



Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness  
in Humanitarian Emergency Response



# MORE THAN A PROJECT

## THE STATE OF LOCALISATION IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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This publication is an edited and shortened version of the research report.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank all those who participated in the interviews and who gave their time, energy and ideas for the realisation of this study.

## **DISCLAIMER**

This study has been commissioned by the ToGETHER consortium of Caritas Germany, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe and Malteser International and was prepared with the financial support of the German Federal Foreign Office. The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the German Federal Foreign Office, the consortium or other programme partners.

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**THE STATE OF LOCALISATION IN THE  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## *Purpose and key questions*

This research was commissioned by the ToGETHER consortium of four German humanitarian NGOs (Caritas Germany, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe and Malteser International). It is part of a series of eight country studies and a comparative analysis with other reports on Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Somalia. The analysis aims at informing the programme's efforts to advance localisation in these countries. Furthermore, it contributes to a wider translation into practice of the commitments that international agencies have made to support and reinforce rather than replace national and local crisis responders in their countries.

The guiding questions for all countries were:

- Which understandings of localisation of humanitarian aid exist among humanitarian actors?
- Which localisation initiatives and programs took place or are taking place in the respective country? Which initiatives and programs provide good practice?
- Where are in-country actors making good progress and what are the most significant challenges in the key areas of the localisation process - namely partnerships, financing, capacity development, coordination and complementarity, and gender?
- What institutional, policy and political dynamics influence these developments?
- What are the most urgent strategic issues and challenges that need to be addressed to realise substantive, transformative change?

The report first explores the context, with particular attention to the role of the federal government and the legal-political space for civil society. It then maps what could be identified as important localisation-relevant initiatives and localisation conversations. Subsequently, more details are provided on the four dimensions of localisation which were investigated in particular – quality of relationship, finances, capacities, and coordination. Additionally, the cross-cutting issue of gender and localisation is discussed.

This overview of the state of play regarding localisation in eastern DRC is based on a document review supplemented by 28 interviews, and GMI's comparative learning through the same exercise in other countries.

## *Vulnerability to crises with humanitarian consequences and poverty*

The humanitarian crisis in the DRC remains acute and complex and is marked by five main impacts: population movements, acute food insecurity, acute malnutrition, epidemics (Cholera, Ebola, and now also COVID-19), and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law exposing populations to increasing protection risks. In total, 15.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020. The eastern part of DRC has been particularly affected by chronic violence, since large numbers of Rwandans fled there after the fall of the genocidal regime. DRC is currently home to the largest IDP population in Africa with 5.01 million IDPs and is also the second most food insecure country in the world with 15.6 million people affected while 4.7 million people are also acutely malnourished.



### ***Insufficient disaster prevention and management by the DRC government***

In January 2013, the National Humanitarian Dialogue Framework (CNCH) was established, in order to improve the exchange of humanitarian information to achieve more effective interventions in the country and to ensure a better transition between humanitarian action and development. Main coordinator is the Ministry of Planning. Since 2012, there is also a Disaster Relief Organisation Plan (PLAN ORSEC) in place. This plan was intended to be a tool for the government to know who is responsible for what task in case of what circumstance and for the coordination of intervention activities. However, despite the working tools and sectoral policy texts that exist in DRC, the government intervenes only in a subsidiary capacity after the international humanitarian agencies. It might even be the case that the government intentionally downplays the extent of crisis situations so as not to put off potential investors.

### ***Liberal legal framework for civil society in DRC***

In the 1980's, DRC witnessed the development of the NGO movement with the proliferation of development programs or projects in different areas of life. Today, there is a large landscape of cultural, social and educational associations, sports, non-governmental development organisations, human rights defence associations, denominational associations (religious or spiritual), women's associations, workers' and employers' unions, professional, humanitarian and philanthropic associations, farmers' associations, cooperatives, professional orders, associations of the free and independent press, learned and scientific societies. In 2001, the field of the non-profit associations was completely liberalised to make these institutions participate in the conception as well as in the execution of public policies.

### ***Comparatively late establishment of CSO networks and coordination structures***

The Congolese CSO platforms relevant for the issue of localisation were established only in fairly recent years. The most important ones are:

- the Network of National Humanitarian and Development Organisations (RONHD) Kinshasa, created in October 2016 as part of an UN-OCHA initiative, to coordinate and manage humanitarian leadership in DRC,
- the Forum of National Humanitarian Organisations in DRC (ONAHU-RDC), which brings together NGOs eligible for the Humanitarian Fund (still in constitution process),
- the Cadre de Concertation des ONGs Nationales Humanitaires et de Développement (CCONATH/D): South Kivu,
- the Forum of National Humanitarian and Development Organisations (FONAHAD): North Kivu. FONHAD is a platform of Congolese NGOs created in 2010.

### ***Large number of international players***

In 2010, the Security Council renamed MONUC in United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) to reflect the country's entry into a new stage. The new mission was authorized to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate, which includes ensuring the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and assisting the DRC government in stabilizing and consolidating peace. It has a maximum strength of soldiers, military observers, police officers and members of formed police units. Furthermore, key humanitarian agencies such as WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and OCHA, as well as UNDP are present in DRC. In 2011, a National INGO Coordination Committee (CNCONGI) was established, based on the voluntary commitment of organisations. In 2020, the Forum has 115



INGO members who implement projects and programs in the field of development, stabilization, and humanitarian actions whose interventions cover to date all 26 provinces of DRC.

### ***Notable initiatives relevant for localisation***

This survey of the state of localisation in eastern DRC was able to identify some collective initiatives by international NGOs. It also took note of some international NGO initiatives or good practices. The Start Network started as a coalition of UK NGOs but now has over 40 members, including other European and some national NGOs. Two relevant initiatives are its 'Shifting the Power' project (2015-2018) and its current development of a Start Hub DRC. The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is an alliance of 15 humanitarian NGOs in the Netherlands. The Alliance receives funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to respond to acute and chronic humanitarian crises in different countries. Advancing localisation is a strategic objective of the Alliance. The SCORE Project (February 2019-November 2020) was an initiative of Trócaire and was implemented in four countries: Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Rwanda and DRC. Its goal was to build the capacity of a total of 12 national/local organisations across the four countries. The three Congolese partners are Caritas Bukavu, MAAMS Beni and PADEBU Bunia.

### ***Relevant research on financial sustainability of CSOs and INGO approach to complementarity***

LINC, Peace Direct and Foundation Center conducted a 3-year research project, funded by USAID, in five countries around the world. The goal was to study in detail the key factors that determine CSO's financial sustainability, as well as donor considerations and practices in relation to this critical issue. In DRC, 23 Congolese CSOs operating in North and South Kivu participated. The research project has launched an 'Action Learning Group' (ALG) for stakeholders in eastern DRC in 2018. This platform has been changed to the Network for the Sustainability of Congolese Civil Society Organisations, RDSC-RDC in acronym, which is advocating, especially in North and South Kivu and Kinshasa, for localisation in DRC and addressing the issue of financial sustainability. Also noteworthy is the research on capacity and complementarity conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). It revealed a strong tendency of international agencies towards direct implementation.

### ***Few platforms to discuss localisation***

This survey did not identify spaces where localisation is an active and regular agenda item. Apart from the Network for the Sustainability of Congolese Civil Society Organisations, RDSC-RDC, only few Congolese CSO platforms are active on the issue of localisation. To be named is CCONATH/D with 62 local NGOs as members, not all of them active. Representatives of CCONATH/D participated in the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. Today CCONATH/D has access to the Regional Inter-Agency Center or CRIO in South Kivu, led by OCHA. Among the results of its advocacy are, today 25% of the funding from the Fund for Humanitarian Action goes to local NGOs in South Kivu and national NGOs will soon begin to sit in the clusters and in the selection commission for projects to be funded in the humanitarian field in South Kivu.

FONHAD currently has over 150 members, 98 of whom are active. The local organisations that chair each thematic commission represent the forum in the corresponding clusters that are piloted by OCHA, in the name and on behalf of the platform. FONHAD also has a delegate at the level of CRIO North Kivu and Ituri. It is also represented in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) by Caritas Congo and CENADEP. The objective of the FONHAD is to involve national NGOs in the definition of the priorities of the Humanitarian Action Plan,



to professionalize national NGOs and to promote collaboration between national NGOs, international NGOs and agencies of the United Nations system. FONHAD represented DRC at the 1st World Humanitarian Summit.

### ***Quality of relationships between international and national/local NGOs negatively affected by distrust***

While previous research conducted by ODI identified a variety of approaches and practices among international NGOs in relation to the collaboration with national and local actors, this survey confirmed that the Partnership Principles as defined in 2007 are neither widely known nor applied. The quality of the relationship between INGOs and local actors is considerably impaired by distrust of the former towards the latter. Local actors are considered to lack the financial management and technical capacities to satisfactorily implement large projects, to be a fiduciary risk and to be susceptible to community or political bias. While fraud and corruption are certainly serious issues in DRC, it seems that by now a negative narrative has been established which prevents a neutral assessment of the individual case and thus progress in the field of localisation.

### ***DRC CSOs/NGOs are insufficiently funded***

As in many other countries, DRC CSOs suffer from the effects of short-term project funding. The very limited duration of cash flow as well as the reduction or complete denial of a management fee to local/national organisations is a serious barrier to more CSO sustainability. In terms of access to the DRC Common Humanitarian Fund, as of April 2020, only 15 Congolese CSOs and the National Red Cross were eligible for funding, whereas 79 of the 129 organisations funded were international NGOs.

### ***Capacity building is neither a priority nor very effective***

Two factors emerged from various research studies and the interviews conducted for this survey that contribute to stagnation in the capacity development of local actors. Firstly, many international organisations do not value partnerships and therefore have no particular incentive to invest in building the capacities of local actors. In addition, the most commonly used approach to 'building capacities', which is training workshops, is not very effective. According to research of International Alert and Oxfam, neither national nor international agencies can avail of substantial skills in conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive approaches, although these would be a very important asset in the Congolese context.

### ***Dominance of international coordination structures***

Although the main humanitarian coordination structure in DRC should be that of the government, in reality, it is the one set up by the UN. Next to it, there is the International NGO Forum. A better coordination of national/local NGOs/CSOs is also hindered by competition amongst them. But one should also bear in mind that the International NGO Forum receives funding from international donors, which is not the case for CSO platforms.

### ***Socio-geographic coordination approach creates opportunities for local CSOs***

Whereas the UN coordination system is usually organized around technical sectors, in DRC, the Humanitarian Country Team has created four regional structures (Regional Inter-Agency Center or RIC) with autonomy in coordination and planning. These can be replicated at a more local level (Centre local inter-agencies or CLIO). This approach places more value on the context, its knowledge and the ability to navigate it, which creates more opportunities for local CSOs.



### ***Gradually more respect for women as CSO leaders, more focus on prevention desirable***

Gradually, thanks to multiple advocacy efforts by women's and/or human rights organisations, DRC sees greater respect for female CSO leaders. The insistence of international actors has strongly contributed to this positive development. On the other hand, the preference of international agencies to fund the support of survivors of sexual violence to the detriment of prevention measures was raised as problematic in the interviews conducted with three women's organisations for this survey.





