

Agenda for Humanity: What is Ahead of Us?

What lies ahead for faith based local organisations in terms of what has been hailed by the UN as "Agenda for Humanity"?

The "Agenda for Humanity" was the outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul in May 2016.

Over 900 participants, 180 Member States of the United Nations and over 700 local and international NGOs and private sector committed to transform the humanitarian impact and results in favour of peace and sustainability.

Agenda for Humanity aims to make concrete changes in the way we address humanitarian needs, risks, and vulnerabilities. Agenda for Humanity has five core responsibilities and has envisioned 24 transformations.

The Agenda for Humanity includes active role of political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; leave no one behind; change people's lives from delivering aid to ending need; and invest in humanity. There are four key steps to implement the Agenda for Humanity: collaboration; regular synthesis; high level stock taking; and wider use of all forums to push the agenda.

The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute's (AIDMI's) work with over 63 local city authorities and over 6000 schools in India and 66 local district authorities as well as in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh indicates that local faith based organisations are one of the key forces to mobilise communities to implement Agenda for Humanity.

Drawing from AIDMI's work in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka what is ahead of local faith based organisations is presented here.

The Agenda for Humanity has yet to reach cities in **local languages**—Nepali, Hindi, Bangla, Urdu, among

others—and local institutions—in towns and districts—in South Asia.

The Agenda for Humanity needs to focus ahead on the **loss of culture and knowledge systems** as an important loss in the coming years in areas such as Sunderbans delta or Kutch deserts or large cities such as Mumbai. Ongoing research of Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK and Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mumbai with the support from Norway has indicated that there is a need for focus on culture and knowledge systems.

The Agenda for Humanity needs to be **far more gender equal**, and the local faith based organisations are well situated to do so among their families. The earthquake recovery work of Tear Fund in Latur, Maharashtra, India recently evaluated by Dr. Ian Davis after almost two decades of recovery showed that women are better leaders of local recovery.

The Agenda for Humanity has not yet included **focus on Urban Commons** where humanitarian crisis unfolds differently in South Asia. World Vision, Australia has developed "area based approach" to work in and around cities with low costs and more impact which better captures urban commons and local faith based organisations have a key role to play here.

The **city-to-city spread** of Agenda for Humanity is yet to be conceived in South Asia. Mumbai flood response in 2005 and 2017 has a lot to offer to Karachi and Dhaka in terms of response and recovery in addition to building resilience. In many cases, this role can be played by local faith based organisations as they have many live and vibrant connections across cities.

The Agenda for Humanity must focus more on the "informality" of

humanitarian aid and actions in South Asia. Far more humanitarian actions are taken "informally". The ongoing work of American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Nepal has suggested ways to do so in livelihood recovery.

Far more focus is needed on **energy, environment and water in humanitarian action** in South Asia. This has been highlighted by the recently concluded work in India, Bangladesh, Kenya and Ethiopia by Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) and Oxford University on risk awareness.

Far more direct **investment is needed by civil society organizations to be an active and effective** participant in the implementation of the Agenda for Humanity. Urban resilience work of IFRC in Dhaka and smaller towns in Bangladesh underlines this need. This need is even more urgent when it comes to end violence against children in South Asia.

Early Warning is needed in South Asia to avoid mass tragedy such as the Partition of India that caused endless loss of life and fractured a whole civilisation. The recent Indo-Japan action plan developed by the Prime Ministers of India and Japan in the city of Ahmedabad has called for joint action on peace before (and not after) it is lost. Faith based organisations can easily shape the content of joint action.

As Kamal Kishore, Member, National Disaster Management Authority of India said at the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, October 13, 2017 at the World Bank that in the end what matters to reducing risks is what the local communities do.

Local faith based organisations in South Asia have an exciting way ahead in implementing Agenda for Humanity. ■

- AIDMI Team