

Localization: Views from Honduras

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER BRIEF 

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Background and Context

In 2021, the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) of USAID commissioned the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University to undertake a series of “landscape papers” to explore certain key issues in the humanitarian research space. One of the issues identified as a priority by BHA was that of the “localization of humanitarian assistance.” Localization is a loosely defined agenda meant to correct for historic and systematic exclusion and marginalization of actors from crisis-affected countries, often referred to as “local actors,” in the structures of international humanitarian response. The agenda was somewhat formalized through the Grand Bargain agreements that came out of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, which emphasized increasing funding to local humanitarian actors, more equitable partnerships between local and international actors, more integrated coordination efforts, and increased capacity building for local actors.

However, many issues related to the localization of humanitarian assistance, including who is a local humanitarian actor and what reforms are seen as necessary to achieve it, are inherently context-specific. Therefore, in shaping the broader landscape study, the study team decided to include four case studies that would deliver “deep dives” into four different countries to provide context-specific insights into key aspects of the localization discourse. Each study worked with researchers who were from or deeply

connected to the countries being studied and engaged with a broad range of stakeholders in those countries. The countries included Uganda, South Sudan, Haiti, and Honduras. Insights from these interviews were integrated into the general landscape study and used to develop individual case studies.

The objective of these cases is not to provide a comprehensive or definitive take on localization in each context, which would be a longer process that should be led by researchers from those countries. Rather, it is to provide additional nuance to the concepts being discussed in the broader landscape paper and illustrate how these differ across contexts.

Methods

The Tufts study team working on the landscape paper worked with two researchers, Elizabeth G. Kennedy and Dr. Amelia Frank-Vitale, who are American nationals but are connected to and have significant experience working with diverse communities across Honduras and the Northern Triangle. The researchers were briefed on the broader project objectives, tailored the interview guide to the context in Honduras, and carried out a series of key informant interviews across the country.



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Key informants were purposefully selected to represent a variety of viewpoints and geographic areas. The study team spoke with a total of 17 key informants between June and August 2021, many of whom had experience working for a variety of organizations during their careers. Thirteen of the key informants had experience working for local or national NGOs, three of which were indigenous or tribal NGOs. Six of those who had worked for local or national NGOs also had experience working for international NGOs, two had worked with the government. Two key informants worked for a UN agency, one was a journalist, and one was an academic. Two key informants were not formally associated with any organization.

Most of the key informant interviews took place in Tegucigalpa; however, these key informants had experience living and working across the country, including in the El Paraíso department, the Mosquitia indigenous areas, and the Yoro indigenous areas. Two interviews took place in San Pedro Sula with persons working throughout the Cortes department, and one took place in Siguatepeque. Other interviews were done remotely with people living in the Sula Valley and Colon, as well as some persons residing abroad who

had previously lived and worked in Honduras. Forty percent of the key informants were women, and 18 percent were from indigenous communities.

Interviews were conducted both in-person and remotely in Spanish by the researchers who conducted the interviews. Notes were translated into English and shared with the research team at Tufts, who coded the interviews using NVIVO software for qualitative analysis.

The study has several important limitations. The 17 key informants in this study are not representative of the population of Honduras nor of the specific subset of stakeholders who are more deeply engaged on questions on humanitarian action. While the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the analysis was done in English by a researcher who does not have the same contextual familiarity with Honduras; while the analysis was verified with the researchers who conducted the interviews, it was not possible to cross-check the preliminary results with the research participants or other key stakeholders in Honduras. Therefore, it is possible that important nuances were missed or lost in translation.

The Humanitarian Context

Honduras is a country in Central America, located in what is sometimes referred to as “the Northern Triangle.” While Honduras is considered a “middle-income” country, as much as 60 percent of its population lives in poverty, and it has long struggled with chronic insecurity and governance challenges. Honduras is affected by political and criminal violence, with gangs and other organized crime groups having a significant influence on security dynamics across the country, leaving Honduras with one of the highest per capita homicide rates in the region.¹

During the 2020 hurricane season, Honduras was struck by two tropical storms, Eta and Iota. By some estimates, over 4.5 million people were affected by the hurricanes, with over 2.8 million estimated as being left with urgent humanitarian needs.² The ongoing effects of these disasters, paired with other natural disasters (such as drought and fires) exacerbated by

climate change, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Honduran economy, and general increase in food prices, have led to a significant increase in food insecurity across the country. As of February 2022, nearly 2 million people in Honduras were facing IPC Level 3 food insecurity (“crisis” level) and nearly a quarter million were facing IPC Level 4 (“emergency” level).³

These pressures have all contributed to significant waves of displacement and migration. According to UNOCHA, over 900,000 Hondurans were displaced during 2020, making it one of the countries with the highest rate of new displacements in the Western Hemisphere.⁴ Hundreds of thousands of Hondurans have left the country in waves of external migration, primarily moving north towards Mexico and the United States.

