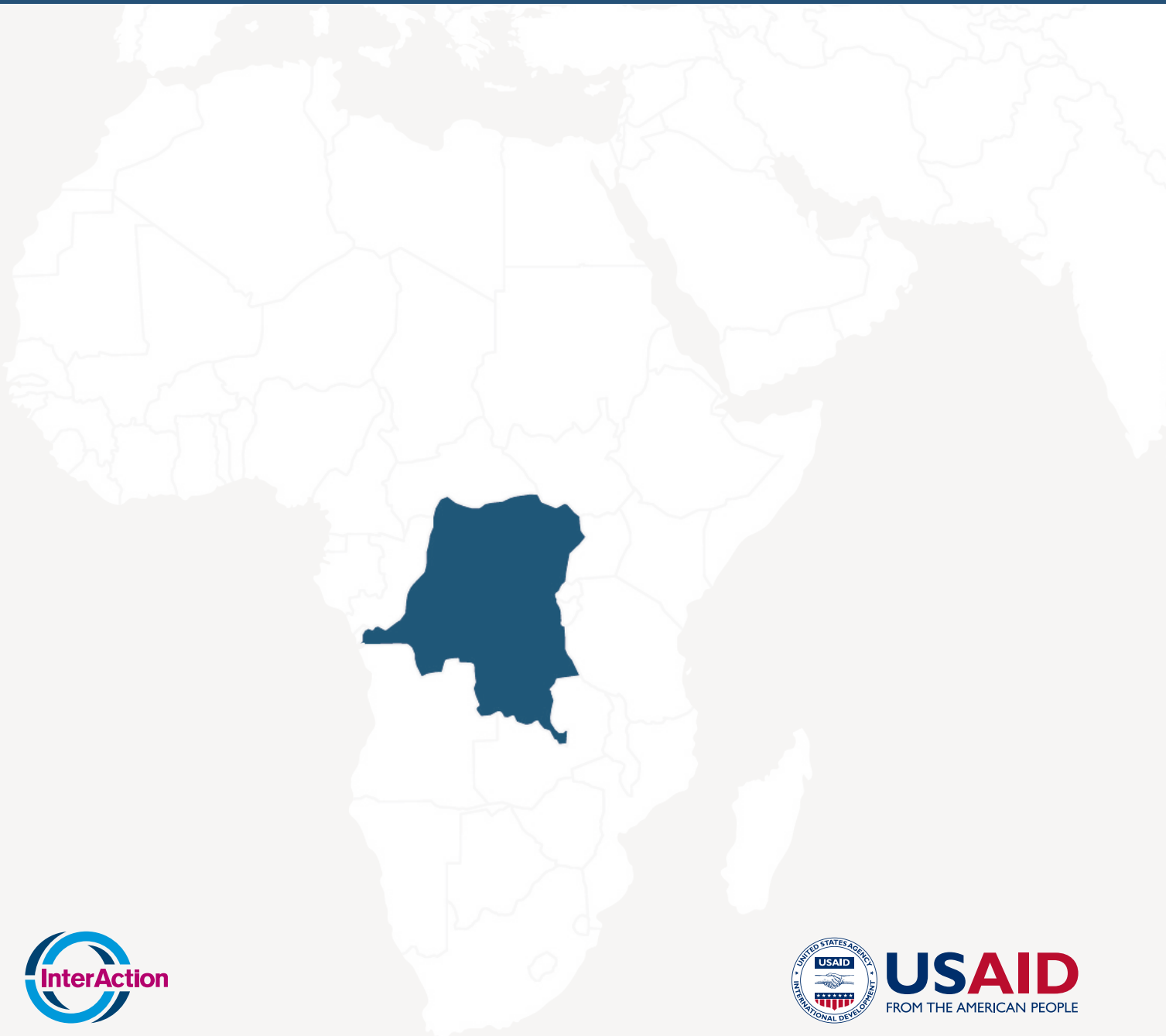


LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Case Study

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



Suggested citation: InterAction (2024) Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response, Case Study: DRC.

This publication is free for non-profit use with appropriate credits and citations.

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA). The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of, nor are they necessarily endorsed by, the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA).

InterAction would like to thank its Member organizations, Shelter and Settlements Working Group members, Global Shelter Cluster, Regional Shelter Forum participants, Shelter Center, and InterAction’s Humanitarian Policy and Practice and Communication Team.

Disclaimers

All opinions, findings, and conclusions in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of InterAction, its donors, affiliates, or Members.

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the content of this publication, no liability can be accepted for any errors or omissions contained within it.

The series of publications on Local Leadership summarizes the consultation and research conducted by InterAction, independent principal consultants, and Country Consultants. Regional consultations primarily took place in Amman, Bogota, Dhaka, Dakar, and Geneva, as well as country consultations in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, and Jordan. Reports are published in several parts. Please see www.interaction.org for more details.

In these case studies, all opinions and findings are derived from research, interviews, and consultations conducted and interpreted by the respective national consultants.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Case Study

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Country Researcher:

YVES BADESIRE of *Victim's Hope*

With support from Global Researchers:

Fiona Kelling and Sneha Krishnan

This research was managed and coordinated by:

Juli King of *InterAction*

With support from Mohamed Hilmi, Madelyn Evans and Danielle Halprin

Copy Editor:

Kate Murphy (*InWords*)

Graphics and Layout:

Livia Mikulec (*The Human Atelier*)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map	5
Executive Summary	6
Abbreviations.....	8
1. Introduction	10
2. Context overview	11
2.1 Country situation.....	11
2.2 Localization efforts.....	12
2.3 Shelter and settlements response.....	13
3. Findings	15
3.1 Understanding localization.....	15
3.2 Examples of locally led shelter and settlements response.....	19
3.3 Challenges and barriers faced by Shelter and Settlement actors.....	23
3.4 Enabling conditions and opportunities for successful localization.....	24
4. Recommendations	26
5. References	28
6. Annexes	28
Annex A: Methodology.....	29
Annex B: Context Analysis.....	33
Annex C: Stakeholder mapping.....	38

MAP

Democratic Republic of Congo



Maps are provided for illustrative purposes only and do not imply official endorsement of InterAction, Members, or partners.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is committed to shifting funding and decision-making power to the people, organizations and institutions that are driving change in their own countries and communities. Various internal reforms, actions and behavior changes orient USAID's work around local actors' priorities. By strengthening local systems, USAID strives to advance locally led development and humanitarian response, in which local actors set their own agendas, develop solutions and mobilize the capacity, leadership and resources to make those solutions a reality. USAID expects that by fiscal year 2025, it will direct a quarter of its funding directly to local partners. And second, by 2030, at least half of USAID programs will create space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation and defining and measuring results.¹

