

POLICY STATEMENT ON PARTNERSHIPS



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Based on an amalgamation of DRC's existing statutes, policies, commitments and approaches, this statement serves to clarify DRC's overall aspirations and approach to partnerships.



Credits: Axel Fassio

1. Why work in partnerships?

The world is increasingly becoming interconnected and interdependent, and partnerships are therefore higher on the agenda than ever before. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the necessity of partnership, in particular SDG 17 with its bold statement that the SDGs “...can only be realized with a strong commitment to global partnership and cooperation.” The Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), which DRC has been part of developing and is strongly committed to, includes the following quality criterion: “Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects” (commitment 3). The importance of partnerships and the support of capacities on the ground is also echoed consistently throughout DRC’s own framing documents and positions: Partnerships is recognized as an important strategic priority for DRC and was enshrined as such in one of the five pillars in Strategy 2020, and operationalized through DRC’s Operational Principles, that clearly state a focus on seeking partnerships to foster local capacities and strengthen abilities of institutions and people to deliver and safeguard the rights of conflict and displacement affected people (DRC Operational Principles # 3 and 10 on Capacity Development, Resilience, and Local Partnerships). This paper serves to support the work with this priority by further clarifying DRC’s aspirations on partnerships.

As stated in its 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 does this by ensuring refugees and displaced persons have access to the protection they need in humanitarian emergencies, by promoting durable solutions, and by addressing the root causes to displacement and conflict.

Committed to a rights-based approach, DRC pursues these goals through different operational modalities: through direct assistance, in partnership with other organisations, or through a combination of both, depending on the context.

- In partnerships with duty bearers, such as state and local authorities, DRC focus on the challenges of making duty-bearers take up the responsibility to protect and respect the rights of people affected by war, conflict, during and after displacement. DRC may fill in when the duty-bearers are unwilling or unable to do so, but at the same time work to build the capacity, opportunity and motivation for duty-bearers to take responsibly.
- In partnerships with the rights-holder’s own associations and civil society actors that work to promote the rights of the people of concern, DRC encourage and support rights-holders to claim and enjoy their rights.
- In partnership with private sector actors, DRC will enable effective and more sustainable solutions to challenges faced by both duty-bearers and rights-holders. Accountability and responsible business conduct is the foundation of DRC’s work with, and vetting of, private sector partners.



Credits: Tobin Jones

The humanitarian needs, and the Sustainable Development Goals, will never be fully met without a multi-stakeholder approach, and there is broad recognition that local and national ownership and capacities are of central importance in first response and to reach sustainable solutions and address roots causes to displacement.

However, the reality in fragile and conflict-affected situations is that potential partners, be they right holders, duty bearers or other stakeholders, may have limited capacity, opportunity and motivation to ensure a sufficient response to displacement effected people and communities in a principled, responsible and accountable manner. In those situations, DRC, being a humanitarian organisation committed to the humanitarian principles and values, may opt for an engagement that strongly focusses on direct implementation to respond to needs. In parallel, based on strong context analysis, efforts will be made towards developing a relevant partnership approach that reinforces and supports local capacities, opportunities and motivations to contribute towards an effective and legitimate response.

As a principled displacement organisation, when partnering for direct humanitarian assistance, DRC will ensure that the selection of partners is based on comprehensive, conflict sensitive civil society analysis as well as an analysis of the potential partner's values, accountability, capacity and potentials. In addition, DRC strives to work with a broad range of actors, aiming at a balance in its partnerships, and through that balance safeguarding the neutrality of DRC and ensuring principled outcomes of its actions.

2. Definition, principles, and foundations for partnerships

This paper focuses on DRC's partnership commitments and what DRC aspires to achieve in its partnerships. It uses CHS' definition of partnerships: "Organisations working jointly within a formal arrangement to achieve a specific goal, with clear and agreed roles and responsibilities". DRC works with partners at three levels: State/authorities, civil society (national and international) and private sector actors. In all partnerships, DRC is committed to the Principles of Partnership: Equality, Transparency, Results-Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity. These are adopted by the Global Humanitarian Platform, incl. UN, WB, and multiple INGOs. It should be underlined that a partnership can, but does not have to, include transfer of funding – and that in many of DRC's partnerships transferring, or receiving, funds is not a part of the setup.

DRC's approach to partnership takes its fundamental point of departure in a rights-based approach. Within this approach DRC makes a basic distinction between i) rights-holders, being people of concern; ii) duty-bearers, being state and local authorities as well as armed non-state actors, and iii) a broad category of other stakeholders with substantial influence on solving displacement related problems.

