WOMEN LEADING LOCALLY

Exploring women's leadership in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan

Life in cyclone shelters in Bangladesh poses hazards for women and girls. A group of women's rights activists is tackling the problem and getting results. Members of a Gender Task Team in Bangladesh, meeting in a cyclone shelter: Mahfuza Begum, Nazma Begum, Reizina Yesmin, Hosneara Champa, and Khadiza Begum. Photo: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America

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This report examines women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action with case studies from Bangladesh and South Sudan. Co-authored with two women's organizations, Ashroy Foundation of Bangladesh and Rural Women for Development in South Sudan, itseeks to understand whether and how local humanitarian leadership (LHL) can promote or constrain women's leadership. The report finds that women's leadership in LHLis limited in both countries, with women's leadership facing many of the same challenges as LHL itself. However, by encouraging collaboration between women leaders, women's organizations, and LHL actors, progress toward a more gender-transformative humanitarian system can be achieved.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BWHP	Bangladesh Women's Humanitarian Platform
CCNF	Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum
COAST Trust	Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust
FDMN	Forcibly displaced Myanmar national
FGD	Focus group discussion
GiHA WG	Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group
IDP	Internally displaced person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
JNUS	Jago Nari Unnayan Sangsta
LHL	Local humanitarian leadership
LNGO	Local nongovernmental organization
LNHA	Local or national humanitarian actor
NAHAB	National Alliance for Humanitarian Actors – Bangladesh
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NIRAPAD	Network for Information Response and Preparedness Activities
NNGO	National nongovernmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RRC	South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission – Bangladesh
RWDSS	Rural Women for Development in South Sudan
RWWS	Rohingya Women's Welfare Society
SPLM/A – IO	Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army – In Opposition
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VOWHON	Voice of Women Humanitarian Organization Network
WRO	Women's rights organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action with case studies from Bangladesh and South Sudan. It seeks to understand whether and how local humanitarian leadership (LHL)—with its transfer of resources and power to local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs)—can promote or constrain women's leadership. This executive summary delves into three main areas covered in the report: why women's leadership[1] in humanitarian action matters, the barriers and challenges facing women's leadership in the humanitarian sector, and whether and how LHL has advanced women's leadership in the sector. The two cases from Bangladesh and South Sudan provide examples of women's leadership in humanitarian emergencies, highlighting the contextual challenges—and successes—of the experiences of women and women's organizations.

The report finds that women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action is limited in both case study countries, with women's leadership facing many of the same challenges as LHL itself. Among the barriers to women's leadership in the examined humanitarian crises are sociocultural notions about what women leaders and women's organizations are able to do. As highlighted by the case studies, the women's organizations that are involved in humanitarian response tend to engage more in traditional service delivery than in strategic gender programming, owing both to the need to conform to the expectations of traditional humanitarian actors in order to access funding opportunities and to the perceived divide between humanitarian, development, and peace programming—a divide that many women's organizations do not recognize. The report underscores the need for humanitarian action to do more to recognize the leadership of women and women's organizations, including by encouraging the participation of women's organizations in LHL-focused spaces such as humanitarian networks like the National Alliance for Humanitarian Actors in Bangladesh and acknowledging their role in peace negotiation processes in South Sudan.

WHY DOES WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP MATTER IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR?

The report identifies three main areas according to the literature in which women's leadership in the humanitarian sector matters: (1) intrinsic value and efficiency arguments; (2) the gender-transformative humanitarian approach; and (3) the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Intrinsic value and efficiency arguments

Women's leadership matters intrinsically; being half of the world's population should entail equal engagement in leadership and decision-making processes. This argument makes the case that women's leadership matters in the humanitarian sector because women matter. There is also research that notes that women's leadership—and efforts linking gender equality and humanitarian action—can lead to more positive outcomes, which the report describes as the efficiency argument for women's leadership. Women's organizations, particularly local groups, are often best placed to respond to humanitarian emergencies, have the trust and knowledge of their communities, and have a greater understanding of women's and girls' gender-based needs, fulfilling a frequently acknowledged service and knowledge gap in humanitarian action. In Bangladesh, for example, the Rohingya Women's Welfare Society provides counseling on issues of domestic violence in the refugee camps. In South Sudan, Steward Women offers support on dealing with sexual and gender-based violence issues with internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country.

Gender-transformative humanitarian action

The leadership of women and women's organizations has been linked to gender-transformative humanitarian efforts. Gender-transformative humanitarian action is based on a feminist lens and aims to change unequal gender power relations and norms, with a focus on women's leadership, consciousness raising, network building, and intersectionality. Examples of gender-transformative action from Bangladesh and South Sudan link humanitarian service provision with changes to the structural forms of discrimination that affect women. In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers Association provides legal aid services to refugees in Cox's Bazar while also advocating for the adoption of national sexual harassment guidelines. In South Sudan, the Titi Foundation provides non-food items to IDPs and also works on advocacy efforts to hold duty bearers to account to provide education for marginalized women, among other things.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

In contrast with more "traditional" humanitarian action, which tends to be short term and focused on emergency response, women's organizations tend to adopt a holistic and long-term approach that straddles the artificial divides that international actors place among humanitarian action, development work, and peace processes. The long-term and comprehensive approach of women's organizations is due to their strategic gender justice lens, which connects the immediate needs of women in crisis with an awareness of their continuing development needs. An example of this can be seen in Bangladesh, where the Sabalamby Unnayan Samity provides emergency responses to flash floods in its area as well as livelihood support and programming to end gender-based violence. In South Sudan, out of the 12 women's organizations identified in the research, 8 work on peace and conflict resolution activities, signaling the important role that women's leaders have historically played in the peace process in the country, again going beyond providing emergency relief to communities to working to ensure a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Women and women's organizations often find their contributions unrecognized or find themselves excluded from coordination and decision-making spaces dominated by international humanitarian actors as well as from spaces for local and national actors. The report finds the following three main types of barriers to women's leadership in the sector: (1) the role of harmful gender norms; (2) the disconnect between women and women's organizations and the humanitarian system; and (3) donor priorities and limited support of women's organizations.

Harmful gender norms

Local humanitarian action has its own set of gender biases and sexist norms that ignore or devalue women's leadership. For example, women humanitarian leaders in both countries identified care work as a hurdle affecting their ability to participate in humanitarian action, because women leaders find themselves—often unlike their male counterparts—having to juggle both work and family responsibilities. In Bangladesh, a Rohingya woman leader spoke about the challenge of finding time to spend on work and with colleagues owing to the competing demands of the household. In South Sudan, a woman head of a national NGO shared that she gets "traumatized balancing our job roles and family," which can become overwhelming. The dual burden women leaders face needs more consideration and acknowledgment.

Disconnect from the humanitarian system

Women's organizations generally struggle to be integrated into the mainstream humanitarian coordination system, making it a challenge for them to gain national-level recognition as significant humanitarian actors. If women and women's organizations are not considered humanitarian actors, they may be excluded from capacity-building and funding opportunities available as part of LHL programming, let alone from greater leadership roles. Yet this does not mean that women's organizations are not involved in humanitarian action; many provide humanitarian relief as part of their portfolios, and others do so when emergencies strike in their communities. In fact, although they are the exception, several women's organizations identified in the research are members of the United Nations–led cluster system in their respective countries, such as the Agrajattra Organization in Bangladesh, a women-led organization, which is a member of the child protection sub-cluster and the food security and shelter clusters, and the South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network, which is in the gender-based violence and child protection sub-clusters.

Donor priorities and limited support of women's organizations

The gender and long-term focus of women's organizations creates conflicts with donor programming and makes it difficult for the organizations to be competitive. In addition, women's organizations may find themselves competing with LNHAs, which have the advantage of being seen as more traditional humanitarian actors. Women's organizations also find that donors often place unrealistic demands on them that do not take into account the strategic gender work they are doing or the challenging environment in which women's organizations find themselves. Women's organizations in Bangladesh and South Sudan flagged funding challenges as serious barriers to their engagement in the humanitarian sector, noting the competitive nature of funding approaches and donors' lack of awareness of the humanitarian work that women's organizations conduct.

HAS LHL ADVANCED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE SECTOR?

LHL efforts have the potential to foster increased recognition of women's leadership and integration of women and women's organizations into humanitarian action, as they shift power and resources to local and national actors engaging in humanitarian action. Yet the power of patriarchal structures and entrenched ways of working that continually ignore or devalue women's contributions to humanitarian action—both of which can exist in networks of LNHAs and other LNHA spaces—cannot be underestimated. They make the implementation of LHL that recognizes women's leadership rare in the two case study countries.

In Bangladesh, while LNHAs generally appear to be actively involved in humanitarian efforts, the leadership of women and women's organizations is limited, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis. Most of the work done by women's organizations in the response to the crisis focuses on service provision rather than on longer-term gender justice programming. This pattern constrains the ability of women's organizations to show leadership in humanitarian activities in Cox's Bazar. In South Sudan, it is too soon to tell whether LHL efforts, which are still nascent, have advanced women's leadership. Though women's organizations have long been involved in responding to the peace process and humanitarian crisis in the country, the study finds that they have received little recognition for their efforts, particularly from donors.

CONCLUSION

Shifting power to LNHAs has been a difficult process, and more work still needs to be done to move toward LHL in the global humanitarian system. Yet the fact that momentum toward LHL is still ongoing creates a window of opportunity in which the leadership of women and women's organizations can be significantly advanced, including through capacity strengthening and funding support. Careful attention must be paid to encourage women's leadership; assuming that women's organizations will benefit from moves toward LHL is inaccurate and can perpetuate gender-blind humanitarian programming. By encouraging collaboration between women leaders, women's organizations, and LHL actors, progress toward a more gender-transformative humanitarian system can be achieved.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report examines women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action, specifically local humanitarian leadership (LHL), with case studies from Bangladesh and South Sudan. LHL is built upon the premise that humanitarian action, whenever possible, should be led by local and national humanitarian actors rather than international organizations (Oxfam 2017). The guiding assumption of LHL is that the current humanitarian system has failed to adequately deliver aid to populations in crisis, raising the need for another model of response. This new model involves shifting power and resources to local and national actors because they are well positioned to act fast in emergencies and are likely more aware of the needs and preferences of the local populations than those from the international community (Gingerich and Cohen 2015). Efforts to spur this shift toward LHL have notably been captured in events such as the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, which gave rise to the Grand Bargain, an agreement between the biggest donors and humanitarian agencies to give 25 percent of their funding to local and national actors, as well as to the Charter for Change, an initiative by 29 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) that commits them to change how they work with local actors (Charter for Change n.d.).

Crucial to improving the effectiveness of locally led humanitarian efforts—and internationally led efforts, for that matter—is the expansion and recognition of women's leadership in local humanitarian spaces. Women and girls experience distinct vulnerabilities in emergencies, but often their leadership, knowledge, skills, and agency are not recognized or appreciated and their gender-specific needs are not adequately addressed. Women's organizations[2] can and have played a crucial role in using their expertise to address these gaps. However, studies have found that even though women's organizations show "extraordinary capacities to mobilize women survivors to improve distribution of aid, access to resources . . . and making local institutions accountable," their efforts often go unacknowledged (Lambert et al. 2018; Gupta and Leung 2010). This research therefore sheds light on the involvement of women and women's organizations in local humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan and seeks to understand whether and how LHL—with its transfer of resources and power to local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs)—can promote, or constrain, women's leadership.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research is guided by four main questions:

1. **Impact**: What does the existing literature suggest about the impact of women's leadership on the humanitarian sector and humanitarian assistance, specifically in locally led humanitarian action? Particular attention was paid to documenting the effectiveness of women's leadership in humanitarian action by looking at the results of efforts made by local humanitarian actors to support gender-transformative action. Definitions of women's leadership and gender-transformative action are to follow.

2. **Current Engagement**: How are women and women's organizations involved in the humanitarian sector and in situations of locally led humanitarian action?

3. **Barriers and Challenges**: What barriers and challenges do women and women's organizations face in their participation in the humanitarian sector, and specifically in LHL? In what ways does LHL constrain, if at all, women's leadership?

4. **Opportunities**: Does LHL encourage women's leadership? How does this compare across the country case studies?

a. Are there opportunities for advancing women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action? If so, under what conditions?
b. What enables women and women's organizations to successfully engage in the humanitarian sector and locally led humanitarian action?

These questions test the extent to which women's leadership features in locally led humanitarian action, and the extent to which it needs to feature to ensure a truly transformed humanitarian system and effective response. The findings from these questions go toward the body of evidence on LHL, and specifically turn a feminist lens on LHL. The findings also help identify how women's leadership can be better incorporated into efforts to alleviate a consistent problem: the patriarchal humanitarian system's inadequate response to women's gender-based needs and disregard for women's agency. This report presents exploratory research on an understudied area that can be used to develop robust research questions and hypotheses in the future.

STRUCTURE OF REPORT

The report begins with a literature review that explores the impact of women's leadership on the humanitarian sector, specifically looking at LHL. It provides an overview of how women and women's organizations are currently involved in LHL and the barriers and challenges they face. The literature review also assesses whether or not LHL encourages women's leadership, testing the assumption that LHL's emphasis on local and national organizations leads to greater integration of local and national women's organizations into locally led humanitarian action than would occur under a more traditional structure of humanitarian action. Following the literature review are two case studies, from Bangladesh and South Sudan, that provide primary data to inform the main research. The report then brings together the literature review and the two case studies to provide an analysis of the overall research findings and what they mean in regard to understanding the integration of women's leadership in LHL.

CASE STUDIES

For the case studies, we focused on countries that have an active civil society involved in humanitarian action, based on Oxfam's experience and conversations with external experts. We also decided, for the sake of variation in our cases, to prioritize variation by geographic area and type of humanitarian crisis.

Bangladesh was selected because it has an active and advanced LHL movement, such as the National Alliance for Humanitarian Actors (NAHAB), a network meant to ensure that national and local actors play a strong role in humanitarian response (Christian Aid 2017). Women's organizations also have a strong presence in the country. Typically the types of humanitarian emergencies Bangladesh faces involve natural hazards, such as floods, cyclones, and droughts. The case study also looks specifically at the Rohingya crisis. The author of the Bangladesh case study is the Ashroy Foundation, a women's organization working on disaster risk reduction issues in the country.

In South Sudan, LHL is starting to take off, as the case study explores. The country's need for humanitarian assistance is primarily conflict-driven. The research paid particular attention to the role that women's organizations, such as the EVE Organization for Women Development and Titi Foundation, play in humanitarian efforts in the country. Our research partner for this case study is the Rural Women for Development in South Sudan (RWDSS), a national women-led development and humanitarian organization centered on women's rights.

METHODOLOGY

Before developing this research, we reached out to key experts in the field to help shape the guiding questions for the research and to inform our analysis. These key experts came from local women's organizations, LNHAs, foundations, and international actors such as INGOs and UN agencies. Based on their feedback, we developed the four research questions. We started the literature review by looking at academic and gray literature exploring the link between women's leadership and locally led humanitarian action, but we extended it to humanitarian action in general because the initial area of research did not result in many reports and articles. The case studies were conducted using qualitative methods in partnership with women's organizations from the two countries.[3]

Researchers carried out semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for the case studies. Most of the interviews and FGDs were conducted from January to March 2019. The research partners mapped the different local and national actors involved in humanitarian action, with a focus on women leaders and women's organizations. The interviews and FGDs were held with a sample of groups that included members of local humanitarian organizations, as well as women leaders, gender experts, and women's organizations at the national and local governmental and nongovernmental levels.

In Bangladesh, a total of 19 interviews and 5 FGDs were conducted. Of these interviews, 12 were held in Cox's Bazar (7 women, 5 men) and 7 in Dhaka (2 women, 5 men). Three out of the 5 FGDs were held in Cox's Bazar (8 women, 20 men), while the other 2 were conducted in Dhaka (10 women, 5 men). Unfortunately, only 1 out of the 5 FGDs was gender disaggregated; owing to time restrictions, particularly for research conducted in Cox's Bazar, researchers deemed that it was not possible to host separate FGDs by gender. Considering the gender and power relations in communities, this is a concern that should be kept in mind when reviewing the case study.

In South Sudan, 34 study participants were interviewed through FGDs and interviews; 7 were men, and the remaining 27 were women. The 34 interviews included international governmental and nongovernmental actors to get their reflections on how they envision their role in LHL. While women were prioritized, conversations were also held with men to explore how they view the role of women's leadership in the humanitarian sector. Gender-disaggregated FGDs were held in South Sudan; because the lead researcher identifies as a man, the FGDs with women were facilitated by women colleagues from RWDSS.

In both countries, the researchers held validation workshops with a smaller group of research participants to share the initial results of the research and seek their reflections. Through these workshops, the researchers were able to hone the findings and ensure that the participants had an opportunity to provide feedback on the final report. These validation workshops were organized and led by each research partner.

By partnering with local women's organizations on this research, we hoped to lessen the unequal power dynamics involved in the data collection process, as well as to "walk the talk'" regarding LHL.[4] We see this research relationship as a collaboration and an exchange of learning between our partners and ourselves, and we found it to be a rich and rewarding experience. The research partners provided feedback on the research questions and process and took the lead on developing interview instruments, selecting interviewees, conducting interviews and FGDs, analyzing data, putting together validation workshops, and writing the case studies. Our role at Oxfam with regard to the case studies produced by the partners was to edit and condense the studies to fit within the overall report. The research partners' connection to and knowledge of gender and local humanitarian dynamics were essential to developing a nuanced analysis.

We recognize, however, that our partners may only feel so comfortable in navigating that relationship with us, the funder of this research. While we were careful to engage with the research partners throughout the process and made sure to provide spaces for them to share feedback and critiques, we are not sure whether the research partners actually felt comfortable doing so. While this is not an unusual problem, as shown by a recent study on working with local researchers from the Overseas Development Institute, more thinking needs to be done on how to create a comfortable and equal partnership, which requires time and trust (Fast 2019, 6). To alleviate some of these uncomfortable power dynamics, one of our goals was to work closely with the research partners to develop their case studies into a published report and to list them as authors. As we share this work externally, we will seek out presentation and conference opportunities for our research partners and support their participation, so they can be visible partners in dissemination. Lastly, this final report will be translated into different languages (Bangla and Arabic) to ensure that the findings are accessible to the local populations in the respective case study countries.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

Several key concepts discussed in this research require definition:

• LHL and localization

• Women's leadership

• Gender-transformative humanitarian action

LHL and localization

Two terms are often used to describe the role local and national actors play in humanitarian action: "LHL" and "localization." This research purposefully uses "LHL." There is no consensus on the definition of either term, though important differences exist between them.

A report by Imogen Wall and Kerren Hedlund (2016, 3) describes the use of "localization" in the literature as an umbrella term referring to all approaches to working with local actors, and "specifically to work that originates with local actors, or is designed to support locally emerging initiatives." According to Wall and Hedlund, this is different from "locally led," which is more akin to "LHL." They also find that the term "localization" is used without delving into the nature and quality of such relationships with local actors (Wall and Hedlund 2016, 10). The emphasis on partnership as an aspect of localization has come under criticism by local actors, note Wall and Hedlund (2016, 3), who find that in reality local actors find this so-called partnership model disempowering and more akin to subcontracting than a true sharing of leadership and responsibilities.

Van Brabant and Patel (2018) note that there are two interpretations of localization. The first is the decentralization interpretation, which says that "'localization' can be achieved if strategic, operational and financial decisions are made close to the 'at-risk' or affected areas, and if 25% of financial resources go 'as directly as possible' to 'local' actors" (Van Brabant and Patel 2018, 17). The second is the transformation interpretation, in which "strategic, operational and financial decisions should be made by undisputedly 'national' actors (governmental and non-governmental) in support of which 25% of the available international resource go directly to them" (Van Brabant and Patel 2018, 17). The transformation interpretation offers a much stronger framing of local and national leadership in the humanitarian sector and fits better into the concept of LHL used in this research.

Finally, a report by the Overseas Development Institute shares the critique of "localization" as a term "principally because it puts the international humanitarian system at the center of the process, as opposed to refocusing on local actors" (Barbelet 2018, 5). According to the same

report, this conceptualization of localization differs from LHL or locally led humanitarian action, in that the latter recognizes the leadership of local humanitarian actions. Therefore this research, considering its attention on women's leadership, intentionally uses the term "LHL" or its synonym, "locally led humanitarian action."[5] The preference for "LHL" does not, however, signify that it is automatically more likely to lead to inclusive and equitable humanitarian action that integrates women's leadership. LHL can be subject to its own prevailing social norms and unequal power dynamics that can lead to the ignoring and exclusion of women's leadership, as noted in this research.

Women's leadership

To narrow the research to a feasible scope, we focused on specific areas of women's leadership. Women's leadership was examined in six main areas:[6] (1) women in leadership roles within disaster management or civil protection authorities; (2) women leading humanitarian programs for national or local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or leading these NGOs themselves; (3) women with leadership roles in community disaster committees; (4) organizations focused on women and women's rights that are shaping humanitarian assistance; (5) women-led networks and associations focused on engaging with the humanitarian system; and (6) women's leadership in peacekeeping and police missions. These areas are based on the local and national governments and civil society organizations typically included within LHL (Els 2017). Working in these six areas helps ensure a strong commitment to the rights of women and girls and enables women's organizations to have decision-making and influencing power across the full spectrum of humanitarian action, including response, resilience, recovery, disaster risk reduction, peacekeeping, and peace negotiations. In this research, these six areas are encapsulated in the term "women and women's organizations."

Because LHL is focused on transferring power and resources to local and national institutional actors, we have concentrated on more formal, institutional forms of women's leadership rather than on informal ones. Leadership can have different meanings depending on the context; to help narrow our scope, we decided to focus more on positionality (i.e., women in positions of leadership within organizations, or women's organizations that head projects within the humanitarian system such as the cluster system). Thus, though we did look at women in leadership positions in community disaster committees, we did not explore many other informal types of women's leadership. We recognize, however, that women's leadership in communities frequently occurs at the grassroots level, where they exhibit power, agency, and knowledge, though they may lack formal titles or connection to a formally registered organization.

Gender-transformative humanitarian action

Gender-transformative humanitarian action, which is part of one of the research questions examined here, is often conflated with gender-sensitive or gender-responsive humanitarian action (see Box 1). For example, the Government of Canada's humanitarian policy expresses support for gender-responsive humanitarian action but defines it in part as action that "supports gender-transformative humanitarian action, where and when possible, particularly through initiatives that address unequal power relations, and build resilience and self-reliance capacities" (Government of Canada, n.d.). In contrast, a note by CARE International distinguishes between a gender-transformative and a gender-sensitive humanitarian approach: a gender-sensitive approach will "respond to the different needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality" but will not change the structural and contextual issues that underpin gender inequality, as would a gender-transformative approach (CARE 2012, 4).

The boundary between gender-transformative and gender-responsive action is a little harder to pin down. According to a report by CARE, gender-responsiveness "requires actions that challenge existing gender roles and relations" (Raud 2017, 8). To move from gender-responsive

to gender-transformative programming involves working toward systemic change and having the resources to institutionalize gender-transformative programming.

CARE defines gender-transformative programming as "actively striving to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and the imbalance of power as a means of reaching humanitarian or development outcomes while also promoting gender equity" (Raud 2017, 4). Oxfam Canada's definition contributes to the discussion by identifying four main dimensions of gender-transformative action: (1) it seeks to change unequal power dynamics; (2) it is intersectional, in that it takes into account the multiple forms of discrimination all women face; (3) it is focused on leadership; and (4) it partners with women's rights actors (Lambert et al. 2018, 5). In both definitions, gender-transformative humanitarian action, built as it is on a feminist lens, is firmly intended to change unequal gender power relations and norms, though Oxfam Canada's explicit attention on intersectionality, leadership, and women's rights actors make it a more appropriate definition for this research.

Box 1: Gender programming in humanitarian action

- **Gender-sensitive**: Identifies the needs of different genders but does not question the structural and contextual issues underpinning gender inequality.
- **Gender-responsive**: Responds to and challenges existing gender roles and relations but does not seek policy change or institutionalization of gender programming.
- **Gender-transformative**: Seeks to change unequal power dynamics, is intersectional, focuses on women's leadership, and partners with women's rights actors.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research was necessarily limited by the budget, which proved to be an acute constraint for our research partner in South Sudan. Because traveling outside of Juba would have required significant additional funds and time, we were not able to expand the scope of the research beyond the capital to include a "deep dive," as we did in Bangladesh. Consequently, there likely are relevant and interesting activities being undertaken by local women's organizations outside of Juba that we were not able to reach. This situation also creates a potential bias in our research toward more "elite" organizations that have a base in Juba. In Bangladesh, we were able to widen our focus somewhat, conducting interviews in Dhaka and in Cox's Bazar. Furthermore, this budget limitation was connected to time constraints imposed by Oxfam, which required us to spend the money for the research project by a certain date. This in turn may have placed undue pressure on our research partners to complete their analyses, while also dealing with the challenges of gathering data for this report—including the logistical challenges of traveling for interviews and dealing with limited internet and mobile connections— and managing their other responsibilities. To ensure that the quality of the findings was not affected, we were careful to be clear about the boundaries of the research and our expectations with the partners.

Another issue among the researchers was definitional. For example, it is important to distinguish between local and national actors, but there is some fuzziness in this regard, and this lack of clarity is arguably an issue in LHL in general. Local and national organizations can face distinct challenges and barriers to LHL: a large NGO that works all across the country can have a different experience from a local, more regionally focused entity. The fuzziness between local and national actors was more apparent in South Sudan, perhaps because the case study's research area was mainly in Juba, where there was little or no distinction between what was considered "local" and what was considered "national."

Another definitional challenge was distinguishing between a women's organization and a women-led organization. At the outset of this research, both country case studies understood women leaders to involve solely women-led organizations. While women-led organizations are key to this analysis, we also did not want to omit organizations with a strong gender focus or assume that just because an organization was led by a woman it had an interest in women's rights and gender justice. Through discussions between the case study authors and the Oxfam America researcher, we agreed to broaden the definition of women's organizations to beyond women-led organizations if the organizations in question were able to show that they had a strong gender justice program.

The findings from this report are limited by the fact that we conducted research in Bangladesh and South Sudan, which are unique contexts in and of themselves. While the findings may be generalizable to some extent, the nature of LHL is context specific, as are gender norms, which can affect the extent to which women's leadership is recognized and visible in humanitarian action.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the connection between women's leadership and the humanitarian system, with an emphasis on locally led humanitarian action. The thesis behind this literature review is that women and women's organizations struggle to be recognized as humanitarian leaders owing to structural gender inequalities within the humanitarian system, and that advocating for and encouraging women's leadership in local humanitarian spaces assigns value to the knowledge, skills, and agency of women leaders and women's groups. This recognition can help reduce gender inequities in the humanitarian system, leading to more effective and more accountable humanitarian efforts. It is this premise that this literature review seeks to examine.

Women face great challenges in surviving, coping with, and recovering from humanitarian emergencies because of unequal sociocultural gender norms that not only undermine their resilience but also fail to recognize their agency and knowledge as valuable and necessary aspects of humanitarian action. It has been well documented that humanitarian efforts that do not take into account the gendered context can further endanger women and girls and exacerbate preexisting gender discriminatory practices (see Table 1 for a few examples of how gender-blind humanitarian action can lead to negative consequences). As stated by a UN Women global study on the United Nations Security Council's resolution on women, peace, and security (UNSCR 1325), "the humanitarian system's collective failure to recognize the ability of local civil society organizations and women and girls to act as partners with valuable knowledge and experience severely limits our effectiveness" (Coomaraswamy 2015, 88).

Table 1: Examples of consequences of gender-blind humanitarian action

Problem	Gender-Blind Response
Restoring land rights to women (or not)	"Hasty resettlement programs, facilitated by foreign aid (i.e. the UN, World Bank and US, UK and Australian governments) and international aid organizations (i.e. the IFRC) disrupted the traditional matrilocal system of the Northern and Eastern Provinces [in Sri Lanka]. When state and non-state actors facilitated the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in regions where women hold rights to land, nearly all the new houses were deeded to men. This mirrored what had previously happened in coastal regions during the post-2004 tsunami, when international humanitarian aid organizations only gave construction materials and wrote deeds to new houses to men" (Jayatilaka and Amirthalingam 2015, 19).
Responding to women's sanitary needs in refugee camps	"A study conducted with refugees living in camps in Cameroon found that 99% of women did not feel safe using camp toilets, citing concerns regarding the risk of assault due to the lack of lighting and locks. Fears of nighttime assault may lead girls and women to create makeshift toilets (e.g., the use of outdoor drains or buckets), refrain from consuming liquids, wake at early hours (4:00–5:00 a.m.) to use toilets, or resort to using plastic bags for waste excretion ('flying toilets'), which are eventually thrown into the open or general waste streams" (Schmitt et al. 2018, 4).

Problem	Gender-Blind Response
Lack of attention to women's reproductive needs	In Indonesia, "'In the tsunami aftermath, women's health in Lampuuk village became a grave concern. Due to inadequate health services, women in the village experienced difficulties in maintaining their reproductive health. Even if doctors paid visits to the village, health examinations were normally conducted in open tents without proper examination beds or in unenclosed areas. Therefore, women were reluctant to [allow examination of] their reproductive organs when they had any pain or ailments" (Silverstein 2008, 156).
No safe space to talk about gender-based violence	UN Women has found severe underreporting of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict zones, noting that "the overwhelming majority of women and girls do not report violence not just because of shame or stigma but even more so because there are often no easily accessible services or ways to report safely, receive help and be treated with dignity" (Coomaraswamy 2015, 73).

Academic and practitioner literature on LHL is still emerging, and research on women's leadership and LHL is also in the early stages. An influential research report by Oxfam International called Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head argued for a humanitarian system that was locally led, and called for more funding and resources to state and nonstate actors in crisis-affected countries to strengthen local capacity (Gingerich and Cohen 2015). The report also addressed the argument that these local and national spaces are rarely composed of women's organizations and that because local actors may be composed predominantly of men, they may lack the necessary gender sensitivity that an international actor supposedly would have. The report noted that these are valid concerns but argued they should be balanced by an understanding that "it is more likely that local actors more than international actors will understand the underlying gender dynamics in a community, the specific risks to women, and approaches to humanitarian assistance that are appropriate given the risks and culture" (Gingerich and Cohen 2015, 19). Other studies have documented how some international actors pay lip service to gender but do not reach out to women's organizations for support and capacity development in the course of a humanitarian crisis (Carpenter 2006; ReBuild Consortium n.d.; UN Women 2016a). In fact, as of 2015, global funding levels from donors, UN member states and private foundations for local women's organizations was only at 1 percent (Coomaraswamy 2015, 90).

The overarching research questions structure the literature review. First, we explore the impact of women's leadership on the humanitarian system and LHL and tease out the main themes uncovered in the analysis. Second, we explore how women and women's organizations are involved in the humanitarian sector and in locally led humanitarian action. Third, we analyze the barriers and challenges faced by women's leadership in the humanitarian sector broadly and in LHL specifically. Finally, we assess the potential of LHL to encourage women's leadership. We should note that in our review of the literature, our focus on women's leadership centered on women's organizations—which, per our definition, could involve women either leading humanitarian programs for national or local nongovernmental organizations or leading these NGOs themselves—and women-led networks and associations. In addition, as noted, research on women's leadership in LHL is still rather limited, so the scope was broadened to look at women's leadership in humanitarian action in general. Recent research by organizations such as ActionAid, CARE, and Oxfam that explicitly link the concept of women's leadership and localization or locally led humanitarian action are welcome additions to this area of research (Barclay et al. 2016; Lindley-Jones 2018; Lambert et al. 2018), but more research needs to be done on locally led humanitarian action in general, and on women's leadership therein.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

First and foremost, it should be recognized that women and women's organizations have long been involved in preparing for and responding to humanitarian emergencies in their communities. Whether as individual leaders in their communities or as grassroots women's organizations, there are countless examples of women's organizations working on the frontlines to help their communities prepare for and respond to humanitarian emergencies. In a 2010 report Suranjana Gupta and Irene Leung found that "women's organizations have shown extraordinary capacities to mobilize women survivors to improve distribution of aid, access to resources, water and shelter, and making local institutions accountable in relief and rehabilitation" (p. 1). Yet they also found that this contribution goes unrecognized and that "women's organizations are forced to negotiate afresh to ensure their active participation in relief and rehabilitation processes" (Gupta and Leung 2010, 1). Therefore when analyzing women's leadership in the context of LHL—a term that started being more widely used around 2014—it is important to keep in mind that a dearth of examples of women's leadership related specifically to LHL does not reflect a lack of women's leadership in the context of humanitarian action in general.

Why does women's leadership in the humanitarian system matter?

One argument for recognizing women's leadership in the context of the humanitarian sector and LHL is that women's leadership has intrinsic value as an important aspect of women's fundamental rights: because women make up half the population and are affected by humanitarian crises, they should lead and participate in efforts to respond to such emergencies. In addition to this intrinsic justification, there is also an efficiency argument, based on research that links women's leadership to more effective humanitarian action (Barclay et al. 2016, 11). Efforts to link humanitarian efforts with gender equality in general have led to improved outcomes, as noted by a 2015 study by UN Women showing that overall gender equality programs "contribute to improving access to and use of services, increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian outcomes and reducing gender inequalities" (UN Women 2015, 8). Another report by UN Women found that "local women's groups are . . . often best placed to mobilize change, identify solutions and spontaneously respond to crises" (UN Women 2016b, 2). Supporting this viewpoint, a report by Oxfam and International Alert stated that "WROs [women's rights organizations] have attempted to provide services for women and girls, and lobby for improved representation when institutions cannot meet these citizens' needs" (Anderson 2017, 11).

Connected to the efficiency argument is the recognition that women's leadership brings a greater awareness of, and responsiveness to, women's gender-based needs in the context of humanitarian emergencies. Women's leadership "contribut[es] to better disaster preparedness and risk reduction; more efficient and effective humanitarian response; and inclusive and sustainable peace building and conflict resolution in communities" (Barclay et al. 2016, 5). There is copious research noting the gender-specific experiences of women in humanitarian crises (a few examples appear in Table 2), ranging from higher mortality rates to greater experience of gender-based violence. As a consequence, there is a need for the requisite gender justice expertise to be incorporated into humanitarian approaches (Gingerich and Cohen 2015, 19). Attention to gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies is relevant to women and women's organizations because there is evidence to suggest that most of the local responders involved in protection activities are women; "this is particularly the case in gender-based violence response services but also evident more broadly across traditionally female dominated fields, such as mental health and psychosocial support" (Chéilleachair and Shanahan 2018, 22). This argument is designed not to essentialize women's leadership, but to

recognize that women and women's organizations may have much-needed expertise that is currently missing from humanitarian efforts.

Table 2: Examples of women and women's organizations' leadership in humanitarian emergencies

Type of Leadership	Example
Women's organizations working with local community-based women's groups after a disaster	After the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, Kadın Emeğini Değerlendirme Vakfı led peer-learning exchanges with local women's groups in the affected area, enabling them to provide support and guidance to one another (Yonder et al. 2005, 32).
Women's organizations developing a network to achieve policy change	After the triple disaster in Japan of a tsunami, earthquake, and nuclear emergency, Japanese women's groups joined together to create the Japan Women's Network for Disaster Risk Reduction. The network managed to reform the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures, striking "down the requirement that the members of central and local disaster management councils be appointed exclusively from specified (male-dominated) professions" (UNISDR 2015, 48). It also supported the creation of training initiatives to support women as leaders in disaster risk reduction.
Women's organizations providing programming on gender-based violence	In Somalia, the Galkayo Education Center for Peace and Development (GECPD), a women's organization, was initially founded to support women's education. Its mandate has since expanded to include disaster relief services and prevention of sexual gender-based violence. The GECPD has worked to document survivor testimonies, provide counseling, and help survivors file complaints (Bhalla and Hassan 2018).
Women's organizations involvement in peace and security issues	In Nepal, Saathi, a women's organization, worked with the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development to draft the national action plan for localization guidelines. These guidelines require that Nepal's local government institutions "incorporate the [national action plan] activities in their local planning programs for conflict affected women and girls" (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders 2013, 16).

What is the impact of women's leadership on the humanitarian system?

Building on the intrinsic value and efficiency arguments on why women's leadership matters, this section identifies two main contributions that women's leadership brings to humanitarian action: (1) encouraging gender-transformative humanitarian action, and (2) fostering a deeper awareness of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.[7]

Gender-transformative humanitarian action

Women's leadership can bring in a gender-transformative humanitarian approach. Connecting humanitarian action to gender-transformative efforts goes beyond short-term service provision projects and requires long-term planning. In Haiti, women leaders see gender-transformative efforts as "encompass[ing] consciousness raising, development of women's leadership capacity, advocacy networks, coalition/building, giving women access to positions of power, and active engagement with both civil society and the state" (Horton 2012, 306–307). In interviews with women leaders in Haiti, scholar Lynn Horton found that they "strongly emphasized the

need to locate the earthquake in a broader context of the long-term, albeit often invisible, crisis Haitian women have experienced" (2012, 298). Responding to the immediate needs of Haitian women without recognizing the issues they faced even before the earthquake struck—such as systemic rape of women by state actors and legal discrimination, among others—risks creating more harm and trauma. Another example can be found in Somalia. The Elman Peace and Human Rights Center established the first rape crisis center in the country and provides legal support, counseling, and health services to survivors (Oxfam 2016). The center connects this service provision to advocacy for human rights, going before the African Union and the European Union, for example, to speak about the conflict issues affecting Somalia (Oxfam n.d.).

A report from ActionAid noted how advancing women's leadership in emergency response by increasing their access to resources led to a change in unequal power dynamics, as women's engagement in emergencies "supports their ability to influence broader community decision making, such as disaster preparedness planning committees, to ensure that planning reflects women's priorities" (Barclay et al. 2016, 32). A CARE International report highlighted an example from a women's organization in Sudan, where the "work of the Women's Association in supporting self-protection strategies resulted in greater respect among religious and community leaders, providing them with the status and platform required to challenge more sensitive issues, such as GBV [gender-based violence]" (Lindley-Jones 2018, 28). Eventually, after local leaders came to appreciate the importance of women's leadership, members of the Women's Association were able to become members of customary courts (Lindley-Jones 2018, 28).

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

Some research suggests that women's organizations tend to have a more long-term, holistic approach to humanitarian action. Gupta and Leung found that "women have long-term agendas even if their entry points are short-term projects such as recovery and reconstruction programs" (2010, 3). Another study noted that women's organizations involved in humanitarian response in Central America tend to use a "comprehensive approach" that prioritizes the "full participation of community members and responds to issues facing whole communities, while ensuring that women and their needs are taken into consideration" (Vukojević 2013, 7). A CARE report stated that in Malawi, "the majority of national women-led organizations had longer-term social justice aims, but the severity of a crisis . . . meant that they may be involved in humanitarian activities" (Lindley-Jones 2018, 19). In Haiti, formal women's organizations see that a crucial way to respond to the needs of women is to "provide structures to help support . . . more spontaneous post-disaster efforts by women and transform them into longer-term advocacy efforts" (Horton 2012, 305).

Related to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is the active engagement of women's organizations in peace and security issues. The focus on women's leadership in peace and security issues in this section is not meant to subscribe to essentialist notions that women are more inherently peaceful than other genders, but rather to recognize that rigorous research on women, peace, and security contains evidence on the importance of women's leadership. The peace and security agenda is a critical element of LHL because it addresses the root causes of the needs and crises to which humanitarian organizations are responding. A report from the International Peace Institute analyzing 40 in-depth country case studies found that "when women participate and are able to exercise influence, there are positive effects for the likelihood of reaching a peace agreement, the text of the agreement that is produced, and the implementation that follows" (O'Reilly et al. 2015, 11–12). Nanako Tamaru and Marie O'Reilly noted that "women's organizations may bridge the gap between the formal process and their communities, particularly when government-led public engagement is absent or insufficient" (2018, 21).

The long-term and holistic focus of many women's organizations fits within one of the World Humanitarian Summit's core responsibilities: "working differently to end need," which means going beyond the divide between humanitarian, development, and peace actions (Agenda for

Humanity 2016). In their response to humanitarian emergencies, women's organizations often do not see a division between humanitarian action and development and peace interventions, in contrast to humanitarian actors, "who have a culture of short-term effectiveness" and who often resist the notion of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (de Geoffroy 2018, 14). Recent research from Oxfam noted that "implementation of a nexus approach could provide a substantial opportunity to enhance gender justice, including through long-term support to women's rights organizations and ensuring that women's rights are integral to both immediate responses and longer-term outcomes" (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019, 3). The long-term, holistic, and comprehensive focus of women's organizations that spans the humanitarian-development-peace nexus therefore makes them stand out but also pits them against the emergency focus of many humanitarian organizations.

WHAT BARRIERS CONFRONT WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SECTOR AND LHL?

Women and women's organizations face several barriers and challenges in the humanitarian sector and in LHL. Some of these challenges are not unique to women's organizations but are shared by local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs), such as inadequate access to funding, lack of capacity strengthening, and unequal models that keep local and national actors positioned as subcontractors to international actors rather than as true partners (Gingerich and Cohen 2015, 6). Even though these challenges are general, they may have greater impact on the capacity and leadership of women's organizations. Furthermore, it is important to underscore three additional barriers faced by women's organizations: (1) the role of harmful gender norms, (2) the organizations' disconnect from the global humanitarian system, and (3) donors' failure to prioritize women's organizations and provide them with financial support. These represent a mix of barriers to leadership by women's organizations and barriers to the recognition of the leadership of women's organizations by other LNHAs and by international actors.

Harmful gender norms

Some of the challenges facing women and women's organizations seeking to be part of humanitarian action at the local and national levels result from constraining sociocultural norms. These norms feed into an idea that "women are not capable to be leaders" (Lindley-Jones 2018, 6). In addition, right-wing movements around the world are strongly pushing back against women's rights and gender justice, impeding women and women's organizations from engaging in decision-making spaces. According to a report from CIVICUS, women's rights groups were the most commonly threatened group in the civil rights sphere (2018, 9). The dangers of a backlash are real. Women's organizations that seek to advance gender equality and challenge gender norms will, by the nature of their mission, come into conflict with powerholders who do not want to share or lose the influence they have (Esplen 2013). In a survey on community decision-making on preparedness in Pakistan, several study participants expressed concern about a backlash from men if women were to engage more in public spaces, suggesting instead "that women in conservative communities might need to request permission from their male counterparts in order to participate in public decision-making spaces" (Van Brabant and Patel 2018, 26). These barriers to participation grow from a patriarchal terrain that has consistently devalued and discouraged women's voice and agency, particularly in public spaces.

Women leaders struggle with depictions of themselves as passive while continuing to participate in humanitarian action. In an article on women's leadership in humanitarian settings in Central America, Lara Seigneur and Jose Chacon of Oxfam America interviewed nine experienced women leaders, finding that "these women leaders have had to also battle unequal

gender norms that consistently undercut their valuable knowledge and expertise, and diminish[ed] the perception of their leadership" (2017, 2). The women leaders reported being turned away from conducting field assessments in conflict zones by the military, who said that they needed permission from their "male manager" (Seigneur and Chacon 2017, 1). Women humanitarian workers also face the risk of sexual violence from their male peers. One leader from Guatemala reported that "women are seen as sexual objects, men make comments with double meaning, derogatory comments, and they look at you searching for an opportunity for something else" (Seigneur and Chacon 2017, 3). In Yemen, women leaders "are seen as emotionally weak and in need of protection . . . yet Yemeni women have been and continue to act as first responders and informal peacemakers at the community level" (Anderson 2017, 13). Social and cultural norms therefore affect the acceptance of women's organizations and women's leadership by men, NGOs, and government in many places.

Even when women's organizations are in humanitarian spaces, they may find it difficult to fully participate, as the simple act of participating can go against the patriarchal norms of a culture, a challenging if not dangerous venture. In Yemen, one women's organization "noted how women would be silent in coordination meetings and ceded the floor to their male colleagues because they lack confidence and experience in asserting their own ideas and opinions" (Anderson 2017, 69). An analysis of UNSCR 1325 by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and UN Women underscored the "endurance of a patriarchal culture and attitudes [that] continue to be an obstacle to the participation of women and the implementation of national policies and UN resolutions" (2013, 40). Women's leadership in decision-making spaces is seen as improper and therefore unwelcome, or it is preferred that women be seen as participants as opposed to leaders. In one research project, interviews with individuals from international, national, and local NGOs revealed a pattern where "interviewees predominantly spoke about initiatives to increase women's participation in preparedness forums and program activities, as well as women's roles as facilitators, rather than as leaders or decision-makers" (Tanner et al. 2018, 12). This framing of women as participants or supporters makes it harder for women to enter into decision-making spaces on humanitarian response like the cluster system, which further denies them opportunities to build upon and strengthen their leadership capacities (see Box 2 for an explanation on the difference between women's leadership and participation).

> **Box 2: Relationship between women's leadership and women's participation in humanitarian action**
>
> A challenge in this literature review was pulling out examples of women's *leadership* as opposed to women's *participation* in humanitarian efforts. Indeed, the body of literature focusing on women's participation is much more extensive than that on women's leadership. Yet participation and leadership are intimately connected, as one must be in the room in order to exert change—though it should be recognized that frequently women and women's organizations are in spaces where they do not feel like they can speak up and influence decisions. Sometimes even being in that space is a success as "women face a double hurdle to power, with formidable obstacles not only to obtaining access to decision-making positions and processes but also to having influence within them" (O'Neil and Domingo 2016, 10). This research takes a broad view of what constitutes women's leadership, seeing women's leadership as going beyond having an equal number of women compared with other genders participating in arena of power. It looks for examples where women and women's organizations were at least able to enter humanitarian decision-making spaces and at most able to exhibit power, agency, and expertise to influence decisions made in humanitarian action and to advance their objectives.

In addition, the lack of visibility of women's leadership—such as in the media, reports, and other publications—can also play a role in creating the perception that women are not leaders. A paper from the Humanitarian Advisory Group noted that "women are not only underrepresented in the media; they are often shown in stereotypical, less powerful feminine roles" (Lavey 2018,

4). Such stereotypes affect women's leadership by creating the perception that women are less qualified and less capable and therefore cannot be leaders.

Lastly, "the need to balance work and family commitments may prevent women from taking up leadership roles" in humanitarian action (Van Brabant and Patel 2018, 21). A study from ActionAid is one of the few that explicitly highlights the role of unpaid care work done by women responders in humanitarian emergencies. ActionAid finds that unpaid care work places restrictions "on women's ability to lead their communities in reducing disaster risks and building resilience" (Bolton et al. 2017, 4). This unpaid care work causes women to be more time poor, limiting their ability to take on extracurricular activities outside of the home; worsens women's economic power in that they cannot perform paid work or pay expenses to travel to community meetings; and "limits women's perceived social value and undermines their self-confidence" (Bolton et al. 2017, 5).

Disconnect from humanitarian system

There is a perception that women and women's organizations are not humanitarian actors, which ignores the significant contributions they have made in humanitarian emergencies. As argued by Mia Vukojević, "women's organizations in general are not well integrated into the mainstream humanitarian system—meaning interagency coordination mechanisms—which means it is a challenge to gain recognition at the national level as a significant player in emergency response" (Vukojević 2013, 14). Along with this idea comes a perception that women and women's organizations lack the capacity to intervene in humanitarian emergencies because they are assumed to lack the technical expertise and knowledge of humanitarian systems to be able to mobilize quickly and effectively. While women's organizations may not be experts in all humanitarian activities (indeed, most humanitarian actors tend to specialize in one or a few sectors and are thus not experts in all areas as well), this line of thinking ignores the valuable expertise women's organizations do have. The programming and services they provide—such as gender-based violence prevention—are frequently not seen as life-saving activities by "traditional humanitarian actors," and they are seen as working mainly on "soft issues" (Vukojević 2013, 14).

The research also reveals a belief on the part of humanitarian practitioners that women's participation is "too difficult to implement within humanitarian timeframes" (Latimir and Mollett 2018, 8). In Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami, for example, "representatives of women's organizations in Batticaloa felt that they were not consulted by international relief workers, and that capacities and vulnerabilities were not registered. They attributed this to an overwhelming sense of urgency" (Scharffscher 2011, 76). As noted in a report from CARE International, "There is also a potential tension between delivering lifesaving services as quickly as possible and working in a way that facilitates collaboration with women-led organizations" (Lindley-Jones 2018, 41). The "tyranny of the urgent," which refers to a focus on dealing with basic needs without engaging in the messy and nuanced world of gender and social issues, persists, despite evidence that gender-blind humanitarian action can lead to poor or even dangerous outcomes (see Table 1, on page 16).

While international humanitarian actors may bear the brunt of the blame for the disconnect between women's organizations and humanitarian action, it can also be "a responsibility of women's organizations themselves, which have not been proactive enough in demanding a space within the mainstream humanitarian community and humanitarian mechanism" (Vukojević 2013, 15). There is also a tendency for women leaders to find it more challenging to engage at the national level as opposed to the community level where "grassroots women's organizations with strong track records in advancing community development find themselves excluded and disconnected from national disaster risk reduction and recovery programs" (Gupta and Leung 2010, iii).[8] Breaking through the barriers between the community, local, national, and global levels remains a difficult venture.

It is important to recognize that some women's organizations may choose not to be part of the formal global humanitarian coordination system. One scholar working on women's humanitarian leadership in Haiti noted that several strong women's rights organizations opted out of the cluster system during the earthquake response, as they found it patriarchal and harmful to women's interests (Canadian Council for International Cooperation, interview, January 10th, 2018). It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all women's organizations want to, or feel the need to, be part of the humanitarian system if they see the humanitarian system as failing to meet the needs of women or perceive themselves as better able to achieve their gender justice aims outside of it. This is, in fact, one of the powerful arguments in support of LHL.

In the literature on women's leadership in humanitarian action, it was telling how many reports on this subject were generated by INGOs, like Oxfam or CARE (Sang 2018; Webb et al. 2017), describing how women community leaders took action in emergencies. While these examples are informative and amplify the roles and voices of women, they also highlight the power of INGOs, which act as gatekeepers to local women leaders, to shape the story of leadership of women and women's organizations. From the framework of LHL, an issue to keep in mind is how to ensure that local women and women's organizations have the time and resources tell their own stories and document their own actions and to ensure that these stories are heard and given weight.

Donor priorities and limited financial support of women's organizations

The disconnect from the global humanitarian system faced by women's organizations closely relates to donor priorities and limited financial support for women's organizations. Donors, such as governments, UN actors, and large INGOs, have a huge influence on how humanitarian programming is deployed. This influence can have an inadvertent constraining effect on women's organizations seeking financial support. A report by Oxfam and International Alert argued that "donors and INGOs are inadvertently hindering the gender justice agenda by exerting a disproportionate influence on the priorities, type of work and opportunities of WROs. . . . Most WROs that were interviewed find it difficult to pursue their own agendas and strategies if these do not line up with donor priorities" (Anderson 2017, 11). One paper termed the issue facing women's organizations in the funding world as a "perfect storm," where "donor language and thinking, increased role and influence of the private sector and the expansion of many international non-governmental organizations to become global corporate actors in development combine to limit the participation of the poor and of many Southern women's rights organizations" (Hunt et al. 2015, 355).

The gender and long-term focus of women's organizations also creates conflicts with donor programming and makes it difficult for them to be competitive. An analysis of Haiti after the earthquake identified a pattern "in which emergencies in Haiti lead to abrupt shifts in donor funding priorities and undermine local women's organizations' efforts to carry out more sustained programs to address strategic gender interests" (Horton 2012, 300). Particularly in the aftermath of a disaster, enormous amounts of funds flow in to fund the humanitarian response, but what constitutes response is limited by what donors prioritize as life-saving measures, which often demote the areas of focus of women's organizations, such as gender-based violence prevention and livelihood support for women.

Women's organizations also find that donors often make unrealistic demands that do not take into account the important work the organizations are doing or the challenging environment in which they find themselves. Historically women's organizations have tended to be underresourced. Data from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Gender Equality (GenderNet) showed that in 2014, though 28 percent of funding from DAC went to civil society (approximately US$10 billion), only 0.5 percent (approximately US$192 million) was reported as going to women's organizations—a decline from the previous year (GenderNet

2016, 4). Most of the funds for civil society went to INGOs or organizations based in the donor country, which means that low levels of funding went to local and national actors. Thus a small pie is being split further among local and national actors and women's organizations. An Oxfam study of its partnerships with women's groups over the past five years showed a similar story—"an average of just 10 to 11 percent of all Oxfam partnerships are with WROs [women's rights organizations] working on gender justice" (Oxfam 2019, 45).

Women's organizations may find it difficult to grow large enough to develop the capacity to deal with donor demands because the grants they get tend to be limited to project support (Vukojević 2013, 15). A report by the Association for Women's Rights in Development surveyed more than 1,100 women's organizations from around the world and found that women's organizations rely primarily on project support rather than long-term or multiyear funding (Arutyunova and Clark 2013, 17). The findings also note that women's organizations receive support for direct service provision, even if their focus is on holistic programming such as on capacity building and empowerment. Organizations based in the Global South face even deeper funding challenges, as donors see them as riskier options (Ford 2016, para. 13).

In the humanitarian context, it is difficult to know how much funding reaches women's organizations because funding flows are not always disaggregated in ways that provide that information. The piecemeal data that do exist paint a sobering picture. From 2012–2013 data, "women's empowerment organizations and institutions received just 0.4% of funding or USD 130 million of gender equality focused aid to fragile states" (UN Women 2016b, 2). If women's organizations' work does not fit into donor priorities, they lose access to the large funding flows that come in to respond to emergencies.

For example, only 0.12 percent of global humanitarian funding from 2016 to 2018 went to gender-based violence programs in emergencies (Marsh and Blake 2019, 10). The amount of funding received does not match the extent and severity of the problem: this percentage represents just one-third of all funding requests for gender-based violence programming. According to the report, "progress toward localization of humanitarian action, including GBV [gender-based violence] response, has been slow. Obtaining funding for GBV is a challenge that women- and girl-focused organizations are still struggling to overcome" (Marsh and Blake 2019, 10). This is indicative of a larger problem of lack of integration of gender justice with LHL.

The issue of funding for women's organizations also feeds into the general problem of sub-granting that faces LNHAs. Sub-granting models have been criticized for not fostering capacity strengthening and not creating space for local and national actors to lead in humanitarian programming. A report from CARE International states, "The predominance of sub-granting models undermines the quality of partnerships, with women-led organizations only being involved after a proposal has been developed" (Lindley-Jones 2018, 6). In some cases women's organizations have been treated as advisers without being compensated for their time (Loy 2019, para. 13). Even when women's organizations are getting access to grants or being tapped for their expertise, it is often done in a limited way that does not allow women's organizations to fully influence the process or to grow as institutions.

These challenges create a weaker position for women's organizations with regard to donors, who are likely to approach organizations that can navigate their demands—which tend to be already well resourced—again and again for consultations and other funding opportunities (Hunt et al. 2015, 355). There is also a danger that donors will play favorites, where choosing to engage with only a few women's organizations "can in some cases exclude organizations deemed to be 'problematic,' whether intentionally or not" or favor women's organizations run by "elites" who often have the education and language skills to better communicate with donors and complete lengthy proposals (Hunt et al. 2015, 355). This situation also stunts women's organizations' work to transform gender power relations—by nature, long-term structural work—by creating an environment where they are forced to compete for funds for short-term projects

that respond more to what the donor believes is needed than to the expertise of women's organizations (Esplen 2013, 2).

HAS LHL ADVANCED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE SECTOR?

Taking into account the impact of women and women's organizations in the humanitarian system, as well as the barriers and challenges they face, is it possible to understand whether LHL uniquely encourages women's leadership? First it is necessary to delve into the premise of the question. This question looks at humanitarian action explicitly labeled as LHL, as this research has made the case that women and women's organizations are and have been involved in providing humanitarian support. Additionally, LHL, which prioritizes leadership by local and national actors, is argued to be a better model of humanitarian action because such actors have the contextual knowledge to respond effectively and have the trust of and proximity to the affected communities.[9] This framing would align with feminist models that argue for the importance of contextual knowledge that is deeply connected to the voices and needs of the community.

The attention to women's leadership, connected to but not limited to their knowledge of women's needs, also fits into this understanding of LHL. Because there is no such thing as a gender-neutral emergency, gaining the expertise of women and women's organizations to promote more inclusive humanitarian practices is a logical connection. LHL has the potential to widen the space for women and women's organizations to move to the forefront of humanitarian responses. As noted in the previous section, there are many examples of women and women's organizations intervening in their communities to respond to humanitarian emergencies. Research also highlights the importance of women's leadership in local decision-making processes that strengthen their political empowerment and influence (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders 2013, 10). Additionally, international-dominated humanitarian spaces have been criticized for being jargon-heavy and using languages that most people in the affected country do not speak (Heath 2014, 290). Therefore the shift to local and national-led humanitarian efforts, where women and women's organizations are more familiar with the environment, may be more conducive to women's leadership. There could be a natural alignment between LHL and women's leadership. However, this connection does not always play out in practice.

Several issues prevent LHL from being an effective vehicle for women's leadership: (1) women and women's organizations are not considered LNHAs and therefore may be excluded from capacity-building and funding opportunities available for LHL efforts; (2) as noted, women's organizations must compete against LNHAs for funding and may have to sacrifice their long-term gender justice programming in order to secure resources; and (3) local and national spaces may have their own gender biases and sexist norms that ignore or devalue women's leadership.

First, the marginalization of women and women's organizations from LHL spaces is a concern. If the emphasis of LHL is more on formal structures such as civil society and government actors—as it is in this report—this can exclude the role of women responders, who are often in more informal settings (Loy 2019, para. 26). If women's organizations are not part of the cluster system or do not already have relationships with international humanitarian agencies, then their chance of being involved in LHL support efforts is reduced. For example, a review of the Grand Bargain's progress on integrating gender equality and women's empowerment by the Overseas Development Institute and the Facilitation Group[10] found that only 33 percent of the Humanitarian Country Teams consulted local women's organizations in the 2018 annual humanitarian planning process (Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2019, 34). Women's organizations are also perceived as being development actors rather than humanitarian actors, which excludes

them from LHL opportunities owing to the narrow focus on humanitarian action as separate from development and peace activities.

Second, when women's organizations compete for funds against LNHAs, they often lose out. Even if there is an increase in funding for local and national actors, this does not translate into more funding for women's organizations. A report from CARE and ActionAid found that the "majority of localized funding to national NGOs has been directed to larger, male-dominated actors, which have been able to negotiate larger scale programs because of their more conservative social and political affiliations" (Latimir and Mollett 2018, 4). This pattern further deepens the marginalization of women's organizations in the humanitarian space. Additionally, through the Grand Bargain, the biggest donors and humanitarian agencies have agreed to give 25 percent of their funding to local and national actors. It is unclear, however, how much of that 25 percent actually reaches local and national actors, and there is also currently no way to track what funds go to women's organizations (ActionAid et al. 2018, 1).

Lastly, like the international organizations involved in humanitarian action, local and national spaces are not immune from being gender-insensitive. The Australian Red Cross conducted a series of validation workshops in the Pacific exploring potential disadvantages women can face owing to localization. Its report identified the following two negatives: (1) women are currently few in number in decision-making bodies at the community, local, and national levels, so as these bodies gain more power through localization there is no guarantee that women will be able to exert any influence or become more prevalent in these spaces; and (2) some local and national actors view localization as an opportunity to return to more traditional sociocultural gender norms that restrict women's rights (Ayobi et al. 2017, 30). These potential concerns highlight the importance of including women's organizations in the leadership of humanitarian efforts (Ayobi et al. 2017, 34).

Some efforts are underway to better integrate women's organizations in the LHL space and to ensure that locally led humanitarian action better reflects the work of women's organizations. In a recent progress report on the localization workstream of the Grand Bargain, UN Women added two activities to the work plan: research on gender-transformative humanitarian interventions and development of a guidance note on gender-responsive localization (Co-conveners' Summary of Progress 2018, 4). The report also noted that 3 out of 10 local organizations invited to the localization workstream are women's organizations (from Kenya, Liberia, and Nepal). Several signatories of the Grand Bargain have also committed to furthering gender equality in the humanitarian system. For example, Oxfam, as co-leader of the IASC Gender Reference Group, has implemented new policies and programs as part of its feminist approach to humanitarian emergencies (Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2019, 26). UN Women, in 2018, reported providing capacity strengthening to more than 300 local women's organizations in 28 countries to help them better engage in locally led humanitarian action (Metcalfe-Hough et al. 2019, 34).

In sum, the existing literature suggests that there is potential for LHL to encourage the leadership of women and women's organizations, but under certain conditions. First, decision-making bodies on humanitarian action, whether at the local, national, or global level, must view women and women's organizations as humanitarian actors. Second, efforts to support LHL, such as funding and capacity-strengthening opportunities, must recognize the role that women's organizations play in humanitarian efforts. Lastly, humanitarian actors must recognize that all contexts have their own set of gender norms that restrict and devalue women's leadership and must therefore pay active attention to overcome and avoid perpetuating such norms, such as through partnerships with women and women's organizations.

CONCLUSION

Women and women's organizations have long been involved in humanitarian efforts ranging from disaster risk reduction to relief and recovery activities. Yet their contributions continue to go unrecognized, and they find themselves excluded from international-dominated humanitarian spaces, like the cluster system approach, as well as local and national decision-making spaces. Part of the challenge is dealing with sociocultural notions of what women and women's organizations do; women's organizations are often pigeonholed as focusing mainly on so-called "soft," non-urgent issues, such as women's economic empowerment, that are seen as more development-focused than humanitarian. To challenge patriarchy and harmful gender norms and to better respond to the needs and priorities of women in the context of humanitarian emergencies, it is important to end the devaluation of women's organizations' expertise.

The two case studies that follow offer current examples of women's leadership in humanitarian emergencies, highlighting the contextual challenges—and successes—women and women's organizations are facing. Attention is paid to how the findings from the case studies intersect with the main highlights from the literature, and areas of commonality and difference are highlighted. Based on the findings, the report concludes by identifying some of the factors that may enable women and women's organizations to successfully engage in the humanitarian sector and locally led humanitarian action.

3 BANGLADESH CASE STUDY

From natural hazards to the current Rohingya refugee crisis, Bangladesh has faced a myriad of humanitarian emergencies. The main types of disasters affecting the country have been natural hazards such as cyclones, droughts, and floods, which will increase in frequency and severity as the climate crisis unfolds. Bangladesh's experience in managing such disasters has made it a leader in creating comprehensive disaster risk reduction and preparedness programs (Nasreen 2018). Since 2017, however, the Rohingya refugee crisis has presented new challenges to Bangladesh, as the country attempts to meet the needs of an additional 1.2 million refugees, of whom about 52 percent are women and children (Humanitarian Response 2019, 16).[11]

Local humanitarian leadership (LHL) is a notable topic of discussion within the humanitarian community in Bangladesh.[12] Networks of humanitarian nongovernment organizations (NGOs)—such as the National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh—have been launched through localization efforts such as Shifting the Power, a venture of the Start Network that seeks to move the balance of power toward locally led humanitarian action (Start Network 2019). These discussions, however, have included only limited involvement by women and women's organizations (IFRC 2018, 3–4). This does not mean that women and women's organizations are not involved in humanitarian action, but that among the local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs) involved in LHL and localization work in the country, there is still a gap.

This report seeks to find out how women and women's organizations are involved in locally led humanitarian action in Bangladesh, with a look at the barriers and challenges they face, and assesses whether LHL encourages women's leadership. While this study addresses these research questions through a broad overview of Bangladesh, it also provides a particular focus on the Rohingya refugee response.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative method, consisting of a desk review, stakeholder mapping, key informant interviews (19 interviews in total; 9 with women, 10 with men), and focus group discussions (FGDs) (reaching 19 women and 25 men). The study participants were representatives of (1) concerned government agencies and institutions, including the Directorate of Disaster Management, Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, District Disaster Management Office, Deputy Commissioners Office, camp-in-charge, and the NGO Affairs Bureau; (2) national and local NGOs involved in humanitarian response, including the operational-level officials of INGOs; (3) women's networks, women-led organizations, and women's rights organizations, (4) humanitarian networks; and (5) community representatives from the Rohingya refugee camps, among others.[13]

HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is the second most disaster-prone country in Asia and the Pacific (UN OCHA 2017). More than 80 percent of the population is vulnerable to floods, earthquakes, and droughts, and 70 percent to cyclones. The recent Rohingya refugee crisis has also had a huge impact on Bangladesh as an enormous influx of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (FDMNs) has crossed into the country. In what are described as "clearance operations," Myanmar security forces targeted and attacked hundreds of Rohingya villages in northern Rakhine State,

destroying more than 40 percent of villages and causing more than 725,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh by September 2018 (Human Rights Council 2018, 178). Persecution of Rohingya citizens of Myanmar based on their religious beliefs includes "extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, intimidation, gang-rape, forced labor, robbery, setting of fire to homes, eviction, land confiscation and population resettlement as well as the systematic destruction of towns and mosques" (Human Rights Council 2018, 29).

In addition, tension and violence both within the camps and between refugees and host communities have increased. The extremely congested conditions in the camps and limited opportunities for education and skills development have exacerbated frustrations between FDMNs and members of the host community (UNDP 2018). The Bangladeshi government strictly monitors access to the refugee camps, where humanitarian actors have reported operational challenges in getting the necessary clearances to enter.

CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN BANGLADESH

Gender inequality issues persist in Bangladesh, and gender-based violence, early marriage, sexual harassment, and sex trafficking are serious concerns in the country (Human Rights Watch 2017; Ain o Salish Kendra 2019; Humanitarian Response 2018; ActionAid 2019). Women are also often not allowed or expected to take part in decision-making; they are often relegated to the private sphere and play "complementary rather than independent role[s] in the case of disaster preparedness" (Rahman and Alam 2016, 1). Women in Bangladesh tend to have a harder time gaining access to resources than men do and have limited participation in the workforce. The "lesser value and authority afforded to women in the household and society" in Bangladesh exacerbates their vulnerability in humanitarian contexts (Juran and Trivedi 2015, 602). Yet it is important to note the crucial work that women do during disasters. Research by Mahbuba Nasreen (2004) argued that "it is women's strategies, developed over the last few years [that] are vital in enabling rural people to cope with disaster" in Bangladesh (p. 25).

Many Rohingya women and girls are traumatized and face major mental health and psychosocial challenges (UNHCR 2018). Many are survivors of brutal sexual violence in Myanmar, and the camps lack adequate and proper care to address their trauma. The 2019 Joint Response Plan notes that "a more focused response is required to meet the needs and mental well-being of the most vulnerable among them — particularly for the elderly, persons with disabilities, women and children at risk as well as survivors of violence" (Humanitarian Response 2019, 11). Gender-based violence in the camps is also a concern. As of the end of 2018, "only 43% of minimum service coverage has been achieved for urgently required gender-based violence case management and psychosocial support for children and adults" (Humanitarian Response 2019, 29). Rohingya women and girls lack freedom of movement in the camps, and they fear abduction and sexual abuse (Baykan 2018). Rohingya girls and boys are also prevented from going to school in Bangladesh.

LHL IN BANGLADESH

This section delves into the major national and local actors involved in humanitarian response in Bangladesh, as well as the main players involved in the Rohingya response. It also explores the role played by women and women's organizations in humanitarian action in the country.

Local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs)

Several key LNHAs are involved in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and also play a role in the Rohingya refugee crisis response: (1) the Government of Bangladesh, (2) local and national NGOs, and (3) humanitarian networks.

Government of Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh is an active leader in disaster risk reduction and preparedness efforts, as well as in managing the Rohingya response. In terms of disaster risk reduction and preparedness, humanitarian action is conducted not only by the national government, but also at the district, upazila (subdistrict), and Union Parishad levels.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief coordinates the Department of Disaster Management. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs also plays a role in humanitarian efforts. For example, it is a member of the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHA WG), a mix of government, local, national, and international organizations working on mainstreaming gender in the Rohingya response (Humanitarian Response 2019, 21).

The government response to the Rohingya crisis is coordinated by a national taskforce chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and consisting of representatives of various ministries and UN agencies. To coordinate operations on the ground, the government has formed the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) as the dedicated lead to address the needs related to the Rohingya crisis from Cox's Bazar. The RRRC serves as a "vital interlocutor role between the Government policies and the Sector's strategies" (Humanitarian Response 2019, 46). Connected to the RRRC is the Camp-in-Charge, which oversees coordination at the camp level, monitors overall service in the camps, and ensures that any gaps or duplicative efforts are addressed (Humanitarian Response 2019, 21).

The Government of Bangladesh established two layers of management at the camp level: camp management committees and block management committees. Both of these structures supposedly have equal gender representation, though this often does not play out in practice. In addition, the blocks are managed by a traditional leader called a *majhi*, who is tasked with handling community disputes and incidents of domestic violence (ACAPS 2017, 13). The *majhi* system has come under criticism for encouraging abuse and exploitation (ACAPS 2017, 13). In an interview with a Rohingya woman leader, she reported that she had once been assigned the responsibilities of the *majhi*, but it was an unpaid position: "I have been assigned as *majhi*, but there is no payment for the service. As I have no earning member in my family and the *majhi* needs to find some alternative ways to secure payment, I declined the post. There should be a clear guideline and definite pay structure for the *majhi*."

Local and national NGOs

Many local and national NGOs are actively involved in humanitarian action; two of interest here are BRAC and COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation) Trust.[14] BRAC is a complicated example. Though it is a Bangladesh-based organization and could therefore be considered a national organization, it is also the largest international NGO in the world, working in 10 other countries. BRAC is heavily involved in the Rohingya response and serves in many of the clusters. COAST Trust works on humanitarian issues in coastal communities across Bangladesh. It is leading a campaign on localization issues in the Rohingya response called the Cox's Bazar CSO NGO Forum (CCNF), which will be described further below.

Humanitarian networks

Bangladesh's local and national NGOs are incorporated into four main humanitarian networks: the CCNF, the National Alliance for Humanitarian Actors (NAHAB), the Network for Information

Response and Preparedness Activities (NIRAPAD), and the Disaster Forum. The CCNF includes about 40 local and national NGOs working on the Rohingya response. The major objectives of the CCNF are to ensure coordination among members and the government and to "promote a human and gender responsive society" (CCNF 2017).

NAHAB was launched in 2017 as a Start Network project in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, and it is therefore connected to LHL. It currently includes 50 local and national NGOs (NAHAB 2018). This platform is expected to help local and national NGOs gain a stronger voice and better representation in humanitarian platforms, networks, and the national disaster management structure as well as facilitating access to financial and non-financial resources.

NIRAPAD, established in 1997, is a humanitarian network of 22 NGOs. It is engaged in generating and managing knowledge, providing technical support for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, and promoting collaboration and partnership. NIRAPAD has addressed issues like establishing an accountable humanitarian system and mainstreaming cross-cutting issues like good governance, gender, and environment. It has documented the role played by local leadership in the Rohingya crisis response (Shevach et al 2018) and has produced training guides on how to encourage women's leadership in disaster risk reduction (NARRI 2012).

Lastly, the Disaster Forum consists of 70 humanitarian and development agencies, research institutions, government departments, and independent activists who work on various disaster and environmental issues, with a special focus on preparedness. Since 1994, the forum has worked on issues related to the accountability of humanitarian and development agencies (Foundation for Disaster Forum 2014). Its activities consist mainly of producing publications, trainings, and communication materials, and it does not seem to be part of the Rohingya response.

In conclusion: Assessment of the degree of LHL in Bangladesh

LNHAS in Bangladesh, such as the Government of Bangladesh and local and national NGOs, generally appear to be strong leaders in humanitarian efforts such as disaster risk reduction and preparedness programs. In regard to the Rohingya crisis, the main LNHA involved is the Government of Bangladesh, which has a robust leadership and management role in the response. However, although a few local and national NGOs were the first to respond to the crisis and are still involved, most of the humanitarian activities in Cox's Bazar are now undertaken by international actors such as UN organizations and INGOs. Some local actors have remarked that there is a power imbalance between themselves and their international counterparts (Ahmed 2018a). It is unclear why this is the case, given that Bangladesh has an active local and national humanitarian network; additional research will be needed to clarify why the Rohingya response involves more international actors than local ones.

How are women and women's organizations involved in the sector and LHL?

Women's organizations—specifically NGOs—in Bangladesh are involved in humanitarian action in the form of both disaster risk reduction and the Rohingya response. They seem to be only minimally involved, however, in the cluster system of the Rohingya response. For example, no local women's organizations are part of the gender-based violence sub-cluster, and if they are, they do not seem to receive large amounts of funding, though confirmation is not possible as disaggregated data on funding are not yet available. Additionally, no local or national women's organization appears to be an active member of the GiHA WG, which, as mentioned, is working to mainstream gender in the Rohingya response. The group has, however, made a commitment to "include local women's rights organizations and networks and local gender equality actors in

the GiHA WG to promote their influence and engagement in all aspects of response" (GiHA 2019a, 2).

Women's organizations are also involved with the humanitarian networks mentioned above. Members of the CCNF include Agrajattra, a women-led social welfare organization, and the Rohingya Women Welfare Society (details on both of these organizations' work follows in the next section).[15] In NAHAB, out of 45 organizations, 9 are led by women. Several members of NAHAB are involved in the Rohingya refugee response, such as Young Power in Social Action, which provides emergency nutrition and health services to women and children in Cox's Bazar.

A selection of women's organizations currently providing humanitarian response in Bangladesh identified by this research includes the following:

- **Ashroy Foundation**: This organization (also the author of this case study) is a women-led, women's rights-based humanitarian organization that focuses on disaster risk management (including response, resilience, recovery, and disaster risk reduction), food security, human rights, education, and climate change adaptation, among other areas. It works mainly in the southwest region of Bangladesh, but it also has spoken on the need to increase women-friendly services in Cox's Bazar (*Daily Star* 2018). The foundation belongs to the Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform,[16] NAHAB, the Voice of Women Humanitarian Organization Network,[17] and the Rohingya Response NGO Platform.

- **Association of Voluntary Actions for Society:** This organization works in Barisal, a city in south-central Bangladesh. It works on disaster risk reduction issues in the area, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe water supply and sanitation, and legal aid support for women. It is a member of NAHAB and the BWHP.

- **Chandradip Development Society:** This organization is a women-led organization working in the southern coastal belt and focusing on community empowerment and the reduction of disaster vulnerability for women and children. It first became actively involved in humanitarian response activities after Cyclone Sidr in 2007, and it is a member of NAHAB, BWHP, and the Disaster Forum.

- **Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS):** This is a women-led organization in northern Bangladesh, an area that is highly vulnerable to flash floods. SUS provides livelihood support to women during emergencies. It also works on gender-based violence prevention and women's rights issues and is a member of NAHAB and BWHP.

In terms of the Rohingya crisis, several women's organizations work in Cox's Bazar in addition to their work outside of the camps, such as the following:

- **Ain o Salish Kendra:** Ain o Salish Kendra is a women-led legal aid and human rights organization. Its gender and social justice program focuses on community-level activism. In Cox's Bazar, it has, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), led the project Strengthening Access to Multi-sectoral Public Services for Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Bangladesh (ASTHA).

- **Agrajattra:** Agrajattra is a woman-founded and women-led organization that works on a variety of programming such as water and sanitation, education, and women's rights. Agrajattra is part of the child protection, food security, and shelter and nonfood items clusters in the Rohingya crisis (Humanitarian Response 2019). It is a member of the CCNF.

- **Aparajeyo Bangladesh:** Aparajeyo Bangladesh provides a range of services to socially excluded children in urban settings in Bangladesh. It operates in five child-friendly spaces in Cox's Bazar. The overall objective of Aparajeyo Bangladesh is to improve the living conditions of 1,000 Rohingya children and youth in the refugee camp by meeting their basic needs, providing protection, creating a child-friendly environment, and ensuring access to community and public services. It also provides awareness training on sexual and reproductive health, abuse, and exploitation of girls.

- **Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers' Association:** The association's main area of focus is sexual harassment. It has reviewed cases of sexual harassment in universities and workplaces across the country. In Cox's Bazar, the organization provides legal aid services for the Rohingya community. It is a standing member of the gender-based violence subsector in Cox's Bazar and is one of three national organizations involved (the other two are Mukti Cox's Bazar and Technical Assistance Inc.; the latter is not a women's organization) (Cox's Bazar GBV Sub-Sector 2017).

- **Jago Nari Unnayn Sangsta (JNUS):** JNUS is a women-led organization that provides adult literacy classes for Rohingya women, as well as health programs and legal aid. JNUS provides a range of services to disadvantaged and deprived women and children in urban and rural settings. In Cox's Bazar, JNUS distributes relief supplies, provides medical support, and serves as a liaison with Rohingya communities in Ukhia and Teknaf to gain a better understanding of their socioeconomic conditions, safety, and other concerns (Banik 2018, 24). JNUS is a member of BWHP, CCNF, and the Rohingya Response NGO Platform.

- **Mukti Cox's Bazar:** Mukti is a development organization with a strong gender justice program. It focuses particularly on marginalized women, mainly through livelihood support, in urban and rural areas of Cox's Bazar. Established in Cox's Bazar in 1991, the organization was present in the area before the influx of the Rohingya refugees. In the camps, Mukti provides gender-based violence programming, in addition to child protection and food distribution services. It is a member of the CCNF.

Rohingya women leaders are also organizing in the camps to advocate for their rights. Two examples are the following:

- **Shanti Mohila (Peace Women)**: Shanthi Mohila, a group of more than 400 Rohingya women, submitted a request to the International Criminal Court in 2018 for an investigation into the Myanmar authorities for "deportation, apartheid, persecution, and genocide" (Ahmed 2018b).

- **Rohingya Women's Welfare Society (RWWS**): RWWS provides counseling to Rohingya women and girls on issues of domestic violence, health, and child marriage (RWWS n.d.). The foundation is a member of the CCNF.

In addition, several women leaders' networks and taskforces focus on humanitarian action:

- **Bangladesh Women's Humanitarian Platform (BWHP):** The BWHP is a nationwide network that aims to ensure efficient humanitarian action to address the need of women, girls, and children in Bangladesh. It is one of the few women's entities involved in the localization movement in Bangladesh. Its major activities include serving as a collective voice of local, regional, and national women's organizations, contributing to localization discussions, and providing networking opportunities with national and international humanitarian platforms and networks. The BWHP has 32 member organizations, all of which are women-led organizations. Two of its members—Ashroy Foundation and JNUS—are actively involved in the Rohingya response. The BWHP is supported by Oxfam in Bangladesh through its Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors project.

- **Voice of Women Humanitarian Organization Network (VOWHON)**. VOWHON is a network of women's organizations in the coastal belt based in Khulna. Its members are spread across six districts in southwest Bangladesh, namely Bagerhat, Gopalganj, Khulna, Jessore, Narail, Pirojpur, and Satkhira. Sixteen women-led organizations are involved in the network, and their major activities include knowledge sharing, capacity building, and resource mobilization. Most of the organizations are engaged in disaster risk reduction and safe programming activities in the region. This network is still relatively new and in the process of becoming institutionalized. VOWHON does not appear to be involved in the Rohingya response.

WHAT BARRIERS CONFRONT WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SECTOR AND LHL?

As mentioned, few women-led organizations or women's organizations are involved in LHL—or in localization (the term more commonly used in the country). One notable exception is the BWHP, but that network is still in its early stages. There are several reasons for the minimal engagement of women and women's organization in local humanitarian action: (1) harmful gender norms, (2) funding challenges, and (3) disconnect from the humanitarian system. Additional barriers were mentioned in the course of the data collection, such as staff poaching, but because they were the same challenges facing local and national humanitarian organizations, they were excluded from this section in order to focus on the specific issues faced by women and women's organizations.

Harmful gender norms

Women have relatively low mobility compared with their male counterparts in Bangladesh and are highly restricted by gender and religious norms. In an interview with a Government of Bangladesh official, he mentioned that the "state of women's leadership is limited by patriarchal thinking, state of literacy of the concerned community, religious fundamentalist thinking, and accessibility and women's mobility." Although women participate in the economic sphere, they cannot escape their unpaid household obligations. Consequently, they face more pressure in the workplace and home compared with men. One woman working in a leadership position in a Rohingya response organization stated:

Historically home was the space for women, and office and business were the space for men. Consequently, women live on a different island. After completion of office work, they need to take up household responsibilities but a man can easily spend time with friends or colleagues. Even having tea together, it is very easy for men to make a decision.

Women visiting the camps have in some cases experienced harassment and violence. There have been reports of men cutting the dresses of women who are not veiled, and imams urging men to prevent their wives and daughters from attending activities. These threats have created an environment where women have reported that they do not feel safe continuing to do their work, which has implications for the delivery of programs and services for women in the camps (GiHA 2019b, 3).

In addition, some Rohingya women's groups have reportedly experienced additional hurdles to working in the camps, such as being required to get permission from the government to conduct activities (GiHA 2019c). However, "this issue has not been reported for activities conducted by Rohingya men's groups operating in the camps. . . . This restriction on women-led or survivor-led groups is a concern" (GiHA 2019c, 1). According to an interview with a Rohingya woman leader, "We as Rohingya would like to form our own organization to help the people in need. I have mobilized about 500 women using a cascade method. But we cannot open a formal organization because we don't know the process." It is unclear why women's groups face additional scrutiny when organizing within the camps whereas men's groups do not.

There is also the perception that women and women's organizations are less capable when it comes to humanitarian action. In a FGD with local humanitarian organizations, one participant expressed that he found that:

The definition of women's organization or women-led organization is problematic. For example, the CEO of CAMPE is a woman because of a competitive recruitment process, but these are not women's organizations and operating in a competitive environment. In

contrast, there are many organizations where the CEO and other members of the board are women and work mostly for women. But they have a significant capacity deficit in terms of capacity to manage large projects […] and fundraising.

Some study participants believe that adopting policies that encourage the participation of women and women's organizations could help overcome such perceptions. However, opinions about such actions were mixed. Most male study participants supported a neutral and competitive environment for engagement of women and women's organizations. Women, unsurprisingly, argued the opposite and advocated for special support for women and women's organizations. There does not seem to be evidence that women's organizations lack capacity or whether capacity issues are just problems common to LNHAs in general. Nonetheless the important point is that women's organizations often struggle to prove their legitimacy and credibility among their humanitarian peers.

Funding challenges

Funding issues were identified as challenges facing LNHAs, particularly for women's organizations. A report from Oxfam showed that $12.4 million of all humanitarian funding to Bangladesh from international donors went to LNHAS, most of it directly to the Government of Bangladesh. An additional $12.2 million went to LNHAS through indirect transfers. These allocations bring the total amount of funding LNHAs receive to 39 percent of total humanitarian funding (Parrish and Kattakuzhy 2018, 9). In 2017, 94 percent of all humanitarian funding channeled to NGOs was allocated to INGOs. In addition, while LNHAS receive a significant proportion of international humanitarian financing, they do not receive it directly; "instead, funds pass through international agencies before reaching LNHAs under subcontracting style agreements" (Parrish and Kattakuzhy 2018, 8). There is no system to track how much money has been received by women's organizations. In a FGD, a woman leader from a local humanitarian organization said,

> *Both the volume of resources and visibility are critical for survival. Our work was valued by the development partners. But at the end of the day, our interventions are not as visible as we do not have adequate resources and people capable of marketing our achievement. As we need to depend on low-paid staff, we cannot afford such expensive people.*

They lack financial resources to continue their initiatives. In a FGD, a woman staff member from a local humanitarian organization said, "We face serious resource constraints because of such a competitive environment" for funding. Additionally, the research showed that most of the women-led organizations involved in humanitarian action are smaller than the NGOs led by men, making it challenging for them to compete for funds against these larger organizations.

Disconnect from humanitarian system

Though this report was able to share examples to the contrary, there is a perception that women and women's organizations are not involved in humanitarian response. A mission report from Bangladesh noted that "many of the established women-led and women organizations in the country are engaged only in development programs" (Humanitarian Response 2019, 27). While women's organizations, like the ones identified here, do focus on more long-term development activities, we see that women's organizations are also involved in disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and response activities. The perception that they are not involved can be explained in part by the perceived separation between humanitarian and development activities, as well as a lack of visibility of women's organizations in the humanitarian space in general.

CONCLUSION: HAS LHL IN BANGLADESH ADVANCED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE SECTOR?

While women and women's organizations are involved in humanitarian activities in Bangladesh, in regard to the Rohingya crisis, it appears that the leadership of women and women's organizations is limited, as is the leadership role of LNHAs in general in Cox's Bazar. Most of the work done by women's organizations in the Rohingya response tends to focus on service delivery rather than strategic gender justice programming. Such gender-based programming, however, is much needed. For example, women's organizations such as Rohingya Women Welfare Society and Aparajeyo Bangladesh provide gender-based violence services to Rohingya communities, but because gender-based violence programming is not seen as a life-saving intervention, this work does not receive the funds and attention it requires (Vigaud-Walsh 2018, 16). Considering that many of the Rohingya women and girls survived brutal violence when fleeing Myanmar and may still be vulnerable to violence in the camps, this is a huge oversight. Gender-based violence can cause physical, emotional, and mental injuries; unwanted pregnancies; and sexually transmitted diseases—all of which can cause serious harm to a person's life. Including gender-based violence in life-saving programming can widen the space for women's organizations with the requisite expertise to respond more actively to the Rohingya crisis.

If LHL is to encourage women's leadership, it needs to engage women's organizations specifically in LHL-focused spaces, such as the CCNF, NAHAB, and NIRAPAD. Women's networks such as BWHP, which specifically links women and LHL, represent another opportunity to advance women's leadership and to create a space for women's organizations to develop and share their recommendations for humanitarian action. Indeed, such amplification is already occurring: the BWHP held a press conference calling for more attention to gender and women's rights in humanitarian action (Lambert et al. 2018, 9). The activities of women's organizations (including women-led organizations) that are currently conducting disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and Rohingya response programming also need to be uplifted, as there is a perception that women's organizations are solely development organizations.

To conclude, during the past few years the LHL agenda has emerged as a priority issue across the globe, including in Bangladesh. New voices, energy, and ideas have emerged in the humanitarian system in Bangladesh, leading to the creation of new networks such as NAHAB and BWHP. Currently the leadership of women and women's organizations in the LHL movement in Bangladesh is limited. More attention and visibility need to be provided to women and women's organizations operating in humanitarian crises, particularly in the Rohingya crisis response, in order to better illustrate their leadership and demonstrate the importance of their involvement in the humanitarian system.

4 SOUTH SUDAN CASE STUDY

South Sudan has suffered decades of conflict that have disrupted the economic and social fabric of communities. The current conflict has resulted in widespread hunger, displacement of people, and a crippling economic crisis. More than 1.8 million South Sudanese are internally displaced, and 2.3 million people have sought refuge in neighboring countries (UNHCR, n.d.). According to UNHCR, women, children and vulnerable groups form at least 80 percent of refugees in most camps. Owing in part to these challenges, women have often been viewed mainly as recipients of humanitarian assistance while the leadership role they play in humanitarian response is ignored.

This report seeks to learn how women and women's organizations are involved in humanitarian action, particularly locally led humanitarian action in South Sudan. It examines the barriers and challenges they face in this work and assesses whether LHL has encouraged women's leadership. In the past five years, international policy, the increased demand for humanitarian services in South Sudan, and other dynamics have contributed to a moderate shift in humanitarian response from international to national actors. However, the overall level and type of involvement of women in the humanitarian sector in South Sudan is still unclear. It is on this basis that this study seeks to identify the factors that enable and hinder women's involvement in LHL in South Sudan.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design in which primary data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews and focus groups discussions (FGDs). Secondary data were collected through a literature review of both academic and gray literature for information pertaining to leadership by women and women organizations in humanitarian settings, with a particular focus on locally led humanitarian action. The interview study participants included women and women's organizations, particularly those that are carrying out humanitarian assistance, local and national humanitarian organizations, women-led networks and associations focused on engaging with the humanitarian system, international NGOs, UN bodies, donors, and government agencies operating in South Sudan. In total, 34 study participants participated in the study through FGDs and key informant interviews. Of the 34 study participants, 7 (20.6 percent) study participants were men and 27 (79.4 percent) were women.

In addition, the study analyzed the use of the terms "national NGOs" (NNGOs) and "local NGOs" (LNGOs) in South Sudan. From the analysis—at least in Juba, where the research took place—the terms "NNGOs" and "LNGOs" were found to be used interchangeably by stakeholders. The researchers thus used the term "local actors" to refer to both.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SOUTH SUDAN

In September 2018, most parties to the conflict in South Sudan signed a revitalized peace agreement that aimed to end fighting that has left "over a third of the population displaced and two-thirds of the population severely food insecure" (Knopf 2018, 2). The conflict is also estimated to have led to nearly 400,000 deaths since 2013. Since the signing of the agreement, the number of clashes between parties has declined significantly, but the political process

remains fragile. Additionally, intercommunal fighting continues to contribute to violence and insecurity in many parts of the country.

CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOUTH SUDAN

The effects of protracted conflict have often been different for men, women, and girls in South Sudan. South Sudan has one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world (Cone 2019, 9). Research found that in several conflict zones in the country, up to 65 percent of women and girls had experienced some form of physical and sexual violence (Global Women's Institute and International Rescue Committee 2017, 12). Since the onset of the 2013 conflict, women and children have accounted for approximately 85 percent of the displaced persons (UNFPA 2019). In addition, traditional communal gender roles are rigid in South Sudan. Women are generally expected to occupy the private space rather than assuming leadership and decision-making roles in the public sphere. These strict gender roles, the high illiteracy rates among women, and high rates of child, early, and forced marriage have all limited women's participation in the humanitarian sector. This section investigates the challenges facing women's leadership, looking specifically at gender-based violence, access to education, and participation in decision-making.

Gender-based violence is an enormous humanitarian problem in the country. According to a report from CARE, "There are few places in the world where it is more dangerous or disempowering to grow up female than in South Sudan" (2014, 3). That report further asserts that the vast majority of women and girls will survive at least one form of gender-based violence, such as rape, sexual assault, early and forced marriage, denial of resources, psychological or emotional abuse, or survival sex. According to research from the International Rescue Committee and the Global Women's Institute, 65 percent of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, and more than half of married women have suffered intimate partner violence (2017, 12, 16). Access to justice and medical services in gender-based violence-related cases is also low, with some estimates suggesting that 43 percent of survivors choose to keep quiet out of fear and an additional 57 percent do so out of a sense that there is no point in reporting (CARE 2014, 8).

Early and forced marriage is a common form of GBV in South Sudan. According to UNICEF (2016), South Sudan has the seventh-highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. Research has found that 52 percent of girls are married before the age of 18 and 9 percent are married before they turn 15 (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). Recent research from Oxfam suggests that in some parts of the country, rates of child, early, and forced marriage are likely to be much higher (Buchanan 2019). In many communities of South Sudan, women and girls are valued most for the dowry they can bring and the support they provide in domestic chores (DFID 2012); this dynamic has been heightened in the context of the conflict, exacerbating the difference in gender roles in households. These gender inequalities have adversely affected women's participation in leadership roles and humanitarian response, a situation that has only become more entrenched during the conflict.

Education indicators for women and girls in South Sudan are also among the worst in the world, with a large gap between genders. The overall adult literacy rate is 27 percent, and the women's literacy rate is 19 percent. Girls are less likely to enter school than boys and more likely to drop out (UNESCO 2019). Low levels of educational attainment of women and girls may reduce the number of women who are able to take on leadership roles in the humanitarian sector.

In South Sudan, some "rural women have no voice regarding their own rights, and are unable to participate in any major decision-making process regarding themselves or their families" (Kuany

2010). Common perceptions also require women to be submissive and subservient to their families, husbands, and in-laws, limiting the space for them to make significant decisions about their lives (Kuany 2010). Politically, while women have played an active role at various levels to bring peace to South Sudan, their role has tended to be underestimated or ignored during political negotiations (Itto 2006).

LHL IN SOUTH SUDAN

In recent years, a number of NNGOs have emerged in South Sudan, as a result of not only the Grand Bargain conference, but also other factors, such as the year-on-year increase in humanitarian needs created by the conflict. This section gives a brief overview of some of the major humanitarian actors in the country and then explores the role of women and women's organizations in humanitarian action in South Sudan.

National humanitarian actors

Several national humanitarian actors (NHAs) are involved in responding to the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan: (1) the Government of South Sudan and the coordination in opposition held areas, (2) NNGOs, and (3) faith-based actors.

Government of South Sudan and coordination in opposition held areas

On the government side, the major actor is the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (also referred to as the RRC). The RRC is the official policy regulator of humanitarian work under the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management. Initially formed in 2005 as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the RRC helps coordinate humanitarian work in partnership with other institutions such as OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). Its mandate is the "coordination and facilitation of relief assistance, repatriation, resettlement, reintegration and reconstruction activities, mainly for IDPs and refugees" (South Sudan, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management 2010, 6).

Understanding the structure of humanitarian coordination in the opposition held areas of South Sudan during the conflict was and is still tricky given the sensitivity of the matter in the eyes of the government. This is so because there are several opposition movements operating in different parts of the country including (but not limited to): the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement/Army – In Opposition (SPLM/A - IO) being the largest opposition group, National Salvation Front, South Sudan Opposition Alliance, and the South Sudan United Front. The SPLM/A-IO is the major opposition group and has in place a 'SPLM/A-IO committee for humanitarian affairs,' which is responsible for the coordination of all humanitarian activities though little information exists about it. Under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), humanitarian coordination between parties signatory to the agreement is being centralized with key institutions of government, however there is still a general lack of clarity on the current levels of implementation and functionality of this (United Nations, 2019).

National NGOs

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency estimates that there are currently 330 registered NNGOs in South Sudan (SIDA 2017, 5). A majority of national NGOs emerged after the 2013 conflict, driven by the large gap in humanitarian services in the country coupled with availability of funding opportunities locally.[18] The 2015 South Sudan NGO forum annual report also noted a significant increase in the number of national NGO members, from 74 in 2011 to 242 in 2015—a 227 percent increase over four years. It was not possible for the

researchers to disaggregate this data to see how many of these registered NNGOs are women's organizations.

A related actor is the South Sudan NGO Forum, which includes both NNGOs and INGOs.[19] The forum defines itself as an independent, voluntary coordinating and networking body of NNGOs and INGOs operating in humanitarian and development work in South Sudan (Tanner and Moro 2016). It is dominated by INGOs, though national NGOs have joined in greater numbers since 2006. Its main activities involve coordination, but it also engages in information sharing, policy development and advocacy, networking, and sharing of security information, among other things (South Sudan NGO Forum, n.d.). In addition, the forum routinely provides direct and indirect capacity-building opportunities to its members and helps identify funding opportunities. It is unclear, however, whether the forum has managed to improve national NGOs' access to decision-making spaces, given the dominance of INGOs.

Faith-based actors

Lastly, faith-based actors are also involved in humanitarian action in the country. Churches in particular have been a significant actor.[20] The Muslim population is small—estimated at only 6.2 percent of the religious affiliations in 2010—and little is known about mosques' engagement in local humanitarian work (Pew Research Center 2016). Churches have been involved in peace negotiations on several occasions. They continue to be identified as interlocutors who are able, and at times obligated, to mediate and cross boundaries between different groups, particularly through the South Sudan Council of Churches. The Justice and Peace Commission/Catholic Diocese of Malakal has also worked with the Inter Church Committee in Bentiu to increase the role of women in peace-building activities, facilitating dialogues within and across their communities (Pax for Peace 2017).

In conclusion: Assessment of the degree of LHL in South Sudan

Despite the growing number of NNGOs and the role of government actors, the humanitarian response in South Sudan continues to be dominated by international actors. Though the research documents a growth in national humanitarian actors and ad hoc instances of LNHAs playing substantial roles, it was difficult to identify examples in which LNHAs led humanitarian efforts; it appears that such leadership is retained by international actors. It is important to keep this in mind as we assess how women and women's organizations are involved in LHL, considering that LHL is still nascent within the country.

How are women and women's organizations involved in the sector and LHL?

It was not possible to establish the exact number of women's organizations registered in South Sudan; the researcher tried to track down the numbers but was unable to access the data and is not even sure if such data exists. However, there is a sense that the number of women's organizations involved in humanitarian action is increasing; since 2017–2018 the RRC has registered more than about 30 women's organizations—an unprecedented number. In regard to the South Sudan NGO Forum, though women's organizations are members, it was not possible to identify exactly how many women's organizations were members. Several of the women's organizations interviewed in this study have called for the establishment of a women's organizations desk at the forum offices so as to be able to receive additional support.

Interviews conducted with organizations involved in this study pointed to two factors behind the rise of women's organizations and feminist networks in South Sudan. The first was the increase in humanitarian needs before and during the conflict. According to several women leaders interviewed in this study in a focus group discussion (FGD), the clear need for humanitarian assistance in South Sudan compelled them to start their own organizations as a response to the crises. One of them was quoted saying, "I was touched by the suffering of South Sudan women

and children during the 2013 conflict. I saw some of them crying and helpless on roads, and I was inspired to do something" (head of women's organization). The second was an increasing awareness of women's rights, and some of the women's organizations were formed to protect these rights. They engage in activities such as promoting women's political participation and economic empowerment, addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and delivering livelihood support.

Several of the women's organizations currently providing humanitarian services as identified by this research include the following:

- **Aliab Rural Development Agency:** This women's humanitarian and development organization provides psychosocial and counseling services to survivors of gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas.

- **Crown the Woman – South Sudan:** This women-founded and women-led NNGO was established and registered in 2016 with the aim of empowering girls and women to contribute to nation building economically, socially, and politically. The organization operates countrywide in the areas of women's rights, health, HIV/AIDS, civic engagement, mentorship, child protection, economic empowerment, and humanitarian assistance (Crown the Woman 2018).

- **Diar for Rehabilitation and Development Association:** This organization was founded in 2000 in the Mayo Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp, Khartoum, with the aim of empowering Sudanese women by educating them and equipping them with skills to sustain their lives. Their core activities address gender-based violence and water, sanitation, and hygiene. It operates in the former Lake States and has its office in Rumbek.

- **EVE Organization for Women Development:** EVE was established in 2005 in Sudan and in 2008 in South Sudan. It conducts programs on women's political participation, gender-based violence, peace building and conflict resolution, reproductive health, and socioeconomic empowerment.

- **Hope Restoration South Sudan:** Founded in 2010, Hope Restoration exists to secure livelihoods, promote the security of communities, and achieve equity and equality for individuals and communities. Its core activities address gender-based violence, food security, livelihoods, and peace building. The organization sits on the Humanitarian Country Team, reflecting a targeted effort toward increasing women's leadership (woman staff member, interview, INGO).

- **Rural Women for Development in South Sudan (RWDSS):** RWDSS (the author of this case study) is a national women-led development and humanitarian organization centered on women's rights. The organization was founded to provide humanitarian assistance particularly to women and girls. It operates in 4 of the former 10 states of South Sudan, though it is legally mandated to work in all parts of Sudan. It works on the following issues: food security and livelihoods; women's empowerment and protection; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); education; and peace building.

- **Steward Women (formerly STEWARD Organization):** Steward Women is a women's organization founded in 2009 by a group of South Sudanese women lawyers and friends and managed by women. It was established to address the problems of sexual and gender-based violence, customs harmful to women and girls, child labor and trafficking, community insecurity and conflicts, poor governance, and illiteracy. In a significant recent legal victory demonstrating the group's leadership, Steward Women pushed through one of the first court rulings in favor of the victim in a child, early, and forced marriage case (Toby 2019).

- **South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network**: This women-founded organization was established in 2005 with a core mission of facilitating the empowerment of South Sudanese women and the girls. It addresses sexual and gender-based violence, women's rights, political participation, peace building, health, reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS, and economic empowerment. It currently operates across South Sudan, and is a member of the national gender-based violence and child protection sub-clusters.

- **Titi Foundation.** This women-founded and women-led organization was established in Juba in 2016. In its short time in existence, the Titi Foundation has received funding from donors such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and UNICEF—which is normally challenging for new organizations. The Titi Foundation's activities are in the areas of education, food security and livelihoods, HIV/AIDs, and peace and security.

- **Voice for Change**: This organization was founded in 2005 by a group of women to monitor the initial 25 percent quota for women across all levels of regional and national government that was included in the Interim Constitution of South Sudan. Its core activities are in the areas of women's rights and advocacy, gender-based violence, and peace building.

- **Women Advancement Organization:** Founded in 2012 in Juba, this organization was formed to reduce illiteracy among women, improve their livelihoods, protect their rights, and increase their participation in socioeconomic activities. WAO's core thematic areas have been food security and livelihoods, functional literacy for adult women, child protection, conflict resolution and reconciliation, and HIV/AIDS.

- **Women Aid Vision:** Women Aid Vision works to strengthen and empower South Sudanese women by training them on basic skills and on awareness of their rights. Women Aid Vision works on peace and security issues as well as gender-based violence prevention, education, and safe water services.

As the information provided shows, these women's organizations not only focus on humanitarian action but also offer development programs that deal with women's economic empowerment, women's rights awareness, and peace-building processes, among others. This multifocused aspect of their mission indicates a linkage between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts and a longer-term engagement with the communities in which they work.

In addition, several women leaders' networks and taskforces in South Sudan are advocating for gender-sensitive policies. These groups have called for representation of women in government and recognition of women as equal partners in peace talks and the development of democratic institutions and have paved the way for women's engagement in humanitarian leadership (Sabiiti 2017). Some notable examples of these women's networks, coalitions, and task forces include the following:

- **South Sudan General Women Association**: The association is headed by a secretariat of seven women based in Juba with representation in all 10 former states of South Sudan. According to a FGD held with the secretariat, the association played an active role in the 2011 South Sudan referendum by mobilizing and rallying women for the separation of South Sudan from Sudan. In the various peace negotiation processes mediated by the regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), it has been one of the key players. According to a member of the secretariat, its contribution was to push the warring parties to sign the agreement: "The negotiation process was too long, yet we as women are suffering. We even threatened to undress in front of them. . . . That's when they finally saw light and signed the peace accord" (FGD with the secretariat).

- **Women Monthly Forum**: This forum is a coalition of women leaders and women's groups formed in 2014 to update, coordinate, and share with women and women's organizations activities surrounding engagement in peace processes. The forum is composed of 42 women's groups and has a membership of 81 individual women leaders from across the country drawn from various representatives of civil society groups, academia, politicians, independent activists, and women professionals. The forum has worked to educate women on the peace negotiations and the national dialogue (Dimo 2017).

- **Taskforce on the Engagement of Women**: The taskforce's main objective is to increase the credibility and effectiveness of the peace process in South Sudan by ensuring that it is inclusive, comprehensive, and gender-sensitive (Taskforce for the Engagement of Women in Sudan and South Sudan 2014). The taskforce was formed in 2013 following a joint

statement by a coalition of women leaders noting the lack of community voices, and specifically women's voices, in the peace process and recommending the creation of a taskforce. Since the start of the IGAD-mediated peace talks, the taskforce has called upon all parties in the new "IGAD Plus" structure to carry out the immense responsibility of making the next round of talks an inclusive and authentic process (South Sudan Taskforce on the Engagement of Women 2015).

- **South Sudan Women's Union:** The union serves as a network for women's groups in 10 states of South Sudan. Since its formation it has been an advocacy platform for women, promoting women's economic empowerment and political participation.

- **South Sudan Women's Coalition for Peace (SSWCP):** The SSWCP was created in response to the R-ARCSS to ensure the active participation of women in the peace process and is a signatory to the agreement.[21] The SSWCP includes more than 40 women's organizations from Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda as well as organizations representing refugee women (Lopidia 2019). The SSWCP called for the inclusion of a 35 percent quota of women at all levels of governance in the R-ARCSS. Four women members were delegates to the IGAD-led High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) peace process in 2017 (South Sudan Women's Coalition for Peace 2019).

- **Women's Bloc of South Sudan:** The Women's Bloc of South Sudan is a network of civil society leaders and was a stakeholder to the ARCSS, the 2015 precursor to the R-ARCSS (Council on Foreign Relations 2019). One representative of the bloc sits on the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, which was supposed to track the implementation of the ARCSS (Public International Law and Policy Group 2016, 14). This bloc has also been part of the 2018 High Level Revitalization Forum.

Women as individuals, groups, and associations have also played important roles in community reconciliation and peace-building processes in South Sudan. For example, through engagement with PAX South Sudan and the Justice and Peace Commission/Catholic Diocese of Malakal, women in Bentiu have led local dialogue groups known as peace tables. They have facilitated dialogues to bring the Nuer community together and improve relations between those living in the Protection of Civilians site and those living in town, an effort spearheaded by a women-led organization in Malakal. Women have also created links and forums for resolving interethnic conflict, leading to many grassroots peace accords. Examples include people-to-people processes such as the Wunlit Covenant between the Nuer and the Dinka of 1999 and the Lilir Covenant between the Anyuak, Dinka, Jie, Kachipo, Murle, and Nuer of 2000 (Itto 2006). In these two conferences, women, as survivors of conflict, played a key role in reconciliation efforts and in expanding peace to the communities.

Women leaders and women's organizations have advocated for the rights of women and children in South Sudan as well. One of the most successful campaigns has been #Mamarasakit—meaning "She is everything," or "Not just a woman"—which started around October 2018. Begun by a group of women-led organizations, including Hope Restoration South Sudan, EVE Organization for Women Development, and Steward Women, the campaign advocates for women's rights and empowers women to discover themselves with a key message (Catwalk to Freedom 2018):

We are not 'Just women.' We are the foundation of this nation. We carry the load of our families, our communities and our Country on our shoulders every day. We have suffered and endured, yet we are strong. It is time to rise again! We are capable of achieving all we aim for, be anything we dream to be. We are the leaders of TODAY, not just tomorrow!

The campaign gained a lot of attention on social media platforms and among communities and NGOs, and it has generated discussions in families about women's roles (interview with one of the founders of the campaign).

WHAT BARRIERS CONFRONT WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SECTOR AND LHL?

In South Sudan, several factors have been identified as key barriers to women's participation in leadership and humanitarian action: (1) harmful gender norms, (2) funding challenges, (3) a disconnect from the humanitarian system, and coordination issues among women's organizations and networks. Other challenges, however, may exist. This section identifies those that affect women and women's organizations specifically.

Harmful gender norms

Across several cultures in South Sudan, women are allowed only limited decision-making power from the household level up. This cultural norm has an impact on how women interact with men and engage in LHL. In some ethnic groups, for example, an interviewee from an NNGO noted that he finds that "women cannot talk in front of men in public. If she talks, the husband will be questioned about the fact that his wife talks a lot, and he needs to take punitive action." Even in prominent leadership positions, women still complain about lack of recognition in public. For example, according to an interview with a woman state government official, "if a man and woman leader are invited together for a function, a chair is first given to a man before us women."

In addition, women leaders often face the double burden of balancing family and job roles. A woman's progression to any level of leadership does not necessarily relieve her of her family obligations. According to a participant in a FGD of women NNGO leaders, this situation hindered their ability to advance in leadership. "We get traumatized balancing our job roles and family . . . so you end up losing control of both your family and the job. . . . Maybe we just need a training on trauma and psychosocial challenges because it becomes too much sometimes."

Gender stereotyping is still common in South Sudan. Women are generally perceived to be less capable of performing certain tasks than men. Some women study participants noted having received negative comments from community members in the execution of their work. For example, a participant in a FGD of women NNGO leaders, "I was one time told 'You are simply a mere woman and as such cannot deliver on anything.' . . . This touched me very much because that phrase is very common here." Another participant in the same FGD said, "When we started operating in Gudele, we started with a small room. Some guy would come up and say to me, this work of running an NNGO cannot work for you, leave that to me." Even when they are in positions of authority, women are viewed as incapable of leadership, and men resist their directives. Another participant concurred, saying "Most men say, how can [this organization] be led by a woman?"

There is also a perception that South Sudan has few educated women who can do humanitarian work. Though the literacy rate of women in South Sudan (19 percent) is lower than that of men (35 percent), it could be that the discussion on the low involvement of women in LHL owing to lack of education has to some extent been overrated. Men's literacy rates are higher than women's, but they are still low. Yet men are able to access leadership positions. Even though one out of three literate people in South Sudan is a woman, we do not see one out of three posts filled by women.

Nevertheless, the issue of illiteracy among women is still a challenge and a reality that all stakeholders should work together to address. Prolonged conflict has resulted in the destruction of education infrastructure in major parts of the country, limiting the educational attainment of all young people, especially girls. A staff member of one of the NNGOs operating in Upper Nile expressed his dissatisfaction in recruiting women: "We have several times made jobs

advertisements with a focus on women, but you cannot easily get even a single female applicant." But this outcome could occur in part because women are sometimes discouraged from applying for jobs, not because qualified women do not exist.

Lastly, some women who participated in this research cited sexual harassment in the workplace as a key obstacle to getting women into almost any position, although no reliable statistics are available to back this assertion. In an interview with a woman head of a women-led organization,

> When I was getting started with this organization, I was very eager to get the first project, so I would move up and down in search for opportunities and never knew some people would take advantage of me. Several times I was told to have late evening meetings in the offices or in hotels, and I came to realize that these people wanted to sleep with me before connecting or giving me a grant.

Another interviewee reinforced this message: "Some of these men promise you funding opportunities or connections, yet in actual fact they want to sleep with you" (woman head of an NNGO).

Funding challenges

Access to funding was a challenge raised by the majority of women's organizations and NNGOs interviewed in this study. The largest funding mechanisms in South Sudan are the Common Humanitarian Fund, the Health Pooled Fund, the Rapid Response Fund, the Common Emergency Response Fund, and the Humanitarian Response Plan. All of these funding mechanisms are controlled through the cluster system. However, accessing funds through these mechanisms is not a simple process. One interviewee said, "Yes, we know these funding mechanisms, but the main problem is the technical bureaucracies required" (woman head of an NNGO). Another interviewee was cited saying the "CHF [Common Humanitarian Fund] is a good funding option, but my organization is very young, and their requirements are quite complex if you are new to the system" (woman, staff member of an NNGO).

A growing body of evidence suggests that many women's organizations, like other NNGOs in South Sudan, experience difficulties with financial management and accountability mechanisms, and these difficulties diminish their effectiveness in humanitarian action. Nonetheless, overgeneralizing the lack of expertise of women's organizations and NNGOs devalues their contributions to humanitarian efforts. A woman leader interviewed in this research noted, "There might have been a few cases where NNGOs could have failed to account for funds and perform, but this does not necessarily mean that all national NGOs and women's organizations have failed" (woman head of an NNGO). This problem could also be resolved through capacity-strengthening opportunities focusing on bolstering the financial management systems of women's organizations and other local actors. Some women's organizations have managed to overcome this challenge through networking. One interviewee said, "I used to apply for several funding opportunities but wouldn't succeed in any. Afterwards [I] slowly started sharing with potential donors the results of my organization work through routine reports" (woman head of an NNGO). This approach led to greater exposure of her organization and ultimately a partnership with an INGO.

Disconnect from the humanitarian system

The humanitarian sector in South Sudan is mainly structured in terms of the cluster system, which facilitates humanitarian funding, planning, coordination, and response. Membership in the various cluster groups is important for any NGO (national or international) operating in South Sudan that wants to access funding. The number of women's organizations involved varies from cluster to cluster. In the WASH cluster, according to the 2017 membership list, out of 37

registered NNGO member organizations, only one women's organization was represented (Aliab Rural Development Agency). In the education cluster records from 2019 indicate that of the 17 NNGO members, only one – Women Advancement Organization – is represented. Women's organizations are thus minimally represented at the cluster level.

Comparatively, sub-cluster coordination has involved more NNGOs. In the gender-based violence sub-cluster, for example, only three to four national partners were involved in the humanitarian response plan in 2017. Records from the gender-based violence sub-cluster for January 2019 indicate the leadership of at least two women's organizations: Voices for Change is the focal point for Yei, and Women Aid Vision is the co-lead for Rumbek. Women-led organizations also number as members of the sub-cluster. In an interview, the focal coordinator of the sub-cluster noted an increase in the number of women's organizations in this space in the past year.

Despite the existence of this diverse body of coordination mechanisms, the validation workshop revealed some criticisms of women's organizations, notably from fellow women leaders. There are four main points of critique. First, according to feedback from the validation workshop, there is poor coordination among women leaders in these networks. In the validation workshop, a participant stated, "Each network is doing the same thing for the same group of people" (woman head of an NNGO, validation workshop). Another said in the same validation workshop that "Women in the top leadership positions [of organizations] are also fighting [among] themselves, and this limits their progress" (woman head of an NNGO, validation workshop). Second, there is a perception that "there is a lack of a vivid communication flow" amongst women in urban areas – often in leadership positions of NGOs – and women in rural areas (woman head of an NNGO, validation workshop). Third, it is difficult to access the networks or member organizations. One validation participant noted, "Joining women's networks and coalitions is a big challenge; they do not have specific offices or addresses where you can find them" (woman head of an NNGO, validation workshop). Fourth, though these coordination mechanisms help women's organizations increase their legitimacy and serve a useful role in organizing and mobilizing women and women's organizations, they also expect a certain commonality of approach that is not necessarily possible from all women's organizations and that is not required of other humanitarian actors.

CONCLUSION: HAS LHL IN SOUTH SUDAN ADVANCED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE SECTOR?

In recent years, discussions on the need for local actors to be at the forefront of LHL have increased globally. The call for LHL is trickling down to South Sudan, and many INGOs increasingly embrace the idea of working with NNGOs in humanitarian action. This shift presents an opportunity for women's organizations in South Sudan who work in humanitarian thematic areas that directly affect communities. Considering that the topic of LHL is still emerging in South Sudan, it is too soon to say whether LHL there has advanced women's leadership in the sector. Nonetheless several factors in South Sudan could encourage women's leadership.

For example, the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (2011) provided for women to fill 25 percent of positions in the government's legislative and executive bodies, as affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs, and traditions in South Sudan. At the urging of the South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace, the R-ARCSS of 2018 increased this share to 35 percent (Lopidia 2019, 64). This quota presents an opportunity for women to occupy leadership roles, even given that the quota is not efficiently implemented. The South Sudan NGO Act of 2016 also provides a favorable environment for the registration of

NNGOs by demanding fewer requirements than the INGOs. Through the Labor Act of 2017, the government requires at least 75 percent of the staff employed in INGOs to be South Sudanese nationals. This requirement could provide opportunities for women's participation in LHL.

International actors also have a role to play. Since 2013, the United Kingdom, through a program called Girls Education South Sudan (GESS), committed to provide £60 million over six years to transform opportunities for a generation of girls in South Sudan through education. The program provides incentives to households to offset the cost of keeping girls in school and cash grants to schools to improve the learning environment, thereby enhancing learning outcomes for girls. This program aims to shape the future women leaders of South Sudan. A project by CARE helped women-led organizations, like Hope Restoration South Sudan, participate in the UNHCR consultation meeting on localization of interventions on gender-based violence (Lindley-Jones 2018, 54).

There are also capacity-building opportunities for women. For example, in an interview with a project manager of an INGO she said, "In the last one year, I have sent two women leaders of NNGOs for training" (woman, staff member of an INGO). The various cluster and sub-cluster groups provide training as well. The South Sudan NGO Forum routinely provides training for NNGOs and provides links to professional trainers. Further efforts are needed to ensure that women leaders are connected to such opportunities.

The role that women leaders have played in the peace process also needs to be better recognized and brought to the attention of donors. In the 2015 to 2018 peace talks, women leaders of South Sudan pushed for increased women's representation and for the signing of the peace agreement. Research by the Council on Foreign Relations (2019) found that in the 2018 peace process, "one woman served as a mediator, women made up 25 percent of the delegates, and female civil society leaders acted as official observers." Publicizing their role in the peace process presents an opportunity for women to lobby and advocate for their participation on issues that affect them and to showcase the work they have done.

There is therefore potential for women's leadership to be better recognized in LHL spaces in South Sudan. It involves, in part, making use of mechanisms that are in place but not being enforced—such as the quota requirement—to encourage women's participation in decision-making spaces, to provide capacity-building or capacity-strengthening activities, and to encourage funding of women's organizations by lifting up examples of women's leadership in humanitarian action for donors. As already mentioned, women's organizations have also flagged the need for specific support for women's organizations from entities like the South Sudan NGO Forum. However, efforts to increase women's leadership in LHL also need to recognize the sociocultural context, such as women's poor access to education and their risk of experiencing sexual harassment.

To conclude, in the face of the fragile political situation, a complex humanitarian system, and gender-biased structures in South Sudan, recognizing women as leaders and building on their skills and capabilities is important for ensuring that the humanitarian system goes beyond seeing women merely as victims of disasters. The findings of this research reveal that the role of women leaders and organizations in humanitarian action in South Sudan has evolved over the past years. Women's networks and taskforces have called for representation of women in political spaces and recognition of women as equal partners in the process of democratic development. Women and women's organizations have participated in peace negotiation processes and advocated for the rights of women in South Sudan through campaigns such as #Mamarasakit. The involvement of women in humanitarian action and in LHL therefore needs to be recognized and supported.

5 ANALYSIS

The literature review and case studies from Bangladesh and South Sudan have given a detailed picture of the involvement of local and national women and women's organizations in humanitarian action. This section presents an overview of the main findings from each chapter and how they address the key research questions: (1) the impact of women's leadership on the humanitarian sector and humanitarian assistance, (2) the involvement of women's organizations, (3) the barriers and challenges facing the leadership of women and women's organizations in humanitarian action, and (4) the impact of LHL on women's leadership. Underpinning all four questions is an acknowledgment that women and women's organizations have been involved in responding to humanitarian emergencies in their communities but often see their contributions go unrecognized, which is symptomatic of the general resistance to integrating gender in humanitarian action.

IMPACT OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

The research identifies three main overarching themes to understanding the impact of women's leadership—and how women's organizations are involved—in the humanitarian sector. First, the literature review identifies how the leaders of women and women's organizations in contexts around the world can lead to more effective humanitarian programming through greater awareness of women's gender-based needs and deeper connection to communities, particularly women. Second, women's leadership can introduce a gender-transformative lens that seeks to dismantle unequal gender norms, be intersectional, and focuses squarely on the role of women's organizations. Lastly, the leadership of women and women's organizations tends to bring in a focus on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in that women's leadership fosters long-term holistic approaches that go beyond humanitarian service delivery.

More effective humanitarian action

The case studies offer several examples in which leadership by women and women's organizations provide for women's gender-based needs, therefore contributing to more effective humanitarian action. In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the Rohingya Women's Welfare Society provides counseling on issues of domestic violence, while the Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers' Association provides legal aid services focusing on sexual harassment to the Rohingya community. In South Sudan, the Diar for Rehabilitation and Development Association focuses on gender-based violence issues with displaced people—in addition to WASH. Steward Women, also in South Sudan, focuses on addressing sexual and gender-based violence problems with IDPs in three former states of South Sudan (Eastern Equatoria, Central Equatoria, and Warrap).

Women's organizations also led efforts to provide for women's livelihoods needs in the context of emergencies. In Bangladesh, one women-led organization working on empowerment issues was Jago Nari Unnayan Sangsta, which provided adult literacy classes for Rohingya women in addition to documenting women refugees' socioeconomic needs. In South Sudan, the EVE Organization for Women Development promotes the socioeconomic empowerment of women through policy advocacy and livelihood support.

The provision of gender-based violence services and livelihood support are especially important because in some cases these services are not considered a humanitarian priority. The Government of Bangladesh, for example, does not consider gender-based violence programming or livelihood support to be life-saving activities and thus does not fund such efforts

(Vigaud-Walsh 2018, 16). The lack of such programming particularly affects women, who tend to experience gender-based violence and economic disempowerment most acutely (though it is important to recognize that all genders experience violence in the context of emergencies) (UN OCHA 2019). Women may also need extra support for livelihood opportunities in the aftermath of a disaster or in refugee camps. Women's organizations that are able to provide such services are filling a much-needed gap that responds directly to women's needs.

Women and women's organizations may also have greater access to communities in crisis. Interestingly, the South Sudan research revealed that women may be able to move more freely among communities because they are not seen as members of security or opposition forces and are thus deemed "less threatening" than men. This does not mean they do not face threats themselves; women who are local humanitarian leaders face numerous threats, including sexual violence and harassment. In Bangladesh, the research noted that women and women's organizations have better access to women within households than men do and can gain information needed for emergency response. Women's organizations not only facilitated access to women but also created women-friendly spaces that allowed for psychosocial support and the sharing of health information.

Gender-transformative humanitarian action

Supporting women and women's organizations in ways that bring in women's rights-based and feminist approaches—and holistic programming as opposed or in addition to more service delivery efforts—can lead to more gender-transformative humanitarian action. Gender-transformative action seeks to change unequal gender power dynamics, particularly through policy change, and is led by women's organizations. In Bangladesh, for example, the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers Association provides legal aid services to forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals in Cox's Bazar while also advocating for the adoption of sexual harassment guidelines nationally. In South Sudan, the Titi Foundation provides nonfood items to IDPs and also advocates for holding duty bearers to account to provide education for marginalized women, among other things. These examples from the research bring in the lived experiences of women in these contexts, ranging from displacement, sexual harassment, and lack of legal resources in Bangladesh to the need for basic household items and educational opportunities in South Sudan.

Humanitarian-development-peace nexus

Across the two country case studies, most of the women's organizations involved in humanitarian action in Bangladesh and South Sudan did not focus solely on traditional humanitarian activities. In Bangladesh, for example, the Association of Voluntary Actions for Society, in addition to its disaster risk reduction work, provides services on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as legal aid support for women. The Sabalamby Unnayan Samity provides emergency response to flash floods in its area—a common occurrence in the northern part of the country—as well as livelihood support and programming to end gender-based violence. In South Sudan, the Titi Foundation, a women-founded and a women-led organization, provides basic nonfood items as well as community-based programs that focus on education, livelihoods, and HIV/AIDS activities. A majority – 8 out of 12 – of the South Sudanese women's organizations identified in the research work on peace and conflict resolution activities in addition to more traditional humanitarian services, signaling the important role that women's leaders have played in peace building in the country.[22]

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

The literature review and two country case studies identified three main types of barriers: (1) harmful gender norms, (2) the disconnect from the humanitarian system, and (3) donor priorities and limited financial support of women's organizations. The research identified additional barriers faced by women's organizations, but they are similar to those faced by LNHAs, such as dealing with staff poaching by international actors and being consistently stuck in a subgranting model. This section focuses specifically on the challenges faced by women and women's organizations.

Harmful gender norms

Unsurprisingly, harmful gender norms that govern power relations between all genders exist not only in the private sphere but also in the public sphere, where humanitarian action takes place, perpetuating that idea that women are not leaders. In South Sudan, women leaders reported often facing the sentiment "How can I be led by a woman?" in the course of their work, even from individuals from within their own organizations. Women humanitarian actors in both countries also reported facing harassment during their work, whether from religious authorities in Bangladesh or from men seeking sexual favors in return for funding in South Sudan. In Bangladesh, Rohingya women's groups found that they faced additional questions when trying to organize, whereas men's groups were subject to few or no questions. Lastly, in both countries, women's care work was also identified as a barrier to their leadership in humanitarian action, as women leaders—unlike their male counterparts—must often juggle work and family responsibilities, limiting their ability to participate.

Disconnect from the humanitarian system

Generally there is still a perception that women's organizations are not humanitarian organizations, and that since women's organizations are not visible in the LHL arena—because of a lack of media attention and documentation, compounded by the fact that they are local—they are not doing humanitarian work and it would take too much time to develop relationships with women's organizations during humanitarian emergencies. Evidence, however, shows that women's organizations are engaged in disaster risk reduction; peace and conflict resolution; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and provision of non-food items. Several women's organizations identified in the research are members of the cluster system, such as the South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network, which is in the gender-based violence and child protection sub-clusters, and the Agrajattra Organization in Bangladesh, a women-led organization that is a member of the child protection sub-cluster and the food security and shelter clusters.

The case studies also highlighted the role of international actors such as UN agencies and INGOs, who serve as facilitators—or, more negatively, gatekeepers—to the international humanitarian system, where women's organizations need to go through international actors. For example, the creation of the BWHP was supported by INGOs, which could be seen as facilitating women's organizations' participation in the humanitarian system. In South Sudan, women leaders have received capacity-building training from INGOs. In terms of gatekeeping examples, the fact that most of the organizations involved in the cluster system in both countries are still international actors, particularly on gender-related issues such as gender-based violence, is telling. One potential solution is to have women and women's organizations better integrated into local and national humanitarian spaces such as the networks NAHAB and NIRAPAD in Bangladesh or the South Sudan NGO Forum.

Donor priorities and limited financial support of women's organizations

The previous section noted that women's organizations are often disconnected from the humanitarian system because they are not seen as humanitarian actors. In some cases, though, women's organizations may not wish to be seen as humanitarian actors or be part of the system; they may decide it is not worth it to sacrifice their long-term strategic gender programming in exchange for funding. While it is tempting to pursue funding opportunities that offer short-term and project support—particularly in contexts where funding is limited, as they are in all humanitarian emergencies—donors must be aware of the opportunity costs women's organizations pay to gain funding that is not in line with their mission and strategic gender justice work. Another challenge regarding funding is the lack of information on how much funding has actually gone to women's organizations. It is also important for donors to recognize the humanitarian work women leaders and women's organizations are doing. In South Sudan, the research showed that women leaders were actively involved in the peace agreement process but that such work was not being acknowledged by donors.

CONCLUSION: HAS LHL ADVANCED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE SECTOR?

The literature review and country case studies found that LHL has the potential to encourage women's leadership under certain conditions (see Table 3). LHL has elements that should promote the leadership of women and women's organizations: local women's organizations doing grassroots work serve as an ideal example of a local actor, and they have contextual knowledge of the communities in crisis. The challenges that prevent women leaders from entering global humanitarian spaces (such as poor access to information and language barriers) should be alleviated by having local and national actors take the lead. In practice, however, implementation of LHL that recognizes and encourages women's leadership is rocky.

Table 3: Does LHL encourage women's leadership?

Are there opportunities for advancing women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action from the case studies?	• **Bangladesh**: The creation of the Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform (BWHP) is an example of LHL funding that attempts to amplify women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action. • **South Sudan**: Women leaders believed they were better placed to respond to women's priorities, such as gender-based violence, and therefore could play a greater leadership role in providing programming and services to women displaced by the conflict.
Under what conditions do these opportunities arise?	• **When women's organizations are seen as valuable partners.** Humanitarian actors need to see women's organizations as partners that bring in much-needed expertise and as leaders that can improve humanitarian outcomes. This involves 　○ Spending the time to get to know women's organizations, particularly before a crisis if possible; 　○ Trusting the expertise of women's organizations, even when it may not fit into the traditional approach of the humanitarian system; 　○ Facilitating their engagement in humanitarian decision-making spaces; and 　○ Channeling funding to women's organizations. • **When gender inequality is recognized as a powerful force.** Gender inequality is pervasive, and the quality of humanitarian response can either exacerbate it or address it, underscoring the need for women and women's organizations.
What enables women and women's organizations to successfully engage in the humanitarian sector and locally led humanitarian action?	• **Adaptation to what the humanitarian system demands.** Women and women's organizations that have been able to engage in the humanitarian sector often focus on providing short-term services (such as nonfood items) rather than enacting programs that speak to their strategic gender justice interests. It is unclear whether this is an example of successful engagement—as women's organizations *are* involved in the sector—or an example of women's organizations sacrificing their missions for funding. As noted, some women's organizations choose *not* to be part of the humanitarian system because they do not see the system as currently constructed as adequately responding to women's needs and priorities. Nonetheless, more information is needed to see whether power and resources, such as funding, *have* been shifted to women's organizations. • **Power and voice to influence the humanitarian system.** Networks provide support for women and women's organizations to come together to strategize together about how to gain a stronger voice in humanitarian spaces. • **Capacity strengthening for women and women's organizations.** It is important to provide capacity-strengthening opportunities for women and women's organizations so that they are more empowered to lead and manage in the humanitarian system. • **Supportive international actors.** Support from international actors for the engagement of women and women's organizations in LHL—such as the creation of the BWHP in Bangladesh—is key.

In Bangladesh, women's organizations have not been actively involved in LHL and localization, though the creation of BWHP may change that in the future. In South Sudan, there are several mechanisms that should help encourage women's leadership, such as the 35 percent quota

system for women's representation in the executive organs in the South Sudan government, but they are not currently being implemented. The NGO forums, UN clusters, and other actors offering humanitarian training should increase their outreach to women leaders and women's organizations.

In addition, LHL efforts to encourage women's leadership need to recognize the sociocultural context in which women and women's organizations function. Expecting women's organizations to be able to compete for funding with humanitarian organizations led by elites with more knowledge of how to work the system is a sign of gender inequality. The failure to recognize the value and necessity of women and women's organizations' leadership and expertise in humanitarian contexts explains why humanitarian action still tends to ignore women's needs or even put women in further danger. Assuming that women's organizations can freely participate is inaccurate and can perpetuate gender-blind humanitarian programming. Rather, encouraging women's leadership and organization in LHL—just as in the global humanitarian system—requires careful attention.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LHL efforts have the potential to foster increased recognition of women's leadership broadly speaking and to integrate women and women's organizations into humanitarian action. Yet the power of patriarchal structures and entrenched ways of working that consistently ignore or devalue women's contribution to humanitarian action cannot be underestimated. At its heart, LHL takes on long-standing development issues rooted in colonialism and other forms of inequality, and it challenges North-South dynamics as well as the perceived hierarchy of global, national, and local. Yet LHL is itself situated within a patriarchal system and has, depending on context, its own set of biases and unequal power dynamics. Thus a feminist lens that embraces women's leadership will help further break down traditional and exclusive power dynamics.

Along these lines, the literature review and case studies give rise to several recommendations (Table 4). These recommendations are mainly directed to international actors, which still tend to hold resources and power in the international humanitarian system and can serve as facilitators or gatekeepers in the integration of women's leadership in locally led humanitarian action. These recommendations could also apply to national and local actors who are in a position to provide funding or access to humanitarian decision-making spaces for women and women's organizations. The recommendations focus on three key aspects: (1) get to know women's organizations, (2) trust their expertise, and (3) try to facilitate their engagement in humanitarian decision-making spaces. Underpinning all these recommendations must be an awareness that women and women's organizations often face greater levels of harassment depending on the sociocultural context, and women leaders experience structural barriers to education and other forms of inequality that may make it difficult for them to access and interact in such spaces.

Table 4: Recommendations on how to better integrate women and women's leadership in LHL

Category	Recommendations
INCLUSION	***Recommendations for all*** • Reach out to and engage with local women's organizations before crises in order to establish and invest in relationships. • Provide mentorship and networking activities for women leaders before, during, and after crises in order to amplify the achievements of successful women leaders and build opportunities for knowledge sharing. • Ensure an enabling environment that protects the safety and rights of women's organizations and humanitarian actors and allows them protected access to areas requiring humanitarian assistance. • In international discussions about humanitarian action and LHL, ensure the meaningful participation of not only LNHAs, but also women and women's organizations. In the absence of such representation, representatives of international actors should decline to participate in discussions or recommend a women's organization or women leaders in their stead. • Appreciate the strength of women's organizations, and build on their expertise; do not try to turn them into humanitarian organizations.

Category	Recommendations
	Recommendations for implementing agencies specifically • Help women and women's organizations navigate the global humanitarian arena, such as the cluster system, national humanitarian teams, country-based coordination mechanisms for national and international actors, and international conferences, perhaps through shadowing or mentoring. • Invest in building the capacity of women leaders to help them circumvent any barriers they face owing to the sociocultural context. This capacity includes technical capacity, institutional/organizational capacity (e.g., setting up human resources, finance, and monitoring and evaluation systems; developing fundraising skills), and leadership capacity. • The UN should ensure that the cluster system is inclusive for LNHAs, including women's organizations, and create space to allow them to influence decisions. Address barriers to meaningful participation, including language, expenses, and the culture of the clusters.
FUNDING	***Recommendations for all*** • Disaggregate funding streams to determine the quantity of funds reaching women's organizations. • Develop quotas and other mechanisms to increase funding to women's organizations. • Invest in women's organizations' ability to fundraise.
	Recommendations for implementing agencies specifically • Ensure that women's organizations are included in strategic partnerships (i.e., non-project-based partnerships that focus on strengthening and promoting the local organization and moving toward partner-led humanitarian interventions). • Prioritize more flexible and long-term funding approaches that provide overhead funding, or indirect costs, to women's organizations to support their growth and sustainability. • Offer financial or in-kind support to networks of women's organizations, and budget for capacity-building opportunities; even if the support is minimal, the value gained can be significant.
	Recommendations for donors specifically • Remove unnecessary barriers in funding process (e.g., consider requesting shorter proposals and allowing them to be submitted in local languages). • Fund national and local women's organizations and networks of such organizations directly, and prioritize investments that strengthen women's organizations as opposed to project support. • Recognize that combating gender-based violence—often an area of expertise of women's organizations—is a life-saving activity that needs to receive more funding. • Require that proposals for humanitarian programs by international and national humanitarian NGOs include a women's organization as a meaningful partner. • Commit to funding programs that will increase women's leadership in the humanitarian sector and to projects that include dedicated activities aimed at promoting women's leadership more broadly.

Category	Recommendations
RESEARCH	***Recommendations for all*** • Conduct similar research on examples of locally led humanitarian action, and examine the role that women's leadership played, if any, in efforts made in countries and regions other than those covered by this research. • Conduct research on best practices for partnerships with women's organizations. • Document the role of women's leadership in humanitarian contexts to uplift and learn from their experiences. • Conduct research on sexual harassment as a barrier to women's participation in LHL. • Investigate funding flows going to women's organizations in the context of humanitarian action.

Shifting power to LNHAs has been a difficult process, and much more work needs to be done. Yet the fact that momentum toward LHL is still very much an ongoing process creates a window of opportunity to recognize women's leadership for its many contributions and to prioritize strengthening women's organizations and women leaders. Likewise, LHL efforts need to be more sensitive to why women's leadership matters and why women's organizations need to be recognized. In collaboration between women leaders, women's organizations, and LHL, progress toward a more gender-transformative humanitarian system can be achieved.

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NOTES

1 Women's leadership was examined in six main areas: (1) women in leadership roles within disaster management or civil-protection authorities; (2) women leading humanitarian programs for national or local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or leading these NGOs themselves; (3) women with leadership roles in community disaster committees; (4) organizations focused on women and women's rights that are shaping humanitarian assistance; (5) women-led networks and associations focused on engaging with the humanitarian system; and (6) women's leadership in peacekeeping and police missions.

2 Defining a women's organization or a women's rights organization can be complex. Womankind Worldwide defines women's rights organizations as "women-led organizations working to advance gender equality" (Womankind Worldwide 2015). In a report on a feminist approach to localization, Oxfam Canada used the umbrella term women's rights actors, defined as "local and national organizations, activists and movements which are primarily women-led and have a rights-based, transformative, and intersectional approach" (Lambert et al. 2018, 5). While this is an exploratory research project and we do not want to impose our definition of a women's organization or a women's rights organization, our focus on women's organizations is on those that work primarily on issues of women's rights and gender justice.

3 Working with women's organizations was a key requirement for this research, though it was difficult to identify an organization that had the necessary background in gender, humanitarian, and research issues. Part of this challenge could be due to our incomplete knowledge of women's organizations in Bangladesh and South Sudan—which we tried to alleviate by working with our country teams—as well as the fact that we soon realized that we had been too ambitious in our requirements for research partners. We decided to prioritize interest and commitment to the project, as well as gender justice knowledge, and we provided research support and humanitarian expertise to our partners.

4 See, e.g., Fast 2019; Humanitarian Advisory Group et al. 2017.

5 The term "localization" is used occasionally in this report if it appears in a direct quote from a publication or interview.

6 However, we do not mean to suggest that these are the most important or only forms of women's leadership that exist within LHL or humanitarian action more broadly.

7 The humanitarian-development-peace nexus is defined as "an approach or framework that takes into account both the immediate and long-term needs of affected populations and enhances opportunities for peace" (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019, 7).

8 Interestingly, this is not always the case in South Sudan. In some locales, women's leadership is more prevalent and visible at the national level.

9 It should be noted that this argument that LHL is a better model of humanitarian action is based on an assumption that it is more effective. This exploratory research does not engage in this debate, nor does it provide evidence that LHL is more effective than international-dominated humanitarian efforts, considering that a common definition of LHL does not exist and that what constitutes effectiveness is also under debate. Instead it treats LHL as an ideal type by which we look at whether it can function as an enabling environment for women's leadership.

10 The Facilitation Group is meant to provide continued momentum to the overall Grand Bargain process (IASC 2018).

11 The 2017 refugee influx was not the first time the Rohingya people fled Myanmar into Bangladesh—refugees from Myanmar entered Bangladesh in 1992, 1993, and 2016, for example. However, the sheer scale of the refugee crisis that started in 2017 presents acute challenges in terms of Bangladesh's humanitarian response that are important to acknowledge.

12 In Bangladesh, "localization" is used more frequently than "LHL." For consistency in this report, however, we focus on "LHL" as we want the emphasis to be on the leadership of local and national organizations, include women's organizations. We keep references to "localization" made in interviews and other reports.

13 We had some difficulty distinguishing between local and national organizations within Bangladesh. In a mission report to Bangladesh from the Grand Bargain Localization Workstream, this problem was identified as an issue, and the report recommended that existing humanitarian networks within the country develop a common definition of local versus national actors (IFRC 2018, 4).

14 The distinction between local and national, and the definition of local, in the displacement context of the Rohingya response is not straightforward. For example, in Cox's Bazar "local" could refer either to local Bangladeshi organizations or to Rohingya-led organizations. We decided to include both types of "local" organizations in order to provide a comprehensive view of the humanitarian landscape in Cox's Bazar, but it is important to recognize that "local" can be a complicated term.

15 Another NGO platform created to coordinate local, national, and international actors involved in the Rohingya crisis is the Bangladesh Rohingya Response NGO Platform Partnership. This platform was very new at the time of this research, so we are unable to provide further details.

16 More information on the Bangladesh Women Humanitarian Platform can be found in the following section on women's networks.

17 More information on the Voice of Women Humanitarian Organization Network can be found in the following section on women's networks.

18 This finding is based on feedback from the research validation workshop.

19 Not all NGOs operating in South Sudan are members of the NGO Forum. Membership is voluntary, and admission is based upon fulfilment of certain requirements.

20 The churches referred to here are the Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, the Africa Inland Church, the Sudan Pentecostal Church, the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, and the Sudan Interior Church.

21 The precursor to the R-ARCSS was the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) of 2015. The ARCSS collapsed in 2016, and in 2018 the R-ARCSS was signed (Onapa 2019).

22 The eight organizations are EVE Organization for Women Development, Hope Restoration South Sudan, RWDSS, South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network, Titi Foundation, Voice for Change, Women Advancement Organization, and Women Aid Vision.

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