DRC CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

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1. INTRODUCTION

DRC's mandate

DRC's mandate for working in partnership with civil society is rooted in our rights-based approach to programming. As stated in the statutes, DRC's *"… aim is to protect refugees and internally displaced people from persecution and promote durable solutions to refugee problems on the basis of humanitarian principles and human rights"*. DRC encourages and supports rights-holders to claim and enjoy their rights. An important element in expressing these claims, is for rights-holders to get organised; and rights holders' associations, whether formally or informally organised, are an important part of what DRC defines as civil society. A key role of civil society is to represent the interests of various groups of rights-holders and thereby promote and channel their participation in decision-making and in holding duty-bearers accountable. Civil society organizations also play a crucial role providing services and support in emergencies, towards reaching durable solutions and to address roots causes to displacement. DRC's purpose in working with civil society is to support both aspects, in pursuit of the highest possible benefit to people affected by displacement.

DRC's strategic ambitions

With the 2025 Strategy, DRC intensifies its fight against systemic inequality and structural discrimination of conflict and displacement-affected persons by redoubling our focus on two breakthroughs - **increased protection** and **enhanced inclusion**. Globally, forced displacement has grown due to increased violence, more conflicts, and conflicts that continue without resolution for a longer time. We face a complex nexus of failed conflict resolution, unequal economic development, challenging environmental and demographic trends, and non-inclusive policies. DRC recognizes that impactful contribution to the two breakthroughs requires working in partnership and that a localized response to displacement perseveres over time. The Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy takes a point of departure from the 2025 Strategy through the organizational strategic priorities and principles.

DRC's **three foundational strategic priorities** speak to:

1. Impactful **advocacy based on evidence** - including working alongside local partners, people of concern, and other rights-holders towards representation, inclusion and influencing decision-making at local, national, and international levels.

2. Embracing **strong partnerships and alliances** - including expanding and strengthening equitable partnerships with local civil society actors.

3. Strengthen our ability to **maximise value for money** and pursue innovative and more sustainable financing models – including working towards embedding programming with civil society partners in DRC's value for money analysis tool; as well as, seeking donor partnerships that enable longer term programming in equitable partnerships and/or flexible programming with non-traditional civil society partners.

For the Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy, the inclusion of an **organizational principle** dedicated to "Go Local" reinforces DRC's localization ambitions. While the localization agenda reaches beyond local civil society engagement, working with local civil society is at the core of global discourse around localization. The Go Local principle recognises that first responders to humanitarian crises are almost invariably local actors who have in-depth knowledge of the situation. DRC acknowledges that sustainable development involves – by definition – building self-sustaining local capacities. When we think and act local, we accept that the relevance, sustainability, and impact of humanitarian, development and peace interventions are maximised by working with local actors and organisations.

The principle of Go Local places emphasis on reinforcing rather than replacing or competing with existing local initiatives and capacities. This can in large part be met through ensuring that we invest in identifying relevant local civil society partners, acknowledge their role and capacities, and work better to understand their operating context when deciding on how best to engage in any given context.[1]

The Civil Society Engagement Strategy also aligns closely with the adoption of Participation as an **operational principle**. The Participation principle aims at promoting opportunities for meaningful and equal participation of the people we serve in processes and decisions that concern and affect them and their lives. It is imperative that we encourage meaningful and equal participation as a right, a mindset and a form of basic respect by adapting programmes, policies and strategies to the voices of those affected by them. Supporting participation must include supporting civil society groups and organizations that represent rights holders' interests to enable affected people to have collective power and influence over decision making. This contributes to the fulfilment of their rights and holding duty bearers to account.

DRC's ambitions on engaging with local civil society in the 2025 Strategy align with **global discourse** that has played a pivotal role in influencing change within DRC. The international aid community recognizes local actors' indispensable role and has made a variety of commitments to change the current humanitarian system to promote, rather than replace, local and national humanitarian actors. The most recent have been outlined in the Agenda for Humanity (2016), the Grand Bargain (2016) and more recently Grand Bargain 2.0 (2021), and the Charter for Change (2015), as well as the Global Compact for Refugees (2018) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17. DRC's commitments have been further solidified in 2021 when DRC became a signatory and advocate for the Grand Bargain 2.0 which places greater emphasis on localization as a critical element of the Grand Bargain Framework.[2]

[1] DRC Strategy 2025, https://pro.drc.ngo/about-us/strategic-framework/strategy/

[2] ICVA briefing paper outlining the new phase of the Grand Bargain, https://www.icvanetwork.org/resource/the-grand-bargain-2-0-explained-an-icva-briefing-paper-2022/

Definition of civil society

DRC uses the common definition of civil society being the realm between the state, the private sector and the family.

Agreeing on a common workable definition of civil society is challenging, as the concept of civil society has long been debated, there is no one agreed-upon global definition. DRC uses the common definition of **civil society being the realm between the state, the private sector and the family**. In civil society, people meet, debate, organise, and take collective action. This organization may be temporary, evolve, or formalize into a civil society organization such as a local or national non-governmental organization (L/NGO). Civil societies include a vibrant range of both formally and informally organized groups with diverse interests and roles. Charities, community groups, L/NGOs, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trade unions, social movements, coalitions, and advocacy groups are all examples of civil society actors. Civil society activities can include holding institutions to account and promoting transparency; raising awareness of societal issues; delivering services to meet education, health, food and security needs; implementing disaster management, preparedness and emergency response; bringing expert knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy; giving power to the marginalized; and encouraging citizen engagement. Within this variance, civil society can be local, national, transnational and formed in the diaspora. Given this variance, it is important to keep in mind that there is no *one* civil society view or representation. Civil society is not a single homogenous entity, rather, it reflects a multitude of societal issues and group interests, and thereby does not have a single view or unified representation.

There is no society without a civil society, but the term "civil society" and what it covers as well as the space it is allowed to occupy will look different in the diverse country contexts where DRC operates. The term "civil society" itself may be perceived as a Western construct in some contexts where we operate. Furthermore, it is pertinent to also acknowledge that civil society mobilization may not always be driven by interests and values to meet the collective good of society and thereby also might not align with DRC's values. It is important to understand the complex nuances in the contexts where we operate, as well as the wider civil society landscape, in order to apply a Do No Harm approach in how DRC engages with civil society.

Decisions around who DRC partners with are based on relevant analysis, taking into account social dynamics and perceptions of legitimacy, and ensuring there is adequate diversity in representation, with a particular focus on ensuring the participation of marginalized groups.

It is also important at this stage to clarify what we mean by civil society "engagement". Engagement encompasses all aspects of how DRC works with civil society – from our approach towards partnering with civil society, our programming that aims to empower civil society, and our internal systems that facilitate partnering; all of which are guided by principles of equitability, transparency, complementarity, responsibility and results-orientation. These principles are described in detail under the section, *What Civil Society Programming Looks Like in DRC*.

Scope of the strategy

This global Civil Society Engagement Strategy was developed in response to DRC's recognition of and investment in further advancing our strategic approach to civil society engagement. It includes clarity on how DRC defines civil society, which civil society actors we engage with, and why.

The strategy's main focus is on DRC's partnership with rights-holders through our engagement with local civil society in DRC's international operations. Within DRC's Danish operations, where DRC itself is an integral part of the national civil society, focus will be on DRC's ability to engage with and support civil society groups and associations that represent the voice of our target group in Denmark: refugees and asylum seekers. The scope of this strategy does not include DRC's engagement with likeminded international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). As such, the term "civil society" throughout this strategy refers to local civil society with whom DRC engages in the countries where we operate, as well as across national boundaries such as through our diaspora programming.

The strategy articulates DRC's overall ambition for engaging with civil society through a global theory of change. It also provides key concepts and thinking to guide our work with civil society such as: prioritizing areas where DRC will invest our support to civil society, providing minimum standards for civil society programming, and outlining the principles that articulate DRC values when it comes to our partnerships with civil society. The strategy builds on existing DRC resources such as Strategy 2025, Global Statement on Partnerships, Implementing Partner Policy in the Operational Handbook, and the Program Handbook. With the focus being on strategic direction, the scope of this strategy does not include operational guidance for DRC staff. While reference has been made throughout the strategy on existing operational resources that are available to DRC staff, in other places, gaps have been identified where additional guidance (ie. guidelines, checklists, handbooks, tools) needs to be developed by DRC's Civil Society Engagement Unit (CSEU).

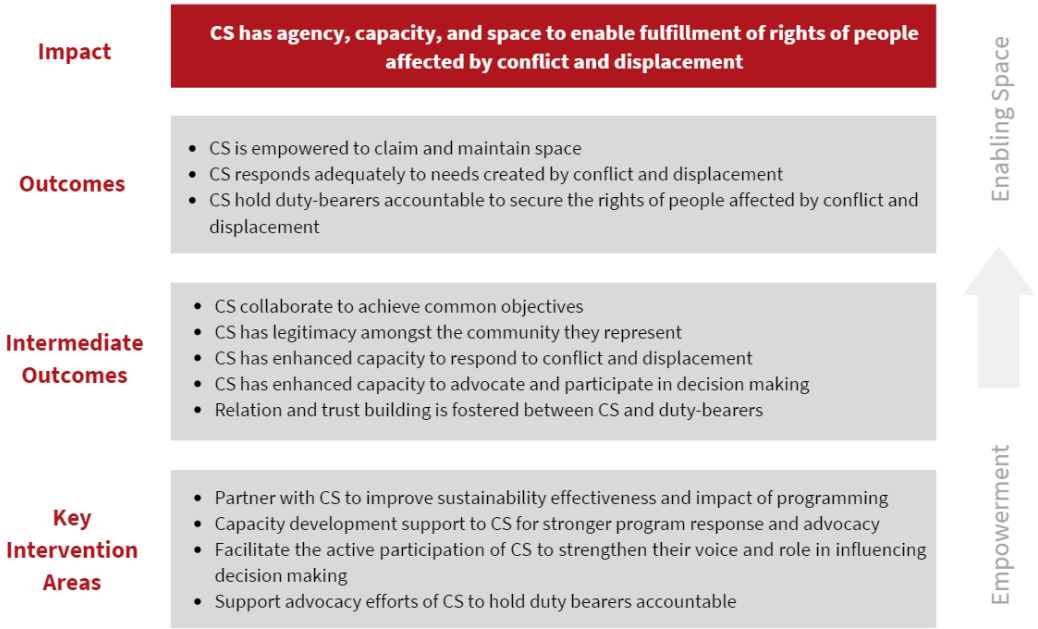
2. DRC'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

DRC's civil society engagement theory of change

DRC's engagement with civil society is guided by a theory that articulates a desired change we aim to contribute to, one **where civil society has increased agency, space and capacity to enable fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement**. The logical pathway to contributing to this ambition is as follows:

> **IF DRC** works increasingly in partnership with civil society in order to improve sustainability, effectiveness, and impact of programming;
>
> **AND IF** this partnership is supported with joint advocacy efforts, capacity development support, and access to participation in decision making;
>
> **THEN** civil society will have increased agency to claim and maintain space, power to influence change, and capacity to respond adequately to needs created by conflict and displacement.

