



SPECIAL REPORT

# HUMANITARIAN AID





“At its core, humanitarian aid is about ensuring that when disaster strikes, the right people get the help they need.”

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## Letter from the Editor

In recent years, we’ve seen climate change play out across headlines as one natural disaster after another strikes around the world. From devastating flooding to wildfires, droughts, and heat waves, today’s children will experience routinely what for many of us have been once-in-a-generation events.

While tackling climate change may one day mitigate the strength and frequency of natural disasters, there will always be work to do on the frontline and in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

Even a cursory glance at the Palladium website makes it clear how broad a range of experts and capabilities the company has, but as a desk worker myself, the work of which I’m most in awe comes from our humanitarian aid, emergency response, and logistics teams. One of the reasons we launched The Catalyst in 2018 was to get their stories out - the ones they’re far too busy (and often too humble) to tell themselves.

Humanitarian aid takes many different forms, from supply chain logistics to operations support and coordination with government entities, including the donor governments on whose behalf we’re often proudly working. It’s a field that’s constantly innovating, with blockchain, greener practices, and more resilient infrastructure just a few of the latest efforts.

But at its core, it’s about ensuring that when disaster strikes, the right people get the help they need in the days and weeks that follow. It’s working with local responders and a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and physical context in each unique geography and circumstance. It’s the difference between life and death.

The articles in this edition of our Special Report are curated from those published by our thought leaders and reflect their unique perspectives on humanitarian aid, be it from a particular industry, stakeholder, case study, or point of view.

To learn more or speak to a member of our team, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

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All the best,

**Elizabeth Godo**

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# Four Ways Humanitarian Aid Can (and Must) Go Greener

BY  
**Nicola Davey**  
Procurement Project Officer, Palladium



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Palladium's Nicola Davey has been tasked with making procurement and logistics more sustainable, specifically when it comes to providing humanitarian aid. As Procurement Project Officer for the UK's Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team, she shares the steps her team is taking and considerations for others who rely on logistics to save lives.

Logistics – from transporting materials to storing goods for future use – creates 11 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. For the humanitarian community (committed to the principle of 'do no harm'), this is a significant concern as the immediate procurement and delivery of supplies in the aftermath of a crisis can mean the difference between life and death. How can we ensure that saving lives doesn't mean harming the planet in the process?

For the UK's Humanitarian and Stabilisation Team (HSOT), the answer lies in overhauling the way we work and respond to crises globally, approaching the problem from four key perspectives.

### 1. IMPROVING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PROCUREMENT

It's not always straightforward to apply sustainability principles to procurement. Initiatives that seem environmentally friendly may have unanticipated consequences for our carbon footprint or cause increased waste further down the line.

To encourage our team to change procurement approaches, we developed a guidance document explaining how to apply environmental considerations to our work.

## “How can we ensure that saving lives doesn't mean harming the planet in the process?”

Used together with an environmental review form, we're ensuring that the environment is at the forefront in every procurement request.

Each response begins with a Supply Chain Plan with a key focus on environmental impact, allowing us to support wider Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) priorities such as the promotion of locally-sourced procurement. Through an analysis of regional procurement options, often prepared with partners (such as the NGO [Field Ready](#)), we can reduce the carbon footprint of our freight while empowering the local economy.

We are also working with our existing suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging used for non-food items (such as tents and water filters) while encouraging

the use of more environmentally friendly packaging where possible.

As we supply goods to the UK government, we are in a privileged position to exercise some influence over our suppliers' environmental policies and procedures. As a result, we will be adding environmental criteria to due diligence assessments for suppliers with whom we spend over GBP 5,000. This will allow the development of a database of suppliers' environmental policies and encourage them to develop policies where they are missing.

### 2. CARBON OFFSETTING AND REDUCTION

Arranging and managing aircraft charters is one of the main areas of HSOT's procurement and logistics supply chain. As part of this arrangement, Palladium's air charter broker offers carbon offset credits through the [Carbon Trade Exchange \(CTX\)](#) for FCDO flights chartered by HSOT.

