



The Rise Of Faith-Based NGOs And Local NGOs

Definition

With the proliferation of civil society actors, faith-based and local NGOs are becoming more visible in the humanitarian sector, increasing their financial capacity, presence on the field, and media exposure.¹

Faith-based NGOs or faith-based organizations are defined as non-state actors that have a religion or faith as core to their philosophy, membership, or programmatic approach, although they are not necessarily missionaries. While there is no generally accepted definition of faith-based NGOs, they are characterized by having one or more of the following: “affiliation with a religious body; a mission statement with explicit reference to religious values; financial support from religious sources; and/or a governance structure where selection of board members or staff is based on religious beliefs or affiliation and/or decision-making processes based on religious values.”²

Local or national NGOs can be defined as any non-profit, voluntary citizens’ group that programs on a local level.

Even if they represent different entities, faith-based and local NGOs can be observed together because they have several characteristics in common and their increasing presence in the sector has a common impact on its evolution.

Common characteristics:

- distinct from Western, secular INGOs and traditional humanitarian model
- have access to different funding channels
- have easier access (physically and often culturally) to beneficiaries
- have different relationships with governments and local bodies than secular INGOs

¹ The term “non-governmental organization” was created in Article 71 of the Charter of the newly formed United Nations in 1945. An NGO can be any kind of organization provided that it is independent from government influence and is not-for-profit.

² Ferris, B. (2005) Faith-based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations, *International Review of the Red Cross* 87 (858), in Haynes, J. (2014) *Faith-Based Organizations at the United Nations*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York pg 10



Key insights

Southern-based NGOs will be recognized as system leaders

With the growth of national NGOs and the creation of South-South alliances, national NGOs will grow in scale and importance and occupy more of the humanitarian space. The power balance between NGOs and INGOs will shift.

Increased importance will be placed on the role of faith-based organizations

The importance of faith-based INGOs, NGOs, and alliances (including interfaith) will increase. Religious divides can affect the relevance of faith-based NGOs, which can best leverage their networks when providing assistance where the growth in the population of their religion is highest,³ but their influence collectively will grow worldwide.

Humanitarian actors will become increasingly differentiated as local and faith-based NGOs dominate direct implementation of humanitarian programming

INGOs and transnational alliances will increasingly focus on advocacy and activism, while faith-based NGOs and local NGOs leverage their proximity to communities and established networks to lead on direct implementation of humanitarian programs.

Changes by 2030

➤ **Adapted actors in aid**

Civil society has grown phenomenally since the early 2000s, especially as far as Community Interest Companies and Companies Limited by Guarantee are concerned.⁴ Within the civil society, there has been a proliferation of faith-based and local NGOs.

These actors have become more visible and have taken on more responsibility in the humanitarian field. Increasing religiosity in areas of operation, an increase in donor funding for

³ Act Alliance (2016) [The Role of Faith-Based Organizations In Humanitarian Response](#), pg 3

⁴ [How Has the Number of Civil Society Organisations Changed?](#), UK Civil Society Almanac, retrieved on 21 November 2019



faith-based organizations,⁵ and the opening of the humanitarian space (challenging traditional actors and principles) have increased the role of faith-based NGOs⁶ in the sector.

While numerous faith-based NGOs concentrate their activities at the local level, many have emerged at the regional and international level and represent a significant part of the international humanitarian community (e.g. World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief Worldwide, BRAC). The growth in the portfolio of faith-based NGOs at every level is likely to be supported by growing religiosity of areas of continued fragility in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

The ability to better align culturally with beneficiaries is an important factor. Both faith-based and local NGOs can share the same language and culture with the communities they service, which can have an added value in efficiency and acceptance.

