

# Grand Aspirations

Dutch Relief Alliance and the  
Grand Bargain 2.0

June 2022



**DUTCH** RELIEF  
ALLIANCE



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# Preface

## Taking the main stage

During the next Annual Meeting from 30 June to 1 July 2022, the humanitarian community will take stock on the progress made towards the Grand Bargain Commitments. How can DRA present itself during the Annual Meeting? DRA chair Geert Jan van Dijk started a WhatsApp discussion with Stéphanie Noël, in-country coordinator of the DRAs Joint Response in the DRC and Lars Faber, Senior Policy Officer Humanitarian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to prepare for the event.

**Geert Jan:** Hi Stéphanie and Lars. RU also looking forward to the Grand Bargain 2.0 annual meeting? ✓✓

**Geert Jan:** What about you Stephanie? ✓✓

**Geert Jan:** Will you attend the meeting? ✓✓

**Geert Jan:** Hope so. We need local organisations to talk about localisation! ✓✓

**Geert Jan:** Equitable relations between humanitarian INGOs and LNGOs is one of our main goals. You can hold us accountable to it! ✓✓

**Lars:** Yes! 👍  
great to meet old and new friends

**Stéphanie:** Me too! Looking forward to sharing our experiences of DRC.

**Stéphanie:** Sure. If I'm invited 😊

**Lars:** We definitely will! DRA is making good progress. @Stephanie, what lessons from the DRC JR could you share?

**Stéphanie:** We have made sooo much progress. At first, local partners felt unheard: all decisions were taken by the NLD together with INGOs. Local partners were not involved.

**Stephanie:** But a lot has changed. For example: local partners were involved in developing the Joint Response guidelines and designing the JR of 2022-2023.

**Lars:** 👍

**Stephanie:** typing ...



**Stéphania:** Yes, and 35% of the funding goes to local partners. And 3% of the coordination budget to build their institutional capacity.

**Lars:** Sounds good! Hey CJ, what about quality funding, has the GB commitment impacted the DRA?

**Geert Jan:** For sure. Thx to our partnership with MFA, we have received a five-year block grant. ✓✓

**Geert Jan:** This allowed for multiyear contracts with local partners. Most JRs have more flexible budgets now to respond quickly to sudden disasters. ✓✓

**Lars:** I'm sure these lessons and achievements will be noticed!



I remember that during last year's meeting, the DRA experience in Nigeria was shown on the main stage as a real-life example. Shall we repeat this with the DRC?

**Geert-Jan:** Very good idea! What say you, Stéphania? ✓✓

**Stéphania:** I would say yes: the localisation process in DRC deserves a place on the main stage. Local partners are involved in DRA strategy development. We take no decisions without their involvement

**Geert Jan:** Sounds good, let's do this! Can you help us to get a slot on the agenda, Lars? ✓✓

**Lars:** I will do my best!

**Geert Jan:** Was good chatting, enjoy your evening 🙌 ✓✓

**Stéphania:** Thanks

**Lars:** 🙌

# About DRA

**The Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) was established in 2015 in response to an increase in the number of humanitarian crises and people affected globally. Dutch non-governmental humanitarian organisations, in partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, came together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their humanitarian efforts.**

Over the years, the DRA has delivered humanitarian aid to more than 4 million people in 23 crises worldwide, working together with more than 100 local organisations. The DRA has incorporated the Grand Bargain commitments in its operations model and sees a role in furthering these commitments to encourage more effective interventions and to reduce the need for humanitarian aid.

## DRA Partners

Current DRA partners CARE Nederland; Cordaid; Dorcas; Oxfam Novib; Plan International Nederland; Help a Child; Save the Children; SOS Children's Villages The Netherlands; Stichting Vluchteling; Tearfund NL; Terre des Hommes; War Child; World Vision; and ZOA.

## Joint Responses

The DRA responds to humanitarian crises by designing 'Joint Responses', drawn up and implemented by the partners best placed to address a specific crisis. The DRA implements *Protracted Crisis* Joint Responses (with an annual or multi-annual timespan) and *Acute Crisis* Joint Responses (with a maximum of 6 months). At the moment (June 2022) the following Joint Responses are under way:

- Yemen Joint Response (Protracted)
- Ethiopia Joint Response (Protracted)
- Syria Joint Response (Protracted)
- South Sudan Joint Response (Protracted)
- Somalia Joint Response (Protracted)
- DR Congo Joint Response (Protracted)
- Afghanistan Joint Response (Protracted)
- Sudan Joint Response (Protracted)
- Ethiopia Food Insecurity Joint Response (Acute)
- Kenya Food Insecurity Joint Response (Acute)
- Somalia Food Insecurity Joint Response (Acute)
- Madagascar Joint Response (Acute)
- Ukraine Joint Response (Acute)
- Burkina Faso Joint Response (Acute)
- Ethiopia Tigray Joint Response (Acute)



## DRA commitments

DRA has committed to strengthening the role of local organisations in the planning and delivery of humanitarian aid. DRA also promotes multi-year funding and programming, and strives towards maximum accountability and community engagement. In doing so, DRA is working towards the operationalisation of the Grand Bargain commitments and the Core Humanitarian Standards.

Through the last years of collaboration, DRA has established a set of 7 values:

1. The DRA approach is built on a foundation of principled humanitarian action
2. The DRA collaborates within the Alliance and with a wide range of other players
3. The DRA is accountable to affected populations, partners, donors and their constituencies
4. The DRA's responses are gender sensitive and inclusive of vulnerable groups
5. The DRA pursues quality, innovative ways of working and continuous improvement
6. The DRA uses its voice to influence the humanitarian system
7. The DRA works as locally as possible and as internationally as necessary

# Grand Bargain 2.0

## Going further to pursue localisation and quality funding

Some six years after the Grand Bargain was introduced during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian system remains relevant. Local actors still struggle to access resources. Current emergency situations, like the war in Ukraine, but also seemingly forgotten, ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar and protracted crises elsewhere highlight the urgency of reforms. Global responses to recent crises – e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic – demonstrate a lack of efficiency in humanitarian action.

During the Grand Bargain Annual Meeting in June 2021, the signatories endorsed the Grand Bargain 2.0. The decision was taken to further pursue the Grand Bargain's objectives, and to expand its strategic outreach. While maintaining the 'old' elements of the agreement, GB 2.0 has identified two new priorities: 'quality funding' and 'localisation'. Five of the GB workstreams (1, 2, 5, 6 and 9) – see box – will continue, four workstreams (3, 4, 7 & 8) have closed.

### The Grand Bargain Agreement

The Grand Bargain is an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. At the heart of the Grand Bargain are 9 'workstreams':

1. Greater Transparency
2. More support and funding to local and national responders
3. Increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming
4. Reduce duplication and management costs with periodic functional reviews
5. Improve joint and impartial needs assessments
6. A Participation Revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives
7. Increase collaborative humanitarian multi-year planning and funding
8. Reduced earmarking of donor contributions
9. Harmonize and simplify reporting requirements

#### More on the Grand Bargain:

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

See also: <https://www.icvanetwork.org/uploads/2022/04/The-Grand-Bargain-Explained-An-ICVA-Briefing-Paper.pdf>





The GB 2.0 framework includes the work of a number of *caucuses*. *Caucuses* are flexible, informal groups of dedicated stakeholders – ‘coalitions of the willing’ – working to overcome political barriers to specific commitments. *Caucuses* have been formed on cash-based programming, on the role of intermediaries, and on quality funding.

Following the critique that the Grand Bargain embraced the idea of localisation without representation and participation of local and national actors, National Reference Groups (NRGs) were initiated. These groups translate global commitments to the country level and vice versa. NRGs will furthermore provide local actors with a platform to engage with, and if necessary to challenge, humanitarian leadership.

## Eminent Person

In 2021, Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, was appointed the new *Eminent Person* of the Grand Bargain. Mr Egeland took over from Sigrid Kaag, the former Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.



# Progress to date: highlights

**In the 2018-2021 period, the DRA identified four strategic priorities: localisation, accountability, innovation and collaboration. While considerable progress was made, challenges and obstacles also arose. Below a summary of the highlights and how previous challenges can be met in the coming years, as presented in DRA's 2022-2026 strategy:**

## Localisation

The DRA is strongly committed to localising humanitarian assistance. Localisation is defined as a process towards local actors having a stronger role and greater leadership in humanitarian assistance. Localisation improves effectiveness by leveraging local knowledge, context awareness and links to communities. Three major achievements of the previous period:

- Increase funding to local actors: We have reached the GB target of 26% by the end of 2021.
- Allocate DRA budgets to strengthen the capacity of local humanitarian actors: e.g., a capacity building fund was made available which Nigerian partners could use unconditionally to organise their own security.
- Amplify local voices in international humanitarian settings: a Local Advisory Group (LAG), made up of representatives of local partners, is involved in the designing of the Joint Responses to ensure more locally-led responses. They also provide input into DRA's new strategy. In 2021, all eight protracted JR-countries were represented in the LAG.

The localisation agenda within the Joint Responses has facilitated a shift from capacity building towards capacity sharing. This means a tailor-made transfer of technical, financial and institutional knowledge that strengthens organisational capacities, a need identified by local organisations. In the Nigerian Joint Response, this has been addressed through mentorship programs. These programs move beyond one-off trainings on capacity building. Instead, the programs place an expert in a particular field within a local organisation, assessing needs and working together with local partners to apply new skills.

## Mentorship programs in the Nigerian Joint Response

In 2021, a fundraising expert was appointed to mentor the Nigerian partners on fundraising strategies, donor engagement and proposal writing. Over a period of 70 days, the fundraising expert worked with the 7 Nigerian organisations involved in the Nigerian Joint Response. In addition to assessment and training workshops, individual trajectories were designed, including co-writing project proposals. This resulted in 40 submitted project proposals. The participating partners all have fundraising policies or plans in place.

Additionally, localisation means working towards locally-led programming, resulting in more equal and equitable partnerships. Key elements in these localisation efforts are multi-year funding assurance, multiple INGOs cooperating in partnership in the Joint Responses, and budget flexibility (e.g., for capacity building).

Enhancing local humanitarian leadership stands high on the DRA's localisation agenda. Equitable partnerships between local and international humanitarian actors are crucial for the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance, but also to address prevailing power imbalances within the humanitarian system. The DRA will establish a framework for equitable partnership in humanitarian aid which emphasises complementarity, mutual respect, sharing of risks and benefits, and brokering collaborations between diverse actors and networks at community, local and national levels. ■

## Equitable partnerships

Equitable partnerships are essential to balance power, resources and ownership of risk in the humanitarian sector, especially between international organisations and local actors. We understand *partnerships* as principled, diverse and effective collaborative relations between two or more actors, aimed at addressing key humanitarian challenges.

Subcontracting and transactional relationships are not equitable partnerships. This definition builds on the Principles of Partnership (2007), which were an attempt to acknowledge gaps in the humanitarian reform process, such as neglecting the role of local and national response capacity (<https://www.icvanetwork.org/transforming-our-network-for-impact/principles-of-partnership>).



## Accountability

The DRA wants to be accountable to crisis-affected populations, donors and to the DRA Partners' constituencies. Good progress is being made with enabling meaningful participation within each Joint Response, for example by implementing inclusive project committees and innovative accountability mechanisms. Yet, to further pursue the accountability goals, the DRA will need to upscale best practices and enhance the involvement of affected people in all stages of the program cycle. The DRA's multi-year funding scheme can be well suited, as it generates longer-term and more strategic engagement of affected communities.

Accountability also entails the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, such as women, children and differently abled people, in line with one of the GB2.0's key pillars:

*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.*



While the DRA has gender-sensitive proposal criteria and the Joint Responses apply gender-sensitive approaches, it is crucial to keep the spotlight on these issues and apply these approaches consistently throughout the Joint Responses. For example, by allowing local women's organisations and other relevant networks to take the lead, and to address the root causes of gender inequality and exclusion, thereby reshaping unequal gender and power relations. ■

### **Innovative accountability mechanisms: the voice recorder**

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In 2019, the Nigerian Joint Response partners, using additional funding approved by MFA, launched an accountability pilot to test new ways of receiving feedback and complaints from the communities of intervention. The pilot included the use of voice recorders and the availability of accountability staff in order to enhance the beneficiaries' access to direct feedback and complaints mechanisms.

The voice recorder has been an effective channel for the community to communicate with the humanitarian actors. It has increased the participation of the community in the accountability program. The voice recorder is deemed more confidential compared to other communication channels, such as suggestion boxes or face-to-face contact with accountability staff. It has also become easier and faster to communicate feedback, especially since the voice recorder allowed beneficiaries to use their local languages.

Using the voice recorder is also largely inclusive, as it does not require reading or writing, and it does not discriminate against beneficiaries based on gender, age, or culture. It is, however, inappropriate for people living with disabilities: the booth has stairs and narrow doors, making it unreachable for someone using a wheel chair. These booths are also not yet child friendly, preventing young children from easily accessing the channel.

## Innovation

The DRA has tried innovative approaches to better reach hard-to-access populations, anticipate crises and address issues of exclusion and (gender) discrimination. A funding tool specifically geared at innovations in humanitarian responses, the DRA Innovation Fund (DIF), enabled scaling up best-practices within the Joint Responses. To further pursue this upscaling, the innovative methods need to be aligned with the specific local context within the Joint Responses. This means engaging affected people and local actors in deciding which type of innovations should be applied in which contexts. ■

### DRA Innovation Fund (DIF)

During the period 2018-2021, the DRA initially identified seven themes for innovation. For each DIF call, the DRA partners made a selection of the most relevant themes for innovations, resulting in a DIF Portfolio with innovative projects related to four themes:

- Smart Use of Data
- Cash Programming
- Safety & Protection
- (Renewable) Energy

The DIF Portfolio contains a wealth of information on the innovations, but also on the approaches and processes behind these innovations. This way, these innovative projects greatly enhance knowledge on understanding the challenges behind the solutions.

The main challenge is to embed innovation in the Joint Responses. Currently, the position of innovation is relatively isolated within the DRA.

This means the DRA needs to unpack, together with all local and international DRA partners, what embedding of innovation means for the DRA.

As a start, initial matchmaking took place towards the end of 2020: matchmaking sessions were organised between the Joint Responses and the DIF funded projects, resulting in actual linkages made, such as Build your own Buddy (BOB) in South Sudan, Dioptra in Nigeria, and B-Ready in Sudan.



## Collaboration

Through collaboration in the Joint Responses, the DRA has achieved impact through harmonized programs, joint needs assessments, and exchange of knowledge, skills, expertise and learning. Collaboration has resulted in jointly targeting beneficiaries, joint trainings on MEAL, sharing technical capacity and expertise among the partners involved, as well as sharing resources. This ranges from sharing vehicles for transport to shared offices and warehouses. Considering high operational costs of, for example, transportation due to insecurity and poor roads in many countries, sharing resources becomes valuable and results in cost-efficiency. ■



# Experiences from the field

Interview Paulin Bishakabalya:

## Our local knowledge is our greatest asset

**The Grand Bargain Commitments are all about “as locally as possible and as internationally as necessary”. As a result, the role of local partners must and will increase. A lot has changed already. In the Democratic Republic of Congo – DRC – the number of DRA’s local partners increased from 4 to 11 in the course of only three years. Some 35% of the budget is spent through these local partners. Paulin Bishakabalya explains what the Grand Bargain means for his work in the eastern part of the DRC.**

“Localisation is an important focus of DRA’s joint responses. As far as I can see, all DRA partners are equally committed. I think the key moment where localisation comes into practice is during DRA’s yearly Design Workshops. In these meetings all DRA partners active in DRC and all local organisations come together to talk about what needs to be done.”

### **What kind of things are discussed during these meetings?**

“During these workshops all activities of the Joint Response in the next year are discussed: where we will work, what we will do and who will be responsible for what. All local partners of DRA are allocated a budget to improve their capacities. They are free to spend this budget according to their own wishes. If you need to increase your mobility, you buy a car or a motorcycle. If your staff needs more financial knowledge, you organise an accountancy training. In the case of CODEVAH, for example, we recently purchased accountancy software to improve our financial capacities. But we also bought a motorbike to step up our activities in remote areas. Increased capacities improve our abilities to respond to the needs of local communities. That way we increase our... how do you say that in English ... *responsabilité* ...?”

*“The biggest difference is the openness”*

### **Accountability?**

“Yes, that’s it, thank you, haha, ... accountability towards the local communities. We have to be accountable on the choice of beneficiaries. Or on the kind of assistance we provide.”

### **What has changed compared to a couple of years ago regarding localisation?**

“The biggest difference is the openness. Openness, for example on budgets. Before it was always unclear what budgets were available. We just had to wait and to see what the international organisations had in store for us.

Nowadays we work together as partners. DRA has committed to spending at least 35% of the budget through local organisations. So that is clear. We know what to work with and we can plan accordingly.”

**What are the main obstacles to further develop localisation?**

“The weakest link is perhaps the commitment of people. If people are not committed to a transfer of power, nothing changes. The quality and capacities of local NGOs is another obstacle. A lot has improved in the capacities, but the issue of Internal Cost Recovery has been debated fiercely. Internal Cost Recovery, or ICR, is the percentage of budgets that can be used for administrative purposes: cost of the office, salaries of staff. Sometimes we have to travel to Kinshasa to make our paperwork in order, or we need funds to organise internal audits: expenses that cannot be linked to any specific project. The budgets for these costs have been the subject of heated discussions. It gave us the feeling we had to justify our every move. What is it for? Why this money? This matter is still not really settled.”



*“We are fully integrated in the decision making process”*

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**Paulin Bishakabalya Kokere**, deputy country coordinator Comité pour le Développement et l'Assistance Humanitaire (CODEVAH)

**What has changed in practice? Has the type of interventions changed as a result of the Grand Bargain Commitments?**

“Not so much. We do more things, not different things. Our role has increased. And we do it better. We have a more professional approach. The acceptance of humanitarian assistance by local communities has much improved. Localisation makes interventions better received. The best example of this is in our food security program. The funding through DRA

allows us to work directly with local communities: Our agronomists train voluntary community ‘animators’ in agricultural techniques. This direct process is well appreciated and receives good feedback.’

“Working with DRA gives us the opportunity to analyse and to plan our activities, we can really use our expertise and do our planning around that. The quality is increased. Other donors are beginning to see that. We have recently won a bid to participate in a project of the DRC Humanitarian Fund. We were selected because we are present in the Nundu Health zone; we know where the groups of the population are, and where they need is highest; we know the existing gaps. Our local knowledge is our greatest asset. Also, donors are beginning to see our added value. We landed the assignment, before other bidders because we wrote a very good proposal and we were cheaper. In a nutshell: we have increased our capacity to be elected for such work. We have grown into a full member in the humanitarian setting. We participate in meetings of OCHA, for example. We have learned to sell ourselves to the humanitarian mechanism.”

*“We need to continue with capacity building and investing in local partners”*

**Does localisation also include that local communities are more involved?**

“Okay, what I can say is that during design workshops we represent local communities. We are the civil society of our country. Local communities’ interests are also served because we involve them in needs assessments. All projects are developed based on local needs. I think that need assessments have greatly improved as a result of localisation. This also relates to the fact that we are now implementing all activities with representatives of local government. We train using their knowledge as co-facilitators and we even monitor together during implementation.”

**Is DRA different than other international organisations?**

“100% different, I would say. DRA is the localisation champion! Regarding the percentage of budget for local organisations – 35% at the moment –, DRA leads the pack. And more importantly, our voices are heard. We are fully integrated in the decision-making process. This is not the case working with other INGOs.”

**What is the next big step to fulfil the Grand Bargain Commitments?**

“We need to continue with capacity building and investing in local partners. The budget for local partners has to increase even more. Local organisations must be facilitated to play a more prominent role. It has everything to do with transfer of budgets and assets. That includes Internal Cost Recovery. Accept that local NGOs need ICR to be good and reliable organisations, with good audit and accountability.”

**That has a lot to do with trust. Or lack thereof.**

“To be honest, there is still lack in trust. We still need to justify our every move. But I am not complaining, we are making progress and we will work it out.”



**In a paper you co-authored in 2019 the term ‘organisation Valise’ was used: the NGOs that are set up only for monetary gains.<sup>1</sup> Maybe some caution regarding the motives of local NGOs is justified?**

“Yes, that is true. And it is a valid point. Corruption is a real issue. But it is an issue we need to confront together, each from its own responsibility. We must all work to contain the risks. CARE International, for example, strictly monitors our funding. Funds are only transferred on a three-monthly basis based on audits and due diligence. Everything is checked. And this is good. We open our books. We share the risks according to responsibilities. If there is a receipt missing, for example, we as CODEVAH pay the consequences, not CARE.”

*“Corruption is a real issue. But it is an issue we need to confront together”*

*In the paper I just mentioned it says: “The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and Grand Bargain commitments to humanitarian action that is as local as **possible**, as international as necessary have not yet shifted this situation on the ground in DRC.” That was in 2019. And now?*

“The environment is much better than in 2019. In that era, when I mentioned the term ‘localisation’ in a coordinating meeting, the people present just stared: ‘What is that, localisation?’ But now it is on the table. Localisation is the talk of the town.”

**How come this changed?**

“I think that some international organisations have led the way. I think of the UK organisation CAFOD and the NEAR network, the movement of Local and National Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from the Global South. Also, the ‘shifting the power’ program created awareness of localisation. But also, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs can take credit for some changes. Your ministry was one of the big donors of the Capacity Building Programme Fund. That was a common basket fund that was open for us as a local NGO. It completely bypassed the big UN-agencies, for example. This helped a lot in strengthening local NGOs.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/l2626.pdf>

## Localisation and participation

# In the front seat on a bumpy road

Working together is the essence of localisation, says Kingsley Okpabi. Kingsley is the national program manager of the Jireh Doo Foundation, one of the local partners of the Joint Response in Nigeria. Looking back on 7 years of Joint Response in Nigeria, Kingsley has seen the DRA slowly grow into more localisation.



*“It has been a new and interesting consortium in Nigeria, with all the INGOs and local partners working together, complementary, being able to tap into each other’s strengths.”*

**Kingsley Okpabi**, national program manager of Jireh Doo Foundation, Nigeria

To place localisation and participation of the recipients of humanitarian assistance at the centre is one of the key recommendations for the Grand Bargain 2.0. But how can localisation and participation be effectively implemented in a complex context such in northeast Nigeria? And how have local partners experienced these efforts so far? Based on their experiences, what do they recommend for further revolutionising local leadership?

Working complementarily proved to be a real strength of the Joint Response. Multiple partners were addressing multiple needs - such as WASH, nutrition, protection - at the same time, without much overlap. Sometimes, local partners explicitly mapped out who was working where and in what sector prior to starting a new project, preventing duplication.

Partners avoided budgeting for the same things, sharing their resources, such as opening up their office building for partners that did not yet have a physical presence in a location.

According to John Augustine Okpe, a soft-spoken man, but still clearly audible despite the cacophony of city sounds in the background, localisation was more pronounced in the DRA's Nigerian Joint Response compared to other consortiums working on humanitarian aid in Nigeria. As a protection manager of the Gender Equality, Peace & Development Centre, he noticed that in every project developed by the JR, the Grand Bargain commitments stood at the forefront, especially considering localisation and participation. "Every project was always co-led and focused on organisational strengthening. And the more we contributed, the more we understood of the processes of project design, and the more we could actually participate."

Sitting behind his desk in Maiduguri, Okpe reminisces about the uniqueness of this collaboration between local and international partners: "I haven't seen this kind of collaboration anywhere in the northeast."

### **Mentorship**

To reinforce localisation, the Nigerian Joint Response Consortium realised that capacity strengthening needed to move beyond the training of local partners' staff members. Due to high staff turnover, training staff did not result in strengthening partner organisations. The focus shifted towards addressing more collective needs and strengthening organisational capacities, a need that was brought up by local organisations. One of the ways to address this was through mentorship programs. In 2021, for example, a fundraising expert was appointed to mentor the Nigerian partners on fundraising strategies, donor engagement and proposal writing.

Okpe describes the early years graphically. "A couple of years ago the normal course of affairs was this: local partners sat back and waited to be fed by the donors. The donors decided, we just implemented." But in a couple of years the situation drastically changed. Through the mentorship program, local partners learned things like fundraising, proposal writing, and engaging with external stakeholders. This process of capacity building is ongoing. Okpe:

## **The Nigerian Joint Response**

The Nigeria Joint Response Consortium was led by Save the Children and formed by 5 international DRA member organisations and 7 Nigerian organisations, working together to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the people affected by the crisis in northeast Nigeria. The collaboration ran from 2015 to 2021. The Joint Response ran for 7 years, which places them in a unique position to reflect on the past efforts, and to present their views on implementing the GB commitments in humanitarian aid.



## Localisation Advocacy Event, 11 December 2020

In December 2020, Joseph Gyandi, Disaster Response Coordinator at Crudan and the lead for local partners in the NJR from 2019-2021, organised a Localisation Advocacy Event in Abuja. Next to local partners, they invited donors, international partners, and other relevant networks (e.g., Charter for Change, [www.charter4change.org](http://www.charter4change.org)). The event centred around discussion on the Grand Bargain commitments and the gains of localisation.

Looking back at this event, Gyandi remembers lively discussions on the Grand Bargain commitments. “We, as local partners, emphasised the need for the global donor community to do honour their commitment and increase the opportunities for the direct funding of local partners. We also discussed the fact that in many cases, INGOs didn’t reach the agreed allocation of 35% of the budgets to local partners. However, the Nigerian Joint Response stood out, since the % of budget allocated to local partner often even exceeded this 35%. For example, we at Crudan even received 72%. In general, I can say that there has been no local partner within the Joint Response that received less than this 35%.”

The conversations also dealt with the capacity gaps that prevail among local partners. Gyandi noticed that there was a general satisfaction with the successful mentorship programs. He is happy to conclude that the INGO forum will follow up with this mentorship program for 2 or 3 selected local partners of the Joint Response that need this the most.

“I was actually just applying my knowledge in proposal writing before this interview.”

In addition to developing their proposal writing skills, a consultant also stayed for a three-month period in Okpe’s organisation to improve their HR system. Now they have an improved HR database and better HR processes. And they have a gym in their office building for relaxation and to manage the work stress.

Okpabi recites the growth they have experienced, from no opportunities or capacities to develop projects in 2017 to designing their own projects and budgets, and having grants to continue working, in 2021.

### **Equitable partnerships?**

Nonetheless, Okpe states that the process towards localisation and participation “has been a bumpy road. INGOs were afraid that we were

to take food from their hands.” Local partners also perceive a lack of accountability systems on strategic levels within the Joint Response.

They are worried that not all INGOs are equally committed to the Grand Bargain and they fear that for some, the commitments are mere paperwork.

Through a crackly Zoom connection, Okpabi recalls that there were large differences between the INGOs. He remembers that only 3 local partners received direct funding, the rest remained sub-contracted by INGOs, in line with more standard partnership models. This gap in accountability is also observed by other local partners. “Who holds the INGOs accountable? Who follows whether the money actually goes to local partners?”, Okpe questions. He points out that there is a demand among local partners for more accountability.

### *“Who holds the INGOs accountable?”*

While striving for equitable partnerships, the question lingers: what exactly is equitable partnership? To date, the UN prevents local partners to become members of UN bodies. This causes them to, for example, miss out on OCHA’s security updates. To create awareness among INGOs of their unequal footing, one idea is to carry out a power analysis, to map out the unequal relationships. Local partners also recommend to create a transparent monitoring system.

Okpe and Okpabi emphasise the need to go further on the road towards localised leadership. To actually put local partners in the front seat, concrete steps are needed. Okpabi suggest to “provide a working document on how to work together. It takes more than just signing the Grand Bargain. We need deliberate efforts mapped out, not just ticking boxes.”

#### **Sharing risks**

“There is a strong need to make plans, to be more progressive”, Okpabi says, “There is a growing support for the road towards direct funding. This can start small, but it has to be direct. Local partners need to be given the chance. Then you can watch them grow!” The reason why direct funding has not been fully implemented yet, he thinks, is because discussions focus too much on risks. Without interference of the international DRA partners, who will take on the risks? Major donors are more comfortable funding INGOs instead of local organisations, Okpe observed.

With a deep sigh, Okpabi concludes: “There are discussions on the capacity of local partners, but when will local partners ever have enough capacity?”

## DRA Innovation Fund's Call for Proposals

# Tapping into local innovation strength

How can emergency assistance be improved? What innovations are available? And how can locally bred innovations surface, rather than known approaches designed at the headquarters of international aid organisations? To answer these challenges, DRA made two million euro available for innovative ideas. A call for proposals in Uganda resulted in six locally sprouted humanitarian projects, being executed in 2021.



*“There are no excuses not to go local.”*

**Charlène Cabot**, manager of the Response Innovation Lab.

“My favourite project was definitely CloudGreen”, says Edirisa (‘Eddie’) Sembatya –managing director of Finding XY, a Ugandan innovation and business advice company. As a business innovation expert, Sembatya was the Chairperson of the External Review Committee, choosing the winners of DRA’s call for proposals. Looking back on the selection process, Sembatya was pleased with the overall quality and the innovative character of the ideas presented. CloudGreen was one of several proposals that focused on ‘green solutions for vulnerable communities’, Sembatya explains. “This is a hot topic, very relevant in the Ugandan context. We really need to move forward on the path towards greening the economy.”

According to DRA the Grand Bargain is not just about local implementation of projects or about promoting local ownership, it is also about welcoming local ideas for innovation. The problem is that local ideas are seldom given the means to be put into practice. Local innovators often lack the network



and the knowledge to pitch their ideas in the right circles. The call for proposals that DRA's Innovation Fund (DIF) initiated in 2020 was intended to put local initiatives centre stage. By making two million euro's available, local innovative ideas can make it to the implementation phase and be properly tested.

## DRA Innovation Fund (DIF)

The DRA Innovation Fund (DIF) was established in 2018 and funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the current four years 'strategic period' (2018-2022) a total of four DIF 'Calls for Proposals' have taken place resulting in a total of 22 grants/projects with a total of 12 million EUR allocated.

## Six winners

Six proposals were elected as winners of the call. Apart from CloudGreen the winning propositions are:

- 'Sports for Peace' (Strengthening relations between refugee and host communities)
- 'Clean Energy Kiosks' (Clean energy products for vulnerable households)
- Prospers (Improving accessibility to quality and affordable clean energy solutions & maintenance)
- Waste to Clean Energy (Localised closed loop energy solutions)
- Woodfuel (eco)systems (User-led design and implementation to support sustainable fuel systems)

In total 55 proposals came in response to the call. The initiative was limited to Uganda and targeted proposals responding to 'Energy solutions' and to 'Safety & Protection' challenges in the refugee hosting areas, two topics that are of particular importance to DRA. In several rounds, the contenders were guided to further develop their proposal. This resulted in a shortlist of 18 proposals. In the last round the candidates could pitch their proposal live in front of a team of experts, the External Review Committee. And in the end six winners were selected.

Against the background of a downpour, Juliana Lanyero, dressed in a simple white shirt with the logo of her newly started organisation, pitched her project in front of the Committee members. Lanyero (29) is one of the initiators of the winning project CloudGreen. CloudGreen, a partnership of several Ugandan organisations, makes smart use of the fact that the Ugandan government has made small plots of land available for refugees. This land is predominantly used for agriculture, but women have



limited access to markets or lack time to bring their products to potential consumers. CloudGreen supports female entrepreneurs and farmers in marketing their products. So-called Sparky Dryers, simple, solar powered drying cabinets, are made available to dry agricultural products making them safe from spoilage. E-bikes are provided to help bring products to the market place. Also, an online platform is created where the participants can present their products to consumers. On top of that, financial advice is offered to the women by project partner Fynixwave, a fintech company.

Eddie Sembatya was particularly impressed with the partnerships that were forged by the contenders. In the case of CloudGreen this partnership allowed for a multifaceted approach that seemed very workable.

## CloudGreen, unintended results

In 2021 CloudGreen was rolled out among refugees and host communities in the Kiryandongo district in Western Uganda and in Kampala. Almost 1,5 years after the project started, over 750 women have been reached. The original target was 450 women, but once the project started many women wanted to join. The first reports on CloudGreen revealed some interesting unintended results of the intervention. For example, women are reporting that the financial literacy training from Fynixwave is helping women to create family budgets and that it is leading to decreased domestic violence. The organic briquettes used in the Sparky dryers are quickly replacing wood and charcoal for cooking, lowering the dangers of erosion through deforestation.

The success of the CloudGreen idea is easily measured by the average income increase of the women of some 40%. As spin-offs of the project, the e-bikes are used as a commercial transportation service to women in the market and shopkeepers. And the service of (solar powered) battery packs for the e-bikes is extended to others.

The value of the call for proposals is not just that a number of innovative ideas have presented themselves, says Sembatya. “The idea is that the ideas originate in the local context. Outside agencies can also have good ideas, of course, but if they do not fit the local circumstances, it is unlikely they will succeed. We have seen many excellent ideas fail.” The idea of the call came from the DRA Innovation Fund, but the organisation was put into the hands of the Response Innovation Lab (RIL) in Uganda. No less than 165 organisations participated in the calls. One of the conditions was that each application had to be backed by several organisations, working together in a partnership. Local organisations had to play a lead role in each proposal, but international organisations were allowed to participate. “In the end about half of the participating organisations was international and the other half was local”, says Charlène Cabot, manager of the Response Innovation Lab. Another statistic: 33% of the grantees were from the private sector, 10 per cent was from academia and the rest was NGO.

The call worked very well to identify new, local ideas, Charlène Cabot says. “Many of the ideas that we received would never have surfaced if we had not provided the incentive.” A clear example is Sembatya’s favourite, CloudGreen. “This project would certainly have stayed ‘under the radar’ if not for the call for proposals.” The call was successful because the people working at RIL have excellent contacts within Uganda society. “The call was widely distributed, in all parts of Uganda and making use of all possible platforms and social media.”

A clear obstacle is that the local initiatives lack the capacities to comply with the complicated accountability rules and other administrative burdens the international community has put in place to assure that funds are well



spent, says Cabot. “These rules are complex – maybe sometimes too complex – but they are necessary.” But playing safe is not always the best reflex when confronted with such challenges. What you don’t want is to only make room for initiatives that are sophisticated enough to comply with all the rules. “We need initiatives that are ‘out of the box’. These initiatives are not likely to originate from organisations that are encapsulated by the humanitarian aid complex.”

There is a tendency among the emergency aid community not to learn, Cabot warns. “They are to a large extent working in silos, each in their own bubble and with their own standardised ways of getting things done. By involving local actors in all stages of the humanitarian process, the quality will improve. Maybe not immediately, but certainly in the long run and the local ‘ecosystem’ will be increasingly able to respond to humanitarian challenges innovatively. In the long-term local aid is more sustainable and more cost-effective. There are no excuses not to go local.”



## Partnerships

# From competition to complementarity

**The process of localisation does not always go smoothly. For example, capacity strengthening became a priority in South Sudan in response to requests from local partners. Yet, Joseph Kennedy Odhiambo, a localisation expert from CEDSS, notices that some INGOs feel threatened by strengthened local partners. Stronger local partners are perceived as competitors in a context of scarce resources and funding, he says. “Local partners shouldn’t compete; partnerships shouldn’t be ambiguous. INGOs and local partners need to work complementarily.”**

Complementarity is precisely one of the focal points of the DRA. But working complementarily is challenging in practice, Odhiambo firmly states. He feels that things get messy when local partners get stronger because power dynamics shift and there is no clear role division anymore. “I have seen WASH activities being carried out by both INGOs and local partners at the same time in the same place. Why both? In general, local partners should have a preference, as we are mostly more knowledgeable about the local context.”

Odhiambo is nonetheless happy with the progress so far: “I’m part of this journey to localisation since 2018. Initially, it wasn’t mandatory for DRA partners to have local partners, but since 2020 it is. The allocation of funds also increased. At the beginning, it wasn’t clear which percentage of the budget was directed to local partners, but now it is at least 35%.” However, Odhiambo is concerned by the lack of a strict monitoring protocol for directing funds to local partners. “Not all international partners are committing to this, it is not a strict rule but left at the goodwill of INGOs. The DRA should ensure that this percentage is mandatory and monitored.”

## Participation

With a beaming smile, Elisama Daniel, executive director of ACROSS, enthusiastically narrates his experiences as a local partner within the Joint Response. “The DRA is meeting real needs. They work continuously, consistently, and comprehensively” Daniel alliterates, emphasizing DRA’s holistic approach. Local partners are increasingly included in decision-making. “Yet”, Daniel asserts, “participation is mostly directed by INGOs. Instead of leading and directing, INGOs should take on a facilitating role to actually allow for local leaders to stand up.”

Risk-sharing in the partnerships within the Joint Response is another hot topic among local partners. Daniel continues: “Risk mitigation is an extremely important topic in the context of South Sudan. We experienced that someone who was working for us got killed (shot) on duty. But we felt let down by the DRA. We were on our own. Events like this are a huge liability for us, we don’t have provisions for this. We hope the DRA can better assist local partners with risk mitigation, given the hostile context we live and work in.”

## Humanitarian leadership academy

As highlighted by the Grand Bargain, humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent, complex and widespread than internationally led responses can cope with. In light of the local capacity strengthening efforts, the South Sudan Joint Response partnered with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (the Academy) to participate in the program titled *Supporting Effective Humanitarian Partnerships*. This program aimed at enabling local actors in crisis prone countries to strengthen individual staff competencies through blended learning and organisational guidance.

One of the main features of this unique capacity strengthening program is that local partners are in the lead of designing the content and methodology. The program started in 2019 with an organisational learning capability assessment. Based on this assessment, partners built their own learning plans and created a contextualized learning pathway to develop the skills and competencies as identified and prioritized.

Together with the increase in budgets for local partners, the responsibility of partners increased. There has been a clear shift from sub-contracting to joint decision-making. According to Panther Alier, from Smile Again Africa Development Organisation, this makes the South Sudan Joint Response one of the best programs around. "The DRA is one of the few to actually put localisation and participation in practice. We, as local partners, are part and parcel of all stages of designing and implementing projects. The views of local partners are included." This feeling is corroborated by Odhiambo: "DRA is much better than other partnerships, our voices are actually being heard."

### Logistical nightmare

Sitting behind his desk in Nairobi, with the Kenyan sun shining bright through the windows behind him, Daniel reiterates his concerns with the DRA's budgeting. "The bulk of the funding should go to the beneficiaries. In my opinion, the share allocated to overhead costs of INGOs is too large. And local NGOs receive the least funding, yet they make the greatest impact. There is a great need to revisit DRAs allocation of funds." The necessity for funds to pass through the lead international organisations, rather than directly to local partners, creates another layer of costs, of processing, and of reporting. In line with the localisation agenda, local partners feel the next step is for local partners to be able to access funds directly.



## Crisis modifier

After a successful pilot in the Somalia Joint Response, the South Sudan Joint Response put a crisis modifier in place for all national partners at the start of 2021. The crisis modifier enables and contributes to the localisation of aid. It ensures timely and efficient responses to new emergency situations. National partners can independently design and manage quality emergency response programs in collaboration with affected communities.

When an emergency occurs, national partners can raise an alert based on pre-set criteria. The money is directly available within a maximum of 90 days. The crisis modifier was applied, in consultation with local partners, in response to South Sudan's food crisis in 2021.

The flexible nature of the crisis modifier mechanism empowers local partners and enables them to identify humanitarian needs when they occur and adjust humanitarian interventions to changing conditions.

Alier firmly agrees: "The logistics of reporting is a nightmare! When we implement a project, we report about it to Plan International, and then Plan reports to Save the Children. This amounts into so much paperwork. And even worse, this paperwork needs to be delivered in physical form for accountability purposes. Yet logistical challenges are huge in South Sudan." He continues in a worried voice about the challenges with the operating environment in South Sudan, with hard-to-reach areas and the many security threats. While human resources are available, logistical support, for example in the form of appropriate vehicles, is lacking.

### Crisis modifier

Inspired by the Somalia Joint Response, a crisis modifier mechanism was put in place in South Sudan as well. The crisis modifier is embraced by local partners, as it enhances their response capacity. Local partners are very pleased with it, as is Alier. "SAADO used the crisis modifier in 2020 to support the victims of the floods that devastated areas that were already extremely vulnerable. It was a great success. It stimulates partners to think on how to solve, or react to, acute crisis in an innovative way."

### Humanitarian leadership academy

In response to local partners' request, the South Sudan Joint Response put capacity strengthening at the fore. A humanitarian leadership academy was formed together with about 40 international NGOs. The aim was to offer trajectories and to create a learning environment. Alier's staff is enrolled and he is pleased with the way these courses are tailored to the needs of his staff. "It is one of the best academies. We have access to a lot of online

information, but continuity is guaranteed by also offering offline courses that we can access when internet is down.” Despite being content, he also sees points for improvement. Especially in terms of scaling up. While local partners are able to contribute to the content of these trainings at the humanitarian leadership academy, Alier feels that his organisation could have made an even bigger impact if the capacity strengthening efforts were even more specifically geared to its needs.

This aligns with Daniel’s observation that more differentiation between local partners would be desirable. Both Daniel and Alier emphasize the differences between local partners. “In fact, there are different categories of local partners”, Daniel says, “and some have limited capacities and are less accountable. Yet others are very well equipped. They should be treated the same as international NGOs.”

### South Sudan Joint Response

In response to the humanitarian situation in Sudan, seven member organisations of the DRA and nine national partners, work together in the South Sudan Joint Response. Considering the existing needs and gaps, the program will focus on Food Security and Livelihoods), Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH), Multi-Purpose Cash, Nutrition and Protection. In addition, the program supports efforts in containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19. The Joint Response works in different parts of South Sudan, namely in Aweil East, Koch, Malakal, Fashoda, Wau and Pibor.

Local partners also call for more opportunities to meet together. Odhiambo: “Local partners are not getting enough opportunities to meet together as local partners, there is no local forum yet. There was one meeting with local partners last year, which was successful, but this needs to happen more frequently to be able to discuss and tackle the challenges of partnerships at an early stage.”

Daniel has a final remark about accountability, and how it is enhanced through the Joint Response: “Never compromise about accountability. We use various feedback mechanisms, through e-mail, phone, etcetera. We take it very seriously. We do it even more than the DRA. Here is where we are in the lead.”

# Column



*Sara Savva standing third from the left.*



**Sara Savva about the need to strengthen the role of local organisations:**

“Over the last couple of years, the topic of localisation came up in every meeting of the Local Advisory Group (LAG). The LAG is an independent group of representatives of local partners of DRA. COPA-DERD is a member of the LAG, established in 2018. We have, over the years, given many advices to DRA on how to strengthen local resilience. It is vital that local NGOs take centre stage in the process of humanitarian aid. If not, the end result of the aid given will be limited. Local resilience must be the final outcome of humanitarian aid.

The organisation I work for, COPA-DERD, cooperates with no less than 23 international organisations, including quite a few UN-organisations. As far as I know, DRA is the only organisation with an initiative like the Local Advisory Group. DRA is quite serious about localisation. We do hope that an initiative like the LAG will be followed by other INGOs and even UN organisations.

Localisation has become part of the mainstream discussion on humanitarian aid. But nowadays the practice is still far removed from what is being

discussed. The Global Humanitarian Assistance report<sup>2</sup>, issued in 2021, revealed that only 3,1% of humanitarian funding was directed through local organisations! A far cry from the Grand Bargain Commitments! DRA, an exception to the rule, spends almost 30% of its funds through local organisations.

I am a firm believer of the credo: as locally as possible and as internationally as necessary. This sums it up. But nowadays it is still the other way around. Syria is a case in point. The INGOs here in Syria need clearance to travel, to move into cities and other localities where the crisis is unfolding. Such clearance is not always easy to obtain. As a result, they spend their time mostly behind their desk. Local organisations, on the other hand, are 24/7 present in the field. We know the context. It is our context! We understand the local culture and history. Even when Damascus was being shelled, we still managed to continue our work: we learned the patterns of shelling and bombardments. We were not afraid to go out. This is the difference. Local organisations have good hearts, they are strong and brave and they keep on doing what they have to do.

Sometimes I think that the Grand Bargain Commitments have not yet landed into the consciousness of INGOs. Maybe they do not see the bigger picture? Maybe they have no eye for the longer term? Again, DRA is one of the exceptions. Sometimes I think that localisation is just a buzzword.”

Sara Savva is Deputy-Director of GOPA-DERD. The Department of Ecumenical Relations and Development, affiliated to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, is one of the largest humanitarian aid organisations in Syria. GOPA-DERD provides humanitarian aid to some 3,5 million people from all backgrounds in all of Syria.

2 <https://devinit.org/documents/1008/Global-Humanitarian-Assistance-Report-2021.pdf>



## Colophon

### **Coordination**

Paul van den Berg and Steven Lanting

### **Texts**

DRA, Kim Caarls and Roeland  
Muskens (WiW Global Research)

### **Design and lay out**

Haagsblauw

### **Photo's**

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**Contact**

[info@dutchrelief.org](mailto:info@dutchrelief.org)  
[www.dutchrelief.org](http://www.dutchrelief.org)

