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Toward Feminist Place-Based Responses to Forced Displacement

March 2022

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies to strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice.

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Feminist Humanitarian Network is a global collective of grassroots and national women's rights organizations in the Global South; national and regional women's networks; individuals; and international NGOs and organizations headquartered in the Global North working together to transform the humanitarian system into one that is guided by feminist principles.

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Executive Summary

This report proposes key considerations for, and suggested pathways to, creating feminist place-based approaches to crises and forced displacement.

We argue for a re-consideration and refinement of the localization agenda, from othering and essentializing the local as a uniform locale of equity and equality, to appreciating the multiple intersecting structural inequalities that shape marginalization in every locale, specifying what exactly is needed, who is best equipped to achieve transformative and equitable impacts, and the implications for who should be resourced, and what roles actors should play. We propose that this can be achieved through applying feminist principles and expertise, a systemic decentralization and redistribution of power from larger actors to those who are feminist and place-based.

Humanitarianism Today

At its core, humanitarian action represents expressions of concern for humanity—this concern is manifested in different ways, by different actors, in different spaces. Though the resources, scale, and ambition of the formal humanitarian system have crowded-out other types of humanitarianism, this model is still often constructed as the only legitimate form of humanitarianism.

There are numerous problems with the current humanitarian system. The three most pressing issues relate to politics, ethics, and power.

We have clustered key challenges of the formal humanitarian system into four categories.

1. Neglect of structural causes of conflict, and those that drive forced displacement.
2. Over-reliance on one-size-fits-all approaches that do not account for differential impacts of crises can blindside intersectional understandings of crisis contexts, needs, and impacts.
3. Marginalization of the agency, competencies, and capacities of place-based actors.
4. Lack of accountability to affected populations.

A Different Humanitarian Future

Feminist frames of analysis and approaches can lead us to a different set of actors, those who are implicated in crisis and those have lived experience in negotiating crises. Attention needs to be given to place-based actors with respect to knowledge and networks to respond in ways that best serve their context. Feminist and place-based actors are key for a people-centered humanitarian system—by placing those affected by crisis or conflict at the center of all efforts.

A number of donors, UN agencies, and international NGOs have now begun to include feminist principles in their policy frameworks and programmatic priorities. The Feminist Humanitarian Network is an international collective of local and national organizations, international organizations, academic institutions, and individuals committed to transforming the humanitarian system in a way that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda. Their work is built on the following principles:

1. Being intersectional, inclusive, holistic, and committed.
2. Putting women (all self-identifying women) at the center.
3. Ensuring women's dignity, driving transformation, dismantling patriarchy, and challenging exclusion.
4. Leaving no one behind, ensuring safety and safe space, and accountability and transparency.
5. Recognizing power dynamics, and taking action to address them, to shift power where necessary, and always using power responsibly.
6. Being self-reflective, and open to adapting and changing, to ensure feminist principles are consistently upheld.
7. Working together as a movement for women's rights, for human rights, and justice for all.

In other examples, the Women's Refugee Commission's recent *Gender-Transformative Change in Humanitarianism White Paper* points to the need for women's leadership and a change in international organizational structures and cultures.

Place-Based Approaches

Utilizing diverse approaches, at their core Place-Based Actors (PBAs) are best placed to strengthen the engagement of affected populations by working in a participatory, multi-sectoral approach. Most PBAs are in and of the communities that experience crises and displacement; they are there before, during, and after.

1. **People in crisis know what they need best; listen to them.**
2. **Recognize that context and location matter (most).** This means responses have to be tailored for specific locations—it takes time to understand the local context and build relationships. Focusing on the location reinforces the importance of rebuilding people's everyday lives.
3. **Data is always partial, representative, and political.** The focus on quantifiable data metrics for evaluating humanitarian response and needs obscures the complex social realities behind that data.
4. **Work toward empathy and transformation.** People's needs are complex and multidimensional. They extend beyond lifesaving assistance. Programs should enable people's right to self-determination.
5. **Make accountability a practice.** Accountability is not only about transparency about how money is spent and its impacts. It includes what is invested in, how, and what is considered success. This is particularly important with unequal power relations, such as between large external agencies and the communities they serve.

Introduction to a Reimagined Humanitarian System

A reimagined humanitarian sector that embodies the principles of both place-based and feminist theory would require a fundamental shift in the way power is distributed in the system. The current power distribution assumes that power will trickle down, but this does not work in practice. Those at the center of a crisis, those affected, and the NGOs and civil society groups that work with them are often the last ones consulted and enjoy the least amount of power. A new horizontal distribution of power model proposes that the humanitarian system must have affected people at the center. In an ideal future, affected communities are able to articulate the type of assistance they need, who is best placed to offer that assistance, how to assess the effectiveness of different responses, and how to ensure the accountability of response efforts.

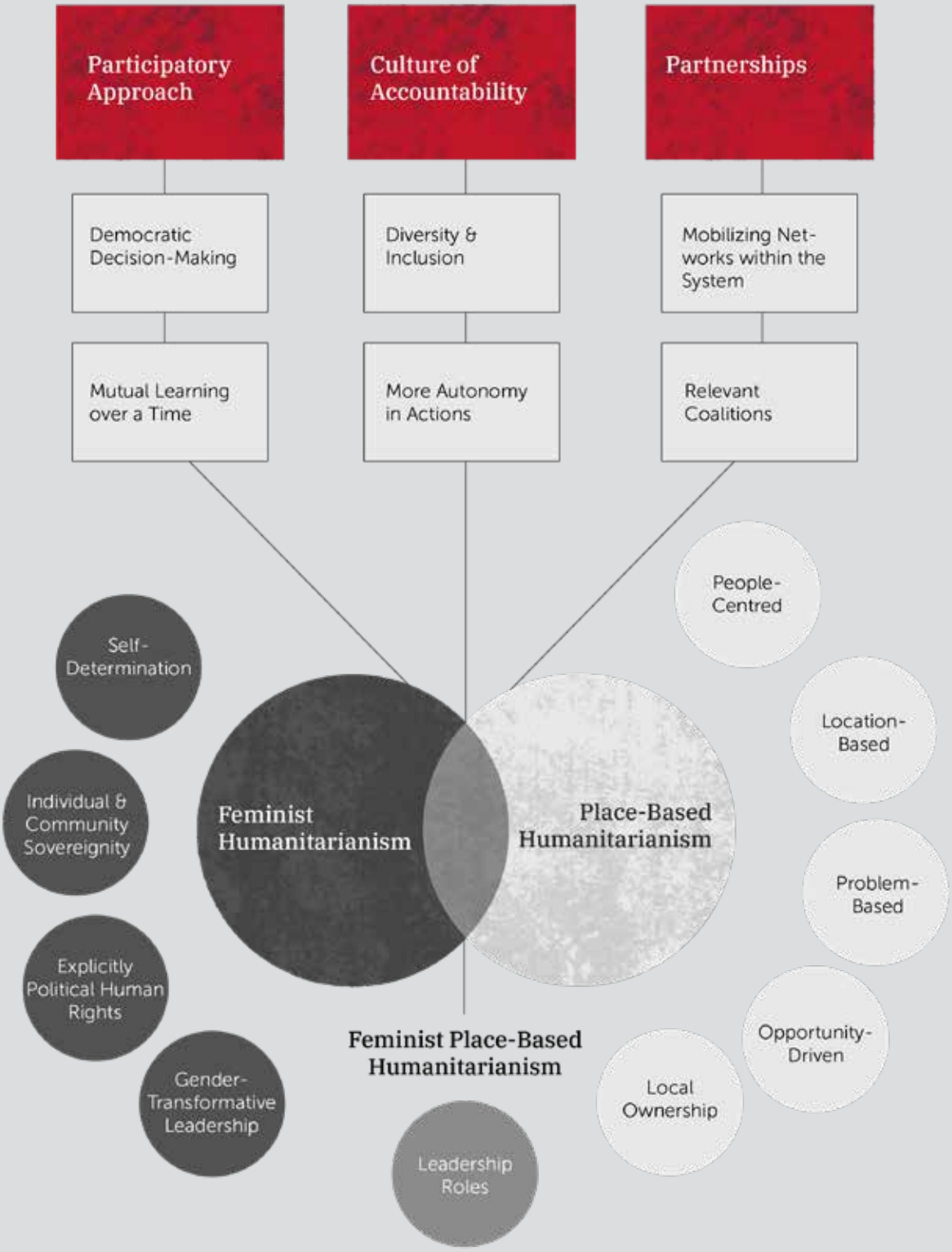

Figure 1. An intersectional approach to a desired humanitarianism.

