

GUIDANCE NOTE: PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

(Refer to the Global Civil Society Engagement Strategy for a full description on how DRC partners)

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.

What is a partnership?

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. 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 of 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.



What are DRC's partnering principles?

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.

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.

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.

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.

What do these partnerships look like in practice?

The below examples draw both from DRC programming and industry best practices. Tips are included and the end, to spark further reflection when considering how to use the principles in your partnership approach.

Principle	Practice
<p>Equitability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult partners when developing the terms of the sub grant agreement (SGA). Country operations have room to adjust reporting and monitoring requirements in a way that suits both DRC and the partner. Financial disbursement schedules may also be adjusted to minimize undue burden and increase timeliness. Withholding 10% of the total sub-agreement until the donor approves the final financial report may not be warranted with partners whom DRC knows well. For more equitable and strategic partnerships, consider using an MoU in conjunction with the SGA to outline the expectations of the partnership (beyond the lifespan of a single project) and include partnering principles that will govern the partnership, as agreed by both parties. • Our partners should not have to adhere to compliance rules and regulations that are stricter or more cumbersome than those of the donor funding the agreement under which DRC sub-contracts to a local partner. • With your more strategic partners, consider entering into a different type of partnership and funding arrangement; for example, submitting a joint funding proposal as a consortium with either DRC or the local partner as the lead (in the latter DRC can take on more of a technical support role) <p>Tips:</p> <p>Respect is at the center of a strong partnership. It is important to understand the challenges and risks that are unique to our partners. It is also important to understand the unique role and value add of local organizations, meaning we do not expect local organizations to play the same role as an INGO. This is particularly pertinent when engaging partners in discussions on risk, compliance, and capacity.</p> <p>Listening to your partners helps to build this respect and a level of trust that is required for a fruitful partnership.</p>
<p>Transparency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners should have access to all project documents, including the overall narrative, budget and workplan for the project under which they are implementing alongside DRC. While this is a common practice in consortiums, in unequal partnerships between INGOs and local partners, it is only the local partner that shares their project documents. • Partners should also have access to DRC’s country strategic plan, to better understand a DRC country operation’s overall position and ambitions. This information provides our local partners with the bigger picture, beyond the parameters of a single project goal. While we often ask for our partners strategic plans, to determine their relevance or fit, we neglect to provide the same to our partners. • Where absent, DRC should facilitate partner access to donors. Involving partners in dialogue with donors is a good practice. It gives partners greater understanding,

	<p>positioning them to make better informed decisions on the purpose of the partnership and direction of current and future programming with DRC.</p> <p>Tips:</p> <p>Including partners in decision making and sharing information with partners are two ways DRC can share power in the partnership.</p> <p>Create opportunities for honest dialogue and information sharing with your partners.</p>
<p>Results oriented</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningfully engaging partners during project design will greatly increase the relevance and quality of DRC programming with your partners. In the effort to overcome tight donor proposal submission deadlines, consider embedding discussions on potential future program ideas as a topic of discussion in project review sessions under the current partnership. Or during a partnership review process that looks at the health and direction of the partnership. • Consider joint monitoring of both partner and DRC project activities under a grant that is being implementing jointly with a partner, in order to enhance coordination, complementarity, and as a mutual learning opportunity. <p>Tips:</p> <p>Facilitate mutual exchange and learning opportunities with your partners, both parties bring knowledge to the partnership that the other can benefit and learn from.</p>
<p>Responsibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage partners in honest conversation on risk sharing and potential realistic risk sharing mitigation measures that each party can take forward. This means being honest about what DRC can and can not do to support our partners. Support partners in mapping out risks if needed. • Include partnership skills as essential qualifications in position descriptions when recruiting and appraising DRC staff. This should not be limited only to partnership related positions, as partnership engagement spans across functions and departments. Doing so contributes to the increased likelihood of a country operation having the means, competencies, skills, and capacity to deliver on their commitments to partners. • When designing partner capacity support activities, avoid overcommitting to areas where DRC does not have the resources or expertise. <p>Tips:</p> <p>Engage colleagues and management from support services in the project design phase. That way, buy-in is ensured and realistic planning of risk mitigation and capacity support.</p>
<p>Complementarity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a partner expression of interest, include text on what the DRC country operation sees as its value add, in addition to asking for partners to articulate their value add to the partnership and/or potential programming. • In order to determine how best DRC can work with a partner, any capacity assessment process should look at identifying both existing capacities 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.

Tips:

Value add goes both ways, look beyond only what a partner can bring to the table, and be clear about what your country operations value add can be.

One way DRC can use its position to add value to a partnership is to pave the way for partners to get better access to coordination fora and information. This may include small, yet important actions like supporting with transport to meetings, forwarding communication, and helping with translation.