Defining Key Concepts

Humanitarian Aid

Before defining the localization of humanitarian assistance in Honduras, the study asked key informants to describe how they understood the concept of humanitarian aid itself. Several key informants distinguished humanitarian assistance as being a first line of response in emergencies.⁵ For other key informants, there was less of a clear distinction between humanitarian aid and other kinds of external aid, including development assistance. Some of the blurring between development and humanitarian aid had to do with the way that external assistance was perceived in general, particularly as a tool of foreign policy and neocolonialism that was not genuinely driven by local priorities and needs.⁶ One key informant from a youth organization in the Cortes department described his understanding of humanitarian aid as follows:

We feel that right now, it's being called humanitarian aid but wasn't called that in the past, even though we were doing it. We worked on "resilience" and "violence prevention" beforehand... so, for two years, we've been doing "humanitarian aid." Here in Honduras, development aid puts a name on projects: migration, unaccompanied children, humanitarian aid. So, every few years, they change their terms according to where the money is.⁷

In addition, many key informants' views on humanitarian action were shaped by a more expansive view of what constituted a humanitarian crisis, which went beyond acute or sudden-onset emergencies. Climate change, chronic malnutrition, drought, a weak public health and education system, human rights abuses, housing shortages, governance challenges, migration, and chronic violence were all cited as crises that humanitarian actors should be working to address, both as their own issues and as factors that made responding to acute and sudden-onset emergencies more difficult. Several key informants from local and national NGOs felt they were always moving between different crises, often filling the gaps between what was consid-

ered humanitarian action and what was not.⁸ One key informant who worked with indigenous communities summarized the feeling of unending crisis response as follows: *"Working with indigenous peoples is always almost permanently doing humanitarian work."⁹*

Because of this lack of clear distinction among many key informants between humanitarian and development aid, many of the comments and critiques throughout this paper are related to external aid more broadly.

In terms of describing how humanitarian response functions as a system in Honduras, most key informants did not address this point directly. Based on the experience and prior work of the researchers of this case study, there are essentially two parallel systems. The majority of larger, established national and international organizations are based in the capital and San Pedro Sula. During emergencies, many of these organizations and some government agencies will coordinate among themselves to organize a response. However, this generally takes time and may be disconnected from ongoing response efforts in the regions. Communities outside of the capital typically organize their own responses to disasters because of general absence of the central government, which will be addressed later in this report in more detail, and a general sense of disconnect from larger organizations based in the capital. This is particularly the case in areas that are more remote and marginalized, especially indigenous communities.

Localization

As described above, much of the humanitarian response that happens in Honduras, particularly outside of the capital, can be described as "locally led" or localized because of the absence of the central government and of sustained or meaningful engagement with international organizations. However, the rest of this section will focus on defining localization in terms of what is considered the more formal humanitarian response system that is largely based in the capital.

Many of the key informants, particularly those in local and national organizations, had never heard of the term “localization”¹⁰ before or were unaware of its existence as a humanitarian reform agenda.¹¹ The few key informants who did know the term localization either were currently working for or had worked for INGOs or UN agencies.¹² Two key informants indicated that while they knew the term, they agreed that it was not well-known in general.¹³

Most of the key informants who said they had heard the term localization defined as involving the affected community more systematically in decisions throughout the humanitarian process.¹⁴ *“I have heard [about localization], but it’s not common to discuss it this way within the UN system. We are talking more and more about involving the people in our decisions and involving the displaced.”*¹⁵ One key informant defined localization as something that involved working more systematically with local partners.¹⁶ Of people who had not heard the term before, some attempted to guess its meaning, with some describing it as being an approach to humanitarian action that is very focused on a specific geographic scope of intervention,¹⁷ while others described community empowerment and mutual aid structures,¹⁸ and others focused on the recognition of indigenous rights and land.¹⁹

