

# Evaluation of the Dutch Relief Alliance 2015-2017 Final Report



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## Abbreviations

AFJR	Afghanistan Joint Response
CARJR	Central African Republic Joint Response
CP	Child Protection
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DRAC	Dutch Relief Alliance Committee
DRF	Dutch Relief Fund
JRE	Ebola Joint Response
ETJR	Ethiopia Joint Response
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSL	Food Security and Livelihood
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICCO	Inter-Church Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO)
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JR	Joint Response
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NIJR	North Iraq Joint Response
NJR	Nigeria Joint Response
NPJR	Nepal Joint Response
SC	Save the Children
SJR	Syria Joint Response
SSJR	South Sudan Joint Response
SSPJR	Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland Joint Response
SV	Stichting Vluchteling
UKJR	Ukraine Joint Response
WVI	World Vision International
VJR	Vanuatu Joint Response
YJR	Yemen Joint Response
ZIMJR	Zimbabwe Joint Response

## 1. Executive Summary

This report presents **key findings from an independent, external evaluation of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA)**. The objectives of the evaluation are to (1) **evaluate the DRA's delivery of €180 million worth of humanitarian aid across 18 countries from 2015-2017**; (2) **analyze how the DRA is contributing to the Grand Bargain Commitments**; (3) **assess the added value of the consortium approach**; and (4) **provide strategic recommendations for the future improvement and role of the DRA**.

The evaluation was carried out by **Europe Conflict and Security (ECAS) Consulting Ltd** between July and October 2017. It included a **desk review** of hundreds of DRA documents; an **online survey of 78 programme staff** in the Netherlands and the field; **15 in-person and 14 telephone interviews of DRA members and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) representatives** in the Netherlands; a **meta-evaluation of 32 Joint Responses (JRs)**; **field visits to Ethiopia, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe**, including **focus groups with 51 beneficiaries, 46 interviews with staff and partners**, and **participant-observation** of learning visits, meetings, and trainings; and a **briefing** on preliminary findings in The Hague. In addition, the ECAS team drew on its prior knowledge of the situation in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, having undertaken an evaluation of the **Syria Joint Response** in 2016.

### Key Findings

#### On the delivery of aid –

- **The DRA has provided timely assistance to people in need.** Slow approval processes at MoFA level and by national authorities often delayed the start of interventions. However, once in motion, the DRA was able to prioritize urgent needs and adapt to changes in the operational environment. This was largely thanks to the 25% budgetary flexibility entrusted to JR leads, which allowed assistance to be redirected as needed.
- **DRA assistance generally aligns with international needs assessments and is seen by beneficiaries as appropriate to their needs.** Evidence suggests that JRs reach the most vulnerable people – including women, children, and the elderly – although the assistance provided only covers about 4% of the total number of people in need in target countries.
- **Joint Responses regularly surpass their targets, and beneficiaries report being satisfied.** The consortium designs interventions that draw on the comparative advantages of its members, with view to avoiding duplication. DRA members effectively implement their respective activities independently and are their own quality guarantors.
- **While the DRA serves to save lives in emergencies, there are clear advantages to follow-up (second and third phase) responses.** The distinction between 'acute' and 'chronic' crises has little resonance in the field, where programme staff grapple with the compound effects of fragility and recurrent crises. However, follow-up responses profited from improved collaboration among member NGOs and a greater emphasis on long-term community resilience.
- **Collaborative impact is improving over time, and extending deeper into the field.** The true potential of the consortium approach remains untapped – no doubt – with few genuine examples of joint programming. That said, at the time of the mid-term review, the added value of the DRA was to be found mainly in the Netherlands. Now, there is a growing number of examples of collaboration among partners in different countries.

#### On the contribution to Grand Bargain Commitments –

- **It is unclear whether the DRA has contributed to greater transparency, despite the obligation (as of this year) to report to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).** A number of

practical challenges must be overcome with regard to IATI reporting, and DRA members could do a better job of being more transparent with their partners in the field.

- **Every Joint Response engages local NGOs and community based organisations – in some cases, the bulk of activities are implemented through local partners – but there is lack of agreement about providing them with more direct funding.** DRA members and MoFA must consider how localization can be improved within the framework of the DRA. The starting point may be budgeting for more substantial local capacity-building efforts.
- **Good progress has been made towards the call for increased use of cash-based programming.** Cash is increasingly used as a response modality, to the satisfaction of beneficiaries. It is not appropriate for every context and population, however, so NGOs should deliberate all options carefully. In addition, cash grant procedures should be streamlined and harmonized among DRA members and other humanitarian providers.
- **Management-wise, most benefits of the DRA manifest in simplified award and reporting procedures in the Netherlands.** Benefits of the DRA at field level are more elusive. There remains room for improvement towards reducing in-country costs during implementation.
- **Sharing data on needs and beneficiaries remains ad hoc and there is room to improve joint needs assessments.** Member NGOs can further streamline and harmonize beneficiary-facing feedback and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Individual NGOs excel at mobilizing the participation of beneficiaries from design to delivery – but there is no evidence that the DRA mechanism contributes to this.** Nonetheless, the DRA's 25% budgetary flexibility enables real-time improvements based on beneficiaries' suggestions and complaints.
- **The DRA mechanism has not capitalized on its potential to improve multi-year planning and funding.** Even though the Dutch Relief Fund is a multi-annual funding pool, JRs last for a duration of six months to a year, producing uncertainty about renewal even in cases of protracted crisis.
- **The DRA has clearly contributed towards simplifying reporting requirements for member NGOs.** Nevertheless, JR leads continue to find burdensome the task of harmonizing reporting formats, terminologies, and accounts.
- **There are only weak indications that the mechanism has served to enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors.** This is unsurprising given the focus of the DRA on life-saving aid. However, all JRs have included activities that seek to improve community resilience and provide more sustainable solutions.
- **While NGOs are in small ways transforming their way of work with view to the Grand Bargain Commitments, it is too early to tell how this will impact the future of the DRA.** Agreement on the role and vision of the DRA has been hampered by lengthy discussions among NGOs, who have divergent priorities and modalities, and are sometimes part of competing coalitions and international structures.

#### On the setup of the DRA –

- **Protracted crises offer better opportunities for joint operations than acute crises, due to the longer implementation period and improved humanitarian access.** Follow-up phases feature learning from mistakes, more stable relationships with local actors, and greater trust among partners.
- **The main factor influencing jointness is the geographic spread of a Joint Response.** NGOs working in close geographical proximity find more opportunities to cooperate. Invariably, larger JRs (with 10 or more participating NGOs) are able to reach more people in more places. But after

a certain point, there are diminishing returns to increasing the number of partners. Jointness begins to unravel – even bringing partners together becomes unruly – and the administrative burden multiplies for the lead.

- **The DRA has changed the Dutch humanitarian landscape, and the vast majority of staff in the Netherlands and the field believe it has improved collaboration in the sector.** However, there are risks to the ongoing growth and institutionalization of the initiative, namely time- and resource-intensive meetings, slow democratic decision-making, and hampered agility of the DRA and its members.
- **Communication between MoFA and the DRA is satisfactory, but characterized by fundamentally different expectations about the depth of joint action and the future role of the consortium.** There is considerable confusion around a number of key considerations, and NGOs are hesitant about jumping into a more integrated arrangement without certainty for the continuation of the DRA. Meanwhile, MoFA is pushing for collaborative value (beyond simply saving lives) and for commitments like the Grand Bargain, but not providing sufficient guidance on what it really needs.
- **Joint programming is not always feasible or appropriate; expectations for increased jointness should be determined by real humanitarian needs and possibilities, rather than pre-defined institutional requirements.** Planning and funding decisions should encourage variety and complementarity, and reflect the comparative advantages of NGOs.
- **Visibility has been less of a priority for the DRA than originally intended.** Recent efforts have contributed to increasing the visibility towards the Dutch audience. It is wise that MoFA does not insist on visibility of the Dutch government vis-à-vis beneficiaries, reflecting a proper understanding of humanitarian principles and security concerns.
- **The DRA is not a producer of innovation, but a multiplier.** New ideas and good practices stem from individual NGOs and are sometimes shared and disseminated among members. More timely evaluations will facilitate learning ahead of follow-on phases.

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Background

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) was established as a pilot mechanism to channel better humanitarian aid for chronic and acute crises, following an initiative of the Dutch Minister for International Trade and Development Co-operation in September 2014. The DRA is composed of 16 Dutch NGOs (the evaluation covers only 14), eligible for funding from the Dutch Relief Fund, and the mechanism has funded 32 Joint Responses (JRs) for a total amount of €183 million over the period 2015-2017.

The **5 specific objectives** of the DRA are to:

1. Deliver humanitarian aid in response to major ‘ongoing’ crises in a timely, appropriate, effective, and efficient manner;
2. Deliver fast humanitarian aid in major acute (new) crises;
3. Generate synergies and cooperation between the DRA member NGOs 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. Tackle the major bottlenecks in humanitarian practice through co-created innovation, joint learning, and research.

### 2.2 Objectives and Scope of Evaluation

At the close of the first three years of the DRA, it was considered an opportune moment to evaluate the outcomes of this pilot mechanism in terms of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of delivering humanitarian aid in acute and chronic humanitarian crises. Specifically, a final evaluation of the DRA was deemed necessary to ensure: 1) **accountability** towards the donor, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and the DRA’s own members; and 2) **learning** for all stakeholders.

The aim was to assess progress in the following **4 result areas**:

1. Delivery of coherent humanitarian aid in major ‘ongoing’ crises;
2. A fully operational rapid response mechanism for new crises;
3. Creation of collaborative value, in terms of visibility, reducing the administrative burden, increased speed of decision-making, and scaling up on the ground; and
4. Transparent reporting, offering visibility and data to the Dutch public.

In addition, the evaluation team was requested to assess to what extent the DRA mechanism has contributed to meeting the **Grand Bargain Commitments**, with a specific focus on supporting national and local responders (localization), innovation (in particular cash-based programming), transparency, and beneficiary participation.

With this in mind, the evaluation delivers the following **outcomes**:

- With regard to **Accountability**:
  - Assessment of the efficiency/timeliness, relevance, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact/reach of the DRA, including structure and function;
  - Assessment of progress towards the five DRA objectives; and
  - Recommendations for future programme implementation and management of the DRA mechanism.



- With regard to **Learning**:
  - Lessons on the following topics: acute crises vs. protracted crises; difference between first round JRs and follow-up JRs; and difference between JRs with a thematic focus vs. a multi-sector approach; and
  - Follow-up on relevant recommendations from the Mid-Term Review.
- With regard to the review of the **Grand Bargain Commitments**:
  - Assessment of progress; and
  - Emerging good practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for the future.

In short, the evaluation provides an overview of the progress made by the Dutch humanitarian sector, and offers specific and actionable recommendations to key stakeholder groups.

## 2.3 Methodology

The final evaluation was commissioned by the DRA Monitoring, Evaluation, and Added Value Working Group and overseen by a special Reference Committee. The methodology was co-designed by ECAS and the Reference Committee, based on the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the evaluation. ECAS used triangulation and consultation to validate findings and where possible, findings were supported with quantitative data.

The evaluation took place in five stages:

- 1. Inception Phase:** The ECAS team worked closely with the Reference Committee to finalize the methodology and selection of field visits.

Field visit sites were selected jointly to ensure a representative sample of acute vs. chronic crisis, first phase vs. follow up phase, diverse geographies, potential for learning, JR membership, different JR leads, and size of budget. It was agreed that Ethiopia would represent a large JR (11 members and approximately €20 million), Zimbabwe would represent an acute crisis JR, and Ukraine would represent a small JR featuring protracted political crisis. In addition, building on ECAS' existing knowledge through its performance of the SJR1 evaluation, Syria was a focus of the desk review and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

An evaluation matrix was developed based on the questions in the ToR. The matrix aimed to cover the DRA's 5 specific objectives and 4 result areas, balancing the evaluation objectives of accountability and learning, input from the Reference Committee, and prioritization of core questions. Sub-questions were divided across several cross-cutting criteria and additional questions were added to round out perceived gaps. The OECD/DAC criteria were taken as a starting point, and were adapted to reflect the needs of the DRA. Criteria were loosely defined as follows:

- **Efficiency:** ratio of inputs to outputs; resources used responsibly for intended purposes; balance of quality, cost & timeliness. (Particular attention was given to the aspect of timeliness, including rapidity of response and prioritization of urgent needs.)
- **Relevance:** suitability of intervention to needs of target population and priorities of operational environment.
- **Effectiveness:** extent to which intervention achieved its objectives.
- **Impact:** positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (Particular attention was given to the aspect of reach, in terms of the quantity of vulnerable people reached with quality goods and services.)
- **Sustainability:** measure of whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn.



- Coherence: extent of coordination/ complementarity of intervention (within DRA & country-facing).

**2. Instrument Development Phase:** During the **desk review**, the evaluation team reviewed a range of materials that had been made available. This consisted of several hundred documents, including evaluation reports and proposals from all JRs, annual plans, strategic plans, vision documents, methodologies, case studies, budgets, lessons-learned documents, email correspondence, meeting minutes, newsletters, memos, among others, from all stakeholders, including member NGOs, MoFA, and partner organisations.

In addition, the evaluation team developed and finalized questionnaires and plans for field visits and visits to the Netherlands. This involved **translating the evaluation matrix into concrete questions** for data collection, tailored for each sample JR.

Furthermore, an **online survey** was designed and administered. This survey targeted all members and JRs with the aim of collecting quantitative data on the opinions and perceptions of the broader DRA community and to verify findings collected during the field visits. The online survey contained 22 statements to which respondents could reply with strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Respondents could also provide additional comments to explain their answers. The survey enabled disaggregation between staff from the field and the Netherlands, and staff with a lot of experience and little experience in the DRA system. The survey was sent to approximately 10 staff members from each member NGO (as selected by point-persons) who participated in the online survey ahead of its close on 10 September 2017. In total, 78 responses were collected. A summary of survey questions, results, and graphs can be found in Annex G.

**3. Data Collection Phase:** The **meta-evaluation** was designed to support the data collection in order to evaluate to what extent the DRA is making progress towards achieving the 5 specific objectives and what good practices and lessons-learned can be identified from the period 2015-2017. 18 evaluation reports and 32 project proposals and logframes were included in this exercise, and were assessed on criteria from the evaluation matrix. The meta-evaluation was performed by the same ECAS expert to ensure objectivity and the focus was on gathering general indications on the presence and extensiveness of the criteria in the documents. The scope of this evaluation did not allow for an in-depth qualitative assessment and comparison for all criteria, as explained at inception, in part because the quality of reports varied. Summary tables from the meta-evaluation are captured in Annex E. The evaluation team chose not provide further differentiation of color codes, notes, or quantitative scores to avoid triggering any competition between JRs and JR members.

ECAS consultants undertook **field visits** to Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Ukraine during August and September 2017 in order to collect and verify data through focus groups with beneficiaries and KIIs with staff. Field visits lasted on average 8 days, as originally agreed, and included a desk review, interviews with staff and partners, consultations with beneficiaries, and participant-observation of meetings, trainings, and learning visits. The JR leads were closely involved in the preparation and execution of the field visits. Preliminary findings were presented in-country at the end of each field visit to allow for feedback and ensure ownership of findings. Reports from these field visits can be found in Annexes A, B, and C.

In addition, the ECAS Team Lead visited the Netherlands for 15 KIIs and held 14 additional interviews over Skype or telephone, including with SJR staff.

**4. Analysis and Delivery Phase:** Following a thorough verification and comparison of quantitative and qualitative data collected during the data collection phase, triangulated analysis led to a draft report containing key findings and recommendations. The report was informed by a briefing on preliminary findings delivered to the Reference Committee in The Hague on 19 September 2017. The Reference Committee provided verbal and written feedback, which culminated in revisions and delivery of this final report.

5. **Learning Phase:** Following validation of this final report, a stakeholders' workshop comprising an oral presentation of final findings and recommendations will be held in the Netherlands on 6 December 2017 for the DRA community and MoFA. This will be an opportunity for discussion and will facilitate learning from the evaluation, as well as uptake of recommendations.

## 2.4 Challenges and limitations

There are a number of challenges and limitations to this evaluation:

- Evaluations of humanitarian assistance can be complex, in particular when activities are implemented in the framework of a consortium. Consortium members have different working methods, policies, approaches, and monitoring methods. **Since the goal of this evaluation is not to evaluate the individual delivery of humanitarian assistance of each DRA member and each JR, but rather to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the activities of the DRA as a whole,** the ECAS team had to prioritize the investigation of cross-cutting themes, objectives, and cases in order to evaluate the relevance, appropriateness, and effectiveness of the interagency model as a whole. In addition, the evaluation seeks to extrapolate lessons for the consortium moving forward. Compromises had to be made when it came to comparing JR documents and outcomes since the DRA does not keep comparable data across its operations. For example, data on beneficiary outcomes is not standardized, information management practices differ between JRs, and DRA members' evaluation capacities vary significantly. In these cases, ECAS worked with what was available, but could not make strong conclusions and recommendations on these issues.
- The **safety** of its consultants, as well as DRA staff members and interviewees, is of primary importance to ECAS. In close cooperation with the respective JR lead, field visits were restricted to geographies that did not pose undue risk to the evaluation or programme teams.
- **The meta-evaluation was not expected to fully assess the quality of all evaluations, nor to validate or take formal positions on all findings and recommendations in these reports, nor to review the follow-up on all recommendations of all reports.** In the first place, the meta-evaluation was designed to assess trends and which areas had room for improvement. The meta-evaluation does not intend to score JRs, nor categorize JRs into 'good' and 'bad' programmes. Therefore, the summary tables from the meta-evaluation in Annex E should be seen as a quick-reference tool rather than a scoreboard to influence decision-making. Only 18 out of 32 JRs had been evaluated at the time of the meta-evaluation, which limited the potential for generalisation of findings.
- **The focus of efficiency in this report refers to timeliness.** Other elements of efficiency as conceived by OECD/DAC, such as cost efficiency or comparison with alternative modalities, were not possible to assess.

### 3. Main findings

#### 3.1. Delivery of aid under DRA

##### ▪ Efficiency<sup>1</sup>/Timeliness<sup>2</sup>

**Overall, the DRA has been able to provide timely assistance to people in need.** 10 out of the 18 JR evaluation reports fully confirm that the DRA provided timely assistance, such as the CARJR1 evaluation report, which states, *“This joint response addresses part of the imminent needs of the entire CAR in terms of timely support to the needs of the people of the country.”* In NIJR2, timeliness was said to be one of the strengths of the JR, and people receiving aid in Mosul and Hawija provided relevant examples to the evaluators.

**Field findings:** In Ethiopia, areas of intervention were allocated to NGOs in terms of their expertise and geographic experience, which served to facilitate effective and timely implementation. In Ukraine, the Lead NGO, Dorcas, maintained a flexible approach and facilitated communication with MoFA as needed, freeing NGOs to implement their activities.

