

SUMMARY REPORT
DRA Final Evaluation, 2015-2017
ECAS Consulting

This report summarizes key findings from an independent, external evaluation of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), carried out by Europe Conflict and Security (ECAS) Consulting Ltd.

Objectives. The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the DRA’s delivery of €180 million worth of humanitarian aid across 18 countries from 2015-2017 and to review the consortium’s strategic approach.

Methods. The evaluation comprised field visits to Ethiopia, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe; focus groups with 51 beneficiaries; 29 interviews with all DRA member NGOs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) representatives in the Netherlands; an additional 46 interviews with staff and partners; a meta-evaluation of 32 Joint Responses (JRs); an online survey of 78 programme staff at HQ and field levels; and participant-observation of learning visits, meetings, and trainings.

Key takeaways: The DRA is starting to prove its worth. Overall, the DRA has provided timely, relevant, and appropriate assistance to people in need. Although the full potential of the consortium approach remains untapped, there are more and more examples from the field demonstrating that improved cooperation is yielding more efficient and effective delivery of life-saving assistance. Collectively, the Joint Responses planned to reach more than 8 million people, and in practice they often surpassed their targets. Joint Responses are taking good efforts to mobilize the participation of beneficiaries in the design and implementation of their programmes, and local NGOs and community-based organizations are engaged at all stages. The main hurdle remains achieving a truly integrated approach to delivery – although it may be the case that less is more.

At the same time, there is considerable room for improvement. Joint Responses should budget for more substantial local capacity-building efforts, and be more creative and willing to share information and implement joint activities. The MoFA, with its ambitious expectations of the DRA, should quicken approval procedures for individual JRs and consider multi-year funding (18-24 months) for protracted crises. The DRA should specify its desired contribution to international aid initiatives like the Grand Bargain, and avoid growing too big, too fast. Capping the size of JRs to 6-8 member NGOs and engaging a full-time, in-country coordinator for each JR would enhance collaborative impact.

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.

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



I. ON THE DELIVERY OF AID

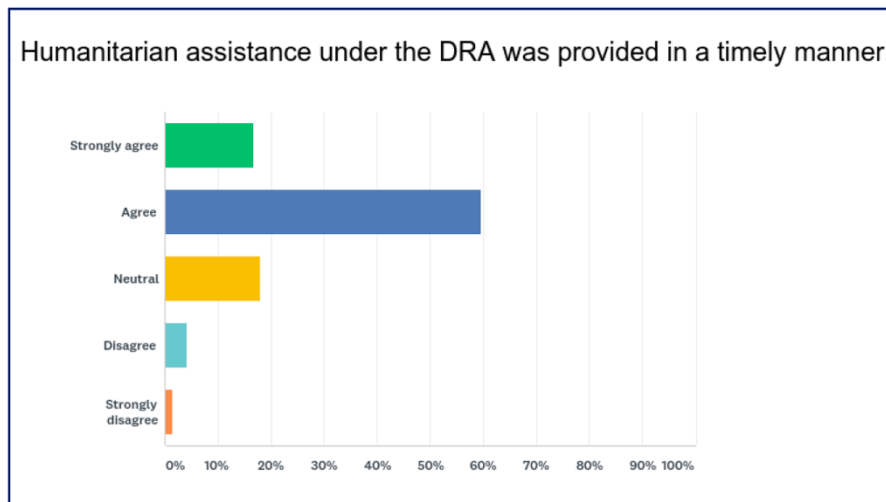
Efficiency & Timeliness. Overall, the DRA has provided timely assistance to people in need.

Slow approval processes in the Netherlands and at national level 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 percent budgetary flexibility entrusted to JR lead organizations, which allowed assistance to be redirected as needed.

Snapshot from the field

● In **North Iraq**, the DRA adapted to respond to an additional 111,000 people in the immediate aftermath of military operations in Mosul and Hawija. The JR lead in **Ukraine** maintained a flexible approach to the unfolding crisis there, freeing member NGOs to meet water and heating needs wherever the conflict escalated, like in Avdika.

● The **Ethiopia** Joint Response experienced delays due to procurement problems, difficulty in finalizing agreements with authorities, and the late release of funds from the Netherlands. In **Nepal**, delays in setting up semi-permanent shelter were attributed to bureaucratic governmental processes to set shelter standards.



More than 75% of programme staff were confident that timely assistance was provided to beneficiaries.

Relevance & Appropriateness. 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.

Snapshot from the field

- *Local leaders, provincial authorities, and the national government in **Vanuatu** expressed their appreciation for the DRA addressing their most pressing needs, especially reaching more remote communities with food distribution. In **Ukraine**, much-needed jobs were created through income-generating activities like car repairs, photo services, a manicure studio, a spice shop, and manufacture of chimney brushes.*
- *The **Yemen** Joint Response concluded that the quantity of aid provided was insufficient in face of the staggering needs on the ground. In **Nigeria**, which was the only Joint Response not to explicitly address gender in project documentation, beneficiaries complained that the assistance provided did not always respect cultural customs.*

Effectiveness. 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.

