

WORKING ON THE GRAND BARGAIN COMMITMENTS

June 2021



Photo by Hamid Abdulsalam, UNAMID

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GRAND BARGAIN 2.0: A SYSTEM APPROACH AS EXIT STRATEGY

From its inception in 2015, the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), a collective of humanitarian INGOs in the Netherlands, has worked tirelessly to make the humanitarian system more effective, efficient, and accountable, which was also the goal of the Grand Bargain commitments that were adopted during the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 in Istanbul. Through its unique Joint Response model and access to predictable, multi-year, and flexible quality funding by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the DRA is able to drive more localized humanitarian responses and combine speed, expertise, and agility with multi-year programming and longer-term investments in sustainability.

This has made the DRA a global testing bed for the operationalisation of the commitments to the Grand Bargain and the Core Humanitarian Standards such as localisation, multi-year funding and programming, accountability, and community engagement. The Grand Bargain was thus instrumental in guiding our priorities. But at the same time, DRA has provided the Grand Bargain with very useful insights on how to put theory into action. The document you are holding now presents some of last year's achievements in working towards the fulfilment of the Grand Bargain commitments.

We have made some major strides forwards, with respect to localizing humanitarian assistance, for instance. This is reflected in the substantial increase in the funds available for our local partners. We have already reached the target of 25% set by the Grand Bargain and expect to reach our own target of 35% by the end of 2021. The change towards localisation is also reflected by the Local Advisory Group, made up of representatives of local partners, guiding us in our policy-making and in designing our Joint Responses.

The Grand Bargain officially runs until June 2021, but a follow-up – a *Grand Bargain 2.0* – is currently being discussed. As we reflect on what we have achieved till now and what still needs to be done, we should embrace a strong collective step change. We need to create more synergy between

the different Grand Bargain commitments and move away from separate initiatives implemented per workstream.

The DRA is currently piloting a new model of humanitarian action that advances the entirety of the Grand Bargain commitments through locally empowering and sustainable solutions. We have partnered with Nexus, a Somali-led platform for change that advocates for a locally driven, community-led model of partnership, promoting and applying a collective problem-solving approach with local government, civil society, private sector and international actors. Within this framework, the DRA members play a facilitating role and provide institutional and sustainable funding, flexibility in the use of the grant, and an anticipatory funding modality for local actors.

We hope that these practices can inform not only the DRA 2.0 vision, but the Grand Bargain 2.0 practice as well.

We align ourselves with the growing call to broaden the reform process to shrink the needs and to deepen and broaden the resource base for humanitarian action. This requires political will and long-term vision by both traditional donor governments and non-traditional ones. A key element of this is investing in local systems for anticipation, preparedness, relief and recovery with a range of local stakeholders. A systematic investment in the resilience of communities is the sustainable way to go. It is in fact the only possible exit-strategy.

And last, but not least, the Grand Bargain needs to better integrate gender-responsive approaches, with local women's organisations and networks leading. Mending this is not only a mission for the future Grand Bargain, it is something that also individual signatories – including DRA! – need to place at the forefront of their work.

Petra Righetti, Chair of the Dutch Relief Alliance

INTRODUCTION

ON DRA

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) was established in 2015 in response to an increase in the number of humanitarian crises and people affected globally. Major Dutch non-governmental humanitarian organisations, in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, came together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their humanitarian efforts.

Current DRA partners

CARE Nederland; Cordaid; Dorcas; Oxfam Novib; Plan International Nederland; Help a Child; Save the Children; SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands; Stichting Vluchteling; Tearfund NL; Terre des Hommes; War Child; World Vision; and ZOA.

Over the years, the DRA has delivered humanitarian aid to more than 4 million people in 22 crises worldwide, working together with 83 local organisations.

The DRA has incorporated the *Grand Bargain commitments* in its operations model and sees a role in furthering these commitments aimed at more effective interventions and reducing the need for humanitarian aid.

Joint Responses

The DRA responds to humanitarian crises by designing 'Joint Responses' drawn up and implemented by the members best placed to address a specific crisis. The DRA implements Protracted Crisis Joint Responses (with an annual or multi-annual timespan) and Acute Crisis Joint Responses (with a maximum of 6 months). At the moment (June 2021) the following Joint Responses are under way:

- Central African Republic Joint Response (Protracted)
- DR Congo Joint Response (Protracted)
- Ethiopia COVID Joint Response
- Ethiopia Tigray Joint Response (Acute)
- Mozambique Cabo Delgado Joint Response (Acute)
- Nigeria Joint Response (Protracted)
- Somalia Joint Response (Protracted)
- South Sudan Acute Food Insecurity Joint Response (Acute)
- South Sudan COVID Joint Response
- South Sudan Joint Response (Protracted)
- Sudan Joint Response (Protracted)
- Syria Joint Response (Protracted)
- Vietnam Joint Response (Acute)
- Yemen Joint Response (Protracted)

DRA COMMITMENTS

The DRA's work is guided by four priorities/pillars:

1. **Accountability.** The DRA aims for open, transparent and inclusive project implementation, always involving the affected population in a meaningful way. The DRA contributes to transparency by quarterly reporting of key indicators for different Joint Responses to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) database, as well as adopting the standardized Grand Bargain reporting format ('8+3').

