

2022-2026 STRATEGY





INTRODUCTION

With our strategy for 2022-2026, the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) is moving towards further localization and triple-nexus work while keeping our humanitarian mandate at our core. We aim to become a leading example for humanitarian reform. We will showcase the added value of our approach to humanitarian action in our communication and advocacy.

Since its establishment in 2015, the DRA has evolved into a global testing ground on operationalizing Grand Bargain and Core Humanitarian Standards commitments such as localization, multi-year funding and programming, accountability and community engagement.

As humanitarian needs continue to grow more chronic and complex in nature, further impacted by the health and non-health related shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian system is not keeping pace. Change is happening, but not fast enough.

We are generating evidence on how to achieve results by doing things differently. Examples include the Joint Response Mechanism, a unique model for needs-based, agile responses to both acute and protracted crises, co-created and implemented by DRA members and local partners.

The DRA consists of 14 Dutch double-mandated NGOs which collaborate closely – in partnership with amongst others the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs – to respond in a timely, effective and efficient manner to the most serious and complex crises. Our strategy for 2022-26 is based on collaboration among our diverse members with complementary strengths, and a commitment to continuously learn, evolve and improve.

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THE DUTCH RELIEF ALLIANCE



PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

Our actions are guided by four widely accepted principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. International humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law set out fundamental legal standards on protecting and assisting individuals and groups. Our position is well summarized in the CHS on quality and accountability. The DRA believes that people are at the heart of humanitarian action, and the humanitarian imperative comes first.

WHO ARE WE? WE ARE THE DRA!

The DRA was established in 2015 by 10 Dutch humanitarian NGOs, which started cooperating in 2014 on three crises – South Sudan, Ebola and Iraq. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which was funding the relief projects, saw an opportunity for a large-scale, lean funding model for which they had additional funds available through the Dutch Relief Fund.

The NGOs and MFA have since established a mechanism that goes far beyond a fully operational humanitarian funding modality – which would have been a major achievement in itself. The DRA is not so much about what we are but what we *want to achieve*. It is as much an **approach** as an alliance.

At the heart of the DRA is ‘*putting the Grand Bargain commitments into practice*’. The sector now recognizes that the ‘*what*’ in humanitarian responses is less of an issue than the ‘*how*’. This is where the DRA is breaking ground. We are committed to a joint vision and finding ways to realize it together as an alliance. The DRA is a continuous global testing ground on the operationalization of Grand Bargain (GB) and Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) commitments such as localization (see Annex for definition), multi-year funding and programming, accountability and community engagement.

The DRA, as an **ALLIANCE**, currently consists of 14 Dutch NGOs which collaborate closely to respond in a timely, effective and efficient manner to the most serious and complex crises. The DRA partners meet ECHO partnership criteria (certified DG ECHO partners – FPA) and are fully committed to leveraging their global presence and capabilities to achieve humanitarian impact, in line with global humanitarian sector developments, CHS and GB commitments.

The DRA partners work on the ground to deliver principled humanitarian **RELIEF** – life-saving assistance, in line with humanitarian response plans and best practices. While keeping humanitarian response at its core, the DRA is also exploring how to broaden its programming approach into areas such as the ‘triple nexus’, resilience, preparedness and early action.

The **DUTCH** in DRA refers to the nationality of the NGOs and the MFA, but we operate at a global level. Over the past seven years the DRA has become a globally significant response mechanism, delivering timely and high-quality humanitarian aid to more than 4 million people in 22 crises, working with 83 local organizations. DRA values keeping the Dutch constituency informed on the results we achieve.

PARTNERSHIP WITH MFA

One of the most interesting, important and innovative aspects of the DRA mechanism and partnership with MFA is its potential to deliver ‘quality funding’ as aspired to in Grand Bargain 2.0 (GB2.0). This moves the relationship and dialogue beyond the level of financing. While there is and should be a clear relationship between government (donor) and NGO (receiver), both stakeholders recognize the added value of the mechanism’s potential to jointly further GB commitments. A combination of constructive dialogue, dissent and agreement in numerous meetings – characterized by openness, mutual trust and respect – have generated impact where it counts. These characteristics also enable collaborative and constructive operationalization of such complex issues as risk management and direct funding.

At country level, MFA – via its embassies – and the DRA – via its Joint Response (JR) partners – are in close contact on issues such as access and security, national government engagement, mobilizing additional funding opportunities and advocacy.

“Last year, I started going to the child-friendly space of the DRA. I learn a lot, about sexuality, about the rights I have. I also attend a DRA sewing and knitting course. I still clean houses and sell food on the market. But soon, I will finish this training and they will give me what I need to start my own business: a sewing machine and other things. Once I have my own business, I will also prepare for the entrance exam and pick up school where I left it.”

A 14-year-old woman in Bossangoa, CAR.

VISION AND MISSION 2022-26

The **DRA vision** is a world in which *people affected by crisis are at the centre of a humanitarian response which saves lives, alleviates suffering, restores dignity and contributes to resilience.*

The **DRA mission** is therefore to work with those most in need to provide timely, efficient and high-quality humanitarian response through equitable partnerships.

OUR VALUES

Through the last seven years of collaboration, DRA member organizations and local partners have established a set of values by which we work. We will continue to build on these values and take them forward into our next strategic period:

- The DRA approach is built on a foundation of **principled humanitarian action**
- The DRA **collaborates** within the Alliance and with a wide range of other players
- The DRA is **accountable** to affected populations, partners, donors and their constituencies
- The DRA's responses are **gender sensitive and inclusive** of vulnerable groups
- The DRA pursues **quality, innovative ways of working and continuous improvement**
- The DRA **uses its voice** to influence the humanitarian system in support of its vision
- The DRA works **as locally as possible** and as internationally as necessary (see Annex for definition)

WHAT MAKES THE DRA DISTINCTIVE: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED AND WILL TAKE FORWARD

Our strategy 2022-26 will be driven by six key learning points:

We are more than the sum of our parts. While all DRA partners are committed to its vision and mission, diversity and complementarity are essential elements in its success. A one-size-fits-all approach is not helpful in the complex reality and diverse contexts of humanitarian crises. Building structures, evolving JR approaches and on-the-ground adaptation require diversity, agility and specific partner lenses and expertise. The DRA is not about competition, control or size. It is about collaboration, complementarity and learning, respecting identities and using each other's strengths. Ultimately, the DRA is not about what we *are* but what we *achieve* in the eyes of the people in need, at the JR country level and global level. The collaborative way of working entails that we learn from each other and push each other to improve quality and value for money. Through working together, we achieve a better response for the people in need.

We keep improving and evolving. Learning 'on-the-go' is an intrinsic aspect of the DRA. We are continuously engaged in *mechanism-building and approach-testing* processes, to improve the way we work and *how* we can make progress in incorporating CHS and GB components. We continuously review and adapt technical support, financial processes, capacity assessment, JR priorities, JR member selection and joint programming.

The Joint Response Mechanism – a unique model for needs-based, agile responses. Central to the DRA approach, the Joint Response Mechanism is a unique intervention mechanism established in a collaborative manner by the DRA partners and local partners (see Annex for definition). Through JRs the DRA aims to reach people most in need, filling gaps and operating in underserved areas in sync with humanitarian response plans and UN assessments, adding value with limited funding. JRs are co-created and implemented by DRA partners and local partners who are best placed geographically and technically, with consideration for vertical and horizontal complementarity and in collaboration with other international and local humanitarian actors. JRs are realized through some distinctive features:

- Joint monitoring and assessment of crises and trends;
- DRA partners themselves decide on initiating a JR and funding;
- A Response Task Force, consisting of the most 'context-experienced' members,

- decide on context- and crisis-specific conditions, objectives, thematic and geographic intervention areas;
- Proposals are assessed and selected via peer review or designed in joint workshops;
- Quick allocations can be made to a JR through direct access to the funds; and
- Standing agreements with MFA enable flexible and adaptive program implementation.

In-house dual response nodes. The JR comes in two flavours: the Acute Crises Mechanism (ACM) and Protracted Crises Mechanism (PCM). The ability to respond to both types of crisis – a 'dual response mode' – is a very distinctive feature of the Alliance. The ACM can respond in a timely manner to an acute crisis or spike in need, without lengthy approval processes – the JR can kick off within 72 hours. The PCM allows the DRA to invest in more sustainable longer-term responses through predictable multi-year funding. The DRA's added value is speed, expertise and agility in ACM; and a multi-year programming horizon, localization and engagement in the PCM. Both mechanisms are crucial parts of the DRA, each with an appropriate share of the available funding.

Localization (moving towards localized). In line with the evidence and international commitments, the DRA believes that localization is key to improving effectiveness – for example, by leveraging local knowledge, context awareness and links to communities. Local actors which adhere to humanitarian principles and have the right qualifications – adequate skills, resources and space in which to operate – not only save lives but can sustain recovery and risk-reduction efforts long after international responders have left. From the first JR onwards, DRA partners have collaborated to engage and support local partners and strengthen capacity. In a standard humanitarian program, a single INGO might not have the time and resources to establish a close and long-term relationship with local partners. With JRs for protracted crises, local partners are more and more engaged in all program phases. This is reflected in an increasing share of funds for local partners, and capacity strengthening moving towards capacity sharing. Localized leadership and equitable partnership are being boosted where possible.

Multi-year funding and community engagement. The drive towards more localized humanitarian responses is hugely enhanced by the more predictable, multi-year and flexible 'quality funding' opportunity that the DRA mechanism can offer. Or, as formulated in GB2.0: '**Quality funding** is as *flexible, predictable and timely as possible throughout the delivery chain – including for local responders – while still being clear and transparent (to an appropriate level of detail) in how it is used and where it goes and what it achieves*'. The PCM, in conjunction with the potential for multi-year and flexible funding, also enables JRs to accommodate suggestions from the community in ongoing programming and next-phase proposal design. Assurance of next-phase funding massively supports meaningful community consultation and engagement, as proposal design can be much more oriented towards quality programming (in terms of impact, needs, support or target group) instead of winning an award (fundraising). This increased community engagement is very much in line with one of the GB2.0 pillars: '*Quality funding targets the most vulnerable with what they need most based on inclusive consultative processes with affected populations, and effective coordination open to local responders including Women Led Organisations*'.