Religious affiliation	Number of organizations	Percentage of all religious NGOs
Christian	187	58.4 %
Muslim	52	16.3 %
Jewish	22	6.9 %
Buddhist	14	4.4 %
Hindu	3	0.9 %
Spiritual	25	7.8 %
Multireligious	11	3.4 %
Other religions[23]	6	1.9 %
<i>Total</i>	<i>320</i>	<i>100 %</i>

Source: [International Religious NGOs at the United Nations: A study of a Group of Religious Organizations](#)

⁵ James, R. (2009) [What Is Distinctive About FBOs?](#), INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre)

⁶ Petersen, M. J. (2010) [International Religious NGOs at The United Nations: A Study of a Group of Religious Organizations](#), *Journal Of Humanitarian Assistance*



Cultural or religious connections can lead to better access to beneficiaries, especially in sensitive contexts marked by religious confrontations. Local religious leaders are critical to humanitarian responses⁷ in many areas, particularly where the reach or legitimacy of the state is weak. In this context, faith-based and local NGOs are unique players in the international humanitarian space: rooted in their local or religious communities, they have a global reach.

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups in Middle East and North Africa, 2010-2050

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050	% INCREASE 2010-2050	COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%)
Muslims	317,070,000	93.0%	551,900,000	93.7%	234,830,000	74.1%	1.4%
Christians	12,710,000	3.7	18,180,000	3.1	5,470,000	43.0	0.9
Jews	5,630,000	1.6	8,200,000	1.4	2,570,000	45.7	0.9
Unaffiliated	2,100,000	0.6	3,280,000	0.6	1,180,000	56.2	1.1
Hindus	1,720,000	0.5	3,700,000	0.6	1,980,000	114.6	1.9
Folk Religions	1,060,000	0.3	2,270,000	0.4	1,210,000	114.2	1.9
Buddhists	500,000	0.1	1,190,000	0.2	690,000	137.4	2.2
Other Religions	230,000	< 0.1	260,000	< 0.1	30,000	11.5	0.3
Regional total	341,020,000	100.0	588,960,000	100.0	247,950,000	72.7	1.4

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2010-2050

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050	% INCREASE 2010-2050	COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%)
Christians	517,320,000	62.9%	1,112,390,000	58.5%	595,070,000	115.0%	1.9%
Muslims	248,420,000	30.2	669,710,000	35.2	421,280,000	169.6	2.5
Folk Religions	27,010,000	3.3	61,470,000	3.2	34,470,000	127.6	2.1
Unaffiliated	26,240,000	3.2	50,460,000	2.7	24,220,000	92.3	1.6
Other Religions	1,920,000	0.2	3,740,000	0.2	1,830,000	95.3	1.7
Hindus	1,560,000	0.2	1,900,000	0.1	340,000	21.6	0.5
Buddhists	160,000	< 0.1	220,000	< 0.1	60,000	38.1	0.8
Jews	100,000	< 0.1	70,000	< 0.1	-30,000	-28.9	-0.8
Regional total	822,730,000	100.0	1,899,960,000	100.0	1,077,230,000	130.9	2.1

Source: Pew Center (2015) [The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projection, 2010 - 2050](#)

⁷ Act Alliance (2016) [The Role of Faith-Based Organizations In Humanitarian Response](#), pg 1



➤ **Access is local**

Concurrently, the interventions of INGOs, which are largely from the Global North, are being politically challenged by states and communities in their area of operation. INGOs were historically the organizations with the most capacity to respond to large-scale humanitarian emergencies, but with crises becoming more complex and challenges to Western interference more common, many INGOs have difficulty accessing beneficiaries directly or being accepted by local authorities. Conversely, many local organizations have been able to maintain access in some of the most challenging environments (including Syria and Somalia). Local NGOs are well adapted to the context in which they operate and remain in the country for the long term. Their weight in the humanitarian sector is likely to continue to grow, especially as direct implementers of humanitarian interventions.

One of the strongest messages resonating from the World Humanitarian Summit was the call for more international support for localized humanitarian action. The social, economic, and legal arguments in favor of using local organizations instead of INGOs as the primary implementers of humanitarian programming will continue to undercut the position of INGOs. Though INGOs will face pressure to no longer operate as implementers, the big six (CARE, MSF, Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, and CRS), which represent 0.1% of all NGOs but 23% of expenditure,⁸ are likely too big to lose in this outlook.

