



DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination

Update on 2017 Progress

This paper was prepared by:¹



Background and Executive Summary

43 diaspora organisations supported by the DEMAC initiative showed their intention to be full participants in enhanced humanitarian response by creating and signing up to 17 joint diaspora commitments as part of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in May 2016.

These commitments included providing a voice and delivering actions towards resolving root causes of conflict and current conflict situations, aligning humanitarian response activities with humanitarian principles; ensuring social inclusion and working holistically and meaningfully with all humanitarian response stakeholders towards efficient, inclusive and people-centered humanitarian action to support vulnerable people and communities.

The commitments are shaped around the five core responsibilities and so are to act as a practical guide that would contribute to the realisation of the core responsibilities.

1. Core Responsibility One – Political Leadership to Prevent and End Conflicts
2. Core Responsibility Two – Uphold the Norms that Safeguard Humanity
3. Core Responsibility Three – Leave No One Behind
4. Core Responsibility Four – Change People’s Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need
5. Core Responsibility Five – Invest in Humanity

The signatories and the DEMAC secretariat have worked hard on continuing to enhance the visibility, knowledge and understanding of diaspora interventions across the humanitarian sector and amongst diaspora organisations who welcome information regarding the work of their peers.

The work of DEMAC has centered around raising awareness within the traditional humanitarian sector on the work and opportunities available within diaspora organisations and actors. This has led to a collaboration initiated with the global protection cluster (GPC) Child Protection Area of Responsibility to include diaspora actors in their coordination structures. Interest has also been shown from the Red Cross and Save the Children to learn more and seek avenues for greater inclusion.

¹ This paper was authored by DEMAC. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.

The other part of DEMAC’s work has been to identify ways to respond to specified needs of the diaspora organisations (DOs) connected to DEMAC. Training to enhance capacity in a number of areas that would improve DO’s knowledge of the sector and those who work within it had been requested. To this end DEMAC has been talking to the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and working on content for their platform, KayaConnect.

Signatories are actively making efforts to increase partnerships and joint working with other diaspora organisations, local, regional, institutional organisations and donors to increase the impact of their work.

‘We have created partnerships with local authorities and national actors for smooth interventions implementation... we have established relationships with local and international actors like DRC CISU (Civilsamfund i Udvikling/Civil Society in Development), diaspora organisations for better... coordination and implementation.’ (*OFROSOM Somalia*).

A promising progression are organisations sharing feedback on enhanced levels of partnership taking place with other diaspora organisations. This has been done to support each other’s initiatives, share knowledge and links as well as increase reach of response in a crisis.

Data sources

Diaspora organisations share the same challenges as NGOs and community organisations in that funds for adequate human resources are limited. This has an impact on the level of responses we see when sending out requests for information and reporting as having the appropriate person with the time to complete desirable but non-essential pieces of work is difficult. This could explain the limited number who reported to the PACT. DEMAC will engage with the signatories to understand the low response rate and identify ways for further support to address this.

A needs assessment questionnaire for support was circulated to the signatories and 10 responses were received. The questions provide an insight similar to what would have been gathered through the PACT self-reporting platform and so will help inform this paper.

Major achievements and challenges in 2017

Organisations have made a concerted effort to source goods and services locally as committed to under Core Responsibility 4. Some have found this has been of economic benefit as items are cheaper locally. However, one organisation working in Syria made an interesting point that they do not purchase from the local market as they do not want to drive up prices. It is clear that thought and observation of the impact, intended or unintended, needs to be considered.

A great deal of thought and work has gone into Core Responsibility 3 – Leave No One Behind. Respondents reported varying levels of success in achieving or making progress in their responsibility but overall progress has been made.

One respondent (UKSSD) put in place concrete steps to ensure increased inclusivity in their work with a HR policy for non-discrimination for employment, acquiring a car tailored for disabled people who work in two of UKSSD's centres, staff sensitisation training and interaction with the European disability forum.

This level of response provides a best practice model, which organisations can emulate to the best of their situation and abilities. A definite achievement since the World Humanitarian Summit has been the number of signatories who have taken learning and insights from the summit and incorporating them into their organisations.

In response to Core Responsibility 2 - upholding norms to safeguard humanity - a number of respondents stated that their work and organisations had been shaped by the principles and in line with this commitment. Others pointed to attention being given to enhance:

- Transparency and financial accountability/management.
- Quality of programmes.
- Internal procedures to support implementation of projects.

Some of this work has been through sharing information and guidance from other diaspora organisations, seeking help from DEMAC and looking externally for assistance as they recognise the importance of this knowledge and its implementation for their growth.

A number of respondents confirmed increased partnerships with other diaspora organisations and civil society organisations, including:

- Co-hosting trainings to share knowledge on key humanitarian areas such as warning systems, frameworks for conflict and risk analysis as well as best practice.
- Sharing reports in locations and context where access is increasingly difficult (UKSSD reported INGOs requesting to share reports for Syria).
- Hosting community events.

Advocacy

Diaspora's close working relationships with local organisations provides them with insight, which helps inform advocacy. Organisations like WATAN (a Syrian diaspora organisation) is a member of a network of 66 civil organisations, enabling meaningful information sharing.

UKSSD changed strategies at local and regional level in order to advocate and raise awareness of the decreasing space for Civil Society Organisations (CSO). They also led in negotiations with local authorities on behalf of other organisations and local communities.

Organisational Capacity

A number of diaspora organisations that have signed up have often formed in response to a crisis and then grow using diaspora funds and other contributions. While these funds help in the immediate response organisations struggle after the crisis. To continue their work many rely on volunteers but this makes consistency, growth and sustainability a problem.

Other challenges cited include lack of human resources:

- To be able to seek or follow up on relationships with other humanitarian actors – diaspora, local and institutional.
- To put in place processes and structures to build relationships.
- Overreliance on volunteers.
- Desire to have roles in place to respond effectively to all areas of concern but lack of funding prohibits this i.e. UKSSD would like to have a dedicated member of staff focused on gender issues and mainstreaming but do not have the funds to hire or appropriately train such a person.

It was positive to see signatories recognising that growth was tied to partnership work. However, barriers to making and nurturing partnerships came through as a definitive impediment and in addition to capacity constraints for some organisations in building partnerships there was also the issue of access. There were calls for assistance in creating conducive spaces for networking and information sharing as well as training and general support to DOs.

One of the commitments under Core Responsibility 4 was in relation to working in cooperation with local organisations. Local partnerships come through strongly as a standard way of working. The Danish Human Appeal stated ‘Our local partner alerts us and informs us about the condition of the people affected by the drought in Somalia. They also inform us about the most vulnerable groups amongst them. Women, children and elderly are mostly affected and we made sure that they received assistance quicker.’

UKSSD said ‘At the local and national level, we enhanced coordination with local authorities to define their role and the role of CSOs in maintaining work policies and operations adaptable to local standards. We employed more local people to enable local markets.’ This was promising but the challenge was that INGOs often destroy local-local partnerships because they offer too high salaries leading people to leave the local-local cooperation’. This concern was also vocalised by other DOs.

A consistent challenge for all is funding. However, our signatories have pointed out ways that they feel could assist them. While effective and correct staff capacity has been mentioned previously as a challenge some also said lack of time and experience made it difficult to successfully complete funding applications. Two signatories were in a position where they were able to have dedicated staff but this is not the norm.

Some signatories shared that through strengthening and formalising structures (code of conduct and staff policies, monitoring and reporting), communication and recording of past activities, they had seen an increase in access to humanitarian funding and partnerships. This supports the identified needs of the DOs as outlined above and helps look at practical ways that would provide effective assistance. This also highlights the positive outcomes peer to peer mentoring could provide.

There are also lessons to be learned regarding inclusivity and the need to adapt bureaucratic processes to ensure necessary information can be gathered in a way that is accessible to all partners.

Recommendations

The consistent message from all the respondents is that they are dedicated to improvement and building on areas that are in place to meet the responsibilities. From the work of DEMAC and contributions from our signatories some recommendations include:

1. Signatories shared the view that a platform to coordinate, inform and support diaspora organisations was an essential vehicle to enhance their work and presence in the humanitarian architecture.
2. The identification of resources and ways to enhance diaspora capacity in areas where they request assistance. This could for example be INGOs offering space in trainings to diaspora organisations.
3. DEMAC secretariat has begun planning and looking for partners to provide relevant tailored e-Learning for diaspora organisations.
4. Networking and experience-sharing space being created and facilitated so diaspora, INGOs and other interested parties can communicate directly and meet. This space could contribute to joint working and to addressing challenges organisations working in the same space may be facing and which would benefit from support.

About this paper

All stakeholders who made commitments at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in support of advancing the Agenda for Humanity were invited to self-report on their progress in 2017 through the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation (PACT) (agendaforhumanity.org). The information provided through the self-reporting is publicly available and forms the basis, along with other relevant analysis, of the annual synthesis report. The annual synthesis report will be prepared by OCHA and will highlight trends in progress, achievements and gaps that need more attention as stakeholders collectively work toward advancing the 24 transformations in the Agenda for Humanity. In keeping with the multi-stakeholder spirit of the WHS, OCHA invited partners to prepare short analytical papers that analyze and assess self-reporting in the PACT, or provide an update on progress on initiatives launched at the World Humanitarian Summit. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations Secretariat.