However, 8 evaluation reports (see table below) noted delays in the delivery of aid. These delays were the result of a range of incidents, including the late transfer of funds, delays in provision of supplies, or the approval process by both MoFA and in-country governmental authorities. In Yemen, the political dimension of the crisis caused administrative challenges that delayed the start of project implementation. In Vanuatu, the remoteness of target communities negatively impacted the timeliness of activity implementation. In Nepal, delays in setting up semi-permanent shelter were attributed to lengthy government processes to set standards, without which organisations could not start their projects. The NPJR evaluation concluded, however, that *“in light of delays in funding disbursement that exists in other projects, some can argue that the receipt of funds by March 2015 [two months after project approval] is actually fast when compared to the speed of response of other agencies in terms of funding approval and project start up.”*

	Delays in approval process	Delays because of no. of partners	Delays because of partners	Changing needs on the ground	Host country's preferences and actions	Environmental factors
AFJR1	Three-week delay at start of programme		WFP's belated notification			
JRE	Delays in project approval (Nov - March) and in disbursement of funds to implementing NGOs			Projects modified due to ground realities	Project modified to reflect preferences of host countries	
NIJR1	Developing DRA procedures which took time and delayed the transfer of funds	Getting funding to multiple implementing partners in North Iraq				Bank of the implementing partner in Iraq was slow
NJR1	<i>Recommendation of Evaluation report: “Ensure that programme activities commence in time at the peak of needs.” No further details on the topic of timeliness were provided in the evaluation report.</i>					
SSJR1	Interventions were delayed due to					Late start led to

<sup>1</sup> The focus of efficiency in this part of the report is in terms of timeliness, since other elements of efficiency, such as if the programme or project was implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives, were difficult to assess.

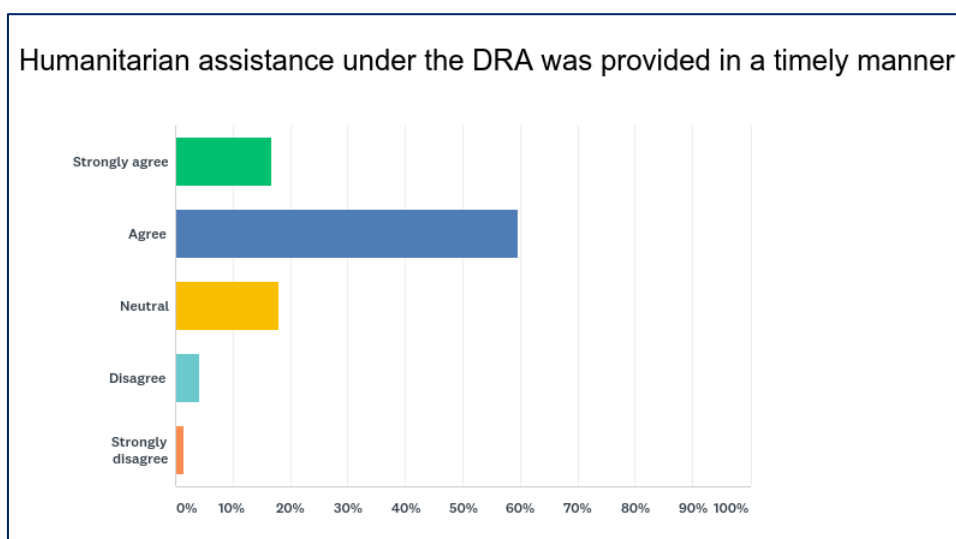
<sup>2</sup> Timeliness = part of efficiency; rapidity of response; prioritization of urgent needs

	late disbursement of funds and joint set-up					logistical challenges (rainy season): poor road conditions and safety issues
UKJR1	Delay in the transfer of programme funds led to start-up problems			Due to changing weather conditions, too late for winterization programmes	Government decided to suspend and review its pension and social security payments	Lack of humanitarian access in NGCA; Volatile security situation
VJR						Remoteness of communities, limited transportation possibilities
YJR1	Re-submission of programme and start-date moved to 1 June, less than 2 weeks from the start of Ramadan					Contextual delays in logistics and procurement. Administrative delays linked to the political nature of the crisis

**Field Finding:** In Ethiopia, administrative and bureaucratic delays in the implementation of activities was the result of difficulties in procurement, difficulties finalising the MoU with the authorities, and the late release of funds. This cut into implementation time, meaning that over a 6-month-long project, activities were practically implemented for only 3-5 months.

Feedback from DRA staff pointed to the fact that the humanitarian response of JRs was largely timely, with 17% of survey respondents strongly agreeing and 60% agreeing respectively with the statement that *“humanitarian assistance was provided in a timely manner.”* KIIs suggested that the start of activities is often delayed by slow approval processes, since the annual approval of the budget for chronic crises is often late and therefore does not allow for timely planning. In 2017, for example, the annual budget was only confirmed by MoFA two months into the year, leaving DRA members uncertain about the continuation of programmes until that point. Furthermore, at the time of writing, NGOs are unaware of the 2018 budget, which makes planning very difficult.<sup>3</sup> Slow procedures of this sort have caused challenges and insecurities in the field in the past: in North Iraq it was not possible to pay field staff for two months. On occasion DRA members have needed to finance programming in advance, and NGOs without contingency funds could not start their operations before the funds arrived, thereby losing considerable implementation time.

<sup>3</sup> The absence of a clear budget for 2018 is mainly due to the absence of government and clarity of governmental budget.



**The DRA mechanism has been supportive to a particular form of timeliness – namely the prioritization of urgent needs.** Flexibility of programming has allowed assistance to be redirected, when necessary, in order to respond to changes in the humanitarian situation. In urgent situations, approval from the DRA for the redirection of assistance was said to have come quickly. In SJR2, for example, assistance was adapted from cash vouchers to food parcels to meet the changing and specific needs of a sudden flow of people on the move. In this instance, a DRA member NGO contacted the JR lead for approval to adapt the programme to needs as they arose, which was swiftly granted.

**Field Finding:** In Ukraine, when the conflict escalated in Avdika in February 2017, people were suddenly faced with additional water and heating needs. Save the Children mobilized to get approval from the UKJR to distribute extra cash grants. The ease of administration in this case was put into contrast with approval processes of other donors.

80% of survey respondents (strongly) agreed with the statement that ‘*When unplanned and urgent issues arise, it is possible to respond to them effectively and fast*’.

*“The NIJR2 has adapted to respond to the new huge humanitarian crisis in Iraq due to the Mosul and Hawija military operations and supported more than 111.000 people in needed not previously planned.”*

*“The 25% budget flexibility permits this. Also the fact that the lead agency (rather than the donor), can approve some changes proposed by agencies (in line with the consolidated logframe), also reduces time needed for approvals.”*

Although flexibility is a strong asset of the mechanism, it is hard to consider this a unique characteristic of the collaborative approach of the DRA.<sup>4</sup> The meta-evaluation showed mixed results as to whether the **collaborative approach** of the DRA has contributed to timeliness. Although not all evaluation reports provided an answer, good collaborative practice is indicated by the following statements:

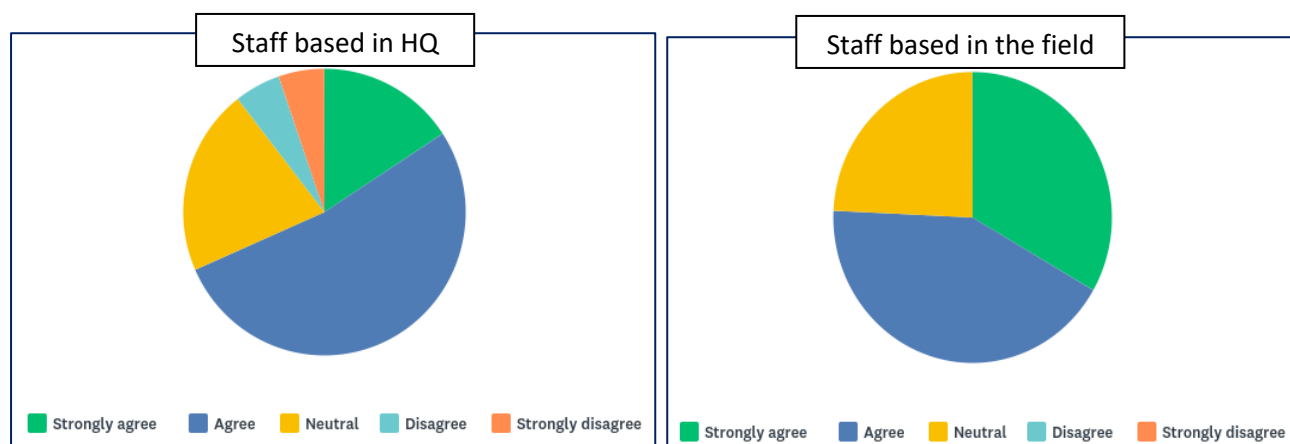
*“The geographic division of food distributions by World Vision and CARE on Tanna made it possible to service the entire island [of Vanuatu] in a timely manner.”*

*“The [ETJR1] consortium has improved the project efficiency through reducing the time and expenses required for design, appraisal, approval, reporting, auditing and evaluation of individual responses. Making pipeline extensions for emergency WASH was also efficient in reducing costs required for drilling and motor pumps, besides its time efficiency to quickly serve the needy.”*

<sup>4</sup> Collaborative Value: the effect of joint communication / participation on increased reach, improved delivery, reduced management costs & faster decision-making.

It should be noted, however, that some other JRs seemed not to have capitalized on the opportunity for collaboration in the same way, as confirmed by the evaluation reports of AFJR1 and YJR1.

I am confident that the collaborative approach of JRs results in the faster and more efficient delivery of humanitarian aid.



70% of survey respondents (strongly) agreed with the statement 'I am confident that the collaborative approach of JRs results in the faster and more efficient delivery of humanitarian aid.' 68% of survey respondents based at headquarters were positive regarding the collaborative approach of the JR, and 10% were negative. Colleagues from the field, who are assumed to observe the results of the DRA even more closely than staff in the Netherlands, are slightly more positive, with 42% agreeing and 33% strongly agreeing to the statement. Nobody disagreed.

The impact of collaboration on **cost-efficiency** was considered in most JR concept notes, with the following positive outcomes cited: avoidance of duplication, beneficiary sharing, joint logistics, market analysis, and security monitoring.

**Field Finding:** In Ukraine, Dorcas facilitated the development of a common methodology by drawing from Terre des Hommes' scoring system for selection and Save the Children's post-distribution monitoring scheme, and aligning these with key criteria of the UN Cash Working Group. This was not so much a joint system as it was a set of guidelines and shared criteria, but it was sufficient to produce real collaborative impact and improvements in the delivery of aid.

The following 5 concrete examples<sup>5</sup> from the field demonstrate how collaboration under the DRA enhanced efficiency<sup>6</sup>:

- In NJR1, "improvement in the delivery of food voucher systems by consortium members and their local implementing partners resulting from experience sharing by IRC...has helped to minimize the risk of double distributions." (NJR1 Evaluation Report)
- Also in Nigeria, there are examples of NGOs sharing of suppliers; IRC shared hygiene awareness raising material with Save the Children.

<sup>5</sup> A full list of examples found throughout the evaluation can be found in the Annex.

<sup>6</sup> The impact of the DRA on reduced management costs, which can also be seen as collaborative impact, is mentioned under Commitment 4 of chapter 3.2.

- In SJR1, “exchange of innovative methodologies on health care in Syria between Dorcas and Stichting Vluchteling/International Rescue Committee (SV/IRC); exchange of fuel between two SJR members; and sharing of protection-related training materials from WarChild to the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO).” (SJR1 Evaluation)
- In SSJR3, Dorcas, Oxfam and Cordaid work in the geographically isolated region of Wao. They jointly prepared for the visit of a MoFA representative and presented DRA activities together.
- In VJR, WVI and Care temporarily shared office space in Port Vila when Care’s office was damaged by Cyclone Pam. The evaluation said: “the joint food distribution to schools on Tanna was the most obvious example of collaboration between the VJR agencies through 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.”

However, some JRs point to the fact that sometimes **collaboration might have negatively impacted on the timeliness** of emergency action. This emerges in the SSPJR1 evaluation, where it is stated that:

*“While harmonised approaches – which take time to create – may be a perceived added value of consortium, rapid responses are considered key in humanitarian programming – and thus, two important goals appear to be competing against each other: either a rapid, uncoordinated response, or a delayed yet cohesive response.”*

The meta-evaluation did not offer a wide range of examples to support this statement, although this seems *not* to be as a result of the absence of this sort of timeliness-collaboration tension, but rather because evaluation reports did not look into this in detail.

**Field Finding:** In Ethiopia, smaller JR members sometimes struggle to communicate or engage in a deep way with the consortium due to time/manpower constraints, as their focus is on direct implementation. With so many NGOs working in disparate contexts, interviewees admitted they ‘can’t pay attention to everything’.

Delays were mainly out of the control of DRA members, and cannot be directly attributed to the DRA mechanism but rather to existing approval procedures. Ahead of activity implementation, getting approval from MoFA and national authorities appeared to be a slow process. However, getting the go-ahead from the DRA to adapt a JR to respond to urgent needs proved much faster and contributed considerably to the efficiency of the aid provided. The potential for collaboration to contribute to timely assistance is not explored equally for all JRs. In addition, further consideration is needed to avoid situations where collaboration negatively impacts on efficiency.

## ■ **Relevance<sup>7</sup>**

**DRA project documents confirm that programmes align with international needs assessments and that DRA assistance is seen by beneficiaries as appropriate to their needs.** All project proposals refer to international documents, including Humanitarian Response Plans, UN Flash Appeals, national plans or UN agencies’ plans as the basis for defining needs and the foundations from which to plan a response. That said, some KIIs mentioned that these plans might already be out of date by the time JRs are started and that, as a result, flexibility for programming remains essential, as was seen by developments in Mosul and Al-Raqqa.

<sup>7</sup> The extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. (OECD-DAC)





Mr. Day Muleya, Secretary of the Luseche "Kubatana" Garden Project, Ward 12, Hwange District, proudly displays his thriving tomato crop.

If the relevance of assistance is considered as the **appropriateness**<sup>8</sup> of assistance from the point of view of beneficiaries, the meta-evaluation offered enough evidence to demonstrate that beneficiaries receiving aid under the DRA stated that the aid met their needs overall, with a few exceptions. Reasons given for the appropriateness of assistance include the ways in which the JR complemented other assistance (AFJR1), offered flexibility on how to use cash (SJR2), and combined short-term and long-term needs (ETJR2). On the other hand, in NIJR2 the assistance was not always considered appropriate, despite meeting the Sphere Standards, with beneficiaries stating that aid did not always respect cultural customs.

Current global humanitarian assistance is said to be uneven compared to global needs. The DRA itself can only cover a **small part of the needs** of affected populations. In the YJR1 evaluation, for example, it was concluded that the quantity of aid provided was insufficient in

comparison with the high needs on the ground. When comparing the target population of the JRs with the total number of people in need, the proportion is limited. On average, JRs are able to provide assistance to 4.52%<sup>9</sup> of the total number of people in need. The Vanuatu response was an exception, targeting 20% of the total 188.000 people in need. UKJR3 targets only 0.40% of the 3.8 million people in need.

The online survey strongly supports the finding that humanitarian assistance provided under the DRA was relevant to the needs of the affected populations, with 61% of respondents strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing; nobody disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. However, feedback did point again to the fact that JRs could not reach everyone in need of assistance:

*"Yes, assistance has often reached those most in need, but in many cases [it] is just a drop in the ocean; only a small part compared to the needs in the country of response."*

*"The needs in CAR are so great, that there is enormous scope for meeting them. I am confident the members have prioritised things that are urgent for the population."*

Another dimension of relevance is related to how far JRs have provided assistance to the **most vulnerable people** among target populations. There are two key findings related to this: 1) specific mention of gender was included in all project proposals except in NIJR1; and 2) KIIs confirmed that JRs were successful in reaching the most vulnerable populations not covered by other programmes. Furthermore, in the Vanuatu evaluation it is stated that:

*"Local leaders, provincial authorities and the national government also considered the VJR relevant as it addressed the communities' most pressing needs. The Taféa Provincial Government extended its appreciation for the thorough approach of the VJR agencies to reach all people for food distribution especially those living in the more remote communities."*

<sup>8</sup> Appropriateness is the tailoring of humanitarian activities to local needs, increasing ownership, accountability, and cost-effectiveness accordingly (ALNAP).

<sup>9</sup> These numbers have to be seen as indicative, since a complete overview of the target population across JRs is problematic given that no clear data exists without double-counting.

The field findings are in line with the finding that JRs reached the most vulnerable populations in the target areas.

**Field Findings:** In ZIMJR, members worked together through a series of learning visits, joint trainings and joint visibility efforts, which enabled broader targeting of vulnerable populations, including HIV positive people.

Indications also suggest that in the UKJR, the most vulnerable people were successfully reached: the beneficiary selection system is based on critical vulnerability criteria, and organisations treat the most vulnerable people within their reach, cross-checking beneficiary lists to avoid duplication to the extent legally possible. NGO staff and volunteers also make home visits as part of beneficiary selection and post-distribution monitoring. Up to 80% of a target population may be visited in some neighbourhoods, whereas in more remote areas, the proportion could be closer to 20-40%. This is a time-consuming process for NGOs, but deemed important to reach the most vulnerable people.

**The 25% flexibility-rule of each JR total has, in particular, facilitated the responsiveness<sup>10</sup> of DRA assistance.** This rule states that as long as the re-allocation of funds stays under 25% of the total JR budget, the JR lead guarantees the outcome and MoFA does not need to be involved in the transfer of funds. As a result of this flexibility-rule, budgets can be relocated as-per-need, as was the case in Nigeria where funds were transferred to IRC to take over a protection training that Oxfam was not able to implement.

In the KII, it was found to be unfortunate that when a JR underspent, money would be lost for the DRA as the left-over funding would not go back to the DRA pot. Nevertheless, JR Leads were hesitant to allow overspending for one NGO when another NGO had underspent in order to prevent overspending overall in a JR. One respondent in the online survey stated that partners are insufficiently aware of the 25% flexibility possibility.

Across the evaluation, there are several concrete examples that point to how cooperation under the DRA has enhanced the relevance and appropriateness of assistance:

- In NJR1, “[the] adoption of the Save the Children’s approaches for Complaint and Response Mechanism (CRM) by consortium members and local implementing partners because of the shared learning from Save the Children” was perceived as an added value gain.
- At the NIJR mid-term meeting, a shortage of food for under-five year olds was noted. A recipe that had had good results was shared by one organisation with the others.
- In NIJR2, Tearfund organised a workshop to bring other agencies together to share learning and information on hygiene promotion methods and approaches. The workshop provided a forum for individual and organisational learning, and supported an integrated and consistent approach in hygiene promotion messaging. This workshop was attended by several organisations including World Vision, Dorcas, ZOA, TAD (an Oxfam partner) and Tearfund, and had 12 participants in total.
- In SJR2, “all hubs report examples of joint assessments and monitoring and beneficiary referrals, and some even identify the beginnings of other forms of integrated programming.”
- In UKJR1, “TdH made use of a complex beneficiary database that allows selection based on an advanced system of scoring different vulnerability criteria. This was shared with the consortium

<sup>10</sup> Responsiveness is the ability of a system to adjust quickly to suddenly altered external conditions, as of speed, content, or focus, and to resume stable operation without undue delay, as defined in the meta-evaluation conducted by MEAV Committee in September 2016. (Based on: dictionary.com)

*at the midterm meeting and recognized as a model that other UKJR members could replicate in its UKJR phase two activities.”*

**Field Finding:** In practice, meeting targets meant the delivery of life-saving aid. This ranged from nutrition assistance to vulnerable communities affected by drought in Zimbabwe, the promotion of vital health and nutrition practices to pregnant and lactating women in Ethiopia, and the financing of income-generating activities in Ukraine (where initiatives included car repairs, photo services, a manicure studio, a spice shop and manufacture of chimney brushes).