Snapshot from the field

- *In a survey conducted with beneficiaries from the **Somalia, Somaliland, and Puntland** JR, 209 out of 292 respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the programme. In the **Central African Republic**, the construction and rehabilitation of water points was especially welcomed by women, as it created a forum where they could meet and strengthen social bonds.*
- *In **South Sudan**, only 60-80% of planned outputs (depending on the sector) were achieved compared to initial expectations. Security concerns hampered the realisation of outputs in **Syria**: the implementation of a water programme was delayed when a generator, meant to be installed in Soliman Al-Halabi, could not cross conflict lines, and had to remain in a warehouse in Homs until the contractor was allowed access to the project site.*

Sustainability. While the DRA serves to save lives in emergencies, there are clear advantages to follow-up (second and third phase) responses. However, short time-frames for implementation sometimes compromised JRs' sustainability efforts and hindered collaborative impact.

The distinction at HQ 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. In sudden-onset acute crises, such as in the Ebola, Nepal, and Vanuatu responses, DRA members stopped working collaboratively following the end of the implementation period.

Snapshot from the field

● In **Afghanistan**, sustainable access to safe drinking water was ensured in Nangarhar, Paktya, Herat, and Kunduz provinces through the construction and rehabilitation of wells and the training of local water management committees for their maintenance. In **Zimbabwe**, capacity testing of boreholes preceded the construction of solar gardens. These were established at places with high water-yield, thus underpinning their durability.

● In **Ethiopia**, persistent droughts continue to compromise the livelihoods and resilience of communities dependent on rainfall, in spite of a follow-up response. In **Yemen**, the brief time-frame and the urgency of humanitarian needs led to the absence of a specific objective to develop the capacity of local partners as part of the response efforts, which compromised the sustainability of efforts.



Water quality: before (right) and after (left) the intervention in Ethiopia

Impact & Reach. 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 previous 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.

Snapshot from the field

● In **Syria**, the size of the response allowed the JR to work across conflict lines. The broad sectoral and geographical coverage inside and outside of Syria improved the ability to reach beneficiaries, for example by providing opportunities for JR members to travel together in convoys. In **Nigeria**, consortium members managing food security and livelihoods programmes in Ninawa used a Skype group to share information on beneficiaries and activities, improving coordination and avoiding overlaps.

● In **Afghanistan**, the six-month implementation period was said to be too short to pursue jointness, and it was thought to be more effective to focus on individual programming. In **Somalia** and **Yemen**, JRs had difficulties running joint activities because of security limitations and difficult humanitarian access. In the latter, some NGO members were even located outside of the country, while in the former, NGOs tended to work in isolated locations.

II. ON THE CONTRIBUTION TO GRAND BARGAIN COMMITMENTS

While NGOs are in small ways transforming their way of work to meet the Grand Bargain Commitments, it is too early to tell how this will impact the future of the DRA.

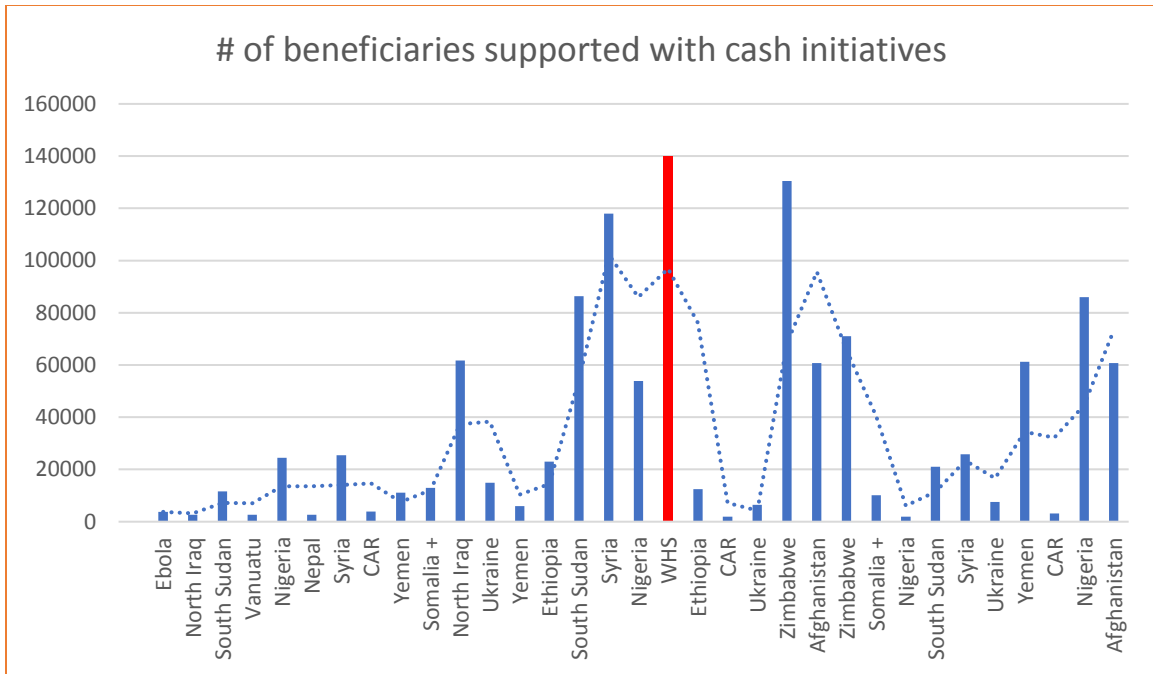
The Grain Bargain was officially launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, following the report of a High-Level Panel created by the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. Besides addressing the humanitarian financing gap, the report introduced the concept of the Grand Bargain as a means to promote changes in the way donors and agencies deliver aid. It was hoped that these changes would result in efficiency gains, in order to make more human and financial resources available to the benefit of those in need.

