



# THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

A collection of case studies from fragile states

## Introduction

In humanitarian response, one of Tearfund's models is to work alongside local faith-based organisations, including local churches and denominations. While the benefits of working with local actors are widely acknowledged, within Tearfund little research has been done on the specific role of local churches in responding to humanitarian emergencies, particularly in fragile states. These case studies are intended to paint a picture of the role that these non-traditional humanitarian actors play, as well as highlight gaps in our current evidence base and raise questions for further exploration. They are taken from recent responses in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Colombia, Zimbabwe and Uganda, and cover examples of the church responding to humanitarian emergencies in the context of fragile states, alongside and with support from Tearfund. In each case study five common themes are explored: access, quality, security, community engagement and capacity building.

The case studies are based on document reviews and a limited number of key informant interviews, and as such are not intended to conclude impact, but rather to paint a general picture and raise questions for further research.

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# 1. Democratic Republic of Congo



Photo: Fabrice KISAHO/Tearfund

## Background

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced decades of civil unrest, which has led to massive displacement within and outside the country. In recent years there have been several small outbreaks of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in different regions of DRC, but until 2018 they had all been rapidly contained. In August 2018, the first cases emerged in what was recently declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The Kivu region has seen over 3,430 cases and 2,200 deaths in what is now the second largest Ebola outbreak in history.

Ebola has been difficult to contain in the region for a number of reasons. Rumours that the disease is made up and being used to the advantage of the government or to kill local people have contributed to suspicions and resistance. Some people have seen it as a business scheme to gain money for the profit of response teams and allies. Many people felt these rumours were confirmed when the government used Ebola as a justification to postpone elections in the region last year. The methods of treating Ebola, explained by foreigners or response workers from Kinshasa with little understanding of local language and culture, have also garnered resistance. Mandated prevention methods include isolation of the sick and closed-coffin burials, which go against cultural practices for the care of the sick and dead. Humanitarian actors further lose legitimacy in the eyes of locals when most of those who go to treatment centres die. This has all contributed to resistance to Ebola

prevention messaging and medical help. Many families have hidden their sick rather than send them to be isolated, and some medical centres have been attacked.

Tearfund has been working in DRC since 1986 and for over a decade has been providing humanitarian assistance in the eastern part of the country. In the Ebola response, Tearfund works with partner International Medical Association (IMA), a medical NGO that uses Tearfund's assistance with WASH projects in particular. Tearfund has also worked with partners PPSSP and, more recently, HEAL Africa in responding to humanitarian needs.

In its own programming, Tearfund has built relationships with the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), which is a network of over 95 church denominations and associated organisations. Tearfund and ECC have been working together on Church and Community Transformation (CCT) projects, including supporting IDPs, promoting conservation agriculture and working on gender protection. In November 2018, Tearfund and several other faith-based NGOs created a consortium to respond to Ebola, with funding from USAID, and chose IMA to take the lead. ECC was connected into the consortium as part of Tearfund.

### **Purpose, methodology and limitations**

This case study seeks to understand the role that the local church has played in responding to Ebola in DRC. A desk-based review of project proposals and evaluations was conducted in order to understand the context and inform interview questions. Three semi-structured interviews with key informants were then undertaken remotely via google hangouts or phone, with questions around access, quality, security, community engagement and capacity building. A snowball sampling method was used, where participants identified others to be interviewed. This was because the local staff were believed to have a better understanding of key informants than the remote researcher, and it was thought that people would be more willing to participate in the research if they were introduced by someone they already had a relationship with. In total three interviews were undertaken, two with Tearfund staff in-country and one with a local bishop who was one of the leaders in the response.

The small sample size and diversity are one limitation of this research. Those interviewed were men in positions of leadership in the response, and did not include beneficiaries or those opposed to the response. Another limitation in this case is poor internet connection in DRC, which made remote interviews difficult. Sometimes interviewees were cut off mid-answer, or struggled to hear and understand questions. The phone was used as an alternative to internet calling, although the quality of connection remained poor. This was mitigated somewhat by participants' patience in repeating themselves and asking for the questions to be repeated. It did, however, make the discussion less natural, and may have resulted in less conversation than would be had in an in-person interview. To allow for more input from participants, a draft of the case study has been sent to them for comments.

### **Challenges in the Ebola response**

According to respondents, major challenges in the response have been the suspicion and lack of awareness around Ebola among communities and the lack of contextual awareness among humanitarian actors. An absence of community engagement has limited humanitarian actors' access

and influence. Many local people have not understood why foreign and non-local humanitarian actors are suddenly flooding into the area, when people had already been struggling for many years before Ebola. They believe it is an economic opportunity for the response workers and political actors, and have even suspected that the response teams are using their chlorinated water to spread Ebola. According to one respondent the communities have been saying, ‘We have all these other things that are killing us... but you guys are actually coming now because you know this is a disease that could easily spread, so you are actually coming to protect yourselves not to protect us, you just want to stop it so it doesn’t go to you.’ Another respondent said, ‘They frequently ask questions like “Where was all this money used for Ebola response when the people were being massacred by the ADF rebels?”’

With all the suspicion surrounding Ebola, locals haven’t trusted the response workers. Multiple respondents mentioned the large, expensive cars response workers used, and one also explained that the people did not like ‘the morality of those group members who came... their comportement’. Respondents also mentioned that a significant number of responders were brought in from West Africa or Kinshasa, and came in assuming they knew how to respond without considering the different context. One respondent mentioned that ‘there was suspicion of corruption and favouritism in recruitment of staff... They [were] suspected to have come to make money and not to care for people. [There was] suspicion about false laboratory results because response staff want to increase the local caseload.’ It was felt that the response workers did not respect the local customs and so did not actually care for the people they claimed to want to help but actually had ulterior motives.

### **Tearfund’s Ebola response**

Tearfund, then, has a unique role and opportunity in DRC. The organisation has been able to respond with quality programming due to its long-standing relationships with partners and communities. Because Tearfund and local partners had been working in the community for many years, local people trusted them and knew they were seeking their good. A Tearfund staff member said, ‘The community knew us already and we were trusted, [they] knew we were there not just for Ebola but we had been there for them in other problems.’ Tearfund also used local health committees to help select and hire local technicians to build WASH infrastructure. One respondent explained that this practice ‘increased Tearfund’s acceptability and accountability’ to the local community.

Partners IMA and PPSSP have used their medical expertise to provide medical care to those in need, while Tearfund has focused on WASH, procurement and infrastructure. Because of their pre-existing relationship and experience working together, Tearfund knew the strengths of each partner and was able to coordinate and work together with them to deliver services quickly and efficiently. As a well-organised consortium, they were able to start implementing as soon as the grants came through.

Tearfund also had a pre-existing partnership with the local church network Church of Christ in Congo (EEC), who saw the need, had unique access to communities and faith leaders, and wanted to get involved. They built faith leaders’ capacity by bringing them together for training on responding to Ebola, which gave them a space to learn and ask questions. They invited doctors and health officials to explain their areas of expertise. This equipped the leaders to go out and explain to their

congregations the symptoms of Ebola, where to go for help, and how to prevent its spread. ECC had connections with the Catholic diocese from previous projects, and also brought in churches from other denominations as well as Muslim leaders. While some groups doubted at first that Ebola would affect them, they joined the mobilisation effort when people in their congregations began to die. Because most of the schools in DRC are run by churches, and the police and military chaplaincy is also connected with ECC, the churches were also able to influence schools, the military and the police. Tearfund has also been bringing traditional healers into the trainings.

The faith leaders have been very effective at awareness-raising because of their community engagement. They have long-standing relationships with their communities and are known and trusted. One respondent said, 'People trust the message of church leaders because they know very well that they are leaders and they are shepherds who can't tell them wrong things.' The church leaders began speaking in their Sunday services about Ebola, telling people symptoms and prevention methods. One respondent said, 'At some point in the Ebola area people are afraid of sending their children to school, so the schools were getting deserted, the markets were not as full as they used to be, but the churches were always packed on Sunday.' Even so, the faith leaders felt that the services weren't enough, so they began going door to door to tell their communities.

Because of faith leaders' engagement with their communities, they have also been able to contextualise Ebola for their members, sensitise them to things such as vaccinations, and influence social norms so as to stop the spread of the disease. They explained that there must be some behaviour change to prevent the spread and helped people to believe that was acceptable within the faith. For example, faith leaders had the legitimacy to convince church members that they could be healed through prayer even without people laying hands on them. They also set an example for their congregations, who would begin to change their own behaviour when they saw the pastor set up a washing station, for example. The churches also involved Ebola survivors in the sensitisation campaign, who, according to one respondent, 'lived Ebola in their flesh and spirit', and whose 'testimonies are more powerful to convince people'. Over time Tearfund began to train other leaders, such as youth and choir leaders and church elders. One respondent explained that 'church choir groups composed songs on Ebola that are used during Sunday services and are aired on local radio stations'.

### **Risk and responsibility**

While leading the awareness-raising and continuing to care for their congregations, faith leaders have faced security risks. They put themselves in danger of contracting the disease, because, while people are hesitating to enter other public places where the disease could be contracted or shared, they still go to church. Faith leaders also visit and pray with the sick and their families, potentially exposing themselves to the disease. Thus one respondent found it unsurprising that the first case of Ebola in Goma was a pastor who came from praying for sick people in Butembo.

Faith leaders have also faced some resistance as they have sought to spread the news of Ebola. The bishop explained, 'I received a threat... They were saying that [the response workers] have given me money, that's why I'm defending them. And yes, I was not alone, the Roman Catholic bishop received another threat, the mayor of our city received another threat, and other people.' Another

respondent mentioned that faith leaders had been threatened when going to radio stations to discuss Ebola.

Despite this danger, faith leaders have continued to do the work faithfully, seeing it as part of the role that God has given them. Two of the respondents referenced images from the book of Ezekiel – of the shepherd who must take care of his sheep and the watchman who must warn the people. The bishop said, ‘We did not mind about [the threats] because we said “God has placed us here so that we may defend people.”’ The bishop emphasised that ‘for us church leaders, we say that, if there is no population, there is no church’.

### Engaging other voices and actors

As they were working in the communities, ECC saw the need to engage with those who were still resistant to the Ebola response. They reached out to Tearfund for funds to organise a symposium, which brought together people from all sectors of society, including members of armed groups resisting the Ebola warnings, business people, motor-taxi drivers and political leaders. It was an opportunity for the community to share their concerns and questions and to explain why the response was troubling them. ECC was able to answer questions and explain Ebola and also to better understand why there was so much resistance to the response. They took feedback to change their strategic plan and also to share ideas and recommendations with other organisations involved in the response. The church’s access to and engagement with communities enabled them to host this, and it improved the quality of their hosting.

Faith actors have been a key component of the humanitarian response, and that is starting to be acknowledged by the wider humanitarian community. Although at first other organisations did not see the value of working with faith leaders, over time they have realised the influence that faith leaders have in communities. Now, according to one respondent, ‘they all appreciate’ what the faith leaders are doing, and ‘whenever we invite them to events organised by the faith leaders, they come’. The government requires Tearfund to attend coordination meetings with the government and other actors, which has enabled Tearfund to coordinate and share information with other actors. At Tearfund’s invitation, doctors from the World Health Organization (WHO) and government officials have come to participate in the training of faith leaders. Donors such as USAID are happy to provide funds for working with churches. A Tearfund staff member said, ‘It’s one of the times where we’re getting funding and [we]’re saying we’ll work through faith leaders and they are like “yes, yes, yes, how much do you need for that?”’

### Conclusion and further questions

In DRC, faith leaders have played a key role in the humanitarian response, engaging communities to understand the danger of Ebola and the urgency of prevention and response. Because of their long-standing relationships with and respected positions within the communities, they are better able to engage communities than traditional humanitarian actors. They also seem able to bridge the gap between communities and humanitarian actors, providing the humanitarian community with recommendations and better understanding of the context.

This case study has provided a preliminary picture of the role of the church in responding to Ebola in DRC, which would benefit from more in-depth study. While respondents were confident in the faith

leaders' influence, further research into the impact of faith leaders' work on behaviour is needed. It would be beneficial to understand the breadth of the community engagement – to what extent the church's links with other civil society organisations are far-reaching into those communities (eg the police, Muslim communities etc). It would also be interesting to better understand why the church leaders believe it is important for them to engage in humanitarian work, and what influenced this decision. Tearfund staff were able to give second-hand accounts, but interviews within communities and with more faith leaders would provide helpful insight.

## 2. Colombia

### Background

As the political and economic situation in Venezuela has deteriorated in recent years, millions of people have fled the country. While several neighbouring countries have closed their borders to Venezuelan migrants, Colombia has continued to allow them to enter, even despite growing anti-immigrant sentiment. The over one million Venezuelans in Colombia have often lost most of their assets and are forced to live in overcrowded or dangerous areas, where they are at high risk of exploitation. They have difficulty finding employment and accessing services such as health care and education.

In the Caribbean region, migrants often enter at the border through Maicao and continue to the larger city of Barranquilla, where the Tearfund office is located. They are concentrated in large slums around the city – many are living in areas that were rubbish dumps and are trying to earn money begging or peddling. Churches in these areas have seen the desperation of the migrants and felt compelled to help.

Since 2018, Tearfund has been working with churches and small local partners to provide humanitarian assistance. Together they have provided medical support, hygiene and non-food items kits, meals and safe places for children, and cash vouchers, as well as spiritual and emotional support. Tearfund has also been part of an international campaign, *Como Nacido Entre Nosotros* (As If Born Among Us), which seeks to combat anti-immigrant sentiment and mobilise Christians to embrace and care for migrants.

### Purpose, methodology and limitations

This case study seeks to understand the role that the church has played in providing humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. It focuses on five themes: access, quality, security, community engagement and capacity building. It is one of four case studies that seek to help understand the role that non-traditional actors such as the church can play in humanitarian response. It is intended to paint a general picture and highlight gaps in our understanding and questions that need further research, rather than to conclude impact.

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants. Both informants are Tearfund staff members based in Colombia, who have been involved in coordinating the response. The small sample size is a limitation of this research, which is why this case study is not intended to conclude impact, but rather to give a sense of the situation and what more needs to be understood.

### Churches' access and motivation

Churches in Barranquilla have been well placed to reach out to migrants, due to their access to the areas where migrants are staying and legitimacy with the communities. Tearfund's partner churches are located in or near the areas where migrants are settling, and are intentional about reaching out to them. In many cases migrants also come to the church looking for support. As one respondent said, they come because they feel rejected and vulnerable, and the church seems like the only place they will receive real help.

Churches feel a human and Christian responsibility to care for those arriving from Venezuela. While not all churches in Colombia have been welcoming to migrants, many have been motivated to help

after seeing the needs of those moving into their communities. One respondent said, 'The need is so big that you can't ignore, when it's happening around.' They saw that the migrants were in poor health and emotional turmoil, the children were sick, and they were living in what used to be rubbish dumps; and the churches felt they needed to help them. Church members also believe the Bible calls them to welcome the stranger and have sought to live that out by welcoming these migrants. According to one respondent, the word of God says that it is their mandate to welcome the stranger as if they were local, and so they must give a good welcome. The respondent also mentioned that it could be harmful to society if the Venezuelans are not welcomed well, as it will foster resentment and increase insecurity in the area.

For these reasons, churches started reaching out even before Tearfund got involved. One respondent said, 'Even when Tearfund wasn't supporting financially, [the churches] started to receive them, to provide spiritual support, and also doing other like small activities to support them with food, with activities for the kids.' Other churches in the area have continued to provide a significant amount of support to migrants, even without the support of Tearfund.

The churches have been engaging with migrant communities and building relationships with those they are providing aid to. Because they have often helped those who have most recently arrived – the ones in the most immediate need – they have not always had pre-existing relationships, but they have built those relationships quickly. Church leaders have gone into the areas of greatest need, seeking to get to know people and offer them help. One respondent said, 'With the first stage of the project, [churches] started to go to the community and visit the people to see what were their needs.' These visits and time spent getting to know the community have led to relationships between the migrants and church leaders. One respondent noted that 'every time I visit the communities it's like people respect them, not just the pastor and the leaders, but the church itself. And they have the confidence to go there if they need something, if they need some help, even if it's not related to the project.' This has helped Tearfund gain access and community engagement even in communities where other humanitarian actors are not working. According to one respondent, Tearfund is working in some areas 'where the help, the financial support of the government and other financial organisations are not getting'.

### **Partnering with Tearfund**

With support and funding from Tearfund, churches learned how to act on their desire to help with quality activities. One respondent said, 'It's [not] like they are just like "okay, let's do anything". No... they have been in a process with us too.' They took into account recommendations from donors and the needs that migrants stated in an evaluation, and decided on activities. They also designed selection criteria for beneficiaries, seeking to help those with the greatest needs. Initially, two churches were involved, undertaking activities to meet the physical needs of those arriving. They began distributing hygiene and non-food items kits, and they set up a community kitchen as a safe space for children, where they could come and receive much-needed meals. They also began helping migrants to access medical services by transporting them from the community to the local Red Cross centre for treatment.

Tearfund has provided a significant amount of support and capacity building to churches as they engage in this humanitarian response. While some people in the communities have experience from working with other organisations such as Compassion, for many this was their first time engaging in humanitarian response. Tearfund has several staff working to support the project, including a project manager, assistant, and various staff who support monitoring and evaluation. There is also a capacity-strengthening officer, who has been evaluating the areas where partners are weak and seeking to strengthen them in those areas.

As they were providing humanitarian support and getting to know the communities, the churches noticed that the migrants needed support with more than just their physical needs. They began to provide spiritual support by establishing groups where individuals could learn about God and encourage each other through faith and hope. They also went through training in counselling organised by Tearfund with an organisation called Fundación Doulos, which trains churches in using support groups for counselling migrants. The two churches invited other churches from their network to the training, and more churches came and were trained. When new churches became interested, Tearfund evaluated whether they met Tearfund Quality Standards before deciding to work with them, and the number of churches involved in the response grew.

The churches, with Tearfund support, have been evaluating the effectiveness of the project, and the feedback has been largely positive. One of the respondents gave thanks to God that the beneficiaries are grateful for what they are being given and find it very helpful. The one piece of constructive feedback they have received is that in some cases beneficiaries find it difficult to travel to the community kitchen to receive help. Tearfund has taken that feedback and is working to make programming even more accessible. There has also been some trouble with funding – banks have been unwilling to release the foreign funds that are coming to NGOs. This has delayed the delivery of some cash vouchers, but Tearfund is working to ensure the vouchers will be delivered soon.

### Engaging local host communities

Churches' engagement with local communities has contributed to the smooth running of the programme. The churches have been in the local communities for a long time – since before the migrants came, and so have strong relationships that have given them legitimacy with local communities. In some cases the churches were already working to support community members, particularly the children. According to one respondent, it would have been more difficult to work with the migrants without these pre-existing relationships with local communities, because the communities would have questioned why churches were helping foreigners when they were not helping those already in the community. Because they had those long-standing relationships with the communities this was not a problem. Another respondent noted that it was somewhat difficult for communities to understand at first, because the host communities themselves are poor and vulnerable. Yet 'at the end they understand, they understand why the decision was made', when the churches 'explain to the Colombians, that, okay, they know they are in need, [the migrants] are the most vulnerable right now'. Having those pre-existing relationships helps churches to explain beneficiary selection to host community members, and helps the communities to be more understanding. The church also provides some support for Colombians, 'for instance if there is a Colombian who needs access to health... the church provides the route, or the information for the Colombians where to go', given that they have more available medical services than migrants.

The churches' relationships with the community have also contributed to the safety and security of Tearfund staff as they visit communities. According to one respondent, the communities are very vulnerable, and there are often issues with gangs and drugs, which could create security risks for team members visiting. Because the church leaders are known and highly respected in the communities and have relationships with other community leaders, they are less at risk of crime. When Tearfund staff or other actors visit the community or distribute aid, the church reaches out to local leaders to accompany them, which helps to keep them safe.

### Working with other humanitarian actors

Local churches, through Tearfund, have also partnered with other humanitarian organisations working in the region. When the International Organisation for Migration and the United Nations

High Commission for Refugees established offices in Barranquilla, Tearfund reached out to meet with the leaders of the organisations. They invited Tearfund to join a group they had formed for coordination among NGOs, which meets monthly and provides an opportunity for organisations to coordinate and work together on projects. They discuss what each organisation is doing, what their focus is, and issues with the response. The network has formed working groups to address specific issues and provide extra support in those areas. Sometimes organisations have worked together on projects and activities, and they coordinate to ensure that they do not repeat activities and beneficiaries. The group also provides a platform for organisations to reach out to each other for extra support when needed. According to one respondent, the other organisations 'have been really open' to the fact that Tearfund is working with churches. They have sometimes even used the church facilities when they need a place to host their own activities.

## Conclusion

Local churches in Barranquilla, Colombia, have been an important actor in providing humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants arriving in the region. They have access to the areas migrants are settling and legitimacy within the communities, and have used that to meet physical, spiritual and emotional needs. Tearfund has provided significant support and capacity building, enabling churches to welcome the migrants, as they feel called to. Tearfund has also worked closely in coordination with other humanitarian actors, who respect the work that churches are doing. Tearfund is hoping to expand its reach to work with churches in other cities in the Caribbean region, and to mobilise churches across Latin America to welcome migrants in their communities.

This case study has provided a preliminary picture of the role of the church in providing humanitarian aid to Venezuelan migrants arriving in Colombia, which would benefit from further research. Respondents highlighted the great need for psychosocial support, and it would be useful to better understand the effectiveness of the churches' counselling support groups, and whether this is a particular strength of the church compared to other actors. This research also demonstrated that the church has access and community engagement, but does not show the extent to which that differs from other humanitarian actors. It would also be interesting to better understand why some churches are not involved and whether the churches are more effective when they are located within the communities they are working with.

### 3. Zimbabwe

#### Background

When Cyclone Idai hit land on 14 March, 2019 and then moved into the eastern part of Zimbabwe, homes and livelihoods were devastated, along with major infrastructure. Water sources were contaminated as toilets were destroyed, and many people lost lives and loved ones. Roads and infrastructure were so damaged that days passed before humanitarian actors were able to reach affected communities. The country had already been struggling through a drought, leading to food insecurity, and the cyclone destroyed many of the precious remaining resources.



*Idzai Murimba / Tearfund*

Tearfund had already been working in Zimbabwe for years, but had little experience of humanitarian assistance in the country. Ongoing programmes were focused on church and community mobilisation (CCM) and participatory assessment of disaster risk (PADR), which was focused almost exclusively on droughts. Tearfund decided to consider humanitarian response when one of the churches undergoing CCM in the region of Buhera asked Tearfund's partner, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), for help. Tearfund then went into Buhera, Chipinge and Chimanimani to do needs assessments and provide assistance. In Chipinge and Buhera, EFZ used needs assessments and communities' knowledge to decide on the programmes – which involved distribution, WASH, livelihood recovery and psychosocial support. Churches in the EFZ network that had not been affected by the cyclone gave donations in support of the response.

Tearfund also partnered with two local NGOs – Zimbabwe Orphans through Extended Hands (ZOE) in Chimanimani and Family Aids Caring Trust (FACT) in Chipinge and Chimanimani. ZOE was already a Tearfund partner, who had been working alongside churches to care for orphans. They had relationships with communities that were affected by the cyclone, and reached out to Tearfund asking for support in providing assistance to them. FACT had been a Tearfund partner until 2016 and had experience responding to flooding in another region in 2013. FACT had significant capacity and, with support from Tear Netherlands, was already beginning to respond in one of the worst-affected regions, so Tearfund decided to re-engage them to increase Tearfund’s programming.

### **Purpose, methodology and limitations**

This case study seeks to understand the role that local churches in Zimbabwe have played in responding to Cyclone Idai. A desk-based review of project proposals and evaluations was conducted in order to understand the context and inform interview questions. Two semi-structured interviews with key informants were then undertaken remotely via google hangouts and Skype. The small sample size is one limitation of this research. Those interviewed were Tearfund or partner staff members involved in coordinating the response. For this reason, this case study is not intended to conclude impact but rather to give a sense of the situation and what more needs to be understood.

### **Churches’ access and community knowledge**

Cyclone Idai rendered many affected communities inaccessible to outsiders, including humanitarian actors, for days. In the meantime, churches stepped in to provide assistance and assess needs. Although they had limited resources, they immediately began activities such as organising burial of dead bodies, ensuring that people had shelter, and providing food. When they could provide nothing else, church leaders would ‘go and seek these families and pray with them’. They opened their church buildings for those who had nowhere else to stay; they collected items to help the households that had lost everything; and they ‘[found] alternative accommodation for families that had lost their house’. The local churches were also immediately available to provide psychosocial support. One respondent said, ‘Most importantly, the local church was there to be able to provide some psychosocial support to people. People were in shock – this had never happened in their lives – and the government was not there to provide psychosocial support; social workers were not there; psychologists were not there; local NGOs, the international NGOs were not there; but the local pastor was there, so he had to comfort the people, despite the fact that he was not properly equipped.’ While churches that had not undergone CCM and those that had both responded in this way, respondents noted that CCM churches had more passion for the work and felt more ownership of it than non-CCM churches, who saw it primarily as a task for humanitarian organisations.

Local CCM churches had significant knowledge of their communities, which enabled them to quickly identify those in greatest need and the resources available to assist them. Trainings that they had received as a part of CCM and Participatory Assessment of Disaster Risk (PADR) had given communities skills in identifying risks and resources and mobilising support. They assessed damage to the communities and identified needs. One respondent said, ‘It was the combination of the knowledge and skills that they got from training in CCM and PADR, which was able to help them to do assessments even without somebody coming up with a template to say, guys this is the template that you need to use.’ The respondents noted that the CCM churches’ criteria were well defined, and

that the CCM churches were able to stand their ground when local leaders disagreed, which other churches struggled to do.

By using their access and local knowledge in this way, CCM churches lay the groundwork for humanitarian organisations. According to one respondent, by the time staff arrived in Buhera the churches had already come up with lists of who needed help according to thematic areas and nominated key people to coordinate. The churches 'were the ones contacting partners and saying this is the situation, this is maybe the best road you can use if you want to come here, these are the things we need [you] to bring to us'. One respondent said, 'When we came for our needs assessment, they already had some information, and they were even [pointing out] some of the areas that we probably needed to visit because of the scale of the damage that had happened. So the communities – we were amazed – especially in Buhera, they had already done the assessments, they had found the information; number of lives that were lost; number of houses that collapsed; the amount of grain that was lost; and all the other things that were destroyed.' Thus, even before Tearfund and other humanitarian actors arrived, the churches were responding to the needs of the community. Their involvement continued after humanitarian organisations arrived, and even churches that had not undergone CCM assisted with beneficiary selection, registration and verification, as well as mobilisation for trainings and distributions. CCM churches also managed to mobilise large groups of volunteers to assist the partners with their ongoing response. They created project committees, facilitated community meetings to assess needs going forward, and continued to provide psychosocial support.

The CCM process had also helped churches to recognise their breadth of capacity and build strong relationships with other organisations, which prepared them well for responding to the cyclone. Churches were able to make the most of their capacity and reach out to Tearfund and other organisations they had been connected to through CCM for extra support and capacity building where necessary. They also, for the most part, already had good relationships with local authorities and other development organisations, which helped them in receiving much-needed resources. Overall, CCM helped churches to recognise their capacity and the importance of their involvement. They were able to assist the humanitarian organisations and added significant value to the response. Furthermore, they were able to help the communities understand that the aid was temporary and should not replace their own initiative and use of local capacity.

### **Working with Tearfund and partners**

Tearfund and EFZ had pre-existing relationships with communities that were based on capacity building and mentoring, as CCM encourages communities to implement development initiatives through identifying and utilising their own resources rather than being dependent on aid. Because of this, many communities were not expecting distributions, and staff were somewhat hesitant at first to provide external resources. One respondent said, 'We had to go against one of the things we would never do, that is providing handouts in communities.' Yet they soon realised that 'if we did not respond, we would lose basically everything we had worked for'. Tearfund and partners had been working for years to help these communities develop and build assets, but negative coping strategies were rapidly undermining those gains. In the words of one respondent, 'Communities are going to spend more money addressing the effect of Cyclone Idai and thereby stopping interventions like bridge construction, dam construction, road construction, all the interventions they had begun

to do.’ They decided to provide humanitarian assistance ‘in order to protect the few assets that are left and to help them build on and resuscitate their livelihoods’.

EFZ also recognised a spiritual mandate to provide for the communities in a different way at this time. One of the respondents referenced a Bible verse where Jesus warns that he may someday say ‘I was hungry, and you did not feed me.’ Another explained, ‘Tearfund in Zimbabwe, we always say no to handouts, but at this point we did feel like Jesus fed the 5,000 with fish and bread, and it seemed like this was the proper time for us to come to do for the community that way.’ They went on, ‘We felt we were obliged to support them, remember the word of God says we should cry with those who also are crying.’

Tearfund and partners sought to design the response in a way that empowered the communities, even through distributions. One respondent said, ‘The community did feel like there was enough space created for them to even lead the process of identifying what is needed as well as identifying the people who can benefit as well as even during the distributions... so even though I think sometimes you would feel like handouts are not empowering, I think the process before and after distributions were made empowered the community. I think they did appreciate that.’

Churches now feel more confident participating in humanitarian response, as they have new and strengthened relationships, experience and knowledge. In the words of one respondent, ‘The churches are now more confident as they have relations with the community. More so, they have interacted with a various number of development partners who have capacitated them on some humanitarian principles.’ Through this response, they strengthened relationships with their communities and gained new knowledge and experience.

Partners also saw the response as an opportunity to support their long-term development work and build resilience. To ensure that activities were having a long-term benefit for communities, they incorporated conservation agriculture in rehabilitation to support economic capacity and build resilience to drought. Partners coordinated conservation agriculture trainings and in some cases provided starter packs for communities to begin implementing what they were learning. One respondent said, ‘We have made it clear that [distribution] is the temporary measure, we are not going to be supporting you forever. Our goal is to come up with long-term recovery interventions, where you will be able to buy your own foods, buy your own items.’ They have also been incorporating capacity building to support long-term CCM in the areas of protection and hygiene.

### **Tearfund capacity building**

Because none of the partners had extensive experience in humanitarian response, Tearfund provided a significant amount of capacity building. EFZ was trained in the SPHERE standards, to help them ensure that they are in no way causing further harm to communities. Tearfund also provided support in drafting proposals.

Tearfund and EFZ also provided capacity building to churches and communities. Tearfund’s roving WASH coordinator took communities through training in community-led sanitation, helping people assess their water sources and understand good practice for toilet construction and borehole rehabilitation. Tearfund also engaged Africa University to train partner churches in trauma counselling and healing, so that they could support community members with ongoing trauma and

speak out against sexual abuse. EFZ also helped communities create beneficiary selection criteria that would prioritise the most vulnerable and helped them think through the proper feedback mechanisms to put in place.

### Community engagement and quality programming

EFZ designed quality programming based on communities' needs and their own constraints. One respondent explained, 'It was a combination of factors: what the needs assessment was saying, what we have capacity to do, also looking at the funding levels that we have at that time, also looking at what are other organisations doing.' Both respondents mentioned that they were able to provide more useful quantities of food than other organisations had because they listened to what communities thought would be useful.

Their community engagement also enabled them to recognise needs that other humanitarian actors did not address. As they returned to communities multiple times, staff found that over time people were still crying during interviews and encounters, searching for their lost loved ones, and having nightmares. They realised that the response needed to incorporate psychosocial support and were able to raise that issue with other organisations. According to one respondent, other humanitarian organisations did not recognise that need because they 'are not intentional about creating relationships with communities'. Another respondent said, 'It was good the church and other faith-based organisations were able to raise the need of psychosocial support to say, yes whilst you may bring the food and the water, this person is not viable, and you need to speak into that aspect.'

Respondents mentioned that while at the beginning of the response it seemed like every humanitarian organisation wanted to do something, particularly in Chimanmani, over time they disappeared. Meanwhile, Tearfund continued to care for the communities in a more holistic way. One respondent said, 'We were coming up with something that was a bit holistic, we tried to speak into the spiritual needs of people as well as the physical needs, there's the psychological and emotional needs of people, something I think other organisations didn't really look at in the beginning.' Both respondents commented that other organisations seemed to think addressing immediate physical needs was enough, but actually people needed the long-term psychospiritual support that the church could give.

### Engaging other actors

Other humanitarian actors have recognised the incredible work of the CCM churches and the necessity of working with them. One respondent said, 'I think every organisation when they were sharing their Cyclone Idai experiences [was] saying we had to work with the church because when we got there the church was organised... so we feel like there was recognition even from international NGOs that the church had played a critical role... And sometimes for organisations to actually reach the worst affected, it was the church that had to point out and say, "The people were here but they're not here, this is where you come and find them, come and speak to them.'" The government has also recognised some church leaders involved in the response as community heroes. CCM churches have continued to represent Tearfund's humanitarian response by showing up for meetings with the civil protection committee because EFZ is based too far away. Tearfund has also been coordinating with other NGOs for training, and has helped build relationships between communities and these NGOs.

## Conclusion and lessons learned

Local churches in Zimbabwe that had gone through CCM are widely recognised as having been key actors in responding to Cyclone Idai. They had access to and knowledge of the affected communities that enabled them to provide assistance days before other actors arrived. Tearfund's partners were able to build on their community knowledge and engagement and, with capacity building from Tearfund, to provide quality humanitarian aid. They sought to do this in a way that empowered communities and built their resilience.

Respondents and churches learned a significant amount from the process that they believe would be beneficial for other CCM churches to understand. In the initial response, churches needed training in the humanitarian standards and principles, and had to discover who the key stakeholders were in the response. If those things had been done beforehand, it could have saved precious time. They also discovered the importance of psychosocial support, and found that churches needed more training in that area.

Finally, the respondents learned the importance of the church remaining involved in humanitarian response and encouraged other churches to do the same. In the words of one respondent, 'The church should know they are the first responders in the disaster and they will continue to provide service long after everyone else is gone and has forgotten about the disaster. The church needs to understand that they do not have to resign when the community is flooded by organisations and individuals collecting data and providing relief. The church is a permanent institution in the community and people will continue to come for assistance when the response and recovery interventions by other players have been completed.'

This case study has presented a preliminary picture of the role of the church in responding to Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe, but it would benefit from more in-depth research. Those interviewed were confident in the effectiveness of the churches' activities, but the voices of community members are only reflected here as second-hand accounts. More interviews need to take place with community members and beneficiaries to understand more clearly what the churches' impact was, and how it differed from the impact of other actors.

## 4. Uganda

### Background

Since the beginning of the South Sudanese Civil War in December 2014, over two million people have fled the country as refugees. Uganda has been particularly welcoming, designating areas as settlements and giving refugees their own small plots of land. Even so, life for refugees in Uganda is challenging. Their allotments of land are small; there are large numbers of refugees and not enough jobs; they have lost their homes and possessions and are often traumatised from what happened to them in South Sudan; they have limited access to food and water; and scarcity of resources sometimes leads to conflict with host community members. Several agencies, including UNHCR, have been working to provide for some of the immediate needs of communities, in ways such as distributing food. Yet this is not enough to meet all the needs of refugees. Tearfund's partner, Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG), is seeking to fill some of those gaps.

Pentecostal Assemblies of God is a church denomination that was founded in 1966 with the aim of telling people about Jesus. Over time, they decided that simply telling people was not enough. The people they were reaching out to were living in difficult situations, particularly those affected by unrest in eastern and northern Uganda. PAG felt that in order to reach them, the church could not simply talk about Jesus – they had to 'be salt and light to the people in crisis'. So PAG created a social development arm specifically for development and humanitarian work, and responded to crises such as landslides, floods and droughts. After a crisis, churches in the PAG network often donated items to help others in need, and, with support from Tearfund, they sought to undertake development projects to improve their communities.

When large numbers of refugees began arriving in 2014, the Ugandan government put out a call for partners to work in the refugee settlements. PAG wanted to respond, and looked to government reports to identify gaps in the response, then went on the ground to confirm what the major needs were. With funding from Tearfund Netherlands, and Emergency Relief and Development Overseas, they assisted in Rhino Camp with WASH – building latrines and providing menstrual hygiene kits for women and girls. They continued doing work over the next several years through grants from a number of funders. They focused primarily on WASH, but also built homes for the most vulnerable people.

There was a second major influx of refugees from South Sudan in 2016. PAG began distributing reusable sanitary kits with support from Tearfund Netherlands in 2016, then secured further funding from Tearfund for the project to continue from August 2017 until April 2018. Tearfund had already been working with PAG in development work, and in 2017 agreed to fund more of PAG's work in the refugee settlements. PAG provided sanitary kits and built more latrines in schools. They also provided psychosocial support and promotion of hygiene and sanitation.

### Purpose, methodology and limitations

This case study seeks to understand the role that the local church in northern Uganda has played in responding to the influx of South Sudanese refugees, focusing particularly on the distribution of menstrual hygiene kits funded by Tearfund. A desk-based review of project proposals and

evaluations was conducted in order to understand the context and inform interview questions. Two semi-structured interviews with key informants were then undertaken remotely via Skype. The small sample size is one limitation of this research. Those interviewed were partner staff members involved in coordinating the response. For this reason, this case study is not intended to conclude impact but rather to give a sense of the situation and what more needs to be understood.

### **PAG's quality activities and capacity building**

PAG initially decided to get involved in the response because it was clear that more help was needed and they had a strong history of and desire to help those in need. One respondent said, 'When the refugees came to Rhino Camp, the crisis was all over in the newspapers, in the TV, and... the national office of PAG shared that with the partners.' The government decided to welcome the refugees, and 'was calling for partners, for any partner in an institution or organisation that could be able to mobilise support and intervene in the refugee settlements. So PAG, on seeing that plea by the office of the Prime Minister, made a response.'

PAG had been responding to humanitarian crises for years. One respondent said, 'The church of PAG since its inception has been meeting the needs of other people... whenever disaster strikes, the church in Uganda throughout its history has always intervened.' They saw responding to humanitarian needs as part of their identity, so when they heard about the call for partners, they wanted to help. One respondent explained, 'In the Bible, in Matthew, where Christ said that when I was naked, you clothed me, when I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was in prison, you visited me. So we realised that as a church that is our calling, to demonstrate the love of Christ to the needy.'

PAG wanted to ensure that their activities were high quality, so they made sure that their activities were filling a gap and that their staff were sufficiently trained. They decided what activities to do by identifying gaps in the response and working with communities to identify needs. One respondent explained, 'The reports from the office of the prime minister indicated the gaps that other partners were requested to address... So PAG now was able to base on that report, and then went on the ground to confirm the needs on the ground.' Another respondent explained how they used the community to identify needs, saying they would 'go to the community, identify people who can speak to you on behalf of how the condition is, how people are feeling, [so that] you get the need, you get the gaps, so that by the time you sit to write your proposal, you are writing something that is trying to address a gap'.

After building relationships with the communities, it was clear to PAG that more support was needed in the area of menstrual hygiene. Girls were often using torn pieces of clothing or blankets as pads, which were not secure and sometimes led to infection. They reported feeling shame, or fear of shame in case the pieces of cloth fell down in public, which was causing girls to miss school. One respondent said, 'When we were working in the community, we discovered that the women were coming to us and saying, "But we are finishing our blankets, cutting them to make sanitary pads. This is a need that nobody, not UNHCR, not Oxfam, not another partner is thinking about. Everyone is thinking about food, thinking about clothing, thinking about shelter, thinking about water, but nobody is paying attention to the challenges that we [have] as women and girls." So it was because of close interaction and fellowshiping with the community members, they were able to tell us the real need.' PAG responded by providing menstrual hygiene kits for women and girls in 2014.

In the years after PAG's initial distribution, it was clear that menstrual hygiene remained an important and unmet need. One respondent said, 'Sanitary kits remained a major gap because the demand was greater than the capacity of the available resources by then, by partners. So during meetings it kept being flagged as one of the needs that needed to be attended to. During those meetings, they would [ask] "PAG when are you again bringing? There is need here, there is a crisis here," so I would keep telling them that "okay, when God opens the door for us, we shall again come back with the sanitary kits". So when there was that discussion with Tear Netherlands, it was easy for us because we already had data from the meetings... it was clear that menstrual hygiene was critical.' When they received more funding from Tear Netherlands and Tearfund after the influx of refugees in 2016, they knew exactly where the gaps were in the response. They also decided to distribute reusable sanitary pads in this second distribution, so that the beneficiaries would be able to use them for longer. With Tearfund's support they provided 15,000 sanitary kits to women and girls. Beneficiaries gave positive feedback, including one schoolgirl who was quoted saying that because of the reusable pads, 'I feel so comfortable and free with both boys and girls during my menstruation periods, since the size of the Eco pads are good for me as compared to the piece of cloth.'

PAG and Tearfund have supported their staff and volunteers with training and other capacity building. When church members volunteer to help, they receive training in the humanitarian standards and principles. PAG also seeks to keep learning as an organisation. One respondent explained, 'As a church we do identify our own capacity gaps. You find your capacity gaps and then you look for expertise to train you specifically for that, so that you'll be able to provide services effectively and efficiently.' Often they coordinate with other humanitarian organisations to give and attend trainings. The different organisations come together in sector working groups and organise capacity building for each sector. Tearfund also sent experts to train and help staff in specific areas.

### **Access and community engagement**

The respondents noted that PAG had a high level of community engagement, which they saw as essential to their work. Because they were a church, they were seen as more legitimate by the community. One respondent said, 'Everyone in the community belongs to the church, [they] might not be Pentecostals but might be Catholic, Protestant, or in other church denominations. So, being a church, you are already identified as people of God. So...you have that open door even to speak to the people in the community.' They then worked through the existing structures, going to the local Refugee Welfare Council chairpersons to explain who they were and what they intended to do. Through the Council leaders, PAG then engaged refugees to be involved throughout the process. One respondent said, 'In all that we do, we use the refugees themselves to help us in the mobilisation and the identification of beneficiaries, and [in] verifying them, and during distributions we engage them to help us in the distribution process.' Some of the refugees have continued to be involved in the response and have become volunteers. PAG has also been working with local churches in the refugee settlements. Some are South Sudanese denominations that have moved down into the settlements with the people; others have been planted by PAG and the host communities.

PAG also saw community engagement as a major part of their role as the church. They didn't want to come in and just act like a humanitarian organisation; they wanted to be seen as a church, meeting people's needs in a holistic way. One respondent explained, 'We present ourselves not as NGOs or humanitarian actors – we present ourselves as a church. So a church is supposed to be walking with people. So we don't do hit and run away like other NGOs do... we want to walk with these people until they are totally transformed.' He continued, 'The church is open for other services, welcoming other refugees to come to a Sunday service, to the Bible study service, and showing them love... You know a church is a place all of us need to go. When we have problems, all of us go to church for rescue.' PAG responded to the physical needs, as other humanitarian organisations did, but also sought to meet spiritual and emotional needs. That level of engagement involved getting to know people personally and walking with them in the long-run.

### **Relationships with the government and other organisations**

At the same time, PAG has been taken seriously by the government and other humanitarian actors as having an important role in the humanitarian response in Rhino Camp. The government views PAG as an organisation that is truly committed to the response. One respondent explained, 'With support from Tearfund, PAG was able to construct an office block, in Rhino Camp. So... the office of the prime minister looks at PAG as one of those partners who have taken initiative to make an investment that will live beyond this current response... they view us as one of the resourceful partners that have managed to mobilise resources and continued to serve refugees in a transparent manner.'

Other organisations have also developed strong relationships with PAG. This is due in part to the coordination of the humanitarian response. The organisations meet together regularly to discuss the response and work together. One respondent explained, 'We seek guidance whenever we are doing implementation if there is a capacity gap in PAG... so we have those close working relationships with other partners, and that has earned us a good reputation with them. Whenever we need support from them [they] give, and then whenever they need support from us we give.' PAG has been an asset to many other organisations, particularly due to PAG's willingness to share resources. One respondent explained, 'Currently we have only one car, but every time UNHCR has requested us, we [have] always offer[ed] the car, fuel, aid, and join[ed] other partners. So PAG has been appreciated by UNHCR as among those few partners that are willing to share their resources and staff in joint activities in Rhino Camp, and that has earned us a very good relationship with UNHCR.' PAG also has the only hall in Rhino Camp with a flush toilet, so one respondent explained that 'whenever there is any high delegation... the government [and] the partners take their high profile visitors to PAG office'.

PAG has also built relationships with other organisations in more personal ways. One respondent explained that PAG always has footballs for staff to use, so staff of other organisations come looking for them. PAG has also become known as a place of prayer for Christians of all denominations on the staff of humanitarian organisations. One respondent said they have a prayer gathering, and 'Some of the staff members of these organisations are pastors from where they come from, so we make a rota and it is like fellowship of believers, not only PAG church.'

### **Security and other challenges**

PAG staff have faced some dangers and challenges in responding. Respondents explained that there are diseases nearby and even within the settlements, which they are exposed to. There is also sometimes violence in the settlements, which the staff must try to avoid. PAG also doesn't have accommodation for staff, so staff have to find accommodation in villages, usually without electricity or indoor bathrooms, and travel by motorcycle to work. Both respondents also mentioned the danger of the staff being traumatised themselves. Yet the staff members persist and find the work rewarding. One respondent said, 'We get the joy that we are doing ministry. Because when you look at what we do, we are focused on holistic ministry, we are focused on reaching out to people spiritually, and also reaching out to people physically, so as a team, most of us are very happy, feel that fulfilment.'

Through evaluations, PAG has also been learning how to make their response more effective going forward. Beneficiaries explained that they needed more of certain items, particularly soap. In the three months after the initial distribution, PAG provided one bar of soap per month. Once the soap ran out, however, it was difficult for beneficiaries to clean the reusable pads. Persistent stigma also contributed to inefficient use of reusable pads, as beneficiaries were embarrassed to hang them outside to dry. Instead, they often left them in less airy and bright places or hid them away, making them dry slowly or poorly. Thus, evaluators determined that a change of attitudes is a necessary factor in distributing menstrual hygiene kits going forward. They are taking these and other lessons forward into future programmes.

## Conclusion

The Pentecostal Assemblies of God has been an important actor in the humanitarian response in Rhino Camp, northern Uganda. They have worked with communities and other organisations to identify and address unmet needs. They have also been a spiritual and emotional support for refugees, many of whom have got involved in their work and/or joined PAG churches. Even after the response discussed in this case study, PAG has continued to be present in the settlements and has expanded their work to cover peacebuilding and psychosocial care. More research would be beneficial to understand how this history in the settlements has contributed to PAG's current response. It also would be helpful to better understand how refugees came to be involved in the response, and to what extent they feel ownership over it. Interviews with beneficiaries would be particularly insightful in understanding the impact of PAG's activities.