



# DIASPORA HUMANITARIANISM: FINDINGS OF THE DIASPORA EMERGENCY ACTION AND COORDINATION PROJECT



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## Cover photos

- 1: Medical help in Syria © Hand in Hand for Syria
- 2: Ebola response volunteer © DEMAC
- 3: Handing out emergency supplies during the current drought crisis in Somalia ©DEMAM



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## Background

This final Report and Handbook presents the data and findings of the Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAM) project. It includes operational recommendations for diaspora, donors and institutional actors to improve mutual coordination, based on these findings.

The DEMAM project was an ambitious and wide-ranging exercise focusing on Sierra Leonean, Somali and Syrian diaspora-based relief organisations and initiatives based in the UK, Denmark and Germany. It was implemented over nineteen months to improve diaspora emergency response capacity and coordination with the 'formal' humanitarian system, with the ultimate aim to improve conditions for people of concern in humanitarian crises. The project had three specific aims:

- Providing insight into current **modalities of diaspora humanitarian initiatives**.
- Conducting seminars for diaspora organisations and conventional aid actors to **address and reduce identified gaps** in knowledge, perception and coordination on both sides.
- Developing recommendations for **improved operational and strategic communication and coordination** between diaspora and conventional humanitarian actors.

It is noted that DEMAM targeted formally-constituted diaspora organisations, which is only one part of diaspora efforts that take place alongside individual level action, such as the sending of remittances (see section later in this report).

This report should be read alongside other DEMAM documents available on [www.demam.org](http://www.demam.org)



**Photo:** Local community members in Kalabaid, Somalia, benefiting from extended water pipelines

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# Aims and objectives of the DEMAC project

The DEMAC project has two central themes – diasporas and humanitarianism. Diasporas are understood to be dispersed collectives residing outside their country of origin who “maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries” (Sheffer, 2003: 9-10). As transnational entities diasporas contribute to their countries of origin and settlement. Bakewell asserts that there are four criteria that must be met for a group of people to constitute a diaspora, namely: “(i) movement from an original homeland to more than one country, either through dispersal (forced) or expansion (voluntary) in search of improved livelihoods; (ii) a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home; (iii) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time, based on a shared history, culture and religion; and (iv) a sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries of settlement (Bakewell, 2009: 2).

Diasporas are dispersed collectives residing outside their country of origin who “maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries” (Sheffer: 2003, 9-10).

It is important to note that “not all migrants become diasporas and not all diasporas can be considered as migrants (although their ancestors may have been so)” (Bakewell, 2009: 2). In this way membership of both diasporas and diaspora organisations is voluntary. The primary focus of the DEMAC project was on diaspora organisations which are formally constituted entities comprising diaspora members that operate in their countries of settlement and countries of origin, and may also work in neighbouring (third) countries. The unique connection and understanding of their home country (and in some cases neighbouring countries) plays a vital role in humanitarian relief and assistance where diaspora organisations are often the first international responders in the aftermath of a disaster.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness that much diaspora work occurs in parallel to formal humanitarian systems which are comprised of a multitude of organisations including UN agencies, international NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent. A number of structures are used to facilitate humanitarian coordination and achieve predictability, accountability and partnership including the ‘cluster approach’.

Clusters are groups in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action that have been designated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) with specific organisations having clear responsibilities for coordination. Through cluster working groups the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is able to collate information on who is doing what and where (known as the 3W/4W). Leadership is achieved through a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) under the guidance of a Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). There are many criticisms of the formal humanitarian system, including campaigns to achieve a more inclusive humanitarian system (see for example ODI, April 2016). To date there has been no systematic engagement between the formal humanitarian system and diaspora organisations. Against this background, DEMAC targeted three diasporas (Syrian, Sierra Leonean and Somali) in three countries (Germany,



**Photo:** Presentation of the cluster approach during one of DEMAC’s community workshops. © DEMAC

the UK and Denmark) to test ways in which greater cooperation and coordination could be achieved. Initiatives conducted over the course of the project to foster engagement between the formal humanitarian system and diaspora organisations started with mapping exercises and included community and humanitarian workshops, strategic inputs by diaspora organisations at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and culminated in a final conference. Though these activities, the DEMAC project has been able to raise awareness about diaspora humanitarian interventions and diaspora organisations’ modes of intervention in the humanitarian field in significant ways as will be described in this report. In particular, findings related to the key aims set out above are:

# DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS RELATIONSHIPS



## LEGEND

Mutual and direct contact	Direct contact	Some contact
Some contact, limited cooperation	Direct/limited contact	Limited contact

**Modalities of intervention**

Humanitarian interventions carried out by diaspora organisations are wide-ranging, cross-cutting and multi-sectoral involving significant human capital. They bridge categories of humanitarian, early recovery and development activities through a long-term focus of intervention and investment in a specific locality rather than select sectors of intervention. For instance diaspora organisations involved in the DEMAC project had activities that aligned with clusters, but were often working cross-sectorally and without necessarily focusing on a specific sector as many formally constituted NGOs would. More broadly their activities range from economic development to infrastructure rehabilitation, in some instances they support peace, security and reconciliation efforts, and undertake activities in the area of public service development, institution-building and capacity building. Rather than expecting diaspora organisations to align to ‘conventional’

categories, it may be more helpful to distinguish between initiative-based and transnational organisations, and nature of crisis (i.e. human-induced/conflict-related, health/natural disaster) as this in turn affects modalities of interventions, potential for collaboration and advocacy activities. Importantly diasporas can be both donors and implementers and are very often part of the first response in humanitarian crises along with affected communities.