The Grand Bargain has encouraged DRA members, regardless of their differences, to discuss how humanitarian assistance is delivered and to identify common approaches and methodologies, including at country level. However, agreement on the role and vision of the DRA to meet Grand Bargain commitments has been hampered by lengthy discussions among member NGOs, who have divergent priorities, and are sometimes part of competing coalitions and international structures. The table below presents an analysis of those Grand Bargain commitments subject to a DRA-specific focus.¹

Grand Bargain commitments	Analysis	Snapshot from the field
<p>Greater transparency</p>	<p>It is unclear whether the DRA has contributed to greater transparency, despite the obligation (as of 2017) to report to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).</p> <p>A number of practical challenges must be overcome with regard to IATI reporting – such as the prevailing confusion regarding measurement of humanitarian results and the lack of clarity on IATI’s target audience. DRA members could also do a better job of being more transparent with their partners in the field.</p>	<p><i>The North Iraq Joint Response was advised to increase transparency by detailing at proposal-stage the implementation chain down to the implanting partner on the ground, including respective control over funding by each link in the chain.</i></p>

¹ Thus excluding commitments to reduce management costs, conduct joint needs assessments, ensure multi-year planning and funding, and harmonize and simplify reporting requirements.

<p>Localization: support and funding tools for local and national responders</p>	<p>Every JR engages local NGOs and community based organizations – 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><i>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, including on mental health and psychological first aid. In Yemen, difficulties in tracking population flows and movements of displaced persons were mitigated by coordinating closely with local partners and authorities, as well as by training local communities in Hajjah to support the process.</i></p>
<p>Cash-based programming</p>	<p>Good progress has been made towards the call for increased use of cash-based programming.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><i>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. In Nigeria, beneficiaries were satisfied with the unrestricted cash programming that was implemented, using the funds to meet their most urgent needs. They were reportedly less satisfied when the programmes were restricted, as they could not decide for themselves what to spend the money on.</i></p>
<p>Participation revolution</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Nonetheless, the DRA’s 25% budgetary flexibility enables real-time improvements based on beneficiaries’ suggestions and complaints.</p>	<p><i>In Afghanistan, there was a special hotline for female beneficiaries, ensuring more agile, transparent, and secure feedback. In the Ebola Joint Response, although there was evidence of adaptation, feedback from the community did not lead to many changes in the implementation of the project, which largely followed its original design.</i></p>
<p>Engagement between humanitarian and development actors</p>	<p>There are only weak indications that the mechanism has served to enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p><i>In general, evaluation reports and beneficiaries called for activities to strengthen resilience, as highlighted in focus groups discussions in North Iraq. In Zimbabwe, a longer-term approach was explicitly taken from the start, namely in terms of food security and livelihoods.</i></p>