2. **Collaboration.** For Dutch humanitarian assistance, the establishment of DRA itself was an enormous stride forward in collaboration. Instead of competing for funding or working in

isolation, DRA members come together and use their different mandates and set-ups to design a well-targeted humanitarian response in difficult contexts. By working together, DRA members are able to create a more timely, efficient humanitarian response with higher impact for those in need. DRA has also facilitated joint lobby and advocacy to leverage its collective voice, with the aim of strengthening impact for the affected population.

3. Innovation. In a context of increasing needs and reduced resources, innovation is needed to stimulate more efficient and effective use of available resources. Over the past years, the DRA has tested how to do things differently, specifically to better reach hard-to-access populations, anticipate crises, and address issues of exclusion and discrimination. The [DRA Innovation Fund \(DIF\)](#), an exclusive funding window for innovation, has set out to drive innovation in humanitarian response. Between 2018 and 2021, the DRA Innovation Fund has made 12 million euros available for humanitarian innovation projects.

4. Localisation. Following (and exceeding) the Grand Bargain commitment, DRA has adopted an ambitious target of 35% of its funding going to local actors by the end of 2021 (the Grand Bargain sets the target at 25%). This has accelerated learning on how to facilitate effective localisation. The funding to local partners in protracted crises has risen from 21% in 2018 to 25% in 2020. For acute crises, the funds increased from 19% in 2018 to 36% in 2020.

By 2019, the DRA had been able to transfer 25% of funding to local actors already, thereby meeting the Grand Bargain commitment. Other initiatives have included advocacy on localisation at a national level (for example South Sudan and Somalia Joint Responses) and the creation of a Local Advisory Group (LAG), consisting of representatives of local partners, which is helping to identify opportunities to involve local actors more meaningfully in DRA decision-making and policy development.

ON THE GRAND BARGAIN

The Grand Bargain, launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, is an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action.

The heart of the Grand Bargain are 9 issues (or workstreams) that the signatories have committed to:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Greater Transparency | 6. A Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives |
| 2. More support and funding tools to local and national responders | 7. Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding |
| 3. Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming | 8. Reduced earmarking of donor contributions |
| 4. Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews | 9. Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements |
| 5. Improve joint and impartial needs assessments | |

An original 10th issue ('Enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors') has been closed as an independent workstream and mainstreamed as a cross-cutting commitment. Each workstream is co-convened by one donor government representative and one humanitarian agency or organisation. The Netherlands is, with the World Bank, co-convenor of commitment 1 (Greater Transparency). The Grand Bargain is championed by 'Eminent Person' Ms. Sigrid Kaag (Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Netherlands), responsible for promoting and advocating for the advancement of the Grand Bargain commitments.

GRAND BARGAIN COMMITMENTS – DRA’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

COMMITMENT I – GREATER TRANSPARENCY

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will lead in transparency to the government, Dutch public and disaster affected people by clearly communicating results. This will include but not be limited to quarterly reporting key indicators for all Joint Responses to the IATI database.



DRA’S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

The main instrument to maximize transparency is the reporting to IATI. The DRA reports on its Joint Responses to IATI, using key indicators based on ECHO’s set of standardized indicators. The IATI-data provided by all DRA-partners are also integrated into the so-called [DRA Dashboard](#). The DRA dashboard was upgraded and has an additional functionality that allows members to trace errors in their datasets to improve the quality of the open data that are provided by DRA members. At the same time, it provides insights to interested outsiders on which DRA partner does what, where, with whom and with how much funding. The dashboard informs on both financial and result level. By introducing the dashboard, DRA has moved from being open and transparent to really using the data that are published and allowing others to use it.

In addition to the reporting of data through IATI, DRA is committed to improve its transparency towards all stakeholders. Initiatives to inform and involve stakeholders include:

Beneficiaries:

- During project design, village heads, village committees (consisting of men and women), government authorities and other NGO actors are directly involved and consulted.
- Regular information sharing with beneficiaries about the progress of projects e.g., through community entry meetings, and regular feedback meetings.
- Feedback and complaint mechanisms in each location, consultations and qualitative reviews.
- The affected population is consulted during needs assessments.