**Bridging the ‘gap’**

Multiple factors contribute to gaps in knowledge, perception and coordination between humanitarian actors and diasporas. Language and terminology that maintains a dichotomy between ‘conventional’ and ‘diaspora’ actors may be unhelpful to bridge this divide. Instead diasporas could be viewed as ‘brokers’ and deeply invested actors with specific motivations. The recommendations presented here and by Somali, Sierra Leonean and



Photo: DEMAC Conference November 2016 © DEMAC Project, Photo CLAUS-J.COM Photography

Syrian diaspora-based humanitarian organisations to the WHS offer a number of practical ways in which all actors working in humanitarian crises – governments, UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs and donors – can contribute to maximising the impact of diaspora input, as well as ways for diasporas to enable themselves to further engage (not merge) with the system.

### ***Improving operational and strategic communication and coordination***

Humanitarian workshops conducted by DEMAC created a space for an open mutual exchange and joint knowledge sharing between UN agencies, international NGOs and diaspora organisations on topics such as humanitarian principles, negotiating access and use of information communication technologies (ICTs). Diasporas have demonstrated a willingness to participate in learning exercises and coordinate their effort despite their limited resources. Representatives of UN agencies and international NGOs participating in the DEMAC project also shared similar sentiments towards working together. In future the onus may be on the formal humanitarian system to demonstrate specific entry points for diasporas including through existing coordination mechanisms and sustained engagement.

Recommendations for future iterations of the DEMAC project follow.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for future phases of the DEMAC project based on the outcomes and findings of the DEMAC project collected over its 17 months duration:

### Coordination

- The DEMAC project has clearly illustrated that diaspora organisations are brokers and agents of change in humanitarian initiatives. Therefore engagement between diasporas and other humanitarian actors (UN agencies, INGOs, local NGOs) and inter and intra-diaspora dialogue are critical to working with them as equitable partners. In order to best realise diaspora organisations' strengths and added value, better ways to categorise them should be sought instead of the currently used 'non-traditional' actors.
- In order to foster dialogue and heighten the visibility of diaspora humanitarianism, an interactive platform or portal of diaspora actors and skilled diaspora specialists should be developed by DEMAC out of the current DEMAC registry and other lists.
- Bringing the full range of actors invested in humanitarian action around the same table is a key priority. Future iterations of DEMAC should build on existing work and be a platform for dialogue, networking and knowledge exchange between diasporas and UN/INGOs.
- Existing coordination mechanisms within humanitarian action (HCTs, cluster working groups) can and should be used to reflect the contributions made by diaspora organisations. For instance focal points could be identified at HCT-level, and data collection mechanisms at cluster level be strengthened to capture data on diaspora contributions.

### Capacity Building

- Best practice resource guides that are short and user-friendly should be developed on key topics including lessons-learned and be produced in different formats (video, written etc.). This includes diaspora humanitarian initiatives, partnerships between diaspora and UN/INGOs, ways diasporas partner with local NGOs, developing a track record and assessing the economic contribution of diasporas.



Photo: Aid delivered in Aleppo ©Hand in Hand for Syria

- In order to reach more participants and cover a wide geographical scope, future training sessions should include Training of Trainers (ToT) and peer-to-peer exchange formats to enable diaspora organisations to train more members and local NGOs. Attention should also be given to mentoring initiatives within future iterations of DEMAC and measuring the impact of capacity building interventions.
- Improving linkages with local NGOs and diaspora organisations should also be prioritised utilising where appropriate NGO coordination networks (including NGO forums) and peak bodies such as the NEAR network.

### ***Advocacy and knowledge management***

- DEMAC should further document examples in which organisations within the formal humanitarian system have been able to utilise its existing tools to facilitate the recognition of diasporas, for instance having a diaspora focal point within the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) that may be the representative of one specific diaspora organisation, a local NGO representative and/or OCHA counterpart.
- DEMAC should advocate with donors and INGOs to find ways to ensure that current funding structures work better to incorporate diaspora organisation contributions. It should also collate lessons learned on how to make funding applications or partnership opportunities diaspora-friendly or promote specific funding calls for diaspora organisations.
- In an era of protracted conflict and unprecedented levels of displacement, in some instances, diaspora organisations present an untapped opportunity for advocating towards political leadership to address structural root causes of conflict. This unique positionality should be viewed as an opportunity and could be further explored through a research agenda that may include partnership with UN agencies and INGOs as part of WHS follow up on some of the key challenges facing humanitarian organisations.

# DEMAC - moving from theory to action

The DEMAC project was grounded in a strong awareness of the growing reach of diaspora-driven humanitarian initiatives and the main challenges diasporas faced to maximise their impact within the wider humanitarian system. These issues will not be repeated here as they are covered elsewhere (for more see the DEMAC research report, *Diaspora Humanitarianism: Transnational Ways of Working 2016*). It is known that in other contexts, such as Haiti and the Philippines, their sizeable diasporas have long played a role in humanitarian action<sup>1</sup>. The DEMAC project targeted three diasporas with a presence in Europe whose involvement in humanitarian action was emerging but not as well understood or documented.

**The Lunchbox Gift** was created in 2014 in response to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone. It was set up to provide hot cooked meals to patients and health workers in hospitals or in quarantine. During the Ebola crisis The LunchBox Gift with its local partner - the Campaign for Good Governance - provided 52,600 hot meals to quarantined Ebola patients, patients and health workers in seven communities in the capital city, Freetown. They are now piloting a school feeding programme.

In order to move discussions about diaspora humanitarianism forward a number of phased activities were implemented, supported by the establishment of an inter-agency advisory board (see Appendix A). Activities included a research/mapping exercise, a series of practi-



**Photo:** Photo: Preparation of hot meals for vulnerable communities during the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone  
© The Lunchboxgift project

cal seminars and a final conference. These have captured a number of lessons about diaspora organisations as humanitarian actors and the mutual (mis)perceptions between diasporas and other, more formalized humanitarian actors, which are set out next.

