

Localizing humanitarian aid: A rapid response entrepreneurship model

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ABSTRACT

This rapid response research develops the localized aid model—a distinct approach pioneered by new entrants in the humanitarian aid sector—for the problem owner Field Ready, an entrepreneurial NGO innovating the humanitarian supply chain and empowering local social infrastructure. Unlike traditional aid organizations and spontaneous venturing, the localized aid model embeds entrepreneurship as an organizing logic to address crisis needs through local manufacturing, human-centered design, partnerships, and capacity-building. We position the localized aid model as a third approach in the entrepreneurship literature on humanitarian response. Drawing on social enterprise, organizational resilience, and crowd-sourcing research, we advance the model theoretically and show how it can support localized decision-making, integrate with civic infrastructure, and garner acceptance in differing institutional contexts. By equipping aid ventures to measure the degree of localization—defined as agency and ownership of local actors—we highlight how entrepreneurial organizing can foster community resilience as a civic outcome. This research helps Field Ready and similar ventures articulate their innovative model to stakeholders while offering a framework for system-level change in the aid sector.

Buckets, Bottlenecks, and Building Better Aid

Buckets are cheap to make, but they can be costly to move in a crisis. In one flood response in Nepal, an international NGO planned to distribute buckets until the shipping costs became prohibitive. Though manufactured nearby in Pakistan, the humanitarian supply chain would rout them through warehouses in Denmark and a depot in the UAE before reaching Kathmandu, where they still required last-mile distribution. A simple mold and local manufacturing could have produced the buckets faster, cheaper, and closer to where they were needed.

The problem is not just inefficient logistics, but also the missed opportunity to work shoulder-to-shoulder with affected communities to develop local solutions. This paper introduces the localized aid model, an entrepreneurship-driven approach that shifts production and decision-making closer to the point of need. Taking Field Ready as an example of a new approach to humanitarian aid, we show how humanitarian systems can become more agile, adaptive, and contextual. The localized aid model offers a third path, bridging the gap between traditional aid institutions and the improvised citizen responses that emerge during crises. Here is how you can act on it.

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- Funders: Invest in ventures that embed and adapt in place. Assess multifaceted value where it is created, not just where it is reported.
- Policymakers: Make local procurement a default, not a fallback. Prioritize processes that shrink the distance between need and solution.
- Practitioners: Innovate in the field. Use this model to evaluate where your approach creates flexibility, or where it adds friction.

This rapid response paper offers a framework to rethink how aid can be not only delivered but designed entrepreneurially.

1. Introduction

The entrepreneurship literature contrasts two main ways that humanitarian aid is organized in response to disruptive events: spontaneous venturing and traditional humanitarian aid. Spontaneous venturing refers to how citizens self-organize in response to sudden onset of disasters to quickly address gaps left by official crisis response systems (Drabek and McEntire, 2003; Shepherd and Williams, 2019; Stallings and Quarantelli, 1985). Scholars have examined spontaneous venturing in contexts such as earthquake recovery in Haiti (Williams and Shepherd, 2016a), the Australian Black Saturday brushfires (Williams and Shepherd, 2016b), and the COVID-19 pandemic (Browder et al., 2023). This highly localized approach to organizing is characterized by its resourcefulness, adaptability to changing conditions, fast response, and ability to customize solutions to local needs (Dutton et al., 2006; Shepherd and Williams, 2014; Williams and Shepherd, 2018). Despite these advantages, emergent citizen groups face significant challenges including overwhelming scale and scope of suffering, resource constraints, infrastructure disruption, simultaneously being victims and responders, and the inherent nature of spontaneous ventures as reactionary and temporary (Farhoud et al., 2024).

Spontaneous venturing is often contrasted with traditional international humanitarian aid organizations which provide relief through large-scale operations, centralized “command and control” coordination, extensive networks, and large budgets with substantial government funding (Shepherd and Williams, 2019). Examples include the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Oxfam International. In traditional aid, efficiency is critical because 60–80% of more than \$40 billion in annual humanitarian expenditures goes toward logistics, primarily procurement and transport of supplies (Moshtari et al., 2021; Rieger et al., 2024; Stumpf et al., 2022). Reliance on economies of scale to appease cost-conscious donors inhibits traditional aid organizations’ ability to adapt to local needs and requires more generalizable solutions across contexts (Perroni et al., 2019). These aid organizations excel at shipping supplies to the edge of disaster zones, but often leave impacted populations to solve last-mile distribution hurdles and match deliveries to priority needs (Gutjahr and Nolz, 2016; Suzuki, 2020). Despite strengths in resources, replicable expertise, scale of response, operational infrastructure, and legitimacy, traditional humanitarian aid organizations face challenges with localization, speed, adaptability, waste, and economies of scope (Kovács and Falagara Sigala, 2021; Leiras et al., 2014).

