

CHECKLIST: ENGAGING DIASPORAS FOR EMERGENCY ACTION AND COORDINATION

A PRACTICAL TOOL FOR DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS
AND ACTORS IN THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM DESIGNED
TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION.



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This Checklist is a product of Phase I of the Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination (DEMAC) project. The first phase of the DEMAC 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 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.

Current plans for Phase II of the project will focus on operationalising key recommendations specifically related to coordination, information-exchanges and training so diaspora organisations can coordinate with systems including those led by UNOCHA and other coordination bodies. With an emphasis on man-made humanitarian crises, DEMAC will build on existing links made during Phase I to harness opportunities for genuine sustainable collaboration of diaspora humanitarians with institutional responders on a structural level and develop partnerships between diaspora organisations and other humanitarian actors.

The checklist is a practical tool for diasporas organisations and actors in the formal humanitarian system designed to improve operational and strategic communication and coordination. We encourage you to add this to your organisational handbooks and/or operational manuals. For further detail please see our full Phase I DEMAC report available on our website www.demac.org, alongside all our other publications and information.



For Diaspora organisations

Know your value and demonstrate it

✓ **Relative strengths of diaspora organisations**

Diasporas can (i) expand access in high risk crisis affected countries, (ii) have cultural/linguistic background knowledge and (iii) possess insights into effective methods of communication and response to affected communities. Think about key elements of your diaspora organisation which might include fluidity, responsiveness, knowledge of local conditions and flexibility and highlight them. If you are looking to offer brokerage to organisations in formal humanitarian systems, these advantages should be stressed as you demonstrate how you can be a bridge between affected communities and actors in the formal system. Remember to also be clear about the ways in which your diaspora organisation can add value to wider humanitarian efforts.

✓ **Promote your work**

Visibility is extremely important in humanitarian work. This means promoting your achievements, recording your activities and demonstrating to a wider audience the impact of what you have done. Some ways to do this are listed next.

✓ **Register your organisation on the DEMAC website and other portals**

Make sure your details are up to date at www.demac.org/organisation-registry/diaspora-organisations. There are other maps for diaspora actors here www.diasporaalliance.org/the-diaspora-map/. You might be able to join country-specific databases or find diaspora databases run in your country of origin by the relevant Line Ministry.

✓ **Enrol in umbrella organisations of relevance to your work**

In many country settings and also at supra-national levels, there are networks/umbrella organisations that engage in the exchange of experience, mutual coordination and joint advocacy. Some examples are the Somalia NGO Consortium, ICVA based in Geneva and the Syrian NGO Alliance.

✓ **Demonstrate your track record**

A track record highlights your expertise, past achievements and future plans. If you have any reports, photos or case studies that show results of your efforts this can also be part of your track record. Making this information readily available (on a website, in annual reports or through networks) could allow potential partner organisations to find you. You can also freely upload reports on reliefweb.int/ which has a searchable database so a wide range of users can find your organisation. Check out some examples of DEMAC partner organisation at the links below:

Hand in Hand for Syria: www.handinhandforsyria.org.uk/

Sierra Leone UK Diaspora Ebola Response Taskforce: www.facebook.com/sierraleoneukebola/

Somali Diaspora Organisation: www.somdias.dk/en/

Engage with the formal humanitarian system

✓ **Contacts on the ground in your areas of work**

Find the local representative for the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs www.unocha.org/. They can inform you about relevant meetings and register you in their database. Be prepared to participate in meetings where you might not have an active role yourself, but can listen and learn, and network.

Make sure you are included in the OCHA 3W/4W as it can help you find partners and lets others know you are on the ground www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/tools/category/3w-who-does-what-where. There might also be a local NGO forum you can visit.

✓ **Know how the system works**

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 of each cluster. www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach

Access Training opportunities

✓ **Find free or low-cost training options**

For a review of diaspora training that has already taken place see the DEMAC website for reports.

There are many ways to access face-to-face or online training. Some organisations include ALNAP (www.alnap.org/); Core Humanitarian Standards Alliance (www.chsalliance.org/); Humanitarian Leadership Academy (www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/); PHAP (www.phap.org/). At country of origin level, you may find specific INGOs that offer training for local NGOs/diaspora organisations or training may be offered through NGO forums. See also ICVA www.icvanetwork.org

Add to knowledge base on diaspora humanitarianism

✓ **Consider partnerships for action research**

There are many gaps in existing knowledge about the ways in which diasporas play a role in humanitarian action. Consider in what ways your organisation can contribute to addressing these gaps, for example through research partnerships, offering case studies and/or providing access to diaspora members for surveys and discussions. For example, one area in which there has been a lot of policy attention lately is remittances. Is there information you can share about remittances sent by your community? Through such research you could show how diasporas help to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in certain contexts by aligning remittance flows with other assistance provided.

For actors in the formal humanitarian system

Have diaspora organisations on your radar

✓ Locating diaspora organisations

Diasporas are bridges to local communities, and brokers whose efforts contribute to humanitarian crises. But they require support to maximise their impact and to engage (not merge) with the system. You can find out more about diasporas through the DEMAC website www.demac.org/ including a diaspora database.

Ensure your tools capture the contribution of diasporas

✓ Are diaspora organisations noted in your operational handbooks or online staff portals

Existing humanitarian databases and other tools (such as [Financial Tracking Service](#)) may not always be sensitive to diaspora interventions. Encourage staff to think more broadly about the full palette of humanitarian actors including whether there may be any diaspora organisations you can link with and whose contributions can be highlighted in country-wide reporting tools. As a first step it is worthwhile explicitly mentioning diaspora organisations in internal documents as a key humanitarian actor to engage with.

Strategic partnerships

✓ Consider developing a partnership with a diaspora organisation

There are a range of partnership options to explore, covering funding, co-location (embedding a diaspora organisation in your offices), strategic and operational-level collaboration. Some suggestions to consider for your organisation include:

- Co-locating or embedding diaspora organisations in INGO offices
- Having a focal point for diasporas in your organisation
- Formalising relationships with diasporas at organisational-level
- Partnership development can also take directions such as expanding partnerships with the private sector, government departments and philanthropic groups with and through diaspora organisations.

As a start you might like to map priority countries (of humanitarian action), or find diaspora organisations that are established in the same country as your HQ. DEMAC has initiated a basic database which can be a good starting point (www.demac.org/organisation-registry/diaspora-organisations).

HQ and field-level engagement

✓ Capturing diaspora contributions at country and cluster-levels

Whether you are a cluster lead, co-cluster lead or member of a cluster working group, you can encourage all actors involved in existing coordination mechanisms to reflect the contributions made by diaspora organisations. This will more accurately capture the full gamut of humanitarian action with diaspora organisations often able to provide real-time qualitative data that can supplement quantitative data so that everyone is reporting in one direction and not creating further parallel structures.

Working with diasporas as partners

✓ **Can you access funding opportunities with and/or for diaspora organisations**

Diasporas' contributions may not readily 'fit' into current funding structures. Consider how any funding applications you develop can be made diaspora-friendly or promote specific funding calls for diaspora organisations. Remember that diaspora organisations bring significant in-kind contributions to funding proposals, often are able to maintain low transaction costs and can offer links to local communities that speak to the localisation agenda.

✓ **Networking events**

Newly organised diaspora organisations may require assistance with networking. If you are part of existing networking groups or if you have networking or information days, consider inviting diaspora organisations.

✓ **Training for diaspora organisations and about diaspora contributions**

If you are running training days, consider inviting diaspora organisations to kick-start knowledge sharing efforts with diasporas as part of a continual process, not just one-off sessions. Mentoring is another way your organisation can embed learning across diaspora organisations or by seconding diaspora staff to your operations. Finally, if your organisation would benefit from specific information/training about diasporas, please contact DEMAC.

Diaspora support for collaborative research on humanitarian challenges

✓ **What common challenges can be unlocked together with diaspora organisations**

In an era of protracted conflict and unprecedented levels of displacement all humanitarian actors are grappling with issues such as access, protracted displacement and addressing root causes of displacement. Diaspora organisations can offer knowledge, skills and expertise to help un-lock these challenges and their unique position should be viewed as an opportunity. As a result they can enhance potential research agendas you may be developing (especially as part of WHS follow up).

✓ **Working together on remittances and cash transfers**

There is potential for learning between diaspora organisations and INGOs/UN agencies involved in cash transfers, which are increasingly used as a modality in humanitarian crises. 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. Similarly with remittances, there are many gaps in data collection and methods of targeting of remittances to best address humanitarian needs, that diaspora organisations could assist in filling.



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