



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE & ENGAGEMENT KEY HIGHLIGHTS



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VOICES OF DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

“In the age of digital democracy any Ukrainian citizen living abroad can find a community or people that need help in Ukraine via the Internet without any intermediaries. Technologies also help to produce transparent reporting and visibility without any bureaucracy”. **Ukraine**

“We realized that working as a collective of associations is much more practical and has a greater weight”. **Tunisia**

“We communicated fully and in detail about each of our decisions regarding the allocation of resources and donations and we ensured a complete follow-up and monitoring of the different phases of the process: from the collection of money to the final delivery of the material”. **Tunisia**

“We have direct connections with people back home, and we also know who is affected more than others”. **Somalia**

“We feel we have the capacity of having the knowledge of the context: we have local contacts; we have easy access; we have familiarity with structures - this know-how we have is not that clear to INGOs and sometimes they overlook our efforts”. **Somalia**

“We are from this area, we know the people who are the hardest hit and the most vulnerable, therefore we are confident that we can select the people in need”. **Pakistan**

“It was unexpected - on the morning of 4 April we saw information on social media about the flooding and we contacted community members to see what we could do to support. We then contacted family and friends in Timor-Leste, and they reported a lot of damage in some areas. They said they needed clothes and food mostly. So we did two campaigns - one for money and one for material items and we asked community members to spread the information to help”. **Timor-Leste**

“This is the first time we are doing this kind of humanitarian work to help those affected. We know those partners by name but we never worked with them before”. **Timor-Leste**

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

DEMAC is a global initiative aiming to enhance coordination among diaspora organizations involved in humanitarian assistance, and across diaspora organizations and institutional humanitarian actors. DEMAC seeks to increase engagement and visibility for diaspora organizations in the humanitarian system. DEMAC contributes to a deeper understanding of diasporas as humanitarian actors and thus adds to transforming the humanitarian ecosystem.

Diaspora organizations are multi-sectoral, fast responding actors who work transnationally. Having a connection and understanding of their country of origin or heritage plays a vital role in humanitarian assistance where diaspora organizations often are part of the first response in the aftermath of a disaster. They are key actors when it comes to raising the alarm in times of crisis. The ease and frequency of communication between local communities and diaspora organizations means that they can be alerted in real-time, and their capacity to collect and disperse funds rapidly ensures that they are a key factor in unlocking the first responses in crisis settings. In hard-to-reach places where access may be an issue, diaspora organizations have a unique advantage due to their local connections and ties.

They use their transnational position to respond to the growing demands for remote management and cross-border response in countries where international actors have a limited presence, and to advocate on behalf of crisis affected populations in the policy arenas of their countries and regions of residence. In line with the objective of facilitating increased common ground between diaspora and institutional humanitarian action and enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination between diaspora and humanitarian actors and the international humanitarian system, DEMAC commissioned Owl RE research and evaluation consultancy in 2020-21 to conduct two real-time reviews and three case studies.¹ The case studies provided an in-depth analysis of the diaspora response to the crises experienced in Pakistan, Somalia and Ukraine from 2014 to 2020. The real-time reviews provided a rapid analysis of the diaspora response to sudden-onset crises, with a real-time review conducted on the flash floods and landslides in Timor-Leste (April 2021) and a second on the COVID-19 response in Tunisia (October 2021).

This document provides key highlights and findings of this research

¹ The research was led by Lois Austin and Glenn O'Neil with the support of national consultants. All reports are available on the DEMAC website: <https://demac.org/resource-library>.



2. TYPES OF DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

Of the 108 diaspora organizations mapped across the five countries, there were diverse organizations representing diaspora that can be broadly grouped into four categories, considering their legal status, staffing, structure, location, and governance, with the most dominant type of structures being associations and formally registered charities:

35% Organizations with a formal structure, officially registered in the country of residence, with volunteers, staff and governance structure

44% Organizations and associations with a less formal structure and governance, sometimes registered in the country of residence, staffed mainly by volunteers

6% Organizations officially registered in the countries of origin with affiliate offices or representatives in countries of residence with volunteers, staff and governance structure

15% Loose networks of volunteers coming together to respond to sudden-onset crises in their countries of origin with no formal structure and governance



3. DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Implementation

Diaspora organizations across the five contexts implement humanitarian response through different ways of working, directly or indirectly through partners and with different activities, with three main operational models seen.

Diaspora organizations are flexible and adopt multiple and parallel forms of implementation, for example a diaspora organization can both partner for response and carry out a direct response.

Partner model



Diaspora organizations implement responses with local partners, mainly L/NNGOs and community-based organizations

Seen in all contexts

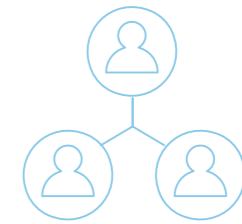
Direct model



Diaspora organizations implement responses directly with their own staff and/or volunteers

Seen in all contexts but dominant in Ukraine

Sub-grantee model



Diaspora organizations carry out responses as implementing partners for UN agencies and/or INGOs

Examples seen in Pakistan and Somalia

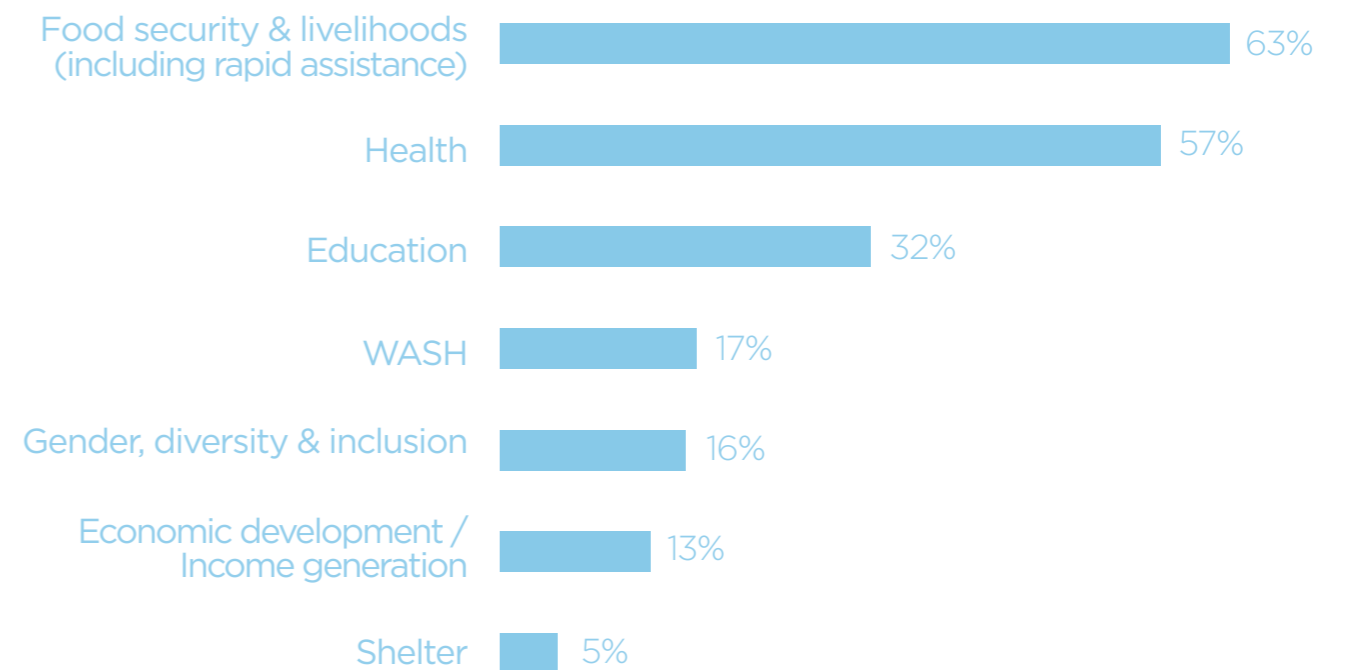
Areas of intervention

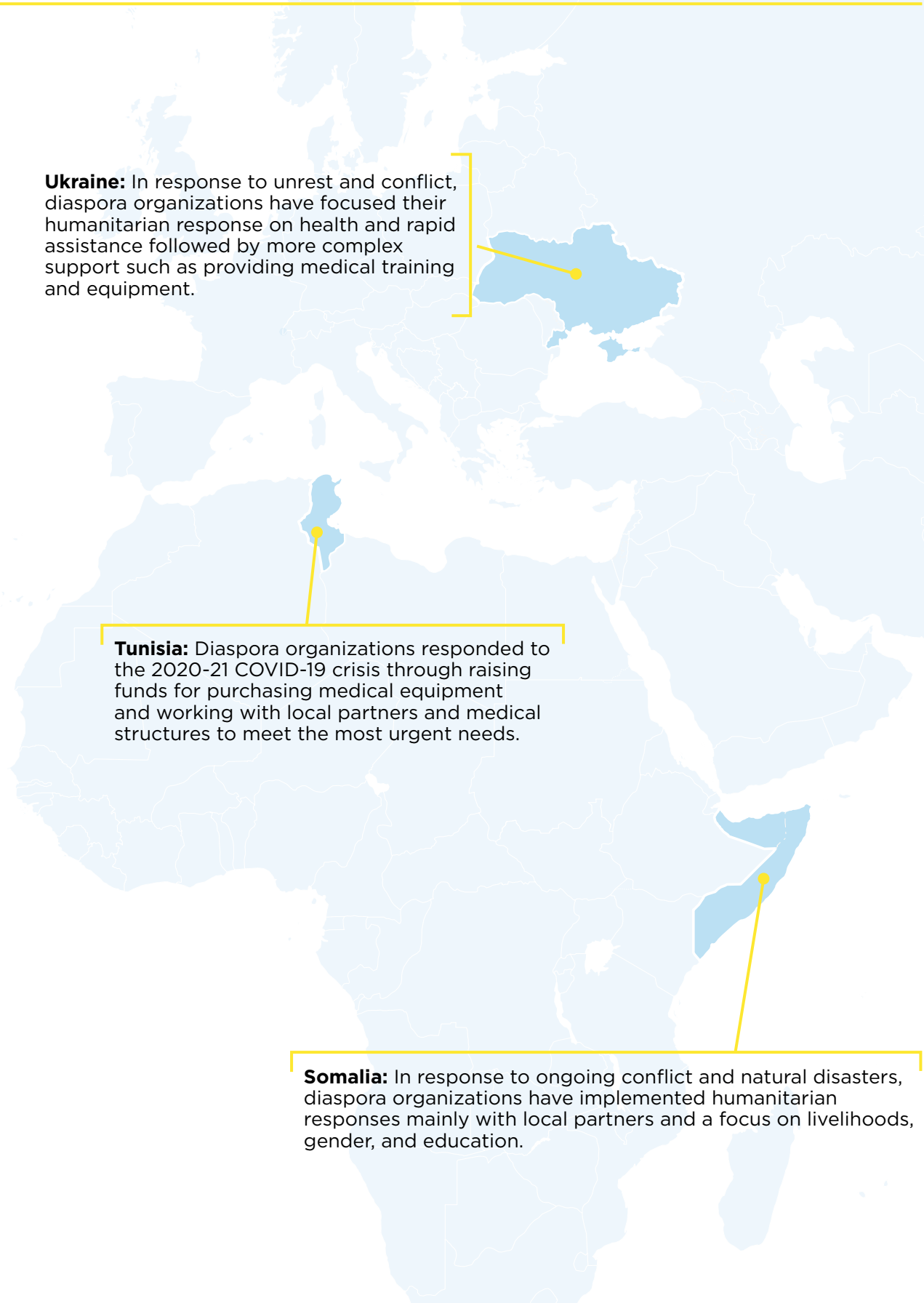
Diaspora organizations were active across a range of areas of intervention with the greatest focus on meeting immediate needs in crises in all five contexts, mainly through food security and livelihoods (including rapid assistance) and health activities:

Main areas of intervention of diaspora organizations in five contexts (108 diaspora organizations – multiple responses)

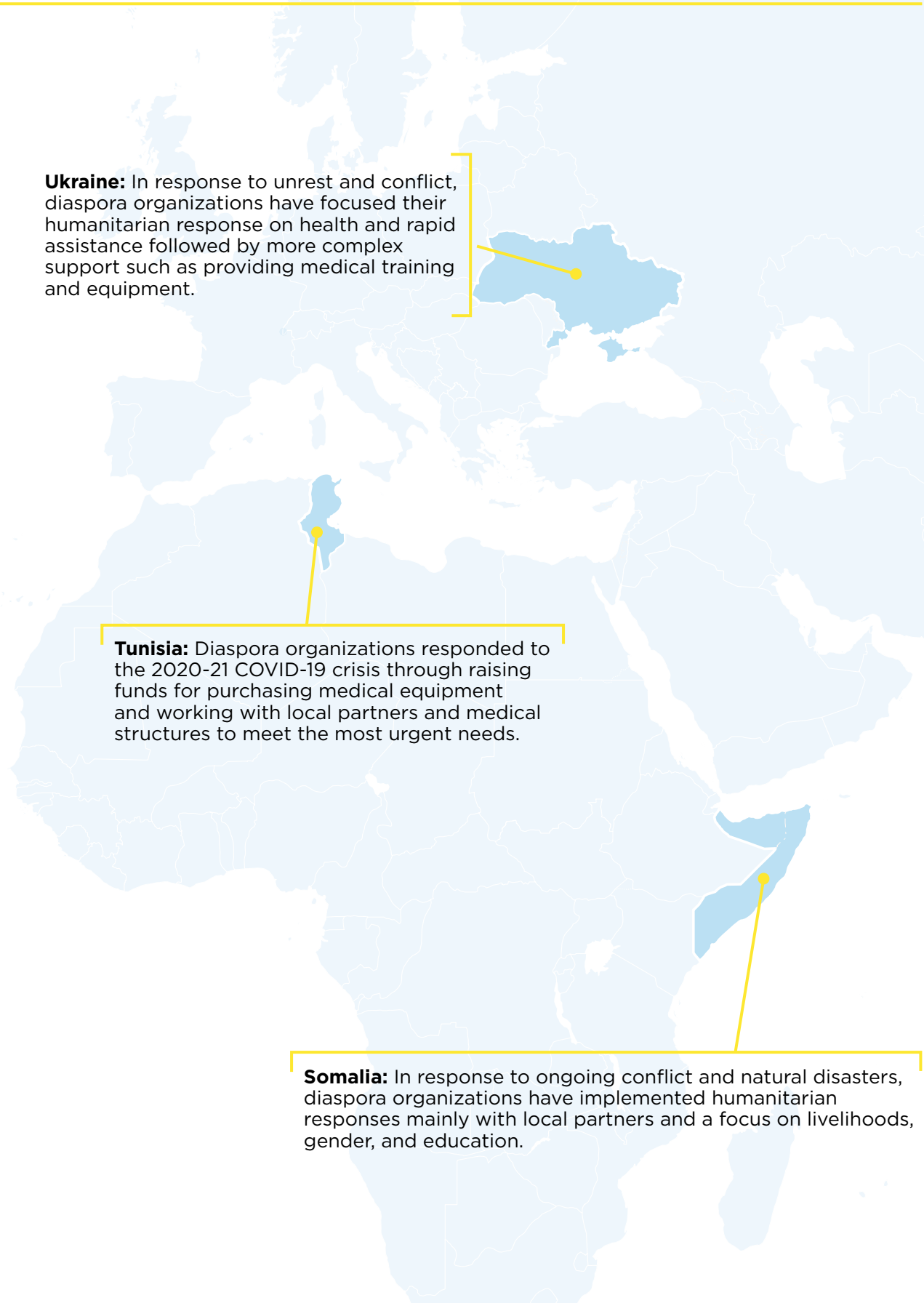


In all five contexts, diaspora organizations tend to focus on immediate, life-saving activities before and/or in support of the more institutional humanitarian response; equally diaspora organizations were often building on existing relationships with communities they had supported over time. Differences were seen in how diaspora organizations responded, often related to the type of crisis and contextual factors; for example in Tunisia, the activities were overwhelmingly focused on health given the COVID-19 response; in Somalia, the activities were more varied given the range of crises experienced, from conflict to floods.





Ukraine: In response to unrest and conflict, diaspora organizations have focused their humanitarian response on health and rapid assistance followed by more complex support such as providing medical training and equipment.



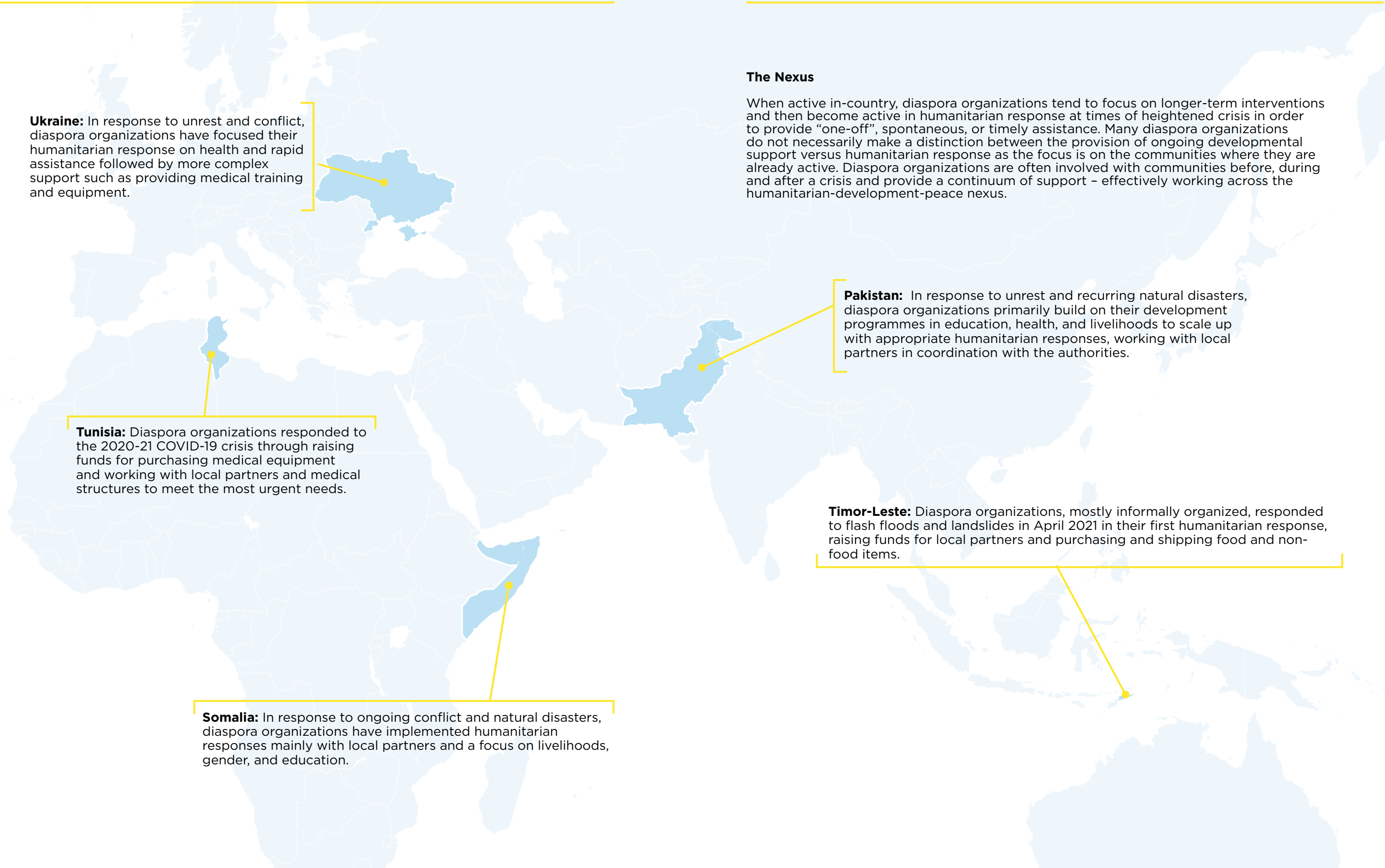
Tunisia: Diaspora organizations responded to the 2020-21 COVID-19 crisis through raising funds for purchasing medical equipment and working with local partners and medical structures to meet the most urgent needs.



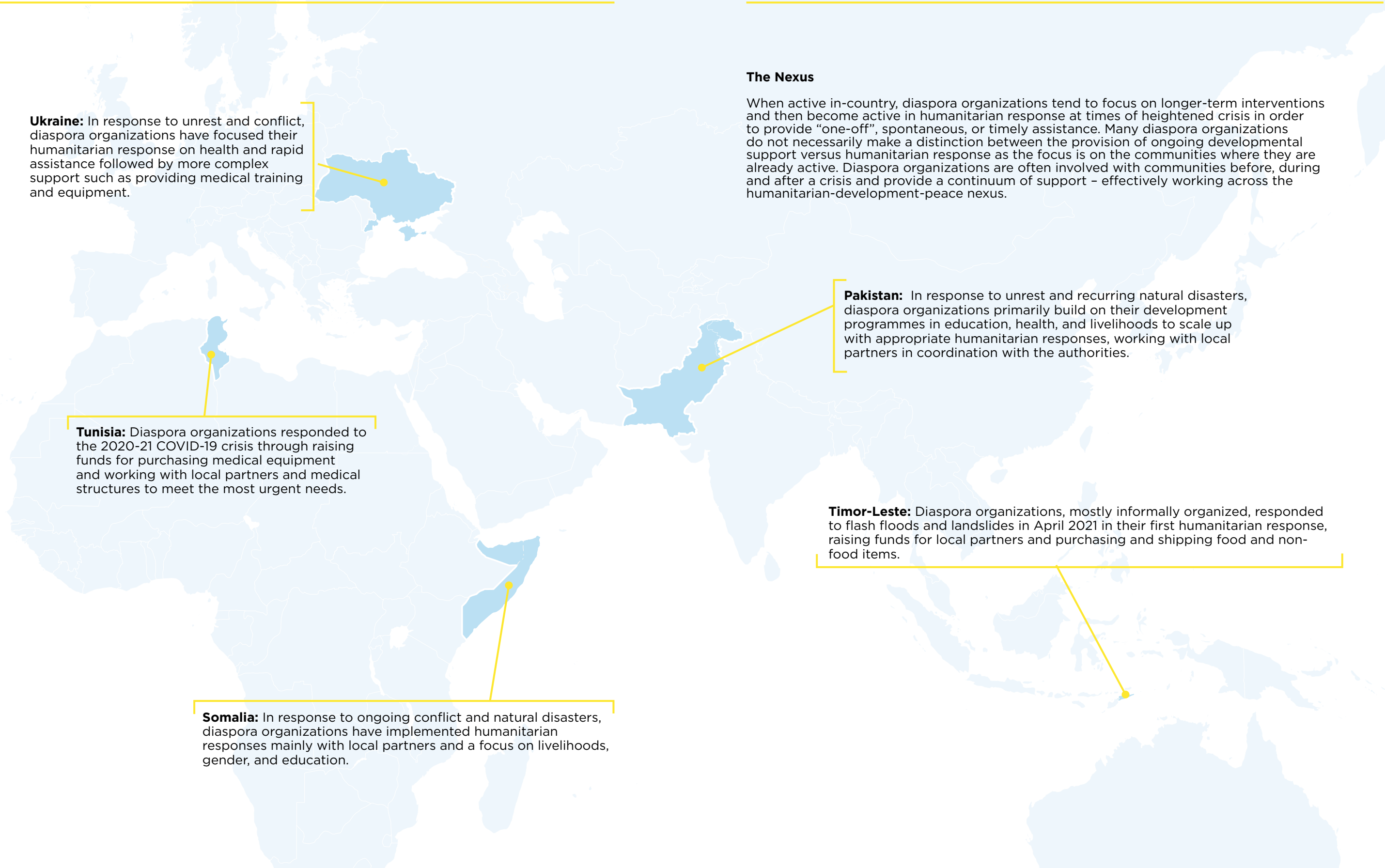
Somalia: In response to ongoing conflict and natural disasters, diaspora organizations have implemented humanitarian responses mainly with local partners and a focus on livelihoods, gender, and education.

The Nexus

When active in-country, diaspora organizations tend to focus on longer-term interventions and then become active in humanitarian response at times of heightened crisis in order to provide “one-off”, spontaneous, or timely assistance. Many diaspora organizations do not necessarily make a distinction between the provision of ongoing developmental support versus humanitarian response as the focus is on the communities where they are already active. Diaspora organizations are often involved with communities before, during and after a crisis and provide a continuum of support – effectively working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.



Pakistan: In response to unrest and recurring natural disasters, diaspora organizations primarily build on their development programmes in education, health, and livelihoods to scale up with appropriate humanitarian responses, working with local partners in coordination with the authorities.

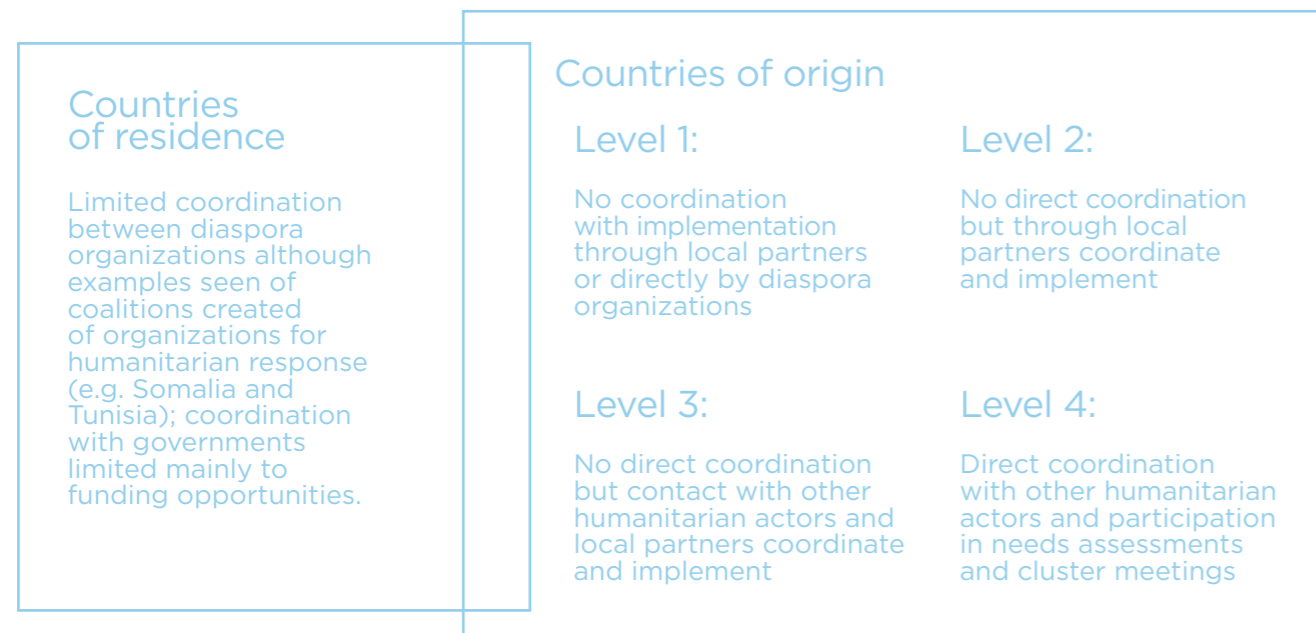


Timor-Leste: Diaspora organizations, mostly informally organized, responded to flash floods and landslides in April 2021 in their first humanitarian response, raising funds for local partners and purchasing and shipping food and non-food items.

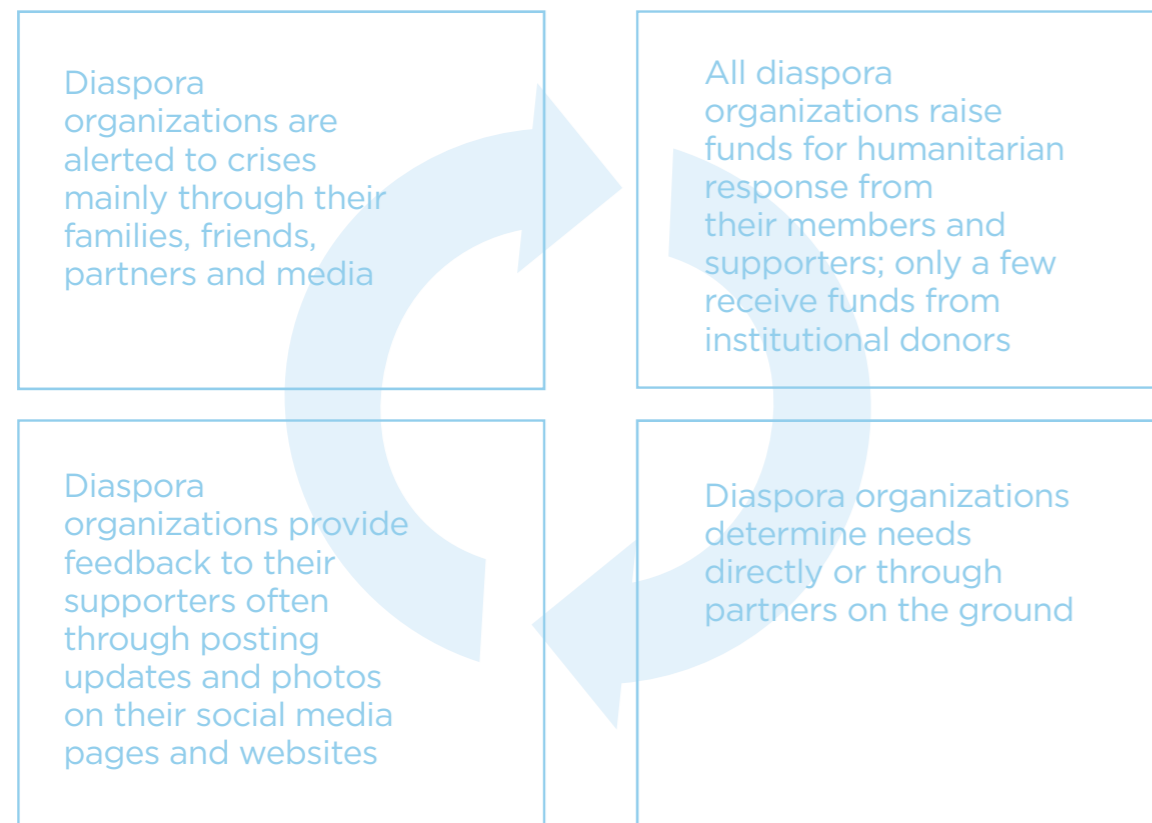
4. APPROACHES TO COORDINATION

Diaspora organizations coordinate with other diaspora organizations, governments, humanitarian organisations and local partners. The level of coordination of the diaspora organizations for their humanitarian response varies both within their countries of residence and within their countries of origin.

In all contexts, level of coordination varies by diaspora organization with contextual factors influencing coordination - for example, in Tunisia no institutional humanitarian coordination exists so coordination was limited.



5. DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMING CYCLE



- Diaspora organizations have different transparency and accountability approaches, often based on high levels of trust between the diaspora and their countries of origin.
- The source of funding influences accountability and feedback; institutional donors require more traditional reporting; diaspora supporters are provided with updates, photos and feedback often via social media and in “real time”.
- Diaspora organizations are concerned with the sustainability of their activities, often linked to lack of access to longer term institutional funding.



6. GAPS AND CHALLENGES

- Perception that diaspora organizations face challenges in adhering to humanitarian principles and standards by diaspora organizations, as raised mainly by institutional humanitarian organizations.
- Resource limitations of diaspora organizations for humanitarian response in their ability to secure funding for longer term responses.
- Administrative impediments to operate in crises such as limits on transferring funds to countries of origin, having access to those in need and delays in having transported goods processed and released by authorities.
- Recognition as diaspora organizations by authorities and institutional humanitarian organizations when carrying out humanitarian response which implies that they were not always being called upon or recognized for their unique added value as diaspora organizations, such as their ability to raise funds and mobilize quickly, their local knowledge and access to communities.
- Collaboration with the institutional humanitarian actors and systems seen as prohibitive due to the perception by diaspora organizations of the slow and bureaucratic processes of these actors and systems that would hinder the diaspora response.
- Given their strong reliance on financial support from individual diaspora members, this implied it was challenging to carry out planned and predictable humanitarian response due to limitation of available funds.
- Although diaspora organizations were involved with projects that addressed gender-based violence and provided legal aid, they were less involved in protection activities given the specific know-how and approaches required.
- Evolving professional experience and skills of diaspora organizations, both in countries of residence and with partners, staff and volunteers in countries of origin, implying challenges in having the necessary skill-set available to support humanitarian response over time.
- Difficulties in creating reliable partnerships and long-term coalitions for humanitarian response between diaspora organizations, their local partners and institutional humanitarian actors given unstable funding and ad-hoc nature of diaspora response.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS



PEER REVIEW AND EVALUATION

- Involve diaspora organizations in joint-assessments and reviews
- Encourage exchanges between diaspora organizations and humanitarian actors on feedback and accountability mechanisms



ALERTING AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Capitalize on diaspora organizations - access to communities
- Integrate diaspora feedback into alert mechanisms



STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Seek greater diaspora input into humanitarian planning
- Establish dialogue, exchange and capacity building on humanitarian principles and standards



RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

- Support to facilitate transfer of diaspora funds to countries of origin
- Donor governments set up matching funds for diaspora response



IMPLEMENTATION

- Humanitarian actors develop partnerships with diaspora organizations for implementation
- Encourage exchanges between diaspora organizations on implementation modes for scale-up, response and recovery approaches

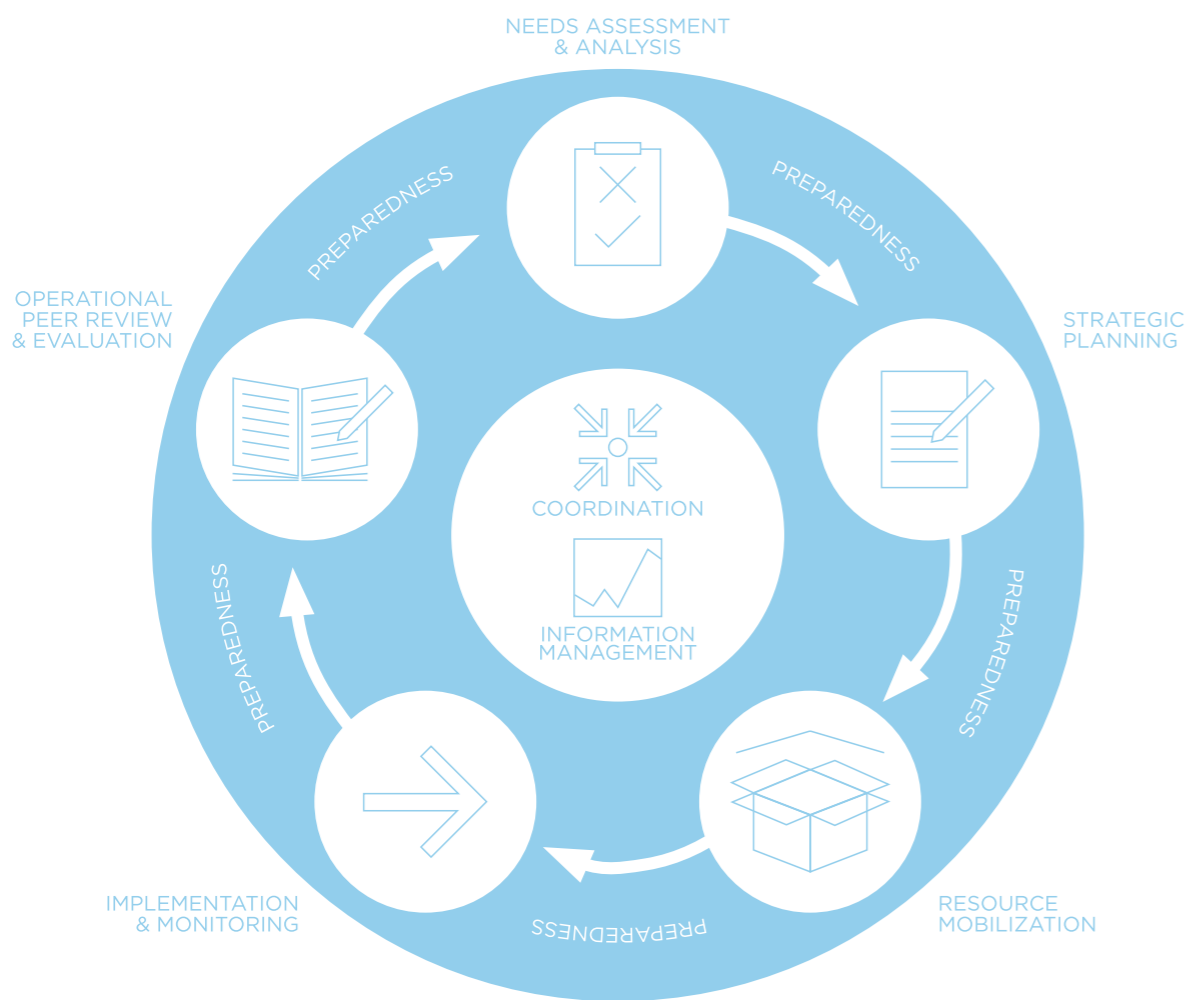


COORDINATION

- Greater involvement of diaspora in coordination fora
- Support coalition-building between diaspora organizations

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- Integrate information from diaspora organizations within humanitarian information channels



8. FUTURE TRENDS

Real-time accountability and feedback:

Although most diaspora organizations lack formal accountability systems, many provide nearly real-time feedback to their supporters through social media and their websites. Some diaspora organizations go further and put supporters in direct contact with affected populations to hear firsthand how their support helped, for example as seen in Somalia.

Ahead of the curve in response time:

Diaspora organizations often learn about crises before other humanitarian stakeholders through their families, friends and networks. Although most diaspora organizations are not able to respond at scale, they can and do respond rapidly to communities they know and are already supporting.

Collaboration and coalition-building:

Given the enormity of the crises seen, some diaspora organizations have formed coalitions to strengthen both their funding base and their implementation ability. Diaspora organizations see the clear advantage of working in coalition and this could possibly be extended in the future to working with a broader range of humanitarian actors.

Innovative fundraising:

Diaspora organizations have shown an “early adopter” approach for fundraising using crowdfunding platforms, social media and mobile apps to build a loyal supporter base. Diaspora organizations continue to innovate, for example, using the new social media platform Clubhouse and in Ukraine, partnering with a credit card provider to offer zero commission on transfers and credits for humanitarian response.

Active in remote response:

Although diaspora organizations are responding directly in crisis countries, they have also been active in responding remotely. This has ranged from Tunisian diaspora organizations providing e-learning courses for health staff to Tunisia diaspora setting up an online platform where medical goods for the COVID-19 response could be purchased and delivered to the medical establishment of the donors’ choice.

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