The purpose of this rapid response paper is to lay out the contours of an entrepreneurial model for humanitarian aid and position it relative to the spontaneous venturing and traditional aid models. Recent research has pointed beyond short-term, compassion-motivated spontaneous venturing to identify that some entrepreneurs think longer-term about building enduring organizations in situ (Mittermaier et al., 2023). However, entrepreneurship research has paid little attention to new entrants to the humanitarian aid sector that innovate new models of aid delivery and new systems for alleviating human suffering across geographies and crises. This issue warrants rapid response from entrepreneurship scholars for two reasons. First, traditional aid organizations face intensifying challenges at a sector level. Global demand for humanitarian aid has increased as disasters are recorded more frequently and incur greater economic and human costs (Ritchie et al., 2022; UNDRR, 2020). The number of refugees worldwide has more than tripled in the last decade (UNHCR, 2024). Meanwhile, the traditional aid sector increasingly faces bans by local governments restricting foreign aid (Al Jazeera, 2023; AP, 2024; Loy, 2018). It has also encountered controversy in large-scale initiatives, such as the \$9.5 billion US Agency for International Development (USAID) contract with Chemonics International (Igoe and Stockton, 2023).

Second, amid growing volatility in the humanitarian aid sector (Strucke and Cohen, 2025), new entrants receive insufficient support as they attempt to innovate aid systems while navigating non-market dynamics. New entrants are low resourced organizations encountering extreme challenges of uncertainty in operating environments characterized by sudden onset, unpredictability, resource constraints, infrastructure disruptions, security risks, demand spikes, and delays (Shaheen et al., 2023; Sodhi and Tang, 2021; Van Wassenhove, 2006). As ventures with novel approaches, they must seek legitimacy on multiple fronts—both locally in crisis contexts and in the aid sector overall (Laufer, 2007; Takeda and Helms, 2006). Nevertheless, new entrants hold potential to address the need for localization—increased agency and ownership of local actors in humanitarian aid decision-making (A4EP, 2024; Frennsson and James, forthcoming)—to better customize solutions to local needs and create more enduring and sustainable local solutions (Browder et al., 2023; Farhoud et al., 2024).

2. Problem owner requiring rapid response

Field Ready is a recent entrant in the humanitarian aid sector that needs a way to distinguish itself from the traditional aid model to better communicate with potential funders, public and private partners, and other stakeholders. As a non-governmental organization (NGO), Field Ready brings manufacturing to the local point of humanitarian need by combining high-tech (e.g., 3D printing) and low-

tech (e.g., woodworking and sewing) solutions (Field Ready, 2018; James and Gilman, 2015). Field Ready's local manufacturing model circumvents many humanitarian supply chain costs and other problems to instead equip and empower local social infrastructure for both acute and chronic crisis recovery (Aldrich, 2012).

Field Ready projects to make humanitarian supplies locally are currently ongoing in Bangladesh, Syria, Türkiye, Philippines, the Horn of Africa, and the South Pacific. For example, in Syria, Field Ready made rescue airbags to support post-bombing search and rescue when commercially sourced airbags were unavailable or prohibitively expensive. In Türkiye, they partnered with Waste4-Warmth to convert waste plastics into insulation as part of a customized earthquake recovery project. In Colombia, Field Ready developed an active carbon filtration solution from locally sourced materials and trained residents to produce it, leading to the reopening of a water treatment facility that had been closed for two years.

Field Ready represents an entrepreneurial approach to humanitarian aid for three reasons. First, Field Ready leverages technological innovation to address the challenges inherent to humanitarian aid delivery (James and Taylor, 2018). Proficiency in technology is imperative for local manufacturing, yet technical feasibility alone is insufficient to address the full scope of design, manufacturing, supply chain, social, and environmental innovation required (Corsini et al., 2019; Corsini and Moultrie, 2019). Second, Field Ready systematically introduces process innovation in each location where it works by replicating bricolage capabilities and equipping local response systems to combine new and existing resources (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Busch and Barkema, 2021). Such translation of new ideas across different institutional contexts is critical for innovations to be accepted long-term (Claus et al., 2021). Third, Field Ready faces resource and legitimacy constraints common in crisis entrepreneurship (Browder et al., 2023). New aid entrants must innovate with scant funding from large government contracts while prioritizing social sustainability amid surges of public attention and resources.