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## ACRONYMS

<b>AFEDEM</b>	Support to Poor Women and Marginalized Children
<b>AFEPD</b>	Action Femme pour la Paix et le Développement
<b>ALG</b>	Action Learning Group
<b>C4C</b>	Charter for Change
<b>CADI</b>	Action Committee for Integral Development
<b>CAFOD</b>	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
<b>CBR</b>	Community Based Reintegration
<b>CCONAT</b>	Cadre de Consultation des Organisations Nationales
<b>CCONATH/D</b>	National Humanitarian and Development NGOs Consultation Framework
<b>CEDERU</b>	Center for Rural Development/Kibutu
<b>CEMUBAC</b>	Scientific and Medical Centre of the Free University of Brussels
<b>CENADEP</b>	National Center for Support to Development and Popular Participation
<b>CEPROSAN</b>	Center for Socio-Sanitary Promotion
<b>CGSB</b>	National Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>CHF</b>	Common Humanitarian Fund
<b>CLIO</b>	Centre Local Inter-Agencies
<b>CNCH</b>	National Humanitarian Dialogue Framework
<b>CNCONGI</b>	National INGO Coordination Committee
<b>CODEVAH</b>	Committee for Development and Humanitarian Assistance
<b>CRIO</b>	Réunion du Comité Régional Inter-organisation
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DCA</b>	Dan Church Aid
<b>DDR</b>	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
<b>DEPP</b>	Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness PRogramme of the Start Network
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DRA</b>	Dutch Relief Alliance
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>ECC-MERU</b>	Church Refugee and Emergency Ministry
<b>EVD</b>	Ebola Virus Disease
<b>FEC</b>	Federation of Enterprises of Congo
<b>FONHAD</b>	Forum of National Organisations of Humanitarian Actions for Development
<b>GMI</b>	Global Mentoring Initiative
<b>HEAL AFRICA</b>	Health and Education Action for Leadership in Africa
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview
<b>HPG</b>	Humanitarian Policy Group
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-agency Standing Committee



<b>ICVA</b>	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>MIDFEHOPS</b>	International Movement for the Rights of Children, Women and Widows and their Social Promotion
<b>MONUSCO</b>	United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NPCYP</b>	National Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>ONGL</b>	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PACODEVI</b>	Programme d'Appui aux Comités de Développement des Villages
<b>PADECO</b>	Promotion and Support for Community Development
<b>PAH</b>	Humanitarian Action Plan
<b>P-FIM</b>	People First Impact Method
<b>ONAHU-RDC</b>	Forum of National Humanitarian Organisations in DRC
<b>ORSEC PLAN</b>	Disaster Relief Organisation Plan
<b>PHCP</b>	Primary Health Care Promotion Program
<b>RDSC - RDC</b>	Network for the Sustainability of Congolese Civil Society Organisations
<b>RHA</b>	Haki na Amani Network (Justice and Peace Network)
<b>RHONA</b>	Humanitarian Network of National NGOs
<b>RISD</b>	Research Initiative for Social Development
<b>RONHD</b>	Forum of National Humanitarian and Development Organisations in DRC
<b>STP</b>	Shifting the Power
<b>ToGETHER</b>	Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UJEOPAD</b>	Union of Jurists Committed to the Oppressed, Peace and Development
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UNOY</b>	United Nations of Young Peacebuilders
<b>UPDDHE/GL</b>	Union for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights and the Environment in the Great Lakes Region
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WHS</b>	World Humanitarian Summit



## THE RESEARCH STUDY

### 1.1 PURPOSE AND KEY QUESTIONS

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The guiding questions for all countries were:

- Which understandings of localisation of humanitarian aid exist among humanitarian actors?
- Which localisation initiatives and programs took place or are taking place in the respective country? Which initiatives and programs provide good practice?
- Where are in-country actors making good progress and what are the most significant challenges in the key areas of the localisation process - namely partnerships, financing, capacity development, coordination and complementarity, and gender?
- What institutional, policy and political dynamics influence these developments?
- What are the most urgent strategic issues and challenges that need to be addressed to realise substantive, transformative change?

### 1.2 RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGES

The questions invite a broad canvas or systems-perspective on the state of localisation. This provides an opportunity as it takes the localisation conversation beyond the bilateral relationships of an international relief actor and its partner(s). It also considers contextual constraining and enabling factors. Most global research on localisation since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit has tended to focus on one single aspect (e.g. funding; coordination; gender and localisation; risk management; governmental policy towards international operational presence). There is, to the researchers' knowledge, no significant precedent of a contextual systems-analysis.

The question where in-country actors are making good progress and where there are significant challenges is hard to answer, when there are hundreds of multilaterals, bilateral, national and local governmental and non-governmental actors. Due to the inevitable time and resource constraints of any exercise, trade-offs had to be made between broad scope and in-depth analysis of details and components. A broad canvas inquiry leads to broader observations that cannot capture all nuances and do justice to the multitude of different approaches and experiences. There are hundreds of actors in DRC, operating in significantly different sub-national contexts. They find themselves in a myriad of relationships, the realities of which tend to be more complex than is captured in a word like 'sub-contractor' or 'partner'.



## 1.3 INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS AND METHODS

### A FRAMEWORK

The research looks at localisation as a multi-dimensional issue. In 2017, GMI developed the Seven Dimensions framework of localisation for the Start Network, which emerged from extensive conversations with local and national actors in different countries (Patel & Van Brabant, 2017). It shows the key dimensions on the operational level. The framework has been tested and is used, sometimes with adaptations, by several other agencies, networks, or research groups.

RELATIONSHIP QUALITY	PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION	FUNDING & FINANCING	CAPACITY	COORDINATION MECHANISMS	POLICIES AND STANDARDS	VISIBILITY AND CREDIT SHARING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respectful and equitable</li> <li>• reciprocal transparency and accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deeper participation of at-risk &amp; affected populations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better quality</li> <li>• greater quantity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sustainable organisations and collaborative capacities</li> <li>• stop undermining capacities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• national actors greater presence and influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• national actors can contribute to and influence global and national policy and standards-development, and their application in their contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• roles, results and innovations by national actors are given credit and communicated about by international actors</li> </ul>

**Diagram 1.** Seven Dimensions framework of localization

The guiding questions, for this and the other country assessments, focused on four of the seven dimensions: quality of relationship, finance, capacity, coordination, and one cross-cutting issue, gender and localisation.

To receive an adequate description and measurement of 'localisation', additional factors contributing to the overall picture have to be included in the analysis.

#### **Localisation needs to be understood in relation to internationalisation**

Historically and globally, most crises have been and continue to be managed with primarily local/national capabilities and leadership. The rise of a global relief industry, currently worth some \$30 billion annually, is a fairly recent phenomenon. Under certain conditions (major crisis that receives international media and political attention, and where national governments invite international assistance), large-scale international crisis response capacities are mobilized. The result can be a process of 'internationalisation', with international humanitarian actors taking over most strategic and operational decisions, sometimes replacing national and local agencies, sometimes employing them as mere providers of pre-defined services.

Localisation in this sense is then the effort to reduce and reverse this internationalisation, when the feeling grows that it is no longer justified and becomes counterproductive. This is implicitly recognized when international actors talk about 'rebalancing' the system or 'putting' local actors back at the centre of the response.

#### **National government plays a key role in shaping the dynamic**

National governments have a major influence on the dynamics of internationalisation and localisation. The national government decides what role it wants to play in managing people affected by crises on its territory: will it lead and if so, to what extent? It may simply set the overall policy framework, but it may also chair or co-chair coordination efforts, it may insist on validating or not validating each project proposal, and it may or may not provide protec-



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tion and other services itself. The national government also determines the space and roles of its own civil society actors and international humanitarian actors. This varies from country to country, may vary between different subnational contexts, and may change over time.

## B METHODS

This report draws on a document review and interviews with key informants. The acquired information is analysed using the Seven Dimensions framework as described above.

**Document review:** The inquiry started with a literature review. 'Localisation' as a search word may yield some documents from after the World Humanitarian Summit and its Grand Bargain outcome document. But the dimensions of partnership, capacity support for national and local actors, and the latter's access to finance or meaningful participation in coordination structures, have a longer history. The same is true for the support for women's rights and women-focused national and local organisations.

**Key informant interviews:** This overview of the state of play regarding localisation in eastern DRC is further based on 28 interviews, 23 of which were with people based in the region, 4 in Kinshasa, and one in the Netherlands. These 28 people cover 2 government entities, one UN entity, 7 international NGOs and 12 local CSOs (organisations or networks; the Start Hub, for the moment, is counted as an international network). The concentration on NGOs is explained by the fact that the ToGETHER Consortium sees its field of action primarily with other NGOs. A balance between international and national/local interlocutors is justified. The experiences and perspectives of the latter are often less known or heard - but the former have more power. A transformation in the terms of collaboration will not happen without the will of the international actors.

## C CONDITIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

All of the research took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic in the summer of 2020, while there were still cases of Ebola in the east of the DRC. Even when government regulations did not require total containment, prudence dictated that much of the work was done through online conversations. Online conversations sometimes become shorter than face-to-face. A kick-off workshop, and a feedback and validation workshop, which were originally planned, were not held. Although theoretically possible online, this assumes the mobilization power of the national researcher, good quality internet access for all participants (a more important constraint in eastern DRC than in the other seven countries studied), and the availability of participants at the same time. One or more of these factors were often absent.

The research also took place at a time when serious allegations of fraud and sexual abuse and exploitation have been made against several international NGOs and UN agencies in DRC. The politics of localisation already create certain sensitivities, even under 'normal' circumstances not everyone speaks openly about the quality of collaborative relationships, or details of funding. The situation heightened sensitivities even more.

With respect to initiatives relevant to localisation, this research did not have a mandate to evaluate them. While there were no reflection or evaluation documents available, we were able to mention only a few points raised in interviews.

Not all of those approached were available or responsive to a request for an interview. Many international and national colleagues were preoccupied with adaptive management or were working at home in a family context, and some internationals had left the country. National researchers, if not household names, may also find that they get no response to their interview requests from internationals but also from fellow citizens in positions of responsibility.



## THE CONTEXT

### 2.1 VULNERABILITY TO CRISES WITH HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES AND POVERTY

The Democratic Republic of Congo, the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa, has seen a slight decline in its poverty rate over the past 20 years, especially in rural areas. But it remains one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2018, 72 percent of its population lived on less than \$1.9 a day, mostly in the Northwest and Kasai regions. DRC is ranked 135 out of 157 countries in human capital, with a human capital index of 0.37 percent, below the average for sub-Saharan Africa (0.40). After reaching 5.8 percent in 2018, economic growth slowed to 4.4 percent in 2019, due to lower commodity prices, particularly cobalt and copper, which account for more than 80 percent of DRC exports. The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is expected to lead to an economic recession of -2.2 percent in 2020 due to lower exports caused by the poor global economic situation. However, the gradual recovery of global economic activity and the start of production at the Komoa-Kakula mine should allow economic growth to rebound to 4.5 percent in 2022 (World Bank 2020).

The humanitarian crisis in DRC remains acute and complex and is marked by five main impacts: population movements, acute food insecurity, acute malnutrition, epidemics (Cholera, Ebola, and now also COVID-19), and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law exposing populations to increasing protection risks. Indeed, as analysed in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) released in December 2019, despite some localized positive trends and a favourable political context marked by the first peaceful transfer of power in the country's history, conflicts have sharply intensified in some parts of the country and the structural and conjunctural causes of the humanitarian crisis in DRC have changed little. In total, 15.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2020, a 22 percent increase compared to the needs analysis conducted at the end of 2018 (12.8 million people). This increase, however, is not necessarily due to an overall deterioration in the situation, but primarily to an expansion of the geographic coverage of the integrated food security framework analysis, which allowed the identification of previously unassessed needs. In addition, people in need are often located in remote areas that are difficult to access by humanitarian actors.

The eastern part of DRC has been particularly affected by chronic violence, since large numbers of Rwandans fled there after the fall of the genocidal regime. This led to internal clashes, and the area was the cradle of a rebellion that ended the rule of President Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997. Despite the peace agreement signed in 2013, inter-communal violence and conflicts between armed groups persist and drive populations to flee their region.

DRC is currently home to the largest Internally Displaced Person (IDP) population in Africa with 5.01 million IDPs and is also the second most food insecure country in the world with 15.6 million people affected while 4.7 million people are also acutely malnourished. With its own strategic and operational framework, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) response is not included in the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 but has been taken into account and considered as an aggravating factor of the crisis in the affected geographical areas of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri (OCHA, 2020).

### 2.2 INTERNATIONALISATION AND LOCALISATION PROCESS

As mentioned already, 'localisation' becomes an objective only after a wave of internationalisation. It seeks to reduce this internationalisation, to put national and local actors back in a



position of leadership of the action - with the responsibilities that this entails. The contemporary internationalisation of humanitarian action in DRC has accelerated particularly since the large and rapid exodus of refugees in 1994, in the face of the rapid advances of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in Rwanda. Several years of internal and regional violence and warfare later, and the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (July 1999) between the DRC and five regional states (Angola, Namibia, Uganda, Rwanda and Zimbabwe), the Security Council established the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the meantime, UN agencies have expanded their scope of activities and programs, and a large number of international NGOs have come to carry out humanitarian (and/or peace) activities. One Congolese civil society leader, whose organisation is an endorser of the Charter for Change, put it this way: "*Localisation implies the reversal of the trend, the reduction, if not the end of international domination (internationalisation) in the humanitarian sector in DRC.*"

That said, there are undoubtedly places in DRC that suffer from crises where there is little presence and action by international actors. This constitutes, in the authors' terms, a situation of 'localisation by default': little influence of international humanitarian actors, because the situation is rather a forgotten crisis, for security reasons, or because international funding is reduced. 'Localisation by default' is not the same as 'localisation by design': the competent and responsible management of situations by national and local actors, supported but not replaced or simply availed of by international aid agencies.

### 2.3 THE CONGOLESE STATE IN THE FACE OF CRISES

As noted earlier, a key factor in internationalisation or localisation dynamics is the roles, positioning, and public policies of the national government (donors, of course, are another category of actors with great influence on the dynamics of internationalization and localisation). Does the government play the main role in crisis management (as is the case, for example, in India, Indonesia and Ethiopia)? Or does it leave this role and responsibility to other actors? How does it determine, by intention or default, the spaces and roles for national and international actors? For the former, the legal and administrative framework for national and local non-governmental actors is important. A restrictive framework will make it difficult for civil society actors to develop strong and sustainable organisations. Paying attention to public institutions is also relevant because they are, in the Grand Bargain, included in the set of national and local actors. It goes without saying that the state has the main responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and the protection of the fundamental rights of others in its territory.

In January 2013, the National Humanitarian Dialogue Framework (CNCH) was created by Decree N° 13/008 of January 23, 2013.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the CNCH is to improve the exchange of humanitarian information in order to achieve more effective interventions in the country, to ensure a better transition between humanitarian action and development, and to facilitate the search for solutions to the difficulties encountered by humanitarian actors in their daily relations with state services in the implementation of their activities in the field. The CNCH includes, at the national level, the Cadre de Concertation and the Groupe Technique de Travail, and, at the provincial level, the Cadre Provincial de Concertation and the Groupe Restreint de Travail. These are complemented by the Local Consultation Framework and its Technical Secretariat at the local level.

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<sup>1</sup> National Humanitarian Dialogue Framework: [https://www.droitcongolais.info/files/812.01.13-Decret-du-23-janvier-2013\\_Cadre-de-concertation-humanitaire.pdf](https://www.droitcongolais.info/files/812.01.13-Decret-du-23-janvier-2013_Cadre-de-concertation-humanitaire.pdf)





A few ministries are mainly involved, namely: the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action. The Ministry of Cooperation also intervenes because of the partnerships between DRC and its international partners who come to its aid in case of humanitarian or development problems in DRC. This ministry is also key in the sense that international partners are mobilized through bilateral or multilateral cooperation as the case may be. All of this is coordinated by the Ministry of Planning, which is responsible for coordinating all actions in the country in favour of the population, and all projects for greater efficiency.

Since 2012, there is a Disaster Relief Organisation Plan (PLAN ORSEC). This plan was intended to be a tool for the government to know who is responsible for what task in case of what circumstance, but also the way to trigger it, the coordination of intervention activities, in addition to the ORSEC services that must come into play for this purpose. It is a matter of setting up, in advance, an appropriate and efficient organisation by streamlining practices that should contribute to the improvement of the response in its emergency and early recovery component, under a single command and through effective coordination. At the level of each province there is a Planning Division and a Humanitarian Affairs Division which are key state actors in the humanitarian sector, but whose impact is lessened by the lack of a clear and effective sectoral policy for coordinating and monitoring NGO interventions in relation to the province's objectives in each area where humanitarians intervene.

In North Kivu, there is a structure called CPAP (Cellule Provinciale d'Appui à la Pacification du Nord-Kivu) which has ramifications in all the entities of the province in the name and on behalf of the Provincial Government. This structure contributes enormously to the peaceful cohabitation of local communities and the management of inter-ethnic conflicts. It represents the Provincial Government in forums related to conflict management and peacebuilding.

However, despite the working tools and sectoral policy texts that exist in DRC, when there is a humanitarian crisis, the government intervenes only in a subsidiary capacity after the international humanitarian agencies, and often comes second. It would seem that DRC Government has sometimes wanted to minimize even the crisis situation so as not to dissuade investors. This is the apparent reason for its refusal to participate in an international donor conference in Geneva in April 2018 (see Barbelet et al. 2019:32).

## 2.4 CONGOLESE CIVIL SOCIETY

During the colonial period, the Catholic and Protestant missionary churches were concerned with the development of the population and took charitable actions in favour of the most destitute. Schools, hospitals, health centres, social homes, etc. were created. Some agencies date back to the 1930s. We cite the cases of the Kivu Social Fund (FSKI) founded in 1931, the Salvation Army in 1934 and the Scientific and Medical Center of the Free University of Brussels (CEMUBAC) in 1938. Religious denominations are pillars and strong links of the Congolese civil society and play a determining role in the recent history of the country (Kayenga, n.d.). With independence, certain structures, both denominational and secular, were created. The ordinance-law of September 18, 1965 governed the non-profit associations (ASBL) of which the NGOs are a part. In the 80's, we witnessed the development of the NGO movement with the proliferation of development programs or projects in different areas of life.

The legal framework that currently governs civil society is Law n°004/2001 of July 20, 2001 on general provisions applicable to non-profit associations and public utility institutions. Among the non-profit associations, we have: cultural, social and educational associations, sports,



non-governmental development organisations, human rights defence associations, denominational associations (religious or spiritual), women's associations, workers' and employers' unions, professional, humanitarian and philanthropic associations, farmers' associations, cooperatives, professional orders, associations of the free and independent press, learned and scientific societies. The political parties are excluded in the radius of the civil society according to the Congolese law and the other groupings which take part in the management of the public power and there is a clear distinction between the two. The law n°004/2001 of July 20, 2001 completely liberalizes the field of the non-profit associations, and acknowledges the necessity to make these institutions participate in the conception as well as in the execution of public policies. This law secures the civil society as a whole despite the rigor of certain legal provisions of the law. Unlike some other countries where the legal and political space for civil society is restricted or becoming increasingly so (e.g. Pakistan, and Ethiopia in the period 2009-2019, Jordan and India currently), in DRC it is quite open (Kayenga no date).

## 2.5 CSO NETWORKS AND COORDINATION STRUCTURES

The Congolese CSO platforms, both national and in the east of the country, that are relevant to humanitarian action and that are, or can be, more active on the issue of localisation are:

- The Network of National Humanitarian and Development Organisations (**RONHD**) Kinshasa. This national platform was created in October 2016 as part of an UN-OCHA initiative, to coordinate and manage humanitarian leadership in DRC. In September 2019, RONHD had again organized a day on localisation. Due to lack of financial support from donors as well as contributions from its members, the meetings of this network have not been held for several months.
- The Forum of National Humanitarian Organisations in DRC (**ONAHU-RDC**), which brings together NGOs eligible for the Humanitarian Fund. This forum is in the process of being constituted.
- The Cadre de Concertation des ONGs Nationales Humanitaires et de Développement (**CCONATH/D**): South Kivu. This framework was created in 2013 with the aim of bringing together local NGOs in order to have a strong advocacy voice.
- The Forum of National Humanitarian and Development Organisations (**FONHAD**): North Kivu. FONHAD is a platform of Congolese NGOs created in 2010, but the initiative began in 2008. It is structured in thematic commissions (equivalent to clusters for INGOs and UN agencies). To date, FONHAD has eight thematic commissions, namely Education, Food Security, WASH, Protection and Peace, Logistics, Health-Nutrition and HIV/AIDS, Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI), and Gender, Women and Children.
- The Humanitarian Network of National NGOs (**RHONA**): Tanganyika
- The Haki na Amani Network (**RHA**: Justice and Peace Network): Ituri.

To have several platforms is normal and to be expected in a country as large and diverse as DRC. Also, within the United Nations and international NGOs, several networks and platforms coexist. In order to have a unique and important interlocutor who will speak in front of national and international institutions in the name and on behalf of Congolese civil society, the National Consultation Framework of Civil Society was created by the delegates of Congolese civil society organisations in 2013. With its headquarters in Kinshasa, the CCNSC-RDC seeks to create a space for exchange and interaction between all CSOs without exclusivity and between CSOs and state structures, scientific, technical and financial partners. Its goal



is to contribute to the emergence of a modern and just Congolese society which acts responsibly towards itself and its internal and external partners, to ensure a harmonious, integral national development. As such, it wanted to offer a federate framework and constitutes the highest level of consultations for all strategic questions of the Congolese civil society. It is structured from the national level to the provincial level, and intends to build its ramifications at the territorial level.<sup>2</sup> To achieve this feat, CSOs have benefited from the support of various experts but also from a close accompaniment of Technical and Financial Partners, mainly those of the GIBSOC group (European Union, UNDP (United Nations Development Program), Belgian Embassy, French Embassy, British Cooperation DFID, American Cooperation (USAID)). The leaders of the CSOs and the heads of the eight main religious denominations in DRC (the Catholic Church, the Church of Christ in the Congo, the Salvation Army, the Kimbanguists, the Independent Churches, the Islamic Community in the Congo, and the Revivalist Churches ) are the artisans of this initiative alongside the Government of the Republic through the Ministry of Planning.

Unlike the international NGO platform, Congolese CSOs do not benefit from donor support.

## 2.6 PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector is relevant for a variety of reasons beyond its role in conflict dynamics: it can be or become an actor in responses to humanitarian crises and/or a source of funding for local or national organisations. However, from a tax perspective, there is currently no provision for tax deductions on a pro-rata basis for aid to nonprofit organisations. The contribution of the private sector to the humanitarian response remains very limited. At the level of each province there is the presence of the Federation of Enterprises of Congo (FEC) which is made up of the majority of economic operators or traders at the level of the province. It happens that some of these economic operators intervene in the humanitarian sector in order to meet certain primary needs of the population in normal times and most often in times of crisis. An example is the trader Vanny Bishweka, owner of Etablissements Vanny Bishweka and Société IHUSI in Goma and Bukavu who intervenes in the sanitation and the road system of the city of Goma using his own funds. It should also be noted that the FEC of the Ituri Province has assisted the displaced persons of war since 2005 and has built a conference room in favour of the civil society and continues to intervene in the humanitarian sector by building bridges to allow a humanitarian access of quality in the Ituri Province.

## 2.7 INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS

**MONUSCO:** On July 1, 2010, the UN Security Council renamed its mission MONUC to United Nations Organisation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) in order to reflect the country's entry into a new stage (MONUSCO 2018). The new mission has been authorized to use all necessary means to carry out its mandate, which includes ensuring the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and assisting the DRC government in stabilizing and consolidating peace. It has a maximum strength of soldiers, military observers, police officers and members of formed police units. Reconfigurations of the Mission are made according to the evolution of the situation on the ground.

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<sup>2</sup> National Civil Society Concertation Framework, available at <https://ccnsc-rdc.org/ccnsc-rdc/a-propos/>.



## 2

**United Nations Agencies:** Key humanitarian agencies such as WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and OCHA, as well as UNDP are present in DRC.

**International NGOs:** International NGOs in DRC have been trying for several years to consolidate and structure their coordination. In 2011, a National INGO Coordination Committee (CNCONGI) was established, based on the voluntary commitment of organisations. Since 2015, a full-time Secretariat has been established. In 2020 the Forum has 115 INGO members who implement projects and programs in the field of development, stabilization and humanitarian actions and whose interventions cover to date all 26 provinces of DRC. The Secretariat team covers three platforms together, representing the main locations of its members' offices in DRC, namely Kinshasa, Bukavu and Goma. The Forum aims to encourage active and constructive debate among the 115 INGO members around common issues, and to bring their messages and concerns to state actors, humanitarian cooperation and aid (FORUM des ONGI RDC, n.d.). The main roles of the INGO Forum are (FORUM des ONGI RDC No date):

- support for the resolution of common issues for its INGO members;
- improving the flow of information within INGOs and between INGOs and external actors (Government and administrations, UN agencies including OCHA, donors, etc.);
- support for strengthening the voice of INGOs in the humanitarian and development coordination system in DRC;
- be the INGO point of contact for external actors;
- ensure national cohesion of INGOs.

The Forum is supported by ECHO, USAID, the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Swiss Confederation, as well as by membership fees.



## RELEVANT INITIATIVES

This survey of the state of localisation in eastern DRC was able to identify some collective initiatives by international NGOs and some very relevant previous research. It also took note of some international NGO initiatives or good practices. The investigators did not have the mandate or authorization from the agencies involved to evaluate these initiatives, nor did they have the time, in an exercise with a comprehensive perspective, to delve into what the various participants learned from their experiences.

### 3.1 COLLECTIVE INITIATIVES

#### *The Start Network*

The Start Network started as a coalition of UK NGOs but now has over 40 members, including other European and some national NGOs. Two relevant initiatives are its 'Shifting the Power' project (2015-2018) and its current development of a Start Hub DRC.

**Shifting the Power** (STP) was one of the Start Network's Disaster, Emergency and Preparedness Programme (DEPP) projects from mid-2015 to early 2018. The project was led by a consortium of CAFOD, Concern Worldwide, Action Aid, Christian Aid, and Oxfam GB. Most of the six INGOs are signatories to the Charter for Change. Each INGO had accompanied its local partners in this process. The geographic coverage was mainly North and South Kivu.

The initiative came from the observation that there was an under-representation of Congolese CSOs in the humanitarian team in DRC, whereas nationals are on the ground with the affected communities and in permanent contact with them. They have a better understanding of the context and appropriate responses to the needs of local communities affected by the various crises in DRC. The project aimed to help international partners to better transfer to national and local actors the skills and power to make decisions in the framework of humanitarian and development interventions. STP began with a mapping exercise of humanitarian actors. Three CSO networks were identified for partnership: the Forum of Humanitarian and Development NGOs (FONAHD) and the Cadre de Consultation des Organisations Nationales (CCONAT) based in North and South Kivu respectively, and the Réseau des Organisations Nationales de Développement et Humanitaire (RONDH) in Kinshasa. Advocacy capacity was one of the first areas of focus, for which training was provided, leading to the development of a shared advocacy plan and individual strategies. The following quote shows the systemic design of

#### **Congolese organizations that participated in the 'Shifting the Power' project**

CODEVAH: Committee for Development and Humanitarian Assistance

PACODEVI: Support Program for Village Development Committees

Heal Africa

CEPROSSAN: Center for Socio-Economic Health Promotion

BOAD : Ecumenical Development Office

ECC-MERU: Church Refugee and Emergency Ministry

Caritas Congo

Caritas Goma

Health Progress Without Price

CEDERU: Kibutu Rural Development Center

CADI: Action Committee for Integral Development



the approach. *"The advocacy plan is a set of four position papers outlining shared positions toward the government, UN-OCHA, international NGOs, and the private sector. At the government level, it aims to influence the adoption of a country humanitarian policy and the updating of related provincial laws as well as access to earmarked funding. At UN-OCHA, it advocates for increased representation of LINGOs/NGOs in coordination mechanisms. In addition, STP partners have themselves formed an informal WhatsApp group, where they share information, advice and technical assistance. (...) LNHAAs and networks agree that there is now a need to strengthen accountability between platforms and local organisations, to encourage greater two-way information sharing."* (Tanner 2017:13).

In a 2017 reflection report, the project claims some fairly relevant outcomes:

- Seven of the participating CSOs had developed written memoranda of understanding to give local authorities access to more information about the needs of the population and to demonstrate how CSOs are contributing to the response.
- Five partners in South Kivu have begun advocacy work to get the provincial parliament to adopt a new provincial law on humanitarian affairs.
- After enjoying observer status for a while, in early 2017, Caritas DRC became a permanent member of the Humanitarian Country Team. At the time, CARITAS was also chairing RONDH. CSOs at the time were advocating for greater CSO participation.
- STP encouraged participating CBOs to attend cluster meetings at the provincial and national level. The advice was to become more visible first. The goal was for more CSOs to become cluster co-leaders. At the national level, a Congolese organisation became co-leader of the nutrition cluster, while HEAL Africa came to coordinate the Mandya Protection Cluster at the district level and is also active in the cluster meetings in Goma. This is a change for an organisation that previously only attended such meetings on occasion. (Tanner 2017:11/13-14).

STP also used the Strategic Humanitarian Assessment and Participatory Empowerment Framework (SHAPE) as a tool for self-assessment of local partners' capacities, as a starting point for a capacity-building plan. Some of them have also benefited from training offered by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy. Again, CARITAS DRC is mentioned.

Due to lack of funding, there was no second phase of the project. Nevertheless, each of the project's local partners now has its own emergency response preparedness plan and accountability framework. In addition, the 11 Congolese NGOs that were supported in North and South Kivu have become more active in clusters and other humanitarian platforms. There are attempts to revive the purpose of this project through a 'Start Network Hub'.

**Start Hub DRC:** The Start Hub DRC is part of the Start Network's idea to create Hubs in five countries around the world. Others are being considered in Pakistan, India, Guatemala, and the Pacific. The Hubs in these countries are in different phases of conceptualization or experimentation, thanks to funding from DFID. The Hubs are part of a decentralization strategy of the Start Network.

The DRC Hub is currently run by a transitional team. It is conducting case studies on Cholera and Ebola, volcanic eruption problems, armed conflicts, etc., to demonstrate that the current humanitarian system is no longer functional or appropriate. Practices are too reactive, fragmented and top-down. A workshop is planned before the end of 2020 to validate these case studies, the business plan for the DRC Hub, the types of disaster risks to model for potential insurers, etc. The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted the timeline of activities, extending the transition period (compared to the DEPP).



The DRC Hub wants to develop a new humanitarian system where innovations in humanitarian interventions are proposed, notably the idea of disaster risk financing. The originality of the DRC Hub is that it envisages having international NGOs, Congolese CSOs, the Congolese Government but also the private sector. One objective, in line with the financial aspect of the Grand Bargain (and the Charter for Change), is to achieve a more or less equal distribution of financial resources: 50 percent for international actors and 50 percent for Congolese actors. The DRC Hub also plans to work with a Network in Tanganyika Province and another in Ituri Province in the near future. This will allow it to have a picture of the humanitarian problem in Eastern DRC.

CAFOD is currently the host organisation in DRC. Trócaire, ActionAid, ChristianAid, Tearfund are also involved. As for national NGOs, apart from Caritas, MIDEFEHOPS, AFEDEM, AFPDE and PADECO are already members. The DRC Hub would like to have at least 28 national NGOs as members in DRC. Other applicants, for the moment, have not yet satisfied an assessment of their management systems and practices (due diligence) to be an integral part of the Hub in DRC. The vision is that each key decision point will be occupied by an equal number of Congolese and international actors. The Congolese Government is also represented through the Provincial Division of Humanitarian Affairs in North Kivu.

The interviewees for this survey are aware that the vision for the Hub is moving quite far from historical practices. It may be that some actors see the emerging Hub more as a decentralization initiative, and that their interest is limited to the potential to access funding (interview with staff of Aid Agency).

### ***The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) / Alliance of non-governmental humanitarian actors in the Netherlands***

The DRA is an alliance of 15 humanitarian NGOs in the Netherlands. The Alliance receives funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to respond to acute and chronic humanitarian crises in different countries. Responses are made in the form of a 'joint program', designed by the members present in a certain country, with one member agency as focal point for the Ministry and then coordinator for the others. For DRC, this role is played by World Vision.

Advancing localisation is a strategic objective of the Alliance. For some years now there has been a working group on this topic. The Dutch Ministry is very much in favour of a stronger implementation of this collective commitment. A strategic objective of the DRA is to increase the percentage of the budgets that go to and through national and local actors. By the end of 2021 (the end of their current agreement with the Government of the Netherlands), this percentage should increase to 35 percent of budgets for a joint country response, managed by local partners. Currently, the Alliance is probably already at 25 percent.

In 2019, the Ministry had increased the overall envelope to advance programming with cash and localisation. The proposal from members in DRC (for the East) focused primarily on cash, and - with justification - the response to the threat of an Ebola outbreak in that region. There was less collaboration with CSOs than in most other countries where DRA works. Reflection on this situation has begun (interview with staff of Dutch Relief Alliance).



### **SCORE Project (Cordaíd and Trócaire)**

This 1.5-year project (February 2019 - November 2020) was an initiative of Trócaire and was implemented in four countries: Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Rwanda and DRC. Cordaíd is a member of the Dutch NGO Humanitarian Alliance (DRA). Cordaíd and Trócaire (CARITAS Ireland) are signatories of the Charter for Change and members of the Start Network.

Its goal was to build the capacity of a total of 12 national/local organisations across the four countries. The three Congolese partners are Caritas Bukavu, MAAMS Beni and PADEBU Bunia. The focus was on their emergency preparedness and capacity to respond quickly, with tools and approaches that are still 'new' for many of them (cash, digital data collection) and with quality (Core Humanitarian Standard, but also protection, and good conduct of both staff and volunteers). Disrupted in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, the approach remained rather classical (interview with staff of INGO), i.e. with training workshops and online modules, but without as much coaching and mentoring as expected.

The structural weakness was that this training and capacity-building program was divorced from the issue of access to finance. They now have tablets - but no finances when they should be used in practice. Trócaire and Cordaíd understand that eventually a follow-up must help CSOs to access more funding. Another future focus should be on deepening accountability to affected populations. They should be able to better track the use of funds, which can also be a factor in reducing the risk of fraud. (SCORE 2020:3 and interviews).

### **Charter for Change**

The Charter for Change (C4C) is a global initiative, of which Danish Church Aid is currently the international focal point and UPDDHE the DRC focal point. This initiative, currently around thirty-five international NGOs, seeks to better distribute resources, powers and roles between signatories and partner CSOs (Charter4Change No date). National and local CSOs can become endorsers. They are invited to advocate for implementation. The signatories also aim to positively influence global humanitarian aid policies and practices in the same direction.

The number of endorsers in DRC is much larger than in other countries. However, at the national level there is no structure or focal point of the signatories in DRC and no serious discussions are taking place between signatories and endorsers. Several attempts to meet in the country with the representatives of the international organisations that signed the Charter for Change did not obtain the result expected by the endorsing CSOs. Only CAFOD and Action Aid are actively involved. The other signatories do not seem to be active, at least not with explicit reference to this Charter, which does not mean that they are not pursuing practices that go in the same direction with the desired spirit. Trócaire and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe deserve to be mentioned as illustrative examples.

However, many representatives of the signatory NGOs in DRC have little interest in this Charter commitment, and some of them seem unaware of it. This commitment, which the signatory NGOs put forward at the international level as proof of their progress on localisation, does not seem to be sufficiently institutionalized. In DRC, then, the initiative is not moving forward as desired, despite the vigorous international debate on the issue. This state of affairs was raised several times during the recent C4C annual conferences, also in December 2020. The intention of the Charter members is to initiate more dialogues at country level from 2021 onwards. It remains to be seen whether this movement will be able to change the indifference. Other international NGOs remain sceptical of the initiative as it stands or of some





of its specific commitments, such as covering CSO administrative costs; ethical practices in recruiting people to work for CSOs; and conceptualizing projects and actions jointly with CSO partners. Some of these commitments require donors to follow through, which is not automatically the case.

Interviews indicate that many endorsers have since lost faith and are no longer involved, many feeling frustrated. Some endorsers remain active in promoting C4C. In December 2020, they developed their 'Strategic Plan for the DRC C4C Network 2021-2023'. The plan notes the current lack of life signs of the Charter. The promoters want to revitalize the endorsers and expand their number, establishing C4C circles in several provinces. The Plan comes with a budget for which they are currently seeking funding. The budget will mainly cover communication tools and costs (which remain expensive in DRC), and promotion. The target audiences are not only other CSOs but also local and national authorities, some private sector entities and associations such as youth associations.

Experience in other countries shows that more systemic change in the humanitarian aid sector does not happen without promoters/catalysts/activists for localisation (Green 2016). It will be important to ensure that the focus is not exclusively on funding, but on a medium-term vision where Congolese actors, public and private, CSOs and communities, are willing and able to deal more directly with recurring challenges and have the collective capacity to do so.

### 3.2 RELEVANT PRACTICES OF SOME INTERNATIONAL NGOs

**Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe**, in the East of DRC, works exclusively with local/national organisations in all its projects. They are responsible for the implementation of the projects on the ground. This is the expression of a fundamental approach in its global mission: partnership is not a goal in itself, but an instrument to share our responsibility for the world. It is built on common core values, common goals and shared ideas of how to achieve them. The partnership lasts as long as it takes to achieve the goals, which is rarely a short time (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe 2018).

In terms of process, Diakonie organizes assessments to identify new local partners through a transparent questionnaire. The area and the sector of activity guide Diakonie in its choice of new local partners. Diakonie develops three levels of partnership. Level 1: Possible partnership with very local organisations, without experience and resources at the grassroots level; Level 2: Local organisations that are able to cover one province, but without access to funding; Level 3: Organisations that are able to cover several provinces or the entire national territory.

Diakonie promotes its local partners in terms of activities and visibility in the field and with third parties. They receive over 90% of the funding and Diakonie only accompanies them in all stages of the project for an effective and efficient implementation.

In relation to risk management and risk sharing, there are several levels of risk, including:

- Change of staff of national NGOs in which Diakonie has already invested in terms of capacity building. This staff is increasingly poached by other international NGOs or by agencies of the United Nations system. That negates all the efforts made as well as the energy and resources for their capacity building which will no longer benefit the national or local NGOs in favour of which Diakonie had made this investment. This creates a kind of unfair competition between INGOs.
- Regularity and stability of funding. Often funding allows for the realization of part of the activities through a specific project, but there is no guarantee of the continuation if the



funding is not renewed. This leaves many processes in the field unfinished and national NGOs can sometimes do nothing about it.

- The application of humanitarian principles by national NGOs at the community level is often problematic because the human resources are not always the most experienced.
- Risks related to fraud, embezzlement and corruption.
- The problem of conflicts of interest that many Congolese face in the projects.

As far as risk sharing is concerned, generally it is Diakonie that takes the risk or that assumes it on its own funds when it takes on a new partner. That is why, with new partners, it always starts with small financing and with evaluations. Then capacity building follows in order to bring the new partners up to speed to improve their performance in the field.

**Malteser International** is currently implementing a project in Ituri province that aims to enhance the value of local actors working in the health sector. The main target is the local services of the Congolese Government, with a view to improving their performance for the benefit of patients/clients. To achieve this, Malteser International works with local government health partners, including General Reference Hospitals, Health Centres, the Agricultural Inspection (since health goes hand in hand with nutrition), a central MEG supply centre (CDR). This project does not envision direct collaboration with local NGOs, of which there are few in the intervention zones in Ituri, Haut Uélé, and Bas Uélé.

**Johanniter International**, another German NGO, tested its 'People First Impact Method' (P-FIM) approach also in North Kivu, where it had been providing basic health care, WASH and protection services for several years. Since the only person who was more familiar with the P-FIM approach at Johanniter Goma was confined to his home country due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was unable to respond to the researcher's emails, it was not possible to fully explore this important approach that promotes localisation in DRC. The objective was to put into practice a 'community-led' approach. A secondary objective was to assess whether the sectors Johanniter was working on (health and WASH) were aligned with community priorities. A training session was held in June 2016, involving 34 participants (13 women) from 17 institutions, including local authorities. Reportedly, it took a lot of effort to reach female participation of one third (McCarthy et al. 2016:23). The first outcome was a two-day community discussion by a Johanniter team in August. An evaluation meeting was then held in September 2016, in which participants shared how they were applying the acquired knowledge in their personal and professional lives.

'Community-based approaches' is an interpretation of 'localisation' that is clearly consistent with Commitment 6 of the Grand Bargain, calling for a 'revolution in participation'.

### 3.3 RELEVANT RESEARCH

#### *LINC, Peace Direct and Foundation Center: Research on CSO Financial Sustainability*

This three-year research project, funded by USAID, was implemented by Peace Direct, LINC and the Foundation Center in five countries around the world. The goal was to study in detail the key factors that determine CSO financial sustainability, as well as donor considerations and practices in relation to this critical issue (Renoir & Guttentag 2018). In DRC, 23 Congolese CSOs operating in North and South Kivu participated, including BIFERD (Rutshuru); CCD (national); CRESA; CELPDH; CIPSOPA; CVPD (North Kivu); Fondation Chirezi



(Uvira); JOCHADEV (Kalehe); Virunga Yetu (Rutshuru), UJEOPAD (North Kivu), some of which receive substantial international funding, others very little. This made for a very interesting mix of cases.

The research revealed a variety of structural and organisational challenges that local organisations face as they move towards sustainability. It is worth noting here that staff ‘engagement’ is as important a driver of sustainability as funding.

This project ended in February 2020. But the research project had already launched an ‘Action Learning Group’ (ALG) for stakeholders in eastern DRC in 2018. The name of the platform has been changed to the Network for the Sustainability of Congolese Civil Society Organisations, RDSC-RDC in acronym. This network has formally registered and is advocating, especially in North and South Kivu and Kinshasa, for localisation in DRC and addressing the issue of financial sustainability. The ALG/DRC is composed of a diverse group of stakeholders to identify and facilitate actions that can be taken collectively by group members to overcome these challenges in the local context.

### ***Overseas Development Institute: Research on capacity and complementarity***

Led by a researcher from the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute (London), the team was largely composed of Congolese researchers associated with the Committee for Development and Humanitarian Assistance (CODEVAH) and Research Initiatives for Social Development (RISD-RDC). This research explored understandings of ‘capacity’ and ‘complementarity’ among different categories of humanitarian actors in Kasai but especially in South Kivu. Complementarity is one of the key principles of the ‘Principles of Partnership’, another set of commitments made earlier by international emergency agencies (international NGOs and the United Nations). The capacity subject is taken up later in this report. With regard to complementarity, the research suggests that many international agencies do not ask themselves how they can complement national and local actors. Instead, their starting point is often to do as much as possible, and then look for others who can complement their actions, both international and national. This does not correspond to the Grand Bargain formula ‘as local as possible, and as international as necessary’. Rather, the formula is reversed to ‘as international as possible, and as local as necessary’. This practice also emerges from an egocentric (organisation-centric) and not eco-centric (focused on all actors and collective impacts) perspective.

### ***Trócaire and Groupe URD: More than money***

In 2017, Trócaire (CARITAS Ireland) had commissioned a study by Groupe URD (Geoffroy & Grunewald 2017) on localisation. It was inspired by two contexts: Myanmar and DRC. From an interview with Trócaire, we understand that Groupe URD is in the process of directly setting up some projects in which the main actors will be Congolese CSOs. Trócaire does not play a role.

Despite the relevance of its research, this survey found no indication from these interviewees that they are well known or that their observations and recommendations have influenced the practices of any agency or others.



## SPACES FOR CONVERSATION ABOUT LOCALISATION

### 4.1 PLATFORMS/CONVERSATION SPACES

Beyond the Network for the Sustainability of Congolese Civil Society Organisations, RDSC-RDC, some Congolese CSO platforms are active on the issue of localisation.

**CCONATH/D:** Its headquarters is in Bukavu, South Kivu, and its focal point is Dr. De-Joseph Kakisingi. It has 62 local NGOs as members, not all of them active. Representatives of CCONATH/D participated in the International Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. As we have seen, the Shifting the Power project has supported CCONATH/D. This platform is also an endorser of the Charter for Change. The main objective of CCONATH/D is to conduct risk studies to prevent diseases and disasters in South Kivu on the one hand, and on the other hand, to propose local solutions and mobilize funds locally in order to meet humanitarian needs in South Kivu. Two areas of focus are early warning and rapid response, and direct access to funding for local NGOs.

Today CCONATH/D has access to the Regional Inter-Agency Centre or CRIO in South Kivu, led by OCHA. This is the decision-making framework for humanitarian action in Eastern DRC (for the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika). Among the results of its advocacy are that today 25 percent of the funding from the Fund for Humanitarian Action goes to local NGOs in South Kivu, national NGOs will soon begin to sit in the clusters and in the selection commission for projects to be funded in the humanitarian field in South Kivu.

**FONHAD:** Its headquarters is in Goma, North Kivu. It currently has over 150 members, 98 of whom are active. The local organisations that chair each thematic commission represent the Forum in the corresponding clusters that are piloted by OCHA, in the name and on behalf of the platform. FONHAD also has a delegate at the level of CRIO North Kivu and Ituri. It is also represented in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) by Caritas Congo and CENADEP.

At the regional level, it is part of the coordination forum for humanitarian NGOs in Africa which is supported by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA). FONHAD is also a partner of the IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) based in Geneva. It is the IASC that coordinates humanitarian action within the United Nations. FONHAD covers North Kivu, Tanganyika Province and Ituri Province.

The objective of the FONHAD is to involve national NGOs in the definition of the priorities of the Humanitarian Action Plan, to professionalize national NGOs and to promote collaboration between national NGOs, international NGOs and agencies of the United Nations system.

FONHAD represented DRC at the First World Humanitarian Summit where the guidelines chosen by the participants were: 'SUPPORT NOT REPLACE', 'invest in prevention not in response'.

In Kinshasa, the RONHD platform had organized a day on the subject in September 2019. The original idea was to make it a two-day workshop. RONHD is currently affected by financial concerns. According to an interview in December 2020, the Kinshasa-based International NGO Forum will have the topic of localisation on its agenda by early December. It is unclear whether this was the first time but this survey, and other research cited, found no



indication that there was much attention and energy around localisation in Kinshasa. The relevant national government institutions are not active on this issue either. This contrasts with the active role of the DRC government in the 'International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding' in the years leading up to the last Aid Effectiveness Summit in Busan in 2011, and in the G7+ group. The leadership of national actors, especially the government, was strongly emphasized (observations from the GMI experience).

One factor that weakens the effectiveness of Congolese CSOs in their advocacy is their lack of unity. As one national CSO leader confessed: "*Because of rivalries and personal interests, local and national NGOs have not been able to speak with one voice and work in synergy. This situation has a negative impact on their visibility and the influence of their actions.*"

## 4.2 UNDERSTANDING/INTERPRETATION OF LOCALISATION

The interviews conducted show that there is no common understanding, although there is an element of convergence in some features which were repeatedly named: local leadership, decision-making power, participation and locally driven change that is more in control of the assessment of needs and the context.

**Capacity and finance:** Almost all international NGO interviewees see localisation as simply a matter of building the capacity of Congolese CSOs to improve their performance in the field, to be able to negotiate partnerships with them, and so on. "*Localisation implies close accompaniment of Congolese CSOs in order to enable them to develop the necessary tools to be more effective and efficient in their field interventions.*" This perspective is also alive among CSOs: several interlocutors spoke of the importance of 'skills transfer'. Better access to funding, and better quality funding, are important goals for CSOs.

**Economy and political economy of the humanitarian sector:** The 'DRC C4C Strategic Plan', developed by some CSO members, correctly distinguishes between two visions: one that sees localisation as an agenda for the humanitarian economy, i.e., improving cost-effectiveness; and another that sees it as an agenda for transforming the political economy of international humanitarianism, which places much more emphasis on power relations.

**Communities, the nexus and resilience:** Better involving and supporting 'communities' also comes up in conversations, although it is not clear what this means in practice. This may be related to the fact that the nexus theme is receiving more attention. In 2018, DRC was declared by the UN Deputy Secretary-General to be one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the humanitarian development peace nexus. The Country Team has designated North Kivu as one of the pilot provinces in the country; UNDP and UNHCR have volunteered to take this pilot forward (see e.g. United Nations 2019; Pickwick 2020). Building 'resilience' is often part of this discourse. How this translates into practice, and what will change for communities at risk, remains to be seen.

In their research commissioned by Trócaire, de Geoffroy and Grunewald of Groupe URD put forward the following understanding: "*Localisation of aid is a collective process of the different stakeholders of the humanitarian system (donors, UN agencies, NGOs) that aims to bring local actors (local authorities or civil society) back to the center of the humanitarian system with a larger and more central role. In addition to enabling a more effective and efficient humanitarian response, the long-term goal of localisation is to strengthen the resilience of crisis-affected communities by establishing links with development activities.*" (De Geoffroy & Grunewald 2017). This can take many forms: partnerships, increased and 'as direct as possible' funding for local organisations, and a more central role in aid coordination.



# 4

***Collective capacities in the same area:*** The Start Hub approach is distinguished by its clearer willingness to support not only better consultation, but also stronger complementarity between different stakeholders in the same province, including the public and private sectors. There is an aspect of 'decentralization' in this conception, with a potential to also transform the relationships between local and international actors. The challenge would be to realize this potential and not stay with decentralization.



## KEY DIMENSIONS OF A LOCALISATION PROCESS

The framework here is the Seven Dimensions of localisation, already introduced at the beginning of this report. We now look at four key dimensions, i.e. quality of relationships, finance, capacities, and coordination, in line with the guiding questions in the Terms of Reference. Then we pay attention to gender in the context of localisation.

### 5.1 QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

**Meaning of 'partner':** In theory, a 'partnership' implies a collaboration between two or more organisations around a common goal and/or objectives, while each retains its autonomy. This implies trust in the relationship between partners, management autonomy (no dependency relationship) and a balance of power between partners. With regard to the balance of power in a partnership, the Congolese interlocutors emphasized that the terms and clauses of any partnership should be discussed and negotiated between international and national partners. The delegation of power to local partners should be gradual, but noticeable and serious in order to achieve a balance of power. Partnership should not be paternalism, and the relationship between partners should be respectful and based on trust and meritocracy. (This ambiguity between paternalism and partnership was raised a long time ago. See Smillie 2001).

**Choice of partners:** A real partnership develops on the basis of knowledge and the beginning of mutual trust. However, international agencies also often choose 'partners' on the basis of a 'call for partners'. In this case, there is no opportunity for the CSO to get to know the international agency before signing an agreement. For those who are not selected, it is often unclear why, and there is no feedback or only general feedback that explains nothing (see also Barbelet et al. 2019:28) One CSO interviewee, recounting the history of collaborations with international agencies, reported that only in one of six examples a developed relationship existed before the decision to collaborate.

**Partnership Principles not known:** This research confirms that the 'Partnership Principles' articulated by international humanitarian actors in 2007 (equality; transparency; results-based approach; accountability; complementarity) are not well known and not widely applied. Gradually, international organisations are beginning to develop or to revise their partnership policies and principles. Others have had such guidelines already for a longer time. For example, the principles of Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe include: common goals; autonomy of partners; reciprocity; transparency and integrity; trust and patience; avoidance of negative consequences; and inclusion of spiritual resources (Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe 2018:14-15).

**Different practices:** Previous research conducted by ODI confirmed the diversity of approaches and practices among mostly international NGOs in relation to collaboration with national and local actors. Some work exclusively in partnership, the preferred modality for others is direct implementation. *"Many INGOs in South Kivu and Central Kasai stated that it was not part of their operational procedures to partner with local actors or anyone other than donors, and that their donors supported them because they implemented their programs directly"* (Barbelet et al., 2019:20). Among those open to collaboration, two approaches have been identified. Some international NGOs want to work together only with local actors who are truly specialized in humanitarian work and therefore have a humanitarian agency identity. Others are more open to collaborations with civil society actors and public authorities, without requiring a humanitarian specialization, as well as directly with communities (Ibid:20-21). Among UN



agencies, the ODI research found a greater willingness to work with Congolese governmental and non-governmental entities. Nevertheless, UN agencies as a whole worked more closely with other UN agencies, with international NGOs, and with local organisations that were part of an international network (Ibid:21).

**Distrust and social hierarchy:** This survey finds that international actors distrust national or local actors. In what can be called a 'negative narrative', they are considered to lack the financial management and technical capacities needed to satisfactorily implement large projects. They are also described as a fiduciary risk and susceptible to community or political bias. CSO managers are very aware of this negative narrative and deplore the situation: *"This trend should be reversed, and this bad campaign that INGOs are waging against CSOs in front of donors should stop."*

*"As a coordinator of [international NGO], I could speak. As co-lead of the logistics cluster, too. And now as a [national NGO] coordinator, I can't speak. Coming from an international NGO to national NGOs, do I lose my faculties? (interview with local NGO)."*

(Quoted in Barbelet et al 2019:30)

Note also the existence of a social hierarchy between organisations that automatically affects the credibility of a person, as the quote shows.

**Partners shared risks:** Congolese interlocutors emphasize that localisation requires international and national partners to share the risks of their joint actions and collaboration, rather than transferring the risks to Congolese actors. Instead of having a conversation where the international actor focuses only on those risks when working with a Congolese actor, the two should get together to look at the different risks for each other and see how they will manage them together.

## 5.2 NO COMMON UNDERSTANDING

**Quality of funding and capacity are inseparable:** As noted in the earlier mention of the SCORE project, the international humanitarian sector's practice of 'building capacity' without connecting this objective to the issue of funding is a mistake. Many local and even national organisations can be caught in a vicious cycle: insufficient financial management capacity and technical expertise, so no international funding, so no way to develop or retain capacity. While understandable in the first period of a major emergency, this vicious cycle could and should have been broken when international humanitarian agencies operate in a context for a decade or more, as is the case in eastern DRC. Our observation is consistent with that of the ODI-led team: *"Funding was the most cited and selected challenge when asking what facilitates capacity. In addition to enabling capacity, funding enables long-term organisational capacity, including increasing staff retention capacity, managing funds through appropriate tools (such as fund management software), and allowing organisations to retain assets such as computers, offices, vehicles, etc."* (Barbelet et al. 2019:17).

**Quality of funding and financial sustainability of Congolese CSOs:** The research of the LINC consortium, Peace Direct and Foundation Center is extremely relevant here. It can be argued that the purpose of humanitarian action is not to strengthen local organisations and institutions, but to help affected populations. This argument, however, is not as valid as it sounds.

- Humanitarian action is used to strengthen international organisations, many of which used to specialize in development, but are now more involved in humanitarian work where there is more money;





- Resilience is not just about households, or even a community: a well-functioning country needs strong institutions. In the spring of 2020, during lockdowns in humanitarian aid donor countries, CSOs played an important role in mitigating the medical, social and economic consequences;
- More detailed analyses are beginning to be done which show that the operating costs of CSOs are much less than those of a national NGO.<sup>3</sup>
- Other studies and experiences show that investments in institutional development over time yield better impacts (No author 2020).

The debate on localisation must then turn to the question of 'value for money'. What is good value in the short term may not be so in the medium and long term. Investing more in Congolese institutional capacity will, in the long run, reduce the costs of expensive international infrastructure. The reluctance to do so is justified, in practice, by the negative narrative that Congolese organisations represent a greater risk of fraud and corruption. This concern is obviously not without foundation, but this narrative has to become more balanced in view of the events taking place during the period of this research.

**Inequality in the allocation of flexible management fees:** One source of quality, i.e., 'flexible' funding is the management fee for each project. Every international agency receives a management fee, which is not usually the case for CSOs unless they are funded directly. This sum is not only used for the management costs of an operational project or program, but also contributes to the costs of the international headquarters of the international NGO or UN agency. A contentious issue in localisation is, or will become more so, the fairer sharing of function costs. Even in mixed consortia, this inequality has been observed: "*Another example of a mixed consortium showed how international and local organisations were treated differently, in that INGOs in the consortium receive a 10% contribution to their organisation's operating costs, compared to 7% for local organisations...demonstrating a negative consortium dynamic.*" (Barbelet et al. 2019:22-23) Many CSOs are currently still struggling to buy smartphones or afford internet access.

While a localisation approach would require proper funding of local and national organisations, on a par with international organisations, researchers commissioned by Trócaire felt a concern that local CSO staff would be paid more than local officials (De Geoffroy & Grunewald 2017:7). This is a good observation, but it ignores the fact that Congolese staff at international agencies are also paid much better than civil servants. Keeping CSOs financially anaemic in any case does not solve the problem of a government in a very resource-rich country that does not fund the civil service.

**The challenge of fraud and corruption:** DRC is considered a country where fraud and corruption are endemic, including in the aid sector. Several strategies are used to divert funds during the implementation of humanitarian aid projects. The box below summarizes some of the ways in which fraud and corruption are discussed in common discourse.

**Operation Return:** This term refers to emergency operations in which trucks carry a large amount of aid into a community and bring it back half-filled with aid into the city, where it is sold and cashed by aid actors. In other words, the term describes the fraud and mismanagement of aid resources for monetary gain.

**Friends Club:** This term describes the practice of national staff contracting with implementing partners with whom they have personal relationships, thus favoring personal relationships over capacity. It also refers to the close relationships within and more informal coordination among international organiza-

3 Start Fund Bangladesh, interview by GMI.



tions, which are often perceived as exclusive and offer certain advantages in terms of access to funding and partnerships.

**Suitcase organization/pocket organization:** This term describes local organizations that are created for monetary gain, have little foundation in local communities or civil society, and little organizational structure. The term is used to denounce organizations that have no accountability to people or donors and tend to be part of a club of friends involved in backdoor operations.

(Barbelet et al 2019:11)

Humanitarian needs assessments and targeting of beneficiaries are an opportunity for fraud. At this stage, numbers can be inflated. Lists of fictitious names are developed and validated by local leaders before being passed on to the various clusters. The risk is more pronounced in areas where physical access is difficult. Because of a common interest, local authorities sometimes validate the figures knowing that they are unrealistic, in exchange for a bribe or with the idea of putting pressure on donors to act promptly. As for the implementing actor, beyond the pressure on donors that these figures command or forbid intervention, the idea is to inflate the envelope because generally, organisations which have conducted or participated in needs assessments are more likely to implement projects. Surviving in a chronically precarious financial situation, a CSO may be tempted to manipulate the numbers, which it is certainly concerned with survival. This logic of needing crises with significant humanitarian consequences to survive is also reflected in a popular phrase currently used in eastern DRC: "No Nkunda, no job."

During election periods, diverted funds may be used to finance the election campaigns of some local leaders running for office. In 2011, several NGO leaders who were recipients of 'Pooled Funds' ran for national and provincial assemblies as independent candidates or as members of political parties and used humanitarian aid project funds for their campaigns. (Barbelet et al. 2019:14).

However, while this research was being undertaken, aid agencies in DRC were confronted with major situations of corruption and sex-for-work in international NGOs and UN system agencies. There were several instances of international agency staff demanding, for example, payments from commercial suppliers and local NGOs to obtain a contract and sexual favours to receive employment. On the other hand, international agency staff paid, for example, external evaluators not to expose corruption and victims of sexual abuse to keep quiet, etc.

**Social hierarchy - double standards:** This should challenge the narrative that local and national CSOs are the main risk of financial malfeasance (Dodds & Kleinfeld 2020). One complaint heard from Congolese CSO interlocutors, beyond the negative narrative, is that of double standards: a case of fraud in a Congolese organisation puts it directly on a blacklist, while an international organisation will be punished, but will not be on the same type of blacklist.

**Access to the Common Humanitarian Fund:** As of April 2020, 129 humanitarian actors have been confirmed as eligible for funding from the DRC Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF). Of the 129, 79 are international NGOs. 15 Congolese CSOs and the National Red Cross. Their active participation in coordination mechanisms and their performance will determine their access to future funding. One of the leaders of this HLF said that their priority is to support Congolese CSO projects. "We are seeing more and more quality in projects implemented by national NGOs." Although a positive constant, their numbers remain very limited. These CSOs, as noted earlier, are seeking to network.



### 5.3 CAPACITIES

Previous and this present research raise a number of points of attention: there is constant talk of 'capacity' but the understanding(s) of the term remains very vague. Subjects raised are the power of those who are entitled to assess capacity, the link between capacity and access to finance, the failure of traditional approaches to capacity building, and the presence of some local resources that could be better utilized.

**Lack of clarity:** The discourse on 'capacity development' often fails to specify what kind of capacity is needed, by whom and to do what. Research conducted by ODI, offers a pragmatic understanding: "*Capacity is broadly understood as the potential or actual contribution of an actor or organisation to mitigating the suffering of crisis-affected populations.*" (Barbelet et al. 2019:3) This will include some capacities that are very context-specific, others that are more generic in nature. One important capacity is the ability to operate within the functioning and requirements of the international humanitarian sector. GMI also places great importance on the ability to collaborate, in complementarity with other actors, as the challenges are too great and complex for any one agency alone.

**The requirements of the sector count more than the actual context:** International actors clearly prioritize mastery of the international sector's operations. "*All actors interviewed tended to view capacity from their perspective, in terms of the capacities they had or related primarily to their roles and functions, as opposed to identifying the capacities needed in the context. UN agencies focused on capacity as overall experience, both in terms of developing expertise and know-how from other humanitarian contexts, as well as the number of years of experience (as did international NGOs). [...] In general, international actors described capacity as detached from or specific to the context and crisis. This differed from local actors' emphasis on more contextual elements and capacity in relation to the specific situation of communities, the sub-region, or the province in DRC.*" (Barbelet et al. 2019:14).

**Power to determine and assess capacity:** The fact that international agencies can determine what capacities are relevant, and then assess them unilaterally, is an indicator of the degree of internationalisation and power asymmetry. Congolese agency members, according to this and other research, respond in two ways. They are aware that many of them lack certain individual skills and organisational capacities. They want to learn but point to the challenge of retaining capacity. Without a more stable financial base, an organisation cannot attract or retain experienced or talented people, develop more equitable partnerships with international actors, and even attract funding. The one who has already received more easily than the one who has little. The issue of 'capacity' cannot be separated from that of financial resources. On the other hand, they object to the concept of 'capacity building' as a distortion. Respondents disliked the term itself, finding it "*disempowering and insulting, condescending and simply unintelligent*", noting that those who use the term often undervalue what local actors bring to partnerships. Actors typically bring legitimacy, methodological skills, valuable context-specific knowledge, and access to local and national resources and networks. Each needs the other to maximize their effectiveness. (Stephen 2017:35). International actors can also learn from national and local ones.

**Ignored Capacity:** Research on the financial sustainability of CSOs raises the importance of engagement and volunteerism among many CSOs, including in DRC. This 'momentum', full of potential, is largely ignored in formal assessments of CSO capacity by international actors.

**No investment but also a failure of traditional capacity building approaches:** A key question must be: how is it possible that after more than 20 years of international agency presence, they continue to say that Congolese actors do not have (enough) capacity?



Two factors emerge from the various research studies and our interviews that contribute to stagnation in the capacities of local actors. First, many international organisations do not value partnerships and therefore have no incentive to invest in building the capacity of local actors (Barbelet et al. 2019: 18). In addition, the most commonly used approach to 'building' capacity, that of training workshops, is not very effective. These workshops may strengthen participants' skills but are not necessarily shared further with their colleagues afterwards. As we have seen, if the organisation does not have access to funding, the skills learned cannot be applied. Furthermore, even if they can be applied, there is no support available when faced with a difficult situation that was not addressed during the workshop (Stephen 2017:34). In some of the interviews with people based in Kinshasa, the point was made that it was better to accompany local actors by working with them and showing them in practice how to do things. One way to do this would be to place a highly experienced person (national or international) at a CSO; another approach is a kind of organisational accompaniment, over a period of time but not necessarily with the more experienced person (and with didactic skills) always present. CAFOD, the Catholic relief agency in Great Britain, is pursuing this type of approach, which also includes quite a few exchanges between different partners in different countries (Rogers 2020).

“For more than two decades, local and national NGOs have benefited from theoretical training. However, there is an honest need to rethink how capacity building is done. It would be more cost-effective to let consultants and other experts work directly with local actors. As far as consortium funding is concerned, this method is only useful when projects are implemented together, with each partner showing the other its expertise rather than just sharing the funds received.”

(UN Focal Point)

**Rather informal skills transfer?** Previous research has found that skills transfers often occur when national staff from an international organisation go (back) to work with a CSO, or start their own organisation. *"It became clear early on in interviews with local organisations that most staff had long careers with international organisations before starting or joining local organisations. Some left international organisations due to frustrations with expatriate staff who had little experience and expertise in humanitarian assistance. These individuals felt more capable of leading the strategic direction of aid programming than their expatriate managers but were unable to do so in an organisation that valued the opinions of international staff over those of local staff. Others left international organisations when those organisations ran out of funding, reduced staff, or left the DRC."* (Barbelet et al. 2019:18). These individual skills, however, do not address the lack of access to funding.

**Three specific abilities:** Three important abilities that deserve attention are the ability to respond quickly to an emergency; the ability to work systematically to have a deeper impact; and the conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity skills.

- The ability to respond quickly, at a certain scale, and with sufficient quality requires certain individual skills but also organisational capabilities. The Power Shifting and SCORE projects have sought to strengthen these elements. This capacity can be lost quickly if the Congolese organisation does not retain trained and experienced people (they are likely to be recruited by international agencies). On the other hand, a rapid response is not possible without quick access to funding and goods. The Start Fund specializes in speed, and seeks to fill the time before other, probably more important, funding becomes available. But this Fund is only directly accessible to Start Network members, after a demanding organisational assessment (interviews with different INGOs and local NGOs, 2020).



- Systemic approach to deeper impact: When our CSO interviewees told the story of their organisation, it was often in terms of successive projects. The success of the organisation is expressed as the ability to get more projects from different international agencies. The projects are typically conceptualized by these agencies, with the CSO being more of an 'implementing' partner. Many of the CSOs in eastern DRC work on complex issues that require structural approaches; what is striking then is the lack of continuity and even strategic coherence at times, which are necessary to have a deeper or broader impact. They cannot realize their willingness and potential to be agents of change if they cannot pursue a longer-term agenda, which requires support, also financial, beyond the 'project' format. The case of NPCYP on the next page is an illustration.
- According to International Alert and Oxfam, two relevant skills that were not well developed by either international or national agencies were conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive approaches. Given that many local actors understand that humanitarian needs will always return as long as there is no peace, this represented, in their view, a missed opportunity (Stephen 2017:34).

**Research capacity:** Research is an important component of and investment in the international humanitarian sector. However, most research on countries receiving aid is done by and for 'Northern' actors. Not all relevant research is translated into French or easily accessible to Congolese agencies. Localisation also means investing in and using Congolese research capacity. We have identified two candidates: the *Collaborative Network of Researchers on Governance in Conflict Situations* and the *Peacebuilding Support Office in DRC*. *ResCongo* is the first national network of Congolese researchers working on security and peace.

The Governance in Conflict Situations network is a strategic collaboration between the Land Rush Programme, led by the Institut Supérieur de Développement Rural de Bukavu and the Université Catholique de Louvain; the Groupe d'études sur les conflits-sécurité humanitaire or GEC-SH of the Centre d'Etudes de Recherche Universitaire du Kivu, and Ghent University.

The Office is a pool of Congolese consultants who have been experts in various fields of humanitarian and development interventions for years. They have come together in a non-profit association to support Congolese CSOs working in the peacebuilding sector to address institutional and organisational challenges for their credibility and sustainability. Indeed, the Support Office draws its *raison d'être* from the search for sustainable solutions to the chronic instability in DRC. The Support Office works to rehabilitate and enhance the role of local peace actors in DRC. It seeks to strengthen the capacities of local peace actors to make them more credible, viable, cohesive and resilient in order to effectively manage direct funding. The Office aims to reduce competition among local peace actors through support to forums for exchange and joint advocacy and dialogue for sustainable peace. The Office also facilitates the connection of local peace actors to other national and international stakeholders for greater harmonization and effectiveness of their interventions.

**Example of a local organization that was able to develop there National Partnership for Children and Youth in Peacebuilding, NPCYP**

What has allowed NPCYP to develop is the financial support of its partners, the collaboration with local leaders, the exchange of experiences between organizations, as well as the capitalization of lessons learned in each activity carried out in the field within the framework of projects already implemented in the past and projects in progress.



The key internal factors that have contributed to its emergence as a network of youth organizations in DRC and its maintenance or sustainability are the commitment of member organizations to work for peace, the active search for funds through the exploitation of calls for projects, the sharing of information at the internal level, and teamwork. Its internal culture which advocates transparency and a job well done, respect for reporting deadlines, evaluations and audits to which it has already been subjected, as well as the willingness and vision to grow, to do better and to serve the beneficiaries with dedication.

NPCYP has already received funding from various international partners, including: Search for Common Ground, World Vision, Save the Children, Patrir and UNOY who had funded the research on or evaluation of the participation of adolescents and children in the peace process in DRC in 2015, Peace Direct which is currently supporting, with funding from the Swedish International Development Agency, a project that aims to accompany and support youth actions for peace. This support has strengthened the institutional recovery of the NPCYP network, which previously operated with its own funds (membership fees), and has helped to strengthen the ties of collaboration between adolescents and local leaders and to work in synergy, thereby strengthening local capacities in peacebuilding. This support has also enabled young people to get closer to policy makers through advocacy and to strengthen the economic empowerment of young people through entrepreneurial activities for peacebuilding.

The particularity of this project is that Peace Direct has left the management of funds to the NPCYP as a pivotal organization, which in turn supports 23 mini and micro projects of youth peace structures and leaders in North and South Kivu. This is a mark of respect for the localisation and appreciation of local capacities.

However, to take it to an even higher level, NPCYP needs funds to support local youth peace initiatives and advocacy, capacity building (trainings) and exchange of experiences with other national and international actors to further learn how to improve its financial and program management system.

*Face-to-face interview, respecting the barrier measures against Covid-19, with Justine Namwangu of NPCYP, Etienne Kambale of RDSC and Enack Makunda of the Peacebuilding Support Office in DRC, BS-RDC in July in Goma.*

## 5.4 COORDINATION

**Dominance of international coordination structures:** The main humanitarian coordination structure in DRC should be that of the government. In reality, it is the one set up by the UN. Next to it, there is the International NGO Forum. Better coordination of international NGOs makes them stronger in their relations with national and local actors, especially if the latter are less well organized. As one interviewee from an international agency put it: "*Because of rivalries as well as personal interests, local and national NGOs have not managed to speak with one voice, to work in synergy. This situation has a negative impact on the visibility and influence of their actions.*" It should be remembered that the International NGO Forum receives funding from international donors, which is not the case for CSO platforms. National and local coordination structures are in second place. In South Kivu, for example, there are:

- **Provincial government:** "*The government's humanitarian affairs division is mandated to manage the relationship between the government and international humanitarian actors in DRC, including at the provincial level. However, government coordination was widely perceived as lacking the capacity to fulfil its function. Local actors, in particular, felt that the government lacked leadership in humanitarian affairs at all levels.*"



- **Forum of Congolese CSOs, South Kivu (CCONAT):** This platform was created in 2014 "due to the frustrations of local actors towards the current humanitarian system in South Kivu and to address the lack of representation of local organisations within this system, particularly with regard to decision-making structures." One such activity is monitoring and responding to allegations of fraud in a local organisation through a mediation committee. "CCONAT (...) has been instrumental in advocating for local organisation representation on the interagency committee." (Barbelet et al. 2019:24). As we have seen, CCONATH/D was one of the platforms supported by the Shifting the Power project.

**Socio-geographic coordination:** The UN coordination system is usually organized around technical sectors. In DRC, the Humanitarian Country Team has created four regional structures (Regional Inter-Agency Center or RIC) with autonomy in coordination and planning. These can be replicated at a more local level (Centre local inter-agencies or CLIO). The Common Humanitarian Fund provides them with financial envelopes, the allocation of which is decided by these centres. This approach, however, places more value on the context, its knowledge and the ability to navigate it. It has provided more opportunities for local CSOs: the proportion of CSOs funded from the Common Humanitarian Fund increased to 38 percent in 2017-2018, after the creation of the CRIOs and CLIOs, compared to 19 percent five years earlier (Konyndyk et al. 2020:17-18). The DRC Start Hub is moving in the direction of collective capacities and complementary actions in a socio-geographical area. (GMI prefers to speak of a 'socio-geographic' area, knowing that here, and elsewhere, one may have in mind the province or district, that is, an administrative area. Ultimately, the 'logic of the context' must be the determining criterion, not the administrative structure).

## 5.5 LOCALISATION AND WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

The Grand Bargain as a document was quickly criticized for being gender blind. Within months of its publication, a 'Gender Friends of the Grand Bargain' group was formed to accompany the working groups around each of the ten commitments (No author 2019).

**Gender becomes women's organisations:** Gender and localisation, in practice, has quickly become a subject with a focus on women's organisations. CARE and ActionAid, among others, have invested in promoting the role of women in humanitarian crises (e.g. ActionAid 2019). Both have also implemented a project (2018-2019) 'gender and localisation' with UNFPA, the key agency for gender-based violence in the Global Protection Cluster (Van Brabant & Patel 2019).

**Who sets the agenda?** There is a certain tendency or risk that 'gender and localisation' becomes translated into support for women's organisations that also work with survivors of gender-based violence, and that this becomes the primary focus of international agencies (e.g. CARE International, 2014). From the regional meetings that this CARE, ActionAid and UNFPA project organized, many women expressed discomfort with this reductionist or at least narrow agenda. They want to be able to work much more on prevention, and the causes and contributing factors, such as images of masculinity. Gender-based violence, also in DRC, affects not only women and girls, but also men. The same point was made by a protection expert with a decade of experience in eastern DRC, within and beyond international agencies. Her overall finding is that their protection efforts have largely been a failure, due in part to a great lack of investment in prevention (Seymour 2019). Three women from Congolese CSOs participated (FMMDK, SOFEPADI, APEF) in the Africa regional workshop in Nairobi in September 2019.



# 5

Interviews with three women's organisations with a centre in Goma and a women's network in Ituri raised additional points:

- They implement projects with the support of various international agencies, such as CARE, World Vision, EPER Switzerland, UN Women, MONUSCO etc. But the financial support they receive is insufficient. Some of them suspect that international organisations keep most of the budget for themselves while they do the work.
- It is easier for established organisations to get additional funding. CSOs that are still in the process of finding their feet can do good work but are often passed over by internationals.
- They confirm the preference of international agencies to fund support to survivors of sexual violence, to the detriment of prevention. They are beginning to have successes such as some women being recognized as village and group leaders, something that was impossible until a few years ago.
- Gradually, thanks to multiple advocacy efforts by women's and/or human rights organisations, we are beginning to see greater respect for women CSO leaders. Here, the insistence of international actors has made this issue evolve among Congolese CSOs.

There are also challenges for Congolese women researchers in and about their own society. They can sometimes access and obtain certain perspectives more easily than their male colleagues. But they also face prejudice from international researchers as well as from their compatriots (Bahati 2020).





## HOW TO MOVE FORWARD?

While this overview of the current situation is relatively accurate, it will not be easy to effect more systemic change. This change will also require a collaborative and sustained effort by many actors, both Congolese and certainly international agencies. It is the latter who have the power, control over resources and are more easily heard.

**Information and accountability:** After four years, we should not be in a situation where many international actors are not aware of or do not take seriously the commitments they have made.

- **Objective:** International actors accept responsibility for commitments made and promises made, from the Partnership Principles to the Charter for Change for signatory NGOs, and the Grand Bargain for all, including donors and UN agencies. This will require information dissemination, advocacy, also at the international level, and activism. Never has a system been changed without activists (Green, 2016). An opportunity exists in the initiative taken by some CSO members around C4C, who have made the effort to develop a strategic plan. The C4C coordination from 2021 also wants to encourage more country-level meetings and actions. This will not be enough: there is a need for promotion to international agencies, also regarding the Grand Bargain which is a broader reference.
- **Objective:** Regular conversation spaces around localisation, in Kinshasa and eastern DRC, that start from a proper understanding of the Grand Bargain. Conversation spaces should evolve into working groups. Experience in other countries shows that a working group needs a few people who can dedicate their time and energy. This will require a modest budget.

**Vision of success/progress:** Localisation will remain a 'default' practice if a vision of success or at least of progress in the medium term is not articulated. What do we want to see in three or four years? Who needs to play what role to get there, and how will we measure progress? In a few other countries, such as Somalia and Nigeria, 'localisation frameworks' have just been articulated, which can then be detailed in action plans, with allocation of responsibility, and indicators of progress.

**Application to a socio-geographic area?** Decentralized coordination, the multi-stakeholder approach envisaged by the DRC Hub of the Start Network and the active endorsers of the Charter for Change, as well as experiences from listening to the populations, such as the one tested by Johanniter Internationales, and probably others, can converge in a clearer vision of what we want to see in a few years, in a socio-geographical area. Development and peace actors, as well as researchers and members of the private sector in the same area can be involved. A strategic issue such as, for example, the right to land, can bring them together. Not everyone will be convinced or able to actively engage. We can move forward with those who have the will, if the collective effort proves relevant, others will want to join in. International NGOs and CSOs active in the initiatives identified in this research may be interested. Experience in other countries shows that some funding will be needed to get a number of people involved.

**Introduce and use available tools:** There are various tools available and already in use elsewhere that can be used to structure conversations around localisation and advance their implementation. There is the 'seven dimensions' framework and its cross-cutting themes. This framework (albeit without the cross-cutting themes) has been adapted and enriched with indicators by the Humanitarian Advisory Group, which is already using it to plan and evaluate



collective responses to an emergency (see Jirauni Osborne et al. 2019; NIRAPAD & HAG 2020), A practical tool that can be used at the bilateral level of collaboration between an international and Congolese agency is the one developed in the Netherlands by 'The Spindle' (2020).

**Reflection and collective action with and for women's organisations:** It should not be possible, nor acceptable, for women's organisations and networks not to receive serious attention and responses to their critique of the practical interpretation of 'gender and localisation', and their ideas for preventive approaches. International agencies can help them getting more attention and relevant responses, especially from international actors.

**Viable and capable organisations and collectives:** If, after a few decades of international presence, it is clear that few national or local organisations have the capacity to conduct programs in a professional manner, it must be admitted that 'capacity building' has been a failure, for which the main responsibility remains with the international agencies. However, there are CSOs that have been able to develop, with varying degrees of support from one or more international partners. Listening to and documenting the historical trajectories of these organisations can reveal points of attention and learning that are useful in conceptualizing more effective approaches to organisational development. Accompanying approaches and opportunities for exchange of experience and knowledge among CSOs have proven relevant in other countries. An essential prerequisite, however, is access to funding and quality funding. Research on the financial sustainability of CSOs provides the arguments. International agencies have the relationship with donors or directly control funding, they need to do more and better. More funding must also be directed to reward collaboration rather than competition. The complexity of the crises in eastern DRC can only be addressed with collective efforts.

**Proactive action by CSOs:** Localisation implies greater sharing of power and resources, but also accountability. CSOs with a serious mission to serve populations in need could be more active in developing their own standards and practices of integrity, transparency and accountability. It is important that those which are serious actors in the field distinguish themselves from others that serve individual interests. Feasible seems a form of self-regulation to start with, which may have to be reinforced by an external supervisory entity. A grouping of accountable CSOs can also develop practical proposals for responses to allegations of wrongdoing.

**Mindsets:** Systemic change is not achieved by changing policies, procedures and resource allocations alone. On a deeper level, we have to deal with mindsets which people are not always aware of.

- **Objective:** To reduce and eventually stop the negative narrative about Congolese agencies. Speaking in general terms, it must be recognized for its true nature: prejudice, which maintains an atmosphere of distrust and prevents movement towards more positive relationships. This is not a plea for blank checks. But it is not possible to develop more balanced and constructive relationships if one systematically sees the other as 'a risk'. International agencies cannot claim to be immune to mistakes, including serious ones.
- **Objective:** To initiate a sustained conversation about power, its responsible use and abuse, in the relationships between international and national/local agencies. Localisation is not a 'technical' or 'economic' issue but is about the political economy of the international humanitarian sector. Accountability to the public and parliament in donor countries is real but does not justify the establishment of a structure of domination and subordina-



tion. Since mid-2020, a conversation about the 'decolonization of aid' has started, at least in Europe, which cannot be ignored.

- **Objective:** To introduce more medium- and long-term thinking: after decades of chronic crisis, decisions and actions/projects with a short-term horizon can't be anything but the exception in situations of real emergency. The 'nexus' is not a luxury but a necessity. For Congolese actors the link between responding to needs and reducing violence and advancing a peaceful situation comes more naturally than for international actors who remain stuck in the silos of international aid administration and organisational mandates and capacities. A longer-term perspective also changes assessments of 'value for money': What is good value for money in the short term is not necessarily good value for money in the medium term.
- **Skills required:** Technical reports with recommendations alone do not change attitudes. Skills are also needed to help the different actors to become aware of the assumptions that influence their views and behaviours, and that are ultimately not constructive. It is also necessary to be able to argue why certain practices may give 'results' in the short term but become counterproductive in the medium and long term. And we need the courage to say that certain behaviours or discourses are not acceptable.



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# IMPRINT

© Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e. V.  
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March 2021

## EDITING:

Dr. Claudia Streit

## GRAPHIC DESIGN:

Anja Weingarten

## COVER PHOTOS:

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