While most key informants were not aware of the formal localization agenda as outlined in the Grand Bargain, when asked about what an ideal, locally led humanitarian response system would look like, both those who were familiar with the term localization and those who were not described the importance of affected communities being present in the system and listened to so that their priorities are centered in the response.²⁰ One key informant who had worked for both national organizations and the government defined localization as follows: *“It would mean fortifying community capacities and empowering them so that they are their own agents of their own development, their own assistance, their own help.”*²¹

Local Humanitarian Actors

When asked more broadly about which actors respond during humanitarian crises, key informants cited a broad range of local, national, and international ac-

tors. Local and national actors cited by key informants included the following:

- **The government:** Local authorities and municipalities were generally seen as important actors in humanitarian crises.²² One key informant who worked with a variety of local, national, and international actors shared the following: *“Without bias, the municipalities do the fastest response and get the first calls from the population, so they have to be complemented. They’re always the first ones to help people,”*²³ The Comisión Permanente de Contingencias (COPECO) is the government body who is officially responsible for disaster response, and they were also brought up by many key informants as a critical yet extremely controversial actor in humanitarian crises,²⁴ whose role and shortcomings will be discussed in much greater detail in the Barriers Section. Other government actors included the Ministry of Social Affairs,²⁵ Ministry of Education,²⁶ the Ministry of Health,²⁷ the Armed Forces,²⁸ and the national police.²⁹ While not explicit in the interviews, it is evident from the context and the experience of the researchers that different levels and branches of the state have the mandate to respond to different types of crises.³⁰
- **National and local NGOs:** A number of local and national NGOs were described as participating in humanitarian response, including many who normally do development or human rights work and pivot to humanitarian response during a crisis.³¹
- **Community-based groups, associations, and institutions:** This includes local groups that are both formal and informal—such as neighborhood committees, rural cooperatives, fishing cooperatives, unions, women’s movements, youth associations, parent associations, churches, health centers, firefighters, and spontaneous citizen volunteers.³² One key informant who works with indigenous and local NGOs described that many communities have local emergency committees that are *“very effective. They are in the community. They are supervised by [and have participation from] the local leadership board selected by the community [patronato], church, etc.”*³³

- **The private sector:** The private sector was occasionally cited as a humanitarian actor.³⁴ According to one key informant who worked for a UN agency, “For example, with COVID-19, there are many businesses that changed their production to produce gel and disinfection. They’ve contributed to respond to the pandemic and to do business. Sometimes, they’ve donated part of their product to the poor.”³⁵ The role of the private sector is complex, because while it is often not seen, and does not often see itself, as responsible for responding to social or humanitarian problems, it is involved in various social and humanitarian programs. For instance, “violence prevention centers” in neighborhoods with high levels of violence were often funded through private-public partnerships.
- **The media:** One key informant described how news outlets helped to organize some relief efforts for disaster-affected communities.³⁶
- **Organized crime:** While this study was not able to fully unpack the dynamics of organized crime in humanitarian crises in Honduras, one key informant noted that organized crime plays certain roles in emergencies. This key informant described some local gangs as problematic humanitarian actors:

*Inside the community, they [gang members] helped each other. Those groups are part of the community. They’re not external. Well, we say help. But they helped their own. There were strategic moments to win and take territory. So, they’d go under whatever conditions with their arms to get the territory and help their people.*³⁷

The State of Localization

Most key informants said they were unaware of formal, systemic efforts to “localize” formal humanitarian assistance systems and policies in Honduras.³⁸ There was a sense that some international organizations may have a strategy that leans more towards supporting or following the leadership of local actors, but that this was organization-specific and not necessarily part of a broader strategic effort.

One key informant,³⁹ older than the rest and not from the country, who had worked at the leadership or senior-consultant level for both national and international organizations, presented a different view and argued that larger/well-established, national Honduran NGOs are present during and aligning themselves with international policy discussions on localization, but implied that this was mostly happening among development organizations:

Of course, there are various international conferences that have happened for this, on how the international cooperation can align itself to local and national initiatives. There are many. The Honduran NGOs do participate in them. It’s a topic be-

ing discussed. All those who do development know they have to make their actions sustainable, and the only way is to be part of local organizations: city halls, universities, cooperatives, you’re always looking for the local actors with whom to work for sustainability. This is a permanent topic.