Because Field Ready exemplifies a different but not well-understood category of humanitarian aid, it needs a way to communicate the transformative potential of its model to others in the aid sector. Unlike traditional aid organizations in which little of the money invested goes toward value creation in-country at the point of need, Field Ready offers a novel solution to the problems of supply chain cost and localization in crisis response. However, funders accustomed to the traditional model of professional aid have developed elaborate reporting requirements that do not align with the high level of resourcefulness and adaptability required on the ground. Such requirements are better suited, for example, to account for bulk warehouse supplies shipped in containers across long distances than they are for a single wrench made on the spot with additive manufacturing to meet an immediate need.

3. Toward an entrepreneurship model of humanitarian aid

Taking Field Ready as an exemplar of an entrepreneurial approach to humanitarian aid, we build a model of localized aid that compares features of both traditional aid organizations and spontaneous venturing (see Fig. 1). The localized aid model is distinguished from the two prevailing aid models because it introduces entrepreneurship as an organizing logic, not just a set of behaviors. Entrepreneurs starting new aid organizations aspire to transform the aid sector in the long-term, not only alleviate suffering with a shorter-term compassion motivation (Mittermaier et al., 2023) or incrementally improve incumbent aid organizations. Fig. 1 lists four distinctives of the localized aid model in the center: it (1) partners for local systems sustainability, (2) requires human-centered

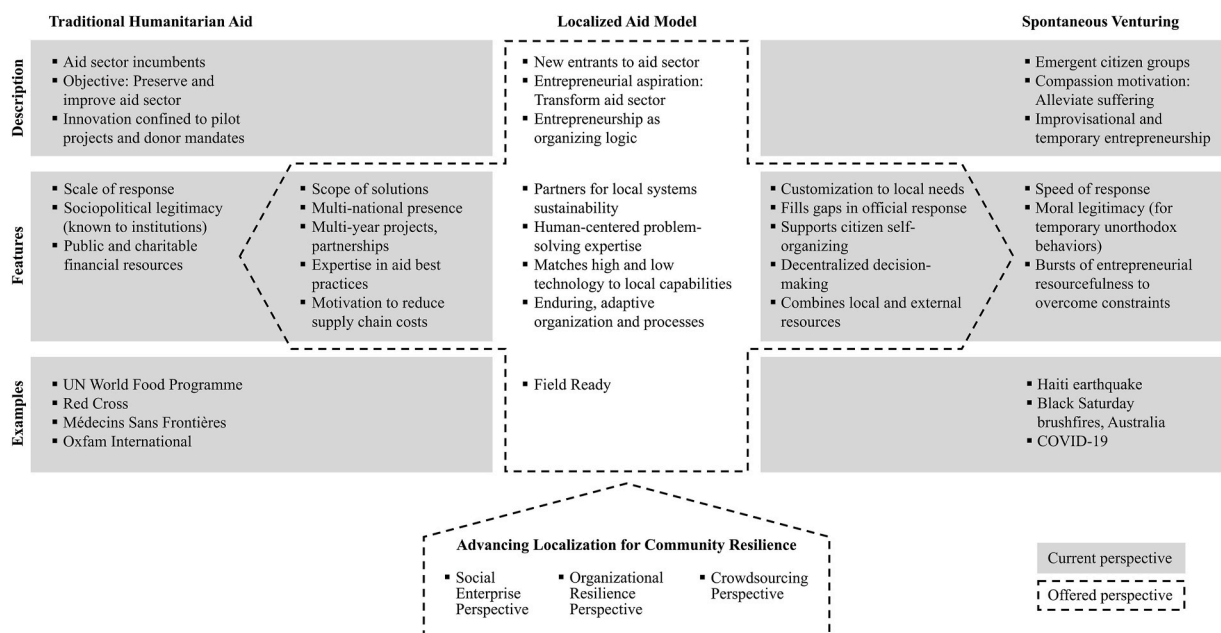


Fig. 1. Localized humanitarian aid model.

problem-solving expertise, (3) matches high and low technology to local capabilities, and (4) develops an enduring, adaptive organization and processes. Table 1 provides examples of these features in action at Field Ready.

