

Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Weeks 2023 DEMAC Session Report



Title: What can we learn from the diaspora humanitarian responses in Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan?

Date: Wednesday April 26th. Time: 11.00 AM to 12:30 PM.

Rationale and Summary of the Panel

Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination (DEMAC) led a panel focusing on diaspora and local actor partnerships and collaboration as a good practice for enhanced localization in humanitarian responses. Nearly seven years after the launch of the Grand Bargain, the international humanitarian community is still striving to achieve the localization agenda. While institutional actors still grapple with challenges such as how to allocate funding to or coordinate with local actors, diaspora actors work closely with local actors to respond quickly to crises and can serve as an example for how international and transnational actors can support local leadership in humanitarian responses. Despite this, diaspora organizations are transnational in their nature and cannot usually be considered as local actors, which can also pose challenges for localization.

The panel included representatives from Syrian, Ukrainian and Afghan diaspora and local organizations; in all three contexts, diaspora and local actors have jointly responded to humanitarian needs quickly and targeted geographies and vulnerable populations that other actors could not reach. They presented best practices, discussed challenges, and explored opportunities for improving partnerships and collaboration between diaspora and local actors and enhancing coordination between diaspora, local actors, and institutional humanitarians. The conversation focused on concrete examples of joint humanitarian action by diaspora and local actors, highlighting ways in which they are complimentary in their humanitarian responses and what institutional humanitarian actors can learn from their collaborations. This panel aimed to provide a forum that invited the speakers and the audience to jointly reflect on different actors and ways to work together in the humanitarian ecosystem, while enhancing local leadership and recognizing each other for their unique added value.

Context

Research on and engagement with diasporas has shown that diaspora organizations are multi-sectoral, fast responding actors who work transnationally to support their countries of origin. Having a connection and understanding of their country of origin or heritage and local context plays a vital role in humanitarian assistance where diaspora

organizations often are part of the first response in the aftermath of a disaster. They are also key actors when it comes to raising the alarm in times of crisis. The ease and frequency of communication between local actors, communities and diaspora organizations means that they can be alerted in real-time, have access to hard-to-reach places, and their capacity to collect and disperse funds rapidly ensures that they are a key factor in unlocking the first responses in crisis settings.

In order to create a more inclusive humanitarian coordination system and allow non-traditional actors with their unique specific values to be considered, DEMAC – the Diaspora Emergency Coordination & Action initiative – has been laying the groundwork for a deeper understanding of diasporas as humanitarian actor groups. DEMAC has worked on diaspora humanitarianism since 2015 and in numerous contexts, such as Syria, and recently Ukraine, Afghanistan and Somalia, elaborating on the different modus operandi for the implementation and coordination of aid in practice. By identifying and opening potential spaces for engagement and synergies, and highlighting the complementarity of the assistance given, this will ultimately allow for improving coordination between diaspora and institutional relief providers thus serving better the people in need.

Supporting diaspora as part of a broader humanitarian ecosystem to play a key role in humanitarian responses and provide vital support to local actors and communities in countries of origin contributes to a better delivery by increasing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of humanitarian responses. In light of their transnational identity and close local ties, it is strongly linked to the localization agenda, one of the main commitments under the Grand Bargain.

Facilitator

Béatrice Mauconduit, DEMAC Coordinator

Panelists:

Dina Volynets, Liaison Officer in Ukraine for [DEMAC](#).

Dina is Social Change Analyst & Strategist with 14 years' experience in governance, civil society, community development and humanitarian response projects in Belarus and Ukraine. Former National Coordinator of Ukraine NGO Forum she has been the DEMAC liaison officer in Ukraine since March 2021. Prior to this, she co-led as national consultant for DEMAC a Case Study on Diaspora Organization response in Ukraine.

Safia Khalid, Director of Women's Programs at [Aseel](#)

Safia is an accomplished advocate for Afghan women's rights and has over 15 years of experience working with the United Nations, various governments, and private sector entities to improve livelihoods and promote gender equality. Currently serving as the Director of Women's Programs at **Aseel**, a prominent technology platform that supports humanitarian and development initiatives in underdeveloped countries, Safia is dedicated to providing humanitarian aid to women in Afghanistan. Safia holds an MSc in International Human Resource Management and a PhD in Gender Equality, which focused on a study of women in management, from UWS.

Fadi Al Dairi, Regional Director, [Hand in Hand for Aid & Development](#) (HIHFAD)

In response to the commencement of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Fadi Al-Dairi co-founded HIHFAD before leaving a career in finance in the UK to join the organization's task force and lead and establish the organogram. From its origins as a two-man team, HIHFAD has grown into a highly impactful organization with over 1,100 employees and offices in the UK, Turkey and Syria. It is also a founding member of the Syrian NGO Alliance, an umbrella for diaspora and local NGOs which delivers about 70% of aid to Syria.

Kseniia Bukshyna, Founder and lead in [TAK Stab](#), local humanitarian centre providing rapid and long-term assistance for internally displaced mothers in Ukraine

Kseniia is a Ukrainian journalist, gender communications expert, women rights speaker and founder of the local Ukrainian NGO TAK Stab. TAK Stab is a humanitarian center, established on February 25, 2022 based on the online edition for responsible mothers 'Promum', and the NGO "Institute of Constructive Journalism and New Media". Their mission is to provide sustainable material and psychological support to mothers and children during and after the war in Ukraine.

Summary of Key Take-aways

Watch the full recording of the session [here](#).

Objective 1: Share lessons learned from diaspora and local actor joint humanitarian responses in the context of Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan: how have diaspora humanitarian organizations partnered and worked in collaboration with local actors to strengthen locally led humanitarian responses?

Key Take-aways Objective 1:

- In Afghanistan, the diaspora-led organization AseelApp works with a network of community-based volunteers who they have worked with prior to the current crisis. Following the Taliban-take-over, the volunteer networks who are referred to as *atalan* (meaning heroes) were able to quickly adapt to deliver emergency aid, and this is AseelApp's primary method of delivering emergency aid. The *atalan* network conducts community assessments, purchases and delivers locally-sourced supplies to communities in need. In collaboration with local communities, AseelApp has been able to provide aid to vulnerable women and families during a time when the UN and many INGOs have struggled with their operations and access due to the Taliban's ban on women working. Additionally, AseelApp has served as a platform through which local organizations can raise funds for their activities directly.
- In Northwest Syria, Hand-in-Hand, a diaspora-led organization with headquarters in the UK, implements directly through local staff. Though Hand-in-hand has close connections to local communities through staff and its own strong

networks, they do not partner with local organizations to implement. This is mainly because of challenges with the context as local organizations are not registered and they face challenges with ensuring due diligence requirements are met. This is a challenge that has come with the growth and institutionalization of Hand-in-hand who now faces many similar challenges to large INGOs. In order to ensure they remain agile and can respond quickly, Hand-in-hand ensures funds are raised from private and charitable donors in addition to INGOs and institutional donors.

- In Ukraine, DEMAC, facilitated connections between diaspora organizations based outside of Ukraine and local organizations within Ukraine. The DEMAC Liaison Officer hosted by Danish Refugee Council in Ukraine was able to leverage her links and knowledge of international organizations and institutional actors as well as strong local connections and knowledge. This allowed her to act as a bridge between diaspora based outside of Ukraine and local actors in country. By remaining in close contact with both diaspora and local organizations via i.e. Whatsapp, she was able to create links between the two to facilitate direct implementation by local-actors and long-term partnerships. Examples of successful collaborations between diaspora and local actors include; Ukrainian diaspora in Denmark solicited furniture donations from a hotel in Denmark for a rehabilitation center in Lviv, Ukrainian diaspora in Spain put on a rock concert to raise funds and renovate a shelter, and several diaspora organizations have MoUs with Ukrainian ministries such as the Ministry of Health.
- In Ukraine, TAK Stab came into initial contact with a diaspora organization based who were looking for a local partner to support delivery of goods. This was in the early days of the crisis and TAK Stab mobilized volunteers to do the delivery as well as other supplies and services to support vulnerable women. What initially started as a one-off connection with a diaspora organization became a longer-term partnership through which TAK Stab and the diaspora organization were able to collaborate in the long-term. The unique aspect of the support received by the diaspora compared to other donors was the way they engaged in an equal partnership with TAK Stab based on trust and complementarity and that they were able to quickly mobilize unconditional funding that was one of the first grants TAK Stab received. Having received this first grant later made it easier for them to access other sources of funding.
- Key lessons learned from the collaboration between local partners and diaspora organizations in Ukraine included;
 - Flexibility and agility of diaspora organizations` support to local actors gives them space to plan and put money towards more sustainable interventions as well as to cover small things that are necessary but not eligible to be covered by donors such as ad hoc/unexpected costs, audit fees, or administration costs.

- Diaspora are good partners to local organizations because they are highly engaged and dedicated to the cause which contributes to a more equal partnership between local and diaspora organizations.
- Diaspora have contributed an immense amount of funds which should be recognized and valued.

Objective 2: Present feasible steps that enable an improved engagement between diaspora organisations, local organisations and institutional humanitarian actors: What are the challenges for joint diaspora and locally led actors when collaborating in humanitarian responses? What best practices and lessons learned from diaspora and local partner collaborations could institutional humanitarian actors draw on to improve their collaboration with local actors?

Key Take-aways Objective 2:

Through the panel discussion and Q&A with the audience, the following recommendations across the three areas of coordination, funding, and capacity development were discussed.

Coordination

- National coordination meetings should be conducted in the local language to ensure participation of local organizations and coordination with local actors.
- Donors should include INGOs, NGOs, and local actors in their strategic development processes to ensure that strategic goals are better linked to the operational realities and reverse the trend of aid organizations tailoring program to donor requirements that are not aligned with real needs and realities.
- INGOs should support localization through forming consortia, developing policies, and being activist about steps towards localization.
- In Afghanistan, AseelApp is facilitating connections between local organizations and UN/INGOs to support access to women in Afghanistan; international actors should recognize that local actors are key for reaching women.
- Coordination between all types of actors including local, diaspora, INGO, UN etc. should be prioritized and improved, including through fora such as HNPW.

Capacity Development

- Capacity assessment processes for local organizations should be streamlined, and capacity assessments conducted by one UN agency or INGO should be valid for all the others as well (to prevent overburdening of local organizations).
- Donors should provide feedback to local organizations when their proposals or compliance forms are rejected or done incorrectly; this will contribute to improved capacity.

- The case of Syria can serve as a good example in terms of coordination between international actors, local, and diaspora actors, as local/diaspora organizations are involved and active in many coordination bodies. While there is room for improvement in some areas, it is a good example to follow in other contexts.
- International actors should prioritize capacity development in all areas for local actors and not exclude them from responses because of gaps or perceived gaps in areas such as reporting and compliance.

Funding

- Mechanisms need to be established for international actors and INGOs to directly provide funding to local organizations, such as diaspora organizations due.
- To support local actors, donors should provide funding for administration, capacity development, emergencies, and sustainable development (not only direct funding).
- In Ukraine, many local organizations have been excluded from receiving funding/responding due to the fact that they do not have humanitarian experience. However, they have long-term experience in development, human rights, women`s rights, etc. Donors should consider these experiences and their long-term engagement in country as a strength and support them in developing humanitarian response capacity rather than excluding them for this reason, since these organizations will be the ones contributing to rebuilding and development in the years that come.

Resources/Additional Information

- [DEMAC Ukraine Case Study, June 2021](#)
- [DEMAC Ukraine Real-time Review, May 2022](#)
- [DEMAC Ukraine Snapshot Feb March 2022](#)
- [Afghanistan Real-time Review Nov 2021](#)
- [Afghanistan Real-time Review Aug 2022](#)
- [Video about the Syrian NGO Alliance and the diaspora response](#)
- [Key highlight of diaspora humanitarian response & engagement Feb 2022](#)
- [Good Practices Guide of diaspora humanitarian response & engagement July 2022](#)
- [Sign-up for the DEMAC newsletter](#) to receive notifications of events and other research, among others an ongoing Real-time-review of the [Syrian diaspora`s response to the earthquake in NW Syria](#).
- Follow DEMAC on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Youtube](#), and [Twitter](#).