It is an often repeated criticism that diasporas are perceived as biased and politically motivated actors who may lack a shared understanding of humanitarian principles, are organized ad hoc and therefore not sustainable. The DEMAC project's major baseline study has shown that there are many sides to this issue and the perception is not always supported by the evidence including relevant literature and findings of the DEMAC project itself (2016). See later in the report for a further discussion of this issue.

Furthermore the project itself has demonstrated the value of engagement with diasporas, fostering dialogue between diasporas and other humanitarian actors, and bridging gaps in understanding rather than isolating diasporas and marginalizing their effort. This includes expanding access in high risk crisis affected countries, cultural background knowledge sharing and possessing insights into effective methods of communication and response to affected communities. A needs-based approach means that it is imperative for the formal humanitarian system to engage with diasporas.

## *Categories of diaspora organisations*

Throughout the DEMAC project, attempts were made to further delineate diasporas and develop a typology of diaspora organisations. For instance some discussions focused on initiative-based organisations versus transnational organisations, and differences in diaspora action depending on the nature of crises - armed/protracted conflict versus natural disasters/pandemics.

**Southern Somalia's Peace and Development Organisation (SSPDO)** is a Danish diaspora organization working to promote Somali integration in Denmark, and contribute to peace, stability and development in Somalia with diaspora support. Since its establishment in 2007, SSPDO has worked closely with the Danish Somali Diaspora to respond to humanitarian crises, and provide direct development support in Somalia through local partners on activities such as vocational training for youth (carpentry, tailoring etc.), as well as conducting initiatives in Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> See for example <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99139/philippine-diaspora-rallies-typhoon-victims>



**Photo:** Local community members in Kalabaid, Somaliland, benefiting from extended water pipelines © Mingo Heiduk

Related to this were ideas about diaspora-specific platforms (e.g. Danish-Somali network) and profiles of crisis specific-platforms. Key elements of diaspora organisations need to be clearly articulated including their fluidity, responsiveness, knowledge of local conditions and flexibility. If they are to offer brokerage to organisations in formal humanitarian systems, these advantages should be stressed including the added-value they bring as experts in culture, political motivations and inherent legitimacy.

Members of diaspora organisations are as heterogeneous as diaspora organisations themselves. They include people from different professional categories, gender, ages, skills and experiences with links to specific territories in their countries of origin as well as diverse loyalties and affiliations (Sinatti and Horst, 2014). So while generalisations

may be impossible “given the tremendous variation in historical experience, relations with authorities in the home country, levels of prosperity and education, religious background and ethnicity both within and among Diaspora communities” (MPI, 2004: 2) there is a consensus that diasporas are a ‘living link’ or bridge between countries of origin and settlement (MPI, 2004). This is a strategic advantage that diaspora organisations seek to capitalise on as humanitarian actors. Mapping the skills of diaspora members could offer an insight into another potential contribution through human resource mobilisation as has been pioneered by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, see later section on partnerships). Profiling the socio-economic status of diasporas in their countries of settlement could also illustrate wider potential for humanitarian engagement.

**Barada Syrienhilfe** is a Danish diaspora organization working to promote Somali integration in Denmark, and contribute to peace, stability and development in Somalia with diaspora support. Since its establishment in 2007, SSPDO has worked closely with the Danish Somali Diaspora to respond to humanitarian crises, and provide direct development support in Somalia through local partners on activities such as vocational training for youth (carpentry, tailoring etc.), as well as conducting initiatives in Denmark.



**Photo:** Emergency stock, Syria © Jasmin-Hilfe



Photo: DEMAC Workshop, February 2016, Copenhagen. © DEMAC

### ***Remittances – the original cash transfers***

Throughout Phase 1 of the DEMAC project a recurring issue was the need to address remittances as one of the most significant humanitarian contributions made by diasporas and also find a clearer way forward on remittances. What follows is a synthesis on remittances, as well as some suggested ways in which DEMAC could contribute to a wider research agenda on remittances in humanitarian action.

Large sums of money have long been directly remitted by migrants in countries of settlement to individuals and communities in countries of origin that have an impact on poverty reduction and are used for basic needs (MPI, 2004). Refugees and asylum seekers who are displaced in neighbouring countries also benefit from remittances (KNOMAD, 2016b). According to World Bank estimates, global remittances worldwide in 2015 exceeded \$601 billion, of which \$441 billion went to developing countries, representing three times the volume of official aid flows (2016). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) defines personal remittances as personal transfers as well as capital transfers between households, although the latter is hard to document. Not all countries report on remittances with gaps on remittance inflows and outflows present. Funds are remitted through formal and informal means for example money transfer services (hawala being the most cited example), passed through family members, friends and mobile money transfers (for example M-Pe-

sa). Remittances can be recorded through commercial banks, but this does not adequately capture flows through money transfer operators, post offices, and other informal channels. There is a paucity of official data on inward remittances to Somalia, Syria and Sierra Leone; remittances to Somalia are estimated to be around \$1.4 billion annually, representing 23% of the GDP (World Bank, 2016b), last official figures show \$1.6 billion were remitted to Syria in 2010 (World Bank cited in NRC, 2015), and \$57.7 million to Sierra Leone in 2014 (World Bank).

Research on the impacts of remittances at country of origin level confirms that remittances “have a direct poverty-mitigating effect, and promote financial development” with a particular impact for individuals and households that may not have access to bank accounts (Gupta, Pattillo and Wagh, 2009: 1). However the broader political environment also plays a role in as much as this determines the extent of enabling policies and institutions that can channel remittances for positive economic development (Catrinescu et al, 2009). Engagement with diasporas in local humanitarian coordination mechanisms could result in alignment between remittance transfers and [humanitarian response](#) plans. This may improve the effectiveness of remittance flows in certain contexts through, for example, encouraging where funds can be directed. At a practical level, being able to monitor remittance flows through existing [financial tracking service](#) could address data collection issues noted above.