Another key informant, also not from the country, who worked at the leadership level for both national and international organizations, said that a lot of organizations were coming together to support localization, but only for large national NGOs with the capacity to absorb millions of dollars.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that few non-profits in Honduras have this level of budget capacity, and those that do tend to be found in major cities with close ties to the private sector and may not therefore have close ties with crisis-affected populations. Unfortunately, UNOCHA’s Financial Tracking Service (FTS) does not have clear data on local organizations or secondary funding flows in Honduras, so it is difficult to verify this statement. This lack of available data resonates with observations by other key informants that humanitarian funding needs to be better

tracked and the tracking data needs to be publicly available.

None of the key informants commented on whether official coordination efforts were becoming more inclusive of or led by local actors. Honduras does have a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and the latest published Humanitarian Response Plan mentions that the HCT is made up of 50 national and international organizations. But no information was available to confirm what percentage of the HCT is made of local and national actors and to what extent the HCT and related coordination bodies are locally led. Based on other research from the study's researchers, official humanitarian coordination efforts tend to be highly concentrated in the capital and take time to mobilize out towards other disaster-affected regions. During this period, localities are typically organizing their own responses outside of the more official humanitarian coordination mechanisms. While this might indicate "locally led" coordination and response efforts outside of the capital, that may be due more to a lack of effective outreach and engagement by Tegucigalpa-based coordination systems than a deliberate effort to "localize" said systems.

Enablers to Localization

Based on the comments of many key informants and previous studies of the researchers, Honduras in many ways already has a **strong tradition of locally led humanitarian response** in that communities are the ones typically responding to crises. However, this is generally a default response to the absence of the central government and Tegucigalpa-based organizations as opposed to a deliberate strategy of localizing and decentralizing formal humanitarian response systems and resources. While most key informants did not perceive there to be much progress towards localizing the more formal humanitarian system in Honduras, many key informants spoke about factors in the country that would enable such a system to emerge.

Several key informants spoke about the strong level of organization at the community level in response to disasters, with ordinary people and local groups responding quickly and effectively.⁴¹ One key informant, who had worked for both national and inter-

national NGOs shared the following: *"While the Red Cross, UN, etc. arrive, I as a neighbor could probably do more and address needs better. So, I think we need to retake the topic to be collective and not just about NGOs, international, and government organizations."*⁴² This existing capacity and practice of communities to organize their own response to disasters provides a strong foundation for any efforts to localize the more formal humanitarian system in Honduras.

Other key informants described the potential power of **civil society networks** in Honduras. They describe how pre-crisis relationships among civil society groups across communities, regions, and even at a national level led to more effectiveness, greater accountability, and more resource mobilization in two urban areas following the 2020 hurricanes.⁴³ One key informant described how indigenous organizations are increasingly mobilizing not only connections to regional groups, but also *"receiving support and solidarity...from indigenous organizations across the world."*⁴⁴ She also noted how certain civil society groups across Honduras were able to mobilize intersectionally—e.g., combining women's rights, indigenous rights, environmental justice—in an effective way (although it should be noted that male indigenous leaders interviewed for this study did not mention these efforts). The strength of these civil society networks and organizing approaches was also seen as potentially providing a strong foundation for more purposeful efforts to localize more formal humanitarian systems in Honduras.

Several key informants who were not from Honduras themselves cited **individual international organizations** as supporting localization by modeling **good partnership practices**.⁴⁵ These organizations were described as practicing transparency about their own policies and practices, listening well to local partners and affected communities, and, in one case, trying to tackle pay discrepancies between local and international "experts." Several mentioned international organizations actively working to support local partners in strengthening their own administrative and technical capacity and being able to secure their own funding streams.⁴⁶ However, it should be noted that these key informants represented an international perspective and key informants from Honduras

generally critiqued the partnership practices of international organizations. While it is possible that certain organizations are modeling good partnership practices that would lend themselves to localizing more formal humanitarian assistance, it is also possible that internationals perceive their partnership practices as more equitable or localized than they truly are.