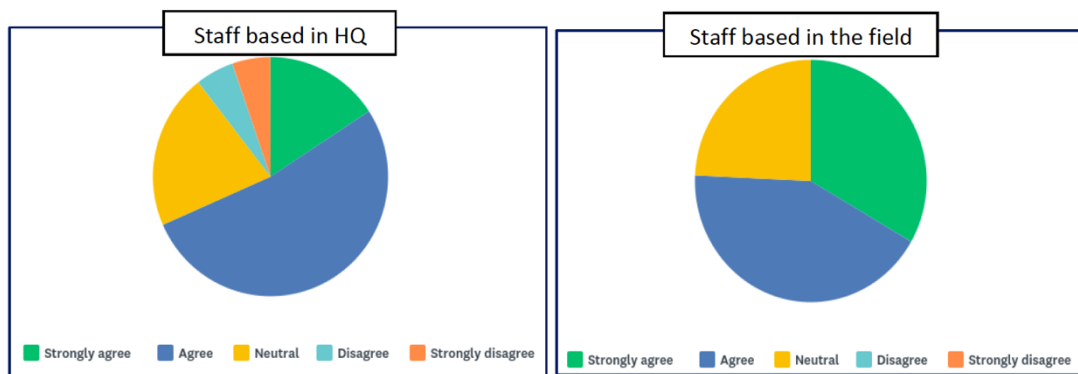
Numbers of beneficiaries included under cash-related activities (cash, vouchers, in-kind) in project logframes. JRs are sorted according to their start date. 'Somalia +' refers to the Somalia, Somaliland, and Puntland Joint Responses. The red line indicates the timing of the World Humanitarian Summit, where delegations committed to optimizing the use of cash-based programming.

III. ON THE SETUP OF THE DRA

At the Headquarters level

- **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.**
 - There are risks to 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. However, 85% of field staff and 89% of staff in the Netherlands agreed 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.

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



- **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, such as with regards to the means of communication and information sharing, 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.
- **Visibility has been less of a priority for the DRA than originally intended.**
 - Recent efforts have been made to increase the visibility of humanitarian efforts 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.

Snapshot from the field: During the first phase of the **Ukraine** Joint Response, the filming and screening of 'Face Down', a documentary about the crisis in the Eastern part of the country, helped to secure funding (and more structural aid) for the second phase. In **Vanuatu**, due to the fact that multiple agencies responded to the Cyclone Pam disaster, beneficiaries in many communities were often unaware of who was the donor, or which country or agency donated which items.

At the field level

- **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.**

- After a certain point, there are diminishing returns to increasing the number of partners.

Snapshot from the field: In **Ethiopia**, each NGO worked in a different geographical area, independently, avoiding duplication and working to their comparative advantage. This led to a wider coverage and assistance to those in need across the country, but also meant that collaboration and joint implementation of activities was limited. In **Ukraine** and **Zimbabwe**, the relatively small size of the consortiums was reported to be of significant value, facilitating communication, coordination, and the delivery of aid. In **South Sudan**, the quality of the assistance was considered satisfactory by the beneficiaries, despite the large number of member NGOs, which was justified given the high needs in the country.

- **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.

Snapshot from the field: In the **Nepal** and **Ebola** Joint Responses, due to the acuteness and quick onset of the crises, NGO staff said that there was no time to get to know other JR staff, let alone to think about joint activities. The **Syria** Joint Response showed that a large number of JR members could also be beneficial, facilitating activities across conflict lines based on the comparative advantages of organizations.

- **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.

***Snapshot from the field:** In **Ukraine**, 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. In **Ethiopia**, the transition from the first Joint Response to the follow-up phase implied continuity, with NGOs building on previous projects and working with the same people, areas, and sectors. There were fewer delays due to better preparation and earlier opportunities for using the funds.*

- **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.

***Snapshot from the field:** The **Yemen** Joint Response retained learnings from the previous **Vanuatu** experience, while informing the subsequent **Nepal** process. This enabled the DRA to identify areas for improvement. NGOs can indeed learn from other member organizations in terms of aid modalities, innovative tools, and methodologies. For example, in the **Somalia, Somaliland, and Puntland** Joint Response, one member NGO helped another to improve the gender-sensitivity of its post-distribution monitoring tools. In **Nepal**, a JR member used a durable method to build reusable latrines, catching the attention of organizations outside the DRA. In **Zimbabwe**, when faced with the challenges of hand water pumps, which require hard labor to get water and left children and the elderly struggling to fetch water, solar-mechanized pumps were installed.*

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Quicken approval procedures for individual JRs
- Consider multi-year funding (18-24 months) for protracted crises
- Articulate desires and needs clearly and consistently to NGOs in writing
- Let the jointness happen naturally, without pushing too hard – otherwise it could weaken the consortium

For the Dutch Relief Alliance

- Clarify the role of the DRA in contributing to Grand Bargain commitments
- Consider developing exit criteria for when a JR is about to close operations
- Consider developing stricter eligibility/ membership criteria
- Let the implementation of joint programming be dictated by humanitarian needs, rather than pre-defined institutional criteria

For Joint Responses

- Budget for more substantial local capacity-building efforts
- Continue to place an emphasis on cash-based assistance
- Hire a full-time, in-country coordinator for all JRs, but especially larger ones
- Consider capping the size of JRs to 6-8 member NGOs