At the country of settlement level, research specifically focusing on Somali refugees in London found that remitters are under great social pressure to send money, and for people in low-paid employment with little disposable income remitting may in fact reinforce their conditions of poverty (Lindley, 2007). Lindley's research shows that newly arrived migrants and refugees may take on any work to start remitting money which may affect their ability to undertake further education or training. Additionally remitting money can undermine an individual's ability to save money in their country of settlement. This also mirrors a similar finding that the sending of remittances can discourage job-seeking in some countries of origin which keeps unemployment levels high. Despite the uneven impact of remittances, the sheer volume of remittance flows means they have immense potential to aid individuals, households and communities during times of economic downturn, emergencies and when other capital flows have ceased (KNOMAD, 2016).

humanitarian crises. As a recent Norwegian Refugee Council report on the Syria context highlights, lessons regarding remittances can be usefully applied towards preparations for designing cash transfer programmes (2015). Given the access that diaspora organisations have in many contexts, there could also be a future role for them to partner with INGOs as delivery agents and to foster even greater innovation in humanitarian programming on cash transfers which is becoming a dominant modality.

#### AREAS WHERE DEMAC COULD SUPPORT A RESEARCH AGENDA ON REMITTANCES

- Could diasporas help to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in certain contexts by aligning remittance flows with other assistance provided
- How can diaspora organisations support greater innovation in humanitarian programming on cash transfers
- Can diaspora organisations support the implementation of cash transfer based programming by UN/ INGO

A lot of policy attention in recent years has been focused on reducing the cost of remittances, especially sending fees but also the lost value through currency conversions. At the same time there have been measures by some governments that resulted in the closing of bank accounts of money transfer operators which can often have detrimental effects on remittances in countries of origin. Some diaspora organisations have been involved in advocacy with INGOs on this issue. For example, Oxfam Australia partnered with Somali diaspora groups to highlight the impact of one bank's decision to cease banking services for remittance companies (Oxfam Australia, 2015). There is also potential for learning between diaspora organisations and INGOs/UN agencies involved in cash transfers, which are increasingly used as a modality in

## Improving operational and strategic coordination

Currently the number of humanitarian crises is on the rise and the capacity of humanitarian actors to respond to those needs is being stretched to the limit. Diaspora-led action provides another avenue to offer assistance to crisis affected people. Diaspora organisations bring multiple advantages due to their connectedness with communities and access (both to communities but also to information). This connectedness is even more critical in era of remote management of humanitarian work where many UN agencies and INGOs are not able to reach populations of concern. Yet one of the biggest impediments raised throughout the DEMAC project is communication between diaspora organisations and other actors in the humanitarian system. A clear recommendation has emerged through the project for a platform to foster coordination and dialogue with an emphasis on sharing and comparing information as well as supporting the different actors in understanding how they can reach each other.

Inter- and intra-diaspora dialogue and coordination is also critical and has commenced through peer exchanges whereby DEMAC members visited projects in Sierra Leone, facilitated through DEMAC. Other organic developments emerging from the project are that some DEMAC members have started a WhatsApp group to exchange information, send photos of their work and ideas. These are all positive efforts towards improved information-sharing and coordination.

The establishment of the DEMAC Advisory Board with diaspora members, UN agencies and IOM, INGOs and donor representatives became a de-facto platform for policy-level communication and exchange of ideas including inter-diaspora dialogue, while the conduction of workshops with diaspora and institutional participants from the implementation/field level allowed for an exchange on concrete operational practice and experience. Diaspora involvement at the World Humanitarian Summit showed the scope for supporting diasporas in their coordination efforts, sharing a clear and common message (see later section on WHS). Members noted in particular the need for a long-term focus on initiatives such as DEMAC, aiming for continuous knowledge exchanges, formalising collaboration as well as documenting the work of diasporas and the results of their engagement. A registry of diaspora organisations in DEMAC's countries of interest established on the [DEMAC website](#) has 57 entries. A further development of that registry including regular updated and vetting would be recommendable.

As a UN representative on the Advisory Board commented, "working with diasporas is a 2-way process – we enable diasporas, diasporas enable us". A similar comment was made by a diaspora organisation participant at one of the community workshops, who expressed that "diasporas have the good connection with the communities, know the language, and can manage quick access to get the information needed, flexible and familiar with the context, and the conventional actors have the funds, the expertise and the technology". However many of the recommendations made to date have placed greater emphasis on diasporas to mobilise their efforts and coordinate. If UN agencies, IOM, INGOs and others are truly committed to engage with diasporas in equitable partnerships they must also find ways to integrate (but not mainstream) diasporas into current humanitarian systems by including them in coordination mechanisms and information streams (such as the financial tracking systems, FTS) where appropriate. This could also help to increase their visibility. Overall there is a great need for so-called conventional actors to sensitise their existing tools to capture diaspora interventions, and to facilitate actual collaboration. As one of the UN representatives at a DEMAC workshop put it, using the picture of the wider humanitarian system being like a house: "we might not be able to move the house closer to the diaspora, but we can tell them how to find it and give them the key to the door".

Increased effort on both 'sides' can realise results as the case of the Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA) shows. While the SNA is a group for local NGOs, diaspora organisations such as Hand in Hand for Syria were able to benefit from being part of this network. One example that has emerged through the course of the project has been the case of OCHA Turkey which reached out to the SNA to identify relevant local NGOs and diaspora organisations and provided training to support funding applications in advance of the Turkey Humanitarian Fund (THF). Priority is given to projects of Syrian National NGOs with partners having to undertake a capacity assessment process and be part of relevant cluster working groups. In Somalia, DEMAC has collaborated with the Humanitarian Coordinator, who has nominated an OCHA-level focal point for diaspora organisations – a new initiative that is planned to come into effect in the near future.