Barriers to Localization

When asked about what the greatest barrier to locally led humanitarian response in Honduras would be, the vast majority of respondents cited **a complete/extreme lack of trust in the Honduran government** (particularly the central government and the main disaster management authority, COPECO) to effectively lead and manage responses. The main concerns were primarily around general government **corruption** in the management of emergency assistance and other aid.⁴⁷ There were specific concerns around **the politicization of aid** by the government.⁴⁸ A representative of a national NGO shared the following observation that reflected concerns raised by other key informants:

COPECO would not let [other aid groups] in because that aid had to come, they said, through COPECO, so that COPECO would distribute according to them and in an “equitable” manner and so COPECO could ensure that efforts were not being duplicated. But there were many complaints of corruption, of taking things, of segmenting for example the groups and saying the priority for COPECO was their group of people, such as nationalists [loyalists to the President’s party] because they are obviously securing votes for the upcoming [2021 presidential and municipal] elections. So, they distributed aid depending on whether it will help me win more votes and not depending on who needs more. In fact, we conducted a survey of satisfaction of the humanitarian aid that we gave and many people from those results of that survey said that humanitarian aid was politicized, humanitarian aid did not go where it should go.⁴⁹

There were also other critiques that centered on the **government’s lack of willingness and ability to effectively manage humanitarian response**. Specific critiques included that the government was generally

not responsive, not well coordinated, lacked technical capacity for preparedness and planning, underfunded services related to resilience and response, and was overly bureaucratic.⁵⁰ One indigenous leader described how he offered volunteers from the indigenous community (who knew how to swim and use canoes from childhood) for post-hurricane search and rescue missions in his areas where few NGOs or government agencies operate to COPECO but was rejected because they lacked an official certification.⁵¹ A representative of a national NGO called the government “the weak link” among all of the humanitarian responders.⁵²

Many key informants expressed concern about **aid mismanagement among some civil society groups**. The experiences included leadership that diverted resources (such as cars) for their own personal use,⁵³ organizations that prioritized their “own people” (e.g., church leadership prioritizing members),⁵⁴ and aid that never reached the intended beneficiaries or realized the planned results.⁵⁵ Another concern was about the limited ability of many civil society groups to manage large amounts of money.⁵⁶ One key informant, who has worked for both national and international organizations, described the capacity dilemma as follows:

The capacity, management, resources, and donors’ confidence is much greater for international organizations in humanitarian crises. Donors do not trust smaller [community] organizations, and even when they do, the smaller organizations often do not have the capacity. It [big money] has to be [for] a large national organization. Giving USD 50 million to a community organization would take them months to distribute, whereas international organizations can get it distributed more quickly. Here’s the dilemma, though. Community or small organizations are typically more flexible and able to adapt. They’re actually informed of what and how things are needed... But they don’t have the capacity to necessarily realize it... They often get marginalized and don’t have the resources or means to professionalize themselves and their organizations. I know a great community leader, but for the same structural problems in the country, she only studied to sixth grade and had to stop... So, she has all the knowledge of her community and fantastic ideas, but she can’t do the capacity pieces or get donor confidence.⁵⁷

As described in the quote above, several key informants mentioned how the “capacity” issues faced by local actors often stem from and are compounded by **structural violence and marginalization**. All three key informants who are indigenous spoke about how the marginalization and displacement of indigenous communities affects their ability to access, manage, and have a voice in aid.⁵⁸

Other key informants described how the strength and capacity of local actors was constrained by **overlapping security, governance, and environmental crises**. Several key informants described how general insecurity and targeted violence impacts civil society organizations.⁵⁹ One key informant, who worked for both national and international organizations, described the following: “*The local organizations are often threatened [by] organized crime, state actors, private interests and the like and are facing huge challenges.*”⁶⁰ Other key informants described how many local organizations were **overwhelmed** by responding to, and experiencing firsthand, multiple overlapping crises.⁶¹ One key informant described how local organizations struggled to engage in strategic work because they were “constantly fighting fires.”⁶² Another described the challenges as follows:

*Today it is all, everything, it is all Eta and Iota, it is all pandemic, it is all femicide, it is all abuse of power, all elections and social protest, all migration, all displacement, we are in constant focus on everything. No, we no longer have just one focus. It is tiring.*⁶³

While some key informants described the networking and collaboration among civil society groups as an enabler for localization, other key informants described **division and a lack of coordination** between local actors as a potential barrier for locally led humanitarian action.⁶⁴

However, one of the largest barriers to locally led humanitarian response identified by key informants was the **rigid, top-down structures of aid**. International organizations and donors were perceived as coming into Honduras with pre-determined programs that did not match the priorities of affected communities and left no room for local organizations’ voices or leadership.⁶⁵ One key informant who worked for national and

international NGOs stated, “*Humanitarian projects already bring what they are going to work on. It is very rare that they have asked the local organizations [before deciding what they will do].*”⁶⁶ Local organizations described how this top-down approach sometimes pits them against their own communities and creates distrust.⁶⁷ Others described how “*local organizations are so tired of workshops that don’t resolve anything*”⁶⁸ and describe having “*died of laughter*” at the irrelevance of internationally-led trainings.⁶⁹ The rigid compliance requirements of certain donors and partners were also described as a barrier for many grassroots and local organizations.⁷⁰

The **geopolitics** of international aid are another barrier that was identified that reinforces why top-down approaches to aid were seen as undermining local leadership. A significant amount of foreign aid was seen as being linked to geopolitics that discourages migration, promotes capitalism and Christianity, and generally supports the dominance of US foreign policy.⁷¹ This was seen as undermining the ability of local organizations to use aid to meet local priorities.

The **projectization** of international aid was also seen as a barrier to locally led humanitarian response. Most civil society organizations saw their role as addressing long-term, structural issues in Honduras, but international aid was nearly always seen as short-term and focused on tangible, easily measurable projects.⁷² A key informant described the dilemma as follows:

*The goal should be to build local capacity and a stronger civil society, and that type of money just doesn’t exist. People instead want short-term things. It’s more attractive to give money to build a school or a well than to find out why there’s no teachers or no water, when in the past there was. It’s more attractive to their board and their donors.*⁷³

The short-term, cyclical nature of aid financing was seen as undermining the capacity of local organizations. According to one key informant:

It’s harder and harder to get this money. A project lets [local organizations] do well with [staff] who learn how to do one thing, but then [those staff] have to go, because there is no project to

pay them. They might get another project and be able to recontract them... So, there's no stability. Continual financing would let [local organizations] have that: a constant and stable human resource and better maintain human relations. But without it, everything falls, and you have to redo it every time. I don't know of any local organizations that have overcome this.⁷⁴

According to some key informants, the pressures of this top-down and projectized approach to aid has affected the structure of Honduran civil society. Key informants described local organizations being **trapped in a cycle of subcontracting and dependency** on international NGOs and donors.⁷⁵ One key informant said that as a result, many local and national organizations prioritize satisfying international actors as opposed to actually serving their communities:

What happens is, you come, as a local NGO, with a proposal and you say that you can execute a budget of so many thousands of dollars or euros in six months, and the NGO believes you. So, you've sold a product and at the end, the results are there...but really the majority of the people [are] in the same condition... It is a business, that's what I'm telling you. There are issues that are becoming fashionable for NGOs. They become fashionable and they say here is the money and in fact there are NGOs that have a complete team preparing proposals, managing resources to live off of that. Migration [is fashionable] right now, almost all the NGOs put in a migration component, because that's where the money is.⁷⁶

Recommendations for Change

When asked about what could be changed to strengthen locally led humanitarian response in Honduras, many of the key informants wanted to see **longer-term investments in strengthening civil society and governance structures.**⁷⁷ As a key informant explained: *"There has to be an urgent rethinking of the model of funding from project-driven, outcome-driven to capacity-building, and longer-term capacity building, specifically. It encourages and probably requires local organizations to work together locally, nationally, and regionally."*⁷⁸ Awareness raising and training were mentioned as priorities for affected populations, local organizations, and government workers.

There was a similar call for longer-term investment in addressing **the root causes of vulnerability** in Honduras, investing in disaster risk reduction and resilience, governance, and other issues that go beyond short-term crisis-response.⁷⁹ One key informant who worked with indigenous organizations said, *"They assist with emergency natural disasters. They do not do so with chronic malnutrition or root causes. And that is the nature of emergencies, I suppose. They only see what happened... [But] humanitarian aid should go beyond the disasters."*⁸⁰ Several key informants said that humanitarian funding should be carried out with a hori-

zon of five, ten, or twenty years.⁸¹ This resonates with the importance that many key informants in the study gave to integrated approaches to humanitarian aid that align with **the Humanitarian-Development-Peace triple nexus.**