In June 2020, we arranged a charter to Bangladesh, which delivered oxygen generation equipment to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) using 73,000kg of fuel. Air Charter Services offset based on the assumption that each kg

“As we supply goods to the UK government, we are in a privileged position to exercise some influence over our suppliers' environmental policies and procedures”

of fuel burnt produced 3.3kg of carbon dioxide. As the Bangladesh flight was a part charter using 20 percent of the aircraft capacity, 48,100kg of carbon dioxide was offset through this mechanism. In August, we transported medical supplies to Beirut in response to the port explosion, burning 22,500kg of fuel and offsetting 74,250kg of carbon dioxide.

To reduce the carbon footprint of courier and freight movements, we are developing framework agreements for international freight forwarding and haulage with environmental considerations as a key focus of the tender process.

We've already awarded an agreement to international courier service [DPD](#) in light of their strong environmental policies and competitive pricing. For example, they aim to ensure that 10 percent of their fleet will be electric by 2021 and that all parcel deliveries are carbon neutral for no additional cost.

Part of our research during a response focuses on regional supply of surface freight so that we can offer alternatives to air charter to reduce our carbon footprint. For example, during the recent response to the Camp Moria fire in Greece, we offered a surface freight option as an alternative to air charter and trucked solar lanterns from the UK to Athens.

### 3. IMPROVING OVERALL ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND WATER CONSERVATION

We are focusing on improving the energy efficiency of our main operational base,

the UK Aid Disaster Response Centre in Kemble, UK. This includes leasing an electric forklift for stock handling and an electric car to act as the primary vehicle in our fleet and installing solar panels on the roof for a solar generator and battery charging station.

We are also creating a rainwater capture system, initially to flush the lavatories. If this is successful, we will investigate whether the rainwater can be filtered to a potable level to supply the warehouse's drinking water. LED bulbs will replace all lightbulbs, which use 75 percent less energy and last 25 times longer.

Our hope is to improve the green credentials of our standing operation through these adjustments.

### 4. REDUCTION OF WASTE SENT TO LANDFILL

A key focus for improving the Disaster Response Centre's sustainability has been reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill. We now receive monthly reports from the waste disposal company, demonstrating how the waste is disposed. Once a baseline is established, we will plan activities to maximise recycling and reuse.

Our procurement and logistics team have a strong track record in modifying pieces of equipment to increase their service life and utility, rather than disposing of them and purchasing new items. For example, we recently saved GBP 50,000 after refurbishing a heavy forklift that was repatriated from Mozambique when it was deployed for the Cyclone Idai response.

We are working closely with other HSOT team members to roll out further environmental initiatives, such as utilising only environmentally friendly office consumables and reducing the carbon footprint of deployments globally.

This will allow us to continue our mission to limit any negative environmental impact caused by the HSOT program and ensure that the work we're doing continues to be sustainable for both people and planet. ♻️

# How Does the Australian Government Procure Emergency Relief Supplies?

BY  
**Elizabeth Godo**  
Director of Communications, Palladium

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth brings over 15 years of experience creating compelling, inspiring, and influential communications with a direct link to business results. Her work has shaped multiple Fortune 500 companies, and she continues to connect people to purpose as Global Head of Communication and Editor in Chief of The Catalyst, Palladium's online publication.



The current crisis is laying bare the strengths and weaknesses in our global supply chains and readiness to get emergency relief items to those who need them most. The Australian Government has long recognised how vulnerable the Indo-Pacific region is to “external shocks” (what humanitarians call the natural disasters, conflicts, and economic swings that can increase poverty and cost lives) and sees itself as a leader in responding to these shocks internationally.

In practice, this has meant that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has had to stay at the ready, through the cost effective, strategic pre-positioning of relief supplies, and maintaining standing arrangements for immediate access to air, sea, and land transport across the region.