Reporting to the donor:

- Information at Joint Response level is shared in an annual ‘combi-report’.
- The Block Grant Annual report shares information on acute Joint Responses and innovation projects.
- Information is shared through the annual support budget report.

Other stakeholders as well as interested outsiders are informed through the DRA website (www.dutchrelief.org) and other online channels:

- The annual [DRA impact report](#).
- Advertorials in Dutch media about achieved results (e.g., about the Syria Joint Responses and the DRA activities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic).
- Via social media channels of both the DRA and its partners.

Within each Joint Response, partners aim for an open and inclusive implementation, continuously involving beneficiaries and local stakeholders. This is reflected in equal gender representation in committees and seeking to address the exclusion of marginalized people and minorities.

The Netherlands and the DRA as a partner have implemented the so-called ‘8+3 reporting template’. This template, based on 8 core questions and 3 additional questions has greatly simplified reporting requirements (see also Commitment 9), thus enhancing transparency.

Challenges

For some local partners, data sharing through the IATI template is still challenging. When possible, DRA partners support the local partners in the reporting requirements. In some cases, it has been agreed that the DRA partner includes the data in IATI on behalf of the local partner.

IN 2021

DRA continues working towards further increasing transparency. Some of the (anticipated) activities include:

- Attention for IATI reporting by local partners.
- Continued support on IATI reporting at the level of DRA members.
- Revision of DRA indicators to improve measurement of funding through local organisations.
- Increasing the visibility of DRA’s work through advertorials/new communication materials published on the website and shared with external stakeholders.
- In 2021, DRA will join a pilot initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to improve the calculation of the number of people affected by disasters and other crises.

COMMITMENT II – MORE SUPPORT AND FUNDING TOOLS TO LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESPONDERS

DRA strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will serve to amplify the voice and capacity of local actors in international fora, coordination systems and with other donors (more funding to local partners, efficient funding, more capacity strengthening, amplifying local voices funding).

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS & CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

This commitment aims to achieve localisation by increasing locally led humanitarian responses and investing in local capacities. The DRA supported this commitment through five pathways:

1. **Increased funding for local partners:** the DRA Localisation Working Group has successfully pushed for an increase in funding to local partners in both protracted and acute crises. For example, the funding to local partners in protracted crises has risen from 21% in 2018 to 25% in 2020. For acute crises, the funds increased from 19% in 2018 to 36% in 2020, hereby reaching the goal of spending 35% of DRA funding to local actors.

2. **More efficient funding:** the DRA continues to commit to minimizing transaction costs, support locally designed responses and to ensure direct flow of funding through 'smart' strategies.

3. Allocation of 5-8% of DRA budgets to **capacity strengthening** of local humanitarian actors: on average, the amount spent on capacity strengthening to local actors in acute crisis has been less than 1% each year. Moreover, this budget has been decreasing from 0.83% in 2018 to 0.68% in 2020. The explanation is that capacity strengthening in acute crisis is challenging because of the short time frame; the priority is on meeting urgent needs. For local actors in protracted crisis, the budget for capacity strengthening did increase, from 1.86% in 2018 to 3.19% in 2020, but it is still below the aim of spending 5-8% on capacity strengthening. There are substantial differences between the Joint Responses. For example, the Nigeria Joint Response was raised from 1.7% in 2018 to 6.9% in 2020. The conclusion is that localisation is context specific, with varying existing capacities of local actors and different needs. The focus of DRA regarding capacity strengthening is shifting from trainings, with limited and short-term impact, to institutional strengthening, as stronger organisations will be more supportive to locally led responses.

Humanitarian Leadership Academy

In the Yemen Joint Response, DRA, together with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, is carrying out a two-year tailor-made programme to identify learning and capacity strengthening needs of local humanitarian actors. Collaboration with the international community is strengthened to adequately address these needs. In 2020, 31 local NGOs were selected to participate in this programme. Two workshops were organised to map the envisioned capacities that are needed as well as possible obstacles to reach these capacities.

4. **Improved partnerships with local actors** in conflict-affected settings: DRA has taken initiatives to set-up, test and learn from different partnership models. Joint Responses are designed in the field with increasing 'ownership' for local partners. They also give support to amplify local voices in the humanitarian system, for example by having local partners present in all Joint Response meetings and including them in planning and decision-making processes.

