



DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Photo: DRC Diaspora Programme Annual Grand Assembly 2019 © Jamil Ghafuri



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Preface

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) recognizes diaspora as crucial actors playing a significant role – positively and negatively – for people and communities in countries of origin (or heritage), for refugees and migrants in transit, and for newly arrived refugees and migrants in countries of residence. Via its Diaspora Programme, DRC has since 2010 engaged directly with different diasporas to support their constructive engagement in countries of origin (or heritage), transit and residence.

The purpose of this document is to outline DRC's strategic foundation to engage with diaspora and articulate our ambitions - how and why we do it, and what we aim to achieve.

Our definition of diaspora and diaspora engagement

The concepts of diaspora and diaspora engagement are complex and at times sensitive as they relate to concepts of identity and belonging, and thus also to the politics of conflict and peace. DRC acknowledges this and promotes a nuanced approach based on evidence and analysis.

We adhere to a definition of diaspora as *migrants and refugees and their descendants who maintain active ties with their former or ancestral homeland and with compatriots living elsewhere*. As such, diasporas are an integral part of civil society in both their countries of origin and residence.

While there are many forms of engaging with diasporas, DRC has an operational focus on facilitating constructive diaspora engagement in relation to their support to persons and communities affected by conflict and displacement.

DRC considers diaspora integral civil society actors that we work with, as part of our overall approach to civil society engagement. Therefore, DRC's strategy on diaspora engagement is a reflection of DRC's Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy and is aligned to its overall intervention logic, normative framework, principles of engagement and change processes. It places DRC's interventions with and for diaspora within DRC's overall strategic frameworks, towards achieving DRC's mission to assist refugees and the displaced, protect their rights and empower them towards a better future, in pursuit of a dignified life for all displaced.

Context

Globally the number of people living outside their country of origin is increasing. While the complexity of migration cannot be unfolded in this strategy, what is important to note is that the total number of people born in one country, but living in another, is on the rise (272 million in 2019 compared to 119 million in 1990¹, counting only first-generation migrants and refugees).

For many, family ties, or a sense of belonging, loyalty and civic duty to their country of origin (or heritage, for second and subsequent generations) do not cease with the physical move. Migrants and refugees and their descendants often maintain active ties with what they regard as their homeland and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries, thus forming politically, culturally, socially, philanthropically and economically engaged diasporas, with an often sizeable influence and impact on their countries of origin or heritage.

Typical areas of diaspora engagement

Individual remittances to relatives

Providing household income and emergency lifeline.

Emergency response

Individual or collective support to people affected by humanitarian crises.

Community development

Individual or collective support towards communities in countries of origin or heritage.

Knowledge transfer

Through individual or organized engagement with institutions / civil society in countries of origin or heritage.

Advocacy and lobbying

Organized engagement with authorities and other relevant stakeholders in countries of residence and origin.

DIASPORA ACTION

Economic development & job creation

Investment and/ or support to local businesses.

Political engagement

Engagement from outside, by return, or through financial or other support to political groups / parties

Peacebuilding

Engagement in international, national and local peacebuilding, reconciliation and mediation processes at top, middle-range and grass-root leadership levels.

Integration and social cohesion

Support to newcomers and communities in residence countries.

Conflict

Financial or personnel support to local conflicts, rebel groups, etc.

Migration

Advisory and/or financial support to migrants

¹ IOM World Migration Review 2020

Within academic institutions and among actors in the international aid system, the value of remittances and the importance of considering the role of diaspora in development-related activities has been on the radar for several decades.

Remittance flows reaching close to 600 billion USD in 2021

Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are projected to reach USD 589 billion in 2021, standing more than threefold above official development assistance and surpassing foreign direct investments (FDI) flows by more than 50%.

Source: Knomad (Knomad November 2021, Migration and Development Brief 35) / https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Migration_Brief%2035_1.pdf

Case: Somali diaspora remittances exceeding levels of official development and humanitarian aid

“At present, Somalia’s diaspora is estimated to remit nearly twice the level of official development assistance and five times the level of humanitarian aid annually. Remittances account for about one-third of GDP, roughly equivalent to government revenues, and help to support livelihoods for an estimated 40 percent of the population. Remittances also help finance Somalia’s large trade deficit, paying for a sizeable portion of imports.”

Source: Brookings (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/10/02/somalias-path-to-stability/>)

However, while the impact of diaspora engagement has been the subject of a growing body of literature, specific programming with and for diaspora with a view to support and enhance its positive potential, especially within humanitarian aid, remains limited and rests with a handful of actors, including DRC.

Part of the reason for this may be linked to substantial differences between international aid agencies and diaspora individuals, communities and organizations in terms of their motivation and their ways of working. Although a diaspora is frequently labeled as THE diaspora, it is far from being a homogenous group. Diasporas are complex hybrid mixes of identity expressions and political practices, driven by a diverse set of motivations and aspirations, such as family obligations or a sense of community belonging, by political activism or religious beliefs, by prospects of financial gains or social status, in their countries of residence or for an eventual return. Hence there is a need to pluralize ‘diaspora’.

Furthermore, the diversity of contexts in their countries of origin also plays a significant role in how members of the diaspora want to and/or are able to engage. Some key contextual factors include security, government policies/ practices toward diaspora engagement, financial and technical resources in the diaspora, and ethnic, religious, cultural and political dynamics.

Overall, the heterogeneity of diaspora communities and their contexts makes it hard to categorize or standardize diaspora engagement. Rather, it is of crucial importance to remain flexible, context-specific and recognize their diversity as fact and an opportunity when seeking to meaningfully engage with diaspora actors. In conclusion, programming with and for diaspora must build on a strong contextual understanding based on evidence and analysis, and it needs to make the investments necessary to develop long-term relationships based on trust and respect.

Why DRC works with diaspora

DRC works with diaspora actors because we recognize the substantial impact they have in their countries of origin/heritage, transit, and destination, and, consequently, their potential for further improving the situation for many of those affected by conflict and displacement.

Given the heterogenous nature of diaspora, DRC bases its work on thorough analyses of the context and types of engagement of the diaspora in question and will work with and support diaspora individuals and civil society groups and organizations that play or have the potential to play a constructive role towards DRCs vision of “A Dignified Life for all Displaced”.

DRC’s diaspora engagement is guided by the overall aim to support civil society across national borders to have agency, capacity and space to contribute to the fulfilment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement. Specifically, and in line with DRC’s Civil Society Engagement Strategy, **we aim to ensure that diaspora transnational civil society actors are empowered to:**

- **Claim and maintain space** for constructive engagement;
- **Contribute to fulfilling the rights of populations** affected by conflict and displacement;
- **Increase their agency through greater collaboration** across diaspora civil society actors and stronger links to duty bearers to influence decision making on policies that affect the rights of people affected by displacement.

Diaspora engagement and the DRC response framework

DRC’s Response Framework aims at capturing the full spectrum of DRC’s engagement with people affected by conflict and displacement. The response framework comprises three platforms that seek to articulate DRC’s ambition of a comprehensive, holistic approach to displacement.

Below is an overview of ways diaspora individuals, communities and organizations play a role across all phases of displacement.

Addressing root causes to displacement	Emergency	Durable solutions to displacement
Diaspora actors contribute to the strengthening of local resilience and to conflict management and mitigation.	Diaspora actors act as first responders, aid providers/donors, and advocates for aid support.	Diaspora actors identify and support durable solutions for people affected by displacement by, for example, (i) supporting livelihoods, service delivery, investing in communities in countries of origin, (ii) advocating for the protection of rights of the displaced to change policies, perceptions and practices, and (iii) providing support to integration, organizing cultural activities



Photo: Aisha, a beekeeper in Hama, Syria, © DRC



Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles

Following the above, DRC's Diaspora Programme is working based on the following vision, mission and guiding principles:

Vision

Diaspora civil society actors have agency, space and capacity to contribute to the fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement.

Mission

DRC's Diaspora Programme supports the constructive role of diaspora as transnational civil society actors that seek to contribute to relevant protection and solutions outcomes for people affected by conflict and displacement – in the diaspora's former home countries, for those on the move, and for those settling in third countries.

Guiding principles

Know Your Diaspora

Diaspora engagement can be contentious: it is based on a myriad of motivations, positions and affiliations, and it does not follow specific rules, frameworks and mandates. It is most often personal in its nature, with all the strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities that this entails. At its best, diaspora engagement can save lives, contribute to economic and social development, and bring about key changes towards peaceful and resilient societies. At its worst, it can be based on partisan and discriminatory action, and proactively contribute to creating or maintaining conflict and prolonging crises.

While it is difficult and somewhat unreasonable to require neutrality of groups that are part of the social fabric of communities/countries affected by conflict, much can be done to ensure constructive outcomes of their action, and that no harm is done. A key factor in this regard is DRC's approach to base diaspora engagement programming on comprehensive analyses of the nature and the dynamics of their engagement in a given context, and focus on supporting the voice and agency of diaspora as such, while refraining from supporting any specific position within that voice and agency. "Knowing your diaspora" is thus a key guiding principle for DRC's diaspora engagement.

Diaspora agency

Our primary role is to *support and strengthen the agency of diaspora civil society*² while considering their diverse ambitions and levels of capacity. We aim to facilitate the voice and actions of diaspora civil society organizations rather than talking and acting on their behalf. We recognize and see a strength in their broad range of size, skillsets and motivations, and work to support the realization of our common goals rather than pushing our own agendas. We are aware of the inherently political aspect of the agency of diaspora (and civil social broadly), and we respect diasporas' right to a political position and a voice. At the same time, our support to diaspora will not be politically driven nor will we support any specific political agenda of diaspora through our engagement, in the aim to maintain the neutrality of DRC's work.

² Agency is understood as collective power and strength in horizontal (across civil society) and vertical (community, civil society, duty bearers) linkages.

Non-instrumentalization

Recognizing that the diversity of the aid community is an asset, DRC works to support diaspora civil society organizations to identify and work toward their own goals in support of people and communities affected by conflict and displacement. DRC's diaspora engagement is based on a genuine wish to facilitate constructive diaspora agency rather than instrumentalize their resources and added value in support of DRC's implementation of projects. As such, DRC's diaspora engagement is an example of DRC engaging in strategic partnerships, with objectives reaching beyond response outputs towards longer-term strategic objectives and impacts³.

Accountability and meaningful engagement

DRC seeks to include diaspora advice, collaboration and coordination throughout the development and implementation of its Diaspora Programme activities, with a view to further strengthen and qualify strategies and ensure transparency, relevance and ownership vis-à-vis the diaspora. Practically, the Diaspora Programme invites diaspora partners to participate in development of project ideas, design and implementation, and consults them on strategic and programmatic questions and decisions. To facilitate and formalize this approach, the establishment of diaspora advisory boards is part of most diaspora projects.



Photo: DRC Diaspora Programme Annual Grand Assembly 2019 © Jamil Ghatfuri

Case: The DiPS Advisory Boards

During the +10 years that the Diaspora Project Support (DiPS) grant mechanism has existed, diaspora advisory boards have been an integral part of the project.

At the Annual Grand Meetings, +500 community members cast votes to elect representatives from the Afghan and Somali community in Denmark to be part of the DiPS Advisory Boards. The Advisory Boards provide inputs on proposals by Afghan and Somali diaspora organizations submitted to DiPS for funding and advice on programmatic issues.

³ DRC's Civil Society Engagement Strategy: *DRC engages in equitable partnerships with civil society organizations to design and reach joint DRC and partner response outputs (programming partnership), and in equitable and strategic partnerships with civil society organizations with objectives reaching beyond joint response outputs towards longer-term strategic objectives and impacts (strategic partnership).*

What we support

In line with the framework of DRC's Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy, DRC supports diaspora engagement in pursuit of two overall strategic tracks:

- **Diaspora civil society representing the interests of various groups of rights-holders** and thereby promoting and channeling their participation in decision-making and in holding duty-bearers accountable.
- **Diaspora civil society providing direct support to displacement-affected populations,** enhancing local responses in pursuit of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

Through a changing number of projects and initiatives, DRC's Diaspora Program supports the following aspects/types of diaspora engagement:

Diaspora voice, agency and space

DRC seeks to empower diaspora actors to engage and influence duty-bearers, policymakers, opinion leaders and the general public to ensure fulfilment of the rights of people affected by displacement.

To facilitate access and audience for diaspora voices in the relevant fora, DRC connects diaspora members to advocacy opportunities and helps them increase their impact through trainings and support to establishing diaspora networks. To ensure that diasporas can contribute constructively in advocacy for the rights of people affected by conflict and displacement, the Diaspora Programme facilitates intra-diaspora dialogue in a safe environment, offers relevant capacity development opportunities, helps them organize and consolidate joint positions and collective voices through the support to networks, alliances and coalitions. DRC also supports their access to relevant spaces and channels to voice their positions with key stakeholders in countries of residence, across Europe, and in countries of origin.

Diaspora responses

DRC seeks to enable and strengthen sustainable, effective, impactful and locally anchored diaspora responses to needs created by conflict and displacement, be they in countries of origin, transit or residence; before, during and after displacement.

We provide financial and technical support to diaspora-led interventions, collaborate with diaspora and the international aid system locally, regionally and internationally to provide tangible outcomes for people affected by conflict and displacement.

We identify and document the complementary value of diaspora emergency assistance, and facilitate relevant operational links between diaspora and other local and international humanitarian actors engaged in emergency response at policy and operational level.

We support activities that focus on sharing protection-related information via diaspora organizations and communities, to ensure that individuals that leave their countries are able to make informed decisions and achieve the best possible protection outcomes for themselves in preparation of leaving, while on the move, and during (temporary or permanent) settlement⁴.

⁴An activity or response can be said to have 'protection outcomes' when they contribute to reducing risks for people affected by displacement.

Diaspora contributions to economic development

DRC seeks to support diaspora's role in contributing to increased employment opportunities along with broader economic development in their countries of origin or heritage, with a focus on the benefit for displacement affected people and communities.

Diasporas' remittances, investments and entrepreneurship activities in their countries of origin or heritage often contribute significantly to sustainable livelihoods and economic development in areas that have been affected by displacement.

How we support

Though varying in content and ambition, programming in support of diaspora engagement includes but is not limited to the following operational approaches:

Capacity strengthening

A crucial part of all activities under the Diaspora Programme is supporting diaspora organizations to strengthen their capacity to deliver what they aim for and realize their potential.

We do so by providing tailored and diverse support interventions mainly for diaspora organizations but also for institutional and local partners, and others. Reflecting the capacity development approach under DRC's Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy, we aim to ensure that capacity building processes are owned by our partners, reflect their needs, and are properly resourced.

At the same time, DRC recognizes the knowledge and expertise that diaspora organizations bring and has special focus on facilitating peer-to-peer learning and improved collaboration within and between diasporas.

Technical and financial support

All activities under the Diaspora Programme seek to provide the best possible technical support to assist diaspora actors in achieving their objectives in support of people affected by conflict and displacement. Financial support – to projects, advocacy activities, networking approaches, capacity development – also forms an integral part of how we support diaspora.

Building knowledge and evidence on diaspora engagement

To ensure that our often novel programming is based on evidence, and to systematically improve evidence on diaspora engagement, all projects in the Diaspora Programme portfolio contain research activities. Such research is often done in collaboration with international and locally based research partners and relevant DRC counterparts, such as the Mixed Migration Centre and the Durable Solutions Platforms. Outcomes focus mainly on producing recommendations for either concrete programming or to diaspora and their counterparts, such as the international aid system, duty-bearers and policymakers, to contribute to an improved mutual understanding and recognition, and thus an increased potential for collaboration to the benefit of affected populations.

The Diaspora Programme also collaborates with other international organizations with relevant expertise, to increase the overall pool of knowledge and experience on diaspora engagement in order to inform programmatic development and to link policy with practice, toward ensuring relevance and performance of programmes and policies promoting diaspora in development beyond DRC's own activities.

Where DRC works with diaspora

Working to support diaspora engagement that contributes to improving the situation for people affected by conflict and displacement, the Diaspora Programme is principally global in its outlook. However, based on the beforementioned key principle of “Knowing Your Diaspora”, and the value of direct outreach to and close collaboration with diaspora communities, the Diaspora Programme usually targets diasporas from specific countries of origin/heritage settled across Europe. In the past decade, we have worked extensively with the Afghan, Somali and Syrian diaspora. Overall, the Diaspora Programme remains agile, developing and adjusting its project portfolio according to identified needs and opportunities and will – where relevant – also work with diasporas from outside DRC’s geographies of intervention.

As diasporas from displacement affected countries are frequently dispersed across the globe, DRC’s Diaspora Programme is managed from DRC HQ in Copenhagen but with strong collaborations with DRC Regional and Country Offices or specific programmes and initiatives linked to the diasporas and topics we work with.

For more information on our current work and projects, please visit <http://www.drc.ngo/diaspora>



Photo: Malin Amin Ibrahim, Dollow Somalia © DRC, Tobin Jones



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