Figure 1: Civil Society Engagement Theory of Change



The theory of change diagram above shows the full logical pathway for DRC to achieve its ambition for why we engage with civil society – to contribute to civil society having increased **agency, space and capacity to enable fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement**.[3] DRC's impact statement articulated through the theory of change mirrors global discourse on civil society promoting change in the way the humanitarian system operates to enable greater role for local civil society in humanitarian response.[4]

[3] A theory of change needs to be specific to the varying contexts where DRC operates, based on a specific context and stakeholder analysis. While the above theory of change gives an overarching frame to DRC's ambition, it will need to be contextualized to make it fit for purpose to each context or country.

[4] For further reading on global discourse, refer to the Grand Bargain – Localization Workstream; The Charter For Change; Core Humanitarian Standards.

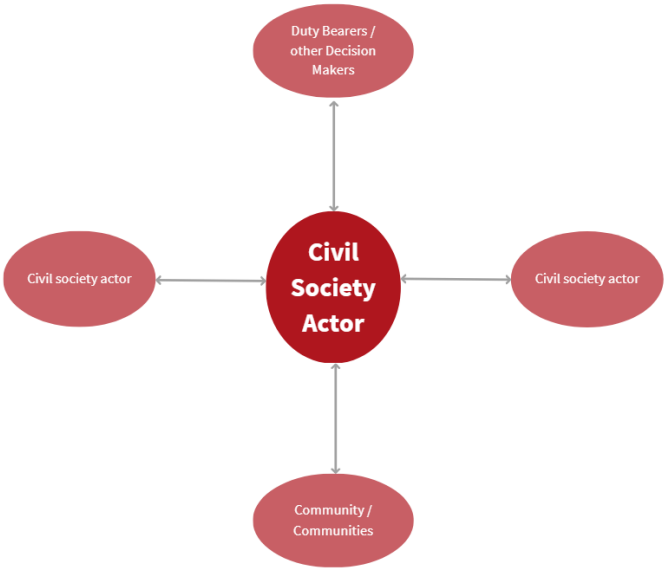
Agency

Civil Society and Duty Bearer engagement - two sides of the same coin. In the effort to secure the rights of and provide durable solutions for people affected by conflict and displacement, DRC works both with rights holders and with duty bearers. Programming should aim to improve linkages between civil society and the state, and to strengthen duty bearers' capacity to better engage with civil society and respond to rights holders' demands. For DRC, there are thus clear strategic and programmatic overlaps and synergies between the civil society and duty bearer engagement.

Agency refers to rights holders and rights holders' representatives – through civil society organizations, though not necessarily formalized NGOs – having collective power and influence over decision making affecting the fulfillment of their rights. In order to achieve this, DRC places value on the notion of legitimacy, thereby prioritizing partnering with civil society organizations that are legitimate representatives of rights holders affected by conflict and displacement. At the same time, the theory of change speaks to supporting vertical linkages between civil society actors and communities through strong community engagement and participation, in order to ensure that our partners have acceptance and legitimacy from the communities they aim to serve and represent. Foundational to this is community members, including the most marginalized, knowing their rights and how they can participate in influencing change.

At the other end of the vertical spectrum is the upward linkage, between civil society and duty bearers or other decision makers who hold power (i.e. non-state armed actors). Similar to the downward linkage to the community, DRC has a role in fostering stronger linkages upwards between civil society and the state in the effort to ensure that duty bearers engage with civil society to secure the rights of people affected by conflict and displacement. In parallel to fostering linkages, DRC focusses on strengthening duty bearers' capacity to better engage with civil society and thereby better respond to rights holders' demands. This may take on the form of developing capacity to put in place mechanisms for consultation and feedback, and for better information sharing in the effort to increase transparency. The latter is a clear indication of the strategic and programmatic overlaps and synergies between the civil society engagement strategy at hand and what at some point might be developed as a separate strategy for how DRC engages with duty bearers.

Figure 2: Horizontal and Vertical Relationship Axis



Equally important is the emphasis on horizontal linkages across civil society actors. Illustrated in the theory of change is DRC's role in facilitating and/or supporting collaboration across civil society partners we work with – at a local, national, or global level. This horizontal collaboration can foster trust building and a stronger alignment of demands through coalitions, alliances or networks with a common interest or cause, and thereby a stronger voice to advocate for their demands. At the same time, such coalitions, alliances, and networks have the potential to provide opportunities for increased access to decision making forums to influence change, especially at the global level. Collaborating around a common interest can be particularly critical when it comes to supporting and empowering traditionally marginalized and excluded groups to participate in advocating for change and influencing decision-making processes. In this way, placing emphasis on relation and trust building and stronger collaboration is one means by which DRC contributes to increased power or agency of civil society.

Space

Governments, or non-state actors in the absence of functioning government, play a key role in creating enabling or disabling civil society space. Creating a disabling environment includes introducing legal, administrative, and bureaucratic processes that hinder the role of civil society to engage and/or respond. But it can also take on the form of a negative narrative from governments on the role and value of civil society, thereby negatively affecting public opinion of, support to, and engagement in civil society. In some contexts, restrictive measures include harassment, intimidation, or persecution of civil society actors. In humanitarian contexts, this space can be further complicated through the enactment or revision of NGO laws that become more restrictive and burdensome and further strain state-civil society relationships along perceived lines of political, ethnic or cultural allegiances during or post conflict context. It is imperative that we better understand the operating environment in the contexts where DRC works through a conflict sensitive civil society analysis, including the role DRC can play, both positive and negative, through possible risks transfer. This may take the form of perceived political allegiances and alignment to foreign values associated with partnering with an INGO, leading to further eroded trust between state-civil society-public and hinderance of civil society operating space.[5] Strengthening linkages between state and civil society, a logical pathway articulated in the theory of change, can build trust in the effort to break down barriers that limit access to space.

Similar to supporting agency, DRC's role in fostering vertical and horizontal linkages can be an entry point to supporting civil society to navigate restrictive space and/or to claim their own space. Collective action through NGO fora can be a powerful avenue in contexts where the operating environment for civil society is restrictive. As mentioned above, illustrated in the theory of change is DRC's role in facilitating and/or supporting collaboration across civil society actors we work with. This collective power and voice can be an effective way to claim more space, as coalitions, alliances, or networks of national actors can claim legitimacy in representation and be more powerful through capacity and resource sharing.

Restricted space can also be found within the international humanitarian system. Examples include unequal participation in clusters, a lack of cluster leadership by local actors, and international humanitarian policies established with little to no consultation with or contribution from local actors.[6]

Change across the humanitarian architecture is beyond the realm of control of any one actor, but DRC can, leverage its position to facilitate opportunities for civil society to have increased access to decision-makers and decision-making forums. This can include inviting civil society partners to participate in influencing policy change alongside DRC, facilitating a seat at the table for our civil society partners in

[5] For more information on shrinking civil society space, refer to ICVA's recent study, Scoping Study on Civil Society Space in Humanitarian Action, November 2018, https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2021/08/ICVA-Report.pdf

[6] Rethinking Capacity and Complementarity for A More Local Humanitarian Action, Veronique Barbelet, Humanitarian Policy Group, October 2018. https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12957.pdf

coordination mechanisms in the countries where we operate, and supporting institutional and technical capacity strengthening for local partners on coordination. It is equally important to recognize that national or local coordination mechanisms exist and to make efforts to link with and support these local structures.

Change can also be achieved by advocating for adaptations with DRC's donors to further enable increased operating space for local actors. For example, burdensome administrative processes imposed on civil society organizations by governments thereby creating a disabling environment, can be compounded by complicated financial and reporting requirements from institutional donors that further impede the capacity of civil society organizations to be able to operate. Lastly, in our partnerships, DRC is mindful of the limitations in access to financial and human resources that partners face and commits to avoiding overburdening partners with another layer of administrative and operational procedures that are not fit for purpose. While not explicitly mentioned in the theory of change, this value is reflected in DRC's efforts to align our ambition in the theory of change with our operational processes through a comprehensive review of operational procedures to better allow for facilitating partnering with a diverse set of civil society actors – including small and informal actors.

The **Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination** (DEMAC) initiative is a permanent platform for enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination between diaspora humanitarian actors and the international humanitarian system. Through the development of guidelines, tools and resources in support of diaspora emergency engagement, DEMAC supports diaspora organizations to engage in emergency responses in coordination with the humanitarian system. DEMAC also enhances the knowledge and awareness within the institutional humanitarian system about the essential role played by diaspora with a view to discuss how the system should coordinate with and relate to diaspora-led actions. Finally, DEMAC engages with diaspora and institutional humanitarian actors to enhance the generation of lessons learned /self-reflections from diaspora-led emergency response with a view to adjust its approach and enhance the knowledge among diaspora organizations about the humanitarian system to increase probabilities of coordination between the two.

DRC is one of the founding members of the DEMAC initiative, which is currently housed in the Diaspora Program in the CSEU in DRC.

https://www.demac.org/

Capacity

Capacity refers to the abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, and behaviors that enable individuals, organizations, and institutions to achieve their objectives over time. Hence capacity development is focused on improving the ability to acquire, strengthen, and maintain these capacities. Underpinning this definition is the need to understand capacity at three levels:

1) individual – related to development of skills of individuals, be it through training, practice, exposure;

2) organizational – related to strengthening organizational processes and systems, be it through training, advice, financial support; and

3) institutional environment – related to policy and regulatory frameworks and influencing change.