5. **Amplifying local voices:** to facilitate and support the influence of local actors on DRA's policies and practices, a Local Advisory Group (LAG) has been established. This group

consists of 8 representatives of local actors. The LAG is increasingly participating and consulted through, for example, learning meetings and when developing new strategies. More than before, local partners take part of planning and design workshops. In the Yemen Joint Response in 2018, for example, none of the local partners were present in the kick-off meeting and workshops, but in 2020, five local partners were participating. They contribute significantly to the overall programme design and the joint activities, and they were having the same rights as INGOs. Another example is the Nigeria Joint Response, where two local partners were present in 2018. This number has increased to seven (all) local partners in 2020. In non-government-controlled areas in Syria, the local partners in the Joint Response have the status of consortium members and deliver the complete implementation of all interventions. Other examples of amplifying local voices can be found in the South Sudan Joint Response, where a National Partner Advocacy platform has been established to foster open and direct engagement and enhance learning opportunities between the national partners and institutional donors. This allows national partners to take the lead in the humanitarian responses in their country.

Flexible crisis modifier

The ‘flexible crisis modifier’ has been introduced in the Somalia Joint Response 2020. This is a small contingency fund for acute emergencies, consisting of 33.000 EUR per local partner (6 partners participated in Somalia). This fund is integrated in local partner budgets and follows a quick and flexible application and reporting process, allowing local partners to quickly respond to sudden emergencies such as COVID-19, floods, and cyclones. Local partners used this fund for quick COVID-19 prevention responses in early March 2020, resulting in DRA being one of the first to address this virus in the country.

Challenges

‘Risk-sharing’ is one of the key challenges. This is partly related to the DRA governance and the subsidy frameworks of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which make it difficult to include local actors as a direct contracting partner (instead of a sub-contractual arrangement). Additionally, local partners do not have the same ability to pay back potential ineligible costs or to pre-finance, which means that localisation involves an increased risk for the lead organisation. In 2020, a discussion took place on indirect cost-recovery (ICR) and how DRA partners can be transparent on this in their budgets.

Local partner participation in meetings and humanitarian fora is in some contexts restricted by the government, for example in government-controlled areas in Syria. This means that local partners are sometimes not able to attend meetings or workshops.

IN 2021

Following the five key pathways to achieve localisation mentioned above, the next goals and actions have been developed for 2021:

1. **Increased funding for local partners:** in 2021, all Joint Responses will make an effort to increase the percentage of funding to local partners. The aim is to have 35% of DRA funding go as directly as possible to local actors.
2. **More efficient funding:** among the activities planned for 2021 are defining models for local leadership of Joint Responses and explore possibilities for an increased mandate for Joint Response leads to lead a Joint Response locally. A concrete example is the direct allocation of funds to a local partner that will implement a program in the Nigeria Joint Response in coordination with other DRA Joint Response members.

3. Increased budgets for **capacity strengthening** of local humanitarian actors: in 2021, an estimated 3% of DRA budgets of local humanitarian actors will be spent on capacity strengthening. Some Joint Responses will go beyond this, such as the Nigeria Joint Response, where the total budget for capacity strengthening is estimated to reach 5.6% in 2021. Additionally, the DRA will continue to develop more appropriate strategies for capacity strengthening, more directed at organisational development. The DRA understands that there is no quick fix: partnership models need to be re-assessed to be more equal, instead of the common practice to only sub-contract local actors.

4. **Improved partnerships with local actors** in conflict-affected settings: to improve partnering and risk-sharing in conflict settings, innovative practices will be identified and key actors and country leads will be consulted.

5. **Amplifying local voices:** DRA's Innovation Fund Local Call for Proposals (DIF 3) was launched in Uganda and intends to support local humanitarian innovation as much as possible within the DRA governance model and the DIF subsidy framework. The call resulted in six DIF funded innovation projects, commencing implementation in 2021. Also, the Local Advisory Group will be stimulated to advise DRA on localisation and DRA will support the Local Advisory Group to voice their opinions in international fora.

In preparation for the new DRA Strategy, collaboration with local actors in design, co-leading and funding allocation will be part of the operational plan. Moreover, the DRA localisation agenda and definition of local actors will be included in this new strategy.

Following up on the success of the flexible crisis modifier pilot in 2020, the local partners of the Somalia Joint Response will each receive 40.000 EUR in 2021. In addition, this instrument is introduced to other Joint Responses as a valuable option to enable local NGOs to respond more independently. The DRA Localisation Working Group formulated recommendations to DRA's COVID Task force for the first tranche of COVID-19 funding. The recommendations focussed on soliciting local inputs to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in their respective areas, how DRA can support their plans, and to increase the involvement of local partners in the decision-making process at an early stage.

