



Clarence Tamara, chair of her community's disaster and climate change committee, blows a conch shell—a warning signal for her community in Port Vila, Vanuatu. Credit: Elizabeth Stevens/Oxfam America.

FUNDING THE FRONTLINE

How an Oxfam Emergency Response Fund facilitated local humanitarian action

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From 2014 to 2020 Oxfam embedded an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in its multiyear disaster risk reduction programs in Asia-Pacific and Central America. The Oxfam ERF was designed as a flexible funding mechanism to prioritize small-scale, under-the-radar, and forgotten emergencies and help local actors respond to and mitigate the impacts of disasters in their communities. ERF grants totaling US\$1.9 million were disbursed and supported 24 small-scale responses led by 15 local organizations in nine countries. The ERF, through the support of a donor who values local leadership, helped local actors shape humanitarian responses, and the simplicity of fund administration unlocked creativity and delivered speed without compromising the quality and accountability of humanitarian aid.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIR	annual impact reflection
APLIFT	Asia Pacific–Local Innovation for Transformation
ASEDECHI	Asociación de Servicios y Desarrollo Socioeconómico de Chiquimula
ATECA	Acción Temprana Comunitaria Centro América
C4C	Charter for Change
CAMEL	Central America–Melanesia
CBPF	country-based pooled funds
CDC	Community Disaster Management Committee
CDP	Center for Disaster Preparedness
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CORDES	Asociación Fundación para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Comunal de El Salvador
CSO	civil society organization
CTP	cash transfer program
DEPP	Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Programme
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
DRR	disaster risk reduction
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ELNHA	Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
FEP	Financial Enablers Project
FEMUPROCAN	Federación Agropecuaria de Cooperativas de Mujeres Productoras del Campo de Nicaragua
FGD	focus group discussion
FUNDESA	Fundación para el Desarrollo
GHT	Global Humanitarian Team
GIO	gender interest organization
GNI	gross national income
HRGF	Humanitarian Response Grant Facility
HRC	Humanitarian Response Consortium
ICR	indirect cost recovery or indirect cost rate, depending on context
IFP	Institutional Funding Program
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	international nongovernmental organization
JMK	Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan
JORS	Joint Oxfam Response Plan & Strategy
KI/KII	key informant/key informant interview
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex

LGBTQIA2S+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit plus
LHL	local humanitarian leadership
LNGO	local nongovernmental organization
LNHA	local and national humanitarian actor
LNGO	local and national nongovernmental organization
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MEL	monitoring, evaluation, and learning
NBV	National Bank of Vanuatu
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRRM	Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement
QRF	quick response fund
RCRCM	Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
SIDT	Solomon Islands Development Trust
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
VDPA	Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association
WRO	women's rights organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, humanitarian responses have often taken the form of large-scale interventions, which, it is assumed, will require direct implementation by international and multilateral institutions. Local actors, despite being the first responders on the ground, have long lacked access to the resources and decision-making power they need to lead in the delivery of aid in their communities. Among the biggest challenges in providing effective response by local actors is access to funding. In humanitarian action, even if the mobilization of funds, technologies, and process support is global, an effective response needs to be context specific, based on a deep understanding and appreciation of community situations, needs and capacities. Local humanitarian leadership (LHL) does not mean that the response involves only local actors, with no outside support. It means that local actors, such as local and national governments and civil society organizations, lead the response in collaboration with external actors, including international organizations (Masagca *et al.*, 2021).

From 2014 to 2020, Oxfam America embedded an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in three projects in donor-funded, multiyear disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs in Asia-Pacific and Central America. This research examines the viability of the ERF in enabling more direct funding to local actors so they can better prepare and shape their own response actions when disasters caused by natural hazards strike (as currently designed, it is not applicable in certain contexts such as large-scale humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations). The research gathered evidence from reports, proposal documents, evaluations, and select key informant interviews on whether and how the ERF helped Oxfam country teams and local actors gain access to the resources needed to respond rapidly and effectively to shocks. It also assessed whether the ERF helped local actors play a greater strategic decision-making role, design the response, and lead implementation.

Research results showed that the ERF supported LHL, allowed fund recipients to respond rapidly, especially to politically sensitive disasters, and supported underfunded phases of emergency response. Both Oxfam staff and local actors who were interviewed in the research credited the ERF with leveraging local capacity, providing opportunities to innovate, and preventing program losses in the event of disasters. Across the 24 humanitarian responses that the ERF supported, local actors demonstrated that they could swiftly reach isolated communities and, by being first on the ground, help shape response options with input from the affected populations. Backed by ERF funding, local actors also leveraged additional resources to scale up these responses and put a spotlight on forgotten emergencies.

Direct funding to local actors is one of the major goals of a truly transformed and effective humanitarian system. Although traditional donors suffer from limitations—such as lack of a legal presence in a country and lack of capacity to vet multiple contracts in certain geographies—all local actors who participated in this research said these limitations should not be used as a reason to exclude locals from accessing funds to carry out their humanitarian work. Nonetheless, even in such cases, changes are needed, especially with regard to fund administration and grant management. Such changes must include power sharing and the provision of overhead costs. Local actors see the need to press Oxfam and other international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), the United Nations and other international actors to consider terms of engagement that are more favorable to the local actors. This is particularly relevant when it comes to consortium-type arrangements with big donors.

Helping donors understand the need for local humanitarianism can be fast tracked if international actors like Oxfam, working side by side with local actors, purposely provide options and solutions to remove barriers to direct funding to local actors. This also includes introducing local actors directly to donors, highlighting and crediting their work in every response, and nurturing years of a relationship built on trust and evidence-based learning,

According to respondents, the application and reporting templates for ERF grants were among the simplest that local actors in this research had ever seen, yet they did not detract from the high level of quality and accountability that humanitarian responses demand. Quite the opposite: they resulted in speedy decision making and facilitated a wealth of innovative local solutions that helped reduce the suffering of affected communities. This finding shows that compliance could be streamlined and addressed more creatively without diluting accountability and transparency.

There is a consensus among respondents that the funding landscape is changing and that funding mechanisms like ERFs should not be the exception but the norm. ERFs and other types of emergency funding reviewed in this research—designed for, and ideally in consultation with, local actors—should be multiplied and scaled up in contrast to the current trend, in which big donors launch fewer calls for proposals and concentrate larger amounts of funding in each call. Humanitarian actors in general could also explore opening new funding streams such as crowdfunding, local actors outsourcing other services where possible, such as procurement of supplies, and adopting other non-traditional methods of resource mobilization. There is also the emergence of local pooled funds and community philanthropies. Local actors see the need for INGOs to change and have identified focus areas for collaboration so that together they can shape the humanitarian system and make it more effective in delivering aid.

Research respondents said that the ERF process can nonetheless be improved. Both Oxfam staff and partners strongly suggest designing ERFs that could eventually be managed directly by local actors and handed over to a network of local organizations. In the meantime, immediate changes could include letting local actors apply for ERF grants directly in the new cycle of the Oxfam DRR program and negotiate their terms.

Research findings also showed that ERF-type funding should be complemented with strong capacity sharing and indirect cost recovery to allow local and national organizations to continually develop and sustain their organizations beyond project-based implementation. The Oxfam DRR ERF is part of a donor-supported grant.¹ It is important to note that there are donors that are supporting locally led responses and who are willing to invest in multiyear programs to help local organizations strengthen their humanitarian capacity and systems. The donor supporting the ERF grant is open to learning and with each iteration of the cycle of the programs it supported, including the Oxfam DRR ERF, has provided built-in improvements to make it more effective. The same donor is influencing other donors to support similar mechanisms.

Another flexible funding mechanism, country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), is a potential game changer when it comes to scaling up locally led humanitarian action because it focuses on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and offers flexibility to local agencies. Research participants referenced these benefits.

A review of similar funding mechanisms shows that ERF-type funding provides more decision-making power to local actors and gives more mileage for the money. Primary data from research respondents confirmed the three benefits listed below from a review of similar funding mechanisms:

1. Local actors bring in pre-positioned relationships, resources, and local knowledge, giving them an advantage in targeting the most vulnerable and isolated, even in areas where there are mobility restrictions, as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. They can power-map key stakeholders and navigate the complexities of governance and other relationships on the ground. This helps them make decisions, negotiate better with or on behalf of affected communities, and match and collate other resources, making the sum bigger than the parts (Vera and Vera, 2020). With the ERF, leveraging additional funds was among the key achievements of local actors.
3. Local actors need not be humanitarian agencies to respond to a crisis. The majority of local actors who implemented ERF-supported responses were doing development work, which in

fact helped them provide more sustainable response options linked to development priorities that addressed the underlying causes of risk and vulnerabilities (De Dios *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, the following recommendations from the research findings apply to the wider humanitarian sector and call for addressing key challenges and taking advantage of opportunities. They are also meant to help improve the new phase of the Oxfam DRR ERF.

- **Address the challenge of transboundary disaster management.** Transboundary governance and challenges such as drought, freshwater management, forest fires, refugee crises, and pandemics affecting multiple countries require innovations in social and environmental management, including new forms of multistate governance and disaster management. Tools for planning, preparedness, and assessment for targeting the most vulnerable could be agreed upon at a regional level to reduce redundancies and optimize resources. Regions should have a built-in standby agreement for a regional response involving disaster preparedness, governance programs, and funding.
- **Explore anticipatory finance.** The shift from disaster relief to DRR requires more long-term and less reactive planning. Anticipatory finance is a funding mechanism that provides financing to reduce disaster risk and improve resilience by disbursing cash grants, insurance coverage, or access to loans before the impact of a humanitarian crisis or extreme weather event (Oxfam in the Philippines, 2020a). Anticipatory finance could, for example, help a farmer prepare better for drought or flooding. A Start Network innovation using smart-data early warning systems allows humanitarians to be better prepared by quantifying risks in advance of crises or disasters, pre-positioning funds, and releasing them according to pre-agreed protocols. Another example of anticipatory finance is the B-READY project in the Philippines.² Its pre-disaster cash transfer component and informed preparedness planning give communities the time and resources necessary to protect themselves and minimize damage to livelihoods, infrastructure, and well-being (Manlutac *et al.*, 2020).
- **Rethink the development-humanitarian divide.** Local actors suggested looking at humanitarian actions within the development framework and not the other way around. This approach means that local implementing partners can be primarily development NGOs with embedded humanitarian capabilities. This will help prevent disasters from hampering communities' development—a chronic issue. It could also provide a more inclusive environment for women's rights organizations or gender interest organizations, whose work is often deeply rooted in development issues.
- **Rethink layered risks and hazards and local emergencies.** All countries in the 2020–2023 cycle of the Oxfam DRR programs are among the top 10 most disaster-prone countries in the world, with many communities lacking the resources or power to address the underlying causes of disaster. To manage fund allotment, ERF guidelines should revisit protocols and scenarios for countries and situations with multiple hazards and layered risks. Research participants recommended earmarking a small portion of funds—US\$15,000–30,000 per event—to ensure responses to small local emergencies where communities may not be able to leverage additional funding because of their isolation and small size.
- **Include learning.** Other funding mechanisms reviewed included a purposive learning agenda and learning exchanges among grantees. This area was a missed opportunity in the Oxfam ERF. In the few instances when learning exchanges did happen, they yielded significant improvements in practice and savings for humanitarian actions. Learning approaches should be included in the Oxfam ERF and other similar funding mechanisms.
- **Fund women's rights organizations (WROs) and gender interest organizations (GIOs) directly.** Lack of direct funding to WROs and GIOs was seen as a major gap in the disbursement of ERF funds. Although this research was not able to make definitive conclusions on how best to do so, suggestions included the following: (1) incorporate this issue into the humanitarian sector's research agenda; (2) require the participation of WROs or GIOs in all responses; (3) provide capacity-strengthening support to help WROs and GIOs effectively engage in humanitarian responses; and (4) allot a percentage of any ERF funds for WROs and GIOs across all responses.

This research discusses the changing roles of Oxfam,³ other INGOs, and local actors. Local actors also see the need for themselves to change, and they have identified key areas in which to focus their efforts, including investing in knowledge management and monitoring and accountability systems. Local actors interviewed also want to start computing their own ICR. Lastly, by taking responsibility for the visibility of their own work, local actors could contribute to thought leadership and organically transform the humanitarian system and sector to be locally led.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Note: These definitions are based largely on frameworks and definitions used in Oxfam publications and research work from 2016 to 2020.

Capacity sharing: The Charter for Change, the Grand Bargain Agreement, and other similar agreements include a focus on building institutional capacity to create strong, sustainable organizations. But to shift power and to recognize the existing capacities of local actors, “capacity sharing” is a more appropriate term to demonstrate that capacity can (and should) be shared, including between local/national and international actors. This puts a more collaborative approach—one that reflects commitments to mutual learning and partnership—at the center of any system (Oxfam, 2019b).

Direct funding: Direct funding is money that flows directly to the ultimate recipient agency from a foundation, a governmental donor, or a pooled fund. If the money is instead granted to an INGO and the INGO disburses and monitors the funds, the funding for the local agency is considered indirect. Indirect funding is channeled through one or more intermediary organizations between the original donor and the ultimate recipient agency. The key differences from the perspective of local organizations are that (1) the closer an organization is to the source of funds, the larger the role it is likely to have in shaping the programs; (2) engaging directly with international foundations and government donors provides greater visibility, opportunities for major grants in the future, and opportunities to shape donor priorities; (3) direct recipients of funds receive money for overhead expenses, whereas indirect recipients often do not; and (4) the more direct the funding, the fewer the transaction costs (Oxfam, 2018).

Disasters: Unlike hazards, disasters are not natural. They occur when people’s exposure and vulnerability exceed their capacity to cope with the impact of a natural or human-made hazard (Oxfam International, 2018).

Emergency Response Fund (ERF): For the purpose of this research, “ERF” (or “Oxfam ERF” or “Oxfam DRR ERF”) refers to the emergency fund embedded in particular Oxfam multiyear disaster risk reduction programs. The ERF is a flexible funding mechanism designed for crises that fall outside the attention of the mainstream media, governments, and international donors. The fund is intended to prioritize small-scale, under-the-radar, and forgotten emergencies and to help local actors respond to and mitigate the impacts of disasters in their communities (Oxfam America, 2015). Other similar funding mechanisms will be referred to as emergency facilities or emergency grants.

Gender interest organization (GIO): GIOs are “organizations with some goals/objectives/programs/activities related to women’s rights and gender equality (may be or not be women’s organizations)” (Tomas and Ferreras, 2018).

Local actors: For reporting purposes, the term “local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs)” is used synonymously with “local actors.” When Oxfam uses the term “local actor,” it broadly refers to all levels of civil society and government (local NGOs, national NGOs, CSOs, municipal authorities, national civil protection authorities, the local private sector, etc.). In other words, by “local” we mean “not international” (Oxfam, 2019b).

Local humanitarian leadership (LHL): LHL occurs when “local humanitarian actors (whether civil society, government, or both) lead humanitarian action, ensuring that it is fast and appropriate and meets the needs of the affected population” (Kergoat et al., 2020, 4). LHL “refers to a transformed humanitarian system: one which is collaborative, inclusive, agile and diverse in nature, and where aid decision-making processes are equitable and closer to affected people” (Kergoat et al., 2020, 4).

Localization: The term “localization” is used widely in the humanitarian sector and refers to the process of strengthening the role of local actors in internationally led humanitarian responses; however, it does not fully capture the local humanitarian leadership agenda. A disaster response planned by international actors and implemented by local actors could be considered localized, but it would not reflect local leadership. In recent discussions on decolonization and the racism of aid, the term has been criticized as disempowering, reflecting arrangements more akin to subcontracting than a true sharing of leadership and responsibilities (Wall and Hedlund, 2016, 10). “Localization” is therefore part of the process toward that transformation in leadership and not necessarily an end in itself (Kergoat et al., 2020, 4).

Women’s rights organization (WRO): “For the purposes of this research, women’s rights organizations (and feminist organizations) are defined as actors in local and national organizations, activists and movements that are women-led/governed, whose core mandate is advancing women’s rights and gender justice, and have a rights-based, transformative and intersectional approach. These can be organized and registered organizations, but also loose networks of women’s rights/feminist activists. This includes those that support and advance the rights of LGBTQIA2S+ people, racialized women and girls, indigenous women and girls, etc.” (Oxfam Canada, 2020).

1 BACKGROUND

From 2014 to 2020 Oxfam America embedded an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in three projects within multiyear, donor-funded disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs in Asia-Pacific and Central America. The ERF was designed to provide early and flexible funds to enable local communities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to conduct rapid assessments and implement timely responses when disaster struck, in collaboration with their governments and other actors. The facility could also be activated for natural hazards outside of the Oxfam project areas within the same country and region.

ERF grants totaling US\$1.9 million were disbursed over the seven-year period from 2014 to 2020. They supported 24 small-scale responses, which were led by 15 local organizations and reached about 220,000 beneficiaries in Bangladesh, El Salvador, Fiji, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nicaragua, and Vanuatu. Grants for each response ranged between US\$15,000 and US\$200,000. The three projects were as follows:

- **The Central America–Melanesia (CAMEL) Resilience Building Project:** CAMEL was implemented from 2014 to 2017 in 44 communities in four countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. The ERF was used in additional communities in those countries, as well as in Fiji, and was implemented with the following partners: Wan Smolbag in Vanuatu; Asociación Madres Tierra (AMT), Asociación Comunitaria Coordinada en Servicios de Salud (ACCSS), incorporating staff from the smaller NGO Asociación para el Desarrollo Agrícola y Microempresarial (ADAM), in Guatemala; Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF) in Fiji; and Fundación para el Desarrollo (FUNDESA) in El Salvador. The ERF was activated three times—first, for Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu (April–September 2015); second, for Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji (August 2016–June 2017); and finally, for a drought in Central America (September–December 2015).
- **Asia Pacific–Local Innovation for Transformation (APLIFT):** APLIFT was implemented in 154 communities in the Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu from October 2017 to October 2020. It supported local communities affected by recurrent natural hazards by enhancing their capacity to prepare for disaster and to co-lead on relief and recovery efforts in collaboration with authorities. APLIFT was implemented by Oxfam with local partners: the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), the Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP), the Visayas State University, the Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA), and the Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT). These countries are highly exposed to natural hazards, and their poor economic and social situation makes them particularly vulnerable to disasters. The ERF was activated seven times in Asia-Pacific for total disbursements of US\$670,000 during the three-year program. Grants were activated three times in the Philippines for Typhoon Kai-tak (April–July 2018), Typhoon Phanfone (December 2019–June 2020), and the Tulunan earthquake response (October 2019–May 2020); twice in Indonesia for the Palu and Dongala earthquake and tsunami response (November 2018–February 2019) and the Greater Jakarta flooding (January–August 2020); once in Vanuatu for the Ambae volcano response (December 2018–March 2019); and once in Bangladesh for Cyclone Amphan (August–October 2020).
- **Acción Temprana Comunitaria Centro América (ATECA):** ATECA was implemented along the Dry Corridor of Central America—specifically in nine municipalities covering 45 communities in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua—from October 2017 to October 2020. The program supported these communities, which face recurrent small-scale disasters, by enhancing local leadership, strengthening local response systems, and helping communities better protect their livelihoods. Oxfam implemented the program with local partners: the Asociación de Padres Corazon del Maiz, the Fundación para el Desarrollo (FUNDESA), the Asociación Salvadoreña de Ayuda Humanitaria Pro-Vida, the Asociación Fundación para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Comunal de El Salvador (CORDES), Fundación Campo, Fundabase, the Association of Field Workers (ATC), the Rural Women

Coordination Group (CMR), the Women's Foundation (FEM) and the Federación Agropecuaria de Cooperativas de Mujeres Productoras del Campo de Nicaragua (FEMUPROCAN), the Association for Education and Development (ASEDE), the Guatemalan Ecumenical Foundation for Hope and Fraternity, EFRA/Institute for Overcoming Urban Poverty (ISMUGUA), ASEDECHI, the Institute for Lifelong Learning (INSFOP), Save the Children, and the Inter-municipal Council (Mancomunidad) CAFEG. The ERF was also allocated to non-program locations in all ATECA countries and in Honduras. The grant was activated 11 times in Central America, for a total of US\$625,000 over the three-year program. The ERF was activated in El Salvador for Storm Amanda (2020) and for a drought response (2018–2019); in Guatemala for a volcano response (2018); and in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua for a regional drought response in the framework of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) project in 2019 and again in 2020.

As of the writing of this report, a new phase of the Oxfam DRR program in Asia and Central America has started and will be implemented in Bangladesh, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines from October 2020 to December 2023. The program will continue to have an ERF component.

2 INTRODUCTION

When the Grand Bargain⁴ was first launched in 2016, it was intended to drive a truly transformative change across the humanitarian system. Specifically, workstream 2 of the Grand Bargain—commonly known as localization—commits donors and aid organizations to provide 25 percent of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders “as directly as possible” by 2020, along with more unrestricted money and increased multiyear funding. In total, 18 donor countries and 16 international aid organizations from the United Nations (UN), international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRCM) agreed on this Grand Bargain.

Local NGOs are widely accepted as critical to an effective humanitarian response because of their proximity to, knowledge of, and access to affected populations and their ability to respond rapidly to developing humanitarian emergencies. Since the signing of the 2016 Grand Bargain, the localization of global humanitarian funding to local and national responders has become a key priority, and 10 signatories met the target of allocating at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders “as directly as possible” (Metcalf-Hough *et al.*, 2020). Unfortunately, Oxfam is among those that have yet to reach the 25 percent target. For 2018–2019 data, Oxfam’s average global share of funds transferred to local and national NGOs and civil society organizations stood at 14.3 percent.

Despite the Grand Bargain commitment and the Charter for Change (C4C, 2020), 96 percent of all humanitarian funding went to international responders in 2018, with only 3.1 percent going to local and national actors (Sumar and Gingerich, 2020). National disaster management agencies and their local offices are key local humanitarian actors, and strengthening their capacity is a crucial part of supporting local humanitarian leadership (LHL). Out of this 3.1 percent, 83 percent went to national governments and only 15 percent to local and national NGOs. There is a lack of metrics tracking how much of this money went to women’s rights organizations (WROs) or gender interest organizations (GIOs), and it is important to capture these data. But the interviews conducted as part of this research and a review of similar funding mechanisms suggest that funding to WROs and GIOs is low.

The top-down approach to humanitarian response persists, perpetuated (or underpinned) by a history of colonialism and patriarchal attitudes. Only 1 percent of all official aid and about 0.2 percent of humanitarian assistance goes directly to local organizations in countries recurrently impacted by disasters. Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, local NGOs have frequently pointed out that assistance from donor countries is often accompanied by colonialist attitudes and assumptions, permeated with inherent bias and sometimes overt racism.⁵ As Degan Ali, executive director of the African charity Adeso, says:

[T]here are so many elements where the [humanitarian] system is seeped in colonial and racist structures. [...] We have to be honest about who the humanitarian system is—and it is dominated by the UN and INGOs that are predominantly Westerners and mostly white people. The majority of the decision-making in these institutions lies in the hands of white people” (Cornish, 2019).

In a *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article entitled “The Future of Humanitarian Action Is Local,” among the main propositions for ways forward is funding for local and national actors (Sumar and Gingerich, 2020). The article emphasizes that while building local leadership and improving capacity merit consideration, funding remains a top constraint. The authors call for a new funding model—one that transfers a significant portion of funds to local and national actors before, during, and after a crisis. Such a funding model will require greater transparency and accountability regarding how funds are raised, transferred, and spent. The authors advise that this funding model should go beyond just direct funding to implement a project or response action to include coverage of indirect costs. It should be as flexible as possible, with a

combination of multiyear and short-term time frames. This approach will require rethinking financial flows in the sector and helping national governments and local and national NGOs set up financial systems that can readily absorb and use funds for humanitarian responses. As recommended in this article, “Donor governments, the UN, INGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies need to uphold the commitments they made in the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change to direct at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national actors” (Sumar and Gingerich, 2020, 46).

THE EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND

Many humanitarian INGOs are reliant on bilateral donors, which are in turn dependent on the willingness of national governments to declare a state of emergency.⁶ With this as a backdrop, Oxfam designed the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) as a key component of its donor-funded DRR capacity-strengthening and preparedness programs, to serve as a flexible funding mechanism that would be particularly helpful for crises that fall outside the attention of the mainstream media, governments, and international donors. The fund was intended to prioritize small-scale, under-the-radar, and forgotten emergencies and to help local actors, specifically local NGOs and community-based organizations, respond to and mitigate the impacts of disasters in their communities. The ERF was also a means to contribute to the longer-term goal of building disaster ready communities.

The ERF was developed by Oxfam America with the support of the donor and with input from local partners. The ERF is managed by Oxfam America and implemented jointly with Oxfam affiliates, which provide back-office support to country teams under the framework of an inter-affiliate partnership agreement.⁷ Funds were pre-allocated to each region. During the CAMEL phase, when the ERF was first introduced, a total budget of US\$600,000, equally divided among Vanuatu, Fiji, and Central America, was disbursed. For the APLIFT phase, a total of \$1.295 million (US\$625,000 to Central America, US\$670,000 to the Asia-Pacific) was secured for the ERF. Transfers of funds were based on the results of rapid assessments developed in country and on the approval of country requests by Oxfam America. In the new 2020–2023 phase of the grant, responsibility for approving ERF requests is given to steering committees composed of Oxfam country representatives in each region.⁸

The ERF was designed to allow Oxfam country teams and their local partners to draw emergency funds for small-scale, under-the-radar emergencies, many of which are recurrent in nature. Priority was also given to the countries where Oxfam’s disaster preparedness projects were implemented and, within those, to the communities where projects would be implemented. But conditions governing the use of the funds remained flexible to ensure that the allocation would cover the greatest needs and gaps within the context of a response to a natural hazard, even outside of project areas. The ERF was also available for early recovery and rehabilitation (Oxfam America, 2015).

Countries eligible for the ERF were divided into two tiers (Table 1). Tier 1 countries were those where project activities would be implemented. Tier 2 countries were those where Oxfam would take a learning perspective and where Oxfam was already engaged. For example, Oxfam had implemented projects in Bangladesh and Honduras and had made important contributions to emergency response efforts in Fiji and Nepal. As mentioned, however, the funding mechanism retained some flexibility, particularly in situations of small-scale disasters that did not get the attention of donors and the media.

Table 1: An indicative, non-exclusive list of countries eligible for the ERF, 2014–2020

Tier 1	Tier 2
El Salvador	Bangladesh
Guatemala	Fiji
Nicaragua	Honduras
Philippines	Indonesia
Solomon Islands	Nepal
Vanuatu	Papua New Guinea

MODALITY

- Recipients drew upon the ERF at early stages of humanitarian emergencies or to cover early recovery actions. It was meant to allow Oxfam and its local partners to launch timely responses and leverage additional funds from other sources as needed.
- The regional manager for the Central America project and the regional manager for the Asia-Pacific project were the focal points for country teams regarding funding requests. These managers convened their respective regional steering committees for decision making and made recommendations to Oxfam on the allocation of funds in their respective regions.
- For each ERF-supported response, Oxfam provided a report to the donor supporting the ERF grant and larger DRR program. In cases where the response was part of a larger response supported by other donors, for example, if the ERF contributed US\$50,000 to a US\$500,000 response, then this leveraging of additional funds was also reported in the ERF report.
- To facilitate learning, the ERF responses were part of the quarterly regional project steering committee meetings and country annual impact reflections (AIRs) of the regular DRR projects.

A new cycle of Oxfam DRR programs, including an ERF mechanism, is underway in Asia and Central America. Recommendations from this research are intended to strengthen and improve subsequent ERF grants.

3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

This research is an inquiry into the viability of the Oxfam-administered ERF funds in enabling more direct funding to local actors so they can better prepare and shape their own response actions when disaster hits. The overall aim of the research is to identify good practices and analyze challenges in giving local actors access to funds to help them strengthen institutional capacity and give them the power to innovate and exercise autonomy (see research questions in Table 2). The premise of the research is that these types of funds will fast-track local humanitarian leadership and generate more effective and sustainable response options.

This research was conducted against a backdrop of similar funding mechanisms such as the Start Fund; Oxfam’s Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF), which is part of the Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA)⁹ project being implemented in Bangladesh and Uganda; and the Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP)–supported Financial Enablers Project (FEP), which was piloted in the Philippines and is part of the portfolio of the Start Fund. This research is not an evaluation of the ERF as an LHL funding modality, because it was not designed to be such, and it is not an evaluation of ERF-supported responses. Rather, it looks at the process of fund administration and management. Ultimately, the research will assess the potential of the ERF and similar funding mechanisms to be among the funding modalities that local actors can access.

Table 2: Research questions

1.0	What are the strengths and challenges offered by the ERF in empowering local actors to become decision makers and humanitarian responders based on the ERF experiences of Oxfam and its partners (from CAMEL, APLIFT and ATECA)?
1.1	Were funds allotted to women’s rights organizations (WROs) or gender interest organizations (GIOs)? Why? Why not?
1.2	How much of the ERF funding made its way to local actors (consider overhead taken by Oxfam, share kept by country offices)? Were the funds for country offices flexible (unrestricted) or entirely project based? Were country offices able to leverage the ERF funds to attract other funds, including funds from new donors?
1.3	Based on the ERF experience, what are good practices and opportunities for providing funding more directly to local and national humanitarian actors (LNHAs) within the framework of the Grand Bargain localization commitment and the C4C?
2.0	What funding modalities do other agencies use to enable them to fund local actors directly, and what can we learn from them?
2.1	Do comparisons with similar modalities suggest that the ERF should be modified to make it even more accessible to local actors? What lessons can we learn from others, and what learning can we offer others?
3.0	Specific to phase 2 of the ATECA and APLIFT programs, how can ERF contribute to strengthening local humanitarian leadership? What recommendations can this research offer?

4 RESEARCH METHODS

An analytical framework was used to guide the research (see Annex 1). This report is based on data collected from surveys, key informant interviews, and a literature review conducted from September 2020 to October 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on mobility and mass gatherings, research methods were adapted to incorporate physical distancing, reduce risk of transmission, and avoid unnecessary interruptions to respondents who were working from home or in difficult situations. All interviews were conducted remotely. Trained local field researchers helped the lead researcher conduct phone and virtual interviews with key informants, administering the interviews in Spanish for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua and in Bahasa for Indonesia.

The research gathered evidence from reports, proposal documents, evaluations, and select key informant interviews on whether and how the ERF helped Oxfam teams and local actors with the resources needed to respond rapidly and effectively to shocks. It sought to assess whether the ERF helped local actors play a more strategic decision-making role, design responses, and lead implementation. The research drew on insights from local actors and Oxfam staff across nine country offices that received the ERF on how the funding facility and its modality can be enhanced to make it even more friendly to local and national non-government organizations (LNGOs).

A total of 37 people—22 Oxfam staff and 15 local partners—participated in the research, exceeding the initial target of 22. Of these, 35 people participated in key informant interviews (Table 3). Additional respondents were added to compensate for the absence of community beneficiaries as respondents and to include global and regional Oxfam staff involved in funding mechanisms similar to the ERF.

Table 3: Affiliation of participants in key informant interviews

Oxfam country offices	Oxfam regional and global offices	Local actors
13	7	15

An initial list of respondents and relevant organizations was identified through a review of ERF reports submitted by country teams and verified through consultation with the regional program managers of APLIFT and ATECA. Respondents were selected based on their involvement and leadership in ERF-supported responses and their role as humanitarian personnel at the country and regional levels. For CAMEL, it was only possible to conduct meta-analysis of ERF reports, program progress reports, and evaluations, as all the people involved in the program have since moved on to other organizations. Data gathering occurred just when countries were experiencing varying degrees of community quarantine and disruption owing to COVID-19, and it was challenging to track down CAMEL respondents and arrange interviews.

Surveys were rolled out as an initial data-gathering tool to establish trends and recurring practices. They were translated into Spanish for Central America. This step was followed by semi-structured interviews based on a set of open-ended questions. In a couple of cases, brief follow-up interviews were arranged with respondents to clarify or add details to the first interview. Initial results of the research were presented for validation in webinars separately to Asia-Pacific and Central America. Responses are anonymized in the report.

Data were also collected from a meta-analysis of case reports highlighting key aspects of the ERF grant. Country-specific experiences and insights in the form of caselets (small case studies) were selected based on where the ERF most comprehensively fulfilled the key criteria for which it was set up: communities were off the radar, they received little media attention, the

ERF allowed local actors to be first responders, and it helped leverage additional funding and other support.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH

Several limitations of the research approach should be noted:

- The initial research design involved compiling at least two case studies to unpack the opportunities and challenges that arise in the use of the ERF. As data gathering got underway, however, researchers realized that potential insights about the ERF are widely spread across all grantees and that it would be a loss to focus on only two case studies. Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic also meant that researchers were unable to do any fieldwork to collect semi-structured interviews and participatory observations, the key sources of information for the original case study design. Although we adapted to a remote data-gathering mode, field researchers' and respondents' unfamiliarity with this type of data gathering proved to be a challenge, especially within the two months available for research. Some key informants from remote communities had no internet or phone connections while working from home. We managed this limitation by highlighting key aspects of the ERF throughout the document.
- A list of donors that have supported ERF-type funding mechanisms was drafted, and letters requesting interviews were sent out with repeated follow-ups. The timing, however, was not ideal, as the data-gathering phase coincided with various degrees of COVID-19 lockdowns and quarantines across the world, with people still figuring out how to adapt to the pandemic. We were unfortunately unable to interview any donors.
- Answers to some of the research questions—particularly those pertaining to community participation—proved difficult or impossible to procure. Midway through the data gathering, researchers realized that communities were disconnected and had no knowledge of the ERF; we thus decided to forgo conducting community focus group discussions, even if country teams said they could be managed with proper physical-distancing protocols. Information on community participation was instead extracted from response evaluations and real-time reviews.
- To manage beneficiary bias (where an informant might focus on positive aspects of an intervention in the hope that the agency would continue to support the community), researchers divided Oxfam and partners during interviews and took pains to explain to all informants that all information would be confidential and that it was a safe space to provide constructive criticisms on both sides, should any be forthcoming.
- Initially most of the suggested informants identified as men. We mitigated this risk by conducting key informant interviews with one female and one male representative per country and arranging meetings with female respondents when it was convenient for them, as some were doing care work on top of their regular day jobs while working from home. Nonetheless, a pronounced gender disparity remained, with 27 males and 10 females participating in the research, showing that decision makers on humanitarian action from both Oxfam and local partners were mostly male.

5 RESEARCH RESULTS

CASE STUDY: THE OXFAM ERF

The evolution of ERF partnerships

All ERF-supported responses were conducted with local partners. However, in the seven years from 2014 to 2020, the nature and type of relationships between Oxfam country offices and local actors evolved. During the CAMEL phase, the responses were mostly Oxfam led. When Tropical Cyclone Pam tore through Vanuatu on March 13, 2015, this Category 5 cyclone affected 166,000 people across 22 islands (Turnbull and Sterrett, 2017). The response was considered a large-scale operational response, with surge capacity staff led by Oxfam Australia and with support from Oxfam New Zealand—the closest affiliates, geographically, to Vanuatu (Walden *et al.*, 2015). In contrast, during the ERF cycle in the APLIFT and ATECA programs, most responses were partner led, even the Category 2 response¹⁰ in Sulawesi, Indonesia. This speaks to the increasing capacity of local humanitarian actors. However, it is important to point out that this shift also reflects changes within Oxfam, especially its partnering capacity and ability to step back and change its attitudes and policies to be more locally led.

Not all partners that implemented an ERF-supported response were humanitarian partners. Most Oxfam partners, with a handful of exceptions, do not exclusively deliver humanitarian interventions. In fact, part of their strategic difference is that they work with communities on their development priorities long before an emergency response is required. This helps them gain trust and an understanding of local governance systems and processes, which are well in place when they respond to emergencies. In this case, local leadership blurs the line between humanitarian action and development.

All local actors who participated in the research felt they had decision-making power. Often local actors went to Oxfam with a response plan after dialogues with their communities, and Oxfam's role was to mobilize funds and support fund administration. When partners tested new systems or platforms, such as the digital cash transfer in the Philippines or the use of new assessment tools in Vanuatu and Central America, Oxfam was asked to provide technical support. At other times Oxfam provided support by brokering relationships with other actors, keeping the response high on the public agenda for resource mobilization and policy influence and offering large-scale procurement and warehousing. These forms of assistance were especially relevant during the initial weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown, when partners had to pivot to an online mode of work.

Oxfam America had a technical team with time dedicated to support the regular CAMEL, APLIFT, and ATECA programs and their ERF components. Country teams could also get support from regional platforms, which had humanitarian capacity. But regional humanitarian platforms had also been overstretched owing to the increasing frequency and scale of emergencies in both the Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. The regional platforms had suffered from diminishing capacity brought on by (1) organizational restructuring toward partner-led humanitarian teams at the country level and (2) financial constraints at Oxfam, which was at times unable to keep permanent regional posts.

The decision-making process

Oxfam staff and local actors said they operated as partners in designing ERF-supported responses. There were other areas of complementarity in the ERF process: Oxfam helped strengthen local actors' capacity to plan for business continuity and to write high-quality program proposals and reports to donors. In turn, local actors brought speed, networks of other

actors, technical capacities, and relationships with local governments and communities. Most of the local actors who implemented ERF responses were long-term partners of Oxfam, so together they had conducted joint assessments, compiled vulnerability and risk data for certain geographies, and built up relationships and trust. The ERF funds came through Oxfam but needs and priorities were established by local actors and affected communities.

When a response is large in scale, however, Oxfam often designs the initial response, and local actors feed into operational plans. In Central America, a partner who had implemented a small-scale community-based response and is also part of the regional drought response felt this difference. This partner was quick to point out that when responses involved a big donor and multiple countries, response interventions were more commonly coordinated and designed by Oxfam offices and staff, such as when Oxfam coordinated with ECHO on the regional drought response in Central America. Both Oxfam and its partners said the regional response helped leverage additional funding, allowing responses to reach more beneficiaries on a longer-term basis. This approach allowed access to a donor like ECHO, which only accepts applications led by European partner INGOs from EU member states. However, it diluted local voices and shifted decision making to the regional Oxfam offices.

Nonetheless, a majority of research respondents agreed that a regional approach is often a better option in cases like the Central American drought, which affected multiple locations in the Dry Corridor. Even in the CAMEL phase, the ERF grant released to Central America was for a regional drought response. Therefore, it is important to think further about how interventions can keep the core goal of promoting local humanitarian leadership while helping affected populations recover as quickly as possible and build back better even in regional or large-scale responses.

In comparison, an evaluation of the Financial Enablers Project (FEP) showed that once grant recipients had passed due diligence requirements, the project provided them with a high degree of decision-making authority, including the power to define how cross-consortium business should be conducted. This project had a specific non-interventionist approach (DEPP, 2018, 16)—that is, the project management unit could provide technical assistance or any intervention only if invited by local actors. Local networks and partnerships aided swift, effective responses, maximizing partners' resources and addressing the needs of people in disasters. Improvement is needed, however, in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) and project quality, especially because the project management team was committed to providing technical advice only when requested to do so by local actors (DEPP, 2018, 20). Overall, consortium partners of FEP grew in confidence over the project period and felt justified and emboldened to claim greater localization in the Philippines. Most said they would be reluctant to return to a partnership model where international agencies tell local partners what to do and how to do it (DEPP, 2018, 18). After the project ended in March 2018, some members of the consortium continued to work together and wrote concept notes for funding.

One approach that may help accelerate responses and increase local leadership is to use response models designed by local actors themselves that were shown to be good practices in the ERF-supported responses (Box 1).

Box 1: Locally led response models

Over the years, Oxfam has made a key shift toward having roving capacity, with technical regional and global staff hosted in country, and with disaster management programs and humanitarian responders hosted in regional and subregional hubs. This approach allows for faster responses that can draw on various staging areas, a diverse range of experiences and expertise, and local leadership. It has also saved resources by lowering logistical costs. Long-term partnerships with local organizations have improved the quality of responses—these organizations have a vested interest in continuously strengthening their capacity to manage disasters, and they can draw on local expertise and context (Manlutac *et al.*, 2020). This box highlights two successful models of local consortia that Oxfam has partnered with.

Humanitarian Response Consortium in the Philippines

The Humanitarian Response Consortium¹¹ is composed of 12 local NGOs that have provided humanitarian responses in the Philippines since 2010. The People's Disaster Risk Reduction Network (PDRRN), a member of the HRC, has implemented an ERF-supported response. HRC already has its own quick response fund (QRF) of at least US\$50,000, which it replenishes annually as part of its business continuity plan. It also has its own warehouse, response mechanism, and oversight steering committee to make decisions for both response and non-response issues. Oxfam invested in the HRC's foundational development from 2010 to 2015, including funds for training programs, and provided direct funding for HRC-managed responses starting in 2013. This approach was aligned with Oxfam's country strategy in the Philippines, which stated that all responses, especially Category 3, would be partner led. As early as 2012, most of the capacity-building budget for the Oxfam Philippines team was shared with the HRC. The HRC's humanitarian response clock—such as the number of hours before declaring an emergency—is in sync with Oxfam's, and this helps align trigger protocols and timelines.

Among the responsibilities of the HRC oversight committee is to update capacity maps of its members so it knows whether there is a decision to respond, who is available, what the mobilizing course is, what organization will lead the response, and what the composition of the rapid assessment and response team is, among other things. Over the years, HRC partners have received other funding and stocks of emergency supplies such as food, water, and shelter kits from other donors and partners, and they have built up their own technical roster for humanitarian interventions. All HRC members are proactive in sharing monitoring and assessment reports and tools for assessment and are capable of immediately deploying teams even before a hazard such as a typhoon hits a community. They can decide, independently of Oxfam and other INGOs, whether they will respond to a disaster and the types of interventions to be rolled out.

Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan (JMK) in Indonesia

A similar model can be found in the Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan (JMK), also known as the Humanitarian Knowledge Hub, in Indonesia. On September 28, 2018, a series of earthquakes—including one of 7.4 magnitude—struck central Sulawesi. The quakes triggered a tsunami (waves reached three meters in height), as well as landslides and soil liquefaction—a phenomenon in which saturated soil temporarily takes on the qualities of quicksand. More than 2,000 people were reported dead and around 700 missing in the Sulawesi disasters, and more than 200,000 people were displaced.

It was also during this time that the government of Indonesia issued a directive limiting the scope of work that international NGOs would be allowed to undertake and requiring that all assistance offered by INGOs be channeled through local and national partners.

The government's decisions required Oxfam to adjust its ways of working, but by then Oxfam had already been working with JMK, a network of 23 Indonesian NGOs. Oxfam helped found the group and since 2017 has worked to strengthen its humanitarian capacity. Although all partners of JMK started out as development NGOs, over the years they have built up expertise in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), emergency food security and vulnerable livelihood (EFSVL) assistance, protection, gender issues, disability inclusion, and more. JMK is unique in having a vast network across Indonesia, and it has developed its own thematic and geographical cluster approach to delivering development and humanitarian services that are fully locally managed. In accordance with the government directive restricting INGO engagement, JMK invited Oxfam to participate in the Sulawesi response, and Oxfam's responses to the earthquake and the floods and liquefaction that followed were carried out in close partnership with JMK. The Sulawesi response was a Category 2 response; it had a total budget of US\$11.8 million of which US\$2.4 million was directly managed by JMK. Oxfam also had Indonesian nationals in its national, regional, and global humanitarian teams who could provide surge capacity, as expatriates were not allowed to be part of the response unless they could prove that the expertise they brought did not exist among Indonesian nationals.

Fund administration

Interviews and survey results showed that the ERF facility offered the opportunity for immediate action. Fund availability meant a timely response to the food needs of the households in the Dry Corridor in Guatemala in 2016 and arrested child malnutrition in partner communities during the drought of 2019 and 2020 in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. According to a key informant interview (KII) with a local partner based in Guatemala, once funds were authorized, the ERF helped avoid long and bureaucratic processes. Local actors were able to do an assessment or be part of assessment teams that gave them the power to select households, conduct monitoring, and provide operational leadership in response interventions.

ERF funding was essentially unrestricted in nature (apart from the requirement to adhere to Oxfam compliance mechanisms such as audits). That is, no conditions were placed on the budget items to which it could be allocated. Partners could use funds to support emergency response and recovery, including personnel costs, procurement, and for starting up relief operations while waiting for other resources to come in. By giving partners the freedom to shape and implement activities, including filling out the proposal and reporting templates themselves, the ERF process offered dividends related to capacity strengthening and applied learning.

Turnaround time for approval of ERF grant requests ranged from 12 hours to four days. Grantees had to fill out a one-page request form that included key information about the disaster and proposed interventions. Upon submission of the form, verbal approval from the regional program managers was enough for country teams to borrow from their country resource allocation (a pot of funds within the country team's control for their operations and projects) to pre-finance an assessment of damage and losses during disasters or an initial response on the ground. In turn, Oxfam country teams could disburse money to local partners almost within the same time frame. Around 90 percent of ERF funds were sub-granted by Oxfam country offices to local actors directly, unless the proposed response involved a cash transfer, in which case the money was given to a local financial institution to be disbursed to beneficiaries. This arrangement was made to reduce partners' transaction costs, such as in the cash transfer programs in El Salvador and Vanuatu. The remaining 10 percent of ERF funds were spent on Oxfam staff technical assistance and back-office support to local partners. Most of these funds were used for monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL); cash transfer programs; and use of new tools or techniques.

Partners said that the ERF proposal template was one of the simplest they had ever seen. The final reporting template asked for only key information and was three to five pages long. This

reporting was augmented with story-gathering missions supported by the Oxfam team with national communications and knowledge managers, who produced blogs, media releases, video clips, and briefs about the response. To comply with Oxfam's own grant management system, country offices still needed to fill out a grant application proposal (GAP) and enter an Oxfam Inter-affiliate Partner Agreement with Oxfam America. The GAP preparation was done mostly by Oxfam staff based on the response plans that were submitted or co-designed with local actors. The biggest hurdle in the grant approval process was within the Oxfam system itself and consisted of getting signatures and approvals across two to three affiliates.

Although there was no official pre-vetting of local partners in the ERF process, all local actors were long-term partners of Oxfam. They had undergone the regular partner compliance screening and had existing partnership agreements with Oxfam country offices. This situation allowed for the fluid transfer of resources and technical assistance.

Oxfam, led by its Global Humanitarian Team (GHT), worked to streamline application and reporting processes for humanitarian responses across country offices. There was a directive to use one response plan called the Joint Oxfam Response Plan & Strategy (JORS) for all fundraising applications during emergencies and to produce one set of reports. Although different donors had different requirements, the idea was that across all responses Oxfam would collect data and information that Oxfam grant and program managers could modify based on donors' requirements. This practice aimed to lessen the burden on country staff and their partners in adhering to multiple donor compliance needs.

This grant approval process still came with its own challenges, but it was tested in the 2019 Sulawesi response in Indonesia, where there were 17 donors with different donor requirements. The JORS was adequate for writing up an ERF application, and the report that came from the Sulawesi response served as the basis for the ERF final reporting template.

Recently the GHT launched a digital situation report portal to help streamline the process and make dashboards available across the Oxfam confederation and local partners for decision making and information sharing. This portal could be another source of data for ERF applications and reporting, but Oxfam will need to work out a MEL mechanism that can extract the lessons and impact of humanitarian interventions vis-à-vis a specific donor's contributions.

ERF coordination and governance

In CAMEL, ERF coordination was governed by a program steering committee led by the overall program manager and country representatives. It was not clear from the program's guidance note or from documentation for the respective regional steering committees in Asia-Pacific and Latin America whether local actors were voting members of these committees. Interviews revealed that decision making on fund disbursement was done largely by Oxfam and the regional program managers. Local actors provided their input through Oxfam country offices and were not part of the final decision making.

The ERF had a clear set of guidance notes on hazard triggers, response sectors, response processes, and technical standards for responses. Nonetheless, there was some tension about how decisions on ERF activation were made. During CAMEL, there was confusion about the role of the steering committee, which was not a decision-making body but rather a collegial group making recommendations on whether or not to respond. The final decision at that time still lay with Oxfam. Overall, however, ERF coordination has worked well, particularly when responding to fast-onset emergencies such as the cyclones in Fiji and Vanuatu, where decisions were made quickly.

In APLIFT and ATECA, all Oxfam staff who were grant recipients were aware of the ERF and its administration process. They attended a briefing about the ERF during project inception meetings. A majority of partners were aware of the funds but had little knowledge of the actual process of administration or selection. Partners in Bangladesh and Indonesia, which were not

APLIFT focus countries, said they only knew of the fund through their Oxfam contacts and were not involved in the back and forth of negotiation. Instead they went to Oxfam with a response plan, and Oxfam served as an intermediary to access the funds from Oxfam America. So far, all agree that the proposal and reporting templates were easy to fill out and that local actors were given the freedom to decide on and shape the responses. In El Salvador, partners were aware of the ERF as a funding mechanism favorable to local actors but were unaware of the details.

Regional platforms intended to support country teams in times of emergency know about the ERF and its rules.¹² In the new Oxfam structure, regional platforms can help categorize responses (see Table 4). The regional drought response in Central America was supported by the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) regional platform. In Asia-Pacific the regional platform supports country teams in terms of fund mobilization and technical support for Category 3 responses based on need. The ERF was among the funding mechanisms that the Asia-Pacific regional platform promoted to country offices, especially to support initial needs assessments and underfunded emergencies.

While the GHT supports responses by Oxfam and its partners to all Category 1 and most Category 2 emergencies, Category 3 emergencies must be dealt with by the country team and its partners within the scope of their capacities. Most of the responses supported by the ERF were Category 3 responses, below the mandated scope for GHT deployment of humanitarian support personnel. They were managed at the country level with minimal support from regional humanitarian units. However, this research revealed that outside of the CAMEL, APLIFT, and ATECA program areas and ERF grantees, not many people in the Oxfam confederation were aware of the ERF mechanism.

Table 4: Oxfam’s guide for categorizing humanitarian responses

Category 1	More than 2 million people, or more than 50% of a population, badly affected in one or more countries
Category 2	250,000 to 2 million people, or up to 35% of a population, badly affected in one or more countries
Category 3	Fewer than 250,000 people, or less than 35% of a population, badly affected in a single country or localized crisis

Pro-local actor funding and indirect cost recovery

There are various reasons cited by donors for why, even though they want to, they have challenges to expand funding to local actors, including a preference for channeling funds through a few, trusted partners so they can manage risk and comply with their own rules (Sriskandarajah, 2015). Even Oxfam funds often go through multiple levels (for example, first to the Oxfam affiliate headquarters office, then to the country office), with each level taking a cut to cover administration and the cost of business. Traditionally, it is not a practice for LNGOs and other local actors to fully recover indirect costs. In the 2020 C4C self-assessment survey conducted by Oxfam America, a staff member working in fundraising reported a need to continuously improve in many areas, such as on advocating that donors give funds directly, including support for indirect costs, to local actors. Failure to do so is often due to donors’ legal constraints in granting to non-profits and to their efforts to reduce transaction costs.

This is an area where all humanitarian actors, especially international actors like Oxfam, have a role to play. There are donors who are willing to provide ICR across all tiers of program implementation and who can be on board in influencing other donors to do the same, i.e., holding donor meetings where they showcase the results of our joint capacity sharing projects with local partners. This is what happened with the donor supporting the Oxfam DRR ERF (Oxfam staff interview).

It is important to note that technically no grant from the Oxfam DRR ERF has been disbursed to any local partner directly, as defined by the C4C or the Grand Bargain agreement. Since the

ERF is embedded in a multiyear project where Oxfam is the contract holder with the donor, from an audit perspective the funds are the sole responsibility of Oxfam America, which then disburses funds to Oxfam country offices. Oxfam country offices sub-grant funds to local partners, where possible, and partners working with local civil societies or a local network in collaboration with community disaster management committees (CDCs).¹³

For the ERF, 60 percent of local organizations interviewed said overhead costs were covered in the budget given to them while 5 percent said all funds went to direct programming. The rest of the local actors interviewed said their overhead costs were covered by other budgets, including from other Oxfam-supported programs or projects. There are still no clear guidelines or agreements across the Oxfam confederation on the practice of providing ICR to partners. However, in the ERF, for partners that received administrative overhead support during the lifetime of their projects, the rate ranged from 8.2 percent to 13.2 percent. When asked, partners who participated in the research said an ideal rate is between 7 percent (if they need to split the work with Oxfam and other INGOs, and depending on the ratio of the work) and 15 percent (if the work is fully implemented by partners).

A local partner whose organization received ERF support shared his perspective: “We assume all the risks. We must be accountable to Oxfam/INGO, to the government, and to the community. We deliver the response. Everything is managed by the local partner like us. The rest just come in to monitor us, but they will not give us ICR.”

Surprisingly, however, it is not common for local actors to have a ready, calculated computation of their own indirect cost rate. It would be beneficial for local actors to compute this rate and have a standardized agreement among themselves when negotiating for funding.

Another Oxfam project called Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) aims to build a new humanitarian model that entails allocating more power and resources to local and national humanitarian actors in Bangladesh and Uganda (see Box 2). It comes with a response fund called the Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF). The HRGF, like the ERF, covers administrative costs, but it does not give a lump-sum ICR. Grant recipients can request technical support, such as in emergency food security and vulnerable livelihood (EFSVL) assistance, especially in Uganda, where capacity is still being scaled up. This support in no way replaces ICR but can help compensate for the lack of it.

According to informants, ICR is an issue that should be discussed across the Oxfam confederation. The issue of accountability for financial losses has not been resolved. One Oxfam staff member said, “Even in ELNHA, if there is a whole set of ineligible costs, the local actor cannot pay for these as they would not have enough funds. The ICR disbursement needs to be in parallel with the risk that the players can absorb. It is a partnership and a proportional discussion too. We give less money to an organization that can manage a lesser amount.”

The Financial Enablers Project (FEP) is one of a suite of initiatives that form part of the Start Network’s Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Programme (DEPP), which is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and was implemented with Oxfam as consortium project manager. Although not entirely similar to an ERF, it has an ERF-type component embedded in its program to help local actors decide on and design emergency responses through a quick response fund (QRF).¹⁴ The project is committed to tackling imbalances within the humanitarian system by providing consortia of national actors with flexible funds to develop their own self-identified capacities. The project allocated US \$1.4 million in grant funds to seven consortia with 31 member organizations between them to develop or enhance their humanitarian preparedness and response capacity. The consortia identified and addressed several aspects of capacity, including (1) consortium development and strengthening such as through new policies, systems, protocols, and membership expansion; (2) technical competencies such as core humanitarian standards; contingency planning; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in emergencies; and cash transfers; (3) social networking and

strengthening of networks and alliances; (4) resource mobilization such as through QRFs and prepositioning of stocks; and (5) research and advocacy (Plastow and Pagsanghan, 2018).

According to a review of FEP consortia expenditures, 58 percent of total consortia spending was used directly for a variety of capacity-development initiatives. The remainder of consortia spending was split between staff costs (26 percent), learning (6 percent), stakeholder engagement (5 percent), and overhead (5 percent) (Plastow and Pagsanghan, 2018, 10). One member of the FEP consortium, the Humanitarian Response Consortium (HRC), invested 15 percent of funds in training staff, 33 percent in warehousing and pre-positioning stocks, 11 percent in a QRF, and other funds in systems development such as logistics (Plastow and Pagsanghan, 2018, 9).

Regional Oxfam staff said that core direct costs and overhead should be covered in humanitarian agreements to support the sustainability of local actors. Support for capacity during normal times enables local actors to keep qualified staff and be ready to deploy them in times of emergency. This approach is in line with the Grand Bargain, C4C commitments, and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines that call for new partnership agreements allowing not only for multiyear and flexible funding but also for institutional strengthening and risk sharing (IASC, 2020). Furthermore, with the COVID-19 pandemic as the backdrop to any emergency response, there is a call for covering insurance and medical support for local actors, beyond just the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) (IASC, 2020).

Box 2: The ELNHA project and a journey of changing mindsets

The IKEA Foundation gave US\$8.8 million to Oxfam to pilot ELNHA in Bangladesh and Uganda in 2015. The ELNHA project has a strong learning agenda as it is testing a model for local humanitarian funding. It comes with a response fund called the Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF) and also funds a full-time global staff that does advocacy and influencing to change the humanitarian system. The second phase, for institutionalization of good practices, received an additional US\$4.2 million from IKEA for 2019–2021.

The size of the local and national humanitarian actor (LNHA) organization is often a point of debate in determining how local is local. The HRGF encouraged relatively small actors with great potential, in line with its principle of building local capacity. In the project's second year, learning reviews showed that a local consortium was a good model for this type of funding. This model was tested in Bangladesh, where a large organization was encouraged to partner with smaller organizations that could benefit from being part of a consortium. Grant managers are quick to point out that smaller organizations bring strengths that make them helpful partners: they are close to their own communities and can leverage the financial management capacity of larger national organizations, which may be more removed from work on the ground.

According to an ELNHA decision maker,

“In HGRF, it took a lot of engagement and relationship building with Oxfam country teams, especially with the humanitarian teams. In Uganda, ELNHA team was working in the same camps where Oxfam’s humanitarian team was directly delivering a humanitarian response. These were two different models, and often the same partners worked in the same response—ELNHA was locally led, and our regular response was still led by Oxfam staff. So, there was learning on both ends.”

In an ELNHA response, local partners lead throughout the project cycle based on localization principles while in the other, more traditional Oxfam intervention, they implement on behalf of Oxfam. Where capacity of local actors is still being strengthened through the ELNHA project, Oxfam is still responsible for providing close technical assistance and mentorship because the priority remains the provision of quality, standard-based humanitarian assistance to people in need. Secondly, in the beginning of ELNHA, the response was often seen as Oxfam's, even if led by a local actor, and there was the perception that the locally led response was not at par with humanitarian standards, and it was still Oxfam who will be accountable should anything bad happen."

This does not imply that humanitarian responses implemented by INGOs, Oxfam included, are always up to international humanitarian standards. High-quality responses are not the exclusive domain of international organizations.

Ways of working had to be adjusted on both sides, and the Oxfam country office had to consider the level of risk it was willing to take. The operations team in Uganda was initially hesitant but eventually supported and championed the initiative. IKEA's support allowed for the piloting of this model. In all of these responses, the humanitarian imperative could not be set aside, and Oxfam and local actors had to work together to ensure that the response was up to accepted standards. At key moments, upon the request of local actors, technical people from Oxfam came in to provide training and surge capacity support.

This setup also required a paradigm shift with regard to leadership and power. Oxfam staff had to change their mindsets and behaviors, learn to loosen control, and work side by side with local actors as equals. Over time capacity developed, attitudes changed, and relationships improved. With the project now on its fourth year, Oxfam staff can draw on the expertise of the local consortium, and ELNHA has a set of local actors who have graduated from the ELNHA capacity-sharing program and who are now trusted and participate in large networks. One example is African Women and Youth Action for Development (AWYAD), a WRO based in Uganda, which started with ELNHA and is now part of C4C and the Grand Bargain work streams.

"The local consortium model has its challenges too, and we need to be clear about roles and responsibilities and what is the added value of each. We also see tensions. Sometimes there is a tendency for the bigger national NGOs to promote themselves more than others. Sometimes the more established NGOs also behave like traditional INGOs, and the hierarchy can be a barrier to real localization and local humanitarian leadership. These values and principles had to be core to the design at the very start of this type of program to really reform the humanitarian system."

—Information and quotations are from an interview with an ELNHA decision maker, October 6, 2020

The ERF and off-the-radar emergencies

The ERF was designed specifically to respond to off-the-radar and forgotten emergencies. For the purposes of this study, "off the radar" is defined as being far from the center of power in its different facets—geographic, social, political, and economic. In normal times such communities have limited access to social protection and basic services, and these shortfalls are exacerbated in times of disaster.

The forgotten emergencies

The humanitarian crisis related to the volcano eruption on Ambae in Vanuatu has been unfolding since the first eruptions and displacements began in October 2017. Humanitarian agencies in Vanuatu have devoted resources to responding to the crisis on Ambae island itself, but there was a distinct gap in assistance for displaced families, who had received little assistance and were displaced for more than a year. Oxfam's ERF-supported response

delivered cash-based assistance, in the form of a multipurpose, unconditional grant, to 417 displaced families and 106 host households to address the gap in humanitarian assistance for displaced families and host households on Espiritu Santo, to where the bulk of internally displaced people had moved. Because Espiritu Santo is the second-largest island economy of Vanuatu, it offers better market access and livelihood opportunities than the designated relocation sites. While the overall Oxfam emergency response covered the delivery of grants on a monthly basis over a three-month period, the ERF-supported contribution covered the operational setup, baseline assessment, registration, and delivery of the first round of grants in November and December 2018.

Typhoon Phanfone was the third in the series of emergencies in December 2019 in the Philippines, and when it struck, most local governments, including humanitarian agencies, had run out of disaster response funds. The ERF's support for under-the-radar emergencies like Phanfone benefited Eastern Samar communities suffering from the emergencies at a time when the government's focus was still on areas affected by Typhoon Kammuri (Tisoy), which had occurred earlier. Through ERF support, Oxfam and its partners were able to conduct rapid assessments and augment the government response with early interventions related to shelter, cash assistance, WASH, and essential non-food items. Without this support, assistance would have taken longer to reach the affected communities, prolonging their suffering.

In the Tulunan earthquake, affected families from hard-to-reach *barangays*¹⁵ were advised to evacuate their homes and move to safer places. Most of them had limited access to assistance and had mostly been left behind owing to their remoteness and inaccessibility. The ERF supported these areas, and with continuous coordination with local governments, especially with CDCs and other actors, local partners were able to cover people in need in remote areas. Recognizing the government's leadership in the overall response to earthquake-affected communities, the project established strong partnerships with the provincial government of North Cotabato and the three target municipalities to ensure that activities were aligned with these governments' response priorities. If not for the quick approval from the ERF, early deployment of the response team (Oxfam with HRC) to conduct rapid assessments a day after the earthquake would have not been fully supported and the early interventions related to shelter, non-food items, WASH, and psychosocial support would have been staged a little later.

These three examples demonstrate how the provision of the ERF to local actors helped them assess and respond appropriately, thus reducing the suffering of these isolated communities. Local actors, by the power of their assessments alone, managed to share information in the proper channels, supported ongoing initiatives, or gathered additional support from the government and other key actors. As part of the collective effort, local actors helped scale up the response or, at the very least, put a spotlight on these forgotten emergencies.

Politically sensitive disasters

During CAMEL, the government of El Salvador did not declare a drought emergency, and donor funding was thus not forthcoming. At that time even ECHO's response did not cover El Salvador, and therefore the opportunity to respond to the crisis using ERF funds was lifesaving. Drought conditions in the Dry Corridor in Central America began in 2013 and were compounded by a coffee rust disease and, from 2015, by El Niño. Reports of 70–100 percent crop loss in central and western El Salvador and on the southern coast of Guatemala led Oxfam to activate the ERF, disbursing US\$200,000 in September 2015. The ERF contribution filled a gap by funding an assessment of food security, which triggered other agencies' eventual responses to the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO). The seed funding from the ERF helped leverage funding from the Start Fund once the response was underway. Oxfam's response was notable for its speed, thanks to its strong national partners Pro-vida and FUNDESA, which had the grassroots networks to fast-track the delivery of interventions.

Year two of the ATECA project, in 2019, was conducted in a context of political changes, climate variability, and region-wide drought. At the community level these elements exacerbated

preexisting vulnerabilities. Political changes impacted the delivery of aid and the types of interventions that Oxfam and local partners could design with affected communities. The presidential elections in El Salvador in March and in Guatemala in June, together with the continuing sociopolitical conflict in Nicaragua, presented a challenging political scenario that became the backdrop to the humanitarian responses supported by the ERF that year. The situation reduced states' capacity to contribute to or invest in the actions proposed within the framework of the communities' comprehensive risk reduction plans.

In El Salvador, with the change of government, some officials from the national civil protection system were replaced. Through the efforts of the country team and local partners, positive relations were established with the new authorities, and project implementation eventually resumed at the community level. Transitions in political leadership in Guatemala created delays and challenges in coordination and at times resulted in disruptions in disaster response preparedness processes. The municipal committee for disaster risk reduction was not coordinated in a timely way in Guatemala, and the process had to be rescheduled for early 2020, when the new municipal authorities took office. In Nicaragua, social cohesion continued to deteriorate, with the state exerting high levels of repressive control.

In 2019, for a fourth consecutive year, scarce rain and prolonged heat waves in the Central American Dry Corridor reduced the amount of water available for agriculture and caused crop losses that affected mainly the poorest families in the region, threatening their livelihoods and food security. Economic recession was another consequence of this context. Small producers had harvested low yields of basic grains and horticultural products because of (1) increased prices for and reduced availability of alternative products (bio-fertilizers and organic fertilizers) and (2) reduced daily labor available for agricultural work in view of the need to seek other income-earning strategies. Producers' need for alternative income-earning strategies also reduced their participation in training workshops and awareness-raising activities in the regular ATECA program.

The ERF helped respond to these politically sensitive disasters, especially to the drought and underfunded response phases; it leveraged capacity and created opportunities to innovate and prevent program losses in the event of disasters in the same locations as ongoing activities. The regional drought response helped arrest food insecurity in the target areas. Access to ERF funds was crucial for several reasons: (1) it was the first time Oxfam had launched a regional response to drought in Central America, (2) the issue of gender in emergencies was studied in real time, and (3) ERF funds were leveraged and ERF actions were complemented by ECHO.

This response specifically targeted the most vulnerable populations—that is, food-insecure households, households with children under five affected by malnutrition, and women-headed households. Identifying beneficiaries for the cash transfer was a new challenge for the Oxfam country teams and their local partners since different countries had different methodologies for identifying vulnerable populations.

In Vanuatu, the ERF added value to the Ambae response by targeting evacuees who voluntarily moved from Ambae to Espiritu Santo, which was initially not a primary focus of government-sponsored assistance despite being home to the majority of volcano-displaced households. These funds allowed Oxfam in Vanuatu to respond in a manner that filled a critical gap in the humanitarian response at large. Early action activities such as standby agreements with host communities and local governments funded with this contribution, particularly in August and September 2018, and allowed the Oxfam country office to gather critical data on beneficiary needs and locations and to successfully advocate for additional funding to scale the operation. In Vanuatu, the Department of Local Authorities was sidelined from the decision-making process, which was centralized at the National Disaster Management Office, even though the Department of Local Authorities was the direct responder. But with the ERF, the spotlight was moved back to Espiritu Santo, where the cash transfer program (CTP) response was ongoing and where the subsequent leveraging of additional funds moved decision-making power back to local authorities, according to Oxfam staff and local partners.

Importance of speed and the cause of delays

Early action¹⁶ is often more cost-effective than later action because investments made early can immediately reduce the impact of disasters on vulnerable communities and help them retain their dignity. Early action can also help people recover more quickly from shocks. A flexible ERF provided space for local communities, governments, and NGOs to conduct rapid assessments and implement a timely response in many of the humanitarian actions it supported. There were also lessons learned from delays, and Oxfam staff and partners continue to course correct based on these lessons.

Oxfam staff and partners credited the ERF with providing a timely response in Guatemala in 2016, enabling farmers to sow at the beginning of the planting season and to adopt an irrigation technology in anticipation of water scarcity. The grant supported a demonstration effect and generated significant media attention for drip irrigation technology in Guatemala. As other farmers learned its benefits and sought to buy the same materials, markets responded.

In Fiji, for Tropical Cyclone Winston, project implementation started six months after Winston smashed the country. By then, multiple relief efforts by many diverse groups meant the landscape had already changed from the initial assessment. Reports showed that although a cash-for-work intervention targeted clean-up of cyclone debris, most of this work in affected communities had already been completed (Qoro and Vunisea, 2017). Delays meant that the construction of flush latrines and the distribution of seedlings, cuttings, and fishing rods one-and-a-half years after the cyclone came at a time when priorities had changed for most villages (Qoro and Vunisea, 2017). Although most interventions were considered relevant, delays in the start-up of the program meant that consultations with community members to ensure attention to gender and protection issues were not fully carried out.

Among the key challenges mentioned in the evaluation report included the perceived lack of transparency in how cash was distributed in the cash-for-work program, resulting in distrust and disagreement within certain communities (Qoro and Vunisea, 2017). Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF) was one of Oxfam's key partners in implementing project activities. PCDF staff, for example, thought that some of the target communities and households receiving cash had already received cash from other organizations. They believed this practice would make people dependent on "handouts" and cash instead of finding ways of getting back on their feet, as traditionally practiced by Fijians.

WROs, GIOs, and the ERF

Research findings show that ERF responses benefited women but were not led by women. Direct funding for WROs was not a requirement in the ERF guidelines, nor were such relationships prioritized by country offices. However, the research included questions designed to assess how women participated in shaping response interventions. Among the indicators used was the amount of funds that went to WROs or GIOs. The research showed that funds were not allotted or directly transferred to WROs from the ERF. In some responses, Oxfam staff and local actors said there was no WRO or GIO in their local area, and they did not have the budget to link to a national-level WRO. A third of the research participants said that WROs were often focused on development work and lacked humanitarian capacity; they could engage only in specific aspects of the responses, such as providing technical assistance in reviewing response strategies.

Oxfam staff pointed out that since putting "women's rights at the heart of what we do" is a core organizational value, they had mechanisms in place to make sure that responses were targeting women's and girls' special needs, especially during the design of needs assessments. Another local actor pointed out that the commitment to include gender and protection is Oxfam's value added in the responses, because local actors sometimes miss this aspect when they are too busy with deliverables. In El Salvador, under the regular DRR program, emergency response

commissions were restructured to be more gender balanced, requiring 52 percent men and 48 percent women in decision-making positions.

A recent study on women's leadership in Bangladesh and South Sudan in 2020 by Oxfam produced similar findings. Unlike traditional humanitarian actions, which have specific, quick, and short time frames, "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" (Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2020, 6). Despite this, "the Bangladesh and South Sudan case studies showed that 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" (Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2020, 6). They are even excluded from spaces for local and national actors owing to three main barriers: (1) the role of harmful gender norms; (2) the disconnect between women and women's organizations and the humanitarian system; and (3) donor priorities that limit support to women's organizations (Jayasinghe *et al.*, 2020).

However, there is an overall sentiment that Oxfam needs to rethink its strategies to fulfill its commitment to fund WROs directly. An Oxfam interviewee from the Asia-Pacific cohort said,

Are we more gendered in our responses when it comes to budgeting in the last five years? There have been changes in the last five years with WROs and GIOs, but we are not yet there on what we really want. Again, it sometimes has to do with our compliance issues. Most established organizations are run by men so that makes it challenging to fund the less-established WROs, especially if you are referring to the last five years. But now the approach is more targeted, and we are conscious that we put that in our criteria for selection of partners. But again, there are limitations. When we did a scanning of WROs in Asia recently, most will not meet our compliance criteria, so no one is qualified.

Respondents said that sometimes Oxfam disqualifies WROs for funding because they are led by men or because they lack humanitarian capacity. Having women in leadership positions is one of the criteria for provision of funding to WROs. Whereas some local organizations interviewed for this research who are also development actors have undergone capacity strengthening on humanitarian response, it seemed that most of Oxfam's WRO partners have not done this. In Bangladesh, ELNHA formed a platform for WROs, but even there, it is difficult to find a WRO focused on humanitarian issues because these organizations tend to focus more on development issues.

One Oxfam staff member said,

If we say we will only fund a humanitarian-led WRO, then we may not be able to find them. The responsibility falls on Oxfam to find a WRO and provide some technical capacity building on humanitarianism, e.g., a gender analysis in the normal times would be different in a response time. We can't lump local organizations in one basket, and there are different types of partnerships we can do—some on activity basis only, some collaborative, some contractual, and some are more strategic and all these types are valid depending on the type of situation and what we need at the time and what the partners need as well. You cannot force a partner to be a strategic partner if that is not what they need, e.g., maybe a partner says we can only engage on the first two months. This is good. Some partners said, "We have so many meetings in Oxfam," once they are a strategic partner, so they want to engage at key moments in time only. This is true for most private sector actors we recently engaged with.

In terms of gender-specific response interventions, all ERF-supported responses had a focus on women's and girls' needs. Some examples are as follows:

- In Nicaragua's drought response from July to November 2019, the design of the survey to evaluate food and nutrition security indicators considered women's care work in the home in

order to adapt the project's response to women's schedules, time, and roles to avoid overloading them.

- In Typhoon Phanfone in the Philippines in 2020, the project helped raise awareness of personal hygiene, which became important in the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 3,200 families were assisted through information, education, and communication materials on hand washing, and 2,781 individuals benefited from the installation of hand-washing facilities. A gender analysis snapshot was conducted to assess the impact of the typhoon on the affected communities. Also, the project contributed to the national rapid gender assessment (RGA) for COVID-19, which highlighted issues faced by youth, the elderly, and LGBTQ people during the pandemic while still recovering from the impacts of Typhoon Phanfone.

Good practices in the ERF

Local actors able to leverage additional funds

A local humanitarian actor in Central America whose organization received an ERF grant stated:

Yes, it helps us to access funds from other humanitarian response donors. Normally, donors favor financing organizations that are already giving some type of response; these funds help us to have a quick response. We become an interesting organization for donors, as we are already working on a humanitarian response; they give us these additional funds and leverage a more robust intervention.

Twenty-two out of the 24 ERF-supported responses were able to leverage additional funding. Most notable of these responses were the ECHO-supported regional drought responses in Central America. ERF responses leveraged a total of US\$1 million in 2019 and an additional US\$2 million in 2020 from ECHO alone (Table 5). In terms of process, local partners went to Oxfam country offices in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua with a proposed response to the drought. Noting the wide-ranging geographic impact of the drought, the regional program manager of ATECA who received all the ERF requests called for a regional meeting to explore complementary options. At that time, ECHO launched a call for proposals for the drought response. The ATECA countries and Honduras agreed to come together for a regional response and used the ERF funds as a matching fund to increase the chances of approval from ECHO, which they eventually secured.

Table 5: Funds leveraged by the ERF funds in the Central American regional drought response

Project	ECHO contribution	ATECA ERF contribution	Oxfam El Salvador contribution	Total in USD
<i>ECHO project 2019</i>	\$1,000,000	\$282,102	\$150,011	\$1,432,113
<i>ECHO project 2020</i>	\$2,000,000	\$150,000	\$72,750	\$2,222,250

ERF funds were often critical in facilitating preliminary setup and assessment processes in humanitarian responses. The Category 2 Sulawesi response in Indonesia in 2018–2019 was a US\$11.8 million response, and the ERF contributed only US\$50,000. The timing of the ERF contribution was strategic, however, and it enabled local partners to conduct rapid assessments. These assessments allowed the response interventions to be co-designed with Oxfam and were later used for public appeals and other resource mobilization. Being first on the ground also meant the local consortium, Jejaring Mitra Kemanusiaan (JMK), was able to build good relationships and trust with affected communities, which made them effective in directly

managing the response in these communities. Of the total budget, US\$2.4 million went to JMK to directly manage phase two of the response.

A similar situation happened in the Ambae response in Vanuatu in 2018. Prior to the earthquake, Oxfam in Vanuatu did a feasibility study showing that cash transfers were viable (Oxfam in Vanuatu, 2019). There was widespread skepticism, however, especially in the government, about using cash as part of humanitarian response interventions. Using the US\$150,000 ERF grant, Oxfam and its partners—the Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA), the Vanuatu Red Cross, ANZ Bank (Australia and New Zealand Banking Group, Ltd.), and the National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV)—piloted the cash transfer program in Espiritu Santo Island. There was a steep learning curve as the project had to develop the financial infrastructure to support the cash transfer program.

Having long-term local partners who were trusted and had their own networks with local governments and communities helped fast-track the process. However, these long-term partners, especially civil societies and grassroots organizations, were often not well resourced as shown in Box 3. Luckily, the APLIFT project had an ongoing disaster preparedness program and a staff seconded to the Provincial Disaster Management Office in Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital. This relationship and knowledge of the emergency response system were leveraged in the response. Youth also played a key role in this innovation for Vanuatu. Once they were trained in the delivery of cash, they were effective communicators and amplifiers of the new technology and new ways of doing things—providing cash instead of the usual food parcels to affected communities. After the first pilot, Oxfam informed partners and donors of the preliminary assessment findings and the planned cash transfer operation. In October 2018 the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded a full-scale operation with blanket coverage of all displaced and host families located in the area. As a result, Oxfam received US\$1.6 million to cover all remaining host and displaced households with multipurpose cash grants. This was a significant expansion of the program in terms of the number of beneficiaries, and the implementation period was extended through the end of December 2018 to allow time to include all eligible beneficiaries (Oxfam in Vanuatu, 2018b).

Box 3: State of civil societies and local leadership

Civil society is deeply ingrained in the Asia-Pacific. Philippine civil society, for example, is widely considered among the strongest in Asia.¹⁷ People often joke that whenever 10 Filipinos are gathered in one room, they might form an NGO. Grassroots organizations play key roles as community-based people's organizations or through other forms of civil society organizations (CSOs) that operate locally, regionally, or nationally. A reported 83 percent of the population are part of CSOs in one form or another, with 43 percent reportedly being active members. These formations play significant roles in community organizing, service provision, poverty reduction, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian response, and advocacy. Philippine civil society is also characterized by a considerable number of umbrella or coordinating bodies organized by sector, issue, or geography. This includes a number of organizations working on disaster risk reduction and management (Plastow and Pagsanghan, 2018).

In Central America, the NGO sector became visible in the late 1970s and early 1980s. NGOs arose as a result of the need for state decentralization and a feeling that charity was needed for the most deprived sectors of society. Missionary churches and lay groups promoted NGO development. Specifically in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, a number of CSOs—social movements, NGOs, associations, and networks—emerged in the 1980s as a result of the search for alternatives to ensure lasting democracy, citizen security, human rights, poverty reduction, and more dignified and sustainable human development.

Yet few donor resources have gone to these CSOs. A study conducted by the global civil society alliance CIVICUS and the Colombian social impact start-up Innpactia showed that of more than 6,500 calls for proposals for a total amount of almost US\$5.9 billion offered between 2014 and 2017 by 2,000 donors to individuals, CSOs, the private sector, and other actors in the region, only 12 percent were offered exclusively to CSOs, including international CSOs. Out of this total, less than 3 percent went exclusively to LAC CSOs (Bosco *et al.*, 2019).

The report revealed not only the scarcity of resources exclusively offered to CSOs but also the type of funding provided. Calls for proposals are not designed to align with the most urgent needs of LAC civil societies or their sectoral needs, putting CSOs at a distinct disadvantage. Funding is often offered in large, one-off disbursements or is inappropriate for the context. In recent years support from bilateral, multilateral, and private donors, which have historically been the main sources of funding for LAC CSOs, has dwindled. This has an impact on the sustainability of CSOs and their organizational and capacity development.

Like LAC CSOs, other local actors interviewed for this research said that most funding available to them does not come with investment in strengthening their resilience and sustainability. The bulk of funds go to operations and project implementation. Among the major challenges faced by CSOs that lack core funding is the difficulty of developing and maintaining capacity. Qualified staff—who, according to market studies, earn half the salary of their INGO counterparts—often eventually take employment elsewhere, sometimes with INGOs. This poaching of local staff has been raised numerous times in the humanitarian sector; although it is being addressed, it could be better tackled with some level of salary standardization between local and international actors. The lack of core funding likewise restricts CSOs' ability to innovate and exercise autonomy without being dependent on the bigger INGOs.

Local actors also bemoan that major donors tend to launch fewer calls for proposals and concentrate larger amounts of funding in each call. With complex bid requirements that demand huge investments, this practice tends to limit access by small and local CSOs.

Links to regular projects

The ERF was embedded in Oxfam America's multiyear disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs in Asia-Pacific and Central America from 2014 to 2020. The DRR program was focused on overall resilience building in communities affected by chronic natural hazards.

In responses where work in the regular CAMEL, APLIFT, and ATECA programs was ongoing, ERF grants had the added benefit of supporting the preparedness work done with communities and CDCs by local implementing partners. For CAMEL, the ERF helped protect against program losses. For all three programs, this meant that partners had done emergency preparedness planning and pre-positioned assessment tools, emergency response teams, and vulnerability and risk data, accelerating the targeting of beneficiaries. In instances where framework agreements had been secured in the regular programs between local governments and the private sector for critical supplies, business continuity in the affected communities and price control was more fluid. This is what happened in Salcedo municipality for the Typhoon Phanfone response in the Philippines.

In Bangladesh, before the ERF grant was transferred, local partners in consultation with beneficiaries produced a wish list of income-generation options. Beneficiaries were briefed on the objectives of these cash transfers to incentivize them to build productive assets. Barguna, the focus of the Cyclone Amphan response in 2020, is also one of the new target districts of the upcoming phase of the APLIFT-supported project in Bangladesh, where Oxfam and its partners will foster learning and innovation on disaster risk reduction.

The power to innovate locally

Locally led responses bring forth community-based solutions to everyday issues that are often magnified in times of crisis. Although humanitarian actions require different and faster actions owing to the urgent needs of communities and the demand for additional skill sets, key community governance structures should be capitalized on. This ERF research showed that locally led responses used existing community mechanisms, which led to more suitable interventions and helped communities organically transition to greater autonomy. In cases where responses capitalized on the strategic priorities of local actors, their development work could be scaled up in the post-recovery phase. This approach helped those actors connect the crisis to more sustainable development pathways later, with better support from affected communities.

When a crisis is beyond a community's ability to manage technically or financially, there is a need to reach out externally, but decision making should still be done primarily with local actors at the helm. The following are examples of locally led responses using local mechanisms and platforms:

- In the drought response in El Salvador delivered from October 2019 to January 2020, the approach was participation through learning by doing. As part of this process, coordination and communication mechanisms were established with key local actors such as mayors, the Plant and Animal Health Division (Dirección General de Sanidad Vegetal y Animal, or DGSVA), and community leaders through strategic meetings, with the aim of presenting the municipalities and community organizations with the objectives, expected results, and activities that would be developed by both the DGSVA and the local governments in the implementation of the project. Coordination and communication occurred through information and communication technologies such as telephone contacts, emails, and WhatsApp, as well as through direct coordination with the project technicians assigned to each municipality. These processes made possible the establishment of strategic alliances with key local actors such as the municipal mayor's office and community leaders, allowing for adequate coordination, facilitating the development of the different project activities, and guaranteeing the safety of the Asociación Fundación para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Comunal de El Salvador (CORDES) personnel at the community level. The involvement of community leaders was key in the development of the project, strengthening the engagement of each participating family (Oxfam in El Salvador, 2019).
- The formation of a network of community volunteers in Nicaragua composed of young people (women and men between the ages of 17 and 30) allowed for greater coordination and participation among beneficiaries of the project. Working in conjunction with the communities' local humanitarian leadership, the project guaranteed the implementation of security and protection measures for women, children, and the elderly along the routes where people and resources were mobilized for communities and at the food distribution points. The days and times of food delivery through vouchers were carried out based on the recommendations of beneficiaries, and community assemblies were held to involve families in planning and evaluating project activities. Negotiations were conducted with local suppliers to prevent an increase in food prices (Oxfam in Nicaragua, 2019).
- In Indonesia, COVID-19 affected a large number of activities, and many CSOs consulted with local governments and revised their implementation of response strategies considering the ongoing pandemic. After discussions and considering the situation at the local level, the Government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Social Affairs decided to channel social assistance through Pos Indonesia, the country's postal service. Pos Indonesia has a trusted methodology for delivering cash transfers to targeted beneficiaries by using a "come-in" approach, where beneficiaries are identified and given special tags to withdraw money from its offices. Oxfam and its partners also distributed cash to communities, which helped reduce suffering from floods as well as from the crises related to COVID-19. The use of the post office meant using available mechanisms to innovate (Oxfam in Indonesia, 2019).

Peer-to-peer learning

The Oxfam ERF saw many innovations arise from needs assessments and the use of different partnership approaches emanating from affected populations themselves. When drought hit Guatemala in 2018, local actors asked for unconditional cash transfers and fortified flour during the most critical months of the seasonal hunger period. During the process of selecting beneficiary households, a combination of two methodologies made it possible to serve the most vulnerable population in the prioritized area. One of these methodologies was CARI (Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security), which combines the Food Consumption Score (FCS), the Food Expenditure Ratio (FER), and the Survival Strategies indicators to assess the food insecurity of the households evaluated. CARI was carried out through a digital ballot prepared using the app KoBoCollect. The other methodology, coordinated with the staff of the Ministry of Health, consisted of nutritional assessments that selected households with children under five years of age suffering from acute malnutrition or at risk of suffering from it. By delivering this humanitarian assistance package, Guatemala's Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS) strengthened its technical capacity, specifically in the Permanent Attention Centers (CAPs) in the prioritized municipalities, enabling it to subsequently provide better service to the population in the area (Oxfam in Guatemala, 2019).

During exchange visits to Guatemala to learn about the experience of Asociación de Servicios y Desarrollo Socioeconómico de Chiquimula (ASEDECHI) in Chiquimula, a local partner from El Salvador realized that the cost incurred by participants to receive their unconditional cash transfers and fortified flour was about 20–30 percent of the total received; most of these costs went to payout points and market delivery points. Learning from this experience, the El Salvador partners defined logistical support for deliveries and included transportation for participants, ensuring comfortable and safe transport. The cost associated with the transfer was reduced to 5–10 percent, as participants spent about 95 percent of the cash grant for food (Oxfam in El Salvador, 2019).

The benefits of local leadership

The Oxfam ERF not only allowed local actors to have a timely presence in crises, but also promoted their leadership in their work areas. The partner respondents saw how the ERF empowered local actors in the community by including them in the decision-making process and equipping them with skills, thereby enabling them to develop or validate their credibility and response capacity.

Even though the ERF-supported CTP response in Vanuatu was the first of its kind and carried out on a large scale, the Oxfam country office tapped local resources and expertise in an innovative and creative manner and requested external expertise only as needed. In discussions with the Global Humanitarian Team (GHT) and other NGO actors, the country office established a partnership with a local accounting firm, Barrett & Partners, for the financial transaction and processing component of the CTP operation. This type of partnership allows country offices with small finance units to leverage existing private sector capacity to scale payments quickly for a cash transfer response. This partnership also helped build credibility for the program, as the partner is a well-known audit and accounting firm that regularly works with local NGOs, government, and private sector actors. It allowed locals to explore this intervention as front-liners and learn and grow with this new approach.

In Indonesia, Oxfam started the localization agenda at the beginning of Central Sulawesi response operation, and it actively involved JMK and its partners as the main implementing partners. Some key roles were given to JMK based on JMK partners' competencies (e.g., Center for Child Study and Protection [Pusat Kajian dan Perlindungan Anak], KKSP for gender, Cis Timor for WASH, PKBI and LBH Apik for health promotion, and SAPDA for disability inclusion). Oxfam used the branding "JMK-Oxfam" to promote JMK at events and meetings and encouraged JMK to take the lead in representing the overall operation in public, with the

government, and at donor meetings. In addition, Oxfam expanded the localization agenda by engaging and supporting the local district water company (PDAM) in water production and delivery. It provided a longer-term solution for water production by identifying an alternative water source that would help PDAM provide better support to its customers. JMK-Oxfam also promoted local government leadership as a cash focal point, as part of the Grand Bargain agenda to increase local leadership and the use and coordination of cash-based programming in Central Sulawesi.

REVIEW OF SIMILAR FUNDING MECHANISMS

In the past four years, there has been an increase in funds allocated directly to local and national actors through various funding mechanisms, including the country-based pooled funds (CBPFs) of UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), other pooled funds such as the Start Fund, the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Oxfam's Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF), and private donors. The United Nations' Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), though it can provide direct funding only to UN agencies, also contributes to the localization of funds, as nearly a quarter of 2017 CERF funding was sub-granted to non-UN partners, including 447 local and national partners (UNOCHA, 2019a).

Pooled funds collectively made an important contribution toward the localization of aid, as shown by a recent study done by the Grand Bargain work stream 2 on pooled funds. Results showed that pooled funds channel more funding (in both volume and percentage terms) to local and national actors than bilateral donors, particularly in conflict contexts. But the same study of 15 pooled funds showed that these funds still need scaling up and often encourage good practice but have no consistent policy on the inequities and inconsistencies involved in how these funds contribute to the overhead costs and sustainability of local actors and their organizations (Featherstone and Mowjee, 2020). Although pooled funds are not the focus of this study, it is important to note that they are among the funding mechanisms that could provide more accessible options to local actors. They could also potentially complement ERF-type funding mechanisms.

Application processes

A review of the application processes for the varying funding mechanisms yields a general, shared framework for local and national actors to access funds: (1) local aid workers identify a humanitarian crisis and urgent assistance needs; (2) a call for proposals is issued by donors and other funding groups, introducing priority areas; (3) responding organizations submit funding proposals; (4) review committees evaluate each proposal based on set criteria, including technical merit, financial appropriateness, risk, and likelihood of success; (5) approval, contracting, and fund disbursement take place; and (6) the response is subject to evaluation and reporting. There are, however, key differences in the processes, which can be leveraged to streamline funding accessibility and strengthen funding localization.

With a member-led decision-making process, the Start Fund engages its member organizations and their partners at every stage of the application and decision processes, ensuring that projects are chosen and funding is allocated by local committees on the ground (Start Network, 2020). Any member agency may issue a crisis alert, and members collectively decide whether to allocate funds to the crisis and which projects to fund; the process from initiation to release of funds normally occurs within 72 hours. Local actors interviewed for this research repeatedly referenced the Start Fund as a good facility, but some bemoaned that they could access the funds only after a very stringent screening process. After the vetting process, local actors had to compete not only with fellow local actors but also with INGOs: "It is difficult to compete with

INGOs as they have more staff and grant writing capacity than us, local actors. There are a lot of processes from the Start Fund that are more fitted to INGOs,” according to a research respondent.

Other organizations have similar activation processes. Oxfam’s HRGF activates when a crisis occurs (Oxfam Novib, 2018). For the UNOCHA, the humanitarian coordinator decides to activate reserve allocation of the CBPFs to respond to an emergency (UNOCHA, 2015). And the national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement may apply for financial support from the DREF when they engage in a response to an unforeseen disaster (IFRC, 2020).

When a funding mechanism is activated in response to a crisis event or humanitarian emergency, a call for proposals is issued. Each funding mechanism has specific criteria and limitations regarding which organizations may participate in an open call for proposals and receive a funding allocation. Whereas the DREF and Start Fund accept proposals from a national society or member organization, respectively, the HRGF issues a competitive call for proposals from pre-qualified local and national actors (IFRC, 2020; Start Network, 2020; Oxfam Novib, 2018). CBPFs differ from the other emergency funding mechanisms in that any implementing partner can prepare a proposal that aligns with the country’s humanitarian response plan and the CBPF’s operational manual (UNOCHA, 2015).

Proposal formats

Though the proposal formats differ among the mechanisms, each provides templates for preparing and submitting proposals and project budgets. The use of templates is considered a best practice for engaging local and national actors in funding allocations and localizing humanitarian funds. The length of the proposal template varies from fund to fund; however, the information requested is generally similar, with emphasis on collecting sufficient information about the proposed projects to allow for making rapid and informed funding decisions. The consensus is that lengthier, more complex proposal templates act as a significant barrier to local and national actors who wish to access emergency funds and should be avoided (Patel and Brabant, 2017). Oxfam approached the proposal format for HRGF differently, opting not to use a simplified proposal out of concern that the global push to simplify donor formats is a disservice to local and national actors. They reasoned that a standard format allows organizations to build capacity and gain proposal-writing competence through practice, feedback, and training (Oxfam Novib, 2018).

Vetting and prequalification processes

Pre-vetting and pre-qualification are considered good practices because they pre-position qualified members to access grants more quickly during a crisis. However, smaller local actors that lack institutional capacity, especially with regard to their financial, administrative, and grant management systems, often struggle to compete even at the pre-qualification and vetting stage.

The mechanisms similarly diverge in their approaches to the proposal review process; each approach has merit based on comparative advantages. The Start Network aims to decentralize funding decisions to in-country teams (Patel and Brabant, 2017). It requires local representatives of member organizations to serve on review committees and actively engage in the decision-making process, thereby keeping key decisions close to the context of the crisis (Start Network, 2020). In contrast, the HRGF, though it considered mobilizing local actors in the decision-making process, intentionally decided to engage its staff to conduct the review, following the expressed preference of local actors who wanted a more transparent and neutral process (Oxfam Novib, 2018).

Whereas the Start Network approach localizes decision-making and encourages local leadership, Oxfam’s approach responds to input from local actors, allowing them to participate in the design of the process. UNOCHA’s *Operational Handbook for Country-based Pooled*

Funds allows implementing partners to resubmit project proposals at least twice upon receiving feedback during the review, encouraging a collaborative approach to the proposal-writing and review process (UNOCHA, 2015). The Start Fund incorporates a similar mechanism, providing conditional awards with revisions to the original proposal based on comments from the review committee (Start Fund, 2020).

The final element in the funding cycle—learning and evaluation—remains a component of funding mechanisms that successfully localize humanitarian funding (Start Fund, 2020; Oxfam Novib, 2018; UNOCHA, 2015). A formal reporting process enables local actors to reflect on lessons learned during the funded response and can present substantial capacity-building opportunities for the organizations. Oxfam organizes a learning review with funded organizations to check that projects have delivered the proposed activities and outputs, to guide local actors through the process, and to help them identify areas of future improvement (Oxfam Novib, 2018, 3). Reports are a required element of all reviewed funding mechanisms.

Challenges to accessing humanitarian funds

Despite the global push toward localization of humanitarian funds, local and national actors still face significant barriers in accessing these funds. INGOs make up the majority of funding recipients owing to funding preferences, lists of pre-vetted and approved organizations, and lack of capacity and experience on the part of local and national actors (Patel and Brabant, 2017; ECHO, 2018). Private funders' preference for funding INGOs is due to multiple factors, including risk aversion, the desire to ensure that funds have a significant impact, and limited capacity to conduct due diligence and review the finances of the multitude of local and national organizations. By contributing to pooled funds or granting funds to an intermediary INGO, private funders can direct their dollars to local actors without undertaking the administrative work that would be entailed in identifying, screening, and monitoring a whole host of local actors working in all of the countries in which the donor wants to engage.

Local and national actors interviewed in this research said they do not have the same capacity or resources as INGOs to submit proposals, placing them at a disadvantage in accessing humanitarian funding. Unlike INGOs, which can maintain grant managers on their roster, they lack the dedicated grant-writing, fundraising, and financial competence that funders require (Patel and Brabant, 2017). Even where organizations have built competence, most of the local actors who participated in the research are still hesitant to apply for funding directly owing to the large investment it will require and the rigorous reporting requirements, and they prefer to partner with established INGOs that can assume accountability (ECHO, 2018). Recognizing this barrier, Oxfam incorporated training sessions into its HRGF application process to help local and national actors gain grant-writing competence (Oxfam Novib, 2018).

Finally, local actors lack direct access to funders, having historically relied on intermediaries to access funds (Oxfam Novib, 2018). Hence, among the eight Charter for Change commitments is one for INGOs to introduce local actors to their donors and advocate for their direct funding.

Local actors were asked to unpack the barriers they faced in bidding for proposals or accessing funding (Table 6). A majority answered that calls for proposals are often complex and require huge investments during the grant-making process, which are beyond the capacity of most small to medium-size NGOs. Local actors do not want to be little Oxfams; they said their strengths lie in their agility. They would rather invest small, streamline their administrative and grant management process, and scale up operations and technical capacity building on WASH, EFSVL, gender and protection, shelter, and other key areas normally required in a humanitarian response. However, they recognize the need to mobilize resources. All the actors interviewed in this research are Oxfam partners, and 90 percent said they would still need an ally like Oxfam to serve as an intermediary with the big donors like ECHO until the funding models are reformed in favor of smaller contracts that are accessible to them.

Table 6: Perceptions of barriers to direct funding for local actors

According to local actors	According to Oxfam
1. Compliance mechanisms across different levels are difficult to navigate.	1. Compliance mechanisms across different levels are difficult to navigate.
2. Calls for funding are complex, including the requirements, and they get more complicated as the funding gets bigger.	2. Local actors do not have enough systems and resources to invest in large bidding processes.
3. Some local actors have little or no familiarity with the funding institution or the financial service providers and donors.	3. Strength in writing proposals and donor reports is a challenge for these local organizations. Language and cultural barriers are also challenging.
4. Lines are blurred between humanitarian and development actions as local actors work across the full spectrum.	4. There is a clear division between the humanitarian and the development sector in funding calls.
5. In areas where there are no repressive government controls, local actors can capitalize on good relationships with governments. But in other areas, there is a problem of shrinking civil society space.	5. Government rules and regulations can be a challenge to local actors.
6. The big INGOs are localizing ¹⁸ and are now competing with local actors.	6. According to an Oxfam interviewee from Central America, “Big organizations such as UN are competing in the bid, or sometimes government has usually awarded the bid to big local NGOs that are in partnership with UN or another INGO. For example, Oxfam is implementing a big project with the Ministry of Education. So the international recipients are becoming the competition, and it is more unfair competition.” This sentiment was echoed by several local interviewees.

Oxfam partners call for more locally accessible, multiyear, flexible, and locally managed funding facilities. They also say it is important to allow this funding to have links with their development work because the lines between development, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery are blurred when it comes to providing services and assistance to their communities. This is especially true for WROs and GIOs, whose portfolios often fall heavily in the development phase and whose issues of focus are underlying causes of risks and vulnerabilities that, if not addressed, exacerbate disasters.

With the increasing number of disasters and climate change impacts, many of which are localized and small in scale, local actors are often stretched to the limit and need to continuously scale up their operations and capacities. All local actors interviewed want to professionalize their ranks, adhere to international standards, and serve their communities with the highest-quality actions possible. The capacity to innovate using local solutions and resources is also an area where most local actors interviewed get excited. All of these efforts will require financial and other resources currently channeled to INGOs.

According to an Oxfam country director, “It is all about infrastructure development, system development, business model development, so that the organization will be sustainable and contribute to the effectiveness of program delivery. We need to support our local partner organizations in attaining sustainability and resilience in their own organizations and lessen their dependency on Oxfam and other INGOs when it comes to funding their regular operations. This is where core institutional funding comes in.”

Good practices from the reviewed funding mechanisms

This research gathered insights from Oxfam staff and local partners about three local funding mechanisms they are familiar with and compared these with the Oxfam ERF to highlight good practices that could be adapted to subsequent ERF activities (Table 7).

Table 7: Comparisons across four funding mechanisms for local actors

Characteristic	Humanitarian Response Grant Facility (HRGF)	Start Network	Financial Enablers Project (FEP)	Oxfam Emergency Response Fund (ERF)
<i>Model</i>	Single and consortium model	Combination	Consortium	Single application
<i>Funding uses</i>	ERF + capacity strengthening	Quick response fund (QRF) ¹⁹ + learning budget	QRF + capacity building + warehousing	ERF linked to bigger disaster risk reduction programs
<i>Application process</i>	Pre-vetted	Pre-vetted	Pre-vetted	Pre-vetted
<i>Length of response</i>	3–6 months	45 days	3–6 months	3–6 months

The review of existing funding mechanisms presented several good practices for localizing humanitarian funding to local and national actors, achieving the targets of Workgroup 2 of the Grand Bargain. These practices include the following:

1. Engage local and national actors in the design of the application process for accessing humanitarian funds to ensure localized leadership and engagement (Patel and Brabant, 2017).
4. Incorporate opportunities for local and national actors to revise and resubmit funding applications based on comments from the review committee (UNOCHA, 2015; Patel and Brabant, 2017).
5. Provide capacity-building support for local and national actors to develop proposal-writing, fundraising, administrative, and financial competencies (Patel and Brabant, 2017; DEPP, 2018; Oxfam Novib, 2018).
6. Provide flexible capacity-building grants for projects identified by local and national actors (DEPP, 2018; Oxfam Novib, 2018).
7. INGOs should facilitate interactions between donors and local and national actors to bridge the gap and cut out the intermediary, allowing local and national actors to access funding directly (Oxfam Novib, 2018).
8. Promote increased diversity of partners within locally led consortia, encouraging the involvement of women-led and refugee-led organizations so they can also enhance their capacity through hands-on experience and help ensure that responses are appropriate for the most vulnerable and marginalized people. Other possible engagements include internships, mentorship, and training of some staff within other local responders (ELNHA, 2020).
9. Support LNHA to limit governance issues in their consortia by providing training on consortium building, focusing on topics such as conflict management and collaborative approaches (ELNHA, 2020).

This list is not comprehensive, and there are contexts in which LNGOs may say “no more proposal writing trainings.” It is important to note that while the items listed are valuable, they may not be the right ones for all local actors. Donors that want to develop or design emergency

funding mechanisms similar to the ones discussed here should seek to co-create such mechanisms with local actors and engage in a dialogue or needs assessment on what works for them.

THE CHANGING FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Beyond the ERF and similar emergency response funds, the humanitarian sector could also look at the changing funding landscape, which offers various options for a truly locally led humanitarian system.

CBPFs play a significant role in allocating funding as directly as possible by serving as intermediaries between funders and local actors. In 2018 and 2019, 33 percent of CBPF dollars were directed to local and national actors (Development Initiatives, 2018; UNOCHA, 2019b). With the funding provided to pooled funds doubling since 2015 (Development Initiatives, 2020), pooled funds will become a more significant means of localizing funding.

In Indonesia, donors increasingly require a guarantor to underwrite funding that will be given to local actors. One Oxfam staff member reported that an international donor would agree to fund JMK only on the condition that Oxfam underwrite a US\$100,000 deposit to cover ineligible costs if they occurred.

Other Oxfam staff and partners point to a funding landscape crowded with big “facilities,” or what others refer to as contractors. The Australian government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is among the big aid providers that have shifted to the use of facilities to bring aid programs or activities that would otherwise be managed separately under one organizational banner. According to an article in Devcom by Colin Adams, this move brings efficiency gains to aid and development agencies that do not have the administrative resources to manage many small programs in a foreign country (Adams, 2016). An example of a facility is Palladium, a leading implementer of international development programs in more than 90 countries and across a broad range of sectors. It offers donor agencies a balance of global-scale and in-house technical expertise that engages the private sector in designing solutions that use aid to spark lasting social and economic development. Such facilities often corner a big portion of aid funding, and questions about how local actors can access funds through these facilities directly and more effectively are an understudied area.

Among middle-income countries, national-level funds are starting to be available through foundations, philanthropic initiatives, government-channeled development and aid funding, and even crowdfunding. The People Survival Fund in the Philippines is an annual fund intended for local governments and accredited local and community organizations to help vulnerable communities deal with the impacts of climate change and disasters. There are also emerging pooled funds aimed at localizing disaster management and enabling local actors to plan and respond to disasters as quickly as possible. In Indonesia, for example, religious networks receive a large portion of local donations, and they have already developed financial systems to manage these funds, something that local NGOs have yet to do.

At the ALNAP 33rd Annual Meeting,²⁰ one session provided the following key takeaways on the future of funding for local actors:

1. Funding for local and national actors from donors is not sustainable.
2. Local actors could increasingly turn to service fees or income-generating projects.
3. Crowdfunding using social media platforms will increase at national and subnational levels.
4. Local actors could generate savings from outsourcing whatever activities can be outsourced.

Crisis response is a crowded field: many actors compete for media attention, citizen engagement, and money. Humanitarian response in general has been chronically underfunded for decades. Now more than ever, humanitarian response organizations are underfunded compared with the scale of need, and financial supporters are suffering from donor fatigue. The UNOCHA recorded significant underfunding of recent large-scale responses. As of the end of July 2020, funding for the plans included in the Global Humanitarian Overview had reached only US\$9.96 billion—25 percent of the US\$39.76 billion needed for 63 countries (UNOCHA, 2020).

At the same ALNAP conference, a UNOCHA representative pointed out that even if aid commitments from the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) continue at the same percentage of gross national income (GNI) as in recent years, the absolute amount of aid will be less in the coming years owing to the economic downturn and consequent declines in GNI. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the funding constraints facing humanitarian responses. As the wealthier nations have understandably invested heavily in their domestic responses to the pandemic, foreign aid has suffered significant budget cuts.

THE EVOLVING ROLES OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

In this research on the ERF, local actors who participated in the interviews proposed roles that Oxfam and other INGOs could play in localizing and decolonizing aid to usher in more locally led responses. Around 95% of ERF partners said they still need help to attain and maintain international standards as they carry out interventions in specific fields, especially in emerging areas such as anticipatory finance and the use of new technologies that require data protection. One local humanitarian responder said, “The humanitarian mandate is imperative. At the end of the day, we need to get these things right because we are talking about saving lives. It goes beyond a good relationship with affected communities or mastery of local context. It is like conducting a surgery. You need the technical skills to do it.”

ERF recipients also believe that INGOs like Oxfam can add value in warehousing and procurement. In Bangladesh and the Philippines, Oxfam supports the warehousing and stock replenishment being managed by local actors. Especially when it comes to large-scale procurement involving complicated logistics and massive financial guarantees, local actors said that being a partner of a global organization like Oxfam can help them address constraints and respond quickly.

Brokering relationships and linking local actors directly to donors and new supporters is another area where Oxfam and other INGOs can help. Local actors interviewed stated clearly that right now, they cannot afford to change their systems to compete in the complex bidding processes being launched by large donors without additional funding to keep grant managers or to put in equity funds against these bids. This is not the type of funding they need. Until those donors change their funding models, INGOs can serve as intermediaries, with clear roles and power sharing. INGOs can support grant management while local actors can design and deliver humanitarian interventions. But the overall long-term goal is to change funding models to make funding accessible to local actors and to move away from quick-fix, temporary solutions.

Finally, Oxfam and INGOs can start designing funding models with local actors and together reach out to new donors.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, drawn from research participants and documents reviewed, apply to ERF-type funding mechanisms in the wider humanitarian sector and call for addressing key challenges and taking advantage of opportunities. They are also meant to help improve the new 2020–2023 phase of the Oxfam DRR ERF.

Address the challenge of transboundary disaster management

Challenges such as drought, freshwater management, forest fires, refugee crises, and pandemics affecting multiple countries require innovations in social and environmental management, including new forms of multistate governance and disaster management. Disaster preparedness and governance programs and funding should have a built-in standby agreement for a regional response.

In the case of the Oxfam ERF, this was seen in the regional drought response in Central America, where response interventions have a certain level of homogeneity owing to similar contexts and climate issues. Since 2013 the region has been affected by droughts, along with weather anomalies and intense weather events, that have led to loss of resources and limited access to livelihood opportunities, in addition to the need for humanitarian assistance in some cases. It is anticipated that Central America will continue to be affected by important changes, especially regarding water availability, which in turn will impact food security and livelihoods, among other things. To reduce redundancies and optimize resources, planning, preparedness, and assessment tools for targeting the most vulnerable could be agreed upon at a regional level in Oxfam and on other regional platforms.

Rethink layered risks and hazards and local emergencies

People in the Asia-Pacific, Central America, and some other regions of the world will always be exposed to immediate and emerging risks and hazards, with many communities lacking the resources or power to address their underlying causes. All countries in the new cycle of the APLIFT and ATECA programs are among the top 10 most disaster-prone countries in the world. To manage funding allotment, the Oxfam ERF and similar funding mechanisms should carefully consider protocols and scenarios regarding situations where multiple hazards and layered risks will exist at the same time and in the same countries. Research participants recommended earmarking a small percentage of funds—US\$15,000–30,000 per event—to ensure responses to small local emergencies where communities may not be able to leverage additional funding because of their isolation and small size. They also recommended including an advocacy component to plug these isolated communities into the wider humanitarian system for more sustainable assistance.

Rethink the development-humanitarian divide

Local actors suggested looking at humanitarian action within the development framework and not the other way around. This approach would mean that local organizations that are primarily development NGOs with embedded humanitarian capabilities would be considered acceptable actors to implement humanitarian programs. Such a framing will help prevent disasters from hampering communities' development, which is a chronic issue. Along these lines, local partners suggested that Oxfam enhance its facilitation of capacity-strengthening programs for local actors so they can achieve the minimum capacity required to access ERF-like

mechanisms for humanitarian response. This would reduce or even eliminate the time required for due diligence in emergencies. This will also open up more opportunities for WROs and GIOs to directly engage in humanitarian responses.

Explore anticipatory finance

The ERF and similar funding mechanisms include anticipatory finance. The shift from disaster relief to disaster risk reduction requires more long-term and less reactive planning. Anticipatory finance could, for example, help a farmer prepare better for drought or flooding. A Start Network innovation using smart-data early warning systems allows humanitarians to be better prepared by quantifying risks in advance of crises or disasters, pre-positioning funds, and releasing them according to pre-agreed protocols. In the B-READY project in the Philippines,²¹ pre-disaster cash transfers and informed preparedness planning give communities the time and resources necessary to protect themselves and minimize damage to livelihoods, infrastructure, and well-being (Manlutac *et al.*, 2020).

Include learning

Both ELNHA and FEP included a purposive learning agenda and invested in learning exchanges among grantees, and this should be considered a best practice for QRFs. This area was a missed opportunity in the Oxfam ERF. In the few instances when learning exchanges did happen, as in the Guatemala and El Salvador cross-learning event, they yielded significant improvements in practice and savings for humanitarian actions. The ERF could explore new approaches to capturing and disseminating learning among its grantees and beyond. The local innovation and approaches the ERF generated during its implementation, and the lessons learned, could help others who want to explore the use of local funding mechanisms. Right now, with the exception of this research paper, lessons learned from the ERF are disseminated only through the bigger Oxfam DRR program's constituencies.

Fund WROs and GIOs directly

Although there were intense and extensive discussions on how to engage WROs more effectively in humanitarian responses, this research was not able to make definitive conclusions on how best to do so via QRF mechanisms. There were a range of suggestions: (1) include this issue in research on ERF-type mechanisms; (2) require the participation of a WRO or GIO in all responses; (3) provide capacity-strengthening support to help WROs effectively engage in humanitarian responses; and (4) allot a percentage of ERF and similar funds for WROs across all responses. This is an area that all humanitarian actors should collectively work to address, as there is no doubt that the participation and leadership of WROs would help improve humanitarian responses. Whether in development or humanitarian activities, research participants generally agreed that a portion of funds should be given to WROs directly.

Proposed changes to the Oxfam ERF

In the newly begun cycle of the Oxfam DRR program, it is worth exploring the inclusion of local actors in the ERF steering committee, the highest governance mechanism of the ERF, which decides collectively on allocation of funding. Many of the local actors who participated in this research seemed unaware of the back-and-forth negotiations involved in accessing ERF funding. For transparency and accountability, all parties should be aware of how decisions are made and participate in decision making, especially in relation to the selection of affected communities and the interventions suited to their needs. In future phases of the program, it is also recommended that that local actors be given the chance to test an approach of directly managing a small amount of ERF funding. This approach can then be built into subsequent programs that Oxfam and other international actors can co design with their local partners.

5 SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

The Oxfam ERF allowed fund recipients to carry out speedy crisis responses, especially to politically sensitive disasters, or to support phases of responses that were underfunded. The ERF was also credited with leveraging local capacity and creating opportunities to innovate and to protect program losses in the event of disaster. Across the 24 humanitarian responses that the ERF supported, local actors demonstrated how swiftly they could reach isolated communities and how, by being first on the ground, they could help shape response options with input from the affected populations as close to the ground as possible. Backed by ERF funding, local actors also leveraged additional resources to scale up these responses and put a spotlight on forgotten emergencies. The learning curve for local actors is lower than that for expatriates or external actors, reducing the time needed for “assimilation” and speeding informed decision making. Ideally local actors should have a presence in the community, but in cases where they do not, they are likely to have a network or local peer that will bring them up to speed quickly.

Direct funding is not the only way to get high-quality funding to local actors. Recognizing certain funding protocols by traditional donors and understanding their limitations—lack of legal personality in a country, lack of capacity to vet multiple contracts in certain geographies—several local actors interviewed in this research shared their belief that intermediaries like Oxfam are needed in the interim. Nonetheless, changes need to happen soon. Local actors see the need to influence Oxfam and other international actors in negotiating for terms, and not the other way around. This is particularly relevant in relation to consortium-type arrangements with large donors.

There is a consensus among respondents that the funding landscape is changing and that funding mechanisms like the ERF, ELNHA, the Start Fund, and FEP should not be the exception, but the norm. Funding designed for local actors should be multiplied and scaled up, in contrast to the current trend in which large donors launch fewer calls for proposals and concentrate larger amounts of funding in each call. That practice, involving complex bid requirements that demand huge investments, tends to limit access by small and local CSOs.

Both Oxfam staff and partners suggested that the Oxfam ERF should eventually be removed from Oxfam management and handed over to a network of local organizations. Oxfam can continue to raise funds and contribute to these ERF-type funding mechanisms. Such a shift would increase local organizations’ experience in implementing humanitarian programs and truly transform the humanitarian system to be more locally led, especially when these organizations start making decisions about where to get resources and how to manage and allocate them.

Oxfam staff have critical reflections on Oxfam in this research. The application and reporting templates for ERF grants were among the simplest that local actors in this research had ever seen, yet they did not detract from the high level of quality and accountability that humanitarian responses demand. Quite the opposite: with a few exceptions—especially from the startup phase of the ERF grant in CAMEL—real-time reviews, post-distribution monitoring surveys, and feedback from communities in APLIFT and ATECA showed a wealth of innovative local solutions that helped reduce the suffering of affected communities. This finding shows that compliance could be streamlined and addressed more creatively without diluting accountability and transparency.

Oxfam is transforming itself and adapting its system to be truly supportive of local humanitarian action and leadership. Its massive bureaucracy and lack of coherence across various parts of

the confederation when it comes to partnering with local actors are barriers to speedier responses and more equitable partnerships. Oxfam staff said they are seeking to think outside the box and listen more to local actors on how to better relinquish control, be open to change and stop imposing their worldview, metrics, and ways of working on local actors.

The Oxfam ERF is part of a donor supported program which shows that there are donors that are supportive of this type of accountability mechanisms that are not solely based on lengthy monitoring and end of project reports. This research showed that there is space and need to design simpler and less expensive funding models with calibrated accountability and compliance systems relevant to affected communities. In the last three years of the Oxfam DRR program, Oxfam has purposively designed donor and partner visits to be led by local actors, with Oxfam county staff providing more of a coordination and behind-the-scenes support. This is part of a commitment to introduce local actors to donors directly in every opportunity possible. Partly as a result of this, the same ERF donor continued to invest in another cycle of the Oxfam DRR program from 2020-2023, another multi-year capacity strengthening to help local actors increase their humanitarian capacity and systems. After years of jointly designing community resilience programs and constant dialogue with local partners and Oxfam country offices, the same donor, using the evidence from operations in CAMEL, APLIFT and ATECA and its other grantees, has started to influence other donors to support local actions including early response and recovery.

Partners who had worked with Oxfam on previous responses saw the difference in ERF- or ELNHA-supported responses. A local NGO representative said that most INGOs just tap local partners to directly implement programs already defined by the organization. But funding mechanisms like the Oxfam ERF and ELNHA were better adapted to local actors, with power being shared between them and Oxfam staff.

Local organizations interviewed for this research also acknowledged that they themselves need to change if they are to access funding directly or create new funding models and avoid dependency on Oxfam and other international organizations. Among the areas where they see gaps are in scaling up and maintaining core technical and organizational capacity that meets international humanitarian standards. Another area for improvement is in conducting monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) and conducting their own research. The average age of local partner organizations in the ERF response was 10 years, and some were as old as 60 years. However, lack of documentation, knowledge management, and visibility continue to be a problem. Even if INGOs help local actors amplify their work, this is an area that calls for leadership by local actors, who must prioritize this work if they want to exercise thought leadership in the wider humanitarian system. Local actors also admitted the need to study indirect cost recovery more closely and for them to compute their own indirect cost rate to help them deliver effective programs to their communities.

The ERF missed the opportunity to include a purposive learning agenda and learning exchange platform across its grantees. This research reviewed good practices from other local funding mechanisms that can be incorporated into the ERF to ensure that local actors will continue to build on their collective knowledge and practice in leading humanitarian responses.

Localization and LHL are often associated with decolonization of aid. Shifting power to local actors is an organic pathway to counter racism and top-down approaches in the humanitarian system. For the ERF, research participants recommended taking steps to include indirect cost rate for local actors and to help raise and channel institutional funding to their coffers. Another recommendation is to shift to a model where local actors are at the forefront of both action and documentation. Supporting the visibility of ERF-supported local actors and helping them share their lived experiences about locally led actions is another key step toward decolonization of aid.

Research results showed that CBPFs are big contributors to local humanitarian funding. These should be made more and more accessible to local actors, and some of their current gaps, inequities, and inconsistencies in the provision of overhead funds should be addressed.

Given the increasing frequency and scale of disasters, the need for this collaborative partnership is both timely and urgent. To cope with this worsening situation and the increasing needs of vulnerable families and communities, we need to plan and implement larger-scale and more integrated response strategies. This will require inclusive funding models, creative capacity sharing, and shared risk management between INGOs, donors, and local actors.

Finally, the funding landscape is likely to change even more with the new normal brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has revealed the need to address issues beyond mobility restrictions. It has exposed many of the gaps in the INGO-centric humanitarian system. There will be a shift in roles between local and international actors and even a potential expansion of players delivering humanitarian action. More and more, actions should be designed and implemented closer to the ground. All actors will need to be aware of these changes, be forward looking, cultivate the ability to adapt, and design funding models suited to the context, led and owned by local actors.

ANNEX: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ERF RESEARCH

Dimension	Statements to describe the dimension/area	Questions	Data harvest via
<i>Funding</i>			
Accessibility of funds	The ERF provides Oxfam teams and local actors with the resources needed to respond rapidly and effectively to shocks, thus empowering community members to be first responders to avert large-scale emergencies.	Was the ERF grant easy to access? Yes or no, and why? Did it allow local actors to respond quickly and effectively? Why or why not?	KIIs, survey
Pro-local actor funding	Partners identify priorities and lead on how their funding is allocated. Flexible and simplified funding, including for indirect costs, is essential to deliver assistance rapidly and effectively and should be provided as directly as possible.	What was the decision-making process on funding allocation for the response? How much money went to local actors? Did the ERF cover indirect costs? If yes, how much? What are good practices and opportunities on LNHA-level financing to provide funding more directly to local and national responders?	Survey, KIIs
Local actors able to leverage additional funds	Early response saves lives and can also stimulate action within the humanitarian community by leveraging early response funding to gain additional funds.	Were local actors able to leverage additional funds to support the response? From where? Did you have existing partnerships with donors?	KIIs, survey
Financing supportive of locally led responses	Compare the ERF with other funding modalities with a similar aim of promoting locally led responses.	Based on your experience with other funders/grant facilities, what lessons can we learn from others, and what learning can we offer others? What do you like most about the other funding modalities you know? What do you least like about Access grants in general?	KIIs, survey

Dimension	Statements to describe the dimension/area	Questions	Data harvest via
<i>Off-the-radar emergencies</i>			
Responds to off-the-radar emergencies	This funding mechanism will be particularly helpful for crises that fall outside the attention of the mainstream media and governments and receive less attention from international donors.	Was this response off the radar in nature? How did the ERF support add value to your response efforts?	KII
Allows for early action	Early action is often much more cost-effective as the investments made early on can immediately reduce the impact of disasters in vulnerable communities and help people recover more rapidly from shocks. A flexible Emergency Response Fund will provide space for local communities, governments and NGOs to conduct rapid assessments and implement a timely response when a disaster strikes.	Did the ERF made it possible for local actors to do early action, thus averting further disaster? Did you have contingency plans? Does your community have a disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) plan? Did you have a DRR program before the response? Was there an existing local network of responders?	KII
<i>Women-specific interventions and leadership</i>			
Women's leadership	Humanitarian leadership should advocate for local and national NGOs, including women's rights and women-led local organizations and other marginalized CSOs to be fully included in balanced and impartial pooled funding. They should prioritize inclusion of WROs and GIOs as implementing partners.	Did you give funds to WROs? Or to a woman-led organization? Why or why not?	Survey, KIIs
Women-specific response interventions	Require gender stand-alone objectives and indicators to help indicate how women in emergencies will be specifically reached and supported, and ensure that plans and budgets target women in need.	Did you have any specific response that targeted women's needs? Why or why not?	Survey, KIIs

Dimension	Statements to describe the dimension/area	Questions	Data harvest via
<i>Local leadership</i>			
Pulse check on the Grand Bargain and Charter for Change	Local actors and Oxfam staff are familiar with localization and other commitments for locally led responses.	Are you familiar with the Grand Bargain agreement and the Charter for Change? What do you know about them?	KIIs
Leadership by local actors	Local and national humanitarian actors exercise leadership in humanitarian action and lead decision-making.	Who designed the assessment? Who designed the proposal for the grant?	KIIs
Partnerships	Responsible partnerships are based on equality, mutual respect, mutual accountability, trust, understanding, and sharing of capacities and information (rather than a one-way flow).	What was the role of local actors, and what capacities were needed? What was the role of Oxfam, and what capacities were needed?	KIIs
Coordination and locally inclusive processes	In responses funded by the ERF, the system enables a need-based approach to the provision of external support based on the assessments of local partners themselves. INGOs provided support, guidance and expertise. Local actors were consulted in agenda setting or allowed to shadow or twin with experienced NGO representatives.	What was the humanitarian coordination mechanism? Did local actors lead in meetings? Who was setting the agenda?	KIIs
Reduction of redundancies	Humanitarian efforts should reduce duplication of management costs, improve joint needs assessments, and harmonize and simplify reporting requirements.	Was the size of the grant appropriate? Was the release of the funds timely? Were the requirements for accessing the grant appropriate? What was the reporting process like?	KIIs, survey
Coordination and complementarity	New systems will be required to enable a need-based approach to the provision of external support based on the assessments of local partners themselves. Steps can be taken to make meetings more inclusive, such as translating meeting notes into local languages; ensuring national actors are consulted in agenda setting or allowing shadowing or twinning with experienced NGO representatives; and supporting national, local and community coordination such as local and community platforms,	What was the role played by Oxfam staff in the response? What was the role of the local actor in the response? Was there complementarity? What were the challenges? Opportunities?	KIIs

	local consortia, exchanges and secondment approaches.		
Program development recommendations	Research findings suggest areas for improvement to the next phase of APLIFT and ATECA in Asia and Central America and to the humanitarian sector in general.	Specific to phase 2 of ATECA and APLIFT, how can the ERF help strengthen local humanitarian leadership? What recommendations can this research offer?	KII

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NOTES

- 1 The donor prefers to remain anonymous.
- 2 The Building Resilient, Adaptive, and Disaster Ready Communities (B-READY) Project, which ran from February 2019 to December 2020, aimed to better protect vulnerable households from disasters using the latest digital forecasting technologies that predict extreme weather events. It was piloted in Salcedo municipality in the Philippines (Oxfam in the Philippines, 2019).
- 3 The speed and scale of change within Oxfam have an impact on the support it can provide to local partners. Oxfam has moved toward a “one program approach,” which results in more streamlined systems. Part of this process is the formation of regional clusters across the confederation. The ERF should update its guidance note and trigger protocols against this backdrop, and suggest efficiencies learned from the last 24 responses it supported.
- 4 The Grand Bargain was launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016. It is an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations, which committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.
- 5 This point is taken from an online conversation about racism in the aid sector facilitated by Aid Re-Imagined (2020).
- 6 In some instances where a government feels capable of dealing with a crisis, declaring a state of emergency does not entail a request for international aid, as in the case of the Sulawesi earthquake response in Indonesia or recent typhoons in the Philippines. This situation means finding new funding mechanisms for under-the-radar aspects of those crises.
- 7 Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 independent organizations—known as affiliates—networked together in 67 countries. See back page for the full list of affiliates.
- 8 This report does not include an analysis of the latest phase of the program.
- 9 The Oxfam project ELNHA aims at building a new humanitarian model that would direct more power and resources to local and national humanitarian actors in Bangladesh and Uganda. It created the HGRF to help local actors design, develop, and implement high-quality humanitarian programs.
- 10 Although this was not a small-scale response, it started out as a response initiated by JMK, which had no funds to do assessments at that time; hence the ERF was activated.
- 11 <https://www.singledrop.org/humanitarian-response-consortium/>
- 12 Regional platforms in Oxfam are regional teams that coordinate with country offices. In the new Oxfam system, there are no physical regional offices but rather multi-located personnel providing regional function support to country offices.
- 13 These groups have different names in different countries, for the purposes of this research, we use “CDCs” to refer to all disaster management committees and structures led by the government.
- 14 QRFs are budgetary allocations or standby funds designed to immediately assist areas stricken by catastrophes and crises. These are usually funds that get replenished annually. There are varying scales of QRFs—some are organized by national governments, some by local networks, some by the UN, and some by individual INGOs. ERF mechanisms function as QRFs but with special distinctions. ERFs do not get replenished annually, and they are attached to a bigger project, like CAMEL, APLIFT, and ATECA in the case of the Oxfam ERF or the HGRF in the case of ELNHA. ERFs usually have prescribed geographic locations tied to a bigger project.
- 15 A *barangay*, or village, is the smallest political administrative unit in the Philippines.
- 16 Early actions are identified for a definite time frame between an early warning trigger and the actual occurrence of a disaster: they differ from early response as they occur before the disaster has happened and therefore sufficiently early to offset part or all of its impact. Examples can include interventions to protect assets and livelihoods against the impending shock (such as rebuilding riverbanks or repairing irrigation schemes) as well as prepositioning to ensure timely humanitarian assistance to those most in need (FAO, n.d.).
- 17 The CSO Sustainability Index of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) ranks Filipino CSOs highest in Asia across seven dimensions: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure, and public image.
- 18 Country offices of INGOs often register nationally in Southern countries. This practice has received mixed reviews from internal and external advocates of localization. Southern affiliation provides a much-needed national voice to be heard in the decision-making processes of INGOs. However, it is also viewed by many as an attempt to circumvent localization by providing a platform to generate resources earmarked for national actors, and it tends to crowd out local actors.

- 19 For the purpose of this research, QRFs are funds that are earmarked by donors for local actors to access for their humanitarian response activities. QRF funds are part of the bigger programs reviewed under this section.
- 20 ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, donors, academics, networks, and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises. This session was held on November 18, 2020, as an online webinar. A detailed concept note can be found at ALNAP (2020).
- 21 The Building Resilient, Adaptive, and Disaster Ready Communities (B-READY) Project, which ran from February 2019 to December 2020, aimed to better protect vulnerable households from disasters using the latest digital forecasting technologies, which predict extreme weather events. It was piloted in Salcedo municipality in the Philippines (Oxfam in the Philippines, 2019).

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