



24 April 2014 - Today, humanitarian actions are often associated with international NGO's. Names like the Red Cross, Save the Children - and of course the United Nations. When we see humanitarian assistance on the news we see established relief camps, marked vehicles, special crates and large signs indicating areas where help is being given. Yet, behind these lie a multitude of local NGO aid agencies, often overshadowed or pushed aside by their larger counterparts.

It seems the giants have forgotten their roots. Nearly all aid agencies started local: Save the Children started out small in the UK, and a few French doctors who believed in helping those in need, created Doctors Without Borders.

But an increase in size also entails an increase in shadow. Today, for instance, large NGO's seek to professionalize with certifications and standards, at the same time making it harder for small local organizations to maintain a presence.

Most international NGO's are connected together through the UN's [cluster system](#), amongst others. In this system agencies working in a particular field coordinate together to provide responses. But the main drawback of this system is that it functions through the security of UN bases and compounds, making access for local groups difficult. Guarded UN compounds exist sometimes in conflict zones where humanitarian personnel can become targets.

The Day Four effect: edging out smaller NGO's

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