“In an emergency response to a sudden crisis, there isn't always time to approach the market and ask suppliers to develop

**“When people are suffering or require shelter, they need immediate assistance.”**

complicated proposals or ideas,” says Peter Diplas, head of Palladium's Humanitarian Logistics team. “When people are suffering or require shelter, they need immediate assistance. What's required is a rapid mechanism for pre-approved, pre-vetted support.”

For DFAT, this support comes in the form of the 5-year (2018-2023) “Provision of Humanitarian Logistics Capability Services” contract, held by Palladium.

“Essentially, we act as the procurement arm on behalf of the Australian government,” Diplas explains. “When a rapid response

is needed, our team of experts have already done the due diligence. We have agreements with a broad range of pre-vetted suppliers that cover likely scenarios designed to complement the Australian Government's existing stockpile of relief items. We coordinate with the Australian Defence Force, the United Nations, NGOs, and others, and stay ready to respond.”

DFAT calls this mechanism “a critical tool” for Australia to provide “best-practice humanitarian response”.

## ONGOING VS. EMERGENCY RESPONSE

As the provider of DFAT's humanitarian logistics, many of Palladium's activities are broken into scalable service orders, which are issued on an as-needed basis.

For instance, planning and coordinating with DFAT's operational partners (such as

**“When a rapid response is needed, our team of experts have already done the due diligence.”**

## THIRTY YEARS OF SUPPORT

Diplas, who joined Palladium through its acquisition of HK Logistics in 2015, has dedicated much of his life to humanitarian emergency response.

“We've proudly done this work for the Australian government since 1987,” he says. “At the end of every contract, we review, evolve, and present the most effective solution for the next 5 years. This current iteration took effect in 2018 and focuses in many ways on the technical expertise required. Humanitarian logistics is more than just moving a widget from A to B.”

While DFAT administers this contract, the deed is held by the Commonwealth of Australia, which means that any Australian government agency can use it to procure and deploy supplies in an emergency.

“Governments across the globe are being inundated with offers from suppliers who are seeing this global pandemic as an opportunity to get a foot in the door with promises which at the moment cannot be realised. The Australian Government established this contract to ensure a reliable, flexible, transparent and cost-effective mechanism for relief supplies to reach the people who need them most.” [↗](#)

the ADF), and maintaining warehouses of relief supplies are ongoing tasks between emergency operations. The contract also contains a “Logistics Operations Services” component for the procurement of relief items. This includes sourcing of specific technical supplies and equipment, and deploying those supplies to where they are needed.

DFAT issues a service order to mobilise Palladium for every such task.

“Right now, it's about PPE (personal protective equipment) and COVID-19 Country Kits – packages of relief supplies for healthcare frontline workers that are tailored to this crisis and can be on their way within hours of DFAT's call,” says Diplas.

# How to Move 'Blockchain' Beyond a Buzzword in Humanitarian Aid

BY  
**Jonathon Martynski**  
Strategic Procurement Manager, Palladium



**“Using blockchain in supply chains is being touted as revolutionary for the sector, especially for humanitarian aid.”**

Blockchain is currently a massive buzzword in technology, with particular interest in logistics circles; using blockchain in supply chains is being touted as revolutionary for the sector, especially for humanitarian aid. Everyone is talking about how this technology has the potential to add security and traceability to supply chain tracking, and how it can speed up current systems and digitise manual processes. There's a lot of excitement about what blockchain could do.

However, there's a lot less information about how to unlock blockchain's potential. With such hype and expectations, there's a risk of organisations rushing to use the technology, harnessing it in the wrong way or for the wrong reasons, and being very disappointed with the results.

What is Blockchain?

Blockchain is an “immutable de-centralised electronic ledger”. To break that down:

- Blockchain is a ledger: It's a list of records of information or data. The data being recorded is typically on transactions, including time, dates, costs, and the people involved.
- Blockchain is electronic: It's digital and online.
- Blockchain is de-centralised: this electronic ledger of information isn't held in a single place. It's held simultaneously by all computers which are connected to the blockchain network. Each computer has a copy of the ledger, and every ledger is updated automatically whenever anyone adds any data to it.
- Blockchain is immutable: Data on the ledger is always added to the end, chronologically and in a single line. You cannot go back to an earlier record and change it.

