EVALUATION OF MSF INTERSECTIONAL COMMS POOL

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MSF OCB Evaluation of MSF Intersectional Comms Pool, by Stockholm Evaluation Unit

ACRONYMS

CA	Communication Advisor (OC level)
CM	Career Manager (in partner section). Note that the role varies (and evolves) from one section to another depending on the HR set-up in PS as well as in primary partner OC
Coco	Communication Coordinator (coordinates the CAs), OC level
Comms	Communication department and/or stakeholders within MSF
Comms Pool	Intersectional Comms Pool (no pool as such before it)
Comms PM	Intersectional Comms Pool Manager
Dircom (full)	International Platform of Communication Directors
Dircom (5)	International Platform of Communication Directors (5 OCs + 2 rotational seats)
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
IDRH	International HR Directors Platform (5 Ocs + 2 rotational seats)
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
OC	Operational Centre (talking about OC rather than section avoid the confusion with PS, and this is important as the roles are different in OC and PS)
OCA	Operational Centre Amsterdam
OCB	Operational Centre Brussels
OCBA	Operational Centre Barcelona and Athens
OCG	Operational Centre Geneva
OCP	Operational Centre Paris
NS	National Staff
PM	Pool Manager
PM/Rec Platform	Pool Management and/or Recruitment coordinators Platform (5 OCs)
PS	Partner Section
SC	Steering Committee for the Comms Pool
SEU	Stockholm Evaluation Unit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MSF initiated a Pool management system for international field communication (Comms) positions in 2015, to improve the management of those profiles and better respond to increasing needs for Comms professionals in the field. The initiative, decided by the Dircom5 and the IDRH late 2014-early 2015 (see Annex I), required important work from many people in order to design and implement this innovative intersectional HR (Human Resources) mechanism. The "Comms Pool" is of strategic importance to the Comms and HR departments of MSF, as well as the organization as a whole, as it could pave the way for increased intersectional collaboration in the field of HR generally,[1] but also more specifically for profiles without a large volume of positions (lab technicians or pharmacists, for example).

This evaluation was commissioned in May 2017 to assess the results of the Comms Pool pilot phase (mid 2015 to date), identify lessons learned, and make recommendations for the future. The analysis was articulated around 6 standard evaluation criteria: relevance; appropriateness; effectiveness; efficiency; impact and connectedness, and continuity. The desk review and data collection (interviews and survey) were conducted between June and August 2017. It included a review of key documents, Skype or face-to-face interviews with 35 key stakeholders, an online survey for international staff (58) with a response rate of 55% (32).

The findings show that the Comms Pool is seen as a positive step in the right direction by all stakeholders, no matter how critical they can be when it comes to its functioning in practice. The initiative is in line with the willingness, need and duty of MSF to better share its resources and be a responsible employer. According to all interviewees, there should be no turning back. However, the Comms Pool did encounter numbers of challenges under its short existence: difficulties were due to some extent to the urgency to move forward while processes were lacking; the model was launched before it was fully designed and adapted. Some changes are therefore needed with regards to the Comms Pool model and ways of working, to make it more successful and sustainable. More ownership and clearer leadership from OCs across the Comms and HR departments are also needed, as well as a common definition of the Comms Pool and what it is meant to achieve. On the other hand, some of the difficulties faced by the Comms Pool have in fact very little to do with the initiative itself or the way it was carried out: they are symptomatic of the broader challenges MSF is facing, linked to the HR model it has chosen (pool management, centralized vs decentralized HR processes, etc.) as well as to difficulties in terms of intersectional governance mechanisms.

Achievements:

- There is now a HR procedure and an intersectional mechanism in place

- There are harmonized recruitment paths and criteria, and more defined Field Comms roles with associated set of skills and competencies

- There is a better overview of positions and people, and it is overall smoother to fill the positions, by first looking into the pool

- There is an increased intersectional spirit and collaboration between OCs. This makes it possible, for example, to have the most critical positions getting the priority on scarce resources, in case there is an unbalance between needs and available candidates at the time to fill several vacant positions.

- There is a better mutual understanding and collaboration between Comms and HR departments.

Areas for further consolidation:

- HR procedures and intersectional mechanism must be fine-tuned and better embedded in ways of working.

- Recruitment efforts should be better coordinated, based on accurate and well communicated needs. The system could perhaps benefit from a slightly different validation procedure, for example through a single rotating focal point (instead of each section (Dircom)/OC (CoCo) validating candidates).

- The intersectional overview document in terms of positions and people should be disseminated, so that it reaches beyond the Pool Manager (PM) and Steering Committee (SC) members and is gradually appropriated by relevant Comms (CA and CoCos) and HR (focal points in OCs, career managers/recruiters in PS, HR Ops in OCs) stakeholders across the movement. This will help break down the OC "ownership", which is still present,

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[1] Cf. among others Symphony, MSF's intersectional HR system due in 2018.

- even unconsciously (many stakeholders acknowledge they have a better vision and higher involvement towards the positions and people for whom they are "focal point").

- The Comms Pool can today not work without the Steering Committee: this is not normal governance, and is neither healthy nor sustainable. Now that the pilot period is over, involvement of the SC should decrease, as planned, while the autonomy of the Pool Manager must be enforced (see Recommendation #4).

- The respective involvement of Comms and HR stakeholders is not yet adequate. HR must take its true share of responsibility and ownership.

EVALUATION MATRIX: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This table aims to summarize the evaluation results. For more details, please refer to the report, and each evaluation criteria.

Evaluation criteria	Findings and Conclusions	Recommendations
Relevance	All stakeholders perceive that the initiative is positive and makes sense. It is seen as a positive step in the right direction. It makes sense and was needed to pull Comms positions together, share human resources and streamline and professionalize management of Comms Profiles. However, the objectives set for the Comms Pool are linked to Comms needs rather than HR ones: they can only be achieved through a global Comms and HR strategy.	**#1: Work on a clear strategy for the Comms Pool, with a few SMART objectives.** The needs must be reassessed from a Comms and HR perspective, based on the current situation. Differentiate the objectives for the Comms Pool in the short-term (set-up phase and transition phases) vs middle- to long-term (management and improvement of the pool) and set a timeframe for the implementation plan to help follow-up on priorities.
Appropriateness	Priorities were identified correctly, i.e. have a process in place and clarify roles and responsibilities. There is now an HR process in place; recruitment tools are used. However, the model was designed without involving relevant stakeholders in an *adequate/sufficient* manner and the Comms Pool was launched before solid working mechanisms were in place.	**# 2: Review the HR process, clarify and empower it**. Set-up a working group to further assess the system as it is today and propose the needed adaptations, based on how MSF HR system is working. Keep in mind change management theory to ensure adequate approach.
Effectiveness	Effectiveness of the Comms Pool is difficult to assess at this stage as adequate indicators and data are largely missing and the model is still young.	**# 3: List key indicators in line with the objectives, establish targets and a simple dashboard**. Collect baseline data to establish a point of reference. A dashboard will then help keep track of achievements and be a good support for decision-making and internal communication.
Efficiency	The Comms Pool was identified early on as a challenging and innovative initiative, but the resources allocated were not in line with this analysis. The current governance model is neither efficient nor sustainable.	**# 4: Review current governance model and allocate adequate resources** Invest in resources, which does not necessarily mean more resources overall but better use of the allocated resources. The Steering Committee should be phased out after having implemented recommendation #1 and secured the PM position. A 100% project manager or a 100% PM with project management skills is needed at least for some months, to implement the recommendations of this evaluation and fine-tune the system.
Impact	It is too early to assess impact as such, but some concrete changes have been noted already, such as the existence of a HR process and an increased intersectional overview and collaboration.	Cf. Effectiveness
Connectedness and continuity	All stakeholders support the intersectional vision and collaboration put in place; criticism and/or differences	**Recommendation # 5: To be sustainable and successful, the Comms Pool must gain in clarity and legitimacy.**

	of opinions are linked to the way it has been implemented. As it is today, the Comms Pool model lacks clarity in some aspects. Fine-tuning should also aim for a more sustainable model and governance system, based among others on findings from this evaluation.	Improve adequate internal communication towards all relevant stakeholders. **The system should remain flexible and not person-dependent,** so that it can work anytime, anywhere and adapt to changing needs. Any decision for the future should be taken on the basis of the best approach in the long term.

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