

DEMAC Workshop Report
Friday 30th September 2016, 18:00 - 21:00
Headspace, 19 - 21 Hatton Gardens, London, EC1N 8BA
'Humanitarian Action and Coordination in the Diaspora'

Moderator: Omolola Coker

The DEMAC workshop event on 'Humanitarian Action and Coordination in the Diaspora' was successfully delivered and achieved its primary objectives of;

- Engagement with Syrian, Somalian and Sierra Leonean diaspora actors;
- Encouraging knowledge sharing for better humanitarian response coordination; and
- Formalising a more structured response to crisis in their countries of origin/heritage.

Among the speakers were diaspora members who have responded in different ways to the Ebola crisis that plagued Sierra Leone from 2014 – 2016, sharing their experiences during the health crisis, as well as diasporans from other countries. Through a series of lively group activities and by engaging in dialogue, attendees identified relevant challenges and shared best practice techniques for diaspora mobilisation during crises.

The event focused on the Diaspora on the key areas below:

The event highlighted assistance provided by the diaspora in time of crisis with a focus on Sierra Leone, Syria and Somalia with focus on;

- Reaffirming shared commitment to humanitarian action guided by Humanitarian Principles.
- Demonstrating the advantage of using diaspora links during crises.
- Sharing essential learning and recommendations by Sierra Leoneans affected by the Ebola crisis.
- The positive effect of creating safe spaces following crises.
- Sharing of ideas from diaspora groups to aid in building resilience post-crises.
- Dissecting the challenges and advantages of diaspora collaboration during and post- crises.





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The key points are summarised below:

1. Reaffirming shared commitment to humanitarian action guided by Humanitarian Principles.

Humanitarian Principles (Isabella Lisk - SLUKDERT) - Isabella Lisk is an Administrator by profession, with over 20 years of experience working in large to medium companies in Media, Legal and Accounting. She is a passionate supporter of a number of charities, volunteering with the Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Ebola Response Task force ([SLUKDERT](#)), giving talks and facilitating at events aimed at creating awareness and understanding of the effects and needs on the ground during the Ebola outbreak; she has also collaborated with various diaspora groups interested in the long-term, post-Ebola development of Sierra Leone. Isabella is also currently Chair of the MUSAC House of Caring (UK) which supports a children's home in Sierra Leone. She helps to fund raise and provides practical support to the young boys currently in residence.

Isabella focused on the importance that the application of Humanitarian Principles played in the response to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone;

- While assisting SLUKDERT during the crisis, information was exchanged with other conventional and non-conventional humanitarian actors, guided by Humanitarian Principles as defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the national Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies;
 - *Humanity* - Human suffering must be addressed and alleviated;
 - *Neutrality* - must not take sides in hostilities;
 - *Impartiality* - Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone;
 - *Independence* - Must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives
- The desire to take action, and being moved to alleviate distress in the face of human suffering is what unites us and forms the cornerstone of humanitarian action. However, it is important to incorporate these principles into humanitarian action and to think before acting as more harm than good can be done otherwise.
- Diaspora are becoming first responders to crises in their home countries which makes it all the more pertinent to formalise an approach to humanitarian action. There is an increased need for effectiveness and accountability to the recipients of aid and therefore seamless collaboration is required with conventional actors. In that way, they can assist the diaspora when leverage is needed with aid, without losing the unique perspectives that people with links on the ground can offer.
- SLUKDERT was an amalgamation of concerned individuals and actors from Sierra Leone, each with their own expertise, who put aside politics and partisan feelings to act in harmony in order to achieve a common goal in order to alleviate the devastating effects of Ebola. Education and sensitisation workshops, mapping exercises, advocacy and lobbying and local area intelligence were leading examples of some of the actions put in place during the crisis and what most diaspora groups would like to demonstrate as good practice going forward.
- While Syrian and Somalian actors were working under very different circumstances, they still employed the 4 core Humanitarian Principles.
- When the opportunity arose to contribute to the World Humanitarian Summit Framework, valuable learning from responding to humanitarian crises from all the different actors were agreed and resulted in 32 broad commitments (cumulating in 5 core responsibilities) that mirror and enhance the humanitarian principles. Diaspora groups were encouraged to sign up to these commitments. Humanitarian



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organisations should be able to demonstrate the actions that they have concretely undertaken to apply the principles and be transparent on the challenges and compromises they make.

- DEMAC's Report "[Diaspora Humanitarianism - Transnational Ways of Working](#)" was recommended as highlighting specific examples of formalized collective intervention during humanitarian crises.

2. Demonstrating the advantage of using Diaspora links during crises.

Humanitarian response and coordination, Ebola as a case study (Ade Daramy) - Educated in Sierra Leone and the UK. Founder member of the Sierra Leone Diaspora Network and the Sierra Leone Cancer Charity, Trustee and founding member of the National Association for Peace and Positive Change (NAPPC - SL), Ambassador for the anti-FGM charity FORWARD, Chair of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD), Communications Professional (including broadcast and print journalism); Experienced editor (co-editor, Journal of Sierra Leones Studies, editor in chief, Promota Africa magazine); Experienced radio (BBC World Service) and TV broadcaster; Consultant on African Diaspora affairs, Media commentator on African affairs, including Politics, History, Media, Popular Culture (Music and Fashion) and Sport.

Ade's presentation focused on the advantage of diversity in diaspora communities; despite the fact that we have different crises that we are addressing, we are all diaspora communities, migrants, individuals or organisations with close links to our homeland. He highlighted the varied interest in humanitarian issues e.g. education, healthcare and business and the innovative ways people dealt with the Ebola crisis as well as the challenges faced;

- The community was brought together by individuals taking on different roles which enabled stronger networks to be formed with more effective communication and cross-pollination of ideas; coordination was improved among the organisations they were associated with as a result.
- Diaspora communities have local knowledge and thus are able to 'get around the system' and can anticipate challenges.
- The use of social media (especially WhatsApp) was highlighted as having been crucial in helping to get people together for meetings and to disseminate information of needs and outcomes. There was a general agreement for collaborative work through these means.
- Once the crisis was over, organisations again became isolated. However, a positive outcome was highlighted in that it was demonstrated that people and organisations can come together and it can be done in a coordinated way.
- It is necessary to formalise these coordination and collaboration efforts and use it as a model for future crises. Attending the World Humanitarian Summit was an opportunity to take our voice as the diaspora to a world platform and be heard. Don't waste opportunities in this case Ebola and use this to face the next crisis.
- There is a lot of diversity even within each country and lack of information and best practice sharing is absent in a lot of cases.
- Partisan affiliations especially in terms of country and district development may cause rifts between opposition parties and the people. Ebola was an 'equal opportunity killer' and the unity of purpose brought Sierra Leone together in a structured way. We need to maintain the momentum that brought people together in the first instance, and solidify and document an action plan for the future.



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3. Sharing essential learning and recommendations by Sierra Leoneans affected by the Ebola crisis.

Health and Coordination in Sierra Leone (Elizabeth Conteh) - Elizabeth Conteh is a Healthcare practitioner who acquired Registered Nursing and Midwifery certificates in Sierra Leone, Diploma in Public Health Nursing in Nigeria BSc. (Hon) In Public Health (UK). She worked as a Primary Healthcare Co-ordinator in Rural Sierra Leone before migrating to the United Kingdom. She has also worked in the NHS for 23 years as a certified orthopaedic nurse, General surgical nurse and Intermediate care service manager. Elizabeth is the Chairperson for The Sierra Leone Health Care Professionals Abroad/UK ([TOSHPA](#)) whose main objective is about diaspora volunteering to give back their Skills and Knowledge to Sierra Leone healthcare workers and communities. She was a co- lead for the Human Resources pillar of the SLUKDERT.

Elizabeth discussed the challenges of collaborating with conventional actors during the Ebola crisis and shared TOSHPA's learning and recommendations;

- It was identified through assessment that one of the major challenges that affected the alleviation and eventual eradication of Ebola was the state of healthcare infrastructure in Sierra Leone. While this was identified even prior to the outbreak of the disease, very little has been done in improving it since.
- As a result, TOSHPA's main objective was to strengthen resources through the provision of personnel and equipment in support of healthcare. Financial restrictions made it difficult but despite this, the organisation's contributions were extensive.
- The initial focus was on preventative measures and as a result, a consignment of hand-sanitisers was delivered where there was immediate need.
- Following on from that, collaboration with conventional actors and concerned government bodies was established and TOSHPA worked with Public Health England (PHE) to create an information fact sheet to keep people informed on what preventive measures to take when travelling to Sierra Leone. The information was then updated with local knowledge and the fact sheets were distributed in public places such as markets in Sierra Leone.
 - A task force was created with the aid of the Sierra Leonean High Commission in July 2015 and with the collaboration of concerned diaspora members and other experts including DFID and King's College partnerships in Sierra Leone, putting aside their normal activities and teaching in order to help form the task force which was formalised in September and put into action in October.
- The key learning during this tumultuous period were as follows;
 - The diaspora were absolutely key in mobilising concerned parties and bringing together relevant organisations and individuals to maximise impact.
 - Collaborative work was achieved through careful coordination and communication.
 - Information sharing was effective due to cultural knowledge, risk and challenges and aid could be directed in a way that was most effective to eradicating the disease.
- Post-Ebola work includes continuing work in educating individuals and volunteering in the Sierra Leonean community.

4. The positive effect of creating safe spaces following crises.

Health, Women and the Survivor's Dream Project (Fatou Wurie) - Fatou is founder of [The Survivor Dream Project](#) (SDP), an Imperial NEXTe Award Recipient for "Young Professional of the year 2015", and Illumessence "Community Builder" Women National Award Honouree 2016. She is committed to project design that employs creativity and advocacy for policy impact which is influenced by her background in strategic communications for development. Her work has been featured on the Huffington Post, Forbes, MamaYe Campaign, UNICEF Innovations Blog, Amnesty International Digital Blog, The Journalist and others. Fatou is a passionate social activist, public speaker and storyteller. She holds a BA from the University of British Columbia and has worked for Options UK, UNMEER, UNICEF and others.

Fatou stressed that Sierra Leoneans were failed by the very systems that governed their lives: social, political, health and international partners, further compounding the negative consequences of crises such as Ebola. Through determined community mobilization and engagement, kindness and through the resilience of the people change could be achieved;

- Sierra Leone is a post war country and there are not enough spaces to address the trauma that people have been through. However, Sierra Leoneans have become innovative and found solutions that are local and are owned by the people.
- The Survivor Dream Project carried out its work on healing with the most vulnerable; illiterate or semi-illiterate women in the community to bring about transformative change. They create safe spaces to heal; psychosocial, education and entrepreneurial community support; and use the art of storytelling as a tool for change in directing the women's own narrative.
- The organisation's mission is to heal bodies and transform communities and is rooted in the principles Faith - belief in the human capacity to heal and grow; Design - individual ownership of solutions through innovation, art, and creativity and; Change – as the catalyst for sustainable impact on community ecosystems.
- The next steps are to track the efficacy of community interventions by evaluating levels of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression.

5. Sharing of ideas from Diaspora groups to aid in building resilience post-crises.

Lessons Learnt from DEMAC & Sierra Leone Community (Ahmed A Omar Dharbaxo) - Ahmed Dharbaxo is a humanitarian activist and capacity building consultant at the Danish Refugee Council. In 2006 he was assigned by the DRC to establish and coordinate the DRC Office and base in Mogadishu. He has actively worked in East Africa on relief and refugee protection and community development sectors since 1996. He founded the first African organization in Næstved named 'NæstVedAfrika' and has conducted several studies between 2003 and 2006, based on Youth and Somali customs. Ahmed Dharbaxo worked in UNICEF-Somalia for 4 years, trained and mentored more than 200 CBOs on Leadership and Organizational Development Concept and is a Senior National Officer on Child Protection Advocacy.

Ahmed spoke about the transformative impact of diasporans working together and sharing knowledge obtained from dealing with crises in their own countries to strengthen resilience. Visiting Sierra Leone and evaluating

projects such as [Heaven Homes](#) and [LunchBoxGift](#) provided clear evidence of breaking barriers, be those religious or geographic. Humanitarian support was given despite the fact that those affected, particularly women and children, were from different religious backgrounds. DEMAC was effective in bringing these actors together to demonstrate that diaspora collaboration was not just beneficial but crucial to emergency response.

6. Dissecting the challenges and advantages of Diaspora collaboration during and post- crises

Attendees of the workshop were encouraged to break into groups and discuss the challenges and advantages of diaspora collaboration during and post- crises. The activity was followed by presentations by nominated individuals in each group which was followed by discourse highlighting specific experiences.



Group Activity 1 A - Challenges of coming together to help in a crisis:

Challenge	Breakdown
Self-interest / Ego	Everyone wants to be the 'chairman' and it is difficult to come to decisions due to power play.
Tribalism, regionalism etc.	Cultural differences even within countries can often hinder working together
Time	Everyone is busy and may have personal and / or professional responsibilities that take precedence
Corruption	Fear of money being used inappropriately breeds lack of trust which often results in projects not getting off the ground
Politics	Cannot share common goals if there are partisan tendencies of individuals within an organised group
Political interest	In terms of government agenda which would hinder humanitarian

	action in terms of access to groups in need
Knowledge gaps	Lack of knowledge or awareness of specific gaps where help could be given or even in terms of individuals' ability to assist in crises
Apathy / 'Crisis fatigue'	History of failed projects or projects not being implemented or run effectively
Greed / Selfishness	Individuals not thinking of the bigger picture and therefore commitment to a greater cause is an issue
Lack of organisation / Coordination of individuals	This may be due to conflicting priorities or inability for individuals or organisations to impact change effectively
Communication	Lack of communication due to infrastructure break down or miscommunication about best steps forward
Leadership	An absence of strong leadership in bringing people together and being able to demonstrate the common goal or purpose
Duplication and competition	Organisations carrying out the same work, being unaware of each other and therefore not pooling resources adequately
Religious differences	This is a fundamental problem that may prevent individuals or organisations from achieving a shared outcome

Group Activity 1 B - Challenges of mainlining momentum of working together following a crisis:

Challenge	Breakdown
Becoming side-lined	With other activities / regular programming as there is no longer an urgency of a crisis.
Poaching	Of ideas and forming other organisations with different foci
Fear of corruption	Fear of money being used inappropriately may result in projects ending due to lack of proper accountability
Nothing more to gain	As with becoming side-lined, there is no longer a feeling of need to keep on with activities
Resilience	Quality of networks formed may not have been strong enough to maintain momentum following the end of the crisis
Lack of communication	No workshoping or sharing of ideas that could be cemented into future action plans
Complacency	As there is no immediacy once the crisis is over, people become complacent about building resilience for the future
Cultural differences	Again, as the crisis is over, there is no longer a need to collaborate and everyone sticks to their own
Resources, capacity and leadership	The resources and leadership may have only been available for the duration of the crisis and new resources are difficult to obtain
Mission creep	The original purpose of working together changes to the next problem that requires an immediate solution
No knowledge sharing	Knowledge and intelligence was not documented during the event and it is lost

Informal links	People tend to drift apart as the links bringing them together were never formalised
Loss of intelligence when not formalised	As with knowledge sharing, there is little organisational memory which is lost if no one takes the responsibility to preserve it
Want to go back to the comfort zone	By the end of each crisis, people want to forget and heal and this often results in neglecting further steps for maintaining resilience

Group Activity 2

Attendees were asked to form groups again and come up with factors that are necessary to enhance coordination and collaboration when dealing with humanitarian crises. The responses given could broadly be categorised under the following:

- Respecting local intelligence in conjunction with the needs of the community
- Defining goals and agendas with clear communication by all parties involved
- Consistency and transparency to encourage 'buy in' from all parties
- Stamina and resilience to setbacks
- Clear communication translating into real commitment to action
- Local and diaspora led research to inform work-plan and strategy
- Creating of a hub / portal for effective communication
- Effective leadership and partnership working to promote cooperation and networking
- Identification of organisations with common goals and visions
- Looking at wider political questions that may affect actions e.g. African Union, ECOWAS etc.
- Adhering to humanitarian principles to drive all humanitarian work
- Maintaining records for future analysis
- Character of purpose – addressing the issues that drive or exacerbate these crises on a deeper level (healthcare problems, education problems, infrastructure, food and nutrition)





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7. Feedback and Outcomes

Throughout the event and from feedback obtained, majority of participants commented that there is a need for greater coordination and cooperation needed amongst the diaspora, but interestingly also recognised the need to find ways to retain commitment post-crisis and aim for longevity. Learning outcomes listed were linked directly to the messages shared by the presenters. Comments included awareness of the Humanitarian Principles presented by Isabella Lisk, SLUKDERT model of operation by Ade Daramy, and acknowledgement of the need for guided healing in the aftermath of trauma and mental health post crisis. Six participants expressed the need for an online platform for communicating and sharing best practises, and more opportunities to share real experiences. Other common requests included upgrading healthcare systems, standardising response processes, and education of local context and political awareness. Other interesting comments included the establishment of a 'Coordination Hub' that fosters partnerships in the diaspora and countries of origin; an international committee and greater capacity building.

The participants had a shared interest in more opportunities to come together and learn from each other, especially in the form of platforms that encourage and enhance collaboration. Creation of a hub was brought up again for cross-diaspora networking, along with the introduction of an exchange program for different diaspora communities. Participants also expressed interest for more capacity building workshops, or follow up workshops in the context of DEMAC. A participant suggested the identification of synergies with other EU and global initiatives to build partnerships that improve humanitarian logistics.

The positive outcomes of the workshop included the demonstration of the propensity for diasporans to come together to alleviate suffering, with the use of innovative methods in response to humanitarian crisis in the following ways;

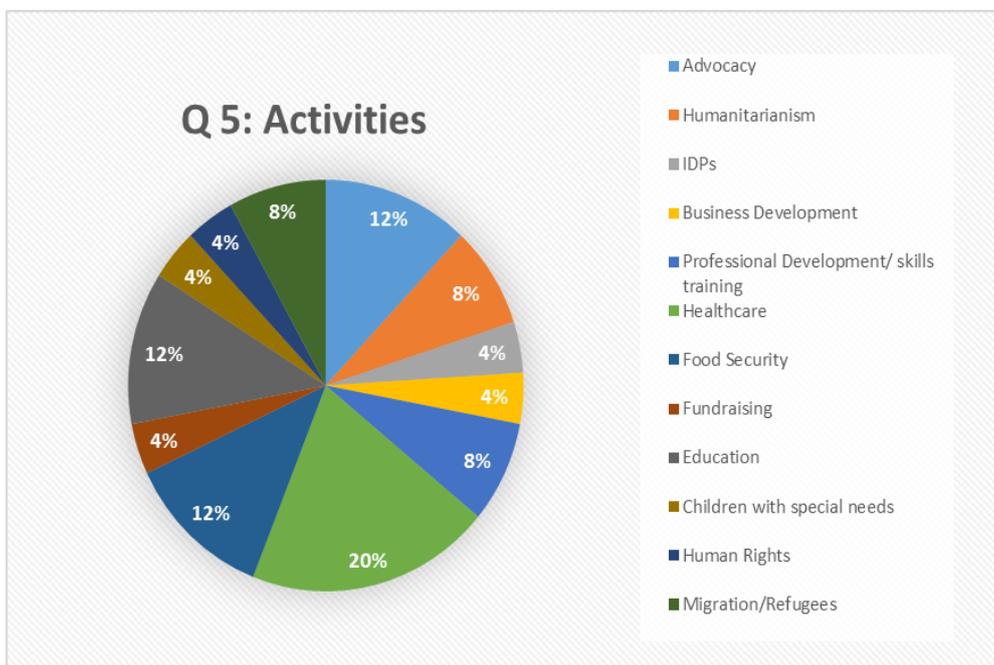
- Social media was named as the primary method for assembling individuals and organisations quickly.
- Diasporans took ownership of finding solutions and used their networks both locally and abroad to coordinate a suitable humanitarian response.
- Information sharing was effective in identifying vulnerable groups / areas and mobilisation was achieved by nominated actors with specific expertise to the areas that required the most urgent assistance.
- Effective leadership and partnership working was clearly evidenced as being paramount to cooperation and networking.
- The diaspora demonstrated incredible resilience to setbacks including financial and logistic restrictions.
- There was a genuine respect for local intelligence and understanding of cultural differences.



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Additionally, participants who attended the event were diaspora or affiliated with diaspora or non-profit organisations with their contributions shown below:



8. Conclusions

The DEMAC project has proved to be an inspiring journey of meeting individuals and organisations who have a sincere commitment to humanitarian action. There is evidence of an incredible amount of innovative and inspiring work happening within the diaspora which have been brought to the fore and there is a need to continue to share experiences, collaborate and communicate. It has been demonstrated that diaspora assist those in need and come up with tangible solutions during humanitarian crises, using Humanitarian Principles. This phase of the DEMAC project has focused on natural disasters and conflict and the next phase will be addressing conflict specifically by taking the learning, best-practice knowledge sharing and diaspora mentorship to create the blueprint for peace, growth and prosperity. AFFORD, through its work with DEMAC, continues its drive to work with diaspora organisations because innovation and impact needs to be harnessed in order for us to be able to support each other effectively.



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APPENDIX A: DEMAC WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

“Humanitarian Action and Coordination in the Diaspora”

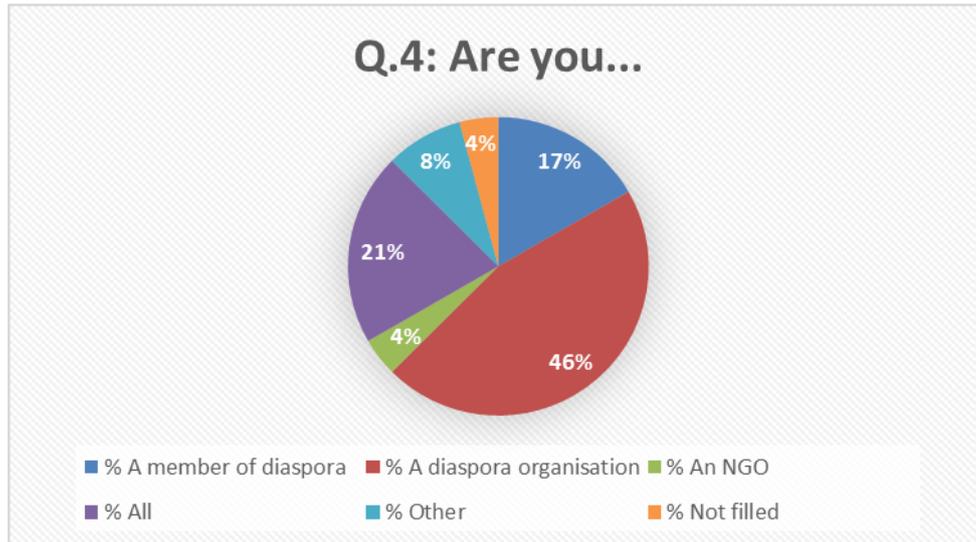
Friday 30 September 2016, 6:00 – 9:00 PM

Headspace, 19-21 Hatton Gardens, London, UK

PROGRAMME	
6:00-6:30	Registration
6:30-6:35	Welcome address
6:35-6:50	Humanitarian Principles Isabella Lisk
6:50-7:05	Humanitarian response and coordination, Ebola as a case study Ade Daramy
7:05-7:20	Group Activity
7:20-7:40	Break
7:40-7:55	Health and Coordination in Sierra Leone Elizabeth Conteh
7:55-8:10	Health, Women and the Survivor’s Dream project Fatou Wurie
8:10-8:20	Lessons learnt from DEMAC & Sierra Leone Community Ahmed A. Omar ‘Dharbaxo’
8:20-8:35	Group Activity and Q&A
8:35-8:40	Closing comments
8:40-9:00	Reception

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

46% of the participants were members of a diaspora organisation, with 21% identifying as all categories. 'Other' included student and diplomat.



Majority of the participants, 54 percent, had activities based in both the UK and Abroad; Sierra Leone (8), Nigeria (3) and Uganda (2) being the most popular. Other countries were participants have humanitarian activities included Kenya, Ethiopia, Denmark, Somalia, the USA and globally. The most popular form of activity was Healthcare (20%), Food Security, IDPs and Education each at 12%.