Storing information using blockchain means that the information is extremely secure, theoretically un-tamperable, and easy to work with across an extensive network.

For supply chains, blockchain has many wide-ranging potential uses: from tracing products' histories – like how Walmart tracks its pork's journey from origin to processing to sale - to sharing and saving shipping documentation at ports, which increases efficiency and removes unreliable paperwork requirements.

## **BLOCKCHAIN FOR HUMANITARIAN AID**

In rapid-response humanitarian aid, there is a distinct lack of visibility of the supply chains involved. When a disaster hits and multiple organisations are trying to respond, there is often confusion over what and where stocks of aid items are available and how many goods are in transit at one time.

Palladium's Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team (HSOT) is working with the UK Department for International Development and the private company Datarella on a pilot to utilise blockchain to improve humanitarian relief supply chains. Datarella has created a system that lets

**“In rapid-response humanitarian aid, there is a distinct lack of visibility of the supply chains involved.”**

all partners on the network view all the completed and planned movements of goods into a disaster response. Essentially, it gets rid of the confusion by giving “proof” of what good is where and when, thereby helping build trust among the partners while strengthening efficiency.

HSOT is now planning to track one international shipment of cargo from end-to-end to provide a proof of concept that can be scaled and added to the rest of the sector's blockchain tests and learnings.

## **BLOCKCHAIN NEEDS MASS PARTICIPATION TO WORK**

The odd thing about the pilot, which only involves HSOT, DFID, one supplier and one freight forwarder, is that it doesn't actually need blockchain to function. This single shipment isn't a network of users, it's a chain - so blockchain doesn't add much to the way the information about this shipment is recorded. However, once we prove that this system works, the fact that it is a blockchain system will enable a 'scale up' to involve multiple partners across multiple supply chains. This pilot acts as a valuable beta-test experience which will provide valuable learning points to the overall sector.

A blockchain system only really achieves maximum utility if it reaches 'critical mass' of participation, with a wide, comprehensive network of people all using it. It must be a system that enables mass-participation and encourages partners to get on-board. It could be an easy mistake to build a system that works well for the creators, but which later proves to be unattractive to others or even incompatible with others' requirements.

The hype around blockchain in supply chains is entirely justified. We're only beginning to tap into the many ways it could revolutionise not just Walmart's meat supplies but how we can respond better and faster to the world's disasters. To use

this new technology to its full potential, we must remember that people operate the systems, and it has never been easy to get numerous, disparate organisations and individuals working in the same way. But the sector is on the right path to making our most needed supply chains more accountable, transparent, and efficient. [P](#)

# Pushing Humanitarian Innovation in Fire Risk Reduction

BY  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorenza Geronimo is the Communications Lead on the Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team.



“Settlements of displaced people, whether refugees or internally displaced people, are particularly prone to fires.”

Every year around the world, fire kills up to 265,000 people. This is five times more than the number of people killed by other natural hazard-related disasters.

Settlements of displaced people, whether refugees or internally displaced people, are particularly prone to fires. Such vulnerability is due, among other factors, to the combustible nature of housing materials commonly used in camps, the methods and fuels for cooking, heating, and lighting, and the densely built nature of many sites.

While the impacts of recorded fires are clear, there are no global statistics focused on fires in humanitarian settings. Coordination

for data collection and sharing is lacking, and fire is such a crosscutting issue that it is everyone's (and therefore no one's) responsibility.

The complete scale of this problem is still unknown, but there are a few recent indications of how widespread fire disasters are in such settings. One month ago, Monguno, a town in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria, witnessed fires in two camps that affected almost ten thousand people. A month before, a fire broke out in the Kutupalong mega-camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the world's largest refugee camp, killing over a dozen people and re-displacing tens of thousands. Six months before that, a fire in Moria refugee camp in Greece caused 11,000 people to flee. These are just a handful of the highest profile events, and extreme weather, higher temperatures, and low humidity due to climate change will only make the problem worse.