Within this understanding of capacity, DRC aims to contribute to change at all three levels in our partnerships with civil society. DRC's theory of change speaks to empowering civil society, achieved in part through the capacity development support we offer at both the individual level (ie. skills and knowledge of partner staff) and the organizational level (ie. resource, policies, and systems of a partner organization).

In this way, DRC contributes to strengthening the ability of civil society to respond adequately to adequately to needs created by conflict and displacement. At the same time, DRC works towards creating an enabling space for civil society's voice and participation. This encompasses facilitating the participation of civil society in decision making processes at local, national, and global levels and supporting and/or conducting joint advocacy efforts with our civil society partners to influence policy reforms.

DRC recognizes that the concept of "capacity" is often narrowly understood, typically focusing solely on gaps in local capacity. When using the term capacity *development* (as opposed to capacity support or exchange), "development" is understood as seen from the perspective of and owned by the civil society partner we are working with. Capacity development is not something DRC does for a partner, rather DRC contributes to the partner's own development process, one that the partner owns. DRC recognizes that local civil society actors have existing capacities that need to be identified and leveraged. There is also a recognition and desire to enable exchange of learning between DRC and our civil society partners based on the specific capacities each partner brings to the partnership. This perspective is embedded in our guiding principles on our approach to capacity development, discussed in further detail in the *What Does Civil Society Programming Look Like in DRC* section below.

The means by which we will contribute to influencing change in civil society capacity, agency, and space is through key intervention areas in which DRC sees a mutual value-add in partnering with civil society. The theory of exchange explains why we engage, with the value add of engaging in partnerships moving away from purely instrumental (ie. partnering to access areas DRC cannot) reasons towards a more meaningful purpose. The key priority areas articulated in the theory of change reinforce each other and combined, ensure a multi-pronged approach which increases the likelihood of achieving the change we aim to see. The section on *Approaches to Working with Civil Society* takes a deeper dive on the concepts behind each intervention area with illustrative examples of how these interventions can be applied in DRC's operations.

Who DRC works with

The enormous diversity in civil society organizations requires DRC to be clear on its goals when entering into partnerships with civil society. This should always be done with a perspective of giving voice, or bringing support, to people affected by displacement or conflict.

Civil society encompasses a wide range of actors with varying interests, roles, and mandates. Some of the civil society actors that DRC engages with include: community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, foundations, gender-focused and SOCIESC[7] minority organizations, cooperatives, youth and women-led groups, civil society networks and alliances, disabled persons organizations, and the not-for-profit media. As mentioned above, these actors might be local, national, transnational, and formed in the diaspora; formal or informal organizations; and take on various roles in society. This range in interests, roles and mandates should be seen as a strength of civil society when trying to ensure that all rights holders are heard and represented in decision-making.

In the displacement context, while it is national authorities who are ultimately responsible for protecting the displaced and establishing conditions and providing the means for durable solutions, civil society plays a crucial role – from responding to life saving needs to monitoring and advocating for the protection of rights. At the onset of a crises, civil society often organizes as first responders. In post conflict societies, civil society contributes to reconstruction efforts and is a core constituent in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, creating conditions for sustainable return.

In conflict and post conflict settings, civil society actors are influenced by the dynamics of conflict shaping both communities and their operating space. Civil society actors may – voluntarily so or under duress – become aligned with parties to the conflict. They may take actions or adopt positions that (sometimes unintentionally) contribute to increasing distrust and insecurity. The complex operating environment they face may hamper their ability to work across conflict divides and to effectively contribute to meeting needs of people affected by conflict and displacement. However, this does not mean that in conflict and post-conflict settings DRC should refrain from partnering with and supporting civil society actors – but it necessitates a strong contextual analysis and understanding.

A conflict sensitive civil society analysis allows us to have a better understanding of the roles and the dynamics diverse civil society actors play in any given context, including the horizontal and vertical power dynamics, across civil society actors and between civil society and the state. Such an analysis critically examines the operating space for civil society in that given context – looking at both enabling and disabling factors that create opportunities and challenges for civil society to actively engage and fulfil their role. It also considers how effectively certain civil society actors engage with certain communities while struggling to reach others due to identity-related dynamics. It is important to have this contextual understanding, as well as an understanding of the comparative advantages civil society organizations and DRC both bring to the partnership table. Closely tied to this is DRC's commitment to work in partnerships that reinforce and complement these roles and capacities rather than duplicating efforts – a commitment that is prominent in the localization agenda. A civil society analysis will also consider the risks civil society actors face, including possible risk transfer from DRC to civil society organizations we may partner with.[8]

[7] Sexual orientation, gender and identity, expression and sex characteristics

[8] Guidance for DRC Country Offices on conducting a conflict sensitive civil society analysis can be found on the CSEU Insite Learning & Resource page: Civil Society Analysis Guidance.docx

When it comes to principled humanitarian action as a consideration in partner selection, DRC strives to work with a broad range of actors, aiming at a balance in our partnerships, and through that balance safeguarding the neutrality of DRC and ensuring principled outcomes of its actions. This means acknowledging the challenges civil society organizations face in conflict settings that may compromise principles of neutrality, and that we may partner with local actors who, taken individually, may not be considered neutral. Through a balanced partnership portfolio, it is DRC's response as a whole that needs to be neutral and impartial rather than each organization we partner with. While a requirement for "neutrality" from DRC's local civil society partners is not always realistic, support must be conditioned on partner's commitment to non-discrimination and non-violence.

3. WHAT CIVIL SOCIETY PROGRAMMING LOOKS LIKE IN DRC

The purpose of a partnership is to bring together relevant actors under a common umbrella in order to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of planned actions to enable the fulfilment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement.

Civil society partnering principles

Partnership is a broad term, spanning from informal to formal arrangements for the purposes of advancing mutual interests and meeting both short term and longer-term common goals. As with the term civil society, there is no one commonly agreed global definition of "partnership" in the context of partnering in the humanitarian aid and development sectors. For DRC, **a partnership is formed between two or more actors that agree to cooperate based on common objectives for the purpose of achieving a mutually agreed goal.** A partnership has clear roles and responsibilities that clarify expectations and is guided by fundamental principles that all parties to the partnership strive to adhere to. These principles are listed and elaborated on below. A partnership is understood to go beyond a solely contractual relationship at the output level, though the fulfilment of short-term deliverables can of course form part of a partnership, and a partnership can evolve out of a solely contractual relationship.

It is important to clarify that a partnership is not formed only where there is a formal sub-grant agreement in place between DRC and a civil society partner. A partnership can exist with or without a sub-grant agreement, and with or without the transfer and receiving of funds. For instances, a partnership may be established between DRC and a civil society organization with the purpose of collaborating on a common goal such as shared advocacy initiative or joint research and publication.

It is also important to clarify that the outsourcing a specific deliverable in a DRC-designed and -owned project, without other aspects in the relationship than a supplier-type delivery of that specific output, does not constitute a partnership, even when the actor delivering the output is formed as an NGO rather than a private company.

When entering into a partnership, one may want to consider drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlining collaboration, mutual interests, and ways of working between DRC and the partner. The purpose of an MoU is to clarify the scope of a collaboration between DRC and a partner, the purpose of the partnership, and expectations for engagement, including expected progression. It should be drafted jointly between DRC and the partner, reflecting both DRC's and the partner's partnership principles.[9]

[9] When the partnership also includes a transfer of funds between DRC and a partner organization, DRC's standard Sub Grant Agreement must be used. An MoU can be drafted in addition to a Sub Grant Agreement when there is an interest to outline a broader mutual collaboration between DRC and a partner that extends beyond a project specific agreement. A template of an MoU can be found on the CSEU Insite Learning & Resource page here: Example DRC MoU Template.docx . Further guidance on using a Sub Grant Agreement can be found in the Implementing Partner Policy in the Operational Handbook, Implementing Partners Operations Handbook (sharepoint.com)

In all partnerships with civil society organizations, DRC's partnering approach is guided by the following key **partnership principles.** This means, the way that partnerships (both formal and informal partnerships) are developed and managed throughout the life cycle of the partnership should be guided by the following values. The following principles have been endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007. All organizations participating in the Global Humanitarian Platform agree to base their partnerships on these principles.

Equitability

Equitability requires mutual respect between members of the partnership irrespective of size and power. The participants must respect each other's mandates, obligations and independence and recognize each other's constraints and commitments. Mutual respect must not preclude organizations from engaging in constructive dissent. Today, the principle of equality has mostly been replaced by that of equitability, as INGOs and their local partners rarely have the same level of opportunities and resources which the term equality implies. Equitability implies that partners are treated in a fair, transparent, and respectful manner, and operate on a level playing field, irrespective of underlying disparities in opportunities and resources and thus power.

Transparency

Transparency is achieved through dialogue (on equal footing), with an emphasis on early consultations and regular sharing of information. Communication and transparency, including financial transparency, increase the level of trust among organizations.

Complementarity

The diversity of the humanitarian community is an asset if we build on our comparative advantages and complement each other's contributions. Local capacity is one of the main assets to enhance and on which to build. Whenever possible, the humanitarian system should strive to make it an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.

Results-Oriented Approach

Effective humanitarian action must be reality-based and action-oriented. This requires result-oriented coordination based on effective capabilities and concrete operational capacities. This does not preclude working with organizations that might not yet have the capabilities and capacities needed to independently deliver effective humanitarian action. Supporting an increase of sustainable local humanitarian capacities through the support of capacity development of local responders is one relevant result to orient us towards.

Responsibility

Humanitarian organizations have an ethical obligation to each other to accomplish their tasks responsibly, with integrity and in a relevant and appropriate way. They must make sure they commit to activities only when they have the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments. This includes the ability to deliver on commitments to support the capacity development of partners. Decisive and robust prevention of abuses committed by humanitarians must also be a constant effort.

These principles can be found at the core of how we work with civil society partners, described in the "approaches" section below. DRC strives to monitor how we live up to these principles through the practice of conducting partner satisfaction surveys and partnership evaluations on a regular basis to gather feedback from the perspective of partners on DRC's performance, collect lessons learned on challenges and good practices, and develop an action plan to respond to that feedback.

Refer to *Guidance Note: Partnership Principles in Practice* for tips and examples of how the partnership principles are being applied in DRC programming.

Minimum standards for civil society engagement

The minimum standards outlined below provide minimum key considerations to be factored into the design and implementation of civil society engagement across DRC. These standards have been drafted in the effort to ensure quality across programming with DRC civil society partners, and with the perspective of a do-no-harm approach.

1. **Conflict-sensitive civil society analysis**: Along the same lines as a conflict analysis or gender analysis, there is value in investing some time on an analysis of the civil society landscape to inform programming and partnering decisions. The conditions for working with civil society – strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats – will vary tremendously in the different contexts where DRC operates. It is therefore important that we develop and maintain a minimal understanding of the civil society landscape in these operating contexts. This analysis includes examining the composition and perceived role of civil society in the given context; the operating environment looking at both enabling and disabling factors; the structure of civil society including horizontal and vertical relationships between key stakeholders and the power dynamics; civil society in relation to DRC's mandate/programming – the main problem we are trying to address and our comparative advantage; and an initial scoping of potential civil society actors with whom DRC could and should engage. A civil society analysis also considers the risks civil society actors face, including possible risk transfer from DRC to civil society organizations we may partner with. The methodology for conducting such an analysis can range from desk research combined with key stakeholder consultations conducted by DRC staff, to bringing in an external consultant for a more in-depth analysis. A civil society analysis can inform both the individual design of projects that have a civil society component and the development of a country-level and/or regional civil society partnership strategy. In situations where DRC seeks to start operations in new locations, this analysis is to be part of the initial context analysis needed to design DRC's entry into the country.

2. **When considering who to partner with**, DRC invests time in understanding who the relevant civil society actors are in relation to our mandate and programming in a given context. Beyond a mapping exercise to identify capabilities, administrative and technical capacities to deliver, and mutual interest and objectives, DRC's partnering choices are informed by the ultimate goal of what we are trying to achieve through engaging with civil society. Here the global theory of change for civil society engagement is a useful reference point but should be adapted to a given context - looking at what change DRC is best placed to contribute to, relevant stakeholders, and logical pathways to achieve change.

   This likely entails taking a more holistic approach by looking at partnering decisions overall in a country program, rather than project by project. Furthermore, by striving for a balanced portfolio of partners that we work with across our programming in a country, DRC aims to ensure diversity in whom we work with and support. This means not always looking for the "biggest and the best" organizations, in the effort to include smaller and often excluded civil society groups – such as those led by women, youth, and ethnic minority groups. Working with a consciously diverse and complementary portfolio of partners is also one means by which DRC can address the issue of neutrality when it comes to working in partnership. As mentioned above, when it comes to principled humanitarian action as a consideration in our partner selection, DRC strives to work with a broad range of actors, representing diverse interests and identities. By ensuring that our portfolio of partners is balanced, through diverse representation, DRC creates an umbrella of neutrality thereby safeguarding our commitment to the principled outcomes of our actions.

3. **Understanding DRC's value add** in partnering with civil society links back to the theory of change where we ask: what do we strive to achieve and why, and how are we best placed to get there. This includes looking at our internal capacities – human, technical, financial – to support civil society in a meaningful and responsible way. Do we have adequate staff and staff with the right skill set to work in partnership, do we have the necessary technical capacities to realize the change we set out to achieve, have we dedicated sufficient financial resources to our partners and financial support required to realize change? This includes assessing and recognizing the capacities that local civil society actors can bring to the partnership, both in the effort to avoid duplication or taking over local response efforts, and to leverage and complement capacities that each partner brings in order to achieve change more effectively and efficiently. This reflection can be done through a SWOT analysis or as part of the theory of change design process at the country level – adapting the global theory of change referenced in this strategy to fit the specific context where we are working towards engaging and programming with civil society. This reflection could be embedded in existing DRC strategic planning processes - such as annual reviews, in country and regional strategic plans, or when developing a dedicated civil society partnership strategy at the country or regional level. It is also critical here to get partner perspective on DRC's value add – be it through regular partner check ins (i.e. annual partner meeting, feedback or satisfaction surveys), or partner consultations during strategic and programmatic development processes.

4. A **do no harm approach** to DRC partnerships builds on standards 1, 2, and 3. Through an understanding of the civil society landscape where we operate, a strategic consideration of whom to partner with, and identifying DRC's value add in our partnerships, we can work toward pursuing a do no harm approach in the way we work with civil society partners, avoiding negative short- and long-term impact on the partner's organization or its position in the given context. An additional and crucial component to this is understanding the risks that DRC partners face in specific contexts and programs. Typically, risk assessments and risk management tools focus on mitigating fiduciary risks that civil society partners can bring to the INGO partner. A more holistic assessment also takes into consideration the risk transfer that our partnership and programming can bring to civil society partners and considers risk sharing measures as a means to mitigate those risks. The practice of risk transfer also requires engaging with our donors: through open and honest dialogue, DRC will look for opportunities to move forward risk sharing and risk mitigation approaches with our donors. An example of this may be advocating for overhead or direct administrative support costs going directly into partner budgets in order to put in place the necessary resources required to adhere to compliance requirements.

Practicing ethical duty of care or responsible partnering must also be considered in the discussion on risk transfer. While 'duty of care' is a legal concept that applies to an organization's legal responsibilities for the care of its staff ethical duty of care or responsible partnering has become widely adopted in reference to ethical or moral responsibilities of INGOs to minimize risks and support partners to handle the impact of those risks. Many INGOs, including DRC, continue to grapple with the scope and implications of this concept and with what practices they can put into place. These may include "having partners sign onto a joint code of conduct that the INGO uses, providing resources or training for psychosocial support, and helping them set up self-insurance schemes to pay medical and death benefits in the case of an accident or encountering violence on the job".

5. **Strategic direction for engagement:** Standards 1 through 4 collectively inform DRC's strategic direction for our engagement with civil society in the countries where we operate. DRC's ambition is that this strategic direction is identified and articulated in all the countries where we operate; **at a minimum, our reasoning and approach to why and how we do or do not wish to engage with civil society is articulated in region and/or country strategic plans.** In certain DRC countries and regions, depending on the scope and ambition, DRC may have a dedicated civil society strategy that outlines our position and approach in that specific country in greater detail.[10] The purpose of putting an increased emphasis on strategy development is to avoid taking an ad hoc approach to working with civil society partners in favor of a more deliberate, thought through and planned process that guides DRC's decision making and approach.

6. **Participatory, inclusive, and transparent processes**: Working in partnership by nature entails that participatory processes are followed and that DRC strives to improve participatory approaches with our civil society partners. This starts with greater participation in the assessment and project design stage, moving away from a purely instrumental implementing relationship (where activities are designed and contracted out by DRC) when there is opportunity and value for a more equitable partnership to reach joint response outputs. Greater participation spans across the entire project management cycle, striving to get better at including partners throughout implementation and in monitoring and evaluation processes. When it comes to capturing results, we make every effort to publicly recognize and promote the work of partners, rather than packaging it all under DRC programming. At the same time, DRC seeks to ensure that there are learning and dialogue opportunities with our partners during the partnership, increasing transparency around project budgets, access to information, and facilitating opportunities for greater engagement in coordination structures and with donors.

Ensuring participation, inclusion and transparency is at the core of our equitable and strategic partnership with the purpose of supporting partners to meet their objectives. Beyond following these principles when jointly implementing a project, DRC is also working to better engage our strategic partners in consultations on DRC's own strategic thinking and planning processes, to ensure perspectives from partners has a role in influencing our strategic thinking. In these partnerships, DRC seeks opportunities for joint research and advocacy; while also facilitating opportunities for civil society participation in local, national, and international decision-making forums.

It is important to mention that the above minimum standards are not meant to replace the Minimum Operational Procedures within the overall Quality Framework for DRC's Implementing Partner Policy. While the Minimum Operational Procedures in the Implementing Partner Policy serve to enable operations to better manage "implementing" partnerships, the minimum standards articulated here take a wider perspective on how to engage with a wide variety of with civil society actors.

[10] A Country Partnership Strategy template with guidance is available here: Civil Society Partnership Strategy_country template.docx

Approaches to working with civil society

While the above sections focus on theory, definitions, principles, and standards that guide DRC's overall engagement with civil society, this section focuses on what this engagement might look like in reality. Guidance around what civil society engagement looks like in reality is structured against the 4 key intervention areas DRC has prioritized as the means to achieve our ambition for engaging with civil society – to contribute to increased agency, space and capacity.

Intervention Area 1: Partnering with civil society to improve sustainability, effectiveness, and impact of programming

DRC's partnering principles can be found at the core of how we work with all our civil society partners. DRC's way of working – our actions and systems – reflect principles of equitability, transparency, complementarity, results-oriented, and responsibility. Across the spectrum of partnerships depicted in the diagram below, DRC aims to "reinforce and support local capacities, opportunities and motivations to contribute towards an effective and legitimate response"[11], contributing to the core tenant of the localization agenda [12]. For example, in the sudden onset of an emergency, DRC recognizes the valuable role civil society plays as first responders and seeks to coordinate and collaborate with responding local organizations.

DRC engages in equitable partnerships with civil society organizations to design and reach joint DRC and partner response outputs *(project-based partnerships)*, and with objectives reaching beyond joint response outputs towards longer-term strategic objectives and impacts *(strategic partnerships).* As part of DRC's implementation approach, we also enter contractual relationships with local civil society organizations for the purpose of meeting response outputs linked to DRC-owned projects. In itself, this transactional relationship, which resembles that of supplier and customer, is not considered a partnership as defined in this strategy, nor does it contribute to the objectives of DRC's civil society engagement and localization commitments. It is therefore outside the remit of this strategy. Equitable and strategic partnerships may also include aspects of fulfilment of short-term DRC deliverables, but are understood to go beyond solely a contractual relationship at the output level. A partnership may also start as a contractual relationship with a local civil society organization but transform into a more meaningful partnership. DRC seeks to reduce the number of purely contractual relationships and increase the number of equitable partnerships over time.

Reinforcing local capacities in our programming

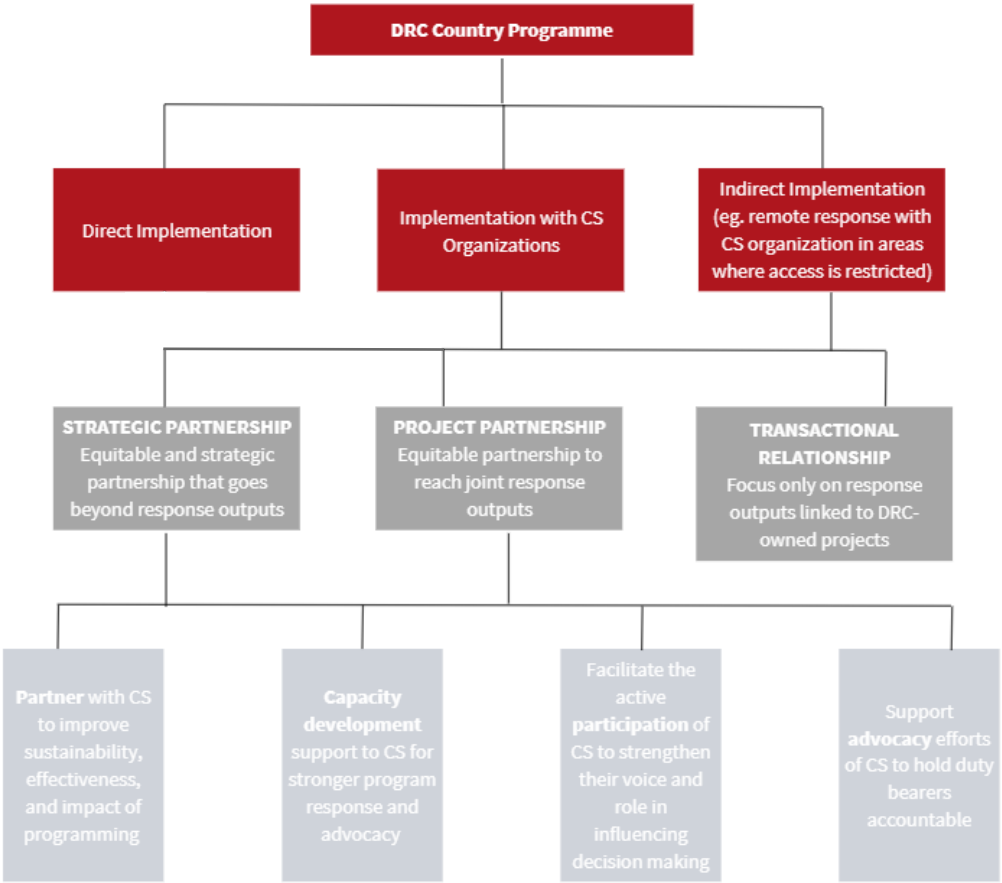
In the sudden onset of an emergency, DRC recognizes the valuable role civil society plays as first responders and seeks to coordinate and collaborate with responding local organizations. During the early stages of an **emergency**, analyses conducted to identify DRC's entry point (be it rapid assessments or mapping of humanitarian systems and actors) should also include looking at the role of local actors and identifying opportunities to complement and reinforce local emergency response capacities. For **Durable Solutions** and **Addressing Root Causes** programming, partnering with civil society is a key component for successful programming. Actively engaging civil society is critical to ensuring quality and relevance of DRC durable solution strategies and interventions, and in strengthening ownership and self-reliance and locally driven responses to durable solutions. Civil society actors are also key stakeholders to identifying and addressing multifaceted and complex root causes of conflict in a given context and are central to governance programming targeting the link between communities, civil society and duty bearers.

[11] DRC Policy Statement on Partnerships, October 2019. DRC Policy Statement on Partnerships_2019.pdf

[12] Grand Bargain Workstream 2; https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/more-support-and-funding-tools-for-local-and-national-responders

What this looks like operationally across DRC country programs is depicted by the diagram below.

Figure 3: Different Modi Operandi of DRC implementation and partnerships



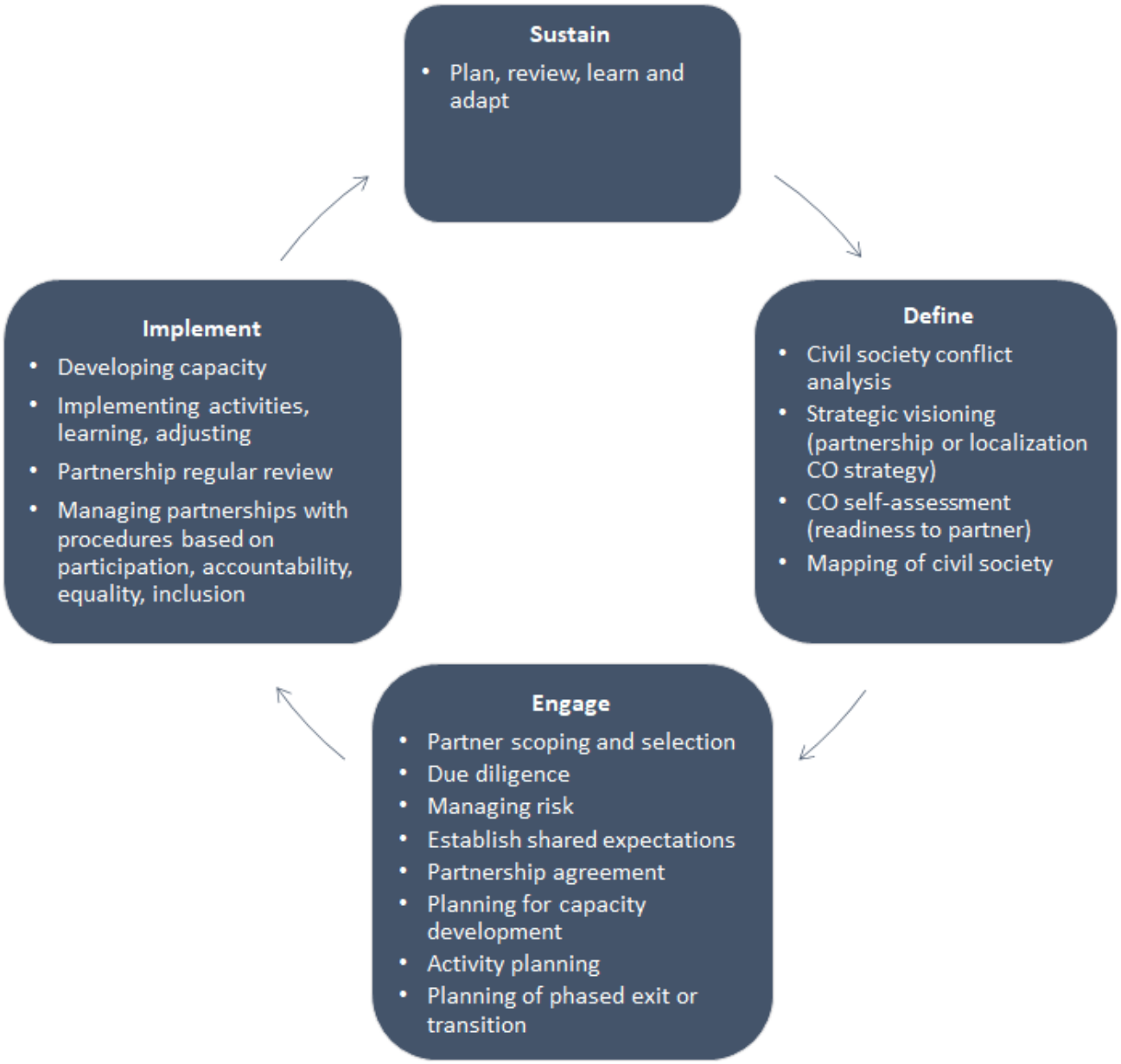
Refer to *Guidance Note: Partnership Types* for further guidance on the distinction between transactional supplier type relationships and more equitable and strategic partnerships.

In reality, the distinction between categories of relationships between DRC and civil society organizations may not always be clear. Furthermore, our relationships with civil society organizations may change or evolve over time.

As depicted in the operating model in Figure 3 above, DRC will continue to work in **transactional relationships - supplier-type relationships with focus only on response outputs linked to DRC-owned projects** where it is relevant to do so. At the same time, DRC will look for opportunities to evolve and expand our partnership approach in the countries we work in, striving to establish partnerships that are equitable and strategic and that – even when focusing on implementation of DRC outputs – involve longer-term rather than one-off engagements, ensuring that the partner gains more from partnering with DRC than a one-off sub-grant agreement. Across all implementation modalities with local civil society organizations as illustrated in Figure 3 above, DRC will look for opportunities to increase transfer of funding to local organizations. However, the success and the quality of DRC's partnership approach is not defined solely by a set % benchmark of funds to be transferred, as funding transfer alone does not achieve our vision illustrated in the theory of change.

In our **project partnerships - equitable partnerships to reach joint DRC and partner response outputs**, DRC facilitates opportunities for the active engagement of our civil society partners throughout the entire partner engagement life cycle.

Figure 4: Partner Engagement Cycle



DRC's partner engagement life cycle is summarized by four stages: define, engage, implement and sustain.

- The **"define" stage** includes defining the strategic vision for engagement at the country office level. This includes elaborating what is included in DRC Country Strategy Plans with the development of a dedicated partnership or localization strategy at the county office level.[13] The strategic vision is informed by a county office's readiness to engage, which includes conducting a country self-assessment to critically and systematically look at internal organizational capacities and resources to engage in civil society partnership. The strategic vision is also informed by an understanding of relevant local civil society actors and their operating environment.[14]

- The **"engage" stage** is where the partnership is established and begins with scoping and selecting partners. New partners could be identified through an open or restricted expression of interest or call for proposals. It is not advised that a call for proposal option is used unless a country office plans to further develop and fund the proposal. If partners are invited to develop program activities with DRC, their engagement should be meaningful rather than a one-off consultation. Relevant due diligence process includes assessment and vetting on selected partner to identify and plan for mitigating potential risks. Regardless whether funds are transferred to the partner or not, the purpose of the partnership and shared expectations for engagement should be jointly decided and clearly articulated in an MoU.[15] Where there is a transfer of funding, when developing a Sub Grant Agreement the process includes consultations with partners and some degree of flexibility and/or concrete support to allow for partners to meet the terms and requirements.[16] At this stage, country offices should consider planning for a phased exit or transition in the partnership (refer to the Responsible Transition Planning section below for further information).

- During the **"implement" stage** is where project activities are implemented and where regular learning and adjusting is embedded. Rather than solely focusing on monitoring the quality of partner activities, DRC looks for opportunities to actively engage partners in overall project monitoring and other learning opportunities embedded in the project. During this stage, DRC invests in providing quality and diversified interventions to support partner capacity development that have been mutually agreed with partners. It is also within this stage that DRC country offices should conduct regular partnership review processes to determine the health of the partnership.[17]

- In the **"sustain" stage**, opportunity is created to critically discuss and assess the partnership, joint decisions are made for potential responsible hand-over and/or phase-out, and discussions are revisited on the future of the partnerships beyond the project life cycle.

[13] A country partnership strategy template is available on the CSEU Learning & Resource page: Civil Society Partnership Strategy_country template.docx

[14] As mentioned above, guidance for DRC Country Offices on conducting a conflict sensitive civil society analysis can be found on the CSEU Insite Learning & Resource page: Civil Society Analysis Guidance.docx

[15] A template of an MoU can be found on the CSEU Insite Learning & Resource page here: Example DRC MoU Template.docx .

[16] DRC's standard sub grant agreement template can be found on the CSEU Implementing Partner Policy page here: Implementing Partners Operations Handbook (sharepoint.com)

[17] A partnership review can be done as part of an overall annual partnership meeting, through key informant interviews, or through online surveys. When deciding on the method, it is important to create a process that will enable open and honest inputs from our partners. Regardless of the type of methodology selected, a joint action plan should be developed with partners putting in place measures to improve engagement and committing the necessary resources to do so. The CSEU is working on developing global guidance for conducting a partnership review, the guidance will be available in 2023 on the CSEU resource page here: Resources for Staff (sharepoint.com)

In our **strategic partnerships** - **equitable and strategic partnerships that go beyond response outputs**, DRC engages in longer term partnerships with the purpose of reaching impactful objectives – be it joint objectives with our partners or supporting partners to meet their objectives. These partnerships can be, but do not necessarily need to be tied to a formal financial agreement through an SGA, nor are these partnerships based solely on the premise to deliver specific outcomes limited to the lifespan of a single project cycle. It is within this category of partnerships that longer term, more meaningful engagement takes place. It is also within this category of partnerships where DRC largely works to address agency and space and places most value on the notion of legitimacy, thereby prioritizing partnering with civil society organizations that are legitimate representatives of rights holders affected by conflict and displacement. Within this category, it is also of central importance to ensure that there is adequate diversity in representation and voice in these partnerships. This includes looking at partnering with groups that are traditionally marginalized – such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, SOCIESC minorities, ethnic minorities, to name a few. DRC also looks for opportunities to engage and/or consult our strategic partners in DRC strategic planning process, in the effort to ensure that partner perspectives influence our strategic thinking. For example, at a minimum, DRC encourages all country offices to include civil society partners in relevant sessions of our Country and Regional Annual Strategic Planning workshops.

As articulated in Strategy 2025, DRC commits to expanding our equitable and strategic partnerships across global operations over the strategic period, while simultaneously working on adapting DRC systems to be able to systematically collect and report on progress towards meeting this ambition.

Case study: What do equitable and strategic partnerships look like?

The **Great Lakes Civil Society Project** implemented by DRC in conjunction with civil society partners in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Kenya had as an overall objective to contribute to the stabilization of displaced communities in the Great Lakes Region by improving local, national and regional responses to displacement, and by reinforcing the role of civil society in defining and implementing these responses.

DRC worked alongside civil society actors to conduct research on a variety of themes and issues relevant for refugees and IDPs, and in lobbying and advocacy to ensure laws passed better reflect and take into account refugees' perspectives and rights; while at the same time, offering diversified capacity development support interventions to the civil society partners to execute these actions effectively.

The project placed civil society partners at the forefront of identifying research and advocacy initiatives relevant to each specific context, and capacity support required to effectively carry out objectives prioritized by them. The success of the project was in part attributed to the nature of the civil society partners who were locally rooted - lobbying policy makers at various levels as legitimate representatives of affected refugees and IDPs seeking durable solutions.

Intervention Area 2: Capacity development support to civil society for stronger program response and advocacy

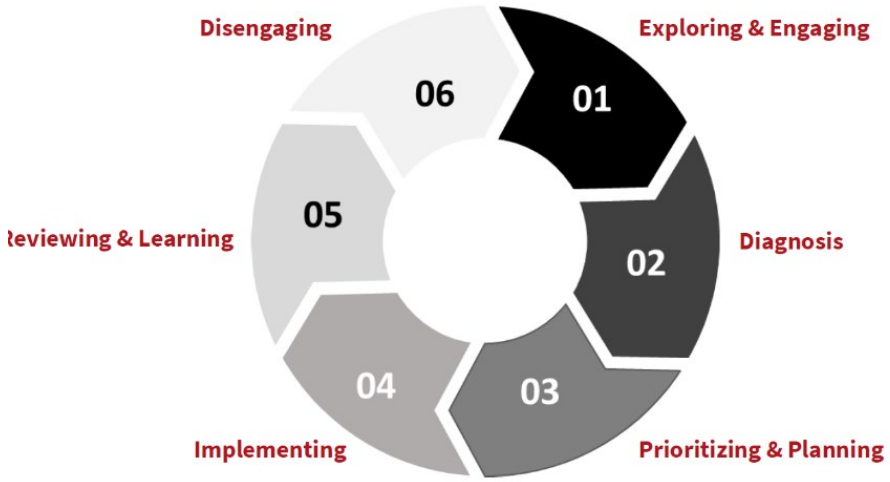
Capacity development support is a central aspect of the DRC's civil society engagement work; whether in an acute crisis, a displacement or a durable solutions context, and should be considered during the early stages of DRC operational set up in a country. While the scope and type of capacity development support will vary depending on the partner, type of partnership, and context, the principles outlined below guide DRC's overall approach to supporting our civil society partners across all programming.

Underpinning these principles is acknowledging that civil society partners have existing capacities. This means working with partners in a complementary way, avoiding competing with local expertise and duplicating efforts – a pursuit that is also key to the localization agenda. This also means recognizing that both DRC and our partners can bring knowledge and expertise to the partnership, fostering an opportunity to mutually learn from each other, and work better together.

For example, as part of our commitment in pursuit of DRC's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) Minimum Standards, DRC seeks to partner with civil society which have expertise on particular groups at heightened risk in the context of displacement and conflict, and which can legitimately claim representation of such groups (for example local associations for women, people of SOGIESC minority groups, persons with disabilities, youth and elderly persons), in the aim to compliment capacities in partnerships with DRC and civil society organizations. In acknowledging that capacity strengthening can go both ways, DRC seeks to actively identify and foster opportunities for mutual learning and capacity development support on AGDM issues.

In response to an increased focus in DRC on providing quality capacity development support to civil society partners, the CSEU developed a Partner Capacity Development Guide. This comprehensive resource provides step by step guidance along each of the 6 stages of the partner capacity cycle – from engaging in the capacity journey through to disengaging from capacity support. Each stage is accompanied by guidance, tools, templates, checklists and further reading. The guide and associated tools can be found on the CSEU Insite Learning & Resource page here: Resources for Staff (sharepoint.com).

Figure 5: Capacity Development Cycle



The following guiding principles and approaches inform DRC's planning and implementation of capacity development support to civil society partner organizations:

- Capacity development support interventions are agreed and planned through a **participatory process** with partners; in this way the change process is owned by the partner organization. In order for change processes to be successful, they need to be driven by the partner themselves; building capacity is not something that DRC can do for the partner, rather DRC plays a supportive role contributing to the desired change as defined by the partner

- Capacity development support offered to partners focuses on tangible outcomes, with support offered reflecting DRC's **value add and expertise**. Efforts are made to avoid overcommitting beyond our own internal capacities and resources available to deliver

- Capacity development support offered to civil society partners is properly **resourced**. For partnerships with a sub grant agreement, civil society partners are encouraged to include a capacity development line in their budgets. Developing a master capacity development plan will give an overview of capacity support being offered to partners across all programming, revealing gaps that require resourcing to fulfill our commitments

- In recognizing that our civil society partners have **existing capacities**, capacity development support offered recognizes and complements partner's existing capacities

- Additional capacity development support being received by our partners – be it internally initiated or external from peer INGOs or donors - is discussed during the planning stage in the effort to **avoid duplicating** support offered and overburdening partners with "mandatory trainings and workshops"

Case study: Investing in Capacity Development

DDG and 3F started working as partners in 2014. Conflict escalation in Libya meant that all international staff had to leave the country. At that time, there was no local NGO capable of working to International Mine Action Standards. The core of the partnership strategy consisted of developing internal administrative systems as well as a managerial structure and technical expertise that would eventually enable the local organization to operate independently according to international standards. This unique, fully integrated organizational and technical capacity development program was fundamental to the success of the partnership. Designed as a multi-year phased approach, it focused on deep mentoring complimented by training as a mean to establishing operational capabilities and a sustainable institutional set up.

Since 2019 3F has directly received funding from UNMAS, UNICEF, the UK, Switzerland, Italy (grants of up to 500k GBP). Starting in 2022, they expect to start working through consortiums with direct EU agreement.

- Capacity development support **goes beyond** the scope of capacities required to implement DRC led projects, to include support required for civil society organizations to effectively realize their own objectives

- Capacity development support offered is not limited only to partnerships where a formal agreement is in place (sub grant agreement). Nor does capacity development support always entail financial resourcing. For example, support might include staff secondment, learning through joint opportunities – assessments, research, design, facilitating linkages, etc

For additional guidance on what these principles look like in practice, refer to the *Illustration of Principles* resource document in DRC's Partner Capacity Development Guide: PCDGuide_principles_illustrations.pdf.

Which capacities?

A recent report from the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) on capacity and complementarity brings light to the notion of "invisible power" in relation to how capacity is defined and assessed in the international humanitarian sector. "The use of a vague term such as capacity as if it were a single quality to cover the enormous range of abilities, skills and competencies required for effective humanitarian action is also a way of making the power dynamic in capacity assessments invisible." This "invisible power" on how capacity is defined also determines which skills, abilities and competencies are valued. "For instance, English language skills are often a necessary component of capacity, while skills in the language of the affected people are not. This is because international agencies may believe that hiring a translator to interact with affected populations gives them enough understanding of how these people see the world. Capacity assessments often measure familiarity with international donors' requirements; however, if being able to speak to and negotiate with local authorities were part of such assessments, then many international agencies would fail. Similarly, familiarity with SPHERE standards is essential; enough familiarity with the local context to apply SPHERE standards is not." The report is a useful reminder for INGOs to be more mindful and aware of unequal power relations when it comes to defining and assessing capacity and determining how best to provide quality capacity support to our civil society partners.

In order to be truly effective, capacity development support requires planning and management, much like implementing a project. The planning process for initiating capacity support involves more than just applying a capacity assessment tool and developing a capacity strengthening plan. In order to determine how best DRC can work with a partner, any capacity assessment process should look at identifying both existing capacities (understanding what our partners can contribute) and gaps in capacities. This understanding not only informs how best DRC can contribute to capacity strengthening, but also how we will work in a partnership where existing capacities can be complementary. The planning process includes understanding our partner's existing capacity development commitments and support from other INGOs or donors, as well as internally led processes. It also entails gaining a clear understanding of our partner's priorities and expectations as well as what DRC's ability is to deliver on those expectations. Sufficient budgeting to allow for meaningful capacity development support is critical in the planning phase. This includes dedicated funding allocated in both DRC and partner budgets, and it includes a mobilization of technical capacities across DRC, including support functions, to contribute to the capacity development support. It is important to remember that change in capacity takes time, a few trainings or workshops alone will not lead to significant change. While certain trainings may be considered fundamental prior to implementing activities, capacity development support can be provided alongside program implementation and should be ongoing – beyond the lifecycle of a project. Moreover, capacity development support goes beyond capacities required to implement DRC project activities, in favor of a more holistic and sustainable investment in supporting the growth and role of civil society in the country contexts where DRC is present.

Capacity development support can be offered through diverse methods, including but not limited to trainings. The type of method that is best suited to meet an identified capacity gap is agreed jointly with DRC partners. In this way, capacity development support is tailored to the specific needs of partners. Capacity support methods can be through both formal learning opportunities, such as trainings, and through learning-by-doing. DRC encourages a multi-dimensional approach to capacity strengthening, including more than one type of support method. For additional guidance, refer to the *Capacity Development Overview*

Methods Table in DRC's Partner Capacity Development Guide: PCDGuide_Methods_table.pdf. The methods table provides a compilation of a wide range of possible capacity methods you could choose from, with guidance on which methods work best for different purposes.

What capacities would we look to support under DRC program platforms?

Durable solutions

- Improved understanding of durable solutions concepts, including consequences of non compliance to core principles such as voluntariness, non discrimination, safety and security
- Improved research and advocacy skills and opportunities to advocate

Addressing root causes

- Skills building on effective dialogue, between communities, civil society, and duty bearers; and the creation of safe spaces to facilitate open dialogue
- Improved knowledge and skills to raise awareness on rights for rights holders

Emergency

- Building capacities relevant to emergency response in existing partners as part of preparedness measures
- Improved operational capacities through surge secondment to partner office at the onset of an emergency
- Real time technical help desk support from DRC to partner staff when operating remotely

Capacity development support does not end once a one-off support intervention is delivered. A capacity development plan is monitored by both DRC and the partner – to revisit gaps in capacity, monitor change in capacities, evaluate the effectiveness of capacity support interventions, and update the plan.

The extent of investment in supporting partner capacity development will vary depending on the organization, type of partnership, and context. At a minimum, all DRC partners are assessed for risk and compliance related capacity gaps as per our internal partnership operating procedures.[18] When working with a civil society organization to meet response outputs linked to a DRC-owned project the relationship will likely be short term in nature, with a limited scope, requiring equally limited investment in capacity support – such as a technical training to deliver protection activities, or financial management support to meet donor requirements. In our more equitable and strategic partnerships however, capacity development support is central and should be guided by the approach outlined in this secti

Assessing compliance risks to DRC and assessing capacity strengths, gaps, and needs of our local partners are not the same thing. But neither are they mutually exclusive. Both play an important and complementary role in DRC's partnership engagement, and it is not appropriate to substitute a risk assessment for a capacity assessment. As such DRC's partnering procedures are undergoing a shift, separating out assessing partner relevance, risk (due diligence procedures), and capacity (capacity diagnosis). While these processes will now be separate, they are designed to build on each other, to maximize effectiveness in our support to partners.

[18] Further guidance on partner assessments can be found in the Implementing Partner Policy in the Operational Handbook, https://insite.drc.dk/en/operations-handbook/implementing-partners

Intervention Area 3: Facilitating active and meaningful participation of civil society to strengthen their voice and role in influencing decision making

With the aim to reach the ultimate objective articulated in our global theory of change on civil society engagement, DRC sees its role as one of facilitating the active participation of civil society to strengthen their voice and role in influencing decision making that affects the fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement.

Within this intervention area and in pursuit of the above, DRC supports civil society by **developing and/or strengthening linkages across civil society organizations through networks, coalitions, alliances or through more informal collaboration forums**. When looking for opportunities to support these horizontal linkages across civil society and as a point of departure when identifying DRC's role and value add, it is important to remember that civil society is often self-organizing.

What this support might look like in reality across DRC programming varies widely. DRC may bring together existing civil society partners we work with in a country program, for example, in round table discussions around a specific issue to collect recommendations that will feed into policy making for durable solutions. We may enable safe spaces for dialogue and trust building between civil society actors across conflict divides; as well as between civil society actors, community members and duty bearers, including security providers in the aim to encourage working better together to address root causes of conflict. We may also purposefully map and seek civil society actors – at local, national, or transnational level, to come together around a common cause; establishing a formal network with democratic mechanisms; and supporting network members with longer term capacity development, resources, and access to relevant decision makers and decision-making forums. Coalitions, alliances, networks, and even less formalized forums can provide a platform for organized collective action through coordination, strength in numbers, and resource sharing. This collective action can be harnessed into stronger voice, legitimacy, and access to decision makers.

Case study: What does supporting civil society voice look like?

Working to contribute to durable solutions for displaced Syrians, DRC engages and supports Syrian civil society outside of Syria. Under the Durable Solutions Platform, DRC has been supporting the establishment of the **Voices for Displaced Syrians forum**. The forum strengthens coordination and dialogue across Syrian civil society, across national borders. A strong and resilient civil society that engages strategically with national, regional, and global policy processes on displacement increases the quality of policies to promote durable solutions. DRC has designed a phased approach to support the forum over four years - starting with the forum's establishment, offering capacity support on research and advocacy, facilitating access to participation in international forums and advocacy initiatives, with increased ownership and eventual handover to a Syrian hosting organization.

In parallel, **DRC engages Syrian diaspora in Europe on durable solutions**. After eight years of conflict, Syrian civil society actors acknowledge fading prospects for a positive outcome of the conflict allowing for safe and voluntary return as well as a safe space for civil society within Syria. This is reinforced by Syrian civil society actors' shrinking access to Syria, forcing them to rethink their engagement as a civil society in exile. Thus, they see the need to become better organized in their host countries as a diaspora, and to seek collaboration between the near diaspora in Syria's neighboring countries and the far diaspora in Europe and the US in order to get their voices heard for a better future for Syrians inside and outside Syria.

DRC can also play an important role in **fostering stronger linkages between civil society and duty bearers** in our support to civil society to influence decision making at local, provincial, or national levels. The aim is to increase the influence of civil society on policies and planning processes that affect the needs and rights of populations affected by conflict and displacement. As well as, influencing national regulatory frameworks, policies, attitudes, and behaviors that restrict the operating environment for civil society in a given country context.

Closely linked to this is **fostering stronger linkages between civil society and communities** to ensure community engagement and participation (either directly or through civil society organizations) in decisions that affect them. Strengthening this relationship, where weak, also increases a sense of legitimacy of civil society organizations to represent and advocate on behalf of the affected populations they work to serve. This requires particular attention when working with civil society organizations supporting affected communities from which they are not locally rooted in.

It is pertinent to mention here that in protracted conflicts involving non-state combatants, government duty-bearers may be either largely absent and/or unable to fulfill their responsibilities towards rights-holders. A plethora of non-state actors (including armed groups) may be acting in this vacuum as the de facto (informal) duty bearers. In many contexts customary, traditional and religious (justice and governance) systems and actors, having existed longer than state institutions, are recognized and operate in parallel to, instead of, in competition with, or in complementarity to the state authorities. In DRC's engagement with non-state armed actors, it is valuable to recognize that civil society can play an indispensable role in negotiating humanitarian access and maneuvering humanitarian space where DRC's role and ability may be limited.

Case study: Working with civil society and duty bearers

In **Iraq**, DRC is working with both civil society and duty bearers to address root causes of conflict and displacement linked to inequalities in the provision of basic services and socio-economic opportunities; these inequalities result in feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement, allowing for social tensions to simmer and hindering a return to stability and peace. Recognizing the potential of a strengthened and representative civil society to increase capacity and willingness amongst duty bearers to respond to community basic needs, including those of the most vulnerable and traditionally marginalized, the project aims to strengthen the role and capacity of civil society in identifying community needs across specific interest groups, and holding duty bearers to account to meet these needs – including strengthening duty bearers' technical capacity to do so.

In acute and protracted crises contexts, it has been widely recognized that barriers exist preventing the **meaningful participation of civil society in international coordination mechanisms**. This is evidenced by a commitment to effective coordination that promotes increased representation and where possible leadership of local responders, as put forth in outcome pillar 4 of the Grand Bargain 2.0. While this involves a system wide shift and wider participation to identify and compliment local coordination systems and make space for more local participation, as part of our work under the Emergency platform, DRC can advocate for increasing participation in the working groups we sit it, co-lead, or lead. This includes looking at reducing barriers to participation as such language, use of humanitarian jargon, technological obstacles, security challenges, and resource and capacity constraints.[19]

Also included in this intervention area is the work that DRC does **to increase access of civil society partners to our donors** in order to promote the voice of civil society in discussions on the needs and rights of populations affected by conflict and displacement; and where possible, participation in wider donor forums where there is an opportunity to influence relevant policies. Beyond the donor community, DRC has a history of success in facilitating active civil society participation in **global forums** on refugee and migration issues. One such recent example being DRC supporting the participation of refugee-led and diaspora organizations at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. The Global Compact on Refugees makes a direct reference to the participation of refugees as part of a multi-stakeholder approach and explicitly mentions diasporas as a stakeholder group. Nevertheless, accessing this forum and other similar global policy forums is often a challenge for civil society, limiting their voice and active engagement in durable solutions.

When engaging with civil society to strengthen voice and influence - across the displacement axis and from emergencies towards reaching sustainable solutions and to addressing roots causes of displacement - it is important to acknowledge that power imbalances exist within civil society. Civil society within a country, or civil society that crosses national borders, is not homogenous. It is important to be mindful of whose voice is being heard and who is representing and participating in these forums. DRC's approach is to strive for balanced representation and deliberate inclusion of the most marginalized, ie. youth networks, women's groups, SOCIESC minority associations, when facilitating participation. For example, supporting the participation of women led and women's rights civil society actors requires an understanding of the barriers to women's voice and participation, such as patriarchal norms – both within society and the humanitarian sector.

Case study: Supporting civil society voice at the global level

To further strengthen **diaspora and refugee voices at the Global Refugee Forum 2019**, DRC facilitated and promoted meaningful participation of diaspora and refugee-led organizations through regional and international workshops to raise awareness and foster networking among refugee-led and diaspora organizations and facilitate diaspora and refugee-led organizations to make relevant pledges towards the Compact's objectives. The workshops also culminated in representatives from participating refugee-led and diaspora organizations being elected to attend the first Forum meeting in Geneva.

Diaspora, community-based and refugee-led organizations from the three participating regions – Europe, Middle East, East Africa -- are eager to continue to play a complementary role alongside other stakeholders in addressing durable solutions for refugees, asylum seekers and returnees, and to engage further. Diaspora have a strong ability to serve the interest of GRF and relevance to inform policy and widen the understanding of how to support displaced populations by bringing their experiences on the ground into policy related discussions.

[19] Refer to IASC Guidance: Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Coordination Mechanisms for further reading. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/operational-response/iasc-guidance-strengthening-participation-representation-and-leadership-local-and-national-actors

Intervention Area 4: Supporting advocacy efforts to hold duty bearers accountable

As a rights-based organization, advocacy is a key component of DRC's work towards ensuring that duty bearers protect, respect, and fulfill the rights of people affected by conflict and displacement; while at the same time encouraging and supporting rights-holders to claim and enjoy their rights. In this work, the concepts of voice and representation of civil society are fundamental in what we aim to achieve. DRC takes action to contribute to building an environment conducive to respect for the rights of the individual, including advocating on behalf of people affected by conflict and displacement. At the same time, we look for opportunities to complement this with joint advocacy efforts with civil society partners; as well as taking a "behind the scenes'' approach through support that puts civil society at the forefront of advocacy efforts. DRC acknowledges local civil society as the legitimate voice and representative of people affected by conflict and displacement. It is important to reiterate here, the importance of legitimacy when it comes to who's voice DRC supports amplifying. As mentioned above, DRC prioritizes partnering with civil society organizations that are legitimate representatives of rights holders affected by conflict and displacement. This should be considered when selecting relevant partners, with the perspective of giving voice, or bringing support, to people affected by displacement or conflict. Decisions around who DRC partners with are based on relevant analysis, taking into account social dynamics and perceptions of legitimacy, and ensuring there is relevant representation and adequate diversity in that representation. Partnering decisions should also be informed by the local organization's overall advocacy agenda, looking for common ground on advocacy issues based on humanitarian principles.

Case study: Civil society advocacy at the forefront

Despite an extensive legal and policy framework in support of **civil society and women's inclusion in the security sector governance in the Sahel region**, a culture of exclusion persists, depriving national policies of the precious input that a diverse pool of citizens and public service users may provide. The persistence of cultural norms that excludes civilians in general, and women in particular, from security decision-making results in laws, policies and practices that fail to acknowledge the full range of security concerns affecting communities – women as well as men, boys as well as girls – leave unaddressed extensive domains of risks, vulnerabilities and concerns faced by the less powerful.

To address this challenge, DRC/DDG, with our local/regional civil society partner WANEP - a regional network with CS members in all ECOWAS countries, designed a project which aims to empower the next generation of Sahelian women from diverse backgrounds, with the necessary knowledge, skills and access to break down the barriers that keep them out of security governance, and enable them to advocate for and contribute to a security sector that equally addresses the needs of women, men, boys and girls. These experts are provided with tools, training and mentoring to make a substantial contribution to security issues affecting Sahelian communities, thus challenging the exclusionary stereotypes against women in the security sector, encouraging more inclusive (and therefore more effective) security governance practices, and providing younger generations with role-models who will help them to overcome traditional barriers to women's participation in security issues.

DRC is cognizant of the fact that entering into a partnership for advocacy purposes can pose different risks to DRC and our local partners. These go/no go decisions are wholly partner and context specific and need to be taken at the country/region level.

Our work with civil society in the realm of advocacy lies with our more equitable and strategic partnerships. What does some of our advocacy work with partners look like in practice? DRC supports civil society partners to raise the awareness of rights holders of their rights and facilitate their engagement in claiming those rights. This could be, for example, through working with and supporting civil society to conduct community rights-based awareness raising sessions; facilitating community consultations that feed into civil society advocacy priorities or to influence policy initiatives; and mobilizing community members to collectively take action to demand greater transparency and accountability from duty bearers.

In all contexts where we operate, as mentioned above, DRC looks for partnering opportunities with civil society organizations, based on common shared objectives that align with DRC's mandate; and taking into consideration complementarity in capacities between DRC and our partners. Under this intervention area, DRC partners with civil society organizations on joint advocacy efforts where messages align to reinforce efforts and impact. In other instances, DRC may support civil society organizations to develop their own advocacy plans, with a concerted effort to target traditionally marginalized and excluded civil society groups to participate in advocating for change and influencing decision-making processes. In either case, DRC looks for opportunities to facilitate the active participation of civil society in national advocacy platforms and other forums where advocacy efforts of civil society can be elevated.

In parallel to the above, DRC offers capacity development support to civil society organizations on how to effectively engage right holders in advocacy efforts and how to influence policy and legislative change through advocacy efforts. This might include, for example, supporting civil society organizations with capacity development on conducting actionable research, collecting data and information and using evidence to influence change at local, national and international levels. It is worth reiterating here that we must acknowledge that civil society is often self-organizing as a point of departure when identifying what DRC's role and value add can be in the partnership and the capacity development support we can offer.

Responsible Transition Planning

DRC places emphasis on the importance of responsible transition planning with our equitable and strategic partners, planning for a shift in the partnership from a reliance on sub granting from DRC to one where the partnership has more balanced power sharing. DRC uses the term transition planning rather than exit planning as the intent is not necessarily to exit the partnerships in its entirety, nor does it refer to DRC exiting the operating context. Transition planning encompasses a range of possibilities in shifting the nature of the partnership and implies a more mutually agreed approach.

A transition in the partnership could lead to DRC and a local NGO jointly applying for a funding opportunity, the local NGO as a lead in a consortium that includes DRC, or the local NGO sub granting to DRC for technical expertise and collaboration. While there may be other reasons DRC with our partners decide to transition the partnership (ie. due to a shift in context or change in partner priorities), in this context, transition planning refers to the endorsement of local leadership by investing in the sustainability of our local civil society partners. The specifics of what a transition looks like will be unique to each partnership and operating context.

How DRC enters a partnership is just as important as how we transition, thereby requiring the same investment in planning. The transition requires discussion and taking action well in advance and requires resources to see it through (ie. staff time and financial support), with planning and implementation done jointly with the partner. Given this, DRC will be developing guidance for country operations on how to approach transition planning with local civil society partners. This guidance will be practical considerations for managing the transition process responsibly.

4. EVIDENCE AND LEARNING

The CSE Unit places value in generating learning and evidence in order to inform the steer of our strategic engagement with civil society. One example is through the ongoing production of case studies, illustrating what the strategy looks like in practice, based on promising practices from across our global operations. The case studies can be accessed on the CSEU Learning & Resource page: Civil Society Learning & Resources (sharepoint.com)

At an organizational level, the CSEU produced a report that highlights key areas where, if built upon, DRC can see positive movement towards meeting its commitments to strengthening the way we partner with civil society. The report identifies barriers that are currently inhibiting strong civil society engagement and presents five strategic changes for DRC to overcome the barriers to greater institutionalization of civil society partnerships across the organization. The report provides a range of actions to achieve these strategic changes and includes who should be responsible for leading each action, and the importance of each action to achieve greater system-wide change. The full report and brief can be accessed on the CSEU main page here: Civil Society Engagement (sharepoint.com).

Civil society engagement case studies:

- Supporting Refugee Led Networks
- Equitable and Strategic Partnerships in DRC
- Supporting Advocacy Efforts of Local Civil Society
- A Localized Approach to Nexus Programming

Starting in 2021, the CSEU launched a global Civil Society Engagement Learning series. This online meeting series featuring key topics in civil society engagement is held on a rolling basis throughout the year. Participation is open to all DRC staff and provides an opportunity for cross learning and sharing.[20]

The CSEU will continue to look for opportunities to capture learning on ongoing basis, to continue to inform our strategic direction when it comes to engaging with local civil society.

[20] Recordings of the learning series can be found on the CSEU Learning & Resource Insite page here: Civil Society Learning Series (sharepoint.com)

Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest international NGO, with a specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC is present in close to 40 countries and employs 9,000 staff globally.

DRC advocates for the rights of and solutions for displacement-affected communities and provides assistance during all stages of displacement: In acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC supports displa-ced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and inclusion.

Our 7,500 volunteers in Denmark make an invaluable difference in integration activities throughout the country.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organisational mission, and DRC aims at the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards according to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

HRH Crown Princess Mary is DRC's patron.

To read more about what we do, see: **www.drc.ngo**

DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL