

L2GP is an initiative, which works to promote effective, efficient and sustainable responses and solutions to humanitarian and protection crises with an explicit focus on enabling locally-led crisis responses.

Learning from community-led resilience responses in the occupied Palestinian territories



Photo: Nils Carstensen

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Now I know that we don't have to wait for some donor to come and solve our problems. We can plan and come up with solutions ourselves.

Executive Summary

Since 2015, L2GP has worked with the YMCA East Jerusalem Women's Development Program (EJ-YMCA)¹ in Palestine to co-develop and test practical ways for vulnerable communities in the West Bank² to design and implement their own protection and resilience responses. Over many years, EJ-YMCA has witnessed how the international community has directed funding to humanitarian and development projects that did not always meet the needs, realities or priorities of their constituencies. A L2GP study into protection and self-protection from 2014 confirmed many such flaws in current internationally led responses and documented how externally driven interventions in some cases resulted in failure rather than strengthening community resilience.³

As a reaction towards these experiences and frustrations, EJ-YMCA, together with Christian Aid, started to support communities in making their own Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PVCA) and subsequent action plans in order to revive ownership, trust, social activism and hope. Later L2GP, DanChurchAid and Church of Sweden joined these efforts and worked with EJ-YMCA and eight selected communities to develop and test additional elements from the emerging survivor and community-led crisis response (sclr) approach. This included the use of community cash grants⁴ as a direct means for

five of these communities to identify and implement their own resilience and protection responses.

After two years of piloting these approaches, an evaluation was concluded in January 2018.⁵ Key findings of this evaluation supplemented by on-going project monitoring, feedback consultations and a cross learning event with communities are presented in the subsequent sections of this paper.

In summary, the findings suggest that PVCA and elements of the survivor and community-led crisis response (sclr) were found to be effective in enabling communities to identify and address protection and resilience through their own initiatives and in accordance with their own priorities. These approaches were also found to foster community resilience and spur a sense of dignity along with a revival of an otherwise faltering culture of volunteerism. The PVCA and sclr approaches also appeared to empower women and youth at individual, family, and community levels as well as being a useful tool for communities to hold local authorities accountable and push them to deliver on for instance essential services. These results and outcomes echo similar findings from on-going experiences with survivor and community-led crisis responses in the Philippines, Myanmar, Kenya and Sudan.⁶

Thanks

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Wadi Fukin, Mneizal and Ab Alurqan who so willingly shared their experiences with us, hosted us so generously - and put up with all our questions time and time again. While the content of this paper remains our responsibility, we hope it will do at least some justice to your experience and the wealth of insight you have tried to pass on to us.

Introduction and background

In a 2014 research-interview, a Palestinian woman told L2GP that: *“I do not understand why the international actors do what they do. They come here with aid and development projects, but that is not effective. It is not effective because the problem here is not a specific crisis, but a long-standing occupation. You have to realize that with the present logic, they can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change. So please, stop bringing us blankets and do the right thing by holding Israel accountable.”*⁷

While Palestinian communities and society remain trapped by the all-encompassing and destructive consequences of more than 50 years of Israeli occupation, EJ-YMCA and its partners continue to work with approaches, which aim to give communities a higher degree of influence over their own situation. These efforts are undertaken in cooperation with key external partners⁸ and include elements of what is known as Participatory, Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PVCA)⁹ as well as core elements of the L2GP-promoted survivor and community-led crisis response approach (sclr).¹⁰

While any such efforts will always remain limited and restricted by the realities and destructive dynamics defined by the occupation, these approaches aim to boost the possibilities and capacities of communities to map out their own strengths, capacities, risks and vulnerabilities - and subsequently enable communities and self-help groups themselves to take direct action and implement relevant projects along with the associated monitoring and accountability. Pilot activities started in November 2015 and continued up to February 2018 with the goal of strengthening resilience and protection in five communities in Area C and B in the Palestinian West Bank.

Since 2011, L2GP has been engaged in action-research on how to support communities to lead and strengthen their own responses to humanitarian crises, whether sudden-onset or chronic. Such survivor and community-led responses to crises approaches (“sclr”) are intended to generate benefits in terms of responsiveness and efficacy, speed, cost-efficiency, psycho-social well-being, emerging stronger and, in some cases, addressing root causes of vulnerability - in short, achieving greater resilience, cohesion and protection. Please do examine Annex 1 for a detailed presentation of key sclr elements and experiences. Based on these experiences, EJ-YMCA and L2GP were well placed to cooperate on developing and introducing

community-led approaches in Palestine. This initiative was further informed and motivated by the discussions and momentum around the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change to move from just talking about localisation and participation to actually doing it in practice with Palestinian communities.