Fires that destroy shelters, camps and supporting facilities, such as warehouses which store relief supplies, have wider

impacts on humanitarian agencies' ability to assist affected populations. Persons with disabilities, the elderly, children, pregnant women, and others who may require assistance to escape are more likely to succumb to the effects of fire and struggle to cope with the aftermath. Hence, improving fire safety in humanitarian settings is a matter of urgency.

While helpful but disparate advice exists on how to reduce fire risks, only a very limited amount is geared towards humanitarian contexts. Moreover, available resources and approaches are frequently vague, lax, overly context-specific, or too specific to the global North. But the Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team (HSOT), a UK Government-funded aid program delivered by Palladium, is at the cutting edge of a movement to change that.

## A MULTI-FACETED AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO REDUCE FIRE RISK

“We have adopted a multi-pronged approach which combines pushing research and development into fire risk reduction, contributing towards new guidelines, and advocating for their application at the global level”, says humanitarian advisor Phil Duloy, who is leading on the fire reduction strand on HSOT.

HSOT is working alongside humanitarian organisations to develop expert-informed, scalable tools to reduce deaths, injuries, and losses from fire in humanitarian contexts. From academic institutions, construction experts, fire fighters, fire risk-specific NGOs, fire safety engineers, forensic investigators, to UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs that lead the coordination of global humanitarian responses, this is a collaborative effort that also includes major government donors, namely the United States and the United Kingdom, satellite data analysts, shelter practitioners and site planners.

The group is focusing on a series of activities aimed at fire prevention, harm reduction, information management and advocacy as well as enhancing alert,

“While helpful but disparate advice exists on how to reduce fire risks, only a very limited amount is geared towards humanitarian contexts.”

response, suppression, and recovery. They have also identified the most common causes of fire, those people most at risk, and the prevention approaches deemed most worth pursuing.

One such promising innovation that HSOT contributed to are fire-retardant tarpaulins. Plastic sheeting is one of the most widely distributed non-food relief items used in humanitarian operations. Each year, hundreds of thousands of square meters of sheets are distributed to be used as a temporary building material for repairs or emergency shelter structures. But this type of sheeting only lasts a year to a year and half in harsh environments like Cox's Bazar, making it not only a crucial humanitarian supply but ripe for innovation.

The team managed and assessed laboratory testing of humanitarian plastic sheeting varieties to understand what approach was more effective to achieve chemical fire retardance and provided recommendations to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This led to HSOT's delivery of 10,000 fire-retardant tarpaulins to shelter Cox's Bazar camp inhabitants after the fire in March. It was the first time ever that these special tarpaulins were deployed in this context. If this practice is taken up by other organisations, it has the potential to be a massive turning point for safety in these settings.

To increase the attention paid to the issue of fires in the humanitarian sector,

Duloy has also co-drafted a paper on fire risk reduction, which is scheduled for release later this year on the global humanitarian shelter sector's biannual publication. Advocacy efforts to date have led to HSOT briefing both the Shelter and Camp Coordination Camp Management Clusters, which lead standard setting and coordination of humanitarian response at the global level and are headed by the International Federation of the Red Cross, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and the International Organisation for Migration.

This approach is also influencing other donors. HSOT has been tasked with quality assurance of a project jointly funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance and the FCDO. It will produce a baseline report on the State of Fire Safety in Humanitarian Shelter and Settlements and will develop fire safety guidance, including a decision support tool for use in the field. It is hoped that these outputs will contribute towards improved global humanitarian standards of practice and drive wider systemic change.

While these are steps in the right direction, holistic and integrated fire risk reduction approaches are still incomplete. HSOT will continue to push for fire risk reduction innovation to ensure that we can continuously improve humanitarian assistance and increase the safety of populations affected by crises. [↗](#)

# Is it Ethical to Profit from Humanitarian Aid?

BY  
**Gabriella Waaijman**  
Former Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team Director

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabriella is the former Director of Palladium's Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team, which provides the UK government with capacity and specialist expertise to support effective responses to sudden-onset disasters, crises, and complex emergencies around the world.



