# EVALUATION OF MSF INTERSECTIONAL COMMS POOL

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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

# CONTENTS

# 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,

---

[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.<br><br>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.<br><br>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**<br><br>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. |

# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Discussions about creating a single (intersectional) pool of international field staff with communication profiles started in 2011 and materialized in 2014-2015, driven by MSF communications department.[2] This evaluation understands that the main rationale triggering those discussions was the difficulty to recruit and retain competent communication professionals for field positions, as well as the willingness to invest in Field Comms capacity and serve field operations better.

Studies commissioned from 2012 to 2014[3] by the International platform of the Communication Directors (Dircom) suggested the single pool management option as one of the solutions. The pool would serve all 5 OCs' needs in terms of Field Comms staff, which would mean an overview of all positions and more opportunities for assignments for international field staff, instead of each OC managing its own Field Comms.[4] The decision was taken to move forward and a Steering Committee (SC) was set up to develop the new system. According to the Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee, the objectives were to:

- Improve staffing (timeliness, fit for position, transparency, fairness and quality of HR processes) of Comms positions;
- Have a better career and talent management;
- Be able to fill gaps in competencies through adequate recruitment;
- Have an increased focus on diversity among the Field Comms staff, in order to boost MSF communication capacity towards various audiences;
- Have a positive impact on retention.

There have been various proposals about how and where a single pool could be managed[5] and it was finally decided to locate it in a sizeable partner section, with a Communication Director willing to support the Intersectional Comms Pool Manager (PM) especially during the launch and pilot phase of the initiative, with access to an interesting HR market and with existing HR capacity. MSF UK (through its Dircom) was interested in the role and met the criteria, and was finally chosen to host the pool for a pilot period (set to 6 months), following a decision from IDRH and DirCom5. The pool officially started mid-2015 with the PM (from mid-June 2015) based in the London office. This was an existing position and post-holder, which was seconded by OCA for 50% FTE (Full time equivalent) for the Comms Pool. Unfortunately, the first months of the pool were hampered by the ill-health, absences, and eventual departure of the post-holder in July 2016. A replacement was appointed and began in August 2016 (still based in London and still at 50% FTE), following hiatus and interim solution undertaken by a Career Manager (CM) in MSF Italy.

Aware of the innovative aspect, potential and strategic importance of the initiative, it was decided from the start to carry out an evaluation at the end of the pilot period, in order to capitalize on lessons learned and decide on how to move forward. The evaluation is especially interesting and relevant given the intersectional nature of the Comms Pool initiative and the interest it triggers in other smaller pools.

The main objectives of this evaluation are to:

1. Provide a summative review of the overall relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and connectedness of the Intersectional Comms Pool, including its strengths and weaknesses;

2. Provide recommendations for the future, including any budgetary and staffing requirements, as well as governance mechanisms (the current Steering Committee and set up for the pilot phase).

---

[2] By "MSF Communications Department" the evaluator refers to Comms Professionals working in OC and PS. There are of course several communications departments within MSF and they were not all, and even less so not all individuals composing them, involved in the Comms Pool initiative. MSF UK Dircom was at the core of the initiative, and this was felt when the post-holder moved on.

[3] 2012 03 March Field Comms Positions Review, 2012 09 September field_comms_review, 2014 02 Feb HR report Field Comms.

[4] We will avoid the term "sectional" as it normally refers to partner sections rather than OC and can be confusing.

[5] Communication Officers Pool Management - proposal to IDHR February (note from the evaluator, document from 2015, exact date not available).

## EVALUATION SCOPE

The evaluation does not encompass the Emergency Comms Pool, which is for short-term (4 weeks') needs in emergencies, was created in 2014, and is managed by Sarah-Eve Hammond, Internal Communications Project Manager, in the International Office. The idea has always been to merge the two pools but this aspect will not be looked at extensively in this evaluation. The period covered by this evaluation is mainly from May 2015 (official launch of the pool) to May 2017. However, due to turnover on the position of the Comms PM and consequent lack of data prior to August 2016, the evaluation had to focus on the period from August 2016 (appointment of current post holder) to date. But the evaluator has also analysed the dynamics leading to the creation of the Comms Pool (with documents from 2012 onwards and based on interviews), as well as mechanisms during the transition towards/launch of the Comms Pool.

## THE COMMS POOL: A MATTER OF DEFINITIONS

When talking about the Comms Pool, the evaluation found that stakeholders often have in mind different realities, while using the same terminology:

- When Comms stakeholders (CA, CoCo, Dircom) speak about the Comms Pool, they most often refer to a holding tank of competent people, able to fill available positions in an adequate and timely manner, at any given time. This vision implies actions across the whole HR cycle (including recruitment, training, management, appraisal etc.) and is more the result of this work than the system itself.

- HR stakeholders (Focal points for Comms profiles in OCs, recruiters/career managers in PS) mostly see the Comms Pool as the system enabling the match of candidates with positions. It is the traditional conception of the PM role in MSF, with actions limited to its prescribed role only (other positions are in charge of recruitment, career management, learning and development etc, with the PM "only" linking with relevant actors).

These different perceptions are linked to a lack of clear frame for the Comms Pool, which themselves impacted the evaluation as they lead to a wide range of perspectives on the same subject. The evaluation focused on the creation of the Pool Manager position, and hence on the "HR definition" of the Comms Pool, as per the second point above. However, it was not always possible to be as clear-cut, given among others the very broad ToR for the Steering Committee and the multiplicity of initiatives linked to some extent to the Comms Pool creation.

As developed under the Relevance section, there is a need to clarify the frame of the Comms Pool and its boundaries through a work regarding strategy definition and objective setting.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluator looked at quantitative and qualitative data, based on desk review, interviews and online survey. A systemic approach was adopted in order to analyse the Comms Pool in light of the broader context it interacts with. The DAC[6] criteria (relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, connectedness and continuity) have been used to structure the analysis.

The data collection method aimed to gather insight through individual interviews with 35 stakeholders and an online survey sent to 58 international staff. A document review was conducted, looking at the Steering Committee's documents since the start of the Comms Pool (mid 2015), as well as reports from previous years, strategic HR and Comms documents, minutes of various meetings, etc. A list of reference material can be found in Annex IV.

Interviews were held with a diverse range of people and positions, from HR and Comms departments, at management and implementation level, as well as with Field Comms staff members, mostly international ones. Quantitative data have been used whenever indicators were available and relevant.

## LIMITATIONS

The evaluation was commissioned with the willingness to have results ready by end of September, in order to be able to inform decisions regarding the future of the Comms Pool.[7] With additional time/budget, it would have been possible

---

[6] OECD Development Assistance Committee, which developed evaluation criteria, now considered standard even for the humanitarian sector.

[7] Which will be discussed at the Full Dircom meeting in Berlin Oct 6th, 2017.

to include some more aspects in the terms of reference, which could have further informed findings and recommendations (e.g. gather data directly at the source, across the movement or analyse more in depth the HR process).

The evaluation topic was a system already in place, working and adjusting as the assessment was ongoing. The evaluator tried to stay informed of changes, communication and decisions as they occurred, but might not have been aware of all of them. In the same way, since the desk review was based on documents which could be made easily available, it is possible that some other sources exist which have not been looked at.

As elaborated in the report, the Comms Pool initiative did not develop a set of indicators allowing for baseline and monitoring of achievements. There is only little data available which is sufficiently reliable, and all numbers must in fact be taken with caution given the turnover on the PM position, the limited volume of people, positions and matchings, as well as the short period of time the data refers to (August 2016-May or July 2017). The evaluation could not complement the existing data to a high extent given the extensive work it would have required (going back in time and reaching out to all OCs and PS) for unclear results. Some random checks have been done showing the need to work more on data verification and collection, not least when it comes to the pool composition.

The online survey was a success in terms of participation (55%). However, given the limited volume of respondents it was targeting (58), and given some uncertainties concerning the listing, the survey results should be analysed with caution, especially as the diversity of participants gives an even more limited breakdown per "background".

# FINDINGS

## RELEVANCE

**Main Finding and conclusion: All stakeholders perceive that the initiative is positive and makes sense. But the objectives of the Comms Pool can only be achieved through a global Comms and HR strategy rather than the pool management system alone.**

### Genesis of the Comms Pool

In order to assess the relevance of the objectives of the Comms Pool, the evaluation looked at each of them as well as the genesis of the initiative: why, how and when did the idea first emerge, in what context, in response to which needs?

The drive and motivation from some individuals was crucial for the informal discussions in various platforms to materialize. The idea to create a pool was formalized in a series of reports[8] from the Comms department: they focused on the analysis of *all* Field Comms positions (not only international ones), their role, and the need to have clearer line management. The desk review analyzed those reports, showing that:

- There was no clear overview on the number of positions at a certain point in time; various reports and sources mention different numbers; This was linked to the need to have an overview of Field Comms positions and what they were encompassing in terms of roles and responsibilities.

- The ambition to increase the number of Field Comms positions is formulated but not yet specified in terms of numbers, criteria etc.

- There was no available overview of the number of people with Field Comms experience. Hence, it was difficult to state the status of the "offer" across OCs.

- As a consequence of the points above, there was no real understanding of the gap between demand and offer, and of recruitment efforts needed. The very idea of the Comms Pool was to be able to produce this overview of positions and people and to address the needs hereby identified.

- In terms of volume (and even given the lack of clarity on numbers), there was no need for a pool system: this is clearly stated in the Field Comms Positions Review, part 2, from September 2012 which concludes that "*1) if the Comms department wants to invest in Field Comms capacity 2) then the Comms Pool is an option 3) but it requires to create positions to reach a critical mass making it possible to have a pool system*".

The main rationale behind the pool management discussions is presented as being the difficulty to recruit and retain competent communication professionals for field positions, due to the following reasons:

- Communication positions were managed differently than other field positions, not by HR, and without clear process. There were no standard HR procedures, and not even a clear vision of the roles.
- There were only a few positions per OC, meaning few opportunities for communication profiles to do several assignments within an OC. This was seen as hampering retention and development possibilities.

Besides, the Comms Pool was expected to:

- Decrease the time spent in HR issues by CAs/CoCos, due to ad hoc recruitment on position(s) and due to there being no system;
- Improved HR management for Comms profiles, and define better the Comms profession;
- Better respond to the needs of those specific positions, by nature often intersectional.
- Help the Comms department to reach its ambitions. A better system was deemed necessary in order to manage the foreseen growing number of field communication positions, in line with the willingness to invest in communication at field level, delegating responsibilities from headquarters and improving communication capacities within

---

[8] Mainly: Field Communication Positions Review, part 1 and 2 (2012) and Field Comms positions HR report (2014), see the summary in Annex II.

countries of operations. In this sense the Comms Pool is part of the broader communication strategy towards the future.