Pathways and Strategies to Evolve the Formal Humanitarian System

1. Legitimize lived experiences and place-based knowledge

- **Feminist research tools -** Develop new formats and frameworks that draw on people's, especially women's, lived experiences. Borrow from the ethnographic research and co-design practices that are used in design and social sciences fields to increase the participation from diverse groups.
- **Build and maintain knowledge repositories -**Building on existing knowledge places agency in the hands of place-based actors.
- **Challenge existing definitions of "knowledge" -** Lived experiences contain valid and important knowledge. There is a need to move beyond academia as the only knowledge source. Encouraging knowledge sharing through so-called "unconventional" means (not just papers written by western actors and international NGOs) is required.

2. Reclaim the narratives from foreign actors and build new ones

- **Create channels for lived experiences to be told-** In recent crises, we have seen the way technology and social media have been leveraged to adapt to a changing narrative environment. Those affected have been able to reach people far beyond their geographical regions, creating digital proximity to these crises by posting videos, narrating their stories, and conveying their needs during a crisis.
- **Explore and invest in different forms of storytelling -** Empowering people to tell their stories as central figures gives recognition to their own needs as determined by their lived experiences.

3. Realize and build on the collective agency of communities

- **Support partnerships across place and issue –** A place-based approach can lead to the creation of "platforms" that bring together a range of actors to agree on and implement a collective response. These platforms can help foster a common approach by creating a shared understanding (to inform planning) and a shared vision, resulting in a set of common priorities for the populations in need.
- **Prioritize feminist leadership -** Transform organizational leadership and structures with feminist principles. This includes hiring policies, budgets and contracts, meeting protocols, program development, and the allocation of financial resources.
- **Focus on community engagement and trust building/ community self-mobilization -** All actors, INGOs, national NGOs, governments, and place-based actors should be consciously engaged with communities to take stock of already existing networks and capacities and build on those—before, during, and after a crisis.

4. Focus on funding feminist place-based actors

- **Change the quality and quantity of funding – re-conceptualize risk and change due diligence processes that serve as a barrier to funding feminist place-based actors.** International actors should play only a facilitative role, focused on light-touch coordination. When supporting place-based actors, donor funding should be for feminist placed based actors and movements. It should be directed toward organizations, not projects, and should be flexible and long term.
- **Build new and alternative funding structures -** National budgets themselves have allocations that are under-utilized. Place-based actors can be supported to help identify these budgetary gaps and accordingly develop plans and proposals for what funding is needed from international humanitarian actors. International agencies can help place-based actors develop capacities for

strategic fundraising, campaigning, and outreach, and assist place-based actors to build a body of evidence about their work.

End Note

The approaches highlighted in this report center on the importance of feminist placed-based actors (leaders, community groups, organizations, networks, and movements) in transforming the sector.

At the core of all these practices lies an ethic of accountability. Spending millions of dollars each year is relevant only if there are accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that the needle is shifting.

The strategies presented here can be mapped on a scale from reform to transform. Many of these strategies are already being tried and implemented by a number of actors in the formal humanitarian system. However, these attempts have been fragmented and piecemeal. Implementing these strategies together could create true transformation.

Introduction

The formal humanitarian system is broken. Despite years of reform, it continues to privilege the values, interests, and worldviews of a small number of actors based in industrialized economies. Actors external to each crisis define what affected populations need, often displacing, rather than building on, existing systems and capacities. Programs are crafted in uniform and technical terms, with limited regard for the complexity of human needs or the disparate impacts of conflict on different social groups. Accountability of humanitarian agencies is largely upwards—toward donors, rather than toward the populations they are supposed to serve.

A transformative humanitarian vision and agenda are needed

This report explores how a new vision and strategies can be charted using feminist frameworks, because feminism, at its core, draws attention to unequal power structures and their gendered impacts. The report also draws from literature on place-based approaches—that is, approaches that center the knowledge, capacities, and priorities of actors from the site of conflict—used most often in urban displacement settings, to help identify bottom-up opportunities for challenging these unequal power structures.

The process to compile this report included a literature review, and consultations with experts, researchers and practitioners. Further details on the methods, project team, and stakeholder consultations are in the annex.

Our goal was to explore radical new solutions for transforming the humanitarian sector. But, as we learned during this process, old problems do not always need new solutions. The problem with many existing

proposals to reform the system is not the proposals themselves, but the fact that they have not been implemented. This was borne out by our interviews as well—many respondents repeated old demands, they did not ask for radical new solutions. This report thus presents a mix of old and new solutions—it is vital not to forget the old, in pursuit of the new. What is truly needed is to tackle entrenched, unaccountable power structures that prevent good solutions from being implemented.

01

Humanitarianism Today

At its core, humanitarian action represents expressions of concern for humanity—this concern is manifested in different ways, by different actors, in different spaces. Although the resources, scale, and ambition of the formal humanitarian system have crowded out other types of humanitarianism, this model is still often constructed as the only legitimate form of humanitarianism.

There are two major issues at play. First, the formal humanitarian system consisting of Western donors, UN agencies, and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) represent only one kind of humanitarian action. Within this system, a push for localization—that is, putting local actors at the center of humanitarian action—has been gaining traction in recent years. Yet this in itself is problematic—it assumes a binary division between the local and international that is reductive, and obscures the idea that the local is a space of human agency and activity that changes over time. Local does not mean equal; inequalities and power differentials exist at the local level. Critics have pointed out that the term localization can obscure politics and differences within local actors, and have therefore called for a more "critical localism."[1]

Critical localism emphasizes ways that processes of authority and power unfold within local contexts, and are also shaped by interactions with international actors and stakeholders. Apart from staff of international organizations, "local actors," including experts and crisis responders from other parts of a conflict-affected country, may also be viewed as outsiders by residents of conflict-affected locales.

Recent initiatives for localization have barely shifted the needle—local organizations continue to get only a minuscule fraction of budgets from the formal humanitarian system.[2] Women, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups are typically excluded. Even where local populations are engaged, they do not have meaningful decision-making power, often serving the role of sub-contracted implementing agencies.

The second issue is a focus on lifesaving assistance that may distract from the structural drivers and impacts of crises. Crises are arguably most often manifestations of larger systems of structural injustice. Lifesaving assistance often results in works to sustain, rather than transform, these structures of oppression.[3] Critics have long argued that the primary function of the formal

1 Roger Mac Ginty, " Where is the local? Critical localism and peacebuilding," *Third World Quarterly* (June 2015). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2015.1045482?journal- Code=ctwq20.

2 Geneva Centre for Humanitarian Studies, "Do not make 'localization' another unfulfilled commitment – we can achieve it together" (July 14, 2020). https://humanitarianstudies.ch/do-not-make-localization-another-unfulfilled-commit- ment-we-can-achieve-it-together/.

