

# II VIRTUAL CONFERENCE ON HUMANITARIAN SOVEREIGNTY

**“The Practice of Humanitarian Sovereignty in Africa”**

**Vitoria-Gasteiz, 18 September 2025**

## SUMMARY OF THE SESSION

### INTRODUCTION

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The 2018-2023 Strategy for Humanitarian Action, which has been extended to the 2024-2026 period, includes a commitment to ensuring accountability to affected communities and individuals, as well as a commitment to localisation. Similarly, “Pillar 2: Strengthening humanitarian organisations” aims to further strengthen both Basque and local organisations so that they can effectively support populations in humanitarian crisis situations.

With the aim of ensuring that populations affected by humanitarian crises are the central focus of humanitarian action promoted by eLankidetza, various initiatives have been carried out in recent years in the areas of conceptualisation, research, systematisation and tool development and with regard to training on participation, accountability, and localisation. Alongside this, we have provided support for the implementation of these tools in various contexts in Africa, Latin America and Palestine, culminating in a more far-reaching concept: humanitarian sovereignty. Notable actions include:

- Analysis of the situation regarding participation and accountability to the target population between 2018 and 2020
- Tool and methodology for assessing and promoting participation and accountability within the everyday practice of organisations
- Providing training on the tool to Basque and local organisations
- Pilot testing the tool in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru, Palestine, Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and obtaining feedback on the experiences
- Training on localisation and inclusion
- A document detailing the key milestones of the support process carried out between 2020 and 2023
- I Virtual Conference on Humanitarian Sovereignty

Several humanitarian organisations have been involved in these initiatives, and some have continued working until they have successfully implemented the Comprehensive Participation and Accountability Management Systems (SIGPyR) and Integrated Humanitarian Sovereignty Management Systems, using the TAHUSO tool. More specifically, in Africa, four organisations have worked extensively on these processes, applying their specific perspectives and contexts, and have contributed greatly to promoting the practice of humanitarian sovereignty. It is against this backdrop that the II Virtual Conference on Humanitarian Sovereignty is being held.

For further information, please visit the humanitarian action section of the [eLankidetza](#) website.

### OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAMME

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This second virtual conference on humanitarian sovereignty, held online on 18 September 2025, was entitled “The Practice of Humanitarian Sovereignty in Africa” and it had three objectives:

1. To learn about the experiences of four African organisations and entities regarding the conceptualisation and implementation of humanitarian sovereignty and to discuss them.
2. To identify opportunities for the future development of humanitarian sovereignty, tying it to the recognition of the central role of subject populations, the localisation of knowledge, and the decolonisation of humanitarian action.
3. To broaden the concept and practice of humanitarian sovereignty to the global humanitarian community.

The session was attended by 88 people out of the 179 who initially registered. They belonged to 74 humanitarian organisations, 33 from Spain, 38 from Africa, 2 from Europe and 1 from Latin America, and also included students, researchers and individuals with an interest in the subject from Ethiopia, Niger, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sahrawi Republic, the Basque Country and other parts of Spain.

The speakers were as follows:

- Eunice Achieng Ngwawe: Director of HESED-Africa, an NGO that was set up in 2007 and addresses the needs and aspirations of urban refugees living in informal settlements in Nairobi and vulnerable communities in urban and rural areas. It focuses on areas such as health, economic inclusion, psychological and social support and tackling gender-based violence.
- Issoufou Soumana: Executive Director of DIKO, an organisation that was created in Niger in 2006 and has promoted a regional initiative to promote the involvement of local actors in the humanitarian response in the Sahel (ISLAH - "Initiative sahélienne sur la localisation de l'aide humanitaire") and a nationwide digital platform to link together organisations in Niger.
- Fatma Mehdi: Minister of Cooperation in SADR and President of the National Union of Sahrawi Women for 17 years. The SADR Ministry of Cooperation helps to improve the quality of life of the Sahrawi population by working together with governmental and non-governmental organisations to promote sustainable development and the protection of human rights. It also promotes understanding and support for the Sahrawi cause, through cultural, educational and commercial exchanges between SADR and other countries.
- Chejna Mohamed Mehdi: Secretary General of the Ministry of Cooperation.
- Kunom Hailu: Founder and Director of 4YBIN, a Tigrayan civil society organisation that was set up during the war in 2021. It focuses on humanitarian assistance and development programmes aimed at building resilience and supporting community recovery.

The facilitator was Fernando Almansa, an independent humanitarian advisor and coach who specialises in humanitarian action, development and organisational management for local and international NGOs and aid agencies.

Finally, here are some of the insights and conclusions reached during the conference:

1. Humanitarian sovereignty is not an abstract concept; it is born out of the practice and experience of local organisations.
2. The four pillars of humanitarian sovereignty are transformative participation, full inclusion, authority in the sense of authorship and real localisation.
3. Humanitarian sovereignty could be defined as the right and effective capacity of the populations subject to humanitarian action and their local organisations to decide on and define the criteria, strategies and activities involved in humanitarian action in a participatory, inclusive, autonomous and responsible manner, and to demand full accountability from all humanitarian actors engaging with those populations.
4. Humanitarian sovereignty processes recognise that humanitarian actions are people-centred, addressing their needs, aspirations and priorities - as identified by them - with humanitarian strategies and programmes being shaped around them.
5. Humanitarian sovereignty, participation and accountability are transformative processes that are inextricably linked to the very identity of organisations.
6. Some organisations have already taken a critical step towards humanitarian sovereignty, having started to develop their own humanitarian criteria and policies and their strategies. This allows them to engage in a higher-level dialogue with international agencies and donors.
7. Effective management of humanitarian sovereignty requires a change in approaches towards cooperation and partnership, so that they take much more account of local needs, priorities and aspirations, rather than imposing the criteria established on a global scale. This requires a rebalancing of power relations between the international and national/local spheres.
8. It is important to contextualise the specific terms and practices of humanitarian sovereignty, as each context requires its own specific approach.

9. It is important to develop education and communication based on local culture and languages, and to document all of these processes so that they can be shared with other organisations.
10. It is vital to have specific tools to ascertain the current state of participation and accountability and humanitarian sovereignty; tools such as the SIGPyR or TAHUSO, which are available on the [eLankidetza](#) website or on [Fernando Almansa's](#) website, are useful for this purpose.
11. It is very important to involve young people in all of these processes, so that they can bring fresh energy and a new, more people-centred approach to humanitarian action.
12. Sufficient resources must be allocated to ensure that participation is meaningful and all-inclusive. This involves devoting time to listening, translations, adapting language and methods of communication, etc.
13. The criteria imposed by donor agencies and international organisations must be made more flexible, and the overly technical sophistication of funding methods must be reduced, placing greater emphasis on the criteria of local populations and organisations.
14. We recognise that, in the current humanitarian action model, the needs of the population sometimes lead to situations in which the dignity of the population is undermined by the very way in which humanitarian action is implemented. This should never be the case, and humanitarian sovereignty is a good way to avoid these shortcomings of the current system.
15. The scope of humanitarian sovereignty extends far beyond the specific emergency phase of crises, and looks at the broader contexts in which people experience humanitarian crises.
16. The implementation of humanitarian sovereignty poses major challenges and obstacles, but they must be overcome because it is the right way forward. It is an ethically superior model and it works because it fully respects the dignity of populations.
17. The creation of the Tigray Centre for Humanitarian Studies, together with Mekelle University, is 4YBIN's most notable initiative to promote humanitarian sovereignty, in conjunction with Egoaizia and the University of Deusto.
18. The implementation of humanitarian sovereignty in SADR has taken a step forward with the Ministry of Cooperation defining the initial criteria on which the SADR's cooperation policy and strategy are to be based, and by which all cooperation actors should be guided.
19. In Kenya, using the TAHUSO tool has allowed HESED-Africa to better understand itself as an organisation and to focus on improving the areas in which it is weakest. The organisation is now more aware of and responsive to the needs of the community.
20. In Niger, DIKO has strengthened its credibility as a national and regional actor. It shares its experience by training other organisations, it has launched a digital platform to link together organisations in Niger, and it has promoted a regional initiative to boost the participation of local actors in the humanitarian response in the Sahel (ISLAH).

## **VIDEO SESSIONS AND DOCUMENTATION**

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The materials used in the conference and the recording of the session are available at the following link:

<https://www.elankidetza.euskadi.eus/accion-humanitaria-formaciones-jornadas/webela01-educiekintza/es/>