➤ **Resources and fundraising capacity of local and faith-based NGOs**

Due to the private funding of faith-based NGOs, their financial autonomy is generally higher than their secular counterparts. One channel, the Zakat, is an example of Islamic social financing. An annual alms tax that people are expected to pay as a religious duty, the proceeds of which are used for charitable and religious purposes, it can provide Islamic NGOs with important funds. Similarly, Christian charities such as the Order of Malta receive significant funding from individual donations within their community.⁹

In addition to accessing different funding communities, faith-based NGOs have access to pre-existing, highly stable, and often longstanding networks through which they can work (e.g. churches and mosques). For example, Tearfund has created a network of 100,000 churches working to lift 50 million people out of poverty over the coming decade.¹⁰ Such

⁸ ALNAP(2018) [The State of the Humanitarian System](#), Chapter 3: The Response

⁹ Order of Malta, [Frequently Asked Questions: How Are Its Activities Financed?](#), retrieved on 21 November 2019

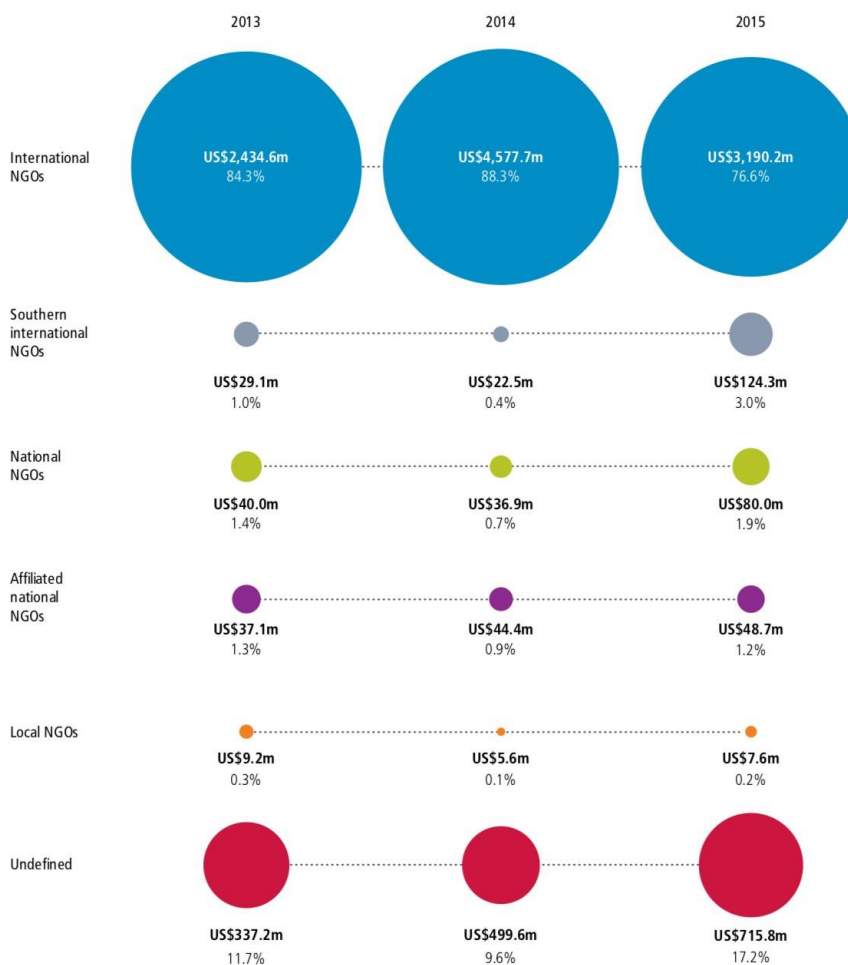
¹⁰ Tearfund, [Where We're Working](#), retrieved on 21 November 2019



networks are expanding, with increased religiosity in many areas of humanitarian operations, so faith-based agencies' resources will likely continue to build.

Local, national, and, to a lesser extent, regional NGOs, which are founded in and staffed from the geographic area in which they operate, already dominate the humanitarian space in terms of volume: in 2014, 80% of the more than 4,000 operating NGOs were local entities.¹¹ However, though some have the capacity to fundraise locally and with private donors (this varies a lot depending on the context), direct funding to local NGOs through formal international humanitarian systems is rare, and their access to resources most commonly flows through partnerships with INGOs.

International humanitarian assistance channelled directly to NGOs by category, 2013, 2014 and 2015



Source: Development Initiatives based on UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking Service data

¹¹ ALNAP (2015) [The State of the Humanitarian System](#), Chapter 3: The Response



Though the current system is heavily weighted against national and local NGOs, there are high-level commitments to change the dynamics of funding, including the Charter for Change, which committed to give 20% of direct and indirect funding to southern-based NGOs by 2018,¹² and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain, which committed to give in excess of 25% of all humanitarian funding “to local and national responders as directly as possible.”¹³ Whether these commitments will be met in full remains to be seen.

Even if the international community falls short of its targets, it is likely that the level of direct funding for local and national NGOs will markedly increase over the course of the outlook, both from the international humanitarian system and from increases in individual giving in countries such as Kenya, India, Brazil, Myanmar, and Indonesia.¹⁴ There are fluctuations in levels of individual giving and uncertainty in projecting, as donations are often correlated with the level of economic growth; however, rates of individual giving in countries with fast-growing economies as a whole have been increasing consistently.¹⁵

Controversies and debates

- Will faith-based NGOs be reinforced or weakened by the increase of violence in the name of religion?

Given the suspicious and hostile environment surrounding conflict and terror attacks associated with groups that claim a religious agenda, religious and faith-based NGOs might be perceived as contributing to tension and terrorism.¹⁶ Parallels made between religion and terrorism can be harmful to the role of faith-based NGOs and have direct consequences on their reputation, image, and credibility as humanitarian workers. The extent to which this will affect the role of faith-based NGOs is unclear as extremism could undermine the acceptance of any organizations that diverge from the beliefs and policies of the controlling group in operating areas.

¹² Charter4Change, [As Local as Possible, As International as Necessary: Humanitarian Aid International's Position on Localisation](#), retrieved on 21 November 2019

¹³ Charter4Change, [As Local as Possible, As International as Necessary: Humanitarian Aid International's Position on Localisation](#), retrieved on 21 November 2019

¹⁴ Charities Aid Foundation (2016) [World Giving Index](#), pg 21

¹⁵ Review of the Charities Aid Foundation, World Giving Indices in [2014](#), [2015](#) and [2016](#)

¹⁶ Delmar-Morgan, A. (2015) [Islamic Charities in UK Fear they Are Being Unfairly Targeted over Extremism](#), *The Guardian*, 22 July 2015



- Do faith-based NGOs perpetuate a Western superiority complex?

Not all faith-based organizations work primarily amongst populations of the same religion. Indeed, religious NGOs, particularly evangelical Christian organizations, are a remnant of Western colonialism and imperialism. Using religion as a consideration in aid distribution could mean that aid is not given to those who need it most and is a subtle continuation of proselytism by incentivizing the growth of Western religions with humanitarian aid.

- Will capacity building for local NGOs and the use of local partners become a condition of operating for INGOs, or will this trend be challenged by issues of transparency and efficacy?

The traditional relationships between local NGOs and INGOs have been criticized as “the formal humanitarian sector finds it extremely difficult to establish genuine, inclusive partnerships.”¹⁷ Such arrangements are being increasingly challenged, and international commitments to empower local organizations through the direct flow of capital could change the nature of these partnerships. Rethinking the relationship between INGOs and local partners, where the power is rebalanced, will be a significant reform in the humanitarian sector if it transpires over the course of the outlook. However, there is still the possibility that this trend toward reform will plateau or even revert (sustaining the current power dynamic in the relationship between INGOs and their local partners), due to the heavy burden of reporting and risk aversion by major donors. The capacity of local organizations to comply with reporting obligations, as well as fraud and counter-terror legislation, remains substantially weaker than that of INGOs and as a result the process to increase direct financing and create a more equitable dynamic with international organizations could be stemmed, as donors could be reticent to accept less rigorous compliance.

¹⁷ Svoboda, E. and Pantuliano, S. (2015) International and Local/Diaspora Actors in the Syria Response: A Diverging Set of Systems?, Humanitarian Practice Group Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute pg iii