

Caritas Internationalis: A Faith-based Perspective for the World Humanitarian Summit

Caritas Internationalis is a Confederation of 165 Catholic Church-related humanitarian, health and social service, and development organizations, with a moral mandate to respond to humanitarian and other human needs without distinction as to origin, nationality, creed or sex. Caritas plays a pivotal role in humanitarian emergencies and social development. As part of the Catholic Church, Caritas, which is present in nearly 200 countries and territories around the world, has dynamically adopted people-centered initiatives to bring about change in the lives of affected and at risk communities.

Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, Caritas Internationalis maintains humanitarian relief and protection of the most vulnerable at the heart of its action. Our members on the ground and the local Church are unique actors in the humanitarian community in that they are rooted in the local community reaching out to people in the most remote parts of the world. Caritas Internationalis supports and promotes the international humanitarian principles and standards in conformity with international humanitarian law.

In preparation for the Summit, the Caritas Confederation offers these perspectives and recommendation to present the challenges with which we are confronted and to highlight the contribution of faith-based organisations in ensuring a better response to future emergencies.

The Caritas Confederation welcomes the World Humanitarian Summit as an opportunity to reflect on our collective contribution to humanitarian work across the world. In the spirit of collaboration, we acknowledge that there is much to strengthen and improve in this field, especially with regard to how we support and respond, with dignity and respect, to those in need and that greater political will is required to halt conflicts and to prevent other humanitarian crises.

WHS Theme: Humanitarian Effectiveness

Recognize, Value and Support Local Organizations in Humanitarian Response

Local organizations are the first responders in emergencies, and religious institutions are often the first place of refuge in a crisis. With a significant capacity to mobilize people, this response is driven by solidarity, compassion and a deep understanding of local context. At the same time, these first responders may also be directly affected themselves and very often experience significant financial limitations. They continue to provide vital support, responding in a variety of important and undervalued ways – addressing spiritual and psychosocial needs, physical and material needs of critical cases that come to their attention, supporting the response of other humanitarian actors by negotiating and securing access, conducting needs assessments, facilitating distributions and often taking the role of the main local interlocutor. There is much to gain from recognising and supporting capacities of local organisations as they are the first line responders, as well as improving engagement and cooperation between international actors and local responders.

According to Catholic Social Teaching, the principle of subsidiarity is based on the autonomy and dignity of the human person. It stipulates that decisions should be made at the lowest level possible and the highest level necessary.

In practice, however, local organizations are often bypassed upon the arrival of international responders, side-lined from being able to access funding, and their role is reduced to one of the service providers for international organisations. “Criteria for establishing eligibility for funding have become highly formalised and many donors have increasingly looked to reduce their number of partnerships,

increase the size of grants, and transfer responsibilities for monitoring, demonstrating results and accountability to funding recipients.¹ Complex requirements and sophisticated tools requested by donors, as well as a limited capacity to absorb large amounts of funding, may discourage and exclude local organizations from accessing humanitarian funding. Local organizations express the concern that too much focus on numbers and targets for registration in sophisticated reporting mechanisms poses a risk that the human needs and dignity of affected populations will be neglected or denied.

- **Specific Recommendation:** Donors, international organizations and NGOs should strengthen collaboration with and support local organizations to carry out humanitarian response. They should reconsider exclusionary selection criteria, simplify reporting tools and procedures to access funding, and, whenever possible avoid duplicative reporting requirements. Financial support should be accompanied by capacity strengthening based on the needs of the respective local organization.

Caritas has robust experience in effectively responding to humanitarian crises – bringing both local and international resources to bear. Local knowledge, presence and the ability to mobilize on the ground combined with specialized expertise and access to international resources, make the Caritas network a model of good practice in implementing the principle of subsidiarity.

In 2014, Caritas established Management Standards that are effective for every member organization, large or small. These standards help member organizations to identify their capacity strengthening needs and act as a springboard for improvement. In addition, a Caritas Internationalis Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct for Staff are in place. Caritas is committed to investing in continuous development of professionalism and effectiveness. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est*, in addition to serving as a “heart that sees,” Caritas should maintain professional competence as “a primary, fundamental requirement” and thus be able to offer sincere, heartfelt concern to one’s neighbour as an expression of faith.²

At the start of the crisis in Syria, Caritas Syria was a small organisation, undertaking high quality development programs, but with limited experience in emergency response. With support from the Caritas network for capacity building and coordination, Caritas Syria developed strong local leadership in six regions of the country and thus transformed the organisation to respond professionally and competently to the diverse needs of women, girls, boys and men across faith communities and across conflict lines.

Caritas Commitment: Caritas Internationalis members will continue to strengthen our model of local/international cooperation and partnership in humanitarian response - subsidiarity in action.

¹ Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in national NGO response capacity, CAFOD, July 2014, p. 14.

² http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deucaritas-est.html

WHS Theme: Reducing Vulnerability and Managing Risk

Address vulnerability and restore the resilience of people

The humanitarian community – donors and responders – has a poor record of responding to early signs of potential crises. There is a similar tendency to quickly move on once the greatest immediate threats have been addressed. This short-term perspective and engagement undoubtedly saves lives. However, additional long-term suffering may not be prevented and the livelihoods of people may not be sufficiently restored to reduce vulnerability to future shocks.

Caritas Bangladesh has invested with vulnerable communities to develop infrastructure and capacities to reduce risk to disaster. Community participation and ownership is built through extensive dialogue and in-kind and cash contributions, ensuring the long-term maintenance of the facilities and capacity at community level. When disaster strikes, the 5000 staff members of Caritas Bangladesh are ready to support community-based responses and continue their engagement until livelihoods are restored.

The governments of many countries are slow to commit to development of an effective and comprehensive disaster management system. Reasons for this include a lack of government leadership, minimal popular support for changes, undervaluing of popular will, and a lack of national expertise on the issues.³

Humanitarian actors must take a broader view – identifying and addressing vulnerability through investments in disaster risk reduction through accompaniment of vulnerable and/or affected people as they strive to build resilience.

- **Specific Recommendation:**
Donors should provide early and sustained support in areas affected by natural disasters, aiming to reduce disaster risk before emergencies strike and to restore people to independent livelihoods after the immediate disaster.
- **Specific Recommendation:**
National governments should take the lead in developing and adequately

During 2014 and 2015, at the request of its national member organizations in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, Caritas Internationalis quickly mobilized a response to the epidemic of Ebola Viral Disease in Coastal West Africa. It launched five Emergency Appeals for financial and technical assistance support for programmes focusing on social education and mobilization in order to reduce the risk of more widespread communities; Caritas member organizations partnered mainly with local faith communities of various religious traditions to deliver these services. These same groups provided emergency food and other needed goods to families in 21-day quarantine, assisted families who lost loved ones to the disease, provided temporary shelter and support to children orphaned due to the Ebola deaths of parents, worked to reintegrate Ebola survivors in their local communities, and offered education to combat stigma and discrimination. At the global level, Caritas prepared a Briefing Note for all Confederation members in order to facilitate further mobilization in the event of Ebola outbreaks elsewhere. Finally, Caritas worked closely with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to set into a motion an Ebola Response Plan, as requested by Pope Francis, to strengthen Catholic health, social service, and spiritual care systems in to be better prepared for future health emergencies.

³ Harkey, Jeremy; Experiences of National Governments in Expanding Their Role in Humanitarian Preparedness and Response, p. 6; http://fic.tufts.edu/assets/TUFTS_13118_Humanitarian_response_V3print.pdf

funding disaster preparedness and risk reduction policies and committing to emergency preparedness plans to which the international community can contribute and engage.

- ***Caritas Commitment:*** Caritas' commitment to reduce the impact of humanitarian crises by enhancing disaster preparedness and response is articulated in its Strategic Framework (2015 – 2019).

WHS Theme: Serving the needs of people in conflict

The Important contributions made by FBOs (faith-based organisations) and religious leaders

Catholic Church-inspired organizations, and many other FBOs, have an enduring presence; they are indigenous entities, integrated in communities and provide social services as well as health care and education. They are trusted in their communities, provide leadership, guidance and mediation through existing systems (including, but not limited to, religious services and spiritual care), speak to communities about important issues, and serve based on need rather than creed. These organizations have a deep understanding of attitudes and practices among the local population and insights into their needs from a holistic perspective. FBOs make an important contribution to analysing needs and formulating responses; facilitate dialogue between various responders and affected communities; and enhance/protect civil society space.

Catholic Church-inspired organizations are often perceived by other humanitarian actors to insufficiently adhere to the humanitarian principle of impartiality. However the Catholic values strongly promote the commitment to serve all in need (all faiths and none), which is broadly practiced within the Caritas network.

In Central African Republic, the Interfaith Peace Platform founded by H.E. Mgr Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Pastor Nicolas Guérékoyamé-Gbangou and Imam Oumar Kobine Layama promotes reconciliation and dialogue between Christians and Muslims to avoid further violence and revenge between religious communities in CAR. They were instrumental in the opening of churches and mosques to provide protection and shelter to thousands of internally displaced women, girls, boys and men irrespective of their religious faith and the leaders regularly travel together to remote areas of the country to preach reconciliation, often at high personal risk. Their activities have been replicated in different parts of the country with the establishment of local Interfaith Peace

In general, religious leaders are highly respected, regardless of their faith affiliation, and are trusted by the affected population.⁴ They can positively influence the perspectives and motivate behaviour of local actors through their religious functions as well as social mechanisms.

⁴ On an exceptional basis, this respect and credibility may be compromised when conflicts are fueled by religious conflict.

By joining together across faiths, traditions and structures, religious leaders can impact safety and security and bring international attention and understanding to issues driving conflict. The potential of religious leaders to provide protection and mitigate conflict is often overlooked by the international humanitarian community.

- ***Specific Recommendation:***

The role of faith-based organisations and religious leaders in disaster preparedness and in response to humanitarian crises should

be re-affirmed during the WHS process. Governments, multi-lateral organizations, and other humanitarian actors should take this into account in follow-up actions after the Summit event.

- ***Caritas Commitment:*** Caritas will continue to support Catholic leaders to engage on conflict issues and promote inter-faith collaboration where it can increase protection of people affected by conflict.
- ***Caritas Commitment:*** Caritas commits to continue its promotion and application of humanitarian principles, especially since they are coherent with the body of Catholic Social Teaching that serves as the basis of Caritas' mission and action in the humanitarian field.

Ukraine is in the midst of the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II with 1,5 million IDP's and an additional 1 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

Caritas Ukraine immediately responded to the crisis and has been implementing a series of humanitarian assistance efforts over the past 2 years. The number of staff and local organizations in the regions has grown two-fold and as a result, Caritas Ukraine is able to access hard-to-reach areas, bringing greatly needed assistance to the most vulnerable.

These crisis-response projects cover a wide geographic area across the country and include food/NFI assistance, psychosocial counseling, medical care, and shelter repair work.

Caritas is an active, highly visible participant in the humanitarian aid community in Ukraine, covering a wide spectrum of coordination and strategy-development efforts, and is a member of the Humanitarian Country Team.