Many key informants who worked for local and national NGOs asserted the importance of **more collaborative approaches to project design** that would allow not only local organizations, but affected populations, to have a voice in what is being planned.⁸² This often specifically entailed spending time physically in affected areas, engaging with affected communities and responders. One key informant who worked for a national NGO shared the following:

My biggest recommendation is that they not send already-made projects to us... [Spend] some time in the place, so that we start breaking with this "helping the people" without the people, [otherwise you] end up working against the people... Let's also make the vertical horizontal instead.⁸³

Several key informants suggested that investing time in affected areas will help international actors to **better understand civil society** and local representatives

of different voices.⁸⁴ An indigenous leader described that it was important to invest time in understanding who the “actual leaders” are and not only to listen to the loudest voices:

The most humble⁸⁵ people, they believe that [donors] will not accept a proposal from them... I really worry about humanitarian aid, because I've seen so much of it being taken away from those who really need it to instead go to those who have so little need.⁸⁶

Discussion and Conclusion

Honduras is a country that experiences complex, chronic humanitarian crises with their roots in chronic governance challenges, a largely absent central government, a deep legacy of extractive and militarized foreign intervention, the effects of climate change, and Honduras' place in the geopolitics of the Western Hemisphere. Honduran civil society attempts to respond to these overlapping crises, but is frequently overwhelmed, underfunded, and lacking the structural support it needs to be more effective and sustainable. Many civil society organizations see humanitarian response as about more than immediate relief during the acute phase of emergencies and see their role as tackling the root causes of what makes the Honduran people vulnerable to both natural disasters and insecurity. Therefore, they envision the “localization” of formal humanitarian assistance as something closer to the triple nexus: a system that allows the groups closest to communities to address sources of structural inequality and chronic vulnerability while helping communities get through and recover from acute crises.

However, according to the key informants for this study, Honduras is a long way from this ideal. The current international aid system, both for development and humanitarian aid, was seen as a top-down structure that does not give local actors much voice or agency, when it engages with them at all. While some international organizations were praised for strong partnership practices that did enable local actors to take more of a lead, most were seen as coming with predetermined plans that were shaped by voices and forces outside of Honduras. The top-down structures

Finally, there was an emphasis on the importance of **increasing accountability and transparency** of humanitarian aid. Given the perception of systemic corruption in the state, described above, as well as within civil society organizations, several key informants said that they believed it was important to have donors, international organizations, and local civil society working together to ensure that humanitarian aid is depoliticized and properly accounted for.⁸⁷

of international aid have had an effect on a broad section of Honduran civil society, affecting the structure and function of many Honduran NGOs. If there are broader efforts among international organizations to more systematically localize their work, there was not widespread awareness of these efforts among the study's key informants.

The question of locally led humanitarian action was also framed as a question of governance. There was widespread distrust of the ability of the government, particularly the central government and COPECO, to effectively and fairly manage humanitarian responses. The concerns about corruption and the politicization of aid were widespread and indicate that much needs to be done to build trust between communities affected by disasters, civil society, and the government agencies responsible for responding to disasters.

It is also important to remember that Honduras, like all countries, is not homogenous, and so the issues and reforms related to locally led humanitarian action in the country may not be universal. Key informants came from and worked on violence and poverty in the urban areas in and around San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, in communities of five of the nation's indigenous groups in the central and northern regions, and throughout the country. Their responses highlighted that the issues in each area and for each group had important differences. Key informants in urban areas were often dealing with the role of gangs as problematic players in humanitarian crises and the anti-migration politics of foreign aid, while key informants in

indigenous areas highlighted the effects that decades of marginalization and structural violence have had on their local leadership and organizations. Just as the localization debate more globally needs to be grounded in context-specific inquiries and policies, so too does the discussion of localization within Honduras.

humanitarian assistance in Honduras need to include questions of governance, structural violence (particularly against indigenous peoples), the generally rigid and top-down structures of international aid as a whole, and the humanitarian-development-peace-building nexus.

