

DUTCH RELIEF
ALLIANCE
2015 - 2025



TEN YEARS OF
DUTCH RELIEF ALLIANCE
IN TEN STORIES



Colophon

Editorial board: Luna Bögemann, Paul van den Berg and KlaasJan Baas. With Menno Bosma and Roeland Muskens (WiW Global Research)

Coordination: Luna Bögemann

Texts: Roeland Muskens, Laurentia Jora (text on page 32-33) and Ime Geuzendam (text on page 38-39)

Graphic design: Saskia Ottenhoff (NiksDesign)

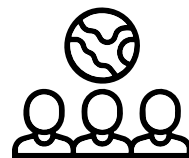
Photo credits: all photo's in this publication are by Dutch Relief Alliance, unless indicated otherwise

Contact

Dutch Relief Alliance

office@dutchrelief.org

www.dutchrelief.org



We've reached
more than

31*
MILLION PEOPLE

with humanitarian assistance from 2015 till 2023.



We have invested

814
MILLION EUROS

up and until 2026 in joint responses to
acute and protracted crises



We worked together
with an average of

101
LOCAL
PARTNERS

each year (2019 till 2023)

* Estimated total. In 2015 and 2016 some cases of double
counting may occur due to overlapping categories.

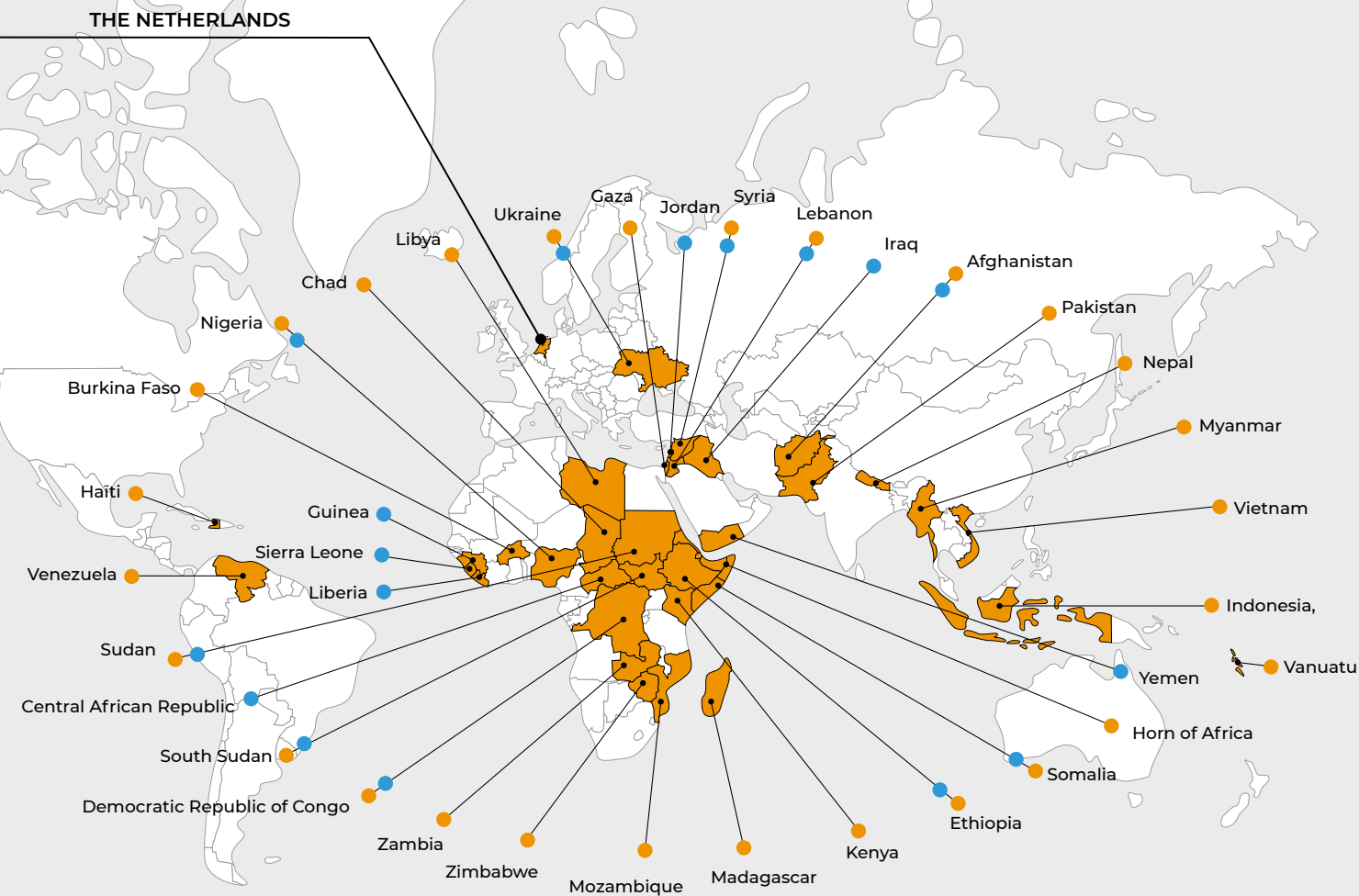


The Dutch Relief
Alliance is a
collaboration of

14
DUTCH
NON-
GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS

We've implemented
joint responses in

34 COUNTRIES
from 2015 till 2025



● Overview of the Acute Crisis Joint
Responses initiated since 2015

● Overview of the Protracted Crisis Joint
Responses initiated since 2015

DUTCH
RELIEF
ALLIANCE
10 YEARS
2015 - 2025



Ethiopia - 2021

CONTENTS

6	Foreword A decade of collaboration and impact
8	DRA's Founding Fathers "We're far from done"
12	Political support "DRA has proven itself, let's maintain that progress – even during cutbacks"
14	South Sudan Lessons after 10 years of Joint Responses
18	DRA and the Grand Bargain Commitments "We're not just talking about localisation. We're actually doing it"
24	Acute Joint Response Ukraine "Agility is key"
28	The Local Advisory Group "Localisation is a cultural and policy shift that requires persistence"
32	How goats changed Maryam's life A lifeline of milk and hope
34	Innovation – TeamUp Healing through play: When a game sparks transformation
38	Garbi's Gift Harnessing the sun to move the water
40	Strategic Partnership It only works with trust
44	The way forward Our dream for Dutch Relief Alliance

Foreword

A DECADE OF
COLLABORATION
AND IMPACT



Christel Sjauw-Koen-Fa-Mulder



Anton van Wijk



Jessie Bokhoven

As we look back on a decade of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), we reflect on our journey, our achievements, and the lessons we’ve learned along the way. This publication is a testament to the commitment and collaborative spirit that defines the Dutch Relief Alliance. Our journey began in 2015 with a vision to create a more coordinated and impactful humanitarian response. Over the past ten years, we have grown into a robust alliance that has made a meaningful difference in the lives of millions. Our partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instrumental in this growth, providing the trust, support and resources needed to expand our reach and enhance our impact.

During my visit to the Dutch Relief Alliance Joint Response in Ethiopia last February, I had the honour of meeting and speaking with Garbi Guyo (see his story on page 38). He reminded me how powerful collective action through Joint Responses can be. In a region plagued by recurring droughts, the term ‘drought brides’ – young girls married off as a desperate measure during dry seasons – sent a chill through my heart. Our partners are now delivering life-saving water where it’s most needed, through innovative water infrastructure that is resistant to shocks. This support helps communities bridge the dry season and avoid resorting to such negative coping mechanisms.

The core strength of the DRA lies in our people – from the local communities we serve, to the dedicated humanitarian workers on the ground, to our colleagues across the alliance. Each individual plays a crucial role in our success. Their stories of courage, compassion, and



Christel and Janneke van Etten (MFA) meeting with the Child Protection Committee in an IDP camp for drought refugees in Dubluk

unwavering commitment form the heart of this publication. We do not take this for granted. We want to take a moment to remember our colleagues who remain at risk, are in detention or have lost their lives while delivering humanitarian assistance to those in crisis. We cannot emphasize enough: humanitarian workers are not a target and must be protected at all times.