COMMITMENT III – INCREASE THE USE AND COORDINATION OF CASH-BASED PROGRAMMING

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will seek to pilot new financing models for localizing support and delivering cash such as direct individual to individual giving, community to community models with INGOs acting as brokers and quality guarantors and links to microfinance, mobile money and insurance.



DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

Over the last period DRA has developed several cash-based financing models, among them:

- The South Sudan Joint Response piloted a mobile and e-technology system for distributing cash vouchers.
- The Nigeria Joint Response developed various cash-programs.
- The Syria Joint Response initiated a study about the benefits and other effects of different 'cash & voucher assistance' models (like vouchers, 'cash for work' and 'multipurpose cash').¹

¹ Key Aid Consulting and Venture International (February 2021). *Comparative Study of the Effects of Different Cash Modalities on Gender Dynamics and People with Disabilities*. Dutch Relief Alliance, The Hague.

Cash pilot in Syria

In 2020, the Joint Response partners in Syria (ZOA, Oxfam, Cordaid, Dorcas, and Terre des Hommes) executed a cash-aid pilot project for almost 15.000 beneficiaries in Aleppo City to cover food security needs. Different modalities were used: vouchers, Cash for Work, and Multipurpose Cash. The objective was to showcase the different effects of these modalities on the most deprived and marginalised groups, in particular women and People With Disabilities. The pilot revealed that a voucher system was most effective in increasing food security among households. All modalities showed a significant decrease of stress and tensions among women by easing some of the financial burdens faced by the recipient households. This was particularly the case for unrestricted modalities as recipients had the freedom to spend the grant to cover their priority needs. Households themselves preferred modalities with less restrictions, like Cash for Work and Multipurpose Cash.

Challenges

Besides the clear advantages of cash transfers, cash can also be very sensitive. In Syria, the government publicly expressed its worries that money might reach opposition groups and that it would negatively impact markets. Also, beneficiaries would prefer in-kind over cash, the Syrian government claimed. In this situation, obtaining approvals for cash-based activities is challenging. The trend of shrinking ‘humanitarian space’ has a significant impact on the implementation of cash & voucher assistance projects. The Nigerian authorities, for example, restricted the implementation of cash projects through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Increased international bank regulation also delayed the implementation of cash projects in, among others, Yemen and Syria.

The roll-out of cash-based assistance – like capacity building related to cash programming – was delayed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak and travel restrictions. COVID-19 also impacted the monitoring and evaluation of cash projects. Monitoring and evaluation are key to ensure accountability and effectiveness. In some contexts, remote monitoring was used as an alternative, but this is not always feasible.

IN 2021

In 2021, the Innovation Working Group initiated the ‘Cash & Voucher Assistance Taskforce’. Its aim is to improve and align the quality of cash & voucher interventions. The taskforce offers a learning and exchange platform for DRA partners, to improve the quality of cash & voucher assistance. Further tailor-made support is based on input and requests from local actors.

In 2021 two cash-programming projects, supported by the DRA Innovation Fund (DIF), are ongoing:

I. PROJECT B-READY

Increasing disaster preparedness by access to cash

Most marginalised people are not prepared when, for example, tornados threaten their homes. Access to cash before the disaster hits greatly improves their resilience. *B-Ready*, initiated by Oxfam Novib and Plan International in the Philippines, has a dual function. It predicts extreme weather events using the latest digital forecasting technology and it provides marginalised people in disaster-prone areas with pre-paid credit cards that can be activated during tornado warnings. This allows people to resort to several coping strategies. They can use the cash to organise transport out of the threatened area. Or they can buy materials to strengthen their home to withstand the tornado. The card also makes it possible to stockpile

food and water to ride out the weather.² In 2021 B-Ready will be scaled up in the Philippines and will start-up in Indonesia.

2. 121 PERSONAL CASH AID

The *121 Personal Cash Aid* project aims to make cash-based aid safe, fast & fair, allowing people affected by disasters meet their own needs. The project includes a number of elements:

- A cash program design ‘wizard’.
- An app for the affected population to register.
- An app for aid worker for validation purposes.
- A portal to monitor and manage cash programs.
- 121 products are innovative by focusing on simplicity, contextualisation and open-source.

The project addresses the challenges of insufficient knowledge and skills by implementing roadmaps to improve how data flows from needs assessment and registration up to payments and evaluation. The 121 Personal Cash Aid project is relevant for Joint Responses and DRA partners as they can facilitate and contribute to scaling up cash programming. The project is finalizing its pilot and is undergoing an external evaluation.



