Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH)

IMPACT STUDY

CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

Cai Wilkinson, Justine de Rouck and Phoebe Downing.
February 2024

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	**4**
1. Introduction	**7**
2. DESLH graduates at a glance: alumni profile	**9**
3. Leadership development and effective humanitarian response	**12**
4. Intensive learning for leadership development	**18**
5. Localisation in the international humanitarian system	**27**
6. Conclusions	**36**
7. Recommendations	**37**
8. Research design	**38**

Figures

Figure 1. 208 students have graduated since 2018	9
Figure 2. INGOs are the most widely represented type of organisation by a significant margin	9
Figure 3. DESLH alumni by nationality	10
Figure 4. DESLH alumni network: country of most recent deployment or operation	10
Figure 5. Success rates for all units and cohorts	11
Figure 6. Graduates improved their knowledge and awareness of key humanitarian resources	13
Figure 7. Graduates improved their knowledge of the humanitarian system and key subjects	14
Figure 8. Cohort 6 report a high degree of satisfaction with DESLH teaching and learning provisions	19
Figure 9. Simulations and coaching sessions are highly valued in Units 2 and 4	19
Figure 10. Graduates improved their understanding of localisation and related topics	30
Figure 11. Graduates demonstrate greater awareness of the Sphere Standards after the DESLH	31
Figure 12. Impact Study research design	38

Tables

Table 1. How completing the DESLH impacted graduates' career progression in the short- to mid-term	16
Table 2. What do faculty members and external stakeholders think about the role of simulations?	22
Table 3. Key informant interview (KII) respondents	40

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Associate Professor Cai Wilkinson (Principal Investigator), Justine De Rouck (DESLH Course Director), and Dr Phoebe Downing (Research Fellow). The authors would like to thank the consultants who were instrumental to this study. Our particular thanks go to Dr Helen Seignior, who led the qualitative analysis; Segolen Guillaumat and Bassekoa Innocent Nama, who conducted study interviews, and Rachel Routley (CHL Deputy Director), who conducted the external stakeholder interviews. Our thanks also go to Helene Veille and Dr Tattiana Chrissy Lopez, who conducted additional interviews and focus group discussions in French, and helped lead the qualitative data analysis; and Maria Paula Hernandez Ruiz and Milo Gruwez for their technical and analytical assistance with the quantitative data analysis.

Finally, the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership would like to acknowledge USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) for the generous funding of the DESLH and these research reports.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACF	Action Against Hunger
ADCAP	Age and Disability Capacity Building Program
APA	Apprentissage par l'action (Action learning sessions)
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
CHL	Centre for Humanitarian Leadership
DESLH	Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International non-government organisation
KII	Key informant interview
NGO	Non-government organisation
UNOCHA	United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

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 accredited by Deakin University and leads to the award of a Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership.

Globally, there are few—if any—university-accredited graduate certificates for humanitarian leaders offered in French. The DESLH is therefore a rare and potentially unique opportunity for humanitarians in West and Central Africa to engage in a Francophone university-level course designed to recognise and strengthen local capacity and impact for humanitarian action.

Report structure

This report presents the main findings from an impact study of the first six cohorts of the DESLH. By presenting key findings from key research questions designed to test the programme's theory of change, this report aims to present evidence-based recommendations for improving the DESLH in future iterations.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the DESLH alumni, including a snapshot of graduates by gender, nationality, and success rates. The rest of the report is organised around three key research questions. Chapter 3 investigates how the DESLH impacts humanitarian response. Chapter 4 examines the extent to which students advance their humanitarian leadership capabilities and capacities through intensive learning, including critical reflection, simulations, and coaching. Chapter 5 presents key findings on how the DESLH impacts meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system. For conclusions and recommendations, see Chapters 6 and 7.

1.2 Key findings

Alumni profile

208 students have graduated from the DESLH since the first cohort was launched in 2017, including 138 men and 70 women. The reasons behind this gender imbalance are explored more fully in the Gender Report submitted alongside this Impact Study.

Of these graduates, 77.4% are from INGOs, 9.62% from the UN (and the World Bank), 3.85% from local or national NGOs, with the remainder representing the Red Cross (2.88%), government/ ministries (1.44%), and key system stakeholders. Based on nationality, 185 of the 208 (89%) graduates are from the Global South.

Countries in West Africa are well represented in terms of graduates' nationalities, particularly Ivory Coast (26 graduates), Burkina Faso (25 graduates) and Senegal (23 graduates). The countries in which graduates report working include Mali (n=26), Senegal and Chad (n=21 each), and Burkina Faso (n=20), with a few also in North-east Africa, the Middle East, Haiti, Madagascar, and Afghanistan. While there is a strong West and Central African concentration in terms of graduates' working contexts, therefore, the DESLH network extends to humanitarian contexts outside West and Central Africa.

Leadership development and the humanitarian response

Central to the DESLH theory of change is that by equipping humanitarians—particularly from local and national organisations—with effective leadership knowledge, behaviours and skills, the DESLH will contribute to more coordinated, evidence-based, and effective humanitarian response.

The DESLH is improving graduates' knowledge of the humanitarian system, with impressive gains in graduates' awareness and understanding of core resources, such as the Sphere Handbook, key Inter-

Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and Global Protection Cluster policy documents, and Age and Disability Capacity Building Program (ADCAP) Minimum Standards.

Graduates also demonstrate impressive gains in their knowledge of core humanitarian skills and subjects, humanitarian ethics, principles and values, localisation, history of humanitarian aid, humanitarian system actors, and humanitarian strategy and operational leadership.

In terms of impact beyond the course, graduates report sharing their knowledge and skills with colleagues and professional networks after the DESLH through, for instance, role modelling new leadership behaviours, organising workshops, and passing on knowledge of key resources within their teams and organisations.

The DESLH is having a positive impact on graduates' career progression in diverse ways. Graduates report that having a French-language university-accredited qualification and increased leadership confidence has helped them achieve promotions. Aside from short- or medium-term promotions, coaching within the course is also helping some graduates to be clearer about their professional goals and trajectories.

Intensive learning for leadership development

The DESLH provides an intensive learning environment, in which multiple learning activities combine holistically to support a personalized leadership development experience. There is strong evidence the DESLH is advancing students' humanitarian leadership capabilities and capacities through this intensive learning design, including through simulations, coaching, and critical reflection tools.

The simulation component of the intensive units is seen by many graduates and DESLH faculty alike as the crucible of leadership development. Put under significant pressure, participants are pushed to reflect on their own leadership styles, implement what they have learned about leadership practices, and work collaboratively through a realistic humanitarian response scenario as a team.

Graduates also highly value the coaching provided through the DESLH, with all participants receiving at least three individual and group sessions to support their leadership development journeys.

Critical reflection—facilitated through Hogan assessments, 360 reviews, and peer-to-peer feedback, as well as unit assignments—provides a space for participants to probe their leadership behaviours, and to consider their own development plan based on their learning and personal goals as leaders.

Crucially, however, it is how these intensive learning activities combine and mutually support participants' learning journeys that provides an effective leadership development experience, as much as the individual activities themselves.

Localisation

Consistent with the DESLH theory of change, the program aims to contribute to meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system, through recruiting local and national NGO staff as participants, providing a course delivered wholly in French, offering tailored fee structures to subsidise local and national participants, and addressing localisation directly in the curriculum.

Through the DESLH, graduates are improving their knowledge of localisation and related topics, including geopolitics, key actors, and coordination across the humanitarian system.

More striking, however, is the fact graduates are implementing this newfound localisation knowledge to change their professional practices and priorities once back in their working contexts. DESLH graduates report creating new roles within their organisations dedicated to engaging with local and national organisations; organising localisation workshops with colleagues and professional networks; and increasing the number of local organisations with which they engage.

There is scope, however, for CHL to redouble efforts to recruit participants—and particularly women—from local and national humanitarian organisations in West and Central Africa (up from 3.85% of graduates). The Centre needs to consider the diversity of its own faculty—for instance, recruiting more facilitators from West and Central Africa—to better reflect the diversity of leadership in the humanitarian system.

1.3 Conclusions

As a Francophone, university-accredited course for humanitarian leaders, the DESLH is making a unique and tangible contribution to localisation and humanitarian leadership in West and Central Africa.

The DESLH is providing an effective form of leadership development which combines intensive learning experiences with highly individualized coaching and critical reflection to support participants through a leadership development journey that continues well after the course ends.

The flow-on effect of this experience on the humanitarian system is amplified through graduates' role modelling new leadership behaviours, leading new initiatives to support localisation, sharing key resources with colleagues, and progressing through the humanitarian system.

As a leadership development course, however, the DESLH makes the greatest impact through the quality of learning experiences it provides students. For this net impact to continue, the DESLH needs to secure funding to provide future cohorts. Investments in future research and evaluation—such as further longitudinal study of graduates—would also be beneficial in quantifying and qualifying the medium and longer-term impact of the DESLH on graduates' behaviours, career progression, and impact within the system.

Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire – Our Impact

208

graduates over six cohorts from 2018 to 2023, from 27 countries.

89%

of these DESLH graduates are from the Global South.

95%

rated the DESLH as either satisfactory or highly satisfactory.

92%

of graduates demonstrated improvements in their humanitarian leadership behaviours across at least four aspects of humanitarian leadership by the end of the course.

8

Open Access papers on localisation published in French

with 11,631 views and downloads.

89%

of graduates demonstrated improvements in their humanitarian leadership knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

'I would like to express my sincere thanks to the DESLH team, USAID, and my peers. It really is a training course and experience that has helped me a lot in my personal and professional life. Thank you.' [DESLH graduate, Cohort 6, post-course survey]

1.1 What is the DESLH?

The Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH) is an intensive and challenging postgraduate leadership course designed for all actors involved in emergency and humanitarian responses. Delivered in French, the course is accredited by Deakin University and leads to the award of a Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership. The Centrepr for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL, part of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences) runs the DESLH in partnership with Action Against Hunger (ACF). The programme is funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

Through the course's four consecutive units, which are completed over eight months, students examine the leadership and strategic issues faced by local, national, and international leaders and managers in the aid system, critically reflect on the principles and values that underpin any humanitarian operations, and, most importantly, develop their own leadership skills and competencies.

Unit 1, 'Le Monde Humanitaire' ('The Humanitarian World'), is taught online over 11 weeks on CloudDeakin (online portal), and consists of five modules:

- an overview of humanitarianism and key issues in humanitarian responses to disasters;
- a critical examination of the history and principles of humanitarianism;
- an exploration of actors involved in humanitarian responses;
- an examination of questions of power and accountability in the humanitarian system and the relevance of humanitarianism for different communities including students' own; and
- engagement with some of the new dilemmas and complexities facing the humanitarian sector.

Unit 2, 'Développer son Leadership Humanitaire' ('Developing Humanitarian Leadership'), is the first of two intensive units and shifts the focus to individual leadership development through a combination of active learning sessions, individual and group coaching, an interactive simulation and critical reflections. This first intensive unit was delivered as a residential course in France until 2020 (Cohorts 1-3) and then as an online intensive for Cohorts 4 to 6.

Unit 3, 'Leadership dans les Opérations Humanitaires' ('Leadership in Humanitarian Operations'), is taught online over 11 weeks on CloudDeakin, and is designed to enhance students' knowledge of leadership in humanitarian operations, with a particular focus on the strategic aspects of leadership and some of the leadership skills and behaviours that support quality aid operations. Content covered includes: humanitarian response strategy; localisation and leadership; leadership and geopolitics and the implications for humanitarian operations; urban contexts and leadership, and the nexus in practice and considerations for leaders.

Unit 4, 'Démontrer son Leadership Stratégique' ('Demonstrating Strategic Leadership in Humanitarian Contexts'), is the second of the two intensive units, and is focused on extending and deepening students' own leadership capacity and practice through a combination of active learning sessions and activities (including coaching), an extended simulation, and critical reflections. This second intensive unit was delivered as a residential course in Senegal until 2020 (Cohorts 1-2), as an online intensive between 2020 and 2022 (Cohorts 3-5), and as both an online and residential intensive in 2023 (Cohort 6).

1.2 Study background

This Impact Study aims to evaluate the impact of the DESLH, spanning Cohorts 1 through 6. In particular, the study investigates the DESLH theory of change:

- if humanitarians, particularly those from local and national organizations, are equipped with highly effective leadership behaviours, knowledge, and skills, a more diverse and inclusive cohort of humanitarian leaders will emerge who put into practice their new leadership qualities and impart them on their peers, leading to a more accountable, coordinated, evidence-based, and responsive assistance throughout the humanitarian system.

1.2.1 Study design: questions and methods

This study investigates this theory of change through three key research questions:

- How does leadership development impact humanitarian response? (Chapter 3)
- To what extent do students advance their humanitarian leadership capabilities and capacities through intensive learning, including critical reflection, simulations and coaching? (Chapter 4)
- How does this leadership development program impact meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system? (Chapter 5)

The study takes a mixed-methods approach to answering these questions, including survey data, qualitative interviews, and course data. For a more detailed research design, please see Chapter 8 below. By presenting key findings from key research questions designed to test the programme's theory of change, this report aims to present evidence-based recommendations for improving the DESLH in future iterations.

2. DESLH GRADUATES AT A GLANCE: ALUMNI PROFILE

> *'DESLH is a unique and exciting experience. It has captivated our whole being: emotionally and professionally. I am a new person who can develop and bring about change in all aspects of my environment. I will recommend this DESLH to everyone I know as it fully meets all my expectations in terms of leadership.'* **[Cohort 6 DESLH graduate, post-course KAP]**

This chapter presents a snapshot of access and course completion rates for Cohorts 1 through 6 of the Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH). For additional graphs, please see Annex below.

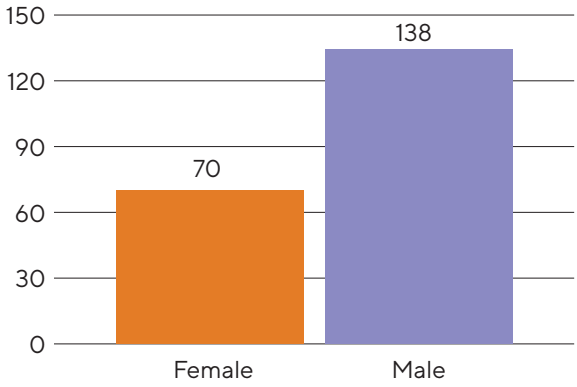
2.1 Who are the DESLH alumni?

Total number of graduates (by gender)

Since the first cohort graduated in 2018, 208 students have graduated from the DESLH programme, including 70 women and 138 men (Figure 1).

The reasons for this gender imbalance—and evidence-based recommendations for improving the representation of women in future cohorts—are investigated in a separate study as part of this evaluation.

Figure 1. 208 students have graduated since 2018

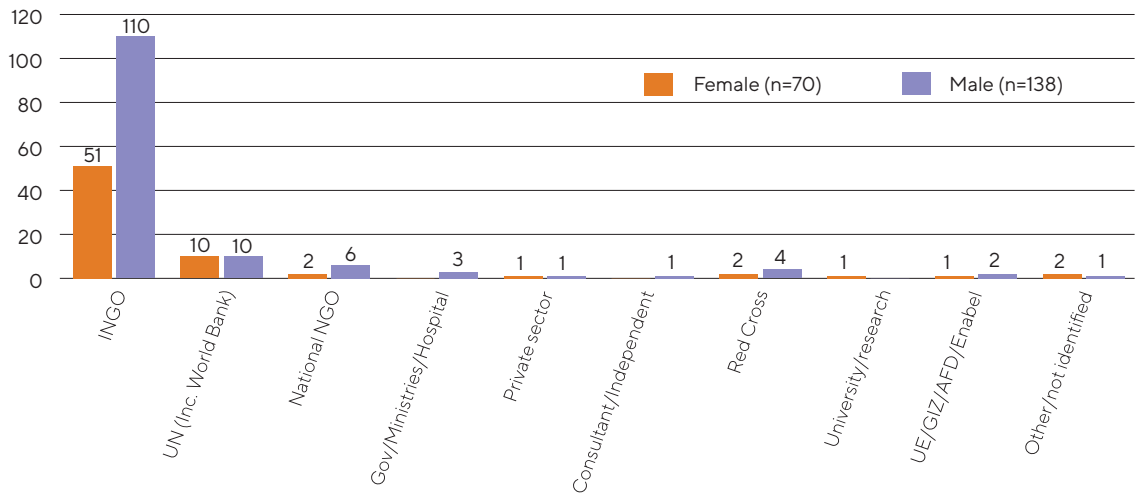


Type of organisation

When disaggregated by type of organisation, participant data show that the majority of DESLH graduates, both male and female, work for international non-government organisations (Figure 2). Gender parity is seen only in UN and private sector participants. Local and national NGO leaders comprise just 4% of all graduates (only one quarter of whom are women). 77.4% of DESLH graduates work

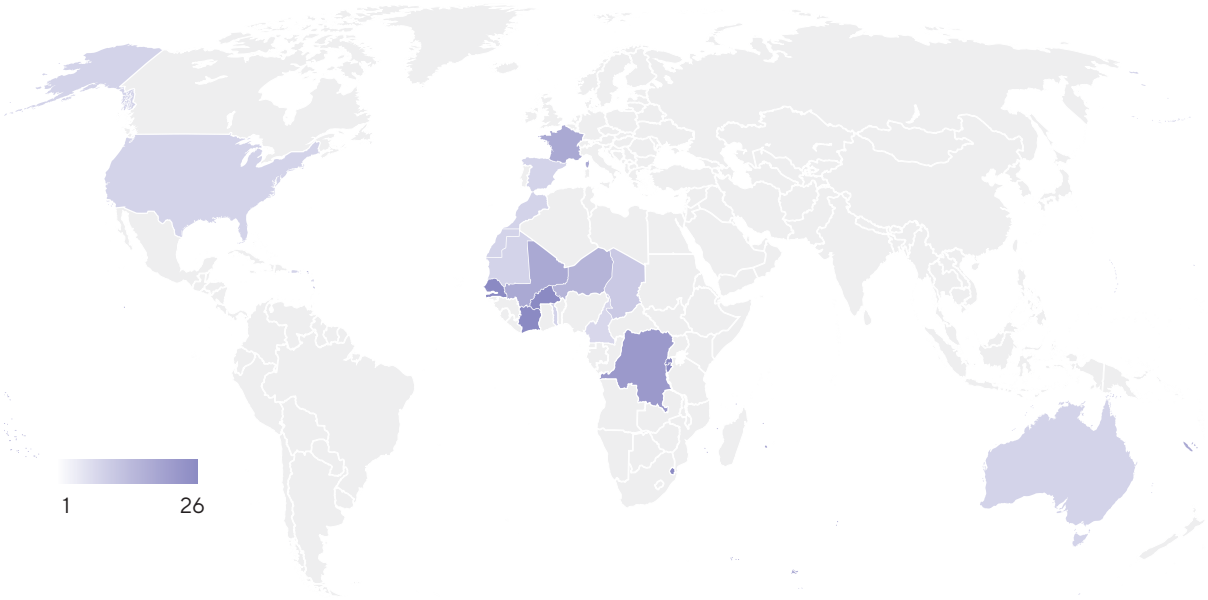
Figure 2. INGOs are the most widely represented type of organisation by a significant margin

Alumni disaggregated by gender and type of organisation (n=208)



Please note: UE = Union Européenne/European Union; GIZ = German Development Cooperation; AFD = Agence Français de Développement; Enabel = Belgian Development Agency.

Figure 3. DESLH alumni by nationality



for INGOs (72.8% of female graduates and 79.7% of male graduates), while 9.6% of DESLH graduates work for the UN (14.3% of female graduates and 7.25% of male graduates). For reporting purposes, graduates from governments, ministries, and hospitals are counted as separate categories, though in some instances it would be reasonable to count these—as well as universities and some private sector or consultant organisations—as local actors.

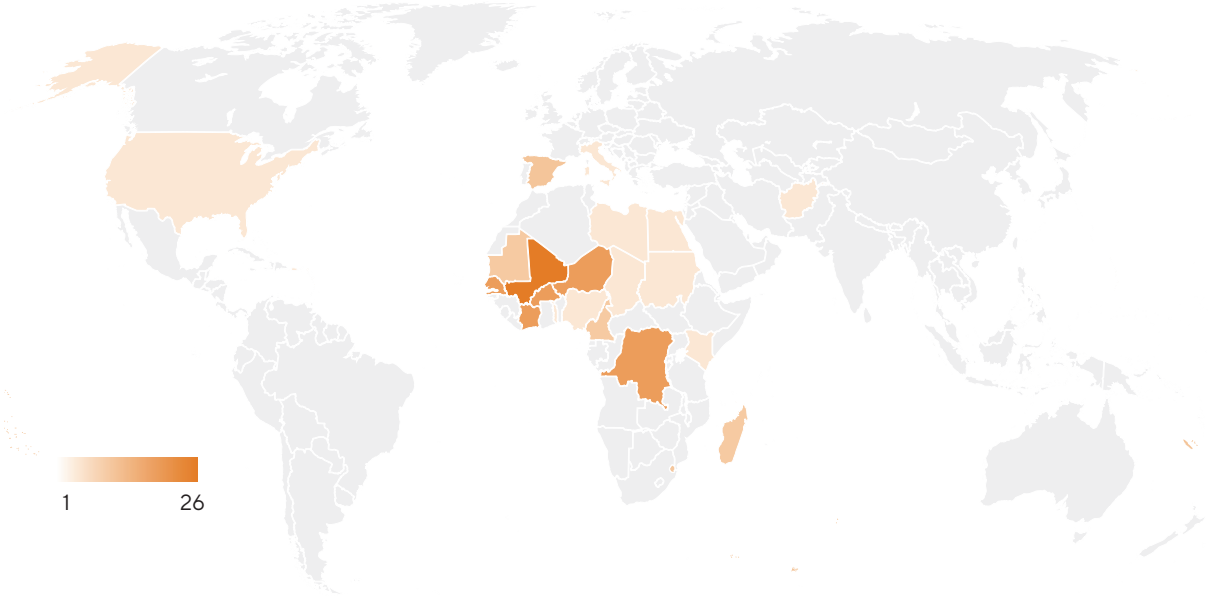
Nationality and country of operation

89% of graduates report a nationality in the Global South. An analysis of DESLH graduates' nationality indicates a strong connection between the DESLH alumni and Francophone West and Central Africa (left). Countries in West Africa are well represented, particularly the Ivory Coast (with 26 graduates), Burkina Faso (25 graduates) and Senegal (23 graduates).

A few alumni represent non-French speaking countries, including Australia, Spain, Greece, and the United States of America (USA).

When compared to the countries in which graduates report working most recently, the sphere

Figure 4. DESLH alumni network: country of most recent deployment or operation



of influence of the graduates and of DESLH training expands beyond these national countries of origin (Figure 4).

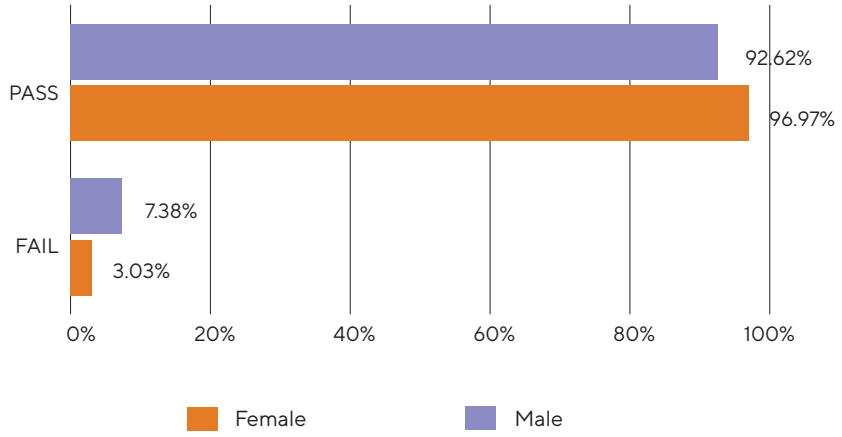
While the concentration of operational contexts remains in West and Central Africa, new regions covered by DESLH graduates' operational work include Northeast Africa, the Middle East, Haiti, Madagascar, and Afghanistan, Switzerland, and Italy. The top three countries in terms of graduates' most recent country of work are Mali (n=26), Senegal and Chad (n=21 each), and Burkina Faso (n=20). This comparative mapping highlights the global mobility and reach of the DESLH graduate network, and the global impact of DESLH graduates working in humanitarian and crisis contexts outside of West and Central Africa.

2.2 Success rates

The overall success rate—e.g. the proportion of students who successfully pass each unit —is high, with an average of 94.51% across all cohorts. For context, this is slightly higher than the Faculty success rate at Deakin University, which is on average between 86% and 90%. Success rates vary slightly by gender, with women achieving a slightly higher pass rate (96.97%) than their male peers (92.62%) across all cohorts (Figure 5).

This difference is not statistically significant and reflects a range of variables, including participant profile, cohort size, and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in all spheres of life.

Figure 5. Success rates for all units and cohorts



3. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

'As long as we have humanitarians who are well trained, better equipped and better supported, we can hope to have a quality response. It's really linked.' [12AlumM]

3.1 Introduction

Central to the DESLH theory of change is that equipping humanitarians—and particularly those from local and national organisations—with effective leadership knowledge, behaviours and skills will contribute to more coordinated, evidence-based, and effective humanitarian response. The aim of the DESLH is therefore to do just this: to improve humanitarian responses through effective leadership development.

However, demonstrating the link between —let alone impact of— leadership development and the international humanitarian response is difficult, owing to the long causal chain between the intervention and the intended outcome, and the multiplicity of other factors which mediate the knowledge, behaviours, and skills of humanitarians in the field.

This chapter therefore addresses the question of how leadership development impacts humanitarian responses by examining the issue of impact from multiple perspectives:

- To what extent do students gain knowledge and understanding of the humanitarian system and humanitarian operational delivery from enrolment in the course?
- How and to what extent do students apply learnings from the course to improve their work within an organization?
- To what extent do learnings from the course contribute to career progression of students in the short- to mid-term?
- To what extent do students directly or indirectly impart their learnings to their friends, colleagues, peers?

Monitoring and evaluation data provide evidence that the DESLH is improving the humanitarian response in specific contexts and specifics ways. First, graduates improve their knowledge of key resources, including minimum standards and humanitarian principles, as well as their humanitarian leadership skills. Second, graduates are disseminating this new learning to colleagues and their wider networks, including within their own organisations and also across partnerships and consortiums. Third, the course has contributed in some instances to DESLH graduates' career progression, with their insights and learning from the DESLH viewed as beneficial for taking on more senior positions.

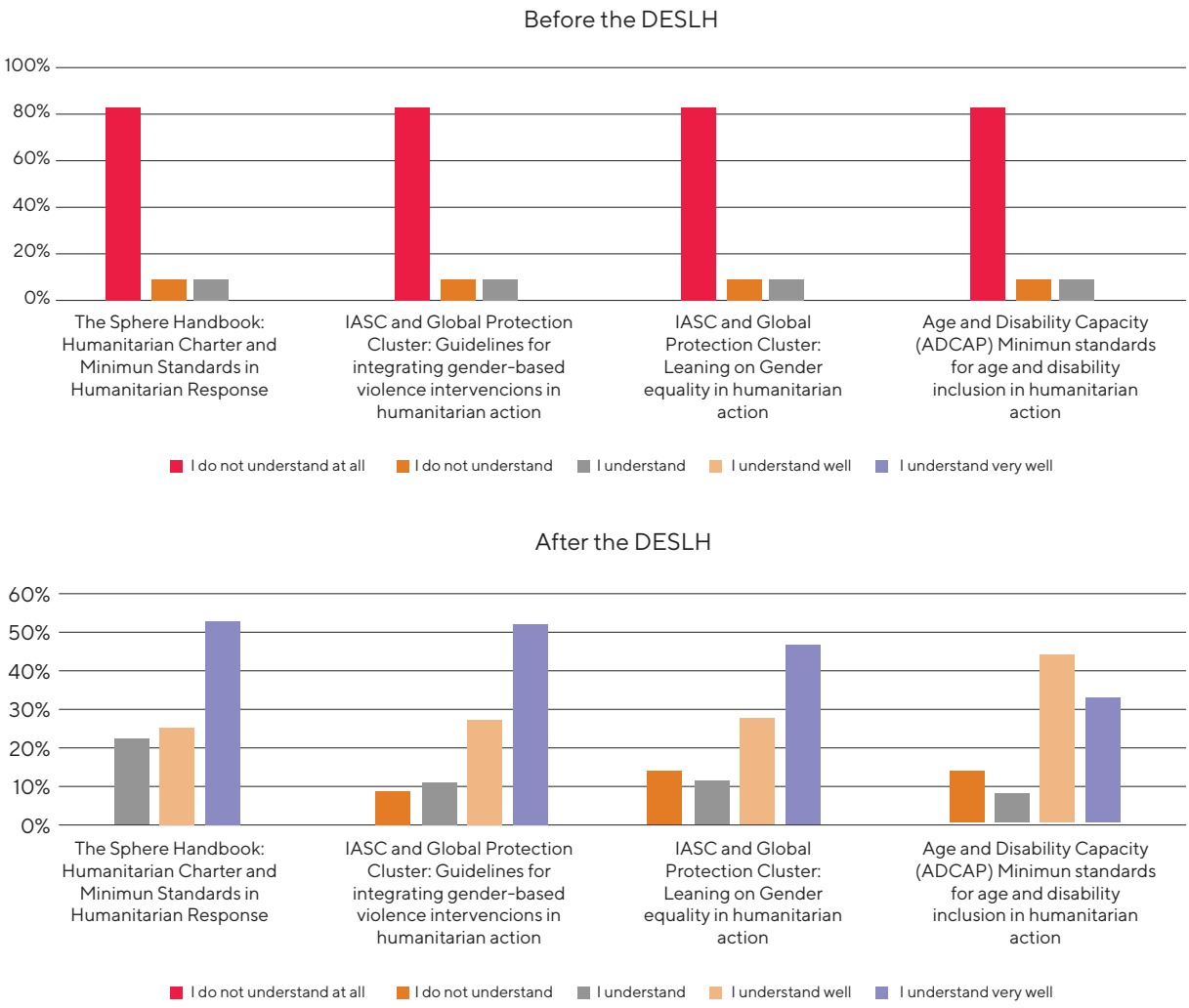
3.2 Knowledge of the humanitarian system and leadership skills

'My second objective in this training course is to have an efficient national organisation that follows The [Humanitarian] Standards. [Name of DESLH faculty member] also opened my eyes to the situation of the national organisations in the world.' [39AlumF]

One way of gauging the extent to which students gain knowledge and understanding of the humanitarian system and humanitarian operational delivery from enrolment in the course is seen below in Figure 6. This figure compares students' self-reported awareness and understanding of key humanitarian system resources before and after the course. We can see impressive gains in students' awareness and understanding specifically of the Minimum Standards on Inclusion, the IASC and Global Protection Cluster resources on gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian action, and the SPHERE Standards. These resources are included in the core curriculum of the DESLH to provide students with a robust understanding of the core quality assurance tools underpinning high quality humanitarian programming.

Figure 6. Graduates improved their knowledge and awareness of key humanitarian resources

Q10 - 10. What is your current level of knowledge and understanding of the following resources?



When asked how their knowledge of the humanitarian system changed because of the course, graduates reported diverse ways in which the DESLH has shaped how they understand, navigate, and interact with the wider humanitarian system, both at a local and international level. One male respondent from West Africa, for instance, cited how his DESLH learning on the *Sphere Handbook* led him to disseminate his knowledge about the humanitarian principals and minimum standards with local NGO and humanitarian organisations in Mali and Guinea:

> *'More specifically, it's the Sphere, the Sphere manual, yes, which I would say is totally unknown, that I've been able to share with these local organisations, whether here in Mali or in Guinea. Because I actually saw something positive in it. I saw that frankly, if you manage to understand it, you can create a response. But if you [don't] understand the Manual, you're missing out on a lot of things. So I got them to sign up, read the Manual, validate it and so on, including the heads of the various NGOs, so they can understand the activities they undertake. And so they were amazed after seeing all that was in [The Sphere]. Some of them found it difficult to connect to everything. But it's really something that has had a big impact on me, that I've been able to share with those around me, but also externally.'* [26AlumM]

Knowledge of humanitarian leadership

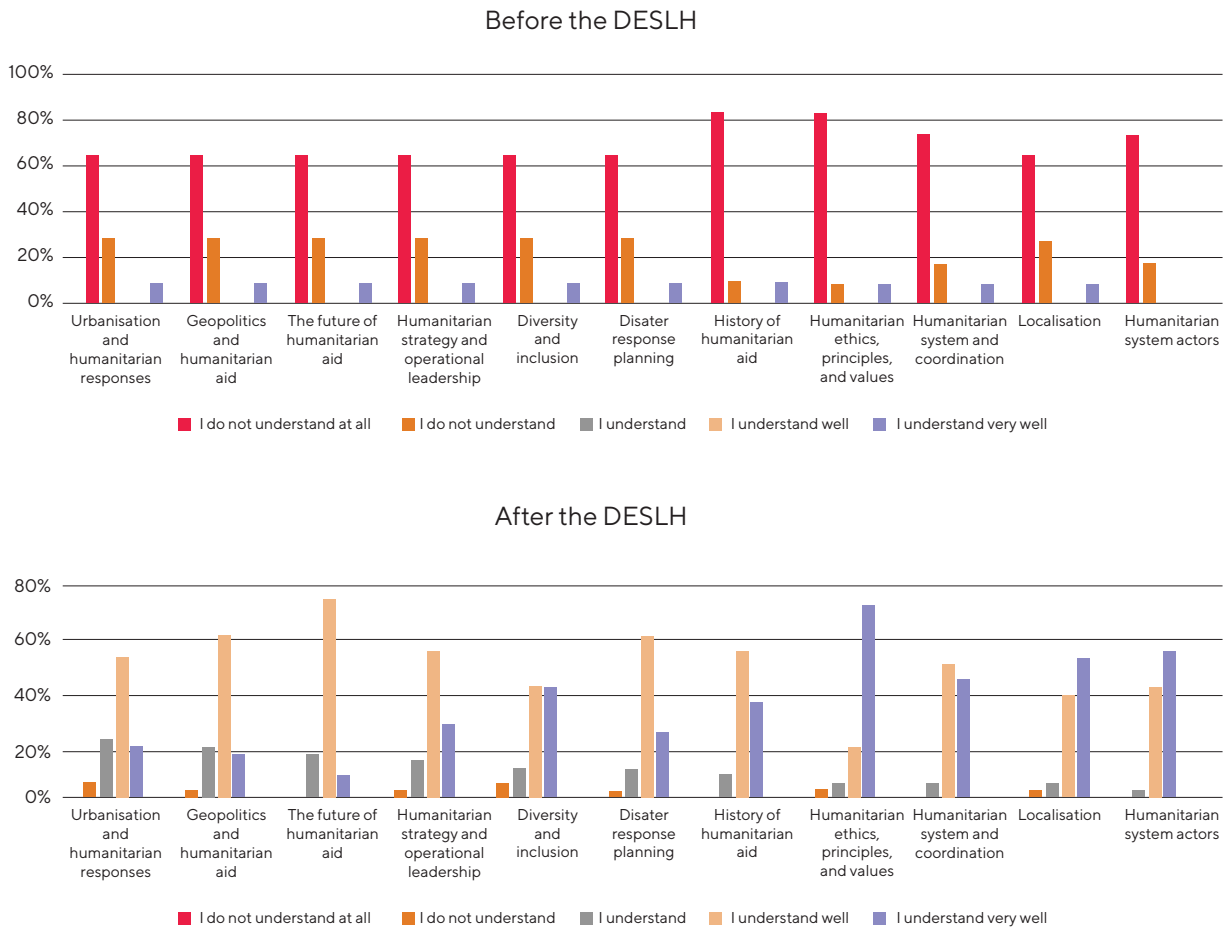
Knowledge of core elements of humanitarian response are covered in the DESLH curriculum. To enable students to have a strong grasp of the way that power affects the system, the core elements of

humanitarian response are taught through the lens of localisation, diversity and inclusion and geopolitics. Lectures on key current trends are underpinned by lessons on the history of humanitarian assistance. Operational leadership is combined with strategic decision-making and humanitarian coordination to provide students with improved capacities in humanitarian leadership.

Monitoring and evaluation data show that the DESLH is improving students' knowledge, attitudes, and practices of these key subjects and core elements within humanitarian leadership and response. Cohort 6 graduates, for instance, reported significant improvements in their overall knowledge, attitudes, and practices in leadership from participating in the DESLH (Figure 7). Significant improvements can be seen from baseline to endline for graduates' knowledge across all subjects, with particular gains in humanitarian ethics, principles and values, localisation, history of humanitarian aid, humanitarian system actors, and humanitarian strategy and operational leadership.

Figure 7. Graduates improved their knowledge of the humanitarian system and key subjects

Q9 - In your opinion, what is your current level of knowledge and understanding of the following subjects?



3.3 Sharing knowledge after the DESLH

The section above shows impressive gains in graduates' awareness and knowledge of key resources and core subjects of leadership and response within the humanitarian system. This section explores how and to what extent graduates are then implementing this learning to improve their work within an organization. This flow-on impact is not captured by quantitative monitoring and evaluation data, but qualitative data provide an insight into the after-program impacts of the DESLH.

Interview data provide examples of how the DELSH directly enabled graduates to implement their learning—such as on localisation, partnerships, and engagement—to improve their work once they are back in the field. After Unit Two on localisation, for instance, one alumnus organised a training session to address problems in the partnership between their INGO and civil society key partners in the east of the country:

> *'The second thing I did after unit two on localisation was to run a training course at a base in the east of the country where we had serious partnership problems with civil society organisations. Each side, our teams, kept accusing the partners and the partners kept accusing us. Then I thought, this is a great opportunity, I'm going out into the field, I'm fresh out of this capacity building, I organised a workshop and to my great surprise, even before I got back, the two organisations agreed to write a message to my superiors and really appreciate all the contribution I've made. And I owe part of that to the knowledge I've gained.'* [38AlumM]

Other respondents similarly reported sharing their learning with actors outside of their organisations, including with local civil society partners and INGO partners in a regional task force. Alumni report sharing 'what they learned in the DELSH training' with INGO partners and running trainings and workshops for local partners on the Sphere Standards and humanitarian response, while sharing knowledge on the localisation agenda. [26AlumM, 27AlumM, 37AlumM]. One graduate explained that he had been approached by a local NGO to develop and run a training based on what he learned through the DESLH:

> *'There is an organisation called [local NGO], which approached me and asked me personally to organise a series of trainings using the tools I have come to know through the training, and to see, together with the organisation, how we can apply this knowledge and tools.'* [25AlumM]

Another explained how the 'humanitarian expertise' he gained through the DESLH helped him engage with and help 'support capacity' development of 'local organisations':

> *'The idea is that the local organisations who know the area, who know the local population, can act very quickly, have the capacity to act very fast. Now, that requires a lot, a lot of preparation. So, for the first time, we organised a capacity building workshop for the partners [...] it was really to build the support capacity because, well, it isn't easy. They have difficulty building effective organisational structures. So, in this workshop, I took all my expertise on the human resources side, as well as the humanitarian expertise I was able to gain in the program...'* [26AlumM]

Other graduates report sharing their knowledge and learning after the DESLH not through organising training, but by role modelling their learning through their own behaviour and giving other people—such as friends, colleagues, and peers—an example to follow. Graduates report, for instance, demonstrating new behaviours or practising tools and techniques, enabling others to learn through observation. Several graduates indicated their awareness of serving as a role model as one way to influence others:

> *'It is really my behaviour, in my opinion, which has had an impact on my colleagues.'* [38AlumM]

One graduate said they found it easier to have impact on their colleagues, rather than external actors, because colleagues can see first-hand the difference the DELSH had made to the graduate's own abilities and behaviours. Setting an example was particularly useful for one graduate in an advisory role without direct managerial oversight over others, in a demonstration of leadership without authority.

Role modelling was also seen as valuable for conveying complexity and nuance when applying the humanitarian principles in sensitive, high stakes conflict settings. In this instance colleagues learned how to manage a complex negotiation for humanitarian access through observation and a follow up debriefing.

> *'So our colleagues, when we got back to the office, we debriefed together and the colleague said to me, but listen, [name of graduate], you don't know how useful this meeting today was for me to know how to deal with a military person who is in power, but at the same time who is angry and suspicious of us. It was very complicated for me to know, and being an office manager, but also being national staff, I was wondering from what angle I was going to approach this commander, and you've just given me the recipe for not just going along as if we were obliging. We used to say to the military, but we're humanitarians, you have to let us through. So this pedagogical way of getting the principles to speak for themselves without turning into a teacher or lecturing the military.'* [28AlumM]

Another male graduate said he had received positive feedback from colleagues, recounting how they commented on his changed behaviours after the course:

> *'They too gave me feedback : every time we saw that you had changed the way you addressed certain people, you were more into this constructive, but shared relationship, rather than having an individual focus.'* [43AlumM]

3.4 Career progression

The role that the course plays in a graduate's career depends on multiple individual factors. Completing the course in order to transform their career seemed less of a motivation for some graduates who believe they already have enough professional experience to secure the roles they seek. For one such senior level graduate, the program helped 'refine my career' by adding some 'finishing touches' to their leadership through new tools and practices, but as for 'experience, I have it already', they said. (30AlumM). However, most of the graduates interviewed for this study believed that the course had impacted them in ways that influenced their career choices and options.

Table 1. How completing the DESLH impacted graduates' career progression in the short- to mid-term

	Ways DELSH impacts career progression	No. refs	Sources (Alum)
1	Greater capacity and performance is recognised by employers, recruiters, and others who encourage promotions and new opportunities	7	26, 27, 31, 32, 36, 43, 44,
2	Having a university qualification with a good reputation can help set graduates apart from others	7	26, 27, 29, 31, 32, 35, 42
3	Greater confidence and belief in their abilities helps alumni put themselves forward for roles	6	27, 39, 38, 40, 42, 44
4	Coaching and greater reflection helps provide greater clarity and vision for career goals	5	26, 28-29, 33, 42
5	DELSH provides knowledge, experience & tools that help alumni perform during the recruitment process	4	26, 27, 29, 35
6	Instils or awakens courage, a desire for growth and ambition to have influence	3	29, 34, 40
7	DELSH provides tools and resources that equip alumni to transition into different roles	2	40, 42
8	Provides greater motivation (new energy) and sense of hope to continue and expand horizons	2	28, 34
9	Learning to place responsibility where it is due is helping alumni avoid burn out and quitting their jobs	2	41, 43
10	Alumni are sought out as a resource to give career advice to others	1	26

Most graduate interviewees articulated ways in which they believed that completion of the DELSH program had contributed to their career progression or plans. These contributions and influences are summarised in Table 1 below. The most cited influences are the recognition of greater capacity and performance by existing and potential employers, and the perception that a formal, recognised qualification helps elevate graduates' professional profiles.

In addition to gaining valuable skills and knowledge that influence their ability to secure new roles, graduates also highlighted the value of changes in mindset, particularly confidence, motivation and ambition:

> *'I have some examples of success, helped in effect by the humanitarian leadership program, and especially the mentoring which contributed hugely to some of the success I've ultimately had within the professional sphere... I passed the validation process for a promotion in my organisation, to qualify for deputy director, for example. So I was able to be successful in this process for example. And, I have also been contacted by another organisation for a country director role in [country name] and was successful in the recruitment process.'* **[5AlumM]**

Even where graduates indicate they have not changed positions since the DESLH, there is nonetheless a belief that having completed the course was of professional advantage:

> *'So the diploma has actually increased my standing within my organisation. It's true that I haven't changed role, but I've been validated for a promotion. There just hasn't been any funding yet to move towards that position.'* **[26AlumM]**

A longitudinal study would be needed to investigate the medium and longer-term impact of the DESLH on graduates' career progression and post-course leadership opportunities.

4. INTENSIVE LEARNING FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

'The diploma is definitely better compared to other certificates.' [31AlumM]

4.1 Introduction

The above chapter illustrates changes in graduates' knowledge and capacities in key humanitarian resources and subjects. This chapter explores how, and the extent to which, these humanitarian leadership capacities and capabilities are advanced through specific aspects of the intensive learning design of the DESLH programme.

Within the structure of the DESLH, there is a dual focus on two inter-connected aspects of leadership: collective, operational, and strategic leadership that enables graduates to lead and influence the humanitarian sector towards better ways of working, and personal leadership that enables teams to achieve more than they would individually and deliver effective humanitarian responses.

Units 1 and 3 focus on developing students' knowledge and understanding of collective, operational, and strategic leadership, providing essential context as well as the opportunity to reflect on the implications of geopolitical, sectoral and historical trends and issues affecting the humanitarian sector. Units 2 and 4 then focus on the development of students' personal leadership capacities, with the emphasis on critical praxis (i.e. learning through practice and reflection). The intensive format of the units is central to this focus, providing students with a rare opportunity to fully immerse themselves in exploring their own leadership skills through group learning sessions that introduce a range of concepts and models to support leadership development, individual and group coaching sessions, use of industry-recognised leadership development tools (Hogan Assessment and 360 profiles), and structured activities that enable students to practise their leadership skills and receive feedback from peers and faculty to support their ongoing development, including simulations.

This chapter investigates the role of learning intensives (Units 2 and 4) in advancing students' humanitarian leadership capabilities. Specifically, the analysis focuses on how the different elements of these intensive units contribute to individual leadership development, including critical reflection, simulation, and coaching.

Monitoring and evaluation data provide a snapshot of key outcomes associated with these intensives:

- 95% of students pass Units 2 and 4;
- 92% of students demonstrate an improvement of at least one level of demonstrated leadership behaviours in at least 4 of the 6 Leadership Behaviours
- 94% of students satisfied or very satisfied with coaching and simulations;
- 100% students participating in Units 2 and 4 benefitted from Hogan assessment and 360 evaluation

This chapter contextualises these M&E outcomes values through qualitative and additional quantitative insights, drawing on student feedback, KAP surveys, and semi-structured interviews with DESLH graduates and faculty.

Findings indicate that the intensive learning format of the DESLH is seen as crucial for leadership development, with DESLH graduates particularly valuing the simulations and the personal feedback provided through individual and team coaching.

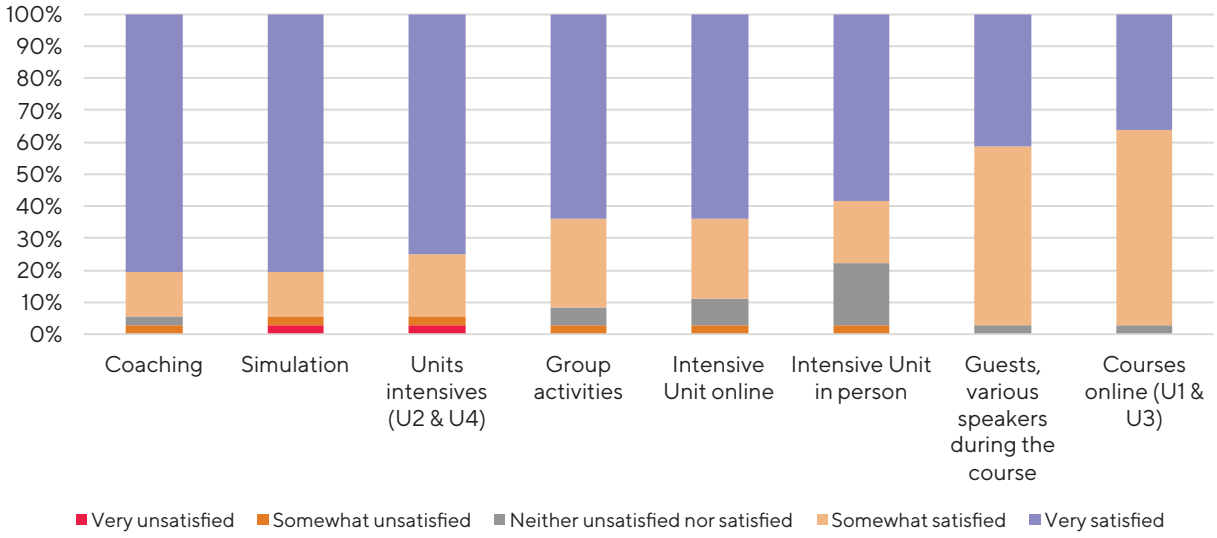
Participants also report, however, that it is how these components are sequenced to mutually reinforce and support their overall leadership development journey which brings the course together and makes it maximally impactful.

4.2 Learning interventions

The intensive format of Units 2 and 4 is a key factor in how these units support students' leadership development, requiring focused engagement and continuous synthesis of concepts and principles with application and action. Beyond this overall format, however, the integration of learning

Figure 8. Cohort 6 report a high degree of satisfaction with DESLH teaching and learning provisions

Q36 -To what extent were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the following provisions?

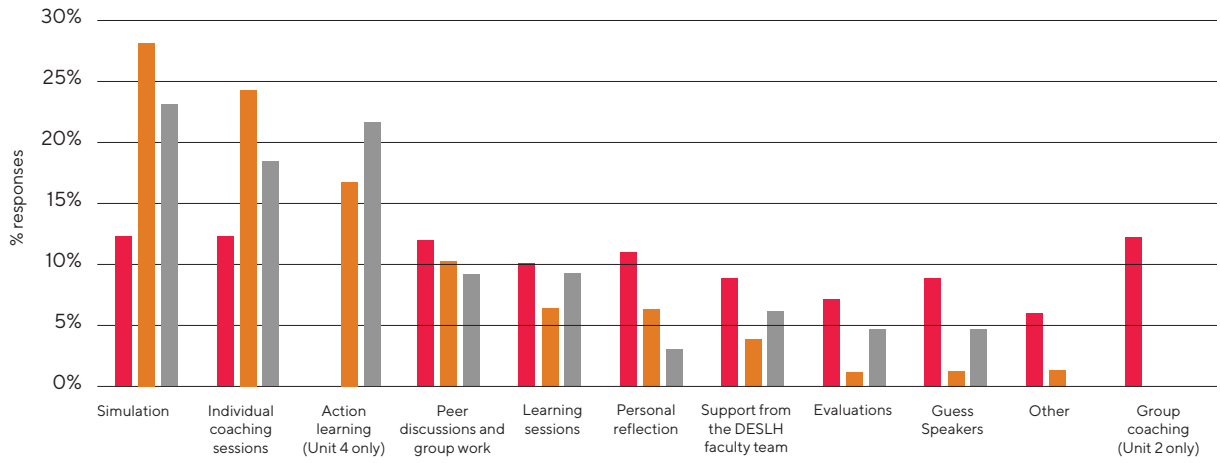


interventions–defined as activities specifically aimed at accelerating leadership development–into the unit design are crucial for maximising student progress and attainment. These interventions, which include coaching, simulations, Hogan assessments and 360 feedback, and Action Learning Sets (ALS), provide students with opportunities for action-orientated critical reflection and personalised feedback that allow for real-time practise and refinement of leadership behaviours, meaning that Units 2 and 4 are not only intensive in format, but also in their focus on supporting individual leadership growth.

Overall satisfaction with the design and delivery of the DESLH is high across all cohorts, with of 95.1% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with the unit on average compared to a faculty average of around 87% (ITT). Looking more deeply into student evaluations of the course, data from Cohort 6 speaks to the central role of the intensive units and accompanying learning interventions play in students' experiences of the course. When asked to what extent they were satisfied with specific provisions, Cohort 6 graduates rated coaching, simulations, and the Unit 2 and 4

Figure 9. Figure 9 Simulations and coaching sessions are highly valued in Units 2 and 4

AHLF702 Q3 - What were the most important/positive factors/elements that helped you in your learning during this unit 2? / AHLF704 Q5 - What were the most important learning elements during the intensive unit AHL704? (Choose up to three options)



Please note, respondents could select up to three options on this survey item.

intensives overall as the highest in terms of student satisfaction (Figure 8).

Unsurprisingly, given this high level of satisfaction, when asked what elements of the course best supported their learning through the Units 2 and 4 intensives, Cohort 6 also rated the simulation and coaching as the top two most valued learning elements (Figure 9). Other interventions—such as the Hogan, 360 reviews, and Action Learning Sets—are critical to supporting the impact and effectiveness of the simulations and coaching sessions by facilitating students' reflection and action.

This rest of this section therefore focuses on students' perceptions of learning interventions within Units 2 and 4, including coaching, tools for self-reflection, including the Hogan assessment and 360 reviews, and simulations.

4.3 Coaching

> *'I remember one of the students asking for flash coaching at one point. There was a low point, a rather difficult moment in the simulation when she came out of it. She needed a boost, she needed to get going again. It gave her the energy to get going again. And then she needed reassurance. It was clear that following this exchange her behaviour and well-being changed...'* **[DESLH coach]**

As per the Indicator Tracking Table target for this course, all DESLH students received at least three individual and group coaching sessions. In practice, the total is much higher, with students receiving 6 individual coaching sessions (including two Hogan sessions), five group coaching sessions in Unit 2, and 4 APA sessions in Unit 4 (please see Indicator Tracking Table). In addition, as in the quotation above, short and tightly focused "flash" coaching sessions can be requested by students during the simulations as a form of targeted individual support. Graduates consistently rate their coaching experience as among the most highly-valued components of their experience on the course. Coaching is therefore central to this investigation exploring how, and to what extent, participants develop their humanitarian leadership capacities and capabilities.

The high degree of graduate satisfaction with coaching (illustrated in Figure 8 above) is corroborated by student survey and interview data. When asked directly about their experiences, DESLH graduates reiterate their positive experiences with individual and group coaching, and describe how they believe it contributed to the development of their humanitarian leadership capacities and capabilities.

Graduates see coaching, for instance, as a useful tool in general which they can use help develop their leadership skills. Several graduates reported that coaching specifically helped them to discuss strengths and areas of improvement identified through their Hogan assessments and coaches' feedback on their performance during the simulations, for instance, and to develop their own solutions and tips for working on their leadership abilities in partnership with their coach.

As well as being of general assistance, coaching helped some graduates to achieve specific results in their workplace. One graduate, for instance, reported that they made discoveries through their coaching discussions that helped them build a high performing team. Another female respondent from an INGO indicated that her coach supported her to overcome her apprehension and improve her confidence in making professional presentations:

> *'During the training, I worked on two projects. The first was as part of a consultancy for [name of INGO] where I was actually the consultant who had to present the results of our research. But I can assure you, this presentation, especially in an environment with people I don't know, is something that had me blocked, but with the support of our coaches, with the techniques we learnt, I could say that I made one of the best presentations of my career.'* **[42AlumF]**

Coaching also plays a role in keeping graduates motivated to learn and progress. One graduate reported that having someone who actively listens created an environment in which they could freely express themselves and speak frankly and honestly. This gave the graduate a feeling of liberation and a 'sense of ease,' which helped motivate them to keep learning and progressing:

> *'They're great people who can give you a five-ten minute session and know how to say [things], how to how to actively listen,*

> *so you are able to really speak and really say what's on your mind … After these sessions, you feel liberated, you feel at ease and you feel highly motivated to move forward. And that has been great.'* **[41AlumM]**

How graduates talked about their experiences of coaching often involved reflecting on how it interacted with other elements of the course, to help bring clarity, insights, or points of action in terms of their leadership development journey. For instance, one female graduate reflected on how the coaching helped deepen her insights from her Hogan assessment:

> *'In terms of tools, there's also coaching, which was also very useful, because it enabled me to discuss with the two coaches I had […] aspects that came out of the Hogan test, for example, or that came out of what I myself saw during this course that I wanted to work on. I was able to exchange ideas with the coaches, which enabled me to develop my own solutions or tips for working on certain aspects of my leadership that I thought needed work.'* **[36AlumF]**

The interactive relationship between participant and coach described above is an important observation: this respondent highlights the role of the coach not as an instructor, but as a critical partner who can help scaffold participants' own self-reflective processes and generate their own pathway. This self-awareness then puts the participants in good stead to continue this development pathway—with the help of a mentor, if they so choose, and their leadership development plan—after the conclusion of the course. For more information about mentoring in the context of the DESLH, please see the accompanying report on the mentoring workshops.

4.4 Tools for connecting concepts, practice, and self-reflection

In addition to more conventional learning activities such as lectures, seminars, and structured active learning exercises, the DESLH program utilises tools to promote self-reflection, reflective practice, and connecting concepts delivered through the curriculum. These self-reflection tools—including the Hogan assessment, 360 feedback, and action learning sets—are core components of the overall leadership development experience of the DESLH. Such tools help students to identify what they need and want to practice as leaders within the humanitarian system.

Overall, 218 students across all DESLH cohorts benefitted from a Hogan test and 360 evaluation (ITT). Qualitative data from student interviews show these self-reflection tools aid participants' understanding of their own identities and practices as leaders. As one graduate wrote, reflecting on Unit 2:

> *'The Hogan test also helped me to get to know myself better by highlighting my skills, my areas for improvement and the professional context in which I can flourish.'* **[Graduate, Unit 2 Cohort 6]**

Another graduate highlighted how this self-knowledge was then reinforced through other learning activities, such as the simulations and action learning sessions:

> *'The action learning sets and the simulation enabled me to discover myself. I discovered the confirmation of my weaknesses in my leadership behaviours that had been identified in my HOGAN and 360° assessments. The individual coaching helped me to better understand the nature of these weaknesses in my leadership behaviour and above all helped me to draw up a development plan to improve.'* **[Male DESLH graduate, Cohort 6]**

This graduate is not alone in remarking that the learning sessions, simulations, Hogan and coaching all combined to help him understand his own leadership behaviours and inform his leadership development plan. Such a perspective on the interactive and mutually supporting nature of these course elements was shared by many of the graduates interviewed and is discussed further below.

It is important to recognise however, that no tool is without limitations. Even extensively validated tools, such as Hogan Assessments, will be experienced and perceived differently depending on one's cultural, linguistic and national context. Reflecting this, one graduate made the following comment during feedback on their overall experience of the course:

'The Hogan test has its biases (notably the fact that it was designed with an Anglo-Saxon mindset), and it would have been interesting to have a 'French-speaking' equivalent for potentially more relevant and culturally more coherent results.' [Unit 2 Feedback survey]

The perception of an 'Anglo-Saxon' bias in the Hogan assessment is an important observation in the context of decolonising the humanitarian space and the intention of the DESLH to support a localised agenda through a Francophone course specifically designed for West and Central African leaders. While Hogan assessments have been tested globally for validity, there are inevitably cultural factors that influence perceptions of behaviour and understandings of leadership more widely. The role of coaches in debriefing participants on their Hogan assessments and supporting them on their leadership journey more broadly is central here, enabling students to understand the Hogan assessment and other tools as reference points for exploring authentic leadership both within and across multiple cultural contexts. It is anticipated that updated course content and improved faculty diversity and representation will support further critical exploration of the interrelationships between culture and leadership.

4.5 Simulations

'The simulation was a crucial moment for me. It allowed me to get out of my comfort zone and interact with other colleagues. It was an exceptional moment in terms of demonstrating my leadership behaviours.' [DESLH graduate, Cohort 6 feedback survey]

Alongside coaching, the simulation is the most highly-rated component of the DESLH for most graduates.

In fact, for many graduates and DESLH faculty alike, the simulation is the crucible of leadership development in the DESLH. Simulations provide an intensive learning space in which the leadership theories, behaviours, and self-reflection culminate in an intense, high-impact learning environment.

A high-level summary of key insights DESLH faculty members are outlined in Table 2, with further insights from interviews discussed in greater detail below.

A major reported advantage of the simulation as an intensive learning intervention is the provision

Table 2. What do faculty members and external stakeholders think about the role of simulations?

Simulations:	No. refs	Source
Allow students to practice what have learned from the course and from feedback	5	15, 18, 20, 23, 1Ext
Test students under pressure, stress, and out of their comfort zone	4	15,17, 20, 21
Enable students to take risks, try out different behaviours, challenge themselves, and take on different roles within a crisis/ humanitarian response scenario	2	15, 17
Enable students to practice mobilising resources and inter-agency networking to understand how an emergency response works from multiple perspectives	2	23Fac, 1Ext
Enable DESLH faculty to observe and assess students learning and behaviours	2	18, 21
Provide an opportunity to learn from observing others and to get peer feedback	1	19
Provide an opportunity for students to work collectively to produce results	1	24,
Embed practices for use in the workplace, eg. self-reflection	1	20

of a safe learning environment for students to practice new leadership behaviours and take risks, in response to targeted feedback about their own practices and tendencies as leaders. Having reflected on their biases, practices, and assumptions as leaders through the self-reflection tools described above, students report using the simulation to try out new behaviours while being observed and supported by faculty and peers. One external stakeholder interviewed for this study, for instance, highlighted that the in-person simulations ('residentials') provided a 'powerful' forum for DESLH graduates from her organisation to respond to specific feedback they had received through 360 reviews, Hogan assessments and coaching:

> *'What we have been told was powerful was definitely the residentials. And when they can be in person and people have been so grateful for the efforts made to put things online. There's certain things you just can't replace that way. So, the value of going back to what we talked about earlier, having 360s, doing a Hogan [assessment] and getting specific feedback and working through that with the coach. And then people come up with their own plan then to go: what are they going to focus on? And then practicing it in a simulation context and getting feedback from colleagues and obviously then wanting to continue to practice it in, in the workplace.'* **[1ExtF]**

DESLH faculty members reported how they used simulations to help students develop their leadership through learning from peers and reflecting on feedback and discussions. The simulation helps students develop leadership skills by allowing them to observe their peers in action and receive peer feedback on their own performances.

> *'When they did this simulation, they had the time to reflect on what they have learned from that day or from this particular activity. They themselves have the capacity to reflect back and say, "I remember when I was working in this situation and now that I see that I behaved this way. Next time, I will do it differently." This capacity to reflect on past experience, and how they have learned and how they will apply [this] in their daily work is interesting.'* **[19Fac]**

As noted in the coaching section above, the emphasis in the above quotation is on empowering participants to take ownership over their own leadership development journey through critical self-reflection. Interviews suggest that the DESLH is providing a space which encourages this self-reflection, and a forum for feedback to be offered and responded to constructively:

> *'I think that from what I've seen, people took the feedback very well. And as a result, even when it wasn't necessarily very pleasant to hear, with the stress of the simulation, etc., I think that all the people I worked with showed a willingness to incorporate this feedback and to use it, to put it into practice and to test it in this environment, which is actually quite safe.'* **[15AlumF]**

Another key dimension of the simulation experience is the pressure that it put students under, including time pressure but also pressure to cooperate and deliver as a team (within the broader context of a safe, training environment). Several DESLH faculty members, for instance, highlighted that the simulations help develop leadership by putting students under supported stress to see how they respond and how well they have understood and can demonstrate the necessary leadership behaviours and competencies under pressure. As one DESLH faculty member explained:

> *' ... the simulations are quite intense. OK, it's deliberate, it's deliberate like that and it's intense. And that's also where we were able to see a bit about people's reactions to stress and how they receive information.'* **[20Fac]**

Another DESLH faculty member highlighted that this high-pressure scenario provides an opportunity for coaches or facilitators to check participants' understanding of the leadership behaviours in practice. Please note, 'CD' refers to 'country directors,' a role within the simulation:

> *'We're still put to the test, the people forced to work, to produce. Humanitarian work, rapid response, a lot of demands, a lot of stress, but also focusing on identifying leadership behaviours. And even, as I've already said, the interviews at the end of the day, we can also correct a few slightly aberrant behaviours, but also the team briefing*

interviews with the CDs [Country Directors] and [...] I thought about the simulation. It's really, really relevant for not only working, working under stress and also checking the understanding and adoption of a certain level of leadership behaviour for.' **[21FacM]**

This quotation once again highlights the mutually reinforcing relationship between components, such as the feedback loop between simulation, coaching and action-orientated reflection in the development and assessment of participants' leadership behaviours, with a professional and psychologically safe environment.

The pressure of the simulation helped some graduates feel better prepared for a humanitarian response. One graduate who had to respond to the rapid escalation of a conflict said they felt 'a bit more supported and prepared' to deal with the challenges, thanks to the simulation. As a result of the simulation, the challenges of the response felt familiar, including the need to push hard and innovate to find solutions in a fast-changing, complex environment with a multitude of actors.

For two graduates, the pressure of the simulation also helped them understand the need to prepare mentally for the potential stresses of a humanitarian response. One respondent, for instance, indicated that the simulation helped them understand the reality of the need to work long hours and the need to prepare oneself mentally for this; while another reported that the simulation taught them 'to rebound' after facing difficulties in a response.

' ... the simulation, we worked out of hours to tell ourselves this is what to expect, this is the real world or this is your everyday life. And taking that into account, there's already the preparation side, of preparing yourself already in your head, which is what I'm doing here, it's negligible, we're not yet at a level where everything will be overwhelmed and so on. So we're trying to prepare in our heads...' **[27AlumM]**

Another graduate commented that having to deliver under the pressure of the simulation and the DELSH program helped remind them of the need to maintain values when under pressure and not lose sight of people's humanity.

'At one point, we said to ourselves that it's a lot of pressure. But when I had seen a bit, when the situation deteriorated, it was us, the time or the context and the way in which we worked, it was using precisely the values we had worked with and not the time to dehumanise. [...] Afterwards, we had to do group work, then we had to follow a lecture. Yeah, so that. So, it really worked, it really put us in the space. It put us in a real context and when the real context presented itself, one thing led to another. So for me, it's a very good training...' **[41AlumM]**

Another DESLH graduate reported finding the simulation learning helped his humanitarian response in his professional work:

'All of a sudden, in Burkina Faso, things exploded and the crisis became very complex [...] The humanitarian situation was catastrophic [...]. So, we had to push a little harder to find a way to respond quickly, to understand the situation, to analyse the players, to find ways of [...] getting them involved in this rapid response dynamic. But at the same time, yes, I remembered a lot from that course [...] I really remembered that framework in Burkina Faso, [it] really reminded me of the simulation we had with funding, additional funding needs because we had to include the response by road which was blocked [...] [and] try to innovate by doing perhaps mixed operations...' . **[28AlumM]**

Empathy and role-swapping

Several respondents also highlighted the importance of simulations in encouraging people not only to consider but to adopt the perspectives of other actors, including within an organisation or even within the wider system. One DESLH faculty member, for instance, highlighted how the simulation creates the conditions for students to focus and be in the present moment, which then helps them step up and lead and take risks, including overcoming the barriers of hierarchy when working alongside peers who are more senior or experienced:

'Then [...] there are people who have managed to overcome the barriers linked to how you are labelled in real life, what hierarchy there

is between the most experienced people, the youngest, the senior staff, the UNs, the little beginners in inverted commas, the NGOs. And that's something that doesn't happen straight away, it's something that you build up as you go along in the simulation, so you forget where you've come from and you're in it now, in the present, and using all the.... Yes, people who have taken risks, who have tested different things that weren't necessarily their natural way of doing things. And yes, a lot of questioning too, a lot of self-examination.' [15FacF]

This impact of this role-swapping and perspective shifting exercise was highlighted by another faculty member:

'I know that the strong point is the simulation. They're really immersed in it. [...] I think it's very powerful to be able to experience all the different roles. I think that was one of the strengths. In fact, whatever our role in the NGO or the organisation, we're going to try all the roles during the simulation. And that, I find, is also very enriching because it allows you to check them out. I'm not an accountant, but I'm still going to check out the role of an accountant and so on, and look at the situation of others in their setting. So, there you go, with what tools and. So that's what I'm in a position to do and contribute. And I think that's very good. [17FacF]

Team dynamics

The simulation scenarios require participants to work together to produce results which helps them learn what it takes to make an effective team. The interactions during these scenarios helped one graduate better understand how to develop a team spirit and how to build a higher performing team. One graduate reportedly replicated the simulation as a training tool when working with his own team:

'What we did during the course to see how to develop this team vision, how to work towards creating high-performance teams, that also had an effect. Because sometimes, and the interactions we had through the different scenarios [...] we did, because there was the group work we did together, it helped us to understand, to understand there are certain things you're obliged to do to ensure that the team can produce... And maybe [...] this is for your information, when I was in [name of African country], I organised, how shall I put it, a simulation for a flood response in [name of country] and I think we did it in 2000. We did it in 2020, 2021 and 2022, there were floods and I hope they managed to get through it.' [31AlumM]

Practical humanitarian operations

Interviews highlighted specific areas of humanitarian coordination that the simulation enabled students to learn about how emergencies work, for instance mobilising financial resources and inter-agency coordination, while working together:

'And I think the main change I saw was related to the presentation skills, you know, communication with impact, really trying to get the point across, trying to explain the situation with as much evidence and data as possible, maybe even in the right thing, if I'm not mistaken. You know, the emergency alerts kept improving from the very first draft, which was quite basic. And then they kept understanding that they needed more data to, you know, to fundraise. And for the emergency appeals sorry, I told them alerts, appeals. So, I think just an overall understanding of how humanitarian emergencies work in the very first phases. I think in terms of working together and I'm now remembering they had to go from room to room, you know, kind of mobilizing others, networking, working together. I think there was an acknowledgement that this was important. But the main one that I think I personally may have impacted was perhaps related to how you deliver your message in the most kind of effective way.' [23Fac]

Overall, the DESLH simulations are consistently reported to be the culminating experience for students, in which they can learn and embody practices and theories of leadership in a challenging but safe environment. As one graduate from Cohort6 wrote:

'I came to realise that simulation exercises are a fundamental part of the DESLH curriculum. They give a vital place to the

human factor and its potential, which is not always optimised in a highly hierarchical context. Finally, contrary to what I had read, LEADERSHIP is not innate, it is actually learned and integrity is consubstantial with it.' **[Post-KAP, Cohort 6]**

4.6 'Trust the process': why holistic course design matters

'Each of these activities helped me in my learning process. They complemented each other. It's true that I discovered more about myself during the simulation sessions, the peer feedback and the individual coaching. But each of these activities gave me something extra.' **[DESLH Feedback survey]**

This chapter has investigated how, and the extent to which, key humanitarian leadership capacities and capabilities are advanced through specific aspects of the intensive units of the DESLH programme. Graduates consistently report that the simulations and coaching are the most highly valued learning exercises in the course. However, this analysis has also revealed the impact of the overall course design—including but not limited to the coaching, simulations, and self-reflection tools—in providing a holistic leadership development environment that is highly individualized while providing a robust grounding in core humanitarian content and principles.

The research evidence on effective teaching and learning highlights that how individual learning activities are embedded holistically into the design and delivery of a programme matters to the quality and experience of participants. When done well, these interventions are sequenced and designed to mutually support and reinforce the overall learning outcomes of the program. A quality learning experience emerges from how these components interact and reinforce one another. The DESLH curriculum and course design reflects these principles of holistic design and basis in an evidence-based leadership development framework.

Monitoring and evaluation data indicate that DESLH graduates appreciate how the various elements—such as coaching, simulations, and reflection—are embedded in the intensives and contribute holistically to their leadership development. These leadership development interventions combine to provide an effective learning environment in which students can identify and reflect on their own leadership behaviours, learn about new strategies and approaches to humanitarian leadership, and enact these new leadership behaviours in a safe learning environment supported by the DESLH faculty, coaches, and peers. Two participants reflected on the importance of how components such as the simulation, coaching, group work, and feedback interact and support each other in the design of the Unit 2 intensive:

'The design of this unit is so exceptional that all the elements were useful in helping with the learning process. Each session is essential to complete the desired change. As [DESLH faculty member] said, "you have to trust the process," so everything contributed positively to the learning.' **[Unit 2 feedback survey]**

'The simulation was very important in terms of learning, particularly for the development of leadership behaviour. Then, the individual and group coaching sessions enabled me to receive feedback and look back on the way I interacted with the group, which helped me to discover more about myself in terms of leadership.' **[Unit 2 feedback survey]**

5. LOCALISATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

‘ [I] think you’re trying to produce a certain type of leader, which we know ultimately will drive the localisation agenda, will drive the sort of things we’re trying to move to within the sector. I think a course like [the DESLH] is basically growing the people who will ultimately lead these responses, and even help other international agencies adapt to the kind of role they can play in that type of context. And [who] I think questions mindsets [...] in terms of the value that the local actors bring to the work and that it’s their right to lead. I mean, it’s not just the value, but it’s actually their country and their right: their agenda is really important. I think those sort of mindsets are where you’re building them.’ **[1ExtF]**

5.1 Introduction

The current humanitarian system often creates and perpetuates imbalances of power: the people who are the most affected by the crisis have the least power. This means that humanitarian assistance can divide rather than include, lack cultural and contextual understanding, deny the agency of affected communities, and reinforce dominant ways of thinking and working. Such power imbalances deeply undermine ambitions to address climate, racial, gender and social injustice. The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership is working to promote a more diverse humanitarianism that embraces the agency of affected people and promotes distributed power, social justice. and equity. Efforts to improve localisation in humanitarian action are key to achieve this end. The DESLH aims to contribute to the practice and awareness of localisation in effective humanitarian leadership and response. Alumni are equipped with knowledge of the history, practice. and challenges in the move to greater localisation in humanitarian action, as well as being challenged to engage and reflect on what actions they can take relating to power, social justice and equity in their work.

This chapter highlights five mechanisms through which the DESLH impacts localisation—understood as meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system:

- Inclusion of local and national NGO humanitarians in the course
- Localisation content in the DESLH curriculum
- Delivery of DESLH in French language
- Tiered fee structure to subsidise local and participation
- Relevance of the DESLH for local and national humanitarians

Results show that the DESLH improves the level of knowledge and understanding of localisation and associated content—such as decolonisation, geopolitics, and power structures within the international humanitarian system—among alumni, including local, national, and international staff.

This knowledge gain is impressive in its own right. More striking in terms of impact and outcomes, however, is the fact that DESLH alumni report that this newfound knowledge has empowered them to make tangible and meaningful changes in their professional practices to promote inclusion, representation, and localisation. DESLH alumni report, for instance, creating new roles within their INGOs specifically dedicated to engaging with local and national organisations; organising localisation workshops with colleagues and their professional networks after the course; and intentionally increasing the number of local organisations they engage with as a result of their learning from the course.

To maximise the programme’s impact on localisation, however, there is scope to increase the number of local and national NGOs recruited to the DESLH in future cohorts.

5.2 Inclusion of local and national NGO humanitarians in the DESLH

> *'I'm very satisfied with the humanitarian leadership training. I feel galvanised and sufficiently equipped to move out of my comfort zone because I've spent over 15 years in development but I'm very resistant to moving into humanitarian work. This barrier or fear of taking the risk of going into humanitarian work has been broken down thanks to the various work sessions during this course. I wish a long life to the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.'* **[Cohort 6, post-course survey]**

Embedded in the DESLH theory of change is the principle that equipping local and national NGO staff with highly effective leadership behaviours, knowledge, and skills will contribute to a more diverse and inclusive cohort of humanitarian leaders. The logic is that this more diverse and inclusive cohort of leaders will, in turn, apply their new leadership qualities to help create a more accountable, coordinated, and evidence-based humanitarian response for affected communities.

The rationale of including INGO alongside local NGO: e.g. collaboration and awareness of localisation across the whole system, including donors, INGOs, UN as well as local and national organisations. The primary objective of the courses and training provided by the CHL in general, and in particular in the DESLH context, is to have cohorts of students who are representative of the humanitarian actors in the field. During a humanitarian crisis, humanitarian actors come from a variety of backgrounds/organisations and act together, according to their expertise, access, skills, etc., to respond to the crisis together. It is therefore necessary that the cohorts are made up of students from INGOs, but also and above all of local actors, from the United Nations, civil society, the government, etc. This diversity adds a valuable dimension to the discussions between participants, who bring their different perspectives to the table and can compare them to ensure a more effective response to the crisis in a humanitarian situation.

A key mechanism, therefore, through which the DESLH impacts meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international humanitarian system, is through enrolling participants from these organisations directly in the course. Alumni data suggest however that the cohort composition is heavily weighted towards international NGO staff, with local and national participants underrepresented (particularly women). As seen in Figure 2 above, 77.4% of DESLH graduates report working for international NGOs (of whom 24.52% are women, and 52.88% are men), with only 3.84% of graduates working for national NGOs (of whom 0.96% are women and 2.88% men). Understanding the root causes of these distributions merits further research, if a greater proportion of local and national NGO participants is to be achieved in future cohorts.

5.3 Tiered fee structure to subsidise local and national participation

> *' We've started to work with local players, local NGOs, in extremely difficult areas. How, in terms of leadership, could we push these local actors by giving them more responsibility, more support, more training and find ways for them to remain operational despite the challenges they face in terms of access [...] I felt somewhat supported and prepared for these challenges. Because, yes, we talked a lot about it in the lectures and above all I remember very well the simulation we did.'* **[28AlumM]**

To increase the inclusion of local and NGO humanitarians, the DESLH programme has a tiered fee structure through which staff from non-governmental non-profit, or community organisations from non-OECD countries (Tier 1) are subsidised by other participants. This tiered structure is as follows:

- Tier 1: Staff of non-governmental, non-profit or community organisations from non-OECD countries
- Tier 2: Staff of international non-governmental organisations under national, international or headquarters contracts
- Tier 3: Staff of UN or government agencies from OECD countries/top 40 on the Human Development Index*.
- Tier 4: Private companies and other (no grants)

The intention of this tiered fee structure is to use INGO, UN, and other international agency participants—who have on average higher salaries and discretionary organisational spending for professional development—to fund participants from local and national NGOs, CSOs, and other organisations.

5.4 Localisation in the DESLH curriculum

As well as recruiting participants from local and national NGOS, the DESLH is designed to impact meaningful inclusion and representation in the international system through directly addressing localisation and related topics through the course curriculum. Localisation content reaches not just local and NGO participants, but also those from the wider international system, including INGOs, UN agencies, donors, and other organisations operating in this space. The aim is to generate awareness of localisation, geopolitics, inclusion, and related topics across the whole system, to drive change towards more inclusive practices at all levels. Bringing humanitarians from across the system together in a learning environment is an intentional design element of the DESLH. By providing a forum where local, national, and international humanitarians can work and learn alongside each other—with a focus on understanding the power dynamics, systemic privileges, and assumptions of international humanitarian operations—DESLH contributes directly to mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation across different actors in the system.

This section on how localisation is included in the DESLH curriculum is presented in two parts:

- Curriculum content and interventions; and
- Student knowledge, attitudes, and practices

5.4.1 Content and interventions

Localisation is a core subject area covered in the DESLH curriculum. In Unit 1, the subject is briefly addressed in the context of coordinating the various actors in the sector. Participants are also given the opportunity to discuss the subject in detail as part of a critical analysis (one of the 3 assessments in Unit 1). During the simulation in Unit 2, students are again presented with localisation issues, in particular by introducing them to local actors/local NGOs. In Unit 3, the subject is dealt with in detail, with one module dedicated expressly to localisation issues in the humanitarian sector (2 weeks out of a total of 11). DESLH participants are also required to explore localisation as part of an introspection assignment (writing a reflective journal responding to the following questions: 'what do I know about localisation, what have I learnt, what impact has this learning had on my day-to-day practice and, finally, what do I want to do with it in my work and why'). In Unit 4, localisation is embedded within the simulation scenario, through the constant intervention of local actors in response to the crisis. Students are invited to position themselves in this respect and assess their leadership position on the basis of the leadership behaviours matrix.

In addition to the course content itself, the CHL has organised two events in recent months on localisation issues: a conference held in Dakar in March and a webinar in July as a follow-up to these exchanges and to further discussions with various actors in the sector. In both cases, students were invited and strongly encouraged to participate as part of their studies and engagement with course content.

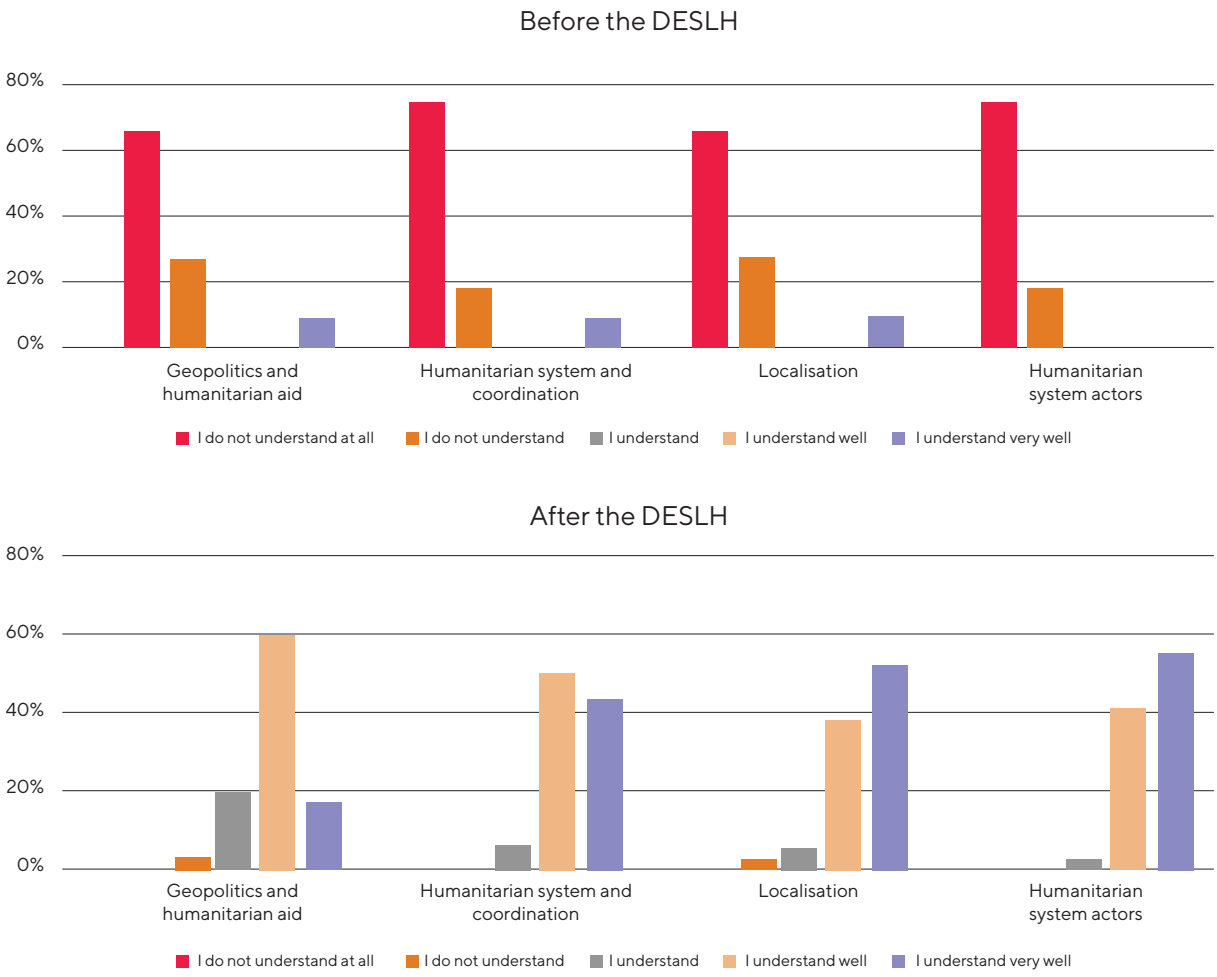
5.4.2 Student knowledge, attitudes, and practices

> *'Where the question of localisation is concerned, it's something I wasn't perhaps interested in, but during the course I was able to do more critical analysis, and on the question of geopolitics, for example. I haven't, however, explored that enough outside the course, but during the course we had discussions, sessions and decisions that I found very interesting, which also gave me new perspectives on this issue.'* **[36AlumF]**

The DESLH curriculum content on localisation is improving students' knowledge about the issue. As highlighted in the opening quotation, interviews with DESLH graduates shed light onto how the DESLH curriculum on localisation has expanded graduates' awareness and perspective of how localisation, representation, inclusion in the international humanitarian system is relevant to their professional work. These changes are noted both in local and national NGO participants, and those from international organisations, signalling a valuable shift in attitudes across different actors in the system.

Figure 10. Graduates improved their understanding of localisation and related topics

Q9 –In your opinion, what is your current level of knowledge and understanding of the following subjects?



DESLH graduates from Cohort 6, for instance, reported improvements in their understanding of localisation and related topics, including geopolitics, coordination, and actors in the humanitarian system (Figure 10).

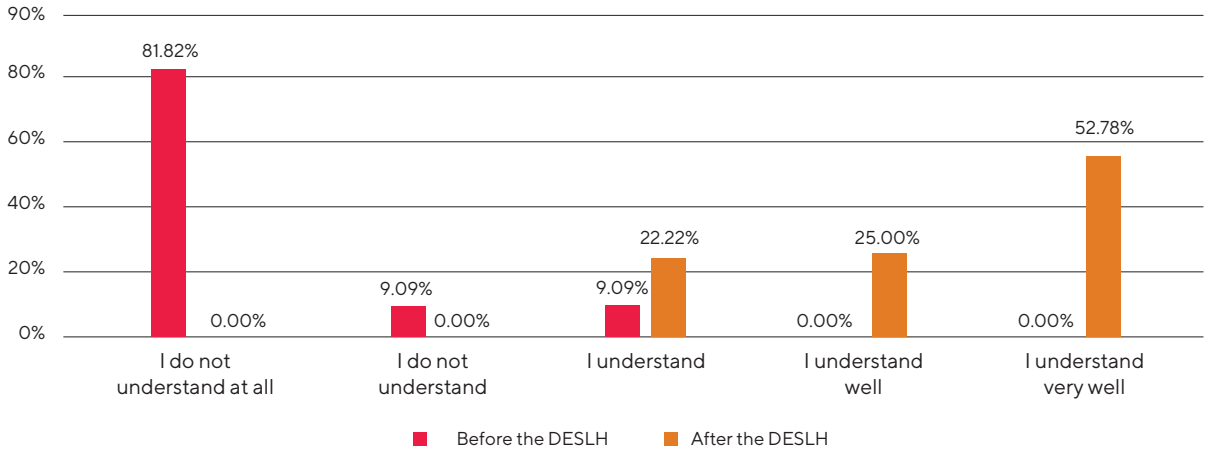
While this is reporting at the cohort level for just one cohort, these results nonetheless show significant gains in knowledge of localisation in a humanitarian context for participants both at local and international organisations.

The same cohort also demonstrated greater awareness of key resources supporting the localisation and inclusivity agenda in humanitarian responses, such as the Sphere Standards (Figure 11). The Sphere Standards provide a clear guide to minimum steps to increase localisation across the project implementation cycle. Students are encouraged to identify ways in which they can adapt programming based on the Sphere Standards to ensure that affected communities have a greater say in humanitarian response.

Interviews with DESLH graduates from across cohorts confirm this positive change in knowledge about localisation. Several DESLH alumni report, for instance, that having the opportunity to discuss and think critically about localisation changed their perspectives and increased their interest and engagement in the issue. One interviewee who enrolled in DESLH because she wanted to develop knowledge and skills they could use ' to have a national organisation that adheres to the [humanitarian] norms,' developed a broader understanding that localisation is a global issue (39AlumF). Another, who did not have prior interest in localisation, reports developing an interest in localisation and the decolonisation of aid, as well as larger ' geopolitical' issues (36AlumF).

Figure 11. Graduates demonstrate greater awareness of the Sphere Standards after the DESLH

Q10 In your opinion, what is your current level of knowledge and understanding of the Sphere handbook: ' The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response' ?



More striking however, is that DESLH graduates were able to provide tangible examples of how their newly acquired knowledge empowered them to lead initiatives and changes to promote localisation and representation once they returned to their organisations. One alumnus from an INGO explicitly reported for instance that he translated his newfound macro-level interest in localisation, geopolitics, and decolonisation of aid into concrete actions on the ground. They report working to build local capacity so that local organisations can become strategic partners within the humanitarian system, and not just operational actors:

> *'The second thing I did after unit two on localisation was to run a training course at a base in the east of the country where we had serious partnership problems with some civil society organisations. Each side, our teams, kept accusing the partners and the partners kept accusing us. Then I thought, this is a great opportunity, I'm going out into the field, I'm fresh out of this capacity building, I organised a workshop and to my great surprise, before I even got back, the two organisations had agreed to write a message to my superiors effectively to acknowledge all 'my efforts. And I owe part of that to the knowledge I gained.'* [38AlumM]

Another graduate reported increasing his advocacy for strengthening local capacity after developing a greater understanding of ' the importance of local organisations' through the DELSH:

> *'Through my personal commitment influenced the fact that we have expanded the network to work with local organisations [...] Personally, first of all, within the organisation, I made a major contribution to initiatives aimed at working with local NGOs. I had a role influencing them so that we could recruit an administrator in charge of local partners [...]. [...] And so we've now been able to organise workshops because we had local partners, people I meet, where we try and see how you work. We are where we are, but for local organisations, well, 'We [don't] have funding', etc. [...] So I made them understand that today's local alliances will have a future in many years, but they couldn't understand. 'But since we have a future', we don't understand. So, what do you want? What are you telling us? All the funding is going to international organisations, to countries who hook up with us because they can't get access into these areas, etc. For security reasons, they keep us alongside. And so, we've been able to grow for these reasons.' I'll say it again, for example, following the meeting in Istanbul in 2016, the Grand Bargain, the International Humanitarian Summit, it was decided, there were many resolutions on the allocation of more and more funding towards national and local organisations so that these structures are at the heart of the humanitarian system.'* [26AlumM]

In a third example of tangible change in professional behaviours as a result of the DESLH, some alumni from INGOs expanded their level of engagement with local organisations and increased their organisation's network of local organisations (2ExtINGOM, 26AlumM, 38AlumM). Not only this, as in the case mentioned above (26AlumM), they also successfully advocated for the creation of a new position to support these organisations. Through these initiatives local organisations were able to raise some of their concerns about the direction of funding to INGOs and to become more aware of the humanitarian system and the global localisation agenda.

> *'He [a DELSH graduate] learned how to work with local partners... We were speaking about localisation. He started, let's say a whole work of collaboration with local partners. Today, in the space of three years, two years, three years, he is now up to a dozen local partners with whom he works on the national scene. So, it's really, you see, there is a confidence which he developed.'* **[2ExtM]**

There is also evidence that the DESLH training on localisation and the need to partner equitably with local and national organisations may be contributing to efforts to increase capacity in these organisations. Leading change and transformation within local NGOs, for instance, was considered the most useful and relevant behaviour and skill set by one DESLH alumnus from a national NGO, who had recently commenced work with a local NGO which had limited experience and who did not have staff trained in humanitarian response. This made leading change and transformation a priority, to change the staff and organisational mentality to believe in their ability to learn what they needed to know and achieve results, despite their relative lack of experience compared to other organisations:

> *'Well, when I arrived at this local NGO, they were just starting out, it was a new NGO, new to me, with two years' experience, and they were trying to find their feet. They don't yet have the experience they need. It's true that they've recruited a fairly experienced team, but the team on the ground, the team accompanying that team was not sufficiently trained. So, they really had to drive change. But when I say drive change, it's difficult for me to go step by step. But what they were able to understand was they could envisage a new organisation that's still finding its feet but that needs results, that's it. So how can we achieve these results with the teams? They're not yet trained, they don't yet have the benefit of experience, because experience also helps us to be equipped. But when you're in an organisation that doesn't yet have the level of experience of other organisations, then you have to change people's mentality, you have to bring about this change to tell them that OK, through training, we don't have the experience we need, but we can train ourselves and, then, we can take on this challenge of succeeding in the mission which is our reason for being here.'* **[32AlumM]**

The perception that the DESLH improved not only participants' knowledge but also their practices is corroborated by feedback from three key external stakeholders familiar both with the DESLH and many alumni of the programme. One external INGO representative familiar with many alumni, for instance, expressed the view that the DESLH was helping to change the mindsets of humanitarian leaders, to be more collaborative and value the right of local actors to lead [1ExtINGOF]. This respondent believed that the DESLH is producing the type of leaders who can help drive the localisation agenda and support other agencies to adapt to the localised way of working. Furthermore, two INGO representatives reported that in their view, completing the DESLH helped alumni to develop greater confidence and ability to work with a variety of actors, including local partners. One of these interviewees reported that in the space of just three years, one alumni has gone from working with two local partners to twelve, which they attribute to having developed greater confidence in their leadership and working with diverse actors during the DESLH.

Localisation and representation within the DESLH faculty

CHL needs to improve the representativeness and diversity of its own staff, to fully embody the principles of diversity and inclusivity in leadership within the wider humanitarian system. This includes addressing the need for greater diversity in staffing for the DESLH, which was commented on by alumni in their feedback.

When asked for any other feedback, for instance, one Cohort 6 graduate recommended having greater diversity among facilitators of the course: 'Avoir plus de diversité au niveau des facilitateurs'/ 'More diversity among facilitators' [C6 post-KAP]

A DESLH faculty member elaborated on this view, highlighting the need for the DESLH programme to better reflect the principles of localisation it explores through the curriculum:

'So, at a time when we're finally starting to talk about localisation, decolonisation of aid, etc., it's important that the programme reflects this a little, if the programme wants to stay at the cutting edge. In my opinion, there is that ambition, but that may be the case today... It's been in place for a few years now and it's also the former students who have brought in the new cohorts of students. So, it's just that we started from a point where there wasn't really any diversity. It's to be expected that there might be a bit of a time lag with the teaching team, but probably that.....' [15FacF]

There is an opportunity in future iterations of the DESLH for the Centre to prioritise inclusive recruitment in the delivery of the course, especially in relation to coaching and delivery of the intensive units, to achieve these recommendations.

5.5 French-language delivery to improve access and inclusion

The delivery of the DESLH in French is another key mechanism through which the DESLH is designed to improve localisation of the humanitarian response in the West and Central African context. Globally, there are no other university-accredited graduate certificates in humanitarian leadership offered in French, making the DESLH a rare and potentially unique opportunity particularly for humanitarians in West and Central Africa to engage in a university course designed to recognise and strengthen local capacity and impact in French.

Interviews highlight that graduates working in West and Central African contexts recognise and appreciate the fact the course is delivered in French. Graduates repeatedly highlighted, for instance, the importance of having the opportunity to learn in French, and to have their leadership skills recognised through completion of the certificate. Two graduates conveyed a sense of disparity in access to professional networks and opportunities at this level, compared to their Anglophone colleagues working in these areas. [25M, 34M]. A third expressed their belief that having a French-language qualification will help Francophone humanitarians gain recognition and opportunities within the system [31KIIM].

Of note was the importance of leadership capacity development in French for Francophone humanitarians working alongside English-speaking colleagues specifically in West and Central Africa:

> *'The small hurdle we face at our organisation is that we have a lot of French speakers, and English speakers who don't really speak French, so it's often difficult for us to manage a number of things in French-speaking countries. [...] I think these are opportunities, for example, where we can manage and where it's easier for someone who understands French to interpret English and render the content in French to people who understand French, especially in West and Central Africa.* [34AlumM]

The DESLH not only directly provides a rare opportunity for humanitarian leadership development in French, but also provides a platform for Francophone leaders in the region to have their leadership skills recognised via formal university accreditation. Given the noted disparities of opportunities between Anglophone and Francophone humanitarians in the area, and the implied power dynamics between English and French speakers, the impact of the language of instruction on representation and inclusion of francophone African-based leaders is not to be undervalued.

5.6 Relevance of the DESLH to local and national humanitarians

> *'I'm convinced that this training will help produce new leaders in the humanitarian scene.'* [18FacM]

Interviews with DESLH alumni, stakeholders, and faculty revealed insights into the ways in which the DESLH is relevant for local and national NGOs working in West and Central Africa.

Three external INGO stakeholders interviewed believed leadership training is relevant and important for local organisations. One interviewee, for instance, believed the DESLH course helps build confidence and the ability to work with other actors and agencies and their networks which they believed would support local organisations in their own humanitarian response work.

> *'... many staff in national agencies don't have access to a lot of high quality or at least training that costs a lot of money, right. And have a lot of resources. So, to build their confidence, to be able to work with other actors and their networks amongst different actors and people from different agencies would surely like to me obviously have a lot of benefit for our response work.'* [1ExtNGOF]

DESLH faculty members supported this view, and provided more detailed insights into how specific aspects of the DESLH provide highly relevant learning for local and national humanitarian leaders. One male faculty member, for instance, indicated that the simulations provide a contextually-relevant learning environment for humanitarians and emergency responders on the course:

> *'I think the simulations, you know, [the] kind of the chaos at the beginning, how you deal with security, how you [make] proposals. Right. And you fundraise [...] I think it's very much relevant and it's you know, it's very much geared towards kind of the first phase of an emergency response which I think may be the hardest, right. So, if you're able to do that, then most likely you're able to be the leader. [...] I feel it's very relevant.'* [23FacM]

Other faculty members indicated their belief that the leadership behaviours embedded in the DESLH curriculum are relevant, because they provided a framework through which Francophone leaders from local humanitarian organisations could advocate for localisation and approach their roles and responsibilities. One faculty member, for instance, said the leadership behaviours enable local NGO staff to advocate for a more equal role alongside the UN, rather than operating as intermediaries for the United Nations [18FacM]. Several interviewees specifically cited using skills associated with leadership behaviours such as managing and creating high performing teams, managerial courage, and strategic vision regularly in their work.

A third reason the DESLH was deemed relevant from the perspective of faculty members was the broader alignment between the objective of the DESLH and the general need to support a new generation of African leaders. One respondent, for instance, argued the DESLH helps develop a new cohort of African-based leaders who can speak up and defend positions, and to question and challenge decisions and the established order, in cultures that makes it difficult to challenge those above them in the hierarchies. The respondent who made this observation, however, also expressed the view that given this hierarchical cultural norm in West and Central Africa, the DESLH ought to target 'senior managers' who are decision makers in the humanitarian scene [18FacM].

Alumni reported their own perspectives on how they found the DESLH relevant for their work as Francophone humanitarian leaders. One female graduate from the Sahel, for instance, explained that her motivation to participate in the training was specifically to develop her leadership credentials as a humanitarian leader in the region:

> *'In fact, that was more or less my objective in taking this training, given my origins and the fact that I'm from the Sahel. And you know the problem in the Sahel, I'd really like to be a recognised leader in the field who can really provide support at the level of...who can provide support to improve, propose ideas that can improve the context of the humanitarian situation in the Sahel and beyond.'* [42AlumF]

What does the gender survey reveal about local and national NGO interest in the DESLH?

For the DESLH Gender and Leadership Study, an anonymous, online survey was distributed among the francophone humanitarian community. While this survey was designed to collect data on attitudes towards gender and leadership in the francophone humanitarian system, key insights emerged into the perspectives of local and national NGO humanitarian respondents towards the DESLH. Below are selected insights on the question of localisation generated by this survey. Figures referenced in this text are included in the Annexes below.

9 out of 10 respondents who reported working for local and national NGOs said they consider themselves appropriate candidates for the DESLH (Figure 15): the one local NGO respondent who responded 'no' did so because he was already a DESLH graduate ('Je suis déjà diplômé DESLH.') Despite being a small sample, this finding is indicative of a positive alignment between the DESLH programme and the needs and interests of Francophone humanitarians at the national and local level.

Local and national NGO humanitarians also widely report that their employers would support their candidacy for the DESLH (Figure 16), suggesting local NGO-level support for this kind of course.

There is also no clear pattern on how local and national NGO staff are hearing about the DESLH, due to limited data. That said, CHL channels—including the website and the regular newsletter—do appear to reaching the intended audiences. More data and analysis are needed to better understand marketing and information flow for this target group.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As a Francophone, university-accredited course for humanitarian leaders, the DESLH is making a unique and tangible contribution to localisation and humanitarian leadership in West and Central Africa.

How does leadership development impact humanitarian response?

Graduates are improving their knowledge of key resources, including minimum standards and humanitarian principles, as well as their humanitarian leadership skills. Graduates are disseminating this new learning after the course, including within their own organisations but also across partnerships and networks. The DESLH has also contributed in some instances to the career progression of graduates, who are bringing their insights and learning from the DESLH to more senior positions. There is also evidence that graduates are also sharing what they learned with peers, friends, and colleagues, amplifying the impact of the training across the system and graduates' personal experiences.

To what extent do students advance their humanitarian leadership capabilities and capacities through intensive learning, including critical reflection, simulations, and coaching?

The DESLH is providing an effective form of leadership development which combines intensive learning experiences with highly individualized coaching and critical reflection to support participants through a leadership development journey that continues well after the course ends.

How does this leadership development program impact meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system?

DESLH graduates and external stakeholders report meaningful initiatives to increase localisation in specific contexts, including for instance graduates organising localisation workshops, increasing the number of local partners they engage with, and creating new positions within their organisations.

The DESLH curriculum content on localisation is also improving graduates' knowledge of localisation and related topics. More needs to be done, however, to recruit and support local and national NGO staff to participate in the DESLH, and to improve the diversity and representativeness of the DESLH faculty.

As a leadership development course, the DESLH makes the greatest impact through the quality of learning experiences it provides students. For this net impact to continue, the DESLH needs to secure funding to provide future cohorts. Investments in future research and evaluation—such as a longitudinal study of graduates—would also be beneficial in quantifying and qualifying the medium and longer-term impact of the DESLH on graduates' behaviours, career progression, and impact within the system.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been derived from the analysis presented in this Impact Study. The objectives of these recommendations are to:

- Improve the course design and delivery for future iterations;
- Increase impact towards DESLH outcomes and theory of change;
- Improve partnerships between key stakeholders; and
- Optimise practices and systems where positive practices and outcomes are evident.

7.1 Improving inclusion and diversity

DESLH participants: women and local/ national NGO staff

The CHL should:

- Engage more directly with local and national NGOs in West and Central Africa to increase awareness of and applications to the DESLH from these organisations.
- Identify further ways in which to support under-represented participant groups in applying for the DESLH.
- Ensure adequate capacity is in place to provide necessary 1:1 support to participants from local and national NGOs to minimise non-completion.

DESLH faculty and guest speakers

The CHL should:

- Prioritise inclusion and diversity in all aspect of the course design and delivery—including guest speakers, mentors, coaches, and faculty—to provide a more representative faculty that better represents the diversity of the international humanitarian system and to ensure DESLH students benefit from a diversity of experience, expertise and backgrounds.

7.2 Demonstrating impact

The CHL should:

- Implement standardised pre- and post-course Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) surveys to enable cross-cohort comparison of key outcomes at the individual and cohort level
- Invest in a longitudinal impact study to investigate medium to long-term outcomes of the DESLH in terms of graduates' behaviours and career progression, and course impact on the humanitarian response.

8. RESEARCH DESIGN

8.1 Research questions

This Impact Study is organised around three key-research questions:

- How does leadership development impact humanitarian response?
- To what extent do students advance their humanitarian leadership capabilities and capacities through intensive learning, including critical reflection, simulations, and coaching?
- How does this leadership development program impact meaningful inclusion and representation of national and local NGOs in the international system?

The following sub-research questions feed into these overarching questions:

a) To what extent do students gain knowledge and understanding of the humanitarian system and humanitarian operational delivery from enrolment in the course?

b) How relevant is the programme to the needs of humanitarians at the national and local level?

c) How and to what extent do students apply learnings from the course to improve their work within an organization?

d) To what extent do learnings from the course contribute to career progression of students in the short- to mid-term?

e) To what extent do students directly or indirectly impart their learnings to their friends, colleagues, peers?

8.2 Research methods

To answer these research questions, the Impact Study utilises a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, key informant interviews and student success data for an analysis of the program's impact.

Key informant interviews

Primary data were collected through semi-structured, key informant interviews with priority respondents:

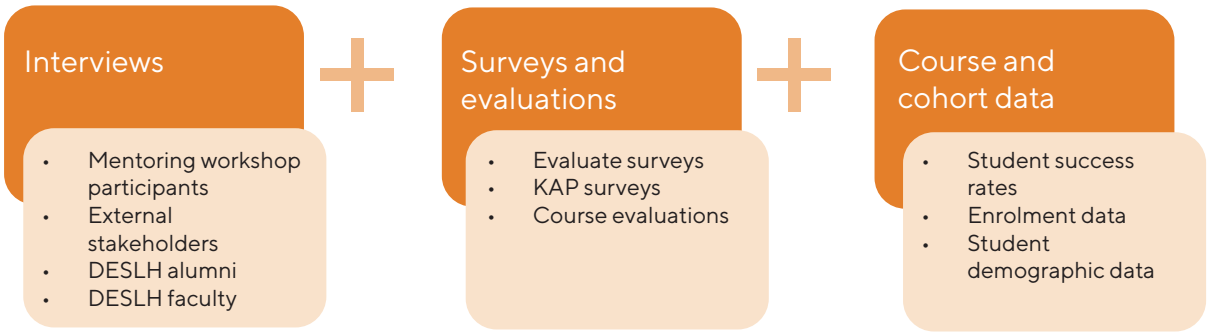
- DESLH alumni
- DESLH faculty
- External stakeholders

These respondent groups were identified to ensure diverse and relevant perspectives on the key research questions. Protocols were designed to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the DESLH and key themes related to answering the research questions.

Surveys

Primary data were also collected through anonymous surveys, which included both quantitative and qualitative items to allow respondents to provide feedback to open-ended questions.

Figure 12. Impact Study research design



Course and cohort data

Alongside these surveys and interviews, secondary student success data (retention rates, pass rates) from units were analysed, with disaggregation focusing on gender, type of organisation, nationality, and last country of operation.

8.3 Methodological limitations and out of scope

Owing to changes in course administration and delivery, not all cohorts participated in all data collection methods, so a direct comparison of responses across all cohorts is not possible. The survey design was not longitudinal (e.g. surveys were anonymous), so respondents cannot be tracked over time to measure individual-level changes in the knowledge, skills, and behaviours, or to follow up on their career progression. Changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours are therefore demonstrated at the cohort level through KAP surveys.

Data were also primarily collected in French and translated for reporting purposes, which introduces the risk of interpretation error. To mitigate this risk, native-speakers conducted all French interviews and focus groups, and all transcripts translation were checked by native-speakers within the Centre.

8.4 Research ethics and integrity

8.4.1 Ethical research compliance and regulations

The research is guided by all the relevant regulations and guidelines authorised by law, including (but not limited to):

- the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research
- the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

The research was fully compliant with these regulations and guidelines. While it is not anticipated that there will be any situations in which disclosure of information to a third party is necessary since the project is focused on understanding the impact of a leadership development program on professional development, all members of the research team will be required to be familiar with humanitarian tools and processes for reporting alleged misconduct in the event that they become aware of it. A statement that disclosure of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse misconduct is not protected by participant confidentiality is included in the PLSCF.

8.4.2 Consent

All data collection—including interviews and surveys—was conducted in accordance with Deakin University informed consent protocols. Plain language statements and tailored consent forms were provided to, signed by, and returned from participants prior to data collection. These are stored in a safe server.

8.4.3 Confidentiality and privacy

Deidentification protocol: transcripts and respondent IDs

All respondent information was deidentified prior to analysis, including name, organisation, and other identifiers as appropriate.

Data management and storage

All data are stored according to appropriate data privacy and security protocols. Qualitative transcripts are stored on Syncplicity, and are password protected.

8.5 Research participants

The following table outlines the number (by gender) of respondents interviewed through key informant interviews (KIIs) for this Impacts Study (Table 3).

Table 3. Key informant interview (KII) respondents

Respondent category	Definition	Number of respondents
Alumni	Graduates of the DESLH	Male: n=13 Female: n= 7 Total: n= 20
DESLH Faculty	Faculty involved in the delivery of the program and/ or units, including coaches and mentors	Male: n=5 Female: n=4 Total n=9
External stakeholders	Representatives of humanitarian organisations and bodies, for instance INGOs	Male: n=2 Female: n=1 Total: n=3
Mentoring workshop participants	DESLH graduates who completed one of the Mentoring Workshops (please see separate report)	Male: n= 10 Female: n= 3 Total: n=13
Total KII		N = 45 (F=15 ; M= 30)

8.6 Data analysis

8.6.1 Qualitative data

Qualitative data analysis was conducted primarily through the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Deidentified transcripts were uploaded to the project file, and coded thematically using a coding framework developed both inductively and deductively for the purpose of this study.

All interview respondents were given a de-identified, unique ID for analysis. While all names and identifying information—such as the specific organisation they work for and their role—were removed in accordance with research ethics and privacy regulations, the following respondent attributes were recorded in the classifications sheet to inform the analysis in NVivo:

- Gender
- Age
- Nationality
- Type of organisation
- DESLH Cohort (for graduates), e.g. Cohort 106
- Unit delivery for faculty, e.g. SimOp

These attributes enabled the disaggregation of analysis results by these categories, which was fundamental to understanding the diversity of experiences within and between cohorts of the DESLH.

8.6.2 Quantitative data

Quantitative data analysis was primarily conducted using two datasets resulting from the historical data of the DESLH program. The first dataset is referred throughout the report as *Unit level data*. The second dataset is referred to as *Master Sheet*. The former compiles the numeric or categorical results obtained by students of all units and cohorts, offering relevant data about student performance. The second dataset offered relevant data about the type of organisation, nationality, last country of operation and gender. Both datasets were cleaned to reflect ethics and privacy regulations, removing personal identifiers, including the name of students' employer and role. They were both analysed using *Excel*.

The Unit level dataset was cleaned to reflect the following variables: gender, grade, student status, country of residence, unit code and mode of delivery. The Master sheet was cleaned to reflect the following variables: student status, last cohort enrolled, gender, nationality, last country of operation, type of organisation, country of correspondence, and other

financial data (such as scholarship attribution) which were not used in this report. It is important to note that the Master sheet data was primarily used to analyse the profile of our alumni. This was done by considering only the students marked as graduated. This leads us to a consideration when comparing the two datasets. There is a difference between the number of students recorded as graduated in the master sheet (n=208) and the number of students assessed (given a mark pass or fail) in units 4 (n=169). This distinction has been noted in the report where relevant. This suggests that forthcoming iterations of the DESLH need more investment in record-keeping. As a final note on the quantitative data analysis, it is important to note, especially for the gender disaggregated data provided, that both datasets contained binary data only. It is not possible to know whether this indicates a factual absence of gender diverse students within the cohort, or a systems limitation whereby gender diverse students cannot fill in non-binary gender identities in the formularies given to register and keep track of the progress within the program.

Wilkinson, C., de Rouck, J. and Downing, P. (2024). *Diplôme d'Études Supérieures en Leadership Humanitaire (DESLH): impact study.* The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Deakin University

The Centre for Humanitarian Leadership is a partnership between
Deakin University and Save the Children Australia

centreforhumanitarianleadership.org

This study is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

ACTION AGAINST HUNGER