3 Simon O'Connell, Danny Sriskandarajah, and Arbie Baguisos, ""We don't need to wait for a systemic overhaul to start doing better," *The New Humanitarian.* https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/11/12/future-of-aid.

humanitarian system is to help Western governments manage external security risks. It represents a continuation of earlier forms of colonial rule. The formal humanitarian system itself reflects and reproduces the very structures that contribute to the crisis in the first place.

There are numerous problems with the current humanitarian system. While there is a vast body of literature that documents these challenges, most agree that the three most pressing issues relate to politics, ethics, and power.

1. **What are the politics that have produced the current humanitarian system and what are the types of politics that are constituted, and suppressed, through it?**

2. **What are the ethics that underlie (or are violated by) the formal humanitarian system? What type of social order is created as a result, and whose ethics are privileged?**

3. **Where does power lie in the system and who or what does the system empower?**

Based on this literature, we have clustered key challenges of the formal humanitarian system into four buckets.

1. Neglect of structural causes of conflict, and causes that drive forced displacement

The root causes of most conflicts extend beyond national boundaries. Processes of colonization, trade liberalization, climate variability, and resource extraction, for example, are contributing factors for many crises depending on the context in which they happen. Crises are also a reflection of deeper inequalities around race, class, caste, and gender. In order to realize lasting and inclusive change, policymakers and practitioners need to start addressing the long-term structural and root causes that perpetuate inequality and conflict and drive forced displacement.

2. One-size-fits-all approaches can bury intersectional understanding of crisis contexts, needs, and impacts

No two contexts are the same—an over-reliance on a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to prove effective in meeting the multiple and varied needs of people. This means responses have to be tailored to specific locations, which takes time; it takes time to understand the local context and build relationships. Intersectional approaches recognize that people will have different identities, needs, priorities, and capacities that are not static, and will shift and change over time.

3. Marginalization of the agency, competencies, and capacities of place-based actors

The global humanitarian system often disregards or overrides existing place-based structures and capacities. This makes it harder to develop meaningful and sustainable responses that carry on even after international actors have left. It is essential to build on already existing structures and capacities, and in doing so, pay close attention to the well-being, capacities, and perspectives of the most marginalized.

4. Lack of accountability to affected populations

International agencies have tended to prioritize accountability to donors rather than to the communities they serve. Sometimes it amounts to check-the-box measures to demonstrate accountability. However, accountability is an embodied practice, which must be central to all interactions, at all times. It must be central to how programs and organizations are structured.

02

A Different Humanitarian Future

Feminist frames of analysis and approaches can lead us to a different set of actors, those who are implicated in crisis and have lived experience in negotiating crises. Privileging this perspective turns attention to place-based actors with the knowledge and networks to respond in ways that best serve their context. The emphasis of this work is to demonstrate how feminist approaches and place-based actors are key enablers for a people-centric humanitarian system—by placing those affected by crisis or conflict at the center of all efforts. This might eventually change the paradigm and flow of power in the humanitarian response system, toward being more relevant, equitable, and sustainable.

Feminist Humanitarian Action

Feminism is an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks to address the logic and practices of patriarchy. This includes justice for women and all marginalized groups. Feminist movements have been a significant force behind major historical societal changes for women's rights. Power is a central concern in feminist theory. Power is seen as a resource to be (re)distributed as domination and as empowerment.

In 1989, American law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectional feminism" as a way for seeing how various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other."[1] Intersectional feminism centers the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context. Using an intersectional lens also means recognizing the historical contexts surrounding an issue.

This provides a useful frame to both understand the structural injustices underpinning the formal humanitarian system as well as identify opportunities and strategies of change. An intersectional feminist framing of humanitarian crises also considers a wide variety of needs and how they differ across social groups, particularly women. It prioritizes the increase of women's leadership in crises.

A number of donors, UN agencies, and INGOs have now begun to include feminist principles in their policy frameworks and programmatic priorities. An example is the Feminist Humanitarian Network,[2] an international collective of local and national organizations, international organizations, academic institutions, and individuals committed to transforming the humanitarian system in a way that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda. Their work is built on the following principles, which provide a framework to start building toward an alternative humanitarian system:

1 "Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectional Feminism," JStor Daily (August 1, 2020). https://daily.jstor.org/kimberle-crenshaws-intersectional-feminism.
2 https://www.feministhumanitariannetwork.org.

1. **Being intersectional, inclusive, holistic, and committed to feminist causes.**
2. **Putting women (all self-identifying women) at the center.**
3. **Ensuring women's dignity, driving transformation, dismantling patriarchy, and challenging women's exclusion from decision-making.**
4. **Leaving no one behind, ensuring safety and safe space.**
5. **Ensuring accountability and transparency in the way humanitarian action is carried out.**
6. **Recognizing power dynamics, and taking action to address them, shifting power where necessary, and always using power responsibly.**
7. **Being self-reflective, and open to adapting and changing, to ensure feminist principles are consistently upheld.**
8. **Working together as a movement for women's rights, for human rights, and justice for all.**

In other examples, the Women's Refugee Commission's recent *Gender-Transformative Change in Humanitarianism*[1] white paper points to the need for feminist leadership and a change in international organizational structures and cultures. Taking this point further, a recent Oxfam report[2] calls for four types of change: women's leadership, building bridges between development, humanitarian, and peace and security programs, basing partnership and funding models on feminist principles, and using participatory methods.

1 Women's Refugee Commission, Gender-Transformative Change in Humanitarianism: A View from Inside (2021). https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/gender-transformative-change-in-humanitarianism-a-view-from-inside.

2 Duncan Green, "What would a feminist approach to localisation of humanitarian action look like?" (August 14, 2018). https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/what-would-a-feminist-approach-to-localisation-of-humanitarian-action-look-like.

Place-based actors and approaches

Place-based actors (PBAs) are in and ***of*** a location, and exist before, during and after crises. PBAs' approaches have gained traction in recent years in urban crisis recovery contexts. Utilizing diverse approaches, at their core PBAs aim to strengthen the engagement of affected populations by having a participatory, multi-sectoral approach. Most PBAs support people after a disaster in a specific location, to transition effectively from relief to recovery. While there is no "right way" of thinking about them, PBAs are uniquely able to effectively act within the multiple and intersecting systems that make up a place. We use here the term place-based to signal a different conceptualization from the "local" used in the drive towards "localization."

First, place matters. There is a strong focus on location. The intent behind this focus is to reinforce the importance of people's identity and of rebuilding people's everyday lives. Focusing on location also forces implementing agencies based outside of the local to take into account the complex, interconnected nature of living in that place.

Second, change is fundamentally relational. PBAs are in and of a place and by definition must have knowledge of, build and work in the context of relationships. This includes building effective relationships with place-based and external actors.

Third, lived realities are intersectional. Affected communities live their lives and manage crises from a holistic, multi- sectoral perspective. While sectoral approaches and technical expertise remain important ingredients of humanitarian response and recovery, understanding the holistic needs of affected communities requires improved sectoral and stakeholder collaboration.

Fourth, lived realities are multi-sectoral. They are inclusive and participatory, focusing and involving all the relevant actors within a specific location or place, namely, refugees, host communities, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations. Common to many approaches is the creation of platforms that bring together a range of actors to agree and implement a collective response.

Fifth, existing structures are critical. They work with existing structures, such as local government. For interventions to be effective after the life of a program, activities must engage with existing structures, even if they are weak. Otherwise, such structures may be weakened even further.

Bringing these together

There are a number of similarities and tensions in both these approaches. The language of feminism is still seen as confrontational in some contexts. Our interviews with women leaders of humanitarian and community organizations from various countries from the Global South (used here as a site of oppression and injustice, not a geographical location) revealed that in many of their communities, feminism is considered a "bad" word. It may be seen as "anti-men" and deeply challenges existing social and cultural values. While challenging these patriarchal structures is of course precisely the aim of the feminist movement, different vocabularies or strategies may be needed to first create the space for more transformative change.

Working with existing structures, PBAs can reinforce existing power structures. The focus on location can obscure the broader structural causes of displacement. But because they define an area, rather than a sector or a target group, as a primary entry point they can provide a more inclusive and collaborative platform across diverse social groups. Because PBAs rely on local knowledge and skills, and are well positioned to build community cohesion and engage with local economic systems, they can help chart pathways for structural transformation.

Building and learning from the strengths and contradictions of the feminist movements and PBAs could help provide a way to imagine and build a new humanitarian system.

This report focuses on the steps In a reimagined system through which humanitarian agencies of the formal humanitarian systems and donor governments can create enabling conditions for a feminist place based approach to humanitarian action. It argues that incremental points of change can be derived by learning from feminist and place-based actors.

Introduction to a reimagined humanitarian system

A reimagined humanitarian sector that embodies the principles of both place-based and feminist approaches would require a fundamental shift in the way power is distributed in the system. The current power distribution assumes that power will trickle down, but this does not work in practice. Those at the center of a crisis, those affected and the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) that work with them, are often the last ones consulted and enjoy the least amount of power.[1] **The current drive towards localization provides an impetus and opportunity to transform humanitarian response and the humanitarian system. Donors are increasingly requiring that humanitarian INGOs partner with "local" global south organizations in order to receive funds. In practice, this does not typically result in equitable partnerships. It is typically an instrumental approach, to enable those INGOs to access funds for their own agendas. This commodifies the expert knowledge and relationships held by placed-based actors, which INGOs essentially purchase because they have access to funds. Feminist and placed-based organizations are then subjected to INGO due diligence processes, from the INGOs perspective these are utilized to control for the risk of funding place-based actors. As we have found in this research, and is well documented by others, this may on paper check the "partner" box but does not in fact achieve the outcome of shifting power to feminist place-based actors.**

A new horizontal distribution-of-power model proposes that the humanitarian system must have affected people at the center. In an ideal future, affected communities can articulate and identify the type of assistance they need, who is best placed to offer that assistance, how to assess the effectiveness of different responses, and how to ensure the accountability of response efforts.

1 Start Network, " Localisation of Aid: Are INGOs Walking The Talk?" ReliefWeb (October 30, 2017). https://reliefweb.int/report/world/localisation-aid-are-ingos-walking-talk.

In a reimagined system, we propose the following kinds of crisis responder roles:

1. **Members of affected communities**
   Affected communities carry the most influence in this structure. Their knowledge, lived experience, and stories about the crisis are central, and inform the crisis response.

2. **Feminist place-based actors and movements**
   Feminist place-based actors understand and engage with the structures and systems that shape their realities, importantly local government, education, healthcare, and the private sector. Feminist place-based actors are of and in communities, they work with members of affected communities and understand the cultural, political, and societal nuances of the areas in which they operate. They understand and are focused on transformative change focused on equity and sustainability for all. Close ties to the communities in which they live and serve provide them with critical experience and knowledge. They are the first responders to crises. Placed-based actors choose if and with whom they contract (especially the INGOs who currently hold the power to determine and implement humanitarian response) when they need support.

3. **Feminist movements and actors**
   Feminist movement actors at all levels in the ecosystem are key actors in any humanitarian crisis. National-level feminist movement actors typically have the capacity to serve as allies and support to feminist place-based actors. They often hold relationships with and receive funding from INGOs and large donors. In a reimagined humanitarian system, national actors are aligned in values and support place-based NGOs with resources, contacts, and capacities. They receive funding directly from donors and are able to choose if, when, and with whom they collaborate with.

4. **INGOs**
   In a reimagined system where influence on actions decreases the farther you are from the affected communities, INGOs become peripheral actors, using their influence (due mostly to their size and contacts) to redirect funds to those in the center—the affected communities, feminist place-based actors, and national NGOs in some cases. Feminist PBAs can choose if, when, and how they collaborate with INGOs.

5. **Donors**
   In a reimagined system, donors give to crisis-affected areas keeping feminist values, organizations, and movements at the center. They create new mechanisms for managing risk that facilitate feminist place-based actors' access to resources.

Table 1. Different approaches to humanitarian action

The table on the next page presents three types of humanitarian action, with the aim of showing how feminist and place-based approaches can help us reconsider and improve the current humanitarian system.[1] In practice, these are not exclusive categories; they should be viewed as ideal types, and complementary pieces to solve the larger puzzle of people-centric humanitarianism.

1 https://www.trocaire.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Rwanda-Localisation-Research-Full-Report.pdf?__cf_chl_captcha_tk__=pmd_460fd-1dc2f6d802c953b87c90f31d7ae997987e0-1628523094-0-gqNtZGzNAw-2jcnBszQhO.

Table 1. Different approaches to humanitarian action

	Principles/ Values/ Motivations	Crisis Definition	Leading Actors	Actions/Activities
Current Humanitarianism	Maintains neutrality, impartiality, independence. These principles are meant to present humanitarian action as apolitical.	Crisis defined mostly in terms of proximate and immediate causes.	Donors, UN, INGOs	Treats symptoms with a short-term view driven by a sense of urgency. Prioritizes lifesaving assistance, defined largely as food, water, shelter, and emergency medical assistance. Upholds the distinction between relief, development, and peace building.
Feminist Humanitarianism	Emphasizes explicitly political protection of human rights, self-determination, individual and community sovereignty, gender transformation, and leadership.	Crisis defined using intersectional approaches, rooted in existing structural inequalities, and accounting for multiple interlocking factors that have disparate impacts.	Feminist place-based actors and movements. Feminist, often women-led, organizations and groups, civil society organizations, community groups, community leaders who are always the first responders, and communities affected by crisis and displacement.	Recognizes structural and root causes of inequality and conflict, and the need for longer term engagement to address these. Resources and supports community groups and leaders who are the first responders. Promotes gender transformative change through hiring staff with capacities and commitment toward equity, justice, diversity. Designs interventions in a holistic manner with a view to enable longer term development and peace.
Place-Based Humanitarianism	People-centered; location-based, problem based, opportunity driven, and owned by the communities, organizations, and institutions of the affected place.	Crisis definitions prioritize context, examining the inter-connectedness of place-based actors, systems, and structures.	Multi-agency; multi-sector	Creates platforms for common approaches. Builds on existing community cohesion and capacity, governance structures, markets, and service delivery mechanisms. Actions are iterative and incremental, rather than sweeping overhauls.

03

Transforming Humanitarianism: Pathways and Strategies

Given what we know, the journey toward a people-centered humanitarian system will probably be uphill, meandering, and not wholly linear. Set within the current global climate of socio-political upheaval and precarious structural transformation, the challenge of evolution for humanitarian actors is daunting.

Our consultations comprised rich conversations with various actors in the global humanitarian context; a common thread being to identify feminist and place-based "strategies" that might transform how we view responses to conflict and forced displacement.

Pathways

We have attempted to build the concept of this transformation across four pathways, namely, knowledge, narratives, agency, and funding. Each pathway comprises a cluster of strategies gleaned from our research and interviews. All four pathways need to work together to achieve transformative action.

Strategies

The larger set of strategies also represents ideas that may be adopted by practitioners and applied based on their contexts. These strategies need to be adapted accordingly. While the strategies themselves might differ significantly in their impact, timescale, and requirements, the goal is to find consonance and complementarity between various strategies.

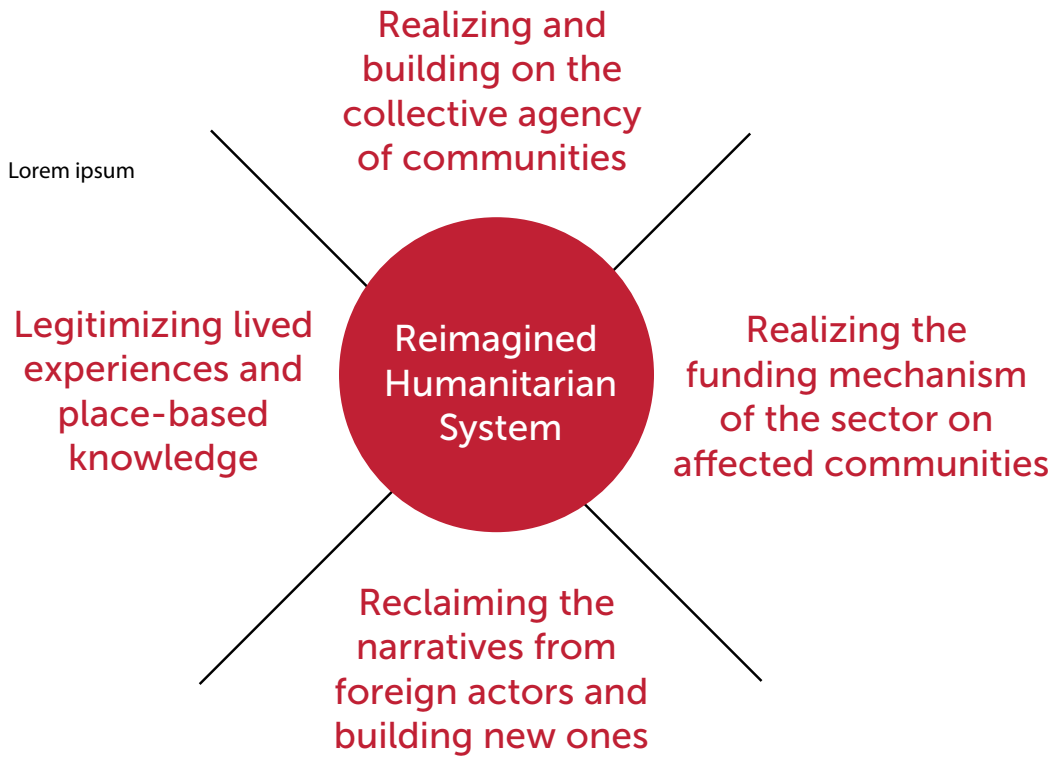

Figure 3: Pathways for change.

Table 2: Pathways and Strategies to Evolve the Formal Humanitarian System

Transformation Pathways	Suggested Strategies
Legitimize lived experiences and place-based knowledge	Feminist research tools Build and maintain knowledge repositories Challenge existing definitions of "knowledge" and decolonize them—lived experiences contain valid and important knowledge
Reclaim narratives from foreign actors and build new ones	Problem definitions and solutions defined by affected communities and feminist placed-based actors Create channels for unfiltered stories to be told Explore and invest in different forms of storytelling
Realize and build on the collective agency of communities	Support partnerships across place and issue Prioritize feminist leadership Focus on community engagement and trust building/ community self-mobilization Focus on amplifying the efforts of women and other marginalized communities
Refocus the funding mechanism of the sector on affected communities	Re-conceptualize risk to perspective of affected communities and feminist place-based actors Change the way funding is allocated Build new and alternative funding structures Prioritize intersectional programming strategies for economic justice and empowerment

PATHWAY 1

Legitimizing Feminist Place-Based Experiences and Knowledge

Shifting power is about recognizing the legitimacy of those outpowered. The focus should be on decentralizing knowledge collection and sharing so as to listen to, and communicate, stories of change and lived experiences of affected communities.

1. Feminist research practice

Develop new formats and frameworks that draw on people's, especially women and marginalized communities, lived experiences. Borrow from the ethnographic research and codesign practices that are used in the design and social sciences to increase participation from diverse groups. Use contemporary research tools and platforms that can mitigate traditional barriers to participation in research for hard-to-access communities. Trust can be achieved by sustained contact with communities and women's groups and organizing communal workshops and programs that encourage women to voice the issues they face on a day-to-day basis.

Tools: Workshops; cultural probes (1); interviews, engagement activities, ethnographic studies (2); feminist research probes, user shadowing (3); and journey mapping (4).

"[The experiences of] affected populations are assets that we can leverage. If we are able to gain their trust and make them feel confident, then we can surely make positive shifts in humanitarian response. Their main asset is their lived experience. They should be recognized as experts, and their knowledge valued."

- Core Working Group Workshop

Example:

Women's World Banking is an organization that builds gender-diverse teams to effectively serve the women's market by using behavioral science and design to create local solutions that meet women's needs and the businesses that serve them; they invest in women-focused financial institutions highlighting the business case of serving women. Their work focuses on feminist research approaches and workshops that help them understand women's financial behaviors and the life experiences that shape those behaviors.

2. Build and maintain knowledge repositories

Building on existing knowledge not only places the agency in the hands of place-based actors, it also enables the easy execution of policies and models and saves time. Many movements have been successful by maintaining these knowledge bases in order to achieve their goals. In some cases, maintaining records and having a rich repository of information has been the backbone of the movement.

Tools: Shared documents/platforms; access to other NGOs and their research/processes in the region; joint conferences; staff out posting/orientation in other organizations/regions; mutual research projects (collaborations).

Example:

Women Also Know Stuff is an online research database that contains projects and research papers from self-identifying women in political science. It asks women scholars to either register themselves or accept nominations to be added to the database. The initiative was started to tackle underrepresentation of women researchers in a male-dominated academia sector, and has now teamed up with multiple such initiatives that focus on people of color, LGBTQ academics in various fields such as law, languages, and governance such as Women Leading in AI, Women Also know Law, Women in Media, and more

3. Challenge existing definitions of "knowledge": Lived experiences contain valid and important knowledge

There is a need to move beyond academia and global north organizations as the only legitimate knowledge source. This requires a critical view on what is considered data. Knowledge-sharing through so-called "unconventional" means (not just papers written by Western actors) should be encouraged. Information coming in the form of well-structured reports often falls flat when it reaches the crisis-affected place. Citizen-generated data is a critical strategy for linking knowledge to advocacy and change strategies. Not only is dissemination of information to the public difficult if the medium is not appropriate, it also makes interpretation and the will to parse that knowledge difficult for place-based actors.

"[T]he language should be easy and comfortable. The medium used for sharing the research would determine its effectiveness. No one reads emails and digital reports. The UN report was ignored [here]. Even after three months, people wouldn't know the reports. Doesn't matter if it's well-designed or short, people find it hard to consume. I don't know why."- UN Youth Delegate, Uganda
- UN Youth Delegate, Uganda

Tools: Digital ethnography (5), digital humanitarianism (6), crisis mapping (7), etc., right after a crisis can help plot lived experiences, allowing for audio as well as visual sharing of knowledge along with written texts is essential. Street theatre, skits, music for awareness, collaborations with institutions of trust—schools, universities, hospitals, etc.—for knowledge sharing.

Example:

Knowledge sharing: The Survivor Theatre Project focuses on raising awareness about how common sexual violence is in our communities by bringing together sexual assault survivors to put up public performances. This also helps them heal and teaches them practical and creative tools for empowerment.

Example:

Knowledge collection: In the days following the Haiti earthquake, volunteers combed through victims' texts, Facebook posts, and other online messages. The information they gathered was curated and compiled online to help disaster-response organizations determine when and where to deliver aid. This is a creative way that lived experiences can be used as valid knowledge. Crisis mappers layer social media-generated data with satellite imagery when available to evaluate road conditions in crisis areas, providing up-to-the-minute maps for aid organizations.

PATHWAY 2

Reclaim Narratives from Foreign Actors and Build New Ones

Due to the nature and size of international organizations, they often control the nature of stories and narratives that come out of crisis-affected regions.

"Most INGOs tend to have way more resources for media engagements; video production, hosting interviews, documentation of their work, etc., whereas grassroots organizations don't always have resources for visibility. Therefore, it's easy for your work or ideas to be seen, copied, and scaled up without giving you credit."
- FHN Liberia report

We need to look at the way stories are gathered and the way they are shared with the public. The perspectives of those affected and their safeguarding need to be at the forefront of crisis coverage. This can be achieved through the following means:

1. **Creating channels for lived experiences to be shared**
2. **Exploring and investing in different forms of storytelling**
3. **Providing platforms for affected communities to share their expertise, knowledge, and stories**

1. Creating channels for unfiltered real stories to be told

Narratives we hear from crisis-affected regions are often tinged with the rhetoric of the people covering them and do not offer a raw picture of what happens on the ground. This is where the nuances and gravity of these personal and human narratives get lost. In recent crises, we have seen the way technology and social media have been leveraged to adapt to a changing narrative environment. Those affected have been able to reach people far beyond their geographical regions and scopes by posting videos, narrating their stories, and conveying their needs during a crisis.

These new platforms could be systematically and practically used to convey stories from affected communities; this not only gives voice to the masses but also does away with any bias that may come from traditional storytelling and documentation.

"I'm particular about telling my story. When you don't tell your story, they tell your story for you, without you."
- FHN Liberia

Tools: Building on current social media platforms and existing social networks among people (from formal ones like cooperatives to informal ones like hobby groups), crisis mapping, and digital humanitarianism.

Example:

Adalah ("Justice" in Arabic) is an independent human rights organization and legal center. Its mission is to promote human rights in Israel in general and the rights of the Palestinian minority, citizens of Israel, in particular. Adalah publishes a monthly newsletter in Arabic, Hebrew, and English highlighting its latest activities and the developments in their legal efforts to defend the rights of Palestinian Arabs in Israel and the OPT. Adalah's newsletter contains opinion pieces, position papers, case analyses, photo galleries, press briefings, reports, and more, all of which are produced by Adalah staff and partners from the region.

2. Exploring and investing in different forms of storytelling

The nature and form that storytelling and narratives take also affect the way crises are viewed. This also influences the nature of the aid that is provided to communities. The stories we hear and see now do not place the members of affected communities as central storytellers. This perpetuates a stereotypical image of "refugees" or those in need of aid, generalizing and skimming over the cultural, social, and political complexities in order to keep these stories palatable for Western audiences. Empowering people to tell their stories as central figures not only gives recognition to their needs as determined by their lived experiences, but also allows them to use storytelling forms, language, etc., that directly correspond to their cultural, political, and social values.

During our research, we were often told that language is a big barrier to communicate with actors on the ground. There is a need to move beyond storytelling methods that are restricted by language. The resources that INGOs provide are not accessible in terms of language and formats, often making them unusable by place-based actors. It is essential to understand the audience for these publications and resources. Who are they and what are their needs?

Place-based and national actors should engage with communities to provide them with a wide array of means to express their needs and concerns, such as practices that include drama, art, or craft.

Investing in creative practices not only gives individuals tools to express themselves but also promotes solidarity and trust in society and plays an important role in post-crisis trauma healing.

"If it's [the material] for camps, how to print it in pictorial form, or skits and drama, or diagrams, put in distribution centers. The content of the reports matters, too."

Tools: Invest in the arts, drama, street plays, creative practices, sports, etc., to bring people together in support groups or community centers built around creative means.

Example 1:

Healing through Art is a program run by ICEHA in Lagos. It provides a space for refugees to heal trauma by providing art, music, and theater supplies to refugee camps and settlements. It also provides training to local volunteers who can execute these programs in their communities. They train social workers, professional writers, painters, teachers, and artists to help identify refugees who need psychological support. The volunteers also train parents and community leaders to create safe spaces and foster an environment for emotional healing. This not only helps in healing trauma but also brings the community together and provides a sense of support for trauma survivors in settlements and camps.

Example 2:

Girl Rising is an American non-profit that works with local partners by providing customized tools and curricula to build confidence and agency in girls and to change attitudes and social norms so that entire communities stand up for girls and against gender discrimination. They use storytelling as a transformational catalyst for impact and long-term social change through film, television, social media videos, graphic novels, radio, curricula and more.

Realize/Build on the Collective Agency of Communities

PATHWAY 3

The identity of individuals depends on the way they perceive their existence in a society and their sense of belonging. In order to face crises or challenges that affect communities as a whole, it is key that individuals in the community feel like they belong, have autonomy, which moves from thought-body-family-community onward, and are equipped to work together as a collective. It is essential to bolster self-sufficiency and autonomy in individuals for them to realize their agency and their sense of communal responsibility. In a crisis, we often depend on those immediately around us for support, information, and resources. Therefore, these community relationships must be considered an important part of the humanitarian system.

1. Support partnerships across place and issue

The application of a place-based approach often leads to the creation of "platforms" that bring together a range of actors to agree and implement a collective response. These platforms can help foster a common approach by creating a shared understanding (to inform planning) and a shared vision, resulting in a set of common priorities targeting populations in those locations in need. Digital technologies can enable community-owned platform-based approaches.

Tools: Emergency response collaboration platforms, guidelines for collaboration, focus on building on available capacities, resources, and abilities within communities.

Examples:

Food Not Bombs is a loose-knit group of independent collectives in the United States sharing free vegan and vegetarian food with others. The movement thrives on building relationships between store owners, bakeries, markets, and farmers and maintaining knowledge repositories of the demand and supply gaps at local levels through various means ranging from flyers to websites. Each chapter collects surplus food that would otherwise go to waste from grocery stores, bakeries, markets, and occasionally from garbage dumpsters when stores are uncooperative, as well as donations from local farmers, then prepares community meals that are served for free to anyone who is hungry.

2. Prioritize feminist leadership

Working directly with the most marginalized is key to an understanding of intersecting gendered inequities and marginalizations, and to further approaches that engage with the realities and self-determination of those most affected.

There is also a need to move away from supporting individual women leaders and adopting a more transformative approach to leadership. Therefore, there is a need to support movements and networks rather than specific organizations or specific leaders. This can be done by supporting these networks to build organizational and leadership capacities, as well as recognize and support their care commitments.

Transform organizational leadership and structures with feminist principles. This includes hiring policies, budgets and contracts, meeting protocols, program development, and money allocation. Make meaningful, sustained investments in the leadership of refugee-led organizations and feminist leaders from the crisis-affected regions.

This means making financial investments, giving decision-making power, and ensuring the immediate cessation of exploitative patterns of "engagement." Compensate people for their time and expertise—feminist principles must run through all aspects of how we conceive of and move in relationship with one another.

INGOs should support local women in leadership to prepare and lead their community in case of any crisis—whether the crisis is humanitarian (such as a sudden-onset environmental emergency) or due to political instability (FHN).

"Representation for women has been at the mercy of our male counterparts in the districts. In Dhankuta, they formed a district-level coordination committee for COVID 19 response, but there was not a single woman in the committee. Even when women's rights organizations tried to work independently, we were blamed for gathering people and spreading COVID 19. It became a common excuse to keep people indoors and prevent them from questioning the activities of the local representatives."
- FHN Nepal

"Feminist humanitarian spaces are replicating cycles of exploitation they purport to fix by exploiting people's desire for change, expecting them to work for free, then burning through leaders."
- Women and Refugee Rights Activist

Tools: Local canvassing, voter registration drives, forming self-help groups, encouraging women to seek political office

Example:

Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) is an African, women-led organization that works in mobilization, networking, advocacy, and training African women. The organization helps build women's leadership capability and works toward changes in policy to be more supportive of women. The work is largely online, using the potential of the internet to reach out to women in Africa. In addition, MEWC plays a huge role in information proliferation. They give guidance to other organizations and grassroots movements operating to empower women in Africa. Tthe organization also provides a platform for women to exchange ideas and create networks to "establish female leaders in Africa." MEWC's major goal is to make sure that African women have a strong voice in governance institutions.

3. Focus on community engagement and trust-building

Communities are facing growing challenges and multitudes of crises, so we need to create more robust and specialized humanitarian systems at the local level. We know that women and children are the worst affected groups of a society in any given crisis and thus should be better equipped with resources, contacts, and capacities to deal with such situations.

There is an ongoing debate about the role of the humanitarian sector. As one interviewee said, "We're only supposed to be there temporarily so you don't want to build permanent structures

because then you're also potentially encouraging the displacement [of others]," Others argue that the scope and definition of humanitarianism is much wider and more encompassing than just delivering aid in times of crisis. It constitutes building capacities that communities can rely on in times of these crises, which is taking a more long-term view of the issue.

Humanitarianism and development are part of the same experience and all actors, INGOs, national NGOs, and governments as well as place-based NGOs should be consciously engaged with communities to build resilience, to take stock of already existing networks and capacities and build on those—before, during, and after a crisis.

Tools: Community modules on mobilization, workshops, disaster policies, accessible information in various formats, community outreach networks, community disaster funds, disaster/crisis education in schools and institutions of trust, etc.

Example:

Nijera Kori (NK) (translates to "We do it ourselves") has organized marginalized people into 8,622 groups across Bangladesh, consisting of 180,000 members, of whom half are women. These groups meet on a weekly basis, contribute to a collective savings fund (to reduce dependence on moneylenders and patrons), elect members to take on organizational responsibilities, and participate in various forms of training. As groups mature, they become more independent of NK, calling their own meetings and planning their own actions. NK continues to provide support for activities that cover larger areas and require mediation and advocacy at local, regional, and national levels. This boosts self-reliance in the region to meet larger goals of transforming society.

Barrios de Pie is a grassroots social movement in Argentina. In a single day, it helped nearly 500,000 elderly people in the country who were isolated due to COVID 19 restrictions, by providing them with freshly made meals at no cost. The group has spent years building partnerships with local communities, small businesses like bakeries, butchers, etc., and in the absence

of government action and leadership has started over 2,000 community kitchens. The group runs various social organization programs that include a culture program for the youth, a women-led wellness and organizing network, a citizenship school for young people, and skills-building workshops for adults.

4. Focus on amplifying the efforts of women

Globally and locally, humanitarian response can only contribute to achieving gender equity and women's rights if women's and girls' perspectives are heard and meaningfully included in consultation and decision- making processes.

For women to be equal partners in decision-making and programming, it is essential that they enjoy an equal role in the societies in which they live. Investing in issues of basic equity and self-determination such as equal rights, equal pay, childcare, maternity benefits, and access to basic healthcare is key. This can be achieved by using existing power structures to lobby and organize for policy changes in favor of women that focus beyond humanitarian issues.

"It isn't [just] about giving opportunity alone, but [it is] also [about] self-reliance, among [them], their family, and [their] community. We need to focus on barriers that inhibit her from being successful—in her head, in her home, community, in institutions—and impact measurement of these factors in these spaces is essential.''
-National NGO Staff, India.

Tools: Collaborating with women's cooperatives, women-led forums, giving out small-business loans, investing in female literacy programs, encouraging women to set up self-help groups, micro-financing, skills programs, funding adult education programs, etc.

Example:

The Microfund for Women is an NGO based in Amman, Jordan, that provides women, especially those living in poverty, as well as Syrian refugees in the country, with both financial and non-financial support to start their own businesses. They offer women loans and partner with educational institutes and various tech companies to provide women entrepreneurs with a wide range of customized non-financial services, including educational courses and e-learning programs. In order to reach women who need their services the most, the organization has set up remote offices in most areas across Jordan and have helped women start their own businesses from their homes with the skills they already had, such as craft stores and home cooking.

Similarly, Fondo Semillas, an NGO based in Mexico, encourages women to identify the problems they face and provide solutions on their own or in consultation with a group of women facing similar issues. They then provide these women with small funds, capacity-building support, and alliance-building training, especially in areas of donors and strategic network building.

PATHWAY 4

Refocus the Funding Mechanism of the Sector on Affected Communities

1. Change the way funding is allocated

International actors should play only a facilitative role, focused on light-touch coordination. When supporting feminist place-based actors, donor funding should be for movements, leaders, and organizations, not projects, and should be flexible and long term. It should be aimed at helping organizations grow and amplify their voices, not deliver on specific outcomes.

Feminist place-based actors should identify and receive funding for their priorities, which are driven by existing local capacities and competencies, rather than being defined in terms of needs or deficiencies. Programs must build on existing community cohesion and capacity, governance structures, markets, and service delivery mechanisms. Feminist place-based actors often have a greater capacity to influence change. They play various roles, from humanitarian responders to local mediators. INGOs and donors should use codesign processes with feminist PBAs when identifying their priorities and when making decisions on responding to crises.

At its root, funding decisions are largely driven by donors and INGOs controlling for risk. The drive towards localization has not come with the requisite shift in conceptualizing and controlling for risk among entities that fund humanitarian response. The due diligence processes that are put into place to control for risk serve as a barrier to getting resources to feminist movements and place-based actors. We need to re-conceptualize risk to include the risk of funding INGOs, of NOT funding feminist place-based actors, and the risk from the perspective of feminist PBAs for receiving funding from actors whose processes and priorities undermine their work.

"The issue of accessing donors' grants is as challenging as dealing with their funding conditions as NGOs often have to shift their interventions to suit donor priorities."
- Women, Law and Development Initiative Africa (WOLDI) FHN Nigeria

"If we are engaging with partners on these short-term three-, six-

month contracts... It is not meaningful engagement in any way, it really ends up being more like a supplier... It is not going to really make any type of impact and movement toward the whole localization agenda."
- KII-INGO

"We are mediators, we need communities, it's an ecosystem. It shouldn't be a top down approach. There's usually no negotiation and we have to accept the conditions. It dictates the tone of the partnership."
- Place-based NGO, Kenya

Tools: Direct funding, organization-based funding, including women and place-based NGOs in programming and design of grants

2. Build on and create new and alternative funding structures

In the recent COVID-19 crisis, we have seen the impact that citizen-led funding and mutual aid can have on the way aid is delivered. Mutual aid breaks down geographical silos, providing instead online proximity to causes that people care about. Feminist place-based actors focus on and harness community relations in times of crisis to help those most in need.

"We are trying to shift the paradigm with relatively few resources when we rely on multilateral organizations and philanthropy. The reality is that these resources are drops in the ocean—we need to explore how to overcome important gaps in national budgets. Look at where the money lies, and where the biggest pools are."
- Place-based Womens' Rights Actor

Example:

'In 2016, we were collecting evidence for elimination of discrimination against women, but the Kenya report did not have anything in that regard. We came together with [other local] organizations to collect evidence for the same. We got support from CREA, an Indian organization. The agreement was that the work would be led by us, and they were just supporting us where we said we needed support. But work with reporting, data collection, and advocacy was done by local organizations that had a real understanding [of the context]. It was incredibly successful. Responses can be led by community and local organizations after all.''

- **Feminist placed-based Actor, Kenya**

Tools: Mutual aid platforms, social media fundraising, crowdsourcing, use of innovative technology, creating partnerships across sectors, etc.

Example:

ACT is a social change movement for the startup ecosystem in India. It enables change makers to give their time, talent, and resources to mobilize solutions that address societal problems at scale. They give out grants and invest in social enterprises that have plans to solve some of the most complex problems in India. ACT started as a response to fight COVID-19 and has now expanded its mandate to cover healthcare, education, environment, and women's participation in the workforce.

Another way to help affected communities is by partnering with innovative tech companies that are seeking partners in the humanitarian sector. The Samburu Project in northern Kenya has teamed up with an app called CoinUp that rounds off transactions made by its users to the nearest dollar and donates the rest to the NGO. Users can pick the causes they like to support and pick specific organizations they wish to donate to. This ensures a reliable stream of contributions every month for organizations.

04

Conclusion/ Way Forward

This paper analyzes, synthesizes, and builds on the work of many in suggesting how we can move forward in creating a more equitable and transformative engagement with humanitarian crises and need. This is relevant to both to unprecedented global humanitarian need, as well as to the well acknowledged crises of the humanitarian system itself not being fit for purpose.

We highlight and build on the calls for a feminist response as well as suggest what can be considered a place-based response, reconceptualizing the localization agenda with a more feminist frame. We know that local does not equal equitable, and we know that feminist does not equal local. By breaking down the components of feminist and place-based humanitarian response and engagement we hope to identify

the ways in which different sets of actors can concretely engage with the systems, values, capacities, resources, and processes that exist in order to transform them. This, admittedly, requires the critical component of political will and effective tactics to shift power in multiple and intersecting systems of foreign aid, national governments, the private sector, and civil society. Thus, we end on a note of collective action.

This paper, which has built on the work of so many seeking equity and justice in humanitarian work globally, is being brought into a critical global collective for feminist transformation of humanitarianism, the Feminist Humanitarian Network, whose work has served as part of the foundation for this paper. There, we as a collective will join with allies to move this work forward.

05

Annexure

Process Map

The process includes a literature review, and consultations with experts, researchers, and practitioners. The deliverables/outputs include an engaging and evidence-based report drawing together experiences from across the globe as well as a framework of actions and strategies to realize feminist and place-based approaches.

1. Literature Review

The literature review maps the evidence of where feminist strategies have been employed for work on crises and forced displacement. It outlines feminist frameworks, critiques of localization, and alternative humanitarian models.

2. Research Framework

The framework identifies core themes central to the inquiry by synthesizing the research gathered through literature review.

3. Consultations and Interviews

We conducted multiple consultations with the Women's Refugee Commission's Core Working Group members, as well as the Steering and Advocacy Committee members of the Feminist Humanitarian Network, for multiple consultations and workshops in order to co-create and envision a feminist and place-based future for the humanitarian sector.

4. Synthesis

The synthesis involved mapping the research framework with the findings from the consultations. The problem areas and gaps identified in the framework were resolved by suggesting strategies and competencies. The research incorporated stories and findings from other reports like the FHN country reports, previous WRCreports, and the Oxfam research documents, to further support these suggestions.

Literature Review

What did we do?

For the purpose of this inquiry, we focused on studying the state of the humanitarian sector as it stands now, its shortcomings, and what place-based actors and women's rights organizations are doing to push responses to crisis and forced displacement in order to make them more accountable to affected communities, especially women. We also summarized, collated, and synthesized information gathered from various secondary resources. The following are some of the important documents this work focuses on:

1. White Paper on "Gender-Transformative Change in Humanitarian Work," Women's Refugee Commission
2. UNRISD paper on importance of intersectionality
3. FHN country reports for COVID-19 Response
4. The Sensemaking research paper by the Core Working Group
5. A Feminist Approach to Localization: Oxfam Canada Report
6. ODI research papers
7. Reports from the New Humanitarian journal

Research Framework

What were the tools?

We used design thinking and analysis tools such as affinity mapping and system mapping, to identify and situate important actors, their actions, and the competencies they need to build in order to reach a feminist, place- based humanitarian system.

What was the outcome?

We created a research framework that focused on the current humanitarian system and the future humanitarian system to which we aspire. The framework proposed actionable pathways of change and solutions to current problems that the humanitarian sector faces when it comes to women's leadership, intersectionality, and funding, as well as the most recognized actors in the sector today. We used the information received through the workshops, consultations, and individual interviews to inform the final outcome.

Consultations and Individual Interviews

What did we do?

We conducted a consultation workshop, prior to which participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire asking them about their optimism/pessimism when it comes to where the humanitarian sector stands today and about their level of enthusiasm for change in the future.

For the individual interviews, we spoke with the Core Working Group members, as well as the Feminist Humanitarian Network Steering and Advocacy Committee and organizations associated with this project. Each interview lasted for about 60 minutes and focused on themes of shifting power within the humanitarian system, challenging existing norms and building synergies of importance. We also asked those interviewed about their hopes for the future of the sector and the changes they want to see.

What were the tools?

The interviews acted as a contextual inquiry into the success stories and the challenges respondents face in their work on a daily basis. Questions were also asked about their ideas of the future of the humanitarian sector and ideal scenarios that can help in speculating a map of the future.

What was the outcome?

Learning about the challenges and problems that the place-based actors face was the primary outcome.

The capacities and "super-powers" that local actors can leverage in order to change the narratives around knowledge, funding, and intersectionalities within the sector were also identified.

We also created a map of the kind of outcomes participants hoped to get from this inquiry as a whole, choosing to either be critical or inspirational in tone and theoretical or practical in application.

Co-creation

What did we do?

By using the method of co-creation we designed the system map of the humanitarian sector.

Participants were asked to articulate problems and solutions by adding suggestions and experiences under the provocations/ prompts provided to them.

What were the tools?

As a part of the co-creation workshops, we introduced the participants to different crisis scenarios and asked them to identify important actors and their actions in such scenarios. We tried to understand through this exercise the importance of actors, the actions they take, and the competencies that need to be built in order to transform practices in the humanitarian system. We also used blank ecosystem maps with actors, values, and actions as provocations/ prompts to get the participants to offer their inputs on them.

What was the outcome?

As part of this exercise, we were able to gain the following information:

1. The challenges and problems that the place-based actors face
2. The strategies for effecting the theory of change and creating cultures of accountability
3. The competencies that are needed to effect the change.

Abbreviations

CSO Civil Society Organization

CWG Core Working Group

FHN Feminist Humanitarian Network

INGO International Nongovernmental Organization

PBA Place-Based Actor

WRC Women's Refugee Commission

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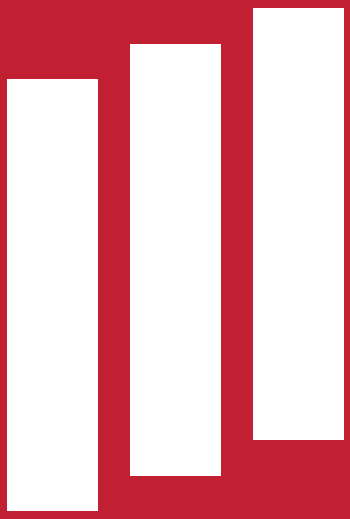

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