Understanding of local context, language, traditions, and culture.
2. Access to hard-to-reach locations.
3. Low overheads and staff costs.
4. Good local ownership and sustainable solutions.
5. Flexibility in responding to changing needs.
6. Minimal bureaucracy.
7. Good relationships with local authorities.[113]

Most of these elements have been cited in the arguments in favor of localization, yet despite the presence of many L/NNGOs, the humanitarian system in South Sudan is almost exclusively internationally led. A 2017 report shows "limited progress has been made

(...) in strengthening capacity development of national NGOs over the last decade"[114] in South Sudan. A 2019 report highlights South Sudanese L/NNGOs think they have "only limited influence on humanitarian decision-making with donors and United Nations (UN) agencies."[115] These L/NNGOs perceive their partnerships with international organizations as instrumentalized and they feel excluded from humanitarian coordination mechanisms.[116] This highlights the complexity of implementing localization in the country,[117] even without mention of the specific roles and perspectives of LFAs.

While they face many challenges in the country, INGOs have also been criticized for their work in the country if they implement short-term projects without a clear impact, leaving the country while also leaving "remnants of projects, many of whose objectives ha[ve] not been fulfilled."[118] Despite the fact networks of LFAs remain thankful for funding from religious partners overseas, LFAs have been sidelined in the humanitarian system.

> The churches are not very visible within the humanitarian response and discourse because they are not part of the cluster system. The majority of churches receive very little funding and, away from Juba, most have limited interaction with international organizations (apart from a select few which have longer-term direct relations). Funding is primarily limited by a lack of capacity in the church institutions and a lack of understanding of how they operate on the part of many international humanitarian actors. Recognizing the value of the existing and potential role of the churches through stronger relationships and networks could benefit humanitarian efforts, peacebuilding, and recovery.[119]

LFAs have difficulty in accessing funding and partnership opportunities because of their outsider status within the humanitarian system and also because there is a clear lack of literacy between international organizations and LFAs.

L/NNGOs that took part in the 2016 research from Tanner and Moro identified nine barriers in partnering with international organizations. They are as follows:

1. Inadequate funding opportunities, complex funding proposal formats and the challenge of meeting all conditions (such as audits).
2. Funding opportunities too closely linked to attendance at cluster meetings.
3. Perception of low capacity and the lack of opportunities for NNGOs to prove themselves. 4.Competition between national and international organizations and prioritization of INGOs in funding proposals.
5. Lack of technical support for NNGOs.
6. Losing staff to INGOs who pay higher salaries.
7. Lack of funding for organizational development.
8. Limited funding for the seven 'non-emergency' states and for development programs.
9. Limited financial management capacity.[120]

INGOs and donors identified six challenges in partnering with L/NNGOs:

1. High turnover of international staff makes it difficult to build close long-term relationships with partners.
2. Reservations regarding the capacity, independence, and neutrality of local organizations.
3. Difficulty of investing the significant time necessary to build partnerships during an emergency response.
4. Insufficient investment in partnership prior to the conflict.
5. Concerns over financial management, corruption, and accountability. 6. The humanitarian system 'does not reward engagement with national actors.'[121]

Partnership potential is high if there is investment in relationships and capacity building before full-scale crisis and if these are integrated as part of an ongoing response. In order to implement such partnerships, the system must strengthen the long-term capacities of LFAs, as well as improving understanding of the partnership potential between LFAs and INGOs.[122] ■

# 5.
# Conclusion and recommendations

This report started with a discussion of how the Triple Nexus aims to improve collaboration between humanitarian, development, and peace actors to develop more effective, efficient, and adapted responses to the needs of people. A context-specific and people-centered approach is needed to implement the nexus. Next, we detailed how the localization of aid requires consequent changes in the way donors, international and local actors are working today. This report also discussed one type of local actor in particular: local faith actors. These actors continue to be marginalized in the humanitarian system despite their long-term involvement as humanitarian actors. Despite negative assumptions regarding the role of faith in humanitarian assistance, there is a clear potential for all humanitarian organizations, not only FBOs, to engage LFAs when appropriate to create a relevant humanitarian response informed by faith. In the case of South Sudan, many LFAs in the country already work within the Triple Nexus.

To summarize, the report concludes

**1.** LFAs already operationalize a Triple Nexus approach by responding to the needs of the communities they are located within and serve, which transcend humanitarian-development-peace silos. Community needs are rarely isolated within one categorization or the other. For example, providing livelihood support that fosters inter-community relations and social cohesion.

**2.** LFAs can struggle to operationalize a Triple Nexus approach because
   - **a.** limited funding and donor requirements push local organizations, including LFAs, into siloed thinking.
     - i. Localization requires local actors to professionalize to the requirements of the humanitarian system, which often means these local actors have to fundamentally change the ways they work. International actors can, therefore, have negative effects on the abilities of LFAs to operationalize a Triple Nexus approach.
     - ii. Religious communities have developed relief and development branches to work with international donors over the years. LFAs can range from these more experienced and developed operations to religious leaders, groups, and volunteer committees within religious communities.

**3.** Religious communities are often first responders, providing for the immediate needs of communities. They are also respected mediators and peace-builders, committed to bringing justice and reconciliation over the longer-term. In conflict contexts, they are the bridge between humanitarian and peace work, but a difficulty can lie in building the stability and funding needed for development work to become part of the mix.

**4.** Alternative partnership models, financing mechanisms, and capacity building all help LFAs to integrate into the humanitarian system. In order to minimize negative effects on the ability of local faith actors to keep operationalizing Triple Nexus approaches, flexibility and contextual sensitivity from international actors can help LFAs to become partners while not undermining their connectedness and their own nimble approaches of responding to community needs.

**5.** This contextual sensitivity and flexibility requires a change from international actors in their organizational culture and their ability to overcome biases from decision makers. Religious literacy is an approach that underlines the contextual embeddedness and dynamism of local faith actors. It can help those unfamiliar with LFAs become more comfortable with when and how to engage these actors and help them identify the skills and experiences of LFAs that can become part of capacity sharing and an equal partnership. ■

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