

DRA External Evaluation

December 2021 to June 2022



Focus Group Discussion with beneficiaries in Munoli, North Kivu, DRC. © Michelle Wilson

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Many thanks to all those people who participated in interviews, Focus Group Discussions and the survey for the evaluation and provided thoughtful and honest input. Particular thanks to Peter Das and Maria Ulissi-Brown for diligently supporting the evaluation, over and above all their other responsibilities.

The evaluation sought to draw out, synthesise and represent views across DRA partners, local partners, affected communities and other stakeholders, however ultimately the views expressed in the report are those of the external Consultants.

List of Abbreviations

AC / ACM	Acute Crisis / Acute Crisis Mechanism
AAP	Accountability to Affected People
BGM	Block Grant Management
BoD	DRA Board of Directors
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
DIF	DRA Innovation Fund
DRA	Dutch Relief Alliance
DRAC	Dutch Relief Alliance Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICR	Indirect Cost Recovery
JR	Joint Response
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoFA	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development-Development Assistance Committee
PC / PCM	Protracted Crisis / Protracted Crisis Mechanism
RTR	Real Time Review
RRTR	Rapid Real Time Review
RTF	Response Task Force
SSJR	South Sudan Joint Response
ToR	Terms of Reference
WG	Working Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is a coalition of fourteen Dutch aid organisations in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), working together to respond to protracted and acute crises.

The DRA external evaluation covers the last four year strategy cycle, from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2021. During this period there were 59 Joint Responses in 25 countries, with a combined total budget of approximately €260 million Euro. Recommendations are included in the relevant sections of the report in blue boxes and summarised in Annex 9, draft Management Response Matrix.

2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The specific objectives of the evaluation were threefold:

- To provide DRA and MoFA with an independent view on the progress DRA has made towards the 2018-2021 strategic priorities
- To identify best practices that can be replicated and errors and omissions that can be avoided in JR implementation and in the functioning of the DRA grant making structure
- To inform DRA strategy, particularly activities that may be needed to realise the new strategic plan

All Joint Responses and DRA support activities for the period 2018-2021 were within the scope of this over-arching external evaluation.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was adopted for the external evaluation, using a combination of 1:1 interviews, Focus Group Discussions, an on-line survey and a Secondary Data review. Three countries (South Sudan, Gaza and DRC) were visited between March-May 2022 for in-depth discussions with DRA partners, affected communities and other key stakeholders. See Annex 3 for the evaluation schedule and key informants. See Annex 4 for the full list of documents consulted.

In total, a sampled range of 606 key informants were reached, covering a variety of DRA partners, local partners, affected people, MoFA representatives, UN agencies and others. Overall, given the number and range of key informants, there is a good degree of confidence that the evaluation has surfaced key issues about DRA during the period 2018-2021.

There were some limitations and constraints, including; the war in Ukraine, various delays, gaps in data, evaluation fatigue and a limited response rate particularly to the on-line survey.

4. MAIN FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation considered key lines of enquiry against two sets of criteria. i) DRA performance against the strategic priorities for the period 2018-2021 and ii) JR performance against both the strategic priorities as well as the OECD-DAC criteria.

DRA PERFORMANCE AGAINST STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

4.1 Localisation

There has been a degree of significant and incremental progress on localisation, although further effort is required.

Co-leading of JRs with a local partner representative was discussed during the strategic period and two JRs (South Sudan and Afghanistan) will have co-leads in 2022.

Funding to local actors is increasing year on year, with the Grand Bargain target of 25% to local actors achieved belatedly by 2021. The DRA aim of 35% to local actors was only achieved in Acute Crises by 2020.

An ongoing issue in terms of funds flowing as directly as possible to local partners is the lack of clarity about ICR sharing.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - DRA should develop a clear policy position on ICR sharing as a matter of principle and concurrently review capacity strengthening measures between DRA partners and local partners to consider how to responsibly share risks

Capacity strengthening has evolved in a number of JRs from a top-down approach, to more of a nuanced partner led approach. However, the hard metric of spend in 2021 was around 3% which was well below the 5-8% target.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – DRA partners should continue to allocate at least 5% of the JR budget to capacity strengthening initiatives, especially in Protracted Crises. Capacity strengthening costs already committed within existing budget lines should be fully teased out, in order to capture the full breadth of capacity strengthening activities taking place

Amplifying the voice and capacity of local actors was ad hoc, with excellent initiatives in Somalia and South Sudan, but no sense of a concerted effort across all JRs.

There seem to be a number of enabling factors, as well as barriers related to localisation including; context, the mandate and ambition of DRA partners, the more stable setting of a Protracted Crisis and the DRA coordination structure.

4.2 Accountability

Despite the challenges of Accountability to Affected People, DRA partners are taking this issue seriously and there are some very positive examples of harmonised and joint mechanisms being developed within JRs.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – DRA partners should continue to explore the possibility of harmonising accountability mechanisms at field level, both in Protracted and Acute Crises and continue to proactively promote accountability to affected people

Upward accountability to the Dutch public was less extensive, largely given that DRA did not wish to compete for attention with DRA partners.

Learning was not a specific action within the strategic priorities, however recognising its importance, there were a number of questions related to learning in the evaluation matrix and several points came up related to information management and evaluations.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – DRA should review SharePoint with a view to making immediate short-term improvements such as file discipline, weeding out unnecessary documents and plugging gaps such as missing data on the JR Tracker data. Whilst exploring options for a more robust and user-friendly learning portal

RECOMMENDATION 5 – DRA should review the frequency, type and style of evaluations and reviews, with a view to coming up with a more streamlined and efficient approach that does not put such a burden on implementing agencies and makes effective use of the learning being generated across JRs

4.3 Collaboration

One of the primary drivers to collaborate is, as one respondent put it, wanting ‘a part of the pie.’ In addition, by working together as an alliance, a number of DRA partners felt that the effectiveness of all DRA partners was being cranked up. However, there is opportunity to go further and deeper in all areas. Particularly co-leadership of JRs, greater levels of sharing at field level, exploring more integrated programming, developing robust DRA quality assurance processes and tools, reviewing the allocation process for PCs and ramping up efforts to liaise with and influence the wider humanitarian community.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – the DRA Quality Working Group should prioritise the development of quality assurance processes and tools, including clarity on who is driving quality and at which level

RECOMMENDATION 7 - DRA should review the allocation process for PC funds and as part of this review consider how other alliances allocate their funds

RECOMMENDATION 8 – the DRA should make much greater efforts to build and strengthen links with relevant external organisations and as part of this venture, to clearly communicate the new strategy to an external audience

RECOMMENDATION 9 – DRA should make further efforts to identify additional sources of funding over and above MoFA

DRA governance and structures are time consuming and onerous for some partners. Suggestions are made about how to improve learning and how to refine and boost the Field Coordinator role. The aspiration is that time invested by DRA partners in effective collaboration will lead to increased reach and impact.

RECOMMENDATION 10 - DRA should start tracking the time elapsed between the following key stages; beginning of a new acute crisis; ACM being activated; funds approved; funds disbursed, implementation started. This data should form part of the key metrics to measure performance of the Block Grant Mechanism

RECOMMENDATION 11 – DRA should have a clearer role definition for Field Coordinators and consider measures to enhance their ability to shape and manage Joint Responses, including the addition of a MEAL Officer in larger JRs

4.4 Innovation

The DIF external evaluation concluded that, 'with a 12 million Euro budget over a 4-year time span, the DIF mechanism is considered a rather unique set-up that funded innovation projects and, consequently, helped DRA partner organisations to become more innovative'.

Both the DIF evaluation and the DRA evaluation findings revealed a number of significant issues such as, a lack of clarity about how to define innovation, delays in the design and implementation of DIF projects, a heavy application process, the inherent silo between the DIF mechanism and JRs, as well as a top-down approach.

The new strategy is taking account of many of these challenges, particularly by encouraging the embedding of innovation within JRs. These various issues will need close scrutiny to ensure innovation funding is used in the most effective and efficient way over the next strategy cycle.

RECOMMENDATION 12 – DRA should ensure that the Innovation Manager and Innovation champions are primarily focused on supporting field teams, including regular travel to Joint Responses to provide support, training and inspiration. As well as considering making use of external facilitation bodies such ELRHA

JR PERFORMANCE AGAINST OECD-DAC CRITERIA

Three countries were selected for in-depth visits (South Sudan, Gaza and DRC) and they provided the main focus for this aspect of the evaluation, supplemented by secondary data. More detailed country level findings and recommendations can be found in Annexes 6, 7 and 8.

4.5 Relevance

Robust needs assessment data has informed the choice of programming and views of disaster affected people have been taken into account. The Crisis Modifier Mechanism was a very useful means for local partners to respond to new crises within existing PC programs and DRA may want to consider extending this mechanism to all PC JRs. The flexibility of DRA funds has enabled DRA partners to adapt and respond to changes such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.6 Coherence

JRs made positive efforts to coordinate with all the key external bodies, such as governments, clusters and other NGOs. As well as extensively coordinating internally with other DRA partners and local partners.

The various components of JRs complemented each other through careful program design and useful 'kick off' meetings. This avoided overlaps or duplication. However, this also meant there was limited genuine integration of programming as partners were often working in different geographical areas.

4.7 Effectiveness

It was not possible to verify if all JR outputs had been achieved, however in the three focus countries visited, outputs had in fact been exceeded.

Cash is a clear preference for beneficiaries and many JRs included a cash component.

4.8 Efficiency

Many AC and PC JRs faced delays, due to a range of factors including; recruitment, procurement, securing beneficiary lists, liaison with local authorities and insecurity. In addition, delayed disbursement of funds from DRA to JRs meant that unless DRA partners could pre-finance, implementation was sometimes constrained at the outset.

Field Coordinators had limited visibility on individual partner spend, which meant underspends were difficult to identify and manage. A related issue is the ability of DRA to reallocate any unspent funds to other JRs.

RECOMMENDATION 13 – DRA should develop a mechanism to reallocate unspent funds to other JRs, rather than funds being returned to MoFA. As part of this, DRA should more widely promote the possibility of Cost Extensions where there are excess funds available, or the option of No Cost Extensions in exceptional circumstances

4.9 Impact

Impact was measured by baseline and end-line surveys and post distribution monitoring. During country visits, beneficiaries reported significant impact as a result of DRA partner programs.

4.10 Sustainability

Exit planning was seen to be in place in the countries visited and this is crucial given the relatively short funding windows. Genuine multi-year funding could help to encourage DRA members to pursue resilience type programming, to ensure more effective capacity strengthening and to encourage program benefits to persist beyond the end of the DRA funding.

5. FINAL CONCLUSION

The external evaluation demonstrates that the DRA has delivered effective and efficient humanitarian assistance, as well as clearly evolving and maturing as an alliance and learning from its experience.

5.1 Progress against strategic priorities

Important gains have been made against each of the strategic priorities. Nevertheless, collaborative working in an alliance is not straightforward and further efforts are required in all areas to deepen and widen the effectiveness of the DRA.

5.2 Progress on JR performance

A comprehensive data set across all JRs would have enabled a more meaningful comparison and analysis of performance. Nevertheless, on the basis of the three country visits and a range of secondary data for some JRs, including RTRs and Evaluation reports, it was possible to conclude that reasonable progress was made against the standard OECD-DAC criteria.

5.3 Inform the new DRA strategy

It may have made more sense to commission the DRA external evaluation prior to the drafting of the new strategy, or at least to have captured early findings during the strategy formulation period. Nevertheless, regular reviews of the strategy should allow for additional activities to be incorporated, to take account of agreed recommendations from this evaluation.

As part of their ongoing evolution, DRA will need to reflect on and address the many lessons and recommendations emerging from the evaluation.

The Management Response Matrix (Annex 9) provides a tool for the DRA Board of Directors to systematically consider each of the recommendations and determine how they should be addressed and operationalised.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is a coalition of fourteen Dutch aid organisations in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), working together to respond to protracted and acute crises.

The DRA vision is a world in which people affected by crisis are at the centre of a humanitarian response which saves lives, alleviates suffering, restores dignity and contributes to resilience.

Humanitarian needs continue to grow exponentially year on year. The UN-OCHA Global Humanitarian Overview estimated that in 2018, 135.7M people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection and by 2021 this had jumped to 235.4M people¹. These statistics underline the ongoing importance of mechanisms such as the DRA.

The DRA external evaluation covers the last four year strategy cycle, from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2021. During this period there were 59 Joint Responses in 25 countries, with a combined total budget of approximately €260 million Euro. Table 4 in the Impact section provides a further breakdown of these figures.

A previous external evaluation took place in 2017, as well as an external evaluation of the DRA Innovation Fund in August 2021.

Recommendations are included in the relevant sections of the report in blue boxes and summarised in Annex 9, draft Management Response Matrix.

1.1 DRA partners

As of 2022, the fourteen Dutch aid organisations comprising the DRA included; CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Dorcas, Oxfam Novib, Plan International, Help a Child, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands, Stichting Vluchteling, Tearfund NL, Terre des hommes, War Child Holland, World Vision and ZOA.

War Trauma Foundation withdrew from DRA in 2019. They were not consulted directly on the circumstances of their leaving, but it is understood they were too small to gain value from DRA and never secured DRA funding.

The report uses the term DRA partners to mean the above International NGOs, who have signed the DRA Partnership Agreement. The term local partners refers to their respective National NGO partners.

2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The overall aims of an evaluation are usually 'accountability' (how well have resources been applied) and 'learning' (to facilitate improvement at program and organisation level). The purpose of this evaluation was both, as follows:

i) Accountability; to MoFA and DRA partners

- Assessment of Joint Responses, as well as the structure and function of the DRA, against the four strategic priorities
- Assessment of Joint Response's against the standard OECD-DAC criteria of; relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability

ii) Learning; to capture best practice and lessons learned, as well as offering specific and actionable recommendations

- Follow up on recommendations from previous evaluations
- Recommendations for future programming
- Recommendations on the functioning and structure of the DRA mechanism

The specific objectives of the evaluation were threefold:

- To provide DRA and MoFA with an independent view on the progress DRA has made towards the 2018-2021 strategic priorities
- To identify best practices that can be replicated and errors and omissions that can be avoided in JR implementation and in the functioning of the DRA grant making structure

¹ <https://gho.unocha.org/>

- To inform DRA strategy, particularly activities that may be needed to realise the new strategic plan

Scope of the evaluation

All Joint Responses and DRA support activities for the period 2018-2021 were within the scope of this over-arching external evaluation. The Terms of Reference for the evaluation is included as Annex 1.

In terms of innovation activities, DIF funded projects were the focus of a separate external evaluation in August 2021. Nevertheless, this evaluation considered overall innovation themes as well as more specifically exploring innovation aspects within JRs.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was adopted for the evaluation, using a combination of 1:1 interview's, an on-line survey to reach a range of key informants from across DRA partners, in-depth visits to three sampled countries, supplemented by a secondary data review.

An Evaluation Task Force was established at the outset, to oversee the evaluation process, comprising; Geert Jan van Dijk (DRA Chair), Johanneke de Hoogh (MoFA representative), Peter Das (ZOA M&E Specialist) and Robert Schofield (Lead Consultant for Ibex Associates).

3.1 Qualitative and quantitative approaches

The evaluation sought a balance of input from DRA partner staff in the Netherlands, DRA partner staff in country programs, local partners, affected people, MoFA representatives and others.

Interview responses were triangulated with survey results and secondary data and key themes were drawn out and highlighted in the report.

TABLE 1: Summary of all key informants including survey respondents (no double counting)

Stakeholder	Interviews/FGD	Survey	TOTAL
DRA Secretariat			
Chair, Vice-Chair, Crisis Coordinator, BGM, support staff, former staff	2F/4M	3F/1M	10
WG & Task Force Chairs & Vice Chairs	2F/4M		6
JR Leads	5F/1M	3F/2M	11
Field Coordinators	6F/4M	1F/3M	14
DRA partners		19F/13M	32
-South Sudan	3F/12M		15
-Gaza	7F/5M		12
-DRC	10M		10
Local partners		1F/3M	4
-South Sudan; CEDS, CEF, WOCO, HFO, SAADO, JYAN, MHA, WDG, ACROSS, UNIDOR	1F/15M		16
-Gaza; CTCCM, CFTA, CMWU, GCMHP, Beit AIMutaqba Association, Beit Lahia Development Association, Bayader	12F/14M 3F/6M		26 9
-DRC; HCC, ADED, CFAD, CODEVAH, UFP, ECC-NK, FEPSI			
Affected communities			
-South Sudan (Aweil East and Aweil South)	135F/39M		174
-Gaza Strip (Gaza City, North Gaza and Khan Younis Governorates)	53F/68M		121
-DRC (North & South Kivu)	101F/24M		125
Local authorities (South Sudan, Gaza and DRC)	2F/9M		11
UN agencies (OCHA & Clusters in Gaza and DRC)	4M		4
MoFA representatives	1F/1M		2
Other Networks (PHA, Partos, Giro555, START)	2F/2M		4
TOTAL	335F / 222M	27F / 22M²	606

² 6 survey respondents were anonymous therefore it is not possible to determine their gender, however an estimate has been made, on the basis of the gender balance proportion of other responses

Combining 1:1 interviewees, country visit informants and survey respondents, there was a total of 606 (362 female and 244 male) unique participants to the evaluation.

3.2 Desk Review of Secondary Data

A systematic review of key documents was undertaken in January & February 2022. This included a selection of documents for 8 sampled JRs (based on a range of DRA partners, geographical regions, ACs & PCs, small and large budgets). Additional documents were provided and reviewed during the course of the evaluation. See Annex 4 for the full list of secondary data reviewed.

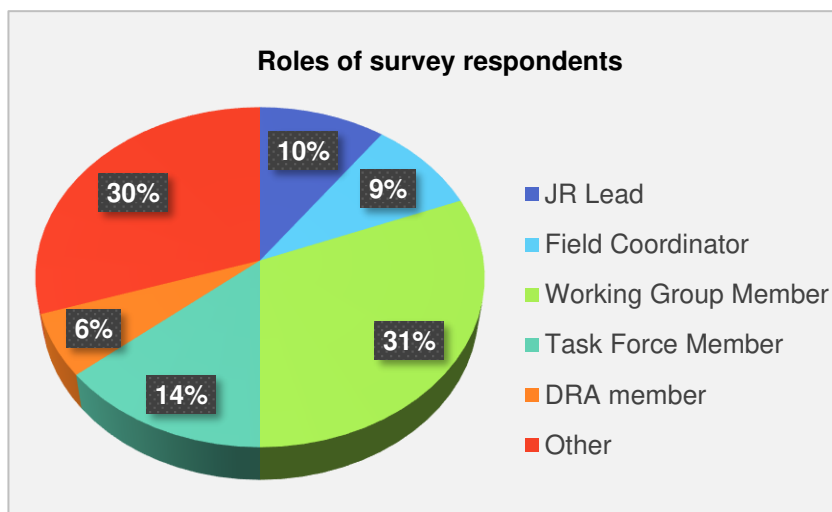
3.3 Online Survey

A short survey was launched via Google Forms on 3 March 2020 for a three-week period, targeting around 140 DRA partner staff in headquarters and country offices.

The survey was promoted via several channels including a news item on the DRA website and a mailout to DRA partners. A personalised follow-up email was sent to individuals to encourage participation.

By the time the survey closed on 25 March 2022, only 60 people had participated (49 were unique new respondents, who had not been interviewed. Whereas 11 had already been interviewed and therefore these individuals are not included as survey respondents in Table 1).

The target was to reach at least 100 responses across the full breadth of JRs. While this number of responses provided useful descriptive data, it was not enough to adequately power a full statistical analysis.



The chart above shows how the survey respondents defined their roles within DRA. There is some duplication within these numbers as many reported multiple roles, for example JR lead as well as Working Group member.

The original intention was that the survey results would provide an initial steer on key issues to then feed into the question plan design for key informant interviews. In the end, due to various delays described in the constraints section, the survey data was not available until the end of March 2022, when interviews had already completed. The on-line survey questions are attached as Annex 5.

3.4 Semi-structured interviews with DRA staff & other stakeholders

A series of on-line interviews were conducted between January and March 2022 with a sampled range of 32 key informants. Key lines of enquiry were explored during the interviews with questions tailored to particular roles.

A list of key informants provided by DRA was used as the basis to prioritise who to interview and the numbers agreeing to be interviewed were within the anticipated range. The role breakdown of interviewees was as follows; DRA Secretariat x 4, former DRA Committee x 2, WG/TF Chairs x 6, JR leads x 6, Field Coordinators x 8, MoFA representatives x 2, other Alliances & Networks x 4.

See Annex 3 for the comprehensive list of key informants and the interview schedule.

3.5 In-depth country visits

Rob Schofield and Michelle Wilson visited three countries, sampled from the 25 countries where Joint Responses were undertaken during the evaluation period. A key consideration for selecting suitable countries was accessibility and some countries were excluded after initial enquiries due to access constraints. This included Vietnam, Sudan and Syria.

Full reports for each of the country visits are included in Annexes 6, 7 and 8. The visit schedule was as follows:

South Sudan (Juba, Aweil East and Aweil South). 28th March – 10th April 2022. Rob Schofield hosted by Save the Children

Gaza (Gaza North, Gaza City and Khan Younis Governorates). 18th – 29th April 2022. Rob Schofield hosted by War Child

Democratic Republic of Congo (Goma, Bukavu, Musienne Health Zone in North Kivu). 2nd – 14th May 2022. Michele Wilson hosted by World Vision

In each country, the evaluators spoke to between 145 and 210 stakeholders, most of whom were beneficiaries (420 in total) and local partner staff (51 in total). This far exceeded the original plan, which was a target of 100 individuals to participate in each country visit.

When it became apparent that in-depth visits would coincide with the end of JR evaluations, there was an attempt made to combine efforts. Fortunately, this new approach was rapidly approved by MoFA as an option.

This meant that in DRC it was possible to conduct one evaluation covering both processes. In the case of Gaza, the contract had already been issued to a local consulting firm to conduct the end of JR evaluation and therefore Ibex Associates and RAI Consult conducted joint meetings and worked collaboratively on two separate but related processes.



PHOTO: Shows a 'proportional piling exercise' during a FGD in Bweteta, North Kivu



In South Sudan, the end of JR evaluation had already taken place in February 2022, therefore to avoid evaluation fatigue, the evaluator selected a field location that had not been included in either the end of JR evaluation or the MoFA effectiveness review.

PHOTO: FGD in Gaza with 'positive parenting' beneficiaries conducted with RAI Consult

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed with a version of the 'framework approach'³⁷ adopting the following steps:

- Familiarisation—initial trawl through the secondary data to begin to work out key themes and recurring issues.
- Identifying an evaluation matrix – the overall evaluation criteria were linked to the objectives and then questions to address these criteria, which began to define the data index.
- Coding - the data index was applied to the data manually. The coding started with pre-defined categories and evolved with emerging categories applied as new themes emerged.
- Synthesising and analysing data - the data was rearranged according to the criteria to which they related, forming associations, themes and recurring issues.

Quantitative data was triangulated with the results of the framework analysis.

3.7 Constraints & limitations to the evaluation

Overall, given the number and range of key informants, there is a good degree of confidence that the evaluation has surfaced key issues about the DRA. Nevertheless, there were several constraints and limitations as follows:

Ukraine effect - the war in Ukraine and the subsequent pressure on DRA partners to respond, meant there was less capacity for engagement with the evaluation. For example, some 1:1 interviews were cancelled at short notice and some individuals declined to complete the survey because they were too busy.

³⁷ Ritchie J, Lewis J: Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers. 2003, London

Delays – the Inception Report was completed at the end of December 2021, but not signed off until the end of February 2022. Secondary data was complicated to find and key documents and data were missing on SharePoint. Provision of key informant data, such as lists of individuals and email addresses was delayed until early February. The survey was planned to launch in January but was delayed until March while awaiting feedback on the survey design and Inception Report sign off. Country visits were originally anticipated to take place from February 2022 onwards, however uncertainty about country selection caused delays and the first visit did not take place until the end of March 2022.

Having said that, these various delays allowed for more reflection between phases which was probably beneficial. Furthermore, the travel delay allowed for more planning time and Covid-19 restrictions were also looser by the time the evaluators travelled.

Gaps in data – there continues to be gaps in the data on Sharepoint, for example the JR Tracker (which was the only comprehensive source of consolidated data available on JRs) is incomplete. As well as issues accessing correct versions of documents.

Evaluation fatigue – the in-depth country visits coincided with the timing for the end of JR country level evaluations, as well as the MoFA Effectiveness Review. For example, in South Sudan the JR evaluation plus the MoFA effectiveness review had taken place the month before the Consultant arrived in country. A related point is made later in the report about the burden created by the sheer volume of DRA evaluations.

Limited response rate – there was a reasonable response to 1:1 interview requests, although numerous chasing emails needed to be sent. It was more of a challenge to find relevant external agencies and some were then unwilling or unable to participate.

The online survey was circulated by email and promoted via the website, however extensive chasing was required and even then, only 60 people completed the short survey. This was a much lower number than anticipated and may well have been the result of the Ukraine effect as well as general evaluation fatigue.

Evaluation timeframe – many respondents were either not in post in 2018, when the evaluation period started, or had limited recall of detailed DRA or JR activities beyond the last year or so. Secondary data, such as the annual Impact Briefs and other evaluations therefore provided invaluable historic data.

4. MAIN FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation considered key lines of enquiry against two sets of criteria:

- DRA performance against the strategic priorities for the period 2018-2021; localisation, accountability, collaboration and innovation. These were further sub-divided into the 'actions' against each priority and this is how the first part of the report is structured.
- JR performance against both the strategic priorities as well as the OECD-DAC criteria⁴ of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Initially, it was anticipated that the OECD-DAC lens would be a major focus, however gaps in data across all JRs (described further in the limitations section) meant that beyond the country visits it was not feasible to make meaningful comparisons across JRs and therefore these aspects became secondary

DRA PERFORMANCE AGAINST STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

4.1 Localisation

The strategic priority was to be 'more local - at the forefront of new approaches to delivering humanitarian action'

DRA requested that the external evaluation should place more emphasis on this strategic priority than the others, which is why the report starts with localisation and gives more space for the findings.

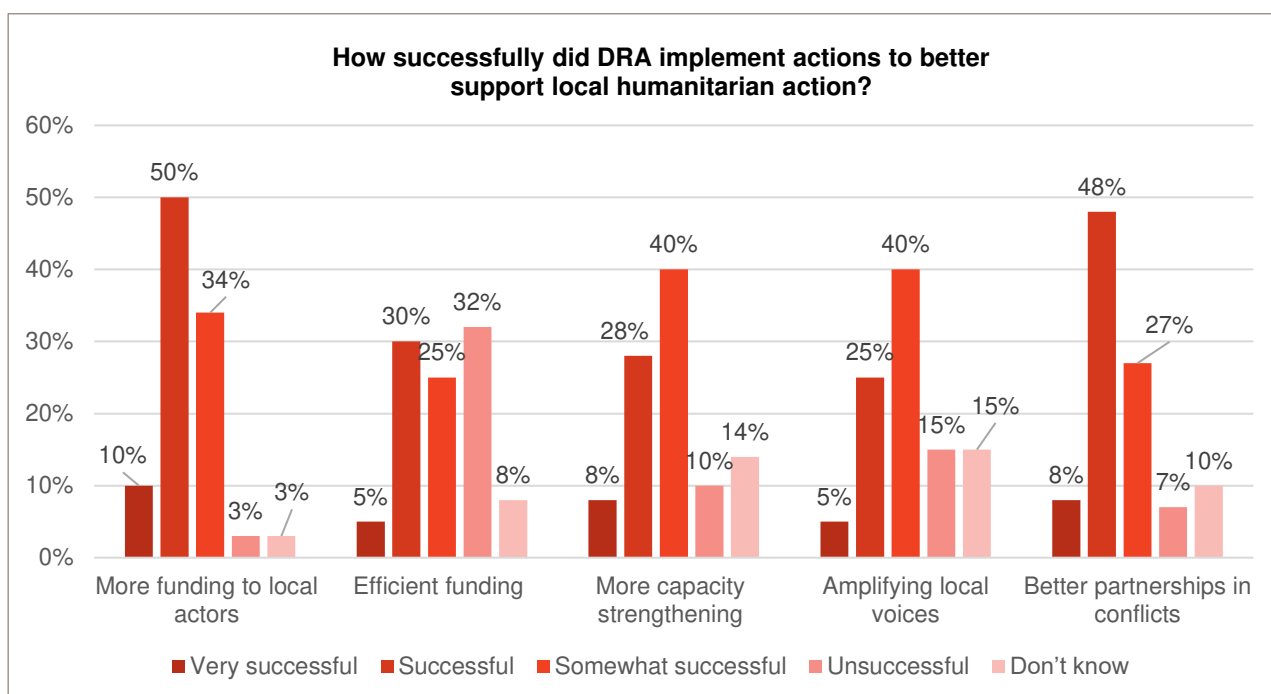
Localisation continues to be a major opportunity as well as a challenge for the humanitarian sector. Jessica Alexander (the New Humanitarian, 3 Jan 2022) questioned the sectors overall progress on localisation by pointing out that "...while a handful of smaller agencies and donor nations have revised their partnership policies and practices to be more favourable to local organisations, aid resources still fall short of empowering well-placed local responders."

⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

The DRA Localisation in Practice study⁵ was published in December 2021 and provided a very helpful overview of some of the key issues and constraints for DRA in this area. However, as the study itself recognises, it was limited by only analysing three JRs (Sudan, Somalia and Yemen), whereas the DRA localisation experience is highly varied across the 59 JRs that have been implemented over the last four years.

In terms of measuring progress on localisation, there was a concern raised by some that the localisation metrics were too blunt, such as the overall spend on local actors, or that they were simply too difficult to measure.

CHART 1: survey results for localisation question



The survey results indicated that DRA was doing well in terms of transferring funds to local partners, as well as supporting partnerships with local actors in conflicts. Efficient funding was an area for improvement. There were mixed results for capacity strengthening and amplifying local voices. Each of these actions is elaborated further below.

i. Equal partnerships

Whilst equal partnerships was not a specific action in its own right, the concept of equal partnerships is very much at the heart of localisation. The point was made by some respondents that different types of agencies have very different starting points on this issue. For example, a large federated relief and development agency working primarily through local partners versus a humanitarian agency focusing on direct operations.

There is still much to do in the area of building and maintaining equal partnerships between International and local partners, based on mutual trust. It is well recognised that this is more achievable during a longer-term multi-year Protracted Crisis response, as opposed to a short-term Acute Crisis response.

A positive example of how this might look is the 'Nexus Pilot Project'. This initiative was built out of the Nexus platform in Somalia, an existing group of eight local/national NGOs in Somalia who lead a program and receive support from OXFAM and Save the Children. In 2021, the Nexus Pilot Project received €2M Euro from DRA and Nexus designed the program, which included advocacy, triple nexus initiatives and an anticipatory and response fund. The Nexus themselves are very positive about the initiative and the role of DRA, saying; "the DRA plays a vital role in sharing newly acquired lessons learned and practices within their internationally-recognized network to further improve and inspire our collective localization-efforts."⁶ It was noted that this is a bottom up, locally led initiative, rather than a measure imposed from above and in that spirit, DRA needs to be careful not to simply impose this type of model in other contexts.

⁵ DRA Localisation in Practice, Koenraad van Brabant, 2021

⁶ DRA Pilot Joint Response 2021: Implementation Plan, NEXUS Somalia

Another positive initiative in terms of building more equitable partnerships is the joint leadership of JRs between DRA partners and local partners. For example, in South Sudan, the DRA Field Coordinator has just recruited a co-lead from one of their local partners into the South Sudan JR Coordination Team for the next 2 years. It is understood that in Afghanistan, in 2022, a co-lead from a local partner (Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan) is now in place, alongside the DRA Field Coordinator.

A similar aspiration was mentioned in the 'Localisation in Practice' report for the Somalia JR; 'the local partners expressed their wish for greater ownership of the JR in-country, possibly through a consortium structure'⁷.

An attempt was made by the DRA to consult more meaningfully with local partners by establishing a Local Advisory Group (LAG). Each Protracted Crisis JR is able to nominate a local partner representative to the LAG, who in turn are consulted on key topics such as DRA strategy. The effectiveness of this initiative was not verified and would be an interesting study in its own right. One comment from the survey suggested there was more work required in this area; "more local actors should be brought on board to participate in key DRA activities, for their voice to be heard. It is still a work in progress."

Overall, there were several examples of good participation from local partners at different stages of the program cycle. This was particularly highlighted during the DRC visit. But many felt that local partners were involved too late, after the design stage and overall, there was a sense that there was a limited genuine shift of power and equal sharing of power with local partners. Therefore, it makes very good sense that DRA intends to continue working on this area, demonstrated by the fact that 'equitable partnerships in Joint Responses' is included as an outcome in the 2022 Strategy.

ii. More funding to local actors

The metric for this action was 'at least 25% of DRA funding will flow as direct as possible to local actors by the end of 2019 and by the end of the strategic period (2021) the DRA will aim for 35%'. This target was consistent with, but more ambitious than the Grand Bargain commitment on localisation, which sought to achieve a global aggregated target of at least 25% by 2020.

The DRA target is an average across all JRs, recognising that each context is very different and some countries have much higher capacity local partners than others with widely varying spend. For example, at one extreme, in Central African Republic, one of the local partners was reported to be a 'one woman show,' versus large partners in North West Syria that have European support offices and are more akin to DRA partners themselves in terms of capacity and reach. As a result, one Field Coordinator felt that the 35% target was unrealistic because they did not think their local partners could absorb this level of funding.

Conversely, some individual DRA partners were far exceeding the target, such as CARE in DRC with a 70% spend on local partners and Oxfam in Gaza with a 74% spend on local partners.

The hard DRA metric is a powerful driver of change, but concern was expressed by some that the focus can then rest simply on the blunt funds transfer, rather than the deeper and more subtle changes that are beginning to take place across the sector.

KUNO conducted an interesting study on the DRA localisation priority; 'Shifting Minds and Setting the Course,' which reported in April 2021 and provided useful initial data on actual and projected spend on direct budget to partners from 2018-2020. This has since been superseded by a more up to date analysis from the Localisation Working Group – see Table 2 below.

Table 2: proposed and actual spend on direct budget to local partners from 2018-2021⁸

Year	PC budget	PC actual	AC budget	AC actual
2018	18.07%	19.62%	17.57%	19.22%
2019	22.13%	22.21%	25.78%	26.97%
2020	22.00%	22.39%	36.32%	36.09
2021 ⁹	27.31%			

⁷ Localisation in Practice report p.12

⁸ Localisation WG scan '2018-2021 Analysis PCJR & ACJR Budgets'

⁹ Actual 2021 expenditure data was not available

The data in Table 2 demonstrates that against the Grand Bargain target of 25% to local actors, DRA partners are generally making progress year on year.

Counter to what one would expect, since 2019 the percentage spend on local partners in Acute Crises is consistently higher than Protracted Crises.

Against the DRA ambition of 35% by 2021, less progress has been made.

Having said that, DRA partners seem to be doing better than many others in the sector. ALNAPs Localisation Re-Imagined study in January 2022¹⁰ reported that; “In 2020, only 4.7% of funding reached national/local actors directly, at its peak in 2018, it was 9.8% – nowhere near the 25% target”.

There is a broader and deeper question, which some respondents touched on, relating to the end goal on localisation for DRA in the next 10-20 years. If the aim is shared power and responsibility between International and local agencies and even direct access to DRA funds by local NGOs, what is the ongoing role of International NGO's? On this point, one survey respondent mentioned the need to have honest discussions about the changing role of NGOs from currently focusing on direct implementation to shifting to more of an advisory, backstopping and brokering role.

There is already a call from some local partners to receive funding direct from DRA/MoFA rather than via a DRA partner. However, it is recognised that for a variety of reasons, this is not a feasible option.

iii. Efficient funding

The action anticipated that funds would flow as directly as possible to local actors, whilst maintaining quality, strong risk management structures and accountability mechanisms. On this action, most of the discussion centred around Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) sharing, which is a live issue for many of the local partners who contributed to the evaluation.

The START Fund in Bangladesh wrote about this issue in 2020 suggesting that “Getting a share of ICR allows partner organisations to get a sufficient budget to think beyond a response – they are able to think about their organisations – improving their systems and enhancing their capacity.”¹¹

Konraad van Brabant also considered this issue as part of the Localisation in Practice Review in 2021, making the point that, “there are no consistent practices on ICR in the JRs, nor has there been a common position on it so far in the DRA”.

Currently, most DRA partners receive an 8% ICR which reflects the contribution of their headquarters to a number of areas including; reviewing reports, technical and programmatic advice on program design, liaising with donors, future planning and supporting the costs of their European headquarters.

Many respondents felt there was a lack of clarity and policy on the issue of whether the ICR should be shared with local partners. It was evident from the interviews that there are a wide variety of approaches across JRs, in fact one JR lead went as far as saying this is “an example of an area where Members are not on the same page, let alone the same book!”

In some JRs, local partners were demanding a share of the ICR and were receiving varying proportions, whereas in other JRs it was not being requested and DRA partners were not offering it.

There is a further complexity in the situation where a DRA partner works through another International NGO such as the Stichting Vluchteling / IRC relationship, where the ICR is split several ways, between the DRA partner, the International NGO and in turn their local partner.

Some DRA partners were of the view that a proportion of the ICR *should* be shared with local partners, whilst at the same time recognising the need to consider how to share risks, such as who is paid to do the oversight and quality control. One respondent recognised that if local Partners take on more of the tasks currently undertaken by DRA partners and paid for with the ICR, then DRA partners will need to do even more capacity strengthening. Their suggestion was therefore that the overall ICR may need to be increased and then divided, perhaps 60:40 between DRA partners and local partners.

¹⁰ ALNAP, Localisation Re-Imagined: localising the sector vs supporting local solutions, Jan 2022

¹¹ <https://startnetwork.org/news-and-blogs/sharing-indirect-cost-recovery-commitment-localisation>

Having said that, some DRA partners and local partners themselves were satisfied that local partner overhead costs could be fully recovered through their program budgets. Indeed, one JR lead made the point that it was important to ensure local partners included all allowable support costs in their support budgets. In the same spirit, one local partner in Gaza made clear that they ensured all of their costs were included during budget discussions.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - DRA should develop a clear policy position on ICR sharing as a matter of principle and concurrently review capacity strengthening measures between DRA partners and local partners to consider how to responsibly share risks

iv. More capacity strengthening

The metric for this action was that ‘the DRA will aim for 5-8% of JR budgets to be related to strengthening the capacity of local actors by 2021’.

Van Brabant noted a significant downturn in actual spending on capacity strengthening since Spring 2020 in the three countries in his study. For example, he says, “Somalia capacity strengthening nose-dived from 4.9% in 2019 to 0.5% in 2021”¹².

Some respondents suggested that the phenomenon of a low spend on capacity strengthening may be because aspects of capacity strengthening are more subtle and wrapped up in existing technical support budget lines, already included in the salary costs of existing staff.

TABLE 3: budgeted and actual spend on capacity strengthening from 2018-2021¹³

Year	PC budget	PC actual	AC budget	AC actual
2018	1.86%	1.44%	0.83%	0.55%
2019	3.24%	2.20%	0.86%	0.62%
2020	2.88%	2.60%	0.63%	0.52
2021	3.51%			

Table 3, above, demonstrates that in aggregate, DRA partners fell well short of the 5-8% target. Furthermore, the capacity strengthening spend in ACs seems to have gone into reverse.

Despite the relatively low spend on capacity strengthening, some JRs made particular efforts in this area, for example: In CAR, a capacity assessment was conducted in 2019 to work out gaps and a local training agency was identified (Maison de la Societe Civile set up by Bioforce) to provide trainings in 2019 & 2020. In 2021, local partners in CAR themselves came up with further areas for training and an external consultant was employed to provide these trainings. One of the important learnings for the CAR JR was to start capacity strengthening earlier - right at the beginning of the planning cycle – in order that there was sufficient time to make use of the training during program implementation.

The South Sudan JR tried a number of different approaches. In 2018, DRA partners agreed to all use the same self-assessment tool with partners. A number of common interests were identified and in turn, an external consultant was recruited to deliver Juba level trainings on Monitoring & Evaluation and financial management. The subsequent feedback from local partners was that they had enjoyed the topics, but they each had different needs and therefore the trainings were not as relevant for everyone. In response, in 2019 and 2020, DRA partners set aside around €15K per local partner and agreed that each partner could prepare capacity strengthening work plans based on a common template in areas such as; financial management, internet connectivity issues and visibility. Each local partner chose quite different topics. From 2020 onwards, the JR lead knew they had two-year funding, so they were in a position to make a longer term plan. Local partners requested capacity strengthening on institutional fundraising, which was delivered by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, who had an existing ‘Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships Programme’ in Juba.

In Nigeria, there was a recognition that in the early years, much of the capacity strengthening revolved around central trainings organised by the JR lead, whereas there has been a shift recently to allocating funding directly to local partners to work on organisational development type issues.

¹²Van Brabant, Localisation in Practice, Dec 2021

¹³ data from Localisation WG scan ‘2018-2021 Analysis PCJR and ACJR Budgets’

DRC local partners were able to access \$17K each per year for capacity strengthening activities identified by the partners themselves. Many received training from their own international partners on finance, logistics, gender, accountability as well as transportation (motorbikes) and office equipment.

One Field Coordinator mentioned that their capacity strengthening budget had been determined by the JR lead in the Netherlands at only 2% and that they would have liked more and could have spent more. Although, others felt that the upper range of 8% was a very high target, especially in an Acute Crisis setting.

When thinking about capacity strengthening, it is important to recognise that some local partners are already stronger than DRA partners themselves, so whatever is offered in terms of capacity strengthening measures needs to be highly contextualised.

It is understood that the Localisation Working Group intend to produce a guidance memo on capacity strengthening in 2022, to assist DRA partners with tools and approaches to inform and inspire them to do more.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – DRA partners should continue to allocate at least 5% of the JR budget to capacity strengthening initiatives, especially in Protracted Crises. Capacity strengthening costs already committed within existing budget lines should be fully teased out, in order to capture the full breadth of capacity strengthening activities taking place

v. Amplifying local voices

The 2020 Final Report Support Budget indicates that more work is needed in the area of amplifying local voices.

This issue was explicitly discussed with local partners during the in-depth country visits, both during interviews and as part of the local partner workshops.



PHOTO: Local partner workshop in Gaza.

As with other localisation actions, the needs of local partners are highly context specific. For example, in Gaza, many of the local partners have many decades of experience and are already coordinating well with Clusters, OCHA and others and therefore do not require the support of International partners in this area. Whereas in South Sudan, the wider connection to coordinating bodies, the donor community and diplomatic community was well appreciated by National partners as a particular distinctive of DRA. Furthermore, South Sudan local partners had requested support to set up a Local Partner Platform, which was agreed to and facilitated by the Field Coordinator and this platform now meets regularly with in-country donors.

There are other positive examples where JRs have made gains in this area, such as the Somalia Nexus project, which includes an advocacy component. As part of this, the Nexus communicated directly with donors such as the Dutch Embassy. In addition, the Somalia JR supported local partners to connect with the OCHA Humanitarian Country Team by facilitating travel to Mogadishu and Nairobi for coordination meetings, although this subsequently became more complicated because of Covid-19 restrictions.

In Somalia in 2019, the JR Joint Budget included support for the Somali NGO Consortium, which includes representatives of Somalia based INGOs and local NGOs (incidentally this is different from the Nexus platform). As

part of this funding, a trip for Somali NGO Consortium members took place to The Hague, Brussels and Charter 4 Change meetings in Copenhagen.

Also in the Yemen JR, the Field Coordinator mentioned they had invited local partners to Learning Workshops with MoFA and the Dutch Embassy.

The amplification efforts made by JRs are largely dependent on individual JRs and the point was made by a respondent to the survey that there may be some value in a centralised coordinated effort, particularly to amplify local voices in international fora.

vi. Better partnerships with local actors in conflicts

This final action related to innovating around ways to support partners in conflicts, through remote management, monitoring and negotiating and maintaining access. Specific comments did not come up in interviews or the survey on this subject.

It is understood that as part of the Yemen PC JR in 2020, online joint training was provided to Yemen JR partners on negotiation skills for humanitarian aid workers, delivered by the Clingendael Institute.

A related issue is the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on implementation over the last two years. Time will tell, but it may have accelerated a fundamental shift in thinking and approach by International NGOs. For example, NGOs have been obliged to make much greater use of remote management while travel was so restricted and as a result, National partners have been more heavily relied upon to deliver services.

vii. Localisation conclusion

The DRA strategic priority was to be 'more local - at the forefront of new approaches to delivering humanitarian action.' There has been a degree of significant and incremental progress in the following areas:

Co-leading of JRs with a local partner representative was discussed during the strategic period and two JRs (South Sudan and Afghanistan) will have co-leads in 2022.

Funding to local actors is increasing year on year, with the Grand Bargain target of 25% to local actors achieved belatedly by 2021. The DRA aim of 35% to local actors was only achieved in Acute Crises by 2020.

Capacity strengthening has evolved in a number of JRs from a top-down approach, to more of a nuanced partner led approach. However, the hard metric of spend in 2021 was around 3% which was well below the 5-8% target.

Amplifying the voice and capacity of local actors was ad hoc, with excellent initiatives in Somalia and South Sudan, but no sense of a concerted effort across JRs.

An ongoing issue in terms of funds flowing as directly as possible to local partners is the lack of clarity about ICR sharing.

There seem to be a number of enabling factors, as well as barriers related to localisation. The context is crucial, with higher income countries such as Lebanon, having higher capacity partners, compared to fragile states such as South Sudan. The mandate and ambition of DRA partners is also a key determinant, with multi-mandate agencies such as OXFAM having a much higher spend, for example 74% to local partners in Gaza in 2021, or CARE having a 70% spend with local partners in DRC in 2021. The more stable setting of a Protracted Crisis with a longer time frame for planning and implementation ought to be an enabling factor, and the spend on capacity strengthening bore that out with 4-5 times higher spend in PCs compared to ACs. The DRA coordination structure is important as an enabler of localisation and the new co-lead initiatives in 2022 should improve localisation efforts.

When considering DRA performance on localisation across all JRs, further effort is required. It is therefore very appropriate that the 2022-26 strategy includes an ongoing emphasis on 'empowering local actors.'

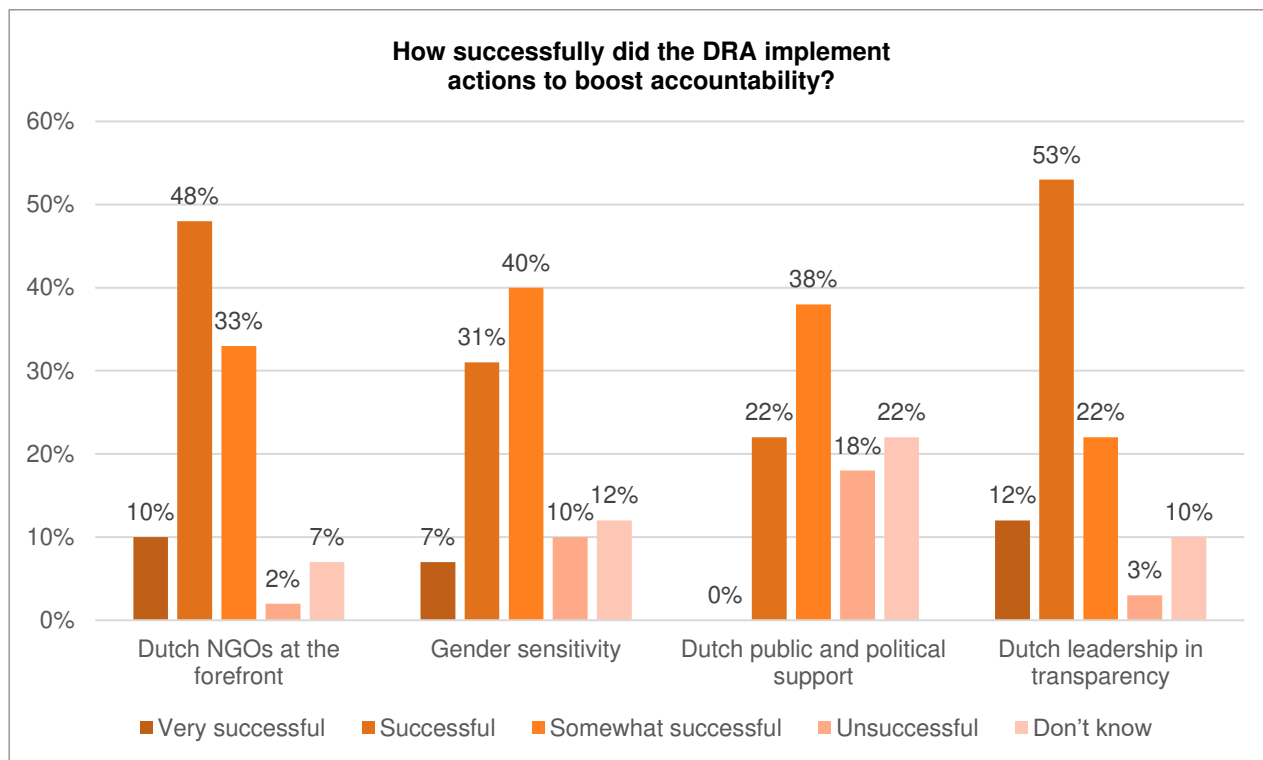
4.2 Accountability

The strategic priority was to be 'more accountable – to disaster affected people, governments and the Dutch public.'

The survey results suggested that DRA was doing reasonably well across each of the actions related to the accountability strategic priority. Scores were good in terms of Dutch NGOs being at the forefront of the participation

revolution and Dutch leadership in transparency. Each of the actions for this strategic priority are discussed in more detail below.

CHART 2: survey results for accountability question



i. Dutch NGOs at the forefront of the participation revolution

Active participation by disaster affected people and building and maintaining effective feedback and accountability mechanisms is a challenge right across the sector. Unsurprisingly, this issue was mentioned in many of the JR Real Time Reviews and evaluations as an area for improvement.

For example, the Cyclone Idai RTR report stated that, “more continued community engagement is needed at each stage of the response. The communities should be consulted directly as to the best ways to share and receive information and input, with special consideration for consultation with vulnerable groups.”

The Lebanon AC RRTR in 2020 reported that some beneficiaries were not consulted on their needs, they did not know the selection criteria and did not know what they were going to receive. Furthermore, many WASH and shelter kit beneficiaries reported that they did not know how to complain.

During the South Sudan visit, in a number of the FGDs with communities, it became apparent that the system for complaining or giving feedback was unknown, suggesting more visibility is needed for feedback mechanisms.

The Somalia JR lead reported that the JR had invested quite heavily in accountability to affected people, with trainings and on the job support for both DRA partners and local partners. For example, by supporting local partners to digitalise partner feedback systems and by providing CHS trainings.

CHS Self-Assessment has been mandatory for DRA partners over the last four years. Although, recognising the need for continuous improvement, DRA is now making it compulsory for DRA partners to be independently verified against the CHS commitments by 2023. This is a welcome ratcheting up in the pursuit of accountability to affected people.

In some instances, JR partners sought to harmonise accountability mechanisms across the JR, and this was more likely to happen in Protracted Crises where there was more time available and a more settled context.

For example, in DRC at the beginning of the PC JR in 2019, it was reported that the World Vision MEAL expert looked at accountability systems across JR partners and sought to harmonise them, by creating a collective feedback system with Beneficiary Reference Committees to review the feedback. This was followed up in 2020 by refresher training

to ensure all DRA partners were operating in the same way. The country visit to DRC confirmed these findings and furthermore, the evaluator was encouraged by the level of knowledge amongst local and International JR partners in DRC on the purpose and importance of accountability. There was also a sense that DRC JR program teams adjusted project design in response to community feedback.

In South Sudan, in 2018, a Consultant reviewed feedback mechanisms amongst DRA partners, to look for ways that individual DRA partner accountability systems could be complementary, out of which a Joint Accountability System was developed. This joint system considered preferred ways for communities to feedback and face-to-face community meetings were the preference. The system was piloted with DRA top-up funding and Joint Accountability Officers continue to be in place in each JR location, hosted by a local partner.

The Nigeria PC JR adopted a similar model, recognising that many communities want a face-to-face conversation. In 2020 they started an approach of having one Accountability Officer per community who collected and then shared feedback with DRA partners, which was scaled up in 2021. This was supplemented by a booth in each community with a voice recording device inside, to capture feedback. The community were reported to have liked this approach.

These are three excellent example of joint accountability systems that could be used as a model for other JRs.

There were also examples of DRA partners making use of existing nationwide feedback and accountability mechanisms and this should be very much encouraged by DRA. For example, in Mozambique, as well as public meetings and suggestion boxes, the JR partners promoted the national 'Linha Verde 1458 toll free inter-agency hotline', which had originally been set up by the World Food Programme after Cyclone Idai.

There is an obvious advantage for beneficiaries and an efficiency for DRA partners to introduce some form of harmonised accountability mechanism across a JR. But the complexities are also recognised. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity, particularly at the beginning of new programs to establish joint accountability systems.

Harmonised models were not evident in Acute Crisis JRs. Although, despite the many challenges of setting up accountability systems in a rapid onset emergency, there is just as much a need to have efficient, effective and user-friendly mechanisms in place in this type of context.

Despite the numerous examples of harmonised approaches, it was more common for individual DRA partners to pursue their own accountability mechanisms, since many had their own organisational AAP requirements and it was stated that it was too complicated to harmonise these across different organisations.

DRA itself has an important intermediary role to promote accountability and could have a role promoting best practice amongst its partners.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – DRA partners should continue to explore the possibility of harmonising accountability mechanisms at field level, both in Protracted and Acute Crises and continue to proactively promote accountability to affected people

ii. Gender sensitive responses

The action sought to ensure that 'all responses will be gender sensitive...where possible, JRs will strengthen local initiatives to advance gender equality and to transform gender relations'. This was ambitious, bearing in mind the major gender disparities in many of the countries where JRs are implemented.

An important starting point involves the availability of disaggregated data and over the last four years, beneficiary data has been disaggregated between female over 18, female under 18, male over 18 and male under 18. There were many examples of good practice in the area of gender sensitivity, especially evident in the country visits.

South Sudan partners received DRA gender mainstreaming training in 2020 from an External Consultant. Although it was noted that despite the training many talked about the need for additional support in this area.

In DRC, the DRA partners have strong credentials in gender sensitivity, from CARE with the 'gender marker' approach to Tearfund's 'positive masculinities' initiative. Local partners felt their capacity had increased through training. Having said that, the evaluator felt improvements could be made in the gender training materials themselves used by local partners, because one partner delivering training was primarily using a textbook that was more about conveying information than supporting genuine gender transformation - see Annex 8 DRC country visit report for further details.

In the Syria NGCA PC JR, a Gender Support Consultant was jointly funded in 2021, as a result of local partners identifying this as an issue they wanted support on. This emerged out of a gender marker process in 2019 that showed planning and program design on gender was not strong.

The Syria GCA JR had a gender action plan between 2018-2020. The Field Coordinator reported that they designed a plan with Syria JR members input, creating tools and trainings in areas such as GBV, gender sensitive programming and doing power assessments in the community. It was noted by the FC that having trainings is useful but that follow up is needed for the learning to be effective.

There were also instances observed during country visits, where more work is required to promote gender equality. For example, the project design for the CEDS Water User Committees in Aweil South, South Sudan, included the requirement for a female Chairperson, but in the Focus Group Discussion with the Water User Committee, the Chairperson was male. In the South Sudan PC JR, it has proved difficult to find women for the Joint AAP roles and currently all AAP Officers are male, which is a significant constraint for gathering feedback from women and children. Additional funds have reportedly been found to recruit more women in future to these AAP Officer roles. Save the Children in Gaza worked through Bayader to deliver a livelihoods project to farmers, but despite prioritising female farmers in the program design, only 12 female farmers were included in the cash transfer program, compared to 289 male farmers.

iii. Generating public and political support

The action anticipated 'joined up communication strategies for JRs.'

A broader question emerged in interviews on communication and advocacy, related to how separate and distinct an identity the DRA wishes to develop over and above the communications and marketing of the individual DRA partners. Most DRA partners are communicating regularly with their supporters and doing effective campaigning, so it may not be necessary or desirable for DRA to offer much more than this. A number of Netherlands based DRA partners mentioned in the interviews the concern that the DRA itself should not develop its own strong identity, for fear it would detract from individual members communications with the Dutch public.

Apart from the DRA website, there seemed to be limited communication with the Dutch public during the strategic period. A South Sudan street art exhibition was mentioned, that had been held in the Netherlands.

There was some centralised advocacy undertaken by DRA, primarily in liaison with Platform Humanitaire Actie (PHA), an informal Dutch humanitarian advocacy platform made up of campaigns staff and coordinated for several years by DRA partners. DRA and PHA were reported to have developed common messaging when parliamentary debates came up on humanitarian aid. A particular success was DRA and PHA teaming up with MSF and the Netherlands Red Cross to push back on a law against operating in designated terrorist areas, as this was infringing on humanitarian principles.

There was a desire from some respondents for DRA to be involved in more collective advocacy, both at Brussels and the Hague levels, as well as at JR level. A field level example was given from Tigray, where given the sensitive context it is difficult for individual partners to do advocacy, whereas the JR provided a useful conduit for partners to voice their concerns, which in turn were taken up through the Ethiopia Humanitarian Forum.

iv. Dutch leadership in transparency

The action related to DRA leadership in transparency included clearly communicating results to the Dutch government, the Dutch public and disaster affected people.

This action links to the above accountability priority in terms of communicating with disaster affected people. Discussion with beneficiaries during country visits on this issue, particularly about the source of DRA funds, demonstrated there was a high recognition that DRA funds came from the Dutch government.

In terms of communicating with the Dutch public and governments, Impact Briefs are published on the DRA website on an annual basis, providing headline data on DRA results.

Another important indicator of transparency is that DRA JR reports are uploaded onto the IATI database on a quarterly basis. Although, the point was made by one respondent, that most members of the Dutch public would not be searching the IATI database for information about DRA funded projects.

v. Learning

Learning was not a specific action within the strategic priorities, however recognising its importance, there were numerous questions related to learning in the evaluation matrix and several points came up during interviews and country visits that are captured in this section.

SharePoint

Currently the main repository for capturing and promoting learning across all DRA partners is a Microsoft SharePoint site. Attempting to locate documents for the evaluation on SharePoint, it became apparent there are significant failings and gaps with this information sharing platform. This point also came up in a number of interviews as an issue for DRA partners. There does not seem to be an individual within DRA or a DRA partner taking responsibility for maintaining the files and folders. This means there are multiple versions of the same document and it is complicated and time consuming to locate key documents. An additional complexity was that certain reports in 2018-2021 were not shared by partners with DRA centrally, but directly between JRs and MoFA, due to the contractual relationship at the time for PC JRs.

An accurate, reliable repository of key documents is essential for accountability and learning purposes.

RECOMMENDATION 4 – DRA should review SharePoint with a view to making immediate short-term improvements such as file discipline, weeding out unnecessary documents and plugging gaps such as missing data on the JR Tracker data. Whilst exploring options for a more robust and user-friendly learning portal

Evaluations and Peer Reviews

ACs are required to complete a Rapid Real Time Review within 3 months of launching the JR and 50% are required to complete an external evaluation. For many good reasons, the timeframe of 3 months to complete a RRTR was not achievable, not least that many JRs were late in starting and arranging a RRTR was not a high priority. In a number of cases RRTR were completed towards the end of the 6-month implementation and therefore they had, in effect, become summative evaluations.

Contractually, PCs are required to complete an end of JR evaluation as well as an RTR. A few respondents made the point that RTRs and evaluations are sometimes undertaken after decisions have already been made on the next funding cycle, therefore there was no opportunity for evaluation findings to meaningfully influence future programs.

The sheer quantity of evaluations to organise and manage was reported as a burden and in addition, a perception was expressed by a number of respondents that they were concerned the learning disappears into a void. One JR lead spoke for many saying, “I wonder who reads the review reports and evaluations”. Another JR lead felt that the excessive number of evaluations was “a waste of money and a waste of time”.

In the new strategic period, with DRA now fully responsible for both the PCM and ACM, there will be an even greater need to ensure MoFA has confidence in what DRA partners are delivering and robust and effective evaluations will be an important part of this accountability trail.

Peer review can be a powerful evaluation tool and is a good alternative to an external evaluation. This approach is especially useful when DRA partners are already collaborating in a JR. The Yemen JR Field Coordinator gave an example of how in 2021 all DRA partners were involved in peer review visits (JR partners pairing up and visiting each other's offices and field sites) followed by a learning workshop, which they intend to continue into 2022. The Venezuela & Columbia AC JR in 2019 also mentioned cross learning taking place through exchange visits.

Other Alliances, such as the Disaster Emergencies Committee¹⁴ in the UK have considered the type and frequency of evaluations over many decades and come up with lighter touch approaches, such as agencies being selected for evaluation on a rotating basis.

DRA should consider creative ways of easing the evaluation burden on JRs, including rotating the requirement for full evaluations, promoting peer review instead of full blown evaluations, learning workshops or lighter touch learning events, thematic evaluations across several JRs focused on key topics such as accountability and localisation, or sectoral evaluations, as well as linking with like-minded organisations such as Giro555 to do joint evaluations if implementing in the same geographical locations.

¹⁴ DEC accountability framework, from DEC Operations Manual, updated June 2020

RECOMMENDATION 5 – DRA should review the frequency, type and style of evaluations and reviews, with a view to coming up with a more streamlined and efficient approach that does not put such a burden on implementing agencies and makes effective use of the learning being generated across JRs

vi. Accountability conclusion

Despite the challenges of Accountability to Affected People, DRA partners are taking this issue seriously and there are some very positive examples of harmonised and joint mechanisms being developed within JRs.

Upward accountability to the Dutch public was less extensive, largely given that DRA did not wish to compete for attention with DRA partners. Further work is needed by DRA to build a learning culture and an effective learning system.

4.3 Collaboration

The strategic priority was ‘more collaboration – finding ways for Dutch NGOs to work more effectively together to increase impact and generate taxpayers support for humanitarian action.’

This section starts by addressing wider issues related to collaboration. Followed by consideration of the collaboration strategic priority, followed by comments on the structure and function of the DRA.

An important question to consider about the DRA is ‘so what?’ In other words, what difference does working together make both to the overall response effort as well as to the performance of individual members. The DRA has been on a journey in describing and defining what this means over the last four years. Initially using the terms ‘added value’ then ‘collaboration’ and more recently, ‘collaborative impact.’

Nenda Lemmers, a DRA intern, completed a meta evaluation on Collaborative Impact¹⁵ in February 2021 and recommended five categories to measure collaborative impact:

- Complementarity - working together to avoid duplication, including case referrals
- Coordination - including joint planning. The next step being joint activities and programming,
- Resource sharing - expertise, tools, information, for example, security info, storage, transportation, office space, technical capacity and joint procurement
- External linkages - sharing networks between members; relationships with local authorities, beneficiaries, capacity building, shared lobbying, sharing details of previous staff
- Harmonisation - common program design, harmonised M&E tools to be able to compare programs

These categories have been incorporated into the logframe for the 2022 strategy, which now usefully includes nine output indicators to measure collaboration. This will also be tracked through PC JR evaluations which will include these indicators as mandatory.

The on-line survey asked a broad question about the added value of being a DRA partner (see results below in CHART 3), which reflected a number of the categories mentioned in the collaborative impact study.

It is interesting to see that the top response was ‘access to Dutch government funding’. Closely followed by, networking, collaboration with like-minded agencies and greater impact by working as an alliance.

Networking and collaboration at Netherlands level was regarded as a strong positive by many respondents.

Collaboration across JRs both at Netherlands and field level was regarded as less successful – and this links to the earlier point about learning mechanisms and systems.

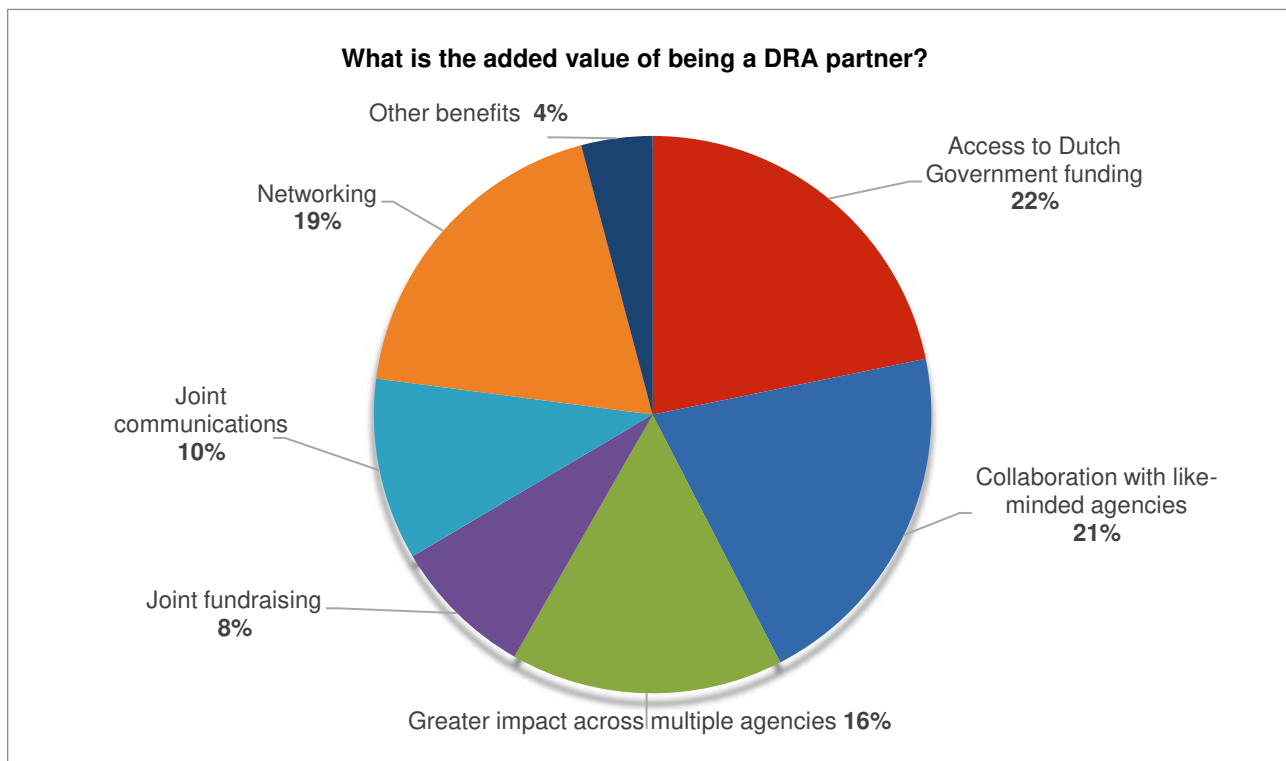
It is well recognised this is a complex issue. Especially because a number of DRA partners are part of large federated structures with their own major sources of funding and organisational policies and driving change through these networks takes time and energy.

“Collaboration is a hard thing to do, Members and Partners have different mindsets and cultures. Trust amongst Members and neutrality from the JR lead is at the heart of good collaboration”

Stéphanie Noël, Field Coordinator,
DRC JR, World Vision

¹⁵ Collaborative Impact Unpacked, Nenda Lemmers, Feb 2021

CHART 3: survey results on the question, 'What is the added value of being a DRA partner?'



Some aspects of collaboration within JRs was strong, such as the DRA catalysing and promoting an intention to work together.

For example, in the Gaza AC JR, the four DRA partners valued the collaborative way of working so much that they intend to continue working together in the future and they have already sought several ways to work jointly following the completion of the 2021 JR.

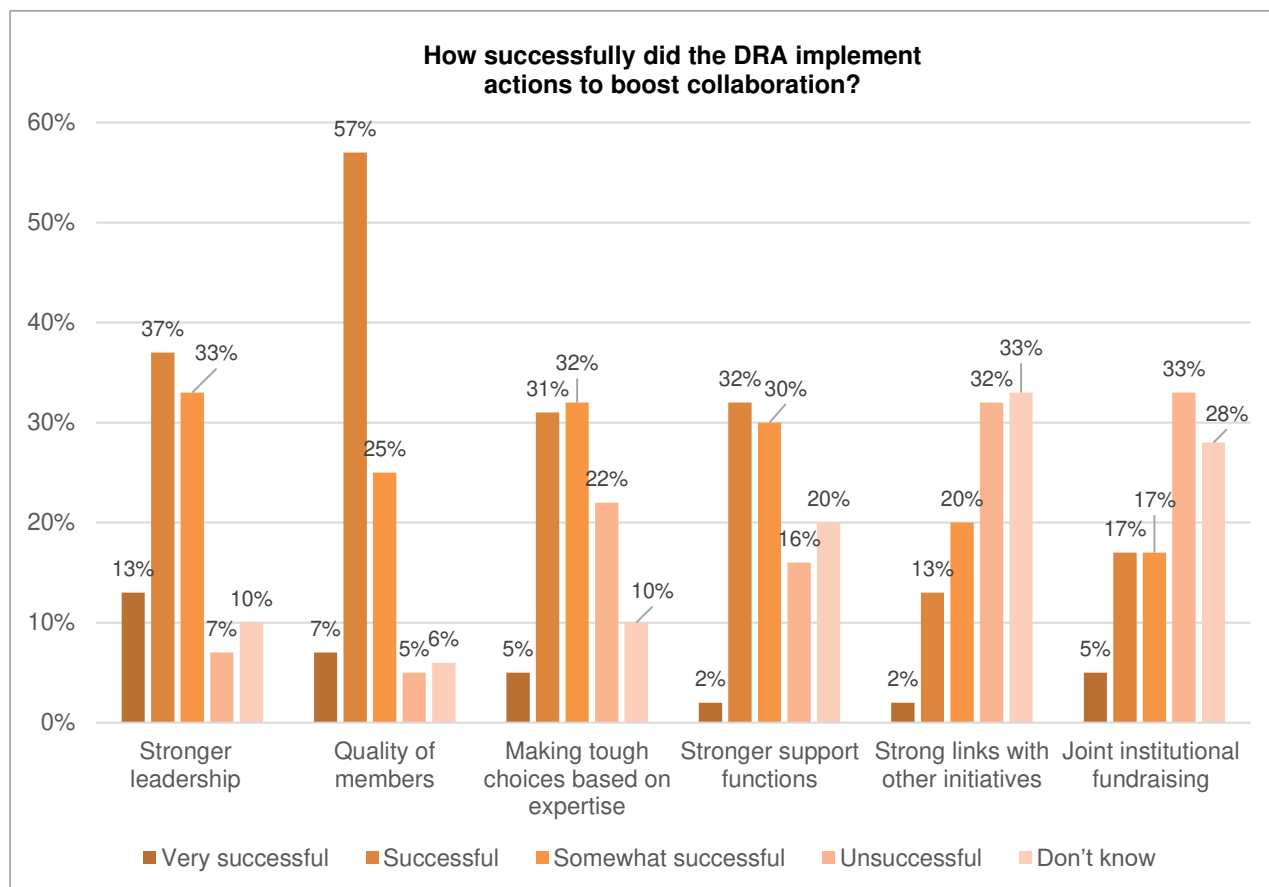
Conversely, there were many examples of JR partners on the ground in South Sudan and Gaza continuing to work in their own ways, siloed from other JR members either geographically or sectorally. This is discussed in more detail in the relevant country visits reports in Annexes 6 & 7.

A key factor to encourage effective collaboration is the long-term presence of a strong Field Coordinator which was seen to lead to good relationships across JR partners, enhanced collaboration and improved opportunities for learning. This point is discussed further at the end of this section under f) Field Coordinator role.

There is opportunity to work in a much more integrated way, to deliver genuinely joint programs which in turn should have greater impact.

The survey results on the collaboration question (see CHART 4 below) indicate that good progress is being made on the 'quality of members' and 'stronger leadership'. There were mixed views on 'making tough choices and differentiating based on expertise' as well as 'stronger support functions'. 'Links with other initiatives' and 'joint institutional fundraising' were not seen as particularly successful. There were many 'don't know' responses to the last three actions; stronger support functions, links with other initiatives and joint fundraising.

CHART 4: survey results for collaboration question



The views expressed in the survey are broadly consistent with the key informant interviews and country visit results which are described in more detail below.

i. Stronger leadership

The action envisaged that JRs will be based on ‘those members best able to respond’ and that ‘JRs will be co-authored by DRA partners and local partners’.

The highly democratic and consensual model of governance for the DRA is in tension with the desire to dispassionately allocate support to the DRA partners ‘best able to respond’. This is discussed further in section iv) making tough choices and differentiating based on expertise.

The decision by War Trauma Foundation to withdraw from DRA was a recognition that they were not best placed to respond. However, there are deeper questions to consider in future years about whether there needs to be a rationalisation of members, with possibly only those retained who are active and highly skilled. This also links with the point below about quality control and how this is determined.

Co-authoring of JRs by DRA partners and local partners

Even by the end of the *next* strategy cycle, not all JRs will be co-led with local partners. Only a handful of DRA partners are front runners in this area, with most catching up. The Somalia Nexus is a very positive example, which receives support from OXFAM and Save the Children. As well as the new initiative to recruit a co-lead from local partners in South Sudan, it is understood that the Afghanistan PC JR will also have a co-lead from a local partner in 2022.

ii. Joint support to local partners

The strategy envisaged that models for joint support to local partners and joint implementation would be developed and piloted. This has happened to a limited degree, for example with the Somalia Nexus Pilot project.

There were many examples of DRA offering joint capacity strengthening type training to JR partners as mentioned above under capacity strengthening. These included; accountability trainings in South Sudan, trainings on how to share referrals between DRA partners in Mozambique and in Gaza, or joint security trainings in Ethiopia.

There were some examples of JR partners sharing logistics in the field. For example, in DRC some of the JR partners and local partners shared office space and logistics, such as Help a Child and War Child with their partners HCC-ADED-KUA who shared office space in Baraka and Fizi. This was reported to lead to savings on office rental and costs, as well as improved security as a result of being able to drive in convoy. In Gaziantep, the Syria JR lead reported there was a shared office and sharing of some resources.

However, in many cases, it was reported that whilst DRA partners sought to coordinate efforts, they essentially delivered their own programs in parallel with each other. In Gaza, it was noted by the evaluator that there was an opportunity to more fully integrate programming in distinct geographical areas in order to have greater impact for affected communities. A similar point came up in the Nigeria 2019 RTR, that DRA partners should consider choosing depth over breadth in terms of consolidating locations, sectors and partners.

iii. Quality of members

The issue of quality assurance is a fundamental question to be worked through, if the DRA is to have credibility and relevance in years to come. MoFA and DRA partners themselves need to have confidence that they are part of an alliance that takes quality seriously.

Reassuringly, quality is a central pillar of the new 2022 strategy, with an ambition both to drive up quality internally across DRA partners, as well as 'systematically sharing learning and good practices within the global humanitarian sector.'

An ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement is required to become a DRA partner as well as self-assessment against the CHS Commitments. This has been enhanced in the new strategy to include independent verification against the CHS commitments. These are important measures of quality. Nevertheless, an interesting point was raised by a couple of respondents, who felt it was unclear what degree of poor quality performance would lead to the loss of DRA membership.

The new Quality Working Group has a mandate to improve the quality of programs and there is an intention in the current strategy cycle to develop tools and processes to assure quality. As part of this new effort, a Quality and MEAL Officer was recruited in 2021.

It will be important to clarify who is responsible for what in terms of quality assurance, at each level of the DRA.

RECOMMENDATION 6 – the DRA Quality Working Group should prioritise the development of quality assurance processes and tools, including clarity on who is driving quality and at which level

Despite the many additional demands of joint working, many mentioned the helpful peer support and professional development resulting from this collaborative approach. In this sense, good collaboration can drive up quality.

iv. Making tough choices and differentiating based on expertise

The strategy sought to ensure that the best placed DRA partners were the ones to respond at scale.

Currently 80% of Protracted Crisis JR funds are divided equally amongst the DRA partners responding and the last 20% is divided up based on a number of factors including 'who is best placed to respond'.

Some JR leads felt that asking the question about who is 'best placed', especially when DRA partners were working in the same sector, was potentially divisive. Others noted that they were unsure about the robustness of the process to work out which was the best agency to respond.

How to determine who is 'best placed' appears to have been an ongoing and unresolved discussion over several years. Some of the key factors included; time in country or in the specific locality, sectoral experience, presence of strong partners, relationship with the community etc.

Because there is currently no consensus on this issue, the result is a varied approach amongst JRs. Some JRs ignore the requirement altogether and distribute all the funds equally amongst the JR partners, others such as the Nigeria PC JR, used the 20% to fill gaps in the response or to address strategic priorities such as localisation. Having

said that, the Nigeria JR noted that this 20% created a huge amount of work as well as unnecessary competitiveness amongst DRA partners and in their view, did not lead to a better response.

The Peer Review scoring system for ACs is one way of determining who is best placed and may be worth considering by PCs as a means of determining who should receive a proportion of funds that is not shared out equally.

Because of the rule that each DRA partner is only able to respond to three JRs, some felt this worked counter to the principle of the best placed responding, because for example a DRA partner may have strong local partners and have already completed 3 JRs, so they will not be able to receive further DRA funding and capable local partners will then lose out.

This issue links to the highly democratic governance model, which encourages a sense from DRA partners that the funds should be equally divided. Having said that, other alliances divide up funds in all kinds of different ways. The UK Disaster Emergencies Committee for example has an annual review process to consider agency spend on emergency response as well as fundraising capacity and they come up with a standard percentage that individual members will receive of the funds raised.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - DRA should review the allocation process for PC funds and as part of this review consider how other alliances allocate their funds

v. Stronger support functions

There was an ambition at the beginning of the strategy period to research the creation of a small DRA support office, however this was not pursued by DRA and there does not seem to be a demand for this facility. Nevertheless, a number of additional support roles have been created over the last couple of years (Communications Officer and Innovation Officer) and these support staff are now in post.

The DRA Foundation was set up to manage the block grant. Although the DRA Foundation itself is not legally able to receive the grant from MoFA, rather the Block Grant holder receives the grant and transfers it to the Foundation.

Bearing in mind the comments below in the section on DRA governance, about DRA bureaucracy and complexity, further effort is needed to help DRA to become a more flexible and agile mechanism.

vi. Strong links with other networks

Despite the intention to strengthen links with other networks, there seems to have been very limited engagement beyond some of the advocacy platforms that DRA partners are already connected to, such as PHA and Partos. In addition, one external network mentioned they had struggled to connect with new BoD personnel and their view was that this was because of insufficient handover.

The previous DRA Chair in 2018 made a presentation to the European Commission and was subsequently contacted by Belgian and French Governments, as well as presenting DRA at AIDEX.

There was reported to be some engagement at the beginning of the strategy period with the START Network and the strategy itself explicitly mentioned building on and strengthening links with START. In fact, there was an idea that DRA funding might follow on from initial START Fund funding. It turns out that further liaison did not happen on this issue. This was confirmed by the START Network themselves in an email exchange where they noted that despite two DRA partners being START Network members, they were 'not able to identify any contact or collaboration between the two networks, whether in general humanitarian advocacy or our more specialist areas such as early action.'

Some external agencies would have liked more planned collaboration. For example, Giro555 mentioned a couple of situations where there could have been more proactive liaison: In a situation where Giro555 was unable to respond to a crisis because their mandate limits them to crisis where there is 'media interest and public support,' they could instead have encouraged DRA to respond. Conversely, where there is a large scale Giro555 fundraising appeal, they suggested there could be opportunity to reduce the scale of the DRA JR funding, because large scale flexible funding would be generated by Giro555 and available. Although only 7 out of the 14 DRA partners are also Giro555 partners. The broader point is that there was a willingness from external agencies to engage and collaborate with DRA but this did not seem to have been reciprocated.

An aspect of this is visibility and interestingly, some external agencies were not aware of the new strategy, particularly the intention to influence the wider sector.

Given that influencing the wider humanitarian system is a major pillar of the new strategy, there will need to be a massive ramp up in linkages with other networks, alliances and initiatives, especially outside the Netherlands.

RECOMMENDATION 8 – the DRA should make much greater efforts to build and strengthen links with relevant external organisations and as part of this venture, to clearly communicate the new strategy to an external audience

vii. Collaborative fundraising and communications

The DRA is currently 100% dependant on MoFA funding. It is understood that at the outset of the DRA there was an ambition to diversify fundraising and European Commission funding lines were explored. However this proved unsuccessful, mainly because DRA is not an entity in its own right.

Some effort was made to reach out to other governments to co-fund DRA but a couple of respondents mentioned a constraint that other countries are unlikely to co-fund a Dutch Alliance.

DRA partners very much value the partnership with MoFA, but there is some risk in only having a single source of funding. There may therefore be value in continuing to explore additional institutional donors over and above MoFA, as well as exploring private funding.

The issue of seeking additional donors is not straightforward, due to the very real tension of DRA potentially competing with individual Members for institutional and private funding.

RECOMMENDATION 9 – DRA should make further efforts to identify additional sources of funding over and above MoFA

Communications

Concern was raised that the DRA does not have a cohesive communications strategy. The new DRA Foundation support staff team includes a Communications Officer, who is also Co-Chair of the Visibility Working Group, in order to align communications. This new approach is in recognition of the fact that communications was previously reported to be ‘rather random’.

Two DRA ‘advertorials’ were produced during the strategy period, to introduce DRA and to publicise some of the activities. But these were reported to have led to difficult internal discussions, because of concern about DRA becoming a distinct brand.

Each JR was expected to generate some visibility materials for the Dutch public. For example, in the CAR JR in 2019 a photographer visited the JR to make a storybook. The team wanted to do a follow up in 2020 but Covid-19 limited travel. It is understood that where there were political sensitivities, in countries such as Syria, there were lower expectations on the JR to produce communications materials.

viii. DRA governance structure and functions

In the first strategy period, DRA was reported to be very focused on the mechanics of set up. In the 2018-2021 the focus became more outward looking although still primarily focused on the Netherlands. The new ambition in the 2022-26 strategy is to go much further and to strengthen the whole humanitarian system.

a) Governance model

The DRA governance model was the subject of lengthy debate in the early years and was reviewed in 2021 by the DRA Structure Task Force. It was reported by the DRA Chair that no DRA partners wished to shift to a separately staffed Secretariat model. By contrast, it is interesting to note that the START Network very much encourages the idea that they offer an independent broker role and see this as a core requirement for effective collective action.

The desire was to keep broadly to the existing highly democratic, member led, equal shares, consensus model. This was felt to be the best means of keeping all partners engaged at all levels; strategy, implementation and learning, because, as Geert Jan van Dijk (DRA Chair) put it, “everyone working for DRA has their feet within a partner agency.”

There are pros and cons with every governance model. Potentially the partner-led model may present challenges with neutrality and impartiality since it is inevitably difficult to separate out individual DRA partner interests from the DRA greater good. The need for consensus could also inadvertently discourage ‘front runners’ and innovators from

pressing ahead to try new ideas without the will of the wider group. Although others made the point that there is an important trade off to be made between speed of change and wider improvements across the whole Alliance.

Both in interviews and the survey, concern was raised that the DRA Foundation was creating too much complexity with onerous rules and regulations and complexity and reporting requirements. Having said that, others noted a deliberate attempt to try and simplify and professionalise processes that have built up over the years and become unnecessarily bureaucratic. Given the strength of feeling expressed on this issue, it seems there is still work to be done to simplify processes and to keep them lean and user friendly.

Levels of trust and engagement between DRA partners is generally perceived as high. However, a phenomenon was noted by a number of people that partners wanted to be involved in all the key meetings and Working Groups, in order to have influence. Several respondents noted that Working Groups were supposed to be smaller groups working intensively on particularly topics, but that the desire to influence these groups meant they were continuing to swell in numbers. For example, the Early Warning Working Group has 14 members and this phenomenon rather suggests there are limits to the degree of trust amongst DRA partners.

It is clear that the present partner-led governance model brings excellent networking opportunities across the Alliance, as well as an encouragement to proactively contribute.

DRA Committee (DRAC)

The DRAC, consisting of Chair, Vice-Chair and Crisis Coordinator was in place until the end of 2021. This has evolved and has now been replaced by the DRA Board of Directors (BoD) as of January 2022.

DRAC roles were rotated every year, with DRA Officers employed by partner agencies and seconded to the DRA Foundation. This also applies to the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Working Groups and Task Forces. There is some continuity with the Vice-Chair, since this role transitions to the Chair in the second year.

Annual rotation of DRA roles provides fresh insights and a sense of common ownership, however a number of people raised concerns about loss of continuity, loss of institutional memory and issues with quality control as a result of the high turnover of key roles year on year. In recognition of this issue, it is understood that at least the Crisis Coordinator role is now a two-year secondment, as well as support staff roles.

A related issue is the sheer volume of work for individual DRAC postholders. At one stage the Crisis Coordinator was also the Chair of the Collaboration Working Group and the Early Warning Working Group, which was recognised as being too intensive, given all the demands on their time. The Crisis Coordinator no longer chairs Working Groups which makes good sense.

b) Working Groups and Task Forces

In the last evaluation, one of the recommendations was to 'revisit the structure and function of Working Groups in general'. Over the last four years, the number of Working Groups and Task Forces has reduced with a deliberate focus on the strategic priorities. This was regarded by most as a good decision. Nevertheless, along with lengthy DRA partners meetings, CEO meetings and all the email traffic, a number of people felt that Working Groups, Task Forces and all the other meetings continue to be quite a heavy structure, with a need to be 'meaner and leaner'. One interviewee made this point more bluntly by suggesting that, "it's all very interesting but it sucks time and time is money."

Working Group Chairs were compensated for their time and the extra effort involved, however Working Group members were not, which some felt led to less engagement by Working Group members.

There was a concern expressed by several people that with the full Block Grant now covering both ACs and PCs that there will be even more meetings and bureaucracy.

c) Acute Crisis Mechanism (ACM)

The ACM is a 6 month funding window for rapid onset disasters, activated by DRA partners. It was noted by some that the decision to activate the ACM was sometimes delayed by DRA themselves, particularly if two crises occurred simultaneously or there was uncertainty about whether the criteria would be met. In addition, sometimes it was MoFA who were delaying their approval.

Timeliness data is not currently gathered to be able to assess the timelines between activation, approvals and funding flows.

RECOMMENDATION 10 - DRA should start tracking the time elapsed between the following key stages; beginning of a new acute crisis; ACM being activated; funds approved; funds disbursed, implementation started. This data should form part of the key metrics to measure performance of the Block Grant Mechanism

DRA partners vote on whether to respond to a crisis, brief Concept Notes are submitted and a peer review scoring process is completed to determine who receives funding.

The ACM is meant to support sudden onset disasters with life-saving type activities. One of the critical issues is how to bridge to longer term funding, since acute needs are likely to persist beyond 6 months. However, the PCM is unlikely to be the solution, because of the different criteria and process applied.

There was a question raised about the prioritisation of crises and the robustness of the ACM criteria. In addition, there was a suggestion that an 'exception mechanism' should be developed to trigger additional funds from MoFA in the event of multiple simultaneous disasters or a mega disaster.

A number of people mentioned the challenge of being able to deliver on the strategic priorities during a 6-month intensive emergency response. Section 4.8 discusses this issue in more detail, including a recommendation about cost and no cost extensions.

d) Protracted Crisis Mechanism (PCM)

DRA supports eight Protracted Crises each year and DRA partners are only permitted to be part of three. There was some debate amongst DRA partners about whether this was desirable. One of the concerns was that this limitation on the number of JRs per DRA partner means that the best positioned agencies may not be able to respond.

Between May and September, the PC JRs are selected. During the strategy period, a separate contract was then agreed between each JR lead agency and MoFA. This will no longer be necessary from 1st January 2022.

There was a concern raised that there are not enough linkages in countries where both the ACM and PCM are activated, such as South Sudan and Ethiopia. Therefore, it may be worth developing an overall DRA country strategy in these circumstances.

e) Field Coordinator role (FC)

The FC role is fundamental to the success of JRs. It was evident from the country visits to South Sudan and DRC, that strong collaboration is closely linked with the consistency and longevity of JR leadership. In other words, where the same Field Coordinator is in post for a period of several years, there is a higher likelihood that good relationships are built, collaboration is enhanced and learning is captured and promoted.

The FC role currently relies very much on the personality of the FC to 'get things done.' FCs primarily exercise 'soft power' to influence and coordinate partners, with very limited actual authority to drive change and no direct reporting lines to DRA partners.

A concern was raised by some FCs that despite being able to see likely underspends and issues with quality of responses, they had very limited ability to insist on partners making changes. A frustration was raised by some that even if the FC or JR lead can see poor performance by a DRA partner or local partner, there are no consequences. This is discussed above in more detail under (iii) quality of members.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face meetings were virtually impossible between JR partners over the last two years with a greater reliance on virtual meetings and this was regularly cited as a significant constraint to collaboration.

The last evaluation recommended hiring an in-country DRA Field Coordinator for larger JRs which has been implemented during this strategic period. However, at this point, it may be worth taking this concept further and considering bolstering the FC role as well as possibly adding a MEAL role for larger JRs, to assure quality and to track overall performance including spending.

A concern was raised during KIIs as well as in Country visits, that Field Coordinators have insufficient role definition. This was particularly emphasised by a former Field Coordinator who had experience managing other Consortiums

where they felt roles were clearer. A related point is that currently a Response Task Force supports the JR lead to oversee the JR at Netherlands level and this model of more shared leadership may also make sense at country level.

RECOMMENDATION 11 – DRA should have a clearer role definition for Field Coordinators and consider measures to enhance their ability to shape and manage Joint Responses, including the addition of a MEAL Officer in larger JRs

f) Joint Response lead role

JR leads are equally crucial to the success of JRs, coordinating JR partners at Netherlands level and providing the link between FCs and DRA partners.

Some JR leads identified a challenge to coordinate DRA partners whose operational centres were in other countries. Furthermore, some DRA partners are implementing through other INGOs (such as Stichting Vluchteling working through IRC, or Dorcas working through Medair in Yemen, or Tearfund working through Food for the Hungry in Mozambique) and therefore in some cases, the DRA partners themselves have no presence in country. This was reported to make the coordination lines even more complex.

g) DRA relationship with MoFA

A few comments came up in interviews and the survey on the overall relationship between DRA partners and MoFA.

Overall, there was a recognition that the DRA represents a positive evolution in the relationship between MoFA and Dutch NGOs.

As has been mentioned earlier DRA funding is regarded as fairly flexible, compared to other donors and MoFA were reported to make limited demands in terms of reporting and information. Although interestingly one respondent mentioned that they thought DRA partners themselves may have created unnecessarily bureaucratic processes, that went beyond the MoFA requirements.

Some DRA partners felt that MoFA were ‘micro-managing’ in some circumstances and that they should instead be more strategic in their engagement with DRA. In response, MoFA felt they had a responsibility to carefully review partner reports and raise questions and concerns.

Until the end of 2021, MoFA continued to contract with each Protracted Crisis JR lead for funding. However, from January 2022, there has been a significant shift, with all decisions on funding now sitting with DRA through a clearly defined mechanism. This new approach should positively evolve the relationship and ensure greater levels of independence and a more strategic outlook.

A number of DRA partners mentioned the delayed MoFA signature for the new Block Grant, which was due to start on 1 January 2022 but was not signed until 1 March 2022. This meant that some DRA partners were having to pre-finance JR activities or delay the start of new programs. Similar types of delays had been mentioned in the previous 2017 evaluation report.

Overall, the relationship between MoFA and DRA was perceived as positive and trusting on both sides. Some stakeholders within MoFA regard the DRA as one of the main innovations in humanitarian funding over the last few years, representing for them a very useful ‘one stop shop’.

ix. Collaboration conclusion

One of the primary drivers to collaborate is, as one respondent put it, wanting ‘a part of the pie.’ Indeed, the survey results backed this up, with the largest number of respondents (22%) suggesting ‘access to Dutch government funding’ was the added value of the DRA.



PHOTO: Abouk Wal weaving grasses into strong rope in South Sudan during a Focus Group Discussion – a vivid illustration of what it means to be stronger together.

In addition, by working together as an alliance, a number of DRA partners felt that the effectiveness of *all* DRA partners was being cranked up.

However, there is opportunity to go further and deeper in all areas. Particularly co-leadership of JRs, greater levels of sharing at field level, exploring more integrated programming, developing robust DRA quality assurance processes and tools, reviewing the allocation process for PCs and ramping up efforts to liaise with and influence the wider humanitarian community.

DRA governance and structures are time consuming and onerous for some partners. Suggestions are made about how to improve learning and how to refine and boost the Field Coordinator role. The aspiration is that time invested by DRA partners in effective collaboration will lead to increased reach and impact.

4.4 Innovation

The strategic priority was 'more innovation – be at the forefront of new approaches to delivering high quality humanitarian action'.

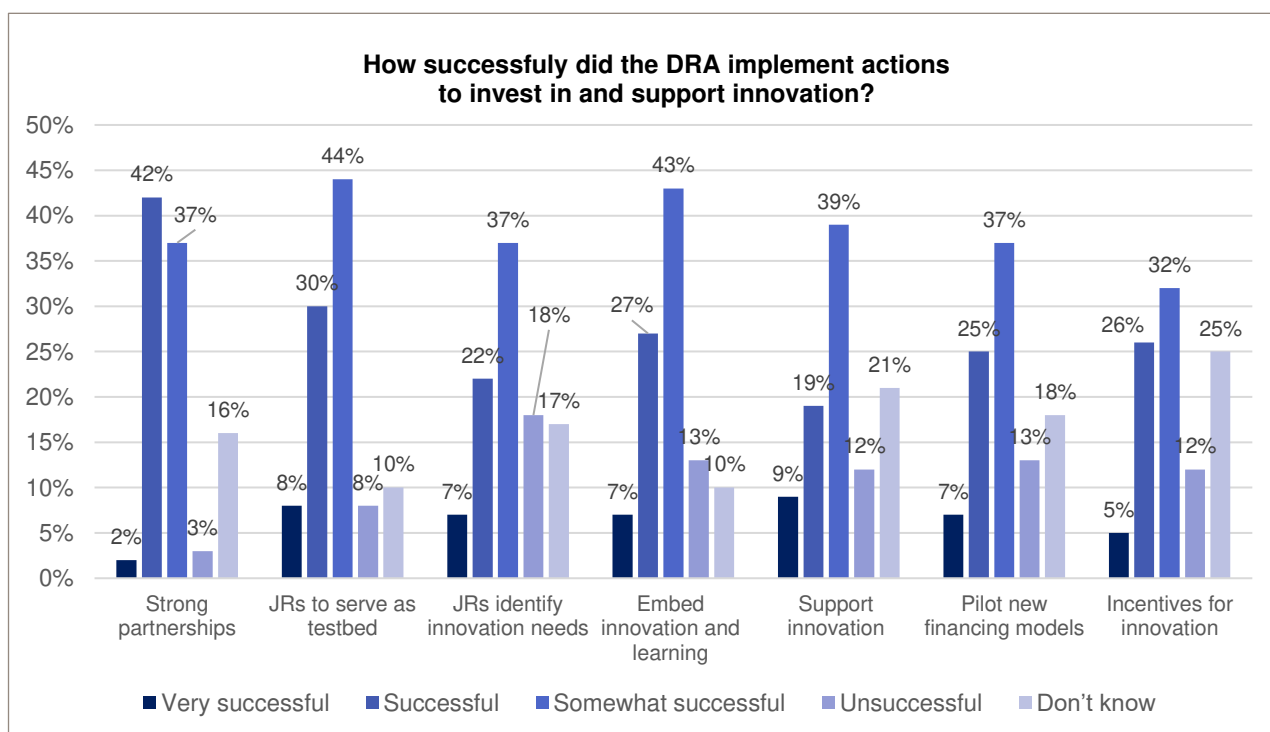
There was some confusion about what DRA was measuring itself against in terms of the innovation strategic priority. The Terms of Reference for the DRA evaluation made clear that the original 'actions to boost innovation' in the 2018 strategy were the metrics to use.

However, it transpired during the interviews and the survey design, that the Chair of the Innovation Working Group and the Innovation Portfolio Manager were working to another set of metrics, specifically those developed by the Innovation Working Group in 2019. After lengthy discussion, it was agreed with the Evaluation Task Force to evaluate the innovation strategic priority against the original actions.

An external evaluation of the DIF mechanism was conducted in August 2021. The ToR for the DIF evaluation and the very brief methodology described in the final report indicate that the primary focus of the DIF evaluation was the Innovation Working Group overall objective, rather than the actions described in the DRA 2018-2021 strategy. Detailed information on the performance of DIF projects was found in the DIF Annual Innovation Update 2021.

The survey results (see CHART 5 below) indicate that respondents felt DRA had been somewhat successful across all the innovation actions. The 'don't know' responses were quite high which may indicate that respondents were not familiar with either the specific innovation actions or the details of the DIF mechanism itself.

CHART 5: survey results for innovation question



There is a deeper point to make about innovation - despite the popularity of innovation in the humanitarian sector, the literature suggests a mismatch between ambition and reality. MoFA IOB commissioned a wide-ranging literature review on Innovation in Humanitarian Action which reported in January 2022¹⁶. The report starts by making the point that, “...recent years have seen a flurry of novel initiatives to promote innovation within and across organisations, new collaborations between stakeholders, and increased investment in developing and testing innovations at the operational level. However, taking stock after several years of increased innovation efforts, there is a sector-wide perception that humanitarian innovation is falling short of its highly set ambitions to transform the sector and add value in tackling the prevailing strategic and operational challenges within the sector.”

Out of the 22 DIF projects, only 7 had completed by the end of 2021. The delay in starting was in part reported to be due to a heavy ‘call for proposals’ process, which was revised after DIF2.

i. Strong partnerships

There was good collaboration reported with external agencies such as the private sector, universities and research groups. Although this was not verified by the evaluators.

ii. An operational test bed

A number of respondents mentioned that JRs were not suitable operational test beds for as yet unproven innovations. DIF1 was the most exploratory and the early learning was that JRs should not be used as an operational testing ground for pilots. Therefore DIF2, 3 and 4 were increasingly about scaling up proven innovations.

It is clear from the DIF evaluation and the MoFA literature reviews and the DRA evaluation findings, that integration of innovation into JRs is critical. It is understood that it was MoFA who required the separation of DIF and JR funding, which meant that DIF projects were siloed from JRs at the outset. In fairness to DRA, scaling up and integration became the primary focus in the final year of DIF and DIF4 was felt to have made a positive effort to integrate innovation within JRs, which included a series of matchmaking events. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem of the separation between DIF projects and JRs should have been anticipated earlier and amendments made more quickly. There was a sense that changes made were ‘too little and too late.’

iii. Generating ideas

DRA partners in JRs were supposed to help identify innovation needs and crisis affected people to co-create innovations. Whereas, according to a number of JRs, there is still a sense that innovation is being pushed onto them in a top-down way. Therefore, more effort is required to be more locally led, in other words to encourage innovative ideas from the field and to push decision making down to a more local level.

The MoFA commissioned literature review on humanitarian innovation made a similar point, that innovations over the last 10 years are largely ‘top down’ focusing on donors wishes, rather than ‘bottom up’ from local communities.

iv. Embedding innovation and learning

There was a structural challenge to the embedding of learning on innovation. The benefits of innovation gained through the DIF projects were reportedly not consolidated because the DIF project lead was different and separate from the JR lead. There is also the wider issue of how to capture learning and best practice across DRA (see separate learning section).

As mentioned earlier, only 7 out of 22 projects were completed by the end of 2021. As a result, it was a challenge to communicate successes across DRA with confidence.

DRA are apparently developing an online learning tool for the 22 DIF projects, however in the spirit of breaking down silo’s the point was made that it would be better to integrate this tool into the wider DRA learning tool, rather than developing a parallel mechanism.

v. Innovation beyond technology

An ongoing question raised in interviews was, how to define what is meant by innovation? The action related to ‘innovation beyond technology’ possibly encourages the confusion, since it widens the scope of innovation to ‘advocacy and negotiation skills, delivery models and ways of doing business’.

¹⁶ Literature Study, Innovation in Humanitarian Assistance, UNU-MERIT, January 26th, 2022

At field level, during country visits and interviews, many informants were unclear what was meant by innovation, whether it was new technology such as a new app, or best practice in the sector such as localisation, or a more efficient way of doing things, or even 'a different mindset,' or indeed a combination of all of these.

The DIF evaluation report fed into this, by suggesting that, 'apart from the DIF mechanism, DRA itself is seen as an innovative structure.'

vi. New financing and cash models

This action involved DRA seeking to pilot new financing models for localising support and delivering cash.

5 out of the 22 DIF projects had a focus on cash programming. This included two projects that were piloted in DIF1 and then scaled in DIF4; B-READY and the 121 Platform. As well as the 'Tackling barriers to CVA' project, piloted in DIF 2.

The cash related DIF projects had successful pilots and particularly the 121 Platform and B-Ready are successfully scaling and being supported by other donors.

vii. Incentives for innovation

Amongst other things, this action anticipated the creation of an enabling environment for bottom-up innovation.

Under the 'generating ideas' action, the point is made that a number of JRs felt innovation was top down and combined with the siloed nature of the funding mechanism, this discouraged bottom-up innovation. DRA has recognised that innovation in the DRA has been fund driven and therefore, the new strategy is seeking to incentivise innovation by other means.

The new strategy includes a budget line of 1 million Euro per year for innovation, with an expectation that innovation will be integrated into JRs.

viii. Future DRA innovation

The Innovation Working Group was wound up at the end of 2021, which makes sense, given that innovation is not a core priority in itself, but rather linked to the quality of JRs. However, there is a risk that innovation could be squeezed in the coming strategy period.

The point was made by several people that JR leads neither have the time or skill set to promote innovation. The DIF evaluation proposed that to operationalise innovation in the new strategy, the Innovation Manager should take more the role of coach/broker, facilitating connections between innovations and Joint Responses and this role to be supported by an Innovation Champions Network.

A suggestion was made that DRA should make more use of external facilitation bodies such as ELRHA to support JRs with innovations.

RECOMMENDATION 12 – DRA should ensure that the Innovation Manager and Innovation Champions are primarily focused on supporting field teams, including regular travel to Joint Responses to provide support, training and inspiration. As well as considering making use of external facilitation bodies such ELRHA

ix. Innovation conclusion

The DIF external evaluation concluded that, 'with a 12 million Euro budget over a 4-year time span, the DIF mechanism is considered a rather unique set-up that funded innovation projects and, consequently, helped DRA partner organisations to become more innovative'.

Both the DIF evaluation and the DRA evaluation findings revealed a number of significant issues such as, a lack of clarity about how to define innovation, delays in the design and implementation of DIF projects, a heavy application process, the inherent silo between the DIF mechanism & JRs and a top-down approach.

The new strategy is taking account of many of these challenges, particularly by encouraging the embedding of innovation within JRs. These various issues will need close scrutiny to ensure innovation funding is used in the most effective and efficient way over the next strategy cycle.

JR PERFORMANCE AGAINST OECD-DAC CRITERIA

Three countries were selected for in-depth visits (South Sudan, Gaza and DRC) and they provided the main focus for this aspect of the evaluation, supplemented by secondary data from sampled JRs and Key Informant Interviews. More detailed country level findings and recommendations can be found in Annexes 6, 7 and 8.

4.5 Relevance

The questions addressed under relevance considered the extent to which JRs were suited to the priority needs of affected communities.

i. Needs Assessment

DRA partners made good use of country level Humanitarian Response Plan data, FEWSNET type technical data and Coordination Cluster data to shape their understanding of needs.

Most DRA partners were reported to talk directly with affected communities to determine needs. This aspect is covered in more detail in Section 4.1 on accountability.

In most cases, DRA partners conducted individual needs assessments rather than joint assessments across partners. This is a lost opportunity to collaborate from the outset of a response, although it is well recognised that in many contexts partners are working in very different geographical and sectoral areas.

Nevertheless, where possible, Field Coordinators may have a role to encourage joint needs assessment, especially in Protracted Crises where there is a longer planning window.

ii. Program design adapted to Covid-19, or other priorities

Crisis Modifier

The Crisis Modifier mechanism was made available to local partners within some Protracted Crisis JRs. For example, in South Sudan in 2021, €33K Euro was allocated to each local partner for unexpected emergency response with a simple disbursement mechanism in country. The Crisis Modifier was very much appreciated by local partners in South Sudan. In Somalia in 2020, €33K was also allocated to each local partner and this increased to €40K in 2021. The Somalia 2020 RTR noted that the Crisis Modifier was 'very useful to be able to implement additional programming to respond to the pandemic.' This was confirmed in the van Brabant report¹⁷ and furthermore he made the point that the crisis modifier 'can be seen as a contribution to localisation'.

DRA may want to consider extending the Crisis Modifier mechanism, since it offers a means to increase relevance by enabling quick community level action, as well as enhancing localisation.

Flexible funding mechanism

The flexibility of the DRA funding and the ability to reallocate budget lines within a JR, meant that JRs could be more relevant and appropriate. Many respondents mentioned the flexibility of DRA funding, especially when compared with other donors.

The top-up funding made available by MoFA was also well appreciated and enabled partners to respond to increased and additional needs. For example, in 2020, the DRA responded to the unprecedented COVID pandemic by offering a top-up of €16M Euro - €10M in March 2020 across various existing JRs and €6M in September to start two new responses in Ethiopia and South Sudan to respond to the pandemic.¹⁸

4.6 Coherence

The questions addressed under coherence considered the extent to which JRs fitted into the wider response.

i. Coordinating well with others

JR RTRs and evaluations, as well as country visits demonstrated that JR partners generally liaise and coordinate well with key coordination bodies such as; UN-OCHA, Clusters, INGO and NNGO Forums, Line Ministries and Local Authorities.

¹⁷ Van Brabant, Localisation in Practice, Dec 2021

¹⁸ Data from DRA Final Report Support Budget 2020

ii. JR components complementing each other

Joint planning was undertaken by DRA partners, with a 'kick off meeting' at the beginning of all new JRs. JR partners sought to complement each others expertise through this process, which was well regarded by most respondents. In the Gaza ACJR, for example, there was a genuine desire amongst DRA partners to complement each other and provide a multi-sectoral response, covering the critical needs and based on partners different technical expertise and geographical presence.

In the case of South Sudan, a National partner mentioned that they had attended the kick off planning workshop with their colleagues and they felt like they were genuinely contributing to the SSJR7 proposal.

However, in the case of some Acute Crisis JRs, there were examples given of the need to more intentionally and intensively plan at the outset. The Cyclone Idai RTR mentioned that joint discussions and planning would have helped the agencies to have a more collective direction on what was appropriate and possible within the emergency 6-month grant. An Acute Crisis local partner in South Sudan mentioned they were less involved in program design and felt that their main involvement was simply implementation. In the Nigeria RRTR in 2019, a related point was made, that during these planning meetings, local partners did not feel their views were taken into account, as much as DRA partners.

Multi-country JRs can be particularly challenging in terms of coherence across separate country programs. Examples were given from the Cyclone Idai response in Mozambique & Malawi, as well as the Zimbabwe & Zambia response, where funds came through a single JR, but it was reported to become like two completely separate programs. As a result, it is understood that to avoid this situation, DRA will now only allow a single country response for Acute Crises.

Within JRs, it was recognised that DRA partners are often focusing primarily on delivering their own individual projects in separate geographical areas or separate sectors, with limited overlap or genuine integration between JR partners. There is greater opportunity for JRs to meaningfully integrate activities. This point is also made in the collaboration section on 'Joint Support to Local Partners.'

4.7 Effectiveness

The questions addressed under effectiveness considered the extent to which JRs are delivering on agreed objectives and outcomes.

JR outputs in the three countries visited were all achieved on time and to budget. In fact, more than that, in DRC and Gaza, beneficiary numbers were exceeded.

Working collaboratively is both an advantage and a disadvantage in terms of effectiveness - the meta-evaluation in 2019 made the point that collaboration in JRs led to both efficiencies through good coordination as well as inefficiencies due to an increase in the administrative burden resulting from being part of a JR.

One modality is singled out in terms of effectiveness. Cash was frequently mentioned as a preference for affected communities. One obvious advantage of this modality is that it can be implemented quickly. For example, following the Beirut explosion, JR partners were able to distribute Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance in just over a month. Both Gaza and DRC beneficiaries expressed a strong preference for unrestricted multipurpose cash, as a means of enabling vulnerable households to spend according to their primary needs.

4.8 Efficiency

The questions addressed under efficiency considered the extent to which JRs are cost effective, delivering good value for money.

i. Timeliness

It was noted in the last evaluation (2014-2017) that due to DRA slow approval processes, 'on occasion DRA partners 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'. The same issue came up in KIs and in other JRs. For example, in the Nigeria PC JR in 2019, the RTR mentioned that funds were not transferred to the lead for more than 1 month after the kick off, which meant DRA partners needed to pre-finance, and then there were further delays transferring funds from the lead to DRA partners and from DRA partners to local partners, resulting in various program delays.

ii. Delayed starts

A number of AC JRs (Venezuela & Columbia 2019, Lebanon 2020, Gaza 2021) faced challenges leading to delays at the outset in areas such as recruitment, procurement, securing beneficiary lists, liaison with local authorities and insecurity. Significant delays were also experienced by some PCs, for example the Yemen JR in 2020 was affected by delays in the approval of project sub-agreements by local authorities, plus Covid restrictions, plus security challenges.

iii. JR underspend

Due to the limited visibility on spend by Field Coordinators, it was reported that there were regular underspends, which were often not discovered until the end of the program, at which point it was too late to reallocate funds, and consequently these funds were returned to MoFA.

During the Gaza visit, it became apparent from JR partners that they would have liked a longer duration to implement their projects. This is beyond the agreed guidelines for the Acute Crisis Mechanism which only allows for 6-month implementation. It is understood that exceptions can be made to allow for Cost and No Cost Extensions, however this is not explicitly included in the ACM guidelines and is not widely known. The only reference to No Cost Extensions is in the DRA 2016 Financial Guidelines “In principle BuZa is not allowing no-costs extensions for the DRA projects, only in exceptional situation.”

During the South Sudan visit, National partners expressed their view that DRA should allow No Cost Extensions in case they faced unexpected delays or difficulties with implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 13 – DRA should develop a mechanism to reallocate unspent funds to other JRs, rather than funds being returned to MoFA. As part of this, DRA should more widely promote the possibility of Cost Extensions where there are excess funds available, or the option of No Cost Extensions in exceptional circumstances

4.9 Impact

The questions addressed under impact considered what difference was made to beneficiaries by the JR.

Impact is difficult to measure in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, the annual Impact Briefs provide a helpful way to track key metrics from one year to the next.

TABLE 4 – summary of data from annual Impact Briefs 2018-2021¹⁹

Year	No of JRs	Budget	No of local Partners
2018	13	59,910,441	Not tracked
2019	15	61,579,980	83
2020	17	79,167,055	105
2021	14	59,882,060	100
TOTAL	59	260,539,536	

Most JR partners were reported to complete baseline and end line surveys in order to be able to demonstrate impact.

During country visits, beneficiaries reported many examples of positive impact, as a result of JR partner interventions. A few examples in different sectors and types of responses include:

- South Sudan SSJR7 in Aweil East, Baac Payam – Save the Children partner CEF trained Women’s Seed Production Groups successfully, to cultivate at all times of the year and beneficiaries reported that “we have green vegetables, even in the dry season.” Other women said, “we can sell our produce and have the money to buy, soap, goats, even money to pay hospital fees for children.”
- DRC JR4 – the food and agricultural inputs distribution to vulnerable people has had a significant impact on the lives of beneficiaries. These include improvement of the Food Consumption Score from poor to acceptable.

¹⁹ 2021 data is estimated, as final data was not available to include in the report

- South Sudan Acute Food Insecurity ACJR 2021 in Aweil East - borehole users in Wun-tit village (*see PHOTO right*) were very happy with the rehabilitation of their borehole by Tearfund partner CEDS, because previously they had to walk one hour for water, or gather dirty water from ponds, but now they reported they have a supply of fresh reliable water on their doorstep.
- DRC JR4 - Multi Purpose Cash to female beneficiaries in Musienene was the most popular activity and enabled them to spend according to their primary needs. Most households used the funds to meet basic needs, pay for school fees and pay medical bills. Approximately a third of the women (mainly female headed households) had been able to invest in productive assets such as land and goats.
- Gaza ACJR in 2021 - PSS kits and Psychological First Aid provided by War Child partner, CTCMM were appreciated. Parents said “I’ve never seen my children so happy after receiving the toys and psychosocial support,” and “the toys helped the children forget the trauma of the war.”



Referrals between partners was mentioned as a way to increase impact in the 2020 meta-evaluation. This was also mentioned in various RTRs and end of JR evaluations. Referrals between JR partners was explicitly included as an activity in the Gaza ACJR in 2021, particularly focusing on referrals for specialist mental health support to one of the specialist JR partners, GMHSP.

4.10 Sustainability

The questions addressed under sustainability considered the extent to which JRs produced sustainable results.

i. Exit plans

Acute Crises need strong exit plans from the outset, given that the funding window is only six months long.

Protracted Crisis interventions are by their nature longer term. In some countries, such as South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, CAR and Syria, Protracted Crisis funding has run for all four consecutive years of the strategic period. In such situations, there is a greater opportunity to plan for sustainable activities, in order for the benefits to persist beyond the DRA funding. A good example of this was mentioned by Tearfund in South Sudan, they are remaining in Aweil County for one final year, with the sole component of their program in this location being exit activities with their Seed Producer Groups.

ii. Capacity strengthening to access institutional donor funding

Capacity strengthening is discussed in more detail in the Localisation section. This aspect, if done well, will ensure local partners are able to continue on beyond the lifetime of their partnership with DRA partners. For example, a number of JRs were seeking to support local partners to build links to institutional donors to be able to secure other sources of funding.

The Nigeria PCJR sought to build the capacity of their local partners in the area of institutional fundraising as part of their exit strategy, which included a mentorship program. However, the JR lead recognised these activities started quite late and new funding had not yet been secured. The learning was that this type of initiative needs sufficient time to bear fruit. In DRC, the evaluator found that local partners have been able to access supplementary funding because of the capacity building through DRA, for example, ADED accessed funds from the UN Pooled Fund mechanisms which they said was a direct result of what they had received in terms of capacity building support.

iii. Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

The perennial challenge in humanitarian response is that the support provided is often only temporary and fails to deal with underlying vulnerabilities. This was well described by a number of beneficiaries during the Gaza visit, who mentioned that whilst they appreciated the emergency support, they were conscious it only provided temporary relief and were frustrated to still be in the same situation one year on, unemployed and without an income to support their families.

Sustainability can be improved by having a longer-term perspective and linking into development and peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in protracted crises. The 2-year funding window certainly offers opportunities in this respect. Nevertheless, a fundamental limitation is that the DRA focus is primarily humanitarian. Despite this, there are some examples of JRs pursuing resilience type programming, such as the Nexus in Somalia and aspects of the DRC JR.

5. Final Conclusion

The vision for the DRA four years ago was that it would be “a cutting edge funding and collaboration mechanism enabling INGOs to be flexible and adaptive in response to crises and ensuring aid efficiently reaches those most in need by those best placed to provide it.”

Four years on, the external evaluation demonstrates that the DRA has delivered effective and efficient humanitarian assistance, as well as clearly evolving and maturing as an alliance and learning from its experience.

On the specific objectives of the external evaluation, a number of concluding comments can be made.

5.1 Progress against strategic priorities

Important gains have been made against each of the strategic priorities. Nevertheless, collaborative working in an alliance is not straightforward and further efforts are required in all areas to deepen and widen the effectiveness of the DRA.

Localisation

The main emphasis of the evaluation was localisation. There has been a degree of significant and incremental progress on localisation over the last four years. However there has been a limited genuine shift of power to local partners.

In terms of blunt metrics, such as the aggregated spend to local partners, DRA has exceeded the Grand Bargain target of 25% but not reached the DRA target of 35%. Although, it is noted that a few individual DRA partners are far exceeding the target.

There were mixed views expressed on the sharing of ICR, between those who thought there should be an equal sharing and others who felt that all allowable costs could be reflected in existing budgets – a clear DRA policy position is needed on ICR sharing.

Capacity strengthening spend has been relatively low at less than 1% in ACs and maximum 3.5% in PCs, compared to the target of 5-8%. Given the importance of capacity strengthening, DRA partners should step up efforts to allocate at least 5% of JR budgets to capacity strengthening initiatives and ideally to continue the shift to partners themselves identifying their capacity needs and being given the budget to directly address these needs.

Good examples were identified in some JRs of local voices being amplified, although further work is needed on a concerted effort to support local partners, where necessary, to connect with international fora and other donors.

Accountability

The strategic plan envisaged three dimensions to accountability; to disaster affected people, to governments and to the Dutch public.

Examples were identified of three JRs (South Sudan, DRC and Nigeria) who have made extensive efforts to set up joint accountability mechanisms. These seem to be working well and could be a model for other JRs to adopt. Continued effort is needed to proactively promote Accountability to Affected People.

Gender sensitivity and gender equality is taken seriously across JRs and multiple trainings have been conducted both with JR partners, as well as by partners to the communities they serve. There were some issues identified with the quality of training to communities, as well as examples of a mismatch between gender equality in the program design and the actual performance within programs.

Transparency to the Dutch public has been primarily achieved through IATI quarterly uploads, annual Impact Briefs and the DRA website.

There was less progress on joint communications strategies largely it seems because of the perceived tension of DRA competing with its partners.

Improvements are needed in the capturing and promotion of learning across DRA partners and initially this will require a review of the information management system. The sheer volume of evaluations is a burden on JRs and there are a range of alternatives available such as Peer Review. DRA should revise its approach.

Collaboration

Collaboration has been more precisely defined over the last year with new output indicators to measure collaborative impact.

It is clear from field visits and discussions with JRs, that collaboration is enhanced by the presence of a strong long term Field Coordinator. Given the importance of the FC role, they should have clearer role definition and possibly a boosted team to work with in the case of larger JRs.

Genuine joint working has been limited to a handful of examples such as the Somalia Nexus pilot, joint trainings at JR level and some sharing of resources. There is an opportunity to go much further in terms of integrated programming in distinct geographical areas, in order to have greater impact for affected communities.

Quality assurance processes and tools require further work, which is planned in the new strategy cycle.

The issue of who is 'best placed to respond' in PCs has been an ongoing debate and requires resolution; either to divide funds equally or to agree clear criteria for disbursing all funds or a proportion of funds. Other Alliances have wrestled with similar issues and should be consulted as part of a review of the allocation process.

External liaison has been weak, beyond some natural linkages with advocacy groups where there was already an overlap with members. Stronger efforts are needed on external liaison, particularly bearing in mind the new DRA ambition to influence the wider humanitarian sector.

Whilst MoFA funds are very much valued by DRA partners, DRA should consider diversifying its funding base. Key performance metrics need to be improved, to be able to measure success - specifically metrics to assess timelines on AC activation, approvals and funding flows.

Innovation

Overall innovation themes and innovation within JRs were the main aspects considered in the evaluation. However, this was constrained by a couple of factors; firstly, confusion about what DRA was measuring itself against in terms of the innovation strategic priority. Secondly, the siloed nature of the DIF projects, which meant there was limited visibility even within JRs on innovation activities.

The evaluation confirmed the findings of the separate DIF external evaluation, particularly in terms of the delays in the design and implementation of DIF projects and the structural set up of DIF projects that meant they were separate from JRs from the outset and therefore benefits of innovation had not been consolidated for the alliance as a whole. The evaluation also corroborated the MoFA literature review finding, that there was a tendency towards a top-down approach.

Nevertheless, the €12M Euro DRA Innovation Fund has undoubtedly stimulated and encouraged innovation amongst DRA partners and supported a range of innovative projects.

Learning from the last four years has been incorporated into the new strategy, in that the new budget line of 1 million Euro per year for innovation, comes with an expectation that innovation will be integrated into JRs.

Given that the evaluation revealed JRs have a limited understanding of innovation, the Innovation Manager and Innovation champions should primarily focus their time and energy on supporting JRs in a brokering/coaching role.

5.2 Progress on JR performance

A comprehensive data set across all JRs would have enabled a more meaningful comparison and analysis of performance. Nevertheless, on the basis of the three country visits and a range of secondary data for some JRs, including RTRs and Evaluation reports, it was possible to assume that reasonable progress was made across Joint Responses against the standard OECD-DAC criteria.

Relevance

Robust needs assessment data has informed the choice of programming and views of disaster affected people have been taken into account. The crisis modifier mechanism was a very useful means for local partners to respond to new crises within existing PC programs. DRA may want to consider extending this mechanism to all PC JRs. The flexibility of DRA funds has enabled DRA partners to adapt and respond to changes such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Coherence

JRs made positive efforts to coordinate with all the key external bodies, such as governments, clusters and other NGOs. As well as extensively coordinating internally with other DRA partners and local partners.

The various components of JRs complemented each other through careful program design and useful 'kick off' meetings. This avoided overlaps or duplication. However, this also meant there was limited genuine integration of programming as partners were working in distinct geographical and/or sectoral areas.

Effectiveness

It was not possible to verify if all JR outputs had been achieved, however in two of the focus countries visited, outputs had in fact been exceeded. Cash is a clear preference for beneficiaries and many JRs included a cash component.

Efficiency

Many AC and PC JRs faced delays, due to a range of factors including; recruitment, procurement, securing beneficiary lists, liaison with local authorities and insecurity. In addition, delayed disbursement of funds from DRA to JRs meant that unless DRA partners could pre-finance, implementation was constrained.

Field Coordinators had limited visibility on individual partner spend, which meant underspends were difficult to identify and manage. A related issue is the ability of DRA to reallocate any unspent funds to other JRs. At present unspent funds are returned to MoFA, whereas DRA should develop mechanisms to identify underspends earlier in programs and reallocate unspent funds to other JRs, as well as more widely promoting Cost and No Cost Extensions.

Impact

Impact was measured by baseline and end line surveys and post distribution monitoring. During country visits, beneficiaries reported significant impact as a result of DRA partner programs. Linked to the issue above about limited integration – more could be done by DRA partners to make referrals to each other's programs.

Sustainability

Exit planning was seen to be in place in the countries visited and this is crucial given the relatively short funding windows. Genuine multi-year funding could help to encourage DRA members to pursue resilience type programming, to ensure more effective capacity strengthening and to encourage program benefits to persist beyond the end of the DRA funding.

5.3 Inform the new DRA strategy

A detailed new strategy had already been formulated and signed off before the external evaluation commenced. It may have made more sense to commission the DRA external evaluation prior to the drafting of the new strategy, or at least to have captured early findings during the strategy formulation period. Nevertheless, regular reviews of the strategy should allow for additional activities to be incorporated to take account of agreed recommendations from this evaluation.

As part of their ongoing evolution, DRA will need to reflect on and address the many lessons and recommendations emerging from the evaluation. The Management Response Matrix (Annex 9) provides a tool for the DRA Board of Directors to systematically consider each of the recommendations and determine how they should be addressed and operationalised.