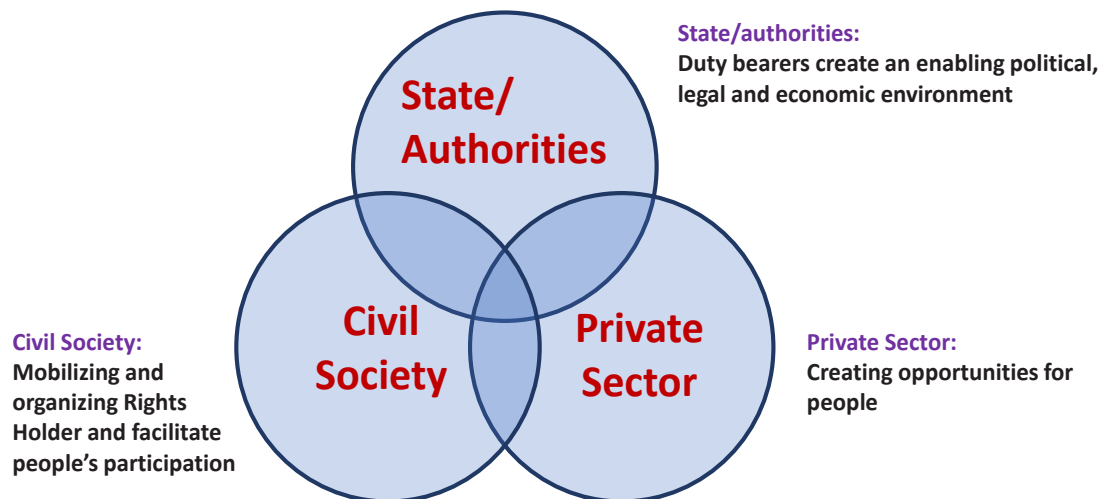
The rights-based approach means that DRC aims to build on and enhance existing local and national capacity and enable it to play an integral role in a given response. Local and national capacities are important in the first emergency response, and local ownership is essential to reach sustainable solutions and address roots causes to displacement. DRC believes it is necessary to carefully analyse existing local capacities to identify how to best support and reinforce local capacities that can help achieve the best possible response to displacement affected people and communities. This analysis shall help prevent DRC from inadvertently strengthening actors pursuing strategies detrimental to the protection and well-being of displaced people, applying the Do No Harm approach. It is also acknowledged that prioritising local capacities can in some instances compromise accountable, principled humanitarian action.



Credits: Klaus Bo

3. Partnerships with state, civil society, and private sector

When analysing existing capacities and operationalising partnerships, DRC distinguishes between three dimensions: State (Authorities), Civil Society, and the Private sector.



DRC can partner with actors from all three dimensions of society, and at local, national, and international levels, but will have different reasons for engaging at the different levels:

- 1) The State as the duty-bearer carries the primary responsibility to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of displacement affected people. DRC's purpose in partnering with authorities is to encourage and enable them to fulfil this responsibility. Where that is not possible, DRC may fill in temporarily to provide relevant services to people of concern (directly or through/with partners).
- 2) A key role of civil society is to represent the interests of various groups of rights-holders and thereby promote and channel citizens' participation in decision-making and in holding duty-bearers accountable. In addition, civil society organisations (CSO) and community-based organisations, groups or associations often organise voluntary work and become important providers of support to vulnerable rights-holders. DRC's purpose in working with civil society is to support both aspects – to represent and respond – in pursuit of the highest possible benefit to people affected by displacement.
- 3) The private sector is key to creating jobs and stimulate economic development and is often driving technological and societal developments. The main purpose for DRC when working in partnerships with the private sector is to partner around technological or systemic knowledge for innovative, sustainable solutions, and to create access to financial services and jobs in the private sector for people affected by displacement.

Although individuals may move between these three dimensions and there are grey areas within each category (e.g. political parties, non-profit businesses, research institutions), the categorization provides a useful framework when considering how to work with each actor.

In the following section, the reasons behind why DRC works with partners from each of these dimensions will be further elaborated. A brief explanation on how DRC works with different types of partners will be presented at the end of the paper. However, more elaborate guidance is not the intention of this paper but will be provided in partnership strategies related to the three different types of partners.

3.1 State (Authorities at national-, regional- and local-level)

The States are the duty-bearers which hold the primary responsibility to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of displacement affected people. When DRC responds to a displacement crisis, it is because the legitimate duty-bearer (the state or local governance structure) has not been able, or willing, to protect and respect the rights of rights-holders, or to fulfil their obligations towards right-holders (people of concern). It is, however, not the role of DRC to substitute for the role of duty-bearers. Rather, DRC's role as a key stakeholder is to:

- Promote and advocate for duty-bearers to take up their responsibility to protect and respect the rights of people affected by war, conflict, during displacement and after.
- Support duty bearers to deliver an adequate response.
- Temporarily fill-in as long as the duty-bearers are unwilling or unable to do so.

Ultimately, DRC wishes to reach a situation where the state and the authorities meet their responsibilities to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of all citizens in their area of control. When delivering direct assistance to people and communities affected by displacement, DRC also prioritises advocacy and capacity development of the relevant authorities and government institutions to reach a sustainable situation where they assume full responsibility and accountability to society and its citizens.

DRC works first and foremost with local authorities that are obliged to provide direct support to people and communities affected by forced displacement. In addition, DRC often also engages at national and regional level to promote policies, legislation and implementation frameworks in support of people and communities affected by forced displacement. At global level, DRC seeks close partnership with the United Nations (UN) and individual donor governments as well as International Finance Institutions (IFI) that can influence, and finance, positive changes for people and communities affected by displacement in host states.

Some may question whether our interaction with the state and the authorities should be labelled as partnerships. Indeed, in many cases there may be limited room to manoeuvre in such partnerships. However, where DRC works, there will be MoUs with the Government under which there are agreed objectives, rights and duties, and frequent interaction with the authorities.

3.2 Civil Society

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 we define as civil society. DRC uses the common definition of civil society being the realm between the state, the private sector and the family. In civil society, citizens meet, debate, organise, and take collective action. This can be to claim own rights, but also to support others and thereby promote larger societal change. Closely linked to the latter is the voluntary work many citizens do for others out of solidarity. As such, civil society is important in mitigating conflicts, building trust and social cohesion in a society, and to have a functional and vibrant democracy.

DRC acknowledges that 'Civil Society' encompasses a huge variety of interests, opinions, and concerns, and can be confusing to deal with. However, the diversity of civil society is also one of its strengths when trying to ensure that all opinions are heard and represented in decision-making processes. The enormous variety however requires DRC to be clear on its priorities when selecting relevant partners from civil society: This should always be done with a perspective of giving voice, or bringing support, to people affected by displacement or conflict.

Currently most of DRC's civil society partnerships are with local organisations providing support to people affected by displacement. Through partnering and joint implementation, DRC builds on and contributes to the local response capacity. The continuation and enhancement of this kind of transformative partnerships will continue to be a priority (point A below). In addition, DRC will put increased emphasis on working with organisations lead by rights-holders directly affected by displacement, be they displaced or host communities, and to support them in organising and bringing their voice to the table, primarily in relation to duty-bearers, but sometimes also to support building more peaceful relations between groups of right-holders who are in conflict (point B). Finally, in another category is DRC's cooperation with other international NGOs as part of an international civil society (point C).

A) The main category of civil society actors that DRC support are local and national CSO/NGO's that are supporting people affected by displacement. For example, they provide services, capacity development, or support advocacy on behalf of displacement affected people. These stakeholders may not be rights-holders directly affected by displacement, but they bring a commitment, and resources, to help the affected. They can be professional organisations at varying levels, or based on voluntarism and for example founded by churches, diaspora groups, human rights defenders etc. There can be several advantages of working with the latter civil society- and faith-based organisations with abilities to access hard-to-reach populations affected by displacement: They may have good local knowledge, and access, and they can be important in creating an acceptance of and support to the displaced. They may have local legitimacy when making claims to authorities, or in working with groups in conflict. In addition, the support to local CSO/NGOs may build long-term capacity for both delivering services and contribute to advocacy and thereby increase sustainability and ownership.

In this category DRC works with a continuum of partners from more short-term instrumental partnerships to transformative partnerships with a longer time perspective. It is a priority for DRC to move towards more transformative partnerships with a target of improving both the quality and volume of responses implemented by local CSO/NGOs.

Within this category, DRC seeks effective partners who are guided by the humanitarian imperative and have a strong commitment to accountability and the humanitarian principles.

- B) It is a key priority for DRC to also support local and national movements and civil society groups who can be regarded as legitimate representatives of rights-holders directly affected by displacement, including host communities. In this, DRC emphasises the importance of variety in age, gender and diversity in the representation, and is committed to understanding the local power dynamics to avoid that it is only a few that dominate the decision-making processes. When rights-holders get organised, it increases their chances of getting access to consultations and decision-making bodies. For the most vulnerable rights-holders, this is rarely possible at an individual level. An organised civil society can often also be a key stakeholder to improve and ensure rights-holders' participation in decision making. Therefore, supporting the empowerment of a local civil society – including movements, networks, human rights organisations, and diaspora groups which are representative of people of concern, has a value on its own. At the local level, this can for example be to facilitate women or youth groups getting connected to the local community development committee or village leaders. At the national level, this can be in the form of support to networks and umbrellas of civil society actors to get them included in national working groups or clusters, but also to protect the civic space that is under pressure in many places, which also affects the humanitarian access. DRC is aware that in some countries there may be few civil society groups that can be seen as legitimate direct representatives of the rights-holders affected by displacement. Therefore, it is even more important to identify those that exist and support their capacity development. The focus here is not on the groups' ability to help others but supporting their participation both in the local and larger society, i.e. to let their voice be heard and included in discussions that affect them. Hence a requirement for “neutrality” is not realistic but support must still be conditioned on their commitment to non-discrimination of other marginalised groups and non-violence.
- C) The third category is cooperation with and support through other International NGOs (INGOs). DRC's work with other INGOs on global advocacy and policy engagement is key in the international civil society engagement for DRC. While INGOs are part of an international civil society, DRC does not regard INGOs as part of the local civil societies. Partnering with other INGOs is therefore not seen as building local long-term capacity but as an effective way of ensuring access to complementary capacities and coordination, e.g. through consortiums, alliances and networks or with the aim of joint advocacy to influence decision making. Similarly, the partnerships with international media or research institutions, which can be very important for advocacy purposes, are also seen as instrumental but rarely as a way to build local, transformative capacity. Strong links between the local civil society mentioned above and INGOs can be important for both the quality and not least the legitimacy of INGOs international advocacy.

3.3 Private Sector

Partnerships with the private sector are increasingly on the humanitarian agenda and a relatively new priority area for DRC. To complement more traditional ways of engagement, which continue to be of great importance for DRC, the Business Engagement Initiative (BEI) was established in 2016. With an overall intention to enhance DRC's impact and effectiveness, the BEI looks to forge strategic, shared value partnerships with private sector partners.

The partner-driven engagement with the private sector can be divided into two main priorities:

- A) Local private sector, which can be particularly interesting when providing access to job opportunities for displaced and in host communities. Such work resonates with DRC's work on economic recovery and market-driven approaches and DRC wishes to enhance its understanding of local market dynamics and stakeholders as a base for future partnerships.
- B) International companies may be interesting to partner with when searching for know-how, i.e. sustainable technical or systemic solutions for both the displaced and host communities. Responsible businesses can offer or contribute to scalable solutions to humanitarian challenges that can serve as means to bridge the global humanitarian financing gap.
- C) Finally, DRC works in partnership with private companies with the ambition to influence and change how they work in displacement-affected contexts. The cooperation with the private sector increasingly brings businesses' respect for human rights on the agenda. Accountability and responsible business conduct is the foundation of DRC's work with, and vetting of, potential private sector partners. The Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGP) and the Global Compact principles are important normative frameworks that DRC encourages private sector partners to commit to. Acknowledging that the conduct of business can and has resulted in grave human rights violations, conflict and displacement of people, DRC has identified several high-risk sectors, including extractive industries, which gets particular attention from a protection perspective.



Credits: Jamil Ghafuri

4. Interaction between civil society, authorities, and private sector

Although DRC distinguishes between the three dimensions and finds it important to be clear about their differences, DRC also wishes to emphasise the importance of supporting the connectivity between the three. DRC thus finds it important to support the Civil Society actors in becoming respected in relation to the Government and the Private Sector.

In relation to evidence-based advocacy, partnership with research institutions (typically public institution) and media (private sector) can be particularly interesting. Such partnerships can be instrumental in generating knowledge to document issues related to people affected by displacement and in getting the information disseminated.

While DRC has limited experience in linking civil society and private sector, it acknowledges, as outlined in the UNGP, that business conduct can have a positive or negative impact on people of concern, including be a cause of displacement. Facilitating links between communities/civil society and private businesses and exerting influence can thus be an important element to solve conflict and prevent displacement.

5. How DRC works with different types of partnerships

DRC has a large variety of approaches when it comes to working with partners. Key approaches include: Capacity development in both programmatic and administrative areas (sectoral expertise, operational management), financing responses to displacement, monitoring displacement issues and responses, partnering to get access to people of concern, and joint advocacy to foster policy change.

Respecting and strengthening local actors is key but there is not one approach that is necessarily better than the other. Instead, it is the contextual understanding of conflict and displacement trends, actors and dynamics which is key to identifying the priority needs and taking the best decisions. The decision on how to work, where, and with whom rests on this contextual understanding, and is guided by a desire to realise the potential of local actors and work through strong, mutually respectful and sound partnerships.

An ability to work with trust-building is therefore essential, also where DRC is pushed to work in partnerships with stakeholders that have values varying substantially from those of DRC. For each partnership there should be some documentation which specifies what the involved parties wish to achieve, the terms of the partnership and the deliverables for each partner.

The formal agreements are typically Memorandum of Understandings (MoU), sub-grant agreements, or contracts, but could also be letters of intent, or statutes for networks and membership organisations DRC is actively working within.

To inspire and give an overall view of DRCs approaches to working with partners, the following page provides a list of examples related to the different type of actors DRC works with.

5.1 State/authorities:

A. Local and national authorities

- Capacity development, e.g. of local security providers; national emergency management agencies; national demining authorities; ministries of refugee affairs
- Joint needs assessments with authorities and design of interventions
- Advocacy with authorities, e.g. to get resources from the international donors
- Resource transfer (e.g. small funding for interventions implemented by authorities, but decided by Community Development Committee's in CDRS project)
- Support for coordination mechanisms, e.g. by secondment of staff
- Support to developing laws, policies, and guidelines for working with displaced people
- Support return processes
- Ensure a sound legal basis for DRC's implementation (MoU's and registration)

5.2 Civil Society:

5.2.1 Local Civil Society/NGOs

With civil society, DRC engages broadly in three types of partnerships:

- Supplier-type relationship with focus only on response outputs linked to DRC-owned projects
- Equitable partnership to reach joint response outputs
- Equitable and strategic partnership with objectives beyond joint response outputs

Partnerships can have different objectives:

- Partnerships with CSOs/LNGOs focussing on technical capacity and ability to deliver quality services, accountability, advocacy, and participation of the communities
- Support rights-holders affected by displacement in forming and developing their own associations which can represent and defend their interests in displacement situations and beyond (solutions), e.g. Camp management committees or CBOs in host communities. This can include organisational and capacity development and grants for the organisation and/or for activity implementation.
- Strengthening right-holders associations' advocacy skills and strategies, facilitating dialogue and networking amongst RHs associations to enable more effective joint action, and linking them to international levels, e.g. Durable Solutions Platform working with Syrian CSOs
- Support developing right-holders' advocacy skills and strategies, and linking them to international levels, e.g. Durable Solutions Platform working with Syrian CSOs
- Support rights-holder led organisations to do direct services, through grants, material support and technical capacity building.

5.2.2 INGOs

- Joint research and advocacy at country, regional and international level to influence decision-making, policies and standards related to forced displacement and migration (e.g. on refugee and migrant compacts)
- Joint fundraising and implementation in consortiums
- Methodology, programme quality and accountability (e.g. membership of CHS and CaLP)

5.3 Private Sector:

Working strategically with the private sector remains a novelty to DRC, and the wider humanitarian sector. This is also the area where most new initiatives are today being tried out. The experience and priorities include:

5.3.1 Local private sector and local chambers of commerce

- Wage employment and job placements, e.g. by linking employer and staff which can be subsidised
- Support establishing and developing small and medium enterprises (SME), e.g. with business training, small grants, loans to develop and create jobs, linking local business to international markets. An example of this is developing an Impact Investment component with Somalia diaspora.
- Advocate with and support responsible financial service providers in reaching displaced/ displacement-affected communities
- Advocacy on rights issues around employment for refugees including decent work conditions (SDG #4, 8).

5.3.2 International companies

- Meeting identified humanitarian needs in shared value partnerships with businesses.
- Partnering to ensure that DRC's people of concern are not locked out of technological advances including connectivity.
- Research activities to document and promote new, impactful technologies based on renewable energy sources. DRC's partnership with Grundfos is an example of this.
- Work to promote decent work conditions and business environment conducive to refugees.
- Exploring new ways of financing humanitarian operations.

6. Concluding remarks

In summary, based on an amalgamation of DRC's existing statutes, policies, commitments and approaches, this statement reiterates DRC's position on partnership with duty bearers, civil society, and the private sector. Reflections in this statement are of an overarching nature; their operationalization is further described in dedicated documents providing more comprehensive strategic, operational and programmatic guidance and direction for DRC's engagement in partnerships.