PROGRESS TO DATE: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

In its 2018-2021 strategy, the DRA outlined four strategic priorities to guide investment and ways of working: accountability, localization, innovation and collaboration. Significant progress was made in each of these areas and a great deal was learned in the process. Highlights include:

Proving the advantage of COLLABORATION. By collaborating in the JRs, the DRA has achieved impact through harmonized programs, joint needs assessments, and exchange of knowledge, skills, expertise and learning. Examples of collaborative impact in JRs include coordination of beneficiary targeting, technical information sharing and planning, joint trainings on MEAL, gender-sensitive programming and inclusion. Partners share resources including offices and warehousing, leading to cost-efficiencies. They have established referral systems among partners, and ensure standardized programming, for example through communities of practice.

SPOTLIGHT ON INNOVATION

B-Ready is piloting forecast-based financing in the Philippines in consortium with a DRA partner, local partners, the private sector, a local authority and a consultancy firm specialized in innovative weather forecasting models. The pilot is now being rolled out within the Philippines.

Tackling Barriers to Cash and Voucher Assistance is an innovative project to meet the needs of unaccompanied and separated adolescents for cash and voucher assistance. The project was designed together with adolescents and the outcomes will be shared with the global community.

FUTURE DRA PILOT

The DRA is currently piloting a new model of humanitarian action that advances GB commitments in their entirety through locally empowering and sustainable solutions. DRA is partnering with Nexus, a Somali-led platform for change that advocates for a locally driven, community-led model of partnership to promote and apply a collective problem-solving approach with local government, civil society, the private sector and international actors. Within this framework, DRA partners play a facilitating role and provide institutional and sustainable funding, flexibility in the use of grants, and an anticipatory funding modality for local actors.

PILOTING THE 'ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT'

An example of continuous evolution on accountability is the pilot 'Accountability Project', in which voice recorders were installed in target communities for community members to record their complaints and feedback, and dedicated Community Accountability Officers were employed.

Advancing INNOVATION in humanitarian action. The DRA has tested how to do things differently to better reach hard-to-access populations, anticipate crises and address issues of exclusion and (gender) discrimination. The DRA Innovation Fund (DIF), an exclusive funding window for innovation, has driven innovation in humanitarian response (see examples below). Building on the learning from the DIF, the DRA now has the potential to scale up innovative practices within its own JR programming and feed into the global humanitarian sector's innovation agenda.

LOCALIZING humanitarian programming. In the 2018-2021 strategy, the DRA made strong commitments on localizing humanitarian assistance: for example, pledging to increase funding to local actors (see Annex for definition), allocate DRA budgets to strengthen the capacity of local humanitarian actors, and amplify local voices in international humanitarian settings. We have made some major strides in this regard, reflected for example in the substantial increase in funds available for our local partners. We will have reached the GB target of 26% by the end of 2021. Among many examples of the localization agenda in JRs, in Nigeria – where 34% of the budget goes directly to local partners – a capacity building fund was made available which Nigerian partners could use unconditionally to organize their own security.

The change towards localization is also reflected in our governance structure including local advisory groups, made up of representatives of local partners, to guide us in our policymaking and designing JRs. They have increasingly been invited to provide input into DRA trajectories, such as developing this new strategy. Driving localization in JRs has accelerated learning on capacity building (moving towards capacity sharing), how to facilitate effective localization (moving towards more equal and equitable partnerships) and joint programming (moving towards locally led programming). It is difficult to overstate the importance of multi-year funding assurance, multiple INGOs cooperating in JRs, budget flexibility (e.g. for capacity building) and a donor with a congruent bold vision on localization.

Realizing ACCOUNTABILITY. The DRA sees it as a responsibility to be accountable to crisis-affected populations, donors and their constituencies. Within each JR, partners aim for open, transparent and inclusive project implementation, meaningfully involving the affected population in line with the 'participation revolution'.¹ Inclusive project committees are regularly consulted, and innovative accountability mechanisms are being piloted to add mutual program accountability to the existing basic systems for member complaints and safeguarding.

The DRA has contributed strongly to humanitarian transparency through quarterly reporting of key indicators for JRs to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) database, and adopting the standardized GB reporting format 8+3, demonstrating commitment to harmonized reporting.

Becoming more VISIBLE. The DRA has geared up its activities in visibility and communication through a new website, use of social media (Twitter and YouTube), an annual impact brief and DRA advertorials in prominent Dutch newspapers to share results with the wider Dutch audience. DRA's joined-up communication strategy and calendar have contributed to much greater impact on constituencies including the MFA, politicians, journalists and the Dutch public. Major achievements on advocacy include DRA's reports on its contributions and challenges in the context of the GB, and joint advocacy with MSF and Dutch Red Cross around a Dutch law to criminalize presence in designated terrorist areas.

Striving for QUALITY. The DRA has committed to provide quality humanitarian aid to people affected by crisis. International standards such as the CHS, SPHERE, INEE, CPMS and ADCAP provide guidance to partners on quality programming, and evaluations investigate JRs' compliance with CHS and SPHERE. The DRA has adapted its misconduct disclosure scheme to Dutch law and implemented it across all partners.

2

2022 - 2026:

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD – OUTLOOK 2026



'In 2021, 235 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection. This number has risen to 1 in 33 people worldwide'

Humanitarian needs continue to increase, and grow more chronic and complex. More people are displaced from their homes than at any time since World War II. Refugee situations are becoming more entrenched. Women and girls are at increased risk of conflict-related sexual violence. As the climate crisis accelerates, we can expect more migration, conflict, pandemics and natural disasters. Climate change and migration drive urbanization (over 50% in 2020, at least 70% in 2050), and urbanization of humanitarian crisis *and* aid amplifies the need for agility, innovation and collaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a profound shock for societies and economies. Amid ongoing conflict, hunger and climate change, the pandemic triggered a 40% increase in the number of people needing humanitarian assistance and the biggest global recession since the 1930s,² threatening to deepen inequalities and increase poverty.

Every crisis affects women, men, boys, girls and individuals of diverse gender identities differently, compounded by intersectional factors of exclusion such as disability or ethnicity. Gender norms, values and practices affect everyone, at all times and in every walk of life. COVID-19 is no different. It will intensify gender considerations, but is also an opportunity to improve gender power relationships.

As the health and non-health effects of the pandemic merge with those of other shocks, humanitarian programming needs to adjust to treat it in a more integrated manner.³

The humanitarian system is not keeping pace with the increase in needs. Humanitarian response funding is falling further behind what is required: in 2020, response plans and appeals were only 46% funded.⁴ Aid coverage in humanitarian responses has been on the decline for a decade.⁵ It is insufficient especially in remote areas, areas with high risks for humanitarian workers, besieged areas, and some displacement settings (people outside camps and irregular migrants).

Politicization of some crises at the international level is shrinking space for civil society and impeding humanitarian access. Examples in the last decade include the crises in Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. International humanitarian law is often ignored⁶ and humanitarian space is under threat. The role and legitimacy of global institutions such as the United Nations is shrinking, and power is shifting to a complex web of bilateral relationships that are increasingly focused on trade and security rather than human rights and development. In the DRA's experience, these macro trends are making JRs in protracted crises more difficult to implement effectively – accessing the most vulnerable is becoming more difficult due to concerns about aid worker safety, restrictive host government regulations and donor government requirements focused on counterterrorism.

Change is happening, but not fast enough. In 2016, the GB set out to address underlying challenges in the humanitarian system. A 2020 review⁷ noted progress in several areas championed by the DRA – such as increasing cash assistance, providing more support and funding for local and national responders, multi-year funding investments and improving joint and impartial needs assessments – but highlighted that these changes are not yet being taken to scale. The Black Lives Matter movement made 2020 a year of reckoning for the humanitarian sector: calls to 'de-colonize aid' prompt all actors to reflect on how humanitarian aid is being delivered and ensure that their roles do not perpetuate unfair power relations.⁸

**AN EVOLVING DRA**

While the 2018-2021 strategy was ambitious and the DRA is proud of what it is achieving, even more needs to be done – especially as the increasingly complex global context makes progress on GB commitments more critical and urgent. In the coming strategic period, the DRA will expand in the following areas (see table in section 4 for more detail):

Enabling Priority 1: JRs are more efficient, effective and impactful, and local resilience to crises is increased

- Putting people at the centre.** While the DRA is making great progress in enabling meaningful participation of affected people in program implementation in JRs, we will need to grow further in cross fertilization and upscaling of best practices and methodologies. Affected people need to be even more involved in the design and planning process and all stages of the program cycle by making better use of the DRA's multi-year funding modality. Within the JRs we will further boost inclusion of disadvantaged groups such as women, children and differently abled people. The DRA's multi-year funding model offers the potential for longer-term and more strategic engagement of affected communities beyond a 'project'.
- Furthering gender-sensitive responses and inclusiveness.** The DRA has gender-sensitive proposal criteria, and JRs apply gender-sensitive approaches and take different gender needs into account. The DRA's processes integrate criteria to understand the rights and needs of different genders, and its programming supports their uptake and adherence. One of GB2.0's four key pillars is: *'To achieve quality, responses must understand the capacities, priorities, and views of affected people, and include people whose needs and vulnerability are heightened by gender inequality, social exclusion and marginalisation'*. It is critical to ensure that we implement gender-sensitive approaches consistently throughout JRs, apply gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches wherever possible and particularly in multi-year JRs, and engage purposefully with local women's organizations and networks to take the lead. Where the means and capacity exist, we will support addressing root causes of gender inequality and exclusion and reshaping unequal gender and power relations. DRA partners will set examples for each other and the wider humanitarian sector in combatting all forms of abuse, exploitation and harassment.
- Reducing humanitarian needs, risks and vulnerabilities.** As per the Agenda for Humanity, ending need requires reinforcing local systems, anticipating crises and working across the humanitarian-development divide. While not deviating from its core purpose of delivering humanitarian aid and relief, the DRA will seek greater complementarity between emergency responses, longer-term development and social cohesion, specifically in protracted crises and with multi-year funding as a prerequisite. We will further explore preparedness, resilience and early action as JR building blocks to achieve *'a humanitarian response which saves lives, alleviates suffering, restores dignity and contributes to resilience'*, along with peacebuilding and the triple nexus, always considering the expertise of members and partners and what is practically achievable in a given situation.
- JRs integrate innovation.** DRA evaluations show that innovative ways of working need to be more closely linked to specific JRs and the local contexts that shape them. This means partners taking a more active role in engaging crisis-affected people and local

actors defining if, where and what type of innovative solutions are supported in JRs, so innovation and learning are used to identify local solutions to local problems. Already the DRA looks at innovation beyond technology – for example, on tackling discrimination and exclusion, delivery models, ways of doing business and shifting modes of aid delivery, such as in urban contexts. When developing innovative strategies and components, DRA will make sure not to duplicate already ongoing initiatives.

- Stronger local humanitarian leadership.** DRA defines LOCALIZATION as a process towards local actors having a stronger role and greater leadership in humanitarian assistance. The expansion of equitable partnerships (see Annex for definition) between local and international humanitarian actors is essential to enhance effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, address power imbalances in the humanitarian system, and promote sustainability and exit strategies. We understand 'partnership' as principled, diverse and effective collaborative relations between two or more actors, aimed at addressing key humanitarian challenges. Participants are open to learning from one another, recognizing the strengths and assets each partner brings to the table. The DRA will embark on establishing a framework for equitable partnership in humanitarian aid with an emphasis on complementarity, mutual respect, sharing of risks and benefits, and brokering collaborations between diverse actors and networks at community, local and national levels.
- Applying complementarity between INGOs and local actors.** Decentralization and localization have an impact on the position and role of INGOs, including DRA members, and the DRA's governance structure. Where local capacity is not (yet) sufficient to manage a response, INGOs continue to support local governments, UN and NGOs. Where INGOs are able to move away from the default approach of direct implementation through large in-country structures and operational capacity, they have an opportunity to explore re-positioning and expand on their current roles. Areas where complementarity can be found include global advocacy and networking, funding (from home donors or public), quality support and assurance, high level technical expertise and operational support, and initiating and scaling innovation. The DRA structure will evolve towards exploring these opportunities to add value in humanitarian responses, and the INGO's role as an intermediary.
- Mobilizing resources.** The organizations involved in JRs, and ultimately the affected populations, will benefit from greater donor outreach to stimulate investment and support for aid. Given the limited resources for humanitarian aid, the DRA needs to be more purposeful about options for joint institutional fundraising and joint communication strategies around humanitarian action.
- An enabling governance structure and mechanisms to fit our ambition.** The DRA is revising its governance structure with the aim of becoming future-proof and fit for purpose to deliver this strategy. The revised structure includes a block grant for the entire DRA portfolio, covering funding streams for both acute and protracted crises; currently, the block grant supports only the acute crisis JRs and innovation projects. The block grant facilitates timely allocation of funding and budget flexibility within and between JRs, with decision making at DRA level, and includes selected positions to ensure quality, compliance and visibility. A thorough review of the composition of the current model, available and required expertise, financing modalities and risk management will be conducted in 2021-22 to feed into the revision of the model. Revising processes to increase leanness and simplicity and decrease bureaucracy, while maintaining strengths on collective learning and accountability, will generate international interest and ensure local applicability. The revised model will ensure decentralized decision-making, adaptive programming and Southern partners' representation in the governance structure in line with our localization ambition.

Enabling Priority 2: The humanitarian system is more efficient and effective, with a leading role for local actors and institutions

The DRA is generating evidence on how to achieve results by doing things differently through JRs and other initiatives. Lessons learned and good practices are being fed into the DRA knowledge base, and there is potential to scale up innovations. The experience we are gaining on the ground also gives us the credibility to engage with the humanitarian system to share solutions to common problems and advocate for a more efficient and effective approach to humanitarian aid – a major task for 2022-26.

- **Increase visibility, communication and advocacy.** The DRA has huge potential to be a leading global actor in humanitarian communication and advocacy, as a whole or via a group of members. However, due to limited resources, communication and advocacy have so far taken place mainly in the Netherlands and the DRA is not yet well known in the wider humanitarian community. This is a missed opportunity, from the perspectives of visibility and funding. GB2.0 will be an excellent platform for partners to showcase how the DRA is contributing to a more efficient and effective humanitarian system in a variety of contexts, and re-assessing how our own role in the system – as INGOs and donors – needs to change.
- **Develop and share learning at three levels:**
 - **With local actors and DRA partners**
Learnings from the DRA approach have boosted collaboration, understanding and progress among Dutch NGOs and Dutch branches of international NGOs. As part of its equitable partnership approach, the DRA will further engage local actors and partners to decide what learning to prioritize, for what purpose and using what methodology. Inclusion of actors with local knowledge will enhance the DRA's capacity to respond to local needs and share locally applicable good practices across the DRA and other humanitarian actors.
 - **Within the INGO 'families'**
The DRA's lessons learned, good practices and innovative approaches can be fed into the wider 'family' of INGO partners. DRA JRs are often still perceived as small and temporary, rather than recognized as a large-scale, innovative testbed of GB and CHS commitments. If the DRA wants to 'incentivize humanitarian actors to increase their efforts towards the Grand Bargain commitments' we need to start turning up the volume within our own organizations.
 - **Externally – going global**
Learning and improved ways of working can also be shared at a larger scale through various channels with the wider humanitarian community, contributing to global knowledge on how to operationalize GB and CHS commitments. The DRA cannot achieve impact at scale through JRs alone – we need to better situate our work as part of a broad international effort and engage more actively with other humanitarian actors. As a humanitarian testbed, the DRA has a great deal to share.

4

THE ALLIANCE IN 2026



Asking the 14 partners ‘What will the DRA look like in 2026?’ yields diverse answers, depending on the lens being applied. We all face the same reality in the humanitarian sector, as described in section 2, but some partners view it more through a ‘close-up’ lens – focusing on people in need and service delivery – while others take more of a ‘wide-angle’ lens on global trends in crises, humanitarian aid and funding. As any photographer knows, you need a range of lenses in your toolkit when going on an assignment – and these diverse but complementary lenses have shaped the vision on DRA-2026, which can be described from three equally important perspectives:

DRA-2026 in close-up view

- Focusing on communities and people in need, vulnerability, inclusion, quality of service delivery, needs, timeliness, resilience and community engagement:
- Achieve quality humanitarian support, meeting SPHERE and CHS standards.
 - Link relief programming to development, resilience, peacebuilding, early action and preparedness where possible and relevant.
 - Use multi-year funding to enable meaningful community engagement in response design and implementation.

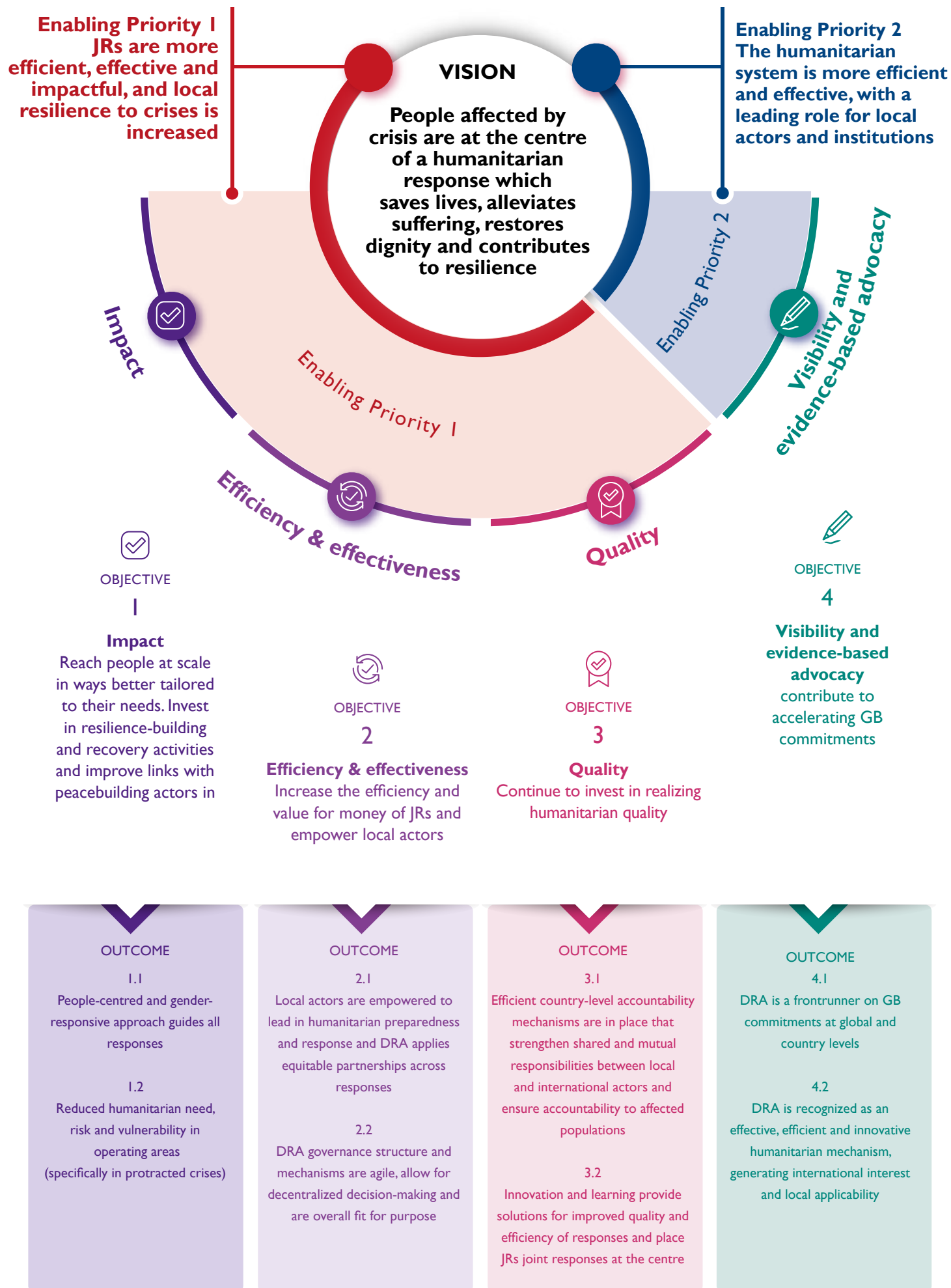
DRA-2026 in standard view

- Focusing on country contexts, local capacity, in-country partner collaboration and complementarity, JRs, adaptive management and national-level advocacy:
- JRs are characterized by quality, in-country design and adaptive management, collaboration, complementarity and innovation.
 - JRs are built on the complementarity of INGOs and LNGOs and increasing local capability to respond.
 - Complex issues such as risk management, the triple nexus and direct funding are properly operationalized by all stakeholders and functional elements of the DRA approach.

DRA-2026 in wide-angle view

- Focusing on the Dutch and global level, megatrends (such as migration, climate change and urbanization), humanitarian space, funding trends and the triple nexus:
- DRA leverages its global presence and expertise to field-test GB and CHS commitments, sharing learnings and good practices at global scale.
 - The DRA realizes additional funding sources while other countries and donors also incorporate DRA components and good practices in their funding architecture.
 - DRA partners address national and global humanitarian issues, using DRA experience and evidence to influence reforms to the humanitarian system at national and global scale.

The table below highlights the changes we will make to respond to the context outlined above, using our learning from the previous strategy period. The premise for the DRA's strategy for 2022-26 is a shared common vision, mission, values and ambitions. We strive to reach our objectives by closely collaborating, with each partner contributing based on their own diverse identity, focus and expertise.



People affected by crisis are at the centre of a humanitarian response which saves lives, alleviates suffering, restores dignity and contributes to resilience

OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	AMBITION/ACHIEVEMENT 2026 (not exhaustive)
Enabling Priority 1: JRs are more efficient, effective and impactful, and local resilience to crises is increased		
1. IMPACT Reach people at scale in ways better tailored to their needs. Invest in resilience-building and recovery activities and improve links with peacebuilding actors in complex emergencies	1.1 People-centred and gender-responsive approach guides all responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interventions are aligned to existing work of community, local and national actors in humanitarian preparedness and response - All JRs and initiatives apply gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches, and when possible invest in gender-transformative programming, particularly in multi-year programs - Communities and people in need are verifiably involved in project design and implementation
	1.2 Reduced humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability in operating areas (specifically in protracted crises)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - JRs in protracted crises have mainstreamed resilience activities and established links to development and peacebuilding actors and activities - Complementarity has been generated between emergency response work and longer-term development and social cohesion, and where possible peacebuilding, in protracted crises and where possible also in acute crises - Context analysis, risk and needs assessments and interventions are developed jointly by DRA partners and local actors, and are cross-sector and informed by risks and resilience - Preparedness and early action approaches are incorporated in the DRA's mechanisms and structures - Funding is mobilized for multi-year programming from diverse sources, leading to greater programmatic reach
2. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS Increase the efficiency and value for money of JRs and empower local actors	2.1 Local actors are empowered to lead in humanitarian preparedness and response and DRA applies equitable partnerships across responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leadership of JRs is located in-country and based on equitable partnerships between local and international partners - DRA supports locally-led capacity strengthening of local actors and systems through collaborative and complementary approaches - By 2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local partners receive a proportional share of ICR based on the program budget - each JR provides for administrative/operational budget for local partners - at least 35% of the program budget is handled by local partners - JRs are designed and funds allocated based on best-placed and CHS quality criteria - Harmonized and simplified compliance, reporting and assessments are put in place to reduce the burden on local actors - Local women's organizations and networks are engaged meaningfully in humanitarian preparedness and response - A risk management framework aligned to the principles of equitable partnership is applied and tested at JR and central level
	2.2 DRA governance structure and mechanisms are agile, allow for decentralized decision-making and are overall fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The DRA will revise its model for governance and decision making to increase local partner engagement - Modalities are practised to create flexibility for acute response within protracted response, such as crisis modifiers for local partners - The DRA mechanism has been revised to realize a collaborative and equal partnership at JR and central level
3. QUALITY Continue to invest in realizing humanitarian quality	3.1 Efficient country-level accountability mechanisms are in place that strengthen shared and mutual responsibilities between local and international actors and ensure accountability to affected populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By 2023 external CHS verification is compulsory - JRs apply practical, efficient and contextualized accountability and compliance frameworks that facilitate upwards and downwards transparency on funding streams, risk management, decision-making and community engagement - Affected people are meaningfully involved in the design and planning process and across the project cycle, with a specific focus on including the most vulnerable and marginalized
	3.2 Innovation and learning provide solutions for improved quality and efficiency of responses and place JRs joint responses at the centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Innovative approaches are linked to problems identified at JR level, tested and scaled to multi-JR level - Innovations are demonstrated in the areas of contingency planning, direct funding, anticipation and preparedness - Systems for learning and information sharing are in place that ensure our own learnings and good practices inform our global work and we incorporate good practices from other networks and actors beyond JRs - Learning and good practices are shared systematically within the global humanitarian sector
Enabling Priority 2: JRs are more efficient, effective and impactful, and local resilience to crises is increased		
4. VISIBILITY AND EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY Contribute to accelerating GB commitments	4.1 DRA is a frontrunner on GB commitments at global and country levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DRA partners and local partners advocate for the international community being accountable for GB commitments, at global and country levels - Evidence from our JRs is effectively used to demonstrate how to achieve CHS and GB commitments, especially on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-year funding - Community engagement and accountability - Collaborative and complementary INGO-LNGO approach
	4.2 DRA is recognized as an effective, efficient and innovative humanitarian mechanism, generating international interest and local applicability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public and political support is generated by better showcasing the DRA's strategy and achievements ('DRA-21 Package') to the Dutch public and donors - The DRA takes a leading role and shapes opinions in international advocacy efforts to claim back shrinking humanitarian space



BASED ON ITS EXPERIENCE SO FAR, THE DRA HAS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS FOR KEY TERMS USED IN THIS STRATEGY.

As locally as possible, as international as necessary

The DRA aspires to make humanitarian aid as local as possible by creating stronger roles for frontline organizations. The DRA recognizes that international capacities are sometimes necessary, but takes local capacities as a starting point. Defining and assessing local capacity in the humanitarian sector can often be more of a political exercise than a technical one.⁹ The DRA aims avoid this risk by harnessing and combining capacities from local, national and international levels in such a way that they support the best humanitarian outcomes for affected communities. What international support is necessary (including financial resources) is determined based on detailed analysis and in close participation with local organizations on the ground.

Equitable partnership

Equitable partnerships are essential to balance power, resources and ownership of risk in the humanitarian sector, especially between international organizations and local actors. We understand 'partnership', as principled, diverse and effective collaborative relations between two or more actors, aimed at addressing key humanitarian challenges. Equitable partnership in humanitarian aid requires an emphasis on complementarity, mutual respect, sharing of risks and benefits, and brokering collaborations between diverse actors and networks at community, local and national levels. Subcontracting and transactional relationships are not equitable partnerships. This definition builds on the Principles of Partnership,¹⁰ which were an attempt to acknowledge gaps in the humanitarian reform process such as neglecting the role of local and national response capacity.

Local actor

DRA adopts the IASC HFTT definition,¹¹ which states that national and local actors are of two types:

- Local and national non-state actors are 'Organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO'.
- National and sub-national state actors are 'State authorities of the affected aid recipient country engaged in relief, whether at local or national level.'

Local partner

All local actors (as per definition above) that DRA partners have a contractual agreement with and that receive a share of funding to deliver humanitarian assistance in a JR.

Localization

DRA defines localization as a process towards local and national actors having a stronger role and more leadership in humanitarian assistance. The expansion of equitable partnerships between local and international humanitarian actors is key to this process to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and address power imbalances in the humanitarian system.

Principled humanitarian action

Our actions are guided by four widely accepted principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. International humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law set out fundamental legal standards on protecting and assisting individuals and groups. Our position is well summarized in the CHS on quality and accountability.¹² The DRA believes that people are at the heart of humanitarian action, and the humanitarian imperative comes first.

Quality humanitarian response

The CHS on quality and accountability¹³ describes the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian aid for both international and local NGOs. The CHS places communities and people affected by crisis at the centre of humanitarian action, setting an important benchmark for quality humanitarian response.



¹ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives>

² OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021: <https://gho.unocha.org>

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ OCHA Financial Tracking System 2020 summary: <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2020>

⁶ ALNAP (2018) The State of the Humanitarian System: <https://sohs.alnap.org> In this report, coverage is the only performance measure to have shown consistent decline since 2012.

⁷ IASC (2020) Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2020>

⁸ <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/07/13/decolonisation-aid-humanitarian-development-racism-black-lives-matter>

⁹ See ODI / V Barbelet (2018) HPG Working Paper: As Local As Possible, As International As Necessary: <https://odi.org/en/publications/as-local-as-possible-as-international-as-necessary-understanding-capacity-and-complementarity-in-humanitarian-action/>

¹⁰ The Principles of Partnership were agreed in 2007 as an attempt to acknowledge gaps in the humanitarian reform process, such as neglecting the role of local and national humanitarian response capacity: <https://www.icvanetwork.org/principles-partnership-statement-commitment>

¹¹ IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team, Localisation Marker Working Group (2018) Definitions Paper: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hftt_localisation_marker_definitions_paper_24_january_2018.pdf

¹² Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (2014), Section V. Principled Humanitarian Action, p8: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org>

¹³ Ibid

DUTCH RELIEF ALLIANCE



Contact:

info@dutchrelief.org
www.dutchrelief.org

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