In conclusion, for the key informants in this preliminary study, discussions about the localization of

Endnotes

- 1 International Rescue Committee (IRC). 2022. "Crisis in Honduras: Ongoing Violence and Climate Shocks," January 26. <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-honduras-ongoing-violence-and-climate-shocks>
- 2 UNOCHA. 2021. "Humanitarian Response Plan: Honduras, Humanitarian Programme Cycle August 2021-December 2022."
- 3 ReliefWeb. 2022. "Honduras: Análisis de Inseguridad Alimentaria Aguda de La CIF, Diciembre 2021- Agosto 2022, Publicado En Enero 2022- Honduras." Accessed April 5, 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/honduras-lisis-de-inseguridad-alimentaria-aguda-de-la-cif-diciembre-2021-agosto-2022>
- 4 UNOCHA. "Humanitarian Response Plan."
- 5 Interviews 2, 8, 17
- 6 Interviews 1, 14, 15
- 7 Interview 15
- 8 Interviews 12, 14, 18
- 9 Interview 6
- 10 The Grand Bargain localization workstream uses the Spanish term contextualización local to refer to localization. The interviewers used this term and localización in their interviews.
- 11 Interviews 1, 2, 5, 13, 15, 16, 17
- 12 Interviews 8, 9, 10, 12
- 13 Interviews 8, 10
- 14 Interviews 8, 9, 10
- 15 Interview 10
- 16 Interview 12
- 17 Interview 2, 16
- 18 Interviews 5, 13
- 19 Interviews 7, 13
- 20 Interviews 1, 4, 11, 10 15
- 21 Interview 5
- 22 Interviews 5, 6, 10, 11
- 23 Interview 11
- 24 Interviews 5, 6, 16
- 25 Interview 10
- 26 Interview 9
- 27 Interview 5
- 28 Interview 5, 6, 9
- 29 Interview 5

30 A note on the reference to the state and government in this paper: the Honduran state is not a monolith and is composed of diverse components. For the purposes of this case, the “state” or “central government” is often referred to as an external or non-local actor. Key informants often considered municipal governments as local but national or central government as non-local actors. Community-based actors generally felt no connection to or a significant disconnect from the central government. This complexity is not fully broken down in this case and merits further research. It is also important to note that the research for this case was carried out just before municipal and presidential elections in 2021. Some of the sentiments expressed about the state may have changed with the newly elected municipal and national officials, while some may remain the same.

- 31 Interviews 5, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16
- 32 Interviews 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11
- 33 Interview 6
- 34 Interview 5, 10
- 35 Interview 10
- 36 Interview 5
- 37 Interview 16
- 38 Interviews 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16
- 39 Interview 17
- 40 Interview 12
- 41 Interviews 11, 15, 16
- 42 Interview 11
- 43 Interviews 5, 15, 16
- 44 Interview 5
- 45 Interview 4, 7, 12, 13, 17
- 46 Interviews 12, 13, 17
- 47 Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17
- 48 Interviews 2, 3, 5, 11, 13, 17
- 49 Interview 2
- 50 Interviews 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13
- 51 Interview 6
- 52 Interview 8
- 53 Interview 1
- 54 Interviews 15, 16
- 55 Interviews 6, 9
- 56 Interviews 8, 10, 12
- 57 Interview 8
- 58 Interviews 6, 9, 13
- 59 Interviews 4, 8, 15, 16
- 60 Interview 8
- 61 Interviews 4, 7, 9
- 62 Interview 4
- 63 Interview 4
- 64 Interviews 1, 2, 7, 10, 11, 14
- 65 Interviews 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 16
- 66 Interview 4
- 67 Interview 14
- 68 Interview 5
- 69 Interview 16
- 70 Interview 4
- 71 Interviews 5, 7, 8, 17
- 72 Interviews 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16
- 73 Interview 7
- 74 Interview 17
- 75 Interviews 1, 8, 9
- 76 Interview 1

- 77 Interviews 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16
78 Interview 7
79 Interviews 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12
80 Interview 6
81 Interviews 8, 14, 15, 16
82 Interviews 2, 5, 8, 11, 13, 14
83 Interview 14
84 Interview 3, 9
85 The Spanish word used in these interviews, *humilde*, often refers to someone with limited education and economic resources, rather than humbleness as a particular personality trait.
86 Interview 9
87 Interviews 5, 7, 9, 11, 14

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- International Rescue Committee (IRC). 2022. "Crisis in Honduras: Ongoing Violence and Climate Shocks," January 26. <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-honduras-ongoing-violence-and-climate-shocks>
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