



## Introduction

A global strategy was developed in response to DRC's recognition of and investment in further advancing our strategic approach to civil society engagement. The strategy focuses on DRC's partnership with rights-holders through our engagement with local civil society in DRC's international operations. The scope of this strategy does not include civil society engagement as part of DRC's Danish operations, and it also does not cover DRC's engagement with likeminded international NGOs. 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.

This strategy includes clarity on how DRC defines civil society, which civil society actors we engage with, and why. 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 its support to civil society, providing minimum standards for civil society programming, and outlining the principles that articulate DRC values when it comes to partnerships with civil society. While this brief provides a synthesis, the full strategy goes deeper into these aforementioned areas.

## 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 we define 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.

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### Working version

This document is a designated working version v.0.1 that will be put into pilot use during the coming 12+ months. During 2021, based on the results of the pilot use as well as the results of the currently ongoing learning exercise across several DRC operations, the document will undergo a revision process towards endorsement of a version 1.0.

## Definition of civil society

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 can be to claim own rights as legitimate representatives of rights-holders, or to support others and thereby promote larger societal change.

The nature of what civil society looks like and what it does varies and can evolve over time - responding to developments within the society where it operates and beyond. Civil society includes a vibrant range of formally and informally organized groups. Citizens, as rights holders, may come together under a common cause or interest to have collective power to influence change or in response to the sudden onset of a crises to respond to critical needs. This organization may be temporary, evolve, or formalize into a civil society organization such as a local or national NGO. Within this variance, civil society can be local, national, transnational and formed in the diaspora, and take on various roles in society and across geographies. 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 homogenous entity, rather, it reflects a multitude of societal issues and group interests, and thereby does not have a single view or unified representation.

The term “civil society” and what it covers 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 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 we partner 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.

## Theory of change

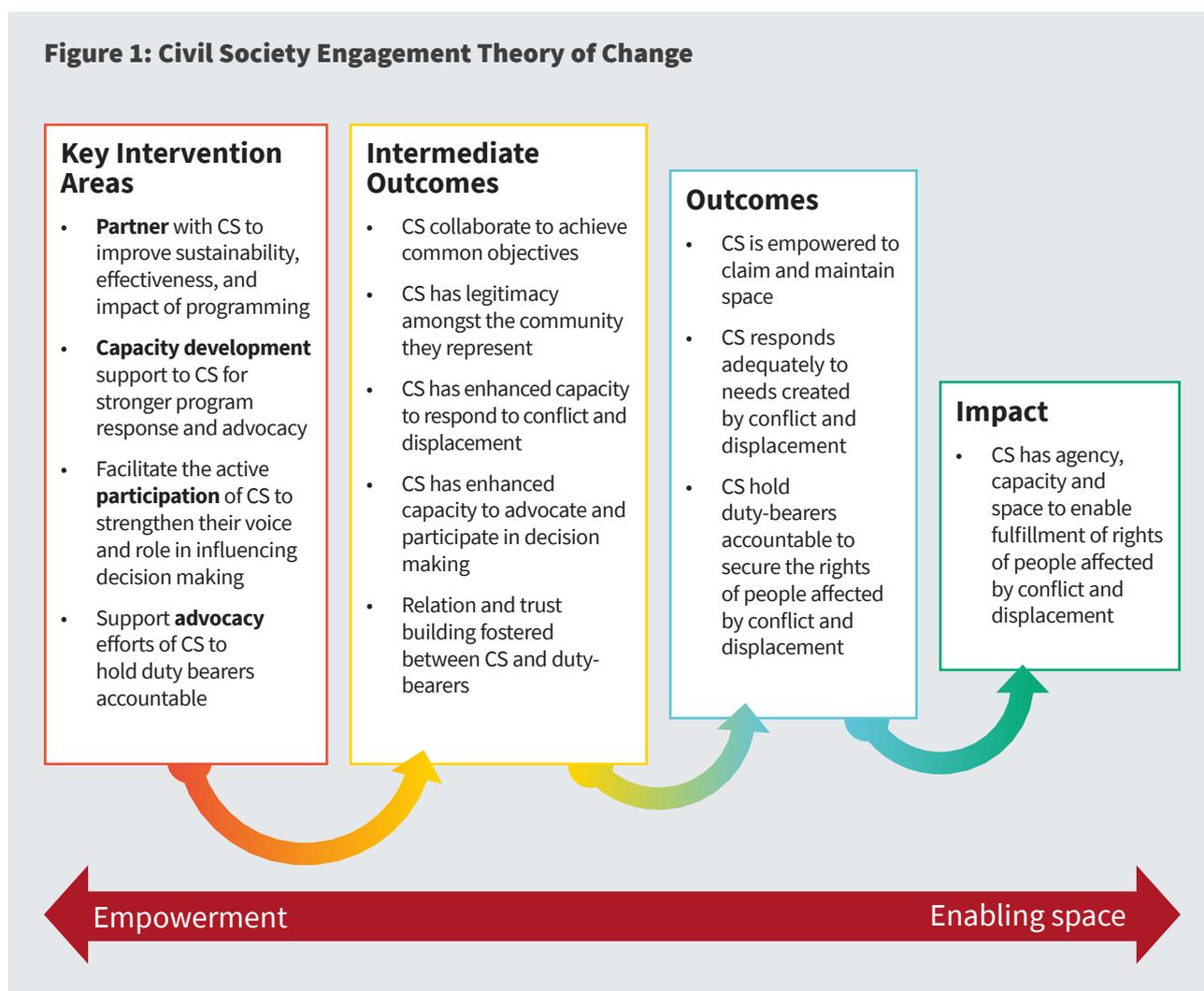
DRC’s engagement with civil society is guided by a theory that articulates a desired change we aim to contribute to, one where **civil society has increased agency, space and capacity to enable fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement**. The logic pathway to contributing 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**.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

## Who we work with

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<sup>3</sup> minority organizations, cooperatives, youth and women-led groups, civil society networks and alliances, and the not-for-profit media. These actors might be local, national, transnational and formed in the diaspora, and take on various roles in society. This range in interests, roles and mandates should also be seen as a strength of civil society when trying to ensure that all rights holders are heard and represented in decision-making. **The enormous variety of civil society organisations 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.**

1 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.

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

3 Sexual orientation, gender and identity, expression and sex characteristics

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 organize as first responders. In post conflict civil societies, civil society contributes to reconstruction efforts and is a core constituent in reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts, creating conditions for sustainable return.

## 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. 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. 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.

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 contracting out of a specific deliverable in a DRC-designed and -owned project, without other aspects in the relationship than the 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.

In all partnerships with civil society organizations, DRC’s partnering approach is guided by the following key principles: equality, transparency, results oriented approach, responsibility, complementarity. 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 these values.

These 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. 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 our partners on DRC’s performance, collect lessons learned on challenges and good practices, and develop an action plan to respond to that feedback.

## Approaches to working with civil society

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. As articulated in the theory of change (above), these priority areas reinforce each other and combined ensure a multi-pronged approach which increases the likelihood of achieving the change we aim to see.

The below provides a brief summary of DRC’s approaches to working with civil society, guided by the four priority intervention areas. The full version of the strategy takes a deeper dive on the concepts behind each intervention area with illustrative examples of how these interventions can be applied in our operations, including short case studies illustrating what we are currently doing.



### **Key intervention area 1: Partner with civil society to improve sustainability, effectiveness, and impact of programming**

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). This implies working in partnership with civil society not only to improve sustainability as part of an exit strategy, but also in pursuit of empowering civil society as agents for change to positively impact those affected by conflict and displacement. In all contexts where we operate, and across all three program platforms, DRC considers partnering opportunities with civil society organizations, including during the early stages of DRC operational set up in a country. Partnering considerations are guided by shared objectives that align with DRC's mandate; and take into consideration complementarity in capacities between DRC and our partners. These partnerships are also developed with the perspective of giving voice, or bringing support, to people affected by displacement or conflict.



### **Key intervention area 2: Capacity development support to civil society for stronger program response and advocacy**

Capacity development support is a critical component in DRC's ambition to empowering civil society. In order to achieve this, considerations for support naturally look at administrative capacities required to enable partners to access and manage funding (including DRC subgrants), but also go beyond, 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. For capacity development support to be effective, it is jointly agreed with our partners, adequately resourced, and tailored according to the partner and type of partnership. This implies recognizing that our partners bring valuable capacities to the partnership; as such, partnerships that DRC enters take into consideration the complementarity of capacities between us and our partners for more impactful programming.



### **Key intervention area 3: Facilitate active and meaningful participation of civil society to strengthen their voice and role in influencing decision making**

DRC has a role in facilitating the active and meaningful participation of civil society to strengthen its voice and role in influencing decision making for the fulfillment of rights of people affected by conflict and displacement. DRC can leverage existing relationships with relevant actors to strengthen linkages horizontally – between civil society organizations through supporting networks, forums, alliances (either formal or informal); and vertically – between civil society and duty bearers and communities by enabling safe spaces for dialogue and trust building. DRC also recognizes the power imbalances that exist that hinder access to participation, and as such, looks for opportunities to facilitate the active participation of our civil society partners in national, regional and global forums to the voices of the displaced are directly heard.



### **Key intervention area 4: Support advocacy efforts of civil society to hold duty bearers accountable**

Central to our work in supporting rights holders to claim their rights are the partnerships we have with civil society, facilitating and supporting their advocacy efforts to influence decision making on policies affecting the rights of those displaced. This entails increasingly shifting from advocating on behalf of rights holders to advocating alongside rights holders through joint advocacy initiatives and supporting rights holders' own advocacy efforts. These advocacy efforts target local, national, regional and global agendas, with DRC utilizing its position to facilitate increased access for civil society to relevant advocacy opportunities and forums. In conjunction, DRC offers capacity support to civil society to generate evidence to inform advocacy efforts and develop advocacy strategies to influence policy and legislative change. Similarly, DRC works with and supports civil society organizations to raise awareness of rights holder concerning their rights and to facilitate their engagement in claiming those rights.



Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest, a leading international NGO and one of the few with a specific expertise in forced displacement.

In 40 countries 9,000 employees protect, advocate and build sustainable futures for refugees and other displacement affected people and communities.

DRC works during displacement at all stages: In the acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC provides protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance.

DRC supports displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and peaceful coexistence.

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

Since DRC's earliest days assisting displaced Hungarians in Denmark, the organisation has never stopped helping people who fled war and

persecution. Not since World War II have more people needed help. The world is witnessing world records of refugees and displaced, in total 70.8 million.

DRC's annual turnover today exceeds 3 billion DKK (€400 million), and the help reaches more than 5.7 million people in the world.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organizational 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.

**DRC** DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL  
• We are there