² See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7RIY4DhZhs>

COMMITMENT IV – REDUCE DUPLICATION AND MANAGEMENT COSTS WITH PERIODIC FUNCTIONAL REVIEWS

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will focus on minimizing transaction costs and ensuring funds flow as directly as possible to local actors in line with Grand Bargain commitments, whilst maintaining quality, strong risk management structures and accountability mechanisms.

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

The DRA practice of Joint Responses reduces duplication and saves costs in a number of ways:

- Alignment on approaches and programming.
- Geographical alignment.
- Organisation of joint community entry meetings and staff training.
- Involving the same community volunteers helps to reduce recruitment and training costs.
- Joint evaluation and learning.
- Sharing resources such as office and storage space, stationary, Internet connection and transportation.
- Using partner networks, for example for finding suitable vendors, helps to save costs and time.
- Shared advocacy.

To achieve greater impact for beneficiaries with limited funds, DRA invested in the innovative SCAN-tool (systematic cost analysis), which quickly and precisely estimates the cost-efficiency of programs and compares them to other programs in different contexts. The SCAN tool is currently known as *Dioptra*.



Challenges

- One of the challenges is risk-sharing, which DRA has actively taken up in 2020 together with local partners. DRA co-organized a webinar on localisation and risk management in the context of COVID-19.³ In addition, the DRA chair participated in a conference organized by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ICRC and Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations - on risk-sharing in January 2021.
- The current DRA set-up and the regulations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs limit the space for direct funding to local actors. In the present situation only a DRA international member can be contracted by the Ministry, so direct access of local actors to DRA funding is not possible. This limits also the equal partnership, as funding decisions are still more in the hand of the international members. Although they are consulted and participate in different steps of the DRA processes (like setting priorities for Joint Responses) local partners do not have the same decision-taking power in the allocation of the funding. In the new DRA Strategy (covering 2022-2025/6) there will be a strong focus on localisation, decision-making power of local organisations, and locally led response within the DRA strategy and set up.
- The *quality* of funding is as important as the access to funding. Issues like ICR sharing, risk covering, flexibility, predictability, and accountability demand need more attention and innovative approaches.

IN 2021

In 2021, Indirect Cost Recovery budget, funding flows, and risk-sharing will be discussed within the DRA Localisation Working Group and the Finance Task Force. Lessons will be shared in 2021. The issue of minimizing transaction costs and making the funding flow more direct will be discussed with Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the Ministry is an important actor in the funding flow.

The current Acute Crisis Mechanism and Protracted Crisis Mechanism are being revised in 2021, based on an internal evaluation of these mechanisms in 2020/2021. In the revised mechanisms, localisation, decision-making power of local organisations, and ensuring that Joint Responses are locally led are translated into concrete steps.

The DRA will continue to build on the strengths and expertise of its members. As a result of the focus on collaborative impact within the DRA, all partners are motivated to share good practices and expertise within the Joint Responses. Resource sharing, joint planning, joint activities, and integrated programming enable DRA-members to provide a comprehensive humanitarian response.

Based on the reporting on the DRA-funded SCAN Pilots, six NGOs are now committed to use the SCAN-tool. Also, other NGOs and donors have shown interest. This became clear during a webinar on Aid Efficiency organized by VOICE, where the SCAN-tool was presented. Preparations for disseminating the use of the tool inside and outside the DRA are taking place.

³ See: <https://www.kuno-platform.nl/events/towards-risk-sharing-perspectives-on-localization-and-risk-management-in-the-context-of-covid-19/>

COMMITMENT 5 – IMPROVE JOINT AND IMPARTIAL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will encourage joint needs assessments and joint response plans that ensure disaster affected people are informed, engaged and able to actively participate in aid intended to support them.

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

Within each Joint Response, partners aim for a joint, cross-sector needs assessment. In most Joint Responses needs assessments are conducted with other DRA members. The Joint Response in the Central African Republic in 2020, for example, conducted a joint needs assessment which was much appreciated by all partners and resulted in many opportunities to exchange, to build cross-linkages between Joint Response partners, and to improve implementation by learning. In a number of cases local actors participated in needs assessments. For the program design in Nigeria in 2020, a joint needs assessment was led by local partners. This notably contributed to local ownership. In several 'health areas' in the DRC, local partners were involved in joint needs assessments with DRA-members, concluding that the most pressing needs were in WASH, food security, education, health, and protection.

Challenges

Joint needs assessments are not (yet) a standard practice among DRA-members. The DRA-practice shows that a joint needs assessment is not always feasible as DRA-members are active in different areas with different needs. In protracted crises, needs assessments often have to be repeated as situations are volatile and can change overnight. Also, as Joint Responses are making use of needs assessments that have already been carried out, there is not always a need to conduct an additional needs assessment. In all cases it is vital, however, that needs assessments are shared with other actors.