Before the organisations got to the stage of formulating the exact objectives and modalities for this approach, a first phase was initiated to explore and determine, which of the elements in the above approaches seemed suitable and to which extent the communities were interested in this way of working. Consequently, none of the organisations knew in detail what to expect from the initial phase of the initiative, since there was no actual detailed project proposal or logical framework for this initial phase. It was clear though, that a holistic approach was needed in order to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development projects in the targeted communities. It was agreed amongst the engaged organisations that flexible funding was needed, that ownership had to be given back to the communities and that on an institutional level humanitarian and development programme officers had to engage in dialogue on how to handle this response in terms of joint planning and sequencing of humanitarian and development interventions in line with what the communities prioritized.

What allowed for this initial phase to take place, was essentially a high level of trust between the communities, EJ-YMCA, the funding agencies and L2GP. This trust rested on a shared belief that communities were interested in and capable of managing their own responses – and accepting that the involved organisations therefore could not know in advance, exactly what the actual responses and activities would look like. After months of initial work with and within the communities, a second phase was initiated including, among other, community micro cash grants and the associated community-led implementation, monitoring and accountability. At this stage, two objectives were agreed for the activities: **1)** Vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women and youth, are enabled to build resilient communities that may withstand shocks, mitigate protection threats, and flourish; **And 2)** Learn if (and if yes – how) a community cash grants scheme can support local solutions and local actions and possibly improve the protection, resilience and wellbeing of vulnerable communities.

Shifting power towards communities

EJ-YMCA through its collaboration with Christian Aid already had strong experiences with the PVCA approach. PVCA is a process of engaging communities and acknowledging that each community is different, both in terms of location, political, economic, cultural and social circumstances, and that each context must be recognized, interpreted and analysed in different ways, and that the community itself is the leading change maker in that process. Building on the PVCA process already carried out, EJ-YMCA and L2GP decided to add components of community cash grants and self-implementation to enable the communities to implement and monitor actual small-scale projects themselves. The subsequent activities were largely divided up and carried out in two consecutive phases.

Phase 1: Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessment – how it was used in the communities

- There was a pre-selection of communities, followed by several announcements made through local CBOs, religious and community leaders, market places, community meetings, schools, local government and the village council in order to introduce the approach,
- Individuals from the communities volunteered to receive training in the PVCA method. While EJ-YMCA was responsible for overseeing participation, inclusion and representation of all people in the communities in the groups of community volunteers. A selection criteria for identifying the volunteers were developed together with the communities,
- The volunteers did a KAP-survey (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices) in each community including interviews with all households as well as general village meetings and discussions. Local authorities, in the form of the respective village councils, were proactively included and collaborated in all of the activities,
- As a result of this process men, women, and youth volunteers from each of the communities were trained

to lead the PVCA process in their respective village. Such groups, known as Protection Groups (PGs), were formed in each community,

- As a part of the process, communities identified common challenges and risks - and subsequently voted on their priorities (importance). Based on this, each community developed a specific action plan including main priorities and agreements on what had to be done, by when, by whom and what was needed to address known risks and challenges,
- In order to promote accountability and ensure ways to manage complaints, a HAP accountability training was conducted with community members in Bethlehem in October 2016. During this training, it was agreed that different communities might use different platforms for information sharing. Common methods agreed upon included announcements in schools, mosques, CBOs, village councils, radio and Facebook groups. In several villages, Facebook groups became an essential part of information sharing, participation and accountability between the protection groups and the wider community. Further into the initiative, Facebook groups were also used as an accountability platform for the community cash grant.

The main risk identified in the action plans (see box 1), regardless of the community, was political risks which translated into different challenges such as lack of access to health services and electricity, confiscation of land and vulnerability to conflict. It was identified in all villages, that while the risks were closely related to the occupation and the political status quo, there were still capacities available in each community to undertake small action to alter some of the challenges they were facing. While mapping out the risks, capacities available and actions needed, it became clear that financial resources were not the only or the most urgent challenge, but that community mobilization and advocacy played equally important roles.

Box 1: Action plans from two of the communities/villages involved

Village	Risk	Capacity and Resources	Actions to handle risk	Village action	External resources needed	Responsible	Implemented / notes
Community 1	Lack of electricity /political	Electricity network inside the village Electricity generator Solar Cells	Advocacy campaign Informing the media Mobilize volunteers to advocate for the rights of the village	Establishing guidelines on electricity consumption Support the volunteers, form arguments for demanding rights	Financial support to a new electrical line An engineer who can fix problems in the existing solar cells Maintaining solar cells and generator	Village Council United Services Council Electricity Company Energy Authority Related organizations	PG is working on this action, by meeting with governmental institutions
Community 2	Land confiscation/ political	Experienced in agriculture and labour work Fertile land Available springs Available NGOs	Pave agricultural roads Rehabilitate agricultural roads and lands Land reclamation mainly those near settlements Form a protection group to document Israeli violations File court cases	Prepare and keep documents for court cases Contribute to land reclamation Cooperate with the village lawyer	Financial support Capacity building and training	Village protection group Village council Ministry of Agriculture Commission for wall and settlements Governorate Local institutions	Land reclamation project costs \$ 25,000 by another NGO Rehabilitation of an agricultural road with the construction of retaining walls costs \$ 75,000

Phase 2: Community cash grants – how it was introduced

After considering the results from phase 1, it seemed relevant and desirable to introduce further elements from the survivor and community-led crisis response (sclr). As a result of this decision, a consultant from L2GP spent time with the communities and EJ-YMCA tailoring the sclr approach and its small cash grant component to fit the specific Palestinian context. For instance, it was agreed that the maximum amount available for each community would be USD 5,000 and the communities (lead by the PGs) could either divide this amount between several activities - or prioritise to spend the entire amount on one

project. Regardless of this, all activities had to be part of the community action plans and among the interventions that the entire community had previously agreed and prioritised collectively. In addition, while the community cash grants did not come with specific conditionality, they were subject to a joint vetting process previously agreed between the communities and EJ-YMCA.

Phase two included the following steps:

- The L2GP consultant worked with the communities and EJ-YMCA to increase their knowledge and develop procedures for managing community cash grants. This work included training, subsequent demand-led

- mentoring and the production of a guidance manual for community cash grants schemes (available in both English and Arabic),
- Subsequently, criteria were co-formulated by the protection groups and the EJ-YMCA that outlined when, how and for what it would be possible to apply for community cash grants,
 - In each of the communities, a committee was formed, which would be responsible for developing concrete activity proposals based on the community action plans. These committees were responsible for receiving the grant and for implementing and managing the project including ensuring transparency on what the grant was spent on and how for instance procurement processes were handled. Such sub-groups under the PGs are called Project Management Committees (PMCs),
 - In addition to the PMC, a separate committee was formed to ensure proper monitoring and accountability of the work done by the PMC. These committees were responsible for monitoring the budgets, expenditures and making sure that the PMCs were implementing according to the proposed plan. The EJ-YMCA project coordinators (community mobilizers), in turn, supported and monitored the entire process including technical implementation, administrative and financial management as well as community relations (feedback and accountability),
 - Proposals for specific activities were submitted to the EJ-YMCA program coordinators, who then screened these against the agreed selection criteria and grants were released. EJ-YMCA also supported communities in identifying other sources of support (financial or in kind) apart from cash grants in a process that promoted volunteerism and community contributions as well as soliciting support from relevant local authorities. EJ-YMCA had the overall responsibility to ensure that project proposals and its subsequent implementation were in line with humanitarian standards.

The activities implemented by the communities through using community cash grants related to:

- Rabud: rehabilitation of a clinic (through a \$1000 cash grant), construction of a culvert for sewage water (through a \$2800 cash grant), and rehabilitation of some of the school's old classrooms and outdoor spaces (through a \$1500 cash grant),
- Abu Alurqan: rehabilitation of a clinic (through a \$1333 cash grant) and the construction of road shoulders (through a \$3644 cash grant),
- Abu Alghuzlan: rehabilitation of a clinic (through a \$5000 cash grant) and school's sanitation units (through a \$995.5 cash grant),
- Wadi Fukin: providing electricity and streetlights along an important street in the village (through a \$5300 cash grant),
- In Mneizal: rehabilitation of an agricultural road (approximately 1.5 km) and the school's sanitation unit (through a \$5417 cash grant).

From this list as well as the action plans, it is obvious that the interventions chosen by the communities cover several sectors and issues across "humanitarian-development spectrum (nexus)": protection, preparedness, livelihoods, community mobilization and resilience. In Palestine, based on the findings through this pilot, protection/self-protection for instance remains closely linked to not just livelihood options but also infrastructure and all the associated political threats and risks. The extension of electricity and streetlights along a road running between the village and surrounding Israeli settlements provided an increased sense of protection in an otherwise insecure part of the village. It also made it more attractive to live along this street and thus contributed to residents being able to continue to live in a part of the village close to the settlements. While the construction of road shoulders is not an intervention traditionally found in humanitarian action, the previous road was considered a risk for children and the elderly obliged to walk along the road several times daily – and it could lead to cars sliding off the muddy road during heavy rains or snow. Subsequently, constructing road shoulders serves as protection, preparedness and prevention interventions and resulted in strengthening the resilience in that community. Overall, all initiatives had multiple aims not only including protection and community resilience - but also often also contributing improved services, livelihood options and a general sense of strengthened dignity.



The protection groups work closely with local leaders such as the Village Councils. The groups are open for all and in most villages women have taken on a strong and often leading role in the groups.

Photo: Nils Carstensen

Community experiences

Based on the aforementioned evaluation¹² as well as other observations a number of findings and lessons have been identified regarding the process and the outcomes described above. Before presenting these findings though, it is essential to examine the experiences and lessons as perceived by some of the community members themselves. A female member of the PG in Abu al Ghuzlan explained how this way of working has had an impact on her village: *“It was important for us to implement the project ourselves. It was not done by an NGO or by some company – it was done by us. A lot of work was done voluntary and nobody tried to make a profit. What was saved by choosing a good tender and by voluntary work, we could spend on more projects.”*¹³

Addressing similar experiences, a community member in Raboud elaborated: *“We have never worked together like this. Before we just had our individual worries and concerns. Now we have developed an action plan, which we all have contributed to. We’ve actually been able to address several of the threats and concerns identified in the action plan. Developing the action plan and then taking joint action has been the key to our success. The cash grants made it possible to take the first important steps and then use that to bring in other voluntary contributions.”*

In one village where a mother-and-child health clinic were so derelict that it was about to be closed down, the community managed to raise USD 2,000 from voluntary contributions on top of the USD 1,000 from the cash grant.

Comparing this way of working with usual externally-led approaches, a community and village council member in Wadi Fukin explained: *“The project succeeded because we worked together in the village. Many other NGO projects*

have failed – mostly because we were not really involved in the ideas and the plans. We did the electricity project cheaper, faster and better ourselves than any NGO could have done. But most important of all – we feel it is our own project – our own work. For instance, we only paid three individuals for some very specific skilled work – the majority work was done by community volunteers.”

Another PG member elaborated on the difference with other NGO activities including stressing the importance of using for instance Facebook groups for local accountability: *“We learned a lot about getting our community directly involved - including how to actually find and hire the right contractor and the things needed for the project. All receipts and contracts were put on Facebook so all could see how the money was spent. We also learned that we could actually do the project cheaper than an NGO could do it.”* While Facebook groups worked well for some villages and some community members, the evaluation stressed the need to supplement that with posters, announcements and availability of all documentation (receipts etc.) to the entire community – including those not using social media and/or less comfortable with written communication.

In Wadi Fukin, a grant was used to install electricity and streetlights to a neglected part of the village. A community member there explained how this contributed to the well-being of those living in that part of the village: *“Installing electricity make it much cheaper for the households along the road to get connected. The street lights also make the area safer - especially in winter”.* In Mneizal, a PG volunteer put the construction of a rural road into the perspective of protection and defending land rights: *“Because of the new road, we can use and develop the land and the cisterns there.*

When we do that, we also protect our right to the area. If this land remains unused, it would be at risk of being taken by the Israelis." In a separate conversation, another PG volunteer elaborated how: *"The (Israeli) settlement and the road reserved for the settlers have been built very close to us. Now we're not allowed to farm our own land in some places. If we want to build anything, we receive stop or demolition orders from the Israelis. We need to improve the agricultural road to the land - otherwise we risk that it'll be confiscated by the Israelis."*

Several conversations with community members demonstrated how EJ-YMCA's way of working over longer time and in a collaborative manner with the villages also had significant impact on their ability to raise issues of common concern with relevant Palestinian authorities. *"If all NGOs worked the way this project works in support of the community and our protection group in their advocacy and talking to local authorities, a lot more could be achieved - as it is now happening with the electricity here in Mneizal."* A woman from Jub Adhib stressed this difference: *"Now we have the courage to advocate for our rights with the government. We have also learned the mechanisms to combat Israeli violations."*

As the PGs grew stronger in the communities, a man explained that the village council felt competition from the PGs achievements. The EJ-YMCA therefore worked closely with the PGs to clarify that they should not consume the role and responsibilities of local government or village council, but rather mobilize their communities to push for their rights towards these institutions. A man from Abu Al Ghuzlan said: *"Our village was marginalized, the village council never took our requests seriously. We've had other organisations entering the village and telling us we should go and advocate for our rights. However, they used to stay for just a couple of days and then leave. The EJ-YMCA was very patient with us, it raised our awareness on how we look at risks and priorities and how to address them."* Another man from Rabud said: *"Ideally, the relationship between the VC and the PG should be complementary. However, sometimes the VC perceives the PG as a competitor."*

Even though cash grants were a key tool towards building resilience in the targeted communities, there were other initiatives that relied entirely on community mobilization and clever and sustained local advocacy. For the citizens in Mneizal, the main priority was to claim the rights to get electricity to their village. They had tried to get electricity for many years but now working with the community mobilizer from EJ-YMCA, the village Protection Group managed to successfully lobby the Palestinian National Authority and the Energy Authority to get electricity.

At the beginning of the activities, women described

themselves as shy and not influential in the public sphere explaining that they mostly stayed at home and that their responsibilities related to domestic work. During the interviews for the evaluation, some explained how at first men were the final reference in community decision-making, which initially also may have had an impact on how women would vote for instance on priorities in the action plans. *"It is true we attended meetings and we began to talk. However, we tell men everything. They do not have time for the meetings, but when they come back home, we consult their opinions and they decide,"* as one interviewee explained it.

However, women present at a community cross-learning and verification event in Jericho (where these observations were presented) explained how they had grown more confident through their participation in the PGs and now claimed more space for their own decision-making and in their communities in general. A woman from the village of Rabud, explained how: *"This claim could be true at the beginning of the project. Women were still shy and they prioritized the community interests over theirs. But later on, now our women, including myself, are stronger, more confident. We are active, we discuss our priorities and we take lead in the decision-making. Look at Amina, she was very shy and now she is a member of the village council!"* Amina (also from Rabud) agreed and added that women at the beginning were not empowered enough. They did prioritize community interests over their own interests - but that had also been a tactic that allowed the women to gain the trust of their communities, so they could address women's interests and priorities at a later stage. Women in the project monitoring committees explained that they had gained experience through designing and managing the projects. They also emphasized, that they had achieved greater bargaining power as a result of the process.

As illustrated above, women have had a crucial role in the protection, project and monitoring groups throughout the project. One explanation may be that women are more present and thus active in the communities, since men often seek employment outside their villages. The cash grants are estimated to have directly influenced the lives of 7,313 individuals of whom approximately 3,583 are women. In total 53 PG members were women while 28 were men during the reporting period. A woman from Abu Alurqan emphasized this point: *"EJ-YMCA's activities have enabled women in Abu Alurqan to play a major role in the community. We became stronger and now we feel like we have a voice. Now women from other communities are approaching us to ask for our expertise and guidance on how to voice their priorities in their communities."*



Three communities choose to spend part of the grants on improving the sanitary units in their local schools - among other to increase the number of female students who will stay on in school.

Photo: Nils Carstensen

Key findings

Summarizing the project evaluation, the cross-learning event and on-going monitoring the following core findings and lessons have emerged from the pilot projects in the occupied Palestinian West Bank.

1. Combining PVCA with community cash grants led to genuine engagement of communities and enhanced their sense of ownership, strengthened their community wellbeing, leadership and sense of responsibility over the initiatives,
2. Community cash grants enabled communities to respond to their own risks and resulted in community volunteering. The cash benefitted the entire community, and not just specific individuals,
3. Local monitoring committees proved to be important, they doubled-checked all prices through procurement and followed the implementation process carefully. As a result, it appears that suspicions or rumours about who was receiving and managing the money, why and for what could be put to rest in a good manner,
4. In several communities, the fact that they could use the cash grants to lead in activities, helped create the confidence and credibility that made external actors (local government and private donors including members of the Palestinian diaspora) contribute additional funding for the implementation of the action plans. Thus communities in some cases were able to mobilise significantly more than the US \$5,000 grant made available through the project. In addition, local government included some of the communities' identified priorities from the action plans in their plans and worked to achieve some of them - for example paving and rehabilitating internal roads in the village. Additionally, in several cases private contractors hired directly by the communities are reported to have worked at reduced price or for free,
5. In general, women played a particularly important role both in the protection groups and in the procurement and project implementation committees. It also appeared that women were more trusted to receive and manage the community cash grant than men,
6. Changes in the role of women have been significant

throughout the pilot. While men initially were seen as the final reference in community decision-making, women seemed to take on more and more of a decision-making role as the project progressed. The presence and participation of women in the protection groups and their on-going exchanges with EJ-YMCA, created a platform for some women to strengthen their self-esteem and bargaining power. Some women have begun seeing and re-assessing their abilities not just in the private (domestic) sphere but now also in the public sphere. Such results also highlight the need for the EJ-YMCA to have both female and male staff working with communities throughout the activities,

7. The activities and the process associated with them, generated opportunities for resilience building through strengthening self-help, collective action through organisation, volunteerism, ownership, local accountability, and dignity. It appears, that the approaches made it possible for communities to identify and address both immediate and long-term needs, while at the same time establishing a high level of community preparedness,
8. Communities should be further supported in developing particular relevant skills as per their own demand – including assisting them in carrying through advocacy efforts towards relevant local authorities. Equally, the national partner (EJ-YMCA) needs to incorporate the experiences now learned and continue to improve the manner in which they work with community-led approaches,
9. There is a need to clarify the terminology for this way of working, since terms such as ‘project’ and ‘programme’ instead of the possibly more appropriate term ‘initiative’ were used in both written documentation and conversational discourse. Lack of clarity regarding the terms (and their implicit meaning and expectations) appears to undermine the creativity, resourcefulness and relative autonomy required - and demonstrated - by the communities involved. Lack of clarity and common language around these essential terms could hamper creativity and cause institutionalization of volunteerism rather than facilitating a shift towards local ownership,
10. Given the nature of the crisis in Palestine, it would seem very relevant to scale up – and use way beyond the current pilot project reach – an approach that has by now demonstrated its ability to contribute very directly to addressing issues and challenges across the development - humanitarian nexus.

Working with these community-led approaches has been a process of learning-by-doing for all involved. While

all partners had a common vision of shifting power and influence towards local communities, all parties were challenged to let go of their traditional roles, regulations and thinking in one way or another. While neither EJ-YMCA nor the donor partners initially had a traditional full proposal complete with Log Frame, exit strategy key indicators etc., all relevant elements were developed along the way. EJ-YMCA successfully argued that this approach was different, needed to be measured in a different way and therefore developed a set of scale indicators to be monitored over a longer period, adapted to fit each community and allowing for communities and EJ-YMCA to gradually shift more and more responsibility to the communities themselves.

Generally speaking, the approaches implemented appear well suited to address and improve local capacities for resilience, and with that, an ability to respond to existing risks and needs in the Palestinian context. The activities have helped bridge existing gaps between humanitarian and development interventions and do provide a concrete example of the “nexus” so prominently featured at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and in the associated Grand Bargain Commitments. Despite this fact, and all the current rhetorical support to localisation and nexus, donor support for continuing the activities and for scaling up the use of the approaches in other parts of the West Bank and Palestine remains a major challenge.

A crucial lesson can be learned from the community member who told L2GP that: *“Now I know, that we don’t have to wait for some donor to come and solve our problems. We can plan and come up with solutions ourselves.”* This statement suggests that externally-led aid can make people feel powerless and create a sense of helplessness and thus end up doing harm. The Core Humanitarian Standard #3 clearly states: *“Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action”* and the associated Quality Criterion reads: *“Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.”*¹⁴ While humanitarian aid cannot as such provide dignity, it may take it away from people if not managed with due care and diligence. That said, external assistance whose starting point and approach build on trust and genuine recognition of local values and capacity may in fact contribute to strengthening a local sense of dignity. Based on collective experiences to date, EJ-YMCA and its partners (DCA and CoS) decided in late 2017 to continue the activities for an additional four years – while constantly learning and adjusting how best to use these approaches to support community-led crisis response.

Conclusion

The approaches detailed in this paper have proven themselves important opportunities for continued learning by doing on how to support community-led responses, protection and resilience building in a protracted and complex crisis – and doing so in a “space” where it is safe to experiment and fail. It is important, therefore, to ensure that initiatives in support of community-led programming within humanitarian-development nexus can be continued while ensuring that lessons are captured in real time to inform such emerging practices.

Integral to this process has been the commitment by EJ-YMCA to take on the significant extra workload to push and promote sclr approaches in global humanitarian advocacy forums. The crucial starting point for a holistic approach, like the one at hand, requires a mind-set that recognizes that communities themselves have ample opportunities and capacities to lead their own responses and are not just helpless victims dependent on external actors. Turning to the global “localisation debate”, this appears to be a growing realisation – but also one that still needs to translate into real action not just by donors but also by most NGOs – be they local, national or international.

A core feature of the survivor and community-led crisis response (sclr) approaches is the potential for social,

political and economic transformation that also attempts to identify and address root causes. Within the context and on-going harsh realities of Palestine such transformation remains a long-term challenge and not one that will be met through or within any typical donor project time frame - nor through any isolated humanitarian intervention or gesture. It does seem likely though, that the need for mechanisms, which enable community-led action will remain important for years or decades to come. Rather than seeing this as short-term “project bound” services and searching for so called exit-strategies, a more suitable and realistic option may be to integrate community-led responses as a core part of local governance and aid delivery systems.

As part of such a paradigm-shift in service and aid-delivery, opportunities should be considered to enable communities to begin addressing not just immediate livelihood and protection needs but also some of the local level political and social root causes of the on-going crisis – essentially trying to face up to the points made in the statement quoted early on in this paper: *“You have to realize that with this present logic, they can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change.”*

Authors' bio

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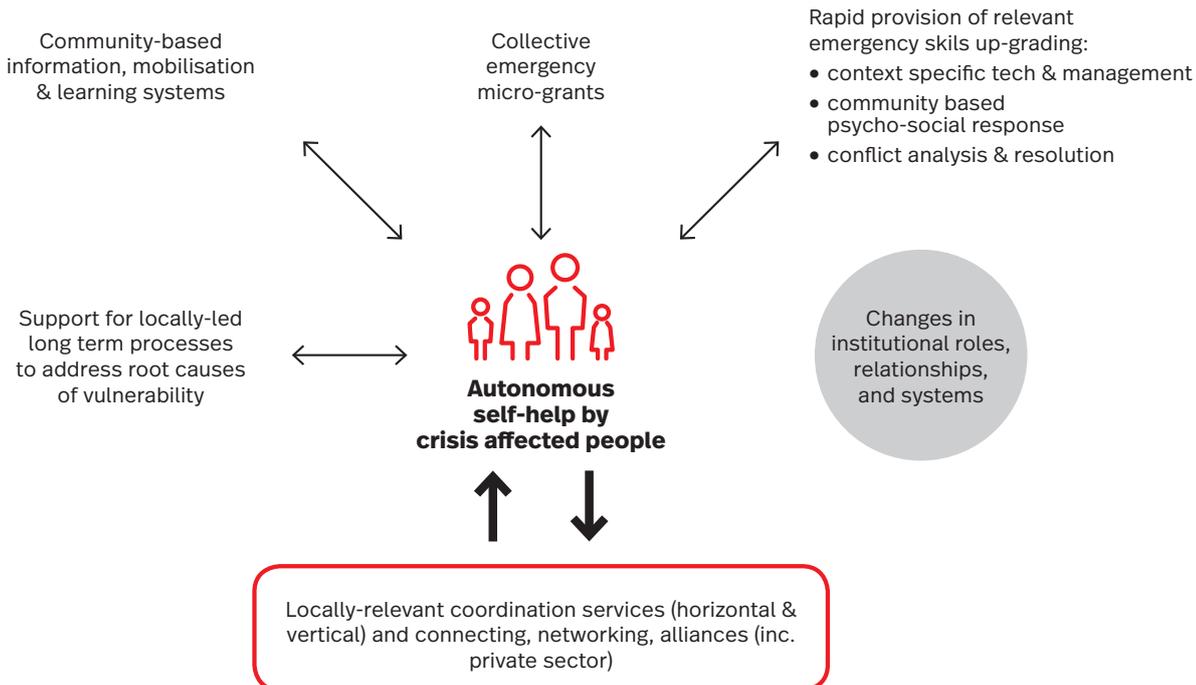
Annex 1

Background: What does survivor and community-led crisis responses look like?

On-going practical learning in Palestine, Sudan, Philippines in conjunction with the multi-country research and practise oriented Linking Preparedness, Response and

Resilience (LPRR) initiative¹⁵ have identified a set of core elements and principles guiding a locally-led response. These elements are outlined in figure 1:

Figure 1. “Community-based information, mobilisation and learning systems” is used as short-hand to describe a community-owned process of rapid situation analysis, appreciative inquiry, information-management, mobilisation, gap-analysis and learning that prioritises building on existing capacities to strengthen opportunities for self-help. This process is also referred to as Participatory Action Learning in Crises (PALC).



In addition, experiences with sclr approaches so far, have highlighted the following basic **guiding principles** underpinning the approach:

- i. A recognition that crisis-affected communities are always first-responders - and that often they are involved with more significant local and immediate “humanitarian” interventions than those led or supported by external aid actors. The emerging sclr approaches focus on trying to maximise the potential of that autonomous local response - not only to help it better address immediate needs but also to strengthen longer term resilience.
- ii. In developing sclr approaches, we are not seeking rigid tools or blueprints, but rather adaptive methodologies that will keep changing according to context and our own cumulative experiences.
- iii. These sclr approaches are not being promoted as some new ‘silver-bullet’ to replace all externally-led humanitarian aid interventions. The aim is to promote a more balanced overall response that recognises the primary importance of local agency and of supporting

it, while still having externals ready to fill gaps as needed.

- iv. In developing sclr approaches, we talk of “crisis” rather than “humanitarian” response because we continually find that communities will prioritise a much broader range of interventions (based both on need and on opportunities) than those typically covered by conventional humanitarian programming. Initiatives focusing on livelihoods, education, peace building, psycho-social well-being, exclusion, root causes, advocacy, even governance are often seen alongside more typical relief activities.
- v. Finally, the term “locally-led” is used as a generic term that recognises populations in crisis are made up of multiple communities each one of which is heterogeneous, generating multiple ‘leadership’ opportunities by multiple self-help groups, CBOs and active household members. This is not a hierarchical leadership model but rather a network with many leaders at different nodes.

End notes

1. The EJ-YMCA Women's Development Program (previously called Women's Training Program, but now referred to as WDP) was initiated in April 1993 to improve the socio-economic status and involvement of women in Palestinian society, through strengthening their decision-making capabilities and economic productivity both inside and outside their homes. The WTP activities include career counselling in schools and youth centres, assessment of personal capabilities, training of career counsellors, intensive training in the targeted rural areas, short-term training courses in non-conventional fields like curtains, bed covers and cushions production, loans and community based development models.
2. Oslo agreement: Area A: Full Palestinian civil and security control; Area B: Full Palestinian civil control and joint Israel-Palestinian security control; Area C: Full Israeli control over security, planning and construction. 61 % of the West Bank, UNOCHA "Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018 - Palestine", page 12
3. Rafael Eguiguren & Luna Saadeh, Protection in the occupied Palestinian territories: "They can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change" (L2GP 2014), page 12
4. Community cash grants differ from individual/household cash grants in the sense, that the grant is given to a group of community members to be used for activities, which aim at benefitting all or large sections of their community.
5. L2GP, January 2018, Luna Saadeh: "Empowering Community Engagement and Resilience through Cash Grants".
6. This learning brief is one out of a small series of L2GP briefs that captures recent learning from locally led efforts in Palestine, Philippines, Myanmar, Kenya and Sudan. (www.local2global.info)
7. L2GP, "They can do projects here for 1,000 years and nothing will change" <https://www.local2global.info/research/palestine-opt>
8. Including DanChurchAid, Church of Sweden and Christian Aid
9. The Participatory Vulnerability Capacity Assessment Toolkit, Christian Aid, P.A.R.C, EJ-YMCA and Y.W.C.A
10. In Palestine, the protracted conflict has accelerated needs beyond survival. The survivor and community-led crisis response approaches used in other contexts has therefore been modified to fit the Palestinian reality which requires a holistic approach beyond immediate needs.
11. See www.local2global.info for more information on existing and up-coming case studies with the sclr approaches in Philippines, Myanmar, Kenya and Sudan.
12. L2GP, January 2018, Luna Saadeh: "Empowering Community Engagement and Resilience through Cash Grants".
13. Local 2 Global Protection "...more with less. Letting go in Palestine" <https://www.local2global.info/>
14. The Core Humanitarian Standard <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>
15. LPRR is a DEPP/Difid funded multi-agency research and practise development initiative led by Christian Aid.
16. ODI HPN 72, London 2012 South & all: Local to global protection in Myanmar, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe (<https://odihpn.org/resources/local-to-global-protection-in-myanmar-burma-sudan-south-sudan-and-zimbabwe/>), ODI HPG, London 2016, Christina Bennet & all: Time to let go Page 5 (<https://odihpn.org/resources/local-to-global-protection-in-myanmar-burma-sudan-south-sudan-and-zimbabwe/>)

"It was important for us to implement the project ourselves. It was not done by an NGO or by some company – it was done by us! A lot of work was done voluntary and nobody tried to make a profit. What was saved by choosing a good tender and by voluntary work, we could spend on more projects." (Protection group member in Abu al Ghuzlan)

Photo: Nils Carstensen