## A strong overall buy-in when it comes to the concept but unclear expectations

In this evaluation, we focused on the objectives mentioned in the ToR for the Steering Committee for the Comms Pool, and in the ToR for the evaluation[9] i.e.:

- Improve staffing (timeliness, fitness for position, transparency, fairness and quality of HR processes) of Comms positions;
- Have a better career and talent management;
- Be able to fill gaps in competencies through adequate recruitment;
- Have an increased focus on diversity among the Field Comms staff, in order to boost MSF communication capacity towards various audiences;
- Have a positive impact on retention.

"the pool was an absolute necessity",
"the pool makes perfect sense"

"Creating order out of chaos"
("Summary for Dircomms" Sept 2015)

All stakeholders, with no exception, praise the Comms Pool initiative in the sense that it is in line with what MSF should do more of: more collaboration across the movement and less competition on scarce HR. Furthermore, the initiative is deemed especially relevant for Comms positions given their nature: often intersectional, often having to deal with several parties/OCs but representing "one" MSF. The limited number of positions per OC made it relevant to seek an overview instead of working in silos, also in order to reach a critical volume of positions and perhaps economies of scale by pulling positions together. Last but not least, everyone acknowledged there was a need to introduce some structure in the way comms profiles were managed, reactively and ad-hoc, with an overall lack of coherence and transparency in recruitment and allocation of positions.

## Discussion on findings

The overall positive feeling that the Comms Pool "makes perfect sense" must be taken with caution, as it does not necessarily mean that MSF is hereby coping better with its needs or that the stakeholders have the vision of what the objectives are and to what extent they are relevant. The Comms Pool is the result of the Comms department's needs, and is expected to achieve much more than good and timely matchings: according to desk review and interviews, the tool was believed to be the solution for better overall HR management of Field Comms profiles across the whole HR cycle (from recruitment to first mission, training and development etc), in order to achieve an even broader objective which is to increase Comms capacity in the field and hence to increase the number of field positions.[10] What is missing is the translation of the Comms vision (what MSF wants to communicate, why and how) into a global Comms HR strategy, integrated in MSF broader HR strategy; only then can the roles and objectives of the Comms Pool be adequately defined. Today, the *raison d'être* and the reality of what the Comms Pool is are understood differently from one department to another and one person to another, while it would be crucial to have a clear common vision. As expectations towards the Comms Pool vary from one actor to another, there is a lack of focus (too many priorities) and difficulties assessing whether or not the initiative is delivering (See Effectiveness and Impact).

Introspection exercises will help to adopt a critical perspective to (re)assess the needs for international Field Comms positions, today and tomorrow, and to express them better. The HR target setting exercise is crucial but is only useful if done on the basis of adequate and realistic information provided by OCs, following a collective exercise done by Comms together with HR teams. Regarding the pool management system, the global HR challenges encountered by MSF should be kept in mind (difficulty to attract and retain, for all profiles) while acknowledging the specificities linked to Comms

---

[9] There are many other documents mentioning a variety of objectives.
[10] 2013 07 July Field Comms vision growth.

profiles. According to several stakeholders, Comms positions in the field are often quite isolated and must deal with very specific challenges linked to the nature of the work, the structure of MSF, the mandate of MSF, the multiple reporting lines, etc. This puts a specific demand on new recruits as they must be prepared to tackle those challenges and understand the broader environment in which they operate, as well as MSF politics. Those interviewees also stated that Comms profiles sought by MSF are by nature professionals who are used to seizing opportunities, activating networks and being independent, perhaps not only interested in MSF/humanitarian work, often quite attached to a context/region, etc. This adds to the complexity to manage them as a pool and tends to go against the idea that any one Comms person can (or wants to) be deployed in any given context.

**Recommendation 1: Work on a clear strategy for the Comms Pool, with a few SMART objectives.**

The needs must be reassessed from Comms and HR perspectives, based on the current situation while staying agile enough to be able to adapt to needed evolutions. The strategy must be translated into a few SMART objectives, which might be different from the current ones. Those objectives will form the framework of a concrete implementation plan including activities, roles and responsibilities and timeline. It will constitute the roadmap for the Pool Manager and his/her counterparts. Hence the role of the Pool Manager will be clarified, and might differ from what it is or how it is perceived today.

There is also a need to 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); setting a timeframe for the implementation plan will help establish the priorities.

*Example: By December 2017, have a strategy for the Comms Pool which presents a clear definition of what it is and wants to achieve (its objectives), why and how (role of the Pool Manager + implementation plan).*

*By March 2018, make sure all relevant stakeholders are aware and use the reviewed HR process and that a feedback mechanism has been put in place to take their comments into consideration.*

## APPROPRIATENESS

**Main finding and conclusions: the priorities were identified correctly, i.e. have a process in place and clarify roles and responsibilities. But the fever to get started and to achieve quick results led to some mistakes. The model was designed without involving relevant stakeholders in an *adequate* manner and the Comms Pool launched before solid working mechanisms were in place.**

### Where does the design come from?

The design of the Comms Pool and the way to launch is suggested by a consultant in 2014, in the report "Field Comms Positions, HR Process Analysis",[11] which shares the following conclusions:

> *"[…] by introducing the matching phase, it's possible to:*
>
> - o *shorten the time between the field request and the position filling*
> - o *plan the field needs together with the people needs*
> - o *allow a proper planning and follow-up of people's career*
> - o *improve retention*
>
> *It goes without saying that, from a purely HR point of view, passing from a "recruitment by post" approach to a PM approach would be justified in any case as it would certainly enhance the quality of the HR management. […]"*

The report adds that the work to set up the Comms Pool

> *"has to be done at intersection level and could be led by a working group, made of Coms and/or HR people from all the OCs. […] We can provide details of 5 possible next steps that could be taken by the working group for the implementation of this option:*
>
> 1. *agree on the job profile of the new PM position*
> 2. *establish the part-time share of the new position according to the current and future needs*
> 3. *creation of the pool database: decide over the practical aspects of the information transferring from the OCs to the new PM, in terms of pool (personal data, CVs, etc.)*
> 4. *design and test the information flow through which the new PM will get the information from the field about the HR needs, with the right timing*
> 5. *3-month process testing phase and feedback by the process actors"*

Following this report, decision was taken by DirCom 5 and IDRH to create the Pool. A Steering Committee was established to lead the work. More details regarding the path towards the Comms Pool can be found in Annex I.

### A process with some shortcomings in terms of leadership and buy-in, as well as participation and inclusion

Efforts have been made to engage with relevant HR stakeholders: not all discussions happened in formal platforms but the Annex I shows examples of updates provided by the International HR Coordinator and/or Pool Manager and of concertation in the process, mostly at the level of IDRH or Pool Management/Recruitment Platform. Interviews also show that dialogue took place with some implementers (e.g. working session with OCB former "Pool Manager" for Comms profiles), while for some others input was only asked once a draft of HR process had been produced. Given the different ways of working across OCs and PS, and given the innovative intersectional model, systematic consultation of all involved would have been needed, for example through a working group. Desk review and interviews highlight the fact that the design of the Comms Pool is the result of a process, which in the end was not participatory and inclusive enough. This is to some extent not only linked to the Comms Pool specifically: given MSF structure, cascading the information is always a challenge and it should not be assumed that informed top/middle management will automatically engage adequately with their teams.

The approach based on a Steering Committee was aiming for adequate representation and participation from different platforms and entities. But it was challenging to find SC members and this system did not alone manage to ensure adequate involvement of relevant stakeholders at the adequate level. While the Comms ownership eventually worked,

---

[11] See also in Annex II the logic tree presented in this report, with the preferred option (intersectional Pool Manager, part-time position)

HR actors did not catch the opportunity to engage enough: in terms of representation in the SC, only the Pool Manager and the newly-appointed International HR coordinator were and still are representing HR. The Pool Management platform was mobilized but several reasons (new post-holders, turnover etc) made the follow-up inadequate in practice. Also, it must be said that the HR perspective of the PS was not represented in the SC. The existence of an SC enabled OCs and hosting PS to somehow "disengage", while this would not have been possible if the accountability was more clearly defined (e.g. a Chair in the SC, a PS accountable via its Board, etc.) rather than relying on people only, and on the SC.

Consequently, and given the unclear and broad ToR (see under Relevance and Efficiency), the Steering Committee took more space than it should have done. This is something the SC is aware of and wants to address, and while it can be perceived by some interviewees as a willingness to control and decide, it seems to be more of a compensation mechanism. For example, the SC has been driving the development of the HR process as it was trying to fill the gap, given both the needs and the lack of existing processes, documented and replicable, for pool management. This is further explained under Efficiency. The willingness to get started and see results pushed the SC to act a bit too quickly, while roles and ways of working were not clearly defined and without a detailed implementation strategy as such. A good stakeholder mapping and a RACI analysis would have helped mitigating this difficulty by providing some guidance to make sure all relevant actors were informed, consulted or involved.

## Transition towards the Comms Pool

No stakeholder could recall a clear briefing, kick-off meeting or streamlined communication in the Comms Pool, and all mention a confusing start. *"Frustrating"* and *"chaotic" a*re words almost systematically mentioned when discussing the transition to the Comms Pool.

The HR process was introduced formally in March 2017 (see below) but some communication on HR procedures for the Comms Pool did happen before that, which blurred the lines somewhat. Counterparts experienced confusion on when the launch of the Comms Pool was communicated or when parts of the HR process were shared, while it had not yet been finalized and validated, and with a communication going through inadequate channels. Another example is the handover of pool members: transition from respective Pool Managers in OCs to Comms Pool Manager in the UK was not done in a systematic manner, and to date some pool members have not been contacted. While establishing contact with existing staff constituted a top priority, considerable time and energy had to be put into the recruitment of new pool members.

## Findings regarding the HR Process

One of the clear objectives of the Comms Pool Steering Committee was to establish a HR process. The need for it was identified early on but it was finalized only in March 2017.[12] This delay explains to a great extent the lack of clarity felt by all stakeholders for quite some time: until March 2017, everyone was trying to understand the Comms Pool model and find ways of working, while still tackling the upcoming needs.

Many interviewees do appreciate the structure and increased alignment the HR process has brought. Webinars broadcast since May 2017 to explain the HR process were welcomed but long overdue, and must be accompanied by further explanations and support so that the process known and applied more broadly. Adaptations might also be required, as implementation reveals some inadequacies, lack of feasibility or grey areas. This need for "maintenance" is recognised, along with the fact that the process is a living document meant to evolve and be improved according to needs and feedbacks; a focal point is also identified[13] in order to coordinate that aspect.

The figure below is a graphic summary of the HR process as per March 2017. The reader must keep in mind that this is only a summary, and that more details are available in the body of the document. But it shows that the process covers much more than the pool management responsibilities, which illustrates the fact that many stakeholders, when talking about pool management, have in fact the whole HR cycle in mind. Everyone refers to the Comms Pool and Pool Manager but with different expectations of what they imply. This is to some extent the case with recruitment and career management as well.

---

[12] Intersectional Communications Pool - HR process narrative - March 2017 - FINAL 2.
[13] HR director of MSF Italy, and this is specified in the HR process.
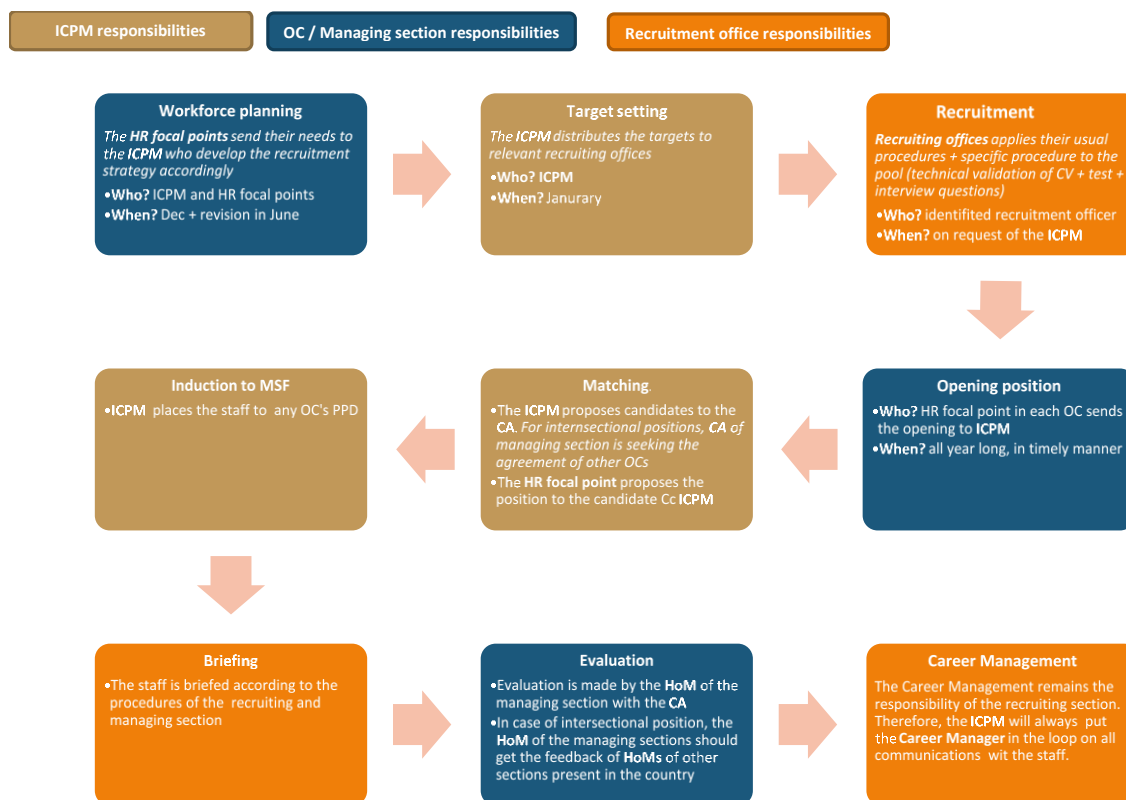
*HR process, summary (figure from Intersectional Communications Pool - HR process narrative - March 2017 - FINAL 2)*

## Analysis of the HR Process

The table below analyses the steps in brown, under the Pool Manager's responsibility.

| Steps attributed to the PM | Remarks |
|---|---|
| **Target setting** — *The ICPM distributes the targets to relevant recruiting offices* • **Who?** ICPM • **When?** Janurary | Target setting is a complicated exercise in MSF's reality, because of both changing needs and MSF structure. In order to have an adequate target setting, a good needs assessment, done in collaboration with Comms and HR, is needed, as described in the HR process (workforce planning exercise). This must be completed with a thorough analysis of the pool composition at all times (by the PM), versus current and upcoming needs. Meetings must take place between Pool Manager, technical referents (or a focal point representing all technical referents) and recruiters (or focal point), not forgetting Ops HR (Cell or desk) to take strategic decisions together, having the same understanding of the situation, in an intersectional manner. The targets should be agreed upon and explained, involving the PS at an early stage (vs top down communication and decision making) |
| **Matching**. • The ICPM proposes candidates to the CA. For intersectional positions, CA of managing section is seeking the agreement of other OCs • The HR focal point proposes the position to the candidate Cc ICPM | At an early stage, direct communication is crucial between PM / Career Manager in PS and HR focal point in OC, to inform about the proposal being made. Currently the HR focal points have a purely administrative role (this can perhaps disappear with Symphony), while the career management aspect is perceived as difficult to observe in practice, even if it is clear on paper that the responsibility is kept in home section of the staff. Note that Career Managers / OC referents are to a large extent *not* using the Sharepoint files (see under Efficiency). |
| | The intersectional nature of the pool and of the positions should mean that there is no need to "seek agreement of other OCs". A candidate once validated in the pool should be seen as "matchable", under the sole responsibility of the PM, with potentially a second layer of technical / contextual Comms/Ops validation, by one person (e.g. rotational intersectional focal point with adequate delegation of decision making). The number of consultations must be streamlined, ideally to end up with only HRO/CM => PM => placement. This would empower the intersectional mechanism and increase accountability. |
| | The perspective of the candidate(s) should not be forgotten and in that sense, "motivation" interviews (rather than selection ones) can be a good away to mutually assess interest and best fit for positions, as well as share important information on the position (cf. duty of care). |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Induction to MSF**<br>•ICPM places the staff to any OC's PPD | Induction to MSF should mean more than the candidate attending the PPD and the Pool Manager should hold responsibility when it comes to making sure that adequate briefings are taking place with HR in managing sections and technical/ops referents (even if not doing them him/herself) as per process and according to needs. This would also enable a better knowledge of the people and of the positions, as well as up-to-date direct information. Today, it is unclear if all international Field Comms staff do get adequate (de)briefings. However, this challenge is not specific to the Comms Pool, but faced for all profiles across MSF. |
| General remarks on the HR process | • **Recruitment:** In terms of the technical validation for Comms recruitment, for a truly intersectional management and for maximum efficiency, there should perhaps be a focal point instead of a selection committee (for active recruitment) or focal point per OC (for passive recruitment). This focal point could be chosen on a rotational basis and have the delegated authority from its peers to take decisions not only regarding new intakes but also matching propositions from the Pool Manager. In that way the procedure would be less tied to a specific OC/ CoCo/CA.<br><br>• **Opening of positions**: The intersectional mechanism and overview must be reinforced, empower the Comms Pool and help break the OC "ownership". With current system, there are some delays in information sharing, leading to Pool Manager and/or other OCs/PS not aware at the same time of the needs. |

## Discussion on findings related to the role of HR actors

The Comms Pool resulted in changes when it comes to HR roles and responsibilities across OCs and PS. When designing the process, the level of Partner sections was almost totally forgotten, while they play a crucial role in MSF's HR model, both for recruitment and career management. As a result the current HR process does not fully clarify things for them, nor does it reflect their (various) realities. On the HR side, some HR actors got confused and have "given up" as they did not understand the role they should play and why, or felt their input was not taken into account.

## Comms Pool vs career management

Even if the process clearly states that the career management responsibility stays in the home section, it also mentions that the question of career management must be further looked at (*the interactions between the CM and the ICPM will be clarified in this document at a later stage")* and the evaluation confirms that need. Career management responsibilities are the least clear element to all stakeholders, including international field staff. Given MSF's HR structure and model, it is not surprising: as roles differ (and evolve, in line with changes in MSF HR set-ups) in regards to career management from one OC and PS to another, it is the most complex part to make "intersectional". And this is the source of frustrations as understandings differ and expectations vary: some stakeholders do not understand why this cannot be done by the PM for all pool members while others feel this should remain in the hands of respective career manager, no matter the volume.

The latter is indeed how the Comms Pool model is designed today, but in practice Career Managers and OC focal points encounter difficulties living up to it and implementing the process, no matter how clear it is in terms of who should be doing what. It is to some extent linked to the changes that actors need to digest and get used to but also to a genuine difficulty to put the process into practice: several interviewees mention the fact that they were not sure how to fulfil their role according to the expectations of the Comms Pool, nor fully confident that the system was taking care of people in the appropriate manner for the steps for which they are no longer responsible. At the same time, it should be highlighted that this difficulty goes beyond the Comms Pool: challenges linked to roles and responsibilities in terms of career management and adequate roll out of induction/briefings/debriefings are an-ongoing discussion in all OCs/PS and for all pools. While Symphony will most probably simplify some aspects linked to administration (contract, salaries etc.), making it possible to suppress some of the communication with HR focal points in OCs which is today only happening for that reason, the complex MSF HR system means that other roles such as recruitment, matching and career management will still need to be clarified. For example, former Pool Managers of Comms profiles in OCs are now "HR focal points for Comms profiles", but without matching responsibilities. It makes them wonder to what extent they can still be "responsible and accountable" towards their staff, brief and debrief them etc., as the HR process expects that from them. In the same way, both Comms HR focal points in OCs and recruiters and career managers in PS (who are sometimes the same person but not always) do handover their candidate to the Comms Pool manager at an early stage, hence feeling very little connection with their staff member, having limited possibility to influence their path with MSF, while still being the first point of contact in MSF and assuming legal responsibility for them if they issue the work contract.

## Recommendation 2: review the HR process, clarify and empower it

Now that the pilot is over, clarification and empowerment of the HR process and Pool Manager role are needed. It is still advisable to set up a working group to look at the process in a consultative manner (seeking involvement of PS, HR focal points and recruiters, not only coordinator's positions in OCs) in order to introduce the right adjustments. When it comes to maintenance and feedback mechanisms, regular sessions should be organized, i.e. not relying only on spontaneous feedback. Sharing of experiences is needed to really get an understanding of stakeholders' realities and feasibility of the system.

As theory and tools linked to change management indicate, implementation of processes requires support and communication at all times, to accompany the change of habits and culture. It is not enough to refer to procedures, and the role of the process must be to facilitate rather than be in the way. Besides, no matter how "good" the process is, flexibility and agility will always be needed. The process must understand and compose with MSF's existing and future structure and culture, instead of "imposing" top-down a model that does not take this reality fully into consideration. Intersectionalism in MSF means increased coordination and collaboration, not full alignment or harmonization.

Even with a process in place, pool management is first and foremost about people and relationships. Communication is the key aspect in the role of the Pool Manager, who needs to link up adequately (communication style, means, frequency, timeliness, content, purpose, relevant counterparts, etc) with all stakeholders (HR at all relevant levels, Comms at all relevant levels, pool members, etc).

## EFFECTIVENESS & IMPACT

**Main finding and conclusion: the effectiveness of the Comms Pool is difficult to assess at this stage as indicators are missing and timeframe is too narrow. While it is also too early to assess impact as such, some concrete changes can be noted already, such as the existence of an HR process and an increased intersectional overview and collaboration.**

Several stakeholders interviewed wondered to what extent it was even possible to measure any results yet because of:

- Limited timeframe being evaluated (real functioning since August 2016 only);
- Limited data available (not sufficient or not representative enough due to limited timeframe and volume);
- Process finalised very recently March 2017), still being communicated, disseminated and tested.

Besides, most objectives are impacted by factors other than the Comms Pool (e.g. retention is impacted by a variety of factors, such as Compensation and Benefits policies). Hence, it is challenging to be able to link achievements (or lack of achievements) with the Comms Pool being successful or not; the Comms Pool can "contribute" to the objectives as defined in the ToR but they can also be due to other HR or Comms initiatives, changes in MSF environment, policies, ways of working, etc.

With this taken into account, there is still an added value in assessing and measuring what can be. Suggestions of indicators were found during the desk review, but dashboard as such and systematic follow-up were not.[14] The table below focuses on indicators, for which it was possible to get some data, thanks to the input of the Pool Manager, Evaluation Focal Point (EFP), as well as figures gathered during the desk review and interviews. Although it would have been interesting for the evaluation, there is no data available over time when it comes to % and length of gaps, lead time between opening and matching of positions, experience in months and number of missions, retention per type of candidate (experienced/first mission) to name a few.

| Indicator | August 2016* | May/July 2017 | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of people in the pool | 37 | **44** in May<br><br>**54** in July | 54 pool members according to excel file from July 13, 2017, which is equal to 37 in August 2016 + 17 recruitments. However, the reliability of some information is questionable as random checks showed some mistakes in the July listing.<br><br>Besides 54 is not equal to 37+17-16 (38) |
| Number of people who "left" the pool since August 2016 | | **16**** | I.e. people who are no longer available or interested, and are not listed in the pool anymore. It would perhaps be interesting to keep track of those people and names as they might be interested again in the future + to keep the history. |
| Number of recruitments<br><br>- Within MSF<br><br>- External candidates<br><br>- Active recruitment (FR-AR) | | **17** ** of which<br><br>- 8<br><br>- 16<br><br>- 5 (French 4, Arabic 1) | Those numbers do not give a fair idea of the difficulty to recruit, i.e. the number of applications received, vs the ones selected (some examples from OCP and OCG show between 5-10% intake). Another interesting aspect is that the threshold, despite harmonization of criteria, seems to fluctuate depending on the needs and the status of the pipeline. Some great candidates are not taken into the pool at times, while comparatively weaker candidates get in at other times. This further complicates the work of MSF recruiting entities. |
| Number of Field Comms positions (total i.e. national + international) | NA | **70** in July 2017 | 70 (of which 38 national positions, mostly FCOs) according to Excel file on Sharepoint from July 13, 2017. For information, in 2012, according the desk review, approx. 40 Field Comms positions of which only 5 international staff. |

---

[14] Objectives Comms Pool 11-5-2016 is the main document touching upon indicators, but far from the only one.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of international Field Comms positions | 26 (incl. 5 permanent contracts) | **29***in May<br><br>32 in July | 32 international positions according to excel file on Sharepoint from July 13, 2017. |
| Number of international positions, identified as suitable for FM departure | | **10** in July 2017 | Note that there is a need, as for all other pools, not only to make space for first departures by identifying adequate positions, but also to respect those positions and not match experienced staff on them. The tendency is always to want experienced staff but this is going against all efforts to build up pools. |
| How many FM on PPD | | **11/12 (92%)*** | One drop off due to visa issues |
| How many FM departures (nr and % of total matchings) | | 11 **(46-55%)** | 11 out of 20-24** |
| How many matchings | | **20-24*** | Some matchings cancelled, due to MSF (e.g. "wrong" nationality for context) or candidate (withdrawing). |
| End of mission<br><br>Handover reports<br><br>Appraisals<br><br>Early returns | | NA<br><br>NA<br><br>NA<br><br>1** | No track: end of mission / handover reports / appraisals – remains with focal points CA<br><br><br><br>1 month earlier |

\* August 2016 is taken as a baseline as the current PM started in the position then, and as there is no data available for the period before that.
\*\* Period running from August 2016 (start of the current post holder as Pool Manager) until May 2017.
\*\*\* Plus 2 in stand-by + OCB boat only for HQ gap fill + 2 temporary positions in Mali (4 months) and Kenya (3 months).

The existing data does not allow for much analysis as there is almost no baseline to compare with over time, largely due to the turnover on the PM position and the lack of dashboard.

This section on effectiveness is about "opening the tap": it is crucial to know why, as well as when, to close it. In order to do so, clear needs, objectives and indicators must be identified, and all are interlinked: without relevant data, it is not possible to analyse the pool status or to define needs. Most stakeholders expressed during interviews a lack of vision on those two elements. While it is to some extent due to the need to increase internal communication, it is also highlighting the importance of better monitoring. Annex III provides further analysis of achievements per objective, but mostly based on perceptions.

### Too early to assess impact but some concrete changes already

In terms of impact, as with effectiveness, and for the same reasons, many interviewees mentioned the fact that it is difficult and perhaps too early to assess (other than based on perceptions) what the Comms Pool has changed until now. Among international Field Comms staff who answered the survey, 31% felt there was no difference for them with the Field Comms Pool, and 25% had no opinion.

That said, all stakeholders interviewed mentioned that some changes can already be noted, which can be directly put in correlation with the existence of the Comms Pool:

- 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.

## Communication around results and needs

By providing regular follow-up on a set of clear indicators and data, the Comms Pool could improve the way it communicates around objectives and results. But it must also streamline the way it does it. Until now, there has not been one single communication channel, via the Pool Manager, but a multiplicity of "senders" (depending on the subject and timing, either the SC as a collective or members of the SC or the PM) and "receivers" (due to no stakeholder mapping and communication plan towards them). The main challenge of any pool is to achieve a good balance between offer and demand and to be able to answer future needs by "building up" the pool (number of people, experience, competencies, profiles etc). This requires clear and adequate communication especially given MSF HR model and intersectional collaboration mechanisms.

In July 2017, the real status of the Comms Pool is unclear to most stakeholders:

- On one side, some interviewees understand there are too many people in the pool: according to data, there are, in July 2017, 54 pool members according to the listing. Which is more than the 32 international Field Comms positions. But knowing that not all people are available, no conclusions can be made on the basis of those numbers only. Looking at the listing, in fact there might be too many people with the "same" profile (e.g. first departure, only English speaking, only interested in or suitable for particular kinds of contexts, nationality being a limiting factor, etc.). This puts pressure on suitable positions as it creates competition, hence the message "too many people". A side-effect is a long waiting time for people to be deployed.

- At the same time, some interviewees mentioned they get the impression is that the pool is "empty" as it is not possible to find suitable and available profiles for all vacant positions (in terms of experience, nationality, language spoken, etc). For some critical positions, the Comms Pool is indeed not in capacity to propose any candidate and specific recruitment efforts as well as gap fillings solutions have to be triggered. This happens for all pools in MSF, with some variations over time (traditionally, gaps are more important summertime, while operational needs shift up and down for different contexts)

- Most interviewees mentioned they do not know how many people there are in the pool and how many international positions exist. This is mostly linked to the fact that the Sharepoint system is not used to the extent it was intended to be and that the internal communication was not compensating this state of fact (cf. Efficiency). Besides, as some recruitment entities are asked to do active or targeted recruitment, while others are not, there is some confusion regarding the status and needs of the pool and the reasons behind the mobilization of some actors more than others. As of Summer 2017, the time of the interviews for the evaluation, some stakeholders were clearly in need of information and clarification (same message to all sections), which came in August.

Before starting the Comms Pool, supply and demand at a given time were in a relative equilibrium as the system recruited on positions, as they became available. As the ambition was to create more positions, pool management was deemed more effective than ad-hoc recruitment. As positions were created, the Comms Pool initial message was that more candidates were needed. According to available data, 17 new recruits entered the pool since August 2016. This is not a big number, but this does not necessarily mean poor performance: what is important is to what extent it is in line with the increased needs or not, both in terms of quantity and requirements. Recruiting too many people is nothing to wish for.

In the fall 2016, the Comms Pool asked[15] some specific recruiting entities for increased recruitment efforts: MSF Belgium, Canada, Greece, Switzerland and teams in Lebanon were asked to find people to fill the pool. Those preferred partners were identified because of their interesting HR market including language skills and fewer administrative barriers linked to respective passports. But HR teams did not all feel that they were asked about their capacity to handle those efforts, especially given the tight timeline. It is also unclear if other recruiting entities were informed of the rationale behind this choice, and if targets were set per entity.[16] Interviews and data show that these efforts have not lead to significant results, with less than 15 people being effectively recruited and not all of them being matched (some people have been waiting for a mission since then, even dropping off as a result). Outcomes have been rather negative in terms of buy-in and trust from some Partners Sections towards the Comms Pool: both in the case of participating recruitment entities who felt their efforts were a bit useless and should have been focused on acute needs for other profiles instead; and with regards to non-participating recruitment entities who did not understand why they were not

---

[15] Email from Pool Manager to recruiting entities, Oct 27, 2016.
[16] The email states that efforts are made *"in order to bring in the pool max 15 new Field Communication Managers (targeting French and Arabic speakers)"*.

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

asked to contribute. Some also expressed concerns about the negative impact those efforts had on MSF reputation in home societies, given the lack of timely and professional recruitment process (unacceptable delays in processing applications).

As all Pools, the Comms Pool encounters challenges in finding the right people at the right time. The tendency can then be for stakeholders to draw the conclusion that the Comms Pool is not working. While in fact, many other reasons explain the difficulties to balance offer and demand. Not used to the Pool management, CA and CoCos tend to actively try to find solutions to gaps, activating networks, sometimes shortcutting the system to gain time. While this is understandable, it should only be used in exceptional circumstances as it creates distortions in the young system of the Comms Pool, slightly undermining its legitimacy and making it impossible to actually use, test and adapt. There must be an acceptance that the system will never be perfect, but that exceptions to the rules must be kept to a minimum to give the Comms Pool a chance to find its cruise speed.

---

**Recommendation 3: List key indicators in line with the objectives, establish targets and a simple dashboard and use them for communication towards stakeholders**

Linked with the strategy (cf. Recommendation # 1), list key indicators in line with the objectives and set targets (short, medium- and longer-term). Indicators can for example be linked to retention and gaps in field positions. They should be specific enough, measurable and time-bound. Ideally, they should be the same as the ones used for other pools or developed in concertation with adequate actors (e.g. Pool management and recruitment) as KPIs are usually needed transversally rather than for the monitoring of the initiative only, taken in isolation from the more global HR work (for example, indicators linked to retention are needed beyond the Comms Pool and must be harmonized).

Once this is done, collect baseline data to establish a point of reference. A simple dashboard will then help keep track of achievements at all times and be a good basis for discussions, analysis, and decisions. It will also allow monitoring, evaluation and adjustments, and make it possible to communicate regularly on achievements and needs, based on data rather than perceptions or isolated cases.

Adequate objectives, indicators and baselines and monitoring over a representative time frame are crucial to be able to measure effectiveness and impact.

## EFFICIENCY

**Main finding and conclusion: The Comms Pool was identified early on as a challenging and innovative initiative, but the resources allocated were not sufficient or adequate. It is not possible to put in place the model straight away with only little investment. There is a need for more dedicated resources to settle the initiative.**

The objective of the Comms Pool is to achieve better results when it comes to management of international Field Comms positions but the ToR for this evaluation mentions the willingness to have "recommendations for the future, including any budgetary and staffing requirements, as well as governance mechanisms". In order to do so, efficiency should be assessed, even if it is not formulated as one objective of the Comms Pool and even if it is challenging to do so:

- Indicators are missing and resources not easy to quantify, making it difficult to compare inputs and outputs.
- The timeframe is perhaps too limited to be able to draw any significant conclusions.

However, the pilot phase can already provide some useful insight, even if only partial, when it comes to making the most of the Comms Pool. This section will focus on the dedicated resources, and analyse to what extent they have been appropriate and used in the best way possible.

### Resources allocated

| Budget (yearly basis) | 50% FTE Pool Manager (covered by MSF UK) + travel costs + others. Many expenses are covered through some ad hoc solutions, such as this evaluation, 50/50 MSF UK/Italy. *Dircom meeting March 2017: Estimated 100,000 Euros per year (20,000 per OC) for one FTE.* *OCG covering – already before the Comms Pool – expenses linked to Field Comms training, Field Comms toolbox and Field Comms e-learning kit.* |
|---|---|
| HR | 50% FTE (Pool Manager) since May 2015 approx. Significant amount of time dedicated by the International Communication Project Manager. Quite some involvement from Steering Committee members (see below). Involvement of HR and Comms actors in OCs and PS (HR Dir, coordinators, career managers, recruiters, HR focal points, CoCo, CAs, Dircom). |
| Governance system | Steering Committee (since May 2015 approx) composed of 7 members in June 2017, all with significant other responsibilities. Meeting approximately once a month for 1,5 hours + some longer working sessions/retreats i.e. at least 16 full working days per year. |

### Cost effectiveness and dedicated HR

No cost analysis has been carried on as such for this evaluation; it could be beneficial to have a comprehensive analysis and enable a benchmark, which would allow to some extent the comparison with other pools or initiatives. In terms of budget, 100 000 EUR compared to the number of positions and matchings (based on indicators in previous sections, July numbers were taken – i.e. 32 when it comes to number of international positions and 24 when it comes to number of matchings) gives a ratio of 3125 EUR per position or 4167 EUR per matching. This rough indication should be fine-tuned and verified, also keeping in mind that it is misleading to only look at direct financial costs.

The concept of the Comms Pool benefited from a strong overall support; but it was not allocated the necessary human resources to make it happen in the best way possible. The initiative was expected to perform with 50% FTE of an *existing* resource, based on a calculation from the 2014 HR report.[17] This workload analysis focused solely on the volume of positions and people to be managed, while the pre-launch and launch phase of the Comms Pool would have required a full-time resource, such as a project manager, in order to ensure all necessary steps in the change process (stakeholders' mapping and engagement, strategy and implementation plan, internal communication, development of processes etc.), especially considering the intersectional nature of the initiative, adding to the complexity.

---

[17] See Annex II.

From a purely cost-analysis and HR perspective, the Comms Pool is not costly. But it would be too narrow to focus only on those direct costs and resources. The Comms Pool's functioning requires not only the 50% FTE of Pool Manager; heavy involvement from Steering Committee members, from the Focal point in the international Office (International Communication Project Manager), and from HR and Comms actors at various levels in OC and PS should be taken into account as well. An exact analysis of the time dedicated to the Comms Pool by all relevant actors would be useful to carry on, but was not possible in the limited timeframe for this evaluation.

## Roles and ways of working of the Steering Committee

As suggested in the HR report of 2014, an intersectional working group was set-up to lead the work towards the Comms Pool. The Steering Committee is composed of 7 members in July 2017: Dircom(s), CoCo, CAs, PM, International HR Coordinator and International Comms Project Manager. They have been meeting regularly since mid-2015 (once a month for 1,5h approximately), working together, across OC boundaries, to tackle the challenges of the Comms Pool. Tremendous work has been done and significant achievements made. Nevertheless, the results so far are not proportional to those efforts.

It is doubtful that the Steering Committee model is the most adapted to the task. Having a SC is not a normal governance mechanism for a pool. Besides, members of the SC are all very busy in their normal responsibilities, causing drop-off rate in meeting attendance and/or limited capacity to follow up on action points to the extent that would be needed, including further adequate mobilization of other actors horizontally and vertically. Challenges encountered by the SC to be efficient are largely due to the lack of leadership and ownership at other levels, unclear or too broad objectives, leading to a multiplicity of "priorities" instead of focusing on the steering role. In June 2015, the Dircom wanted the SC "*to have processes for recruitment, matching, evaluation, follow up, induction, career management…*"[18] by October 2015. In the same way, the ToR for the SC[19] states that it "*will propose a general modus operandi for the pool englobing […]: definition of the needs, recruitment process, contracts, matching, induction process, briefing and debriefing process, appraisal, career management process, training, database, budget proposal*". This is a lot to tackle in a short period of time, and in fact not representative of what a pool is or what a Pool Manager normally does. The confusion and lack of alignment in expectations impacted the way the Steering Committee has been working. The desk review and interviews did not manage to identify objectives for the Steering Committee, distinct from the initiative it was asked to steer. Only the ToR for the SC exist,[20] and this same document is also considered as presenting the objectives of the Comms Pool and the role of the Pool Manager.

The minutes of the Comms Pool Steering Committee meetings show that discussions are a mix of micro and macro, "traditional" pool topics (matchings, positions) blended with other HR and Comms files such as mentoring, training, appraisals etc. There has been some confusion on where responsibilities sit and on main priorities. This negatively impacted more important aspects such as the HR process or the definition and follow-up on indicators, with action points not followed up on adequately.

The steering role of the Committee has been important to take decisions given the intersectional set-up, and some arbitration capacity from the technical side will still be needed in complex cases: this can perhaps be solved via a rotational single focal point rather than a Committee; in any case with the adequate delegated responsibility to decide on behalf of the Comms and HR departments across the movement, and enough availability to act in a timely manner. This could for example be a Dircom, a CoCo or a CA, tackling this responsibility for one year, before handing over to a colleague. This would make processes smoother and faster, instead of having to rely on a collective decision-making process. From the HR side, the PM platform via a PM coordinator (currently in OCA) should probably be the focal point. The HR and Comms Directors of the hosting partner section should also have an adequate level of engagement, with good leverage capacity and the ability to advocate or liaise according to needs, without interfering with the responsibilities of the Comms Pool Manager/Project manager.

---

[18] 2015_June_Dircom5_Comms_pool, "Field Communication dossier", minutes for Dircom5 meeting in New York.
[19] 2015 June Steering Committee ToR Field Comms Pool.
[20] 2015_June_SC_ToR_Comms_Pool_final.

## Role of the Pool Manager and reporting lines

The role and work of the Pool Manager have until now not been articulated around a clear job profile with a set of objectives, which would help steer the efforts, assess performance and provide adequate support. The Comms Pool Manager was *identified* rather than recruited, as the Comms Pool initiative was asked to find HR solutions within existing resources. This explains to some extent the fact that the important step of (re)defining the role was shortcut.

Besides, since the start of the Comms Pool, the question of the reporting lines has been open and unclear (but under clarification while this evaluation was on-going): since mid-2015, the post holder is 50% intersectional Comms PM, 50% OCA PM, but based in the UK. This means that the PM is not physically incorporated into a team of Pool Managers, nor close to the OCA Pool Management Coordinator, its functional manager. While this was somehow wanted for the Comms Pool, in order to keep some distance with any OC and enable more intersectional perspective (it was in fact one of the criteria to locate the pool), this set-up lead to a lack of support in practice, aggravated by the turnover of the PM coordinator position in OCA, as well as the HR director position in MSF UK (July 2016). Physically based in London, the Pool Manager reports to the Head of HR in MSF UK from an administrative perspective; the Head of HR is not accountable nor has the legitimacy to position itself when it comes to pool management objectives: in the current MSF HR model, this is traditionally not in the scope of Partner sections. Support should come from the intersectional Pool Management platform, with a management line with one PM coordinator, not necessarily the OCA one, although it would be easier considering today's set-up, given the fact that the other 50% of the PM position now reports to it. But in case of transfer of the Comms PM position to another PS, the complexity of management lines but be once again looked at, as the primary OC might be different.

In terms of scope of the PM position, while the options suggested in the 2014 HR report mention either a PM doing only Pool Management or a PM doing Pool and Career management,[21] the reality is not that simple or clear-cut due to the complexity of MSF's HR structure, especially when looked at from an intersectional perspective. This has been developed under Appropriateness.

## Tools, IT and communication

The Comms Pool is managed through one specific "Comms Pool" email, but some correspondence is conducted via the Pool Manager nominative address as well: this might seem a minor detail, but it means that it is difficult to channel all communication into one inbox and keep the history in one place, which complicates handovers, for example.

The space created on Sharepoint, where files are uploaded and can be consulted, is not used to the extent it was intended to be, although the list of positions and of candidates are available on this platform. Examples of reasons mentioned by stakeholders are: technical difficulties accessing Sharepoint, multiplicity of platforms and tools they have to work with, lack of reliability / usefulness of the information (e.g. they would need to know the status of the process for each position); some do not even know the compilations are available there. All in all, no matter the reason, many key actors do not use those files, and instead stick to their respective "OC" file, meaning no intersectional overview. This is true even in Partner Sections, who should be less tied to any OC: but they refer to each OC's listing of Comms vacancies, rather than to the intersectional listing. Interviews show the need to increase the reliability of the information contained in the listing of people, so that it is comprehensive and up to date. Today, there are some discrepancies in how Partner Sections, OCs and Pool Manager see their respective "pool". It is in some cases not either in line with what international staff think. This reveals different understanding of who is or should be part of the Comms Pool (cf. discussion on criteria in next section), but also perhaps not enough direct communication to clarify the situation. A few random checks showed that some current/former international Field Comms staff are listed as part of the pool, while they have not been validated as such; and conversely, some former field staff believe they belong to the pool, while they do not.

All stakeholders required more and better communication. Even now that a process exists, there is still a need to communicate extensively to settle the system and ensure all relevant stakeholders are aware of the latest. This might in some MSF entities mean that more than one contact needs to get the information, depending on the set-up, especially as the cascading of information is not always working adequately (this is not specific to the Comms Pool).

---

[21] Cf. logic tree in Annex II

**Recommendation 4: Review current governance model and allocate adequate resources over time**

Invest in resources, which does not mean necessarily more resources overall but better use and alignment of those resources, thanks to adequate roles and responsibilities, clear objectives, communication, and monitoring.

The SC should be phased out, as planned, now that the pilot phase is over, but after having worked on redefining the strategy and boundaries of the Comms Pool (Recommendation #1) while the role of the PM must be empowered. An SC is not a normal governance model for a pool to function, even if some arbitration capacity must be preserved via a legitimate focal point (rotational). To implement recommendations and fine-tune the system, either a 100% project manager or a 100% PM with project management skills is needed at least for some months. Then, possibly, 50% could be sufficient. It depends highly on the strategy chosen for the Comms Pool, what it should encompass or not, what falls under the responsibility of the Pool Manager or not. If the Emergency Comms Pool is merged with the regular Comms Pool (cf. scope of the evaluation), then it makes probably sense to have a 100% FTE. The post holder must (the list is not exhaustive):

- Have a good understanding and experience of MSF's intersectional reality and HR complexity (i.e. different roles and ways of working across the movement in OCs as well as in PS);

- Have excellent communication skills and be able to engage with people at various levels of the organization;

- Have experience of pool management and ideally of career management and/or recruitment;

- Have experience of operations and field reality (i.e. not only HR technician, understanding of operational needs and other departments).

In any case, the role is not to be assimilated to an OC Pool Manager as the intersectional dimension brings some specific complexity, while the workload should not be assessed on the only basis of volume of people/positions yet. Job profile of the PM must be clarified, including responsibilities and reporting lines. Functional management should be via a PM coordinator in an OC (to have the adequate tools and support, overview, and accountability), while line management should be in the PS where the post-holder is located (for administrative reasons). There needs to be a strong commitment and ownership of the hosting PS via HR and Comms Directors. At the same time, OCs must show adequate engagement towards the initiative, especially in its next phase, where feedback and collaboration will be crucial to enable full roll-out of the model as well as required finetuning.

Increase intersectionality, reliability and user-friendliness of current tools and follow-up files. Establish database with enough information according to what various users may need. Verify all information and contact pool members on a regular basis (not only when looking to fill a position).

## CONNECTEDNESS AND CONTINUITY

**Main finding and conclusion: As it is today, the Comms Pool must gain in clarity. Fine-tuning should also aim for a more sustainable model and governance system, based among others on findings from this evaluation.**

### The question of the criteria to be listed in the Comms Pool

The Comms Pool has created some structure "out of chaos", among others when it comes to recruitment. But the criteria according to which people belong or not to the Comms Pool (and are concretely listed in the excel file as such) must be clarified in order for the Comms Pool model to be better understood and implemented. Current listings contain some mistakes and approximations, and some staff might even be "missing". The following questions must among others be answered (the list is not exhaustive):

- When is someone considered as validated? When is the cutting-off point to include experienced international Field Comms staff? (Some staff listed mentioned they were not selected into the pool as such and/or were never contacted by the Pool Manager, while some others really think they are part of the Comms Pool but are not in the listings). When is the cutting-off point to include new recruits? (The evaluator found some staff still under selection process.)

- Should only international staff be listed, due to administrative specificities? (The evaluator <u>found national staff not validated as international staff in the list</u>, either from OC/PS or from field missions).

- Should the regular pool be merged with the Emergency Pool? It would make sense as people can "move" between the two listings, because it is more linked to their current availability rather than anything else, and because of the confusion it currently creates (who is part of which one? Who is managing which one? Etc.).

- When should people be removed from the listings? Knowing that people's professional and private lives are far from linear, removing them from the list when they are not available for an assignment and/or have another position will probably lead to missed opportunities in the future.

- When and on what basis should OC/PS/HQ staff with long term contracts be included in the listings?

- Should all Field Comms positions be taken into consideration, or should some still be managed differently for various reasons? Today the rationale behind one or another is not always clear (e.g. RCC positions, FCO or FCM in a given context).

- Do pool members need to apply for some positions, why, and why not? (Some staff mentioned they had to do so since the launch of the Comms Pool, some feel the "application" step where they have to argument for a position is important, to test motivation and be able to choose between different candidates, etc.).

### The Comms Pool is not sufficiently embedded in MSF (HR) reality

If the Comms Pool initiative is highly supported in its spirit, it is under quite some criticism for its implementation. This lack of legitimacy is largely due to the way the initiative was launched and to the different realities experienced by HR and Comms stakeholders on the topic, while the Steering Committee and the Pool Manager have a more global and comprehensive picture, as they sit on more information. Therefore, investing in (better) communication and concertation in next phase of the Comms Pool is recommended. To be sustainable, the SC must, before it is phased out, clarify, together with relevant actors, what the expectations on the Pool Manager are: the traditional conception of the role or an exploration of new boundaries? And as a consequence, how it is embedded and interacting with existing systems and positions. The exact framework should be clarified further with HR actors, after a thorough analysis, while continuing to work on the HR process, together with them. The Comms Pool is interconnected with, impacted by and impacting other stakeholders and processes, and therefore its final design must be the result of truly intersectional work at the adequate levels, including implementers and not forgetting the partner sections.

Adequate leadership around the initiative has been missing and the issue must be tackled. While Dircom 5 and IDRH decided upon the creation of the Comms Pool, the topic was then left in the hands of the SC, which needed support and arbitration to develop the model and gain legitimacy.

When it comes to International Field Comms Staff, it is too early to be able to draw any conclusions on whether the Comms Pool is better addressing their needs. In the meanwhile, more information and further clarification is needed here as well and is more or less a direct consequence of the situation being unclear to HR stakeholders.

## The "cultural" shift must happen

Despite the existence of the HR process and the PM position, matching of Comms positions is still based to quite some extent on relationships and informality. While this is quite representative of MSF ways of working and culture, stakeholders recognized it is even more so the case for the Comms department, reactive by nature and used for long to tackle issues on its own, for various reasons. It should be kept in mind that 5 years ago, there were only 5 international positions, making it more efficient to deal with people rather than systems. With the existence of the Comms Pool, the shift in culture must happen now: all stakeholders must play the game, try to stick to the system, and provide feedback on it in a constructive manner, so that the Comms Pool model can be fully tested and adjusted, and capitalize on the structure it was meant to build and has started to put in place. The model must learn by doing, failing sometimes. If the overall attitude must be to apply the process in a systematic manner, flexibility and empathy are also needed. It is not enough to refer to the document to make sure the process is implemented. Changing habits and working culture take time and exceptions are and will be made in order to speed things up, because of previous habits or because some mechanisms are inadequate in practice. This is also inherent to MSF culture based on people and on action; CA and CoCos recognize that it is difficult for them to change habits and to give away some of the control they have always had regarding finding Field Comms profiles (this even if one of the objectives of the Comms Pool was to decrease the HR workload for them, on their request), while HR actors (Career managers, recruiters, focal points in OCs mostly) acknowledge they must get used to the process but also that some aspects of it have to be discussed and perhaps reviewed.

> **Recommendation # 5: To be sustainable and successful, the Comms Pool must gain in clarity and legitimacy.**
>
> Improve adequate internal communication towards all relevant stakeholders, Comms, HR and members of the pool. While processes are being clarified and implemented, it should not be forgotten that despite the existence of a system, Pool Management is all about people and adequate and timely communication. Having only one pool (vs separate Emergency Comms Pool), managed by one person (the PM) would help diminish the potential confusion and better reflect the reality of needs and resources.
>
> Ensure adequate leadership, with a clear responsibility and mechanism for accountability (e.g. via the Management Team and Board in hosting PS and via a clear relationship to an OC as well for sufficient ownership and legitimacy).
>
> Any decision for the future should be taken on the basis of the best approach on the long term, vs short term wins or quick available solutions, based for example on people's availability. As seen in Recommendation #4, a specific set of skills and competencies are needed from the post-holder in order to be able to tackle the complexity and innovative aspect of the model. This requires a thorough recruitment process. It might be so that the best candidate cannot be based where the Comms Pool is "located" and there should be an analysis of what is the most important in that case. In the same way, as mentioned above, adequate management and support towards the post-holder, as well as clear accountability on results is crucial to ensure success and must guide the decision to choose a host section for the Comms Pool. As the system is gaining in structure, it should also remain flexible and not person-dependent, so that it can work anytime, anywhere and adapt to changing needs, turnover, and evolutive set-ups.

# CONCLUSIONS

The nature of Comms work and Field Comms positions explains to a large extent the fact that an intersectional initiative with regards to HR management started in this department, traditionally more used than others to work across OCs. But this strength turned out to be the main risk for the Comms Pool: it was important not to underestimate the complexity of MSF HR system(s) and the initiative was a bit too quick moving forward without ensuring adequate buy-in and mechanisms. As a general finding of this evaluation, MSF did not allocate the resources needed to manage change adequately. It is not too late to introduce more elements of project and change management methodology into the Comms Pool, and it should definitely be kept in mind for any upcoming initiative of this kind, touching upon processes, roles and responsibilities, and even more so when doing so across the complex MSF intersectional structure.

The Comms Pool initiative is perceived as relevant and positive by all stakeholders and is seen as a step in the right direction. The Comms Pool's existence is not questioned by the findings of the evaluation process. However, the evaluation found that an adequate needs analysis was lacking leading to unclear objectives. This had a significant impact on the expectations of stakeholders and the ability of the Comms Pool to be implemented, deliver and be perceived as successful.

The Comms Pool is nevertheless promising and has already enabled more structure: a HR process covering all steps of the HR cycle (attraction, recruitment, matching, etc.) has been developed together with some tools (job profiles, definition of competencies etc.) and the Pool Manager has a fairly good overview of people and positions. But as HR actors did not engage sufficiently in the design phase, the model is not totally appropriate, explaining most of the difficulties in implementation.

Neither effectiveness nor impact can be assessed as such: the lack of indicators and the limited time during which the Comms Pool has been working do not enable to draw any reliable conclusions yet. In line with this, the efficiency is difficult to evaluate as well, although the analysis governance mechanisms and ways of working shows a need for better allocation and rationalization of resources.

When it comes to the sustainability of the model, as decisions are to be taken regarding the future, focus should be on clarification of processes as well as improved internal communication. Investments might be needed in order to make the necessary adaptations.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

⇒ **Recommendation 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 current needs while staying agile to be able to adapt to needed evolutions. Differentiate the objectives for the Comms Pool on the short-term (set-up phase and transition phases) vs middle- to long-term (management and improvement of the pool) but setting a timeframe for the implementation plan will help establish the priorities.

⇒ **Recommendation 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.

⇒ **Recommendation 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 simple dashboard will then help keep track of achievements at all times and be a good support for communication.

⇒ **Recommendation 4: Review current governance model and allocate adequate resources over time.**

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.

⇒ **Recommendation 5: To be sustainable and successful, the Comms Pool must gain in clarity and legitimacy.**

Improve adequate internal communication towards all relevant stakeholders. Any decision for the future should be taken on the basis of the best approach in the long term. The system should remain flexible and not person-dependent, so that it can work anytime, anywhere.

# LESSONS LEARNED

The Comms Pool initiative encountered some challenges. Main learning points are listed below, to help avoid the same shortcomings in the future, for the Comms Pool as well as for other similar projects.

1. Apply project and change management theory and steps; this is a needed investment which will pay off. Avoid the temptation of seeking immediate wins and economies (e.g. composing with existing resources when it is not sure it is adequate). Important work must be done pre-launch (analysis and design) and during implementation phase (communication, support, etc.), requiring a specific set of skills.

2. Conduct thorough needs analysis and set SMART objectives; this is crucial in any project. Do not let any sense of urgency rush through those stages; without a clear picture and understanding of the vision, the risk of getting lost along the way and/or failing is very high. Make sure the objectives relate clearly to the identified needs so that an evaluation can measure to what extent they have been met.

3. When a complex intersectional process has to be developed or reviewed, once the middle and top management is informed and on-board, the same must happen at the level of the implementers, and they are the ones who should compose the working group(s) to design the system. A good mapping of roles, responsibilities and existing processes (stakeholder mapping and RACI analysis) is an important first step before any design, to ensure it is in line with needs and realities. A top-down approach should be avoided.

4. Adequate objectives, indicators and baselines are crucial in order to be able to measure achievements.

5. There is no such thing as collective responsibility, but there can and should be shared responsibilities, especially in the case of transversal / cross departmental projects. Delegation of decision making is crucial to avoid bottlenecks.

6. Adopt a systemic approach and perform sufficient analysis before implementing any change, making sure side effects are anticipated and mitigated.

7. Internal communication and large buy-in among *all* relevant stakeholders are keys to ensure success and sustainability of a system.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT STEPS AND REFERENCE DOCUMENTS TOWARDS THE COMMS POOL (REPORTS, MEETINGS, DECISIONS, COMMUNICATION, ETC.)

The table below gives an overview of important documents leading to the creation of the Comms Pool.

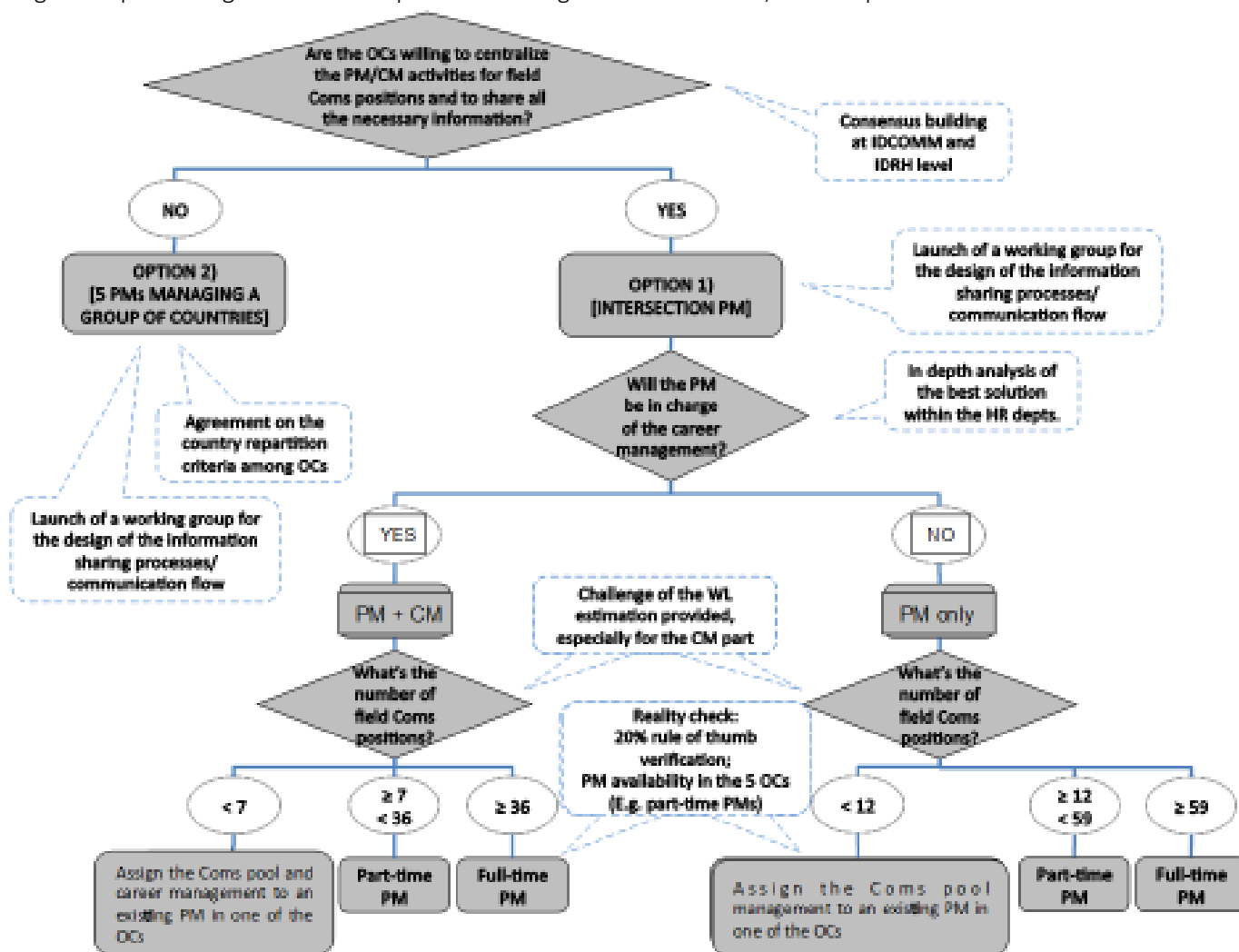| When | What | Description | Analysis of the evaluator, when relevant |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2012, March | **Review of Field Comms Positions**, Phase 1 (author unknown) | This initial study looked at all Field Comms positions, *national and international*. Need to tackle the growth, create some structure, professionalize Field Comms work and clarify how to get those jobs. Mapping of existing positions across the 5 OCs, as well as trends and needs foreseen. Standardization of JP. | Note: only 5 Field Comms positions (out of 27) were occupied by international staff, which is a ratio of 19%. Only FCO positions at that time |
| 2012, Sept | **Review of Field Comms Positions**, Phase 2 (Francois Servranckx, previous Comms Officer/Advisor) | This follow-up on previous study highlights the need for improved HR management, with the focus now shifting towards International Comms positions (while they represent only 5 out of 30 positions). The pool management option is recommended by the author: "I would highly recommend changing the current expatriate recruitment from a recruitment by position to a recruitment per pool". | The need for improvement as identified by the author concerns all phases of the HR cycle (not only recruitment / matching phase). Interestingly, main concern is not gaps in positions (not even mentioned). The study acknowledges that a clear picture of needs is lacking. |
| 2013, April | **Field Comms Officer progress report**, (Dircoms of OCB and OCG, Hélène Lorinquer and Laurent Sauveur) | *"Prior to any coms job opening at field level, a clear needs assessment should be presented […]* while *"a reality check […] should be carried out at least once a year."* HR wise, the emphasis in 2013 will be on the following objectives:<br><br>• *Rationalize the recruitment process of field communications officers between OCs. Shoud we for example create an international pool? In order to answer this question, a vision of the growth of field communication officers over the next 5 years will be established to quantify the needs. The dircom are working in collaboration with the OCB HR department on this aspect.*<br>• *Develop clear career paths for field communications officers, be it in the country where work, between missions of from missions to HQ.* | Confusion between recruitment and pool management, as well as to some extent career management. Assumption that a pool management system is needed if the volume of Field Comms positions is significant enough. |
| 2014, Feb | **Field Comms Positions, HR Process Analysis** (Carlos Centofanti, OCB HR background, 7 days consultancy) | *The goal of this study is the analysis of some key HR process phases affecting the Coms field positions, with particular focus on pool management. The results of this study are based on the analysis of two of the five MSF OCs (OCB and OCG), assuming that it can to some extent be applicable to the others."* | The analysis is focused on OCs' perceptions and functioning, instead of looking at the whole movement including PS, who are the main recruitment entities. Besides, only 2 OCs are looked at, while all 5 have different HR processes/set-up. |
| 2015, June | **ToR for the Steering Committee of the Comms Pool** | *The IO Comms team and MSF UK, with the support of IO HR Coordinator, OCB's Comms Coordinator and MSF UK Dir Comm will work together […] to form a coherent pool, based on MSF's operational needs. […] the steering committee will propose a general modus operandi for the pool englobing the following elements: Definition of the needs, Recruitment process, Contracts, Matching, Induction process, Briefing and debriefing process, Appraisal, Career management process, Training, Database, Budget proposal. Following the first six months of activities, the steering committee will look at key indicators to monitor the success of the pilot and adapt troubleshooting. […]* | The Steering Committee is asked to work on all steps of the HR cycle, which is significantly different than pool management. That's probably the moment when the confusion really materialized with regards to roles, responsibilities and expectations. |

The table below gives an overview of important documents leading to the creation of the Comms Pool.

| When | What | Description | Analysis of the evaluator, when relevant |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2014, Dec | IDRH meeting | "The IDHR approved the principle of a pool dedicated to the management of the FCO pool, providing it would be integrated in an existing pool and not lead to the creation of a new FTE" | No new/additional resource granted: find a solution within existing structure and teams |
| 2015, March | Dircom meeting | *Following IDRH meeting in February the proposal is to set up a 6-month pilot pool in OCB who offered an HR Pool Manager who can do this. The pilot would permit us to see what resources are needed, what impact for HR, and permit us to develop some lessons learned. This would then be handed over to another section. The next step would be to produce a ToR of the pilot.* | This proposal to start in OCB was questioned by the Dircom and the solution of a PS was chosen instead, for more neutrality. |

| 2015, May | IDRH meeting | IDRH validates the proposal of intersectional Comms Pool Manager (50% FTE) based in UK. Starting date June 29th, 2015. | No opening of the position as the solution had to be found in existing resources. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2015, June | **ToR for the Steering Committee of the Comms Pool** | | |
| 2015, Dec | Recruitment (Rec) Platform | The PM presents the objectives of the pool, indicators and his vision of the HR "process" | |
| 2016, January | Launch of the pool | Email from International Communication Project Manager, on behalf of Steering Committee, to Listpress, to inform about the launch of the pool. | The communication should probably not have gone through Listpress, or not so early. Beside no HR in this communication, which increase the risks for different expectations/understandings. |
| 2016, January | Pool Management (PM) Platform | Proposed detailed process will be checked with Comms Pool Manager in each OC and sent back to Sophie (IO HRco). Further follow up on pilot will be done by Florijn [PM Coordinator OCA) as platform focal point. | The Process should have been checked with PS! |
| 2016, March | **HR Process** | First draft following input from PM and Rec platform. Contacts/Emails between IO HR coordinator, PMco OCA, PM and stakeholders regarding the development of the process. | |
| 2016, May | Objectives of the Comms Pool | Word document with a list of "indicators" to measure. | Mix of indicators and ambitions. No known implementation of this dashboard. Author unknown. |
| 2016, May 2016, June | Info PM/Rec platform | Email to Comms network about the Comms Pool incl HR process Update | |
| 2016, July 2016, Aug | Pool Manager resigns / starts | Pool Manager resigns – interim done by MSF Italy. New Pool Manager starts (existing resource, 50% FTE, MSF UK) | This period (already early 2016) saw the Comms network and SC having to compensate for the absence(s) of the PM |
| 2016, Sept/Oct | HR info | Communication by Pool Manager to HR network reg. recruitment procedures | |
| 2016, Oct/Nov | Recruitment | Canada, Greece, Lebanon, OCG and OCB are asked to recruit a max of 15 FCM, French and Arabic speaking. | Tight timeline, questions from other recruiting partners who do not understand the rationale, frustration from participating entities as the efforts are "useless" |
| 2016, Dec | HR Process | Process shared with PM/Rec platform for feedback (until February) | |
| 2017, Feb | Rec platform | *"It seems to be a continued mess [...], like comms is trying to take over the process. Can we have an update of the supposedly approved process on what is going on and who does what? One important point also is that we want to make sure that existing comm officers enter the international pool and do not need a revalidation."* | Frustration from HR partners due to period of latency and lack of communication. |
| 2017, March | HR process / PM and Rec platform | HR process finalized (The recruitment and pool management platforms validates the HR process) | |
| 2017, from May | HR Process | Webinars organized by Pool Manager to communicate on HR process | Appreciated but long time due. The momentum had perhaps passed already |
| 2017, June | Evaluation | The evaluation of the Comms Pool starts | |
| 2017, August | Target setting | Target setting is communicated to recruiting entities. Need for 12 more profiles of which 8 Arabic, 2 French and 2 Italian speaking. | Lack of information regarding timing and target per PS/recruiting entity. |

Logic tree presenting the different options to manage the Comms Pool, and the preferred one.

| Objective | **Achievements of the Comms Pool** (based mostly on perceptions, as well as on quantitative data to the extent it is possible, see indicators above) | Analysis |
|---|---|---|
| **Improved staffing i.e. quality and timeliness of matchings** | **No indicators reg. lead-time to fill vacancy or gap levels over time, which would be needed to assess effectiveness on this objective.**<br><br>Perceptions are very different among stakeholders:<br>- Some feel that the lead-time and complexity has increased, due to process now in place (vs ad hoc quite informal recruitments).<br>- All agree that there is now a HR system in place, a major difference compared to before.<br>- Some feel that the system is working as they have no gaps.<br>- Some have the impression that "there is nobody in the pool" and get this information from the Pool Manager (while in fact, the nuance is that for some positions there is nobody "suitable" in the pool).<br>- All agree that staffing still imply a high level of involvement from Comms stakeholders, perhaps more than what would be needed.<br><br><br>One recurrent issue (not specific to the Comms positions), is the difficulty to place first departures, even for positions which have been identified as suitable for new recruits. There is also still a tendency to prefer "people we know". These 2 aspects clearly impact the functioning of the Comms Pool.<br>Besides more people in the pool and more people than positions does not necessarily mean it is easier to match. | There is still an overall perception of mismatch between needs and availability of HR. Most stakeholders express that they lack overview and vision to assess either or not the staffing has really improved: most of them recognize that they still have only a partial perspective on the Comms Pool, linked to their OC needs/HR.<br><br>One of the main objective of the Comms Pool was to have a more professional HR management and less informal way of dealing with Comms positions. This is partially achieved as there is now one person having the overview and one system. However, there is a need to have this intersectional perspective spread (review communication and information sharing methods) and to increase reliability of the system, and hence trust towards it. Data collection phase showed too many hick-ups in the system.<br><br>This said,<br><br>- it must be understood that all MSF pools, in all OCs, face the same kind of issues, such as difficulties to meet the needs today and tomorrow, unhealthy HR pyramid, low retention rates etc.<br>- Many other factors (beyond the Comms Pool functioning) impact staffing. |
| **Improved career and talent management** | **No indicator available / too early to assess.**<br>Besides, perceptions are very much person dependant, both from the perspective of the international staff (some are very satisfied, some are not at all) and implementers (some HR people feel they have no vision at all, Comms people still lack the Pool Manager doing all career management).<br>However what is happening is that the Pool Manager does get in touch with international staff in the field, before they end their assignment, in order to discuss matching "opportunities". However, pool members would appreciate getting more options than one, and some expressed that they would probably have exactly the same proposals with or without the Comms Pool (as it is still very much based on established relationships with CA/CoCo rather than with PM) | The timeframe is too short to draw any conclusions, but there is definitely a need to clarify expectations linked to career management (see appropriateness) and how to act in practice as it is very difficult to be clear-cut, no matter the model chosen.<br>In any case, differences between OCs and PS in terms of roles and responsibilities must be taken into account, as well as the understanding that Career and Talent management are linked to a broader HR strategy and must be tackled as such.<br>In any case, more regular contacts between Pool Manager and all members of the pool must take place, in order to develop relationships and improve knowledge of the pool. |
| **Gaps in competencies filled** | **No indicator available.**<br>This objective can be understood in different ways:<br><br>a. Streamlining of recruitment process means better assessment of competencies and potentials, leading to improved Comms capacity in the Pool? | a. Too early to assess. But more streamlined and transparent recruitment process.<br><br>b. Recruitment efforts so far lacked coordination, generating frustration among HR partners and missed opportunities / negative image of MSF. Discrepancy between |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | b. Active and targeted recruitment should help find the needed competencies? (e.g. in terms of language skills). | needs expressed at a given time, and capacity to send first departures once recruited. |
| | | c. This is linked to the staffing objective above. There is still a need to do some recruitment on position, as competencies are lacking or people are not available/suitable (e.g. nationality constraints). A pool is not only about number of people, but who they are, what they want, when, where. Having more people listed in the pool does not mean necessarily more choices at a given time, neither for candidates nor for missions. |
| | c. The pool system offers suitable candidates to choose from at any time? Cf. staffing objective. | d. Theoretically yes, but more positions do not necessarily mean more opportunities and in any case, this requires some time/retention: too early to assess (see below on Retention) |
| | d. Does the pool system help develop Field Comms professionals, as it makes it more possible to build up their experience gradually? | It is doubtful that the pool system enables better competencies for a given position at all times; recruitment on position offers a better guarantee of that, but it takes more time and resources, for unknown result. |
| **Increased diversity** | **No indicator available / too early to assess**.<br>This objective is unclear. Broaden recruitment basis means opportunities to have less Western workforce. Besides, targeted efforts seek to attract more diverse profiles in order to better meet the needs and often tight requirements (nationality constraints, language skills etc.). | This objective might rather be a side effect of the needs definition, rather than an objective per se? It is also an objective for MSF beyond the Comms Pool, in line with operational needs and willingness to be a more inclusive organization.<br>The Comms Pool impact on the development of national staff capacities is something to keep an eye on as well as the ration national/international positions and rationale behind. |
| **Improved retention** | **No indicator available / too early to assess**.<br>Some stakeholders mention more opportunities of assignments (due to increase number of positions and better overview of positions) while some international staff feel their options have not increased, and that they would have had the same opportunities, Pool or not Pool.<br><br>Stakeholders agree to say that Comms profiles are very mobile, opportunistic, using their networks, sometimes more attached to a context of expertise, rather than a cause/organization. The Field Comms work is maybe not always matching expectations. The survey shows that 24% of respondents do not know what they want to do in 2-3 years' time, while 19% want to work in other field positions than Comms, 14 % in HQ Comms positions. These results must however be taken with caution given the limited volume of answers (21 persons currently in the pool).<br><br>Note that there is no analysis of the pool available (no indicator on retention and no data such as entry date, time in the field, number of missions etc.) Besides, it is not possible to analyse impact on retention after only one year of functioning. | It is not possible to say that more matching opportunities impact retention positively, it is more an assumption being made. An increased number of positions does not mean that people will stay longer and a quick look at other pools confirms this. Many factors impact retention to a great(er) extent, such as life events, background, career dreams etc. Adequate indicators and data collection must be developed to help fine-tune the understanding. The existence of the Comms Pool doesn't change the fact that attraction and retention are a more global question and those challenges must be tackled by a broad HR strategy at global level.<br><br>Note that the transition towards the Comms Pool might have resulted into some loss to follow-up, people not being contacted, people not transitioning into the pool, etc. |

## ANNEX IV: INFORMATION SOURCES

Primary data collected for this report include:

- Survey sent to 58 international Field Comms staff (based on listing of the Comms Pool as per July 2017, as well as some corrections/additions from the evaluator). 32 responded which gives a participation of 55%.
- Individual Skype or Face-to-Face interviews were hold with 35 stakeholders.

The following type of documents have been reviewed (the list is not exhaustive but aims to give an overview):

- o Meeting minutes from Comms and HR platforms since 2014-2015
- o Meeting minutes from the Comms Pool Steering Committee since 2015
- o Presentations (powerpoint) to various platforms since 2014
- o Process documents
- o Reports and studies from 2012 onwards
- o Position papers / strategic orientations from the Comms department
- o Emails
- o Files available on shared platforms (Sharepoint on previously Googledrive)
- o Documents shared ad-hoc by stakeholders

Stockholm Evaluation Unit

Médecins Sans Frontières

www.evaluation.msf.org