First, a core organizing focus of the localized aid model is that it *partners for local systems sustainability*. Local agency, decision-making, and ownership of solutions are sought from each project's inception based on partnerships with local response systems (e.g., government, emergency services, NGOs). Traditional aid organizations place varying degrees of emphasis on localization, which in practice largely means (1) they increase efforts to transfer capacity-development to local actors once a crisis response transitions to long-term recovery and (2) they decentralize their physical footprint (but not key decisions) by setting up local offices (Frennsson and James, forthcoming). In contrast, the localized aid model views local decision-makers as "in charge" from the beginning and the aid organization's role as supplementary and complementary. The ongoing leadership of the local market and government are prioritized. One example is Field Ready's work in Vanuatu, where it worked within the existing system to co-develop a procurement platform for non-food emergency items (e.g., reusable sanitary pads and soap) through dialogue with local businesses, donors, and agencies (Field Ready, 2020a).

Second, the localized aid model requires *human-centered problem-solving expertise*. This includes not only on-the-ground assessment of damages incurred, but also the empathy required to understand citizen contexts and help locals define problems so they can co-develop solutions as end-users. Rather than beginning with a warehouse of ready-made solutions developed through decades of experience with all types of disasters, the localized aid model relies on expertise in human-centered design. Whereas spontaneous ventures may co-develop solutions with citizens (Williams and Shepherd, 2021), the localized aid model co-creates by bringing process expertise to document and prioritize end user problems based on local knowledge. This approach is illustrated in Field Ready's training materials, which outline practical steps of problem identification to help field workers understand local needs and map them to common humanitarian relief categories such as shelter, health and medical, food and nutrition, safety and security, and water, sanitation and hygiene (Field Ready, n.d.; James and Taylor, 2018).

Third, following its assessment of local systems and problems, the localized aid model *matches high and low technology to local capabilities*. Several aid organizations such as Oxfam have experimented with 3D printing technology due to its portability, affordability, rapid set up, and ability to produce a range of parts without need for inventory or forecasts (Gardner, 2014). However, low-technology solutions can also be produced from recycled or local materials through bricolage. The localized aid model strives to introduce new technology in a way that complements what is available in the local market. One instance of this in action occurred in Haiti, where Field Ready integrated new technology with local capabilities by identifying that local workshops had injection molding equipment but lacked capacity to machine new molds or manage sudden demand spikes, which external technologies addressed (James and Gilman, 2015).

Fourth, the localized aid model is characterized by developing an *enduring, adaptive organization and processes*. Unlike spontaneous ventures which are temporary in nature, the localized aid model is a new type of player with an ongoing role in the aid sector.

Table 1
Field Ready examples of the localized aid model.

Location and Crisis	Field Ready Response	Partnering for Local Systems Sustainability	Human-Centered Problem-Solving Expertise	Matching High and Low Technology to Local Capabilities	Enduring, Adaptive Organization and Processes
Vanuatu: Cyclone Harold and COVID-19	Enabled local production of reusable sanitary pads and soap through domestic procurement channels.	Worked with Vanuatu Business Resilience Council	Dignity kits responsive to gender-specific needs	Simple hygiene technology scaled via procurement systems	Formalized local procurement platform
Türkiye: Earthquake recovery	Delivered insulation made from recycled plastic and supported development of business incubator.	Waste4Warmth and local makerspace in Gaziantep	Made thermal insulation to address shelter needs	Polyfloss technology + local waste plastic + community makers	Training and circular economy incubation
Colombia: Post-conflict water crisis	Restored access to clean water by co-developing active carbon filters using locally available materials.	Collaborated with village school, families, and local water plant	Addressed child and elder vulnerability to waterborne illness	Low-tech filtration + chlorine protocols adapted to local context	Training and knowledge transfer for household water safety
Philippines: Typhoon Rai/Odette	Built and distributed locally sourced solar charging kits to restore access to power and communication.	Fablab UP Cebu + Light of Hope + village-level co-design	Addressed needs for light, power, and phone charging in remote areas	Solar, LiFePO4 batteries, USB ports integrated with off-the-shelf toolboxes	Training and portable systems for ongoing use
Syria: Urban search and rescue	Developed low-cost rescue airbags from recycled materials to lift debris in post-bombing emergencies.	Facilitated in-country workshops with Syrian partners	Enabled rescues of civilians trapped in rubble amid conflict	Recycled vehicle airbags repurposed to meet rescue standards	Built repair capacity and localized manufacturing for ongoing response
Nepal: Earthquakes and COVID-19	Co-founded innovation lab, produced rescue gear and digital fabrication tools.	Started lab with World Vision + supported Nepal's first FabLab	Participatory design, contextual inquiry, and iterative testing	Digital fabrication tools adapted for emergency manufacturing	Trained local designers in digital manufacturing
Haiti: Earthquake supply gaps	Produced essential medical parts (e.g., umbilical clamps, IV hooks) using 3D printing and injection molding.	Made medical kits with rural clinics, workshop owners, and health workers	Prototyped neonatal and maternal health solutions using field inquiry	Integrated local injection molding with externally machined molds	Shared open-source CAD files + trained technicians to combine digital and analog production

However, unlike traditional aid organizations, it is a player built specifically around adaptability and process expertise. The hallmark of this expertise lies in the localized aid model's ability to translate knowledge sharing into capacity-building in highly contextualized ways. Perhaps more important than information sharing is the potential of this model to network geographically dispersed knowledge capital together with local actors engaged in problem-solving. For example, Field Ready partnered with a grassroots network of "humanitarian makers" to crowdsource and coordinate an open-source digital library of solution designs that could be shared broadly and rapidly, then modified locally as needed in disaster areas (Field Ready, 2020b; James, 2017).

Beyond these four distinctive features, the localized aid model exhibits areas of similarity that overlap the other two models in Fig. 1. Like *traditional aid organizations*, the localized model can produce a broad scope of solutions, such as a digital library of solutions. Both approaches maintain a multi-national presence and conduct multi-year projects that rely on ongoing partnerships and bring their expertise in aid best practices to bear in crisis situations. Despite approaching humanitarian logistics differently, both models share a motivation to reduce supply chain costs to minimize waste and improve the direct value created with donated funds. Like *spontaneous venturing*, the localized aid model prioritizes customization to local needs as a key criterion for crisis response effectiveness. Both approaches also fill gaps in official response efforts by emphasizing local agency and actors, thereby supporting citizen self-organizing and decentralized decision-making. Additionally, both spontaneous venturing and the localized aid model combine local and external resources, especially donated supplies and other physical resources that typically originate from traditional humanitarian aid organizations.

The features listed on the far left and right sides of Fig. 1 point to three limitations to the localized aid model that currently fall outside its boundaries, creating challenges for Field Ready: (1) response scale and speed, (2) legitimacy, and (3) resourcing (Browder et al., 2023). The dimensions of *crisis response effectiveness* include scale, speed, scope, and customization to local needs (Dutton et al., 2006). Whereas traditional aid organizations have prioritized delivering large quantities of donated supplies (Quarantelli, 1988), it is currently a challenge for the targeted approach of the localized aid model to achieve a similar scale of response. Also, the localized aid model's speed of response is slower than spontaneous venturing due to the time required to engage in human-centered assessment and design.

Regarding *legitimacy*, traditional aid organizations benefit from a high degree of sociopolitical legitimacy, making them known entities to institutions, including public and charitable donors who provide tens of billions of dollars in funding. Although spontaneous solutions are often unorthodox, the voluntary actions of emergent citizen groups also garner moral legitimacy for "doing the right thing" to alleviate victims' suffering. New entrants like Field Ready face a liability of newness and must continually work to legitimize their actions, organizations, and overall model of aid delivery. Critically, the localized aid model must achieve cognitive legitimacy in the recipient context (Claus et al., 2021) as well as among incumbents, donors, and policy makers working in the aid sector. Lastly, generalized creative *resourcing processes* matched with local resources and capabilities drive problem-solving under the localized aid model, while short-term and strictly local bursts of entrepreneurial resourcefulness to overcome constraints are the modus operandi for spontaneous venturing. Compared to large traditional aid organizations, new entrants following the localized aid model face resourcing disadvantages. Competing for significant funding through grants and aid contracts is challenging.