Over the years, we have learned that true humanitarian action goes beyond immediate relief. It involves building resilience in fragile contexts, fostering local leadership, and ensuring that the voices of affected people

are heard and respected. Our focus on locally led action has been a key pillar, and we have made significant progress in power and risk sharing, as well as in promoting quality funding. In the coming years, we will continue to deepen our partnerships with local actors, advocate for more equitable funding mechanisms, and contribute to shaping a more effective and locally led humanitarian system.

As you read through these ten stories, we hope you are inspired by the remarkable journey of the Dutch Relief Alliance. These stories celebrate the power of collaboration in creating a better world for all. Thank you for being part of our journey.

On behalf of **Anton van Wijk**, *Crisis Response Manager in Dutch Relief Alliance Board of Directors* and **Jessie Bokhoven**, *Alliance Manager in Dutch Relief Alliance Board of Directors*.

Christel Sjauw-Koen-Fa-Mulder
Chair of the Dutch Relief Alliance Board of Directors on behalf of Plan International.

DRA TIME LINE

DRA's Founding Fathers

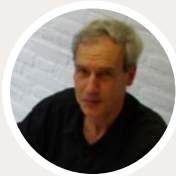
“WE'RE FAR FROM DONE”



Jelte van Wieren



Stan Klinkenberg



Nok van de Langenberg

Ten years ago, Jelte van Wieren (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Stan Klinkenberg (Save the Children), and Nok van de Langenberg (CARE) often found themselves around the same table. Together, they laid the foundation for the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), a unique coalition of Dutch humanitarian organisations that still stands today. Now – older and grayer – the trio reunites for this interview to reflect on how it all began.

Who first came up with the idea for DRA?

Nok van de Langenberg and **Stan Klinkenberg**, in unison: “Jelte!”

Jelte van Wieren: “That’s right. In 2012, I became Head of Humanitarian Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. What struck me was how little the ministry worked with NGOs in humanitarian aid. We collaborated extensively with the UN and the Red Cross, but only about 2% of our humanitarian funding went through NGOs. That didn’t make sense to me. So, I launched a grant programme for NGOs operating in chronic crisis areas to test whether they could handle the responsibility. It turned out they could; better than expected.”

What triggered the real breakthrough?

Jelte: “A bit of luck, really. I was on vacation when my boss called and said, ‘Jelte, we’ve got extra money.’ A recalculation of the GDP had freed up €470 million for development



Nok van de Langenberg signing the Dutch Relief Alliance statutes.



aid. Politically, there were only two possible destinations for that money: refugee support in the region or humanitarian aid. We had just one weekend to submit a proposal for the minister. So much for my vacation!” Within days, Jelte presented a plan to then-Minister Lilianne Ploumen, suggesting that part of the additional budget be channeled through NGOs. But instead of funding them individually – creating an administrative nightmare – he proposed a joint model where NGOs would work together. “I gathered the coordinators of the major NGOs and got them talking.”

Stan: “At the time, South Sudan was on the brink of famine. The opportunity Jelte created led to our first concrete step: a joint funding application. Each organisation submitted a one-pager outlining their proposal. I wrote an introduction, stapled them all together, and that was it. The proposal was approved. Suddenly, five organisations were working together in South Sudan on a single programme with local partners. The funny thing was, after a while, we barely remembered who worked for which organisation. Those boundaries had practically disappeared.”

“Then the ministry asked: Can you do the same for Iraq? And for the Ebola crisis?”

So that's when momentum started building?

Nok: “Yes, and it had to. For decades, we had been working side by side without real collaboration. Now, we had to work together – and fast. That meant creating new mechanisms: How do we distribute funds? Who makes the decisions? Who takes responsibility? How do we coordinate aid?”

Stan: “What we did was new: we evaluated each other’s plans. That might sound like a recipe for conflict, but it worked surprisingly well. We were critical of one another, but everyone knew that if you unfairly dismissed someone else’s proposal, it could happen to you next time. That created a balanced, high-quality approach.”

It sounds so logical. Why wasn't this done earlier?

Jelte: “It only happened because of a unique set of circumstances. First, Minister Ploumen had the political courage to push it through.” **Stan:** “Exactly! She accomplished what her predecessors never could.”

Nok: “And it helped that Jelte was there; someone high up in the ministry who had the drive to make it happen.”

Jelte deflects the credit: “What mattered was that I could work directly with you two, because I knew that most CEOs of humanitarian organisations wouldn’t be much help. They were primarily focused on their own institution’s interests.”

Nok: “Exactly. I always put it this way: ‘If you end up in a hospital after a disaster, you don’t care what organisation’s logo is on the doctor’s coat; you just want the best possible care.’”

Stan: “In the end, the CEOs only got involved once we had a solid proposal. To their credit, they then gave us all the space we needed.”

Nok: “And in the long run, individual organisations benefited enormously. Small NGOs suddenly gained access to major humanitarian budgets and grew into serious players.”

2015

START OF DUTCH
RELIEF ALLIANCE



Afghanistan - 2016

What were the biggest benefits of this collaboration?

Jelte: “Efficiency. The ministry no longer had to manage dozens of contracts, just one. That cut bureaucracy significantly.”

Stan: “And quality. By keeping each other accountable, we ensured that aid was better aligned with real needs. We based our planning on the UN’s ‘needs and gaps’ analyses, so we knew exactly where resources were most urgently needed.”

Nok: “DRA forced us to work together, share methods, and adopt best practices. That made us all more professional.”

Despite the collaboration, is there still competition?

Nok: “Oh yes. NGOs are still organisations with their own interests. But the strength of this approach was that we stopped thinking in terms of ‘us versus them’ and started thinking in terms of ‘together.’ Sometimes that meant stepping back so another organisation could take the lead. And that wasn’t always easy.”

Stan: “And it’s not always fair, either. If you’re already on the ground when a disaster strikes, and another organisation gets the funding while you don’t, that stings.”

What’s next for DRA? Where should it go from here?

Stan: “DRA’s policy plan focused on four pillars: collaboration, accountability, innovation, and localisation. These are still fundamental. We’ve made great strides in the first two, especially accountability: anyone, from politicians to the public, can see exactly how much we’ve spent and on what. But we still have a long way to go on localisation.

Too many decisions are still made in the Netherlands, when local organisations should have the power to decide for themselves. That’s something we need to change.”

Jelte: “The humanitarian sector also needs to embrace innovation. Right now, it’s not happening enough. The world is changing fast. We should be using real-time monitoring, like satellite data, and integrating AI into our work.”

Nok: “I agree. And we once had another ambition: to expand this model internationally. Other countries are watching with great interest. It would be fantastic if this weren’t just a Dutch Relief Alliance, but a model adopted by multiple nations.”

Stan: “This approach has fundamentally changed how the Netherlands provides humanitarian aid. But we’re far from done.”

2015

First joint response in South Sudan.

2015

Read some personal stories from South Sudan:



Central African Republic - 2016

Political support

“DRA HAS PROVEN ITSELF, LET’S MAINTAIN THAT PROGRESS. EVEN DURING CUTBACKS”



Joël Voordewind

“In 2015, I was the spokesperson for Development Cooperation in the Dutch House of Representatives for the ChristenUnie party and in my previous work at Dorcas I had seen how difficult it was for smaller NGOs to gain access to humanitarian funding. The UN and large organisations such as the Red Cross received structural budgets, while smaller organisations were often left out in the cold. I thought that was wrong, because those small clubs were sometimes located in areas where larger organisations were not active. Together with the then minister Ploumen, I looked at how we could improve cooperation between NGOs and how we could involve more organisations in emergency aid.

That year, I submitted an amendment to make 60 million euros available to the alliance on a multi-year basis. This was possible because less money was needed to house asylum seekers in the Netherlands, freeing up the budget for humanitarian action. The idea was not to distribute the budget via bilateral contracts, but to give it

to the DRA in one single decision. The NGOs decided among themselves how the money would be distributed, depending on their expertise and presence in crisis areas. In parliament, we often found support for multilateral aid via UN organizations, but less enthusiasm about NGO funding. Nevertheless, we were able to structurally embed the DRA. But it was a struggle every year to maintain the budget.

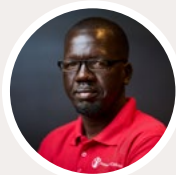
The most important thing is to join forces. NGOs went from competition to cooperation, making humanitarian action more efficient. Expertise was utilised better and the bureaucratic burden on the ministry was reduced. The DRA ensured that aid was deployed faster and more effectively, with notable examples in Iraq and South Sudan. The biggest challenge is to maintain funding. Humanitarian action has always had broad support in the Netherlands, but in times of cutbacks, development cooperation is often the first sector to suffer. DRA has proven itself, let’s maintain that progress. Even during cutbacks.”



Central African Republic - 2019

South Sudan

LESSONS AFTER 10 YEARS OF JOINT RESPONSES



Joseph Kayi

South Sudan was the first country to receive a Joint Response from the newly formed Dutch Relief Alliance in 2015. Today the DRA is still present in South Sudan – Joseph Kayi, Country Coordinator of the South Sudan Joint Response, comments on a decade of humanitarian response in his country. “Humanitarian organisations should not be perpetual stopgaps for political failures.”

When the DRA launched its first joint response in 2015, South Sudan was already in turmoil. Independence, in 2011, had come with continued hardship. Throughout its short existence South Sudan has been confronted with crisis after crisis; many of them manmade, but, also floods and drought created havoc on the 11 million South Sudanese citizens. Only two years after independence, a major conflict erupted within the newly formed government, leading to a civil war. In 2015, South Sudan was on the brink of famine.

Before 2015, international NGOs (INGOs) operated independently, often competing for funding and influence. The introduction of a coordinated approach aimed to foster collaboration, ensuring that resources were pooled and efforts aligned.

Joseph Kayi, Country Coordinator in Juba for the Joint Response, recalls initial skepticism: “At first,

we wondered, was this just a mechanism to access funding, or was it a real commitment to working together and pooling resources?” Quite soon Joseph and his colleagues became convinced of the latter, but nevertheless it took nearly four years for organisations to fully embrace the model.



South Sudan - 2024

Today, cooperation is no longer debated; the focus is on refining it and maximizing its impact.

Complement rather than compete

Joseph: “In practical terms the new approach means that the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not dictate our actions. Instead, we decide together what needs to be done based on the situation on the ground. We analyse needs, prioritize sectors, and determine the best use of our expertise. The new structure allows organisations to complement one another rather than compete.”

The new situation is not without challenges, Joseph stresses. He refers to the decision making: In spite of all efforts and the major steps towards localisation some major decisions are still made in the Netherlands. “While this ensures oversight, it limits the autonomy of partners working directly in South Sudan. Another issue is diversification of funding: we are still highly dependent on the Dutch government, making it difficult to secure alternative sources of funding at the country level.”

Game-changer

That is not to say that many challenges have not been solved over the years. Since its launch in 2015, the Dutch Relief Alliance's Joint Response in South Sudan has transformed humanitarian aid from a fragmented, competitive effort into a more coordinated

March
2015

War breaks out in Yemen between the government and the Houthi's, dividing the country in two parts, causing displacement of millions of Yemeni's. Up till today, the isolated country is facing enormous humanitarian need while international funds are shrinking. The Dutch Relief Alliance is present since the start of the war.



World Humanitarian Summit: birthplace of the Grand Bargain Commitments

May
2016



and collaborative system. What began as a cautious experiment has matured into a structured alliance where aid organisations share resources, align priorities, and respond jointly to crises.

The main challenge was perhaps the funding insecurity that has affected both alliance members and their local partners. Joseph: “Moving from annual to multi-annual funding in 2022 was a game-changer. Previously, uncertainty over funding at the end of each year created instability for staff and communities. With

multi-annual funding, we can plan more effectively, engage with communities with longer-term perspective, and provide some job security for our staff. It also allows us to integrate resilience-building alongside emergency relief. This ensures that communities are not perpetually reliant on aid but can start rebuilding their lives.”

Emergency aid should not be a long-term thing, Joseph agrees. DRA has been in South Sudan for ten years, and an end is not in sight. “However, South Sudan’s crisis is largely political. We can provide relief indefinitely, but unless governance and political stability improve, the underlying issues will remain. Frankly, it’s frustrating to be here for 10 years without a fundamental shift in the situation. We could easily be here for another 10 years. The real solution lies in addressing political accountability and governance.” With a sweeping statement: “Humanitarian organisations should not be perpetual stopgaps for political failures.”

The main lesson learned over the last decade is the need for flexibility, says Joseph. “Our approach must be adaptable to the shifting political and environmental landscape. We’ve also learned that humanitarian response alone is not enough – political engagement and advocacy are essential to breaking the cycle. Additionally, we need to refine our strategic focus. At times, we try to address too many issues – localisation, disability inclusion, collaboration – without ensuring that our core mission remains clear. There is a need to streamline our objectives and be known for a few things that we do exceptionally well rather than spreading ourselves too thin.”



DRA and the Grand Bargain Commitments



Nada Helal



Tram Nguyen

“WE’RE NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT LOCALISATION. WE’RE ACTUALLY DOING IT”

The so-called Grand Bargain commitments are the main guideline for DRA’s strategic planning. Already the Alliance is complying with many of the targets agreed on by the international emergency aid community. For example the commitment to spend at 35% of the budget through local partners has in many cases already been exceeded. But Nada Helal and Tram Nguyen of DRA’s Localisation Working group still have a wish list. “If anything, this moment is an opportunity to ask: How can we do things differently?”

In 2016, only a year after the birth of the DRA, the international emergency aid community agreed on the so-called Grand Bargain Commitments: a set of (initially nine) ambitious targets to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency assistance. Among these commitments are: increased transparency, more involvement of local actors, multi-year planning and funding, reduced

earmarking of funds and simplified reporting rules. For the DRA-members, the Grand Bargain Commitments were more than just words on paper. Over the last nine years, serious steps have been taken to integrate the commitments into the DRA-practice.

Tram Nguyen (CARE Nederland) and **Nada Helal** (Stichting Vluchteling) are co-chairs of DRA’s Localisation Working Group, which is committed to further the Alliance’s process of localisation – arguably the cornerstone of the Grand Bargain.



Risk Sharing workshop in DRC

What did the Grand Bargain commitments mean for the DRA?

Nada Helal: “The Grand Bargain is the basis for our current multi-annual strategic plan, which started in 2022. One of the core commitments is to provide at least 35% of funding to local partners. We’ve not only met that – in some of our Joint Responses, we’ve actually exceeded 40%, and even hit 45% in some cases. We’ve also gone beyond funding. We’ve worked on equitable partnerships, established a Local Advisory Group representing national partners, and launched initiatives around capacity strengthening and risk sharing. These aren’t just buzzwords — we’ve created frameworks and are piloting them in places like DRC, Ethiopia, and Yemen.”

Tram Nguyen: “Yeah, and each year, we assess our progress across different areas, many of which relate to localisation. We ask: How do we get there? What’s working? What’s not?”

This process is done in close coordination with local partners and the Local Advisory Group. Even though the localisation Working Group is Dutch-based, we always ensure that what we’re doing is rooted in local perspectives.”

Nada Helal: “We also track progress through our partnership survey. Recently, we’ve seen more partners receiving multi-annual contracts and being consulted during the contracting stage, which is a shift from the past.”

Tram Nguyen: “Over time, we have seen a shift in mindset across the alliance. The number of local partners has increased significantly. At some point, it became clear that if you weren’t localizing, you were the odd one out.”

Has localisation gone so far that local partners are actually in charge in some cases?

Nada Helal: “Well, first steps are made. In Sudan, we have a National programme Committee that includes all national partners in decision-making. In Ethiopia, a national partner sits on the Response Task Force. So leadership isn’t just symbolic — it’s operational.”

But I can imagine challenges remain.

Tram Nguyen: “Of course. Implementation for one. We have beautiful policies and strong commitments, but translating those into field-level practice can be hard. With staff turnover and shifting leadership, sometimes our shared vision gets lost. We hear from our local partners sometimes that international counterparts are not aware that localisation is one of the key drivers of the DRA-approach. It’s not intentional, but the information doesn’t always trickle down.”

Nada Helal adds: “And also inside the Alliance there is not always smooth sailing. We are quite diverse and the alliance-members have different capacities and internal resources. Sometimes things align smoothly, other times it takes a lot of internal negotiation.”

July 2017

Mosul and Northern Iraq liberated from IS-rule, leaving a region in destruction, economic collapse and massive displacement. The Dutch Relief alliance – already present in Iraq since 2015 – is expanding their work to this region to bring urgent relief and support recovery.

To hand over control must involve trust.

Nada Helal: “Trust is at the heart of all this. The question isn’t whether local partners can deliver – it’s whether they’re given the space and trust to lead. Many of them have deep contextual knowledge and strong community ties that INGOs simply don’t have. That’s why we’ve moved toward longer partnerships, like three-year contracts. Trust is the foundation.”

Tram Nguyen: “But with trust also comes risk. And that’s where risk sharing comes in. Even when INGOs want to hand over power, donors can be more risk-averse. So we’ve asked: How can we distribute risk more fairly, not just resources?”

How does that work, risk-sharing?

Nada Helal: “In 2023, we developed a simplified risk-sharing framework based on the Framework by InterAction, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We’re using it in so-called risk sharing dialogues where local partners, intermediaries, and the donor sit together and ask things like: What are your risks? How can we help mitigate them? How can we share the burden?”

Do you have examples?

Nada Helal: “Well, for example the fact that in 2024, the Ethiopian government devalued the local currency, the birr. This resulted in increasing prices of goods and services. For the Ethiopian partners, who receive their budget in local currency, this soon proved to be a serious risk as the budget no longer sufficed to implement the agreed activities. With the facilitation of the Local Advisory

Group, the local partners approached their INGO partners to discuss this new situation. They proposed that INGO partners transfer their funds in euros, to mitigate the devaluation of the birr. After a transparent discussion the INGO’s accepted this risk-sharing proposal.”



Local partners of the Sudan Joint Response discussing humanitarian access challenges with the Dutch Ambassador

Tram Nguyen: “In another case, the donor asked us to pause activities in an area due to security concerns. But local partners said, ‘We can’t just pull out – we’re providing life-saving aid.’ So we sat down with the donor, the embassy, and partners to sort

through the issues together. In the end, essential activities continued. That kind of dialogue is key.”

Regarding the Grand Bargain Commitments, is DRA a leader in the field?

Tram Nguyen: “I would say yes, but that is maybe a bit presumptuous. What I mean is: we have been approached by colleagues from Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, South Korea, and others who want to learn from us. We’re becoming known as an alliance that actually does localisation, not just talks about it.”

Nada Helal: “And it’s influencing our own organisations, too. At Stichting Vluchteling, we were already doing a lot – exceeding 35% funding to local partners, for example – but the DRA risk sharing pilots gave us a framework to push it further.”

Tram Nguyen: “At CARE Nederland, we’ve used the DRA’s momentum to push our own systems. For instance, we had IT systems that made multi-year contracts challenging. But in Yemen, we managed to work around this obstacle. It showed us that if the motivation is strong enough, solutions can be found.”

2018

DRA Innovation Fund initiated



September 2018

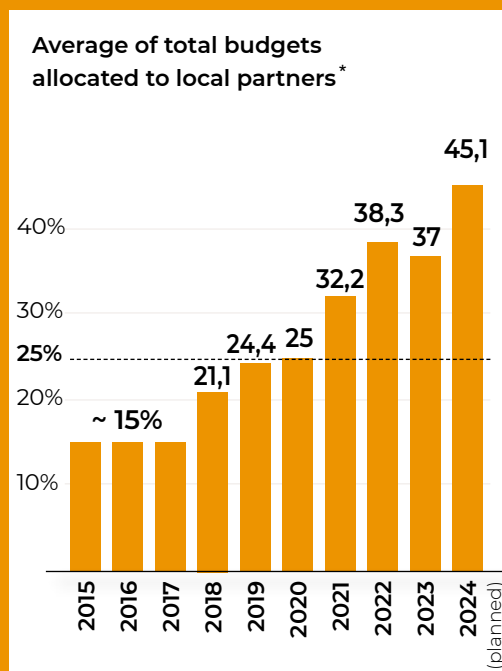
Earthquake and Tsunami hits the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. The Acute Crisis Joint Response of DRA reaches more than 200,000 people with shelter, food and water.



Nada Helal: “Embedding local leadership in our governance model — not just in advisory roles. Note that we have a Local Advisory Group, and not a Local Decision Group. We’re exploring what it would look like to have national partners with voting power or even rotating board positions. That’s the next step.”

Tram Nguyen: “Actually, we just started drafting our wish list as a group. Even in this turbulent time – with budget cuts and growing uncertainty – we need to protect what we’ve achieved and keep pushing forward. If anything, this moment is an opportunity to ask: How can we do things differently and better? That’s my wish.”

- The Grand Bargain, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, has been a key framework for making aid more effective, efficient, and accountable. The Grand Bargain 3.0 aims to direct at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national actors, as directly as possible.



- The LAG, established in 2020, comprises of 8 representatives of national partners from 8 protracted crisis we work in. They provide strategic guidance on localisation policies and advocates for systemic changes to enhance local leadership.

- In 2023 guidance note was established which provides a roadmap for Joint Responses to develop locally led approach for capacity strengthening by 2024. This outlined a recommended 5% funding for capacity strengthening.

- DRA, together with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), is piloting a risk sharing framework. In fragile contexts its essential to share risks evenly and fair among all partners in the aid delivery chain. The Dutch MFA, together with DRA, is championing this approach.

Acute Joint Response Ukraine

“AGILITY IS KEY”

On February 24, 2022, Russian boots trampled Ukrainian soil. Russian missiles destroyed major cities. Russian tanks neared Kyiv. At that time, Tetiana Machabeli was director of the Nehemiah school and community centre in Western Ukraine. Only hours after the invasion, she converted her school into a shelter for people on the run from the violence. Jacqueline Talevska coordinated the Dutch Relief Alliance Acute Joint Response in Ukraine. Both women share their stories.



Ukraine - 2024

Tetiana: “On the 24th of February, at 4:30 AM, someone knocked on my door: ‘It has started.’ Initially I couldn’t believe it, but it was true: Russia had invaded our country! That same day we transformed our centre into an emergency aid organisation. We gathered fuel, secured food and medicine—items we had fortunately stored months before. We even had solar power and water reserves. Within hours, we were ready.”

Jacqueline: “Dorcas, lead of DRA’s Joint Response in Ukraine, had been present in Ukraine for many years when the full-scale invasion began. Our team was based in Zaporizhzhia—very close to the front line. Half the city was under Russian occupation. We had to evacuate our staff and their families to the west of the country, where it was safer.”

Tetiana: “Immediately, people began calling: ‘Can we come? Can you shelter us?’ Thousands of people, on the run from the war, came to our centre, which is right on the

border with Slovakia. Some came only for a few days, others stayed for longer periods of time. And we provided them with shelter and food. In our network, we have doctors to provide medical support.”

Jacqueline: “The first hours everything happened at once: emergency programming, security assessments, proposal writing, and staff relocation. Three DRA alliance members took part in this Joint Response: Dorcas, Save the Children and Cordaid, each with their local partners.”

Tetiana: “Help came incredibly fast. On February 25th, the first aid trucks arrived. Dorcas, member of the Dutch Relief Alliance, gave us what they had—canned food, mattresses, some funds. Later, we formalised a partnership. Dutch Relief Alliance supported our psychosocial staff salaries, helped coordinate child protection with regional services. Their support helped us scale up services for vulnerable groups—children, women, people on the run. DRA also organised joint meetings to avoid duplication of the aid.”

Jacqueline: “Coordinating aid is incredibly complicated. Ukraine is a big country. Every region has different needs. And people are constantly moving, so needs also change constantly. You may hear that a group of people near the frontline are in need of help, but a couple of days later they have moved to other places.”

Tetiana: “Our region was flooded with people who had fled the violence. This created huge pressure on the infrastructure. Coordinating the aid was very important. In the beginning we urgently needed mattresses and blankets.



Ukraine - 2024

It was winter. It was very cold. We were happy that help came quickly. But some of the large donors have complicated procedures. They are not able to quickly adapt to changing circumstances. We noticed that when in June we were still receiving blankets. In the summer!”

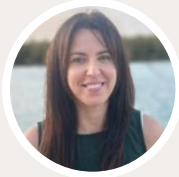
Jacqueline: “We work in close partnership with local civil society organisations and churches. They have good knowledge of what is happening at a community level. That way we can very quickly adapt to changing circumstances. For example, DRA-member Cordaid—through their partner Caritas Ukraine—had initially

December 2019

First cases of Covid-19 in China's city of Wuhan.



Tetiana Machabeli



Jacqueline Talevska

planned to provide drinking water in Kyiv. But once the city authorities recovered from the shock, water services resumed. So Cordaid and Caritas quickly shifted to food kits instead. That kind of agility is key.”

Tetiana: “The first days after a crisis are the most important. In the beginning, thank God, we were well stocked to help the people who came to us. But in a matter of days, DRA and other international organisations stepped in. Besides goods, canned food and later cash, DRA also supported us with psychological first aid for the people who took refuge in our centre.”


Jacqueline: “Initially our aid was mostly in the form of non-food items, but it quickly became clear that Ukraine still had a functioning market system, so we changed our aid to a cash-based response where people receive cash so they can purchase whatever they need. The interesting thing was: according to our criteria, people were really quite vulnerable, but they themselves didn’t think they needed that cash—they actually passed it on to friends and relatives who were more in need. Which shows the Ukrainian spirit, especially early on when people thought of others before themselves.”

Tetiana: “And later, jobs and providing a sense of purpose became the priority. People who have fled their homes eventually need to work, to contribute. They shouldn’t be stuck in dependency. DRA funded small business grants and rental initiatives, which were vital. Also, we must continue developing soft skills—psychosocial care, community building, trauma healing. These are not luxuries; they are essential.”


THE ACUTE CRISIS RESPONSE MECHANISM

The Acute Crisis Response Mechanism (ACM) of the Dutch Relief Alliance is a rapid response funding tool designed to enable swift humanitarian action in the face of sudden crises. It allows DRA alliance members to quickly – within 72 hours – mobilize resources and provide life-saving assistance, such as food, water, and medical aid to affected communities.

The ACM was recently deployed in:



Mozambique



DRC – Goma




Myanmar



Lebanon



Gaza



South Sudan



Ukraine - Potraits of Power Svetlana & Karina - 2018

The Local Advisory Group

“LOCALISATION IS A CULTURAL AND POLICY SHIFT THAT REQUIRES PERSISTENCE”

The Local Advisory Group (LAG) is one of the cornerstones of DRA's efforts to put local actors in the driver's seat of humanitarian action. Shahida Suleiman, the first chair of the LAG, and James Keah, the current chair, reflect on the challenges and opportunities of strengthening locally led action. “Sometimes it means having the same conversation over and over again.”

Localisation is a central pillar of the DRA's efforts to place local actors at the forefront of humanitarian action. The Local Advisory Group (LAG) – established in 2019 to bridge the gap between international and local humanitarian actors – has played a crucial role in this mission. As the first chair of the LAG (until September 2024) **Shahida Suleiman** revealed herself as a staunch advocate for increasing efforts to put local organisations in the driver's seat of humanitarian action, criticizing sometimes the lack of progress, and applauding the small steps forward.



Afghanistan - 2024

Asked about the key achievements during her tenure, **Shahida** says: “One of the things we really pressed for was quality funding. Before, most local actors were operating under short-term contracts, some lasting only a few months, despite implementing multi-year projects. By the time I stepped down, 42% of local actors involved in joint responses had secured three-year contracts, and in some countries, like mine – Somalia – nearly half of all local organisations had long-term agreements. This was a huge step forward.”

The second achievement **Shahida** highlights are the so-called ‘flexible crisis response mechanisms’. These are funds that are kept in reserve in a Joint Response budget in case something happens that requires immediate action. **Shahida**: “We ensured that these resources are also accessible to local actors, not just INGOs. The goal was to distribute these funds equitably, ensuring fairness rather than mere equality.”

The matter of Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) has also been high on the agenda, right?

Shahida: “Correct, we pushed for fairer overhead and indirect cost recovery sharing. But I also need to mention capacity strengthening. Lack of capacity of local organisations is an obstacle to localisation. But who decides what capacities are needed? Instead of INGOs dictating what capacity building should look like, we empowered local actors to define their own needs. And finally, we started conversations on risk-sharing. Traditionally, donors transferred risk to INGOs, who in turn transferred it to local actors. “We were a part of discussions that questioned this model and explored alternatives; whether that meant extra capacity, additional resources, or even withdrawing from high-risk areas. While there wasn't a single correct answer, we were finally asking the right questions.”

James Keah: “If I may step in: I think we need to acknowledge Shahida's leadership; she laid the foundation for much of what we're achieving today. She has done an amazing job.”

Shahida: “Thank you, James.”

James: “You know, the Local Advisory Group wasn't part of the DRA's original framework in 2015; it was introduced later to connect international actors, local actors, and the Netherlands. Since then, Shahida and her team – and now me as the current chair – worked hard to make LAG not just an advisory group, but an integral part of decision-making. In Ethiopia and South Sudan, for example, we have established Response Taskforce Funds (RTF) where

local actors are part of the decision making process. Today, LAG members participate in proposal reviews, and we have representation in key working groups within the DRA.”

Shahida: “Yes, I see that too. In spite of the steps that still need to be taken, we can conclude that – on the topic of localisation – DRA is clearly ahead of the crowd.”



March
2020

The WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic, urging the joint responses of the Dutch Relief Alliance to meet the challenges in the most vulnerable areas.



In 2020, the worldwide network of the DRA reached over 3 million people with COVID-19 responses.

Juni
2021

Grand Bargain 2.0 announced. New priorities: quality funding and localisation.





Shahida Suleiman



James Keah

But obstacles remain.

Shahida: “Oh yes, but you know, the biggest challenge wasn’t always INGOs; it was sometimes local actors themselves. Many assumed that change would be swift, but localisation is a cultural and policy shift that requires persistence. Some colleagues became frustrated and gave up when progress was slow. Another challenge was inconsistency across the 14 DRA members. Some organisations embraced localisation wholeheartedly, while others struggled to translate policy into practice. Often, things looked great at the Hague level but didn’t always translate to real change on the ground, or vice versa. That disconnect was incredibly frustrating.”

James: “I’d add that fear of the unknown was – and is – another major obstacle. When localisation gained traction after the Grand Bargain commitments in 2016, it wasn’t fully understood, and many actors hesitated. This led to tension between local and international organisations – some local actors believed donors should fund them directly, while INGOs insisted that funding should pass through them. Despite a decade of the DRA’s existence, we’re still discussing direct funding for local actors. No local organisation has received direct funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reluctance to relinquish control remains a barrier.”

February 2022

Russia attacks targets in Ukraine. Russian troops march towards Kyiv and invade territory in eastern Ukraine. An immediate Joint Response reached more than 30,000 people affected by the war in the first 6 months.



2022

The DRA is embarking on a new strategic period with a five-year multi-annual partnership agreement with the MFA, spanning from 2022 to 2026

August 2021

Taliban takes over power in Afghanistan, while the DRA remains in place with a Protracted Crisis Joint Response. Since the start of the Joint Response in 2016, the DRA has reached more than half a million Afghans with shelter, health or (access to) water and food.

What's the most critical step forward for localisation?

Shahida: “We need to amplify best practices and commit to making localisation work. We won’t have all the answers immediately, but persistence is key.”

James: “Absolutely. If we don’t push forward, we’ll be having this same conversation in another ten years. It’s time for real commitment and real action.”



Democratic Republic of Congo - 2024

How goats changed Maryam's life

A LIFELINE OF MILK AND HOPE

In a small clay house in rural Herat, in western Afghanistan, Maryam Habibullah begins her day long before sunrise. A widow and mother of three, she weaves carpets to earn a modest income. But it's the goats bleating outside her home that have brought the biggest change to her family's life.



Mahnaz, Maryam's daughter

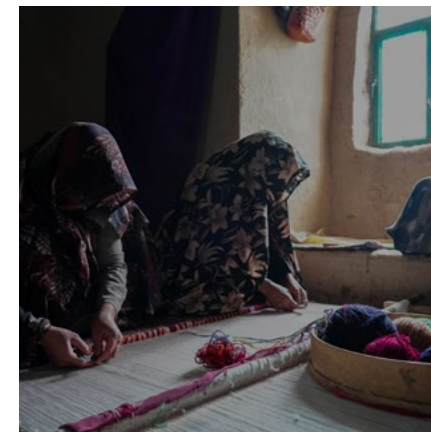
After losing her husband to a heart attack, Maryam Habibullah* became the sole provider for her children. Carpet weaving, a traditional skill passed down through generations, earns her only enough to scrape by. "On good days, we eat three times. Rice, maybe potatoes," she says. "Some days, there is only yogurt."

That yogurt now comes from the goats she received through World Vision's livestock assistance programme, part of DRA's Protracted Joint Response in Afghanistan. The initiative, aimed at supporting vulnerable households in Afghanistan, provided Maryam's family with several goats, an investment that is already transforming their daily lives.

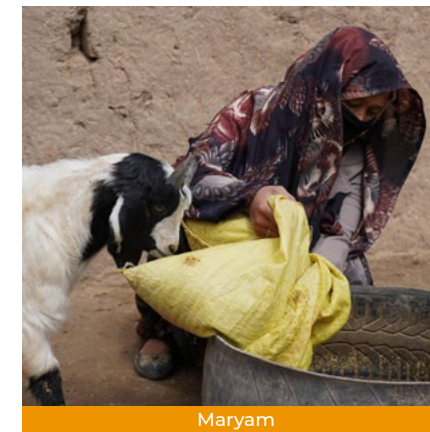
"The goats we received made a huge difference," Maryam explains. "They gave birth to sometimes three kids, and when they grow, we can sell some for income. A young goat can bring in about 4,000 Afghanis. With that money, we buy wool and materials for new carpets."

But the impact goes beyond income. "We drink goats milk every morning. We make yogurt. It's the difference between hunger and having enough to get through the day," she says. The programme also provides veterinary care and feed, ensuring the animals remain healthy and productive.

Livestock is one of Afghanistan's economic backbones, contributing 15% to agricultural GDP and supporting over a million jobs. For Maryam, the goats mean stability and dignity. They represent a turning point in her struggle to care for her children.



Maryam



Zahra, Maryam's daughter

February
2023



A major earthquake hits Turkey and North-West Syria. Dutch and local partners – already present in Syria – are responding within hours after the disaster with food and water distribution, shelter and psychosocial support.

Still, challenges persist. Her village lacks clean water, healthcare, and access to schools. "The school is an hour away. My children are too small to walk that far alone, and I cannot leave my work to take them," she says.

But hope is alive. Her daughter Zahra, just seven, now plays with the baby goats and dreams of becoming a doctor. "One day, I will go to school," she whispers shyly. Maryam smiles. "I want them to have a chance, to learn something beyond survival."

* Maryam Habibullah is an alias to protect her real identity

HEALING THROUGH PLAY: WHEN A GAME SPARKS TRANSFORMATION



Nahed Sahmoud



Birgit van Delft

Nahed Sahmoud: *“In Northeast Syria, we worked with children from areas that had experienced prolonged conflict and instability. Many of these children were in shock, showing no emotion or interaction at all. Some had not spoken for months and seemed completely disconnected from their surroundings. But after just three TeamUp sessions, they started moving, playing, and – perhaps most remarkably – finding their voices again. This was their way of releasing emotions after prolonged silence. They started reconnecting with others, something that had seemed impossible for months. This is the power of TeamUp: it breaks through silence and gives children a way to engage with the world again.”*

Nahed Sahmoud and her colleague **Birgit van Delft**, respectively Technical Advisor and Programme Director of the TeamUp Global Team at War Child, are deeply involved with TeamUp, a psychosocial support intervention that involves movement and play to support the well-being of children in crisis situations.

TeamUp represents a significant innovation in humanitarian contexts. Birgit explains: “With the increased movement of refugees into Europe in 2015, bringing many children to the Netherlands, there was little attention to their psychosocial needs. War Child, Save the Children, and UNICEF in the Netherlands chose to collaborate and develop the TeamUp methodology, bringing years of experience and global expertise.” TeamUp improves the psychosocial well-being of children through structured movement and play.

Birgit continues: “TeamUp has since spread worldwide. Starting in Uganda, Colombia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, TeamUp is now implemented in 29 countries by international, national, and local partners and incorporated in several DRA Joint Responses. To further scale our impact, we decided to engage in strategic partnerships with organisations with large networks such as Save the Children and SOS Children’s Villages. By capacitating their teams to implement TeamUp, they can independently roll it out within their own networks. In the future, we will expand



Team Up in DRC

global partnerships with other organisations and also promote complementary methodologies to TeamUp.”

The results that Nahed, Birgit, and their colleagues witness firsthand – children overcoming shyness, reconnecting with peers, processing traumatic events – have now been scientifically validated through a randomized controlled trial, making TeamUp an official evidence-based methodology. Since TeamUp is deployed in diverse global settings, it must be adaptable to different cultural contexts. Nahed and Birgit explain how a programme is tailored to fit local circumstances.

Birgit: “We developed non-verbal aspects of the methodology to bridge language barriers among children. In Syria, we had to consider cultural sensitivities around gender and physical interaction. For example, an exercise where children are guided through an obstacle course with light touches of a hand was adapted to use a stick to avoid direct contact. In some cases, we found that it was more effective to have boys and girls participate separately.”

Nahed played a key role in bringing TeamUp to Syria. “At first, there was considerable skepticism. Local partners wondered how a play-based method could help children who had endured extreme trauma. We began in northwestern and northeastern Syria, carefully testing and refining the methodology before integrating it into existing education and psychosocial support programs. Our goal was to create an accessible yet effective way to help children reconnect with themselves and their environment.”

March
2023

European Humanitarian Forum in Brussels. The Dutch Relief Alliance and the Netherlands’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs are hosting a humanitarian talk to push the agenda on quality funding and localisation.

April
2023

War breaks out between rival military factions in Sudan. Although the DRA was already present in Sudan since 2019, the Joint Response accelerates its activities with an acute Joint Response top-up, targeting an extra 130,000 people in need.

The success of TeamUp hinges on its local facilitators. When the programme is introduced in a new location, community members – many of whom have also experienced their own hardship – are trained in the methodology. They are the ones who guide the children through the sessions, ensuring that the activities are both engaging and therapeutic. If needed, they can refer children to specialized care.

Nahed: “What resonates with me most is how children rediscover their resilience through TeamUp. Children who had remained silent for months begin to speak again. Those who had withdrawn completely started playing

and making friends. Even facilitators who were initially hesitant embrace TeamUp, bringing it into their own homes and using it with their families. This proves that psychosocial support doesn’t always have to be complicated: sometimes, a structured set of movements and games with peers can be a spark to change a life.”

Birgit: “TeamUp is more than just a programme; it’s a movement that unites people. Even in the most challenging circumstances, play and movement empower children, strengthen their connection with adults, and create a transformative impact.”

DRA INNOVATION FUND

The DRA Innovation fund has contributed to the scaling up and expansion of TeamUP. For example by helping develop a certification system for trainers and facilitators. Innovation is one of the pillars of the Dutch Relief Alliance. Its members and partners continuously seek ways to enhance the effectiveness of their interventions.

The DRA Innovation Fund (DIF) was established in 2018 with support from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was designed to strengthen innovations in emergency aid. The Dutch Relief Alliance has explored innovative approaches to better reach hard-to-access populations, anticipate crises, and address issues of exclusion and gender discrimination.

The DIF has facilitated the scaling up of best practices within the Joint Responses. With its support, a portfolio of 22 innovative projects was developed, focusing on four key themes:



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



Team Up in Syria

Garbi's Gift

HARNESSING THE SUN TO MOVE THE WATER

As a farmer, Garbi Guyo understands better than most just how essential water is. In Ethiopia's Borena region, however, water is increasingly scarce. Thanks to the installation of solar panels, clean drinking water can now be pumped to communities. When the panels were first installed, Garbi paid close attention to how everything worked. After receiving some training, he now takes care of maintaining the system himself.

The persistent drought in Ethiopia has made access to water extremely difficult. To make matters worse, many existing water facilities have been destroyed by violent conflict. As a result, residents in Borena often had to walk for hours to reach a water point – carrying jerrycans back home in the intense heat. This task typically falls on women and girls, who face not only physical strain but also the risk of abuse along the way.

As part of the DRA joint response 2024/2026, SOS Children's Villages partnered with twelve local organisations to install water tanks in the region. Initially, these tanks were powered by diesel engines, supplying around 4,000 households with water. The community welcomed this solution. As one local man shared: "In the past, we could only pray for rain."

But diesel brought its own challenges: the cost was high, straining the community's limited resources, and the engines polluted the environment. That's why a cleaner, more sustainable solution was introduced: solar panels.

In a region where sunshine often signals drought and hardship, the same sun is now a source of hope, providing free, clean energy to deliver life-saving water.

Garbi Guyo, a father of nine, beams as he explains the transformation: "Before, we had to spend so much money on diesel to pump water. Money we didn't always have. Now, we're all relieved, because finally, we have water again."

Garbi took it upon himself to learn the system when the solar panels were installed. After training, he now ensures water is pumped reliably to the community. The impact has been huge: over 4,000 households – and their livestock – once again have access to clean water. In a region where livestock is vital for survival, this has been a game-changer.

Each household pays a small fee per jerrycan, which helps maintain the system and keeps the water flowing. Thanks to the sun – and Garbi's dedication – this community has a lifeline again.



Ethiopia

October
2023

Following violent attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians, Israel retaliates on an unprecedented and alarming scale, causing an humanitarian disaster in the densely populated Gaza-strip. Although humanitarian access is very limited, DRA partners are responding and advocating for more access.



Garbi Guyo - Ethiopia

Strategic Partnership

IT ONLY WORKS WITH TRUST

When Pascale Grotenhuis and Garance Reus-Deelder ran into each other in a refugee camp in South Sudan, it felt a bit unreal. Now, reunited in The Hague, they reflect on that moment – and on how the Dutch Relief Alliance grew into a partnership that's as agile as it is ambitious.



Pascale Grotenhuis



Garance Reus-Deelder

It's a warm reunion between **Pascale Grotenhuis** and **Garance Reus-Deelder** in an office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They immediately dive into an animated conversation about a meeting they had a year earlier, in the most unlikely of places: a refugee camp near Malakal, South Sudan, on the border with Sudan. Garance, Chair of the Board of Supervisors of the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) on behalf of Plan International, was there visiting the Joint Response.

Garance: "It was such a distinct moment: in the heat and chaos of an overcrowded refugee camp ... I looked up and there you were!"

Pascale Grotenhuis, Director-General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Yes, it was surreal! I had just landed in this tiny plane. I was so struck by the place – by the sheer number of refugees who had fled across that wild river from Sudan and ended up there. At the entrance, a whiteboard listed the numbers in detail. That really hits you... And suddenly, there you were."



Pascale and Garance in South Sudan - 2024

After that, the two together visited the South Sudan Joint Response programme that supports young girls in the camp in learning a trade and becoming more self-reliant.

Pascale: "You really see the link between humanitarian action and development. The camp is meant to be temporary, but people end up staying for years. That's exactly where the Joint Response gives young girls the opportunity to learn skills – sewing, entrepreneurship – and that brings real perspective."

Was there a moment that really touched you?

Pascale: "Definitely. A girl – I think her name was Mary – came up to me and asked if she could have her own sewing machine."

Garance: "I remember that moment so well. Providing support that truly fits a person's needs is incredibly important. But it can be challenging to achieve in practice."

Pascale: "Yes, because she explained so clearly why she needed it: she had a skill, wanted to grow, to sell her work, to stand on her own feet. That really moved me. It showed me that hope isn't something abstract – it's real, something quite tangible."

What, for you, defines DRA?

Pascale: "For me, it's the connection with the ministry. What started as an initiative is now a fully-fledged strategic partnership. We've become extensions of each other, working towards the same goals. It's solid, even future-proof. Other countries – Sweden, Spain, South Korea – are watching our model with interest. And rightly so."

Garance: "I feel the same. It goes way beyond a funding relationship. Our collaboration runs across different areas. Just yesterday, we had a meeting here at the ministry on the strategy for humanitarian assistance in the context of stability, security and also about humanitarian access. Embassies play a key role. Over the past ten years, we've built up a kind of ecosystem...where we can find each other quickly. Take Gaza

Grand Bargain 3.0, reiterating that 25% of humanitarian funding should be spent through local and national organisations.



June 2024

Rebel forces seized the Syrian capital, Damascus. As a result, the Assad regime collapsed, ending 12 years of Syrian civil war. The two Joint Responses in Syria, both on the formerly Government-Controlled Area and the Idlib-region, remain active, aiming to shift focus from relief to recovery in the next phase.



December 2024



– despite the almost impossible political context, we manage to deliver humanitarian assistance. We continue to work together to regain access and provide life-saving assistance. That only works when there's mutual trust."

You said 'strategic partnership'. What makes it strategic?

Pascalie: "I think the most strategic element is the localisation process... the Dutch Relief Alliance channels around 40% of the budget through local organisations?"

Garance: "Yes, and in some countries it even exceeds 50%."

Pascalie: "At the ministry – and in the political arena too – we see localisation as hugely important."

Garance: "Absolutely essential. Especially with how volatile the situation is in so many countries now. I was actually supposed to be in Sudan at this moment – the biggest forgotten crisis, if you ask me – but the trip was cancelled at the last minute. Just a week ago, things seemed stable, and then suddenly: Port Sudan was under attack. Fuel depots blown up, airports shut down. It's a volatile environment, and that means you need to be agile and take risks. And you can only be agile with flexible, multi-year funding – otherwise you're rewriting your plans every time something changes. And that only works if the donor trusts you."

Pascalie: "That trust is definitely there."

Garance: "And about localisation – our Joint Response in Sudan kept going in recent years, despite all the unrest and violence. How? Because we have incredibly strong Sudanese partners who consistently get the space – from us and from the ministry – to move with the shifting refugee populations, to start over, to adapt their activities."

Pascalie nods: "That trust has grown because we have open conversations: we talk about dilemmas, about what's going well and what isn't. We find each other quickly – whether by phone or WhatsApp."

Garance: "That's what allows us to react fast. After the recent earthquake in Myanmar, for example, we were able to start delivering support within 72 hours."

Pascalie: "And that's a huge win for us – and politically, too. The minister can stand up in Parliament and say: through our strategic partnership we are there on the ground."

Is this unique?

Pascalie: "It's a unique partnership. We could also learn from this for other areas, for instance we could use a DRA for SRHR in the Sahel."

We just talked about the bridge between emergency assistance and development. What are your thoughts on that?

Garance: "That line is fading – and rightly so. Emergency assistance is rarely just short-term anymore. At first, you support people on the move with food, water, shelter. But many displaced people end up staying in camps for years. You've got to offer perspective. That too is part of the humanitarian mandate – helping people build a stable future. That includes preparing communities for future crises. Building resilience."

Is it a dilemma that this part of aid isn't more visible?

Pascalie: "Absolutely. You don't necessarily want to plant a Dutch flag at the scene of a disaster, but you do want to show taxpayers what we're doing and why. This is public money, after all. At the ministry, we're thinking hard about how to communicate our policies. Not just to politicians, but to taxpayers, to a wider public. We want to reach out to the wider public, and have stories about development cooperation, for instance in widespread Dutch lifestyle magazines like Libelle and Margriet."

Finally: you said other countries are interested in the DRA model. What advice would you give them?

Pascalie: "Sit down together at the start. Talk openly about risk-sharing, about your shared agenda, and what you expect from each other. Be honest about doubts and dilemmas."

Garance: "And don't make it a one-year thing. Commit for five or ten years. That's what makes it a real partnership."

Pascalie: "Yeah, DRA is living proof of that."

January 2025

The Trump administration in the US announces cutting 90 percent of the international humanitarian and development work through USAID, putting many of our local and Dutch partners in a difficult financial position as one of their donors is quitting.

February 2025

IOM calculates that the civil war in Sudan so far resulted in over 8,8 million internally displaced persons and another 3.5 million people had fled the country as refugees.

March 2025



March 2025 Natural disasters are hitting Mozambique (cyclones) and Myanmar (major earthquake), urging the Dutch Relief Alliance to set up two acute crisis Joint Responses within 72 hours.

THE WAY FORWARD

People from and beyond the Dutch Relief Alliance.

Three words they feel best describe the alliance.

They share their dream for the next ten years of DRA.

OUR DREAM FOR DUTCH RELIEF ALLIANCE



Joël Voordewind
Former member of parliament for CristenUnie

Teamwork, Common Goals, Highly Motivated

That DRA is able to save more lives with a coordinated quick response and at the same time works towards prevention and reduction of the effects of natural disasters and a world that suffers under climate change and more climate refugees.



Joseph Kayi
Country Coordinator South Sudan Joint Response

Jointly Saving Lives

The DRA needs to focus on multi-donor fundraising and decentralize implementation at country level. Focus should not only be on saving lives temporarily but also on addressing root causes whether political or non-political, true empowerment happens when vulnerable people know who to ask and hold accountable. That should be the mandate and dream of the DRA for the next 10 years.



Nok van de Langenberg
Founding member of the DRA

Cooperation, Audacity, Passion

In 10 years, decisions will be made primarily at the national level, Joint Responses will be led by local organisations, we will dare to hold each other accountable regarding the quality of our work measured against international standards, we will use innovative methods that fully leverage AI and new technological possibilities, and we will have a clear exit strategy that ensures a proper handover.



Shahida Suleiman
First Chair of LAG

Progressive, Collaborative, Impactful

My dream for DRA is threefold:

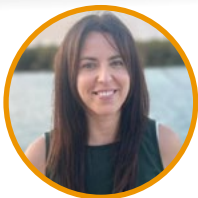
1. Sustained response to protracted and ‘forgotten’ crises globally.
2. Direct funding to local actors - and not through intermediaries.
3. The Local Advisory Group (LAG) evolves beyond just an advisory body to become a key decision-making body in the Alliance.



Pascale Grotenhuis
Director-General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Agile, Effective, Partners

I hope that the DRA and the ministry will hold on to each other in these troubling times.



Jacqueline Talevska
Former Ukraine Acute Crisis Joint Response Coordinator

Ethical, Responsive, Collaborative

I dream of a DRA that, over the next decade, champions local charities and business-driven solutions in crisis response, empowering communities to rebuild through social enterprises and sustainable livelihoods. With the Dutch spirit of ethical business, I dream of a DRA that invests in helping people help themselves, fostering true localisation and lasting resilience in acute and protracted crises, and beyond.



Tetiana Machabeli
Former Director of Nehemiah school and community centre

Collaboration, Support, Humanity

I see the Dutch Relief Alliance scaling its collaborative model globally, fostering stronger partnerships with local organisations. They'll innovate sustainable solutions, make marginalized voices be heard, and raise up their reputation as a leading humanitarian coalition responding swiftly to crises. Their impact could improve humanitarian aid, saving more lives and transforming communities worldwide.



Birgit van Delft
Programme Director of TeamUp Global Team at War Child

Innovation, Collaboration, Impact

DRA is a global leader in locally driven humanitarian action, with initiatives deeply embedded in local systems. DRA continues to invest and scale innovations to enhance the impact and efficiency of relief efforts.



Nada Helal
Co-Chair Localisation Working Group

Partnership/ Collaboration, Relevance, Ambition

My (hopefully realistic) dream for the DRA in 10 years is that we see an Alliance rooted in equitable partnerships and systematic change. How? Through increased in-country leadership, bottom-up decision-making, fair distribution of resources and, ultimately, humanitarian responses centred on the demands and needs of communities.

People from
and beyond the
Dutch Relief
Alliance.

Three words they
feel best describe
the alliance.

They share their
dream for
the next
ten years
of DRA.



Jessie Bokhoven
Alliance Manager of the
Board of Directors
of the DRA

**Innovation,
Energy,
Hope**

My dream for the future is an alliance that serves as a beacon of hope and energy. A breeding ground for innovative solutions thriving on equitable partnerships, fostering collaboration and amplifying the voices of local organizations, ensuring they lead in decision-making and action.



Garance Reus-Deelder
Chair of the Board
of Supervisors of the
DRA on behalf of Plan
International

**Future proof,
Localized,
Trust**

My wish is that, even in today's volatile circumstances, the Dutch Relief Alliance will continue to deliver efficient and effective life-saving aid — providing emergency relief but also long-term perspectives. Especially for those most deeply affected: children and young women.



Anton van Wijk
Crisis Response Manager
of the Board of Directors
of the DRA

**Peace,
Hope,
Impact**

Dreams are not judged by their realism. My dream for the Dutch Relief Alliance is an unrealistic one that we should continue to chase. Conflicts are man-made, and many 'natural' disasters also, and their impact can be mitigated. My real dream is that we live simple lives, are content with having enough and turn swords into plowshares. There will be no more Dutch Relief Alliance. As long as we are still there, we make a real difference.



Tram Nguyen
Co-chair Localisation
Working Group

**Partnership,
Driven,
Inventive**

My (hopefully realistic) dream for the DRA in 10 years is to have a locally-led partnership, with Dutch-based members providing technical expertise whilst solely local partners implement, lead and decide. How? Through entirely rethinking our sector's business model, transforming into country-based leadership, decision-making power, centering communities and local structures.



Lebanon - 2024

The Dutch Relief Alliance is a collaboration of 14 Dutch non-governmental organisations.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands