



Humanitarian Aid  
and Civil Protection



# NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Community Workshop –Berlin, August 6-7, 2016

## Workshop Report Humanitarian Aid in Syria and the Role of the Diaspora



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The aim of the [DEMAC](#) initiative (Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination) is **to improve diaspora emergency response capacities and to facilitate the coordination with the ‘conventional’ international humanitarian system**. The project is working with the Sierra Leonean diaspora in the UK, the Syrian diaspora in Germany, and the Somali diaspora in Denmark.

DEMAC organised a series of three workshops for representatives of diaspora organisation and operation-level humanitarian professionals to create a space for joint and mutual learning, to enhance the capacity of diaspora and humanitarian professionals and to improve the coordination of the different actors within the humanitarian systems.



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## **Background:**

Berghof Foundation organized the third community workshop as part of the Diaspora Emergency Action and Cooperation (DEMAC) initiative which was held on the 6th and 7th of August 2016 in Berlin. The project, which is funded by the EU's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department, aims at improving diaspora emergency response capacity and coordination with the conventional humanitarian system for an improved response to the needs of the affected population.

The community workshops seek to disseminate the lessons learned from the subsequent international thematic seminars to a wider network of diaspora organizations. The three thematic workshops brought together actors from the diaspora as well as from the institutional humanitarian system in order to exchange ways and methods of working and identify possible synergies and ways of cooperation.

The first community workshop was organized in Copenhagen by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) for Somali Diaspora organizations based in Denmark. The second community workshop was held in July 2016 for the Sierra Leone Diaspora based in the UK by the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD). The third and final community workshop targeted the Syrian humanitarian diaspora organizations in Germany and had three main aims:

- Enhancing the understanding about coordination mechanisms, methods and procedures of the existing emergency responses mechanism of the international humanitarian system and diaspora networks in Syria.
- Identifying concrete steps to improve communication and coordination between the Syrian diaspora and actors of the institutional humanitarian system.
- Discussing the principles and challenges facing the formation of partnership between the local and international actors.

15 representatives of Syrian diaspora organizations based in Germany attended the community workshop. The participants presented their work and experience in different sessions; they mentioned success stories as well as challenges and possible solution to improve their work.

## Summary of sessions and discussions of Day 1

### Welcoming and introduction of DEMAC

Mr. Erik Mohns, DEMAC Project Manager from the Berghof Foundation, started the 2-days workshop greeting the participants and presenting the workshop schedule, which was followed by a round of introduction of participants and their respective organizations. Afterwards, the DEMAC project and the partner organizations implementing the project (AFFORD and DRC) were presented as well as the research study "[Diaspora Humanitarianism: Transnational Ways of Working](#)". The study was conducted with a focus on humanitarian diaspora organizations which channel support to Syria, Sierra Leone and Somalia respectively with the aim to get an insight onto the current modalities of diaspora based initiatives. The study mainly explores the following questions:

- What are the driving motivations for diaspora organizations to engage in humanitarian actions?
- What are the prevalent response modes and mechanisms in diaspora humanitarian response?
- How do diaspora and institutional humanitarian actors cooperate?
- How do diaspora organizations, local organizations and conventional humanitarian actors perceive one another?
- What are the main challenges to interventions of diaspora humanitarians?

The research was able to provide a detailed picture of how the diaspora is engaging in humanitarian response and thereby counter some common misunderstandings about the diaspora work and target groups. Contrary to common assumptions, the distribution of diaspora-based humanitarian aid is not only linked to kinship ties. Diaspora emergency assistance in fact often transcends familial ties and personal bonds. However, the research lacked an impact analysis of the interventions. This shortage will be taken in consideration for the activities of a possible second phase of the project. The research results have been presented worldwide to different audiences, who have signaled great interest in the work of Diaspora.



Mr. Mohns concluded by highlighting the main aim of the DEMAC initiative, which is to improve the efficiency of humanitarian assistance in order to help affected populations on the ground.

## Humanitarian Principles in Theory and Practice

The second session was conducted by Mr. Zedoun Alzoubi from the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations and focused on the principles of humanitarian action in theory and in practice. The humanitarian principles are:

- Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed whenever it is found.
- Neutrality: Humanitarian actors must not take any side in hostilities.
- Impartiality: Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone.
- Operational independence: humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actors may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

However, in reality it is often difficult to uphold these principles and humanitarian actors often face **dilemmas**. The participants shared some dilemmas they face with their work in Syria. Examples included the role of donors and their possible impact on neutrality; paying tariffs at checkpoints in exchange for access; delivering aid to the conditions imposed by terror groups and working with humanitarian aid organizations with exclusive target groups.



During the discussions it was highlighted that neutrality with regard to the conflict is key to sustain access as well as protect staff from harm.

However, while neutrality is important, this might cause a dilemma when wanting to speak out against violence and channel information to the public. In order to keep the humanitarian organizations neutral, impartial and credible, the discussions raised the possibility of cooperating with organizations, which work outside the humanitarian aid field and are better placed to interact with the public on these issues. Other examples of dilemmas and possible solutions were discussed.



Other examples of dilemmas and possible solutions were discussed.

## Humanitarian Coordination Structure in Syria and its Neighboring Countries

Afterwards, Mrs. Soumaya El-Azem from Jasminhilfe discussed the humanitarian coordination structures in Syria and the neighboring countries. The clusters system was adopted in 2005 as part of efforts to build up the new Humanitarian Reform Agenda. Clusters are formed of groups from UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations, which work in 11 sectors of intervention such as food security, health, nutrition, protection, shelter and others. Each cluster is coordinated by one UN-Organization.

Furthermore, donors have created a Humanitarian Pooled Fund (HPF), which is a multi-donor country-based pooled fund which objective is to expand and enable humanitarian assistance in Syria.

Mrs. El-Azem highlighted the importance of circulating success projects to different countries (for example iris scanning for refugees in Jordan that enable registered refugees to get their monthly money from cash machines all over the country). The discussion following the presentation focused on the possibility of coordination with the cluster system organizations and the availability of funds for diaspora organizations within the HPF. It highlighted the benefits of coordination, including more efficiency in implementation, information and experience exchange, development of networks and relations for a better delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected population.

### **World Humanitarian Summit 2016**

Mr. Abulaziz Ramadan from the Union of Syrian Students and Academics presented the diaspora's role in the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). Through the DEMAC initiative some humanitarian diaspora organization could take part in the WHS. There were two levels of meetings at which the diaspora was represented (high level meetings and special meetings). During the WHS, the Diaspora was also able to put forth [their recommendations](#):

- 1- Recognize the role of diaspora as aid provider
- 2- Strengthen partnerships and cooperation: Platforms and partnerships should be reinforced between relevant parties
- 3- Reinforce capacity building and knowledge sharing
- 4- Improve effectiveness of humanitarian actions and funding mechanisms
- 5- Enhance greater visibility of diaspora contributions

Furthermore, during the WHS a [joint diaspora commitment statement](#) was drafted and signed by more than 50 diaspora organizations. The document outlines how the diaspora humanitarians will go forward with the humanitarian system.

### **Cooperation with the international humanitarian System**

The last session of the first day was about cooperation with international actors. In a group discussion, participants were asked to share their experiences with international partners. Here are some examples:

- In order to identify beneficiaries, one organization approached UNHCR, to get a list of those children who don't have parents in the camps.
- Another diaspora organization cooperated with Islamic Relief in order to apply for funding from the German Federal Foreign Ministry. They also got funds from the German Development Cooperation. Only by cooperating with such an established organization, the diaspora organization was able to access these funds.
- Another organization provided data on refugees to the UNHCR and to the Red Cross Lebanon
- Participants stressed the importance of coordination on different levels (Funding – trainings and capacity building – information exchange).

Overall there have been a couple of positive examples of cooperation with international partners from the institutional humanitarian system. Yet, most of these cooperation happened on individual basis and not through an established exchange or cooperation process.

## Summary of sessions and discussions of Day 2

### Cooperation with local Partners and national Networks

The second day started with a presentation about cooperation with national humanitarian actors held by Mrs. Nora Rathje from the Berghof Foundation. Firstly, it was highlighted that a cooperation with local partners only made sense when the partners complemented each other (for instance through funds, information, skills, access and experiences) in such a way that they have a greater impact working together than on their own. Mrs. Rathje defined local partners in broad way that includes not only local NGOs, but also includes localities, religious institutions, private enterprises and other networks. She also outlined some criteria which can be helpful for choosing local partners. These could be for example their experience in implementing projects, success of previously implemented projects, presence of any internal conflict, presence of conflict with external institutions/organizations, etc.

The importance of cooperating with existing local structures was also highlighted as a key way of implementing humanitarian assistance. During the world humanitarian platform in 2007, several principles of good partnership were agreed on, which are still used today as a reference point for conducting partnerships. These are:

- Equality
- Transparency
- Result-oriented methodology
- Responsibility
- Complementary

The presentation also outlined some challenges possibly arising when working with local partners:

- Lack of knowledge about humanitarian principles which can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding about the rationale behind certain decisions
- Lack of trust
- Lack of knowledge about the donor's accountability measures, which usually requires too much managerial and administrative work.

The discussions following the presentation added different opportunities and challenges of cooperating with local partners. Examples of challenges include local organization's bias and unawareness of international humanitarian principles, local organization's fear and doubt about the foreign partner's motivations and problems that may arise of undefined tasks and roles. However, participants agreed that partnering with local organizations can bring huge opportunities such as the capability of local partners to access and reach the affected population better and their knowledge about the realities and needs on the ground. The discussion also highlighted the importance of

finding compromises and “win-win” modes of cooperation in which partners with different priorities can work together for achieving their respective goals.

### **Introduction of the Umbrella Organization for Syrian diaspora organizations in Germany**

The session afterwards introduced the work of the “Verband Deutsch-Syrischer Hilfsvereine e.V.” by Mrs. Lilli Kardouh. The association is an umbrella organization for Syrian humanitarian diaspora organizations based in Germany. Mrs. Kardouh presented briefly their work and highlighted their recently published handbook „[Best Practices: guide of delivering assistance in Syria](#)”. It was published in the framework of a project in cooperation with German Development Cooperation (GIZ). The handbook gives an overview about the humanitarian situation and assistance in Syria and in the neighboring countries and provides practical information for administrative and organizational processes for diaspora organizations. Mrs. Kardouh finally outlined some planned next steps which include a series of capacity building workshops to the association’s members as well as the professionalization of the work of the members’ organizations. The subsequent discussion highlighted the importance of capacity building workshops and trainings as donor organizations require financial documentation for the funds they are providing.



### **Group exercise: Steps for better communication and cooperation between the diaspora and institutional humanitarian actors**

Then participants were divided into different groups to discuss the following three topics:

- 1- The current role/ function of the diaspora
- 2- Their potential role/functions
- 3- Areas of support

The results of the group work are as follows:

- Current role:
  - **bridge builders** between Germany and Syria by knowing both cultures, countries and languages as well as between donors and local partners
  - **documentation** of assistance
  - **delivering** assistance
  - **fast intervention** in emergencies
  - **needs analysis**



- Potential roles:
  - access to more funding opportunities and more partners
  - enhancing the impacts of the projects
  - attracting more people in the diaspora (especially since the refugee influx in Germany)
  - international dialogue to discuss local dynamics and needs
  - strengthen capacities of local organizations
  - attain a more active role in the neighboring states
  - enhancing the cooperation between different ethnic and religious groups also as a cornerstone for reconciliation efforts
  - optimizing the knowledge transfer
  - a bigger role in development projects
  - stronger bridging function to donors
  - explore potential role of integration work in Germany
  
- Support needed:
  - expand partnerships with private enterprises, governmental structures and International NGOs
  - working with administrative barriers in neighboring countries
  - best practices resources
  - workshops and capacity building trainings
  - networking with newly organized diaspora
  - professionalization
  - exchange of contacts
  - working more with non-Syrian organizations in the neighboring countries in order to have a door opener into Syria.

## Participants:

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