In acute crises, partners are often involved in in-country joint rapid needs assessments. Partners base their programming on these assessments that are carried out by partners in the wider humanitarian sector. Besides, DRA partners also carry out (quick) joint assessments for the Joint Response specifically. Joint assessments are used as a starting point to reach mutual agreements on dividing technical sectors and locations based on organisational strengths and experience.

IN 2021

The joint community feedback meetings held in Nigeria in 2020 will continue in 2021. Also, the joint needs assessment, as done in the Joint Response in the Central African Republic in 2020, will continue in 2021. The Joint Response in Non-Government Controlled Area's in Syria will conduct individual needs assessments, but combines discussion on risk mitigation and programmatic contingency planning.

COMMITMENT 6 - A PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION: INCLUDE PEOPLE RECEIVING AID IN MAKING THE DECISIONS WHICH AFFECT THEIR LIVES

DRA's commitment 2018-2021: Putting Dutch NGOs at the forefront of the participation revolution: The DRA will further strengthen mechanisms for participation, feedback and accountability to people affected by disasters. It will utilize the potential of growing digital connectivity and big data to support participation. DRA Partners will strengthen their adherence to the Core Humanitarian Standard. There will be a particular focus on ensuring the participation of the elderly, children and youth, people with disabilities and excluded and marginalized groups.

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS & CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

Within each Joint Response, partners always aim for an open, transparent and inclusive implementation, whereby beneficiaries and local stakeholders are continuously involved.

Affected populations are given the opportunity to raise concerns, provide feedback, report unmet needs, and seek information. Each Joint Response includes activities to enhance participation and accountability:

- Consultations with local leaders.
- Informing the community about the program.
- Receiving and addressing feedback from the affected population through, for example, dedicated toll-free hotlines, regular face-to-face meetings, focus group discussions, suggestion boxes, help desks.
- Trainings on monitoring and evaluation and accountability with focus on Core Humanitarian Standard, Responsible Data, gender and power, digitalisation of feedback, MEAL tools.
- Use of mobile devices for data collection and feedback, and to ensure better storage of data and easier ways for follow-up.

The AAP system

Accountability and complaints mechanisms are a key instrument to boost community participation. Currently, implementing organisations each have their own mechanisms, which is not uncommon but very inefficient. To address this, the DRA partners in South Sudan designed a decentralized Joint Response Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) system. This joint AAP system covers three elements of accountability: information sharing, participation, and feedback and complaints mechanisms. Accountability is ensured by assigning local Accountability Officers to each Joint Response location. These Officers are recruited and hosted by national partners, and serve as the focal persons to coordinate and link the community structures and organisations in the area, allowing for effective information sharing and community participation.

A mapping of successful examples of joint accountability mechanisms in Joint Responses, including participation of affected populations in different stages of the programme, was done in 2020 through a survey carried out amongst Field Coordinators. This mapping served as input for the learning days in June/July, in which examples of AAP mechanisms were shared and discussed (see box above).

Joint Response Field Coordinators, Joint Response Leads, representatives of the Ministry, the Local Advisory Group and other DRA members participated in the workshop 'how to make participation happen' (organised by DRA in collaboration with KUNO), which provided practical tools to enhance participation of affected populations.



The key achievement of the AAP system is that community members understand and appreciate their participation in collecting feedback and complaints. Moreover, harmonisation of the system has brought an element of joint accountability among the different implementing partners. The collection of complaints, feedback, requests and suggestions from the communities is ongoing and will continue in 2021.

In Nigeria, a pilot has been implemented to increase accountability towards disaster affected people by using voice recorders. These recorders allow beneficiaries to provide feedback at their own time and convenience. Lessons from this pilot will be disseminated within the humanitarian sector. During 2020, more than two thousand recordings have been received, giving partners a better understanding of the basic needs of people. At the end of 2020, the Nigeria Joint Response conducted an evaluation of this pilot to better understand the impact of the different elements and to ensure learning will be incorporated in the design of this accountability mechanism in 2021.

In Somalia, partners were supported in 'smart' budgeting their proposals for MEAL staff and capacity strengthening support. Activities in 2020 include development of a joint Somalia Joint Response 'Photovoice' project involving staff and beneficiaries, joint monitoring visits, digitalizing feedback systems.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic posed the main challenges in 2020 with regards to the implementation of the AAP system. Due to the pandemic, movements were restricted, as well as the gathering of people for information dissemination and the collection of feedback and complaints. Additionally, there was limited capacity of some of the Accountability Officers to roll out the AAP system independently. There will be a review of the AAP system to understand its current status in the different locations, mainly to understand the implementation per location, its challenges and the capacities of the Accountability Officers.

IN 2021

In 2021, DRA aims to further strengthen mechanisms for accountability to affected people and to ensure participation of the elderly, children, youth, differently abled people and marginalized groups. Activities include:

- Mapping current practices (successful and less successful) on (joint) accountability to affected people.
- Define needs for learning and improvements regarding (joint) accountability.
- Define plans for improved mechanisms and consistency across Joint Responses, taking into account the different roles of the DRA members in the Netherlands versus actors working in the 'field'.

In 2021, the Somalia Joint Response will target women for cash-for-work programmes to enhance female empowerment. Moreover, the support of leading disability rights organisations is sought to ensure meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in all project activities.

In South Sudan, partners will continue with the implementation of the AAP system, seeing the benefits in jointly ensuring accountability to affected populations. Following the recommendations from the review, in 2021, the South Sudan Joint Response partners will develop:

- A joint policy for feedback and reporting mechanisms.
- A joint information provision strategy for communication with communities.
- A clear joint feedback referral policy.
- Joint procedures for learning tools from inputs from communities.
- A series of training and coaching sessions to strengthen the capacities of AAP's Accountability Officers.

COMMITMENT 7 & 8 – ENHANCE QUALITY FUNDING THROUGH REDUCED EARMARKING AND MULTI-YEAR PLANNING AND FUNDING

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: Stronger leadership of Joint Responses in the field; joint support to local partners, quality of members; making tough decisions and differentiating based on expertise; stronger support functions; strong link with other networks; collaborative fundraising and communication.

After agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the DRA on the proposal for a specific Joint Response, funds will be called down by Joint Response leads without the need for further approval procedures in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This will further reduce the administrative burden and accelerate the release of funds to an agreed Joint Response and is consistent with Grand Bargain commitments.

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

Quality funding is strengthened by the multi-annual subsidy framework for humanitarian aid that the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has tailored specifically to the DRA. The Ministry provides DRA with a 4-year 'block grant' for acute crises and innovation. As for the Protracted Crisis Joint Responses; the funding can be used flexibly; the Ministry often responds quickly to budget amendment requests when changing contexts require new approaches.

For five of the eight countries in which a Protracted Crisis Joint Response took place in 2020, multi-year funding was guaranteed (the five countries that scored highest on the shortlist of the Protracted Crisis Mechanism). Since for these five Joint Responses multi-year and predictable funding was guaranteed, they were able to develop multi-year plans on specific themes.

Challenges

Due to the internal DRA process of assessing crises each year for the Protracted Crisis Mechanism, the multi-year funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not always fully utilized by the DRA. Even though some Joint Responses are multi-annual, the annual planning cycle and annual allocation of budgets mean these Joint Responses have to design their programs still on an annual basis. Also, in some Joint Responses, the annual allocation process leads to slow processes when contracts in country are up for renewal, which requires approvals from local authorities.

IN 2021

It was decided in 2020 – with one more year to go in the current strategic period (2018-2021) and funding cycle – not to deviate from the Project Cycle Management. The strategy for the next strategic period will be developed in 2021, including adjusting (if needed) current processes. The DRA is committed to ensure flexible and multi-year quality funding.

COMMITMENT 9 – HARMONIZE AND SIMPLIFY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

DRA Strategy 2018-2021: The DRA will work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop innovative reporting methods that reduce the administrative workload but makes data more accessible and more informative. Deeper involvement of beneficiaries and local actors in project design and monitoring will require innovation in how a larger number of stakeholders can be consulted and how they can feedback on the quality of the implementation.

DRA'S CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES (2020)

Contributions

All DRA's Protracted Crisis Joint Responses tailor their reporting to the so-called '8+3 template', developed under the Grand Bargain. This reporting methodology, designed by the Global Public Policy Institute, requires answering eight core questions and three additional questions, when describing activities, results, challenges, and lessons learned. This helps to minimize the workload of reporting to various donors while maintaining a standard that guarantees high quality reporting.

Challenges

Internal planning and reporting requirements for DRA participating organisations and partners are sometimes still rather challenging for many local organisations and could be simplified further. Furthermore, as the 8+3 combi report includes both reporting on the previous year as well as planning for the next year on the same topics, the report tends to become repetitive, as information in the planning section can be similar to what was reported on for the previous year. Also, since the report is submitted by the end of October, the last two months of the Joint Responses are not always reported on as extensively as the first months.

IN 2021

Joint response leads also align around mid-term reporting and IATI updates.

COLOPHON

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