



Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH) Gender and Leadership Study

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

The [Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire \(DESLH\)](#) is an intensive and challenging postgraduate humanitarian leadership development course. Delivered in French and aimed at humanitarians working in West and Central Africa, the course is administered by the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, and accredited by Deakin University.

Through our extensive, longitudinal research into the course, its students, and its outcomes we have found that the DESLH is making a unique and tangible contribution to localisation and humanitarian leadership in West and Central Africa—yet the data also uncovered a problematic trend.

There has been a persistent gender imbalance within the DESLH, with on average a 1:3 female to male ratio over the six cohorts. This finding reflects the worldwide underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in the humanitarian system. The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership is committed to redressing this imbalance and to working with our partners to increase the representation of women in leadership roles, as well as to increase the intake of women in future cohorts of the course.

Through the data, research and analysis presented in the DESLH Gender and Leadership Study, we have developed a series of recommendations for what humanitarian organisations and training providers can do to increase the proportion of women in formal and informal leadership roles and increase the proportion of women in future DESLH cohorts.

Recommendations for humanitarian organisations

Organisations play a key role in leading and emulating change, in creating opportunities for women and providing the conditions in which they can thrive. Participants recommended a significant number of strategies for change that target organisations specifically.

In addition to ensuring policies and practices take into account women's specific needs in the workplace, organisations can help build women's capacities and confidence and create more leadership roles for women.

The following are some suggestions on ways to achieve this:

- ✓ Conduct a comprehensive gender analysis at all levels of the organisation, including applying a gender lens to all policies and practices, to inform strategies for change;
- ✓ Target and involve decisionmakers for education and awareness, so that they support measures that 'favour the recruitment of women';
- ✓ Recruitment policies that include quotas and positive discrimination to prioritise women for decision making roles;
- ✓ Build capacity and confidence of women: support professional training and personal development opportunities; support access to mentors or professional coaches;
- ✓ Improve working conditions through gender-transformative policies, such as maternity leave, carer's leave, flexible working hours, limit on hours worked away from home, child-care support, family postings; and
- ✓ Increase the safety of women in the workplace, by ensuring policies and practices are developed, well understood and enforced, 'among other measures.'

Recommendations for training providers:

- ✓ Identify local and national women's networks—including informal networks on WhatsApp, Telegram or preferred social media platforms, as well as more formal women's leadership networks—to disseminate marketing information about training programs;
- ✓ Encourage female graduates to disseminate information about the course to female colleagues, peers, and networks;
- ✓ Proactively headhunt female participants for leadership trainings, through engaging directly with local and national NGOs in the Francophone world, and particularly West and Central Africa;
- ✓ Invite former graduates to nominate female colleagues whom they believe have the potential to thrive on leadership programs;
- ✓ Publish case studies on or profiles of successful femalegraduates, highlighting their experiences of the program and encouraging other women to apply;
- ✓ Provide a longer window for applications, or disseminate information about the program prior to the application window opening, to ensure applicants have enough time to consider their options and receive organisational approval.

Selection criteria and admissions

- ✓ Consider affirmative action criteria, to acknowledge women's comparative lack of access to educational and professional opportunities in many contexts;
- ✓ Consider providing a 'bridging course' or 'academic skills' course for female applicants who express concern about their ability to engage in a higher education setting;
- ✓ Encourage women who are new to academic settings to do the Crisis Leadership Program or other similar short courses prior to academic programs such as the DESLH, as introduction to formal learning environment;

- ✓ Consider a peer support group within the cohort, and consider providing additional mentoring opportunities or support for women.

Funding and resourcing

- ✓ Communicate more clearly the value of, eligibility for, and likelihood of receiving bursaries or financial assistance among prospective applicants;
- ✓ Secure additional funding to support female candidates, to overcome gender-based financial barriers to participation;
- ✓ Consider, where possible, gender-transformative funding options, including not only fee waivers or reductions for local and national NGO female applicants, but also discretionary funds or stipends for participants to overcome barriers related to child-minding or domestic responsibilities during online and residential intensives;

Engagement and partnerships

- ✓ Work with target local and national organizations to communicate who the leadership program is intended for and encourage a proactive gender-transformative strategy to enable more women to participate;
- ✓ Partner with organizations that specialize in gender-transformative leadership;
- ✓ Investigate the possibility of asking organizations to provide women with time off for their studies, to reduce the workload of undertaking leadership programs.

Advocacy and policy

- ✓ Produce and publish research to promote awareness of the need for inclusive and diverse leadership across the humanitarian system;
- ✓ Engaging male participants on board into the advocacy as champions;

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