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A photograph of two women walking away from the camera on a dirt path in a dry, arid landscape. The woman on the left is wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned headscarf and a matching dress. The woman on the right is wearing a light-colored headscarf with a geometric pattern and a dress with a colorful, abstract pattern. She is carrying a large, clear plastic water container. The background is a vast, open, sandy area under a bright sky.

# THE ROLE OF THE DEPUTY HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

- AN INDEPENDENT STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A study commissioned by ICVA.**

## Research Team

The study was conducted by an independent research team:

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The study and production of the report was guided by the following members of the advisory group:

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## Acronyms

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations
<b>CRD</b>	Coordination and Response Division, OCHA
<b>DHC</b>	Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>DOCO</b>	Development Operations Coordination Office
<b>DRHC</b>	Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>DSRSG</b>	Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary-General
<b>EDG</b>	Emergency Directors Group
<b>ERC</b>	Emergency Response Coordinator
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>ICVA</b>	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
<b>HC</b>	Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HRA</b>	Humanitarian Reform Agenda
<b>L3 EMERGENCY</b>	Level 3 Emergency
<b>NON-WEOG</b>	Non-Western European and Others Group
<b>OCHA</b>	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator
<b>RHC</b>	Regional Humanitarian Coordinator
<b>SRSG</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
<b>STAIT</b>	Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team
<b>TA</b>	Transformative Agenda
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>WEOG</b>	Western European and Others Group

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Executive Summary structure:

**Section 1:** Introduction.

**Section 2:** Brief Summary of the research.

**Section 3:** Key points of the study.

**Section 4:** Recommendations - How to manage the DHC role in the future.

## Scope of study:

The study covers the following DHC positions from 2012 to 2016.

Central African Republic	Oct 2015 to Mar 2016
Iraq	Feb 2015 to Jan 2016
Myanmar	Apr 2016 to Dec 2016
Nigeria 1	Apr 2015 to Sep 2016
Nigeria 2	Oct 2016 to Dec 2016
Philippines*	Nov 2013 to Jan 2014
Somalia	Feb 2012 to Feb 2013
South Sudan	Apr 2014 to Mar 2016
Sudan/Darfur	Jan 2015 to Aug 2015
Whole of Syria	May 2016 to Dec 2016

\*Partial information.

*Please note:* This report does not consider recent developments in 2017.

## Study objectives:

Considering that deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) have been increasingly deployed in recent years to support the position of Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), this study aims to:

- **Inform future collective discussion and decisions associated with the DHC role within the humanitarian coordination system.**
- **Highlight key issues and propose recommendations for the future management of the DHC role.**

It presents the findings from the Study on the Role of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, commissioned by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and conducted by an independent research team.

The report aims to present an overview of DHC positions that have been deployed since the introduction of the Transformative Agenda (TA) in 2012. The study focuses on describing various perspectives from within the humanitarian community. It does not take an evaluative approach nor take into account developments within the humanitarian landscape in 2017.

This paper presents best practices and lessons learned to inform and improve management of the DHC role.

**The study found that while the role of DHC has evolved organically and has often been managed in an ad hoc manner, it is often perceived by humanitarian actors as bringing a strong added value to a humanitarian response. The DHC role is a powerful tool in supporting principled and effective humanitarian aid across challenging coordination landscapes, when used to address context-specific needs.**

## Study methodology:

Review past and current DHC positions and explore stakeholder perceptions of the aspects of the role that have provided added value to humanitarian responses. The study accepts the system as it is and takes a pragmatic approach to its recommendations, while looking at the larger system-wide dynamics that affect the role. The recommendations are based on feedback from study participants. They aim at fostering further discussion within the humanitarian community.

# 2

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

**The DHC role was found to have developed incrementally and in response to ongoing changes within the humanitarian coordination architecture. Diverse perceptions and opinions regarding the added value of the DHC roles were apparent, however, a coherent view of the DHC role still emerged: A valued senior leadership role seen by a majority of respondents as bringing added value to certain responses.**

The study examined all phases of a DHC deployment, including the inception of the role, its justification and the designation process. It identified the profile attributes, core functions and key relationships of the role and looked at the delegation of authority and accountability issues. Finally, it attempted to identify challenges, as well as productive practices and perceived added value to be highlighted for future management of the role.

**The DHC role was found to have developed incrementally and in response to ongoing changes within the humanitarian coordination architecture.**

As a result, DHC have been deployed in a range of contexts serving diverse objectives, with a corresponding range of outcomes.

Within the complex system of coordination structures across different contexts, respondents' understanding of and experience with the role varied. **Diverse perceptions and opinions regarding the added value of the DHC roles were apparent, however, a coherent view of the DHC role still emerged: A valued senior leadership role seen by a majority of respondents as bringing added value to certain responses.**

The role seems to be most effective: When the DHC focuses on the technical aspects of humanitarian coordination and delivery; where there is a clear delineation of geographic and/or functional space and a clear transmission of empowered leadership by the HC; when there is a high level of acceptance of the role within the humanitarian community; where humanitarian space needs to be protected by a dedicated humanitarian representative and when the DHC invests in strong relationships and plays a convening role in the humanitarian community.

The DHC role has adapted in response to systemic and context-specific influences in a way that has managed to protect the core motivation of the system: Deliver aid effectively and safely to as many people as possible.

The information presented in this report is based on a literature review of 414 documents, and results from 288 surveys and interviews with 63 key informants. The study offers an overview of DHC positions that have been deployed since the introduction of the Transformative Agenda (TA) in 2012. It focuses on describing perspectives of various actors within the humanitarian community, including NGOs, UN agencies, donor offices, the Red Cross Movement, DHCs and HCs.



# 3

## KEY POINTS OF THE STUDY

### 3.1 DHC roles are often perceived as bringing a strong added value to a humanitarian response

**Across the study, the potential of the DHC role to add value to a humanitarian response – while not always manifested – is patently present.** 70% of survey respondents expressed some extent of agreement that a DHC role they had worked with provided strategic added value; 82% expressed some extent of agreement that it provided operational value; and 70% expressed some extent of agreement that a DHC role had positively impacted their own organisation's engagement with the coordination system.

### 3.2 DHC roles are often positively associated with preserving humanitarian space and improving principled delivery

**Where there is a DHC position, humanitarian actors often perceive an increase in the level of independence of aid delivery.** DHC functions and activities contribute to increasing and maintaining humanitarian space, acting as a buffer between humanitarian and non-humanitarian activities.

### 3.3 The DHC role should be considered as a work in progress within an evolving humanitarian coordination system

The role has evolved and adapted organically in response to system-wide demands for greater efficiency, effectiveness and accountability, associated with the TA and the Humanitarian Reform Agenda (HRA), and it continues to evolve in response to field level operational realities of particular humanitarian situations. As such, **it represents an opportunity to creatively address weaknesses within the in-country humanitarian coordination system.**

### 3.4 The DHC role provides many of the humanitarian leadership functions of a stand-alone HC

The role represents both costs and benefits, and has in many ways emerged as an organic answer to the humanitarian coordination system's need for a dedicated humanitarian leadership capacity, independent from non-humanitarian activities. The study demonstrated that **DHCs often fill the space of a stand-alone HC role**, albeit under the ultimate authority of the HC: DHCs are the highest level of leadership dedicated to strictly humanitarian activities. **They play a central coordination role between humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors; increase the humanitarian accountability of the response and contribute to donor confidence.**

### 3.5 The DHC role is associated with increasing cohesion among humanitarian actors in a response

The DHC was often favourably associated with increasing community cohesion, even among stakeholders expressing disappointment in and/or scepticism toward the role. DHCs that placed a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships were highly valued for **playing a critical convening role and promoting the collective work of humanitarian actors.**

### 3.6 Further formalisation of the role carries both benefits and risks

The adaptability of the DHC role can be its weakness and its strength. While a desire for more clarity or standardisation is understandable, **efforts to further standardise and/or regulate the role could result in the loss of its current advantage of adaptability.** Furthermore, if the role were to be institutionalised, the system would likely create another flexible role.

### 3.7 Systemic weaknesses at country level can be mitigated by the DHC role, but risk being concretised

**The DHC role can be a pragmatic and effective short-term solution to mitigate weaknesses in country coordination mechanisms,** however, it should primarily focus on bringing added value to a humanitarian response. Delegation of HC responsibilities to a DHC should not result in the wholesale outsourcing of the HC portfolio. This undermines the roles of the DHC and the HC, as well as the credibility of the RC system.

### 3.8 Emphasis should be on transmitting empowered leadership, rather than the mechanics of delegating authority

The study found that a DHC position can either weaken or amplify an HC's empowered leadership. The role is most effective in situations where the HC clearly communicates arrangements for delegating authority and helps the DHC carve out a clearly defined sphere of operations. Even in situations where agreements are informal or lacking, DHCs with a clearly defined remit can still be effective. Where the HC does not actively extend empowered leadership, or the DHC does not fully inhabit this aspect of the role, leadership is potentially diluted or stymied. **A fully empowered DHC is therefore often a sign of a robustly empowered HC.**

### 3.9 Contested views of OCHA's role have significant implications for the DHC role

Across respondent subgroups, the perception of OCHA's in-country role remains unclear and contested, varying from a non-operational Secretariat role supporting the HC and the HCT, to a more overt leadership role similar to that of the DHC. The study found that, **to be effective, the DHC's scope of activities must take into consideration OCHA capacity on the ground.** Clearer communication and better understanding of their respective roles would help to ensure complementarity between the two. On-going internal OCHA reforms might ultimately contribute to such clarification.

### 3.10 The success of the DHC role relies on community-wide investment in supporting DHCs and HCs

**To be effective, the DHC role requires widespread support involving cooperation from the UN humanitarian community, donors and NGOs.**

Internal dynamics, such as inter-agency politics and low acceptance of the DHC role are a fundamental challenge to its success, depriving humanitarian actors and responses of the role's potential added value. While OCHA plays a primary role in supporting DHCs and HCs, a lack of support from other actors can easily undermine effectiveness and offset efforts made by OCHA.

### 3.11 The potential for NGOs to engage with the DHC role is under-exploited

The study exposed a range of NGO concerns about their perceived role in the system. While these concerns are based on concrete structural inequalities within the UN coordination system, **NGOs should consider the benefits of increasing their own sense of empowerment, rather than waiting for the system to cede space to them.** In many cases, the DHC role offers a substantial added value for NGOs as operational implementers. Participant feedback shows that engaging proactively with DHC positions may represent a source of untapped potential.

# 4

## RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO MANAGE THE DHC ROLE IN THE FUTURE

Given the potential added value of the DHC role, this report makes the following recommendations aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the DHC role. Recommendations are based on accepting the current system as it is, while also assuming that the system will continue to change over time. The recommendations incorporate feedback from study participants, particularly DHC feedback.

### 4.1 Make systemic adjustments to optimise the DHC role, without overly institutionalising it

Even as the DHC role continues to evolve, shaping the role and how it's managed to maximise the potential benefits while minimising the potential risks will amplify the role's effect within the system for all actors. These approaches assume that the DHC is a communal asset that can benefit all actors.

- **Avoid institutionalising the DHC role across the humanitarian coordination system.** The role's flexibility is a primary strength that should be preserved. DHC roles should not be standard features in coordination structures, but be evaluated case-by-case, taking into consideration best practices from previous DHC deployments.
- **Prioritize contexts that clearly benefit from the DHC role:** sudden onset emergencies (including, but not limited to, L3 contexts); contexts with geographically remote and/or distinct humanitarian activity sites; contexts where humanitarian space is compromised, and those where poor relationships within the humanitarian community impede effective delivery of aid.

- **Ensure that the DHC role is approached as a community-wide investment in empowered leadership.** This should result in the DHC acting within a clearly defined autonomous functional space to amplify the HCs leadership, but should avoid filling and/or duplicating OCHA's functions.
- Consider **deploying a DHC role** to responses where there is **lack of cohesion within the humanitarian community**, to refocus and increase collective action.
- Continue the practice of the **DHC request coming from the field level, with collective ownership as the goal.** HQ level bodies, including OCHA and NGO consortia, should manage processes in a way that avoids giving the false impression that the role is imposed on HCs or responses generally.



## 4.2 Increase understanding and acceptance of the role within the humanitarian community (and beyond) for a clearer shared understanding of the role and a shared set of expectations

The success of the DHC role relies, at least partially, on its acceptance. All actors involved should clearly communicate internally on how the role is managed and build a shared set of expectations among humanitarian and relevant external actors.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) members should develop a set of communication materials targeting relevant actors to increase understanding and acceptance of the role, including:

- Communications **targeting HCs** on the added value of the role.
- Communications **targeting current and future DHCs** regarding the potential added value of the role and best practices.
- **Clear communication on the DHC role for the humanitarian community**, globally and within the deployment context. Through extensive communication and consultation during the designation process, particularly among those in the field and/or NGO counterparts, foster early acceptance of the role in potential deployment countries.
- **Clear communication on the role of the DHC for non-humanitarian actors.**
- **Thematic practice guidance for DHCs and their interlocutors**, for instance on the DHC role in the context of the “new way of working”, how to best work within integrated missions and effectively conduct advocacy related to protection of civilians or accountability to affected people.
- Similarly, **NGOs, donors, UN agencies and other stakeholder groups should offer guidance on working with a DHC**, including what to expect from and how to effectively engage in the role. NGOs should also identify DHC engagement opportunities and strategies within their organisations and collectively. At the HQ level, this could include policy level advice on best practices for engaging DHCs, and at the field level, coordinated advocacy efforts to engage the DHC on NGO concerns.

## 4.3 Clarify roles, responsibilities and accountability to the extent possible

**While the flexibility of the DHC role should be preserved**, it is essential to **clarify the parameters of each DHC deployment, taking into consideration the specificities of each deployment**, including existing humanitarian leadership within a response.

- **HCs should clearly transmit empowered leadership to the DHC** by a) agreeing on the scope of the DHC’s activities with the DHC and clearly articulating the DHC’s role to his/her counterparts, and b) ensuring the DHC has a clear functional sphere in which to operate autonomously. HCs should invest in the acceptance and legitimacy of the role through an inclusive in-country designation process, and even if agreements remain informal, in-country stakeholders should understand the DHC’s role, particularly in relation to other roles.
- Under the leadership of the HC, and with support from the EDG and OCHA, the HCT should **improve specificity of TORs**. While these can remain flexible in scope, to achieve potential added value, they should be specific to the context where the DHC will be employed, taking into account the known challenges, systemic weaknesses and unmet objectives of the response. The HCT and the EDG should consider complementarity between roles as part of the designation process and TOR development process, including consideration of OCHA Head of Office capacity when deploying DHCs, in order to ensure a clear distinction between roles. Where necessary, OCHA should clarify the reporting relationships between in-country OCHA offices, HQ OCHA offices, the DHC and the HC. Where relationships and reporting lines reflect established policy, concerns and/or confusion should still be taken seriously and addressed.
- Double hatted DHC should be avoided, in order to **prevent conflicts of interest**, real or perceived.
- **DHCs should be evaluated** using the same accountability procedures that respect the DHC’s reporting relationship to the HC and **allow for community input**. A collective approach taking into account feedback from across stakeholder groups and aiming to manage DHCs as a collective resource should be included.

## 4.4 Reinforce processes for the identification and designation of DHC candidates

While many contextual factors support the success of a DHC role, the EDG, with the support of OCHA, should focus on identifying desirable DHC candidates and facilitating a timely and transparent designation process. A diversity of candidates with the right balance of hard and soft skills, who are identified in a clear and communicative manner, are more likely to gain the acceptance of the community during the designation process, resulting in increased effectiveness once deployed.

- **Continue to improve the diversity and the humanitarian capacity of the HC pool, with an emphasis on identifying and deploying non-UN and female DHCs.** OCHA and NGO consortia should increase their efforts to communicate with NGOs and potential NGO candidates about the HC Pool. OCHA should consider creating a pathway to collective leadership positions, including DHC positions, for non-UN candidates.
- **Consider essential soft skills,** such as interpersonal skills and leadership capacity of equal importance, in addition to extensive humanitarian and coordination experience.
- **Create a distinct 'corps' of DHCs,** within the framework of the existing HC pool, to address factors particular to the DHC role, such as the relatively short deployment time compared to HCs, as well as unique talent development considerations. This would also allow for the development and support of potential DHC candidates.
- **Find a workable balance between transparency and leadership team cohesion in the designation process.** While it is paramount for an HC to trust and choose his/her deputy, ownership of the role should be broadened to ensure the role's adequate acceptance. To set realistic expectations, sensitise humanitarian actors on the nature of a designation versus an open recruitment process.

## 4.5 Expand and deepen DHC support and learning efforts

Given the increased deployment of DHCs, OCHA, EDG, NGO Consortia, Peer2Peer and other relevant bodies should:

- Identify ways to **develop DHC talent as a distinct humanitarian leadership group** that addresses the particular needs and challenges reflected in this report.
- **Ensure all DHCs receive a DHC induction** that includes pre- and post deployment briefing with the HC, the EDG, OCHA counterparts, donors and NGO representatives. Written 'lessons learned' briefs should be encouraged after each DHC deployment and shared with relevant counterparts.
- **Prepare written guidance on what to expect for first time DHCs,** including best practices, lessons learned and how to interact with various stakeholder groups.
- Create a **dedicated space for exchange amongst DHCs** on good practices and experiences.
- Peer2Peer, EDG and other inter-agency entities should also evaluate how to best support the DHC role and its functions.
- Acknowledging the tensions inherent within multi-hatted missions, the EDG should prepare guidance to support HCs and DHCs in this aspect of their roles.





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