Diasporas have lacked systemic and technical knowledge and capacity to link up with formal humanitarian structures with coordination demands also requiring large inputs of time. Additionally other humanitarian actors and donors lack knowledge on means and methods

of aid provided by diasporas and are thus not sufficiently seeking active coordination with diaspora actors. Therefore diaspora organisations may “not be on their radar”, with existing humanitarian coordination systems lacking tangible methods to systematically integrate humanitarian interventions by diaspora organisations in their databases, financial tracking systems and coordination mechanisms. One exception has been the case of Haiti, where OCHA has worked with the Minister of Haitians Living Abroad (MHAVE) to further engage the Haitian diaspora in humanitarian action<sup>1</sup>. This could also be due to the fact that there is a dedicated counterpart within the government to deal with diaspora matters. In the case of Syrian, Somali and Sierra Leonean governments, responsibility for diaspora matters sits within the Foreign Ministry and/or Finance and Economic Development Ministry but no central policy exists to regulate diaspora matters. The role of enabling legislation, policies and government departments to support diaspora humanitarianism could be another area for comparative research by DEMAC in future.

The formal humanitarian system already has a raft of information portals from the collection of data through the 3W/4W, financial tracking systems and humanitarian response sites. As noted earlier these tools have been developed to improve aid effectiveness and ensure the limited financial resources are allocated to those most in need. Interested diaspora organisations need to be aware of these systems which could be shared through a diaspora coordination platform. Diaspora organisations should also support these mechanisms by feeding into such humanitarian sector data collection systems, so that everyone is reporting in one direction and not creating further parallel structures. Reports that are produced by OCHA and others can support the building of track record and raise profile of interventions. Conversely participation in such mechanisms can be a way for diasporas to demonstrate their role as a bridge between donors and other humanitarian actors who can also mobilise financial material and human resources. By sharing real-time information, diasporas organisations can enrich humanitarian databases with qualitative data about local conditions.

At the field level, coordination with diaspora organisations would benefit from organisations already in the formal humanitarian system appointing a focal point to interact with diaspora. Similarly diaspora organisations may use clusters, the HCT or OCHA as an entry point to the wider humanitarian system. There are also other global events where diaspora organisations can make their presence and impact known, for example the UNHCR Annual Glob-

al Consultations with NGOs that is co-organised by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). It is also noted, that many of the smaller diaspora organisations would benefit from establishing structures such as umbrellas and networks that present a more unified voice to engage with. In addition to diaspora-specific umbrella organisations, NGO networks and coordination groups can also act as conduits for a more systematic contact with the larger humanitarian system.

### ***Partnering with diaspora organisations***

During the DEMAC project a number of specific recommendations were made to facilitate an improved engagement between diaspora organisations and other actors within the humanitarian system. These included:

- Establish a diaspora coordination body or other mechanism to enhance coordination
- Ensure diaspora organisations become aware of humanitarian architecture
- Identify existing relevant entry points for engagement with other humanitarian actors
- Create a space for diaspora actors from different countries to learn and connect with each other

One specific issue that emerged during the course of the DEMAC project was that of humanitarian principles and partnership. One of the hardest myths to dispel about diaspora organisations have been the perception of bias – specifically concerns their commitment to humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. Writing on the case of Syria, Svoboda and Pantuliano found that:

“determining what motivates a particular group is a valid question when determining which partner to work with, but criticising Syrian groups for a lack of neutrality and impartiality is both simplistic and unhelpful. It is simplistic because the formal humanitarian system – made up as it is of a variety of organisations (UN agencies, international NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent) with differing mandates – is itself not immune from the same criticism. Numerous examples from other contexts show that international humanitarian agencies struggle profoundly with the question of principled humanitarian action” (2015: 15).

Forging closer partnerships with diaspora organisations could be one way that organisations within the formal humanitarian system encourage open dialogue on humanitarian principles to improve the transparency and accountability of all stakeholders. If future phas-

<sup>1</sup> OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, <http://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/haiti-humanitarian-bulletin-issue-58-february-2016>



**Photo:** Handing out emergency supplies during the current drought crisis in Somalia ©DEMAC

es of DEMAC focus on conflict-affected regions, this will likely bring partiality issues to the forefront that need to be discussed and examined perhaps through roundtables where all participants can speak freely.

Strategic partnerships independent of funding, for example co-locating or embedding diaspora organisations in INGO offices, was another suggestion for possible future pilots. Finally, formalising relationships with diasporas can be achieved at organisational-level. For example, IOM's Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF) specifically includes a section on 'Diaspora and Human Resource Mobilization' to "mobilize the skills and financial resources of the diaspora and other networks of qualified professionals to support the national development, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes in countries recovering from crisis, in transition or conflict situations, through the temporary/virtual return or socio-economic reintegration of skilled and qualified nationals from abroad, and the facilitation of the recruitment of temporary foreign workers in sectors vital to the country's recovery but lacking the necessary human resources". The MCOF sets out ways to engage with diasporas before, during and after a migration crisis. Partnership development can also take directions such as expanding partnerships with the private sector, government departments and philanthropic groups.

There were other aspects of diaspora work that required attention as noted below:

### ***Track record***

- Diaspora organisations must be aware of the need to develop and demonstrate a track record. Related to this is the need for reporting and evaluation to record results of their efforts that can be accessed by all in a transparent and accountable manner. This could allow potential partner organisations to find out the scope and reach of a specific diaspora organisation. Conducting a needs assessment process for diaspora organisations could be one way to establish common ground.

## Visibility

- Visibility requirements for diaspora organisations involve a number of different dimensions within the humanitarian system, internationally and amongst a wider public audience. At a macro level visibility means advocating for the diaspora to be seen as a vital actor who can engage in policy issues, as has been achieved at the WHS. Funding applications and donor guidelines must also be tailored to include diasporas as transnational actors. Finally at a micro-level diasporas must make themselves visible as trusted sources that can disseminate accurate, timely, well-sourced information about their activities.

## Information flows

- Information flows between diaspora organisations and other actors in the humanitarian system need to be multi-directional and systematic. This is not just during crises but post-crisis to maximise opportunities for diaspora engagement for post-crisis stabilization.

## Networking

During trainings the need for networking with newly organized diaspora and ways to increase professionalization including exchange of contacts was often raised as an issue. Existing groups such as the NEAR network, mentoring organisations and other umbrella groups (NGO forums) can be entry points for diaspora organisation networking as could activities such as networking days for diaspora organisations.

All of the above aspects work towards a collective goal of achieving common ground. It has been noted in earlier reports that mutual lack of knowledge and prevalence of misconceptions is hampering abilities to recognize common ground and the potential for synergies between conventional and diaspora-led humanitarian response, leading to a general lack of communication and coordination, let alone cooperation. However through the DEMAC project it has been determined that all involved parties are generally and genuinely interested in engaging with each other to the benefit of crisis-affected people. Furthermore the 'cultural differences' between diaspora and other humanitarian actor engagement have been found not to be insurmountable.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEMAC - COORDINATION

- Coordination and dialogue between diaspora organisations and organisations in the formal humanitarian system must be fostered in a spirit of equitable partnership that maintains the diversity of diaspora organisations whilst focusing on finding common ground
- There are a range of partnership options to explore, covering funding, co-location (embedded), strategic and operational-level collaboration. DEMAC could be a conduit for exploring possible pilots.
- A diaspora coordination platform should map diaspora actors, organisations and skilled diaspora specialists. A future DEMAC should be a platform for dialogue, networking and knowledge exchange between diasporas and UN/INGOs
- Existing coordination mechanisms within humanitarian action (HCTs, cluster working groups) can and should be used to reflect the contributions made by diaspora organisations

**Case study:**  
**World Humanitarian Summit**

Through DEMAC coordination, diaspora organisations were able to achieve representation and visibility, consensus building and common messaging at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). Diaspora representatives were part of the pre-summit session with the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), spoke at the Member States and Other Stakeholders Announcement Plenary, delivered a speech at the Special Session on “People at the Centre” and [submitted a joint diaspora commitments statement](#) endorsed by 41 organisations. Videos from diaspora organisation representatives were made available on twitter and the DEMAC website. At the WHS diaspora organisations committed to align their human-

itarian action with the core humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence and humanity and participated in a variety of side-events and panel discussions. An effort must now be made to follow up on these commitments through the setting of indicators and setting up systems for self-reporting that can feed into wider post-WHS progress reports. The WHS focused on greater inclusivity of the humanitarian system and in particular championed a ‘localisation agenda’. Noting that only about 0.3% of humanitarian funds are currently channelled directly to local organisations, a commitment was made at the WHS as part of a ‘Grand Bargain’ to increase this proportion to 25% by 2020. The localisation agenda presents a real opportunity for diaspora groups to help translate the localisation agenda and facilitate the direction of this funding.



# Mutual learning and Consultation

Capacity building, knowledge exchange and mutual consultation has been a key part of the DEMAM project Phase 1 with three international humanitarian workshops carried out during the course of the project comprising implementation-level actors from diaspora organisations, UN agencies and INGOs. The thematic areas of the workshops were (i) Humanitarian principles, volunteerism and coordination, (ii) Use of new technologies and social media in humanitarian crisis and (iii) Negotiating access and security management in complex environments that informed the community workshop series. The agenda and workshop reports with detailed summaries of proceedings are available on the [DEMAM website](#).

## Sierra Leonean diaspora coordination for Ebola response

A specific event on Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora during the Ebola outbreak coordinated by AFFORD Business Centre (ABC) and DEMAM highlighted the various contributions of the diaspora during this specific humanitarian crisis including remittances, relief aid, advocacy, lobbying and public relations and technical assistance. Coordination as exemplified by the Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Ebola Response Taskforce was also highlighted as a way to achieve a bigger impact and accelerate efforts. The ABC was able to report on negative business impacts of the Ebola crisis. Recommendations for a database to leverage diaspora contributions were made at this event and reference was made to future plans for finance and business support for diasporas. The final AFFORD-ABC report also recommended that the Government of Sierra Leone consider developing a diaspora policy.

There has been some criticism of the emphasis on capacity building as “an essential component of diaspora engagement policy and practice. This approach suggests that the main preoccupation may be to favour the incorporation of migrants into the development industry by providing them with the required skills or frameworks, rather than to strengthen development outcomes for countries of origin or broaden the industry’s own understanding of what development entails” (Sinatti and Horst, 2014: 141). While made within the discourse of diaspora engagement in development, this criticism could be equally relevant for diaspora engagement in humanitarian aid. Bakewell makes a similar point that “many of the strategies adopted by donors and NGOs – the development ‘professionals’ – for working with the diasporas tend to treat them as a client group that needs to be supported, have its capacity built, or otherwise facilitated to engage in activities which support development”, yet as he points out “what marks many diasporas out from other client groups of development activity is that they can potentially generate huge economic, political and human resources for development – after all, that is why states and development agencies are so interested in them” (2009: 4). As noted earlier, **capacity building has been viewed positively by diaspora organisations but should not be at the expense of other interventions including supporting a higher-level vision where diasporas can contribute their talent and breadth of capacity towards, for example, addressing some of the key humanitarian challenges such as access, protracted displacement and addressing root causes of displacement.**

The workshops were organised for operation-level humanitarian professionals and diaspora representatives to address issues and to enable participants to develop common understandings of the humanitarian system and ways and methods of working and coordination mechanisms. It also sought to provide space to identify common ground for cooperation and interoperability for a more effective humanitarian response. No diaspora trainings have as yet been organised for organisations in the formal humanitarian system. Overall there was a recommendation that training for diasporas should reach a wider number of participants in diverse geographical areas that

could even extend beyond diaspora to encapsulate local communities, through for example training-of-trainers or peer exchanges. Peer exchanges offer the potential to tap into the knowledge of other diasporas with long histories of involvement in humanitarianism such as the Haitian and Filipino diasporas. It was noted that knowledge sharing efforts with diasporas need to be a continual process, not just one-off sessions. Mentoring was raised as another way to embed learning across diaspora organisations. Most importantly there needs to be an agreed framework to monitor the impact of training and measure its effectiveness on trainees.



Photo: UKSSD Volunteers in Syria © UKSSD

# Advocacy and Knowledge management

Over the course of the DEMAC project, specific areas for future research and knowledge management emerged. Additionally by understanding and advocating for the needs of its target-diaspora organisations, DEMAC has been able to prioritise events such as the WHS as platforms where the voices of diaspora organisations can be raised. Some areas for future consideration are as follows:

## *Action research*

DEMAC has been able to collate data on the achievements of specific diaspora organisations, as well as lessons learned and areas for improvement. However this has largely been done on an ad hoc basis and there may be an opportunity for DEMAC to support the development of an evidence base by independent research groups or think-tanks through action research-type initiatives in future. This includes collating examples where organisations within the formal humanitarian system have been able to utilise its existing tools to facilitate the recognition of diasporas. DEMAC should also ensure that the investment to support diaspora coordination is sufficient to build the structural responses, promote and facilitate dialogue and establish catalytic pilots or studies that advance learning of diaspora humanitarianism.

## *Improving knowledge on diaspora humanitarianism*

DEMAC as a diaspora coordination body has the potential to produce regular newsletters and other outputs (policy briefs, short reports etc.) that enhance the visibility of diaspora humanitarianism. It could also be a conduit for documentaries and other forms of media representation. The following are specific recommendations for future knowledge management:

- **Diaspora transfers and counting the economic contribution of diasporas**

Quantifying the social, economic and human capital that diasporas transmit to humanitarian crises through economic analysis (for example recent work done by World Vision and Frontier Economics on the [cost of conflict for children](#)).

- **Diasporic philanthropy and the link between diasporas and the private sector**

Assessing in what ways diaspora humanitarianism can be equated with philanthropy including modes of giving (what is given, how, when and why) and related policies that enable (or discourage) giving. Looking at examples of private sector-partnerships to further explore modes of diaspora philanthropy and possible partnership between private sectors in countries of origin and settlement.

- **Generational change in diaspora humanitarianism: engaging youth and women**

One of the criticisms of diasporas has been that they often bring a vision of the 'homeland' that has not changed over time. Similarly, diaspora organisations may reflect power structures from their country of origin that remain static. How can diasporas think ahead to promote generational change, and what strategies can be adopted to better engage profiles of the diaspora who may be missing in diaspora humanitarianism such as women and young people?

- **Perspective of beneficiaries on diaspora humanitarianism**

A study focused on the recipients of diaspora humanitarianism and their perspectives on the impact of these interventions. This will also help to see how diaspora humanitarianism targets those most in need.

- **Diaspora humanitarianism and neutrality**

Case studies and study exploring how diaspora organisations deal with concerns over their commitment to humanitarian principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality.

**• The impact of counter-terrorism legislation on diaspora organization – do donors play a role in firewalling diasporas**

Most DEMAC partners work in countries where counter-terrorism legislation applies (Syria and Somalia, for example). What strategies have diaspora organisations employed to comply with legislation and deliver humanitarian assistance?

**• Diaspora role in country of settlement**

Migration is one of the most hotly contested issues of our modern era with issues of integration, social cohesion and multiculturalism being tested by large influxes of irregular migrants and refugees in new contexts. Diasporas have long played a role in settlement, supporting new arrivals alongside formal funded agencies. What lessons can be learnt from their experiences for integration in countries of settlement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEMAC - KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

- DEMAC to document examples in which organisations within the formal humanitarian system have been able to utilise its existing tools to facilitate the recognition of diasporas.
- DEMAC should advocate with donors and INGOs to find ways to ensure that current funding structures work better to incorporate diaspora organisation contributions.
- DEMAC to develop a research agenda where diasporas can contribute knowledge towards increasing aid effectiveness and addressing some of the key humanitarian challenges of our time.

