



Key highlights from the panel discussion : Strengthening collaboration with diasporas in humanitarian response

As part of OCHA's 2017 Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week, the IASC Secretariat, the IASC task team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and OCHA welcomed over 60 participants to reflect on how to enhance the collaboration with diasporas in humanitarian response



Taufik Pasha presented IOM's 3E's Strategy to Enable, Engage and Empower Diaspora.

- **Enable** transnational communities through skills and resources in country of residence to become effective agents for development
- **Engage** diasporas through mapping and assessing those who have a personal desire to contribute back to their country of origin. This requires building trust and being transparent
- **Empower** diaspora to transfer resources and strengthen links between their countries of origin and destination by facilitating trade, investment, transfer of skills and expertise.



For more information, refer to <https://diaspora.iom.int/ioms-strategy-enable-engage-and-empower-diaspora>

Mingo Heiduk : DEMAC offers a space to link diaspora organisations with the traditional humanitarian system for the benefit of affected communities. (see <http://www.demac.org/>). In its first phase, DEMAC achieved objectives around:

- Profiling the role of diaspora on the ground, with the vocal participation of diasporas to the World Humanitarian Summit and in the localisation discussion.
- Increasing trust by facilitating open dialog around issues of neutrality and impartiality
- Advocating for strengthened collaboration in operations, leading for instance to the creation of a OCHA diaspora liaison officer in Mogadishu.

Joachim Nason : The European Commission recognises the spontaneous role played by diaspora to support their country of origin and the massive resources this solidarity represent. Donors also see the distinctive character of diaspora organisations, with specific cultural links, better understanding of community sensitivities and the huge human capital they represent through volunteers. The EU

- Supports initiatives such as DEMAC establishing the connection between the humanitarian system and the diaspora, and offering opportunities to cooperate, collaborate and learn from each other
- Insists on the importance of respecting the particularities of the diaspora and the way they see their role.

Dr. Tawfik Chamaa : The strength of a diaspora organisation such as UOSSM stems from the fact that it is transnational (with 1500 staff in Syria, an operational office in Gaziantep and several offices in European countries, Canada and the US) but also transgenerational. UOSSM was indeed funded by doctors who have been diaspora for decades, but is also staffed with talented young people who just fled Syria and are the interface with the communities in need in the country.

- Good examples of coordination led by diaspora with UN agencies, INGO and Red Crescent, include the 3-day evacuation of Aleppo and the polio immunisation campaign initiated by UOSSM in non-government held areas.
- Diaspora benefits from trust and proximity with communities which give access to bring assistance to the most needy. International organisations experiencing reduced access need to leverage this comparative advantage.
- Diaspora are also an essential source information to understand the evolving situation on the ground. UOSSM has set-up a reliable system of monitoring and evaluation with 28 statisticians in Syria providing report on how aid is spent as well as information on communities health situation

With

- **Dr. Tawfik Chamaa**, President of UOSSM Swiss (Union des Organisations de Syriennes de Secours Médicaux)
- **Taufik Pasha**, Senior Specialist, Labour Mobility & Human Development Division International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- **Mingo Heiduk**, team leader at Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme; DEMAC (Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination) consortium lead
- **Joachim Nason**, Head of Humanitarian and Migration Section, EU Delegation Geneva
- **Belinda Holdsworth** Chair of the IASC Secretariat

Key themes from the discussion with participants

Localisation

Localisation came out as a major theme in the World Humanitarian Summit.

- Majority of diaspora have been working through and together with local actors. Many of the local organisations traditional actors are supporting in the field have diaspora members, in charge for instance of advocacy work in Europe or the US. Diaspora are both local and international and can build bridges. *“Diaspora speak the language of aid and the language of need”*
- Donors can finance diaspora organisations when they are accredited as NGOs with an international status, while most of the time donors can not finance directly local organisations.

Humanitarian principles

One of the main challenges that traditional humanitarian actors raise before collaborating with diasporas is the issue of neutrality and impartiality : we should however come over this misconception. Does being connected to a community necessarily mean that you are not impartial ?

- Diaspora may come from a minority group or from a politically sensitive area. This does not mean that they are providing assistance only to the affected people from their specific community or group. Diasporas’ intervention may actually bring communities together paving the way towards conflict resolution.
- *“I might have an opinion on a conflict, it does not mean I can not do professional work and manage projects that are treating people equally.”*

Mapping

Overall mapping of diaspora communities and “who does what where” is not easy due to the diverse nature of diaspora actors (potentially including 2nd and 3rd generations) and types of engagement.

- Mapping related to specific crises are more relevant, ie. mapping of health care providers from the Sierra Leone diaspora in the UK during the Ebola outbreak for instance.
- Mapping of remittances is of interest to the sector, but is difficult and might become even more so. The anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing legislation leads to banks being risk-averse and closing of financial channels, pushing diaspora to use other methods that are even more difficult to track.

Remittances

Global remittances greatly outweigh global international humanitarian funding. While remittances are not all sent to crisis, they are an efficient person-to-person financial flow. At a time where traditional humanitarian actors are increasing their cash-based interventions, lessons should be learned from diaspora long-experience in remittances. Diasporas’ financial support is even broader and include :

- **Remittances** : small amounts sent regularly back for individual use.
- **Diaspora philanthropy** : collected at the community level, and sent back spontaneously en masse and immediately after a crisis. The humanitarian community should support diaspora for the most effective/ coordinated use of these philanthropic amounts.
- **Diaspora trade and investment** : in post-conflict environment, diaspora enable displaced communities to set up business and support livelihoods in host communities.

Accountability to Affected Populations

Diaspora are instrumental for strengthening AAP because they speak to communities and can bridge the gap between large organisations and people in need of protection and assistance. Diaspora identify with local concerns and speak local languages. They benefit from trust and proximity.

- Diaspora are in touch with communities during crisis, but also before and long after.
- Traditional humanitarian actors should capitalise better on information coming through diasporas including their use of social media even if the data does not comply with our usual criteria of reliability. It is a direct link with affected communities on the ground.
- Diaspora organisations as UOSSM are able to swiftly modify their interventions based on the information and suggestions gathered from day-to-day interaction with communities.

Concluding remarks

- Diasporas have to be engaged in the negotiations for the text on the global compact on migration and refugees
- Diasporas have a role to play in the follow-up work on the WHS, including the grand bargain commitments, joint needs assessments, and additional transparency and accountability on use of resources in the humanitarian system.
- Platforms such as DEMAC are key to facilitate dialogue between diaspora and traditional humanitarian system.
- Diaspora efficiency on the ground should be supported by an investment in their structures. Resources are needed to accompany their institutionalisation.

“The WHS highlighted the importance of localisation, demand-driven humanitarian aid, centered on affected people, flexibility between humanitarian and development approaches, greater use of cash approaches, more person to person aid : this is what diaspora do already !” Robert Smith, OCHA