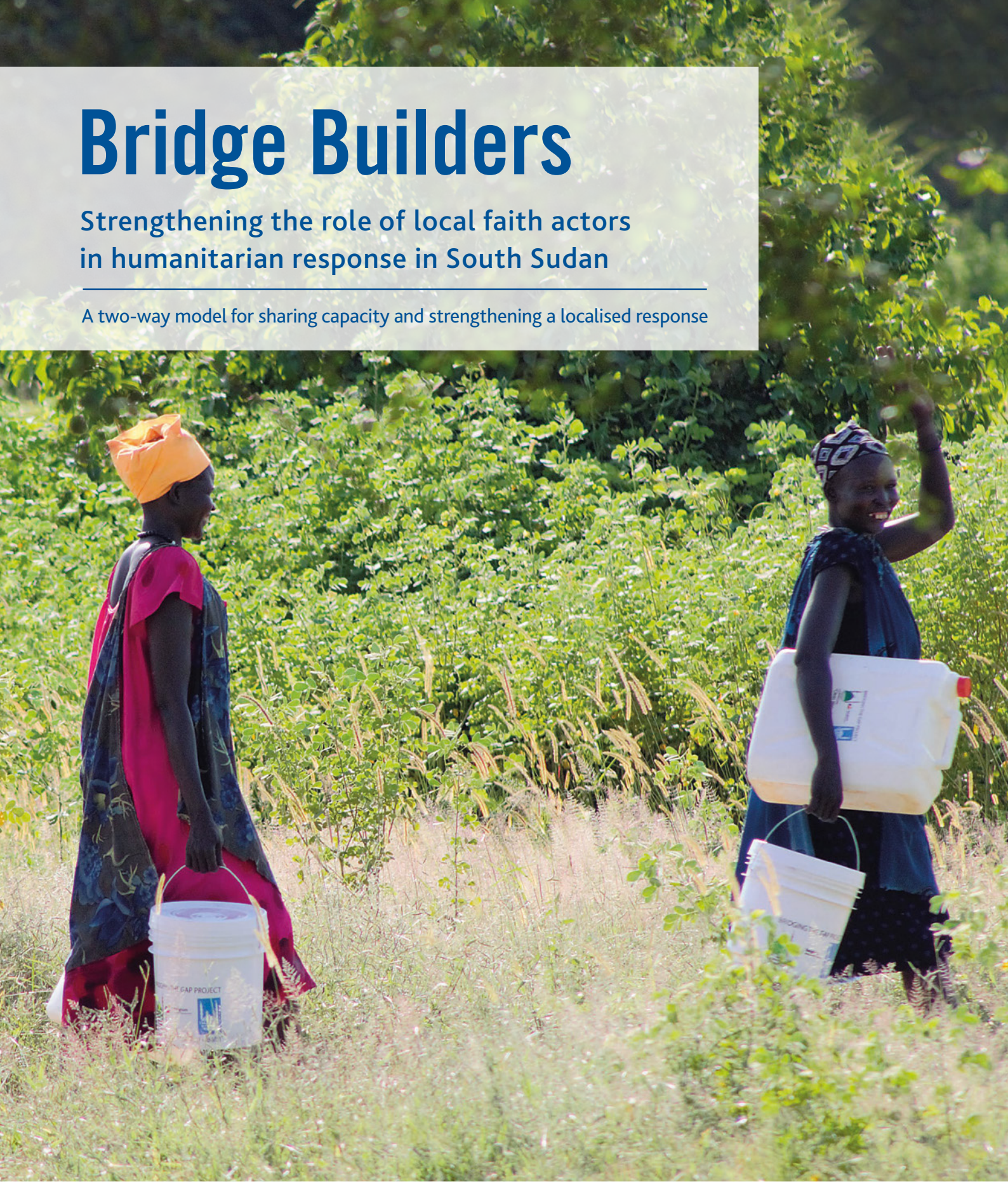
Bridge Builders

Strengthening the role of local faith actors in humanitarian response in South Sudan

A two-way model for sharing capacity and strengthening a localised response



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Research co-leads: Dr Olivia Wilkinson and Prof Emma Tomalin

Primary researchers/interviewers: Wani Laki Anthony and Kuyang Logo

Research assistant: Florine De Wolf

Research project management: Asha Kurien (Tearfund)

Reviewers: Tearfund Belgium, Tearfund UK, Tearfund South Sudan, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Islamic Relief in South Sudan, RedR UK

Copy editors: Seren Boyd and Asha Kurien

Design: Wingfinger

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Cover: Community members from Lokweni village carry non-food items distributed by Islamic Development Relief Agency (IDRA), 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

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List of acronyms

CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CSO	Civil society organisation
DGD	Directorate-general for Development, Belgium
FBOs	Faith-based organisations
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IDRA	Islamic Development Relief Agency
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
JLI	Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
LFAs	Local faith actors
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NNGO	National non-governmental organisation
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSCC	South Sudan Council of Churches
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

Purpose of the report

This report outlines and analyses the implementation of the Bridge Builder Model. This is a two-way, capacity-sharing model aimed at bringing together local faith actors (LFAs) and international humanitarian actors to increase understanding, trust, coordination and collaboration.

The model was developed by the Bridging the Gap Consortium (Tearfund UK, Tearfund Belgium, Tearfund in South Sudan, RedR UK, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Islamic Relief in South Sudan, the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities [JLI] and the University of Leeds) and piloted in 2018–2019 in South Sudan.

The overarching goal of the model is for a more effective and timely humanitarian response that best supports those affected by humanitarian crises, in part by integrating LFAs into the response. The model responds to gaps in localisation, where international humanitarian actors have not built partnerships with LFAs and efforts often run in parallel rather than being coordinated. The model provides capacity strengthening for both LFAs and international humanitarian actors, supported by a number of other activities such as small grants and mentoring for the LFAs, and networking workshops for the international humanitarian actors and LFAs.

The report highlights findings from our research and recommendations from the pilot of the Bridge Builder Model for humanitarian organisations and donors seeking ways to increase localisation in humanitarian response.

Structure of the report

Section 2 provides a background to localisation and LFAs, as well as giving an outline of the context of South Sudan. Section 3 outlines the main elements of the Bridge Builder Model, before Section 4 sets out the research methodology. The key findings from the research are presented in Section 5, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

Local faith actors from Islamic Development Relief Agency (IDRA) distribute relief assistance in Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

Research methodology and context

The research team employed an ethnographic model to follow the pilot project closely. Two researchers were embedded in the project, attending and observing the training sessions, meetings and workshops. Interviews with 47 research participants, both connected and external to the project, complemented the observation, along with analysis of key documents linked to the project.

LFAs are frequently marginalised from internationally led humanitarian responses, even though they are often front-line responders in crises. This is certainly true in South Sudan, a nation that has known cycles of conflict and disaster in its short history as the world's newest nation. The project was piloted in South Sudan because of the high number of international humanitarian actors working there, alongside frequent efforts by LFAs to respond to the humanitarian needs of the population.

Overview of key findings

The model demonstrated significant innovation in capacity sharing to create a more localised response. Key innovations included:

- strengthening the capacity of LFAs through humanitarian skills training, which was spread out in three four-day sessions over the course of six months to mimic a project cycle
- concurrent small grants for the trained LFAs so they could put into practice the skills they learnt at each stage of the training
- mentoring for the trained LFAs while they were receiving their small grants, and training local mentors to continue the mentoring process beyond the end of the project
- strengthening international humanitarian actors' understanding of LFAs' contribution through two training days that outlined why and how to work with LFAs
- providing multiple networking opportunities where LFAs and international humanitarian actors could meet, such as 'Linkages Workshops' hosted by the consortium and additional informal networking opportunities

In implementing the pilot, an initial challenge was selecting and assessing LFAs as several of those interested in taking part did not meet the eligibility requirements, underlining the need to strengthen LFAs'

IDRA members share hygiene information in a school in Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

capacity. It was also a challenge to gain buy-in from some international humanitarian actors and therefore to have an impact in the humanitarian system more generally. Despite some challenges in the pilot, the model proved to be useful and effective overall.

Conclusions

The Bridge Builder Model is an innovative way to provide balanced capacity strengthening, recognising capacities that need to be built across local and international actors, not only local faith actors. Its aim is to create and improve international and local partnerships for more effective humanitarian response. To this end, the model proves the value of humanitarian skills training for LFAs, in a format that allows them to put their learning into practice. The research showed that international humanitarian actors still have misconceptions about LFAs, hence the need for training in this area. There is a need to reach out to international actors in ways that are more appropriate than external training sessions, such as working within existing meeting structures and schedules.

Key recommendations

- **Greater efforts should be made to bridge the gap between international humanitarian actors and local faith actors.** Many LFAs in the global South are ready and willing to engage with the wider humanitarian system, but other actors can be hesitant. Current gaps in localisation dialogue and practice need to be acknowledged and addressed. International humanitarian actors need to open themselves up to learning from LFAs and to true capacity sharing.
- **The consortium recommends scaling up and adapting the Bridge Builder Model in other contexts.** This would allow for widespread collaboration between LFAs and other humanitarian responders, and increased support and training for LFAs who are seeking them. In the area of humanitarian skills training for local actors, the Bridge Builder Model demonstrates several key areas of innovation in capacity strengthening that are recommended for donors seeking to fund future localisation efforts:
  - In-depth capacity strengthening over a period of time is more effective, especially when supported with mentoring and grants that mean trainees can put their learning into practice.
  - Localisation benefits from networking to build relationships that can grow into partnerships.
  - Proper training for localisation should cover generic humanitarian skills, rather than being influenced by specific priorities.
  - Training LFAs has a role to play in strengthening future humanitarian response.
- **There is a pressing need for donors and humanitarian policy-makers to urge international actors to make time and space for self-reflection on the ways in which their own biases are limiting localisation.**
- **Working with LFAs also means understanding and engaging with their religious leaders.** Look beyond the national level to see the work of LFAs in communities around the country.
- **Further research is needed to measure the longer-term impact of localisation initiatives.** There's also a need to investigate effective ways to shift norms within the humanitarian system to break down biases and barriers that are limiting current localisation efforts.

1 Introduction

International humanitarian responders often step in when local and national capacities are overwhelmed. However, critics of the international humanitarian system note that it fails to strengthen the capacity of local and national actors or sufficiently to engage and recognise the existing capacities of local actors (Barbelet 2019).

Local community members at a humanitarian relief distribution held by IDRA in Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

In 2016, the then-Secretary General of the UN, Ban-Ki Moon, recommended that a new era of humanitarian response should be 'as local as possible, as international as necessary' (UNSG 2016), moving towards a focus on localising the humanitarian system.

The localisation agenda has spurred a major recent policy debate in the field of humanitarian action, emanating from the Grand Bargain commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Its headline goal was that a range of international humanitarian donors would commit 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to be passed 'as directly as possible' to local and national actors (World Humanitarian Summit 2016). Among other things, the Grand Bargain encourages international humanitarian actors to 'understand better and work to remove or reduce barriers that prevent organizations and donors from partnering with local and national responders…' (World Humanitarian Summit 2016).

2 Why build bridges between local faith actors and the humanitarian system?

2.1 Why localise

Research over several years commissioned by ActionAid, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Oxfam GB and Tearfund pointed out that local actors, including local faith actors (LFAs), play a critical role in humanitarian response. Yet, the research found, this role is often overlooked by the international humanitarian system. Missed opportunities for partnerships with local actors were identified across several humanitarian responses, including Nepal, the Philippines and South Sudan. Working with local actors improves the relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness and connectedness of humanitarian response (Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti 2013). In the Philippines, the research found that 'NNGOs [national non-governmental organisations] that worked closely with communities, particularly faith-based organisations with extensive networks throughout the affected area and strong links with communities, also had a far greater depth of reach than many INGOs [international non-governmental organisations]. They had better access to areas considered off-limits either for reasons of security or because they were some distance from access roads' (Featherstone 2015). Overall, the research underlined the need to prioritise partnerships between local and international actors in humanitarian policy and practice.

In discussions about localisation, several different types of local actors have been categorised, including local and national NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs), local and national governments, local and national private corporations, and national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Redvers 2017). Local and national faith-based and religious actors come under the local and national NGO and CSO categorisation. In the run-up to and during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, several international humanitarian actors, including donors, committed to work closely with all local actors, including LFAs, through the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change.

Participants from the Diocese of Liwolo and the Baptist Convention of South Sudan / Hope Help Action (BCoSS/HHA) at a humanitarian skills workshop held in Moyo, Uganda. Photo: Pitia Thomas/Diocese of Kajo-Keji, 2019

Box 1

Defining humanitarian and local faith actors

Local faith actors

LFAs can include the following groups:

- Formal faith actors and networks, such as interreligious councils, that have a national or regional reach, are frequently partners with government ministries, and are generally located in the national capital. They may also have links to the UN and other international processes, including through their participation in worldwide religious networks.
- Smaller formal faith actors, which have some transnational ties, but are not linked to the UN or international development organisations. They may be supported by a few religious centres in the West (churches, mosques etc) but with no further international ties.
- Informal faith actors carrying out development and humanitarian work, which are small-scale and local, may be linked to local places of worship. This could include parish committees or zakat committees. They are less likely to have formal links to the UN and other international processes. They have some organisational structure within their religious community, but they are not separate, registered organisations.
- Religious leaders who can be valuable allies in promoting humanitarian goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also, however, important to engage with them when their views might hinder advancement of these goals. Religious leaders span local, national and international levels of formal and non-formal leadership.
- Places of worship and their communities which may support development and humanitarian work but are less likely to have a formal link to the UN and other international processes. Groups may spontaneously mobilise at these places of worship and within these communities when there is a crisis.

International humanitarian actors

For the purposes of this report, international humanitarian actors are defined as international NGOs working within the international humanitarian system:

- The international humanitarian system is 'the network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian assistance is provided when local and national resources are insufficient to meet the needs of the affected population' (ALNAP 2015). It can include faith-based and secular INGOs:
  - Large formal international faith-based organisations (FBOs), with faith ties related to their organisational mission, vision, affiliation and some elements of fundraising and recruitment, but with otherwise secularised humanitarian operations upholding the international humanitarian system's principles and standards.
  - Secular INGOs are those actors who do not identify as or affiliate with a faith group in their organisational mission, vision, fundraising, recruitment policies or operations. However, they can partner with international FBOs and LFAs.

Source: Developed by the authors, drawing on El Nakib and Ager 2015; van Meerkerk and Bartelink 2015; and Petersen 2010

Participants at a theological workshop on the role of local faith leaders and humanitarian actors in humanitarian response, 2019.
Photo: Ochan Joram/Islamic Relief

2.2 Why local faith actors

The shift towards localisation, as well as the experience of relatively recent humanitarian responses such as the West Africa Ebola outbreak (Featherstone 2015; and see Box 2), have focused more attention on LFAs. They can be a critical component of first response in humanitarian situations, because typically they have a breadth and depth of reach, authority and a continuity of presence far beyond those of many international and even national organisations. This means their interventions tend to last longer too. During the Ebola response, LFAs' key attributes were their values, access, trust, long-term presence and knowledge of communities (Featherstone 2015). LFAs work in a holistic way across humanitarian, development and peace silos (Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier 2019), they have strong volunteer bases (El Nakib and Ager 2015), they hold trust and authority in the community (Featherstone 2015), and have in depth knowledge of communities, including ways to build community resilience and provide spiritual support (Ager, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2015).

The key values of LFAs are summarised as:

- the authority and respect held by faith actors in the local community and nationally
- the resources (financial, infrastructure, personnel) held by LFAs
- the strong motivation of local faith actors, arising from religious values around human dignity and social justice
- access to remote areas and large-scale reach of LFAs through religious networks
- LFAs' immediate presence in disaster-affected communities and their role as first responders in the weeks and months before external intervention, if it arrives
- interfaith collaboration that is spurred by disaster response when communities come together to help each other in sometimes unprecedented ways
- LFA presence across all sectors of response, with LFAs having 'complementary specialities' (Wilkinson 2017).

In large-scale humanitarian conflict settings, local actors can be overlooked, and local faith actors are at times particularly marginalised because of hesitations about working with them.

Box 2

Ebola – a wake-up call

A joint research report from Tearfund, Islamic Relief Worldwide, CAFOD and Christian Aid provided evidence of the vital role that faith leaders play in communities. It also concluded that there was a delay in engaging them in the humanitarian response following the recent outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. Once faith communities and other community leaders became involved in the response, their role was transformational: they used religious texts to help explain Ebola prevention and control and provided pastoral support for people during and after the deeply traumatic experience of living through the Ebola epidemic (Featherstone 2015). The author of the report concludes:

'The international humanitarian system has historically been weak in engaging local communities in the provision of assistance. The engagement of faith leaders in the Ebola response as community representatives in two-way discussions permitted the contextualisation of behaviour change messages. The response offers a rare example of power being shifted from the international to the local level and serves as an important example for humanitarian response elsewhere.' (Featherstone 2015, p 10)

2.3 Challenges of working with local faith actors

While the advantages of partnering with LFAs are increasingly acknowledged, it is a complex space for non-faith actors to negotiate, amid concerns about religious extremism and ideological differences. Some international humanitarian actors are hesitant to partner with LFAs due to worries about proselytising, bias towards those who share their faith (Lynch and Schwarz 2016), and practices in religious communities with which they do not agree, such as gender dynamics (Tomalin 2011). It has been argued that LFAs sometimes have limited knowledge of humanitarian standards and practices, including the running and monitoring of large internationally funded projects (Wilkinson and Ager 2017).

The humanitarian system is largely secular and promotes a logic that religious belief and practice should be kept to people's private lives; where it is considered relevant, it tends to be instrumentalised to serve the aims of the secular humanitarian system alone (Ager and Ager 2015; Wilkinson 2019).

Some LFAs who prioritise religious activities, such as religious gatherings and study of religious teachings, may not want to engage with international humanitarian actors. Yet, there are many LFAs in South Sudan and in the wider global South who are ready and willing to engage with the wider humanitarian system, as this report will demonstrate. Funding frameworks have not favoured investing in strengthening the organisational capacity or long-term sustainability of local organisations (Barbelet 2019). LFAs are equally impacted by these difficulties alongside other local counterparts. Overall, LFAs and international humanitarian actors often work in parallel rather than together, so opportunities to partner with a diversity of local faith actors, not just those in the national capitals, are missed. Both sides have limited knowledge about each other and they lack the capacity to overcome barriers to engagement.

2.4 South Sudan context

Following a referendum, South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July 2011, after decades of civil war. Already economically weak and struggling to recover, by the end of 2013 South Sudan had erupted into civil war again along ethnic and political lines (Kindersley and Rolandsen 2017; Johnson 2016). It has been estimated that almost 400,000 people of the total population of 11 million (UNData 2020) died between 2013–2018 as a result of the civil war (Checchi et al 2018). As of June 2019, there were

1,465,542 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country (IOM 2019).

Conflict in South Sudan is rooted in decades of civil war and marginalisation, driven by a complex interaction of: historic disagreements and trauma, cycles of inter-communal and gender-based violence, traditional seasonal migration patterns, cattle raiding and competition for natural resources. These play out at local levels, overlap different geographic levels and have significant implications for national peace and stability.

The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan was signed in Khartoum in September 2018, and it formally led to the cessation of the conflict. Yet, pockets of violence remain, and a severe humanitarian crisis prevails (Ryan 2019; UN OCHA 2019). The World Food Programme warned that more than 5 million people could be in danger of famine in 2020 due to flooding and political instability (UN News 2019).

Defining exact percentages of religious affiliation is difficult, but most people in South Sudan identify as Christian, with significant numbers who are members of the Catholic and Episcopal churches. Less than ten per cent of the population are Muslims (US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2016). Studies have shown frequent syncretism between African traditional religions and Christian beliefs and practices (Kane 2014).

Churches and mosques have often been the first places of refuge or protection during the conflicts in the region for decades (Glinski 2017). In South Sudan, communities have a strong belief that even the armed groups respect places of worship and will not target these locations. During the last outbreak of conflict in Juba in 2016, UN OCHA in South Sudan identified several places of worship and faith-based organisations in Juba as potential sites where IDPs could be hosted and have included them in the 2019 South Sudan Contingency Plan. Half of the 15 sites identified in Juba are faith affiliated, according to an OCHA staff member who spoke with the researchers.

In South Sudan, the Bureau of Religious Affairs exists to provide a link between the government and religious institutions, and 'to map the religious landscape, as well as to determine, through the process of registration of faith-based organisations, which groups count as Christian and which as Muslim (inspectors versed in doctrine were hired to complete this task) and, more importantly, which do not' (Salomon 2014).

For humanitarian management, the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) is an agency of the Government of South Sudan, the operational arm of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster

'Cash-for-work' humanitarian assistance carried out by Islamic Development Relief Agency (IDRA) in Terekeka, South Sudan, 2019.
Photo: Baiti Haidar Lasu/IDRA

Participants at a workshop on linkages between local faith actors and humanitarian actors, 2019. Photo: Ochan Joram/Islamic Relief

Management, formed in 2011. All NGOs, both national and international, must register with the RRC, and are bound by the 2016 NGO Act and the 2016 RRC Act (National Legislative Assembly Juba 2016). LFAs carrying out humanitarian work also have to register with the RRC; many are also registered with the Bureau of Religious Affairs.

Civil society actors have played a key role in peacebuilding activities in the region as well as in humanitarian response, and faith actors have been a part of this (Virk 2016; Malinowski 2014). Tanner and Moro (2016) note that 'South Sudan has a diverse civil society community. More than 200 national organisations are registered with the NGO Forum, and there are an estimated several hundred other [community-based organisations], FBOs and civil society groups'. The South Sudan NGO Forum is 'a networking body of legally registered NGOs' (registered with the RRC). It comprises 240 NNGOs and 116 INGOs, with a total of 24,270 staff, of whom 1,842 are foreign nationals. According to Pius Ojara, the director of the NGO Forum, 60 per cent of international staff are from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe.

Among the faith-affiliated networks, the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) has been a major stakeholder in peace and reconciliation activities and has devised an Action Plan for Peace. SSCC is a member of the World Council of Churches and includes seven national church denominations. The South Sudan Islamic Council was established in 2010 to preserve religious coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Islamic organisations carrying out humanitarian work are required to register with the Islamic Council, as well as registering with the RRC, an additional layer of registration for Muslim LFAs.

3 The Bridge Builder Model

3.1 Background to the Bridge Builder Model

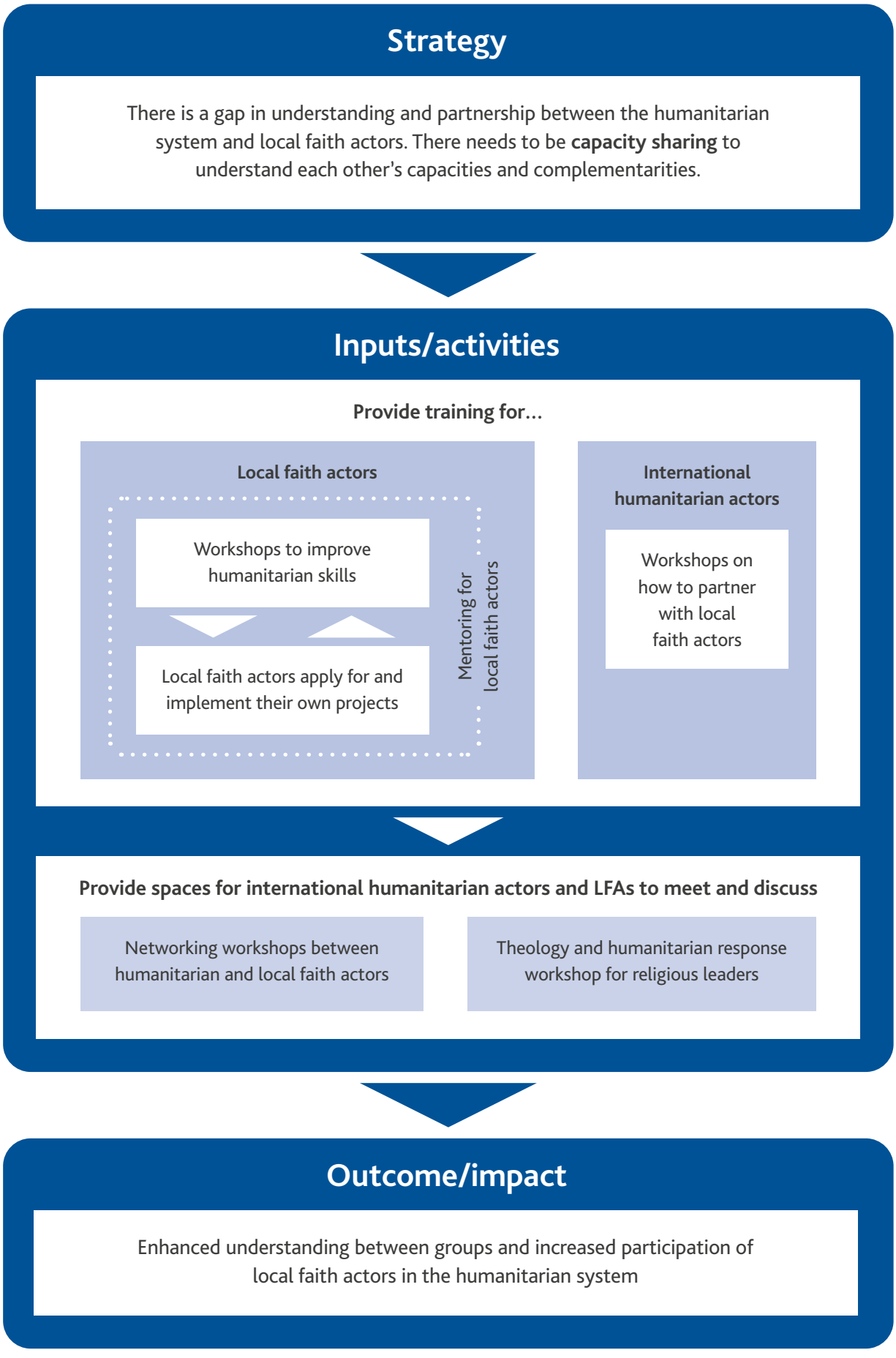
A 2017 conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which assembled representatives of religious communities, faith-based and secular NGOs, and international agencies from 36 countries, concluded that international humanitarian actors should improve their partnerships with local faith actors around the world. They recognised that both international humanitarian actors and local faith actors had a lot to learn from each other (Wilkinson 2017, 8–9).

The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) organised the conference and Tearfund and Islamic Relief were among those who participated. The Call to Action from the conference solidified earlier discussions among academics and humanitarian practitioners about the need for a two-way, capacity-sharing approach, which influenced the development of the Bridge Builder Model (see page 14).

The Bridging the Gap Consortium decided to implement the Bridge Builder Model in South Sudan to address the barriers and seize opportunities for increased partnership between LFAs and the international humanitarian system. The consortium chose South Sudan for this initiative as it is a country with stark humanitarian needs and a large number of international humanitarian actors present. It is also a country where crisis-affected communities align themselves with faith groups and, most importantly, where local faith actors are already responding to many of the humanitarian needs in the country.

A community member from Lokweni village attends a humanitarian relief distribution by Islamic Development Relief Agency (IDRA), 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

The Bridge Builder Model



3.2 Details of the Bridge Builder Model

The Bridge Builder Model is innovative in various ways. The first area of innovation was through the focus on capacity strengthening for LFAs in humanitarian response. While positive steps have been taken by long-term development actors to work in close partnership with LFAs, partnerships with non-traditional actors, especially local faith actors, are not as widely observed in humanitarian response. The model sought to bridge current gaps in localisation dialogue and practice by facilitating the engagement of LFAs in humanitarian response in South Sudan.

The capacity strengthening for the LFAs was over an extended period of time, with three four-day-long training sessions over the course of six months, taking place in three locations (Aweil and Juba, South Sudan; and Moyo, Uganda). Then, small grants were provided so that the LFAs could put their learning into practice. The LFAs were supported in making the most of these grants through mentoring from the trainers. The international trainers from RedR UK also worked with Tearfund and Islamic Relief staff in South Sudan so that they could become local mentors and support mentorship beyond the end of the project. The combination of the in-depth training with small grants and mentoring is rarely seen in humanitarian capacity-strengthening efforts. These efforts were then backed up by networking workshops and opportunities for the LFAs to meet with international humanitarian actors. As identified in Section 2, international humanitarian actors' concerns about working with LFAs are also a barrier. The final element of innovation was parallel training for international humanitarian actors to learn more about LFAs, why they should partner with LFAs, and how to mitigate risks in these partnerships. The main ideas behind the content of the two types of training are outlined in Box 3.

Box 3

Summary of the two types of training in the Bridge Builder Model

Learning opportunities for LFAs to:

- raise awareness of humanitarian principles and standards eg Core Humanitarian Standards and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- increase understanding of the humanitarian system and ways of working eg humanitarian coordination, financial management, monitoring and evaluation etc
- identify ways of improving coordination with humanitarian organisations and practitioners

Learning opportunities for international humanitarian actors to:

- increase understanding of faith context and intrinsic aspects of faith at national, local, community and household levels
- raise awareness of the role of people's faith as being integral to their well-being in a humanitarian crisis
- raise awareness of the critical role of LFAs in a humanitarian response
- identify ways of improving coordination and partnership with LFAs

The LFAs' work took place in four different locations in South Sudan where consortium members Tearfund and Islamic Relief worked. In each area, there was a supporting organisation that helped coordinate training and supported the LFAs with their projects.

- Aweil (Northern Bahr el Ghazal State): with the support of the NNGO, Centre for Emergency and Development Support (CEDS), the project trained and supported three LFAs:
  - Diocese of Aweil Relief and Development (DARD): Episcopal
  - God is Enough Ministry (GEM): non-denominational, Evangelical
  - St George Catholic Church Committee (ST-GCCC): Catholic

- Juba County (Central Equatoria State): with the support of Islamic Relief in South Sudan, the project trained and supported one LFA:
  - Great Lakes Initiative (GLI): Muslim
- Terekeka County (Terekeka State): with the support of Islamic Relief South Sudan, the project trained and supported one LFA:
  - Islamic Development and Relief Agency (IDRA): Muslim
- Kajo-Keji (Central Equatoria State): with the support of the Diocese of Kajo-Keji. In 2016 the Diocese of Kajo-Keji relocated to Moyo in northern Uganda due to the civil war, and they currently work with people in both Kajo-Keji and in Moyo. The project trained and supported three LFAs:
  - Baptist Convention of South Sudan/Hope Help Action (BCoSS/HHA): Baptist
  - Diocese of Liwolo (DoL): Episcopal
  - Diocese of Kajo-Keji's Faith and Development Relief Agency (DKK/FADRA): Episcopal

Box 4

The main elements of the Bridge Builder Model as implemented in the South Sudan pilot

The model was implemented over 15 months, commencing in October 2018 and ending in December 2019. It comprised two main elements, with additional supporting activities:

- The first element centred around the training and implementation of humanitarian projects with LFAs. This involved identifying several LFAs who could apply to be part of the Bridge Builder Model implementation and inviting them to participate in three sets of four-day humanitarian skills training, facilitated by RedR UK and taking place in Aweil and Juba in South Sudan, and in Moyo, Uganda. The LFAs then applied to the consortium for funding to run their own short-term humanitarian projects, with mentoring available to them during their small grants projects so that they could apply what they learnt during the training sessions. The consortium funded eight projects with eight LFAs in four areas of South Sudan: Aweil, Juba, Terekeka and Kajo-Keji.
- The second element was carrying out several LFA awareness workshops for other international humanitarian actors. These were specifically for humanitarian organisations who were not used to partnering with LFAs. The content included discussion of the barriers to partnership with LFAs, presentation of the evidence about the opportunities and the challenges of working with LFAs, and ways to overcome some of the barriers. The consortium held two workshops, in Juba and Aweil. JLI and the University of Leeds supported RedR UK in the development and delivery of this stage.
- Additional supporting activities included:
  - two Linkages Workshops: participants were from a broad group of INGOs and NNGOs, both faith-based and secular. The aim was for different actors to discuss openly their experience of opportunities and challenges around localisation, faith and humanitarian response, and for LFAs to meet with other INGOs and NNGOs.
  - ongoing informal networking opportunities for LFAs
  - a theological workshop for interfaith actors (academics and high-level religious leaders) to discuss their role in humanitarian response. The aim was to help religious leaders understand the worth of supporting their affiliated LFAs in linking with the international humanitarian system.

4 Research methodology

Another area of innovation in the project was its concurrent research component which consisted of an ethnographic study of the project.

Ethnographic research is small scale and long term, engaging the researcher in frequent day-to-day interactions with the research participants, observing what they do, making detailed notes, and reflecting on the interpretation they bring. It often includes triangulation with other methods such as semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Key stakeholders outside of the main project are interviewed to get their perspectives on the research topic. The ethnographic research was continuous, with the researchers observing the entire duration of the pilot Bridge Builder project, including all the training sessions, the workshops and meetings taking place to coordinate the project. The researchers worked from the Tearfund office in Juba and became part of the project team that were involved in implementing the Bridge Builder Model. The research also fills an important gap in academic studies, where much of the literature on religion and humanitarianism/development tends to focus on faith actors that are more integrated at the global level, such as international FBOs, rather than the most local faith actors.

The research included the observation of all the meetings, workshops and training carried out as part of the project, as well as the carrying out of in-depth qualitative interviews with key informants to triangulate information. In total, the researchers conducted 48 interviews. The annex at the end of the report outlines the breakdown of the types of interviewees participating in the research.

The different categories of stakeholders interviewed included members of the Bridging the Gap Consortium, the RedR UK trainers, the LFAs who participated in the project, stakeholders from South Sudanese government institutions, secular INGOs, local/national INGOs, UN agencies and international FBOs. Interviewee names are anonymised in this report to allow them to speak freely, although we have specified names of organisations in instances where it is necessary to outline the different roles in the project.

The researchers interviewed the LFAs twice: once during the first humanitarian skills training and once after the third training. The other stakeholders were interviewed once. Finally, the researchers analysed documents, including the organisational mission and vision statements of the LFAs, all the applications and proposals for humanitarian project funding submitted by the LFAs, post-workshop/training questionnaires circulated by the RedR UK trainers after workshops, and details of what was included in all of the training.

The University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee reviewed the research design. The researchers analysed the data using online software Dedoose. The research aimed to contribute a more robust design for the Bridge Builder Model, supported by evidence, in order to explore how it can be replicated and scaled up in South Sudan and other contexts.

5 Key findings

Organised across emerging themes from the project, this section summarises key findings from the research. This report is not a comprehensive representation of all research results on LFAs in South Sudan, but rather highlights findings relating to the way in which the Bridge Builder Model was implemented. The combination of training, grants and mentoring for LFAs paved the way for international humanitarian actors to form new successful partnerships with LFAs.

5.1 The benefits of humanitarian skills training for local faith actors

Before the pilot, several LFAs said that they felt excluded from partnerships with other international humanitarian actors, because of factors ranging from power dynamics to feeling unfamiliar with how to participate in humanitarian cluster meetings. LFAs also recognised that they needed to take steps to align their work with humanitarian standards, acknowledging weaknesses in procedures and policies, and limited financial resources. But the LFAs were ready to maximise their opportunities by making the most of the training – as their humanitarian response following the training demonstrated. Several LFAs noted that they had never attended humanitarian skills training of this scale before. They had only attended short courses that touched on limited aspects of humanitarian work, prioritised according to the interests of those organising the training rather than building LFAs' core competencies.

The content of the training sessions was tailored to participants' preexisting knowledge and experience, and based on a capacity needs assessment, which helped ensure its relevance.

Before the training, most participants were not familiar with the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS), the international humanitarian cluster system,

IDRA members carry out a sanitation and hygiene campaign at a primary school, Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP), or other key elements of the humanitarian system. They also had limited understanding in administrative areas such as the development of budget templates, log frames and project proposal templates. The training helped to break down LFAs' concerns and hesitations into areas that they were aware of, but wanted upskilling and experience in. One exercise involved a mock cluster meeting that assuaged LFAs' concerns about attending such a forum and prepared them for attending real cluster meetings afterwards.

In particular, participants noted that the training on financial management, proposal-writing and organisational policies led to positive and practical changes in their work. As one LFA highlighted, training in financial management was a key concern for them:

'To be honest, before [the training] we didn't have a [budget] template to use. A template that we were given [in the Bridge Builder training] is a very good template that we normally use. Whatever activity, we put it into the finance template, and we evaluate ourselves: Are we on the right track or not? If we are not on the right track, we need to find out what happened.'

This LFA has gone on to use the financial template presented in the training across its operations. It is just one example of the highly practical materials available to the LFAs in the training – tools which they have put into practice in meaningful ways in their day-to-day operations across projects.

LFAs participants also noted they had gained skills in proposal-writing:

'Before, when we were writing proposals… it was really a challenge… We did not know that the reason why we were missing some of the grants is because of inadequate skills in proposal-writing. But when we got this training now about the proposal-writing and all this, it became clear to us that that was something we were lacking, [so there were]… some opportunities that we have missed. So already, I have seen now the gap has been bridged and it will not be like before…'

In order to access donor funds, there are often requirements around certain policies, such as fraud, safeguarding, whistleblowing and codes of conduct for staff. LFAs pointed out that they had increased their capacity in this regard, as one LFA said:

'When we start to engage in development work and in humanitarian work, there are some things that were not there. But when we now look back, we found that we have improved so much, especially putting in place all the structures that are needed and then the protocols, financial policies, human resource policies, an anti-corruption policy… We put everything that we learn into action and that improves our work…'

The LFAs changed their policies and procedures to comply with international humanitarian standards. Overall, the LFAs felt they were now ready to participate in the international humanitarian system:

'We strongly feel, together with our team, that we are competent enough now to enter into [the] humanitarian world with professional skills and able to deliver properly, as international organisations can do.'

'If there are still people thinking that national organisations or local faith-based organisations… cannot do anything, let them change their minds. Right now, we have got the skills!'

One trainer pointed out how rare it is to have this extended training period:

'I've been working with many organisations, but this type of design of the project is different. I could say that it is one of the best designs I have seen… I could see a huge improvement in the skills… I [told them]: Your humanitarian language has changed, your perceptions have changed, the way you are approaching the trainers is different… When we say capacity building, this is real building… building for the future.'

The trainers were impressed with the effects of this approach in that it meant there was real and lasting change in developing LFAs' skills, in comparison to other, one-off training approaches they had adopted before.

RedR UK trainers who had been involved in the face-to-face training also provided mentoring to the LFAs, via online video calls and WhatsApp. RedR UK also provided coaching to a total of five staff members from Tearfund and Islamic Relief staff in South Sudan so that they could become trainers too. Though LFAs did not often mention the additional coaching in interviews, they did express appreciation more generally for the mentoring process.

IDRA members carry out a sanitation and hygiene campaign at a primary school in Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

5.2 Putting learning into practice through small grants

Between training workshops, the LFAs were preparing their grant proposals and began implementing their projects. There is a summary of the LFA projects in Box 5. The LFAs strengthened their skills over the course of the three training sessions, which were designed to mimic the full project cycle, and then put their skills to work when implementing their own projects. The LFAs reached more than 26,000 beneficiaries, with projects covering the sectors of WASH, protection, education, and food security and livelihoods.

The grants and mentoring made available to LFAs as part of the model was recognised as an improvement on usual capacity strengthening. Interviewees appreciated that LFAs had been given free rein to set their own priorities and to develop aligned projects. Generally, the opposite is true in South Sudan where local organisations take on work that INGOs do not want, due to security or access issues (see Box 5).

It was originally planned that the humanitarian skills training for LFAs would align with the funding cycles available to them, so they were implemented in parallel. Although the initial training was aligned, the timings of the final training and LFA project implementation did not line up with one another. The sequencing was disrupted. One consortium member explained:

'Capacity building is a process, it cannot be hurried… There's the training and there's the practice. For an expert, it will take them only maybe five days to develop a proposal which is good enough to submit to donors. To somebody who is learning, you need a month… and in the end, when you submit, it comes back to you. It goes back and forth and that happens with our review of the proposals.'