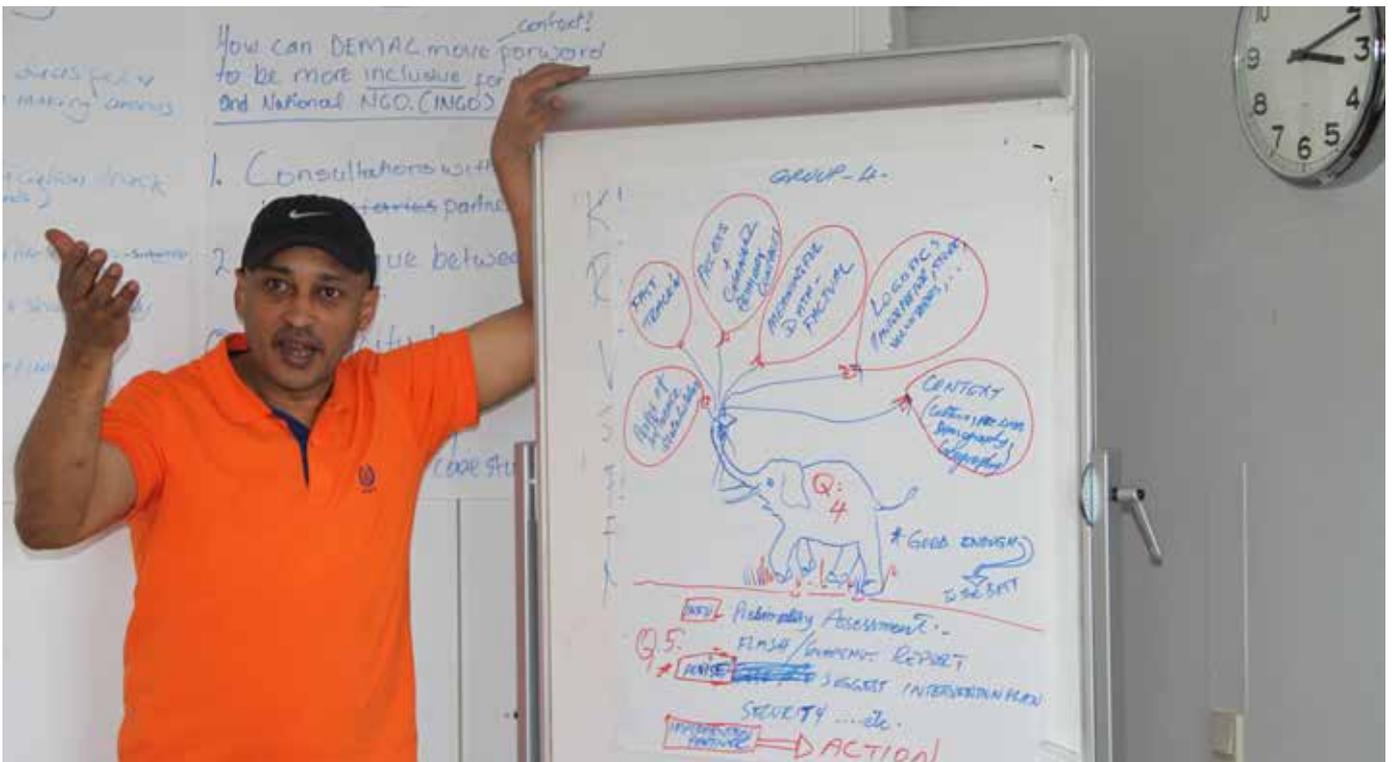


Photo: DEMAC Workshop, February 2016, Copenhagen © DEMAC

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## ***Appendix A: Advisory Board Representatives***

### **Diaspora**

Director, Hand in Hand for Syria  
Somali diaspora representative, SSPDO  
Sierra Leonean diaspora representative, SLWT/ NERC  
Syrian Diaspora representative, UOSSM

### **UN/INGOs**

Senior Humanitarian Affairs Adviser, Save the Children UK  
Director of Transition and Recovery Division, IOM  
Humanitarian Affairs Officer, Transformative Agenda Implementation Team/UNDP  
Director, African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)  
Diaspora Programme Team Leader, Danish Refugee Council  
Representative, Danish Refugee Council Geneva Office  
Representative, OCHA -Policy Analysis and Innovation Section

### **Donor/Policy**

Assistant Policy Officer - Specific Thematic Policies / Aid Systems' quality and effectiveness, Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO)  
Focal point civil society/NGOs, WHS Secretariat  
Representative, EU Delegation Geneva

### **DEMAC**

DEMAC Consortium Coordinator, Danish Refugee Council  
DEMAC Project Coordinator, African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)  
DEMAC Project Coordinator, Berghof Foundation

## **Appendix B: DEMAC training and community workshop participants**

### **Syrian Diaspora**

Armenisch-Akademischer Verein e.V.  
 Back on Track e.V.  
 Barada Syriehilfe e.V.  
 Citizens for Syria e.V.  
 Deutsch-Syrischer Verein für Menschenrechte und Grundfreiheiten  
 Freie Deutsch-Syrische Gesellschaft  
 Hand in Hand for Syria  
 Healing Syria e.V.  
 Homs League Abroad  
 Jasminhilfe  
 Lindauhilfe  
 Syrian Center for Statistics and Research  
 Tübinger Syriehilfe  
 Union der Syrischen Studenten in Deutschland und Syrien  
 Union of Medical Care & Relief Organizations (UOSSM)  
 Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine

### **Somali Diaspora**

Allgargaar Charity Society  
 A-Fid  
 Danish Human Appeal  
 DSN  
 Danish Somali Unity  
 Danta Qouska  
 Daryeel Aid Service  
 East Africa Development Care  
 HIRDA  
 Lugh Børn  
 OFROSOM  
 Ogaden Concern Association  
 Olympic Amager  
 Rajo  
 SDN  
 Somalia Dansk Kvinde  
 Somali Development Network  
 Somaliland Danske venskabsforering  
 Somali Street Children  
 Sorado SSPDO  
 (SWOD)SS  
 Viborg Somali Association

### **Sierra Leonean Diaspora**

Association of Sierra Leonean Healthcare Professionals Abroad (TOSHPA)  
 Africa Matters  
 Becoming a Child/Heaven Homes  
 EngAyde  
 Let Them Help Themselves  
 Light of Love Foundation  
 Lifeline Network  
 Lunchbox Gift  
 National Association for Peace and Positive Change (NAPPC)  
 Niameh Foundation  
 Sierra Leone Health Initiative  
 Sierra Leone Muslim Women Cultural Organisation  
 Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Ebola Response Task Force (SLUKDERT)  
 Sierra Leone War Trust (SLWT)  
 Second Chance  
 The Sierra Leone Diaspora Education Forum (SLEDEF)

### **UN Agencies, INGOs and Institutes**

AFFORD-UK  
 Berghof Foundation  
 Danish Refugee Council (HQ, Middle East and Northern Africa, Somalia)  
 Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe  
 ECHO  
 Expertise France  
 GOAL Syria  
 GPPi (Global Public Policy Institute)  
 IOM Somalia  
 Islamic Relief Deutschland  
 Liberian Red Cross Society  
 Maastricht University  
 OCHA  
 Red Cross Sierra Leone  
 Save the Children  
 Sierra Leone Red Cross Society  
 STAIT  
 UNDP  
 UNHCR  
 World Vision International Somalia  
 Y Care International



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