4. Advancing the localized aid model

In practice, localization often involves transferring capacities from aid organizations to local actors (Frennsson et al., 2022). Hence, organizational research has focused on improving institutional translation—"the transposition of ideas between contexts"—as critical for local acceptance (Claus et al., 2021: 1479). The localized aid model builds on this by conceptualizing localization as agency and ownership among local actors. Taking the localized aid model as an entrepreneurial approach to organizing in the humanitarian aid sector, we strive to enhance its effectiveness for localization by synthesizing lessons from Field Ready with perspectives from key areas of entrepreneurship research (bottom of Fig. 1). Doing so increases the odds that the localized aid model can overcome its limitations and influence system-wide innovation in the humanitarian aid sector. This rapid response paper offers insights from three entrepreneurship research perspectives—from social enterprise, organizational resilience, and crowdsourcing—to show how continued research can help practitioners and policymakers advance the localized aid model.

4.1. The social enterprise perspective

Research on social enterprises can strengthen the localized aid model as a needed bridge between traditional aid organizations and spontaneous venturing, better positioning the localized aid model to assess any given crisis response's degree of localization regarding its antecedents and outcomes. First, the *unique antecedents to social entrepreneurship* introduce insights for localization of aid. Unique inputs include identification of social opportunities and managing multiple, often conflicting stakeholder claims (Lumpkin et al., 2013). Identifying social opportunities relates to human-centered problem-solving expertise (in Fig. 1), as the localized aid model requires empathy to understand the crisis and work with locals in identifying opportunities and co-developing solutions (Kuckertz et al., 2023). Addressing stakeholder claims aligns with partnering for local systems sustainability (in Fig. 1). Agency, collaborative decision making, and co-ownership of solutions give stakeholders in local systems an unusual degree of autonomy for effective scaling and social impact in relation to the entrepreneur (Healy et al., 2024). These factors have implications for how conflicting local stakeholder claims are addressed and harmonized with the desires of donors and other external stakeholders who may be far removed from the local situation.

Second, social enterprise research has long wrestled with how to measure social value creation (social impact less social costs), as well as satisfying multiple stakeholders—key outcomes of social entrepreneurship (Lumpkin et al., 2013). Humanitarian crises involve

complex and unknown human costs, highlighting the urgent need for localized measures of social value creation (Baharmand et al., 2019; Corsini and Moultrie, 2019; Kovács et al., 2019). Currently, recent entrants like Field Ready lack a comprehensive framework to evaluate outcomes by integrating the degree of localization with *social return on investment (SROI) measurement*. Such measures could enhance logistical efficiency by minimizing the economic cost of aid delivery. They could also increase alleviation of human suffering by maximizing solution customization to local needs, especially when those solutions are based on non-market mechanisms such as well-being and safety (Canova et al., 2025). Although holistic metrics for social impact have eluded humanitarian logistics scholars and practitioners (Holguín-Veras et al., 2012; Shao et al., 2020), recent social entrepreneurship research offers a promising typology of social impact measures and a checklist for effectiveness that can be adapted and applied to aid contexts (Rawhouser et al., 2019). These can improve localization by offering differing measures based on single- or multi-sector, and activity- or outcome-based. Effective measures clearly define the time period and level of observation, create fit between definition and operationalization, and link the definition with either an activity or an outcome.

4.2. The organizational resilience perspective

Research on organizational resilience, particularly from a strategic entrepreneurship perspective, can advance the localized aid model by considering how resilience is both an organizational process as well as an outcome with community-level implications (Korber and McNaughton, 2018; Williams et al., 2017). First, *organizational resilience-seeking* is defined as “an adaptive process by which a firm leverages new resource endowments to change action repertoires and transform itself in response to crisis-driven adversity” (Browder et al., 2024, p. 152). As entrants in the aid sector, organizations like Field Ready represent ventures designed to operate under crisis conditions. The localized aid model’s emphasis on adaptability as central to resilience is what these new entrants excel at, unlike traditional aid organizations whose path dependencies and structural rigidities tend to leave them struggling to adapt (Igoe and Stockton, 2023). New aid ventures based on resilience-seeking require expertise in finding solution-crisis fit along with a capacity-matching capability that must be repeatable by the venture and learned by locals for reactivation. A resilience-seeking perspective on the localized aid model may also yield insights to help increase the adaptability of traditional aid organizations.

Second, research on resilience at the organizational level increasingly points to resilience as an outcome that extends beyond organizational survival. Specifically, organizational resilience connects to *community resilience as an outcome* (Aldrich, 2012; Williams and You, 2021). Community resilience is “a matter of enhancing local organizing capacity over centralized planning efforts” (Dutta, 2017, p. 443). The localized aid model addresses this issue head on, making civic organizing capacity central to its purpose and activities (Rao and Greve, 2018). It does so by prioritizing partnerships for local sustainability, human-centered design, matching technology to local capabilities, and creating adaptive processes that endure rather than fade after a crisis wanes. In doing so, the entrepreneurial organizing logic of the localized aid model systematizes and channels many activities done spontaneously when citizens self-organize their local know-how, know-what, know-who, and know-where. Thus, local translation (Claus et al., 2021) is improved, which enhances community resilience as the goal of localization and the outcome of interest for practitioners.

4.3. The crowdsourcing perspective

In entrepreneurship, crowdsourcing is a form of co-creation where entities issue an open call to many individuals (the “crowd”) for external contributions to innovation and/or production processes (Chui et al., 2012; Ghezzi et al., 2018). This model can attract geographically dispersed assistance in the form of user-generated content, collaborative systems, peer production, and collective intelligence (Afuah and Tucci, 2012; Hossain and Kauranen, 2015). In humanitarian aid, crowdsourcing has expanded beyond monetary donations to non-monetary volunteerism, including the generation of new knowledge in the form of new designs or techniques (Hammon and Hippner, 2012). For example, crowdsourced interagency maps facilitated organizational collaboration after an earthquake in Haiti (Zook et al., 2010), and the crowd produced personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic (Corsini et al., 2021). However, aid organizations engaged in local manufacturing face challenges managing crowdsourced designs created outside formal calls for input and without a nuanced understanding of local contexts.

The crowdsourcing perspective can advance the localized aid model in two ways. First, ventures like Field Ready provide the localizing link traditional aid organizations lack to *channel the volunteerism of the globally networked crowd* toward local points of need (Harrison and Johnson, 2016). Aid organizations like Oxfam have experimented with crowdsourcing (Gardner, 2014), but such initiatives rarely survive beyond pilot phases because they fall outside the organization’s core competencies (Wazny, 2017). The localized aid model bridges the gap between distant volunteers and local needs by enabling communities to create context-appropriate solutions and aligning production with local capacity. This approach helps traditional aid organizations leverage crowdsourcing as a tool for system-wide innovation.

Second, crowdsourcing can generate *locally tailored solutions that are replicable*. Although external knowledge can aid in crisis response, synthesis and application occur at the local level, where locals retain applied knowledge, equipping them for future crises. This reflects the transposition of ideas embedded in local translation (Claus et al., 2021), but in a novel way as entrepreneurship triggers replicability of viable solutions. Such replicability is core to building community level resilience and crowdsourcing can amplify that resilience through a bi-directional relationship where the solutions generated are not only held at the local level but also feedback into the crowd among those who contributed as “crowd capital” (Prpić et al., 2015, p. 77). This capital can later be deployed more globally in partnership with the localized aid model.

5. Conclusion

In this rapid response study, we developed an entrepreneurship model of localized humanitarian aid that differs from and complements traditional aid organizations and spontaneous venturing. It establishes entrepreneurship as an organizing logic for new entrants aspiring to transform the aid sector. Its value lies not only in what practitioners like Field Ready achieve on the ground, but also in how it helps scholars and practitioners assess the paradigms that guide crisis response. By conceptualizing localization as agency and ownership among local actors, and identifying the organizational features that enable it, the localized aid model provides a framework for analyzing and designing crisis ventures with greater contextual fit, resilience potential, and civic impact.

More than an alternative classification, the localized aid model offers a platform for rethinking how crisis response is designed, funded, and governed. Rather than operating at the margins of existing systems, ventures like Field Ready reveal a replicable logic for organizing humanitarian aid through embedded entrepreneurship, context-driven sourcing, and civic resilience-seeking. To institutionalize this model across the sector, funders and policymakers must reconfigure systems that favor scale and speed over fit and flexibility. This includes adapting donor reporting to account for the nuances of local manufacturing, establishing funding mechanisms for localization-first ventures, and modernizing procurement systems to support decentralized, on-demand production. New accreditation pathways could help aid innovators legitimate without conforming to legacy templates. These changes will help expand the ecosystem of capable responders while prioritizing the ability of affected communities to lead, adapt, and recover on their own terms.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Russell E. Browder: Writing – original draft, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Eric James:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Todd W. Moss:** Writing – original draft. **Matthew S. Wood:** Writing – original draft. **Justin T. Canova:** Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Eric James reports a relationship with Field Ready that includes: board membership and employment. The other authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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