DRA assistance is in line with international needs assessments, and beneficiaries confirm to a large extent the appropriateness of the aid received. Nevertheless, although JR programmes seem to successfully reach vulnerable segments of target populations, the assistance provided under the DRA covers only a small amount of needs in the selected countries. While the flexibility offered by the DRA in the allocation of funds is an asset, there is significant potential to further enhance the relevance and the appropriateness of DRA projects through the harmonization of assistance and tools, and the exchange of information between NGOs.

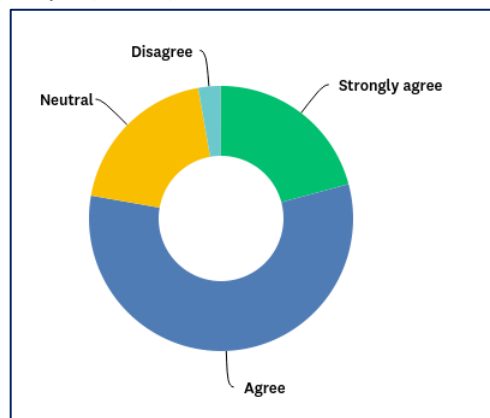
### ▪ Effectiveness

**Joint Responses regularly surpass their targets<sup>11</sup>, and beneficiaries report being satisfied.** The meta-evaluation confirms that almost all JRs have been able to **meet their targets** and implement proposed activities. There were a number of JRs, however, that fell short of targets, including the SSJR1, where only 60-80% of feasible and planned outputs were reached compared to the original proposal. In the NPJR evaluation report, it was stated that *“most planned outputs were delivered. Non-delivery was generally due to reallocations motivated by new circumstances. Examples include adjusting WASH programming and reallocating funds to address winterization needs.”* Security reasons were another explanation for not reaching targets: in SJR1 the impossibility of transporting a large and expensive generator across conflict lines hampered realising targets.

**11 out of the 16 evaluations assessing the satisfaction level of beneficiaries confirmed that beneficiaries were satisfied overall with the aid provided.** In SSPJR1 *“of the 292 respondents who gave answers (8 did not know or refused to answer), 209 were either satisfied or very satisfied with the JR1 programme.”*

Other reports pointed to variation in beneficiary satisfaction, noting that *“the quality of the humanitarian assistance was generally good but lack of harmonisation resulted in some beneficiaries viewing differences in assistance received as a lack of quality”* (AFJR1). Other evaluations refer to insufficient quantity as an explanation for beneficiaries not being fully satisfied with the aid provided, such as in NJR where the food assistance provided was insufficient to meet the actual food consumption of a household for a month.

**The question of quality and quantity requires questioning as to whether assistance provided under the DRA is in line with humanitarian standards.** A general assessment of this was challenging since the only source of information was secondary data. Yet, almost half of JR project proposals do not refer to international standards, like Sphere or CHS. 8 proposals mention these standards,



<sup>11</sup> Targets according to the outputs, not according to target population. This will be addressed under reach.

but not in any depth. The meta-evaluation noted adherence to standards for 7 JRs, including the NPJR where *“distributions and other activities were in line with government/cluster guidelines which in turn were based on a contextualisation of SPHERE standards.”* 8 evaluation reports concluded that some standards were adhered to - to a certain degree - but room for improvement was identified. For example, the NIJR2 report states that *“humanitarian standards, particularly those discussed in the CHS, have been identified as an area requiring further improvement. Overall, the response provided good, and sometimes, very good quality response while trying to maintain CHS standards as much as possible.”*

**One criterion to measure coherence<sup>12</sup> in the consortium is to what extent the DRA builds on the comparative advantages of individual DRA members,** working with the assumption that NGOs will be effective in their individual programmes if they do what they are good at. Working along comparative advantages is expected to enhance the division and delivery of coherent aid.

This question was asked in the online survey, with a positive overall response: 21% strongly agreed and 57% agreed with this statement. Nevertheless, room for improvement was identified, which is addressed more fully later in this report.<sup>13</sup>

*“... I am not sure we are there yet - there are many similar organisations in the DRA. We have not systematically identified comparative advantages.”*

**A majority of DRA staff support the finding that working together and sharing information makes it easier to identify gaps and needs for humanitarian aid, and to tailor activities accordingly.** For example, 70% of staff with more than 2 years' experience in the DRA (strongly) agreed with this statement. Nevertheless, there is also criticism from DRA staff regarding the extent to which this happens, with one staff member stating: *“Not a lot, some are sharing openly, others are reluctant in sharing. I guess we were able to get more info from the staff in the field and not from the NGOs,”* with another respondent opining that *“coordination needs still to be better adapted before tailoring activities.”*

**KIIs confirm that JRs continue to be mainly made up of individual programmes, making it difficult to have an overview of the effectiveness of the JR as a whole.** Indeed, it is often individual programmes (rather than the JR as a whole) that are assessed in evaluation reports. The following statement from the online survey confirmed this observation: *“I do not see how humanitarian assistance [under the JR] was provided differently from the normal humanitarian projects”*. Nevertheless, it was confirmed from several sources that, even though JRs are not always coherent programmes, the consortium structure avoids **duplication**.

It is worth asking why, then, the DRA is different to **any other coordination mechanism**. **A majority of DRA staff appeared to identify added value in the DRA** when compared with UN cluster meetings, UN Sector Working Group, INGO Network/Forum or Liaison Group with national authorities, since over 60% disagreed in the online survey that *“participation in JRs does not offer greater benefits than other coordination efforts”*. Reasons cited for the added value of the DRA include: the smaller size of the coordination mechanism, the potential for increased cooperation, inter-agency learning, and information exchange. In the field, exactly 50% of survey respondents shared this opinion, whereas 70% in the Netherlands see the DRA as distinct compared to other coordination mechanisms.

Examples exist where DRA members enhanced the effectiveness and coherence of aid through a collaborative approach:

- In Ethiopia, ‘side experience sharing’ facilitated lessons learned and information sharing between NGOs in specific regions. For example, Save the Children, Cordaid and CARE shared information and experiences about their respective local projects and expertise, and conducted monitoring activities together.

<sup>12</sup> Coherence = extent of coordination/ complementary of intervention

<sup>13</sup> See heading on relevance of planning process.

- In Nigeria, “IRC, with other NIJR2 members operating in food security and livelihoods in Ninava, has set up a Skype group to share beneficiary information and activities and coordinate together. This helped to ensure a better and unique beneficiary selection so there is no overlap in the locations and standardized wage rate for labours they were using.” It was confirmed in KII that this example could be directly linked to the DRA.
- In SJR3, War Child had programmes for children and referred their parents to other DRA programmes.
- In UKJR Save the Children, Dorcas, and Caritas (Cordaid) work together to determine which amount to provide people in need in livelihoods projects. As a result, aid recipients knew what to expect. A referral system is in place to make activities complementary. Although there are certain restrictions on sharing data on beneficiaries for privacy reasons, each NGO has set-up a hotline where people in need are directed to the relevant provider. In UKJR1, “discussing operational areas in order to avoid overlap, which is likely to occur especially since the geographical area at the contact line is quite small.” In UKJR2, “when SC office Closed in Zaporizhzhia, they continued to receive telephone calls from that area. SC then referred their former beneficiaries to Dorcas.”
- In YJR, “in Hajjah, the evaluator found that though two YAC JR partners were coordinating on a sub-district level through the cluster to avoid duplication.”

The effectiveness of the DRA is confirmed by targets-reached and the overall satisfaction of the beneficiaries. However, individual DRA members and their professionalism are the guarantors of the quality of assistance - not the DRA *per se*. Humanitarian standards are not consistently mentioned in project proposals, and there is room for the DRA to play a stronger role as a quality enhancer for its programmes. Where coordination is said to benefit humanitarian assistance in general, the evaluation finds that the DRA is particularly successful in avoiding duplication among NGO programmes.

#### ■ Sustainability<sup>14</sup>

**While the DRA serves to save lives in emergencies, there are clear advantages to follow-up (second and third phase) responses.** The benefits of an activity do not end after donor funding has been withdrawn since, in most chronic crises (e.g. Yemen, Syria, Nigeria, CAR, Iraq, South Sudan, Ukraine), the DRA has long-term presence through consecutive JRs. In chronic crises, geographic and sectoral focus may change, and therefore the OECD/DAC criterion is relevant. On the other hand, in sudden-onset acute crises (e.g. Ebola, Nepal and Vanuatu) DRA members stop working collaboratively after the end of the implementation period.

**Follow-up responses were said to provide continuity.** In total, 18 JR concept notes fully considered how activities were expected to be durable after the end of a JR. In the ETJR, for example, NGOs built on previous phases of the JR, working with the same people, areas, and sectors. During Phase II of the ETJR, there were fewer delays due to better preparation and earlier release of funds. Elsewhere, attention was often paid as to how to ensure sustainable access to safe drinking water through the construction/rehabilitation of wells and training of water management committees for maintenance of water, such as in AFJR1. In some JRs, sustainability was included in programme objectives, such as for UKJR3:

- *Objective 2: To help affected people with food security/livelihood assistance and support food production for sustainable results.*

<sup>14</sup> Even though investing in durable solutions is also part of the Grand Bargain Commitment no. 10, it was decided to keep the OECD/DAC criteria of sustainability in this chapter on delivery of aid. Resilience and the link with longer-term development activities will be discussed in Chapter 3.2.



- *Objective 3: To improve employment opportunities and income generation of the conflict affected populations for sustainable livelihoods.*

**Yet, in some contexts sustainability could not be achieved because of external factors.** In Ethiopia, for example, since many communities are dependent on rainfall persistent droughts will continue to affect livelihoods and resilience. The compound effects of recurrent droughts make the situation worse and, despite aiming for sustainability, ‘projects cannot do everything’.

A few examples were noted where collaboration under the DRA supported the sustainability of projects:

- In NPJR, an unknown organisation was interested in the durable method with which Oxfam builds its latrines that could be re-used for the long-term. Apparently, for one staff member, this was an ‘eye opener’.
- In ZIMJR, under the WASH component of the intervention, the District Development Fund (DDF) undertook capacity testing of boreholes. This ensured that there was information on the water yield of each borehole where there were plans to establish a solar garden. With this information, it was ensured that solar gardens would be established at places with high water-yield and therefore be more sustainable.

Sustainability appeared to be a challenging concept in the DRA, given its focus on life-saving assistance. A particular reason for this evaluation not being fully able to assess this criterion is because of the confusion regarding what sustainability entails and the way in which it differs from resilience. This is addressed later in this report.

#### ▪ **Impact/Reach**

A key question of the evaluation addressed whether the DRA consortium has realised greater **reach** than NGOs would have working individually. For this, it is first necessary to define reach. This becomes complicated since the evaluation identified differences in interpretations of the concept of reach between different JRs, or a lack of knowledge on the subject in general. Overall, the evaluation team identified two understandings of the term from interviews and documents: 1) the number of beneficiaries reached, or 2) the comprehensiveness of the assistance provided. These two definitions could actually contradict, since where joint programming could result in more reach in terms of quantity, it could also lead to less reach in terms of quality, and vice versa.

In fact, reach is only seldom defined in JR concept notes, with only 6 project proposals describing how working in cooperation would enhance reach. For the VJR for example, it was said *“that the end result will be greater than the sum of the JR’s individual parts and the end result is enhanced as compared to the value added from engaging in separate individual responses.”*

For SJR1, *“Many areas in Syria are difficult to reach, and travelling together (in convoys for example) can improve the ability to reach the beneficiaries. The joint response will result in a broad sectoral and geographical coverage in the region, and will reach many beneficiaries in different circumstances.”* Indeed, the size of the response allowed the JR to work across conflict lines and countries.

The meta-evaluation provided confirmation from a number of JRs that working together led to greater reach, although not always offering details on how and why this happened:

*CARJR1: “But the decrease in competition between the agencies allowed them to dedicate more time on implementation, from which a higher number of people has benefited.”*

*NJR2: “Again the fact that the NJR funds was allocated to 5 agencies working as a consortium, rather than just 1 agency, permitted in a shorter period of time, 3 of the 4 most affected States of the NE Nigeria to be reached. The collaboration within the NJR2 also enable the consortium to reach the most*

*vulnerable persons in the 20 LGAs who benefitted from the diverse range of services delivered through the NJR2 or through referrals to other agencies”*

Where data on the topic of reach is available, statistics indicate that most JRs have **overreached their targets** in terms of numbers of beneficiaries. On the assumption that numbers do not consider double-counting, the VJR was able to reach 310% of its initial target. The numbers are thus impressive, but the evaluation team cannot confirm a direct link between overachievement in terms of quantity of people reached and cooperation between NGOs.

**Field Finding:** Field findings confirmed that JRs often reach impressive numbers of people. Each phase of the UKJR has so far come in on-budget (or slightly under) and has over-delivered, so that 28% more beneficiaries (representing an extra 16,873 people) have benefitted at no additional expense to MoFA. In ETJRI, 616,759 beneficiaries were reached which represented an extra 191,838 more people than were targeted. In ZIMJRI, a total of 297,092 beneficiaries were reached, which represented an extra 47,892 more people than were targeted.

The online survey provided more details on this topic. 68% percent of respondents (strongly) agreed with the statement that *‘the collaborative approach has ensured greater reach than when NGOs were working separately’*. However just under 50% of the respondents (strongly) agreed that JRs *‘enabled my organisation to reach a greater number of beneficiaries than would have been possible if acting alone’*. With this, it is possible to conclude that there is no common opinion amongst JR staff as to whether the DRA has increased reach in general. A clearer result can be seen when reach is defined as quantity, where not even half of the staff opined that the DRA has increased this. Most explanations from the online survey stated indeed that they could not confirm whether the JR increased the number of beneficiaries reached, considering that the focus should be on the quality-side.

The evaluation identified a number of examples where JRs enhanced reach:

- In NJR3, 4 partners in 4 sectors in one area refer beneficiaries to each other’s activities and use each other’s offices. Programmes are complementary.
- In SJR3, at the Kick-off meeting, WVI, SV/IRC, Care, Save the Children and Warchild discussed how they could work together in Kafr Nobl, close to Aleppo, in five sectors (Health, CP, FSL, Education and WASH). Although all have their own implementation procedures, their programmes are complementary and have the same target group. WVI focuses on Wash rehabilitation and Save the Children on multi-purpose cash.
- In SJR3, the government controlled area of Jebel Samman, ZOA works on WASH and ICCO (ACT Alliance) on FSL and Heath. NGOs coordinated before submitting the concept notes.

Impact is also about the unintended effects of operations, and so the evaluation looked at whether a **conflict-sensitive** approach was pursued across the DRA. Unfortunately, the project proposals did not give much evidence on this: a third of project proposals did not even mention conflict sensitivity. On others, possible tensions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries were a main concern in risk analyses. 8 evaluation reports confirmed that the JR did not result in any particularly negative consequences, and where unintended effects did occur, they were managed accordingly.

Results are inconclusive about whether the DRA as a consortium has led to increased reach in the humanitarian aid delivered by participating NGOs. However, a definition of the concept would help in clarifying this – and in the context of the DRA, it would make sense for reach to be about the quality and comprehensiveness of assistance offered by programmes. It is difficult to explain JRs consistently exceeding targets of beneficiaries as a feature of the collaborative approach of the DRA. The impact of the DRA would benefit from a more consistent conflict-sensitive approach.



Overall, assistance provided under the DRA was timely, relevant, and effective. Data indicates that DRA members are professional and quality implementers. The DRA could enhance its role to guarantee its quality and enhance its sustainability.

However, the real potential of the DRA for improving humanitarian assistance is to be found by building on synergies evident in JRs. It is clear that the so-called collaborative impact, as a result of the DRA, has grown over the years. In the mid-term evaluation from 2016, the added value of the DRA was to be found mainly in the Netherlands. Now, however, there are growing numbers of examples in different countries of different partners working together in various ways on different issues that indicate that the DRA is no longer a Dutch story alone. Even the most pessimistic voices agree that the DRA succeeds at avoiding duplication of timely, relevant and effective individual programmes, and that occasional synergies lead to better delivery of aid.



*Female members of Luseche Garden Project, Hwange District, Zimbabwe, explain how they organize their work.*

## 3.2. Contribution to the Grand Bargain Commitments

Originating from the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel Report on Humanitarian Financing ('Too Important to Fail: Addressing the humanitarian financing gap'), the Grand Bargain Commitments aim to improve the efficiency of humanitarian action and propose actions to overcome the lack of available resources. The Grand Bargain is currently signed by 22 donors, including the Netherlands, and 28 organisations, including Care International, IRC (but not SV), and World Vision.<sup>15</sup>

Addressing **to what extent the DRA mechanism has contributed to meeting the Grand Bargain Commitments** is valid for two reasons. First, it was an explicit request of MoFA to assess what DRA members are doing to advance the commitments of the Grand Bargain. Second, since the DRA aims to increase efficiency and effectiveness in providing humanitarian aid in crisis situations, it is worthwhile to ask how far these two initiatives overlap.

DRA members have decided to focus on a number of DRA commitments, which are most appropriate for the DRA and can be integrated into JRs. These are transparency, the use of cash-based programming, localization, the participation revolution, and enhanced engagement between humanitarian and development actors.<sup>16</sup> This evaluation report intended to focus on these commitments, but data collection allowed for an indication of progress towards other commitments as well, in order to reflect the call by the Independent Grand Bargain Report<sup>17</sup> to increase coherence within the Grand Bargain.<sup>18</sup>

### ▪ Commitment 1: Greater transparency

**At this stage, it is not possible to assess whether the DRA has contributed to greater transparency, despite the obligation to report to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).** The commitment of transparency is a key commitment for MoFA, since the Netherlands was the co-convenor, together with the World Bank, for both the negotiations and work stream. The main tool used under this commitment is the IATI. Since 2016 *"all organisations that received ODA funds from the central Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, had to report to IATI (replacing bilateral reporting)."*<sup>19</sup> While 2016 was still a transition phase to provide time for some organisations to make the necessary changes to be able to report to IATI, as of 2017, all DRA members are obliged to use the IATI for reporting.

In principle, DRA members support reporting through the IATI as a way to enhance transparency of funding and decision-making, in particular for the Dutch tax-payer. The challenges are to be found in the practical implication of using the IATI:

- First, many DRA members work in international structures, where other reporting requirements may exist. SV/IRC reports to the IATI as a requirement of its European donors, whereas they are not obliged to do so for their New York offices.
- Second, there continues to be confusion about how to report (per sector or result outcome), and how results of humanitarian programmes are to be measured. Humanitarian Response Plan indicators do not necessarily correspond with JR logframe indicators, even when they are based on them. Guidelines for humanitarian reporting are still under development.

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<sup>15</sup> As stated on the Grand Bargain website (<http://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861>) on 27 September. The evaluation team was told that Save the Children and Terre des Hommes had also signed by now.

<sup>16</sup> The inception report actually suggested to focus on only three commitments, namely localization, participation revolution, and enhanced engagement between humanitarian and development actors, but this focus had to be adapted to reflect the discussions and findings of the data collection phase.

<sup>17</sup> GPPI and Inspire Consortium. Independent Grand Bargain Report, 8 June 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Even though a number of joint responses were established before the Grand Bargain, they have been included in the analysis. The commitments build on reflections within the humanitarian sector, that existed before May 2016, and it was considered not productive to consider a part of the DRA only.

<sup>19</sup> Grand Bargain annual self-reporting exercise: The Netherlands, 2016

- Third, the manual submission of data is said to be time-consuming. Whereas larger NGOs, such as Oxfam, have the means to develop an expensive automated reporting system to facilitate these procedures, smaller NGOs do not have that possibility.
- Fourth, DRA (and MoFA) staff have no idea yet what the actual extracts produced by the IATI will look like. The idea is that everyone can visit the IATI and request an overview of the humanitarian funding of the sector, country, donor or NGO of interest to them. At this stage, it remains unclear, though, how funding streams and consortia will be calculated: per donor, NGO, INGO structure, JR or country. At the moment, the reports generated under the IATI are not user-friendly.
- Fifth, the target audience of the IATI continues to be unclear: beneficiaries, partners, donors or the Dutch public? How and when will the IATI be used? Will Dutch citizens be interested in consulting the IATI? Is the information tailored enough, or will there be an information overload?

The meta-evaluation provided an additional angle to the question of whether humanitarian funding under the DRA was transparent and open. A comparison of the evaluation reports suggests that two-way communication between NGOs and implementing partners was largely absent. Reporting went from the field to the Netherlands, and evaluations suggest that information was insufficiently shared with implementing partners and field staff. The NIJR1 evaluator, for example, recommended to *“increase transparency by including the implementation chain down to the implementing partner on the ground in each joint response proposal, included related control over funding by each link in the chain.”* Almost no evaluation looked at whether implementing partners could access information on JR funding, and not one referred to the IATI, including those from 2017.

The online survey shows high hopes from DRA staff to improve transparency through the IATI, especially vis-à-vis the Dutch public. It was not expected that the IATI would be accessed by beneficiaries. About 45% (strongly) agreed with the statement that *“the JRs have collected quality data about the operations and provided open access to these data by the Dutch public and the relevant local authorities and beneficiaries,”* but a significant proportion of survey respondents (40%) remained ‘neutral’, explaining that the IATI has just started.

The commitment of transparency is key for MoFA, and reporting to the IATI is central to this. Despite obligations to report through the IATI as of 2017, however, it remains unclear whether the DRA has contributed to the commitment of greater transparency by using the IATI or not. Clarity is expected from further adapting the IATI to humanitarian reporting and with guidance from MoFA and the DRA. Transparency about funding and information-sharing with partners can be improved.

#### ▪ **Commitment 2: support and funding tools for local and national responders**

**Every Joint Response engages local NGOs and community based organisations – in some cases, the bulk of activities are implemented through local partners – but there is lack of agreement about providing them more direct funding.** DRA members and MoFA must consider how localization can be improved within the framework of the DRA. The starting point may be budgeting for more substantial local capacity-building efforts.

‘Localization’, as this commitment is often referred to, is simultaneously one of the best-known and most difficult parts of the Grand Bargain. First, it is more than capacity-building alone: *“Localisation is about strengthening the roles and capacities of national/local actors, including by providing them more and better quality direct funding.”*<sup>20</sup> Second, the objective “to achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible”

<sup>20</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant & Smruti Panel, Understanding the Localisation Debate, GMI, 10 July 2017.

relates to one of the most burning discussions within the humanitarian sector – namely how to fund local organisations.

An assessment of the contribution of the DRA towards localisation is difficult due to several factors:

- First, there continues to be a lack of clear understanding amongst DRA members, and also amongst the international humanitarian sector at large, about the exact definition of terms and concepts used. For example, what exactly is a 'local actor'? Does a local branch of an INGO, registered in the country, count as a 'local actor'? What does 'as directly as possible' mean? What counts towards the 25%? etc. Attempts to clarify, including by the IASC Localisation Marker Task Force, have so far failed to resolve this confusion.
- Second, the different set-ups and structures of DRA members make a common understanding challenging and an assessment of what % of humanitarian funding goes to local and national responders very difficult.
- Third, different DRA members work with local actors to different degrees: whereas some NGOs (e.g. Save the Children) are mainly about self-implementation, others (e.g. ICCO) principally deliver aid through (local) implementing partners. Furthermore, the potential for adapting ways of working differentiates between NGOs.
- Fourth, discussions on localization mainly take place within NGOs; DRA members are left to figure out their positions and interpretations for themselves before negotiating at DRA-level. This makes the work of the DRA working group on Localization slow and difficult.
- Fifth, a number of NGOs have signed up to the Charter4Change (Care, Cordaid, Oxfam, Tearfund and endorsed by ACT Alliance/ICCO), which has a slightly different formulation of this concept, and states the objective as: "Increase direct funding to southern-based NGOs for humanitarian action." For the Charter4Change, subcontracting is not sufficient to advance localization, which could be permissible under the Grand Bargain.
- Sixth, the contexts in which the JRs work are very diverse and allow for different degrees of working with local partners. In SJR and NPJR, for example, the country-contexts invite mainly working through local actors. In the Ebola response, however, room for supporting local actors was limited: *"International organisations tended to focus on specific pet projects, rather than strengthening the health sector as a whole."* The evaluation report of the VJR did not refer to possible capacity-building activities at all.

**Field Findings:** In Ethiopia, capacity building activities were instrumental towards ensuring the future maintenance of water schemes. Local committees, often composed of 30-40% women, were trained in the functioning of equipment and how to maintain pumps without external help.

In Ukraine, the JR has organized a series of capacity-building trainings for local member staff and frontline workers. Topics have so far included monitoring and evaluation, project cycle management, and mental health.

In Zimbabwe, in Mwenezi District (Masvingo), Terres des Hommes, Mwenezi Training and Development Centre (MTDC), Lutheran Development Service (LDS) conducted a joint training needs assessment and worked together on a number of farmer capacity-building programmes (on gardens) as a way of supporting ZIMJR food security and to strengthen community resilience.

The discussion on how direct funding should be is a core challenge. If, under the localization debate, it is understood that 25% of the humanitarian funding should go directly to local and national responders, the transit function of the DRA becomes questionable. As it is, a possible route of DRA funds is from *the MoFA → Dutch NGO → its international/sister affiliation → implementing partner*. Is the transit function



of the DRA mechanism actually counterproductive to implementing the Grand Bargain commitments? When localization is understood as decentralization<sup>21</sup> alone, it could be said that the DRA is only a temporary solution until local actors are perceived as being strong and trustworthy enough to receive the funding directly.



*Water quality: before (right) and after (left) the ETJR intervention*

At the other end of the debate, many donors, including the MoFA, do not have the (legal) capacity to transfer funding directly to local organisations. In the Self-Report of the Netherlands it is said that *“there are no legal impediments to channel money to national responders”*. Yet, a recurrent argument in the international debate is that donors would not be able to implement quality-assurances to the tax payer and would prefer larger blocs of funds to a limited number of recipients. At the moment, NGOs take over that accountability under the assumption that they have a better overview of which local actors are able to provide the required quality of assistance than the donor. This perspective thrives better in the transformation<sup>22</sup> interpretation of the localization debate.

Both the MoFA and DRA have intentions to include or expand capacity-building of national responders. The most recent UKJR narrative report specifically referred to learning processes going beyond capacity-building when working with local actors. The question is thus not on the ‘if’, but on the ‘how’. The evaluation shows that capacity-building activities are part of almost

every JR proposal, except for in 2 natural disaster response situations (the Ebola and Vanuatu JRs), the first North-Iraq crisis, which was early in the DRA, and the first Yemen response, which suffered from difficult access to the country.

This picture is broadly confirmed by the meta-evaluation. A number of evaluation reports saw room for improvement in the capacity-building activities of JRs. In the NIJR1 evaluation, for example, it is written that *“aside training of implementing NGO partners, there is no evidence to show if NIJR1 conducted training for other NGOs and actors operating in the focal States and communities.”*

Other evaluation reports praised the capacity-building of JRs:

*“The NJR2 was seen as one of the interventions that provided capacity building support to the State Agencies in order to improve their capacity to coordinate and respond to the emergency situations. As compared with the NJR1 where agencies such as SEMA were not involved in capacity building initiatives, the evaluation team can conclude there have been improvements in the collaboration with local authorities in the LGA’s where projects are implemented.”*

The online survey confirms that, on the one hand, JRs are indeed prioritizing capacity building, while on the other hand staff consider that JRs could do much more. Regarding what role the DRA should have in terms of promoting localization, there are two main sets of thoughts as follows:

<sup>21</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant & Smruti Panel, Understanding the Localisation Debate, GMI, 10 July 2017. Centralisation = *“Under this interpretation, ‘localisation’ can be achieved if strategic, operational and financial decisions are made close to the at risk or affected areas, and if 25% of financial resources go ‘as directly as possible’ to ‘local’ actors, i.e. in proximity to the crisis area, irrespective of who they are.”*

<sup>22</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant & Smruti Panel, Understanding the Localisation Debate, GMI, 10 July 2017. Transformation = *“sees localisation success in terms of much stronger national capacities and leadership.”*

- The DRA could offer guidance on how localization can be translated into operations, including practical ideas on what NGOs can do concretely, rather than subcontracting alone. For example, do local organisations participate in kick-off or mid-term meetings? Are they involved in the project design or reporting? Can they influence programming?
- The DRA could organize more joint capacity-building activities as an integral part of a JR, provided that appropriate budget is available – it should be clearly highlighted which parts of the budgets are used for corresponding activities. This would demand an explicit support of the donor that these efforts do not come at the expense of life-saving programmes and could require longer-term planning in certain situations.

The localization debate puts the DRA-partnership as a whole to the test - both in terms of validating its *raison d'être* and finding a compromise between the different characteristics and working cultures of its members. This challenge is not unique to the DRA (the Start Network also experiences this), but it remains necessary that MoFA and DRA members jointly sort out this challenge and mutually agree on a single interpretation of role of the DRA in an open and transparent manner. Furthermore, the DRA would benefit from a clear demarcation of what assistance can be reported as progressing localization, together with commitment from all DRA partners that capacity-building of local implementing partners and local authorities can be a part of any JR.

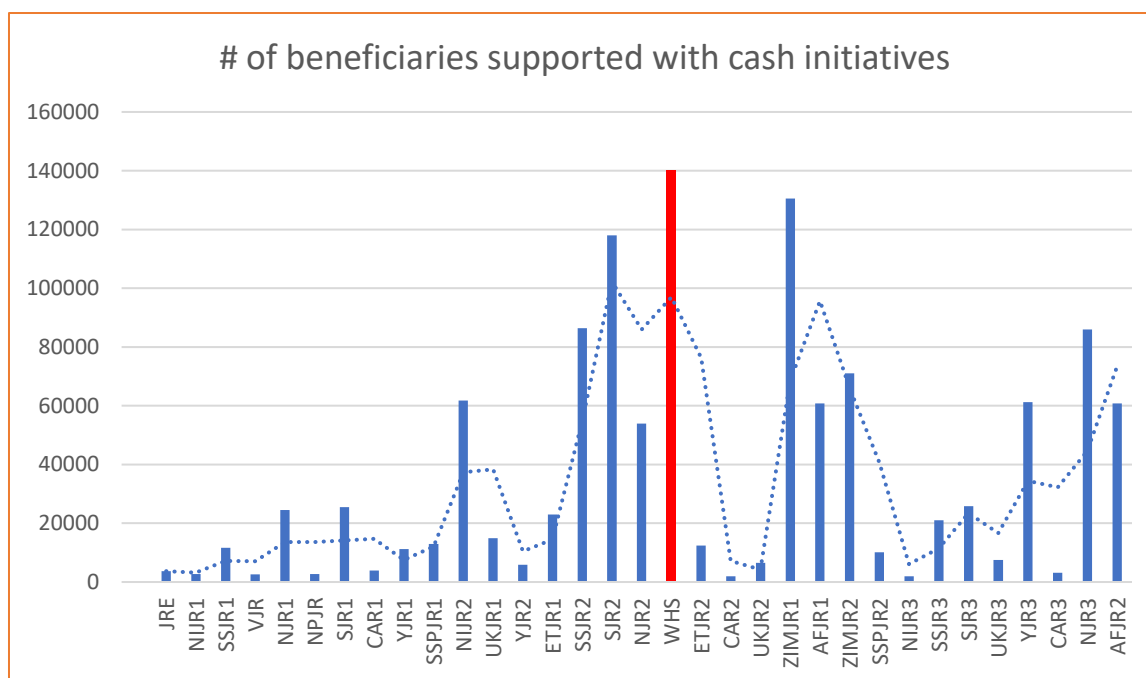
### ▪ **Commitment 3: Cash-based programming**

**Good progress has been made towards the call for increased use of cash-based programming.** First, from a numerical point of view, a growing number of beneficiaries have been assisted through cash-based aid. Of course, differences exist between JRs and contexts, but a growing trend can be identified, and is confirmed by increasing attention to it in narratives and evaluation reports.

**Field Finding:** In Zimbabwe, as a result of market assessments carried out in a number of communities, JR members decided to shift from food assistance to cash transfers.



*Focus group with cash-for-work beneficiaries at the contact line In Ukraine*



*Disclaimer: Numbers of beneficiaries as included under cash-related activities in logframe. These included also mixed activities, since the documents did not allow to distinguish how many people in need received cash, vouchers or in-kind. JR are sorted according to their starting date.*

Second, the meta-evaluation also indicated a growing tendency to use and coordinate cash-based programming, including for less obvious sectors. In ETJR1, for example:

*“The use of resources allocated for livestock support (restocking) to cash payment was a conscious decision by the implementing NGO (CARE) and in line with the FDRMC guideline to relocate the fund to cash payment. Because of a prolonged drought in the target area (shortage of feed and water for restocking), cash rather than livestock was required by the beneficiaries. Result of the assessment indicated that 29.04% of the households targeted for emergency food security supports have received cash/voucher supports.”*

The advantages of cash-based programming, as described in the Grand Bargain commitments, were confirmed in a number of evaluation reports, such as for NJR2:

*“On cash programming the beneficiaries confirmed their satisfaction with the unrestricted cash programming that was implemented in the NJR2. Beneficiaries used the funds to meet their most urgent needs. Beneficiaries were however less satisfied with the restricted cash transfer programming because they could not decide for themselves what to spend the money on. ... Cash programming was also seen as a way of boosting the local economies in such a way that the NJR2 partners did not have bring in vehicles with loads of food stuffs but rather depended on the local market to supply the food needed by the IDP’s.”*

In SJR2 it was explained that *“Our findings confirm that cash assistance ensures appropriate assistance and promotes dignity.”*

**Field Finding:** In Ethiopia, cash handouts were reported to have indirectly benefited disrupted markets through the injection of cash.

The evaluation identified two important considerations for further exploration when it comes to cash-based programming. First, harmonization of cash-based assistance is crucial since *“when communities are receiving different amounts from different NGOs from the same consortium operating nearby each other, it understandably can create tensions”* (SSPJ1 evolution report; similar in AFJR1).



Second, it was noted in the KII that cash-based assistance may have undesired effects in terms of decreased interest and possibilities for collecting feedback from beneficiaries. There is also concern that cash fails to promote resilience. NGO staff called for the decision for cash-based assistance to be based on the needs of the context, especially since, as first response for people on the move, cash may not be the most appropriate means of assistance. In addition, markets may not be able to deal with an inflow of cash, and inflation and depreciation (that may come with an injection of cash) may seriously hamper the desired effects of cash handouts. Cash also brings along security risks and higher vulnerability for both aid providers and recipients. NGO staff also called for cash-based assistance to be part of a more comprehensive programme, in combination with larger WASH or livelihoods programmes, or as a temporary means until more sustainable outputs are in place. In addition, the appropriateness of restricted vs. unrestricted cash deserves more attention.

**Field Finding:** The UKJR coordinator is an active member of the UN Cash Working Group. This ensured that the UKJR adhered to international standards and recommendations when defining the amount of cash used for Multi-Purpose Cash activities. There was clear evidence of coherence in procedures between UKJR member NGOs. In addition, field interviews reported high levels of satisfaction among beneficiaries regarding cash-handouts and business grants.

An increase in cash-based assistance is probably the most practical of all the GB commitments, since it consists of concrete action for NGOs. The DRA shows progress under this commitment, as evidenced by the increased use of cash as a response option and the satisfaction of beneficiaries with this type of assistance. However, cash-based assistance should only be provided when the context is appropriate, and should not be an obligation under the DRA. Furthermore, for this type of assistance to be efficient and effective, an equal amount of cash should be provided by all DRA members and efforts should continue to involve people in need in the project cycle. The DRA could assist existing international initiatives, such as Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) in fostering learning about the requirements for, and implications of, cash-based assistance.

#### ▪ **Commitment 4: Reduced management costs (not a specific DRA focus)**

**Management-wise, most benefits of the DRA manifest in simplified award and reporting procedures at the Netherlands level.** In chapter 3.1, we have written that the DRA has been successful at avoiding duplication of activities in the field. The extent to which the JR has led to reduced management costs is more difficult to measure in numbers for two reasons: 1) an absence of a clear overview of overhead costs along the DRA funding chain, and 2) the absence of a baseline or costing of an alternative. However, to provide an assessment of possible progress we can turn to qualitative data.

In the online survey, DRA staff were asked to what extent they agreed if “*management costs and the administrative burden of delivering humanitarian aid are reduced as a result of JRs*”. Only 11% disagreed, nobody strongly disagreed, 36% agreed and 10% strongly agreed. A large part of the respondents, however, remained neutral.

The advantages were found in proposal writing/short concept notes and simplified logframes and reporting, especially in comparison to other donor channels. Whereas it was perceived that the MoFA has a reduced administrative burden with the DRA, it was said that, for the JR Lead, management costs increased. Regarding implementation, it was suggested that JRs led to few changes for NGOs and implementing partners in the field, since programmes remained mostly individual efforts. Finally, the DRA mechanism required considerable time and effort for NGO staff in the Netherlands, something that will be fully addressed in chapter 3.

**Field findings:** In Ukraine, according to local staff, management costs were reduced because the programme staff channel communications through the lead NGO, Dorcas, rather than communicating with the Dutch MFA directly.

In Ethiopia, member NGOs cited reduced management costs, namely being able to partially fund some staff, as the most significant, indirect benefit of the JR.

The evaluation reports show a wide variety of existing common services, exchange of material and information or sharing of facilities and methodologies (e.g. awareness raising tools, monitoring tools, sharing of offices and accommodation facilities, beneficiary selection methodologies, trainings, harmonization of hygiene kits). Even though this sort of thing is difficult to quantify, it demonstrates that the DRA has the possibility to contribute to reduced management costs. The ETJR2 evaluation notes that: *“They tried to improve efficiency of the responses (reduce overhead costs) through linking the support with the existing offices or partners/government stakeholders’ offices. To reduce costs, they freely used government stores, in collaboration with the woreda sector offices.”*

Nevertheless, as the evaluation of the NPJR identified, there remains room for improvement and the greatest hindrance to reducing management costs are the different internal rules and procedures of DRA members and their implementing partners:

*“Potentially the DRA framework could also stimulate the sharing of resources (compare the role of the logistics cluster in overall earthquake response in Nepal). In discussions key informants have been sceptical as to the scope and feasibility of sharing resources such as procurement capacity, HR capacity etc. Reasons given for such scepticism related to member organisations’ internal rules and procedures which are often defined in the context of federations or networks that the members are also party to.”*

During the AFJR, when Save the Children had too many lamps donated, joint logistics were considered in order to share surplus with partners for winterization programmes. The attempt failed, since in the end Save the Children would have had to pay for the transport of the lamps to NGOs in the field.

There is evidence that the DRA has led to reduced management costs, including through this joint evaluation. However, there seems to be an unevenness between the Netherlands and the field. Most benefits from the DRA seem to manifest in reduced time and effort in proposal writing and reporting. In the field, however, there remains room for improvement towards reducing administrative costs during activity implementation. The DRA could disseminate good practices regarding reduced management costs as a way of providing other JRs with ideas. Also, more clarification is needed on the actual cost structure of the DRA mechanism.

#### ▪ **Commitment 5: Improved joint needs assessments (not a specific DRA focus)**

**Sharing data on needs and beneficiaries remains ad hoc and there is room to improve joint needs assessments.** Indications as to whether the DRA has contributed to the commitment to improving impartial needs assessment is rather slim. First, it should be emphasized that JR programmes are based on international needs assessments, such as Humanitarian Response Plans, Flash Appeals or national documents. The need for independent needs assessments by NGOs could thus possibly duplicate what has already been done, and, anyway, this is not what the Grand Bargain Commitment actually asks for. Rather, the evaluation looked for evidence as to whether NGOs shared data on beneficiaries or harmonized post distribution monitoring (PDM) and other monitoring tools and feedback mechanisms.

The meta-evaluation demonstrated that this only happened ad hoc and small-scale. From KIIs, it was learned that attempts to harmonize PDM tools in Somalia by Care, including to make them more gender-sensitive, were referred to. The ETJR2 evaluation reported that almost all JR members facilitated joint monitoring visits with government partners. NJR1 consortium and local implementing agencies were said to conduct *“participatory rapid needs assessment in all the target communities and amongst key*

target beneficiary groups, prior to the commencement of interventions". Examples of joint assessments and monitoring and beneficiary referrals were also reported in the Hub Working Groups in SJR2. In VJR, Care assisted World Vision staff to undertake needs assessments.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, several evaluation reports call for (greater) harmonization of the different approaches to initial needs assessments, MEAL Tools, or the joint conduct of baseline assessments. In some JRs, like SJR1 or SSJR1, there was no time for proper and joint needs assessments since, because of the severity of the needs, programmes started immediately.

**Field findings:** UKJR members have intended to share beneficiary data with one another to cross-check their lists and avoid duplication and fraud. However, they cannot share these lists freely due to the Law of Ukraine on Personal Data Protection. Nevertheless, there have been ad hoc examples of referral and information-sharing. For example, when Dorcas commenced a new programme in Zaporosk Oblisk, Save the Children provided them a list of former micro-grants beneficiaries there, and Dorcas contacted these individuals and eventually selected several of them for assistance.

In Wenezi District (Masvingo) during ZIMJR, Terres des Hommes, Mwenezi Training and Development Centre (MTDC), Lutheran Development Service (LDS) conducted joint training needs assessment. In Hwange District, World Vision was able to carry out joint needs assessment and programming with Matebeleland Aids Council (MAC) and as a result was able to target vulnerable and HIV infected people and incorporate them into the project.

Needs assessments and data collection was done in ETJR in order to prioritise certain communities (who/what) through a bottom-up approach with back-and-forth communication between NGOs and the government. Member NGOs consulted local authorities and visited communities to assess the most pressing needs, and planned their actions accordingly. One interviewee suggested that, at times, the government had too much influence over targeting decisions and provided false information that may have compromised the quality of interventions.

DRA members continue to rely on international needs assessments for their programmes as a means to ensure that aid is needs-based. Although doubts exist on the quality and timeliness of these assessments, they are used to provide common ground between DRA members for planning purposes. In addition, there are a few examples of NGOs and their partners working together in the field to share data on needs and beneficiaries and the harmonization of monitoring tools, including outside the JR framework. Joint needs assessments should be considered when it is feasible and provides added value. The role of the DRA in this aspect remains vague.

#### ▪ **Commitment 6: Participation Revolution**

**Individual NGOs excel at mobilizing the participation of beneficiaries from design to delivery – but there is no evidence that the DRA mechanism contributes to this.** Indeed, this Grand Bargain Commitment is more than what is often understood as basic accountability to beneficiaries, which are feedback mechanisms. The meta-evaluation allowed a comparison to which degree JRs involved the target population in the project cycle. In Nigeria, beneficiaries were involved in the project design through the needs assessment consultations. In Nepal, they were involved in the implementation phase, but less in project design and monitoring. The quality of complaints response mechanisms and community feedback systems was said to vary between NPJR member organisations. In CARJR1, there was active participation of the target population during implementation, yet, the report noted *"insufficient involvement of local youth organisations, administrative authorities such as the Mayor, the Prefect, Military Police and community leaders when recruiting local staff."*

<sup>23</sup> Care and WVI were co-located during the Vanuatu Joint Response

For some acute responses, participation across the project cycle proved challenging. For the JRE:

*“The Ebola context made it difficult for greater beneficiary input into the programme design. However, key informants in the field indicated that although there was evidence of adaptation, given the urgency of the outbreak, the projects were less receptive to changes based on feedback from community members, and projects were largely implemented as originally conceptualised.”*

Security restrictions in government-controlled areas equally limited the possibilities for participation revolution for SJR.

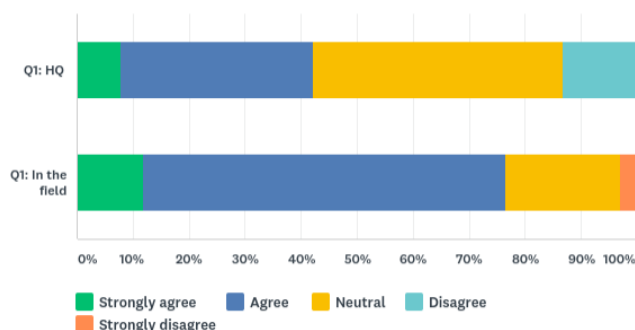
In addition, there are examples where feedback mechanisms led to the adaptation of programmes. The SSPJR appeared *“to have maintained relatively strong achievements in terms of following through on its word to beneficiaries and incorporating their feedback.”* The field visits presented additional evidence.

**Field Finding:** After realising that, for some cash transfers in ZIMJR, beneficiaries were having difficulties using mobile phones due to the cash crisis, IRC established an arrangement with Econet Wireless, whereby IRC HQ in New York transferred funds into Econet’s Nostro (offshore) account. In turn Econet Wireless guaranteed cash payments to beneficiaries via EcoCash (mobile money transfer) agents mobilized and supported with cash by Econet Wireless.

In UKJR, due to difficulties beneficiaries faced receiving cash-grants due to the banks being closed, a system was established to get money to beneficiaries using the post-delivery service. This system had the added benefit of reaching bed-ridden beneficiaries too, who would otherwise have been unable to go out to collect cash-hand-outs.

Finally, the evaluation highlighted some examples of technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback. The SJR1 evaluation report noted interesting efforts in terms of beneficiary accountability, including follow-up mechanisms, such as usage of WhatsApp or complaint boxes. In AFJR1, there was a special hotline for female beneficiaries. In Ethiopia, the IRC piloted a feedback response mechanism where cases were categorised based on sensitivity and urgency in order to enhance accountability. It was shared during the launch meeting of ETJRII, and reportedly adopted by other member NGOs.

Q7 4. We have done a good job ensuring participation and feedback from people receiving aid throughout the project, including during the design, execution and evaluation phases.



The online staff survey provided an overall positive response to the statement regarding whether the DRA has *“done a good job ensuring participation and feedback from people receiving aid throughout the project, including during the design, execution and evaluation phase”*. There is, in fact, a clear difference between respondents from the field and the Netherlands, with 42% of respondents in the Netherlands

(strongly) agreeing to this statement, and 75% of respondents from the field (strongly) agreeing. Staff involved in more than 10 JRs are most positive, with 92% (strongly) agreeing to the statement.

In short, it seems that DRA members have included beneficiary participation in their programmes. The positive assessments of field staff and experienced DRA staff members contribute, in particular, to this finding. However, this evaluation does not recognize a direct causal link with the DRA for this, since responsibility for accountability is mainly found at NGO-level. There are examples and statements that suggest that feedback leads to actual adaptation. The DRA mechanism funds are flexible enough to allow for these adaptations (the 25% rule). More real-time evaluations instead of final evaluations could allow up-to-date feedback from beneficiaries. The DRA could focus on awareness raising of the actual dimension of the participation revolution and the sharing of good practices. An in-depth comparison of the participation mechanisms of DRA members would be an interesting exercise.

#### ▪ **Commitment 7: Multi-year planning and funding (not a specific DRA focus)**

**The DRA mechanism has not capitalized on its potential to improve multi-year planning and funding.**

In its Self-Report, the Netherlands states that 60% of its 2016 humanitarian budget was provided via multi-annual commitments. The Dutch Relief Fund is indeed a multi-annual funding tool, yet the JRs require annual approval. As we have seen under the criterion of timeliness, this annual renewal of grants leads to practical and inefficient results in the field. Also in the Netherlands, staff are required to rewrite project proposals annually, even when they know that the humanitarian needs in some crises, especially protracted crises like Syria, Yemen or South Sudan, will not end within a year. Staff and evaluation reports recognize that long-term planning for certain activities, including capacity-building of local actors, would be more efficient.

**Field Finding:** In Ethiopia, the already short length of ETJRs (6 months per phase) was complicated by delays (and a lack of streamlined approach) in securing Government agreements, practically reducing implementation at times to just three months (depending on activity, region, and level of government approval required). There was thus a rush to spend the full budget.

Also in Ethiopia, recurrent crises impacting a vast area and population meant a constant need for more assistance: as one issue was addressed, another would arise. This meant that the impact of short-term intervention were limited in the context of a this long-term crisis. In some instances, the necessary longer-term support required by communities was only realised as a result of NGOs' continued presence in a region due to commitments with other, non-JR projects.

Particularly with regard to the specific nature of DRA funding, which is life-saving, the DRA mechanism has unused potential to contribute better to the commitment to increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding. Clarification is still needed as to what degree and how a JR can allow multi-year planning for crises that will likely require a multi-annual response, but when this can be clarified, it is likely to result in greater efficiency.

#### ▪ **Commitment 8: Reduced earmarking (not a specific DRA focus)**

**Decisions regarding which crisis response to fund, and for how much, are ultimately political.** The DRA could be perceived as less politicized if these decisions were not made by political actors.

This evaluation has little to add to the following statement: *“Most of the Dutch humanitarian budget is spent either complete unearmarked or softly earmarked [...]. The Netherlands deliberately allows for flexibility and relies to a large extent on the competence of the receiving organisation. The Netherlands*

*does already comply with the target of unearmarked funding.*<sup>24</sup> The evaluation has shown that the DRA does indeed allow a fair degree of flexibility at implementation within JRs. This allows NGOs to adapt their programmes when needed. Almost all evaluation reports (the SJR2 is an exception, making no mention of this) conclude that flexibility is a strong feature of the JR.

At the strategic decision-making level – namely, when it is decided which JR to fund – there remains possible donor influence in terms of deciding what amount of funding should go to which crisis. The evaluation showed that there have been a small number of cases (e.g. DRC and Uganda) in which the DRA members asked for funding, but were not provided with it. The evaluation team was informed that this was mainly due to the MoFA policy to keep reserves in the DRA funding pot until the end of the year/funding phase, and differences of opinion regarding whether a crisis was acute or protracted. For example from the Ethiopia field visit, it was noted that requests for more time to spend the allocated budget were denied. This was particularly challenging during ETJRI, when large sums of money were made available and communicated only 15 days before close-out.

This commitment is mainly directed at the strategic level, and therefore the MoFA. The DRA has confirmed that hard earmarking is not a common practice in the Netherlands. However, the decision regarding which crisis to fund for how much money remains a political decision. Even if there is little evidence that decisions are based on political considerations, the DRA could be perceived as less politicized if these decisions were no longer made by political actors.

- **Commitment 9: Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements (not a specific DRA focus)**

**The DRA has clearly contributed towards simplifying reporting requirements for member NGOs to the MoFA** – something that has been mentioned several times as one of the major advantages of the DRA. All reporting and communication is coordinated by the JR Lead, which allows the MoFA to have just one contact per JR. NGO staff appreciate this clarity, but do not appreciate additional requests for information by MoFA staff outside agreed channels.

The existing system provides the JR Lead with the responsibility to consolidate reports and a duty to maintain an overview of the different activities by the JR members. The role of the Lead will be discussed further in chapter 3, nevertheless, it requires toeing a line between extracting information from NGOs, while not over-demanding reporting from the field. Having only mid-term and final reports was said to be insufficient for providing information for the Lead to do a proper coordination job.

Harmonised reporting requirements continue to suffer from three key difficulties. First, beneficiary counting continues to vary between members, regarding whether to double count or not, or include indirect as well as direct beneficiaries etc. Second, the DRA uses different terminology, such as ‘added value’, changed to ‘collaborative value,’ changed to ‘collaborative impact’. For field staff, the terminology used has not always been clear, which has resulted in lack of coherence between reporting styles. Third, in terms of the Grand Bargain Commitments, no clear instructions have yet been defined regarding how to report on progress in the selected commitments.

The DRA has clearly contributed to the simplification of reporting requirements, which serves to reduce management costs and increase transparency. In the future, the role of the DRA could incorporate a focus on exchanging good practices between JR leads and continue to harmonize reporting templates.

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<sup>24</sup> Grand Bargain annual self-reporting exercise: The Netherlands Self-Report NL, 2016.



## ▪ **Commitment 10: Engagement between humanitarian and development actors**

**There are only weak indications that the mechanism has served to enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors.** This is unsurprising given the focus of the DRA on life-saving aid. Regardless, all JRs include activities that improve community resilience and provide more sustainable solutions.

At first glance, this commitment poses a challenge to a mechanism that was established to respond to life-saving needs. Indeed, it was the understanding of several interviewees that there is no place within the DRA for activities aiming to enhance the resilience and preparedness of target beneficiaries. However, the language of the Grand Bargain would not support this interpretation, since *“it is about working collaboratively across institutional boundaries on the basis of comparative advantage:”*

In practice, several JRs have integrated some degree of resilience focus into their projects and programmes. In ZIMJR, it was a conscious decision of the JR Lead to include longer-term focus in the project proposal guidelines, namely agriculture and FSL, since it was also a priority for the United Nations. However, the needs of ZIMJRII were still categorized as “acute” because of ongoing poor agricultural performance which led to extensive crop failure and widespread food insecurity. Effectively, phases I and II of the ZIMJR facilitated both the absorptive and the adaptive capacities of targeted beneficiaries.

The general tendency of JR programmes was to focus on the short-term. The three sudden-onset acute crisis responses (VJR, NPJR and JRE), for example, did not include a reference to LRRD or early recovery in their project proposals, nor did the project proposals of the three JRs in Yemen. Beneficiaries felt better prepared after assistance in only a few JRs, including in CARJR1, ETJR2, SJR2 and UKJR2, through livelihood, education and protection programmes in particular.

In most evaluation reports, calls were made, including by beneficiaries, for activities to strengthen resilience: *“During FGD, people in need have often referred to their desire to earn their own income rather than depend on humanitarian assistance”* (NIJR1). A similar point was made in the reporting for NIJR2: *“Within the NIJR2, many beneficiaries and KIs have highlighted the need for more projects centred on early recovery such as projects involving support for small businesses and agriculture, so consider this for future responses.”*

**Field findings** from Ethiopia confirmed that the humanitarian/development gap was a constant concern. Recurrent crises impacting a vast area and population meant a constant need for more assistance, and as one issue was addressed, another would arise. The compound effects of recurrent droughts make the situation worse and, despite aiming for sustainability, ‘projects cannot do everything’. Nonetheless, activities did realise tangible positive impacts. It is worth also mentioning that NGOs often continued working in areas after the end of ETJRII, which facilitated longer-term support for communities.

Some NGOs, including World Vision, complemented ETJR activities with other donor funding to integrate the training of health workers and local officials, thereby reinforcing ETJR activities and promoting health/nutrition good practices. This led to healthier children and fewer health issues among pregnant and lactating women.

As such, JRs appear to have not contributed much to sustainable coping mechanisms. Nevertheless, exceptions are evident. In NJR2, the WASH facilities were expected to strengthen rehabilitation and development since they decrease the risk of water-borne diseases. Since NJR2 agencies also worked with WASH committees and the Rural Water Sanitation Agency, the evaluation concluded that beneficiaries could develop coping mechanisms.



The SJR example is a particular case-study in this regard because of the intensity of the conflict and the constant changing needs of the affected population. The dependency on short-term aid remained very high. The SJR2 evaluation states that *“Despite these positive findings, extremely vulnerable people will remain dependent on emergency food distributions, water trucking, and health, protection, shelter and NFI programmes especially during the harsh winter months and in besieged or otherwise targeted areas.”* Nevertheless, the SJR2 is the only JR where the education cluster is incorporated. The need for education in Syria is enormous, as defined in international response plans. Even when the Netherlands has a separate fund for Education<sup>25</sup>, education focus in Syria is different from development situations due to its focus on child-friendly spaces.

Indications that the DRA may have contributed to enhancing engagement between humanitarian and development actors is weak. The main focus of the DRA is on life-saving activities. However, needs cannot be contained within the limits of a funding framework, and short-term programmes should not be an excuse to exclude resilience and sustainable coping mechanisms. Excluding resilience from DRA programmes would go against the spirit of coherent aid, as referred to by the Grand Bargain commitments. Most DRA members have a double mandate anyway, and focus on both humanitarian aid and development simultaneously. The set-up of the DRA in protracted crises, with a time framework of one year, allows more of such a focus.

#### ▪ **Cross-cutting issue: Role Changes**

**While NGOs are, in small ways, transforming their way of work with view to the Grand Bargain Commitments, it is too early to tell how this will impact the future of the DRA.** However, since the Grand Bargain Commitments commit the humanitarian system to change how it operates, the question as to how far the Grand Bargain has led to ‘role changes’ for international organisations is part of any assessment of the progress of the initiative.

First, this evaluation demonstrated that it would be wrong to assume that all humanitarian staff know about the Grand Bargain, or understand how it will affect their work. 13% of staff in the Netherlands and 21% of field staff disagreed in the online survey that they *“know about the Grand Bargain and understand how it would affect NGO structures and operations in the future.”* The survey did not allow to explore what parts of the Grand Bargain staff members were familiar with or not. Many staff members indicated that they have heard about the Grand Bargain, but do not actually know what it entails. Project proposals, after May 2016, do not consistently refer to the Grand Bargain.

Second, not everybody agrees that the Grand Bargain offers new perspectives. Indeed, many corresponding concepts existed before 2016. In fact, the idea that local and national actors (=states) bear the responsibility for humanitarian assistance for affected populations on their territory is articulated not only in the UN GA Resolution 46/183 of 1991, but also in the Geneva conventions. In KII, it was said that the true strength of the Grand Bargain is that it brings a renewed commitment, and provides a boost to all actors in the humanitarian sector, to critically reflect on their work.

Discussions triggered by the Grand Bargain have been welcomed by DRA members. Yet, the discussions require time, especially within NGOs. This is not DRA-specific. The continued lack of a clear understanding of the details of what the Grand Bargain entails does risk losing valuable political momentum. 1.5 years after the World Humanitarian Summit many concepts are still not clear, including localization. A result of this is that there is still no clear way as to how the DRA can contribute to the commitments.

It can be observed in the most recent JRs that small changes and developments are starting to take place, including the greater provision of cash-based assistance, redefinitions of localization, a realization of the need to include the target population throughout project design, joint capacity-building, and

<sup>25</sup> Fund called “Education cannot wait”.

harmonization. However, lots of work remains to be done. At this stage, it remains difficult to state that the Grand Bargain has already led to role changes in the case of the DRA. Even when role changes can be envisaged, much will depend on progress on themes like localization.

At the same time, there is a realization germinating that some commitments may contradict each other. Is localization the most efficient way to deliver aid? Does cash-based assistance lead to fewer possibilities for beneficiaries to be involved in the participation revolution? Is funding local actors compatible with transparency commitments? Here the DRA can offer a forum for dialogue and discussions.

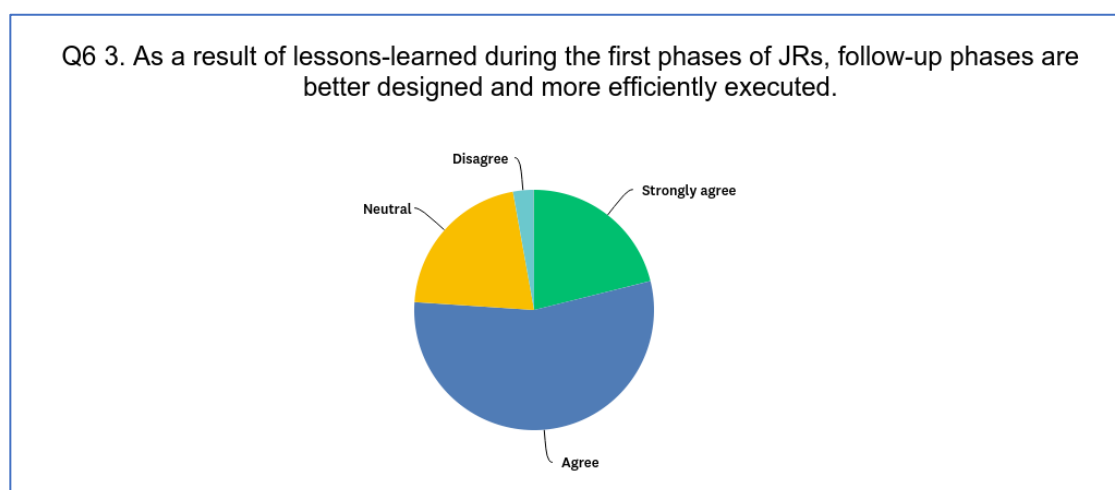
For the future of the DRA, the Grand Bargain comes at a good time since it encourages DRA members, with all their differences, to discuss how humanitarian assistance is delivered and to identify common approaches and methodologies, including at country level. However lengthy discussions hamper agreement on the possible role of the DRA, and do not positively influence more changes at field level. Whereas the decision on actual role changes will be driven by NGOs rather than the DRA mechanism, the DRA can foster experience sharing and guidance on how commitments can be actually translated into the joint responses. This would need to happen in partnership with all NGOs, MoFA, implementing partners and other stakeholders, but it should be borne in mind that changes in mentality will take time.

### 3.3. Set-up of the Dutch Relief Alliance

This chapter looks into the effectiveness of the DRA as a funding mechanism and its results in terms of collaboration between NGOs working on emergency relief in the Dutch humanitarian sector. This assessment aims to identify a number of good practices, lessons learned, and challenges of the first phase of the DRA in order to support planning for the future and facilitate improving the mechanism.

#### ▪ Added value at the level of the in-country humanitarian response

A first question under this heading addresses whether there are **differences between first round JRs and follow-up JRs**. Indeed, from the research it becomes clear that follow-up JRs are often better designed than the first round because of learning from first JRs. 21% of survey respondents strongly agreed and 56% agreed that *“follow-up phases are better designed and more efficiently executed”*. The desk review also reflects this, with first-round JR proposals hardly mentioning joint needs assessments, durable solutions or accountability (e.g. NIJRI and SSJRI). Later narrative reports, however, explicitly refer to cooperation improving reach (e.g. NIJRII and III and SSPJRII).



The meta-evaluation equally confirms that JRs had and have learned from previous JRs in the same country or from different contexts (ETJR, NJR, SSJR, UKJR). 4 out of 18 evaluation reports fully confirmed that there was an appropriate learning mechanism in place and that lessons were learned from the previous response or the mid-term evaluation. For example: *“The experiences from the NJR1 and the lessons learnt were also used to improve the efficiency of NJR2. Quarterly review and added value meetings were used as opportunities for learning and experience sharing. This level of collaboration also made it possible for them to learn from each other and make adjustments where necessary.”* 12 evaluation reports indicated learning, but also identified further room for improvement.

AFJR1	CARJR1	ETJR1	ETJR2	JRE	NIJR1	NIJR2	NJR1	NJR2	NPJR	SJR1	SJR2	SSJR1	SSPJRI1	UKJR1	UKJR2	VJR	YJR1
Orange	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange

Table 1: Comparison of evaluation reports according to the following criteria: “Evaluation confirms that an appropriate learning mechanism was in place, including LL from previous JR have been learnt.” Explanation colour code: Green = The evaluation explicitly confirms the statement; Orange = The evaluation refers to the statement, however a) does not fully confirm the statement or b) indicates room for improvement; Red = The evaluation contradicts the statement.

In the SJR, there was an important learning process. During SJR1 it became clear that the sector working groups were not functioning well for NGOs working across conflict lines and in different countries. As a result, the SJR1 evaluation report stated that *“key lessons [were] learned from SJR1 to improve .... a new hub working group set-up”*. As a result, cooperation became based on geographic proximity, and The Hub Working Groups in SJR2 proved to work much better. In the SJR2 evaluation report it is concluded

that “the hub working group concept developed under SJR 2 paved the way for experimenting with joint programming and hopefully collaborative impact.”

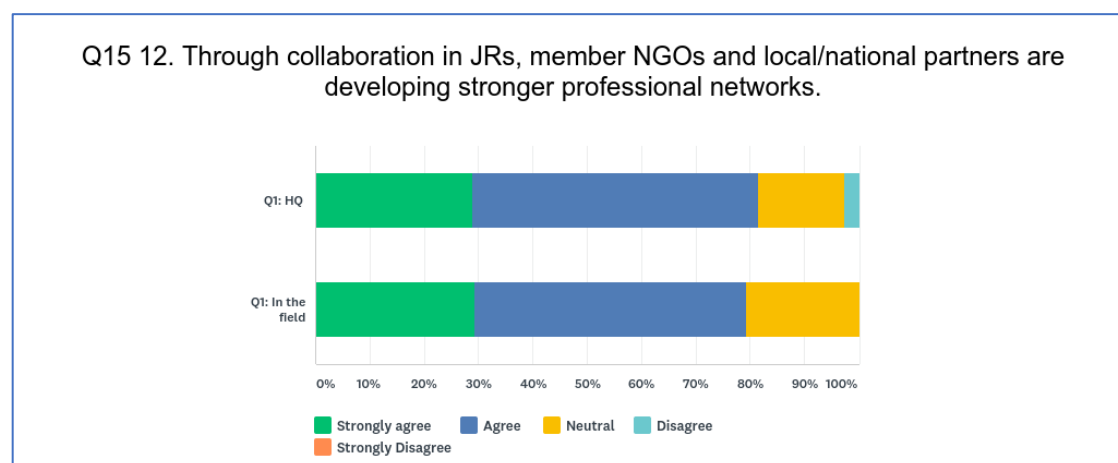
This is also the case for Ukraine, where “building on the UKJR1 project helped the Joint Response to address priority needs established by HRP and verified in the field. The UKJR2 project is built directly upon the Joint Response 1, so when UKJR 2 started, many processes were already in place.”

**Field Finding:** In UKJR, the continuity of the JR structure (through follow-on phases) facilitated good practice. The continuity of funding enabled members to become more comfortable with each other over time, better tailor assistance packages to beneficiary needs, and apply lessons-learned from one phase to the next. Interviewees reported the following lessons being put to work between phases:

UKJR1 → UKJR2: the need for meetings and social cohesion activities between IDP and host communities; more sustainable income solutions for IDPs; extension of multi-purpose cash modality; better-tailored winterization kits and activities.

UKJR2 → UKJR3: localization; linking relief to rehabilitation and development; taking joint-ness seriously; harmonization of work through the communication of joint protection messages and joint capacity-building, harmonizing geographical areas of intervention.

There is one JR that was very different from the rest: the Ebola response. It was not only one of the first DRA responses, it was also unique because it responded to a cross-border spreading of a disease, and had a **thematic rather than a multi-sectoral focus**. The JRE also targeted an impressive 1,5 million beneficiaries (6.8% of total people in need), and reached 75% of this target. Collaboration was not a priority because of the urgency of the approach, and the emphasis was on the quick delivery of aid. There was no development focus, hardly any cash assistance and very little room for involving the target population in the programme cycle. Yet, even here the DRA seems to have successfully avoided duplication: “Collaboration between organisations in country was largely limited to ensuring no duplication in project activities and target sites, rather than encouraging learning” (JRE Evaluation report).



Of the survey respondents, 29% strongly agreed and 51% agreed that, “through collaboration in JRs, member NGOs and local/national partners are developing stronger professional networks.” There is only a minimal difference between responses from field and the Netherlands. It has become clear that jointness is stronger in JRs for protracted crises. Especially in follow-up responses, contact between NGOs is said to be better, since trust has grown and there is greater familiarity. The jointness of field staff in UKJR2 and SJR2, for example, was reported to be stronger than in the first phases of these JRs.

In acute crises, and especially in quick onset disasters like Nepal and Ebola, NGO staff said that there was no time to get to know other JR staff, let alone to think about joint activities. In ETJR, there was a conscious decision to de-emphasise jointness and maximize coverage by having each NGO work in a different geography and sector. In the AFJR, the time of implementation (6 months) was said to be too short to pursue jointness, and it was thought to be more effective to focus on individual programming. The AFJR evaluation reports note that no pre-proposal consortium level planning meetings took place in either phase because of the limited implementation time, typical for acute crisis responses.

**Field Findings:** In Ethiopia, each NGO worked in a different geographical area where they were already present, working independently. This meant that NGOs worked to their comparative advantage, and duplication and overlapping was avoided. As a result, the JR was able to have a wide coverage and assist those in need right across the country, reflecting the scale of needs. This did mean, however, that collaboration and joint implementation of activities was limited.

Jointness is also influenced by external factors, and in particular, the context. It is clear that JRs in Somalia and Yemen had difficulties running joint activities because of security limitations and difficult humanitarian access. In the first Yemen Response, JR members, including the Lead, were actually located outside of the country. In Somalia, NGOs work in isolated locations. A clear focus on jointness in the absence of complex political situation creates space for synergies, as was the case in ZIMJR.

A returning concern was if a **large number of NGOs participating in a JR** had a negative influence on the efficiency, effectiveness and collaboration of a joint response.

First, a large JR in terms of participating NGOs had a clear impact on the administrative workload for the Lead. The larger the JR, the more the Lead had to focus on coordination, such as in SJR. In smaller responses, like UKJR, it was found to be easier for the Lead to oversee the JR and bring partners together. Decisions could be made more easily and quickly, and there was less diversity of opinion and working methods between members. However, it should be noted that a small number of members does not guarantee smooth cooperation.

The SJR showed that a large number of JR members could also be beneficial, as it facilitates activities across conflict lines based on the comparative advantages of organisations. The quality of assistance in South Sudan was said to be good and the large number of partners was justified given the high needs in the country.

Some evidence suggests that in some cases, rather than the number of members, it is the geographic spread that impacts realising jointness. In ETJR, the large number of members was a challenge, but even if there had been fewer members, jointness would have only improved if NGOs worked closer geographically to each other. On the other hand, in North Iraq 11 NGOs worked in a too small area to be able to complement each other. A larger geographic area would have been preferred to increase the potential for complementarity between such a large number of NGOs. Thus, it was not necessarily the number of NGOs that led to perceptions of inefficiency, but the size of the area. A proper balance between geographical spread and closeness is advised.



*Anna Muleya, Committee Member of the Luseche Kubatana Garden Project, Hwange District, Zimbabwe poses next to her healthy vegetables*

That leaves the question of possible overheads and division of budgets in small parts<sup>26</sup>. The evaluators had no overview of the overheads in the JR budgets and could therefore not address this question. In KII it was said that having JR budgets divided into small parts would have an effect on the effectiveness and impact of JRs. However, the meta-evaluation did not identify any differences between effectiveness in larger and smaller JRs and the size of budget appeared not to be a driving factor. One explanation could be that JR projects are, for many of the larger NGOs, part of broader programmes they are running, and thus complement other funding. The answers to this question continue to be anecdotal and based on assumptions. In KII, it was said that NGOs could do more with a million than with less, or that with many members the potential for overlap was larger. However, these statements could not be supplied with adequate documentation to back them up.

**Field Finding:** In Ukraine, the relatively small size of the JR was reported by interviewees and evaluators to be of significant value. It made communication and coordination among the four organisations relatively easy, facilitating delivery.

Similarly, the small size of the consortium in Zimbabwe was relatively easy to manage. The ZIMJR Coordinator/Lead NGO (OXFAM) found it easy to communicate with JR members and get critical feedback promptly. Getting cooperation from NGOs when it was necessary, such as bringing people together for learning visits and for the Kick-Off meeting for ZIMJR2, was reportedly easy.

In Ethiopia, however, the size and geographical spread of the ETJRs was challenging. In principle, 11 NGOs under one platform could hold a strong negotiating power when liaising with the government and realise considerable benefits in procurement and resource management. It was felt, however, that the potential of the consortium operating in a vast area went untapped, resulting in many missed opportunities. This was due to the weak mandate of the coordinator, difficulties faced due to the large geographies between NGOs, and the large size of the consortium.

**Field Finding:** In Ethiopia, the two phases had different coordination structures: during ETJRI the coordinator was Netherlands-based, while during ETJRII it was Ethiopia-based. In ETJRI the coordinator was distant from activities, was unable to organise many gatherings, and NGOs, therefore, participated in fewer joint activities. On the other hand, in ETJRII there was enhanced opportunity for collaboration (relatively). Nonetheless, the role is still reported to be like a ‘pigeon courier:’ even with in-country presence, the Lead reports feeling like a go-between between stakeholders and there are still delays at World Vision HQ level in responding to budgetary requests for learning and visibility activities.

The role of **the Lead** is not the same in each JR. The differences are related to whether the JR coordinator is positioned in the field or in the Netherlands, and also their interest and involvement in activities. Some Leads focus more on collaborative impact and play a better coordination role than others, which results in more complementary JRs. The reasons suggested for this range from personality, to organisational capacity, to freedom to operate, to legitimacy. The SJR Lead ZOA, for example, developed familiarity with the role itself and effectively learned how to ‘lead’ from the first response onwards. It can be seen how it fell to the Lead to stimulate collaborative impact changes over time: in SJR1, the Lead was said to have to “force” added value; in SJR2 the Hub Working Groups established momentum for synergies; by SJR3 the incentive for cooperation occasionally comes from field staff themselves.

There are calls to strengthen the position of the field coordinator, both from the online survey (*“I think field coordination could be improved. However, this could be easily solved by the provision of a strong*

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<sup>26</sup> We will come back to the division of budgets later.



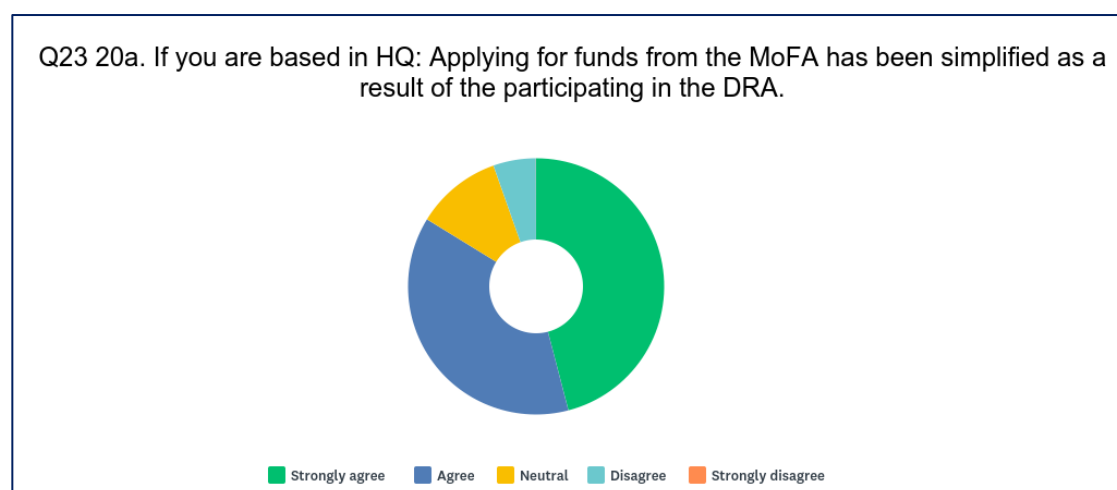
coordination team with regular JR+DRA meetings on the field”) and KII in the field. In ETJR, NGOs call for a strong field coordinator and for the lead to be placed in-field.

In acute crises, there is less interest in, and room for, joint operations since the focus is on quick emergency relief. Protracted crises, however, allow time to build trust between staff members and for jointness to be increasingly carried by field staff. Follow-up JRs permit learning from mistakes and focus more on collaborative impact, though it is the geographic diversity that is the main factor to define jointness. A large number of JR members means there is a higher administrative burden on the Lead, and the nature of the role should continue to depend of the context. Nevertheless there is room for some harmonization in the responsibilities of field coordinators, or at a minimum more exchange between JR Leads to learn from each other.

#### ▪ Added value of the Partnership Mechanism in the Netherlands

**The DRA has shaken up the Dutch humanitarian landscape, and the vast majority of staff in the Netherlands and the field believe it has improved collaboration in the sector.** 85% of the field staff and 89% of staff in the Netherlands (strongly) agree that when working in the same JR, there is a greater incentive to contact and/or work closely with other participating NGOs as compared to when working separately. Based on these staff perceptions, the DRA can be seen as contributing directly to improved willingness to collaborate. The difference with pre-DRA times, where competition and lack of cooperation were certainly not benefiting the affected population, is thus significant. From the KII, it is clear that the DRA has become accepted as the way of working for emergency relief in the Netherlands, and staff members seem to be increasingly familiar with the system in comparison with eighteen months ago.<sup>27</sup> Good relationships built between NGOs even transcended the DRA, and there are examples of NGOs improving their cooperation in other forums (for example Giro555) and submitting joint project proposals to other donors (for example MADAD).

As demonstrated by the online survey, staff in HQ also agree that, despite concerns over the slow approval process, *“applying for funds from the MoFA has been simplified as a result of participating in the DRA”*, as shown below,.



<sup>27</sup> Based on observations made by the ECAS team for the SJR final evaluation.

Yet, there remains room for improving the DRA mechanism in the Netherlands, as outlined in the following points:

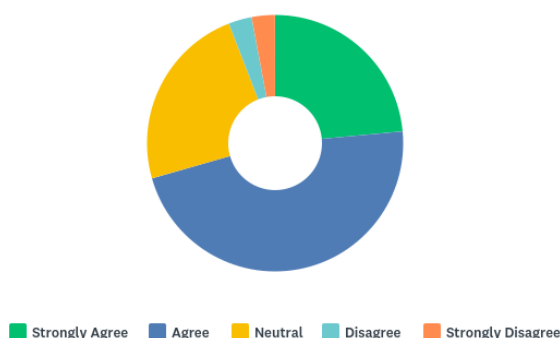
1. The DRA **working groups**, established to support the DRA mechanism in specific issues and work on common approaches, are perceived as being heavy and time-consuming. This comment was mainly made by smaller NGOs with fewer staff members, though not exclusively. Meetings were said to be lengthy and demanded too much travel. Some working groups lacked clear outcomes and targets. Even when meetings had built up trust, the necessity and the frequency of some working groups and meetings should be reconsidered. The time and work investment by DRA Committee (DRAC) members and Leads is considerable: the cost-benefit of meetings and working groups deserves reflection.
2. **Managing** the DRA is challenging, mainly because of the diversity of DRA members. The DRAC faces considerable challenges, and democratic decision-making is at times slow. The objectives of the CEO meetings are not always clear. While it has been said that the DRA needs stronger leadership, especially because of the current insecurity for the future, ownership of the mechanism by all members continues to be crucial. Every member continues to have its own limitations and interests, and there is not always evidence of proper understanding regarding the decisions and positions of other members. More time, transparency, self-reflection and leadership is needed to integrate the DRA further. The foundation and stability of DRA management leaves room for improvement.
3. The DRA continues to **grow** and counts 16 members in 2017. Currently, the only criteria to become a DRA member is to have a Dutch basis and to hold a Framework for Partnership Agreement (FPA). Many staff members have expressed concern that the DRA is becoming too large, which would have a negative impact on working and decision-making. A call was made to restrict membership and increase membership criteria. Related to this is the question of what would happen if one DRA member would not be able, or willing, to adhere to DRA standards and objectives - neither the DRAC nor JR Leads would have any means to respond to this.

The evaluation team has reservations when it comes to the growing institutionalization of the mechanism - despite the obvious progress made by the DRA - in terms of increased cooperation and trust, and even more funding for some NGOs. This finding is based on two reasons. First, the working groups are numerous and request a substantial investment of NGO staff in terms of time and resources. Second, one of the strengths of the DRA is its continued interest in improvement; if the mechanism were to have too many procedures and rules, it would undoubtedly become static and interest in the partnership could be lost. The DRA has to continue developing itself. The DRA requires a collaborative leadership that is able to sufficiently bridge the differences of DRA members while at the same time offering a vision for the future. At the same time, DRA management is a common responsibility.

#### ▪ **Partnership with MoFA**

**Communication between the MoFA and the DRA is satisfactory, but characterized by fundamentally different expectations about the utility of joint action and the future role of the consortium.** Both parties were pleased with the partnership of the past years and agree that the DRA has been able to achieve impressive results in terms of competition and filling gaps. The DRA was also said to be received positively in politics and among the Dutch public. 70% of respondents to the online survey based in the field (strongly) agreed that interactions with the MoFA and/or Dutch embassy have been *“simple and smooth in terms of applying for funds and coordinating JRs”*.

Q24 20b. If you are based in the field: Interactions with the Dutch MoFA in the Netherlands and/or Dutch embassy at country-level have been simple and smooth in terms of applying for funds and coordinating JRs.



The IOB report<sup>28</sup> anticipated that the importance of the MoFA as an NGO funding stream would grow as a result of the establishment of the DRF, from 6% in 2014 to an anticipated 15-20% of the overall emergency relief budget of the MoFA. Expanding this funding stream was a deliberate decision of the MoFA in 2014, and explains the high expectations that the MoFA has of the DRA - an increase in funding to Dutch NGOs was expected to go hand-in-hand with an increase in cooperation, which led to the creation of the DRA. The MoFA is praised by NGOs for having taken that initiative. Of course, the DRA has resulted in a number of advantages for the MoFA, including a significant decrease in the administrative burden of selecting and managing the donations - now largely outsourced to DRA members. This background continues to be relevant to understand the dynamics in the partnership and, in particular, its challenges.

The following points have been identified as posing a challenge to realising a strong partnership between the DRA and MoFA:

1. There are differences in **expectations** between NGOs and the MoFA about the DRA and its continuation. The MoFA has indeed high expectations of the DRA, and expects it to change the way humanitarian organisations work. It expects a focus on joint programming, harmonization of methods and integration of efforts. The 'mere' provision of timely and qualitative emergency assistance is not perceived as a sufficient argument for the existence of the DRA. It would like the DRA to take on a number of Grand Bargain commitments, to which it signed up, including localization, which may require drastic changes and ambitious decisions by DRA members.

The picture on the side of DRA members differs slightly, since improvements in the humanitarian sector continue to be led by individual NGOs – not the DRA. Meanwhile, the DRA has only limited control over how NGOs are changing their ways of working, and the question continues to be if that really is the aim of the DRA. The focus for DRA members is thus clearly on the collaborative process and jointness, whereas the MoFA likes to see outputs and results. For NGOs, reaching compromises between all their differences is an achievement, whereas this is no longer sufficient for the MoFA.

2. Connected to this is the fact that the MoFA is a political actor and the DRA members are humanitarian players. The MoFA needs concrete and practical outputs to demonstrate the success of the DRA to Parliament and the Dutch public. While this is an obvious fact, it seems to often be forgotten and continues to impact on the potential for a real partnership. This seems particularly the case for the **speed** with which changes are expected to occur. The MoFA would like to move quickly, especially since the fairly positive Mid-Term Evaluation. Yet, NGOs are more

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IOB Evaluation, no. 406, Policy Review of Dutch Humanitarian Assistance, 2009-2014.

hesitant and careful, cherish the results they have achieved so far and are careful on how to proceed out of fear that being overambitious could undermine the entire DRA.

3. Before the establishment of the DRA, NGOs were working in a donor-implementer relationship, where decisions on grants and strategic guidance came from the MoFA only. These power dynamics have not disappeared completely in the DRA-era. The MoFA gives the DRA general direction, however it does not take the **initiative** or provide in-depth guidance on its expectations. For the MoFA, providing NGOs with the freedom to make decisions is a sign of trust, but for NGOs this creates insecurity and leaves them working in a void. This challenge has recently come to a head when writing the Vision Document for the future of the DRA. While NGOs require certainty from the MoFA that the DRA will continue to be able to develop a vision for the DRA, the MoFA needs that Vision Document in order to argue for the continuation of the mechanism.
4. Although communication is said to be good in general, and MoFA staff and NGOs meet regularly, the means of **communication** and information sharing are said to result in a lack of clarity and confusion. Apparently, there are few written records of conversations between MoFA and DRA members, and debriefing by DRAC to other DRA members happens orally and inconsistently. As a result, factual correctness and accuracy of conversations with the MoFA is absent within the DRA community. In addition, existing communication channels between the MoFA and DRAC are sometimes by-passed, and different MoFA staff members have different opinions and understandings. Improved communication could have facilitated writing the vision document for example.
5. Working on **assumptions** has been identified as one of the key challenges for the DRA partnership. This results from the communication challenge, but also from a lack of verifying and checking information. One such assumption was that having many members in a JR leads to ineffective and inefficient aid delivery, but no interviewee could provide evidence that this made a difference for the beneficiary. Another statement stated that, in the beginning of the DRA, the MoFA pushed for added value generation. This statement appears to be untrue and unproductive. It is also unconsciously assumed that MoFA staff are all humanitarian experts, whereas they actually expect that expertise to come from NGO staff.

There seemed to be agreement between both MoFA and DRA members that the approval process can be made simpler and faster. Many NGO staff wished for a faster decision-making process, and the MoFA realizes that its approval procedures continue to be slow. The MoFA is prepared to start seeking solutions and simplifying the approval process. This could include Bloc Grants with periodic reviews, in line with its policy for other funding streams.

The partnership between DRA members and the MoFA has led to substantial changes in the Dutch humanitarian sector in recent years. The readiness to trust each other and show vulnerabilities provides a solid basis for the future. However, the potential of a real partnership continues to suffer from an absence of clear communication, resulting in unnecessary assumptions. The communication between the MoFA and DRA should be open and consistent, and DRA members need to receive correct and transparent information about the opinions of the MoFA to be able to meet expectations. Honest discussions should take place about expectations and priorities for the future, in full respect for each other's limitations and capacities. It is also clear that the partnership between MoFA and DRA members will continue to be challenged by its intrinsic political vs. humanitarian nature: while NGOs do not want to be seen as implementers of foreign policy, the MoFA is limited in its communication and actions by political decisions.

## ▪ Relevance of the planning process

**Joint programming is not always appropriate; expectations for increased jointness should be determined by real humanitarian needs and possibilities, rather than pre-defined institutional criteria.**

The annual planning process for JRs for chronic crises is currently a hot-topic of discussion in the Netherlands, and there are three main criticisms, namely: 1) that the planning process does not sufficiently involve the field; 2) that the planning process does not properly allow for joint programming; and 3) that budgets are too equally divided between all members who have an interest in participating in a JR. The suggested new procedure<sup>29</sup> would allow each NGO to participate in a maximum of 3 chronic responses. This would result in more effective JRs, since the selection process is based on capacity and the presence of organisation in a given country. Furthermore, by bringing field and Netherlands-based staff together in the planning phase, more opportunities for synergies could be identified and assistance would be further in line with humanitarian needs.

The evaluation has identified the following observations for further consideration to strengthen the relevance of this selection process:

- It has been observed that budgets are often **divided too equally** between all NGOs whose projects received sufficient scores in the peer review. Project proposals often did not properly justify why budgets had to be divided that equally, nor how budgets corresponded to the potential added value and capacity of an organisation. Budgets are divided mainly by the number of members, and not by the particular strengths of an NGO, since variations between what NGOs receives under a JR is too small. The evaluation did not find evidence that equal division of the budget is the result of a real intention to 'split up the cake equally', but rather being the result of compromise. NGOs did look at each other's concept notes critically in order to score under the peer review, but this critical review was only reflected to a minimum in the division of budgets.
- The decision about the new system created **tensions** within the DRA and not all NGOs see its merit. Although it was said that the new system would make assistance more needs-based, a number of NGOs fear that it would actually increase the supply-driven model of the DRA and go against humanitarian principles. It could be that NGOs have strength and capacity to work in more than 3 countries, and could have a greater impact than another member. Doubts even exist as to if the new system would be less time- and resource-intensive than the old system.
- The development of this new system is an expression of a desire to improve the function of the DRA, and to be more ambitious in line with the expectations of the MoFA. In particular, it fits into a desire for more **joint programming**, which has been growing slowly over the past 18 months. Collaborative impact is now defined at several levels, with joint programming being the highest level. Yet, the 'joint programming' that takes place in a number of JRs, including SJR3, is actually joint planning, but not joint implementation and consists of comprehensive programming for a selected group of beneficiaries and having a proper referral system in place.  
  
In some contexts, joint programming may not be appropriate. In CARJR, for example, cooperation was said to be strong amongst the 8 JR members, but the focus was on sharing of information and lessons-learned rather than joint programming. In Iraq, SV preferred to invest time in attempting a new approach - psychosocial support for men - rather than in cooperation. It was also noted that joint implementation could make programming less flexible and dependent on other NGOs. In the last planning phases, it was indicated that the scoring system had already integrated criteria such as potential for synergies and joint planning. As a result, joint programming received higher scores, yet individual project proposals were still required.
- In KII it was voiced that NGOs should be able to select the organisation that can **guarantee the best possible impact** amongst themselves. This occurred in discussions in Spring 2017 about

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<sup>29</sup> See Flowchart for exact details (not annexed to this report)

how to divide the top-up of €15 million for the hunger crises in Africa, where NGOs organized a joint consultation to score each other's plans. The time frame allocated for this consultation was very short, which forced NGOs to have open discussions about who had the best access, the right absorption capacity and capacity to respond quickly. SV/IRC decided to limit its own activities and allow other organisations more funding. Earlier, NGOs had had to choose between participation in the Zimbabwe and the Somalia JRs, resulting in fewer members per response. Warchild said that it was asked by JR members to participate in CARJR2 and YJR3 because there was a need for child protection programmes.

- The criterion of **track record** in the country was often emphasized in interviews, including with MoFA staff. The assumption is that an NGO who is already present in a country has greater capacity to provide better assistance. Three critical thoughts are appropriate here: 1) a decade-long presence is not necessarily a guarantor for quality or for programmes to meet actual needs. In fact, it could even be that new incoming actors with a fresh look and without settled partnerships could be more efficient and effective; 2), if an NGO is already present in a country, it likely has other funding channels to guarantee its presence there, and so the added value of the DRA and the room to make innovations are limited. Field evidence has shown that where JR activities are only a small part of a much more comprehensive programme, the DRA will not be seen as an incentive for change; 3), measuring a track record in a given country can be complicated - will activities of affiliate organisations or those implemented through local partners also count towards that track record? Is it local staff managing an emergency, or international staff, or surge personnel being sent to deal with the crisis? The criterion of **complementarity** was less mentioned. Overall it is not as important to interviewees if the Dutch Relief Alliance is a success, but overall international assistance.
- The **definition** of what forms an acute and a chronic crisis is at times unclear. The target of the DRA is to spend 30% of the budget on acute crises and 70% on protracted crises. The selection of a crisis as an acute or protracted crisis should not be done on the basis of what money is available, but rather on the needs of the affected population. The division of percentages could change per year, depending on the needs. The evaluation has seen that the short duration of acute crisis responses did not necessarily lead to better assistance.
- The **exact choice** for which crisis DRA money can be spent on remains a difficult one, since needs are so high worldwide and different organisations have different interests in certain countries. At the same time, it should be possible to say when a JR has fulfilled its targets and the focus shifts to early recovery. The DRA may wish to think of some criteria to define this.

The selection of programming and division of funds should be increasingly based on capacity. However, the importance of complementarity should not be forgotten. The DRA recognizes this room for improvement and is interested in developing itself. The trend is moving towards joint programming. Yet, collaborative impact knows many levels, and the degree of jointness should be defined by humanitarian needs and context rather than pre-defined criteria. Budget divisions should allow for variety to reflect the different capacities and comparative advantages of NGOs, however this is not an easy task for a partnership based on equality and may actually result in inter-NGO competition.

## ▪ **Visibility**

**Visibility has been less of a priority for the DRA than originally intended.** One of the specific objectives of the DRA was to increase visibility of this Dutch contribution among the Dutch constituency, Parliament and in-country. Without any doubt, this objective received the least attention in the early stages of the DRA, and only recently are important steps being made towards clarifying the expectations and needs of all partners on this matter.



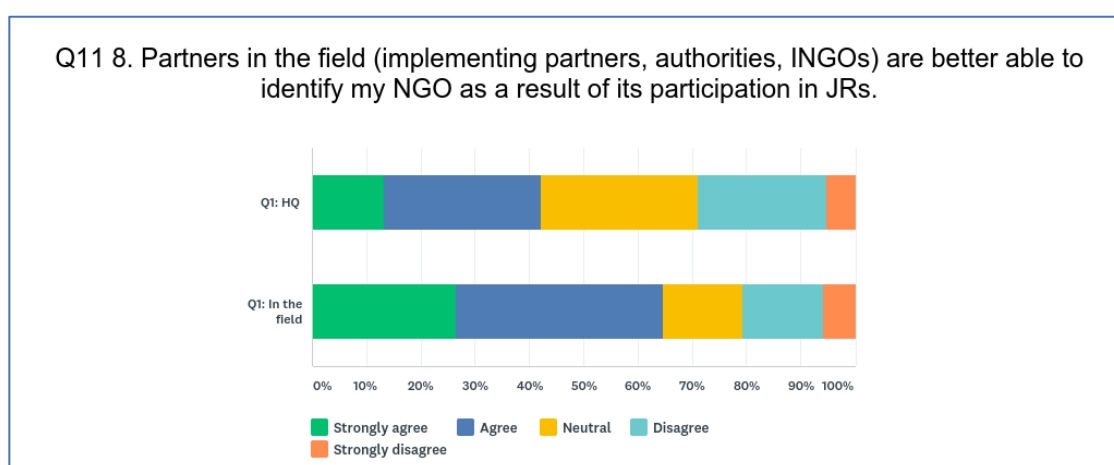
First, **visibility of the DRA to beneficiaries** did not receive priority in the JRs. Although there are examples of visibility signs, e.g. billboards in ZIMJR or next to water points and rehabilitated ponds in ETJR, its impact was minimal.

The meta-evaluation contradicts expectations that beneficiaries know that aid was funded by the Netherlands, as evidenced by the fact that, in the VJR *“people in many communities were generally unaware that ‘MoFA’...was part of the Dutch Government [and] were often not aware of which country donated which items given the huge influx of donations from various organisations and countries following Cyclone Pam”* (VJR Evaluation). In addition, security considerations, especially in Syria, did not always allow for publicity of the DRA. The policy not to focus on visibility in the field was consistent across JRs, thanks to a clear written communique between NGOs and the MoFA from 2015.



A road sign in Ethiopia shows the logos of NGOs and the MoFA

In the online survey, 25% of respondents disagreed that *“partners in the field are better able to identify my NGO as a result of its participation in JRs”*, and another 25% remained neutral<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, implementing partners and local staff know to a certain degree where the funding was coming from, but despite attempts at promoting the source of funding there are challenges. AFJR reporting notes that *“government and OCHA reporting formats focus on activities per Partner, and not on who funded those. Furthermore many in the sector are weary of the donors stressing the need for their contribution to be visualised.”* Also field findings noted that staff working on direct implementation did not always know about the DRA.



In some instances, the DRA seems to have enabled a welcome de-emphasis on funding at the NGO level: *“Joint visibility activities have put the UKJR on the map, and have provided an opportunity to communicate about the humanitarian problems in Ukraine, rather than about the organisations providing it.”*

Second, the **visibility towards the Dutch public** has been a common topic of conversation in recent years - both its relevance and form - including in the Communications Working Group. Early on in the DRA, it was agreed that the alliance would not have a logo or particular identity. Nevertheless, ad hoc visibility events and activities, including photo exhibitions in the Netherlands on ETJR and ZIMJR and videos on AFJR and SJR have taken place - albeit with a limited degree of success. The DRA is consistently referred

<sup>30</sup> The survey only addressed staff of international NGOs. Local implementation partners may have different views on this issue.

to in press releases of NGOs. The latest visibility product is a DRA website ([www.dutchrelief.org](http://www.dutchrelief.org)) showing what the DRA had achieved so far and that tax payer's money is paying for efficient aid.

Third, the **lobby and advocacy towards the Members of the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament** did receive focus. The DRA lobby work is deemed to function well, and the DRA receives a lot of political support. The Lobby and Advocacy Working Group, consisting of 6-7 NGO staff with good political contacts in The Hague, focus on explaining the DRA to Members of Parliament (MPs) in order to generate additional funding in times of high needs and to support its continuation after the end of this funding period. Assurance of the longer-term existence of the DRA would allow the working group to focus on more substantial issues with parliamentarians, leading to more substantive dialogue on how to strengthen humanitarian assistance. The Grand Bargain commitments are a good vehicle to advocate for this, although they could be better promoted amongst MPs.

Fourth, the **visibility towards external partners** such as ECHO and OCHA, **resulting in legitimacy and credibility**, was not subject of systematic attention, but did result in a number of interesting side effects. On one occasion, DRA members teamed up in an ECHO meeting to adapt humanitarian programmes funded under a Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP). Since the majority of present NGOs were DRA members, they were able to jointly represent their concerns, which strengthened their position towards the donor. The DRA is increasingly better known internationally as an exceptional mechanism, and other European countries have expressed interest in it as a model.

DRA visibility has been less of a priority than originally described in its objectives, reflected in the small budget allocated. The reason for this is that not all agree about its relevance. It is a strength of the DRA that the donor does not request visibility towards beneficiaries, as it speaks for a proper understanding of humanitarian principles by the MoFA to provide emergency assistance. Visibility towards the Dutch public is low, but might be improved with the website. Scepticism remains about the actual added value of the website for the Dutch taxpayer. Lobbying is a prerequisite for the continuation of the DRA, however it should be conducted by all partners at the same time. The position of DRA as an independent mechanism towards other international actors, or donors even, should be further discussed.

#### ▪ **Learning and innovation**

**The DRA is not a producer of innovation, but a multiplier.** New ideas and good practices stem from individual NGOs and are then shared and disseminated among members.

The fifth objective of the DRA is to tackle major bottlenecks in humanitarian practices through co-created innovation, joint learning and research. **Learning** is difficult to measure, but is omnipresent in the DRA. JRs include many examples of learning.

*ETJR1 evaluation: "Members of the joint response are under continuous learning and improvement. Looking at a risk free cash payment mechanism (voucher system) from one of the members (Oxfam), other members have started to shift from cash payment to voucher system."*

*NIJR1 evaluation: "Some of the less experienced partners in the NIJR1 have benefited much from the NIJR1 because they have had easy access to the expertise and best practices of the more experienced partners."*

*SJR2 evaluation: "There are many positive examples of SJR2 agencies having used real time programme learning to improve the quality of the work. The SJR member and its implementing partner designed pilots in its SJR 2 integrated agriculture programme, e-vouchers and NFI distribution programmes, based on learning from SJR1, providing important opportunities for collaborative learning about voucher modalities across SJR2."*

*YJR1 evaluation: "agencies should continue to learn from each other by putting in place specific guidelines and mechanisms to share knowledge, experiences, and approaches. As such, the process for*

*Yemen both retained learnings from the Vanuatu experience (one month prior) as well as informed the Nepal process and enabled the DRA to identify areas for improvement”*

The evaluation reports not only indicate learning from the previous in-country response but also across countries, which allows general progress to improve the JRs. Even though learning cannot be seen as systematic, staff in the Netherlands also admitted that they learned a lot through sharing lessons learned and good practices by DRA members in the field. The DRA is a pool of resources, and because of the reduction of competition, this mass of knowledge and experience was opened up to DRA members and their staff, opening a new dimension of learning. Small organisations in particular could potentially learn a lot from the alliance, especially in terms of aid modalities and innovative tools and methodologies. Examples given include the handling of personal data in a safe way, sharing of community-based child protection methodologies, or making PDM tools more gender-sensitive as Care did in SSPJR. There has been evidence that local implementing partners also benefit from learning under the DRA, but this topic requires more research.

Trainings by WarTrauma on Mental Health and Psychosocial support represent a way of learning specific to the DRA. War Trauma did not play an active role in any JR, but rather decided that it would contribute to the DRA by sharing its experiences with members and their partners in the field. In 2017, a total of 4 such trainings have been conducted, in South Sudan, Ukraine, Nigeria and Iraq. This is an innovative way of offering specific expertise to consortium members.

So far 18 JRs have been evaluated independently by external **evaluation** teams. This is a good learning practice since, although the depth and comprehensiveness of the evaluation reports vary, the reports followed accepted valuation criteria, including OECD/DAC criteria, applied mixed methodologies, involved beneficiary feedback and, with a few exceptions, provided forward-looking recommendations. A mid-term evaluation of the DRA mechanism was conducted mid-2016 and this current evaluation is equally a good practice, since joint evaluations provide findings on the quality of needs assessments and DRA programming overall.

An ECAS Evaluator observed a 4-day mental health training in Svetagorsk, Eastern Ukraine, hosted by War Trauma Foundation for 30 frontline staff of UKJR, not far from the contact line. The objective of the training was to increase knowledge and understanding about mental health and psychosocial support and its effect on individuals and communities. The curriculum covered psychological first aid, how to identify suspected mental disorders, making referrals, and self-care. The pair of War Trauma trainers set an animated tone for the four days, and participants responded well. The entire training programme was interspersed with lively activities, including role-plays, breakout groups, and pair work. There were moments during some role plays when participants were so engaged that one could hear a pin drop. One Caritas staff member – a trained psychologist – said that during her studies in Ukraine she never learned such techniques of active listening or how to sensitively engage with traumatized children, and that she will begin to apply the training content in her work immediately.



JR member staff engage in role-play and group work during a training by War Trauma Foundation

However, there are clear difficulties regarding learning from evaluations, namely that evaluation reports are not timely and their results are communicated only after the start of the next phase. This does not allow for recommendations to be included in the design of follow-up phases. This evaluation agrees with the conclusion of the SJR2 evaluation team that the absence of a quality framework and of comparable data on beneficiaries and costs does not allow for comprehensive comparisons of JRs. If in the future the overall outcome and impact of the JRs should be measured, a baseline should be established and indicators should be improved. Evaluations also focus on the DRA specifically, but do not assess the relevance of the DRA to wider programmes of DRA members.

When it comes to **innovation**, joint responses show some good practices, such as Zimbabwe's adoption of solar gardens. Yet, innovation seems to come from NGOs. There is room, however, for the DRA to serve as a dissemination tool.

**Field Finding:** During ZIMJR, when faced with the challenges of hand water pumps, which require hard labour to get water and left children and the elderly struggling to fetch water as and when it was needed, solar-mechanized pumps were installed. Solar powered gardens were considered particularly appropriate for Zimbabwe, considering the abundance of the sun.

The DRA is not a producer of innovation, but a multiplier. New practices stem from individual NGOs and are then be shared throughout the mechanism. The evaluation team considers this acceptable, since the DRA has no specific budget for this, nor is it expected to have. The role of the DRA in terms of innovation and research is indeed about sharing of good practices and experiences, gathering stakeholders around the table for discussions, including on the Grand Bargain commitments, and sharing good examples in the field. Even though evaluation practices in the past years have been beneficial for the learning and development of the DRA overall, evaluation reports should be timelier in order to facilitate learning from them ahead of the next phase. Implicit and explicit learning is present across the DRA.



At a Learning Visit, ZIMJR members marvel at the way the solar panels were erected at an adjacent homestead, guaranteeing their security. Solar panels were supplied by World Vision Zimbabwe, Change Village, Hwange Area Development Programme.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. Strategic Issues: Follow-up from the mid-term evaluation

**Legend:** *Green*: implemented; *Orange*: partially implemented; *Red*: not implemented

Strategic issues	Progress	Comments
Funding continuity		DRA members and MoFA jointly make the case for the continuation of the DRA. Lobbying by DRA members has resulted in political support for its continuation. The recent political situation in the Netherlands, namely the absence of a new government, has resulted in insecurity of continued funding.
Scope and ambition of the DRA		DRA members have been working on a Vision Document, which at the time of writing has not yet been agreed with MoFA. Consultations continue to take place on how the DRA can contribute to global policy commitments, including the Grand Bargain commitments.
Effectiveness and Efficiency		Progress has been made to better define the term 'added value', including by renaming it 'collaborative impact'. Interest and room for joint programming has grown. Improvements on the annual planning process have been made. A corresponding quality framework and common policy across JRs regarding how to enhance effectiveness remains absent.
Visibility		Progress has been made, but a written, common understanding of expectations between DRA members and MoFA is lacking.
Innovation and research		This evaluation confirms that the DRA is a broker of innovation and research, rather than a 'creator'. A consensus on this topic may be reached in the new Vision Document.
Structural and procedural issues	Progress	Comments
Scope and ambition of the DRA		To date, no new eligibility criteria or agreements on growth ambitions have been reached.
Roles and responsibilities		The role of the JR Lead is clear, however differences continue to exist between JRs. Accountability roles are better understood.
Prioritisation and decision-making		UN appeals continue to be the first basis for decision-making. Incentives for joint programming have been built into proposal drafting. Performance of agencies is not the basis for decision-making for follow-up responses. However, capacity and track record will become more important in future planning.



Promoting effectiveness and efficiency		<p>There was no workshop for MoFA and NGO staff to clarify the grant development process, to the knowledge of the evaluation team.</p> <p>Concerns persist about proliferation of small-scale, cost-inefficient projects within JRs.</p> <p>Guidelines on eligible costs and transparent budgets have not yet been drafted.</p> <p>Guidance on key approaches are not fully developed at DRA level, but experience sharing does occur within JRs.</p> <p>IATI has become the reporting standard and audit practices are being revisited.</p>
Learning and innovation		<p>In the draft Vision Document, aspiration for a more effective monitoring and evaluation system was included, but has not yet been applied.</p>
Visibility		<p>There is increasing clarity on the expectations for visibility, in particular towards beneficiaries. A DRA website has been made public. The outputs of IATI are not yet visible.</p>

## 4.2. Concluding comments

**The DRA is in step with history – and current trends.** Since 1991, the modus operandi of the humanitarian system has been the coordination of actors to fill gaps and avoid overlaps.<sup>31</sup> This was strengthened further with the roll-out of the UN Cluster Approach in 2005. The DRA builds on this existing platform and seeks to realize enhanced cooperation among NGOs, from harmonization of tools and methods to actual joint planning and programming. With the assumption that more is possible – and in the spirit of demanding more from humanitarian actors and donors – the DRA is also in line with the current shake-up of the humanitarian reform agenda, which has emerged from the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, in the form of the Grand Bargain and Charter4Change.

**The DRA is starting to prove its worth.** Since its establishment in 2015, the DRA has minimized competition among Dutch NGOs for funding, and put in place a mechanism where ownership and trust are inherent. At the very least, the exchange of information and the consultative design of the DRA planning process have minimized duplication of operations in the field. This evaluation demonstrates that even though operations suffer from serious delays, security concerns, access limitations, internal tensions, and administrative bungles, overall their delivery of aid is effective, efficient, and responsible. Millions of lives have been saved, and efforts have been made to promote long-term resilience.

**In a normal evaluation, the conclusion would end here.** But MoFA has ambitious designs on the DRA, which is expected to go beyond ‘just’ saving lives to provide the added value of so-called ‘collaborative impact’ and change the way humanitarian work is done. This has led to some hand-wringing and wrangling among DRA members. Finding compromises among 16 NGOs with different priorities and preferences, and with their own international commitments and command structures, is complicated. The DRA is still learning about itself.

**There are three main positive developments since the mid-term review.** First, there are more and more examples from the field demonstrating that cooperation can indeed result in increased efficiency and effectiveness, surpassing the level of anecdotal evidence. Even though the effectiveness of DRA programmes is mainly due to the professionalism of individual DRA members, there is increasing evidence of a collective level of collaborative impact. Second, NGOs have warmed to the idea of joint programming. Even though it remains unknown what this might mean in practice, there are signs of a

<sup>31</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (December 1991) provides the basic framework for humanitarian assistance.



change in mentality. Third, whereas the advantages of the DRA previously were limited to the Netherlands, there are signs that field staff are starting to take some initiative to identify synergies, and are reaping the benefits accordingly.

**A lot more could be done – but there are structural barriers.** For starters, the current political landscape of the Netherlands means that the DRA continues to be dependent on domestic politics. Funding insecurity leads to protectionism and hampers the integration of the DRA. Competing political and humanitarian considerations must be managed consciously. Then, funding to the tune of €60million per year is simply not enough to incentivize NGOs – especially larger ones, which have their own international structures and affiliations – to change their way of work. The diversity of the DRA is its strength, and its weakness. The future of the DRA should be guided by pragmatism.

**External developments have also impacted the development of the DRA.** Half-way through the DRA's pilot years, the international community (including MoFA and various DRA members) signed a number of commitments to improve the humanitarian system. At a time when the DRA had not yet defined its own role or way of work, the mechanism was asked to take on additional responsibilities. Even though elements of the Grand Bargain have been around for years, there is a learning curve for every new framework's terminologies and requirements. Therefore, it is too early to tell if or how the DRA has made progress towards the Grand Bargain commitments, and even the indications provided in this report would have been impossible were NGOs not already working on these topics. In any event, the DRA cannot be expected to be the driving force towards the Grand Bargain, but rather a multiplier of change initiated by its members. Moreover, the Grand Bargain is called so because it demands NGOs, communities, governments, and donors to step up equally. If the DRA is going to implement the Grand Bargain commitments, then governments and donors will have to meet them half-way.

**The DRA is at risk of over-institutionalization.** The original idea was to keep the DRA 'lean and mean' – or streamlined and focused. The agility of the mechanism is one of its greatest strengths in the field. But the DRA is currently at risk of becoming too institutionalized, which would go against its *raison d'être*. At the time of writing, the DRA is defining its common vision for the future, which preliminary findings from this evaluation have fed into. The time has indeed come for the DRA to present its vision. Clear expectations will benefit the partnership overall – but it is advisable to keep it simple.

Funding for humanitarian operations is being buffeted by current trends in the global policy discourse, political winds in major donor countries, and shifting industry norms. With a proliferation of actors and the mission creep of different agencies, the landscape is increasingly competitive. Meanwhile, humanitarian needs are increasing worldwide. Against this backdrop, the DRA is a welcome initiative. **As long as the DRA is able to balance its ambitions with pragmatism and humanitarian needs with political interests, the evaluation team is confident that it will contribute to meeting the needs of people affected by crisis and conflict.**

## 5. Recommendations

### For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- **Articulate desires and needs clearly and consistently to NGOs in writing.** Be specific.
- **Quicken approval procedures for individual JRs.** Consider appointing an independent body to make financing decisions.
- **Consider multi-year funding (18-24 months) for protracted crises.**
- **Lobby for faster (or advance) approval of investments in the Dutch Relief Fund.**
- **Ease up on the call for jointness.** This is happening naturally, and pushing it too hard could weaken the consortium.
- **Distribute funds to the DRA in the form of an annual block grant.** Once a JR is approved, the JR lead could then immediately draw down funds, streamlining the award process and improving the timeliness of assistance.
- **Consider doing away with separate pots for ‘acute’ and ‘chronic’ crises.**

### For the Dutch Relief Alliance

- **Dissolve those Working Groups which have completed their mandate or are no longer operational.** Revisit the structure and function of Working Groups in general. Meanwhile, clarify the purpose of CEO meetings.
- **Ensure all communication with MoFA is recorded in written memos and disseminate that information promptly to all members.**
- **Clarify the role of the DRA in contributing to Grand Bargain commitments.** This could take the form of a non-binding memorandum. This will help guide members to incorporate the commitments into their respective operations.
- **Consider developing exit criteria for JRs** (i.e., for when a JR will shut down, not for individual NGOs who wish to pull out).
- **Consider developing stricter eligibility / membership criteria.** Growing too fast can be risky.
- **Let humanitarian needs, rather than pre-defined institutional criteria, dictate if and how to implement joint programming.** Accept that the main drivers of impact are the individual NGOs, but continue striving for a collective level of collaborative impact.
- **Consider engaging a consultancy to facilitate the articulation of the DRA vision and related strategic memos; troubleshoot the new annual planning process; and help design simple mechanisms for collaboration that require minimal input for maximal gain.** Continue to learn from other existing NGO consortia, such as the START Network.

### For Joint Responses

- **Improve the quality, consistency, and transparency of reports, budgets, and evaluations.** Increase learning potential by having timely evaluations inform follow-on proposals. Have beneficiary perspectives become a standard component of all project documents.
- **Budget for more substantial local capacity-building efforts** (i.e., local NGOs, community based organisations, and government authorities).

- **Continue to refer to international standards in project proposals and JR evaluations.** This is important for accountability purposes even when it is assumed that standards have become a mainstream part of humanitarian programming.
- **Continue to place an emphasis on cash-based assistance.** Future JRs should include a (standardized) assessment of the appropriateness and feasibility of cash-based assistance, taking into account the context and target population.
- **Be more creative and less resistant with regard to sharing information and implementing joint activities.**
- **For all JRs – but especially larger ones – hire a full-time, in-country coordinator.** This investment will reap dividends in collaborative impact.
- **Consider capping the size of JRs to 6-8 member NGOs.**
- JRs could have greater impact with a more consistent **conflict-sensitive approach.**