HPG
Humanitarian
Policy Group

Mid-term evaluation of the Dutch Relief Alliance

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is a highly relevant, innovative and effective instrument, which should be further nurtured and supported. The creation of the DRA represents a major advance in partnership between Dutch humanitarian NGOs and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), which has been built with a huge investment of creative and intellectual energy on the part of the DRA member agencies. Just 18 months into the DRA pilot, the Dutch humanitarian sector now has a tried and tested, effective new financing instrument in its toolbox; through the DRA, the Dutch humanitarian sector has been able to reach large numbers of crisis-affected people with timely, accountable and effective humanitarian responses; and the powerful incentive to collaborate which the DRA creates has transformed the culture and behaviour of the Dutch humanitarian NGO community. From a culture of suspicion and competition, Dutch NGOs are now highly networked, and are enthused by the new possibilities for networking, sharing knowledge and expertise, and developing spin-off collaborations well beyond the remit of the DRA.

In short, the Dutch humanitarian NGO sector is far better prepared to anticipate, prepare for and effectively target needs, and respond to major emergencies using a broad range of complementary capacities drawn from a diverse NGO constituency. The Joint Responses evaluated to date confirm that, overall, responses have been well targeted to meet priority needs, have succeeded in achieving, or exceeded, planned results, and have been effective overall.

During this pilot 'design and build' phase, DRA member agencies have established a sophisticated and well-functioning governance structure, legal agreements, decision-making protocols, accountability systems and tools, all within a very short space of time. These systems and tools have a very high level of endorsement and support from a diverse set of member agencies and the MoFA. Where concerns were raised, these related to a range of manageable cultural, procedural and communications issues, as well as more challenging issues relating to clarifying responsibilities and expectations.

The DRA itself provides rapid decision-making and flexibility, but MoFA grant award processes continue to offset these gains. DRA member agencies broadly describe the DRA as both timely and fairly predictable. Proposals are developed and quality-controlled very quickly using now well-practiced processes and tools. In acute responses, proposals have been presented within 72 hours. Once proposals are passed to MoFA for review and preparation of a grant agreement, momentum gained on the side of DRA member agencies has frequently been lost, with significant operational and cost impacts. Often, agencies are able to speed up their implementation and make up for some lost ground, but the net costs are avoidable. The MoFA is looking at ways to improve the grant agreement preparation process in order to avoid unnecessary delays, and to provide further practical orientation in critical aspects of the grant agreement preparation process.

The DRA has generated substantial efficiency gains, but in order to maximise these and extend them to the operational level, further adjustments to procedures and incentives are required. Notable efficiency gains cited include: significant administrative efficiency gains for MoFA in dialogue, contracting and monitoring and a reduced fundraising burden for DRA member agencies, with the removal of uncertainty and virtual elimination of former practices of developing detailed proposals 'in vain'. More broadly, the upfront investment in mapping capacities and establishing decision-making protocols results in significant time and effort savings and a reduced administrative burden for DRA members. The DRA also represents a relatively cost-effective option for the MoFA, with a high level of quality assurance and accountability. The greatest efficiently gains accrue at the headquarters level,

however, not at the operational level, and overall efficiency gains accrue primarily to organisations rather than to beneficiaries.

A number of structural disincentives and tensions within the current DRA set up contribute to limited progress in realising hoped-for efficiency gains at the operational level. The DRA creates space for identifying potential efficiency gains at response level – and some instances of joint working and joint procurement have occurred. But these examples tend to be ad hoc, and a number of disincentives to increased efficiency persist. The funding prioritisation process does not require or incentivise joint working and collaboration, although joint enterprises are likely to be significant sources of cost-efficiencies. The inclusive nature of the instrument leaves it open to a proliferation of small-scale interventions, which may be of questionable efficiency overall. There is currently a lack of guidance on cost controls, and a lack of systematic scrutiny of project budgets leaves budgets susceptible to cost inflation. The lack of timeliness of funding decisions and issuance of grant agreements has in some instances resulted in losses in efficiency and increased operational costs. There is a lack of guidance and clarity on strategic programming choices, which might facilitate cost-efficiency savings. There is scope to reduce the current cost burden of audits. And the complex structures of the DRA member agencies tend towards a proliferation of transaction costs. There are a number of concrete practical areas, therefore, where the DRA can now progress in its ambitions to ensure a more efficient response.

An overall vision of what constitutes effectiveness – and a framework for delivering it – would help to promote more systematic and measurable efforts to improve effectiveness. Overall, there is a lack of clarity of vision around what effectiveness is sought, and it is difficult at present to attribute the effectiveness of programmes within Joint Responses (JR) to the DRA. There is a strong belief that the DRA should not be too prescriptive and should allow JR agencies to develop their own analysis of where effectiveness can be improved. However, a clearer vision of what constitutes humanitarian effectiveness, and areas in which the DRA can promote particular aspects, tools and approaches (such as the use of cash-based programming, accountability to affected populations and support to local responders), may be helpful in guiding, influencing and monitoring agency performance, as well as helping to attribute the contribution the DRA makes to improving effectiveness.

There are emerging discussions within the wider humanitarian policy community which could be used by the DRA to construct a common vision and framework, including a set of goals and practical steps to build a coherent theory of change and a strategy to deliver more effective humanitarian action. The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) may be a particularly relevant tool for the DRA around which to organise a framework for delivering more effective (and efficient) response, since it includes a range of aspirations the DRA has already expressed (including providing timely, appropriate, needs-based assistance that is accountable, coordinated and cost-efficient). The CHS also includes a commitment to ensure communities are better prepared and more resilient, which would provide a logical place to explore DRA members' growing interest in supporting local response capacity. In addition, many of the CHS commitments map directly onto OCHA and OECD conceptualisations of humanitarian effectiveness, meaning DRA members can build a case for the value of the DRA in contributing to shared responsibilities to deliver more effective humanitarian action at the aggregate or community level. Quality standards built into structural systems for decision-making, monitoring and evaluation and accountability could help to influence and incentivise alignment with a commonly agreed framework for effective humanitarian action.

The added value concept may be due for a rethink. It should have a clearer linkage with a common vision and framework for delivering more effective and efficient humanitarian action. Expectations of 'added value' appear to have grown since the outset and a variety of interpretations of it now exist. Added value is often described as if it were an activity or set of activities in itself, rather than an emergent property or a result of specific actions designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of response.

For added value to emerge on anything other than an ad hoc and unpredictable basis, it would need to be the product of a planned strategy to deliver a more efficient and effective response, and it should be these principles – supported by a variety of thematic and practical guidance, structural incentives and resources – which guide the process of delivering better outcomes for crisis-affected people.

The DRA has improved the visibility of Dutch contributions at several levels, and there is scope to do more in this area. DRA members acknowledge that the visibility objective has not been prioritised in the early stages of the DRA, and there has been limited progress in delivering against visibility objectives at the Joint Response level. Multiple interpretations of MoFA's expectations with respect to visibility exist across the different levels of the DRA, and these need to be clarified and managed. However, an impressive array of communications materials targeting the Dutch public and parliament have been produced by individual agencies, and building on established monitoring and reporting templates and systems the foundations for strengthened reporting have been laid. Visibility has been identified as a future priority for the remaining implementation period of the DRA, and is expected to be more effective in future with a fully funded and dedicated chair of the Communications Working Group, which should be well placed to further clarify expectations, define roles and responsibilities and plan discrete activities to advance the visibility agenda. There is also scope to negotiate mutually agreeable modifications to current monitoring and reporting practices between the DRA and MoFA – including potentially using the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) to provide more timely and transparent evidence on agency spend and results.

The DRA has created an environment in which learning can be transmitted and amplified through member and Joint Response networks. The DRA originally envisaged contributing to change at the sector level through 'co-created innovation, research and learning'. Both at the headquarters and at the Joint Response level there are many examples of information-, evidence- and skill-sharing between DRA members, and the DRA has been successful in forging networks and creating space in which such learning exchanges can occur. The impact of this collaborative learning and exchange has yet to be investigated or captured, but anecdotally the chance to share learning is highly valued by staff within DRA member agencies at all levels.

Research and innovation have had little traction and the DRA may be better placed to broker and disseminate research and innovation than to generate it. Little attention has been paid to innovation and research and there are few formal requirements or resources to provide this and no logical place to drive this agenda within the current DRA organisational set-up. Respondents question whether the DRA – with its short-term programmes and focus on operational response – is in fact the right vehicle to advance innovation, noting that, currently, innovation tends to be driven by long-term investments by agencies and dedicated funded platforms. The DRA could more usefully provide a brokering and amplifying function for these external sources of innovation.

There are several major outstanding issues which affect the sustainability of the DRA, the foremost being securing continuity of funding. The creation of the DRA has required a huge investment on the part of the Dutch member agencies. This should be considered a long-term strategic investment in the responsive capacity of the Dutch humanitarian sector, and as such the case for continued predictable support and investment is compelling. Uncertainty around the future of funding for the DRA is already causing considerable concern among agencies. Protracted uncertainty risks undermining a carefully crafted instrument, strong networks and a considerably strengthened response capacity.

Clarity of vision around the purpose and focus of the fund and consensus on higher-level aspirations around increasing efficiency and effectiveness of response are needed as the DRA moves on from the design-and-build phase. This will require a great deal of thought, discussion and consensus-building

among DRA members and with the MoFA. The experiences to date of working collaboratively to build the fund indicate that the likelihood of achieving mutually satisfactory agreement on these key strategic issues is high.

In order to move towards the next phase of the DRA, the MTE recommends the following:

Strategic issues:

- **Funding continuity:** Work with MoFA to urgently make the case for continued support to the DRA and lobby in appropriate forums.

- **Scope and ambition of the DRA:**
  - Agree at the strategic level on the scope and remit of the DRA in protracted crises, including the scope of activities and optimal duration of engagement.
  - Consider among DRA members and develop a position on what the DRA can contribute to global policy commitments and aspirations to strengthen local and national response actors.

- **Effectiveness and efficiency:**
  - Linked to wider and emerging policy discussion in the sector, develop a coherent vision of what effective humanitarian looks like, and a corresponding framework detailing the practical strategies (including thematic tools) necessary to achieve this. Align aspirations to deliver added value with this vision and framework – added value would be a higher-level outcome or an emergent property of outputs and activities to deliver more effective and efficient humanitarian action.
  - Integrate this vision and framework across decision-making and monitoring processes to incentivise uptake, and in particular review how quality standards including the CHS could be used to incentivise operational effectiveness across DRA levels, processes and activities.
  - Debate and agree internally and with MoFA how far the DRA is willing and to what extent it is practically possible to work towards joint programming, and identify which areas of joint working which should be positively encouraged and incentivised.

- **Visibility:** Work with the MoFA to reach a common understanding of expectations around visibility.

- Innovation and research: Debate and reach consensus on the scope of ambition in this area and decide conclusively whether the role of the DRA is to generate or to broker and disseminate innovation and research.

Structural and procedural issues:

- **Scope and ambition of the DRA:**
  - Revisit with MoFA growth ambitions and eligibility criteria for membership of the DRA in order to manage the desire to be inclusive, against aspirations to deliver effective and efficient DRA management and response.

- **Roles and responsibilities:**
  - Review and agree the remit and degree of influence of the Joint Response Lead, including their role in relation to performance management, coordination, support to needs analysis, prioritisation and decision-making, visibility and added value. And clarify lines of communication between the Response Lead, Joint Response members at the field level and their counterpart agencies in the Netherlands.

– Establish where accountability lies for delivering against visibility, added value, learning and innovation within Joint Response MoUs and the over-arching MoU to ensure that responsibilities for delivery are formally assigned.

- **Prioritisation and decision-making:**
  – Consider how to more systematically integrate and value alternative sources of evidence and analysis – over and above the UN appeal – into the decision-making and scoring process.
  – Linked to strategic discussions on the scope of ambition around joint programming, build in incentives to encourage proposals demonstrating coherence, collaboration and joint working.
  – Consider devising a streamlined decision-making protocol for second- and third-phase Joint Responses, which takes into account changes in the context and performance of agencies, and which could be linked to/triggered at the mid-term review stage to expedite decision-making and ensure predictability and continuity of funding.

- **Promoting effectiveness and efficiency:**
  – Convene a workshop with MoFA compliance staff, desk officers and DRA members (including new DRA member staff) to clarify procedural requirements, lines of communication and predictable bottlenecks in the grant development process.
  – Develop decision-making criteria around effectiveness and efficiency, which would permit agencies to take hard decisions to better manage the risk of proliferation of small-scale cost-inefficient projects within Joint Responses.
  – Develop clear guidelines on eligible costs, including for the 'added value budget'.
  – Consider ways to review partner budgets more transparently against new guidelines.
  – In future, consider using emerging methodologies to develop internal benchmarks and ranges against which to compare individual proposals as well as specific guidance based on emerging best practice.
  – Develop guidance on key approaches and programming tools supporting efficiency and effectiveness (including the use of cash- and voucher-based programming and investments in emergency preparedness) to help guide strategic programming choices and evaluate costs.
  – Revisit the necessity to audit every sub-grant within a Joint Response and consider alternative approaches to financial accountability, including through greater use of timely and transparent reporting, as is currently envisaged in discussions around the roll-out of reporting against the IATI standard.
  – Review funding pass-through practices/sub-granting and transaction costs of member agencies to identify practices which are not consistent with the efficiency aspirations of the DRA.

- **Learning and innovation:** Consider using resources currently devoted to evaluations more creatively in order to feed into ongoing operationally focussed learning and adaptation, and commission full evaluations more sparingly and with more consistent links to commonly agreed effectiveness and efficiency goals.

- **Visibility:**
  – Develop clear communication guidelines linked to clarified expectations and ambitions agreed at the strategic level.
  – Review with MoFA the extent to which current reporting practices meet its visibility requirements and consider ways in which the use of reporting via IATI will better meet its information needs.

1. Methodology and approach

1.1. Purpose and scope

This mid-term evaluation was commissioned by the DRA as an independent evaluation undertaken by Lydia Poole and Barnaby Willitts-King of the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute in the UK. A joint reference group of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DRA member agencies provided oversight.

It considers the first 1.5 years of a three-year implementation period (January 2015–June 2016). The primary stated purpose is learning and accountability. The DRA is a relatively new instrument and should therefore be considered in a pilot or formative stage.

The primary research questions seek to establish (1) the extent to which and ways in which the DRA governance structure, decision-making processes and functions support the achievement of the DRA's intended objectives and results (see Box 1 below); and (2) to capture evidence of progress towards the planned objectives and results.

BOX 1: EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

1. To assess to what extent and how the chosen governance structure of DRA contributes to, or hinders, the achievement of DRA's specific objectives and results.

2. To assess to what extent the DRA is making progress towards achieving the five specific objectives and the results.

The MTE took into account all Joint Responses completed to date and currently underway, including those which commenced before the official launch of the DRA on 24 April 2015.

The DRA operates at multiple levels. The performance of the DRA as well as the perspectives of stakeholders at these different levels have been taken into account in the analysis and recommendations. These different levels are:

1. *DRA/MoFA level.* Stakeholders include the DRA Committee and MoFA (DRA Coordinator, Humanitarian Advisor, Humanitarian Director and staff of DSH).

2. *DRA/Netherlands NGO Head Offices level.* Stakeholders include NGO CEOs, Humanitarian Coordinators, Joint Response Managers, M&E Managers.

3. *Joint Response level.* Stakeholders include NGO Country Office staff, the JR Field Coordinator, UN, ECHO, Royal Netherlands Embassies.

4. *Joint Response implementation level.* Stakeholders include field office staff, local partners and beneficiaries.

1.2. Approach and methods

The DRA MTE is a complex multi-level, multi-stakeholder evaluation, and the approach and methodology is designed therefore to achieve a balance of breadth – including representative samples of stakeholders and Joint Responses and a comprehensive review of project documents across all JRs – as well as depth – through detailed interviews and two Joint Response case studies.1

The two case studies provide vertical cross-sections of DRA levels in two protracted crisis responses in different stages of implementation and in contrasting contexts. The Nigeria Joint Response (NJR), which was just entering its second phase at the time of the evolution fieldwork, represents a context with limited humanitarian presence, coordination and in-country capacity. The Northern Iraq Joint Response (NIJR) is a well-established response well into its second phase of implementation within a large-scale international humanitarian operation, with high-level agency presence and established coordination structures. In addition, the NIJR began before the official creation of the DRA and has experienced a great deal of learning and adaptation in the first phase. The first phase of the NIJR has also been evaluated and therefore provides opportunities to examine the extent to which learning has taken place.

The evaluation matrix (Annex 1) comprises the two primary research questions with supporting sub-questions adapted from the original ToRs (Annex 3). The evaluation matrix incorporates a streamlined and modified version of the specific questions identified in the ToRs, organised under the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability for research question one, as well as a series of questions designed to capture results and lessons in support of the five DRA objectives and four DRA results for research question two. On the basis of these research questions, further sets of questions were developed and grouped to guide interviews and the literature review.

An evidence assessment framework was used to organise and triangulate the evidence and data collected during the literature review and field visit phases of the evaluation. The framework organises evidence under each of the research questions listed in the evaluation matrix, rating responses according to whether they are broadly positive, negative or neutral. The evidence assessment framework also disaggregates responses and evidence according to stakeholder type/level. Together, this allows a far more rigorous assessment of the strength of evidence and opinion-informing analysis and conclusions, as well as permitting analysis of findings according to stakeholder cohorts/levels.

In keeping with the learning focus of the evaluation, the evaluation team followed a participatory approach to the research, providing regular informal progress updates and sharing and discussing initial analysis. In addition, two workshops scheduled at the end of the research process to discuss and review findings with key DRA member and MoFA stakeholders provided an opportunity for further reflection on findings and the development of recommendations for the final draft of the report.

1.3. Sources of evidence

Literature review
Documents produced by DRA members were used to provide evidence on the design and theoretical structure of the DRA and the history of the DRA responses; identify evidence to demonstrate the extent to which the five objectives and four results have been achieved; and investigate particular questions in relation to efficiency.

The five completed Joint Response evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Nepal, the Ebola response, South Sudan and Vanuatu) constitute the primary sources of evidence to assess the extent to which results

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1 A more detailed methodology and approach are described in a separate inception report.

have been achieved in a selection of JRs compared with their planned operational-level objectives. The evaluations also provide additional breadth to the case study analysis of the function and performance of the DRA at Joint Response level.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using standardised questions linked to the primary evaluation questions (see Annex 1), which were tailored to respondent cohorts. The 49 semi-structured interviews used to gather qualitative evidence captured insights from 67 respondents and resulted in 922 qualitative data points. In some cases, more than one respondent was present in a single interview. In these instances, responses were recorded and attributed to the respective respondent. Qualitative data points were recorded verbatim wherever possible and ranked in the evidence assessment framework as 'positive', 'neutral' or 'negative'. Neutral data points are typically observations, suggestions and context detail, and are not included in the opinion weighting analysis.

Caution should be applied when interpreting the findings from the Joint Response respondents. Although the total number of respondents is similar to the number of HQ-level respondents overall, perspectives are very particular to the response context and should therefore be interpreted as illustrative, rather than representative of a 'total' Joint Response perspective. It should also be noted that qualitative data is based on the perceptions of respondents at the time of the interviews. This implies that their responses may be influenced by what is going on at the time of the interview and may draw more heavily on examples from the recent past.

Online survey

The MTE used a quantitative (ranking/rating) online survey which addressed perceptions of the DRA value as related to the evaluation questions. A number of qualitative open questions were also included in the survey. The survey was circulated widely among DRA stakeholders by email and via the Wiggio shared resource site. In total, 66 responses were returned. There are inherent limitations associated with such surveys – notably that the ranking questions provide pre-determined statements which do not allow for nuanced or multi-faceted responses. Overall, it is worth noting that the survey responses were considerably more positive than responses to the same questions returned from semi-structured interviews, where it was possible to add qualifying detail. Therefore, the survey has been interpreted as a broad indicator of perceptions across issues and cohorts, but should be interpreted in context with qualifying statements issued through open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.

TABLE 1: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES BY COHORT

Respondent type	No. of interviews	No. of respondents	% of interviews
MoFA staff in The Hague	4	6	9%
NGO staff HQ level	18	24	36%
Northern Iraq Joint Response	15	17	25%
Nigeria Joint Response	12	20	30%

TABLE 2: ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY COHORT

Respondent cohort	Number of responses	% of total responses
MoFA staff	9	14%
NGO Head Office level	30	45%
Implementation of a Joint Response (country office level)	19	29%
Implementation of a Joint Response (field office level)	6	9%
Implementation of a Joint Response (local partner of a DRA member agency)	2	3%

2. Background to the DRA

The DRA represents a major new experiment and investment for both the MFA and Dutch NGOs. It came into being in a particular set of political and financial circumstances, which have played a role in influencing the design and objectives of the instrument.

The MoFA had only provided limited funding support to NGOs in recent years owing to staffing and capacity constraints and a policy preference for supporting multilateral approaches, agencies and funds. Until 2013, NGOs received just 4% of the Dutch government's humanitarian funding directly, compared with an average of 19% for other Northern European donors.[2] However, domestic public support for Dutch development aid spending had fallen notably and questions had been raised in the Dutch parliament with respect to the value for money of multilateral partners, as well as the traceability and visibility of Dutch contributions via these channels. Dutch NGOs lobbied effectively on the issue of the lack of Dutch government humanitarian funding channelled via Dutch NGOs in the Dutch parliament, placing this issue on the political agenda.

In September 2014, the Dutch Minister for International Trade and Development Cooperation proposed a substantial increase in Dutch humanitarian aid contributions for the period 2015–17 of €570 million, to be channelled via a newly created Dutch Relief Fund (DRF).

In these particular circumstances – with ongoing capacity constraints at the MoFA, the availability of new funds and a desire to improve the effectiveness of Dutch humanitarian contributions and to forge new partnership – Dutch NGOs and the MFA conceived the DRA as a pilot financing mechanism, managed and administered by NGOs themselves, which would receive €120 million from the new DRF during 2015–17.

In late 2014, NGO members of the nascent DRA submitted a proposal establishing the objectives and expected results and outlining the structure of the DRA, and the mechanism became operational on 24 April 2015. The proposal for the establishment of the DRA envisages the creation of a mechanism to fund joint NGO responses to large-scale protracted crises and acute emergencies. In addition, the collaborative structure of the DRA is intended to realise a range of additional benefits, including improved cooperation, efficiency and effectiveness, jointly created innovation and learning and improved visibility for Dutch humanitarian financing contributions (see Box 2).

Structure and composition of the DRA

The DRA is conceived as an emergency response financing instrument. It is divided into Protracted (around 70% of funds) and Acute Crisis (around 30% of funds) windows. The DRA is also designed to facilitate timely access to funds with streamlined and rapid proposal writing, budgeting formats and a commitment to rapid processing of proposals – in the case of the Acute Crisis window, proposals should be forwarded to MoFA within 72 hours. The DRA aspires to provide a degree of predictability for protracted crisis responses through the production of annual plans, which give indicative levels of continued financial support to Joint Responses.

The organisational set-up of the DRA comprises, in brief, a formal overarching agreement between member agencies to work jointly in receiving funds and delivering humanitarian response through what are effectively umbrella grants awarded on a crisis-by-crisis basis to a single lead agency, which is then responsible for issuing sub-awards to responding agencies. The DRA is not therefore a separate

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BOX 2: DRA INTENDED OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The five objectives of the DRA are:
1. Deliver fast humanitarian aid in a crises;
2. Deliver humanitarian aid linked to needs and gaps in response to major crises in a timely, appropriate, effective and efficient manner;
3. Generate synergies and cooperation between the Members aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness in providing humanitarian aid in crisis situations;
4. Increase the visibility of this Dutch contribution towards the Dutch constituency, Parliament and in-country.
5. Work together, also with other parties, to tackle the major bottlenecks in the humanitarian practice through co-created innovation, joint learning and research.

The four expected results of the DRA are:
1. Deliver coherent humanitarian aid in major 'ongoing' crises, based on the Guiding Principles of the original DRA proposal.

The activities under this specific objective will be described in an Annual Plan for each of the three years covered by the DRA: 2015, 2016 and 2017, before the beginning of each year.
2. A fully operational rapid response mechanism for new crises that allows NGOs to provide relief assistance within seven days after the disaster occurred and/or response mechanism that enables NGOs to scale up their response on the ground within one week after the disaster occurred or declared.
3. Through this cooperation, the member organizations are aiming to create added value, most notably on visibility, reducing the administrative burden, increased speed of decision making and scaling up on the ground.
4. Transparent reporting on the involvement of the member NGOs offering visibility and data to a wide spectrum of the public in the Netherlands.

legal entity in itself: it is an agreement to collaborate around a set of common objectives, supported by a governance committee and series of working groups (see Box 3 for details, page 16). Funding agreements are negotiated, not by the DRA, but between the MoFA and the formal legal entities that are the individual lead NGOs, on a crisis-by-crisis basis.

There are currently 14 NGO members of the DRA: CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Dorcas, ICCO & Kerk in Actie, Oxfam Novib, Plan Netherlands, Save the Children Netherlands, Stichting Vluchteling, Tear, Terre des Hommes, War Child, World Vision, WarTrauma Foundation and ZOA.

It is worth noting that DRA member agencies are extremely diverse in their organisational structure, size, operational capabilities and expertise. A minority of organisations are 'indigenous' Dutch entities, while the majority of DRA members are members of wider federated transnational organisations or movements. These federated organisations vary widely in size and function. Many of the 'Dutch' federated NGOs do not directly manage operational programming; rather, they provide fundraising, grant-making and compliance services to other members of their networks, which are responsible for implementation and ensuring technical standards of response.

Progress of the DRA to date

Up to January 2016 the DRA mechanism had funded and delivered 12 Joint Responses to a total value of €110.9 million from the original agreed DRA funds, and an additional €22.1 million from the DRF for Joint Responses which began before the launch of the DRA. A number of Joint Responses have entered or are expected to shortly begin a second phase of implementation, and additional new Joint Responses are under development.

BOX 3: ORGANISATIONAL SET-UP OF THE DRA

The five objectives of the DRA are:
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) establishing the 'rules of engagement' of the DRA, including basic governance structures, processes and responsibilities. Notably, the MoU establishes that decisions are to be made on a consensus basis in the first instance, with a two-thirds majority option if no consensus can be reached.
- A set of regulations supplement the MoU in establishing detailed provisions for roles, responsibilities, decision-making procedures and frequency of meetings.
- The DRA Committee 'DRA-Co', the primary coordinating and ultimate decision-making body of the DRA, is responsible for liaising with the MoFA. The DRA-Co comprises an annually elected Chair, Vice Chair and Acute Crisis Coordinator. The DRA-Co oversees the implementation of the DRA MoU, provides guidance to the Response Task Forces, mediates any disputes related to the DRA MoU and is responsible for facilitating evaluations and reporting to MoFA.
- Bi-annual CEO meetings establish the authorising environment for the DRA, including endorsing guidelines and the ToRs of Working Groups and ensuring alignment of vision.
- Thematic Working Groups are convened to develop policy and advance common cross-cutting work areas. Two permanent Working Groups are established under the DRA Guidelines: (1) Communications and Visibility; and (2) Monitoring, Evaluation and Added Value, as well as a 'semi-permanent' Finance Working Group. Ad hoc Working Groups are currently in operation on preparedness, legal issues, and decision-making criteria. Working groups comprise a chair and at least three voluntary members drawn from the DRA member agencies.
- Ad hoc Response Task Forces (RTF), comprising three members, are convened for each joint response. The RTFs lead analysis, prioritisation and rating of member concept notes, decide on the allocation of funds and oversee the development of full proposals for submission to the MoFA.
- Joint Responses (JRs) are convened under a lead agency, which acts as the primary grant recipient, and is responsible for issuing sub-awards to all the other implementing agencies within a response.

TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF DRA MEMBER AGENCIES

Agency	Structure and implementation model	Income
CARE Nederland	CARE Nederland is one of 14 national affiliate members of the CARE International network. Care affiliates provide fundraising, programme management and global policy and advocacy work to support CARE country offices, where programmes are implemented by CARE International.	€35 million (2014)[3]
Cordaid	Cordaid is a Dutch NGO implementing humanitarian and development programming through a network of more than 1,000 local partners. Cordaid is also a member of the Caritas Internationalis network.	€152 million (2015)[4] Humanitarian expenditure €42 million (2015)
Dorcas	Dorcas is a Dutch NGO implementing humanitarian and development programming directly and through local partners.	€22 million (2014)[5] Humanitarian expenditure €3 million (2014)

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3 Care International Annual Report, 2014. http://www.care-international.org/files/files/publications/CARE-International-Annual-Report-2014.pdf

4 Coraid (2016) Cordaid 2015 Annual Report https://www.cordaid.org/nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/06/Cordaid-Jaarverslag-2015-11.pdf

5 Dorcas (2015) Annual Report 2014 https://www.dorcas.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/05/Dorcas-Annual-Report-2014.pdf

Agency	Structure and implementation model	Income
ICCO	ICCO is a Dutch cooperative implementing humanitarian and development programmes through a network of more than 900 local partners. ICCO is also a member of the International ACT Alliance.	€87 million (2014)[6]
Oxfam Novib	Oxfam Novib, formerly Novib, became an affiliate of Oxfam International in 1996. Oxfam Novib delivers humanitarian and development programmes primarily through local partners, as well as engaging in campaigning, advocacy and lobbying.	€193 million (2014/15)[7]
Plan Netherlands	Plan Netherlands, an affiliate of the Plan International Federation, provides fundraising support to Plan International, which implements humanitarian and development programmes.	Not available
Save the Children Netherlands	Save the Children Netherlands is an affiliate of Save the Children International. In addition to programmes in the Netherlands, including advocacy and campaigning, Save the Children Netherlands provides fundraising support to humanitarian and development programmes implemented by Save the Children International.	€25 million (2015)[8]
Stichting Vluchteling (SV)	SV is a Dutch NGO implementing humanitarian programmes supporting refugees. In 2015, SV underwent an 'operational merger' with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which as an ECHO FPA holder renders SV eligible for DRA funding. SV channels funds to IRC for implementation.	€24 million (2015)[9]
Tear	Tear is a Dutch NGO implementing humanitarian and development programmes through local partners and via Tearfund UK.	Not available.
Terre des Hommes	Terre des Hommes Netherlands is an affiliate of the TDH International Federation. TDH NL implements its own programmes, as well as providing fundraising support to other members of the TDH network to implement programmes.	€25 million (2015)
War Child	War Child is a Dutch organisation directly overseeing and implementing child protection and assistance programmes.	€28 million (2015)[10]
World Vision NL	World Vision Netherlands is an affiliate of World Vision International. It provides fundraising support to World Vision International.	Not available.
War Trauma Foundation	War Trauma Foundation is a Dutch organisation implementing and overseeing psychosocial programmes.	€0.36 million (2014)[11]
ZOA	ZOA is a Dutch organisation directly implementing and overseeing humanitarian and development programmes for displaced people.	€36 million (2014)[12]

6 ICCO (2015) Annual Report and Accounts 2014 http://icco-international.com/int/linkservid/D9FAAFF3-A3CF-4F91-6DB97E9E0F014E7D/showMeta/0/

7 Oxfam Novib (2016) Oxfam Novib Annual Review Financial Statements 2014-15 http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Images/Wat%20wij%20doen/Over%20Oxfam%20Novib/Jaarverslag/Oxfam%20Novib_financial%20statement_2014-2015.pdf

8 Save the Children Netherlands (2016) Financial Statements 2015 https://www.savethechildren.nl/Uploaded_files/Zelf/Nieuws/jaarrekening-2015.eb0cb2.pdf

9 Stichting Vluchteling (2016) Annual Financial Statement 2015 https://www.vluchteling.nl/~/media/Files/Jaarverslag/Financieel-verslag-2015-def.ashx

10 http://www.annualreportwarchild.org

11 http://www.wartrauma.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Financial_Summary-2014.pdf

12 ZOA (2015) Annual Report http://www.zoa-international.com/sites/default/files/pdf/ZOA-Jaarverslag-2014-webversie.pdf

3. Findings

3.1. Relevance

3.1.1. Overall relevance of the DRA

The DRA has created a new and innovative instrument in the Dutch humanitarian financing toolbox. The DRA was created at a moment of acute demand for humanitarian financing, which has only continued to grow. The Dutch government announced a significant uplift in ODA funding in 2014/15. Awarding a substantial portion of this uplift to humanitarian response was both timely and relevant in relation to the growing global demand for humanitarian financing. In addition, the creation of the DRA filled a critical cap in the MoFA's funding repertoire at a time when popular and government confidence in the efficiency and effectiveness of MoFA's multilateral strategy was diminishing, and interest in the potential efficiency and effectiveness gains of working with NGOs was growing, yet the MoFA had little in-house capacity to expand its relationships with alternative partners.

Ultimately, the creation of the DRA has enabled the Dutch government to target these additional funds to respond to unmet humanitarian needs in new and escalating crises at scale and in an effective and much more traceable and visible manner than was previously possible.

From the perspective of DRA member agencies, the DRA is valued above all as an important source of emergency response funding. Of all the survey response questions, respondents expressed this point most emphatically, with 55% strongly agreeing, and 28% agreeing (see Figure 1). Access to a significantly increased volume of humanitarian funding has proved a game-changer for the Dutch NGO community. Firstly, DRA funding has enabled Dutch NGOs (their affiliates and partners) to initiate and scale up responses to a range of major and in some instances neglected or under-funded crises, reaching large numbers of crisis-affected people. For agencies with limited contingency reserves, access to rapid response funding has made a significant difference to their ability to respond to new emergencies in a timely fashion.[13] But there have also been a range of other organisational benefits. Two DRA members noted, for example, that DRA funding has enabled them to expand their humanitarian portfolio, and for some agencies this uplift in funding came at a critical moment when they were experiencing a significant drop in development funding from MoFA with the end of the MFS II (development aid co-financing mechanism 2011–15) subsidy, providing some continuity of funding at the organisational level.[14]

The DRA has promoted a cultural shift from competition to collaboration. The second most frequently cited advantage the DRA has brought is a major shift in culture and behaviour among Dutch NGOs, from competition and mistrust towards a culture of collaboration and collegiate working. In contrast to the previous situation, where agencies were in competition for very limited funds which were negotiated in closed bilateral conversations, the DRA approach, which positively requires collaboration and transparency, has transformed relationships between Dutch NGOs. This collegiate spirit is highly

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13 The Nepal Joint Response Evaluation notes that 'DRA funding was received during the initial phase of emergency response and was helpful to start the response activities immediately for organisations without the scale and buffer funding to finance an immediate response'.

14 Cordaid notes the serious organisational impact of the end of MFS II funding in its 2015 Annual Report: 'From 2016, Cordaid will be a grant-seeker rather than a grant-giver. The challenge is formidable. We need to diversify our donor base drastically and acquire new funding partners … Tough choices had to be made. Cordaid had to be right-sized in terms of organization and personnel … and we had to focus on those activities where we could best deploy our expertise and resources, both human and funding. This has meant we were obliged to discontinue funding of certain programs and projects and wind-down a number of partner relationships'. Cordaid has reduced its thematic focus from ten areas to four, including humanitarian aid (Cordaid, 2016). ICCO noted similar challenges: 'We are facing difficult times. In five years' time, we saw a dramatic decrease of the support of our largest financer, the Dutch government … A new restructuring of the organization is inevitable and that will be at the expense of support to partners, the number of countries in which we can work, our decentralized structure and jobs for our employees' (ICCO, 2015). Oxfam Novib meanwhile indicated that the end of MFS II would have 'severe consequences for the income of Oxfam Novib' (Oxfam Novib, 2015).
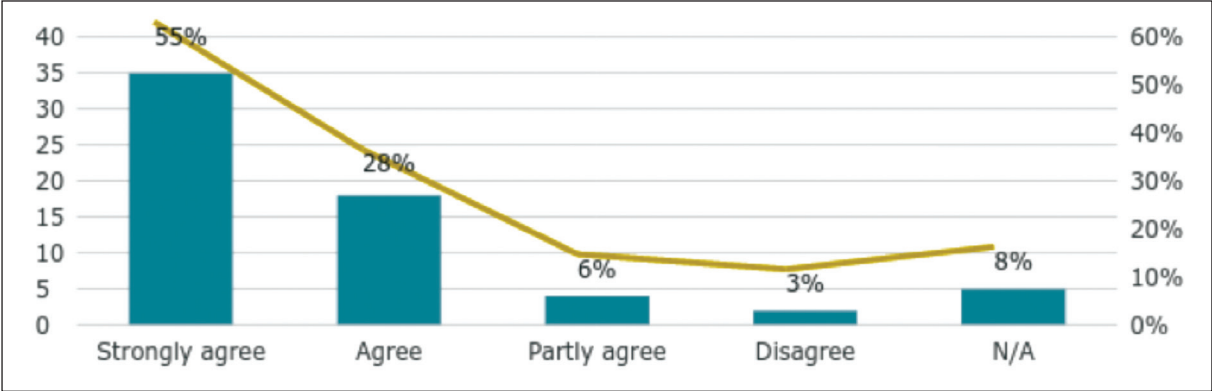
prized by DRA member agency staff, who are enthused by the new possibilities for networking, sharing
knowledge and expertise and developing spin-off collaborations well beyond the remit of the DRA.
DRA members at headquarters level cited instances of agencies developing joint proposals for other
donors, collaborating informally on advocacy and lobbying and drawing on each other's expertise to
develop policy positions as a result of new relationships developed through the DRA.

The DRA has strengthened partnerships between the DRA and *MoFA*. Relationships with MoFA have
developed rapidly and positively. DRA member agencies expressed a high level of satisfaction with the
open and supportive nature of the dialogue achieved between the DRA and MoFA, and many consider
the DRA–MoFA relationship to be one of genuine partnership or joint enterprise, noting that the DRA
emerged out of a strong set of shared interests.

From the perspective of MoFA, having a single interlocutor in the form of the DRA-Co to engage with
on policy discussions, and in the form of Joint Response-led agencies for particular crisis responses,
is hugely beneficial. From the Ministry's perspective, transaction costs are reduced, messages are
streamlined and, ultimately, MoFA receives a level of policy and context analysis which was not
previously available to it. DRA member agencies cited, for example, one instance where MoFA had
requested analysis on cash-based programming from the DRA, which members were able to quickly
consult and consolidate a response. From the perspective of DRA member agencies, they now have a
channel for communication with MoFA which barely existed previously. They have been able to use
this effectively to communicate and advocate on points of humanitarian concern with a strengthened
collective voice.

3.1.2. Organisational set-up of the DRA
DRA members have rapidly fashioned a robust and effective organisational set-up. The MTE comes
just one and a half years after the ink dried on the agreement to establish the DRA. It is important to
stress what a remarkable feat the DRA members have achieved in creating a sophisticated and well-
functioning governance structure, legal agreements, decision-making protocols, accountability systems
and tools, all within a very short space of time. Moreover, the structure and processes created have
a very high level of endorsement and support from a diverse set of member agencies and the MoFA:
63% of survey respondents either strongly agreed (11%) or agreed (52%) that the DRA's current
governance and decision-making set-up and procedures are appropriate and effective. Overall, DRA
member agencies and MoFA staff agree that the organisational set-up is performing well above initial
expectations. In addition, the fact that member agencies have successfully navigated some significant
disagreements and 'bumps in the road' to reach mutually satisfactory outcomes gives members
confidence that the structure they have built is robust enough to tackle future challenges.

Relatively few concerns or critical comments were received from respondents with respect to the current organisational set-up. The respective structures, guidelines and processes are considered to be working largely to the satisfaction of the members. Where concerns were raised, these related to a range of cultural, procedural and communications issues, as well as challenges relating to clarifying responsibilities and expectations.

There is an ongoing challenge with balancing complexity and functionality. The democratic approach to decision-making and a consensus-seeking culture is valued by members, and has been critical to establishing transparency and trust in the early months of of the DRA. However, this consensus-seeking system is complex, time-consuming and may in some instances compromise the ability of the DRA to take strategic decisions.[15] Many respondents expressed concern that there was a real risk of responding to challenging situations by generating more guidelines and processes, which in turn risks dampening the dynamism and responsiveness of the instrument. Several DRA member stakeholders at HQ level pointed towards the need for clearer expectations and benchmarks to establish the parameters within which decisions should be taken as a possible approach to this tension, rather than adding additional processes and discussions. In practice there is no simple solution: this is a challenge agencies are fully aware of, and an area where they will need to continue to exercise their judgement and trust in the system and each other.

Strengthening communications and aligning expectations. There are some residual communication challenges between MoFA and the DRA which require attention and resolution. The first is around the process of contracting and grant compliance, where MoFA staff feel they are receiving multiple uncoordinated approaches from DRA member agencies. In many cases these issues may be easily resolved by clarifying the structure and responsibilities of different components of the DRA structure to MoFA and new DRA member staff, and through training and orientation in MoFA requirements and procedures.

The second, more challenging, issue relates to inconsistencies in messages and expectations from MoFA around policy and ambitions. Semi-structured interviews indicated a range of levels of ambition in vision and expectations of the DRA across different MoFA stakeholders, particularly in relation to the desirability of joint programming and expectations around added value or efficiency and effectiveness gains. This has resulted in DRA member agencies second-guessing where expectations lie, and in some cases probably over-estimating what is actually expected of them, and over-promising above what might be reasonable and practical to achieve. Clarifying and agreeing expectations around certain key DRA objectives – particularly those relating to added value (gains in efficiency and effectiveness), joint programming, visibility and research and innovation – is a recurring theme throughout the study. The MTE should be used by DRA members and MoFA as an opportunity to revisit, debate and renegotiate expectations at this mid-point juncture based on practical experiences to date.

There are also a range of communication challenges and divergent expectations across different levels of the DRA itself. In both the survey and semi-structured interviews there is considerable divergence of opinion between DRA stakeholders at HQ and Joint Response level. Stakeholders at HQ level are significantly more positive than Joint Response-level stakeholders in their assessment of the DRA's ability to enable effective prioritization and greater coherence, effectiveness and efficiency, and there is notable divergence in assessments of the extent to which synergies, cooperation and coordination are possible (at Joint Response level, just 29% of data points were positive in response to this question, compared with 49% at HQ level) (See Annex 2). It is clear that expectations across DRA levels are currently not aligned, and further dialogue between stakeholders at different levels will be required to

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15 Multiple semi-structured interview respondents at HQ level indicated concern with a proliferation of process and procedure. Several respondents at HQ and JR level indicated concerns that consensus-seeking slows the decision-making process and may lead to compromises which run counter to strategic decision-making which considers the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall response.

reach consensus on expectations. There are also particular structural communication challenges between Joint Response-level stakeholders and the HQ level (described further below), which require resolution.

Responsibilities to deliver against higher-level DRA objectives are not sufficiently formalised. There are areas of ambiguity with respect to responsibilities for commitments which fall outside of Joint Response contracts. In particular, Joint Response member agencies are not contractually obliged to deliver against innovation and learning, visibility and added-value objectives, and practical responsibility for delivering against these objectives is unclear. Making clear where responsibilities lie and what the expectations are should not increase bureaucratic process; rather, it could free up time spent in inconclusive discussions and allow agencies to get on with delivering against concrete commitments and obligations.[16] A new over-arching MoU is under development which is expected to provide clarity on some of these issues. However, as noted above there remain higher-order questions to be resolved with respect to what it is reasonable to expect in relation to added value, joint programming, visibility and research and innovation. Reaching consensus on these issues will be fundamental to clarifying who is responsible and how these ambitions should be delivered.

The role and mandate of the Joint Response Lead and Coordinator is not sufficiently clear and is open to a range of interpretations. The mandate of the Lead Agency and Programme Coordinator at the Joint Response level is ambiguous. The Lead Agency is clearly legally responsible for the funds received and spells out expectations and responsibilities with individual sub-awardees in sub-grant MoUs and agreements. However, the mandate of the lead to actually lead the Joint Response is unclear. At the Joint Response level, there is a degree of support for the role of the lead to be strengthened to allow them to take a more directive role in facilitating joint analysis, planning, decision-making and response. Yet the Coordinators report feeling disempowered and unclear as to what they can actually ask members to do. For instance, when asked questions by JR members, Coordinators advise them to refer back to their parent organisation in the Netherlands as they do not feel able to respond as the lead.[17] Unclear lines of reporting and a lack of clarity around the mandate of the lead is felt by agencies at the Joint Response level to limit the scope of activities the Lead can engage in, in turn limiting the possibilities for joint working and collaboration. Indeed, there are a range of concerns raised from the Joint Response level around the concentration of decision-making power in the Netherlands, and a number of respondents at the Joint Response level in particular argued for further devolution of decision-making to the joint response level.[18]

An open question exists around how the DRA will manage growth in membership. Membership criteria are a point of concern for the future. Currently having an ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) is the only hard requirement. Since the initial MoU was signed with 12 Dutch NGOs (one of whom was in the process of applying for an FPA, and another undergoing a functional merger with an agency which has an FPA, in order to meet the eligibility criteria), the group has expanded to include 14 members, and other Dutch NGOs are reportedly applying for ECHO FPAs in order to become eligible to join. Many DRA members at headquarters level expressed concern that, since decisions are based on consultation and consensus, a point of diminishing returns is likely to be reached if the group continues to expand, and the group will become unmanageable.

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16 For example, in 2013 DFID conducted a review of its business processes and found that responses to multiple emerging policy directives had resulted in a proliferation of controls which unintentionally reduced flexibility and responsiveness. Among its responses to this problem was a set of measures to provide greater organisational clarity through establishing clearly defined rules and processes, including a stripped back set of 'Smart Rules' to simplify and clarify the programme approval chain (OECD, 2016).

17 The Northern Iraq Joint Response (1) evaluation for instance notes: 'Could a partner agency on the ground independently interact with the NIJR1 PC in Erbil or should such communication go via the Dutch agency? Different agencies had different answers to that question'.

18 A number of semi-structured interview respondents at the Joint Response level indicated concerns that decision-making is too centralised in the Netherlands, which they consider runs counter to the collaborative approach being nurtured at the crisis level.

3.1.3. Effective prioritisation of funds

The balance of funds between acute and protracted crises reflects the realities of demand. Prioritisation and decision-making occurs at a variety of levels within the DRA. There was a policy decision at the design-stage to partition the DRA funds with 70% allocated to protracted crises and 30% for acute crises. This split is consistent with the global pattern of funding allocations, whereby 66% of humanitarian funds are spent annually in long-term humanitarian crises (Development Initiatives, 2015). DRA members felt that this division was 'about right' based on their first year and a half of experience (as described in further detail below).

Overall, the prioritisation process is transparent, objective, timely and well-regarded. DRA members are broadly satisfied with the way in which the DRA prioritises funds for particular humanitarian responses. The decision-making process is highly valued for its transparency and fairness. The decision to initiate a Joint Response is driven typically from the bottom up, and is not constrained by predefined priorities or programmatic preferences. This is felt to contribute to a more needs-based response. The democratic nature of the prioritisation process provides a platform for any member to advocate for a response on an equal basis. This is a significant improvement from a competitive process where the largest organisations or those with the best networks are more likely to receive funds. In the case of the Ukraine Joint Response, for example, the need for a response was raised by one of the smaller DRA members, which, it was felt, would have been far less likely to have received a hearing and consequently funding without the DRA platform.

In developing a proposal for submission to MoFA, agencies submit to a peer review and objective scoring process which takes into consideration a range of criteria, including alignment with priority needs identified in the UN-led prioritisation, capacity and presence of the responding partner, and willingness to work collaboratively to generate added value. DRA member representatives at HQ level feel that this process is innovative, transparent and fair, and the joint nature of the needs analysis and peer review is felt to improve targeting and the quality of proposed activities.

Actors at the Joint Response level have a range of concerns around the current prioritisation process. Levels of support for the prioritisation and decision-making process are significantly stronger at headquarters level than at the Joint Response level. Of strongly expressed opinions in the semi-structured interview responses at the HQ level, just 27% of data points raised were negative, compared with 58% at the Joint Response level, where a variety of concerns were expressed around the scoring process. These are elaborated further in subsequent sections of the report, but in summary they centre around (1) the appropriateness and representativeness of the UN prioritisation as the basis for assessing needs; (2) structural disincentives to develop joint activities – currently proposals are developed individually and packaged up by the Joint Response Lead with an overarching needs analysis, there is no formal requirement to conduct joint needs analysis[19] and prioritisation or to develop complementary activities and, until recently, collaborative efforts were not valued within the scoring process (discussed further in section 3.2.2.); and (3) control of the process by actors in the Netherlands who may have little understanding of the reality of needs and agency capacities at the crisis level.

UN prioritisation alone is insufficient to ensure a needs-based prioritisation. DRA members agree in principle that responses should be aligned with UN-led prioritisation. UN-led prioritisation is of questionable quality in some cases, however, and there are a number of circumstances under which the UN's prioritisation is felt to be too static, too general, or too particular in its sectoral focus to support agencies' prioritisation of needs in the specific locations and communities targeted and is so broad as

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19 It should be noted that alternative sources of evidence, including joint needs assessments, are permitted and will be taken into consideration alongside UN needs analysis and prioritisation, but unlike UN prioritisation it is not a formal requirement of the decision-making process.

to permit extremely flexible interpretation. In Iraq, for example, sectoral prioritisation covers the whole of the country, whereas the Joint Response targets just Northern Iraq. And the priorities identified by the UN and donors currently have changed considerably from those identified when the 2016 appeal was published (in November 2015), in particular towards, preparations for the humanitarian consequences of the liberation of Fallujah and Mosul. Similar issues are seen in Nigeria relating to the dynamic nature of the conflict and resulting humanitarian needs, compared with the static 'snapshot' of the annual appeal/response plan. In the Northern Iraq Joint Response 2 (NIJR2) proposal process, agencies successfully argued the case for longer-term approaches. While this may be perfectly logical and defensible, and possible within the analytical scope of the existing UN appeal, it does not in fact fit with the informal prioritisation of the UN and donors. In fact, in comparison with major donors to the response, the Dutch emphasis on Northern Iraq is out of step with the current narrative. While NGOs can in principle add their own supplementary assessments and analysis this is not a requirement, and without additional objective reality checks it is possible to arrive at a prioritisation of needs that does not in fact reflect the reality on the ground.

The use of sectoral priorities and gaps (based on funding gaps) within the scoring system has some perverse incentives. For instance, cash is not currently an IASC sector and therefore it is difficult to prioritise multi-sector cash-based programming within the current formulation. Within the NIJR2 prioritisation process, Joint Response members successfully argued that providing cash to vulnerable families should be considered as falling within the protection sector, which was identified as a priority sector in the appeal. For the Ukraine Joint Response II, cash was added to the scoring criteria as a 'special sector' in order to circumvent this limitation of the UN prioritisation.

The inclusive consensus-based decision-making process currently makes 'difficult' decisions to limit the number of agencies in a Joint Response challenging. A further concern was raised by DRA member agencies at both the Joint Response and HQ level around decisions to reject concept notes. During the initial phase of the DRA pilot, agencies have understandably focussed on building trust and strengthening relationships. In this democratic and consensus-seeking decision-making culture, it is very difficult to exercise executive decision-making power, which will disadvantage a single organisation by rejecting its involvement. In the first Joint Response (South Sudan Joint Response 1), which took place before the formal creation of the DRA, agencies were simply awarded an equal share. In the case of the first Northern Iraq Joint Response, 13 agencies received funds, several of which had no existing operational presence in the country. A number of respondents questioned whether this was a rational decision, but the pressure to be inclusive and a lack of hard criteria at the time meant that it was not feasible to exclude any agency's concept note. The result was a 'cake-sharing' decision, where arguably too many agencies, some with limited comparative advantage, ended up receiving funds. This has continued into the subsequent Joint Response. In the first Nigeria Joint Response, one of the agencies in the criteria working group did not itself meet the criteria so it was not selected; in the second phase the perception was that the criteria were made more inclusive, and agencies were better at describing their programmes in ways that met those criteria; this agency has now joined the second Nigeria Joint Response. The decision-making process has advanced hugely during the past year and a half, and it is not always the case that large numbers of agencies receive funds within a Joint Response, but as discussed below (Sections 3.2.2. and 3.3.), the limited scope to take tough decisions potentially impacts on coherence, efficiency and effectiveness, particularly in light of the limited resources currently available for allocation in 2017, and may need to need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

The efficiency and relevance of conducting a full scoring of proposals for second- and third-phase responses in protracted crises is questioned by some DRA member staff. There are also questions in relation to the requirement to conduct a full scoring exercise for the second and third phases of existing joint responses. The decision to continue existing joint responses is considered via ongoing dialogue

between Joint Response members and their individual Dutch counterpart agencies and between the Joint Response Lead and the RTF in the Netherlands. The rationale for continuation and indicative budgets are laid out in a formal Annual Plan, which provides a certain amount of predictability for member agencies and describes the anticipated burn-rate of funds. However, it does not necessarily follow that the same scoring process used to evaluate proposed responses at the outset would provide the right kind of information needed to evaluate whether activities should continue. One respondent noted that, in the second phase, the scoring process was effectively assessing the quality of the proposal writer rather than considering the continued relevance of an intervention in relation to changes in the context, and the performance of the partners in the first phase.[20] There may be scope therefore for simplifying the decision-making process on continuing existing Joint Responses.[21] Currently, evaluations are scheduled after the completion of activities and therefore are not suitably sequenced to feed into decision-making for continuation, but mid-term reviews can be used to formally make the case and signal the need to continue a response, which could trigger a modified decision-making process that takes into account changes in the context and the relevance of interventions to current needs.

Finally, concerns were raised by respondents at DRA member HQ-level and MoFA about the rate at which funds were exhausted within the first two years of operation of the DRA. To an extent, decisions were made on the basis of communications with MoFA, which were interpreted as encouraging the rapid disbursement of funds and indicating potential replenishment. It is far from clear in mid-2016, however, whether additional funds will be awarded in 2017, and the DRA is currently facing a very lean 2017. DRA members at the HQ level, including DRA-Co members, note that this has been a hard-learnt lesson and, in future, they would be far more conservative in husbanding their funds.

3.2. Effectiveness[22]

3.2.1. Coherence

Coherence at the Dutch level has been significantly improved. For the Dutch public and parliament, the DRA presents a much more coordinated position and point of reference, and provides an opportunity for strengthened collective influence. Dialogue between RTFs and MoFA in developing proposals and monitoring responses is generating greater coherence of analysis and approach across the Dutch humanitarian community. However, links between proposed Joint Responses and the wider portfolio of Dutch humanitarian and development investments could be developed further, both at headquarters and at the level of crises.[23] This ought to prove useful to MoFA and implementing partners in better understanding possibilities for synergies and operational links between humanitarian and development investments and approaches.

Activities within Joint Responses are not currently required to demonstrate coherence. Developing Joint Responses at the crisis level, particularly in the second phases, provides an opportunity for agencies to consider operational coherence and links, and there are instances where mappings gaps, needs and priorities, as well as efforts to develop common approaches, have occurred at the planning stages. However, this is not a hard requirement and it is perfectly possible for agencies to develop their

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20 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes for example: 'Systems and procedures in DRA and the MoFA need to take into account that the MoFA has allocated 70% of emergency funding for chronic emergencies. Effective use of that funding requires procedures for seamless continuity between 1st, 2nd etc. phases of joint responses in such chronic emergencies'.

21 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation recommends that the DRA 'Discuss how to delegate even more decisions about programme adaptations to the Lead to speed up the response to changes at grassroots level while ensuring accountability'.

22 ALNAP defines effectiveness as: 'How well an activity has achieved its purpose, or can be expected to do so on the basis of existing outputs' (ALNAP, 2013).

23 This is consistent with long-running problems of limited harmonisation across Dutch humanitarian and development investments, which have embedded structural causes. The 2015 IOB-commissioned evaluation of Dutch humanitarian policy 2009-14 notes for example: 'Humanitarian assistance and development cooperation are poorly harmonised due to separate delegation of budget responsibilities and capacity shortfalls at the embassies' (IOB, 2015).

concepts in siloes. Both the Nigeria and Northern Iraq Joint Response 2, for example, did benefit from joint analysis and discussions on priorities, but in practice they comprised a set of proposals developed independently and submitted upwards to their counterparts in the Netherlands before being consolidated into a single proposal. The result is geographically disparate and sectorally disconnected sets of activities. In many cases, DRA-funded activities are in reality one element within a larger set of activities being implemented by an NGO: the extent to which an NGO has an interest to align a Dutch funded component of their wider portfolio with the Joint Response may be secondary to their interests in building an operationally coherent set of activities across their wider project portfolio. As noted elsewhere, joint needs analysis, joint programming and operational complementarity and coherence are not currently valued within the prioritisation process; whereas agencies at the Joint Response level frequently indicated a willingness to work jointly on developing more coherent sets of activities, they felt that this collaborative impulse was 'blocked' by more risk-averse (and proposal-scoring-savvy) counterparts in the Netherlands.

Alignment with UN-led prioritisation alone is insufficient to ensure operational coherence. As a point of policy and principle, MoFA requires DRA members to align their responses with the priorities identified in UN-led coordinated response planning and prioritisation.[24] This is believed to contribute to a more coherent response by covering priority gaps and avoiding duplication. Proposals take into careful consideration how the proposed interventions fit with the UN's priorities, including sector priorities, which are also evaluated in the proposal scoring process. However, DRA member agencies, particular at the Joint Response-level, question the extent to which the MoFA appreciates the many limitations of cluster and UN-led prioritisation. In practice, agencies are in many cases already doing far more to ensure that their responses are well targeted and filling key gaps,[25] but this is not currently explicitly valued within the scoring system. Respondents at the Joint Response level raised the possibility of permitting greater input from them into an analysis of needs and the relevance of the proposed actions, based on a more diverse range of sources, including potentially joint assessments, to strengthen the targeting of responses to the most critical gaps.

The value of the additional layer of Joint Response coordination is variable depending on the context. A range of opinions exist as to whether Joint Response coordination duplicates or adds to existing coordination fora. In Nigeria and Ukraine, DRA coordination was felt to fill a definite gap in UN/cluster-level coordination. In some instances, DRA coordination was felt provide a safe space in which agencies could share sensitive information they could not in more public forums, and to provide a space to address cross-cutting issues not catered for in clusters.[26] Elsewhere, where coordination structures are more established and functioning well, there was felt to be a risk of duplication. In the Vanuatu acute crisis response, for instance, DRA coordination was minimal and was not felt to have added anything significant to existing relationships and structures.[27] In Gaziantep, cluster coordination and INGO

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24 The DRA proposal for example states that: 'Aid programmes shall fit within the priorities as defined by a coordinated international approach, under the leadership of the United Nations. In exceptional cases, to be consulted with Ministry, NGOs might bypass this coordination system, e.g. where it would be contradicting certain clauses of the aforementioned Code of Conduct'.

25 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes: 'The HRP and member needs analyses (focused on specific sectors and areas) were used by members as the starting point for the design of the response. SSJR sought alignment with UN OCHA via a presentation and publications of factsheets on their website. The members' individual responses were combined by the SSJR secretariat with the programme response. Members largely based their own programme on existing needs analyses. Due to the urgency of the response joint needs analyses were not feasible. Besides the needs, existing presence of SSJR members in the field also influenced the selection of location and sector. Members hereby build upon existing interventions and presence which is good. Members also used a baseline survey executed by the cluster as additional input to provide an appropriate response'.

26 In Nepal, for instance, the Joint Response Evaluation notes that: 'the number of participants in the cluster meetings left little scope for interaction and discussions beyond information sharing. By comparison the DRA meetings provided an arena for sharing common concerns and some practical experience, especially regarding good practice in managing relations with host government institutions'.

27 The Vanuatu Joint Response Evaluation notes that: 'VJR partners worked in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect but they had done so beforehand and were supported by various pre- existing coordinating mechanisms and consortia programmes in Vanuatu'. The Vanuatu Joint Response Final Report also notes a reluctance to add to the existing coordination workload: 'Coordination amongst the VJR-members themselves in Vanuatu happened mostly at ad-hoc base and formal structures were purposely kept at minimum to avoid wasting time and resources on administrative and bureaucratic tasks. VJR-members held two official meetings, one at the start of the programme and one half-way through the implementing period'.

coordination was felt to be relatively strong, and Joint Response members raised concerns around the potential for the Syria Joint Response Sector Working Groups to duplicate these existing mechanisms.[28]

3.2.2. Timeliness and flexibility

The DRA provides very rapid decision-making, but MoFA grant award processes lag considerably behind. DRA member agencies broadly describe the DRA as both timely and predictable – 61% of survey respondents agree the DRA decision-making processes and administrative procedures facilitate the timely delivery of humanitarian response. In protracted crises, agencies have developed proposals within a matter of weeks. Investment in the first phase, moreover, and the agreement of anticipated continuation phases in the Annual Plan, allows even more rapid proposal development and greater predictability in subsequent phases. In acute crises, proposals have been developed within 72 hours.[29]

In the early days of the DRA a lack of procedures, agreements and templates delayed the onset of activities – in the first Northern Iraq response, for example, although the proposal and funding decisions were made relatively quickly, the lack of tools and process meant that funds were not transferred for around two months. From the DRA side, these constraints appear to have been resolved and funding processes are running smoothly.[30] However, there are reported instances where the consensus-seeking approach to decision-making has affected timeliness – in the second phase of the South Sudan Joint Response, for example, the time taken to agree on the lead organisation delayed the start of activities.

However, once proposals are passed to MoFA for review and preparation of a grant agreement, momentum gained on the side of DRA member agencies has frequently been lost, with significant operational (including cost) impacts. In Nigeria, agencies reported rushing to develop their proposals within three weeks, then waiting a further two months for a grant decision. Delays in decision-making and grant agreement preparation for the second phase of the Northern Iraq joint response meant a planned October start date slipped to December, when the agreement was finally signed. For agencies with the capacity to pre-finance this did not cause major difficulties, but for smaller agencies a deferred start date meant planned agricultural activities missed their operational window. Similarly, the delayed start of the first South Sudan Joint Response, and resulting recruitment and procurement delays, would

FIGURE 2: SURVEY RESPONSES 'THE DRA'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES ENABLE THE TIMELY DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE'
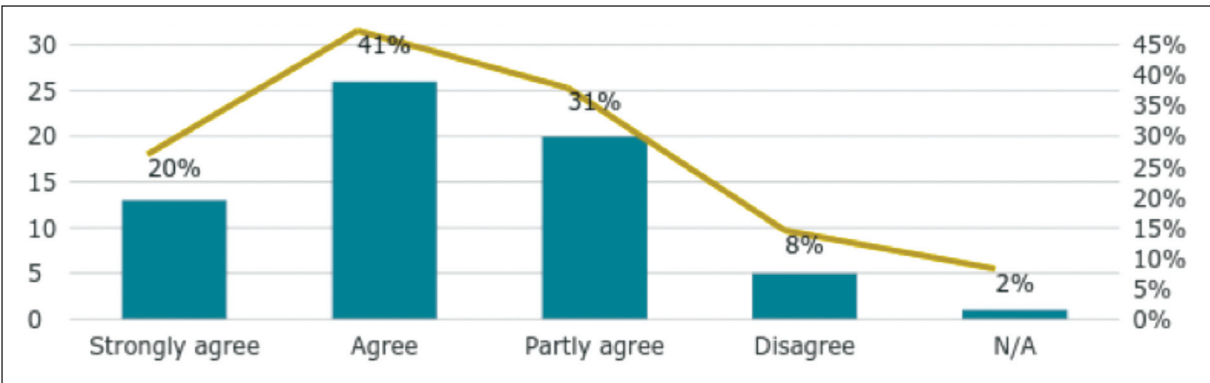
28 Syria Joint Response 1 Mid-term Report.

29 The Nepal Joint Response Final Report notes: 'The rapid decision of the DRA to start a joint response, the submission of a concept note 72 hours later and full proposal, added with a swift approval from the Ministry (which was well-appreciated by the members), demonstrated efficiency and allowed NPJR members to unfold an emergency response almost immediately'.

30 The Nepal Joint Response Evaluation notes for example: 'the procedures and processes of the DRA were seen as flexible, easy to adhere to in terms of administrative complexity and reasonably fast'.

have meant food security activities missing the planting season had the onset of the rainy season not been later than usual that year. Often agencies are able to speed up their implementation and make up for some lost ground, but the operational impact of delayed contracting is an avoidable cost.

Many rounds of minor questions were reported in the proposal review process and the preparation of the grant agreement was seen as often being very time-consuming. MoFA acknowledges these issues, and from the compliance side there is a willingness to better understand the needs of DRA agencies, and to provide further practical orientation in aspects of the grant agreement preparation process in order to avoid unnecessary delays resulting from missing information.

The DRA is a flexible mechanism in principle, but delays in approvals can blunt this advantage. MoFA allows a generous 25% variance in planned budgetary expenditure before a formal modification is allowed. In principle this allows for a high degree of flexibility across a large overall grant. This may not have been fully appreciated by Joint Response leads in the early stages of the DRA, and MoFA reported numerous requests for modifications when in fact the change was permissible within the permitted variance. Overall, a variety of Joint Responses reported that they had successfully modified activities in response to changes in the needs and context, including in the case of the South Sudan joint response, transferring funds between agencies,[31] and in Nepal agencies revised targets and reallocated unused funds to address priority needs for winterisation support, which became apparent as a priority during implementation.[32] However, approvals for modifications have not always been sufficiently timely.[33]

3.2.3. Synergies and added value

The extent to which synergies occur, under what circumstances, and what should be expected to result from these synergies has become a vexed question for the DRA. Although the DRA proposal objectives focus on increasing the efficiency, timeliness and effectiveness of response, the concept of 'added value' (originally referred to in the expected results listed in the DRA proposal) has come to dominate thinking and debate on what might broadly be described as the anticipated gains resulting from a collaborative approach.[34]

Many respondents at all levels expressed concern that the concept of added value is not well defined, and respondents in the semi-structured interviews were overall predominantly negative in their feedback on the extent to which synergies, coordination and cooperation occur, particularly at the Joint Response level (see Figure 3). Efforts to clarify the concept of added value have included the development of an added value monitoring framework, which spells out a range of potential activities and suggested indicators to monitor them. The framework is newly minted and is therefore not evaluated here but, based on semi-structured interview responses, there is considerable divergence of interpretation.

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31 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes for example that 'Nonetheless SSJR strongly responded to rapidly changing local needs by relocating the response to the most affected areas, even when this involved the transfer of funds between members during implementation'.

32 Nepal Joint Response Evaluation.

33 The Northern Iraq Joint Response (1) evaluation notes for example that 'changes on the ground resulting at times in the need for changes in the activities, but the approval process by the MoFA on average took six weeks, rather long in an emergency humanitarian crisis. KIIs in Iraq and in the Netherlands suggest the flexibility of the MoFA was much appreciated. However, getting that approval often took rather long, delaying effective response to people in need'.

34 Added value is described in the November 2015 Draft Capacity Proposal Narrative as an important over-arching objective of the DRA: 'This generation of so-called "Added Value", even though a not 100% clear concept, is an important overarching objective of the DRA mechanism and the Joint Responses'.

35 The Vanuatu Joint Response evaluation notes that 'it appears that some staff were confused about how to report about "added value" and related concepts. Simple and clear language and the avoidance of terms such as "complementarity, harmonization and credibility" will help to ensure the concept of added value is comprehensible to DRA partners in-country'.
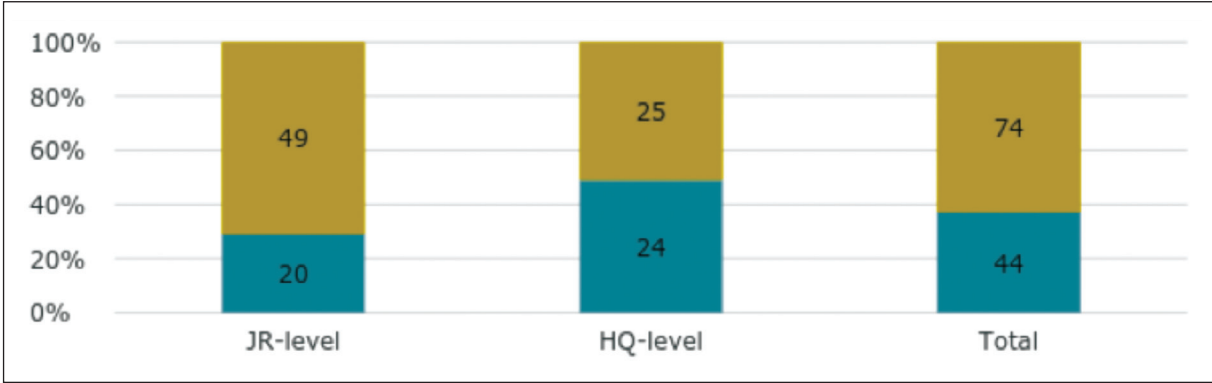
Added value so far accrues predominantly to actors in the Netherlands.[36] MoFA is considered to be the primary beneficiary of the efficiency, effectiveness and visibility gains brought by the DRA. At NGO headquarters level, interaction and collaboration has increased dramatically, resulting in an array of spin-off benefits, some of which benefit organisations more broadly. At the Joint Response level, the concept of added value has evolved over time, but still remains challenging. In the early stages of the Northern Iraq response, for instance, indicators for added value included holding meetings, as in the meetings themselves were considered to be an added value, rather than the outcomes of collaboration facilitated through meetings. This is consistent with what has been described by the original drafters of the concept as the expected level of ambition for first-phase responses, which were envisaged to be exploratory learning phases. By the second stage of the Northern Iraq response, a more sophisticated concept had indeed emerged which targeted the local humanitarian sector as the intended beneficiary of added value activities, but limited progress in delivering concrete activities against these aspirations has been made to date.

Generally, where synergies have occurred at the Joint Response level (see Box 5 for a list of examples) they have been small-scale, ad hoc and they have not been systematically monitored, nor their impact assessed.[37, 38] Moving forward into the second half of the DRA pilot, more conscious and systematic approaches to delivering and monitoring the impact of synergies should be prioritised in order to continue to build the case for the approach.

There are in practice an array of factors which constrain collaborative working. Synergies at JR level have been the most difficult to realise. This again is reportedly consistent with the original vision for the added value concept. There is palpable appetite at both the Joint Response and HQ level to move further towards delivering added value at the operational, particularly beneficiary, level.

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36 The Northern Iraq Joint Response (1) evaluation notes that 'The MoFA has been the main beneficiary of the added value of Dutch humanitarian agencies working together under the NIJR1 as they had to only deal with one, instead of 13 agencies, thus generating a clear and sizable leap in efficiency. The NIJR1 partner agencies in the Netherlands come second in the list of main beneficiaries of added value as they have come to know each other better, come to trust each other and see the scope for mutual benefit by working together more'.

37 The South Sudan Joint Evaluation (1) notes that 'Pro-active joint planning, monitoring and evaluation, systematic peer exchange is largely absent while it should be mentioned that this is the first joint response … Members mentioned in interviews that coordination and exchange between members working in different sectors was largely ad-hoc and unstructured'.

38 The Final Report for the Ebola Joint Response describes a range of meetings and learning exchanges between DRA members, but notes: 'However, though contributing to JRE members' insight and knowledge, the link between these discussions and meetings and adaptations in programme activities with real beneficiary impact is weak'.

BOX 4: EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONAL SYNERGIES

South Sudan (JR1)

- The value of cash for work was harmonised by ZOA and Oxfam in Bor.
- The overall logical framework contains harmonised indicators for all SSJR partners.
- The way beneficiaries were counted was harmonised between SSJR members in order to avoid double-counting.
- In locations where several SSJR members are active (Bor, Akobo etc.), staff of SSJR members mentioned learning from each other's tools, approaches and ways of working.
- Save the Children and Plan in Akobo refer children to each other across each other's Child Friendly Spaces and Family Tracing and Reunion services.
- The SSJR meetings led to exchange of information on approaches (on child friendly spaces, FSL for women's groups and assisting men with fishing gear).
- In Akobo Plan and Save the Children lobbied together against extra taxation by the local rebel government.

Northern Iraq (JR1)

- The added value created has mainly been generated by sharing information and by being encouraged by the Lead to add value through the joint response. The coordination meetings, workshops, learning platforms etc., both in Iraq and in the Netherlands, have helped agencies get to know each other better and develop trust among them.

Vanuatu

- The joint food distribution to schools on Tanna included shared vehicles, joint distribution lists and complaint forms with coordinated activities and schedules. Staff noted that beneficiaries received food faster, information was aligned, messaging was consistent and joint M&E exercises were undertaken.
- CARE assisted World Vision staff to undertake needs assessments and shared agricultural expertise, and World Vision provided CARE with nutrition expertise for their programming.

Nigeria (JR1)

- During the added value meeting a presentation was given on the Complaints Response Mechanism used by Save the Children. Oxfam subsequently adopted a CRM system based on SC's approach.
- Both Tear/Tearfund and their local partner CRUDAN and the IRC split up geographical areas for distributions to minimise the risk of duplication.
- Save the Children and IRC applied jointly for a START fund grant to respond to flooding in Adamawa.
- Tearfund established a pathway to refer severe acute malnutrition (SAM) cases to IRC.
- Save the Children adapted its food basket in line with Oxfam's to include local rice.
- Tear used and adapted Save the Children's latrine design.
- Oxfam trained all partner staff on gender mainstreaming. Save the Children cascaded the training to field staff and local partner staff and used the approach in their WASH and FSL programmes.
- Partners organised a joint donor visit.

Ukraine

- All members report that they have cooperated and shared information on beneficiary targeting to avoid duplication.
- Several members noted referrals of beneficiaries across DRA member programmes.
- DRA members conducted a joint donor meeting.
- Dorcas was advised by TdH on beneficiary selection criteria.
- Dorcas shared its draft cash grant procedure with other members.
- Dorcas' post-distribution monitoring questionnaire was developed with input from the Shelter Cluster and TdH and has been shared on the Kobo platform.
- Save the Children provided a workshop for staff on child protection, which Dorcas staff attended.
- Caritas shared information with TdH on NFI and food suppliers.

Sources: South Sudan, Northern Iraq and Vanuatu final evaluations; Nigeria mid-term report; Ukraine mid-term report.

The feasibility of working collaboratively (which is considered a key requirement to deliver added value) is contingent on a range of factors, including geographical proximity of programming;[39, 40, 41] the nature of the crisis and duration of the response;[42] and the structure and interests of the responding organisations.[43]

In semi-structured interviews, Joint Response staff at field level in Northern Iraq and Nigeria reported that different actors within a Joint Response have different levels of interest in seeking synergies. For example, respondents reported that larger federated agencies may be happy to share information, expertise, standards and tools, which benefits smaller organisations, but they may be less free to diverge from their own existing standards and processes. Larger organisations were felt to already have existing alternative centres of gravity and networks, which are potentially in competition with incentives from the DRA to harmonise and collaborate. Indeed, there were perceptions both at HQ and Joint Response level that larger agencies in some instances blocked collaboration. In addition, where DRA funding is a smaller proportion of an organisation's income for a response, there is a proportionately smaller incentive to participate in activities which are considered to have opportunity costs. In particular, an NGO with one of the largest programmes in Northern Iraq noted that it felt that participating in DRA coordination meetings was of more limited value to them than for smaller NGOs, and that if required to prioritise, they were more inclined to comply with the requirements of their larger donors. The Nepal Joint Response Evaluation notes in its key lessons learned that '(s)cope for value added depends on external factors'. The extent to which each of these factors, singly or in combination, affect collaboration will vary according to context, but there are likely to be enabling and constraining factors in each response scenario which influence the extent to which collaboration and synergies are possible.

Expectations around collaborative working should therefore be realistic, and while the DRA should create spaces in which collaborative working and synergies can develop, it should avoid placing pressure on teams responding to crises to deliver 'added value' where, in practical terms, the opportunity cost of the resources and effort expended might not be worth it, and at worst energies and resources could be diverted from the primary task of delivering effective humanitarian assistance. In particular, respondents in semi-structured interviews at both HQ and Northern Iraq JR level raised concerns about the return on investment of coordination meetings to foster added value at the field level,[44] and the level of budgetary resources allocated to fostering this collaboration, including the cost justification for full-time Joint Response Project Coordinator roles.[45]

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39 The Ebola Joint Response Final Report notes: 'many practical challenges prevented design of cooperation mechanisms and learning activities. JRE members faced travel restrictions and were implementing in different countries and even districts, with different main languages, which hampered the roll out of concrete added value activities'.

40 The Nepal Joint Response Final Report notes: 'DRA learned that inter-organisational learning in an acute crisis has been limited. Inter-organisational learning was not a number one priority as organisations were busy setting up and coordinating the emergency response. After this emergency phase, peer to peer sessions only took place once, as the fuel crisis did not allow for a second one. Next to this, the government (and at a district level the DDRC) in collaboration with the Cluster System took the lead in defining and coordinating the response. With no overlap in locations, there was no need nor space for the NPJR members to coordinate or harmonize the activities'.

41 The Syria Joint Response Mid-term Report notes: 'there are also concerns with regard to the set-up of the SWG as each member is working from different hubs in different sectors and areas. This makes direct communication in the field in theory a good idea, but in practice hardly possible … Thus far the added value of the SWG is limited by the inability to meet in person and the lack of overlap in operating countries'.

42 DRA members at HQ level note that added value is not usually expected in acute responses and the first phase of Joint Responses should be seen as an exploratory phase.

43 The Northern Iraq Joint Response (1) evaluation notes that 'N Iraq KIIs suggest that how active each NGO pursued added value depended to a large extent on the individuals in charge. Apart from that there does not appear to have been individual NGO strategies in relation to added value'.

44 Notably, NIJR members asked for a reduction in coordination meetings from monthly to quarterly as they were felt to consume a disproportionate amount of project staff time.

45 Budgeting for a full-time position for this role is considered controversial for some at HQ level and several respondents argued that it would create work rather than add value.

The question of joint programming remains unresolved and expectations around this point diverge considerably. Continuing to develop independent projects each with their own logic will necessarily limit the scope for synergies and will require a moderation of expectations.[46, 47, 48] Within MoFA there is a school of thought which strongly favours joint programming.[49] At Joint Response level, there is some support for increased joint programming (notably those indicating a preference for this were smaller organisations), but considerably less so at NGO headquarters level in the Netherlands. Given that this is an area where there is divergence of opinion, and one that has considerable influence on the degree to which synergies can be advanced, the extent and specific areas in which DRA members can agree upon joint working should be further debated and clarified.

The added value concept has not yet provided adequate clarity and guidance, particularly at the Joint Response level. Expectations around delivering of 'added value' appear to have grown since the outset and there are now a variety of interpretations. The terminology may in fact have become counter-productive. Added value is often described as if it were an activity or set of activities in itself, rather than an emergent property or result of specific actions designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of response. A number of respondents at HQ level questioned the prevailing theory of change whereby added value will organically emerge as a result of increased collaboration. In fact, there may be good reason to believe that other countervailing incentives would mean that this is unlikely to be the case. In the evaluation of the Northern Iraq Joint Response 1, for instance, considerable optimism is expressed around the likelihood of progress on added value given that relationships had been built in the first phase. Yet the current MTE found Joint Response staff in NIJR2 continuing to believe that it was 'too early' to expect added value. In fact, many of the staff present in the first phase had left, so those relationships had eroded. And although the Joint Response Lead had created physical and virtual discussion spaces, these were not being used – the reality being that agencies prioritise first and foremost their operational imperatives and those activities they are clearly contractually obliged to deliver.

For added value to emerge, on anything other than an ad hoc and unpredictable basis, it would need to be the product of a planned strategy to deliver a more efficient and effective response, and it should be these principles – supported with a variety of thematic and practical guidance, structural incentives and resources – which guide the process of delivering better outcomes for crisis-affected people.

3.2.4. Incentives for effective response
Joint responses are on the whole rated as effective, but the contribution of the DRA is not easily attributed. The Joint Responses implemented to date and which have been evaluated confirm that, overall, responses have been well targeted to meet priority needs, have succeeded in achieving – and in some cases exceeding – planned results, and have been, overall, effective (see Figure 5). It is difficult currently, however, to attribute this effectiveness to the DRA or the DRA approach, as opposed to the individual organisations and programmes funded by the DRA.[50]

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46 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes: 'By integrating and adopting a holistic approach towards the same community SSJR member interventions can be more effective and provide higher quality support'.
47 The Northern Iraq Joint Response (1) evaluation notes that 'As to complementarity facilitated by NIJR1 (rather than the OCHA cluster meetings) there was little scope for this on the ground once the individual programmes of the agencies, their location and target groups, had been approved'.
48 The Vanuatu Joint Response evaluation notes: 'Given that the consolidated project was in essence an amalgamation of agency activities it appears that limited attention was given as to how approaches and activities would be coordinated. Much of this happened in an ad hoc manner during implementation. While this makes it easier to apply for funding, the approach lacked strategic vision to achieve maximum value out of the partnership'.
49 This view was also captured within the Northern Iraq Joint Response 1 evaluation as follows: 'When the MoFA representative was asked about the desired level of cooperation the reply was that they envisage DRA members "Actively working together so that for direct stakeholders it looks like all activities are done by the same NGO." There is an obvious gap between MoFA expectations and the current level of cooperation in the NIJR1'.
50 The Vanuatu Joint Response Final Report notes: 'Although added value has definitely occurred during the response it is more difficult to say if this is due to the DRA-partnership or if it would have occurred anyway, especially since less added value is created amongst organizations who were operating for this response in different geographical areas'.

FIGURE 5: SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS ON RESULTS AND EFFECTIVENESS

Nepal (NPJR)

- Overall, NPJR exceeded the planned number of beneficiaries: planned 138,640 versus actual achieved 276,246.
- Interviews with key stakeholders, staff of partner organisations and implementing local partners, group discussions with beneficiaries and reports from NPJR member organisations all indicate a high level of achievement of targets and objectives. This is supported by data presented in post-distribution monitoring reports.
- Overall quality was good. Materials distributed were assessed by beneficiaries to be of good quality. Distributions and other activities were in line with government/cluster guidelines, which in turn were based on a contextualisation of SPHERE standards.
- Timeliness was, given the challenges of the Nepal environment, also good.

Northern Iraq (NIJR)

- On the whole the planned results have been achieved. Broken down into main types of planned results, targets have been exceeded in direct services (+21%) and training (+70%), but were not met in awareness-raising campaigns (-43%). Sector-wise, shelter/NFI (+60%) and WASH (+148%) have over-achieved and food security (-18%) under-achieved.
- The effectiveness of the NIJR1 was good overall as implementation was aligned with actual needs. In some acute cases the activities implemented under the NIJR1 saved lives. Where planned interventions were no longer relevant, such as winterisation in March, funding was diverted (after approval) to existing needs, such as summerisation.

South Sudan (SSJR)

- In total, the SSJR reached 384,391 individuals with direct services (47% women) via its six focus sectors and 11 members in 2015. 69% of the original target of 1,001,667 individuals were reached.
- From the 27 planned logframe targets across the six different sectors 16 were achieved. This degree of effectiveness can be judged as satisfactory given the highly volatile and rapidly changing context in which SSJR operates.
- About 65–70% of beneficiaries report clear improvements towards sector-indicated outcomes via focus group discussions.

Vanuatu (VJR)

- The VJR was generally considered effective as the response managed to cover more beneficiaries than originally targeted.
- Close to 15,000 people received food assistance; 17,000 people benefited from agricultural inputs to help re-establish food security and rebuild shelters; over 8,000 people received emergency solar lighting to increase safety in the aftermath of the storm and approximately 13,500 beneficiaries received shelter kits, materials and training to rebuild their homes.
- Overall, VJR partners adhered to core humanitarian standards and protection principles during the VJR response, as well as specific standards related to food security and shelter that had been adapted to the Vanuatu context by national clusters.
- Community members expressed overall satisfaction with the distributions of food and non-food items and training and the conscientious approach of the agencies.
- VJR agencies recognised the need for gender-responsive interventions and considered the specific needs of vulnerable members of the community, such as female-headed households (FHHs), the elderly and people with disabilities.

Source: Joint Response final evaluations.

An overall vision of what constitutes effectiveness would help to promote more systematic and measurable efforts to improve it. Overall, there is a lack of clarity of vision around what effectiveness is sought (at which levels? for whom? with what outcomes?) and how that might be delivered. There is a strong belief that the DRA should not be too prescriptive and should allow JR agencies to develop their own analysis of where effectiveness can be improved. However, a clearer vision of what constitutes humanitarian effectiveness and areas where the DRA can promote particular aspects, tools and approaches (such as the use of cash-based programming, accountability to affected populations, support to local responders), may be helpful in guiding, influencing and monitoring agency performance as well as helping to attribute the contribution of the DRA to improving effectiveness.

Emerging discussions within the wider humanitarian policy community could be used by the DRA to construct a common vision and framework, including a set of goals and practical steps to build a coherent theory of change and a strategy to deliver more effective humanitarian action (see Box 6). The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) may be a particularly relevant tool for the DRA around which to organise a framework for delivering more effective (and efficient) response since it includes a range of aspirations the DRA has already expressed (including providing timely, appropriate, needs-based assistance that is accountable, coordinated and cost-efficient). The CHS also includes a commitment to ensure that communities are better prepared and more resilient, which would provide a logical place to explore DRA members' growing interest in supporting local response capacity. In addition, many of the CHS commitments map directly onto the OCHA and OECD conceptualisations of a shared understanding of humanitarian effectiveness, meaning that DRA members can build a case for the value of the DRA in contributing to shared responsibilities to deliver more effective humanitarian action at the aggregate or community level.

BOX 6: TOWARDS A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS?

Within the international development community, consensus emerged around the basic principles and characteristics of effective development aid through the aid effectiveness agenda, which includes a series of principles and commitments agreed at the High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness in Rome, Paris, Accra and Busan in 2003, 2005, 2008 and 2011 respectively. These culminated in the 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement which includes a set of principles guiding donor and recipient country behaviour, with the purpose of improving the results of aid investments.

The humanitarian community has seen many similar themes emerge in recent years – including concern with improved quality, accountability and efficiency in humanitarian action. In addition, global social, economic and technological change has driven an increased awareness of the need to work in partnership with a range of local, national and global actors, provide context-appropriate responses and deliver value for money.

The humanitarian community has not, however, undergone an equivalent process to agree a common understanding of the principles and practices which could deliver effective humanitarian action. Recent policy work by OCHA and the OECD has suggested conceptual frameworks including principles, behaviours and policy priorities that could form the basis of a common understanding with the hope that these would be further advanced as part of the World Humanitarian Summit process. To date, this challenge has not been taken up within the humanitarian community, but many of the themes and concepts continue to be advanced separately and there is a great deal of common ground across the OECD and OCHA frameworks and indeed the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), agreed in 2014.

The OECD offers four sets of characteristics that are considered critical to effective humanitarian action in pursuit of a 'common framework for humanitarian effectiveness,

designed to promote collective responsibility and mutual accountability':

• Humanitarian effectiveness is a shared responsibility, but with different roles – programmes should be grounded in comparative advantage, they should be forward-looking and they should respect fundamental principles.
• Humanitarian effectiveness begins with effective programme design – programmes should aim to maximise reach, be adapted to the context, be demand driven, focus on results and be good value for money.
• Humanitarian effectiveness needs the right tools and partnerships – programmes should be predictable and flexible, timely and coordinated, working together in partnership.
• Humanitarian effectiveness must be measured, demonstrated and improved – through system-wide learning and accountability.

OCHA defines three tiers of effective humanitarian action:

• Crisis-affected people have the right to assistance and protection that is: relevant, timely and accountable. These elements describe the desired results for crisis-affected people.
• Those reaching crisis-affected people should be: complementary, connected, coherent and nimble. These elements describe the desired behaviour and approach for any actor involved in achieving results for crisis-affected people.
• The environment for humanitarian action must be enabled by: respect for principles, leadership, resources, information and evidence and governance. These are the essential enablers that must be part of the operating environment in order to achieve results for crisis-affected people.

The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) is designed for use by organisations and individuals that are delivering direct assistance to crisis-affected communities, and/or providing material, financial or technical support to other organisations. The CHS comprises nine commitments, each supported by quality criteria; key actions to support the commitments; and organisational responsibilities to ensure consistent and systematic implementation. The nine commitments and quality criteria are as follows:

1. Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs.
   Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.
2. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.
   Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is effective and timely.
3. Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.
   Quality criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.
4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.
   Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback.
5. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.
   Quality criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.
6. Communities and people affected by crisis receive coordinated, complementary assistance.
   Quality criterion: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.
7. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect delivery of improved assistance

as organisations learn from experience and reflection.
Quality criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.
8. Communities and people affected by crisis receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.
Quality criterion: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably.

9. Communities and people affected by crisis can expect that the organisations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently and ethically.
Quality criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose.

Sources: OCHA, 2015; Scott, 2014; CHS Alliance et al., 2014.

A framework for delivering more effective response should also consider the levels at which greater effectiveness is sought (see Figure 8) in order to assign responsibilities and practical strategies to different actors and levels within the DRA structure.

The governance structure of the DRA currently lacks incentives to promote effectiveness. Survey respondents overall agree with the contention that governance structures and procedures contribute to a more effective response (13% of survey respondents strongly agreed; 42% agreed). There is a significant divergence of opinion however between semi-structured interview respondents at Joint Response level and HQ level and respondents at JR level, with 80% negative data-points in response to this question. There are currently limited structural incentives built into the DRA system to promote effectiveness, and where these incentives do exist, they could be used more strategically.

Quality standards built into structural systems for decision-making, monitoring and evaluation and accountability could help to influence alignment with a commonly agreed framework for effective humanitarian action. The DRA MoU stipulates that members should 'work in accordance with the Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief – and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS). All Members will adhere to the IATI open standard from 2016 onwards'. These stipulations in principle can be managed to incentivise greater quality and accountability. However, there do not currently appear to be consistent efforts to encourage member agencies to work towards these standards. In evaluations, for example, Joint Responses were inconsistently evaluated against the CHS – the Nepal evaluation considers adherence to Sphere

FIGURE 4: STAKEHOLDER LEVELS BENEFITING FROM 'ADDED VALUE'
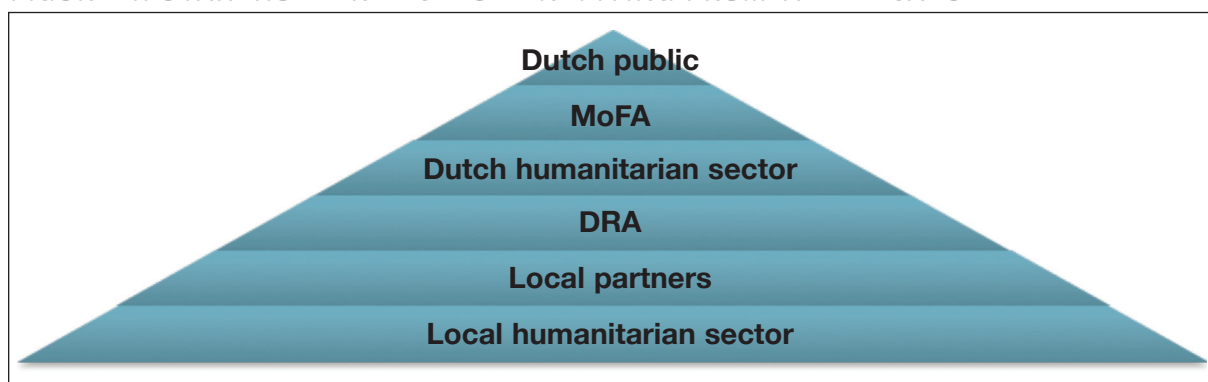
Source: DRA member agency staff

standards (though Sphere standards are not listed as a DRA MoU requirement); the Vanuatu evaluation considers CHS and Sphere – albeit somewhat generally; the Northern Iraq evaluation evaluated agencies on the basis of a self-assessment against CHS; and the South Sudan evaluation considers CHS and Sphere, finding however that, while CHS was used in planning responses, they were used to a lesser extent during implementation and monitoring and were not used consistently across all response levels (international, national and field-level). The extent to which Sphere and sector standards are required by the DRA may be in need of clarification, and there is considerable scope to integrate the CHS into analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation tools across the different levels of the DRA to encourage individual agencies to work towards a commonly agreed commitment to improve quality and accountability.[51]

More broadly, there is scope to use evidence collected through monitoring and evaluations more strategically as a tool to drive effectiveness. Currently, evaluations are scheduled after the end of a response phase, but too late to feed into the design of subsequent phases. Findings in most cases cover a broad scope of evaluation questions against which relatively 'top-line' analysis is generated, and therefore are of somewhat limited use as operational learning tools for Joint Response members. In the early pilot phase of the DRA a strong emphasis on evaluation in order to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the Joint Responses was an important strategic decision to build confidence. Given that the performance of Joint Responses has been found to be good to date and no major concerns have been raised through the five evaluations completed, there is scope at this juncture to consider using resources currently devoted to evaluations more creatively in order to feed into ongoing operationally focussed learning and adaptation, and to commission full evaluations more sparingly and with more consistent links to commonly agreed effectiveness and efficiency goals.

Regular monitoring of data flows in the first instance upwards within NGO networks and may not be being used to its full advantage to monitor and manage performance.[52] There is scope for monitoring evidence to be used more strategically to improve effectiveness on a rolling basis.

Roles and responsibilities should be clarified to facilitate accountability for delivering more effective humanitarian action. As noted in section 3.2.3. above, Joint Response members are not currently contractually obliged to deliver against higher-order aspirations to deliver added value, contributing to unpredictable and ad hoc results in this area. Clarification of what it is agencies are required to contribute to or align with in this area, and identifying where they will be held accountable for this, could help to increase the likelihood of results. The development of the new over-arching MoU could provide a good opportunity to spell out responsibilities and expectations in relation to a framework for delivering more efficient and effective response.

The Joint Response Lead could also play a greater role in influencing effectiveness. Joint Response Leads have in some cases been able to influence agencies to improve their performance – the South Sudan mid-term review, for example, flagged up variance in results and expenditure rates and the Joint Response secretariat was able to make improvements in performance, yet member agencies also expressed concern that the Joint Response Lead did not have sufficient contractual oversight to demand regular formal updates from partners.[53] In other cases, however, the Joint Response Leads have displayed a lack of clarity around how far they can go to performance manage sub-grantees in cases of

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51 South Sudan Joint Response Evaluation recommends in fact that CHS/Sphere be integrated into common monitoring, evaluation and learning tools to monitor programme quality.

52 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes for example: 'South Sudan: Monitoring data is shared vertically within organisations, but not systematically horizontally between members. Monitoring data is shared but not systematically used to steer and coordinate the SSJR'.

53 South Sudan Joint Response 2 mid-term review.'

FIGURE 5: SURVEY RESPONSES 'THE DRA PROVIDES INCENTIVES TO CONSIDER EFFICIENCY GAINS AT AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL'
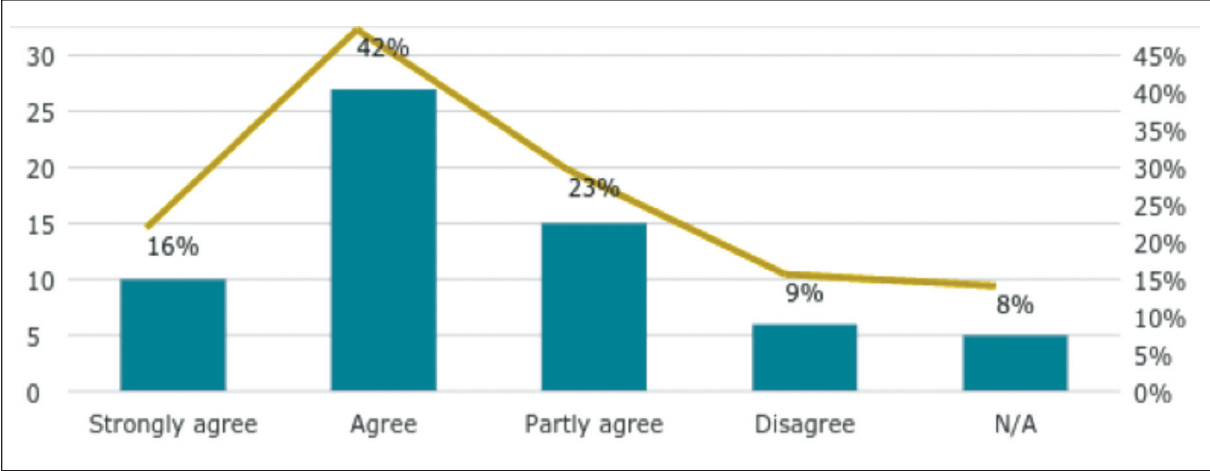
under-performance and their role in influencing, as opposed to facilitating, added value is also unclear. The remit and degree of influence of the Joint Response Lead, as noted elsewhere, would benefit therefore from further debate and clarification.

3.3. Efficiency[54]

The DRA has generated substantial efficiency gains, but largely at the level of MoFA and DRA members. Overall, respondents broadly agree that the DRA provides incentives to consider efficiency gains at an operational level (16% strongly agree; 42% agree: see Figure 9). The Northern Iraq Joint Response 1 evaluation notes that the emphasis on added value in itself provides 'an incentive to continuously consider efficiency gains, for example through sharing resources and procedures, such as procurement of materials and humanitarian goods, joint programming and lessons learnt from NIJR1'. But among semi-structured interview respondents there was significantly less support at the Joint Response level for this contention.

Respondents in semi-structured interviews strongly indicated that the greatest efficiently gains accrue at the headquarters level not at the operational level, and overall efficiency gains accrue primarily to organisations rather than beneficiaries. Based on semi-structured interviews at Joint Response and HQ level, it would appear that efficiency gains are more likely to accrue to smaller members, who may benefit from economies of scale and existing investments in developing tools, capacities and expertise among larger members. Notable efficiency gains cited include significant administrative efficiency gains for MoFA in dialogue (one point of reference), contracting and monitoring; a reduced fundraising burden for DRA member agencies – removal of uncertainty and virtual elimination of former practices of developing detailed proposals 'in vain'; more broadly, the upfront investment in mapping capacities and establishing decision-making protocols results in significant time and effort-savings in each JR; and the relatively light reporting and role of the lead in managing reporting has reduced the administrative burden for DRA members.

The DRA represents a relatively cost-effective option for the MoFA with a high level of quality assurance and accountability and additional benefits, notably increased visibility for Dutch humanitarian aid contributions. For example, the 2015 IOB evaluation case study for South Sudan

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54 'Efficiency measures the outputs – qualitative and quantitative – achieved as a result of inputs. This generally requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving an output, to see whether the most efficient approach has been used' (ALNAP, 2013).

TABLE 4: COST COMPARISON OF THE SOUTH SUDAN CHF AND DRA SOUTH SUDAN MANAGEMENT SERVICES

	South Sudan CHF	South Sudan Joint Response 2
Management fees	• UNDP administering agent fee (1% of total funds received) • OCHA Technical Secretariat costs (equivalent to 1% total value of fund in 2013) • UNDP managing agent fees (7% of value of funds awarded to NGOs)[55]	• Capacity support (1% of DRA 2016/17 total funds)[56] • Joint Response Lead management costs (1% of value of funds awarded for a JR) • Joint Response coordinator (1.1%)[57]
Accountability costs	• Cost of monitoring officers assigned to clusters (0.7% of total value of funds received in 2012)	• External evaluation and meta-audit (0.5%)
Total management and accountability	5%	3.6%
Additional accountability costs embedded within projects	Compulsory audit of every response	DRA has decided to audit every response but not a MoFA requirement

Sources: Based on Poole, 2015; DRA South Sudan Joint Response 2 budget; DRA Capacity Proposal.

found that the administration and management of the South Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) up to 2014 cost the equivalent of 5% of the value of the fund, with relatively poor levels of monitoring provided within the price.[58] In comparison, the cost of managing, administration and oversight and accountability for the South Sudan Joint Response 2 currently is the equivalent of 2.6% of funds awarded, or 3.6% if the proposed additional support requested to cover the costs of DRA management at HQ level is added.

A number of disincentives and tensions contribute to limited progress in realising hoped-for efficiency gains at the operational-level. The DRA creates space for identifying potential efficiency gains at response level – and some instances of joint working (sharing of training, carrying out joint visits e.g. in Nigeria) and joint procurement (in Vanuatu and being explored in Ukraine) have occurred. However, these examples tend to be ad hoc and there is no evidence to suggest that the DRA approach is ultimately more efficient than the sum of individual responses.[59, 60, 61]

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55 Note that this 7% is levied only on the funds awarded to NGOs and not the total value of CHF funds. The amount in volume terms, and the share of the total CHF funds this represents, will therefore vary depending on the volumes awarded to NGOs each year.

56 The Capacity Support proposal was approved during the MTE but is not yet in effect.

57 Note that this position also contributes to the 'added value' objectives and therefore could be interpreted as constituting at least in part a direct activity cost.

58 'When considering the various costs of administering the fund, including the cost of the supporting the OCHA Technical Secretariat, UNDP's role as administrative agent in receiving, contracting and disbursing funds (the recovery rate for which is set globally at 1%), the cost of UNDP's function as managing agent for funds contracted to NGOs (currently set at 7% of the total disbursed to NGOs) and including the costs of the new Monitoring and Reporting function added to the fund in 2013, the total cost was 5% of the total value of the fund. This is consistent with the fees charged by the World Bank for administering trust funds, which are set at 5%'.

59 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes that: 'Budget expenditure lines show little efficiency gains compared with the sum of individual project support. Practical efficiency gains in SS through sharing resources and procedures are found on an ad-hoc basis. Points for improvement have been identified during the midterm event, but no decisions were taken how to sys-tematically address these points'.

60 The Vanuatu Joint Response evaluation for example lists a range of efficiencies achieved which relate to factors which predate the DRA intervention, including: 'Offices and staff based in the area, as well as vehicles, enabled agencies to carry out a rapid delivery of distributions to communities. Previously established relationships with Area Secretaries, Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs) and community members, and service providers greatly facilitated the efficient distri-bution of items in the outer islands of Tafea. Strong and established local procurement networks enabled agencies to receive discounts of 20% for most NFIs purchased from preferred suppliers which helped to lower costs and distribute more NFIs than initially planned'.

61 Joint Response evaluations consistently note the difficulty in assessing cost efficiency.

The funding prioritisation process does not require or incentivise joint working and collaboration, although joint enterprises are likely to be significant sources of cost-efficiencies.[62] Joint Response members and leads report a higher degree of interest in joint activities (procurement, resource-sharing, joint programming), though in practice this happens infrequently, and in some instances it is felt that this willingness is not shared and in fact may be blocked by more risk-averse counterparts in the Netherlands. As noted in section 3.2.3. further discussion on the scope for joint working would be timely at this juncture.

The lack of timeliness of funding decisions and issuance of grant agreements has in some instances resulted in losses in efficiency and increased operational costs, as noted in section 3.2.2 above.[63]

The inclusive nature of the instrument leaves it open to a proliferation of small-scale interventions, which may be of questionable efficiency overall. For example, in Northern Iraq there are currently two very small-scale and short-term cash for work programmes in the same area of operation, each with their own set of management and administration costs. These may be justifiable within the macro prioritisation criteria of the UN appeal, but their overall efficiency and impact in relation to the investment are questionable. In order to achieve a higher level of efficiency across a Joint Response, tougher criteria to assess efficiency, including the overall cost-efficiency of the proposed responses, are needed.

There is currently a lack of guidance on cost controls and a lack of systematic scrutiny of project budgets leaves budgets susceptible to cost inflation.[64] There are particular concerns around the 'added value' budgets in this respect, which a number of respondents, both at HQ and Joint Response level, feel do not ultimately justify the cost. It should be noted, however, that the DRA-Co and Finance working group are fully aware of this gap and are in the process of developing more detailed guidance on allowable costs.

Greater guidance and clarity on strategic programming choices might facilitate cost-efficiency savings. The Nepal evaluation, for example, noted that there was little evidence that middle management-level staff had the capacity to assess the cost implications of their policy choices and appeared to give little consideration to the cost implications of proposed responses. In addition, it is extremely difficult for Joint Response leads and Response Task Forces to evaluate the appropriateness of the different costs of responses proposed. A range of studies are currently underway at the global policy level, which are expected to result in external benchmarks and guidance on operational costs, including guidance and methodologies advanced by OCHA to produce 'activity-based costings'.[65] The DRA could, as a medium-term aspiration, apply emerging methodologies to develop internal benchmarks and ranges against which to compare individual proposals, as well as specific guidance based on emerging best practice and guidance on approaches and programming tools (including the use of cash and voucher-based programming and investments in emergency preparedness) to help guide strategic programming choices and evaluate costs.

There is scope to reduce the current cost of audits. Currently, each agency agreement within a Joint Response is subject to an audit. There is wide variation in the cost budgeted by each agency, and overall the value of this investment is questionable, particularly where Joint Responses enter second or third

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62 It should be noted that the Criteria Working Group is reportedly including collaborative or joint working in the scoring matrix for second-phase responses.
63 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation for instance notes that: 'SSJR had a slow start that made operations more expensive. Due to the delay, most of the field work had to be done during the rainy season, making logistics much more expensive'.
64 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation for instance notes that: 'Expenditure per budget line did not differ notably from what was budgeted. There are however significant differences regarding expenditure per budget line per member'.
65 DFID, ECHO and OFDA have each commissioned studies in 2016 to examine in detail the cost elements, including transaction costs, of partner budgets.

phases and no concerns were flagged in the first phase. Audit reports are not required by the MoFA for projects up to €5 million unless there is a high risk associated with the project. It is not the case therefore that each sub-grant within a Joint Response is obliged to be subject to an audit. There is no barrier in principle therefore to revisiting and finding alternative and less costly approaches to ensuring financial accountability, including greater use of timely and transparent reporting, as is currently envisaged under discussions around the roll-out of reporting against the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard among DRA agencies.[66]

The complex structures of the DRA member agencies tend towards a proliferation of transaction costs. Contrary to emerging policy thinking around the need to reduce layers of transaction costs, the DRA is in fact rather transaction-cost heavy, in some cases involving multiple layers of sub-contracting. In perhaps the most startling example, in Northern Iraq, one NGO, which notably has no direct connection with a Dutch NGO, described how funds travelled from (1) MoFA to the Lead Agency (2) from the Lead Agency to their counterpart in the Netherlands (3) from the Netherlands-based agency to their international network's emergency fund (which deducts a 3% administrative fee) (4) from the emergency fund to three separate responding agencies (all working in geographically disparate areas), and finally in the case of one recipient (5) onwards to a local implementing partner.[67] This is clearly not an efficient system and should be an area for attention in any serious effort to advance efficiency gains across the wider DRA response mechanism.

3.4. Visibility

The DRA has improved the visibility of Dutch contributions at several levels, and there is scope to do more in this area. Many DRA members at HQ level acknowledge that the visibility objective has not been prioritised in the early stages of the DRA's development and note that this will be a priority for the future. However, an impressive array of communication materials has been produced by individual agencies, with two films in particular shown to large audiences through Dutch television, special screenings arranged in parliament and a photo exhibition held in Nigeria and the Netherlands illustrating the Northern Nigeria JR.

Multiple interpretations of MoFA's expectations with respect to visibility exist across the different levels of the DRA. At Joint Response level, there is often a misperception that simple branding is required, though this was not in fact confirmed as a priority by MoFA and there has been limited progress in delivering against visibility objectives at the Joint Response level.[68] Agencies at JR level and the JR leads also show a lack of clarity around how they should refer to and communicate around the DRA. In practice, there are few formal requirements to deliver against the visibility objectives, particularly at the Joint Response level.

Expectations from MoFA may in fact be far more modest and manageable than many within the DRA expect. The majority of MoFA financing contributions have historically been unearmarked, meaning that, when MoFA is required to report back on what has been achieved with Dutch taxpayer contributions, it is extremely difficult for them to access such information. Their primary priority therefore is being able to demonstrate what is being bought with Dutch investments. DRA-funded activities are far more visibly 'Dutch' and provide the MoFA with much more direct and tangible

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66 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation recommends considering the option of 'broader aid-effectiveness audits'.
67 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) also registered that 'Leadership in Iraqi NGOs involved in the NIJR1 implementation have questioned the efficiency of having several agencies/layers between the donor, MoFA, and the Iraqi NGOs on the ground'.
68 The South Sudan Joint Response (1) evaluation notes: 'The visibility approach of the SSJR for 2015–2016 is largely unclear for members. Events targeting different groups (NL public, UN and other countries) have not been jointly organised. Jointly organised communication about the SSJR and project progress towards different groups (NL public, JR approach in SS, UN and bilateral) is limited; most members do not know how to promote and communicate about the SSJR'.

evidence of and visibility for what Dutch contributions are enabling – the Nepal Joint Response, for example, was visited by MoFA twice, including by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen.[69] Creating visibility with stickers and flags at the crisis level does not appear to be of interest to the Dutch government, and in fact is at odds with its current visibility policies. In addition, there is little appetite among the DRA member agencies or MoFA to brand the DRA as an entity in itself, with many preferring to retain the established identities and communications and advocacy agendas of individual members as their primary channel. DRA was considered by most to be a back-office function rather than a separate legal entity to be branded – rather, it is the collaborative approach and the activities of the members which most agree should be communicated.

There is clearly scope here to negotiate mutually agreeable modifications to current monitoring and reporting practices – including potentially using IATI, which DRA members committed in the original DRA MoU to become compliant with in 2016 – to provide more timely and transparent evidence on agency spend and results.

Roles and responsibilities with respect to delivering against visibility commitments require further clarification. The DRA MoU signed between member agencies includes a range of commitments with respect to visibility, acknowledging that increasing visibility is an important priority for the MoFA and stating that members commit to developing communications strategies, building on their existing capabilities and channels, which will make 'information about projects and results funded through DRA visible and traceable across communication channels'. The MoU also establishes that members will become IATI-compliant from 2016. These commitments relate however to agencies based in The Hague, while in sub-grant agreements responsibilities towards collective visibility of the DRA are not clearly identified or budgeted for. In addition, while there is some evidence to indicate that Joint Response leads have taken a lead in developing communications plans – the lead for the Syria Joint Response for example has prepared a communications plan – this does not appear to be the case across all Joint Responses.

The communications working group is as the most difficult to make progress on, but has been identified as a future priority and is expected to be more effective in future with a fully funded and dedicated chair position. The communications working group should therefore be well-placed to further clarify expectations, define roles and responsibilities and plan discrete activities to advance the visibility agenda.

3.5. Innovation, research and learning

The DRA has created an environment in which learning can be transmitted and amplified through member and Joint Response networks. The DRA originally envisaged contributing to change at the sector level through 'co-created innovation, research and learning'. This objective has not been a major priority in the early stage of the DRA pilot period and, based on practical reflections on the structure, allocation of resources and processes for generating innovation, research and learning, expectations may need to be adjusted in this area.

Both at headquarters and at the Joint Response level, there are many examples of information-, evidence- and skill-sharing between DRA members, both informally and through workshops, exchanges and learning events. The DRA has been successful in forging networks and creating space in which such learning exchanges can occur. There have been some efforts to deliver specific documented pieces of learning through case studies, including in South Sudan, where agencies produced a WASH case study in 2016. The impact of this collaborative learning and exchange has not been investigated or captured, but anecdotally the possibility of sharing and learning is highly valued by staff within DRA member agencies at all levels.

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69 Nepal Joint Response Final Report.

Learning from evaluations could be further strengthened, though it is not currently clear where the barriers to uptake lie. The DRA has invested considerably in evaluations of each Joint Response. The evaluations produced to date have been of a high quality and are well regarded by DRA members. Evaluations were designed in the first instance as an accountability exercise, but given that many protracted Joint Responses enter at least a second stage the scheduling is problematic in that the evaluations come too late to feed into the design of the second phase. Despite learning and feedback sessions held at the Joint Response and Netherlands levels for many of the evaluations, few respondents had read and internalised the Joint Response evaluation findings. As an exercise in accountability, therefore, the evaluations have served a useful purpose and they have offered some lessons on strategic issues, which have been heard by DRA members at the Netherlands level, but there may be scope to adjust the focus of evaluations further to ensure that they are meeting the real information and learning needs of the DRA. For example, the Nepal Joint Response evaluation recommended conducting joint after-action reviews, as well as consolidating meta analyses of reviews and evaluations periodically to influence the strategic direction of the DRA.

Research and innovation have had little traction and the DRA may be better placed to broker and disseminate research and innovation than to generate it. Little attention has been paid to innovation and research and there are few formal requirements or resources to provide this, and no logical place to drive this agenda within the current DRA organisational set-up. Respondents questioned whether the DRA – with its short-term programmes and funding focussed on response – is in fact the right vehicle to advance innovation, noting that, currently, innovation tends to be driven by long-term investments of agencies and dedicated funded platforms. However, the DRA could more usefully provide a brokering and amplifying function for external sources of innovation throughout the extensive organisational and operational networks represented within the DRA.

3.6. Sustainability

There are several major outstanding issues which affect the sustainability of the DRA, the foremost being securing continuity of funding. The creation of the DRA has required a huge investment on the part of the Dutch member agencies. This should be considered a long-term strategic investment in the response capacity of the Dutch humanitarian sector, and as such the case for continued predictable support and investment is compelling. Uncertainty around the future of funding for the DRA is already causing considerable concern among agencies. Protracted uncertainty risks undermining a carefully crafted instrument, strong networks and a considerably strengthened responsive capacity.

The sustainability of the costs of running the DRA must be monitored carefully to ensure a fair distribution and remuneration for managerial and administrative work. In the early 'design and build' phase, agencies effectively subsidised the mechanism, taking on a huge managerial and administrative burden without costs being covered. In June 2016, MoFA approved a proposal to fund some of the staffing costs associated with managing the DRA, including a number of staff positions in the DRA-Co and permanent working groups, at a cost of €555,400, which represents 1% of the 2016/17 budget. Most agencies agreed this funding would compensate them adequately for the added work associated with the DRA, but the appropriate level of funding for this work should be monitored closely in relation to the volumes of funds flowing through the mechanism and the level of aspiration agreed for future phases of the DRA.

Resolving outstanding areas of uncertainty in expectations and vision are crucial for the future development and credibility of the instrument. Clarity of vision around the purpose and focus of the fund, and reaching consensus on higher-level aspirations around increasing efficiency and effectiveness of response, is needed as the DRA moves on from the design and build phase. This will inevitably

require a great deal of thought, discussion and consensus-building among DRA members and with the MoFA. The experience to date of working collaboratively to build the fund indicates that the likelihood of achieving mutually satisfactory agreement on these key strategic issues is high.

A discussion at the strategic level on the scope and remit of the DRA in protracted crises may be timely at this mid-point juncture. Many of the Joint Responses in protracted crises have entered a second phase of implementation, and in some cases are embarking on their third phase. While there is almost always a logic which justifies continued support to protracted crises, at the strategic level providing long-term support in protracted crises, for an expanding range of activities, may not be consistent with the original vision and mandate of the fund, which provided for relatively short-term packages of support. As responses become entrenched, the scope of activities tends to expand. In South Sudan, for example, the recent evaluation of the first phase Joint Response notes that 'members go beyond emergency into recovery and sometimes development support (i.e. applying ownership, alignment, sustainability principles), broadening the scope of the SSJR'.

If the DRA decides it wants to consciously engage on a medium-term basis in protracted crises, given that it has the flexibility to programme funds across a three-year window options may be available to permit greater predictability of funding and reduce transaction costs in repeat proposal submissions, facilitating longer-term planning and approaches. If, however, the DRA decides that tying up financial resources in longer-term responses would jeopardise responsiveness at the fund level, it may need to consider establishing clearer eligibility and exit criteria for response funding, and/or potentially adjusting the size and eligibility criteria of the acute window to increase contingent financing capacity in case of major unforeseen emergencies, including in crises where an ongoing protracted Joint Response is present. One could easily foresee, for example, that Joint Response in Northern Iraq may need to call upon the acute crisis window in event of the anticipated liberation of Mosul, in order to scale up to the large-scale crisis which is currently expected. Similarly, the fluid nature of the conflict in Nigeria would benefit from a flexible response capacity – for example in supporting the significant needs relating to the voluntary return of 80,000 displaced Nigerians from Cameroon.

The DRA does not yet have a position on the growing global policy agenda on supporting local and national humanitarian actors. At the Joint Response level (including in the NE Nigeria and Northern Iraq responses), actors have already identified a need to support capacity strengthening and improved partnerships with local and national responders. Notably, the Northern Iraq Joint Response 2 has identified capacity strengthening of the local humanitarian sector as a priority for 'added value' work, and has devoted part of the added value budget to capacity-strengthening activities. The DRA overall does not currently have a clear position on where its comparative advantage lies in this agenda however.[70] There are inherent challenges, including the relatively short-term nature of Joint Response funding windows, which does not fit will with the need for predictable and sustained relationships in organisational capacity-strengthening. There are potentially other areas in which DRA members can add value. The terms on which partnerships are negotiated are noted as problematic at the global policy level. Since several members have extensive networks of local and national partners, the DRA could for example use these networks to investigate and promote good partnership behaviour.

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70 The 2015 IOB evaluation clearly identifies this challenge: 'Since the new grant programme is restricted to Dutch NGOs, it does not contribute to the policy aim of strengthening local organisations'.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

DRA member agencies and the MoFA, which has enabled and nurtured the DRA, have achieved a tremendous amount in just 18 months. The DRA is an established and successful instrument providing timely, efficient, effectively prioritised funding, which in turn has enabled effective humanitarian responses across a broad range of crises. The DRA has increased the visibility of Dutch humanitarian aid and has instigated a transformation within the humanitarian NGO community in the Netherlands, from a culture of suspicion and competition to one of enthusiastic collaboration and collegiate working.

This MTE sought to establish the extent to which the governance structure of the DRA contributes to or hinders the achievement of the DRA's specific objectives and results, and to establish the extent to which the DRA is making progress against its specific objectives and results.

The evaluation found that the governance structure is functioning effectively and largely to the satisfaction of DRA members, who have invested considerable intellectual effort in and practical support to its development. Of particular note, and in line with global-level policy aspirations expressed in the Grand Bargain announced at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the DRA has improved the predictability of funding through the introduction of annual plans across the three-year funding window, and contributes to a reduced reporting burden through its simple and straightforward proposal and reporting tools and process. There are several areas in which, based on the first year and a half of operations and feedback, the governance structure can be further improved, including defining roles and responsibilities more clearly. In addition, in order to support the DRA's ambitious higher-level objectives, the governance structure, decision-making process, tools and guidelines should be reviewed to ensure the integration of incentives which will support these aspirations to improve efficiency, effectiveness and collaborative approaches.

In terms of delivering against these high-level objectives, it is clear from the Joint Response evaluations conducted to date that the projects within the Joint Responses have been effective, and that the instrument provides timely and flexible funding. However, there is limited evidence at this stage to demonstrate that the DRA has made significant progress in delivering a more efficient and effective response, or delivering learning, innovation and research. It is important to stress that the first year and a half of the DRA has been a pilot phase where DRA members have experimented and gathered experience, evidence and feedback on the feasibility of these ambitions and ways of working. The MTE provides an opportunity for DRA members and MoFA to revisit, debate and renegotiate expectations and ambitions at this mid-point juncture.

In order to move towards the next phase of the DRA, the MTE recommends the following:

Strategic issues:

- **Funding continuity:** Work with MoFA to urgently make the case for continued support to the DRA and lobby in appropriate forums.

- **Scope and ambition of the DRA:**
  - Agree at the strategic level on the scope and remit of the DRA in protracted crises, including the scope of activities and optimal duration of engagement.
  - Consider among DRA members and develop a position on what the DRA can contribute to global policy commitments and aspirations to strengthen local and national responders.

- **Effectiveness and efficiency:**
  - Linked to wider and emerging policy discussion in the sector, develop a coherent vision of what effective humanitarian assistance looks like, and a corresponding framework detailing the practical strategies (including thematic tools) necessary to achieve this. Align aspirations to deliver added value with this vision and framework – added value would be a higher-level outcome or an emergent property of outputs and activities to deliver more effective and efficient humanitarian action.
  - Integrate this vision and framework across decision-making and monitoring processes to encourage uptake, and in particular review how quality standards including the CHS could be used to incentivise operational effectiveness across DRA levels, processes and activities.
  - Debate and agree internally, and with MoFA, how far the DRA is willing and to what extent it is practically possible to work towards joint programming, and identify which areas of joint working should be positively encouraged and incentivised.

- **Visibility:** Work with the MoFA to reach a common understanding of expectations around visibility.

- **Innovation and research:** Debate and reach consensus on the scale of ambition in this area and decide conclusively whether the role of the DRA is to generate or to broker and disseminate innovation and research.

Structural and procedural issues:

- Scope and ambition of the DRA:
  - Revisit with MoFA growth ambitions and eligibility criteria for membership of the DRA in order to balance the desire to be inclusive with aspirations to deliver effective and efficient DRA management and response.

- Roles and responsibilities:
  - Review and agree upon the remit and degree of influence of the Joint Response Lead, including their role in relation to performance management, coordination, support to needs analysis, prioritisation and decision-making, visibility and added value. Clarify lines of communication between the Response Lead, Joint Response members at the field level and their counterpart agencies in the Netherlands.
  - Establish where accountability lies for delivering against visibility, added value, learning and innovation within Joint Response MoUs and the overarching MoU to ensure that responsibilities for delivery are formally assigned.

- Prioritisation and decision-making:
  - Consider how to more systematically integrate and value alternative sources of evidence and analysis – over and above the UN appeal – into the decision-making and scoring process.
  - Linked to strategic discussions on the scope of ambition around joint programming, build in incentives to encourage proposals demonstrating coherence, collaboration and joint working.
  - Consider devising a streamlined decision-making protocol for second- and third-phase Joint Responses, which takes into account changes in the context and performance of agencies, and which could be linked to/ triggered at the mid-term review stage to expedite decision-making and ensure predictability and continuity of funding.

- Promoting effectiveness and efficiency:
  - Convene a workshop with MoFA compliance staff, desk officers and DRA members (including new DRA member staff) to clarify procedural requirements, lines of communication and predictable bottlenecks in the grant development process.

- Develop decision-making criteria around effectiveness and efficiency, which would permit agencies to take hard decisions to better manage the risk of proliferation of small-scale cost-inefficient projects within Joint Responses.
- Develop clear guidelines on eligible costs, including for the added value budget.
- Consider ways to review partner budgets more transparently against new guidelines.
- In future, consider using emerging methodologies to develop internal benchmarks and ranges against which to compare individual proposals, as well as specific guidance based on emerging best practice.
- Develop guidance on key approaches and programming tools supporting efficiency and effectiveness (including the use of cash- and voucher-based programming and investment in emergency preparedness) to help guide strategic programming choices and evaluate costs.
- Revisit the necessity to audit every sub-grant within a Joint Response and consider alternative approaches to financial accountability, including through greater use of timely and transparent reporting, as is currently envisaged under discussions around the roll-out of reporting against the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard.
- Review funding pass-through/sub-granting practices and transaction costs of member agencies to identify practices which are not consistent with the efficiency aspirations of the DRA.

- **Learning and innovation:** Consider using resources currently devoted to evaluations more creatively in order to feed into ongoing operationally focussed learning and adaptation, and commission full evaluations more sparingly and with more consistent links to commonly agreed effectiveness and efficiency goals.

- **Visibility:**
  - Develop clear communication guidelines linked to clarified expectations and ambitions agreed at the strategic level.
  - Review with MoFA the extent to which current reporting practices meet their visibility requirements and consider the ways in which the use of reporting via IATI will better meet their information needs.

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Internal documentation referenced:

DRA proposal

DRA Draft Capacity proposal

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South Sudan Joint Response, Final Evaluation

Northern Iraq Joint Response, Final Evaluation

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix

Research question		Sources of evidence
Evaluation objective: To assess to what extent and how the chosen governance structure of DRA contributes to, or hinders, the achievement of DRA's specific objectives and results.		
1. Relevance	1.1. Is the current organizational set up (DRA Committee, general members meetings, supportive working groups such as communication, MEAV and mapping) and the relationship with MoFa supportive in establishing a fully operational and rapid response mechanism (Result 2)? • To what extent is the governance structure and procedures 'fit-for-purpose' to support a rapid response mechanism? • How do different DRA members perceive the current structure? • To what extent is the current membership criteria of ECHO FPA holdership relevant? 1.2. To what extent does the current structure, prioritisation criteria and decision-making processes enable effective prioritisation of humanitarian funds (Objective 2)? • Is the requirement to align with UN-led prioritisation adequate and appropriate? 1.3. From the perspective of DRA member agencies, the MoFA and key knowledgeable external stakeholders, what is the critical added value of the DRA (Objective 3; Result 2)? • Have the organisational structures of DRA members been beneficial or hindering in membership and implementation of joint response programmes? • What is the % of DRA funding in comparison with the total humanitarian budget of each DRA member and what are the effects in this respect? 1.4. To what extent does the DRA ultimately enable members to reach more people with faster support in current and new crises?	Governance documents; meeting minutes. Interviews (levels 1, 2, 3) Interviews external stakeholders (donors, coordinators, federated DRA member lead agencies) Online survey Agency financial data

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Annex 1: *continued*

	Research question	Sources of evidence
2. Efficiency	2.1. To what extent does the current governance structure contribute to the efficient provision of humanitarian aid (Objective 2; Result 3)? • Does the DRA provide a cost-efficient grant administration model (Result 3)? • To what extent and at what levels does the DRA contribute to a reduced administrative burden (Result 4)? 2.2. Does the DRA collaboration work as an incentive for DRA members to consider efficiency gains at the programmatic/operational level (Objective 3)? • What evidence is there of operational efficiency gains and to what extent can this be attributed to the DRA? 2.3. Are resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) likely to be more economically converted to results compared to individual interventions (Objective 3)?	Mid-term and final narrative reports. Final financial reports Interviews (levels 1, 2, 3) Online survey Comparative data on overhead/running costs of financing mechanisms
3. Effectiveness *In what ways has the DRA mechanism been supportive for effective aid?*	3.1. To what extent does the current governance structure contribute to effective humanitarian aid (Objective 2; Result 1)? • How are decisions made on who is in the lead and which NGOs will join as a DRA member in the joint responses? • How does the process of setting criteria per JR and scoring function? • Is the current structure clear to all parties who work within DRA? • Are current modes of engagement between the DRA and MoFA effective in supporting the provision of timely and effective humanitarian aid? 3.2. To what extent do current DRA prioritisation and decision-making processes support a coordinated response at the crisis-level and at the level of the Dutch humanitarian community (Result 2; Objective 2)?	Governance documents; meeting minutes. Proposal documents. Final reports. Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) Interviews (levels 1, 2, 3) Online survey

	Research question	Sources of evidence
	3.3. To what extent does the DRA's decision-making and administrative processes facilitate provision of timely humanitarian assistance? • How many acute Joint Responses started within 72 hours after approval by MoFa? • How many acute Joint Responses enabled MoFA to publish a press release on the onset (within 72 hours) of the humanitarian crisis? • How much time has there been between delivering the concept note to MoFA and approval by MoFA, for each JR? • What are the critical factors enabling or limiting timely response?	
4. Sustainability	4.1. Do current JR evaluations provide sufficient information on quality of the programmes implemented and how does the DRA use the lessons learned outcome of evaluations in follow-up Joint Responses programming and implementation (Objective 5)? 4.2. How sustainable is the DRA governance structure, management and running of the mechanism (Objective 3; Result 4)? • How has the governance, management and running of the DRA been resourced by DRA members? • How do DRA members perceive the return on these investments? 4.3. Is everything in place to measure progress towards objectives and results in the end evaluation (in 2017) in a more quantitative manner, exceeding anecdotal evidence (Results 3 and 4; Objective 4)?	MEAV planning documents; meeting minutes. Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) DRA capacity mapping analysis Interviews (levels 1, 2, 3) Online survey

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Annex 1: *continued*

Research question		Sources of evidence
Evaluation objective 2: To assess to what extent the DRA is making progress towards achieving the five specific objectives and the results		
Delivering fast humanitarian aid in major crises	5.1. To what extent have current JR's delivered rapid or timely humanitarian response (Objective 1)? • How many responses have been able to start up within seven days after the disaster occurred? • What contributes to or hinders the the provision of timely response?	Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) Mid-term and final reports Interviews (levels 2, 3) Online survey
Delivering humanitarian aid linked to needs and gaps in response to major crises in a timely, appropriate, effective and efficient manner	5.2. To what extent have objectives been met in completed and evaluated JRs (Objectives 1 and 2; Result 1)? 5.3. Do the joint responses fit within the priorities as defined by a coordinated international approach, under the leadership of the United Nations (Objective 2)? • Under what circumstances and with what justification do JR priorities differ from UN priorities? 5.4. In what ways have the JR's contributed to coherent response (Objective 2; Result 1)?	Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) Proposal documents Interviews (levels 2, 3) Online survey
Generating synergies and cooperation between the Members aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness in providing humanitarian aid in crisis situations	5.5. To what extent do synergies, coordination and cooperation between DRA members (including institutional network and partners) occur and at which levels (Objective 3)? 5.6. What evidence is there to indicate that effectiveness has increased (Objective 3)?	Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) Mid-term and final reports Interviews (levels 2, 3) Online survey

	Research question	Sources of evidence
Increase the visibility of this Dutch contribution towards the Dutch constituency, Parliament and in-country.	5.7. To what extent is reporting of DRA members transparent and accessible to the Dutch public (Result 4; Objective 4)? 5.8. What evidence is there to demonstrate that the DRA has contributed to increased visibility of Dutch humanitarian contributions and at what levels (constituents, parliament, media and in-country) (Objective 4)?	Mid-term and final reports External communications materials Interviews (levels 2, 3)
Work together, also with other parties, to tackle the major bottlenecks in the humanitarian practice through co-created innovation, joint learning and research;	5.8. What evidence is there to demonstrate anticipated gains in innovation, learning and research been generated (Objective 5)?	Evaluation reports (Northern Iraq, Ebola response, Nepal, Vanuatu, South Sudan) Mid-term and final reports Interviews (levels 2, 3) Online survey

Annex 2: Data and analysis report

1. Relevance

1.1. Is the current organisational set up (DRA Committee, general members meetings, supportive working groups such as communication, MEAV and mapping) and the relationship with MoFA supportive in establishing a fully operational and rapid response mechanism (Result 2)?

- To what extent are the governance structure and procedures 'fit for purpose' to support a rapid response mechanism?
- How do different DRA members perceive the current structure?
- To what extent is the current membership criteria of ECHO FPA holdership relevant?

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data and open-text survey responses

Positive

- DRA has created a 'new platform for collaboration' and built trust where there was competition
- Multiple remarks on huge achievement in a short space of time in setting up governance and decision-making structures

FIGURE 1: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA'S CURRENT GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING SET-UP AND PROCEDURES ARE APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE'
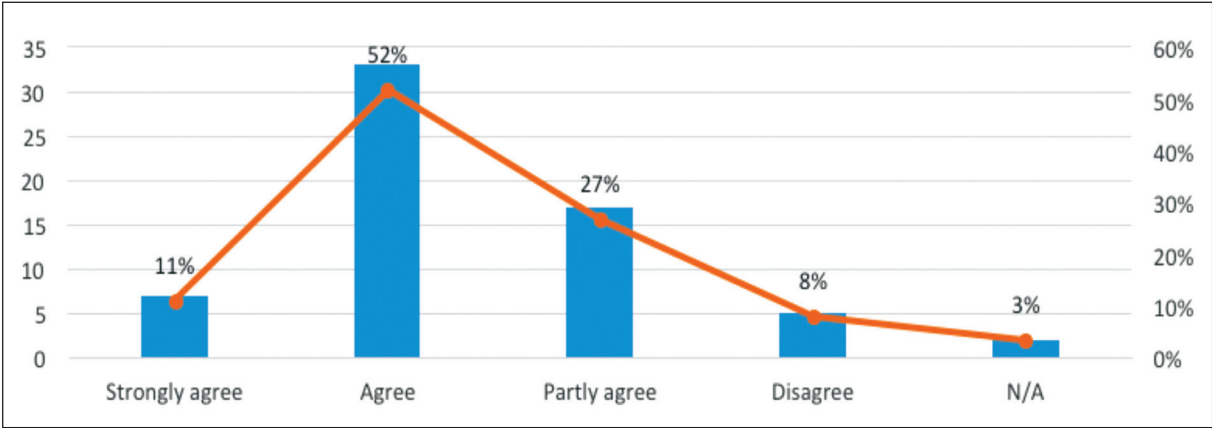
FIGURE 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
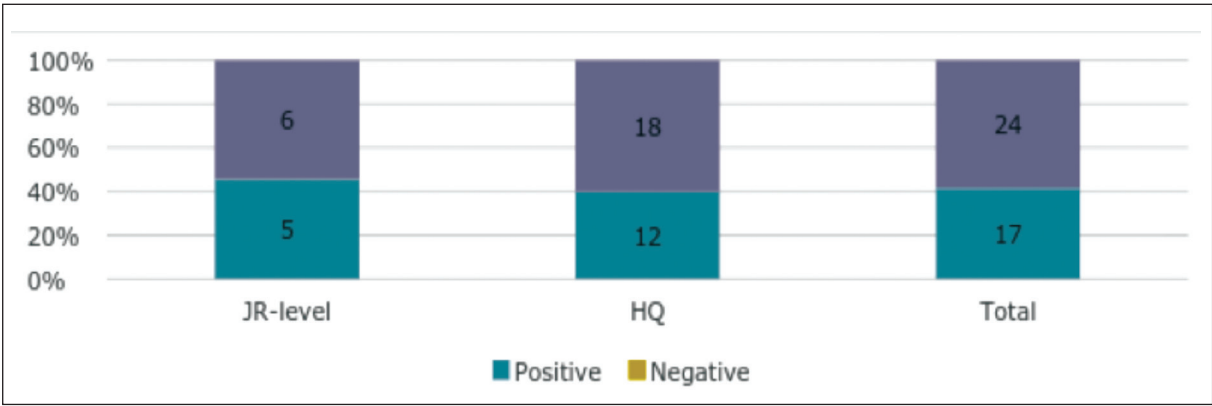
- Relationships with MoFA dramatically improved. MoFA has a new instrument in its tool-box, which is sympathetic to its staffing constraints
- Support at JR level for consortia approach, including role of the lead
- High degree of participation and buy-in to working groups
- Admiration for 'learning by doing' approach
- Admiration for culture and approach
- Importance of emergency managers playing a leading role in developing systems and leading decision-making
- CEOs ensuring effective authorising environment
- Appreciation for sharing of the workload among member agencies
- System of election and rotation of DRACo chair consistent with democratic principles
- Democratic approach allows smaller agencies a greater voice – e.g. Ukraine crisis response was advocated for by smaller agencies, who might not have been heard otherwise

Neutral

- Multiple calls to delegate more decision-making powers to JR level
- A variety of queries raised around membership criteria and the likelihood of reaching a point of diminishing returns if more agencies join, driving down allocation amounts and complicating coordination and management
- New proposed over-arching DRA MoU expected to provide greater clarity

Negative

- Concerns around proliferation of process and procedures
- Concerns at JR level that decision-making is too centralised in the Netherlands, which runs counter to collaborative approach at crisis level
- Concerns that there is currently no basis on which to exclude organisations/reject proposals at the JR level, leading to cake-sharing of resources
- The lead agency has an ambiguous position, being legally responsible but having no direct authority to coordinate, direct or manage performance.

1.2. To what extent do the current structure, prioritisation criteria and decision-making processes enable effective prioritisation of humanitarian funds (Objective 2)?

FIGURE 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
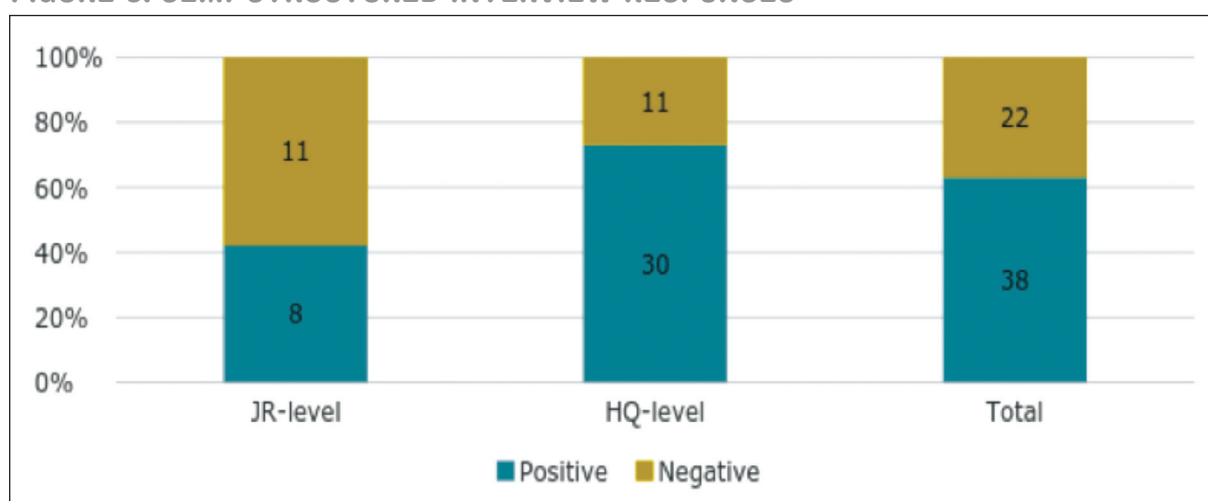
Note: A total of 79 data points; 52 from HQ-level interviews and 27 from JR-level interviews. 19 data points were neutral

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive
- Sense of 'fair play'; a lack of opportunity to influence the process; members evaluated on a fair and equal basis
- Transparency of the decision-making process has reduced competition and fostered climate of and space for collaboration
- Support at JR level for bottom-up programme design approach and the fact that there are no predefined priorities and programmatic preferences
- Peer review felt to improve the quality of proposals and targeting
- Inclusive prioritisation process improves collective analysis of needs and priorities
- Greater understanding of where agencies have response capacity through agency capacity mapping
- Scoring process felt (at HQ level) to be innovative, transparent and effective
- Willingness in decision-making process to compromise and find the best collective outcome
- Scoring process evolved to include incentives to generate added value

Neutral

- Could consider joint needs assessments

Negative

- Mixed opinions on whether a full scoring process is necessary for second- and third-phases or whether different criteria should be evaluated at this juncture that better consider relevance and quality of ongoing activities, rather than the quality of the proposal
- Consensus-seeking slows the decision-making process and may lead to compromises which run counter to strategic decision-making that considers efficiency and effectiveness of the overall response
- Concerns around the actual level of screening of proposals by the lead agency – tends to be a process of combining rather than objective scrutiny and quality control
- Exclusion criteria – it is currently very difficult to reject concepts. The logic may fit with the broad UN prioritisation and yet overall the portfolio of projects may be fragmented and inefficient
- Queries as to whether quality of programming and track record are adequately taken into account in the scoring process
- Concerns that there are currently no mandatory requirements to develop concepts in complementarity – activity mapping done in some cases after proposals funded.
- Prioritisation against UN priorities limits ability to adapt to dynamic changes in the situation and in some cases leads to a perverse assessment of needs
- Questions raised around burn-rate of DRA funds overall and whether funds should be retained more strategically for preparedness and unforeseen emergencies

1.3. From the perspective of DRA member agencies, the MoFA and key knowledgeable external stakeholders, what is the critical added value of the DRA (Objective 3; Result 2)?

- Have the organisational structures of DRA members been beneficial or hindering in membership and implementation of joint response programmes?
- What is the % of DRA funding in comparison with the total humanitarian budget of each DRA member and what are the effects in this respect?
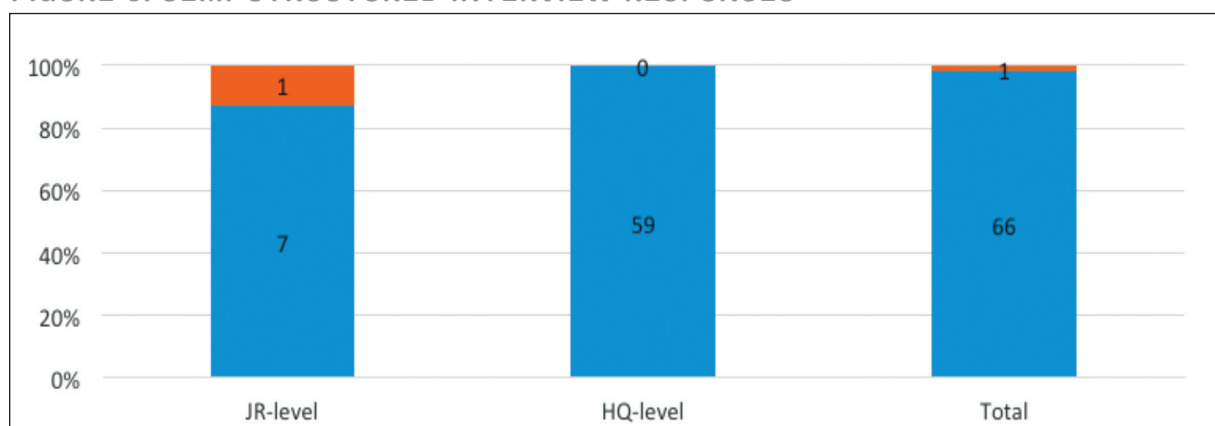
FIGURE 4: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'ALIGNING RESPONSES WITH UN-LED PRIORITISATION ENSURES THE DRA IDENTIFIES PRIORITY NEEDS AND GAPS'
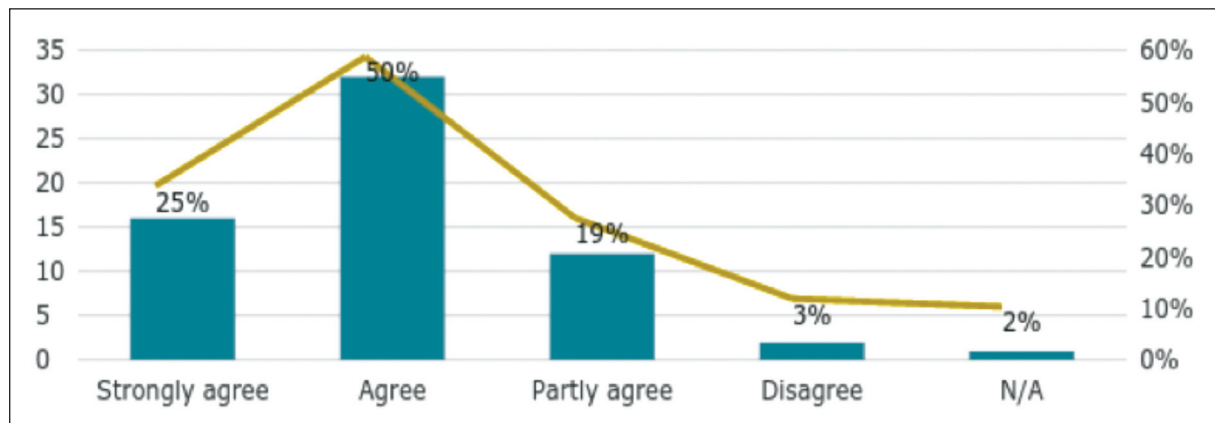
FIGURE 5: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUNDING FOR MY ORGANISATION'
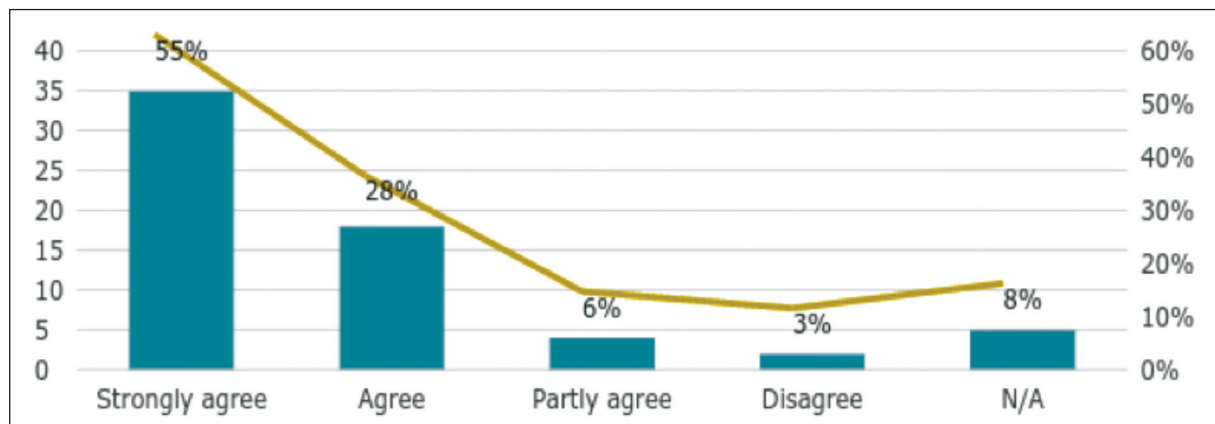
FIGURE 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Notes: In total 73 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 65 from HQ-level respondents and 8 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 6 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Welcome source of predictable financing
- Significantly increased likelihood of getting funded
- Changed the culture among Dutch NGO community from competition and mistrust towards collaboration
- Multiple examples of spin-off benefits from this increased interaction and collaboration including joint advocacy and learning
- Significant increase in openness and transparency
- Increased transparency in decision-making from MoFA
- Appreciation for flexibility, speed and ease of funding
- Smaller organisations gain platform and influence
- Multiple instances of reported learning through improved collaboration
- Improved visibility of Dutch response vis-à-vis the Dutch public
- Significantly reduced time spent writing proposals in vain
- Significantly reduced 'time to market' with decisions possible within 72 hours
- Significantly increased efficiency for MoFA
- Creates a space for collaboration at JR level outside of cluster system

Negative

- Risk that failure to deliver against added value objectives will lead to loss of support
- Added value for beneficiaries still difficult to find and some at JR level doubt its validity

1.4. To what extent does the DRA ultimately enable members to reach more people with faster support in current and new crises?

FIGURE 7: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA ENABLES MEMBER AGENCIES TO REACH MORE PEOPLE, FASTER, IN CURRENT AND NEW CRISES'
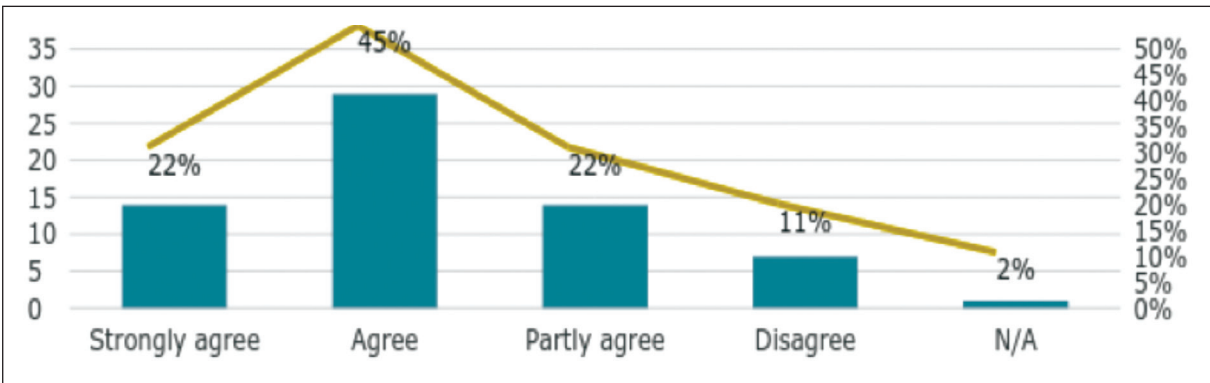
Note: In total 13 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question. Due to the limited sample size these have not been disaggregated by respondent group. There were 4 neutral data points, 4 positive and 5 negative.

2. Efficiency

2.1. To what extent does the current governance structure contribute to the efficient provision of humanitarian aid (Objective 2; Result 3)?

- Does the DRA provide a cost-efficient grant administration model (Result 3)?
- To what extent and at what levels does the DRA contribute to a reduced administrative burden (Result 4)?

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Significant administrative efficiency gains for MoFA in dialogue (one point of reference), contracting, monitoring
- Reduced fundraising burden – removal of uncertainty and virtual elimination of former practices of developing detailed proposals 'in vain'

FIGURE 8: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA CONTRIBUTES TO A REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN'
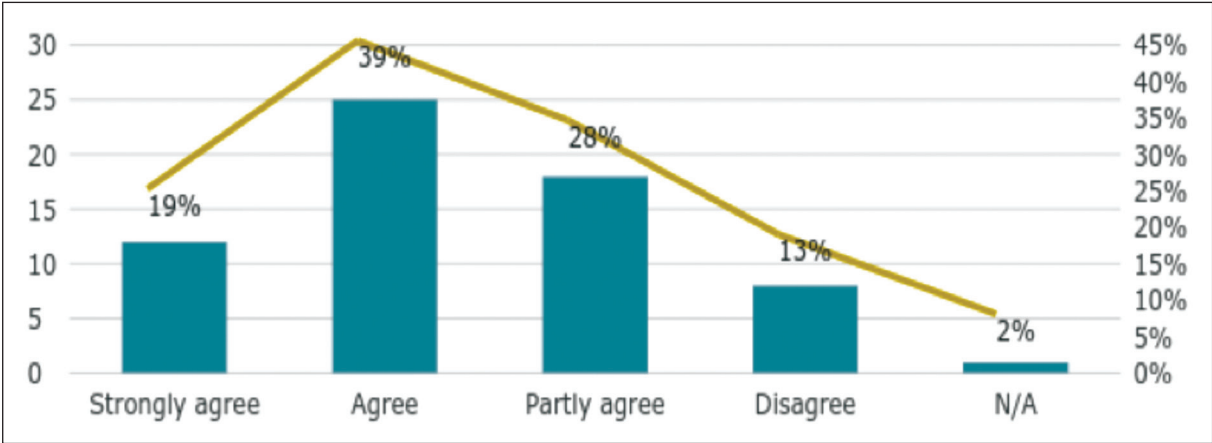
FIGURE 22: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES: 'TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE CURRENT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE CONTRIBUTE TO THE EFFICIENT PROVISION OF HUMANITARIAN AID?'
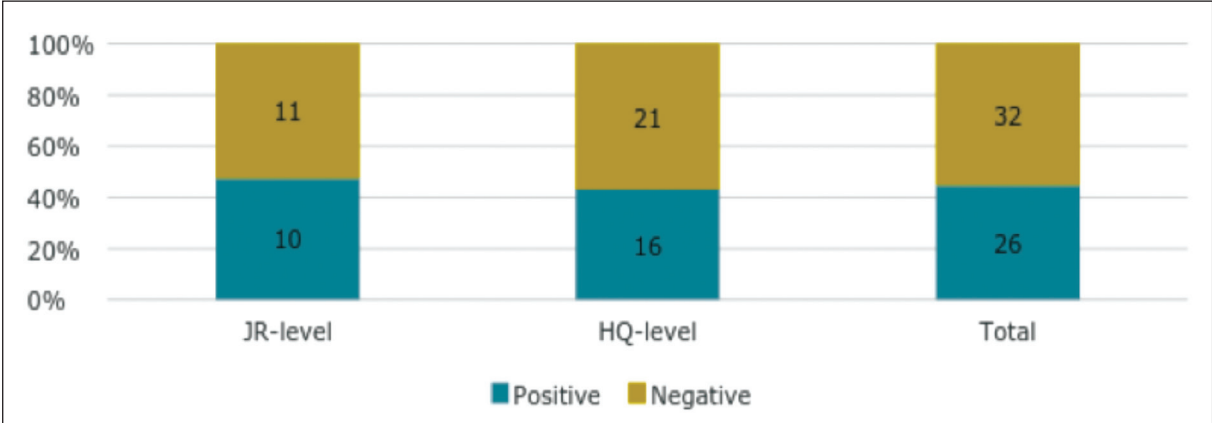
Notes: In total 71 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question; 47 from HQ-level respondents and 24 from joint-response-level respondents. There were 14 neutral data points.

- Upfront investment in mapping capacities and establishing decision-making protocols results in significant time and effort savings in each JR
- Creates space for potential efficiency gains at response level e.g. Ukraine considering joint procurement for cash programming
- Light reporting and role of the lead in managing reporting has reduced administrative burden for DRA members
- Level of monitoring, reporting and evaluation felt to be 'about right'

Negative

- Risks that burden of administering funds has not been adequately remunerated to date, though this is being addressed through the recently funded capacity proposal
- Efficiency gains largely at MoFA and HQ levels to date, far fewer examples and incentives to generate operational efficiencies
- Number of agencies involved creates incentives towards cake-sharing and fragmentation
- Lack of guidance on budgeting/allowable costs and lack of critical scrutiny means few opportunities for cost control
- Lack of guidance on 'added value' budgets a point of concern with respect to cost-efficiency
- Unclear what MoFA's expectations are with respect to cost savings
- Questions as to whether auditing every sub-agreement is cost-efficient and strictly necessary
- Concerns that some JR leads are adding additional layers of reporting and compliance
- Concerns that the volume of meetings at JR-level has significant cost and time limitations that may offset other efficiency gains
- Agency structures also impact on efficiency e.g. ICCO example in N Iraq

2.2. Does the DRA collaboration work as an incentive for DRA members to consider efficiency gains at the programmatic/operational level (Objective 3)?

- What evidence is there of operational efficiency gains and to what extent can this be attributed to the DRA?

FIGURE 10: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA PROVIDES INCENTIVES TO CONSIDER EFFICIENCY GAINS AT AN OPERATIONAL LEVEL'
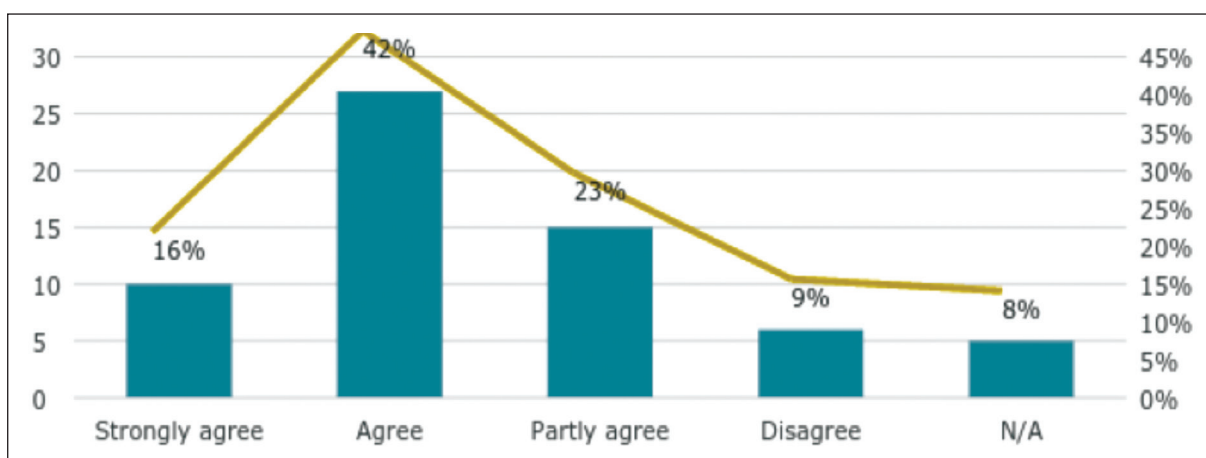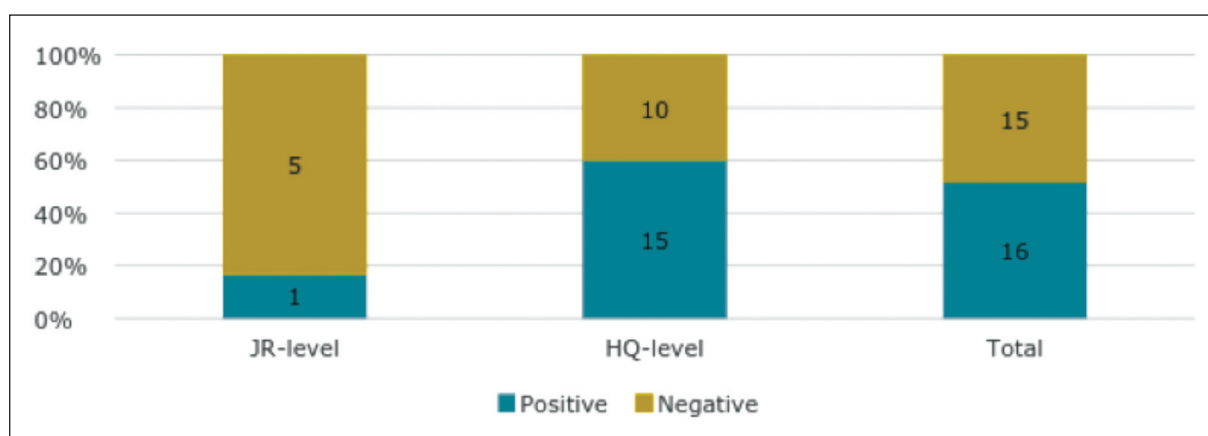
Notes: In total 37 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 30 from HQ-level respondents and 7 from joint-response-level respondents. There were 6 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data and survey open-text responses

Positive

- Vanuatu examples of sharing logs facilities. Ukraine shared procurement. But these are much more likely in smaller responses with fewer actors
- Coordination up-front to reduce likelihood of duplication
- Agencies in Akobo, South Sudan, jointly negotiated terms of access with local commander
- Sharing of beneficiary lists in Northern Iraq between IRC and Dorcas

Neutral

- For federated organisations, it may be more logical to find efficiencies within their existing networks
- May not be realistic to consider efficiency gains in short implementation period

Negative

- If existing coordination structures are effective, there is a risk DRA layer of coordination reduces efficiency through duplication and use of staff time
- Concerns the cost of coordination and 'added value' budgets offsets any cost savings achieved elsewhere
- No structural incentives or requirements to consider or to demonstrate you have considered efficiency gains
- Limit to potential efficiency gains when you are packaging up a bundle of individual projects. Without integrated programming, difficult to see how greater efficiency would be achieved in a planned and systematic way
- JR coordinators report higher levels of support for joint programming, procurement and resource-sharing at JR level, which are met with resistance from NGO HQs in The Hague.
- For larger agencies the size of the financial contribution may be relatively small, in which case there is limited incentive to consider changing behaviour

2.3. Are resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) likely to be more economically converted to results compared to individual interventions (Objective 3)?

Very few data points (6) were returned in response to this question, with respondents noting only hypothetical speculation and acknowledging that no evidence exists to support this contention.

3. Effectiveness

3.1. To what extent does the current governance structure contribute to effective humanitarian aid (Objective 2; Result 1)?

- How are decisions made on who is in the lead and which NGOs will join as a DRA member in the joint responses?
- How does the process of setting criteria per JR and scoring function?
- Is the current structure clear to all parties who work within DRA?
- Are current modes of engagement between the DRA and MoFA effective in supporting the provision of timely and effective humanitarian aid?

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Ad hoc information sharing, sharing of beneficiary lists, security information, standards and protocols
- Northern Iraq agencies exploring joint capacity-strengthening of local partners
- Flexibility (overall 25% variance) allows shifting of resources and focus in response to changing circumstances

FIGURE 12: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES CONTRIBUTE TO MORE EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE'
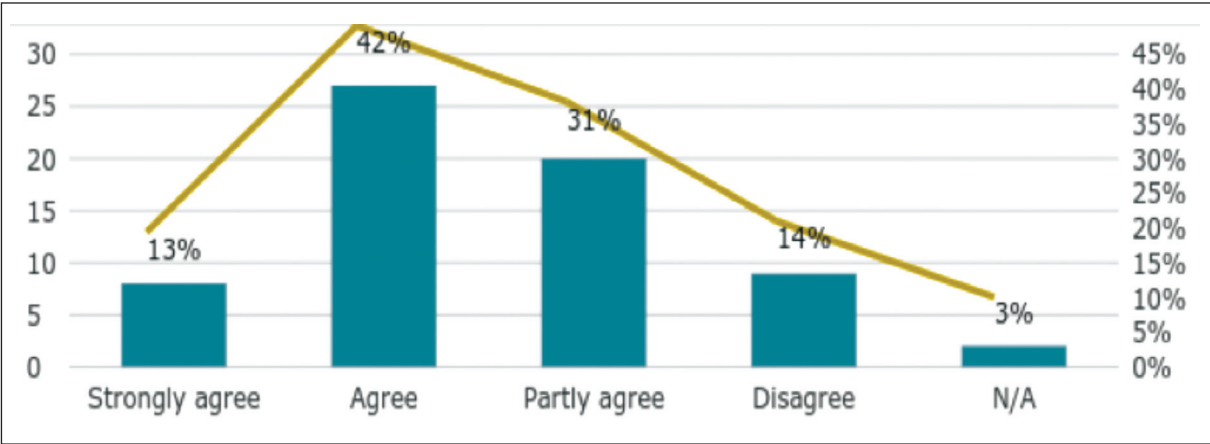
FIGURE 13: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
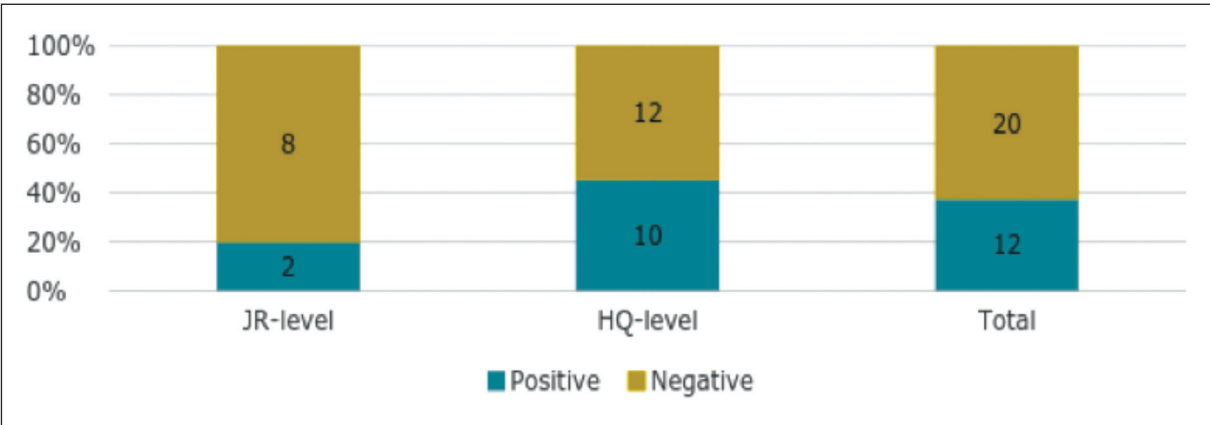
Notes: In total 47 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question; 29 from HQ-level respondents and 18 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 15 neutral data points.

Neutral

- Still a pilot so still exploring what is possible

Negative

- Some agencies (particularly larger federated ones) are less free to diverge from using their own existing structures and processes. Some perceptions larger agencies are blocking collaboration
- Lack of common vision on what effectiveness is sought and how this should be achieved
- Risk of duplicating existing standards and approaches
- Should only push for collaboration where agencies agree it makes sense operationally
- Very difficult to realise collaborative effectiveness gains when programmes are geographically disparate
- Regular staff churn/turnover is limiting attempts to develop organic collaboration

3.2. What evidence is there to indicate that effectiveness has increased (Objective 3)?

FIGURE 14: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
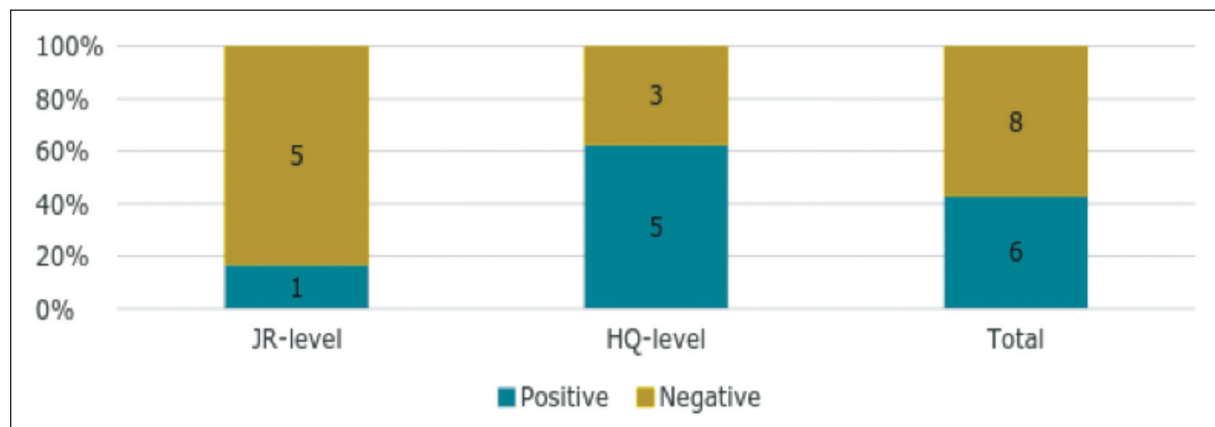
Notes: In total 22 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 15 from HQ-level respondents and 7 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 8 neutral data points.

Positive

- Timeliness enables rapid response
- Predictability important to improving quality over time
- Examples of reduced duplication and cross-referrals across programmes
- Opportunities to learn from training, best practices (in procurement for example)

Negative

- Different levels of agreement on what 'added value' is
- Partners in reality often not well linked at field level
- In order to strengthen collaboration, would need to limit number of organisations, but many see DRA simply as an opportunity to access cash

3.3. To what extent do current DRA prioritisation and decision-making processes support a coordinated response at the crisis level and at the level of the Dutch humanitarian community (Result 2; Objective 2)?

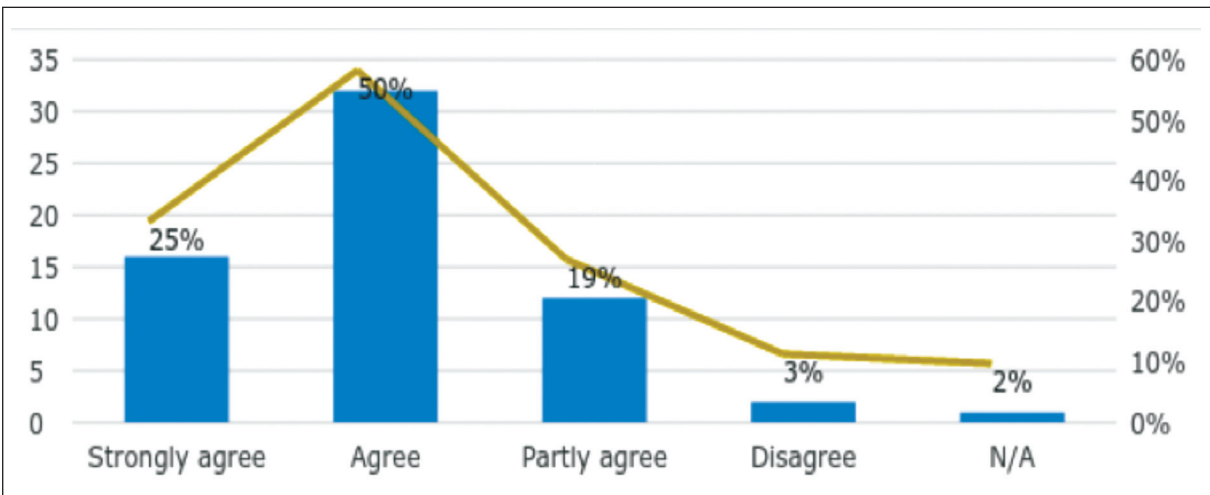Only 10 data points were returned in response to this question.

Key findings:

- At the level of the Dutch public and parliament, the DRA presents a much more coordinated position and point of reference, and provides an opportunity for strengthened collective influence.
- Where coordination structures are functioning effectively, there is a risk the DRA will duplicate these.

3.4. Do the joint responses fit within the priorities as defined by a coordinated international approach, under the leadership of the United Nations (Objective 2)?

- Under what circumstances and with what justification do JR priorities differ from UN priorities?

FIGURE 15: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'ALIGNING RESPONSES WITH UN-LED PRIORITISATION ENSURES THE DRA IDENTIFIES PRIORITY NEEDS AND GAPS

FIGURE 16: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
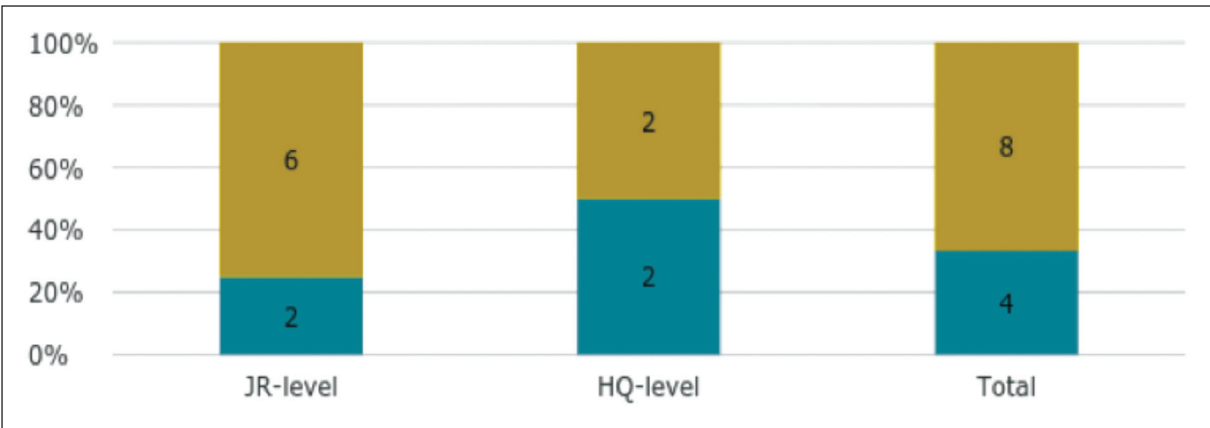
Notes: In total 27 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 7 from HQ-level respondents and 20 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 15 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Where access is difficult and information is hard to come by, UN-led prioritisation provides a useful analytical entry-point
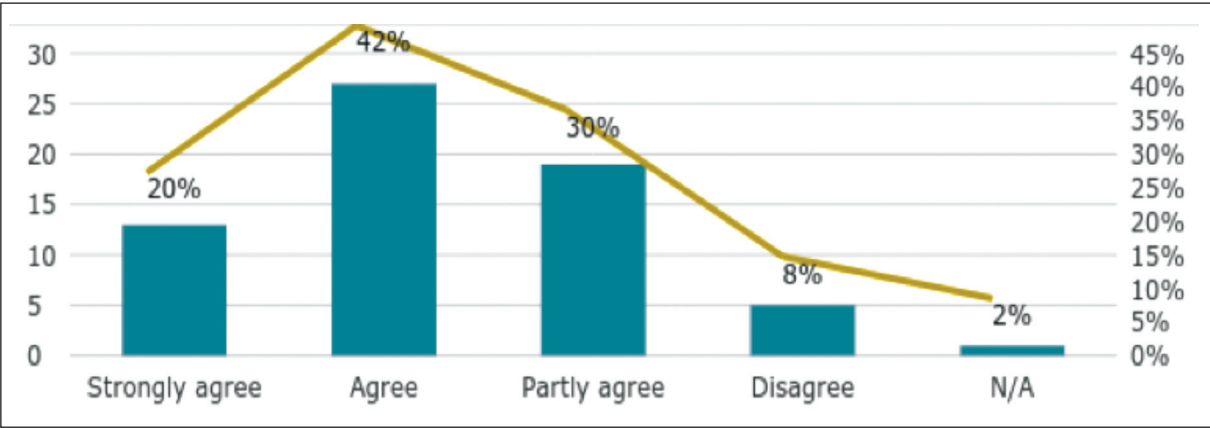
Neutral

- Need to be realistic about the quality and nuance included within UN appeal documents and leave space for alternative interpretations and emphasis
- In many cases the DRA projects funded are elements of wider programmes of activities developed by NGOs on the ground irrespective of and prior to the DRA. These programmes are in many cases already included in the HRPs and funded by multiple donors

Negative

- Questions around the quality of analysis and prioritisation in UN appeals and whether this enables you to identify the real needs and gaps
- Questions around political compromise between the UN and governments, which affects prioritisation

3.5. In what ways have the JRs contributed to coherent response (Objective 2; Result 1)?

FIGURE 17: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE JOINT RESPONSE APPROACH CONTRIBUTES TO MORE COHERENT HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE'

FIGURE 18: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
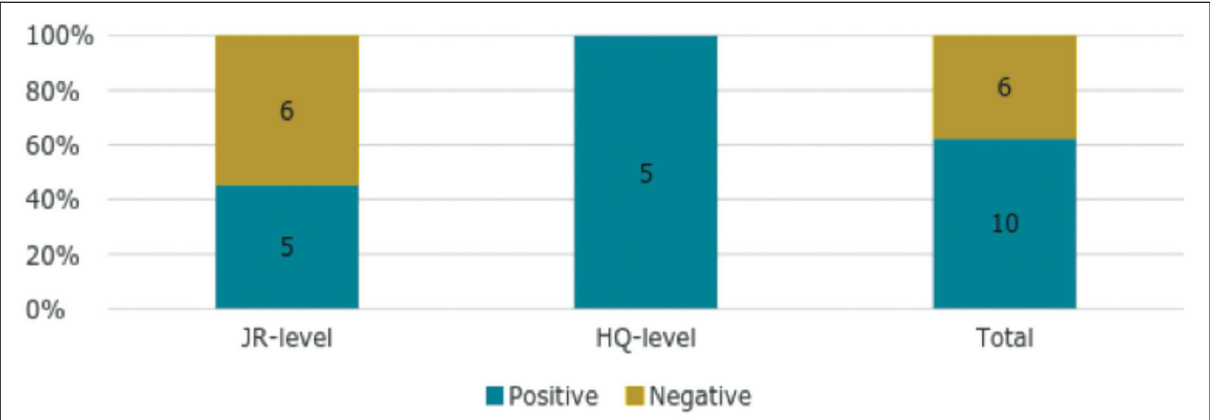
Notes: In total 19 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 6 from HQ-level respondents and 13 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 3 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Alignment with UN-led prioritisation and coverage of gaps de facto contributes to more coherent response at crisis-level
- Second phases typically based on a mapping of gaps, needs and priorities, plus efforts to develop common approaches at the planning stages
- Dialogue between RTF and Ministry generates greater coherence of approach

Neutral

- Range of opinions as to whether JR coordination duplicates or adds something to existing coordination fora. Nigeria and Ukraine were felt to fill a gap. Elsewhere, where coordination more established, there is a risk of duplication

Negative

- In many cases, DRA activities are part of wider programmes of activities developed by partners at country level. They are coherent in the first instance with these agency-devised programmes, rather than with the suite of DRA-funded activities across the JR members.
- Unclear how and whether coherence is sought between DRA-funded activities and MoFA's wider portfolio of investments, including country-based pooled fund contributions.
- Unclear how prioritisation fits with strategies of other donors.

3.6. To what extent do the DRA's decision-making and administrative processes facilitate provision of timely humanitarian assistance?

- What are the critical factors enabling or limiting timely response?

FIGURE 19: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES ENABLE THE TIMELY DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE'
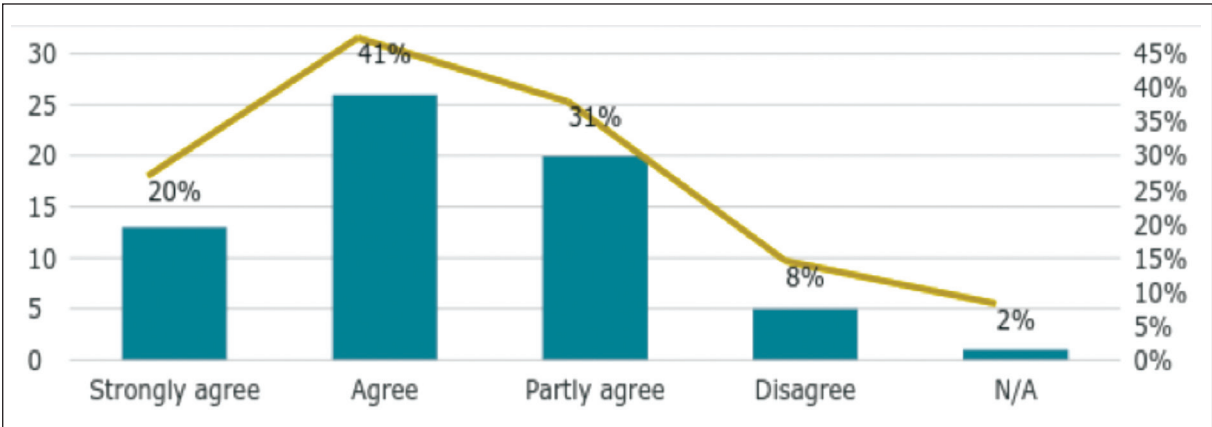
Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Annual planning speeds up decision-making
- Acute crisis-window facilitates proposal within 72 hours
- Second phase proposal development much quicker

Negative

- Development of an actual funding agreement in principle can take a week, but in practice takes more like six weeks, and sometimes months
- No culture of expediting within Ministry – many rounds of minor questions
- Preparation of the agreement is time-consuming
- Agencies often miss critical administrative parts of the grant preparation process, delaying the process and particularly the eligibility date.

3.7. To what extent have current JRs delivered rapid or timely humanitarian response (Objective 1)?

- How many responses have started up within seven days after the disaster occurred?
- What contributes to or hinders the provision of timely response?

FIGURE 20: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES: 'TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE CURRENT JRS DELIVERED RAPID OR TIMELY HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?'
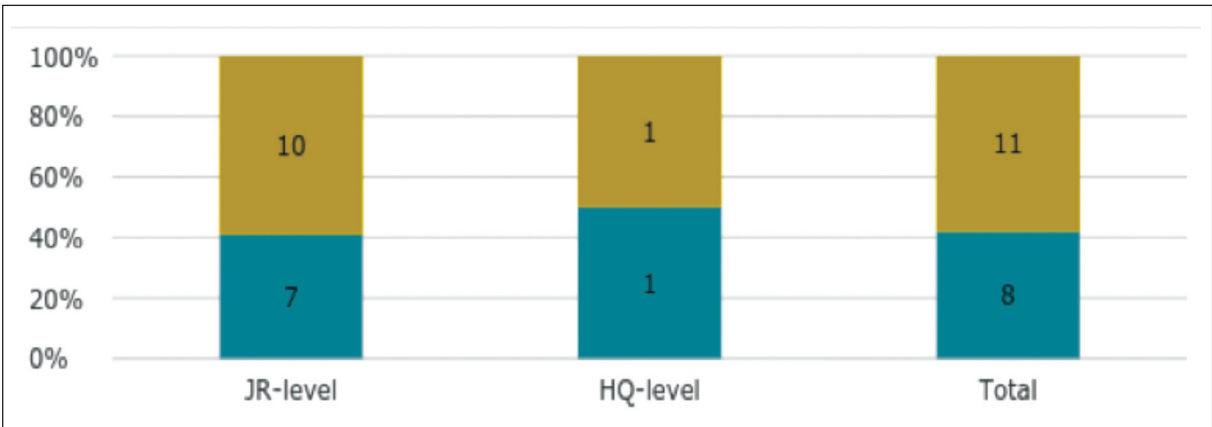
Notes: In total 24 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 2 from HQ-level respondents and 22 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 5 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Flexibility permits responsiveness within agreed programmes. 25% variance plus changes approved quickly
- Catalytic effect – enabled agencies to start up and secure additional funding

Negative

- Signing of NIJR2 delayed from October to December. Eligibility back-dated to October. Larger organisations continued, but smaller delayed start of activities. Impacted agricultural activities.
- Nigeria phase 1 – rushed to produce proposal in three weeks, then took two months to get grant decision

3.8. To what extent do synergies, coordination and cooperation between DRA members (including institutional network and partners) occur and at which levels (Objective 3)?

FIGURE 21: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES: 'TO WHAT EXTENT DO SYNERGIES, COORDINATION AND COOPERATION BETWEEN DRA MEMBERS (INCLUDING INSTITUTIONAL NETWORK AND PARTNERS) OCCUR AND AT WHICH LEVELS?'
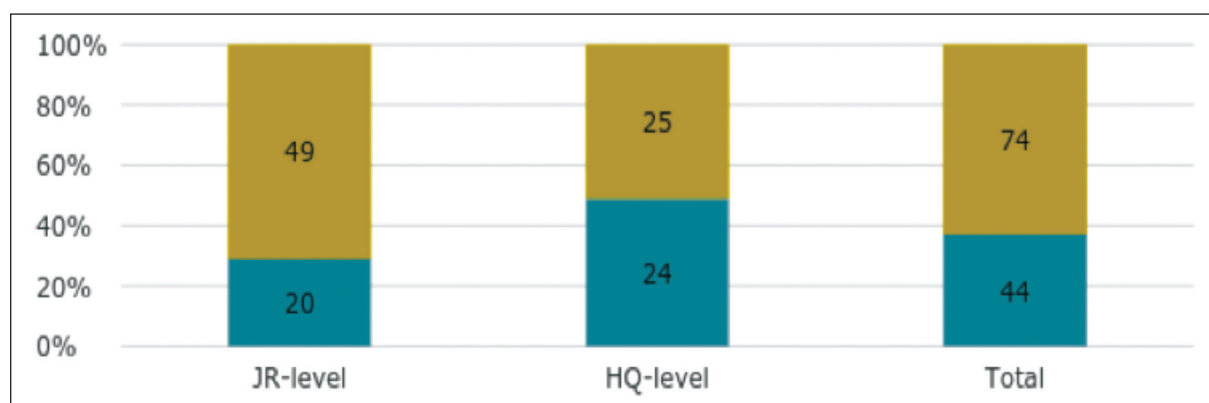
Notes: In total 169 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 68 from HQ-level respondents and 101 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 51 neutral data points.

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Early stages focussed on confidence-building
- Concept of added value difficult to define and exists at many levels
- Reticence from some agencies around joint programming. Focussed instead on creating space/platform in which added value could be developed organically
- At Netherlands level, emergency aid coordinators meeting regularly
- At JR level coordinators facilitating communication and connections
- Joint analysis and planning contributes to greater coherence
- In Nigeria, only five DRA members and lack of organised cluster-level coordination system, so DRA provides forum for coordination
- Structure itself gives ministry access to broader network of expertise and access to affected populations
- Ukraine: referrals between partners, common methodologies for beneficiary selection and post-distribution monitoring enabling better analysis across the JR. Joint training.
- Northern Iraq: cooperation between Dorcas, IRC and LWF in targeting, information-sharing and standard-setting. DRA made introductions, agencies took the initiative from there
- Northern Iraq: planned capacity-building of local partners using AV budget
- Goes further than coordination – it's not just information-sharing – a matter of cooperation

- Northern Iraq – Care gender marker applied to consortium response
- Spin-off benefits at HQ level: development of joint proposals for EU. Much greater transparency and cooperation among NGOs in the Netherlands
- War Child – found links with War Child NL strengthened
- Nigeria – consortium approach reduced competition at response level
- Nigeria – quarterly meetings positive for information-sharing and learning e.g. sharing learning on borehole construction and standardising food baskets (which did not happen in sector working groups).
- Larger organisations less interested in synergies – already have alternative centres of gravity and funding is a smaller proportion of their overall income

Neutral

- Still in the pilot period
- In future may help to have defined thematic areas for added value e.g. capacity-building of local partners, joint procurement, space for initiatives
- Possibilities for synergies are different from context to context and among different agencies
- Should acknowledge that networks and synergies already exist
- Expectation from MoFA that there should be a cost reduction over time resulting from joint working
- Opportunities for joint advocacy at Hague and country level which could be further developed
- Larger organisations willing to share information and expertise, but less likely to want to work jointly. Different organisations have different motivations

Negative

- Evidence still very scattered
- Meetings do not in themselves count as added value
- Meetings at JR level sometimes resented for consuming too much time for little tangible benefit
- Questions around whether the cost of generating added value is worth the return
- N Iraq, mapping completed after concepts had been submitted
- Proposal process is siloed
- N Iraq, partners geographically disbursed and in some cases very distant from first-level recipients in the Netherlands, e.g. ICCO partners receive funding via ACT emergency fund
- Northern Iraq – discussion spaces, skype groups created but not being used
- Turnover at JR level undermines relationship-building
- Northern Iraq, recently arrived organisations struggled to come up with added value
- Very difficult to find synergies in Syria response, which spans four countries with very different contexts
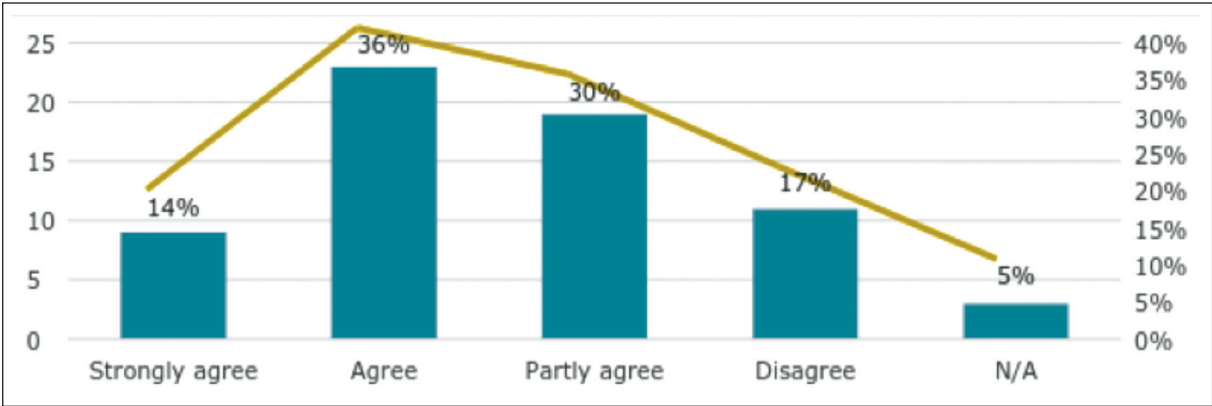
4. Visibility

4.1. What evidence is there to demonstrate that the DRA has contributed to increased visibility of Dutch humanitarian contributions and at what levels (public, parliament, media and in-country) (Objective 4)?

Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Multiple examples of visibility materials targeting Dutch public including films about the Yemen and South Sudan responses developed by Dorcas shown in Dutch parliament and on Dutch television
- Press releases issued for new JRs
- DRA represented in cluster meetings at JR level
- DRA able to provide a clear picture of where Dutch investments are going
- Most DRA member agencies have constituencies of supporters in the Netherlands, so the DRA contributions can be communicated via these channels
- Role of embassies changing with creation of DRA – they are more interested in engaging and in some cases are requesting information on DRA activities to use in other forums

FIGURE 22: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO INCREASED VISIBILITY OF DUTCH HUMANITARIAN AID CONTRIBUTIONS'

FIGURE 23: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO INCREASED VISIBILITY OF DUTCH HUMANITARIAN AID CONTRIBUTIONS'
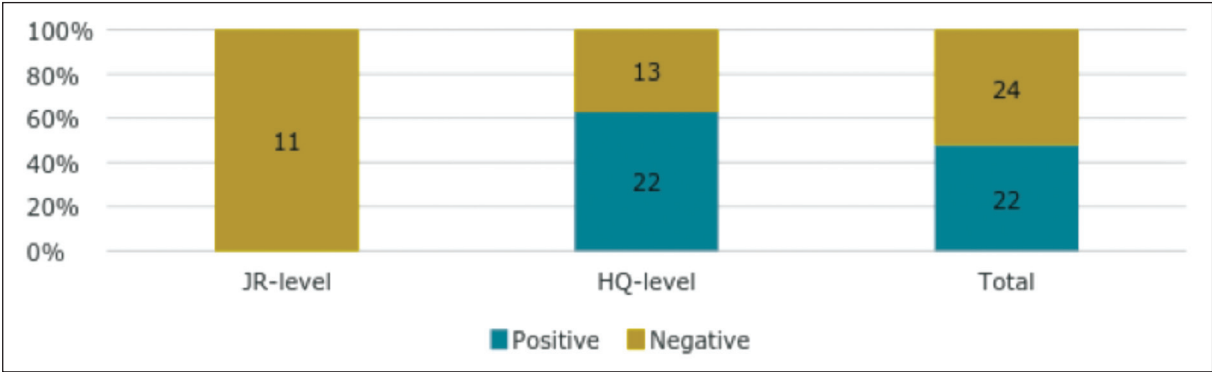
Notes: In total 66 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 47 from HQ-level respondents and 19 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 20 neutral data points.

Neutral

- Communications guidelines produced 2–3 months ago.

Negative

- Confusion at the JR level with respect to what type of visibility is expected. Frequent perceived expectations around branding
- Lack of clarity at JR level with respect to how to describe and refer to the DRA
- NGOs have their own visibility agendas and little formal requirement and no resources to publicise the DRA

5. Innovation, research and learning

5.1. What evidence is there to demonstrate anticipated gains in innovation, learning and research been generated (Objective 5)?

FIGURE 24: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE DRA HAS CONTRIBUTED TO GAINS IN INNOVATION, LEARNING AND RESEARCH'
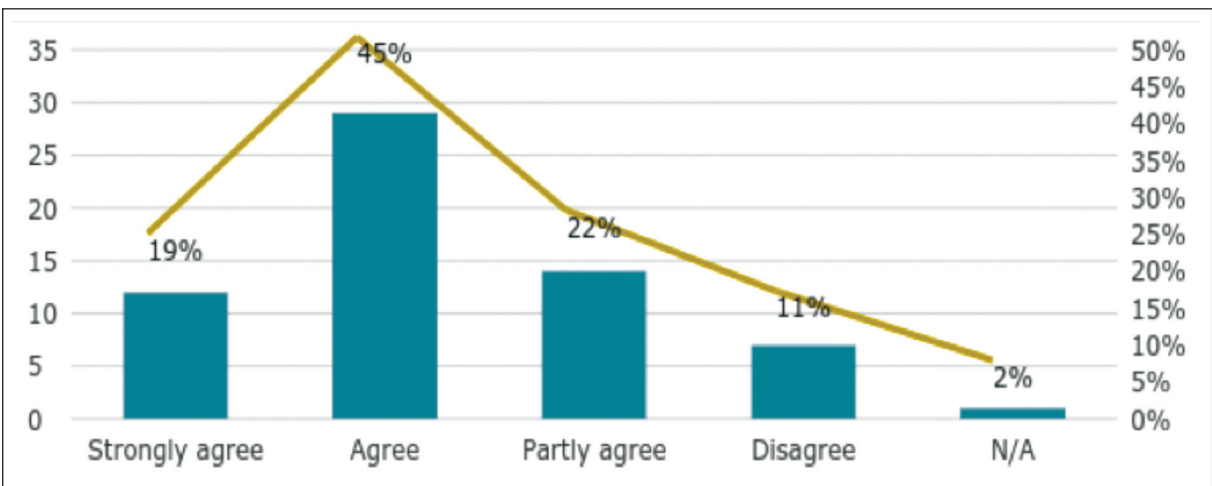
Notes: In total 28 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 22 from HQ-level respondents and 6 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 7 neutral data points.

FIGURE 25: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONSES
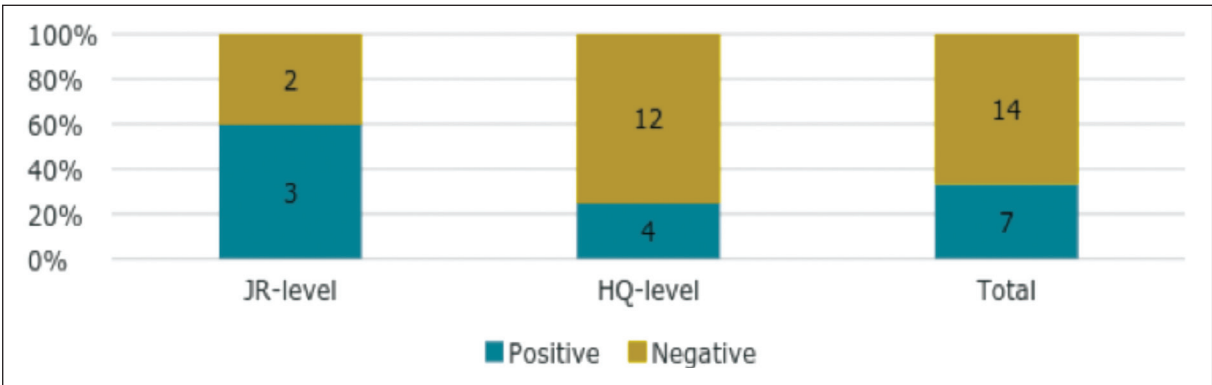
Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Already a huge innovation that agencies are working together
- Northern Iraq: learning sessions on conflict sensitive protection programming held by War Child
- DRA members at HQ level gave MoFA critical feedback on cash-based programming

Neutral

- Responses themselves not hugely innovative – tend to be more operationally focussed
- Innovation tends to come from other sources – long-term investments within agencies, independent programmes/platforms. DRA can be a mechanism to disseminate and amplify this

Negative

- Little attention paid to this issue so far
- Aspirations may not fit well with short-term programming approach

6. Sustainability

6.1. Do current JR evaluations provide sufficient information on quality of the programmes implemented, and how does the DRA use the lessons learned outcome of evaluations in follow-up Joint Response programming and implementation (Objective 5)?

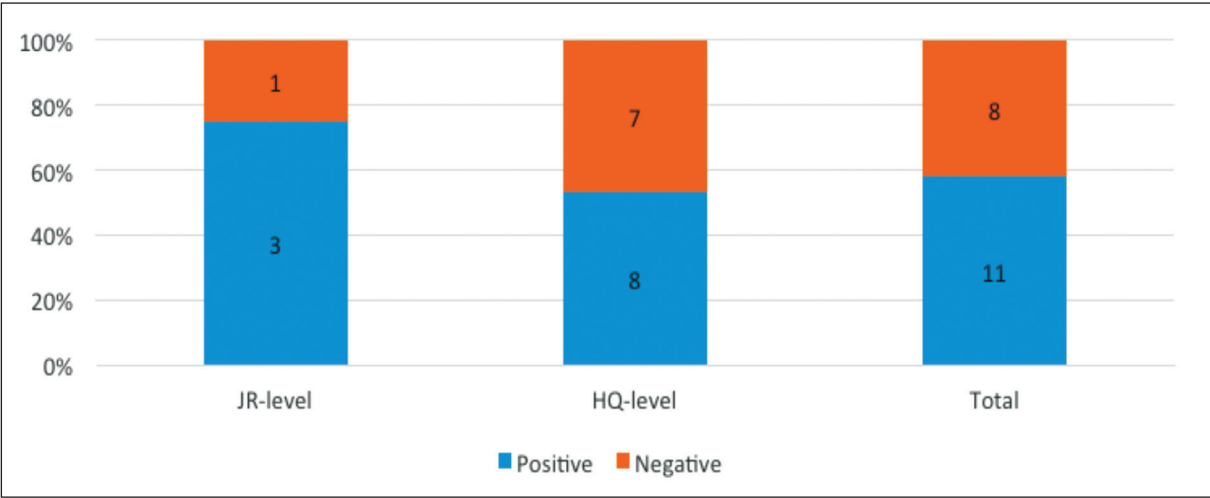Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Generally, evaluation findings have been positive and indicate there is 'potential' for added value
- Evaluations are felt to be of high quality and with plenty of opportunity to provide input
- Results reporting meets MoFA requirements

FIGURE 26: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'EVALUATIONS OF JOINT RESPONSES HAVE BEEN RELEVANT AND USEFUL'
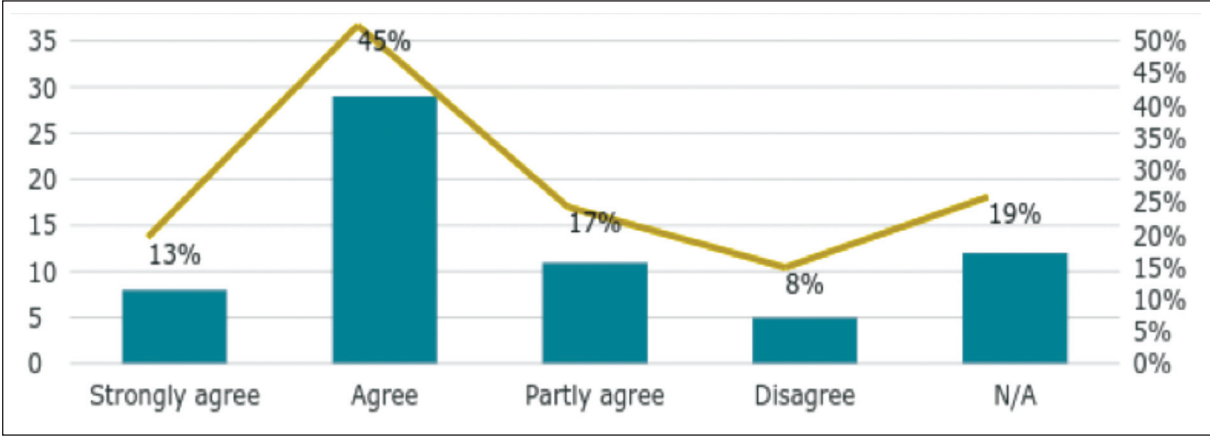
Notes: In total 28 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 21 from HQ-level respondents and 7 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 9 neutral data points.

Neutral

- Could consider focusing evaluations not on every organisation, but on particular thematic issues
- MoFA could play greater role in monitoring

Negative

- Sequencing of evaluations means they do not feed into phase II and are not consistent in methodology or approach
- Measuring added value problematic as it spans so many different levels
- Significant investment in evaluations, but limited 'socialisation' of results across the network

6.2. How sustainable is the DRA governance structure and management and the running of the mechanism (Objective 3; Result 4)?

- How has the governance, management and running of the DRA been resourced by DRA members?
- How do DRA members perceive the return on these investments?

FIGURE 28: SURVEY RESPONSES: 'THE WORK ASSOCIATED WITH PARTICIPATING IN THE DRA IS PROPORTIONATE TO THE BENEFITS'
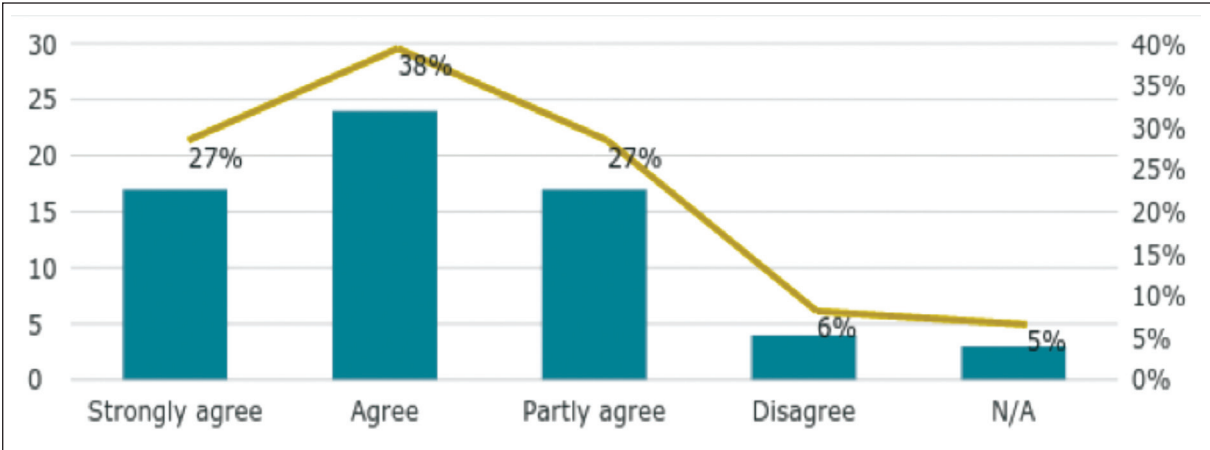
Notes: In total 109 data points were recorded through interviews in response to this question: 92 from HQ-level respondents and 17 from Joint Response-level respondents. There were 34 neutral data points.
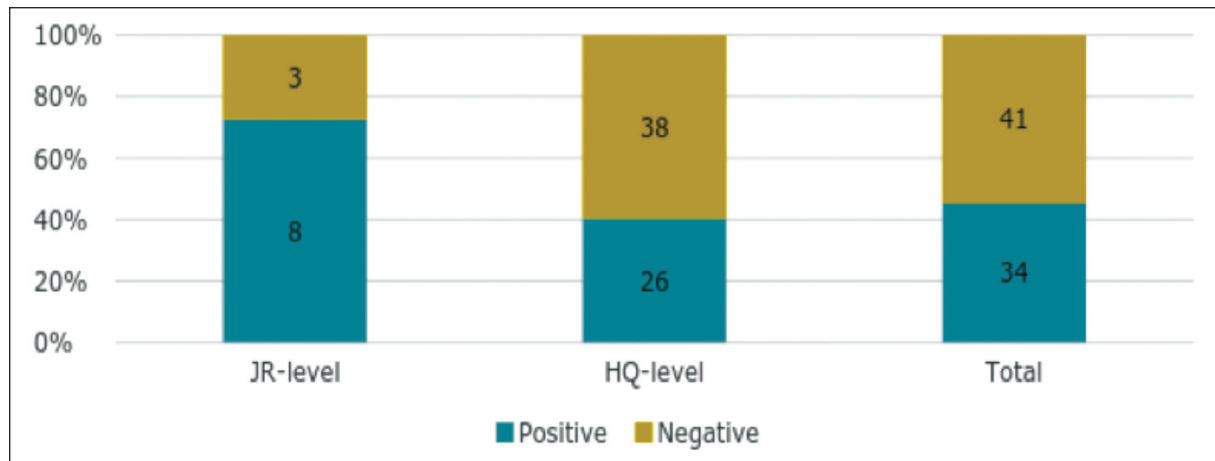
Key points emerging from qualitative interview data

Positive

- Levels of enthusiasm and commitment key asset to sustainability
- Time investments offset by reduction in time spent on proposals 'in vain'
- General feeling time investments to set up the DRA have been worth it

Neutral

- Agencies undergoing major restructuring following end of MFS II funding, DRA provides critical funding continuity in this context
- Question as to whether to internationalise membership and attract donor funding from other sources

Negative

- High levels of up-front unfunded investment from agencies, though some of this will be covered by recent capacity proposal
- Risk of over-bureaucratisation

Annex 3. Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference Midterm Evaluation Dutch Relief Alliance – final
March 14th, 2016

1. Introduction

In September 2014, the Dutch Minister for International Trade and Development Co-operation presented a letter to the Parliament, in which she proposed a revision of Dutch Humanitarian Aid and the set-up of a Dutch Relief Fund (DRF) of €570 million. Although the Dutch Government opted to target its financial contributions better and to vary its humanitarian funding channels, its capacity to evaluate proposals submitted by Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was limited due to workload restrictions. Hence, one of the major changes the new Dutch Relief Fund brings about is the reinforcement of the aid channelled through Dutch NGOs. An amount of €120 million has been reserved for this goal, to cover the period of 2015-2017. The Dutch NGO sector responded and accepted the invitation of the MoFA to develop a collective response mechanism. This resulted in the creation of the Dutch Relief Alliance as a new (pilot) mechanism for channelling humanitarian aid in The Netherlands based on the following criteria:

- The DRA members are responsible for the administrative burden and organizational set-up of a partnership in which one NGO acts as Lead per response
- Humanitarian programs comply with the UN mechanism for humanitarian aid
- A condition imposed by the MoFA for DRA membership is the Framework Partnership Agreement with ECHO (FPA).

The DRA receives funding from the Dutch Relief Fund. Funding was secured through an overall proposal which contains objectives, results and the set-up of the DRA.

The specific objectives of the *Dutch Relief Alliance* are:

1. Deliver fast humanitarian aid in major crises;
2. Deliver humanitarian aid linked to needs and gaps in response to major crises in a timely, appropriate, effective and efficient manner;
3. Generate synergies and cooperation between the Members aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness in providing humanitarian aid in crisis situations;
4. Increase the visibility of this Dutch contribution towards the Dutch constituency, Parliament and in-country.
5. Work together, also with other parties, to tackle the major bottlenecks in the humanitarian practice through co-created innovation, joint learning and research;

These objectives have been paired to four result areas and are translated into the following results:

– Deliver coherent humanitarian aid in major 'ongoing' crises, based on the Guiding Principles of the original DRA proposal (Annex 1). The activities under this specific objective will be described in an Annual Plan for each of the three years covered by the DRA: 2015, 2016 and 2017, before the beginning of each year.
– A fully operational rapid response mechanism for new crises that allows NGOs to provide relief assistance within seven days after the disaster occurred and/or response mechanism that enables NGOs to scale up their response on the ground within one week after the disaster occurred or declared.

- Through this cooperation, the member organizations are aiming to create added value, most notably on visibility, reducing the administrative burden, increased speed of decision making and scaling up on the ground.
- Transparent reporting on the involvement of the member NGO's offering visibility and data to a wide spectrum of the public in the Netherlands.*

DRA started with the main goal to enable protracted and acute humanitarian responses. During the first year of DRA, discussions on the goal of DRA broadened to the question how DRA partners could do more for the people in need, and how to do more in a better way. The Minister called for more added value and cooperation between humanitarian NGOs. Also the question of effectivity and efficiency of humanitarian aid became more prominent in the political arena.

By January 2016 via the DRA mechanism 12 joint responses (JR) were funded: in South-Sudan (phase 1 and 2), North-Iraq, CAR, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ukraine, Yemen (acute; two phases), Vanuatu (acute) and Nepal (acute). In addition, multi-country JRs on Syria and Ebola were funded.

2. MTE purposes and objectives

The main purposes for this midterm evaluation (MTE) are learning and accountability. The evaluation is intended to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and DRA partner organisations with an independent ('outsiders') view on the progress, timeliness, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the Alliance to achieve its specific objectives and results. It should reflect on the chosen structure and processes of DRA and if this structure contributes to achieving the five objectives, especially on topics like delivering efficient and effective humanitarian aid, creating synergy, increased visibility and co-created innovation and joint learning.

The MTE will make use of completed JR response evaluations to assess the timeliness, effectivity, effectiveness and results of the joint responses by DRA-members (objectives 1 and 2 of the DRA mechanism). Additional evidence on timeliness, effectivity and effectiveness can be gathered during the field visits. The MTE will also focus on the mechanism itself, the collaboration within these JRs and the (process of) working as DRA. The way in which member organisations work together and achieve added value, as well as finding options to improve the mechanism are a key components of this MTE (objectives 3-5 of the DRA mechanism).

The MTE will draw from experiences gained in the first 1,5 year of the 3-year subsidy period and is expected to formulate recommendations for future program implementation and management of the DRA mechanism.

Within DRA we distinguish the following levels of operation:

- DRA/MoFA level (involved actors: DRA Committee, MoFA (DRA Coordinator, Humanitarian Advisor, Humanitarian Director and staff of DSH).
- DRA/ Netherlands NGO Head Offices level (involved actors: NGO CEOs, Humanitarian Coordinators, Joint Response Managers, M&E Managers)
- Joint Response NGO Country Offices level (involved actors: NGO Country Office staff, the JR Field Coordinator, UN, ECHO, Royal Netherlands Embassies RNEs)
- Joint Response implementation level (involved actors: Field Offices, local partners, beneficiaries)

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* Some of the terms in the objectives and results have been described in Annex 2 – Working definitions.

The MTE should address all levels at which DRA operates; conclusions and recommendations should indicate to which level of operation it refers. The MTE will also take into account responses that started before the official launch of DRA which is 24th April 2015 (e.g. South Sudan Joint Response).

The MTE has two main objectives in line with the two abovementioned purposes. For both objectives main questions have been formulated. These main questions have been further specified in a set of sub-questions, which are to be included in the research tools, see Annex 3: Full set of research questions.

I. To assess to what extend and how the chosen governance structure of DRA contributes to, or hinders, the achievement of DRAs specific objectives and results.

This objective is meant to make a preliminary assessment of the structures and processes in use of DRA as a mechanism to fund and implement humanitarian aid. We are looking for lessons that could be learned to improve structures and processes in order to reach set results. This objective should cover all levels of the DRA-partnership mentioned in paragraph 2. It should cover both the way the DRA internally steers processes in support of the execution of the JRs and the way in which the organizational structure functions for all involved parties, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Main questions

1.1 Is the current organizational set up (DRA Committee, general members meetings, supportive working groups such as communication, MEAV and mapping) and the relationship with MoFa supportive in establishing a fully operational and rapid response mechanism?

1.2 Given the fact that the both the Ministry and the NGO's participating in DRA have opted for a particular structure to work together, in what ways and how does this setting facilitate or hinder humanitarian funding by MoFA and cooperation/the creation of added value between DRA and the MoFA?

1.3 To what extent do synergies, coordination and cooperation between DRA members (including institutional network and partners) occur?

1.4 Do the joint responses fit within the priorities as defined by a coordinated international approach, under the leadership of the United Nations?

1.5 How sustainable is the current setup, in which only DRA Joint Reponses are funded while DRA members have invested in the mechanism and the governance structure, management and running of the mechanism?

1.6 Have the organizational structures of DRA members been beneficial or hindering in membership and implementation of joint response programmes?

1.7 Which good practices, lessons learned and challenges can be identified in the partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DRA members?

1.8 Is everything in place to measure progress towards objectives and results in the end evaluation (in 2017) in a more quantitative manner, exceeding anecdotal evidence? What still needs to be put in place for this?

II. To assess to what extent the DRA is making progress towards achieving the five specific objectives and the results.

This objective analyses the progress of the Joint Responses, in terms of heading towards intended five objectives and results. The MTE should search for concrete examples that show the DRA is working towards these objectives and results. Evidence can be found in available JR evaluation reports but will probably also be anecdotal and qualitative.

Main questions

2.1 Have DRA members in their JR's been able to deliver coherent, effective and efficient humanitarian aid in major 'ongoing' crises? In what way has the DRA mechanism been supportive for delivering coherent/effective/efficient aid?

2.2 Have DRA members in their JR's been able to provide timely humanitarian assistance and how far has the DRA response mechanism been supportive for this??

2.3 What has been the added value of the DRA mechanism, in particular for the provision of effective and timely humanitarian action?[71]

2.4 Is reporting on the involvement of the member NGO's transparent and does it offer visibility and data to a wide spectrum of the public in the Netherlands?

Conclusions and recommendations

Answers to the abovementioned questions and sub-questions should lead to a number of conclusions, which in their turn should lead to a number of recommendations.

Recommendations are at least expected on:

- Future program implementation and management of the DRA mechanism
- The functioning of the DRA structure at the various levels
- The achievement of objectives and results of JR's
- The creation of added value
- Effectivity and efficiency
- (Future) evaluation.

3. Methodology

The evaluator is expected to answer the questions of the two objectives of the MTR by carrying out a desk study, (phone) interviews with key actors in the Netherlands and at joint response implementation level as well as two field visits.

Data for this desk study will be collected from the following documents: JR proposals, available JR country specific end- and mid-term reports, the DRA MoU / rules and regulations, workshop reports, the DRA-internal (July 2015) review report, mapping criteria docs, timeliness workflow charts, etc. Furthermore the evaluator is expected to conduct interviews and/or focus group discussions with, at least, the following respondents:

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17 Note: bearing in mind that this was a pilot mechanism and that the creation of added value has not been intended as a goal on itself, and targets on added value in proposals and log frames were indicative.

- DRA/MoFA level (involved actors: DRA Committee, MoFA (DRA Coordinator, Humanitarian Advisor, Humanitarian Director and staff of DSH)).
- DRA/ Netherlands NGO Head Offices level (involved actors: NGO CEOs, Humanitarian Coordinators, Joint Response Managers, M&E Managers)
- Joint Response NGO Country Offices level (involved actors: NGO Country, the Field Coordinator, UN, ECHO, RNEs)
- Joint Response implementation level (involved actors: Field Offices, local partners, beneficiaries)

Field visits will be part of the MTE. 2 Field visits are planned of which one visit to a JR programme to an acute, fast onset disaster and the other to a JR to a protracted, conflict related protracted crisis. The affected countries will be selected in consultation with the MTE Reference Committee that will guide the MTE process. However, an important criterion for the selection of the protracted crisis JR is the availability of a finalised external JR-evaluation. Since only 2 JR evaluations seem to have been concluded or are in the process of finalisation, the choice is probably between South Sudan and Iraq/ Kurdistan Governate.

During the field visits information will be gathered from beneficiaries on the delivered humanitarian aid and information will be gathered from DRA implementing offices/partners on the delivery of aid and the DRA mechanism itself.

Based on the data and information gathered during the desk work, the interviews and the field visits, the evaluator is expected to carry out a thorough triangulated analysis. The evaluator is asked to report both on quantitative and in qualitative results; for the latter triangulated perceptions could be taken into account via interviews and group discussions.

The evaluators are expected to provide an inception plan in which the research questions are further specified in an evaluation matrix and in which the proposed methodologies are described in detail. The draft and final report should be submitted to the MTE Reference Committee.

4. Deliverables

The final products of the evaluator will have to be presented in English:

- an inception report (20-30 pages), including the proposed research methodology, a justification for the field work locations and a detailed work plan (including methodologies)
- a draft and final MTE report including an executive summary, the main findings, (representative) examples, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations (at all four levels) based on the objectives and main questions in this ToR
- a discussion with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the DRA Committee, DRA members
- a presentation of the final report to be provided to the DRA members meeting and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

5. Planning

	Activity	March	April	May	June	July
1.	Briefing	Proposal: end March				
2.	Inception plan with Research methodology		Deliverable 1: 15 April			
3.	Data collection analysis and reporting.					
4.	Draft report				Deliverable 2: end May	
5.	Discussion with representatives of MoFA, DRA(C) and MEAV					
6.	Final report including: executive summary, introduction, methodology, analysis, conclusions and recommendations				Deliverable 3: end June	
7.	Stakeholders' workshop to present final report					Deliverable 4: July

An indicative number of up to 50 working days is expected.

6. Roles and responsibilities

The Reference Committee overseas the MTE and makes sure that the MTE is a cooperative process in which parties share responsibilities. This Reference Committee consists of two representatives of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and two representatives of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Added Value (MEAV) working group of the DRA. Feedback of the MTE Reference Committee will be incorporated in the final version of the report.

Commissioner of the MTE:

Since DRA is not a legal entity, the legal responsibility for execution of the MTE lies with the chair of the DRA MEAV working group: Save the Children Netherlands

Consultant	MoFA	DRA MEAV working group *(Contract holder Save the Children)*	DRA partner NGOs
1. Develop an inception report, detailing the methodology-stakeholders to be interviewed, tools to be developed, time frame for the evaluation	1. Participate in the Reference Committee; selection of consultant,	1. Participate in the reference Committee; selection of consultant, feedback on draft and end report	1. Provide all required background materials to the consultant in a timely manner.
2. Holds the overall management responsibility of the evaluation, including designing and carrying out the evaluation, drafting the draft report, incorporating feedback from the Reference Committee on the draft report in the final report and debriefing the project team and key stakeholders.	2. Read and provide comments on the proposal plan submitted by the consultant (especially the proposed research methodology, the information gathering techniques used;	2. Managing the consultancy contract; monitor adherence to specified deadlines; facilitating access to required information.	2. Leads of sample JRs facilitate the field visit and take care of all necessary preparations for field work.
3. Liaise with Save the Children staff and the Reference Committee throughout the process, incorporate feedback; providing weekly updates and seeking their input and advice where necessary.	3. Give feedback on draft and end report	3. Read and provide comments on the proposal plans submitted by the consultant (especially the proposed research methodology, the information gathering techniques used and the suggested target dates);	3. Be available for interviews at Netherlands and implementation level
4. As a condition of entering into a consultancy agreement the evaluator and research assistants must sign the SCI Child Safeguarding Policy and abide by the terms and conditions thereof.		4. Provide guidance throughout all phases of execution, approving all deliverables, and facilitating access to any documentation (or any person) deemed relevant to the evaluation process.	4. Provide feedback on the end report