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Indigenous data in effective humanitarian responses

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Abstract

In the international humanitarian landscape, crisis interventions are deployed based on a long-standing working culture that presupposes that local authorities are usually overwhelmed during a crisis and unable to mobilise local capacity. Thus, external human resource mobilisation is necessary. However, this may only be true in various instances, such as natural disasters, where rapid response is needed to extinguish further harm to human life. In most cases, there are no mechanisms to make prior assessments that can inform decision-makers about the kind of international assistance needed in the local context.

This is because existing data for the availability of resources is produced mainly by international aid agencies and their governing political institutions. This database of knowledge, which leans heavily on a post-colonial Anglocentric viewpoint about 'best practices', is used as the baseline to assess the ability of potential partners to mobilise their resources, while failing to include the capacity of local agents to determine what capacity exists in a particular context, what they are already capable of delivering and how best to support their response system (United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction [UNISDR] 2008).

However, as access to digital communication devices and other globally useful technology in resource-constrained rural settings continues to emerge, this may soon change. This paper explores the ways in which Indigenous and local knowledge should contribute to the exploration of intelligent and sustainable solutions that are well-suited within the local context to mitigate and understand humanitarian crises before, during and after they occur, and how to curate, analyse and use local data and knowledge systems to create innovations that are sustainable and adaptive to the priorities of the local population.

Leadership relevance

This paper aims to showcase the importance of harnessing the full potential of local knowledge systems and data for international organisations to deliver better policies and services to citizens in marginalised communities worldwide. The paper also acknowledges that key challenges exist to identify and unpack the barriers to local knowledge drivers, such as power hierarchies within the international organisation that diminish the ability to collaborate with new and untried practices. Emphasis is placed on the importance of establishing non-hierarchical connections with local humanitarian actors living in the affected communities, in order to deliver aid and assistance that is relevant, helpful, and sustainable. The paper concludes by citing the *ubuntu* way, an Indigenous African resource mobilisation system, as a potentially beneficial method of sharing leadership roles to effectively mobilise local and international resources collaboratively. This approach ensures all sources of knowledge are valued and shared collectively to safeguard heritage and synthesise knowledge that generates sustainable, long-term solutions when responding to a crisis in marginalised communities.

Introduction

The connection between Indigenous knowledge and effective humanitarian action in local and marginalised settings has developed more research interest in recent years. The newer discussions on the importance of having access to this data highlight local actors' potential to improve humanitarian responses through integrating crucial knowledge into standards of operation. This paper argues that when deemed valid, local knowledge would help mitigate the effects of the crisis and even provide essential data for creating an effective early warning system. In doing so, those involved in the response can catch signs of impending disasters and mitigate the long-term effects on those directly affected (UNISDR 2008). Throughout scholarly literature detailing the role of local knowledge in humanitarian response, several arguments have been made for proposing more mainstream access to Indigenous knowledge (Davies 2020).

Local knowledge would help mitigate the effects of the crisis and even provide essential data for creating an effective early warning system.

For example, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, since international responders could not travel to marginalised areas inhabited by Indigenous people, members of these communities self-organised to create effective response systems. It is now undoubtedly clear that local populations living in harsh conditions have a database of practices and strategies embedded in traditional knowledge designed to respond effectively to natural disasters (Zyck and Krebs 2015). Despite limited access to modern resources, these Indigenous residents have been able to mobilise the necessary resources to respond effectively to their immediate needs. Therefore, incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the humanitarian response mechanism would be beneficial to the responders. This system should include the participation of key members of the affected community, thus empowering local citizens to take leading roles in mitigating and reducing the effects of major crises on the residents' daily lives.

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The consensus among humanitarian response field agents is unanimous in agreeing that local data is valuable, but quantifying its precise value is the challenge. In rural settings where modern resources are scarce, the process of gathering and disseminating local knowledge and mobilising local capacity is routinely deprioritised in favour of other Western standards of interventions. These methods are preferred because they provide quicker, more visible outcomes, usually intended to give immediate feedback to external donors (Zyck and Krebs 2015). This is despite multiple sources of evidence-based outcomes showing that local knowledge gathering that promotes secure, fluid, and non-hierarchical information sharing between humanitarian 'outsiders' and 'insiders' can help overcome these 'information islands' when local resources are valued and shared optimally.

Indigenous knowledge and its management in humanitarian crises is a highly underrepresented body of information in the literature on localised responses (that is, transferring leadership for resource mobilisation to local rather than international actors). Any reference to local knowledge is usually reduced to technical know-how such as the need for interpreters of the vernacular language, intricacies around access to local machinery and hardware, or basic contextual data such as who the elders are or who is in charge of local governing bodies. Such knowledge is usually invoked during the preparation and planning phase to assess the needs and give feedback to donors about the budget required to disperse international aid. However, this type of knowledge base fails to accurately assess the crisis based on the overarching goal of restoring people's livelihoods. In order to ensure that local communities can continue to prosper long after the crisis has dissipated, it is necessary to embed local knowledge into the standards of response.

Local data is sidelined when mobilising knowledge in crisis response because local humanitarian knowledge tends to be viewed as intuitive rather than evidence based. Furthermore, some local responders may even try to conform insufficiently to international humanitarian expectations, thus undermining the potential for local knowledge to be valued and utilised by the international development agents.

This paper argues that the standardised notion of evidence as something tangible or measurable by Western scientific measures needs to be challenged to include other undocumented, creative and flexible methods of knowledge collection. This process should be less concerned about the current measures of formalising data and more interested in being inclusive of communities' informal data that is equally adaptable and adheres to logical research protocols.

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Scholars of Indigenous cultures argue that local knowledge systems found in local narratives provide significant "possibilities of existence based on different metaphysics that can generate other ways of knowing/being" (Andreotti 2019). These narratives do not adhere to modern standards of knowledge gathering and dissemination. They are passed from person to person or from generation to generation or exchanged in a peer-to-peer environment. The argument is reinforced by the notion that an Indigenous knowledge database contains a unique understanding of "temporality and futurity", which is irreducible to those oriented towards modern Western knowledge.

In addition to the absence of local contextual knowledge and the voices of local agents in crises, is the gaping lack of local capacity, or "capacity constraints" (Saferworld 2020). This pattern continues to replicate itself all around marginalised settings despite wide acknowledgment that local humanitarian action is "far-reaching, quick and relevant" (Gingerich and Cohen 2015). The unwillingness to break the pattern is partly a result of the dilemma that international responders face in defining what capacities are essential or valuable to respond effectively and the tendency to measure value based on internationalised, Western standards.

Thus, this paper argues that global humanitarian action should encompass local knowledge systems to accurately assess and describe a community's perceptions of the crisis. As a result, this knowledge can provide sensible solutions to delivering aid and assistance that meets the immediate and long-term needs of the local citizens.

After analysing the research findings in *Extreme Economies*, a book by economics scholar Richard Davies (2020), researchers from the Brookings Institute (2021) conclude that the results provide critical social findings that hint at the "role of informal networks in building social trust as the glue that binds societies and nations". The analysis asserts that "Davies' stories reveal a variety and diversity of functions performed by informal networks", which further supports the concluding remarks of this paper.

Such reports are instrumental in providing evidence that local data, a synthesised version of Indigenous knowledge, is key to promoting sustainable innovations, which marginalised citizens can manage and maintain over time. When conducted to include local humanitarians in the overall crisis response, these sorts of reports help diversify the crisis response methods based on the premise that in any humanitarian emergency, local responders already have the capacity needed to react quickly in specific areas (Gingerich 2017).

As one survey in a recent report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI 2021) stated, "Even before any external emergency support comes in, it is actually the people and their existing local system and culture that help them survive and this capacity should be strengthened, not weakened".

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Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the potential for international responders to adapt the response and delivery of resources to the methods utilised by local responders who are more knowledgeable about the daily, evolving crisis, and shows a crucial need to strengthen partnerships between local and international responders (IASC 2020). Further, the global response to the pandemic reveals that data collected by national and local responders are more nuanced and timely, and less inflated than data collected by international agencies situated away from the crisis areas. This localised data provides a more accurate representation of the situation and facilitates better monitoring, thus enabling a more successful implementation process that local citizens can sustain.

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In conclusion, this paper asserts that an evolving database of local knowledge is a valuable tool for responding to humanitarian crises and unravelling some of the social norms that underpin harmful practices. If deemed a valuable asset, this knowledge will go a long way towards understanding the key drivers of social and behaviour change in communities that are hard to monitor and thereby provide a better methodology for keeping track of any shift in these practices over time.

What is Indigenous data?

Data is synonymous with knowledge. Indigenous data is, therefore, local knowledge generated from reliable sources living in rural communities who have a solid connection to the geographical terrain and a deep understanding of the needs of local citizens. Research shows that Indigenous data feeds local knowledge systems and plays a major role in ensuring that communities living in harsh landscapers that are prone to more natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and tsunamis have the technical capacity and can form the resilience required to reduce and avoid undesired short and long-term impacts from these hazards.

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Resilience is defined as:

"The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management" (UNDRR 2017).

The United Nations has already embedded Indigenous knowledge within the Hyogo Framework for Action (UNISDR 2005), primarily focusing on the importance of information management and exchange. It also highlights the use of "relevant traditional and Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage", stressing how it needs to be shared with and adapted to different target audiences such as international humanitarian agencies.

It is important to stress that contrary to an institutionalised humanitarian belief that Indigenous knowledge is not reliably factual, the idea of data itself is not a foreign concept to custodians of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous people "have always been data creators, data users, and data stewards" (Carroll et al. 2019). They have been passing it down through folktales, fables, song, dance, and other oral forms of storytelling. When closely observed, complex data is found embedded in Indigenous instructional practices and cultural principles.

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Furthermore, heritage studies widely acknowledge that many Indigenous knowledge systems exist because of the ability for new generations to gather data by observation and experience with the natural environment, which then informs Indigenous practices, protocols, and ways of interacting with other people and with the natural world. Evidence exists to discount the sidelined positioning of Indigenous knowledge as intellectually wanting or unsustainably stored. For example, numerous studies demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge was meticulously stored and recorded in oral histories, ancestral stories, and

heritage. Indicators such as "calendar sticks, totem poles, and even instruments" were used as information storage space openly accessible to all community members (Lonebear 2016).

Further studies show evidence that Indigenous populations are often well-positioned to observe and understand local ecosystems (UNISDR 2008). Even before we developed high-tech early warning systems or sophisticated standards and procedures for humanitarian response, Indigenous communities worldwide had been responding to natural disasters and other forms of humanitarian tragedies using traditional knowledge that was fit for purpose. This knowledge would be approved by previous generations and then passed down to the next generation. Their success in responding effectively to various crises is due to their close interactions with nature and observations of the ecosystem in which they reside in an interdependent way, observing other life forms as equal inhabitants of the natural landscape.

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Since Indigenous knowledge is garnered throughout a lifetime and enhanced by oral history passed down through generations, Indigenous people often also have knowledge of changes in social and environmental systems over many decades or even centuries. Also, as many Indigenous people live in remote areas, they are often well placed to provide detailed information on local biodiversity and provide accurate warnings about any impending disruption to the circle of life.

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Today, it is undoubtedly clear that the conservation of threatened wildlife or plant species in protected areas will largely depend upon the peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and development of partnerships with the long-term inhabitants of these areas. When Indigenous people become fully engaged as equal partners in developing knowledge data systems for crisis response, they also become crucial agents providing timely research and monitoring, evaluation, and awareness raising about any crises that directly affect their livelihoods.

Despite the ongoing discussions about the importance of harnessing local expertise in gathering Indigenous data for effective crisis response, the international humanitarian community tends to separate humans from their natural landscape when disaster strikes. This separation is rooted in a widely held notion that people must be excluded if environments are to be preserved. However, such a division is unacceptable in Indigenous worldviews as ecosystems and social systems are viewed as co-existent. Thus, landscapes are rendered meaningless if the interdependent relationship between the ecosystem and social system is interrupted, as this symbiotic relationship forms the bedrock of Indigenous people's commitment to preserving the natural landscape that sustains them.

Furthermore, unlike Western scientists' opposition to the spiritual dimension of their findings, Indigenous thought values logic and spirituality, making no distinction between them. It is for this reason that efforts to contain Indigenous knowledge outside of its cultural and spiritual foundations often results in its misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and fragmentation.

President of the Center for Public Service Communications, John Scott, stated in a roundtable discussion with *The New Humanitarian* that:

> "The idea of traditional knowledge and resilience, strength, and risk reduction comes from paying attention and being a part of your environment—being observant, learning lessons, and moving on. It is not a monolithic thing. It is not historical documentation or a closed loop. Indigenous knowledge comes from hard knocks—from having experience and learning from it collectively" (Clement 2020).

Thus, by nature, Indigenous data "center[s] on interdependence" (Carroll et al. 2019), not the acquisition of personal knowledge. While individuals hold specific knowledge as oral storytellers or singers, or those with a specific, deeper understanding of the intricacies of the natural world, ultimately, all members of the community are held responsible for the collective stewardship of this vital knowledge.

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This paper will touch on *ubuntu*, an African philosophical concept of collective knowledge gathering and custodianship, in the concluding remarks. Within the context of the international humanitarian landscape, the *ubuntu* way could help establish a new understanding that knowledge about responding to a crisis should similarly belong to the collective. This method of co-creating knowledge systems is how Indigenous people collectively hold valuable data to ensure that it is accessible to all community members at certain times of need. If applied to the humanitarian landscape, the *ubuntu* way would provide new working conditions between international and local agents to ensure that the training required to respond effectively is passed on to all members of the humanitarian community, and that Indigenous data is identified and defined appropriately.

How can international humanitarian agencies identify local data?

It is critical first to recognise that Indigenous knowledge transfer is more than simply orally sourced information. Knowledge and the people's needs, practices, and lifestyles are all visible through the resources used for enhancing life. These could be materials used for building shelter, locally available sources of high nutrition, and also the types of stories or narratives shared on local communication channels or even orally from person to person. Therefore, it would be necessary for humanitarian agencies to build relationships with trusted local humanitarian agents to begin collecting and storing essential local/traditional knowledge and technical expertise and distribute it across all levels of the humanitarian system.

However, it is equally important to note that while the co-sharing of knowledge between local and international agents can broaden cooperation, it is sometimes the breeding ground for hidden power struggles. Even when well-meaning international agents collaborate with their local peers in field missions, the final decision-making mechanism is steered by a higher level of managers who mainly reside in headquarters in the Global North. There is also a tendency for some local agents to only share information that they believe is what the donors wish to receive.

Nevertheless, various means are available to create a neutral space in which international and local agents can come together and experience a peer-to-peer knowledge exchange exercise. For example, 'Insight', a participatory game designed by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Tandon and Chmutina 2020), is intended to capture "Community Held Knowledge for Disaster Resilience and Sustaining Heritage" by international and local professionals in a non-hierarchical way. This game could also help establish a working relationship between international and local humanitarian agents by tapping into the knowledge and experience held by local experts living in marginalised communities and prone to severe natural and humanitarian disasters.

International humanitarian agencies should also engage in interagency knowledge-sharing to challenge their understanding of the local setting and find answers to what they do not know. In order to achieve this level of awareness, they would also need to recognise local data as fragmented pieces of highly synthesised Indigenous knowledge, which is the foundation of localised narratives containing effective, actionable practices, as demonstrated in the infographic below.

Indigenous knowledge as data

Collected & sorted

Used to solve local problems

For sustainable development

Effective use of Indigenous data. Vera Hoffman, Grade 10 Art Student, United World College, ISAK–Japan, 2021.

By interrogating their self-beliefs about the levels of intelligence and expertise of local humanitarians and recognising the top-down power discourse between the Global North donors and the Global South recipients, international humanitarian agents can better understand how to identify local data. Understanding and accepting that it does not measure against the same Western standards of knowledge verification would also help them learn to curate and interpret what is crucial to delivering aid and assistance in the most cost-effective, locally relevant, and globally sustainable way.

Ultimately, international agents will need to start dismantling the internal hierarchical system that stands in the way of effectively functioning as peers alongside their local counterparts in order to fully accept and help identity Indigenous data systems as a valid form of knowledge.

Understanding the dynamism of local data

Indigenous knowledge is the bedrock of local data. In order to effectively curate data that is necessary and context-fit to responding to humanitarian crises in non-modern settings, it is crucial to understand the premise and dynamism of local knowledge.

Often, Indigenous knowledge is represented as a fixed body of wisdom passed down intact from generation to generation. Also, such terms as 'tradition' or 'heritage' are used to describe its relevance, suggesting that is it dated or was only valuable to a past civilisation (United Nations Education, Social, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] 2021). In reality, local knowledge is a continuous process of reassessment, renewal, and expansion that ensures each new generation has the intellectual capacity to use this database to innovate new ways of adapting to emerging changes and find solutions to new crises.

A common misconception about Indigenous people is that they are averse to modern technologies, preferring outdated resources that are not fit for current times. Others argue that by embracing new technologies, Indigenous people would abandon their heritage and lose touch with their values and natural environment. But in reality, as expressed in a statement by UNESCO (2021), "the capacity to incorporate new tools and skills has always been fundamental to the dynamism of Indigenous cultures". It is by being selective in choosing the right modern technology to incorporate into their traditional methods that many Indigenous communities have maintained their social and economic systems to enhance their distinctive worldview.

Due to the speed with which the modern world is embracing and innovating new digital technology, this paper recognises that Indigenous people face "a difficult paradox in their relationship with modernity" despite their continued effort to adapt to new ways of being (Andreotti et al. 2019). To avoid unprecedented clashes with other civilisations encroaching on their landscapes, Indigenous communities living in those spaces will need to increase their use of various modern technological advances. In addition, they will also need to share their unique technological achievements, showcasing what has been developing

alongside modern technological advances to broaden the global community's understanding of the dynamic nature of local knowledge systems steeped in Indigenous data. This will help external humanitarian responders understand that there exist other best practices available for responding to various crises that threaten humanity's continued existence.

How to use Indigenous knowledge for effective crisis response

During times of drought, war, or the extreme, adverse effects of climate change, Indigenous knowledge provides invaluable guidance on how to collect locally sourced resources that would rapidly aid in halting the crisis (Indigenous Disaster Risk Reduction). However, well-meaning international humanitarian agencies vastly underutilise this knowledge due to the nature of the effort it would take to source, verify and learn how to use local data to innovate sustainable solutions that will continue to solve impending disasters (Zyck and Krebs 2015).

**During times of drought, war, or the extreme, adverse effects of climate change, Indigenous knowledge provides invaluable guidance on how to collect locally sourced resources that would rapidly aid in halting the crisis.**

Although Indigenous knowledge is widely referred to as informal due to the unconventional way in which it is stored, it is essential knowledge that can be authenticated using orally sourced historical findings. This data records past civilisations' traditional knowledge, sometimes referred to as Indigenous scientific knowledge (UNESCO 2021). It includes lived experiences that can be verified using epistemological methods.

This kind of knowledge is gleaned from the recurring stories passed down through generations as blueprints for surviving future crises. These 'stories' are actual records of knowledge databases containing specific instructions or 'survival knowledge' and solutions to sustainable development challenges, tailormade to keep mending the social fabric of the local population and ensure their continued prosperity.

**These 'stories' are actual records of knowledge databases containing specific instructions or 'survival knowledge' and solutions to sustainable development challenges.**

From an Indigenous population standpoint, where a lot of development work is concentrated, it is a misconception to assume that the humanitarian crises that emerge out of conflict situations in these communities result from a lack of knowledge on how to resolve disputes. Most of the time, the problems are instigated by a disruption to a complex system of intricately interconnected relationships formed through social ties that date back several centuries.

When disruption to this system occurs, it may take several years of attempted conflict resolution using strategies and solutions that have worked effectively in the past, before the problem becomes a disaster worthy of international attention. When this happens, the kind of rapid humanitarian response intended to help ease the immediate effects of the aftermath is not always effective in solving the long-term effects of the crisis.

To respond effectively in these areas, humanitarian agencies need to analyse the backstory that led to this point of irreconcilable dispute. When unpacked, there is usually a traceable oral database of information that multiple sources can validate to provide a verifiable background and context in which the point of difference emerged. Based on the information analysed, this gives guidance on the most effective means to move forward peacefully.

These crises are not isolated cases that require standardised institutional solutions. They should be considered indicators of a much larger story with key players and multiple outcomes at stake. Therefore, it is counterintuitive to humanitarian action to assume that local or informal knowledge is secondary to other mainstreamed solutions, which may have successfully resolved crises in other parts of the world. In most cases, such solutions may fail to solve crises specific to marginalised and underdeveloped parts of the world.

As humanitarian crises continue to increase alongside the growing global population, response agencies must change the language and understanding of what essential knowledge is or is not. To Indigenous communities, what the rest of the world considers informal knowledge is the primary source of information about many aspects of their lifestyle. This knowledge is usually meticulously stored in the memories of the old folk to be shared at precise moments with the youth through oral storytelling and well-designed peer-to-peer cultural engagements. This practice ensures that the older citizens are held responsible for continuous learning and maintaining knowledge about the community's best practices. Doing so facilitates cooperation among the elders, a process which, when given due time, could even accelerate the possibilities of achieving such high global aspirations as gender equality.

For example, men and women share common knowledge within Indigenous communities with clearly established gender roles, such as those living in forested areas in the Philippines. However, they also hold specific knowledge sets to perform specific roles (Vera and Brusola-Vera

2021). Women have areas of expertise such as forest management, complemented by their transmission methods. This system and process of disseminating knowledge is essential to sustaining Indigenous people's livelihoods, values, and community well-being.

To respond effectively in these settings, external humanitarian agents need a clear understanding of how the differences in expertise between women and men, especially concerning resource access and decision-making, can sometimes create patterns of gender-specific vulnerability in the face of a humanitarian crisis. Therefore, external humanitarian responders also need to take a keen interest in the cultural understanding of the gender-specific vulnerabilities in disaster-prone communities when responding to crises in these locations.

To establish an effective humanitarian response system that includes local knowledge, international agencies need to establish who the key local actors are, as they usually have a long-standing presence in their communities. These local agents have gained respect and a network of valuable relationships based on trust, thus giving them immediate logistical access to resources that are not readily available to outside responders. Ultimately, local actors are best positioned to mobilise local experts who can provide leadership and guidance on using Indigenous knowledge for effective crisis response.

Coming together to respond together: The *Ubuntu* way

The concept of *ubuntu* loosely translates into a communal or collective effort. It is a philosophical ideology that originated with the Bantu languages in Africa to promote collaboration for finding long-term solutions that challenge all citizens' individual prosperity and collective well-being. From a humanitarian standpoint, the *ubuntu* way encourages a collective working mindset, which requires an improvised, inclusive, compassionate, and collaborative understanding of different ideas from different experts, especially those who have a deeper connection and understanding of the local narrative.

From a humanitarian standpoint, the ubuntu way encourages a collective working mindset, which requires an improvised, inclusive, compassionate, and collaborative understanding of different ideas from different experts.

Therefore, the *ubuntu* way dismantles knowledge hierarchies that are synonymous with formal and mainly Eurocentric knowledge-sharing methods based on the premise that Indigenous knowledge systems are founded on the interdependent relationships between people and nature. As a result, no knowledge is considered isolated to an individual, and all knowledge is considered suitable for use by all to preserve the land and the continuation of heritage.

This paper argues that the *ubuntu* way has great potential to redistribute humanitarian leadership to all knowledge experts, in order to contribute further to global knowledge relevant for effective humanitarian response in marginalised settings. This knowledge can also be essentialised within the global standards for crisis response to redesign the humanitarian response system to ensure that the solutions applied promote sustainability and resiliency for all world citizens, and that humanitarian agents, whether local or global, learn to work together as equal peers.

Conclusion

The challenges of today's world are vast and complex and require the mobilisation of the best available resources and essential knowledge to make intelligent decisions. This paper argues that Indigenous knowledge holders play a key role in building this database and should be equal knowledge partners. This argument challenges humanitarian actors whose decision-making mechanism is driven by donors in the Global North to open their doors and usher in local knowledge experts to the table. In doing so, the collective peer group can succeed in addressing jointly defined challenges such as the effects of climate change on the lives of all citizens of the world.

It should be acknowledged that each group of knowledge experts brings different and valuable expertise to the table. When allowed to emerge in a non-hierarchical manner, it could lead to smart innovations and novel solutions to complex problems. For this to happen, the communication channels between the two groups must remain open, and as argued above, the *ubuntu* way could be a useful method of building dialogues founded on mutual respect.

International humanitarian actors are called on to take a step back to listen to other people's voices, people who can speak in their own terms and language, and use this knowledge as evidence of the diversity of solutions available for responding effectively to a crisis in non-modern settings.

There is a clear need for an institutionalised behavioural shift from rejecting knowledge that does not conform to Western standards to accepting that there are other effective ways of solving problems around the world. In order to integrate local knowledge into humanitarian response systems, the members of the governing humanitarian institutions will also need to self-reflect upon their internalised biases against other worldviews in order to expand their own.

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