Open Doors

THE FAITH FACTOR

A GLOBAL STUDY

Faith Actors' Engagement in Post-Conflict Development Programs:

- New Hope Trauma Center, Iraq
- Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization, Iraq
- Shalom Trauma Center, Nigeria
- Legal Assistance Project, Mexico
- Cow Bank Project, Vietnam

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Introduction

This study aims to explore the benefits and challenges of faith actors' engagement in holistic community development and recovery in four different regions of the world. Case studies of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Iraq, Nigeria, Mexico and Vietnam offer insights into the comparative effectiveness and limitations of similarly situated faith actors in relief and development programs. It expands on a previous study of two FBOs in the Nineveh Plains region of Iraq engaged in post-conflict development work. This study draws on insight from the example of those organizations along with three new case studies to position the work of small grassroots FBOs within the wider humanitarian and development space, to identify their unique and most significant contributions and how those can be best capitalized upon by the wider development and humanitarian communities.

Currently, the global humanitarian system invests relatively little in local partnerships, and even less in local faith-based partners. International donors and those aid providers with a seat at influential policy tables[1] have historically done little to consider the ongoing presence and extensive activity of local actors. The Grand Bargain process emerging from the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 set as a target that 25% of humanitarian funding go "as directly as possible" to local organizations[2], but the complexities of what this actually means in practice and how best to work with local organizations has slowed progress toward this goal. However, a recent study on humanitarian financing finds that only 1-2% of total assistance comes from humanitarian financing, and local systems already exist which are positioned to aid and in fact lead on humanitarian efforts[3]. The international community has struggled to come to understand the scope and scale of the existing local engagement[4].

This is particularly noteworthy when it comes to the extensive role played by faith-based organizations. Faith-based giving, channelled directly to FBOs and through informal religious networks, is likely half or more of total assistance channeled to crisis-affected communities[5]. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that faith-based actors may be more cost-efficient as they can rely on existing resources including facilities, volunteer networks and local relationships to streamline their assistance[6]. There is therefore an urgent need to better understand the expertise, contribution and capacities of local faith-based aid providers in order to better situate efforts of humanitarians, development agencies and policymakers within existing aid structures.

The central research question which this study seeks to answer, therefore, is: *What value-add and challenges do local faith actors present to global humanitarian and development priorities?*[7] This question is addressed through an analysis shaped by current debates on localization and faith-based humanitarianism, drawing its structure from the concepts as developed in the Humanitarian Policy Group series "Understanding Local Response in Crises"[8], which sought to re-conceptualize the theme of localization from the perspective of local organizations and communities. Based on their analysis the following sub-questions have been posed:

1. What is the unique benefit of the organization's grassroots nature? (i.e. to what extent do they do the same job as international aid providers well, and to what extent do they change the job?)
2. Who values what in the organization's work? (so what do they offer that is rarely found elsewhere?)
3. What is the organization's existing and ideal sphere of influence? (and what is their actual interest in contributing to international humanitarian objectives?)
4. What challenges or disadvantages do LFAs present to achieving international development or humanitarian objectives?

Methodology

In the first phase of the research, two Iraqi faith-based organizations were selected to be profiled for the study, for the following specific reasons:

- They are church-based Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which have their origins in local church structures.
- They have a diversity of funding sources, mostly through faith-based networks, and are recognized by at least one existing donor as having strong administrative and management systems that would be capable of handling institutional grants.
- They have strong ties to their local communities and claim grassroots community ownership.

An interview guide was developed, and a set of interviewees identified who could give information to build a picture of the organizations' activities and roles. Due to travel constraints

[1] Including state funding mechanisms such as USAID or the EU, or international organizations such as the United Nations system

[2] World Humanitarian Summit 2016

[3] USAID 2014

[4] Barbelet 2018, p.6

[5] Willitts-King et al 2019

[6] Kraft and Smith 2018

[7] The research questions in the original study were slightly different, but were revised to bring this study a global focus in multiple regions in the world, and to reflect the fact that the case studies in the three added regions were more project-based and therefore less likely to attract direct funding from international humanitarian agencies

[8] HPG Integrated Programme 2017–19: understanding local response in crises, see https://www.odi.org/projects/2870-hpg-integrated-programme-2017-19-understanding-local-response-crises

during COVID-19, the research was conducted by a London-based consultant using online technology for the interviews (mostly BlueJeans, and some interviews over WhatsApp when connections were more challenging). Semi-structured interviews (guides in Annex) ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, with most being under just one hour in duration, during August-September 2020. Most interviews were in Arabic, except for six which were conducted in English. In addition to interviews to develop the case studies, four interviews were conducted with stakeholders who could comment on the wider Iraqi humanitarian context, programmatic needs and the role of organizations such as these. Interviews were not recorded, rather English-language transcripts were reconstructed after the interviews based on detailed notes; therefore, quotes may be conceived as paraphrased.

Then, one year later, in order to study this topic from a global perspective, three different countries in different regions of the world, with different religious compositions, were identified. Within each country, a local initiative was identified which is led and managed by a local faith actor. The three initiatives fit an overlapping yet distinct set of criteria, including:

- They address a niche social need
- They exist to simultaneously support a Christian minority group and to support the flourishing of the wider community
- They have been operational for approximately five years (as is also true for the Iraq cases).

They are funded primarily through international faith-based networks with a small number of staff and high reliance on volunteers.

Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions as well as to ensure local contextual sensitivity, the lead researcher trained local research assistants (RAs) in each of the three countries to collect primary data collection. Training was conducted over MS Teams. The lead researcher spoke with one or two key personnel involved in the projects but with a national or regional perspective, while all interviews at the local/project level were conducted by the RAs. The RAs were trained simultaneously[9] by the lead researcher so that in all three countries the same approach would be taken, and the RAs could share ideas and learning with one another throughout the project. The criteria for RA selection was that they be respected by the local community where the LFA operates, that they not be directly involved in the project, and that they be able to communicate in both English and the relevant local languages.

The interview guide (in Annex) developed was tweaked slightly from the study in Iraq. Modifications were minor so as to ensure comparability. However, the three cases profiled in this study are smaller, with more niche programming, and with services tailored to a more specific Christian minority group, so the research question and interview guide needed to be adapted to use more language and questions appropriate to a religious ministry context, and less tailored to the language of international humanitarianism.

Interviews were conducted in the language of the interviewees' preference. They were recorded, then transcribed to English. Transcripts were analyzed by the lead researcher using NVIVO, followed by critical reflection discussions about the results with the RAs to minimize opportunities for misunderstanding or incorrect interpretations to arise. In total, the following number of interviews were conducted:

- **Iraq** (covering two organizations)
  - 4 regional stakeholders including international NGO representatives
  - 4 community stakeholders
  - 5 decision-makers for the local NGOs (3 were founding members who will be named below, the other two were senior staff)
  - 6 implementing staff and volunteers
  - 5 participants in the LFAs' programs at the community level
- **Nigeria**
  - 2 decision makers/project leads
  - 8 implementing staff or volunteers
  - 4 stakeholders
  - 4 recipients of services
- **Mexico**
  - 3 decision makers, one of which was the founder but is no longer involved
  - 3 implementing staff or volunteers
  - 2 stakeholders
  - 4 recipient interviews, two of whom were with a husband/wife jointly
- **Vietnam**
  - 3 decision makers
  - 2 implementing volunteers
  - 3 stakeholders
  - 3 recipients of services

The following sections offer a description of the five profiled cases.

New Hope Trauma Center, Iraq

Established in 2015, New Hope Trauma Center (NHTC) was founded under the patronage of the Chaldean Church in Iraq and under the umbrella of St. Rita Hands of Hope, a U.S. non-profit. It was co-founded by Fr. Aram Qia, a Chaldean priest who is native to al-Qosh, and Jihan Daman, also from al-Qosh who resettled in the United States as a teenager, where she is

[9] In Mexico, a second RA joined the team after the training, but in addition to an orientation with the lead research and the RA, watched recordings of the full training sessions

now a qualified social worker. Fr. Aram and Jihan's partnership began when providing emergency material assistance to families displaced by ISIS, but they identified through their friendship a mutual passion for addressing the deeper and emotional needs of their community following the recent history of traumatic events which shook all of Iraqi society.

NHTC offers a diversity of educational, cultural and social activities tailored to different ages and life stages, designed to give holistic psychosocial care that addresses individuals' psychological scars in a culturally sensitive and communal way. It is both a social center and a trauma care center, running mainly group activities which create a safe space in which personal, emotional and psychological issues can be discussed. NHTC has a mandate not only to offer psychosocial and trauma care, but also to bring dialogue about trauma and psychosocial needs out into the open in Iraqi society, where there is still considerable stigma about psychosocial needs. The center is also highly committed to engaging with the spiritual side of the psyche, using biblical Scripture and spiritual disciplines as tools for addressing trauma and emotional weariness.

Fr. Aram is a parish priest in a nearby town but originally from al-Qosh, where the center's main operations are based; most of the staff are also local to al-Qosh. NHTC has two facilities, but offers activities in many of the surrounding towns and villages. In total, they have supported well over 2,000 people with psycho-social services.

All staff and stakeholders described the center as deeply embedded in the community, as needs-responsive, as doing something meaningful for people's lives which transcends the simple outputs of the activities which they organize, and which promotes people's human dignity by helping them to be self-reliant through mental health.

Humanitarian Nineveh Relief Organization, Iraq

Humanitarian Nineveh Relief Organization (HNRO) began as a health clinic to serve displaced people fleeing ISIS-controlled regions of northern Iraq, with services in Erbil and its Christian suburb Ainkawa. It was born in the early days of displacement after a priest from the affected area who was serving in Ainkawa came across a woman seeking medical help for her child and was able to identify a doctor who could help from among the displaced. This initial connection led to the identification of more volunteer doctors, which then drew a large number of requests for medical care from other families in the ad hoc camp. A tent was erected, out of which a clinic operated, which soon grew into a charity with two established medical clinics. Even though it was founded by a priest, Fr Behnam Benoka, and it operates as a charitable extension of the church, from the beginning HNRO's mandate has been to serve the needy and vulnerable without any discrimination.

In 2017, when people began to return to areas freed from ISIS, HNRO's staff and projects also transitioned back to the town of Bartallah, where Fr Behnam was reassigned as parish priest. In collaboration with the church, HNRO supported the reconstruction of homes and businesses, opened a new health clinic, and began to organize a range of other services. They offer extensive livelihood skills training and small start-up grants to local businesses, and they run a legal clinic whose focus is on educating and offering individualized services to Christians. The legal clinic aspires to play a role in advocacy on minority rights in Iraq. HNRO has also mounted large-scale food and non-food distributions.

Though based in Bartallah, HNRO also arranges activities in surrounding areas, often in collaboration with the local churches in other villages. They have kept their doors open by diversifying their funding. During its early years when serving displaced people, HNRO had some large grants from international Christian donors, but now it operates through several small grants, many of which are activity-based, from a large number of donors, still mostly Christian. They have also recently obtained funding for one activity through USAID as a part of the COVID-19 emergency response to distribute food in the community.

HNRO is known for supporting people's dignity by helping them to restore their livelihoods as well as meeting urgent material needs, most notably the need for affordable healthcare in a context where no one has access to health insurance. In a community where level of trust for the government is low, many people look to them – as an arm of the church – to be the main service provider meeting people's needs through a range of activities. They are proud of their testimony as Christians in helping the needy and vulnerable regardless of religious sect or group identity.

Shalom Trauma Center, Nigeria

Founded as a project in 2014, and officially opening its facility doors in 2019, Shalom Trauma Center operates as a hub for a variety of psychosocial services for Christians affected by violence in Northern and Central Nigeria. The center itself hosts residential retreats for severely traumatized individuals referred to the center by local churches: the retreats are for early recovery, and then for follow-up and resilience-building exercises on average one to two months after the first visit. During these week-long events, individuals referred to by center staff as 'survivors' receive a variety of psychosocial services, participate in group activities, and are encouraged to simply rest in a safe haven environment.

Other services organized by Shalom are offered through an extensive and growing network of churches and trained church members, referred to as 'caregivers', throughout the country. Staff have trained dozens of pastors and 150 church members as caregivers, with meetings and refresher training happening two to three times each year. These individuals are trained to offer psychosocial support to people in their communities, identify severe cases for referral, and raise awareness about trauma and mental health more generally. Shalom staff and volunteers also visit affected communities in the immediate aftermath of violence to offer psychological first aid.

Finally, Shalom is active in raising awareness about trauma and mental health needs resulting from violence, and the subsequent fall-out on community resilience and economic development. They lead sessions in theological institutions and with healthcare providers, and engage with NGOs and local government to build a dialogue around restoring community resilience in violence-affected communities.

Shalom Trauma Center has national leadership and a strong network in Nigeria of staff, volunteers and promoters, but receives no domestic funding and answers to the international leadership of a Christian NGO which helped found it and which continues to raise most of the funds for the Center.

Legal Assistance Project (LAP), Mexico

The Legal Assistance Project (LAP) began in 2016, as part of a strategic overhaul of the work of a Christian international NGO in Mexico. While the organization had been aware of religious tensions in the tribal mountainous regions of southern Mexico, they had previously only offered material aid and asylum to displaced Protestant Christian converts from Catholicism. However, the international leadership of the organization was encouraging local partners to plan and operate more strategically. In the context of Mexico, it was decided that legal assistance and advocacy for greater tolerance of religious converts in traditional communities was more strategic than aid which was more reactive in nature.

Many Christians in Mexico are unaware that violent religious conflict exists within their nation. However, there is a move across the country to religious conversion, largely out of Catholicism or Agnosticism, to Protestant and Evangelical denominations. In isolated rural areas, social life is built around the Catholic church, and such a move can be seen as quite socially disruptive. Therefore, in some communities, local leadership including but not limited to the Catholic Church, apply pressure on converts to either return to Catholicism or to at minimum continue participating in the festivals and activities of communal life. When converts refuse, they have at times been attacked with violence, imprisonment, or refusal of basic rights such as access to the electric grid or burial sites. Many families decide to flee their hometowns when this happens.

LAP therefore exists to offer not only legal assistance, but also grassroots advocacy, to these converts, as well as to support efforts at reconciliation between them and their local leaders. To support these objectives, a local team was established, comprised of a team leader and a team of three lawyers on retainer, one in each state where the project set its focus: Oaxaca, Chiapas and Hidalgo. Volunteers from churches in these three states were also mobilized to help identify cases of human rights abuse and help them access legal aid. Now, in the fifth year of the initiative, they are preparing to register as an independent legal not-for-profit entity.

The services provided by LAP center around identifying families or congregations that have suffered violations of their rights as a result of their exercise of their right to religious freedom. They then offer them legal services but focus on negotiation and reconciliation by engaging with local and state government, other local influencers (at times including possibly cartels and separatist militias), the Catholic church to find a mutually acceptable and sustainable solution. About two years after LAP began, the team found that the converts benefiting from legal assistance were sometimes aggravating the system through their expression of anger, frustration and desperation. The project, therefore, began investing heavily in training which includes a Biblical orientation to the concept of 'persecution', i.e. the idea that life on this earth is not meant to be easy and as good Christians they should seek to be a blessing to others in their community. They are rolling this training out not only to victims of rights violations, but also to Protestant Christian communities in areas where such issues may be likely to arise. More recently, a local government office in one of the states where LAP operates has adapted the training curriculum to remove religious language, and is training other citizens in communities where there are social tensions.

Cow Bank Project, Vietnam

The Cow Bank Project, which launched in 2016, operates under the auspices of a church denomination in Northern Vietnam and serves some of the most remote tribal communities in the Northern Vietnamese mountains. The project employs a simple microfinance group-loan model, whereby beneficiaries of the project are identified by other members of a community, specifically by church members affiliated with the denomination which manages the project.

Beneficiaries are given a breeding cow as a loan, and after a year they are expected to pay the loan back by returning the first year's offspring to the project, which in turn gives the cow to another beneficiary identified by the church. While the first recipients of a cow in a given community will be church members, the community is expected to identify non-church members to receive a significant portion of the second-generation cows. The cows are given alongside training on livestock care, and orientation on small enterprise management as beneficiaries consider building their flocks. This simple project has reached a relatively small number of people, but is regularly expanding, as it has been found to become sustainable within only a few years once families have bred a couple of generations of cows.

1 What is the unique benefit of the organisation's grassroots nature?

There is no single clear definition of what constitutes a Local Faith Actor. However, these five cases were all established in response to specific needs in a community affected by conflict or ongoing social tensions and are largely staffed by individuals who live in the affected community. They maintain strong ties to local churches which are established, in their own right, within their communities. All these LFAs have ties to the international community and receive at least some international funding, though, which some may postulate compromises their local grassroots nature. However, the literature on localization captures the complexities of defining "local" and rather suggests that it is more relevant to consider how their local positioning equips them uniquely and effectively to operate.

Affinity: Integrated into the local community

Local Faith Actors are often perceived as having greater affinity with the affected community because they are native and well-known, so they can express their faith motivation in a way that is contextually relevant. Various recent studies have suggested that local groups are more accepted and able to engage in dialogue with community members because of their faith affiliation, even those that do not explicitly describe themselves as faith-based[10]. However, the HPG research on localization suggested that this affinity cannot be assumed simply because an organization shares a religious affinity with the affected population and has a local presence. "Local is inherently relative – in relation to who, what or where. 'Local' may be about geography, networks, relationships or affinities, but these categories hide multiple complexities and do not provide neat distinctions."[11] There are also different ways in which affinity may or may not facilitate aid delivery or acceptance. Therefore, rather than simply querying whether these organizations have a greater affinity with the local community because of their faith and geographical presence, this study sought to explore what exactly is the nature of their affinity.

New Hope Trauma Center

Both of NHTC's founders are native to the town where it is based. The fact that they are known local entities was as important as their familiarity with the community and its needs, and certainly facilitated their acceptance, particularly in the early days. NHTC would like to expand its services to other towns and regions of Iraq, where it will not have this advantage, but senior staff suggested that they could ensure similarly 'native' status by working with people local to other towns when establishing new centers.

"We were able to get started easily because we earned people's trust very quickly, mainly because Fr Aram is known and respected, but also because people know who my family is. This was especially true in al-Qosh. It would take so many more resources to work somewhere like Dohok or Erbil." – Decision-maker

It was, however, challenging for NHTC to gain appreciation for their goals in its early days. The concept of psychosocial care and in particular trauma are highly stigmatized in their community. The affinity the founders have with the local community began with their understanding of this fact and their determined, yet patient, approach to challenging the stigma in a culturally sensitive way.

The diversity, creativity and tailored nature of activities run by the center demonstrate how the center's staff, almost all of whom are native to the town, are in tune not only with the concept of psychosocial care but also with the needs and interests of community members. When introducing something innovative, staff lead by example, which is effective when community members know and trust them.

"Here, we have some traditions and I know them, but I also change some. In this society, if you are more than 18 years old, it is difficult for you to bike. But I led by example. I say that it helps strengthen the body, to eat healthy, to exercise – also psychological care, we need it all. In lockdown, day became night, and people became more stressed, and worried, and there was a rise in depression (used English word). So I said, you need to get out, get fresh air, have oxygen, and this will improve your mood... So now we are on the third group of girls getting out and biking. But I led by example. Then you see older people, too". – Implementer

The fact that the staff and volunteers are themselves community members meant that they could invest time in relationships with their beneficiaries, because in many cases their beneficiaries were also their friends or friends-of-friends. A significant amount of contact was maintained through Facebook friendships and groups, as well. This was not always true, in particular when NHTC organized activities in different villages, but this investment of time is a part of the organization's ethos, though it was not possible to verify the nature of their relationships and affinity in locations of operation outside of al-Qosh.

"The Center is a part of the community, so everyone knows each other. We know most people in al-Qosh, it's a small enough community. So the center is just a part of my network. I think this Center is closer to the community than other NGOs, because it is unique to al-Qosh, while other NGOs come from other regions or have offices in other places." – Community member

Community members also commented on their perception that NHTC was close to them, and that they did activities which were relevant. For some, that was integrally tied to NHTC's integration with the church and with Christianity, while for others it was an appreciation of the perceived relevance of the programs offered.

[10] Nakib and Ager 2015, p.7; Kraft and Smith 2018, p.3; Le Roux and Valencia 2020, p.239

[11] Fast and Bennett 2020, p.10

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

HNRO's founder and some of its key staff were displaced and returned to the town where it is now based, alongside the community it seeks to help. The fact that the organization was born in the displacement, and returned home with the returnees, is a key source of legitimacy as an organization deeply embedded in the community. Many people suggested that everyone in town probably knows at least someone who is associated with the NGO.

This sense of community belonging seemed to offer a deeper sense of meaning to the provision of aid, in that by helping others they were in fact helping themselves. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that, unlike NHTC, when asked about expanding, they seemed most interested in growing their services within the town.

The church was described as the vehicle through which HNRO was linked to the community and knew the needs of the community. HNRO's affiliation with the church is widely known even though it operates as a separate entity. Nonetheless, some community members see it as part and parcel of the church, and they see the church as the core institution of the community, arguably more so than the government. Thus, by seeing HNRO as church, they were seeing HNRO as a part of themselves.

"The church is very near to people – they know people's needs, of all types – they are with the people. The church is not just a religious institution but it's also a social institution." – Implementer

"In Iraq, we supported churches to do house reconstruction, they employed church members, the priests managed the projects, but it was the church that benefited and the church members whose houses were rebuilt." – Regional stakeholder

Some participants suggested that local parish priests in each village are the people most ready to report on what is needed in their village, and church councils play a key role in beneficiary selection, being entrusted to follow vulnerability criteria established by HNRO. Churches use their authority to ensure that the community accepts their choices. Finally, use of church facilities along with relationships with priests offer ready access to run legal awareness sessions, vocational training and other activities in many villages.

"What we do well is identify needs – even before people say what they need we see it and so we can address those needs quickly. This is our capacity... Our ability is to know – the church is the barometer of the community, and we get advice from the church." – Implementer

"What is good about HNRO is that it IS [Town]. To work here, I need to know the community." – Community member

For understanding the community needs, HNRO staff are themselves members of the community, for the most part native to Bartallah, and have their fingers on the pulse of who needs what and when. Individuals also know them so feel free to call them and share about their needs with them.

"People may come to us to request help, but they are more likely to call our staff directly, because they know us and we're all part of the community." – Implementer

"The NGO staff, I know them all because they are all local to the community – we all know each other. I have interacted with them in their NGO capacity now, because they have asked me for pictures of the receipts." – Community member

Shalom Trauma Center

Shalom Trauma Center had international origins, an idea first suggested by an international leader of a Christian NGO and operationalized through the secondment of a trauma expert from South Africa. However, these international stakeholders actively engaged with local Christians from the inception of the idea. Nigerian churches were consulted extensively, and local qualified staff identified in the very early days of the project to run it. Shalom's operating model is strongly reliant on a strong and extensive network of churches, and its connection to affected communities is through pastors and, in turn, their congregations, which are strongly embedded in communities affected by conflict. Shalom does not do its own community work, rather it is the pastors and caregivers in its network who offer community support.

"So, uhm all of our interventions are done through the church. So, if we are going to a community to do something, we will talk with the pastors, we will let them understand what we are doing, it is-until the pastors say that we can come." – Decision-maker[12]

Indeed, it was difficult to differentiate between a volunteer, a beneficiary and a stakeholder in Shalom center, because church pastors engage in all of these ways with the center. The center has some staff who are not church leaders and the most severely traumatized beneficiaries are not church leadership, but nonetheless it is church leaders who engage most with the center and transmit its values and model of care to affected communities. Stakeholders, beneficiaries and implementers interviewed were all similarly experienced and with similar types of qualification, usually including theological training.

Many pastors bring their wives, and they are always encouraged to identify a few key church members (according to set criteria given by Shalom) to be trained as caregivers. It is also through local networks that 'survivors' are identified and selected for the residential program; these networks of churches are supported by field coordinators who work for Shalom. There was evidence in the interviews that pastors who have participated are, in turn, sharing the messages learned in the training with the congregations and wider communities.

"Is not every church leader that has the opportunity to be trained like this so, we also actually go those communities and train some of them and-and through the healing group and training for them. And then to the very serious uhm situations like to those pastors or church leaders cannot handle they make referral to the center." – Implementer

[12] The reader may note that quotes from Iraq read in a smooth narrative, while quotes from Nigeria, Vietnam and Mexico read more as spoken word. This is due to a methodological difference. In Iraq, interviews were not recorded, rather transcripts were constructed by the researcher based on detailed notes taken in interviews, and thus are not a verbatim record of the interviews. In the other three countries, RAs recorded, transcribed and (in the cases of Vietnam and Mexico) translated interviews verbatim.

"Yes they are community members. They too they live in those communities. One of the guys said that they burnt his farm-his house, his house was burnt... so we work with churches so we get to hear uhm first hand, what is really happening at that time." – Implementer

This connection to the churches in turn becomes a springboard for relationship-building, and the center has become a sort of a hub for the gathering of a like-minded community of people committed to supporting the emotional resilience of affected Christians. In the interviews, there was frequent mention of family networks engaged with the center, for example a pastor's wife serving as a caregiver and his son helping with IT, or of security guards having previously participated in the residential program. This family feel lends the center a spirit of 'all hands on deck' in which everyone not only benefits but also contributes.

Such a family-oriented dynamic may be assumed to allow for preferential treatment for some families, however, the network built by Shalom all around the country and the diversity of church denominations which they engage helps ensure that they are able to reach a very large and geographically disperse cohort of affected families. In fact, there is some concern that staff and volunteers do not know their intended beneficiaries as intimately as they should, given the personalized type of care offered by the center.

"All mingle together. And we all eat together, we sleep together, we, every, once we are here we start everything together-together-together leave here you will know that, no-no-no, I am still a normal person, you are still a normal person." – Decision-maker

"I will tell them that they can call me at any time but they should not be offended if they call me, I will have to ask who is - Who they are? ... I used to tell them, see it is possible for me to meet with you people-you-you people somewhere and I will not be able to recognize you again, the reason is because we have done umm church work, so I have seen so many people, I don't know whether that is the reason why my memory is." – Implementer

The communal spirit of Shalom is likely a reflection of the fact that most of the care providers have themselves been a victim of violence or otherwise traumatized. Throughout the community of the center, there is a sense of shared experience and empathy for what the 'survivors' have experienced.

"I sat down one day and I realize that so many people are going through a similar pain I am going through and so, my first inclination was that, how can I help them? So, I got talking to my sister, my elder sister, she is married to a pastor. We were talking and she said, well, that sometimes God allow you to go through some pain so that you will be able to encourage some other people." – Implementer

"I think one of the areas which is very good, I have seen the issue of rape there, I have seen the issue of drug abuse, I have seen the issue of ummm domestic violence, I have also umm gone through that material of course I am still using that material now." – Stakeholder

The center, which is located on the outskirts of Jos, is clearly well embedded into its local community, hiring locally and relying on acceptance strategies for security rather than putting up walls of protection. However, some neighbors wondered if this adds to the risk such a center faces in the middle of a conflict-affected region and, in particular, whether greater isolation would allow the survivors maximum space and peace of mind to heal.

Legal Assistance Project

LAP serves as a bridge between different disparate communities in Mexico, not only between different factions of local communities in tension, but also connecting isolated mountainous communities to the more cosmopolitan communities and cultures of Mexico. The program addresses a silent issue that very few people in Mexico are aware of, and which indeed few people understand. As a Christian-dominant country, it is inconceivable to many Mexicans that religious tension and violations of religious freedom, to which Christians are the victims, is possible. Therefore, unlike the other projects studied in this research, LAP's distinct contribution is in its ability to connect worlds, rather than in its affinity to the local communities.

Staff and volunteers mostly come from the state capitals, and some come from the nation's capital. Because they are not actually local to the problems they are seeking to help resolve, there is sometimes initial suspicion when they visit communities in which incidents have been reported. However, families who have benefited from the project repeatedly commented that the team invested in building and maintaining a relationship with them over time. What began as legal support became friendship.

"Even now that things are kind of solved, they are still with us. They don't forget about us. When a person loves you, they won't stop loving you suddenly, because they show the love to you. That's why I trust them, not because I think there will be problems again, God's willing it won't be like that, but I want to be with them." – Recipient

"In [J-town] we have to be aware of what is going on even though the problem has been won. We have to be aware that sometimes they get upset because they turn the volume up, and the other churches get upset. So we have to go and mediate the situations so that they don't rekindle what has happened." – Implementer

They have, however, worked hard to develop strong local ties, most notably with local government and with other actors of influence in any given location. For example, in the location where most of the interviews for this study took place, a separatist militant group is very influential, and LAP has successfully engaged in dialogue with them as well as the established local officials.

"A week later after I got out of jail, brother XX came to my house. He got there on a Sunday, I was worried and sad because in the general meeting they said that they were going to destroy and burn down my house... Then brother XX came, I opened the door thinking it was the police again. "Are you brother XX?" "Amen, brother, it's me. Why?..." Did you get in jail?" "Yes, but I'm free now. I'm just thinking on what to do with all these problems." "I was in [state capital] when I heard you were in prison... we have got an organization..., and a lawyer, we came especially for you."" – Recipient

"When we learn of an 'incident', immediately the first thing we do is send a letter to the municipal government

to inform them of the situation. When the gov invites the persecutors to a meeting and they come, they can reach an agreement. But if there is no interest in dialogue, then we made a legal demand and present it to the municipality and also to the community authority (which is the [separatist] government).” – Decision-maker

Indeed, LAP is very proud of its highly personalized, bespoke approach to doing advocacy work. They approach each case as unique and dialogue individually and extensively with a diversity of stakeholders before proposing specific tailored solutions. They also engage prayer support and encouragement from church pastors to complement their work with more traditional types of legal aid.

Cow Bank Project

When people describe the Cow Bank Project, one of the first things they comment on is how the location of the project is extremely isolated. The project communities are situated at least an hour off-road travel by motorbike from the nearest thoroughfare. The residents in the communities where the project operates speak their tribal language, and very few speak much Vietnamese. A few of the project beneficiaries commented that it is extremely rare for them to interact with people from outside their local community and are unaccustomed to receiving visitors. Most people must travel some distance to pick up a signal or otherwise access the internet.

“Our ethnic group has little contact with strangers, so we don’t know much how to socialise when we meet strangers, and my Vietnamese (Kinh) isn’t good either.” – Recipient)

The Cow Bank Project is entirely managed by a local association, under the umbrella of a church. Even though the church denomination has branches in the benefiting villages, the local association itself does not have a regular presence in the villages the project serves. They are based in a nearby town, which is several hours’ journey away. Visits from the two staff who oversee the project, took place on average monthly pre-COVID-19, but have been less frequent since travel restrictions were imposed. Visits from other stakeholders or donors are significantly less frequent.

The model for the Cow Bank Project is very simple and contextually relevant. Other NGOs as well as the Vietnamese government have run Cow Banks. The government’s model has not been very popular, though, because beneficiaries must pay back their loans under quite strict terms which means they see participation in the government Cow Bank as highly risky. In comparison, this model in which beneficiaries pay back their loan in the form of the cow’s offspring is much more well-received. Even though Cow Banks are locally popular among the development community, the idea is quite unusual from the perspective of development professionals in other countries or to some extent even in other parts of Vietnam. However, in the northern mountainous regions of Vietnam, economic activity is largely limited to livestock and agriculture, with cows seen as the most sustainable investment.

There are aspects of how the project is managed that are very contextually specific. For example, all activities are coordinated through a church which has a presence in the local communities and whose members know and are known by the other residents. Church members jointly select what they describe as the “most needy and deserving” to receive cows from the project, as well as to receive the offspring repayment cows. The participatory approach to client selection is carefully negotiated and discussed at length before being implemented and conducted transparently with any in the village invited to witness, as the project must ensure that the relatively small number of families who benefit from the project are a list agreed by others in the community.

Local coordinators take the selected recipients to the market to choose their own cows, which helps ensure the project is trusted. The churches also help to fill gaps in needs that are not directly covered by the project; for example, one recipient recounted that he was unable to build a shelter for the cow and the church helped with that.

“The first generational family received the Calving Cow, now they are out of poverty, and they shared to the second generation in the community, even though the Un-believers are poor and they agree the regulations of the project. Therefore, the first generation or the next generation all these have to be decided by the leaders for their communities.” – Decision-maker

“I felt the church was very kind with my family even though I’m not a Christian. They gave my family a cow and instructed me on how to take care of it. They regularly visit my family to see the growth of the cow.” – Recipient

Dignity: Focus on the “how” rather than the “what” of aid provision

How aid is provided emerged in the HPG study as being of greater importance to many aid recipients than what is given, which was linked to their desire to maintain or restore a sense of dignity. Mosel and Holloway, in their summary of the study they did into dignity and humanitarian action, found that members of affected “communities did not care who gave them aid so long as it was given in a dignified way.”[13] Faith-based actors have often taken pride in how they prioritize dignity, and that they work hard to design their programs in respect of people’s dignity. They have at times expressed concern that non-faith-based aid providers fail to respect people’s humanity and inherent dignity, a value which they saw as strongly embedded in their sense of faith[14]. The Christian idea of people ‘created in the image of God’, a concept echoed in other world religions, is a strong motivator to want to see aid recipients as enjoying respect and self-reliance, and indeed many Christian aid providers have seen “dignity” as an important principle for humanitarian response.[15]

The HPG study identified some key ways in which aid recipients wanted their dignity to be upheld. Of particular note are the sense of value and autonomous agency (linked to self-reliance) that a person feels s/he has as a human being,

[13] Mosel and Holloway 2019, p.vi

[14] Kraft 2015, p.23

[15] Kraft 2015

and ways in which aid recipients experience dignity through the treatment they receive when accessing assistance.[16] The experience of becoming a "beneficiary" can rob someone of their sense of dignity, but "how" aid is provided can help preserve people's sense of dignity.[17] While honoring dignity is not inherent to being local and faith-based, it is a core hypothesis that a deep cultural understanding joined with a faith motivation should position a faith-based actor to better support the dignity of aid recipients.

New Hope Trauma Center

Many participants in the research commented about how the local culture is one in which there is a strong sense of individual and societal dignity. This was disrupted by the sudden displacement due to ISIS expansion in which many people felt that their dignity was wounded when they fled or received loved ones seeking safe haven. However, they also believe that dignity is still inherently present in the community and, for the most part, that it is internal to an individual and not something conferred by someone else.

"Before I was rich or poor, but I had a secure place to live, a future and a routine. After I was displaced, I had nothing. Many of us couldn't take our money or our clothes, even. We were given many things: but if you have lost many things this is still not the same. So we have a new normal life. Some were living at first in shared houses, in schools, in the church. So they lost their privacy, their toilet, their bathroom." – Implementer

"Dignity is about taking care of yourself, about pulling yourself up on your own, and that people can't come near and be a threat. Dignity is something that we hold within, not something given to us." – Community member

For NHTC, mental health programming is a vehicle through which people can restore their innate sense of dignity. They see mental health as all-encompassing and therefore are prepared to support people's material or livelihood needs as a part of the mental health intervention. This understanding of the whole person as being the center of investment is crucial in their approach to ensuring they help promote dignity.

"If people have good mental health, they can handle anything in life. This is against fear and addresses physical illnesses as well." – Community stakeholder

Self-reliance is the aspect of dignity most notably prioritized by NHTC. More than one member of staff explained how they do not make it too easy for people to attend their activities; for example, they do not provide transport allowances or food allowances, because they do not want people to feel like they are being spoon-fed. They also talked about how they take an individual approach to working with beneficiaries, encouraging them to engage with the activities gradually to help them build the self-confidence needed to take part in social activities, prepare presentations for others in the group or make plans of their own.

"[With] other NGOs, there are lectures and the sessions. They pay people to attend, each gets 10,000 Iraqi dinar, they go for their $10 USD. If a person is going for the money, though, they lose their self-respect." – Implementer

"But people don't need hand-outs, they need work. It's not just about finance, people need to use their time well and to be healthy, which means they need to work." – Community member

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

For HNRO's community, displacement deeply rocked people's sense of inherent dignity. Nonetheless, participants told me that their community is one in which there is a high level of respect and people have a strong sense of dignity. They believe that an individual should be responsible for his/her own dignity, which is not something an NGO can confer. The fall-out of recent conflict is a whole-of-society problem, one which an NGO's approach may help treat but cannot solve.

"If we talk about HNRO and supporting dignity, we are talking in examples or illustrations, not in actuality. It's too big a problem. We visited and we tried, but we couldn't restore dignity. The government needs to restore dignity, too. It is very hard to restore dignity – so many things are needed, and it takes so much time." – Implementer

The experience of displacement, and in particular the shock of suddenly changing from being a stable and self-reliant member of society to being dependent on aid, while also feeling the loss of government protection, has had its impact on the residents of HNRO's community. Programs are designed with this understanding, seeking to address the various things that have hurt dignity in the events of the past years in order to help restore a society in which people feel strong and can be self-reliant.

"Displacement caused our people to lose our dignity. We were pushed out of our houses. Your house is where your dignity is protected. With no house, you have no money, and so no dignity. So you need to reach to an external hand to ask for food, for every small ordinary matter – this costs dignity. And then, after the urgent need passes, then it's not usually OK to continue helping, so then people lose their dignity even more if they continue relying on help. What we do, first, is we try to help with rebuilding of houses, help families to remove rubble, so they have their home again. Second, we help people to remake their businesses so they can support themselves. Third, we have established the legal clinic, which is trying to help explain the meaning of 'our land', 'demographic shift', people's rights as citizens to live in Iraq and also their duties." – Decision-maker

"Work is dignity, even if it's just a little bit of work or a little bit of income, it means we can stand on our own two feet and we won't have problems. So HNRO gave me stuff, and now it's on me to build my livelihood." – Community member

HNRO's approach to preserving dignity also reflects the key themes outlined in the literature and is facilitated by their strong affinity with the local community. They invest significant time in building and learning from their relationships with beneficiaries and take a very cautious stance to taking photos or using people's information for promotional purposes. Many commented that the health clinic staff invest significant

[16] Mosel and Holloway 2019, p.6-7

[17] Mosel and Holloway 2019, p.10

time with each patient, a form of respect they cannot expect from other health services. While they gave examples of times that they chose not to be fully transparent about their decisions and rather relied that on church authority to ensure community members trust their decision-making processes, they nonetheless put significant effort into informing the community about their activities, offerings and programming.

"There is also dignity in rights, so activities for people to feel like they matter, that they are respected, they are important – these are important for promoting dignity. In the [health] clinic, the way that we do this is we focus on the patients, we take the time to understand their problems and their needs. How we communicate with them and show respect, this is how we support dignity." – Implementer

HNRO's legal clinic is built around an ethos of promoting dignity through ensuring people can access their fundamental human rights. Their focus is on promoting the rights of the Christian community and of minorities, ensuring that they have full rights to live as full citizens with equal opportunities.

"Human rights lead to dignity, but right now we have our rights only on paper. If rights are sorted, then we may have dignity. The world is responsible for promoting human rights. If I can't benefit from my rights, why should I have them? God created us, as humans, with dignity – this is the source of the rights." – Implementer

Shalom Trauma Center

While the focus of Shalom is on trauma care, almost every interviewee commented on how material needs are urgent and must be addressed because they are core to the human experience. They pointed out that urgent care comes first in the wake of an attack, and some implementers mentioned the importance of rapid response for psychological first aid as well. They observed that meeting holistic needs in the immediate aftermath of violence helps people to feel loved and valued. Implementers expressed great concern about what happens to jobs, livelihoods and education, as well as emotional well-being when individuals return home; they also expressed understanding that for some people, staying in their home communities, is not tenable.

"Some of the participants that just left, they said we are-keep praying for us, we are still going back to our homes. That well, since their children are vulnerable, they take them safe-somewhere safe but they still live in their environment. They still watch out for their farms, for their homes. Okay, where they are. So, they all put it back to God. But they depend on God to help them as Christians even in this terrible moment." – Implementer

Leadership of Shalom Center talked at length about personal resilience as a core objective of the program. Their concept of resilience is about emotional well-being as well as the capacity to live life in the midst of a great deal of tension. They tied resilience to the principle of dignity, because they see it as a key facet of self-reliance.

Furthermore, staff mentioned their joy at seeing survivors dancing upon healing, and restoration of hope in people's lives. Many interviewees also mentioned the importance of praying for the survivors and for their communities.

"Uhm-I for me, success to me if I begin to look at the persecuted church today is talking less vengeance, talking less vendetta, talking less bitterness. Success for me if I begin to hear the persecuted church saying well, we going back again to rebuilding our lives and starting all over again but not after anyone, we don't want to revenge, we don't want to injure anyone but we want to start our lives all over again." – Decision-maker

"Yes but if you get the person accept it and you build the capacity to survive even in the midst of this chaos is enough. So, empowering people with this skill and the knowledge to know that we live in a broken world, these things will continue, but we ourselves need to be in a position to help us with the skills to survive the situation is what is important." – Implementer

"We-we try to calm them down and try to let them know that they are still loved and appreciated... somebody who has thought life is over for him. Even if somebody is attempting-has considered suicide, during your communication you are trying to let him know that your life is valuable despite all that you are going through. You are still valued... Believe in yourself then you can begin." – Implementer

The way in which Shalom implementers affirm people's dignity is strongly linked to their sense of affinity with the affected community. They reflect a degree of humility in how they talk about the survivors because they do not see themselves as separate or better. This, in turn, is related to their capacity for empathy as survivors themselves – and even though they promote a narrative of faith they understand how difficult it is to trust God in the midst of deep pain and loss.

"They serve us as if they are children. Can you imagine me sitting down and um [the center manager] is bringing water for me to drink... When we came we didn't see any center manager, we only know our teachers. But I think he was the one I spoke with yesterday, he is the one that came here because when I saw him-the way he is taking care of us, I think he is the center manager. He went and brought us drinking water, I followed him to where he will get the water he said I should go and sit down he is going to bring the water. So that is humility on his part." – Recipient

"You know it is like destroying whatever self-esteem that is in that community has been destroyed, all their dignity, you are nothing and you can do nothing and nobody can do anything - Hmm - You know even telling them that your god is very weak. if your god is powerful he wouldn't allow us to be killing you people and be kidnapping you people and be destroying your farms." – Implementer

Dignity is also promoted through the design of the Shalom Trauma Center facility itself, which is intended as a comfortable, restorative setting where people can just rest. Beyond communication and transparency, implementers actually sleep in the same facilities as the 'survivors'. Some survivors spend their entire week just sleeping, and are encouraged to do so. There is a fair bit of effort dedicated to offering tasty wholesome food, which is eaten communally.

Staff and volunteers also mentioned that they are taught by leadership the importance of treating beneficiaries with respect, for example by getting informed consent for any photos and avoiding pressure. They want people to feel valued, and work hard to adapt their methodologies and activities in response to people's needs. One implementer

mentioned limitations in the center's capacity to support the needs of children specifically, but offset this with a commitment to caring by just spending time with a child who is struggling and coming up with creative activities.

"One of the first thing you do to survivors of crisis or abuse is to take them out of the environment where such event happen (sic). Take them somewhere where they can feel comfortable, they can feel relaxed do that they can be able to share their experience and this-s-s-s the Shalom Center has given them that opportunity, a lot of the testimonies we have gotten from these people is that, this place already stepping into the environment you begin to feel healing because of the way-the-way the place was designed and so, one basic thing is taking them out of their environment so that they can find healing and then giving them the opportunity to speak about what has happened, giving them the direction on how to that helps them." – Implementer

The center manager talked about the inherent humanity of all, regardless of their religious background – so even the assumed perpetrator, which is usually in the case of this context Islamic Extremists. The manager tries to promote dignity for all, not just Christian survivors. However, not all interviewees expressed this commitment to acknowledging the shared humanity. Furthermore, almost all participants expressed a general sense of hopelessness at the weight of their circumstances and the pressures that affect people's ability to feel dignity in a context where conflict is far from resolved.

"So, really I don't know what to say, and the truth just like what you said is that most of them go back and they are re-attacked... The only thing I think that is been done for them is most of them will be asked to go to the IDP camps, and they cannot stay there forever. That place is also a place whereby it will never motivate people to become what they really or to regain their lives back." – Implementer

Legal Assistance Project

Even though the concept of human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, is built on the idea that all humans have dignity which must be respected, researchers on faith-based humanitarianism have suggested that the scholarship and practice in human rights has progressed in a distinctly secular direction (Ager and Ager 2011), while religious groups often speak more passionately about dignity. A narrative of 'rights' sometimes obscures one of 'dignity'. Indeed, in interviews with LAP implementers and stakeholders, the narrative of dignity was not emphasized. There were, however, various examples given of ways in which people saw and celebrated the restoration of dignity that came with the restoration of rights. Some converts spoke about the contrast between joy they felt in choosing a new life path, then feeling suddenly stripped of their humanity, then their sense of joy restored when the situation was resolved.

"We were in my house, people in the community heard that we were playing song of praise, worshipping God. It changes, sister, to worshipping a living God rather than traditions, it feels like a change. Then, the people of J-town didn't like it... they surrounded my house, people and policeman. They surrounded my whole house. We were praying, congratulating my baby boy when the authorities came in, the policemen, the people. I felt pain... in that moment they took me to jail for four days. My wife was also gotten into jail for one day." – Recipient

"As we see that they regain their dignity when we solve their case they get their house back and they get their services is when we see them happy and there we can see that way of being able to heal the damage that was done to them before." – Recipient

Furthermore, the way in which LAP operates, with its bespoke approach to advocacy and commitment to building relationships with not only the beneficiaries of their services but also with other stakeholders, may be seen as indicating that the program team place a great deal of value on human dignity. However, it was noteworthy that when speaking of successful relationships with various stakeholders, most interviewees persisted in describing the Catholic church and Catholic community members as the aggressor or even the villain; it seems that extending an appreciation of dignity in the Catholic community is particularly challenging for both the beneficiaries and the implementers.

"So, we told brother XX, "We don't have how to thank you, nor how to pay you, we can only thank you." Until now, we feel supported, happy with them. When we were about to solve everything, we wanted to take them to our community but, to avoid more conflict they didn't go. Out of respect." – Recipient

Another way in which the project supports human dignity is by combining legal assistance with training, drawing on biblical content and principles about the concept of 'persecution'. They place a strong emphasis on teaching people to forgive their aggressors and therefore be examples of tolerance. They then encourage them to find ways to be a positive influence in their communities. They seek to not only help end the abuses, but to activate the potential agency of the erstwhile victims in their communities.

Indeed, the context in which LAP operates is in many ways a battle of the minds. In communities where tensions are high, there are reports of Catholics trying to change the converts to Protestantism back to Catholicism. In response, LAP tries to change the mentality of those community members who are least accepting of diversity and freedom of thought. Though it is not an objective of LAP, many of its church partners and beneficiaries want to use this culture of freedom to promote further conversion to Protestantism. So, while each stakeholder is seen as having and meriting their own sense of agency, each party is trying to shape how the other stakeholders think.

"So the Catholics determined that in order to make them change their minds they would not return the services until they obeyed. So during the whole process they were without electricity, water and education. But together with [the founding NGO] we managed to change the mentality of the persecutors. Maybe not totally, but we were able to get them to accept them in the community and give them back their services." – Implementer

Furthermore, some of the interviewees who had benefited from LAP services expressed that, for them, their dignity as members of a minority religious community includes having a spacious dedicated space to worship. They want this because they want churchgoers to feel comfortable, but also because they see care for their neighbor as including welcoming them into their churches. However, they also want an established physical space of worship because they want the joy of praise – even though neighbors have complained about the noise.

This begins to illustrate the complexities of promoting dignity, as converts want to have full freedoms but their freedoms do begin to infringe on the lifestyles of others.

"I would like to tell you the trigger of the persecution, the brothers invited a pastor from outside to preach and made a big scandal in the town, then they put speakers with a lot of music and it seems that they had already been told once, but they said not to transform the environment and that was the trigger, The community demanded rules that they should not make so much noise but they said they were free, and later when the brothers did not obey this, the town government came, the board of directors, and they grabbed three brothers and put them in jail and cut off their water and electricity." – Stakeholder

"I like instruments, I like to play instruments, we have guitars, they invite us to other communities and we sing songs of praise to God. Now, we want to get electronic equipment. Because we got a keyboard, but it doesn't sound well[18]. There's a lot of need. The intention is to cheer people up with a good praise to God and for the neighbors that persecuted us to hear them... I'm not resentful to them. I put myself in the shoes of the ones that yelled at us, that made fun of us and they did it because they don't know about this." – Recipient

Cow Bank Project

Within the communities served by CBP, there is a very strong culture of poverty. People describe themselves as poor, isolated and limited in opportunities. Furthermore, in the interviews, community members were hesitant to speak with enthusiasm about the opportunities afforded them in their lives, but rather felt it was appropriate to focus on their deprivation. However, after formal interviews were over, interviewees spoke more freely and enthusiastically about the hope they have in their lives.

I: "What is your biggest need now spiritual life or finance?" R: "I am a poor person, so I have nothing." I: "Besides raising cows, growing corn and rice, what else do you want to do?" R: "I don't know what I should do." I: "Do you want to go to work in the city? Like being a worker." R: "I am not good at Kinh (official language), I dare not to go." – Recipient

In such a context, dignity can be elusive, yet there are a number of core aspects of the CBP model which promote dignity. Among them:

- Community selection of beneficiaries, whereby the collective members of a church decide who receives cows promotes participatory methodologies which, while privileging church members over other community members, nonetheless places decision-making inside the communities served by the projects.

- Recipients choose their own cow. Project leaders described this part of the model as a strategy for avoiding complaints as people are responsible for their own choice, but it also promotes dignity by allowing beneficiaries to be active in their own development from the very beginning of their engagement in the project.

- Recipients do not just receive cows, but also participate in skills development in the form of training on how to care for cows and take responsibility for the health and well-being of their livestock.

- Recipients in turn become donors. Once a generation of cows has been bred, the church hosts a handing-over ceremony in which the families who bred the second-generation cows pass them on to the next recipients identified by the church members.

"For resilience, one way in which this is built is by engaging the local church in the decision-making process. Members decide who is more needy, and they are encouraged to find 'the least' among them in the group. Once they have decided, the poor members are encouraged to think not just of themselves but also of the needy in the rest of the community! So the philosophy of the project is to think of others before thinking of themselves." – Decision-maker

The CBP promotes holistic development, and is built around a narrative of care for the whole person. Spiritual well-being and material well-being are seen as closely intertwined. Benefiting from the cow, therefore, was not just a source of material improvement but also a source of hope for a better future. Self-reliance and agency are encouraged. For example, recipients frequently mentioned that, as a result of the financial freedom they have found since receiving and breeding their cows, they are excited to send their children to school. They also described their own empowerment in a number of ways; for example, one recipient trained his wife how to care for the cow. Furthermore, community members who previously may have been relatively idle now had meaningful productive occupation to care for and breed their cows.

When asked how they use the profits they have earned from their cows, recipients gave different answers, as each recipient is able to decide for him/herself how to use their cow. They understand that they are taking responsibility for that with which they have been entrusted. While most seem to talk about their idea of building a flock, at least one said he sells the offspring each year to pay for school fees and other family needs.

"What they do well is that they show responsibility to care for the cows and pass the calves to other families. The responsibility is emphasis when they receive one or two cows, they have to take good care of them." – Stakeholder

"I will take good care of the cow so it can reproduce more. I hope to have a herd of five to 10 cows for the whole family to take care of. When my parents saw that I received cow from the church, they were also very surprised that I did not believe in God but also got a cow." – Recipient

However, because of the sustainable economic stability that cow ownership offers these families, cows can also serve as a status symbol, and recipients can be seen as receiving preferential treatment, moving from being the 'poorest of the poor' to being what amounts to small business owners. Participation in the CBP clearly enhances a person's status but can do so unequally, as not all families in a given community receive the cows. Nonetheless, when church

[18] It bears noting that once the original case was resolved, the founding NGO advised the church leaders that it was not advisable to put speakers with music without local authorization and showed him the rules of religion in the state of Chiapas, so this quote does not reflect the guidance of the founding NGO.

members select recipients, they are walked through a very deliberate process of agreeing and applying vulnerability criteria. Furthermore, the families who receive the cows are typically the 'poorest of the poor' who would not be able to pull themselves out of poverty immediately after receiving the cow, but rather must work very hard for several years to breed their cows before achieving financial stability.

2 Who values what in the organizations' work?

Different actors in aid provision place different levels of value on different things, and an aid provider's inherent value, therefore, is not as straightforward as demonstrating how many people they have assisted, in how many locations, their total budget, or even the quality of their monitoring systems. Value must also consider what aid recipients want and need.[19] In this section, we explore the value of the LFAs' work in terms of the intersection between the values of the aid recipients themselves, the staff and representatives of the LFAs, and the wider development community.

Capacity vs contribution

Capacity is often the first benchmark referred to when determining whether an organization does 'good' work. Not surprisingly, the HPG study concluded that "organizations and individuals defined and valued capacity in terms of the abilities they already possessed."[20] However, this is in part because there is not a clear and commonly-shared definition of "capacity" for aid provision. Capacity assessments for local partners often focus on measuring their financial management, governance and human resources systems, and mechanisms against fraud or corruption. However, they propose that capacity may be better understood as the contribution that an organization makes to the lives of their intended recipients.[21]

Capacity can be held at the individual, organizational or systemic levels.[22] Individual capacities are about the experience, knowledge, technical know-how, energy, motivation and influence that people associated with an organization hold. However, individual capacity tends to move with employees to different jobs and organizations and job retention is often therefore of concern. Organizational capacity refers to "internal policies, arrangements and procedures that combine and align individual competencies to fulfil their mandate and achieve their goal."[23] Finally, system capacities consist of norms, traditions, policies and legislation. An organization's history and leadership is therefore important for establishing their capacity. For faith-based actors, religious structures and leadership therefore can greatly influence an organization's capacity to make a contribution.

Contribution must also be contextually relevant, meeting the specific needs felt by the intended recipients.[24] In keeping with the theme of affinity above, research on faith-based humanitarianism has referred to the concept of "cultural proximity", the assumption that if a faith-based actor will be able to operate with greater ease and expertise with populations who share their religious tradition because they are more culturally aligned. [25]

New Hope Trauma Center

NHTC works with small numbers of people, and they are proud of this. Particularly because they work in the mental health field and understand the complexities and need for long-term investment in well-being, they prefer to serve few people well rather than expand beneficiary numbers. In fact, in the early days there was some reticence on the part of some of the organization's management to count beneficiaries at all, as they considered that to be placing more value on quantity over quality.

"I'm a parish priest; I can't help everybody. Mother Teresa helped seven million people but she helped them one person at a time. I can't send my message to the whole world, so I focus on you now. If I help three people, then they help others." – Decision-maker

"The mental health program needs to be for 6 months to really make a difference, but other NGOs do a session, get their numbers, then goodbye. We need to see change or there is no point doing it." – Implementer

Because NHTC serves fewer people and maintains strong community affinity, they have a deep understanding of the needs of their constituents, and carefully tailor services and activities to address specific concerns or interests as they arise. For example, in a youth program they may only have 10 children in the sessions so they can tailor each session to what those 10 children have discussed and the concerns they have raised. Several stakeholders also commented that their spiritually oriented approach to work, and the fact that they often incorporate Christian scriptures and practices into their activities, enhances the quality of their offering.

"There are other organizations who do mental health work, but they do it without the Holy Bible, and you can see the difference." – Community stakeholder

They are applying the same principle of quality over quantity to their organizational growth and development. They want to grow but they are doing so slowly and are being careful to do it thoughtfully. They now have administrative staff and separate technical staff with specific skills unique to their area of responsibility. There has been enormous investment in building the psychosocial skills of staff and volunteers. NHTC has also gradually improved its monitoring, evaluation, financial and accountability structures. However, some of this improvement may be attributed to their recruitment of a manager who previously worked for an INGO and the fact that one of their co-founders is U.S.-based.

[19] Fast and Bennett 2020, p.14

[20] Fast and Bennett 2020, p.12

[21] Barbelet 2018, p.8

[22] Barbelet 2018, p.7

[23] Barbelet 2018, p.7

[24] Barbelet 2018, p.8

[25] Palmer 2011; Wilkinson and Kraft 2020, p.5

"We are going in the right direction but we are going there very slowly. We are learning more as we go. We don't want to be too fast and make mistakes, we want to be more organized." – Implementer

NHTC management is keenly aware of, and respects, the humanitarian principles, and they try to instill these values in the rest of the team, though it is not clear to what extent the rest of the staff and volunteers share their commitment to a 'humanitarian' approach.

"We don't discriminate. We work with Yazidis, but our goal/ vision is to treat or heal one soul at a time. So even though we have a large number – we try to touch older people, but also children: kindergarten, high school, middle school – we focus on just serving the one person at a time." – Decision-maker

"I focus on building an awareness of the need for impartiality, neutrality, humanity, independence. I told them it is not just about sitting and talking with people, they need to actively avoid doing harm, and the human being needs to be at the center. I also tell them ... we need to focus on people and be ready to know their traditions, their culture, their society... The staff is fully on board with this – they are inexperienced but they learn." – Implementer

Community members and stakeholders widely commented that NHTC's work is highly relevant, and that they can see that it is making a difference, although that difference is mainly qualitative and difficult to evidence using traditional reporting mechanisms.

"Everything they do is useful." – Community stakeholder

"Often kids will come back [to school] and say, "They told us X at the Center." We see them flourish, know how to handle challenges, i.e. they maybe didn't know how to open up to us earlier or how to communicate with us, but now they learn how to behave, how to talk and tell us what they mean or need." – Community stakeholder

HNRO is very active and with a diverse programming portfolio. A relatively small team keeps up with many different sectors of engagement including health, livelihoods, advocacy and infrastructure. They see this, however, as a bedrock of the holistic approach they are taking to addressing the needs of the community and want to ensure that their interventions are thorough. For example, for participants who complete their somewhat comprehensive vocational training program they are committed to offering an investment or start-up funds to ensure the participants can put their training to use. This results in a quality of care which people have come to not expect from public health services and are unable to afford from private services.

"No other NGO has served the people the way HNRO has done. Others have maybe come and done one distribution, then left again. With the health clinic, most of the people go there, and to all the other activities as well. It's well known and they serve the whole community." – Community member

"The primary thing that HNRO does well is provide aid. They support food, give non-food items, and they see people's needs and respond to them. Then, they respond to people's needs, and they have a holistic picture of what all the different groups in the region need. Then, they do projects for the community to develop them – this can include infrastructure projects like improving community gardens and streets – this develops and builds up the region as a whole." – Community stakeholder

For its size, HNRO has arguably spread itself somewhat thin in its portfolio; they see the strength of this however as being their holistic approach. They have also developed some niche services which no other local organization is offering, with qualified professionals at the helm, namely the health clinic and legal clinic. While its advocacy work is not yet well-known at the community level, it is seen by senior management and by regional stakeholders as an area of potentially significant impact in the coming years.

"HNRO is known for health provision and for their economic activities, and also for their holistic approach. They play a complete role. If something needs doing, if funds allow it, they do it." – Community member

In terms of organizational capacity, there is a structure in place and they have been investing in organizational development. Whilst, for example, team members were in the early years often slow to reply to emails or too informal in engaging with stakeholders, they are now highly organized and punctual. Donors such as USAID are finding them attractive as a local partner. Nonetheless, most of the staff are community members dedicated to their vision and would prefer to spend their efforts carrying out programs than managing grants. They do needs assessments, but needs identification actually happens primarily through implementation of existing programs and their ongoing communication with community members. They have developed vulnerability criteria for identifying beneficiaries of different programs in which church councils play a central role.

"We know that with government funding like USAID, EU, we would need more human resources, more financial management, more staff. I'd like that, but we need time to develop that way, and we need to build our experience." – Implementer

"International organizations have entire teams that can do the finances and the reporting or monitoring. It's a lot of work and hard to keep up. At HNRO, as soon as they got the funds approved, they'd be entirely focused on just doing the work." – Former implementer

Shalom Trauma Center

The international Christian NGO which suggested and resourced the establishment of Shalom Trauma Center had extensive previous experience working in Nigeria. Their assistance previously had been in response to immediate and urgent needs, but around 2011, they wanted to shift to a more professional and strategic approach to their work. They conducted a needs assessment and undertook a strategic planning process along with their church partners. It was during this process that the idea for Shalom Trauma Center emerged. However, once the decision was taken to develop a trauma center, much more local grassroots consultation took place which shaped the design and plans of the program.

"We did a lot of research and consultation with survivors. We find out from them what they-what they will need. Initially we were doing things like relief, like also uhm-m providing social amenities like schools, and clinics uhm

portable drinking water like boreholes but uhm-m we discovered that most of these communities were still not yet able to develop a lot of resilience. So, together with them, we discovered that trauma is something that will help them go a long way and so, trauma came onboard." – Decision-maker

The center staff and volunteers all expressed a strong commitment to managing the center to professional standards, for example, by following local employment law, detailed programmatic reporting, and maintaining robust and well-documented financial accounts. The center also has an evaluation and feedback system in place for participants. In the context where the center operates, this is not always easy, due to factors such as limited funding and a high reliance on volunteers, and that few local vendors typically write receipts. Furthermore, because the center does not interact closely with other NGOs or humanitarian agencies, it was not possible to assess how robust their systems may or may not be according to the standards of international donors.

"So like our oga (i.e boss) will always say... work done not reported is equal to work not done. So, if you are doing a work, you're working and you're not reporting it, it doesn't show anybody that you are doing anything and you know that you have to work and you steward." – Implementer

"So, you just have to make the people understand that you need receipt so, I remember that we have made people to make receipt because of us... So, they have-don't have choice especially if you want to be a customer then you just have to provide receipt." – Implementer

"I think the-there is need for more funding, more uhm some of the volunteers should be-should be properly engaged so that they would-they would, they would give their time, they would be more committed to the ministry. If more people will be recruited you know, turning volunteers to staffs and uhm I think more will be achieved." – Stakeholder

Construction of the facility was, for years, a focus of Shalom's capacity building (there were delays due to local violence), and continuing to develop the facility is a priority as the Center's ability to contribute is rooted in their ability to offer safe haven to severe cases. They are aware that they do not currently have sufficient facilities to offer the extent and degree of care that they want.

"Because of the limited space, because Shalom Center has been built for only 16 survivors at a time. Alright, but there are other facilities maybe not structured like Shalom Center (i.e. the Trauma Center) now if it becomes necessary that the whole community be taken care of at that particular point in time then, we will also have to use some of these facilities because we have enough care givers on ground that we can host but then, those facilities have not been designed in such a way that Shalom Center have been designed." – Implementer

Regarding technical capacity, implementers saw the importance of getting training for trauma healing, but not necessarily of qualification in psychotherapy. Indeed, a major component of the program is training pastors as trauma caregivers. Those qualified in psychotherapy had degrees in biblical counselling, specifically, and the training manuals used with caregivers were developed for church-based care specifically.

"Mental and emotional health is a very-very tedious uhm domain that you don't just take anybody and you throw in there, you need to work on them intellectually, you need to work on them very-very hard emotionally, you need to work on them very-very hard socially. The social interpersonal skills must be very-very good. Their compassion level must be very-very high. Their people-oriented skills must be very-very high... Now, for our society I am afraid we have a bit of a gap there and we are filling in that gap and how are we filling in that gap? I call them lay counselor. So we are able to meet who don't have any counseling training, any psychology training but they've been injured emotionally and otherwise and they've lived as survivors and we've worked with them until they are able to live and finally [support] people that are like them." – Decision-maker

"Maybe after that if you are a church leader, we will be able to also raise you by training you to also help your church members that are traumatized." – Implementer

General feedback on the course content and materials is that the modules are well-structured, and the written content is very useful. In fact, there was demand for more written materials so that more people can access the knowledge base beyond those trained directly by Shalom. There was also some comment about the need for written materials in local languages, as most of the manuals are currently in English.

"When I treated some of the topics in the church, some members were even surprised that ah, how-where did I get all these teachings from. They in fact, even asked me to get copies of the manual but I told them I have only my copy and so, the best I can do is to give them my copy for them to photocopy." – Recipient

The manager has a philosophy of holistic resilience, integrating tolerance for community cohesion, with mental health using diverse therapy approaches (cooking/arts/etc.), and livelihoods skills which are also a form of therapy. Even though the Shalom's capacity to offer these services is limited, they understand the importance of holistic care and seek ways to ensure that people's basic needs are met.

"You realize that there is so much insecurity, the people we have met so far, are people who need-who need psychological and emotional stability. They want to be sure that they are okay and unless the-the-the magnitude of fear and all kinds of things going on, it can be very-very difficult. And so the greatest need, there is the economic aspect where people needs security to be able to care for their-you know they have the economic security that I can take care of myself. And then secondly, the physical security where you realize that you're not afraid to move out." – Implementer

"We are doing a practical trauma training that when you meet persons with trauma challenges, you will be able to counsel them using the scriptures for them to see the need to forgive those people who have caused them such traumatic problems. Also, if there is any help you can render to them financially with food items, clothes and also for them to trust in God." – Recipient

Finally, the contribution of the Shalom Trauma Center must be linked to the level of commitment and relationships of their staff and volunteers. The fact that they are themselves members of the affected community, and that line between staff, volunteer,

caregiver, beneficiary is very blurred, means that survivors receive a deep and expansive degree of care. However, this also points to some concern about burnout and compassion fatigue, which can affect their ability to offer this kind of care in the long run. In contrast, though, there was no concern raised about staff poaching by other NGOs, a problem frequently highlighted among the work of effective grassroots actors.

Legal Assistance Project

Even though LAP is in the process of registering as its own legal entity, no one interviewed mentioned this fact. In fact, those who know about its management still clearly associate LAP with its founding international sponsor NGO, who continues to arrange most of its funding. Furthermore, the implementers had little to say about reporting, financial management, or upward accountability. The lawyers are responsible for adhering to all legal procedures, but otherwise, the project team focus most of their efforts on negotiating, training and building relationships. It is likely that the sponsoring NGO handles much of the administrative burden for them. Rather LAP itself focuses on contribution.

"I think that at the end of the day I understand that it is a necessity for both the associates and the state government to be accountable, but there are actions that are unnecessary, the work we do is with our mouths, with dialogue and with the pure saliva directly with the people, we would not need to be checking so much, when the only thing that is required is to talk to them and make them understand the situations, but if it is necessary for someone, we have to do it without any problem." – Implementer

The capacity that LAP has, which is unique, is in their dedication over the course of years to build on lessons of the past and building expertise in grassroots collaborative advocacy.

- The first challenge that LAP had to understand and address was to simply acknowledge that religious rights violations take place in mountain villages. While they have now built a network of allies and stakeholders who understand this and that it should be addressed, LAP and its partners still find that they must put a lot of effort into raising awareness about this with many Mexicans.

- The second challenge LAP undertook was to develop a bespoke approach to offering legal support to victims of violations. This included identifying effective like-minded legal counsel, and LAP leadership found that they needed to do more networking and found their best teammates among lawyers who had not previously supported charitable or advocacy work.

- The third challenge that LAP identified, and to which they now dedicate most of their efforts, is for preventive work. They offer training to members of Protestant churches who may have been victims of rights violations, or who may be vulnerable to religious conflict in their communities, because they have found that the victim's attitude is central to resolving disputes. The training draws heavily on biblical teachings but is also delivered in a bespoke manner in recognition that each situation is unique. They now partner with one state government to offer this training to other key community members. The purpose of the training is to support social cohesion and tolerance on both sides in order to mitigate the likelihood that conflict might arise.

"Until now we are grateful. When everything was over... well... after the deal they taught us how to keep still during the storm, the taught us more of the study of how to keep still during the storm, still you remain here." – Recipient

LAP is well-positioned to succeed because they are strongly embedded in the Protestant denominations of Mexico, which means that they understand the Protestant Christian ethos, and are seen as 'brothers' and 'sisters' by the beneficiaries of their services. However, they have also developed strong ties to local government and contracted with experienced qualified lawyers. Their capacity in both these fields of operation garners them not only trust but also an ability to navigate some extremely complex dynamics.

"The legal advocacy really does seem to be succeeding in a way projects like these never have before... One thing I think is that each case is different. Some are settled in courts, others in negotiation with mayor, others in negotiation with the Zapatistas which is very dangerous. There is no template, but each is uniquely successful!" – Decision-maker

Furthermore, LAP's contribution can be seen in their successful navigation of specific complexities. For example, most of the beneficiaries of their services are functionally illiterate and few speak Spanish fluently, rather they speak tribal languages, which can increase their sense of isolation and helplessness. Furthermore, due to the social dynamics outlined in the section on 'dignity' above, a difficult situation can escalate quickly, and a minor conflict can affect many people if not addressed in a timely and sensitive manner. In addition to relational sensitivity, this also requires legal knowledge.

"The brothers do not really know much about the subject of persecution and because they do not know the Word of God they can make many mistakes to respond to persecution. And the second need is that they do not speak Spanish well and for that reason they cannot seek support." – Implementer

"In our side as lawyers it is not about treating it as a lawsuit in fact we establish primarily the conciliation so that the matter does not confront and become serious, so we began to see alternatives we resorted to various issues and began to work counting the affected people seeing the ways to mediate between which institutions could have better institutions to see what would benefit more to those affected and that was how we began to deal with the case." – Implementer

As a result, success for LAP is claimed when all stakeholders are satisfied in a resolution to a situation and when good relationships across the social spectrum are maintained over time. LAP staff and volunteers are clearly dedicated and committed to what they do, passionate for the cause and genuinely interested in the relationships that they build in order to support the legal assistance work.

"So for me the strongest thing that [the NGO] has is the companionship that it gives to the persecuted and the orientation to face the conflict. Not to run but to suffer to give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. For example here the company that [Volunteer] came to give to the persecuted brothers for me was very excellent, the orientation of the brother was very good, he had a passion to reach the unconverted, and was taken by [the NGO] to work with the persecuted." – Stakeholder

Cow Bank Project

The CBP, unlike some of the other initiatives highlighted in this report, is a development project borne out of decades of learning and experience in development theory and best practices. Furthermore, the director of the project has extensive previous experience in NGOs and development, which he has brought to this role. Therefore, he brings the CBP a level of professionalism. He is also trained as a pastor and is a respected church leader. As a result, several key principles in the field of humanitarianism and development are followed. For example:

- Participatory methods, through communal selection of who receives the cows, ensure community ownership.
- Group lending principles are followed based on the Grameen Bank model.
- Aid provision is coupled with capacity building, as cow recipients are also trained in technical aspects of livestock care.
- Empowerment is encouraged as recipients become donors and have autonomy to decide how their financial benefit is spent.
- Sustainability is emphasized as a key objective of the project. Through reproduction of cows and churches empowered to manage the CBP work after the first couple of years, the CBP's goal is that it be self-sustaining within a few short years in any given community.
- There is at least some monitoring taking place.

Specifically, the ongoing health of the cows is documented and reported to project leadership on a monthly basis.

"If we do rightly at first, it will exist for long time in community for five years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years later when we look back, we will see that five or ten will grow to thousands of ones. We will see directly that the Christians' lives changed as their children can go to school, they build their house from this program." – Decision-maker

"The people who have received the cows, it is decided by the local churches, that are the poorest families... We share them how to care of the cows and breeding, until the cows give birth then they will pass the calves to the other families." – Implementer

"But it is a project that starts from small thing and grows up, it is different from other projects which help people in a short time. But this program helps people to be long-term and more and more beneficiaries and makes a significant contribution to the church and community." – Stakeholder

In addition to demonstrating capacity in its adherence to humanitarian best practices, the project makes a meaningful contribution in ways that are more contextually appreciated. The cultural relevance of the details of the model, including the nuances of how both recipients and cows are selected, is one of the reasons why it is appreciated. By implementing the CBP in close partnership with churches, those church communities build a sense of ownership in the project which means they help expand the contribution of the project by making their own contribution.

"I require that they must build shelter stable and take carefully, if the cows get sick, they must report to us." – Implementer

As mentioned previously, this CBP is an adaptation of an existing model among government and NGOs in this region of Vietnam. On one hand, there is not much evidence that this CBP is unique compared to the others, except for its church partnerships which are the main means not only of community engagement and beneficiary selection, but also of ongoing coordinating and monitoring. This does however allow the project to contribute to communities in a holistic and relevant way. Furthermore, the CBP can count on church leaders as their local community facilitators and monitors, and church are the means by which CBP achieves sustainability as they take on local management of the CBP.

"The government had got a program like that before, but it was a loaning program, they had to return and pay the interest each month so it's hard for them and some could not pay the interests. When they received this program, they did not pay the interests and fund for rotating, they just raise the calving cow and then send the baby cow to the next family in the list, it's truly good for the residents and improves their lives more." – Stakeholder

"In the past, there were some NGO working through the churches like raising cows or pig's paradigm. But they do not work directly with the church but through NGO, the recipients benefit economically. But the influence of faith is not so much that of work through the church." – Stakeholder

Technical vs spiritual expertise

Closely tied to the theme of capacity is that of expertise, there are many different types of expertise which can be valued in humanitarian and development work. There is "universally applicable expert knowledge" and "local, unsophisticated, 'unscientific' knowledge", as well as knowledge of the humanitarian system and organizational management.[26] There is also the important element of spiritual expertise, the idea that quality spiritual support matters and requires its own type of competence. Spiritual expertise may be rooted in knowledge of scriptures, religious community and spiritual care.

Religious leadership is a widely respected form of authority and expertise, and religious leaders have been found by many faith-based organizations to be important partners for challenging people's way of thinking. "Faith and religion are key influencers of thought and practice in many communities around the world, and development practitioners can struggle to change behaviors for improved health and social relations."[27] It is not only because of the power of religious beliefs, but also because of the respect that is afforded by many to their religious leadership. Many religious leaders see their role as guiding their communities

[26] Barbelet 2018, p.7

[27] Wilkinson and Kraft 2020, p.2

regarding social issues as well as offering spiritual support, or pastoral counselling, to their congregants.[28]

There is a need to acknowledge the value of inner strength which many draw from their spiritual beliefs and practices.[29] "Coping methods often rest around available spiritual, faith and religious resources such as prayers, contemplation, recitation of religious scripts and talking to God."[30] This is an expertise which many members of affected communities hold themselves, but which aid providers who share an understanding and sensitivity to the power of spirituality for promoting resilience and recovery, can help maximize. "In supporting members of their faith community, FBOs that adopt a faith-centered approach provide aid recipients with the initial mental and emotional cover which they require."[31] Therefore, while it is important to understand where an organization's expertise lies, and in particular the qualified professionals which it employs, it is also crucial to query how that expertise intersects with spiritual support and how a local faith organization can draw upon spiritual capital to enhance its offering.

New Hope Trauma Center

This was a very important theme for NHTC, as a psychosocial care center which also actively engaged with Christian and Biblical teaching as a tool for nurturing healing and well-being. Primarily, significant effort has been invested in training members to offer quality psychosocial care and recruiting qualified professionals. The founding priest participated in a qualification course on psychosocial care and wants to pursue further training, so that he can, in turn, equip other Iraqi clergy to offer psychosocial care as a part of their spiritual role. Thus, we see that the ethos of the organization includes a belief that psychosocial and spiritual care are deeply intertwined, and that technical expertise in one requires comparable expertise in the other.

In the same vein, NHTC has invested significant effort in upskilling its staff and volunteers in clinical care. This is not a well-developed academic field in the Middle East so, while the center has been able to hire psychologists including some who have lectured at the university level, the staff's capacity for clinical care has come mainly through training arranged by NHTC itself. However, they have found that, once trained, staff become attractive recruits for larger organizations which are able to pay more, so staff retention is of significant concern. Nonetheless, management tries to see this as a gift they are giving to society and continues to invest in training staff to offer psychosocial services to a high standard.

"I need to teach non-clinicians to be clinicians. A lot have degrees, but not as clinical therapists – there is no therapy in Iraq, just psychiatry." – Decision-maker

"When I started volunteering for aid organizations, I had no counselling experience or qualification. I had advanced degrees in psychology but it is not the same. So I did a local training and a national training on how to handle individual cases." – Implementer

The concept of "spiritual" care was understood differently by different participants. For some, it was Christian religious teaching which addressed psychosocial issues through a faith and religious lens. For others, it was an acknowledgement that good psychological services can touch all faiths in a similar way, engaging with people's core beliefs whatever they may be. For others, spiritual care was equated to care for overall well-being. One member of staff summarized the view of many others by also adding that spiritual care involves showing and expressing the love of God in everything they do. Most participants, therefore, agreed that some degree or type of spiritual sensitivity could enhance clinical skills.

"With the Yazidi, we cannot offer 'spiritual' care. There are some verses in the Holy Bible that we would use, but we don't. We do talk about God, though. With Christians, we can do spiritual therapy." – Decision-maker

"Spiritual care is that you teach people, if they have burn-out, how to relax, how to rejoice, how to listen to music, hike... how to be human. You do this whether you use religious teaching or not." – Implementer

For many, but not all, participants, faith was considered to be essential for healing; this seemed to be linked to the degree to which they valued faith in and of itself. Those recipients and implementers who said they value faith were also convinced that faith can facilitate faster and deeper healing than psychosocial processes which are divorced from faith.

"What makes the Center's work significant is the spiritual side. I did a [non-faith-based INGO] training once, through my work, but there was no spiritual side in that. The spiritual side, with God as a part of it, brings faster healing and recovery. If there is faith, and God gives faith, then we change faster. If far from God, we feel the shocks more." – Community stakeholder

"A good example is when the Father was teaching the Bible in English. He told me he was teaching two things this way: faith and a useful skill. This is how they think". – Regional stakeholder

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

For HNRO, the link between spiritual expertise and technical expertise was expressed through a commitment to quality. Staff described their efforts to be highly professional and to offer high-quality services as the main means by which they brought a spiritual element to their work, because this was their holy calling.

The language of human rights imbues much of what HNRO does, likely influenced by the existence of its legal clinic and its commitment to promoting minority rights in Iraq. A few staff members referred to "the right to be loved" as something they seek to ensure that beneficiaries of their programming know they should claim, and which HNRO seeks to uphold through their programming and the ways in which they implement.

[28] Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Ager 2013, p.36

[29] Falk 2010, Aten 2012

[30] Pertek 2019

[31] Orji 2011, p.488

"With regards to faith in our work, all of our work is meaningless if it is not based on our experience and feelings... Without love, any work fails. I try to share my love – say yes, you are our beneficiaries, but we love you. This is your RIGHT." – Implementer

"I care for people as a doctor, and this is my faith that tells me I have to do this. I can't be faithful then not care for people. This is not just in medicine – in any career, we need to do it well. As a believer I need to be faithful... In the clinic, the way that we do this is we focus on the patients, we take the time to understand their problems and their needs." – Implementer

Therefore, HNRO's legal clinic is to some extent conceptualized as offering a spiritual service. Built upon a belief that members of their community have a right to life with dignity, full rights as full citizens and preservation of their property, this program seeks to strengthen hope in a Christian community that has been demoralized by displacement due to ISIS and continuing interreligious pressures. The legal expertise in this program is its bedrock, but the legal staff have a deeply spiritual narrative and motivation.

"Human rights lead to dignity, but right now we have our rights only on paper. If rights are sorted, then we may have dignity. The world is responsible for promoting human rights. If I can't benefit from my rights, why should I have them? God created us, as humans, with dignity – this is the source of the rights – and the scriptural teaching is, ''Do unto others as you would have them do unto you''. You can't believe or live or behave if you don't have dignity. Without faith, it is hard to see dignity – you have to believe that God created you, and gave us our dignity." – Implementer

Shalom Trauma Center

The ethos of Shalom Trauma Center is built around a conviction that mental health needs are spiritual needs, and that trauma is a spiritual reality as much as a physical or emotional reality. They draw on principles of psychotherapy and non-religious mental health research as well, but emphasis is on the spiritual dimension of care. There is an understanding that Christians who have suffered traumatic experiences need spiritual healing. Forgiveness is a particularly important part of what is discussed in the various facets of the program. Therefore, a logical consequence is that the center's Christian identity is core to its operations: its implementers, its beneficiaries must all be able to draw upon their shared religious tradition in the offering of spiritual care.

"Um my own needs sir, is um is diverse but in the two areas I want to point out; we have spiritual needs as I said, when enemies just came in and killed your family members." – Recipient

"The trauma intervention, it helps them to know that whatever happens to you it's part of the consequences of the fallen world because the world is not originally as it is, as God has planned it to be. So, many things will happen, bad things will happen to us. And when they know that the origin of suffering is sin and that only God can bring that restoration when we have the new world after this world is over." – Implementer

"So, what we do at the end of course, we as Christians, you tell them is not just the issue of forgiveness but taking your pain to cross-to Christ. And you keep doing that especially-definitely you are still in trouble on earth don't forget, this is just like giving somebody umm vaccination." – Implementer

Various stakeholders expressed their appreciation of Shalom's strong Christian character and ethos. They highlighted the fact that it offers spiritual care, but also that they appreciate that prayer happens in the Center, and that the trauma care training is strongly biblically oriented. The biblical content of the modules was seen as an essential element. This, however, does not exclude the engagement of people who are not practicing Christians, and one interviewee highlighted how some members of the Muslim community also find the type of support offered by the Center to be deeply meaningful.

"It is a place that teaches you God's love, how to forgive each other, how to live Godly lives, how to forgive your neighbor and so many things. So, I love this place very much because I gained a lot for my life and that of my family like I said [as well as] the church." – Recipient

"The other day I was talking to a group of young people and they said, honestly sir, honestly in this hall, they said truly, this message of turning the other cheek (hisses). In as much as we hear it, we see it and we can't argue it is in the Bible but honestly sir, it is tough. We wish-we wish it can be just... you get what I am saying? Because we can't-we can't be turning the other cheek..." – Decision-maker

"We have Muslims among them. In fact, when we do the healing workshop, there's a Muslim girl that comes constantly for the workshop and she comes-she reads there's-the-we give her the Bible to read-she-she wants to read because the material is Bible principle and mental health principle so, we can't do the-the mental health intervention without the Bible in it. So, she reads the Bible. So, it goes beyond uhm-uhm the Christian-the Christendom." – Implementer

Some participants mentioned that they see the conflict in Nigeria as a spiritual battle, or more specifically, that they see attacks on Christians as attacks on Christ. But at the same time, some saw that as Christians they are therefore called to be a blessing in their communities. So, on one hand, they felt that the trauma felt is of deeply spiritual nature, but on the other hand, they felt that this mandated them to, through their healing, bring a message of compassion to society as a whole.

"So-o umm in my own church I think... I have three more things to do; living as a Christian living in the midst of conflict, helping people after a disaster and some of this-the material actually for me, it is something that is handy that people need to know, living in this part of the world where crisis is bound. You're sure that there will be crisis, in Jos for example, one is sure that there will still be crisis." – Stakeholder

"We have seen-heard of cases where people have turned to Christianity as a result of the resilience that Christians go through persecution. As a theologian, I studied this that in the past Christians were persecuted and persecution became even a tool for Christians to grow and I was wondering, how? But then, I am seeing it in my days now. That Christian communities are being persecuted and more people are becoming Christians." – Implementer

As mentioned above, those staff who have a qualification are likely to have both a secular qualification (whether in counselling or teaching or a medical field), as well as have attended formal Christian education. Most went to seminary,

and indeed theological training is the most dominant considering the large number of pastor volunteers. The interviewees who studied counselling, studied Christian counselling in a Christian institution. Others, whose main qualification is not religious, see their work at Shalom as their spiritual role and calling, rather than as a job per se. Because the Center conceptualizes trauma care as a Christian ministry, their effort to train pastors is particularly fitting.

"I have been involved with counseling and mental health for 20 years now... [I am a counsellor] by training and by practice. By training, I studied counseling in the seminary. Christian Counseling ... Psychology Christian Counseling, So, you study Psychology alongside Christian Counseling, how to apply psychology biblically... So, we are doing things to improve capacity, but we still need more-we need more counselors, we need probably a sociologist and probably uhm-uhm maybe those kind of humanitarian discipline you know even having a chaplain is not a bad idea at all. You understand because our content here is a holistic one." – Decision-maker

"My expertise is trauma healing Facilitator. I have my expertise in listening which is key. Working with this category of people uhm, I am a social worker." – Implementer

"The training is-is-is uhmm the Bible says, I comfort you that you may be able to comfort others I - Uhm R - And now because of that, we also-that is why we are targeting church leaders and pastors, if we are able to comfort the church leaders and pastors, they will be able to do that to their congregations and before they realize they will be able to train 20." – Implementer

Legal Assistance Project

LAP's core offering is formal legal assistance and advocacy which requires a specialized qualification. However, the concept of LAP was borne out of a dialogue among some Christians about theology, or understanding of God and the Bible. They noted a tension between what they called "prosperity theology" and a "theology of persecution". The first is, put simply, a belief that God blesses the faithful with material success and good comfortable lives. The second is a belief that suffering is a part of the Christian life, and an opportunity to show grace and compassion to others. The founders of LAP found that many people were converting to Protestantism and adopting a "prosperity" theology, whereas they believed that a theology of "persecution" was not only more true to Scriptures but also more helpful for them to thrive both as Christians and as citizens. Therefore, even though the core activity of LAP is legal assistance, it is an initiative designed to build a different understanding of God which can help facilitate social cohesion.

"The believer has been bombarded with the idea that we should be love and be silent and passive with the conflicts in a certain way it is true but I believe that we are getting cowardly with the idea that we should not make the conflict stronger and now they no longer burn us, they no longer kill us, they no longer take our heads because we are not able to remove the cowardice or the slogan of God is love and we should also be love." – Stakeholder

In particular, the training component of LAP, which is also seen as the most strategic and forward-thinking component due to its preventive objectives, is focused on giving people the 'spiritual' capacity to be good citizens. It is entirely based on biblical teachings and draws from Scripture extensively, although interestingly a version of the curriculum is being piloted by a state government which removes all biblical references.

"What we have found is that the persecuted are in pain and living in fear. So when they accept our assistance seeking justice they can have a very harsh attitude. They want their enemies arrested and punished. So the lawyer also works with them to challenge and transform their attitudes. What we realized is that they are not mature in the faith, so we train them in Bible principles. They need to know how to live with integrity as the persecuted. A case will last around 6 months so they may pressure or even abuse their lawyer during this time. The training is to help calm their emotions, so they can see persecution as a part of their calling – however, still acknowledging that defense is a good thing. They talk about values such as harmony, forgiveness and love." – Decision-maker

"They also train dialogue with biblical support which is very important because they are based on the bible to say that Jesus Christ also suffered a lot and with this testimony they make the community see that those who are going through this suffering can overcome it." – Implementer

Through all LAP activities, especially the training and the dialogue with various stakeholders, a strong sense of faith is an important component of all discussions. Faith is not only a motivator, but also a tool to achieve success. Implementers and Recipients are all regularly reminded to trust in God because that will help them to keep hope and commitment through the challenging times and keep working towards a peaceful and mutually beneficial resolution. As mentioned above, prayer and personal encouragement were heralded as important tools.

"Although there are times when we feel fear because we never know what will happen, in other cases there are cases that have been strong. And that is where we prepare ourselves, praying for each other, reading the Bible... What I did in the first place was to pray with them, to call fasts, to call prayers, and to work on the topic of persecution." – Implementer

"Brother [Volunteer] was always with us supporting us motivating us and telling us not to worry that God was going to give us the freedom to meet." – Stakeholder

Finally, it bears noting that some of the recipients of the services did not feel that this spiritual capacity-building and support was sufficient. They saw spiritual and material support as being deeply intertwined and felt that their core needs for spiritual support were in fact for material aid. They mentioned their own livelihoods as a place where hope was needed, but also the need for a good church building facility in order to proceed confidently in their chosen faith lives.

Cow Bank Project

While the project director has extensive experience in community development and microfinance, he is qualified as a church leader. He similarly trains local church pastors to manage the technical aspects of the project. They offer livestock training but have not hired a veterinarian on staff, rather drawing from their own knowledge built over years of experience. Indeed, the 'holistic' support of the project tends to be very Christian in

nature, including prayer and religious teaching.

I: "What is your expertise?" R: "I am the pastor of this Church." I: "What are you good at and/or qualified in?" R: "I truly like praying and preaching the Gospel." – Implementer

The CBP preferentially supports fellow Christians but also has mechanisms in place to ensure that assistance comes to non-Christians. Christians are prioritized because the CBP is supported by a church and an international Christian FBO who see their core mandate as strengthening the Christian community. Furthermore, in these tribal regions, Christians have been historically marginalized and deprioritized for access to public services as well as other social opportunities. Further, the project leaders and local coordinators, as well as recipients themselves, indicated that they assume that non-Christians would consider becoming Christians after benefiting from the project.

"There is a preference for church members. The project is church-initiated and the poor in the church receive first assistance. This fits within the mission and strategic priorities, to support persecuted believers. So, the project is trying to do two things in one: support the church and to bless the community." – Decision-maker

I: "Did the neighbors say anything when you received the cows?" R: "Yes, they did. They also said that they wanted to believe in God to receive cow (smiled)" – Recipient

While this on the surface stands in direct contravention of the humanitarian principle of impartiality, there does not seem to be any pressure to convert and people can negotiate their social circumstances as they see fit, and all recipients, including those who are not Christian, expressed hope that their growing financial freedom afforded them a sense of empowerment and overall well-being. However, in communities where the CBP is effective and clearly helping pull families out of extreme poverty, there is some evidence that Christianity is as a result associated with a growing level of prosperity. Project staff reiterated, though, that because of the historic marginalization of Christians in this region, Christianity is still far from being seen as a symbol of prosperity.

"I think that preaching makes them grow in faith and taking care of physical lives are good also, it's like a person need to walk by two legs. These two things help everyone recognizes their purpose, God's love for them. Therefore, the Cow Bank Project is like the second leg for them." – Decision-maker

"I see this program helps the needy families and bring the Gospel to the non-believers" – Stakeholder

For Christian recipients, the CBP is intended to help them stay strong in their faith because they have stronger economic resilience. Indeed, some Christian recipients expressed that they saw their needs as more spiritual than material. Stakeholders commented on both spiritual and material needs, with emphasis on spiritual needs at the community level. For Christian recipients, the CBP is premised on a philosophy that economic resilience means that they have a greater sense of peace and personal well-being, which can assuage any doubts that they are on the wrong path spiritually. This is reinforced by the fact that they receive the cows from the church itself. Eventually, recipients come to see their role as newfound respectable community members as being good representatives of Christianity.

"We will see directly that the Christians' lives changed as their children can go to School, they build their house from this program. So, I believe that God's name will be glorified, and we can preach about God's love and His salvation, it will be easier for sharing the gift 'Cow Bank' and when they share this gift to the others, their value will be appreciated and much more." – Decision-maker

I: "Okay, what do you see as your role in helping your community to become a better place?" R: "I need to have closer relationship with God... God taught us to love our neighbor so sharing with the community is necessary for Christians' life." – Recipient

Individual vs community value

There is a growing understanding in the global humanitarian community that the impact of a crisis, and of subsequent aid, on a community, is as important if not more so than its impact on individuals affected. "Humanitarians' continued focus on the individual fails to recognize the impact of assistance on social and communal relationships. This can include everything from increasing tensions between communities to disruptions to a community's social fabric..."[32] From a faith perspective, there is an historic acknowledgement in many traditions that harm and healing have a communal nature, and the humanitarian community is beginning to look to faith communities to help address the communal nature of social change. "Individual and community processes of meaning-making may be disrupted by mass conflict. For communities this may lead to fragmentation and a loss of coherent narrative and guiding principles."[33] Communal goodwill is an important resource which needs to be built up in order to mitigate conflict and bring restoration to the well-being of a community.[34] Faith communities offer a sacred space, a set of traditions, and a sense of belonging which can facilitate this process. Local Faith Actors, therefore, arguably, are well-placed to invest in supporting community well-being as core to their operations.

New Hope Trauma Center

For NHTC, the deep affinity with the community described above was the central indicator that their approach to development work was deeply communal. While the organization's leaders said they wanted to contribute to healing one person at a time, their structure and the positioning of the center within a community system suggested that they saw their role as addressing something core to Iraqi society. Their interconnectedness with the church placed them at the center of this system.

[32] Fast and Bennett 20202, p.16

[33] French and Fitzgibbon 2018

[34] Bock 1997, p.21

"We are each an individual but one member of a community, we communicate that we love you, that the community loves you and that we are all together under God. Dignity is a part of respect – if they accept me then I have dignity." – Implementer

"The Center is known for culture, religion and awareness – our kids in Iraq they need all of this." – Community stakeholder

The center was seen as doing something that strengthened the community and addressed societal issues. Trauma was experienced collectively as much as individually and had become a central element of the experience of the community. Therefore, promotion of mental health was seen as a move to strengthen the community. Furthermore, though individual therapy is a bedrock of psychosocial care and many people who came to the center were, or became, interested in accessing personalized services, funds are limited which restricts the ability to offer individual counselling, and most activities served groups rather than individuals. This also helps them to address the cultural stigma around psychosocial services mentioned previously, especially through group sessions which promote dialogue around social issues and raise awareness of psychosocial concepts.

"Most of what we do is group sessions. Individual therapy needs resources. Culturally, though, people have personal reasons why they do not want to share with the group – because they feel shame. They will share with a therapist, and not a local therapist: someone from Erbil or elsewhere, someone they don't know. They think that if they are facing personal issues, this means they are a bad person, so we need to change the culture." – Decision-maker

Staff had some interesting examples of how they creatively maneuvered the cultural constraints by, for example, introducing mental health content into English classes. All activities and programs are designed to be socially relevant to the issues and needs which are timely in the community, while also creating a safe space in which participants can reflect on their own well-being, ambitions, dignity, hope and health.

"To address the culture, we run ESL classes – then we are providing people with a skill that they need; English is important. We say the center offers 'psychosocial and spiritual support'. But in the ESL classes, we use mental health stories and activities – we are giving secret messages, 'tricking' people into talking about trauma, symptoms, depression... Then people say they can relate because this is how they feel when they are sad." – Decision-maker

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

As with NHTC, it was their deep embeddedness into the community which ensured that HNRO sees its role as not just serving many members of the community, but the community itself. Even more so, its strong ties to the church, which provide an element of historical ownership even though the organization itself is only five years old, strengthen its ethos as an NGO whose work should engage with the community and society as a whole. It supports the church, but also sees itself as a vehicle by which the church supports the community.

"Any work that we do for society, we also do for the church. But also, here, if people need anything at all, the first thing they say is, let's go to the church and see what they can do for us. So the church is not just the hierarchy but also the community – the entire system." – Decision-maker
"What I do see about HNRO, though, is that they don't give assistance because it's aid, but also because it is their community. They are an integral part of the community." – Implementer

Especially through its legal clinic and advocacy work, but also through its holistic approach to community development, HNRO has positioned itself as an organization which helps preserve Christian society as an integral part of Iraqi society. The legal clinic's goals include becoming a trusted advisor on civil citizenship and minority rights to government institutions, and bringing lasting change to Iraqi society, advocating not only for minorities to be granted full rights but for them to be appreciated for their contribution to society.

"If the NGO coordinates well with the church... maybe it will be easier for people not to leave Iraq; this can give people hope to stay in Iraq... They do legal and awareness capacity-building; this tries to change the atmosphere, to make it different here where we live." – Community stakeholder

It is the desire to be appreciated for the Christian contribution to society that links HNRO's advocacy work with the importance it places on offering impartial humanitarian aid, in particular serving non-Christians and Christians alike without discrimination and based solely on need or vulnerability. One staff member observed that it is significant for non-Christians in the region to see that Christians can benefit everyone, to challenge stereotypes that Christians are only interested in their own well-being.

"The good thing about being a Christian NGO is that it shows we are Christian, but we serve everyone – this is good and beneficial. It doesn't change the quality of what we do, but it is good because a Muslim sees a Christian helping. In these days, to see an NGO that is close to the church helping everyone – it helps to strengthen the social fibers of life here." – Implementer

Some participants drew a link here to the historic presence of Christianity in Iraq, and the recent waves of emigration which have threatened the existence of a community which has existed for well over a millennium. The believed that the Christian residents would stay if they had hope, opportunities and confidence in their ability to live fulfilled lives and contribute to society. HNRO's approach to programming seeks to instill this hope.

Shalom Trauma Center

While the assessment of the Shalom Trauma Center thus far has largely focused on its strong Christian support for an almost-exclusively Christian community, the center's strategic objectives emphasize its role in promoting societal resilience. The program goals focus on building resilience of survivors of conflict, to in turn build the resilience of both the Christian community and the wider community. They seek to do this through demonstrating tolerance and forgiveness and the ability to continue living in co-existence and thus avoid the breakdown of communities. It bears noting that for some participants, supporting the Christian community is a defense mechanism because they perceive the conflict as a war with Islamic Extremism and a clash of communities in which there can be no mutual benefit. However, this is not the central ethos of Shalom even if not all its beneficiaries and volunteers

are aware of its vision for wider societal benefit.
The vision for restored resilient communities is particularly noteworthy as a strategic direction for a trauma care center whose services are highly personalized. The idea that individual care can play a significant role in restoring an entire society may be unrealistically ambitious but helps ensure that Shalom's work is focused and compassionate. They emphasize messages of forgiveness and personal resilience in order to help build a narrative of love for the aggressors, the very people who have committed atrocities against the center's 'survivors.' This direction has allowed for some limited contact with and acknowledgement from the United Nations and other members of the humanitarian communities who have explicit peacebuilding objectives in their work. The center also contributes to society because in Nigeria there are very few psychosocial care facilities and therefore fills a gap in service provision while developing a contextualized model for mental health services.

"We primarily reach out to Christians but the value of what we are doing cuts across the society. Cause one of the things that we are doing to Christians that have been affected is that we teach them uhm-uhm forgiveness, we teach them the value of good existence, the place of good neighborliness, how to live with their so-called neighbors who is not understanding them and is oppressing them and so on and so forth. But we reach out primarily to the Christians but what we-we do has a wider ripple effect to the wider society... through our trauma intervention, they understand the message of forgiveness, they understand the message of peace, they understand the message of reconciliation, what have we done? We have contributed a good neighbor to you. Whether you are a Christian or not and that is a blessing to the wider society." – Decision-maker

"If this one is killed that person is killed simply because of our lack of [care for one another], so, the community could even be destroyed completely but if there is understanding and the wisdom of God, I think the community will be helped and um it will grow [and] it will become a better place." – Recipient

"You know, if you have people that are going about traumatized... because you know human beings lives in the society, we live in communities. Nobod-nobody lives-there is nobody that lives umm lives as an individual. We all live like human beings within the community and if something affects me and I am traumatized, definitely I will live with people, definitely I will have negative impact where I live." – Stakeholder

Many interviewees expressed that they feel very frustrated about how survivors are often being sent back into difficult situations after participating in the residential program at Shalom. They therefore take hope in the idea that that survivor may not only survive but thrive and be a blessing to their community. Some interviewees reflected on how they need to prioritize the needs of the survivors first and foremost, but ensure that those needs are met in way that helps them to hopefully give back to their community, with joy.

This way of thinking also helps explain why, even though community economic and social development is not the focus of the program, it is also strongly valued and the program seeks way to support it. For example, when doing active therapy activities, they may also be teaching survivors new livelihoods skills.

"While I do not support their aggressors, I-i-I will also say they have a role in ensuring that their communities are better places to live, security wise and otherwise. Tolerance wise uhm living together side by side people of different faith, different persuasion, different political understandings living side by side... Success for me is if they are beginning to be able to feed themselves now. If they are beginning to be able to send their children back to school who have been out of school because of the poverty they found themselves as a result of living in IDP's and so on and so forth." – Decision-maker

"Like I said, that is the end game for what we are doing. We have seen communities rebuilding. Okay. We have seen communities refusing to accept the-the-the broken walls. We have seen them rising above the inhumane activities and the things that have been done to them to reintegrate into the society and live life again. So when you see that happen, you know that people's resilience is growing". – Implementer

Another way in which Shalom sees itself as benefiting Nigerian society as a whole is by breaking the generational cycle of inherited trauma. They have initiatives to teach parents to care for and love their children, and also talk about how bitterness can be passed down to subsequent generations. In this way, they seek to have a long-term impact on the well-being of their nation.

"People have learnt to forgive so that they don't transfer the aggression to their children. So, breaking generational trauma is one of the way that we know that peoples' resilience have grown." – Implementer

Some of the interviewees referred to an evangelistic goal of the program, that they seek to bless society by attracting new people to Christianity. This creates a complex interaction with the humanitarian principles which promote religious impartiality and indeed a move of religious conversion can fuel conflict, and yet for these interviewees they see it as a means by which they can bring benefit to society. Furthermore, they saw it as their way of acknowledging that these issues affect both Christians and Muslims, and that the Muslim community is not their enemy.

"Uhmm Jesus Christ came to save the world. God created us in his own image. So whether we come Christians, Muslims or pagans we were all made in the image of God and Jesus Christ came to harness this image. So as an Evangelist, uhmm I work with the church. I do my part for Christians to be Christians and remain Christians and be better Christians, then my life also has to show if a Muslim sees me he should be able to say, wow, this person is really a Christian and so, my life, how I go about my interaction beyond my Christian community shows the difference. So I should-I-affect them by the standard of my life and at any opportunity I have to encourage them to even be better persons I do that." – Implementer

"The ability to-to say it out a number of times help us to deflect the tension, that is inside of us. So, whether you are a Christian or you are a Muslim, mental health issues are the same and how we handle it is the same irrespective of the Bible verses." – Implementer

Legal Assistance Project

In some ways, it is difficult to identify communal benefit in a project which focuses on individualized, bespoke legal assistance, and whose advocacy supports the rights of a small minority community, which in other parts of the country is in fact the dominant population. However, the project looks for ways to promote reflection and dialogue about what living out human respect and freedom actually looks like, and seeks to challenge secular assumptions which may simplify this question. LAP is working in a very niche, complex, space of society, in a country with strong left-leaning politics and progressive philosophical movements which promote diversity of sexual expression as arguably the most important human rights to defend in this moment of history. In addition, Mexico is marked by a pervasiveness of organized crime and an appreciation of religious plurality which privileges syncretism above conviction.

Contrast this with the choices of converts to Christianity in isolated tribal villages where social life revolves around the Catholic Church: an impoverished, socially discriminated, and politically conservative religious group that lives in the fringes of society. LAP's position in such social dynamics are likely questioned by the liberal establishment, as well as by more privileged Christians, but at the local level they force open a space for a frank dialogue about what freedom of belief and diversity can actually look like.

"In my point of view, we weren't doing anything outside of the law. The law says that we're free to profess the faith we want in a sovereign country. So, we had to defend ourselves because we weren't outside the law, we wanted to make our rights respected... we weren't asking for lands or for water or material things, but faith, the way of how we wanted to profess our faith. There shouldn't be a problem with how each one of us wants to worship God. The community where we were... for all of them to be of one religion was what hit us the hardest." – Recipient

"In the work that I do in mediating religious conflicts, then the need that I see on this subject is that there is a very strong training in the communities where they are made to understand that their customs are not above religious freedoms and that there is a law where it says that they must respect each other no matter their beliefs, at the end of the day we are all human beings and we must respect each other." – Implementer

Freedom of belief is upheld as a core right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it is a bit difficult to conceptualize 'remain in Christianity' in a context that is already majority-Catholic. However, converts to Protestantism have more personal conviction due to their personal experiences that led them to their choice, and this conviction can be intimidating to those who do not share it. Nonetheless, LAP's work is designed to enable people to remain in their communities. This means that such dialogue can persist at both state and local levels, and as the converts are capacitated for living in compassion and care for neighbors, LAP hopes that they are becoming a positive influence in the space where they live. This is supported by LAP team members' efforts to build and maintain good collaborations with government and local influencers, including with fringe groups who may also be seen as on the outskirts of society.

"Now that they know that we are free, more will come and it's true... It's going to get better. In five years, if we work hard it's going to be even better. With the support of [the NGO]. There's no fear of being persecuted again and people know that." – Recipient

"The work that [the NGO] has done has been very good from my point of view because it has supported the solution of different problems in the state, the return of some families that had been taken out of their community and the reaching of internal agreements in which peace prevails." – Implementer

"The representatives of the institutions speak to us with such respect because we are doing a good job, and we also use other non-governmental channels that help and suddenly they see that we help the communities and they speak to us with great confidence. And they wonder how the police talk to us in government because we have given a testimony that people see." – Implementer

There are ways in which these dynamics may be a bit too complex for one small project to successfully negotiate, though. One concern is that the Protestant churches in these communities do in fact have an evangelistic mandate and winning people over to sharing their beliefs is heralded as a positive outcome. This, however, creeps uncomfortably into an understanding of freedom of belief from the perspective of the non-convert.

"Spiritually we're happy, we're preaching well, we... are visiting ill people, praying, healing people with the power of God. Because in the Word of God it says "those who come in through me, will be saved." That's the reason we are like this in our spiritual life." – Recipient

"My community, in the first place needs to know the life... know about the Word of God, because my people doesn´t know (siren wailing) the Word of God. That's what they need. That's why I want to keep moving forward to show them that the true path is Jesus. That's what my community needs. To know things of God." – Recipient

Another concern is that some recipients feel that they need material support in order to strengthen the church specifically. Indeed, the issue of material support is very cogent to the theme of communal benefit, because there is ample evidence that poverty can be an enabler for social tension, and the affected communities are among the poorest in Mexico, raising questions about the role of the more affluent regions of the country in helping to alleviate the tensions through economic development. It may be that this is one reason that the recipients interviewed demonstrated a limited understanding of the idea that they can be positive contributors to their communities.

"We also encourage them to serve their persecuting community where they can help clean or do their services for free, depending on their professions. Painting school classrooms – even the Catholic Church." – Implementer

I: "What do you feel you can do to make your community better?" R: "Well... until now... I don't know." – Recipient

"Well... what I need is economic asset that can help me to pay... I don't know how the services there are pay... I think it's monthly, but that's what I need. Money so I can pay and attend that place." – Recipient

Finally, LAP has a role in helping to shape the larger Protestant network of churches in Mexico, which is large and influential and rapidly growing in both numbers and influence. LAP leadership have commented that the churches they have interacted with at the national level have demonstrated little compassion or interest in understanding the plight of their co-religionists in isolated impoverished communities. Rather, they see the role of a religious institution as attending only to spiritual matters but divorcing themselves somewhat from lived reality. Therefore, LAP tries to educate them and offer opportunities for them to engage when and if they are willing. However, there is no sign that this project supports reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant sects.

"Most churches still feel that their focus should be on spiritual matters rather than on solving problems for their members, though! It's like how some churches feel like it's not appropriate to talk about healthy eating because that's not spiritual enough. And while there may be truth to that choice, the church still needs to be RELEVANT. The training programs help the church to be relevant. Once they become relevant and see their role, then yes we can hope they address things like poverty or other structural issues in their communities." – Decision-maker

Cow Bank Project

The CBP does not specifically or strategically seek to have a communal impact, rather focusing on supporting the well-being and opportunities of individual households and, to some extent, local villages. There are many social, cultural and political pressures (including tribal culture and traditions, family loyalty, government suspicion of deviance of any form) that mean local projects and recipients find it easier to just focus on their own well-being without rocking the boat. Project leadership finds that they are able to operate with more freedom by maintaining a simple and limited field of influence. Indeed, several interviewees when asked about benefits of the CBP to the community simply said that they do not see any.

"If we talk about the society, this is not a big project." – Stakeholder

Several did comment on how recipients can become models for others as they grow in confidence and their own sense of opportunity and hope, which often result from their effective breeding of cows and subsequent financial independence. Beyond that, though recipients did not necessarily see that they personally have a role to play in strengthening their community – their focus was on supporting and strengthening their own families.

However, there is one key way in which this project does engage with community and even society as a whole, and that is in seeking to ensure that the image of Christianity is improved in a context where religion is highly sensitive. The leaders of the CBP want Christians to be seen as contributors, not as troublemakers or as a threat. If communities can acknowledge this, then the hope is that they will see that people can honor their communities while following their personal convictions.

Indeed, there was evidence that the role and image of churches in the project communities has changed, and some of the implementing churches have come to be seen as something akin to a community center of charity. There was also some mention of the CBP contributing to peaceful coexistence by, in a small way, helping to break down religious tensions and suspicion of Christians. This happened at a very grassroots localized level, rather than engaging in wider regional or national politics. Indeed, even if at a very local level, the project is strengthening the economic resilience of entire communities by helping sustainable business in these locations. As a result, the CBP has been able to report some positive acknowledgement from government officials at the local level, while still not engaging regional or national government in any specific way.

"The church has changed since the families' received cows. The recipients worked harder and took care of their cows. When the families sold cows, they offer a part to the church, so the church also has money to help poor families." – Recipient

"It's one of those projects that the community sees very well. Because unlike money or food that people eat but it is a cow that exists there with the family, when the people around them see that this family used to be too poor to have a cow but now there is a cow in the family. They're curious and so I see it also making an impact in the community." – Stakeholder

"I find that the local governments who have not been Christians, they also recognize and see that the Christians grow in the spiritual lives not only but also change in the economic." – Stakeholder

"When I just got the cow, [government officials] asked me how I could buy that cow because I was too poor to buy it. I said that the church lent it to me, when the cow produced, I would return the calf to the church." – Recipient

Finally, there was some mention of community impact in the form of proclamation about the beliefs which motivate their development work and hence raising the profile of Christianity, indeed seeking to share with more people the message of Christianity. It is not clear whether this is well-received at the community level or whether, as humanitarians are likely to assume, this can damage the tentative cohesion that the CBP has been able to promote in its other activities.

"We want to bring Jesus's love to everyone; we don't just talk but also act. If they want to have a better life spiritually and physically, we're always ready to help them have hopes in life... Let us continue working and sharing to more places where they can apply this project and the love of God will spread wider in the provinces of Vietnam." – Decision-maker

"Through this project, it also erases the negative prejudice about the gospel... Some of them misunderstand about the Gospel but through this project those misunderstandings have been erased in the midst of believers and non-believers." – Stakeholder

3 What is the organisations' existing and ideal sphere of influence?

The sphere of influence of an organization may be primarily a question of how much and what types of power it has. The HPG research widely found that legitimacy as an aid provider was somewhat automatically conferred to those who speak international humanitarian language, and an organization's influence is in large part affected by its presumed capacity as an aid provider by international humanitarian standards.[35] "Local actors interviewed over the course of our research recognized these patterns, yet saw few avenues to change them or upend the system. This resulted in feelings of inferiority and denial of agency."[36] This however assumes that organizations' desired influence lies in the humanitarian system.

This research finds that not all LFAs see any significant benefit in being acknowledged by global or even national-level humanitarian or development entities. They do, however, want to make the role of the church and its contribution visible, first to other Christians and then to the wider society. There are faith communities and faith leaders who do seek a seat at the table of humanitarian decision-making but only if they can achieve that without sacrificing their vision or the way in which they demonstrate their commitment to their own communities.

Legitimacy – specific lens on legitimacy of LFA intervention

While power and influence may be largely rooted in existing relationships, perceived capacity and funding, there are other sources of legitimacy which local grassroots organizations can claim, and research suggests that local faith actors have some strong claims to legitimacy. In addition to their commitment to dignity, contextual understanding and spiritual expertise, as explored above, they also claim legitimacy on the basis of their longevity and trust.

Longevity captures the historic and ongoing presence of a local faith community; while humanitarian actors and development organizations come and go, faith communities are much more enduring and therefore known to the community.[37] Local faith-based humanitarian and development organizations, therefore, even if they are not as old as the churches they are associated with, may claim legitimacy due to longevity found in their ties to the religious establishment. Trust grows out of longevity, and is also rooted in a respect for spiritual authority as well as in relationships built over time.[38] Though there are country-specific variations, a reliance on faith communities as trusted entities is common to many contexts around the world.[39] Furthermore, local faith actors may invest more time and energy in trust-building with members of the community, perhaps due to their understanding of the importance of dignity as well as their affinity as discussed above.[40]

Further, then, local faith actors have been found that their provision of aid in a community further establishes their legitimacy and then positions them to address complex social issues and promote dialogue about peace and reconciliation.[41] These case studies have in common that they are all by and, primarily though not exclusively, serving a minority faith community: Christians in formerly ISIS-controlled regions of Iraq, indigenous Christians in Vietnam's tribal regions where tradition dominates and institutional religion is discouraged, Christians in Muslim-dominated regions of Nigeria, and Mexican Protestants in Catholic-majority communities. They therefore claim legitimacy within their own communities while seeking to help the wider community understand their role and contribution to society and thus promote further legitimacy of their religious group. While some are interested in establishing legitimacy with the wider humanitarian community, others are less so and one intentionally avoids it.

New Hope Trauma Center

NHTC's legitimacy as a faith-based organization was crucial when it was established. It was endorsed by a bishop in Iraq and given affiliate status by a Christian charity in the USA. When asked if people know it is a Christian NGO, most community members said that its ties to the church were well-known because it is led by a priest who is recognized and widely respected in the community.

"In 2016, we established NHTC – the church here was supportive from the beginning. And the church there... we had no connection and they were in chaos after the traumatic events of 2014. But through [the priest's] connections we were able to get support of the bishops and priests there, they extended their blessing." – Decision-maker

"I met [the founders], and I saw their love and affection. They are supervisors but they work hard and are committed, they do hard work, and they show respect." – Implementer

There was, however, no suggestion that NHTC is a part of the church. Rather it was seen as having well-known ties to the church. This led to a perceived association with other Christian NGOs, both Iraqi and international. The founding priest therefore feels that he is accountable not only for

[35] Such standards include a set of principles which draw from the International Community of the Red Cross/Red Crescent now codified by humanitarian partners: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf). However, the standards also include a variety of documents, such as SPHERE (https://spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/) or the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard), embraced by humanitarian actors as setting the expectations for how aid should be delivered. Adherence to the standards by local partners was found to be as much about echoing the language and concepts found in such documents as about actual implementation guidelines.

[36] Fast and Bennett 2020, p.17

[37] Le Roux and Valencia 2020, p.237; Kraft and Smith 2018, p.3

[38] De Cordier 2009, p.619

[39] Wilkinson and Kraft 2020, p.6

[40] Kraft and Smith 2018, p.15

[41] Orji 2011, p.488

his organization but for the work of other Christians doing charitable work in Iraq. In comparison, the United Nations is something very distant and hence not associated with NHTC the way a Christian INGO would be, rather seen as a kind of protector in a troubled society.

"I don't know it as part of the church. I would describe it as an NGO that helps to strengthen people and gives psychological therapy, and also that strengthens social awareness." – Community member

"The church has a very strong relationship with the center, because [the priest] is there. I know about their Christian identity because the center is here, in the community." – Community stakeholder

Due to its location in a Christian-majority village, most of NHTC's activities are with Christians, and activities in other locations are also in Christian communities. However, they also have a program in a nearby Yazidi camp, facilitated also due to pre-existing relationships, and have clarified that they are committed to assisting all communities. They would also like to expand mental health services to other regions including Muslim-majority parts of Iraq.

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

For HNRO, as mentioned above, their work and the way in which they describe their work includes a strong narrative of how the church, and they as an NGO associated with the church, exists for everyone and offers help to everyone, including both those connected to the church and those of different religious sects. For families who were displaced by ISIS and who have now returned, especially but not exclusively Christians, many see the church as their provider and their safe haven. HNRO positioned itself as a vehicle through which this care and provision is extended.

"The church's role is a bit different, it is to raise the citizens. The church is our tent, it is who we go to for care when we are in trouble or need something, they are our shelter. We get nothing from the government. People in the church are not the NGO, though. The NGO's job is to give services – the church tells the NGO to go do X … but it is a collaboration, not the church directing the NGO. They are partners. Both are for the citizens." Community member

This creates, however, a rather complex picture of the role of the church. Their association with the church facilitates their relationships with sponsors and their reputation in the community. They also see their work as being simultaneously and synonymously both for and from the society as well as the church – but that they are not themselves the church.

Indeed, for some members of staff and for many community members, the legitimacy of HNRO is more intertwined with how they are deeply local and embedded in the community, than in their church or Christian identity. Not all staff feel that their church connections are very important. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that HNRO's strength lies in that it was born in the displacement, cared for displaced families of all sects under the name of the church, and then returned back with the Christian families. Community members often commented on how they remembered how HNRO helped them during the most difficult years and is now still with them, still a part of their community.

"For me, even if the NGO were not Christian, they are local from here. They have the same thinking, the same culture. This is their unique contribution." – Implementer

Shalom Trauma Center

Shalom Trauma Center has as one of its core principles that it strengthens and equips the Christian community ('the Church'), and thanks to a number of linked programs that are outside the scope of this study, they have access to and continue to develop a strong nationwide network of churches and pastors as their main partners. They engage with pastors in local churches, Bible schools and seminaries, and health care providers (including but not limited faith-based providers), to raise awareness and offer training on faith-based trauma care. This approach allows for Shalom to have an extensive reach even though the program itself is relatively small. They also further expand their reach with experience, with previous beneficiaries referring people to the center and facilitating further introductions.

"So, it was the [founding NGO] that called for some of the seminaries [seminarians, theologians] to run the program, the trauma program … because they want to pass the information across the churches in northern part of the country." – Recipient

"And now because of that, we also-that is why we are targeting church leaders and pastors, if we are able to comfort the church leaders and pastors they will be able to do that to their congregations and before they realize they will be able to train 20 … And then, 20 that is 20 churches and 20 churches if you check the number is really growing. And so, if you're are able to train 50, imagine, 50 different churches." – Implementer

Stakeholders and beneficiaries emphasized that they see that Shalom fills a significant gap in the existing support mechanisms. There is growing demand for its services, and several interviewees commented that they would like a Shalom Trauma Center set up closer to their home community elsewhere in the country. However, there are people who do not fully understand what the center offers and are asking for Shalom to expand its basic needs provision rather than its mental health services. Nonetheless, this demand helps ensure their large geographic reach: even though they go to regions affected by conflict when they hear of an incident, a lot of the participation is by invitation through church and personal and ministry networks.

"I love the fact that it has to do with trauma. That is something that not every organization deal with and then there are NGOs around that don't focus on the wounds of the heart." – Implementer

Some interviewees mentioned that they know about the international Christian NGO that helped found and resource Shalom, and that this organization has a good reputation for offering meaningful services and showing genuine care for people. It is this reputation that helped them to trust in the services offered by Shalom. However, even with its broad reach, Shalom is still relatively small and unknown even within church networks outside of the affected communities.

"So, whenever people see or hear the name [name of INGO], they always see an-an help-a-helping organization, they have come to –to do trauma healing. They have come to

help us, they have come to uhm but again, there is another perception to okay, they have come money, food and also they will come and share some gifts... So, so but generally it has, the organization has a good image outside."
– Stakeholder

There was some mention of recognition from other NGOs and UN agencies, however this was limited, and the interviewees generally described Shalom as strongly linked to church networks while generally separate from humanitarian networks. Indeed, the legitimacy of Shalom is primarily rooted in its affinity, or integration with the affected communities. As the implementers are not just support providers, but also comrades, the center's contribution is easily accepted.

Legal Assistance Project

Interestingly, even though as seen above LAP is very focused on serving small Protestant Christian church communities, its growing legitimacy and influence is primarily in the non-religious space. The government partnerships and relationships with local associations and other influential actors, have helped LAP become established at the state and local levels, recognized as a meaningful actors in the human rights space. LAP does have some partnerships with pastors and church leaders, who are very important collaborators for networking and reporting incidents. However, most of its church partnerships are at the very grassroots levels, whereas it is less well-known and arguably under-appreciated by religious leadership at the regional and national levels. Therefore, its legitimacy is relatively strong for a grassroots faith-based actor in Mexico, but limited among the faith-based community who it sees as its primary stakeholders.

"Pastors are both beneficiaries and partners; they become like our advocate to the church and community. But really, the project focuses its work directly with the affected rather than working through churches." – Decision-maker

"[The local community leaders] refused to meet with us and said that they were going to take care of it internally, for this we asked for the support of a civil association... it is an association a little bit linked to the Catholic church and attends to the religious creed. They helped us to dialogue with both parties under the vigilance of the state government and open doors." – Decision-maker

I: "To what extent is the program known for ties to the church?" R: "People who are not Christians do not know it, but people who have been persecuted like us do know it."
– Stakeholder

As the project gains respect with state government, they are increasingly able to influence local authorities in their practices and policies, beyond individual casework. However, there was no indication that they do this at the national level. Nonetheless, for a small initiative, it is noteworthy that they have political influence, a fact which also establishes LAP as primarily an advocacy initiative.

As already alluded, Interviewees repeatedly commented about how Mexican Protestant churches, particularly at the level of denominational leadership or large church communities in the cities, are not understanding or supportive of LAP. A few reasons were given for this:

- They do not acknowledge the existence of violations of religious freedom in Mexico
- Some denominational leaders are reputedly too focused on their own interests
- Churches in Mexico see their role as more 'spiritual' and this initiative is too 'social' (so for example, there are some very wealthy churches, but they don't support the work financially because they don't see it as their role, even if they support other local church initiatives)

Among Christian stakeholders, though, some mentioned the sponsoring INGO as being credible for being international, for having a strong network of interdenominational relationships through its other projects, and for its integrity in how it operates. In particular, the INGO's integrity was praised in that they do not demand credit for their work, and indeed many recipients and stakeholders are not even aware about the project's sponsorship.

[The NGO] is an organization that satisfies many issues, clarity, transparency, that attracts a lot of attention and it also obliges us lawyers to work with transparency, so [the NGO] in a way we see that is what we should do in many denominations... I believe that [the NGO] on this side was not so well known a few years ago but nevertheless it left a status. I have been working with them for 4 years and still people didn't know about it. After those 4 years that people started to know about the organization, many people approached us. (Implementer)

I wish that everybody was like [the NGO] that they don't care to what church you belong or how you worship God, they support you because who you are. (Recipient)

LAP implementers and recipients themselves describe the legitimacy of the program primarily as something rooted in their conviction that the various facets of the project are the work of God. They seem relatively unconcerned about LAP's reputation, expansion or institutional development, because they expressed confidence that they believe they are doing the right thing for the converts, for their communities, and for God.

They saw us as justice because they thought we were right. The affected groups see in us the blessing, they saw in us the path, the light that they could have and that they would not let go. There are those who do not see us in a good light and the offended group who see us as a blessing. (Implementer)

Cow Bank Project

The CBP is mainly concerned with legitimacy among the Christian community, with churches with whom it works both at local and at regional levels. They have not put much effort into raising their profile among Christians nationally or internationally, nor into garnering recognition from government or the wider development community. However, the project is headed by someone who has previous NGO experience and who is now a pastor for a church that is part of a large, respected denomination. His credentials, both as a Christian leader and as a humanitarian, were important for gaining credibility for the CBP.

Since it is primarily concerned with legitimacy within local Christian communities, it is not surprising that Christian recipients expressed a belief that God has brought the program to their communities and this is why it is a good thing.

"I am a Christian, so I believe that God brought me to this program." – Recipient

"I think it was God's plan that brought me to this project." – Recipient

At the community level, the CBP is also keen to earn legitimacy for the Christian community. The cows themselves, as a visible economic investment, are the main source of this legitimacy and the church partnerships extend that legitimacy to local churches who may therefore be seen as the means by which benefit has come to their village. Since project coordinators are church leaders, this church link cannot be missed by neighbors in a given community. Indeed, even though the Cow Bank concept is hardly unique to this project, the focused collaboration with churches differentiates it from other NGOs.

"This program has a closer relationship with churches, and this comes from God's love to churches. This also helps the churches recognize God's love more and have a good relationship between church and this program." – Stakeholder

Even though the cow bank methodology is a well-established methodology in this region of Vietnam, and the project implementers are very aware and committed to the principles of sustainability, especially sustainable economic growth, they apply these principles very much at the local level. From the perspective of national or international partners, this CBP is too small to be contributing in a meaningful way to sustainable development. On one hand, this is an oversight as the entire model is premised around sustainable development; but on the other hand, this illustrates the strongly localized focus of the project, whereby they see success in terms of sustainability of economic well-being within isolated villages rather than in terms of the economic development of Vietnam or indeed even a region of the country.

"The project is currently too small to think in terms of its contribution to sustainable development. Also, it is more of a bridge/survival/sustenance project rather than a strategic development work. It is not very sophisticated and the project volunteers/participants have not been oriented on the concept of SDGs or other development priorities yet." – Decision-maker

Therefore, the project management wants to expand the CBP but not with more activities or with a more diverse impact. Rather they want to reach more families with more cows and bring this methodology to more rural communities in Vietnam. The management of the project has found that they are able to access a greater number of extremely remote communities than other development actors by keeping their model simple and relatively small-scale, so keep their profile low and highly localized.

Money

Influence is affected by access to finances, and existing levels of funding are often perceived by other funders as an indicator of eligibility for further funds. "Power also emanates from access to money, expressed not just in terms of levels of funding, but also in the quality of that funding and the relationships that result."[42] These power dynamics play out within faith communities, as well, as those local faith actors who are already funded are perceived as having capacity. International relationships through denominational or other faith networks that link them to donors can then become a determinant of their scope of influence.[43] However, local faith actors may exert more influence at the community level than their level of funding indicates. They are generally seen as highly efficient providers of assistance from a financial perspective, due to their ability to use existing resources including local volunteers and existing facilities, as well as their connections and knowledge of the local community which ensure they pay reasonable market rates for staff and services.[44]

These LFA case studies are intentionally small and relatively niche, with all but one offering a single very specific service to their community. This means that their demand or potential for growing financially is limited, rather offering more boutique services. They feel the limits imposed by their small pots of funding, but are not prioritizing budgetary expansion or attracting more donors. The question then becomes whether their access to other supports or credibility is affected by their limited engagement in humanitarian financial transactions.

New Hope Trauma Center

Part of NHTC's claim to legitimacy as a humanitarian organization, which should appeal to donors and to the international community, is its registration through a U.S.-based non-profit. Though few people in the community or even staff know about this connection, the founders believe it offers them credibility among potential donors.

NHTC is quite small, with relatively small beneficiary numbers. They work intensively with those beneficiaries, though, taking a multi-generational approach, and offering a variety of activities while investing in personal care and relationships. Donors therefore have commented to NHTC that, for a mental health program, they are quite efficient with a broad reach for such a small budget.

"Donors, yes, they see good efficiency in our work, because we work in the mental health area – they are impressed by how much work and effort is put in by Fr Aram, myself and my brother (who is our finance guy). Fr Aram and I are fully volunteers, we don't take pay from St Rita Hands of Hope." – Decision-maker

Funds are limited, and currently NHTC has one consistent donor through a Christian INGO, and a few private individuals and churches which offer funds. The founding priest prefers to work with fewer but more trusted donors, with whom he and his team can build a meaningful relationship. However, if other institutional donors were to present themselves, they would not want to refuse funds, and in particular are interested in attracting funding from UNHCR because of the United Nations' strong reputation in Iraq which would in turn offer NHTC a degree of organizational stability and protection.

[42] Fast and Bennett 2020, p.17

[43] Burchardt 2012

[44] Orji 2011, p.483; Kraft and Smith 2018, p.3

"The United Nations has many local implementers – my dream is that these organizations would become a part of those networks because then I won't worry about them. I know they will be able to continue and not have to stop for lack of budget." – Decision-maker

One of the pitfalls of having limited funds is a high level of reliance on volunteers and low staff salaries. Most staff began working for NHTC as volunteers and eventually were hired; some are still volunteers and staff are not paid as much as larger NGOs might be able to afford. At the same time, though, the high reliance on volunteers has helped NHTC maintain its strong community ties and mutual sense of community ownership.

NHTC has developed administrative and management systems which do prepare it to seek institutional funding. With exposure to other NGOs and international humanitarians, the importance of reporting and monitoring for accountability and transparency has become embedded in the organization's systems. The current managing director worked for several years for an international NGO and has brought that style and expertise to his role. NHTC does have the ambition of growing, possibly expanding to other regions of Iraq, but it has likely been able to do a lot very cheaply due to its existing local community ties, and would require greater resource and time investment to open a similar center in a location where relationships were starting over.

Humanitarian "Nineveh Relief" Organization

HNRO's founding story is one of providence: right place, right people, right time, all of which converged for an organization to meet a real felt need. In that context, finding funding was not difficult. Most of the clinic's work during the time of displacement was funded through a single Christian INGO, and other Christian organizations were also very interested in supporting HNRO. Since returning to Nineveh Plains, however, the large donor has redirected its resources and funding opportunities are increasingly scarce, even more so since the COVID-19 crisis began. The result is a highly diversified funding base. HNRO staff manage several short-term grants from several donors in order to maintain its operations. They invest considerable effort into inviting donors on field visits to see the work and hence build trusting relationships with them, while hopefully attracting new funding.

"The clinic grew, and in 2015, we made two clinics in containers, in Ainkawa and in Erbil. Since 2017, we have seen more than 250,000 cases. We also did other projects including oil, food, clothes. What struck me about this experience was that, right in the moment of need, the doctor arrived. I had nothing but God sent the help." – Decision-maker

Their donor base for the health clinic is varied with several small pots of funding for various aspects of the work. Nonetheless, the capacity of the health clinic to provide comprehensive care is limited by its funds, in particular for purchasing expensive medical equipment such as to perform blood tests. Other projects also have several donors for specific activities. The legal clinic, however, has not yet enlisted more than one donor, though it is beginning to attract the attention of the humanitarian community and Iraqi government.

"Churches directly support us, and church NGOs from Europe, the US, Australia. We also get aid from governments. We are still getting support from these sources, especially the church ones, but it is less now" – Decision-maker

"Institutional funding is a bit easier for local NGOs because then they are managing fewer donors and fewer sets of requirements. But I have concerns about the impact that can have on an organization. Diversified donors are very important for a local NGO." – Regional stakeholder

Christian INGOs in Iraq see HNRO as a preferred partner, as an active organization doing humanitarian work which serves the Christian community while also adhering to humanitarian principles especially impartiality, and with strong ties to the church. These partnerships are preferred by HNRO as well, due to similar values and vision and faith identity.

"Maybe we need more training from NGOs – NGOs of churches, though, not any NGOs. Otherwise we cannot do real humanitarian work: it is not just about getting our numbers, but about seeing people as a human being, sheep of Christ in need." – Decision-maker

"HNRO's donors are for the most part very easy on them. But it was still hard to keep up with all the reporting requirements. I can see why it's hard for humanitarian agencies to work with local organizations.." – Former Implementer

During the COVID-19 crisis, HNRO received a grant from USAID to do food distribution. This was a significant development for them organizationally, and they were able to offer aid to more people than they usually can, hence meeting a real need as well as raising their own profile. The team generally felt that the USAID project was a successful venture into institutional funding.

"The USAID project we did was ... with other local NGOs. We had to do a daily report, weekly reports, and a final report. This was challenging, a lot of work. But the project was successful, because we partnered with other NGOs, and reached a lot of different people. We met real needs and were able to cover entire towns. USAID was happy with what we achieved through the project." – Implementer

In terms of future growth, HNRO would like to expand its services locally in order to provide more holistic care which ensures that all the needs of the community are met. They would also like to expand their services to other locations, in particular the legal clinic, which is an innovative initiative, and which could meet a felt need in many other parts of the country. Currently, limited funds have also limited their ability to serve the entire community, and though they are committed to impartiality and serving all segments of society, the limitations on funds may mean that they can sometimes only meet the needs of people connected to the church, i.e. in their most immediate sphere of influence.

Shalom Trauma Center

Shalom Trauma Center is seen as offering strongly personalized services to a high standard. However, the facility was often described as being very crowded and financially stretched. In other words, they provide quality but on a budget. Funding limitations mean that they are limited in their capacity to meet the demand, and they would expand easily if they had the funding to do so. What they offer is clearly unique, and there are only a few other entities in Nigeria offering a similar type of support. They do manage to maximize their financial

efficiency through means such as using church facilities for many events rather than hire or expand the center itself, and through a heavy reliance on volunteers.

"We-we need more staff the challenge would always be the funding. The challenge would always be the funding because the place runs 24 hours… Yeah-yeah we have a number of cost saving mechanism, one of our strategy of cost saving mechanism is we partner with benefitting communities like; churches, so for example today we are going to community A to do a trauma healing workshop instead of renting a hall, there are church halls… Alright, we embark on cost saving by training caregivers to ensure that they are close to where incidences are happening." – Decision-maker

"I know we might not have the fund but I have noticed something about trauma, it's not just about the money… It's about the care, the attention and then sometimes just been there, listen to their story, share in their pains and it is enough for them to find hope-the source of hope. So, even if the funds don't come, those volunteers out there are ready to work." – Implementer

No interviewee except for the senior management of Shalom could cite where the funds for the program come from, but they agreed that there is no local fundraising taking place that anyone was aware of. Indeed, Shalom is entirely funded through international faith-based networks, even though it does draw on local resources such as church facilities and volunteer time. For some interviewees, the international funding was a source of encouragement as it helped them feel a sense of global solidarity as they live in troubled times in Nigeria.

It's giving them hope to know that uhm there are people outside Nigeria-there are Christians outside Nigeria that are really interested in their lives and making you to know that we have a body of believers everywhere. And to know that these Jesus is not just Jesus of Nigeria. (Implementer)

"I don't know anything about their funding but mostly I know they are foreign donors so… But, umm I've been in the–in Nigeria seeing how local donors normally umm hardly to get so because to get donors locally is always hard… is not small money even for them to come from their places for the program here they have to go through maybe transportation and some of those things and then the feeding here and all those it needs money. So, somebody have to give that-give that money out. So, I think foreign donors are the ones that mostly help the organization like this in Nigeria because is not that we don't have people that will give but the heart of giving is not there." – Stakeholder

There was no mention of government support whatsoever. In fact, one interviewee commented that they cannot look to the government for support because the government offices themselves are overwhelmed.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is demand for similar services elsewhere. People from other regions emphasized that they would like to see a similar center in their own communities or localities. If resources were available, they would be able to increase their influence in this way; Shalom's current model of working through local churches and a broad network of caregivers allows them that already. However, a few interviewees commented that if the written materials were made more widely available, the influence of their content could be further expanded.

Legal Assistance Project

The funding for LAP comes almost entirely through its sponsoring INGO. However, there are several ways in which it relies heavily on local resources. It has no full-time dedicated staff, three lawyers who are all on retainer, several volunteers, and collaborations with local government and other associations who support their efforts as a part of their existing roles. Furthermore, LAP at first tried to ensure buy-in and shared ownership from the converts who benefit from their services by sharing legal costs evenly three ways: one-third paid for by LAP's sponsor INGO, one-third paid for by the church of the person benefiting from legal services, and one-third paid for by the beneficiary him/herself. However, the project leaders assured me that this rarely happens, with LAP's sponsor covering all costs in practice. Nonetheless, there has been an attempt to garner some cost-share and a sense of shared ownership and mutual partnership in the advocacy work. Beneficiaries who were interviewed, however, were unsure of where the funds were coming from, and suggested that their churches also needed outside financial assistance in order to function effectively.

"They asked, "Where do they get money from? How do they pay a legal practitioner?"… There were not many of us, so they investigated if the pastors gave us money or where we borrowed. They investigated, but no one ever said about [the NGO].… What the organization did for us is something that I cannot repay." – Recipient

Indeed, most of the beneficiaries of LAP services are very materially poor. This means that there are regular requests for further material assistance, both for the individuals and for their churches. The sponsoring INGO has other projects which can offer material assistance to vulnerable Christian families, and so even though LAP does not have the budget for material aid, sometimes they have facilitated provision of food or other basic needs by brokering assistance for vulnerable families. The interviewees who had benefited from the project described themselves very much as beneficiaries who can barely support themselves, who combined a sense of financial desperation with a hint of expectation that their fellow Christians would help them financially, if not them personally then at least their church facilities. They did also express a gratitude regardless of what material assistance may be given, and an expectation that they themselves must work hard to build their livelihoods, but it was notable that they demonstrated very little shame in asking for assistance.

"Now, talking about material possession, now, to be honest, there are some needs… Now, what I'm thinking is… I want to make a house especially for worshiping God. That's our biggest need. We are fighting, we are struggling, asking for monetary aid, there's not a place where we can work well. Our earnings are scarce and also have children to feed and when I ask for two hundred cooperation, they feel like it is a lot, that's what we need." – Recipient

"I'm not asking for money; I do see that they have the money and I don't care. They offered us support last year or two years ago, I don't remember quite well, he told me… that he was going to send me something… if I know how to do something, they can send the tools. I didn't demand for it." – Recipient

"What I think for them is better to help the persecuted church and what I have reached to see what helped us a lot is economic support, resources are needed for the community." – Stakeholder

Cow Bank Project

In the interviews, there was no mention whatsoever of funding source, nor any mention of entities outside the church itself which may influence the project. Some stakeholders at a regional level were aware that the project receives funding through an international Christian NGO but did not see this as significant beyond commenting that the NGO chose a good project in which to invest. Some of the church coordinators acknowledged that the CBP has supporters outside their community, and expressed appreciation equally for the financial support and the prayer support which Christians elsewhere may be extending to them.

Money is of course very important to the CBP, because it is a lending program built around material investment, and one of its key objectives is to help vulnerable households achieve financial self-sustainability. The source and amount of money with which they do this, was not a topic of interest to interviewees. While some people commented on the potential of CBP to expand its services to more communities in more regions, they did not comment on how costly or efficient such expansion might be.

"In my opinion. I think that they need to open wider more because this is my idea, but I don't know just clarify that: The calf (baby cow) will pass to other family after calving cow gave birth, right?" I: "Yes." R: "So, we wish that will develop wider." – Stakeholder

Because the project is implemented through churches and works primarily with Christians, it is generally understood and assumed that the support for the CBP comes from Christians elsewhere, and so there is a general understanding among recipients that they have the global Christian community to thank for their cows.

Discussion: What value-add and challenges do local faith actors present to global humanitarian and development priorities?

The five case studies in this report present a diverse array of initiatives by Christians to address pressing needs in their communities. They are different in many ways, but they have some qualities in common. They are all highly responsive, addressing specific needs according to a strong understanding of the needs of their community. They all seek to balance support for fellow Christians with a compassion-driven humanitarianism which seeks to see their entire communities benefiting. They are all on a journey of organizational development, seeking to have sufficient structure to ensure sustainability and integrity while resisting any urge to morph into something resembling a foreign NGO. This section will further explore some of these themes and nuances across the case studies.

1. What is the unique benefit of the organization's grassroots nature?

We can look at the grassroots nature of a project from various angles. From the perspective of local ownership, the two case studies in Iraq are fully embedded in their localities, founded by respected community members and had even to some extent participated in the displacement and return with the population they serve. The Cow Bank Project in Vietnam has a similar story of national origin, but was founded by a church denomination based in a major city to be implemented in remote villages with very limited access to any educational or development services. The Nigeria and Mexico cases, however, were initially developed by foreign Christians but then quickly passed on to local Christians to own and continue implementing. The Shalom Trauma Center is located centrally but receives and visits Christians from various regions of the country, while the Legal Assistance Project does not have a base but rather visits Christians in their home villages.

In terms of the programming itself, all case studies demonstrated an intimate understanding of community needs. We saw two examples of trauma centers, in both Iraq and Nigeria a novelty service. In Iraq, it was more difficult to gain community trust and ownership for a trauma center than in Nigeria, but in both countries it was the trust and relationships maintained by center staff that ultimately assured the acceptance of a much needed but somewhat stigmatized service. They did not stop at trauma care; both centers looked for ways to offer holistic support integrating material, emotional and spiritual needs. Two of the initiatives studied included a legal advocacy component, both taking place in extremely complex settings requiring a high level of both knowledge and sensitivity. The origins of the advocacy idea in both contexts seemed to emerge from dialogue between local Christians and international Christians, but was developed in a way that clearly met a felt need and was seen as highly relevant in both contexts. In both contexts, legal aid was quickly augmented by a strong component of training and capacity building for community members. This may indicate the importance placed on dignity by the implementers who want to do more than just meet immediate legal needs. The Cow Bank Project was a Vietnamese development program model adapted and introduced in new communities through a network of churches, with the revised model engaging with principles such as group lending to ensure local ownership.

Finally, from the perspective of the staff and volunteers of the case studies, all five cases illustrate the strength of being implemented by a team who is not only part of the affected community, but which has shared in the suffering and traumas which bring beneficiaries to the project seeking assistance. The staff of all five cases are almost entirely Christians (in the case of Mexico, Protestant Christians specifically) in a context where a significant portion of the population is of a different faith. A Christian faith motivated them to seek excellence in the assistance they offered and Christian teachings helped ensure that they were sensitive to strengthening human dignity through their work, and in particular promoting resilience and self-reliance. All five cases also have relatively few staff compared to larger NGOs and rely largely on committed volunteers, which has budget motivations but also demonstrates the commitment of community members to the work.

The five cases also serve primarily Christians, a model which is not locally questioned. It is through their embeddedness in a minority religious community that they are able in turn to build their programs to cascade the benefits out to the wider community, rather than designing their interventions to reach the religious majority from the outset. Even though church denominations and networks are complex, and the church partners of these case studies can all be seen as minority groups, church networks were an important means by which projects were able to activate quickly, build sustainable partnerships and operate on a shoestring budget. It also helped ensure longevity – though these projects were at most little over half a decade old, this already represented a much more lasting presence than many NGOs and aid agencies in these locations, and all five case studies were at the time of the study growing with no indication that they would be closing their doors anytime soon.

Church ownership was therefore crucial for ensuring project affinity, but it also delineated the boundaries of who received assistance first by these specific projects. While allowing for a better understanding of community needs, the religious orientation of these case studies also kept them from being fully impartial in their assistance. It was widely understood and required by both their funders and their constituents, that they support members of their church network first. However, an ethos of compassion and commitment to human dignity meant that, even if not all beneficiaries or even implementers were aware of this, project leadership in all five cases were constantly strategizing and negotiating to ensure that the project

brought benefit to the wider community and not just to their narrow church network. The strengths of affinity in this model, however, also suggest the importance of supporting a broad variety of local faith actors, not expecting an aid provider of one religious tradition to serve everyone but rather enabling the emergence of aid providers representing the religious diversity of a given community. As observed by the director of the Cow Bank Project, sometimes these organizations choose to support their own because they see that other organizations are already supporting different groups.

2. Who values what in the organizations' work?

All five case studies had offerings that were highly relevant and clearly met felt needs. They can be seen as having a strong contribution. Stakeholders and beneficiaries repeatedly emphasized how the programs were indeed benefiting the community. All five cases also expressed a commitment to holistic care, helping beneficiaries access services elsewhere which they themselves were not equipped to offer. Each initiative was somewhat unique, either offering a service not offered by other humanitarian or development agencies, or offering it in a very different way.

Their capacity by humanitarian standards, however, varied. The two cases in Iraq were continually professionalizing and developing their internal systems, staff skill sets, and organizational structures. The Cow Bank Project had the resources available to develop strong humanitarian capacity but preferred to stay small and build the skills of church members rather than develop organizationally. The Legal Assistance Project and Shalom Trauma Center did what they needed to in order to function ethically and according to legal requirements, but were not interested in developing more robust systems rather preferring to invest in relationship-building and in building the resources that they saw as most important to the affected community.

The organizations had varied approaches to the question of expertise, and in particular, spiritual care. The two Iraqi cases were led by priests, but their hiring and training priorities demonstrated their emphasis on technical expertise, both in specialized fields like psychosocial care and in general fields like financial management. The Cow Bank Project and Shalom Trauma Center were run almost entirely by church leaders, but they ensured that those church leaders accessed extensive training in community development and psychosocial care, respectively. The Legal Assistance Project held technical expertise on retainer through their contracts with lawyers, with other staff and volunteers being experienced and committed Christians with varying levels of relevant expertise.

All five cases saw the importance of spiritual care as core to their programmatic offerings. This again demonstrates the value of religious affinity, as the spiritual care was for the most part very reflective of a shared faith tradition, with shared scriptures and shared spiritual practices. Shalom Trauma Center, designed its trauma care around a faith ethos, that healing was only possible through forgiveness, and forgiveness only possible by the help of God. Both trauma care programs used scripture in their mental health services. While Shalom found that occasionally non-Christians found their services relevant and helpful even with the use of the Bible, NHTC chose to remove the scriptural references when working with non-Christians. This could be due to their desire to avoid any hint of insensitivity but could also be because the Bible felt irrelevant to non-Christians. Regardless, both trauma centers found that they worked more easily and effectively with Christians, in large part because of the Christian ethos of their mental health services. 'Spiritual' expertise did not play such a distinct role in the other projects, but nonetheless, they all employed prayer, community and relationship-building, and an assurance that Christians elsewhere were concerned with the well-being of their 'brothers and sisters' in the affected communities.

The humanitarian principle of impartiality emerged repeatedly in this research as an area of tension. As discussed above, all five cases served primarily Christians but also had a vision of blessing their entire community. However, except for HNRO and to a lesser extent Cow Bank Project and NHTC, none of the cases made a deliberate effort to extend services to non-Christians. Furthermore, some of the implementers and decision-makers interviewed commented that they would be very happy if any non-Christian recipients were to choose to become Christians after seeing the work they do in the community. While this is likely billed as 'proselytization' in humanitarian circles, there was no indication of coercion. Regardless, this is probably one of the reasons that these cases may prefer to be funded through Christian networks rather than adapt their narrative to a secular humanitarian one.

There was a diversity of approaches to the question of whether they saw their impact primarily on the individual level or the communal level. The two legal advocacy projects present particularly interesting cases of communal impact through individual services. While both projects include personalized legal services and training for Christians specifically, they envisage those services as laying the groundwork for creating a more cohesive and tolerant society as a whole. In Mexico, in particular, bespoke legal services for a small number of isolated families has attracted the attention of local and state government, sparked processes whereby local communities are more accepting of diversity, and brought the issue of religious freedom to the attention of a few national-level denominations. Similarly, the vision of Shalom Trauma Center bears specific note here, as they describe their trauma care for conflict-affected Christians as a means by which communities become more resilient, diversity is preserved despite the best efforts of extremist groups, and tolerant cohesive communities can be restored. At the other extreme, though, the Cow Bank Project has made the deliberate decision to avoid having a communal or societal impact, rather seeking to support vulnerable families in a meaningful way, confident that they will be able to support more families if they do not try to engage regional stakeholders, government or cultural traditions. Even they, though, see their work supporting churches as having a sustainable impact at the community level by strengthening churches as a charitable institution.

3. What is the organization's existing and ideal sphere of influence?

The church is a source of legitimacy for all five cases, but in different ways. For the Iraqi organizations, they are simply part of the same social system and in some ways an extension of the church and in some ways supported by the church. For Legal Assistance Program, it is their commitment to helping small, marginalized churches that became their source of local legitimacy even while

their relationship with national-level Christians is limited. For Shalom Trauma Center, a broad network of many different churches became both their human resources and their community access. Finally, Cow Bank Project operates under the auspices of a church and uses religious networks to identify churches as local partners in the communities where they work. Some were satisfied with this as the core of their legitimacy while others sought acknowledgement from the wider humanitarian community or a more diverse network of churches. None, however, were so keen to build their reputation that they would adapt their projects because they would see that as watering down their services for the sake of an external party. While the two Iraqi organizations were strongly embedded in a local community, the other three cases all had some degree of regional geographical reach which, again, was facilitated by church networks. Expansion for all five cases would ideally involve broadening their geographical reach, or in the case of the trauma centers establishing new centers in new locations.

All five cases are funded primarily through international networks of Christians. As seen in the literature, religious networks are in fact an enormous source of financial support for humanitarian work that is often hidden to global policy makers. All five cases expressed a desire for more funding and talked about what they could do if their funding increased, but none of them wanted to compromise their approach or their style in order to access more donors. While the Iraqi NGOs were open to institutional funding if it were to become available, the other three cases would have to adapt their systems and their approach so much that they would not pursue institutional funding. In Nigeria and Mexico, there was acknowledgement that national Christians had the resources and capacity to support their work, but there was no evidence that they were working proactively to tap into those national funding opportunities.

All five case studies were of organizations that are growing at their own pace. They started out small and have gradually expanded their capacity and services. They want to continue to grow, but they value the gradual and consistent pace of growth rather than wanting to claim a much larger legitimacy or funding base anytime soon.

4. What challenges or disadvantages do LFAs present to achieving international development or humanitarian objectives?

While the original impetus of this research was to inquire as to how LFAs might be able to access flexible institutional funding as a part of the wider humanitarian agenda, the findings indicate that they are indeed contributing to global humanitarian and development priorities but in a very niche way. While there was no mention of the Sustainable Development Goals[45], the Charter for Change[46] or other humanitarian declarations, there was some mention of the Humanitarian Principles and of International Humanitarian Law. Implementers spoke about compassion, dignity, resilience, self-reliance, mental health and psychosocial care, sustainability, economic empowerment, social cohesion and other concepts often referenced in humanitarian circles. However, the approaches taken are very bespoke and contextually unique. This is a core strength of the work of the LFAs: they understand the culture and the needs, and they respond in an appropriate way. However, it is hard to translate their contribution to the language of humanitarians. Hopefully this report has helped to make that translation, but it also illustrates how each LFA, especially those that are most embedded in their communities, has a unique approach. They thrive in their ability to do their work with passion and focus, without the distraction of engaging with policymakers, donors or even other NGOs.

[45] https://sdgs.un.org/goals

[46] https://charter4change.org/

Recommendations

For institutions and donors

- Recognize and acknowledge that local faith actors have easy access to communities in crisis and are usually the first responders.
- Map local faith actors as key potential stakeholders. This mapping should help identify several factors, including:
  - gaps in services
  - identify populations being served
  - the complexities of local social dynamics and the role played by different actors
  - modalities of assistance that are contextually and culturally relevant
  - individuals and organizations whose voice can help inform local and regional dialogue on development and humanitarian priorities.
- Involve local faith actors to participate in humanitarian coordination and development assistance discussions. Many of them are situated within the affected communities and are well placed to articulate their needs properly. Design strategies on how to best address those needs.
- Collaborate with local faith actors to address the issues surrounding sustainability of projects, from crisis into development.
- Invest in religious literacy for staff, policymakers and partners. While it is important to understand what religious groups believe, it is arguably even more important to understand the nature of interactions and relationships between different groups and the spaces where they will and will not effectively collaborate with one another. In addition, religious beliefs can play a role in promoting resilience and sustaining peace.
- Consider the value of interventions to the community as a whole and not just to individuals when gauging the relevance or effectiveness of interventions. Reassess measures of monitoring, such as the SDG targets, to measure community impact as well as impact on a sum of individuals.
- Consider spiritual well-being, and in particular the contribution that can be made by practices and teachings from specific religious traditions, as an element of psycho-social and community development interventions.
- Offer local grassroots actors access to resources and training to help them improve their understanding of humanitarian principles, accountability and transparency, management and governance.
- Consider joining initiatives such as the UN Interagency Taskforce on Religion and Development, the International Partnership of Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), to understand the role of local faith actors in localizing response to humanitarian need.

For international faith-based NGOs

- Be an intermediary between institutional donors and local faith actors. Invest time in building relationships with local faith actors and design flexible partnership programs which allow each local partner to operate within its unique area of expertise.
- Build interfaith collaborations, acknowledging that your best local partners are likely to share your religious identity but that interfaith partnerships at the global level can help ensure that assistance through faith partnerships at the local level reaches all the most vulnerable regardless of creed or background.
- Invest in building the capacity of local faith actors through investment of time in relationship and mentoring.
- Create opportunities through which local faith actors can network with one another and support replication of ideas across geographical areas and regions.
- Offer funds to local partners with multi-year grants that cover core costs as a reasonable percentage of budgets. Require robust reporting, while mentoring local partners to strengthen their capacity for financial and programmatic monitoring.
- Help local partners think through decisions about growth, strategic planning, organizational sustainability and robust monitoring for impact reporting, and facilitate their access to training and resources to build their internal systems.

For local faith actors

- Stay true to your vision and ensure that all staff and beneficiaries understand your vision and core values. Communicate through informal conversations as well as formal training about humanitarian values along with the ways in which your faith motivates compassion and a desire to bless your entire community.
- Grow slowly and gradually, within the scope of your vision.
- Invest time and energy in relationships with other influential actors in your location, including government and actors of different faith traditions. Model collaboration and tolerance to the population you serve.
- Be aware of the benefits of staying local; if you choose to expand geographically, prioritize identifying passionate individuals, churches or organizations in other locations who share your vision, and allow them to lead in establishing programming in their own community.
- Consider investing in administrative and management systems, including for monitoring and evaluation, through hiring qualified staff and through accessing training or external support.

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Interview Questions

Decision-maker (manager/leader within the organization)

"This is for a study by Open Doors to demonstrate the contribution of local grassroots projects to benefiting society. I am interviewing you as an external person, so your participation in this interview will not in any way affect your position or services. I will make a note of your first name for my personal reference, but will not document your full name in any place, nor will we use your name or any identifying factors in any report. I would like to record the call simply to ensure I can remember what you say. As soon as I have completed my notes, I will delete the recording. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

1. What is the story of the program: how did it come into existence and develop?
2. What is the program's relationship to the church and clergy members?
3. How, as a program, do you balance 'humanitarian' care, 'religious' care, and 'spiritual' care?
4. How does the program promote resilience of the Christian community? Of the wider community?
5. How does the program emulate the principle of being a "Light to the World"?
6. What is your understanding of the concept of "capacity"? What kinds of "capacity" do you as an organization most have and need to invest in?
7. Who are your experts?
8. Is staff retention an issue?
9. Are you familiar with the humanitarian principles? How important are they to your teams?
10. What does the organization communicate to the community, and how?
11. How do you demonstrate the cost-efficiency of your work?
12. Define "success" for your organization in:
    - One year's time
    - Five years' time

Implementing staff/volunteer

"This is for a study by Open Doors to demonstrate the contribution of local grassroots projects to benefiting society. I am interviewing you as an external person, so your participation in this interview will not in any way affect your position or services. I will make a note of your first name for my personal reference but will not document your full name in any place, nor will we use your name or any identifying factors in any report. I would like to record the call simply to ensure I can remember what you say. As soon as I have completed my notes, I will delete the recording. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

1. Why do you do this job?
2. Why do you work for this organization?
3. What is your expertise? What are you good at and/or qualified in?
4. What are the biggest needs of the affected community? How do you know what the needs are?
5. How are beneficiaries identified?
6. What do you communicate to beneficiaries, and how?
7. How do you feel about paperwork? Reporting, finances, monitoring, etc.?
8. How do you share your skills and services to be a blessing beyond the Christian community, i.e. to the wider society?
9. Do you know whether community members feel their dignity has been affected by the events of the past several years? What do you do you help respect their dignity?

10. What gets said in the community about the program? How do you know?

11. How does the program promote resilience for the Christian community? For the wider community?

Community member/beneficiary

"This is for a study by Open Doors to demonstrate the contribution of local grassroots projects to benefiting society. I am interviewing you as an external person, so your participation in this interview will not in any way affect your position or services. I will make a note of your first name for my personal reference but will not document your full name in any place, nor will we use your name or any identifying factors in any report. I would like to record the call simply to ensure I can remember what you say. As soon as I have completed my notes, I will delete the recording. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

1. What has been your journey that has brought you to this organization? How did you first connect with them? (Do you receive aid from other organizations as well?)

2. Why do you come to this organization specifically?

3. What are your biggest needs (these can be material, spiritual, social…)? How are those – or should those – needs be met?

4. What are the biggest needs of your community as a whole? Are they being met? If not, how would they be met?

5. What do you like about this organization?

6. What do you see as your role in helping your community to become a better place? Has the program helped you to make a better contribution in any way?

7. Where do you see yourself in:
   - One year
   - Five years

Stakeholder

"This is for a study by Open Doors to demonstrate the contribution of local grassroots projects to benefiting society. I am interviewing you as an external person, so your participation in this interview will not in any way affect your position or services. I will make a note of your first name for my personal reference but will not document your full name in any place, nor will we use your name or any identifying factors in any report. I would like to record the call simply to ensure I can remember what you say. As soon as I have completed my notes, I will delete the recording. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

1. Please describe the program as you understand it: what does it do, why does it do it?

2. What is its contribution to the community (Christian and/or society, as appropriate)?

3. To what extent is the program known for ties to the church?

4. What is the organization's capacity, i.e. What do they do well?

5. What is the organization's reputation at the local level: how are they treated and perceived by the community?

6. What could the program do better to help build the society?

7. If you know about their funding, what type of funding works best for them? Who would you think is their ideal donor and why?

8. Are you aware of any links between the organization and international development or humanitarian efforts? Should such links exist?

9. Should they be bigger? Why?


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