One advantage of this model is that training sessions are spaced out and related to a trial project implementation. However, the sequencing of events and allowing sufficient time for each stage is critical if the Bridge Builder Model is to succeed. Sequencing must be carefully planned and managed.

Box 5

LFA projects

- **Diocese of Aweil Relief and Development (DARD): Hygiene and sanitation** in Aweil Centre and Aweil East. The project was carried out in 20 schools: 15 schools in Aweil Centre and five schools in Aweil East. The project aimed to raise awareness within targeted schools of good hygiene practices, to reduce the incidence of disease. The project activities within the selected schools included the formation of hygiene clubs (each comprising seven students and two teachers), two rounds of training for hygiene clubs, providing materials for cleaning pit latrines and renovating seven pit latrines.
- **God is Enough Ministry (GEM): Creating a conducive learning environment** and promoting learning in three schools in Aweil Centre. The project aimed to improve the learning conditions in three schools, thus contributing to the improved academic performance of pupils. It involved the construction of temporary learning spaces, the distribution of school learning materials and strengthening the capacity of the schools' management.
- **St George Catholic Church Committee (StGCCC) GBV project** in Aweil: The focus of the project was to address gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls by providing awareness on GBV and psychosocial support including skills building. The project sought to address gender-based discrimination, early/forced marriage and domestic violence. The LFAs worked with girls, community leaders including Christian and Muslim leaders, young people and women's groups in Aweil Centre and Aweil town.
- **Islamic Development and Relief Agency (IDRA): Integrated response: WASH and livelihoods for crisis-affected communities** in Terekeka. The aim was to rehabilitate community water and sanitation facilities as well as to engage in hygiene promotion. The second part of the project targeted families who are food insecure by increasing their income and training women in market-oriented livelihood skills.
- **Great Lakes Initiative (GLI): Improvement of WASH services for vulnerable communities** in Mahad and Munuki. The project aimed to stimulate and increase awareness of the importance of hygiene, and to promote the adoption of best practice related to: the use, handling and collection of water; the disposal and handling of excreta and waste; and good personal hygiene.
- **Baptist Convention of South Sudan/Hope Help Action (BCoSS/HHA): Emergency education response for primary school children and youth** in Central Kajo-Keji. The project aimed to reduce illiteracy rates by ensuring that children and youth had access to quality education and stayed in school. This project supported primary schools by: providing teaching materials, training teachers, and sensitising the communities and children on girls' education and encouraging families to continue sending children to school.
- **Diocese of Liwolo (DoL): Improving the quality and access to basic primary education for children in Korijo IDP camp and IDPs outside camp areas** in Pure, Liwolo County. The project sought to improve the quality of basic education for IDPs in Korijo and Pure to meet the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)'s Minimum Standards by supporting two schools set up by the IDPs themselves. The schools lacked almost all the basic requirements for the effective running of a school.
- **Diocese of Kajo-Keji's Faith and Development Relief Agency (DKK/FADRA): Returnees' reintegration and support project (RRSP)** in Kajo-Keji. The project aimed to provide secure shelter and non-food items to help people rebuild their lives. Another aim was to address returnees' fear and trauma by demonstrating that other groups do not necessarily pose a threat. This project targeted a range of actors including refugees, IDPs, top politicians and community leaders, encouraging them to work together to build a peaceful environment.

5.3 Balancing humanitarian professionalisation and faith actor identity

Alongside the success of the humanitarian skills training for LFAs, it is also worth noting the concerns about capacity-strengthening processes. It is important to discuss ways of avoiding the loss of identity of LFAs in the process of localisation and professionalisation. Participants in the Linkages Workshops warned about the dangers of NGO-isation, with some participants in the workshops stating that the Bridge Builder Model needed to be careful not to erode the identity of LFAs. There is also research that has brought to light the tensions with the NGO-isation of local actors and the loss of local capacity and knowledge through professionalisation towards international standards (Borchgrevink 2017; Al-Karib 2018; Wilkinson, de Wolf and Alier 2019).

In reflecting on the overall impact of the humanitarian skills training, the research demonstrates that the training achieved its desired impact in upskilling and professionalising the LFAs. The reflection on NGO-isation does not mean to undercut the impact of the training, but to underline an overall tension in humanitarian localisation. Localisation cannot only mean local actors following international standards, but must also make a place for the contextual capacity that LFAs can bring. This underlines the need for the Bridge Builder Model to target learning for both local and international actors, rather than a one-way notion of capacity strengthening that targets local actors alone.

The LFAs had thought through their position as part of faith communities and as NNGOs. The LFAs understood that the training had helped demonstrate the difference between humanitarian and church activities, as one LFA pointed out:

'The only element of weakness that comes in is sometimes the issue of local faith actors as a church and also as a humanitarian responder. So with this training…. it has actually helped in bringing that distinction where sometimes, as a humanitarian actor, you will have to abide by some standards whereas if you are to go as a church, you may not be able to respond accordingly.'

In some ways, they drew a hard line between their faith orientation and their humanitarian work. The LFAs affirmed their ability both to be local faith actors and to uphold the humanitarian principles:

'We are upholding the principles of the NGO, how NGOs operate, even if we are a local church but because of the training that we have undergone, we are looking at the principles of how NGOs operate. We are of course humanitarian, we are independent, we are neutral, we are passionate, so we are having all those Core Humanitarian Standards that are in place.'

With appropriate training, it is possible for LFAs to meet the requirements of the humanitarian standards and system while maintaining their position as local faith actors. The Bridge Builder Model has shown that LFAs are relevant humanitarian partners with sufficient training, countering hesitations outlined in the introduction about LFAs being unable to reach the desired capacity for humanitarian response.

5.4 Creating new linkages and partnerships

The Linkages Workshops provided an opportunity to invite staff from a broad range of other international humanitarian organisations, beyond the consortium partners, to participate in discussions about the Bridge Builder Model. The workshop participants generally felt that the model was an improvement on the usual mechanistic relationships where there is only token involvement of local actors. As one secular humanitarian actor put it:

'If you look at all these clusters, mainly the leads are international NGOs. Yes, recently we have seen the national actors being coordinators, being chairs of these clusters, but if you ask yourself in terms of the authority to [make] decisions, the national ones are perhaps sometimes even bypassed. People ought to listen.'

Although some changes have occurred in the clusters with new national co-chairs, decision-making power

Local faith actors at a humanitarian capacity-strengthening workshop in Juba, 2019. Photo: Ochan Joram/Islamic Relief

remains unbalanced, according to this interviewee. Instead, the Bridge Builder Model asserted the value of local actors' involvement at each stage and sought to find ways to bring LFAs to the table.

The LFAs described how, over the course of the project, interaction had increased between themselves and with other international humanitarian actors. They attributed this to a greater understanding of how to network, opportunities to meet other actors created within the project, and the confidence to become involved in coordination activities. One LFA said:

'We have intensified our linkages with so many organisations… Now we are connected with a lot of international UN agencies and before it was not [the case]: we didn't even know how to link up with other partners, to get connected. There are so many ways also to get these partners… attend clusters, coordination meetings, make bilateral visits and all these, so it is one of the things we are applying on a daily basis…'

One of the positive unintended consequences was networking between local faith and non-faith actors, as one LFA said:

'Before we did not know each other as faith-based actors but [now] we are here in person… One family, one body, one consortium, so it will be very easy for us… to coordinate.'

While the longer-term effects of these linkages are unknown as yet, the way in which the training communicated the value of networking and the role of local actors in humanitarian response helped build the confidence of LFAs to reach out and expand their networks.

5.5 Trust and confidence-building, and impact in the humanitarian system

The Bridge Builder Model helped build the confidence of the LFAs in other ways too. One of the LFA staff members explained how much it meant to them that there was a project interested in supporting them and their work. One LFA said:

'This kind of training we are getting with [Bridge Builder]… as an individual and as [an LFA], no one actually gave us that opportunity, that kind of opportunity.'

The LFAs expressed their new confidence in the following ways:

'That's been the motivation, like [the] directors, already they say that we should write our own proposal and submit it to them and the confidence is coming, so the confidence and the trust is coming in… because we are confident now, we are given the project to implement to the best and now we can be attending clusters.'

Likewise, another acknowledged that they could now speak the 'humanitarian language'. This LFA explained that:

'Since we began this training, right now I talk humanitarian language, I talk more of human rights, I talk more of risk analysis, risk management, and it's really helped me.'

The fact that the LFAs had experienced a high level of training was an advantage and allowed international humanitarian actors to set up partnerships with the LFAs that they had not previously considered. One LFA explained this effect:

'One of the partners who has been not trusting that these organisations should… do the work, now is the one actually giving us the funds to implement… It's functioning and working and the way we are implementing it, they actually run and come in and give us project fund[s].'

In some cases, this initiative clearly led to new partnerships for LFAs. In other cases, it is difficult to single out the influence of this initiative alone, yet there has been an overall increase in awareness of and linkages with LFAs in the humanitarian system in South Sudan.

5.6 Selection and assessment challenges

Some of the main challenges in implementing the Bridge Builder Model were in the early stages of the project and related to LFA selection and assessment. There were two stages to the capacity assessment. Stage 1 involved the LFAs filling out a self-assessment questionnaire, followed by a capacity assessment of key functions (such as management of resources, human resources, quality of their humanitarian response). This was carried out by Tearfund or Islamic Relief staff during or after a visit to the LFA office to verify the office existed and was functioning. Stage 2 involved administering the 'FBO capacity assessment tool stage', comprising a more in-depth level of capacity assessment, to check that they met all the requirements needed to become a partner on the project. In Aweil, eight organisations applied but only three were eligible. The others were considered to be either not organised enough to become part of the project or to be not 'faith based' (this was defined as having an affiliation to the main religious institution in the area). While local actors, regardless of faith, are deserving of capacity strengthening if needed, this project had specifically identified the gap regarding the lack of participation of LFAs in the humanitarian system. An organising partner described the process of trying to find a variety of partners, with eligibility requirements being a barrier:

'We are to look for local faith actors… As a diocese, we were looking one should be a Muslim, one should be from Pentecostal, one should be from Baptist, one should be from ECS [Episcopal], so that we are not biased, so that was our plan… But then when we tried to pass the information, people who had applied could not qualify, we knew they would not qualify, that's why they did not even bother to apply, but for Muslim… for Pentecostal, they did not apply.'

Many organisations did not apply because of their limited experience in humanitarian response or their focus on purely religious activities, such as religious gatherings and study of religious teachings. Efforts at interfaith collaboration were somewhat difficult

The Diocese of Liwolo lead the construction of a temporary learning space in Korijo, 2019. Photo: William Waru/Tearfund

when the organisations from another faith either did not meet the eligibility requirements or did not want to apply for reasons that were unclear. Likewise, many local organisations that had adapted to conform to the norms and parameters of the international humanitarian system (and therefore met eligibility requirements) identified themselves as secular actors. It is notable that local actors identified themselves as secular in many cases. This is due in part to the national structure as the country is a secular state and Muslims, as religious minorities, may not be comfortable in identifying as Islamic LFAs. On the other hand, as stated in Section 2, there is also the influence of the secularised humanitarian system, in which local actors are disinclined to identify as faith-based if that could be a barrier to participation because of negative perceptions of LFAs.

The LFAs did not find the application to be a simple procedure and even those LFAs who were selected struggled. When asked whether they thought the application was appropriate, the LFAs did not agree or disagree. Instead, taking a middle ground, one LFA said the humanitarian system should also recognise that fulfilling localisation commitments must include a reassessment of the eligibility criteria so that more can receive training and grants.

The process was different for the Muslim LFAs that were engaged by Islamic Relief. Islamic Relief contacted the South Sudan Islamic Council to obtain a list of Muslim LFAs carrying out humanitarian work. Work with Muslim organisations receives greater scrutiny than with Christian organisations, because of concerns about terrorism links. One LFA explained how this has affected them, saying,

'Being an Islamic organisation, our activities are mistakenly related to terrorism and we experience continuous verifications from the authorities.'

In South Sudan, all Muslim LFAs registered with the RRC must register with the Islamic Council in order to carry out humanitarian activities. This is not the same for Christian organisations, who are not required to register with the Council of Churches to carry out humanitarian activities. Organisational capacity assessments defined the minimum requirements for participation and some LFAs did not meet these minimums. As one consortium partner explained:

'So we had put down three basic minimum criteria, minimum which has to be met by every organisation: that they have to be registered with the RRC and… the Islamic Council of South Sudan … They have to have a basic minimum structure, at least an office, even if it's one person; and at least some sort of governance structure. That's where [two shortlisted LFAs] lost out.'

The assessments therefore highlighted the need for the project to strengthen the capacity of LFAs, as well as LFAs' desire to strengthen and widen their collaboration with other humanitarian actors.

5.7 Engagement with the international humanitarian system

The training for international humanitarian actors was attended by 27 participants from different organisations. They reported that the topic of LFAs and their role in humanitarian response was new to them and that the training was useful in the context of wider localisation efforts that they were committed to.

Representatives of some international humanitarian organisations said that, while they wanted to work with LFAs more, they did not know how to overcome the barriers that stood in the way of partnership. They felt that the training provided as part of the Bridge Builder Model helped them identify ways to address these hurdles. Other organisations stated that they had not considered working with LFAs before, but would now investigate the opportunity.

When setting up the initiative, the consortium intended to involve staff working for secular international humanitarian organisations as these were most likely to be sceptical of the role of LFAs in humanitarian response. It became clear that the training was also relevant for international FBOs. Many staff working for FBOs do have a faith tradition themselves and the organisations are more likely to be sympathetic to thinking about faith and humanitarianism. Yet, it should not be assumed that international FBO staff have the same theological understanding or that they have any training in and experience of the analysis of religions in society, the central component of religious literacy training. FBOs as well as secular NGOs and agencies may experience similar challenges

IDRA members organise a 'cash-for-work' humanitarian assistance programme in Terekeka, 2019. Photo: Baiti Haidar/IDRA

and hesitations in partnering with LFAs. Additionally, members of NNGOs would probably have gained from the workshop, but the invitations targeted INGOs following the consortium's initial assessment of who would benefit from the training. Overall, the range of international humanitarian actors who engaged was less broad than hoped.

There needs to be greater investigation into ways in which international humanitarian actors could have been further integrated into the project. The training was a full-day session and some invitees had to cancel when other priorities arose on the day. A representative from a UN agency explained that in their place of work, they have the distinct role of working on partnerships and it was their job to come to training sessions such as this. They explained that not all organisations have similar roles and people are very busy so external training sessions are not a priority, even if they would be beneficial. In the future, it is suggested that elements of the training could be presented in coordination meetings, and in other existing meetings, to better fit with people's schedules.

Interviews with other humanitarian organisations outside the project revealed that very few understood what this kind of training might include. They expressed some bias towards the idea, indicating, as one international humanitarian staff member said,

'This is of no importance… What we underline are just the common values…'

There were also some misinterpretations that it would be very specifically about religious content and formation. Another interviewee from an NNGO said,

'If I try and guess, it's about how much you're informed about your faith or as a Christian, how much do you know about your strength of your faith in your Christianity; if you are a Muslim, how much is your religion in you?'

Another interviewee working for an international FBO who was not involved in the consortium said,

'I assume it means an awareness of what it means to have an involvement in a faith-based organisation and kind of a way that you can communicate that in a clear way.'

The LFAs and other local actors had not heard of such training either. Overall, the interviewees demonstrated that it was an unknown and untested concept in this context. It was therefore a challenge to introduce a new idea, such as the need for religious literacy in humanitarian response, in comparison to humanitarian skills training that is a known and recognised concept. There needs to be further investigation into how to engage humanitarian staff in self-reflection on the barriers that they put in place and so limit local faith partnerships. A one-day, one-off training was useful for some but not all. Shorter presentations on key concepts at existing meetings and coordination workshops are proposed instead.

Conclusions

The Bridge Builder Model offers practical recommendations for how LFAs and international humanitarian actors might begin to better understand each other, with the aim of stronger collaboration and partnership.

Given the research findings from the pilot, the Bridge Builder Model shows that working with LFAs from different faith backgrounds in fragile contexts such as South Sudan is possible. It also shows that a localisation model is highly relevant in such settings, with the understanding that each fragile context has its own needs and local dynamics. The humanitarian responses implemented by the LFAs involved in the Bridge Builder Model pilot are just a glimpse of what is possible when they are equipped, trusted and empowered. A small investment of training and capacity sharing reaped large rewards, and made possible partnerships that would not previously have been considered.

The key elements of this model's success were a commitment to strengthening LFAs' capacity over an extended period of time, with support that helped them put into practice what they had learnt in training, and providing accessible mentoring so they could ask questions when needed. The training was greatly valued by LFAs as it combined both theory and practice, following a key principle of learning: that knowledge and skills are better retained if learners have the opportunity to put them into practice immediately.

Training for international humanitarian actors to help them engage with LFAs was new. A key lesson from this pilot is that this training needed to be introduced to international humanitarian actors more thoroughly and in settings that fit with their schedules. The training was useful to those who attended, but a greater outreach into the humanitarian system is required. There had not been any training like this before, according to interviewees, and it was an unfamiliar topic for many international humanitarian actors.

This was a one-year pilot project. It will take longer to see significant change for two-way collaboration with the international humanitarian system to develop fully. Even for those LFAs involved in our pilot, knowledge needs to be embedded and the longer-term impact of the project needs to be assessed by revisiting the LFAs. Likewise, it will take further time and effort to build knowledge and acceptance in the international humanitarian system.

When using this model more widely, to benefit other fragile states, certain key areas of review and adaptation need to be considered. These include the eligibility criteria for LFAs' engagement, in light of their often limited understanding of the international humanitarian system, and a robust strategy for encouraging the wider humanitarian system to partner with LFAs. Tackling other actors' wariness and misconceptions around LFAs and promoting literacy around working with faith actors more widely is a longer process, as it will require cultural shifts, organisationally and systemwide.

The Bridge Builder Model acknowledges the need for two-way collaboration, for capacity sharing, rather than top-down capacity building. It recognises the hesitation and gaps in knowledge in the humanitarian system, not just the gaps in the capacity of local actors. This model suggests that building bridges in this way offers the potential to more effectively support communities affected by crises. Although this initiative focused on LFAs, the model would be relevant to any localisation initiative where it is necessary to negotiate and even out power imbalances and where international actors seek to learn about and engage with local actors more thoroughly.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are:

- **Greater efforts should be made to bridge the gap between international humanitarian actors and local faith actors.** Many LFAs in South Sudan and in the wider global South are ready and willing to engage with the wider humanitarian system, but other actors can be hesitant. Current gaps in localisation dialogue and practice need to be acknowledged and addressed. International humanitarian actors need to open themselves up to learning from LFAs and to true capacity sharing.
- **The Bridge Builder Model should be adapted and shared widely**, particularly with key decision-makers such as policy-makers in international humanitarian headquarters and humanitarian cluster leads in countries. This is necessary to draw attention to mechanisms for capacity sharing and the equalising of power dynamics in the humanitarian system, in order to best serve communities affected by humanitarian crises. In the humanitarian skills training for local actors, the Bridge Builder Model demonstrates several key areas of innovation in capacity strengthening that are recommended for donors seeking to fund future localisation efforts:
  - In-depth capacity strengthening over a period of time is more effective, especially when supported with opportunities to put the learning into practice and mentorship. Donors must invest resources and time for training so that trainees can fully benefit from the process. The LFAs built their skills over the course of three training sessions, periodically spaced throughout the year, which were designed to mimic the full project cycle. This was more in-depth than any previous training they had received and allowed time for them to implement and practise what they had learnt. This learning and practice process takes time and one-off training is insufficient. Long-term mentoring was a crucial support in this training process and allowed the training to be as effective as possible. Methods such as mentors communicating with trainees via WhatsApp and training local mentors to provide support in the locations helped improve the flexibility and accessibility of the mentoring.
  - The availability of grants to LFAs as part of the model goes a step beyond usual capacity strengthening. The LFAs were able to put into practice what they learnt in the training. The LFAs who were part of the Bridge Builder Model appreciated the freedom they had to set their own priorities and to develop aligned projects; this is not generally the case in South Sudan where local organisations take on work that INGOs

Local faith actors take a break at a humanitarian capacity-strengthening workshop in Juba, 2019. Photo: Ochan Joram/Islamic Relief

have predefined or do not want to do themselves, because of insecurity or problems of access, for example. This demonstrates a key concept of localisation and the Bridge Builder Model: that there should be a shared idea of success whereby the capacity of local actors to define the needs of the communities in which they work, and respond to those needs, is recognised.

  - Localisation benefits from networking to build relationships that can grow into partnerships. The LFAs benefited from ongoing informal networking opportunities, in which they got to know each other, aside from the opportunities to network with other humanitarian organisations as well. An unintended consequence of the training, this relationship-building among local actors demonstrates the worth of network-building and efforts to link local actors as part of localisation approaches.
  - Training to strengthen localisation should cover generic humanitarian skills, rather than specific priorities identified by a few actors. The time spent on generic, but crucial, humanitarian skills allowed the training to have a multiplier effect and greater relevance outside the parameters of the project. The training included sharing ready-to-use and highly practical materials with the LFAs. These were not one-off tools used for the purposes of the project alone, or relevant to a specific campaign, but tools that have influenced day-to-day operations across the LFAs since the training.[1]
  - Training of LFAs is vital to the strengthening of future humanitarian response. Investment is needed in strengthening the capacity not only of local organisations but also of local and national religious leaders and LFAs to develop their full potential to be effective local players in humanitarian responses and strong advocates on complex social issues.

- **Donors and humanitarian policy-makers should urge international humanitarian actors to make time and space for self-reflection on how they can engage more with local faith actors.** The training for international humanitarian actors on ways to work with LFAs was intended to be a significant part of the model, but it was difficult to achieve widespread engagement and there was less interest and some misunderstanding of what the training included. Mindset change around biases is still a relatively untested concept in the international humanitarian system.
- **Working with LFAs also includes understanding and engaging with their religious leaders.** The theological workshop for interfaith actors allowed space for high-level religious leaders and scholars to discuss their role in humanitarian response. The topic must be treated with sensitivity and a respect and understanding that not everyone will agree at all times. Yet the discussion is important as it helps religious leaders understand why their LFAs should work in humanitarian response, which they might not have prioritised previously. This will help ensure the sustainability of the LFAs beyond the end of the project.
- **International humanitarian actors seeking to partner with LFAs should look beyond the national level to see the work of LFAs in communities around the country.** The Bridge Builder Model moved beyond engagement of LFAs represented at the national level, and reached LFAs working in different counties without national-level presence. It is important to look beyond the most prominent organisations alone, although it will be important to work with them as well, and seek partnerships with LFAs that are close to full partnership potential and could benefit from additional training to achieve that potential.
- **Further locally led measurement needs to take place to assess the longer-term impact of localisation initiatives and to investigate ways to effectively shift norms within the humanitarian system to break down biases and barriers that are limiting current localisation efforts.** It is necessary to deepen research into how to ensure organisational and system-wide change in the humanitarian sector in order to strengthen locally led humanitarian response. Further investigation is also needed on methods to meaningfully measure the influence of localisation in fragile settings.
- **The consortium recommends adapting and scaling up the Bridge Builder Model to reach more locations where stronger collaboration between LFAs and other humanitarian actors is yet to be seen.** The model can be adapted and used in contexts where LFAs provide assistance to people facing humanitarian crises but are not yet integrated into the response of the international humanitarian system.

1 Tearfund has made other such tools available online at: https://learn.tearfund.org/en/themes/disasters_and_crises

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Annex: Summary of interviewees

	Number of interview participants (accounting for individual and group interviews)	Number of interviews
Consortium members	15	10
Local faith actors involved in the Bridge Builder Model (with duplication of interviewees over 2 sets of interviews)	49	19
South Sudan institutions (religious councils, NGO forums, government agencies)	3	3
Secular INGOs	5	3
Local/national NGOs	4	2
Local/national FBOs	2	2
UN agencies	3	2
International FBOs	8	7
Total	**89**	**48**

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