The private sector's involvement in aid is nothing new, but its growing engagement and influence in the humanitarian sector is more recent.

When I joined Palladium after a long career with non-profits, I had to answer an uncomfortable question. Would I be able to work for a for-profit development company in the humanitarian sector? I had heard that the private sector is more efficient, brings new capacities, is better at managing risk, and has a more sustainable response model. I wanted to learn these new skills and keep an open mind to alternatives but wasn't sure that aid and profit should go together, no matter the outcome.

## FROM SYMPTOMS TO ROOT CAUSES

The [World Humanitarian Summit](#) in 2016 concluded that in humanitarian aid, "Success must now be measured by how people's vulnerability and risk are reduced, not by how needs are met year after year." This statement opened

## “Humanity means that human suffering must be addressed.”

the door for multi-faceted strategies and partnerships in the humanitarian sector at much greater scale than before. It caused a shift from centralised, unilateral aid delivery to stronger decentralised, market and network-based approaches. The needle was also moved from addressing symptoms to addressing root causes - a very good step.

Both shifts encouraged greater private sector engagement. This mindset change caused actors like the World Bank to enter the humanitarian space at a scale of which humanitarians could only dream. I remember gasping for air when I heard that the World Bank put a whopping [two billion USD on the table for eight low income countries](#) to "make a shift from crisis response to managing risks; support host

## “For profit making organisations to effectively and ethically operate in humanitarian settings, they must adhere to the humanitarian principles.”

methods like 'payment by results'. This is predominantly in response to growing scepticism among the tax paying public about the way the aid industry is spending its money and a demand for greater accountability, due diligence, and value for money. Contract-based funding transfers the risk of success or failure onto the contracted organisation, a risk that the financial models of non-profit organisations are not set-up to absorb.

In this brave new world of contracting, non-profits do not only have to accumulate sufficient reserves to deal with the risk of delivery failure; they also need to invest in organisational growth and diversification to keep up with changing humanitarian response strategies, innovation, new partnerships, and new required skillsets. The current non-profit financial model makes this very challenging.

The humanitarian and stabilisation contract that Palladium is implementing on behalf of the UK government, and for which I am responsible, provides a good example of these challenges. The cost of bidding was substantial. In order to deliver results under the program, the implementer must upfront significant amounts of money on an ongoing basis. The terms and conditions that govern the contract add a complexity to the program that required significant investment to meet, and in order to grow, diversify, innovate and adapt, Palladium will need to continue to invest. Having worked most of my career for non-profit

organisations, I believe many would struggle to implement a contract of this complexity and financial risk.

## THE ETHICS QUESTION

Building up reserves, including by making a profit, is an effective and sustainable model for future humanitarian action. These reserves are necessary for organisations that need to take on financial risk, to invest in growth to keep up with the changes in the humanitarian space, and to upfront money to deliver large-scale programmes. But that only addresses some of the concerns about whether it is ethical to make a profit from humanitarian aid.

In the [words of Hugo Slim](#), "effectiveness without ethics can be unethical. But, equally, ethics without effect can be unethical." That tongue twister simply tells us that you can be brilliant at doing the wrong thing, or useless at doing the right thing, but neither are acceptable. Values are integral to effectiveness.

The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence define what humanitarian aid is and are grounded in international humanitarian law. Humanity means that human suffering must be addressed. Neutrality means that assistance cannot favour one side in a conflict. Impartiality means that assistance must be provided based on need alone and without discrimination. And independence means that assistance must be free from political, economic, or military influence. Some of these principles seem obvious, but having worked in this field for many years, I know from experience that their implementation isn't always clear-cut in the real world, with all its complexity.

For profit making organisations to effectively and ethically operate in humanitarian settings, they must adhere to the humanitarian principles. The same is true for non-profit actors. Ultimately, ethical legitimacy lies not in the organisation's financial model but in the effectiveness of their programs and their accountability to both affected populations and the tax payers funding the aid. [eP](#)

# Why We Need to Engage Local Women in Emergency Response

BY  
**Sinéad Magill**  
Managing Partner, Palladium

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sinéad Leads Palladium's donor funded businesses, including delivery of the UK Government's Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations program. Sinead has over 15 years of experience leading governance, security, and justice programs. She played a key role in DFID's programming in Iraq and subsequently delivered programs in Afghanistan, Palestine, Uganda, and Syria. Sinead was featured in Management Today's 35 Under 35 and won the Women of the Future Business Award.



**“Engaging local women is key to making disaster preparedness, response, and recovery as efficient and effective as possible.”**

When disaster strikes, the first hours and days can mean the difference between life and death. As the international community works to mobilise, local responders are immediately busy saving lives – providing clean drinking water, building emergency shelters, and digging through rubble for survivors.

In fact, 90 percent of any humanitarian response is carried out by local responders, including neighbours, family, communities, local governments and health workers, local NGOs and religious groups, many of whom are women.

For years, the humanitarian community has been talking about the need to “localise” emergency response – essentially giving more decision-making power over how aid is delivered to the recipients themselves. Engaging local women is key to making disaster preparedness, response, and recovery as efficient and effective as possible.

**“We need to build the capacity of women-led organisations so they can qualify for funding.”**

## NOT JUST VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Women play a pivotal role in all life-saving sectors, from health care and food security to shelter and social protection. And yet, the role of female responders, whether individual or as part of official or unofficial organisations, is often overlooked, undervalued, or ignored. Experience tells us that:

1. Women are an invaluable resource for building a better understanding of communities' needs and informing decision-making. If we only work

through male-dominated structures to understand the problems and the help required, then we'll only ever be working with an incomplete picture.

2. Female responders have better access to other women and children, and often to marginalised communities. In some cultures, women are not able to meet or speak candidly with male responders but can do so with other women. Women are often the primary caregivers of family members, and so increased access to women by female responders means better access to children, and often to the elderly and the disabled.
3. Women are crucial in getting communities back on their feet once the initial emergency response is over. Women are often the ones responsible for ensuring their family's basic needs are met, whether by staying back to rebuild lives once men return to the workforce, or taking on paid work in addition to their unpaid labour.

## BETTER ISN'T NECESSARILY CHEAPER

Recognising that women are agents of change and boosting their decision-making power in humanitarian work requires an upfront investment. Traditional humanitarian structures have failed to engage local women because it's often male-led organisations that are able to grow and evolve to meet donors' partnering and sub-contracting requirements. We need to build the capacity of women-led organisations so they can qualify for funding. We also need to spend more time identifying capable women-run organisations, beyond our usual go-to's.

Some of the planning and response activities can be more expensive if we are to properly involve women. For example, for security reasons, more individuals may be needed to carry out certain tasks if women are responding. Or additional toilets or bathing facilities may need to be built for women, and support provided to help women step away from or manage their day-to-day caregiving responsibilities.

But the investment is small when considering the long-term benefits, both in terms of improving the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and in promoting gender equality.

Local women must have a bigger say in how humanitarian aid is delivered. As organisations working in the humanitarian and development space, we need to do more to raise their voices and support their leadership. [P](#)

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## About The Catalyst

*The Catalyst* is Palladium's online publication, delivering news, perspectives, and in-depth reports from the front lines of our global work. Many of the stories are written by Palladium employees and partners, sharing their experiences and expertise as they work to solve the world's greatest challenges.

*The Catalyst* aims to inspire, educate, and embolden all readers, from experts in international development and C-Suite executives, to impact investors and community leaders.

## About Palladium

Palladium is a global impact firm, working at the intersection of social impact and commercial growth. For nearly 60 years, we've been helping our clients to see the world as interconnected – by formulating strategies, building partnerships, mobilising capital, and implementing programs that have a lasting social and financial impact. We simply call this "positive impact".

We work with corporations, governments, investors, communities, and civil society. With a global network operating in over 90 countries, Palladium is in the business of making the world a better place.

[www.thepalladiumgroup.com](http://www.thepalladiumgroup.com)