Local actors in DRC

The local network is quite developed in the DRC, especially in the eastern part of the country. Most organizations are relatively young, having been created in the upheaval of the last fifteen years in eastern DRC. Few older organizations were created during the 1990s, in the absence of the state, to meet basic services. Subsequently, they also responded to humanitarian crises as the need for basic services persisted.²

While international organizations recognize the comparative advantages of local actors, certain weaknesses are recognized as well both by local actors themselves, and by international organizations. The first weakness is in terms of financial management and the limited capacity to mobilize complementary funds, as well as limited assets to allow advanced payments, which are often barriers to establishing partnerships and receiving funding. What is more, some local NGOs have governance problems because the principle of voluntary work³, which is the basis of an association's activity, is a real challenge in a region where, for many people, each day is used to secure food for the next day. In addition, a lot of local actors in the DRC have institutional problems in terms of financial transparency.⁴

The advantage of working with local NGOs includes lower operational costs and access (physical, cultural and to information and knowledge of the context) to certain regions that are only accessible to local NGOs, which allows programs to be accepted/appropriated by communities. Operational agility and rapidity are also recognized but it is long-term presence, which helps to make programs durable and allow international organizations to adopt exit strategies, which is seen by all as an indisputable added value.

Research summary

The research used a qualitative approach which consisted of a review of key documentation related to localization in the humanitarian response in the DRC and semi-structured interviews with some actors active in the shelter and settlement sector.

¹ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/FY%202022%20Localization%20Progress%20Report-June-12-23_vFINAL_1.pdf






² <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/aid-localisation-ituri-democratic-republic-congo>

³ Many local and community-based organizations have no funding for their ongoing operations and are forced to rely on volunteers during times of funding shortage.






⁴ Financial traceability remains unclear, and some organizations use their family members in key positions, allocating the organization's financial resources abusively with very little level of control, resulting in non-transparent management

The researcher conducted a desk review analyzing all existing and available documentation and information relevant to localization in the shelter and settlement within the humanitarian response in the DRC. Key informants for humanitarian actors were selected based on being an active actor in the national shelter cluster while for community leaders, it was having received shelter assistance in the community during this ongoing year. For government service, these were the most mentioned by actors interviewed.

Summary findings

-  The international, national and local non-government organizations (NGOs) experience localization differently depending on their role in the partnership model while others are leading responses without any formal partnership and actually playing an important role in the humanitarian system in the country.
-  The DRC's current humanitarian response landscape offers several opportunities to enhance local leadership, including long years of assistance that have increased the skills of local stakeholders. There are also a number of barriers to be overcome, such as access to funds, access to decision-making spaces in the humanitarian system, and capacity building.
-  Humanitarian actors working in the Shelter and Settlements Sector have a certain understanding of localization. Knowledge of the term "localization" is greater for UN agencies and international NGOs than for some national NGOs, local NGOs and government organizations in the DRC.
-  Several national and local NGOs are demonstrating their ability to successfully implement humanitarian responses in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. A few other sector projects were cited as good examples of successful localization initiatives in the country.
-  There are tensions in some humanitarian partnerships. Some national and local organizations see localization as a struggle that must be won. Other international actors see it as a threat that reduces their power, while at the same time other UN/international NGO actors see it as a useful tension that can improve collaboration in the partnership model.

Key recommendations made by the interviewed participants

-  UN and international organizations should consider a phased exit strategy as part of the process of building local leadership and not take it as a threat to their power/influence to delay localization process.
-  The Humanitarian Country Team should set up a country working group to monitor the integration of localization into the humanitarian response and the Shelter and Settlements Sector in particular.
-  OCHA should include a section on localization to all reports produced by the humanitarian system, so that current localization efforts can be highlighted and monitored.
-  The Humanitarian Country Team should mobilize donors to set up funds that are intended only for national and local organizations, with eligibility criteria tailored to national and civil society organizations, to give national organizations the greatest opportunities.
-  Humanitarian actors should involve and train government departments in localization, as they have a very important role to play in good local leadership, enabling government counterparts to have a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of locally led responses.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADDP	Action D'Aide Développement aux Paysans (Action for the Development of Farmers)
ADSSE	Association pour le Développement Social et la Sauvegarde de l'Environnement (Association for Social Development and Environmental Protection)
AIRD	African Initiatives for Relief and Development
APROSHAV	Action pour la protection de la santé humaine, animale et végétale (Action for the protection of human, animal and plant health)
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CONAFOD	Conseil National de Forum des Organisation d'Humanitaire et de Développement (National Council of the Forum of Humanitarian and Development Organizations)
DRC	The Democratic Republic of Congo
FHRDC	Fund Humanitaire pour la République Démocratique du Congo (Humanitarian Funds of the Democratic Republic of Congo)
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally displaced people
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
NNGO	National Non-Government Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SAD	Santé pour le Développement (Health for Development)
StP	Shifting the Power
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

These abbreviations occur but are not spelled out:

ADF	Alliance Démocratique Alliées
ADSSE	Association pour le Développement Social et la Sauvegarde de l'Environnement (Association for Social Development and Environmental Protection)
AIRD	African Initiatives for Relief and Development
ALD	Association Locale pour le Développement Intégral
CBS	Convention pour le Bien Social
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities
CIAUD	Comité International pour l'Aide d'Urgence et le Développement
CONAFOD	Conseil National de Forum des Organisation d'Humanitaire et de Développement (National Council of the Forum of Humanitarian and Development Organizations)
DDR	Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration
FARDC	Forces Armées de la R D CONGO
FHRDC	Fund Humanitaire le République Démocratique du Conge (Humanitarian Funds of the Democratic Republic of Congo)
FONADH	Forum des Organisations Nationales des Droits Humains
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IMS	Information Management System
LTP	Logement Terrain et Propriété
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NFI	No Food Item
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
REACH⁵	This is a platform, not abbreviation
SHAPE	Strategic Humanitarian Assessment & Participatory Empowerment
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
L/NGO	Local/National Non-Gouvernement Organizations

⁵ <https://www.reach-initiative.org/where-we-work/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

1. INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is committed to shifting funding and decision-making power to the people, organizations and institutions that are driving change in their own countries and communities. Various internal reforms, actions and behavior changes orient USAID’s work around local actors’ priorities. By strengthening local systems, USAID strives to advance locally led development and humanitarian response, in which local actors set their own agendas, develop solutions and mobilize the capacity, leadership and resources to make those solutions a reality. USAID expects that by fiscal year 2025, it will direct a quarter of its funding directly to local partners. And second, by 2030, at least half of USAID programs will create space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation and defining and measuring results.⁶

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) faces multiple challenges including:

- Conflict
- Chronic political instability and weak governance
- Corruption and competition over resources and power
- Security concerns
- Ethnic tension
- Economic contraction, poverty and unemployment

Violent intersecting conflicts have forced people to flee their homes, with more than 5 million people displaced within the country, mainly in host communities and informal shelters.

In this context, local NGOs play an essential role, often with support from international aid organizations. A variety of local organizations implement programs in areas such as child protection (supporting the demobilization of child soldiers), agriculture development, the protection of women, gender-based violence and peace building. The DRC has taken steps toward increasing the role of local actors, including representation of local organizations in the IASC.

This research was commissioned by InterAction to build an understanding of what a successful locally led response looks like in the Shelter and Settlements Sector and what actions are needed by various shelter and settlement actors to get there. The purpose of this research is to understand what actions are being made to increase the participation, inclusion and decision-making role of local and national actors in humanitarian shelter and settlements response in the DRC. This research focuses on the east of the country, where the majority of shelter actors are present.

This research applied a qualitative method of inquiry to respond to the objectives of this study. There was a desk review of key documents and semi-structured interviews conducted with humanitarian actors. UN organizations, international NGOs, national NGOs, government actors and community leaders were met and a total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews were transcribed and content analysis was performed to analyze the data.

Further details on the methodology can be found in Annex A.

⁶ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/FY%202022%20Localization%20Progress%20Report-June-12-23_vFINAL_1.pdf

2. CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Annex B contains a detailed overview of the country context and localization efforts. This section contains extracts from that Annex.

2.1 Country situation

The DRC has experienced armed conflict since the colonial era and a complex emergency has persisted for more than 20 years. Multiple drivers have contributed to conflict in the DRC, including:

- Chronic political instability and weak governance
- Corruption and competition over resources and power
- Security concerns
- Ethnic tension.
- Economic contraction, poverty and unemployment
- Regional instability

In addition to the violence caused by armed groups, the DRC is a country with a history of political instability and violence.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with violent intersecting conflicts forcing people to flee their homes and preventing their return. As reported by UNHCR, more than 5 million people are displaced within the country and more than 1 million Congolese have sought asylum, mostly within Africa. The situation is exacerbated by disease outbreaks and disasters. At the same time, the DRC hosts half a million refugees from neighboring countries, three quarters of whom live outside refugee camps and settlements.⁷ Many of them live in host communities and informal shelters.

The deterioration of the security context has had a considerable impact on population movements (so-called sudden, recurrent) in the country. The resurgence of the armed conflict between the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and the Movement of Marc 23 (M23), in June 2022 in the province of North Kivu, has led to the displacement of nearly 500,000 people.

Coordination and governance

As of 2023, UNHCR, as the Shelter and Settlements Sector lead in the country, with a key role in refugee camps, has committed itself to provide a robust operational response for the DRC situation. The response consists of protection interventions and multi-sector assistance for refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees. It focuses on long-term solutions and self-reliance. UNHCR will continue to coordinate the overall response in consultation with the government and in collaboration with partners under the Refugee Coordination Model. For the IDP response, UNHCR will play its leadership role in the Protection Cluster, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster and the Emergency Shelter Cluster.

⁷ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/drcsituation#:~:text=2023%20situation%20overview&text=The%20humanitarian%20situation%20continues%20to,sought%20asylum%2C%20mostly%20within%20Africa>

OCHA is at the interface between the humanitarian community, the governor and the different state services, including the army. In certain contexts in the DRC, other UN agencies (such as the UNHCR) provide funds to the government's Commission Nationale pour les Réfugiés (CNR or in English, the National Commission of Refugees) to allow them to support refugees in the affected areas and fulfill their role. UNICEF has tried to include the Ministry of Health in the response to cholera but recognizes that the humanitarian response is mainly being implemented by international and local NGOs.

In general, the administration is structurally very weak, and this weakness is the cause of numerous humanitarian situations (conflicts over land, mining regulations, insecurity, etc.)

Lack of interaction and information sharing between departments validating projects and those where the activities are carried out can make life difficult for humanitarian actors. Some regions occupied by armed groups simply have no state representation to coordinate a humanitarian response. And experience of humanitarian aid in the field has shown that certain representatives of the state sometimes try to control humanitarian aid and divert assistance intended for the population.

Thus, the relations between the government, its local representatives and aid organizations are sometimes tense, or even conflictual. The authorities are both the target of advocacy and partners for the implementation of aid. This dual position is not always easy, particularly in a context where access to resources is difficult and international aid is a major economic sector but is not fully controlled by the authorities.

2.2 Localization efforts

In the DRC, local NGOs play an essential role, often with support from international organizations. A variety of local organizations implement programs in areas such as child protection (supporting the demobilization of child soldiers), agriculture development, the protection of women, caring for the victims of sexual violence, and peace building. Humanitarian aid is part of all these activities and is implemented throughout DRC.

The Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response (ToGETHER) project has been implemented in South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri provinces by five partners (RACOF, AIDES, TPO, SAD, ADSSE). This is a multi-national localization program that seeks to build the capacity of local humanitarian actors by focusing on prevention, coordination and advocacy. The program seeks to make them an active part of the local humanitarian system and promote humanitarian aid in their regions in accordance with its principle, "As local as possible, as international as necessary."⁸

The Pooled Fund for the DRC currently provides 22% of its budget directly to local NGOs, which represents a significant change since 2016, because during the period 2006–2015, it only provided 10% in this way. This change is also related to the establishment of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to which UN agencies have access. This has allowed the amount of funding for these agencies from the Pooled Fund to be significantly reduced, and subsequently the amount that goes to local NGOs to be increased.

Relationship between international and local organizations

International organizations' approaches to localization vary a great deal, depending on their mandate and culture.

The majority of partnerships are purely operational. The local organization implements a part of a program based on a strategy developed by the international organization, which does not allow the partner to build its own strategy. This is in part due to weaknesses in financial and organizational management. Local NGOs recognize the positive input and constructive interaction that has allowed them to develop by working with international organizations. At the same time, they sometimes feel exploited, as they are used to providing information and raise the alert and then ignored during the response. Access to funding remains difficult and some find that being made to compete with international NGOs is unfair.

⁸ <https://together-for-localisation.org/about-us/>

Local NGOs therefore harbor mixed feelings toward international organizations. The quality of their relations depends on the behavior and the approach of the international actor (their practices and their view of partnerships). But it also depends on the behavior and approach of the national organizations, their maturity and their independence, both in terms of finances and outlook.

2.3 Shelter and settlements response

UNHCR as Shelter Cluster Lead is working in collaboration with its co-lead UNICEF and with information management system (IMS) support from REACH,⁹ and government and humanitarian actors at national and provincial levels. They provide assistance to affected people through the emergency, transitional and sustainable phases of shelter response.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the 20 active organizations.

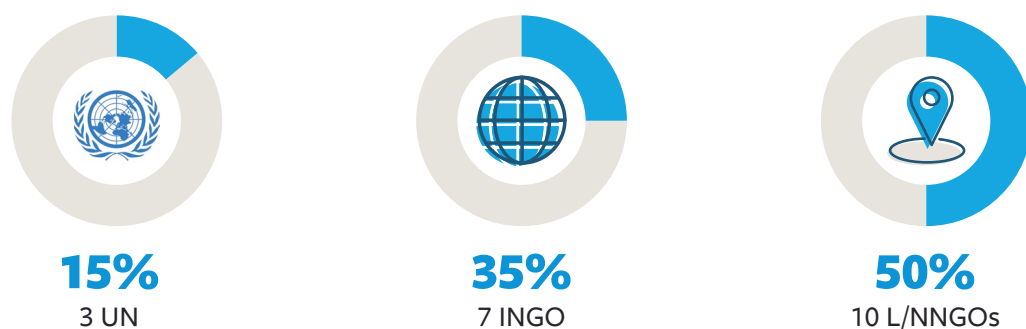


Figure 1: Humanitarian actors in the Shelter Cluster in the DRC (DRC Shelter Cluster report, June 2023, adapted)

The strategy defines shelter response phases, shelter response scenarios, activity packages and costs, 10 shelter intervention principles, and strategic priorities. There are three phases of shelter response:

1. Emergency response through on-site emergency shelter construction delivered within 30-90 days.
2. Transitional response (transitional host family shelter and transitional collective shelter) to be implemented as soon as possible.
3. Durable solution through local peace construction for returnee households to support the transition between humanitarian response to development and peace actions (HDP nexus).¹⁰

Refugees in urban areas do not currently receive shelter support as such, as housing is available in the rental market. However some assistance is provided as necessary to avoid protection risks in periods of economic shortage.

Needs are targeted and emergency shelter and non-food item (NFI) kits are provided through various modalities, including in-kind and/or cash-based assistance. The Cluster recognizes that the engagement and active participation of the targeted populations is critical. It implements an inclusive approach focused on engaging beneficiaries to ensure context-specific shelter solutions (e.g., emergency shelter, transitional shelter, cash-based modalities). Site planning/layout or site restructuring to ensure safe and dignified shelter solutions are put in place. These align with the Shelter Cluster guidelines and meet specifications for safe construction, while ensuring that materials used are adapted to the local context.

⁹ REACH have been supporting humanitarian actors in strengthen assessment activities and implementation. REACH has also provided critical humanitarian information to aid actors and response planners since first being deployed to the country.

¹⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/strat-gie-du-cluster-abris-2021>

Challenges facing shelter actors

The constraints and operational challenges result in, among other things, by the increase in needs or gaps. This is due to:

- The amplification of conflicts
- Lack of adequate funding
- The existence of markets with low absorptive capacity locally
- The problem of secure physical access
- An insignificant response in relation to needs
- The lack of adequate sector funding

Most of the partners were forced to obtain supplies from regional or international markets due to the low absorption capacity of local markets. This applied to the acquisition of most of the items intended for assistance (such as tarpaulins, key household items and household essential assets kits). The problem of market absorption also had an impact on the use of cash in the response.

Other constraints and operations changes which prevent the deployment of the response in certain areas include lack of physical access, characterized by the advanced state of disrepair of roads or road infrastructure. A limited number of air transport companies do not allow access to landlocked areas.

3. FINDINGS

The results below reflect the views of international and national humanitarian actors involved in the Shelter and Settlement Sector in the DRC.

3.1 Understanding localization

Most participants who were interviewed for this research presented some knowledge of localization, which varied depending on the type of organization they worked with and their exposure to existing localization initiatives. We found that participants working in government organizations and involved in shelter and settlement and the community leaders had very little knowledge of the concept of “localization.”

Perception and experience

This section describes the perception and experience of “local leadership” of local, national and international actors involved in the Shelter and Settlement Sector of the humanitarian response in the DRC.

An interviewee from an NGO forum understands localization as, “A process by which all mechanisms are put in place so that local humanitarian actors are placed at the forefront of humanitarian action in the DRC.” In their view, this mechanism should involve all stakeholders, including donors, UN agencies, international NGOs, national NGOs, civil society organizations and state services. This process should not exclude community leaders and the populations benefiting from humanitarian aid.

Others believe that localization should be seen as a way of recognizing local expertise and its contribution, which has not always been taken into account. The impression is that all decisions are taken by international NGOs and UN agencies, and national organizations simply implement the decisions taken.

After taking part in several meetings organized by the forum, respondent from an NGO forum revealed that humanitarian actors in the DRC, whether in the Shelter and Settlement Sector or in the humanitarian response in general, currently understand localization in different ways. This creates two distinct attitudes within organizations involved in the humanitarian response. Some organizations see localization as a struggle and a threat, while others see it as an obvious process that should be embraced and contributed to. This can be seen in both international and national organizations:

“Localization is not well understood by many players, so we have two camps. The [international NGOs], who are not well informed, see localization as a battle and think that the [national NGOs] want to take over their work. As far as we’re concerned, we have to work with those organizations that understand localization as a fight and a struggle, but rather take it as a normal process to which we all have to contribute without fighting.” (D19, male, national NGO, August 2023)

The participants from local NGOs have had different experiences and expectations from the localization processes.

“Localization is when [local NGOs] implement interventions and access funding at the same pace as [international NGOs]. It is when government services and community members play an important role in the implementation of the humanitarian response. And that national organizations have access to the necessary resources and that all these layers are involved from conception to execution.”

(D18, male, local NGO, August 2023)

One respondent explained that their organization sees localization as a collective process, aims to bring local actors, namely civil society organizations and local government services to the center of the humanitarian shelter response system. The aim, according to that participant, is to ensure efficiency and speed. International actors should be involved as necessary, but the humanitarian response should be carried out by local actors, with any international involvement complementing the local efforts.

This means that we need a more equitable partnership with international players [...]. When we set up a partnership, [we have to be] an equal level. It's not because some bring resources and others don't that, we can distort the balance in the collaboration. This also applies to local players' access to funding, which can be direct or indirect. Giving local players a window of opportunity to access funds directly from donors. This should be reflected in the fact that local actors can play a greater role in the humanitarian coordination mechanism [. . .] This is a commitment that was made by decision makers at the Luxembourg World Summit in 2016.”¹¹ (D5, male, local NGO, July 2023)

“There have to be local organizations that can conduct their own studies, and we mustn't leave everything to the [international] INGOs. When the same [international] NGOs carry out studies on this or that issue, they tend to show that everything is progressing, that everything is on the right track, when this is not true. How are we going to talk about sustainability if these [national] NGOs are not at the forefront? And yet when there are imminent crises, it's the [national] NGOs that are the first to know and to share the first information. If [international] NGOs are always put forward, how will crises be managed in the absence of these [international] NGOs? You saw that when there was a crisis in Kalehe with the landslides; it was the [international] NGOs that were the first to intervene to save the first lives, such as the Red Cross and Action d'Espoir, because these [international] NGOs are not too political, and their contact points are established in the communities.” (D4, male, international NGO, July 2023)

For international actor:

“Sharing humanitarian development funds with NGOs and civil society to promote their ownership for sustainability. Take advantage of the relationships that these organizations have with communities and also their understanding of the humanitarian context in the DRC.” (D15, male, UN/IO, July 2023)

For the respondent from a local organization:

“I would say that localization comes from a certain amount of consultation with the beneficiaries around community leaders and other stakeholders, to try to understand how life should continue after crises and not always make these people dependent on aid.” (D6, male, local NGO, July 2023)

According to these local and national organizations, for better local leadership to emerge, there needs to be access to multi-year funding, directly from donors and not through international actors. There also needs to be access to decision making in humanitarian coordination, as well as recognition of the capacities of national and local organizations, some of which are already doing a better job than some international organizations. In addition to this, there needs to be a change in mentality on the part of some international organizations who think that they are always superior to national and local organizations. The head of a national NGO said this collaboration, based on respect and consideration, will help to improve the partnership, which currently remains paternalistic and sub-contracting for certain international actors.

For one respondent within a government ministry in South Kivu, localization is a term that refers to implementation. That is, things that are carried out in a specific place with national organizations that are community players. But it has to be said that government services are not really involved in the implementation of

¹¹ World Humanitarian Summit 2026, <https://archives.cooperation.lu/2016/en/index.html>

shelter interventions, whether by international or national organizations. They prefer to work with the provincial or territorial authorities rather than with the technical services.

For the social affairs division,

“Localization is first and foremost a new concept for most people, because even for us, it’s been two or three years since we first heard about this concept. In terms of what we know about localization, it’s about transferring skills. There are many skills involved, from the donor to the local community, to local organizations. It may be a question of transferring funds or building the capacity of local players to take ownership of the assistance.” (D14, female, national NGO, July 2023)

The community leaders interviewed are generally involved in projects that deliver shelter and settlement assistance. They are involved in providing the land on which the shelters will be built and also in sensitizing members of the community to take part in the construction.

“I sensitize the members of my community, I make the land available for the construction of the shelters, I help the humanitarian actors to identify the beneficiaries and I provide them with labor if they need it.” (D10, male, community leader, July 2023)

The role of the community depends on how the project is developed. Some build the shelters for the people and give them the key when the construction of the house is completed (as in the case of one national NGO in Baraka/South Kivu¹²). Others give money to households and let everyone build their own house, while others bring in some materials and ask the community for their contribution in terms of physical effort or materials. For community leaders, the best localized responses are those that work with the local authorities and community leaders, give voice to the affected communities, and know how to work with local labor. These are the projects that last when the shelters are built by the people of the community and with the beneficiary populations.

The opinions of community leaders are divided on the localized response to the implementation carried out with international NGOs and local NGOs. Some think that the local NGOs were best placed because they were established in the community, knew the context well and already had links with all the community groups, even though they had limited resources. And others think that although international NGOs are not rooted in the community, they communicate more effectively with the community and always seek to do what they do well because they fear for their reputation and are generally more respectful with other stakeholders including leaders, authorities and beneficiaries.

“Yes, there is a difference in our participation when the response is made by a national and international organization. When it comes to a national organization, our involvement is permanent because not only do these organizations open their doors to us, but we are also in the community and close to it. We are a bridge between the community and the local organization. In the case of international organizations, our involvement is temporary, depending on the duration of the intervention.”

(D21 male, community leader, August 2023)

For one UN staff member we met, localization should encourage local leadership by supporting the participation of local and national organizations in decision making within humanitarian coordination.

Tension and conflict surrounding localization

Some international organizations see localization as a threat. They think that giving more leadership to national organizations will reduce the funds available to international organizations, thereby threatening their power. As a result, some international organizations are afraid to transfer skills properly, and this reduces the chances of localization being carried out properly.

¹² Interview with community leader in Fizi, South Kivu

“As far as I’m concerned, I can’t talk about the tensions between national organizations and interventions in their partnership; it’s more a relationship of submission than tension and conflict. It’s not possible to have tension with the person who funding you, it’s more a case of domination between the person subcontracting you and you being subcontracted. If you arm-wrestle with the person who subcontracts you, the next time you’re hired you won’t be selected, and if you need the work, you’re obliged to submit even if you don’t like the conditions of the partnership, because you have no other choice.” (D4, male, global south international NGO, July 2023)

The participant maintains that international organizations know that they have more access and contact with donors, whereas international organisations have open doors with donors. Even when a call for proposals has not yet been posted, international organizations and UN agencies already have access and have plenty of time to prepare. As a result, there will never be any competition between international NGOs and UN agencies and national organizations.

“It’s not fair, we need conditions that are fair and adapted to [national] NGOs and equitable, because [international] NGOs don’t have the same opportunities. It’s the Westerners who decide, and it’s like saying, ‘Wolves can’t eat each other.’ It’s the same thing, these same Westerners can’t eat themselves.” (D9, female, national NGO, July 2023)

“All the time, [international] NGOs are saying that we’re going to strengthen the capacities of [national] NGOs, but that doesn’t mean that [international] NGOs know everything and [national] NGOs know nothing. For example, [national] NGOs know very well the context of their areas and the beneficiaries they have to assist, and on this aspect, at least [international] INGOs should recognize that they can also receive capacity building on this aspect and rely on their capacities to build better projects. And when you look at all the funds that these same donors give to the government implemented by national staff, they’re funds as large as what we give to UN and [international] NGOs. This means that these same donors should have the same confidence in [national] NGOs to carry out these large-scale projects without going through [international] NGOs or UN [agencies].” (D4, male, global south international NGO, July 2023)

One respondent pointed out how international NGOs operate with zero presence in the field:

“Sometimes, even in the implementation of activities, there is little consideration for the [local or national] organizations, even though they are on the frontline in deploying interventions in areas of difficult access, and sometimes even in places where [international] NGOs cannot reach. You’ll see that this NNGO is carrying out activities in the field, but in the report submitted to the donor, the NNGO name won’t even appear. It’s such and such a national organization that has carried out activities in the field, but in the final report it will be said that UNHCR has delivered such and such assistance to so many beneficiaries in this community, even though it hasn’t even been in the field. This is a partnership that is not based on honesty and mutual consideration.” (D4, male, global south international NGO, July 2023)

For one respondent:

“Some international organizations are on the defensive, and this can even be seen in the field, where collaboration is difficult with some international organizations because they see national organizations as inferior. For example, sometimes we are in the same intervention zone for shelter assistance, and if an [international] NGO has already carried out the identification or targeting, it is difficult to share their targeting lists to avoid us having to do double work and minimize resources, but sometimes we are obliged to redo the work already done because [international] NGOs do not want to collaborate. But of course, there are others who are accessible and cooperate well with us as [international;] NGOs.” (D5, male, local NGO, July 2023)

Some participants claim that the tensions arise when the terms of contracts or collaboration clauses are not clearly understood by one of the two parties, or when contract conditions are not respected. One international NGO has experienced certain tensions with subcontracted organizations, whether international and national NGOs in the Shelter and Settlements Sector, because the number of shelters provided for in the contract was not met by the implementing partner within the agreed deadline. The partner showed in its reports that the number had been reached, but when UN agency representatives went out into the field, they found that there was an inconsistency between the reported figure and the figure in the field. This is one of the weaknesses of national organizations, which often lack follow-up in the field. One type of tension is that we work with community groups (which are forms of community-based associations), and other times, when contract closures are not well explained, we observe the same organization noted that tensions arise between the local implementing partner and community-based associations because of what the partner has mentioned in the contract. For example, the cost of the shelters differs from what the UN agency had mentioned in the standard operating procedures (SOP), but by the time the partner realized this, the activities had been completed. These groups were not prepared to understand that each zone had its own specific cost for building the shelter according to the UN agency protocol, and the partner was obliged to pay the additional costs after much tension between the two parties.

“The current partnership between [international] NGOs and [national] NGOs, for me this relationship is still characterized by a spirit of superiority and dominance instead of teamwork. The [international] NGOs always feel superior and in a position of domination over the [national] NGOs. I remember when we (NNGO) were in an intervention zone; we wanted to intervene in that zone and we tried to sit down with an [international] NGO that was also in the same zone as us to discuss and harmonize approaches, but [international] NGOs are always proud. This one didn’t even want to listen to us, and that’s their character. The [international] NGOs/UN see localization as a threat when it shouldn’t be. To work, we need to find a balance between the [international] NGOs and the UN/INGO. We have to fight for this to be effective and the [national] NGOs have to stand up and consolidate their actions in order to achieve this.” (D9, male, local NGO, July 2023)

3.2 Examples of locally led shelter and settlements response

Several national and local organizations have gained experience in humanitarian response over the course of more than 10 years of humanitarian interventions in the DRC. They have been called upon by international organizations and the United Nations to successfully implement humanitarian responses in the form of shelters and settlements. One of the interviewed local organizations has implemented a small shelter response using its own funds received through its members in Kasai province.

Three local multi-sectoral humanitarian response initiatives have successfully demonstrated localization models in shelter and settlements responses in DRC:

- ToGETHER
- Shifting the Power
- UNHCR interventions with the “Pôle de développement” approach

The three initiatives are examples of how “local” can be interpreted in different ways. Some actors consider “local initiatives” to be those that put national organizations at the center with full participation in the whole process from conception to closure of a shelter project. The ToGETHER and Shifting the Power projects are examples of this.

Others believe that successful local initiatives are those where interventions are identified and implemented by local groups. The shelters and settlement interventions carried out by UNHCR in the provinces of North and South Ubangi are examples.

The ToGETHER project

The ToGETHER project, executed from 2020 to 2023, is a multi-national program for localizing humanitarian aid. It has been implemented in eight countries around the world by a consortium of four German NGOs (Caritas Germany, Diakonie, Malteser and WHH), with 40 local humanitarian partners.

In the DRC, ToGETHER is implemented in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri by five partners (AIDES, TPO, SAD, RACOF and ADSSE). It aims to build the capacity of local humanitarian actors by focusing on prevention, coordination and advocacy, so that they become a visible part of the local humanitarian system and promote humanitarian aid in their country in accordance with its principles.¹³



Picture taken by ADSSE staff as part of the ToGETHER shelter intervention in Ituri, 2023

This project offers advocacy workshops, collective training sessions and exchanges of experience. It has integrated the coordination mechanism into innovative pilot projects designed and implemented by local partners in shelters and facilities in the three provinces. Figure 2 shows the shelters built by ADSSE in Ituri for victims of the atrocities committed by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) terrorist groups.

This project offers a number of advantages, including the opportunity for capacity building in terms of training. Each organization carries out a self-assessment, which is then translated into a capacity-building plan.

In addition, it offers an opportunity to exchange experience with partners around the world, as last year ADSSE attended the international conference in Bonn with several partners from Asia and America. That was an opportunity to communicate with its partners to continue sharing lessons during implementation.

This project provided an opportunity for local and national organizations to gain access to the national coordination mechanism through the various advocacy actions carried out by the ToGETHER project. Access to decision-making spaces in the humanitarian architecture was one of the major obstacles to the empowerment of local and national organizations. Furthermore, each partner designs its own project, receives support from the four German NGOs and implements it in the field. At the end of the process, each partner evaluates their own project and designs new ones based on the shortcomings observed, until the best projects are produced.

“These are not projects designed for implementing partners, but rather projects designed and executed by themselves. That’s the difference with the other projects we’ve already carried out. Today, we’re building shelters and facilities for the displaced and returnees whose homes were destroyed and burned by the ADF. These four German organizations had the role of coaching and putting the different countries in contact with each other to share experience and make contact with the donor”

(organization staff)

Shifting the Power project

Shifting the Power (StP) was a three-year project that was strengthening the capacity and influence of local and national humanitarian actors, and to develop a more balanced humanitarian system. It was funded by UK Aid and managed collaboratively by the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) and Start Networks.

¹³ <https://together-for-localisation.org/about-us/dr-congo/>

StP is part of the three-year Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme and has been implemented by a consortium of six international NGOs: ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Concern, Oxfam and Tearfund. The consortium was working alongside 55 local and national NGO partners in Bangladesh, the DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya and Pakistan.

StP supports local actors to take their place alongside international actors to shift power toward locally owned and led responses. It strengthens local and national organizational capacity, supports local organizations greater representation, voice and recognition in relevant networks and platforms, and influences international organizations to promote the role of local and national actors.¹⁴

StP's objectives are that local and national NGO partners in five countries, including the DRC, have the knowledge, skills, processes and policies to prepare for and respond to emergencies, and that they are better represented in relevant humanitarian platforms. The project also provides evidence of good practice in strengthening local and national NGOs' humanitarian preparedness and response work, and their role in humanitarian action.

An important aspect of the project was the networking opportunities it provided. Local and national NGOs came together to share experiences and to learn from one another. As a result, new relationships were fostered at a national level and new ways of working and examples of mutual support have been seen. For example, some partners have accessed new funding through building alliances to submit joint proposals to pooled funds. The progress made in building linkages between local and national NGOs and other humanitarian actors is likely to be transformative for the local and national NGOs going forward, both for the role they play in responding to emergencies themselves and their ability to influence emergency response work. There has been a shift in mindset among local and national NGOs—from seeing each other as competitors to seeing each other as potential collaborators. Furthermore, based on the progress already made and the benefits seen by involved stakeholders, it is likely that these linkages (for the large part) will be sustained.

StP has delivered a great number of activities, including:

- Setting up project governance structure
- Engaging local NGO staff in the Program despite severe funding limitations
- Building close working relationships with local NGO focal point
- Facilitating self-assessment using the SHAPE framework¹⁵ process with 11 local NGO partners
- Supporting the delivery of a huge number of training sessions

The emphasis on influence and voice makes StP unique, as the project aims at developing local NGO capacity and supporting local actors to engage with key decision makers to influence the current system. The project is also supporting platforms representing local and national NGOs at different humanitarian forums and has been working with Caritas Congo, CCONAT and FONADH. These organizations represent local and national NGOs in the humanitarian country team (HCT), UN Inter-Agency Steering Committees and government level. When StP had begun implementing, Caritas Congo was attending the Humanitarian Country Team meeting as more of an observer, but it is now a member of HCT with the right to participate in the decision-making process. This demonstrates how StP has helped partners to be more conscious about the active role they have to play in changing the current humanitarian architecture and have their voice heard. The StP project has not directly implemented shelter and settlement interventions, but the local and national NGOs have acquired skills and linkages that have enabled them to submit projects to existing mechanisms such as the DRC HF and have implemented shelter and settlement projects.

¹⁴ <https://startnetwork.org/learn-change/resources/library/how-has-shifting-power-influenced-local-and-national-partners-response-emergencies>

¹⁵ SHAPE framework is Humanitarian Capacity Self-assessment used to support local organisations to analyze their strengths and gaps in managing and influencing humanitarian response. This assessment is focused on three domains (Governance and Leadership, Influence and Preparedness and Response).

UNHCR interventions with the “Pôle de développement” approach

One UN participant mentioned that since 2021, UNHCR and its partners CIAUD (Comité International pour l’Aide d’Urgence et le Développement) and ADSSE (Association pour le Développement Social et la Sauvegarde de l’Environnement) have been working in the provinces of North and South Ubangi and Bas-Uélé, where they are implementing the village approach to development or the development pole. UNHCR and its partners are working to provide shelter and facilities, such as health and education infrastructure, to accommodate Central African refugees, so that they can enjoy the same conditions as their host communities.¹⁶



UNHCR is setting up transitional shelters for displaced people and host communities, where they are trying to apply an approach they call “villagization,” where refugee spaces are set up in village conditions alongside host communities. All sections of the community are involved (refugees and hosts) to ensure that they live together, whereas in the past they used to build camps far from the host communities, with restrictions and well-defined boundaries, with the presence of the police and other administrative services in the camps. Another special feature of the development pole approach is that UNHCR and its partners use local groups of artisans and community carpenters from all sections of the community. Those people are trained and supported by UNHCR and its partners, even to the point of having legal documents to establish them as legally registered local organizations under DRC regulations. They have some power over the design of the decision-making process because they know more about the context than anyone else, which is an important factor in the construction of shelters. UNHCR’s partners then contract it to design and implement the shelters in their communities, earning money and skills. This is a very successful form of purely community-based localization, because it strengthens the sustainability of actions and also contributes to the economic recovery of these community-based organizations. (stated by IO staff).

As these groups of artisans and carpenters are community-based, they manage to build shelters that are well adapted to their cultures, habits and preferences, which makes the shelters useful and usable for the beneficiaries.

UNHCR’s ultimate aim is to get these community groups to be recognized in the country and working for other humanitarian actors in the area. To date, around 690 shelters and several settlements have been built by these local groups in the Ubangi and Uele region. UNHCR combines this approach with the distribution of cash for the shelters, for example in the Nzakara¹⁷ development pole, 188 households received cash for the shelters and enabled households to build their own shelters by working with these local groups.

¹⁶ UNHCR DRC Operational update_Feb_2023

¹⁷ UNHCR DRC Operational update_May_2022

3.3 Challenges and barriers faced by shelter and settlement actors

The barriers and difficulties encountered by humanitarian actors in responding to shelter and settlement responses take several forms and vary according to the type of organization.

- **Access to information:** Many national NGOs have difficulty accessing information at the same rate as international NGOs. This limits their compete to funds at the same time with international NGOs. According to the respondent at one international NGO, international NGOs already have their headquarters or offices in the countries where donors are based in, whether in the USA, UK, EU or elsewhere. When a call for proposals is still being finalized by the donor, some international NGOs are already aware of it and are preparing their application accordingly, whereas national NGOs will be aware of the call for proposals a few days after it has been published.
- **Predictable funding:** The big challenge for the DRC is the lack of regular funding for the Shelter and Settlements Sector. S&S cluster get the impression that donors are tired of the crisis in the DRC, particularly in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. They don't want to fund any more, they say it's expensive. This has a tendency to influence even the Humanitarian Country Team committee. When we prioritize allocations, the tendency is to quickly cut back the cost of the Shelter and Settlements Sector, which is not really fair. For us, shelter is protection, and there's a link between protection and shelter, in that providing households with shelter is even more important than the other assistance we can offer them. (D4, male, international NGO, July 2023).
- **Access to funds:** Some national NGOs cannot compete directly for donor funds without going through international NGOs, and those that do have funds tend to have them for a few months or a year at most. As a result, national NGOs are unable to plan for the future because it is difficult to do good planning when there are no funds. To increase the leadership of local and national NGOs, they need access to multi-year funds and access to direct funds. (D9, female, national NGO, July 2023).
- **Capacity building:** There are national NGOs with weak management and technical capacities, while at the same time there are local NGOs that have acquired strong skills and are doing more excellent work than even international NGOs. And that's where we think international NGOs and UN agencies should follow the ToGETHER model, to enable each local and national NGO to identify its own weaknesses and put in place a clear improvement plan through which these organizations will be supported throughout implementation. That's where multi-annual projects have even more of a positive impact because it's easier to support the organization over several years than over a few months.
- **Low professionalism and lack of preparation:** "Some national NGOs demonstrate low professionalism. When they receive funding, they manage it very badly and then lose trust and disappear very quickly. This shows that they were not sufficiently prepared to access these funds. And the consequence of all this is that they even break the trust of other [national] NGOs that have the will and determination to do good work but don't have the opportunity to access these funds". (D19, male, national NGO, August 2023)

3.4 Enabling conditions and opportunities for successful localization

The current humanitarian landscape in the DRC offers certain conditions which are conducive to improving local leadership within the humanitarian response in general and the Shelter and Settlements Sector in particular. The most important of these are as follows:

1. The presence of the Start Network fund, the DRC HUB

The DRC Hub is working to build a model of a humanitarian system that is more:

- inclusive,
- independent,
- proactive,
- locally led and which shares collective responsibilities.

It brings together nearly 60 local, national, and international organizations, and it plans to include the public sector, private sector and academia. The DRC Hub strengthened its governance structure, which included preparing for its legal registration. The DRC Hub also utilized Start Network's Hub Incubation Fund to prepare proposals and applications that would strengthen its fundraising capacity. This initiative came after a constituent assembly that validated the hub's administrative and financial manual, membership protocols and statutes. This year, the DRC Hub is hosted by the international NGO, Tearfund, which is coordinating with other international, national and local organizations.

This DRC Hub accesses funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the French Development Agency. With this funding, the hub was able to develop a humanitarian innovation program, which engages communities in designing and testing new ways of addressing humanitarian challenges, and a financing program that combines local and scientific knowledge to understand risks, plan ahead and minimize the impacts of predictable disasters.

In 2021, the DRC Hub strengthened its governance structure, which included preparing for its legal registration. The DRC Hub also utilized Start Network's Hub Incubation Fund to prepare proposals and applications that would strengthen its fundraising capacity. This initiative came after a constituent assembly that validated the hub's administrative and financial manual, membership protocols and statutes.¹⁸

2. The existence of the CONAFOD forum (National Council of the Forum of Humanitarian and Development NGOs in the DRC)

“This forum is a national structure created to raise awareness and mobilize humanitarian and development actors to speed up the localization process and compliance with the commitments of the Istanbul summit. This forum acts as a coordinating structure for the Humanitarian Country Team to campaign for the interests of local NGOs in the humanitarian landscape of the DRC. The forum is carrying out a number of activities, including awareness-raising and advocacy meetings in the provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu, Tanganyika and Ituri. This forum is a response to the issues raised in the interviews, which showed that localization remains a theoretical term with no concrete action at national level. The forum plans to organize the first national summit on localization in the DRC, to be held in Bukavu from 1 to 2 October 2023, which will aim to define the pillars and specifications for monitoring localization in humanitarian and development response”. (D19, male, national NGO, August 2023.)

¹⁸ <https://startnetwork.org/network/hubs/democratic-republic-congo-hub>

3. Experience of the humanitarian presence in the DRC

The long duration of the humanitarian crisis in the DRC has encouraged the development of experience in humanitarian response for national organizations and also for national staff. Today, the DRC is one of the countries with the greatest humanitarian expertise, and one of the French-speaking countries with many expatriates in many countries around the world who can be of benefit to the country.

(D13, male, UN/IO July 2023 and D23, female, UN/IO, August 2023)

Throughout this long crisis, which has resulted in a strong presence of humanitarian assistance for 20 years, several national organizations have been cited several times as having demonstrated expertise in delivering a satisfactory humanitarian response in terms of shelters and establishments. Those organizations include ADSSE, AIDES, SOFEPADI, Caritas Congo and TPO.

“The national and local NGOs have already gained a great deal of experience with the United Nations system and international organizations. In my opinion, their withdrawal should not cause any problems, it should be gradual. [...] There are also [international] NGOs that have lasted too long in the DRC, they have already contributed too much and the whole project is talking about an exit strategy, meaning that the nationals have sufficiently prepared. Exiting should not pose too many problems, because humanitarian aid has taken time in the DRC.” (D4, male, global south international NGO, July 2023)

4. The presence of a dynamic in-country humanitarian team

“Some participants also mentioned that one of the other opportunities is the presence of such a dynamic humanitarian coordination team. They say that national and local organizations are finding that the current humanitarian architecture is conducive to localization. The coordinator takes the time to come and listen to the organizations and give them the opportunity to express themselves, which was not the case with the previous coordination team.

With this spirit of listening, the national organizations find the time to do the advocacy, and with this, certain guidelines for access to humanitarian funds have been modified by saying that national organizations that are eligible for DRC humanitarian funds (FHRDC), can subcontract other national organizations that have not yet reached the level of eligibility to allow them to reach the required level over the years, which was not the case in the past. Their presence is an opportunity, it helps to move a lot of things forward.

Today in the DRC, we have five national organizations that are members of the Humanitarian Country Team (SOFEPADI, TPO, Caritas Congo, Congo Handicap and CBS).” (UN/IO, July 2023)

“We have the presence of a humanitarian coordination team that is opening the doors to the [national] NGOs, and it is now up to the [national] NGOs to show that they are serious and to continue to gain assume and take advantage of this opportunity. With the team, even donors have been made aware of the issue, for example the German embassy, which has opened a dinner to discuss the localization issue with national organizations, and this really shows that the will is taking root.”

(D19, male, national NGO, August 2023)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations emerged from this research:

Collaborate, don't compete

- International NGOs and local NGOs are advised not to see localization as a threat or a battle to be won but for better collaboration in providing localized responses.
- It is appropriate that UN and international organizations consider a phased exit strategy as part of the process of building local leadership and not take it as a threat to their activities and try to delay localization.

Monitor progress

- Set up a country working group to monitor the integration of localization into the humanitarian response and the Shelter and Settlements Sector in particular.
- Add a section on localization to all reports produced by the humanitarian system, so that current localization efforts can be highlighted.
- Localization should not remain a mere slogan, and certain elements need to be put in place that make it possible to track the progress of localization. Already 25% of the funds go to national NGOs, but we need to reinforce this with other indicators such as:
 - Number of local and national organizations that access donor funds directly, without going through the UN or international NGOs.
 - Number of international NGOs or UN agencies that have drawn up improvement plans with the local and national NGOs they work with.
 - Number of local and national NGOs that are cluster leaders or co-leaders or that are members of social humanitarian coordination committees or the Humanitarian Country Team to understand whether local or national NGOs really access to decision have made.

These indicators should appear in reports produced by the Humanitarian Country Team so that everyone is aware of it, and in the annual newsletter and the Shelter Cluster dashboard.

There should be a working group that deals only with localization topics as well as other cross-cutting topics. Even if there are no specific activities on localization, it is important that there is this working group which will work with the other sectors to ensure that localization issues are followed up.

Earmark funding

- Set up funds that are intended only for national organizations, with eligibility criteria tailored to national and civil society organizations, to give national organizations the greatest opportunities.
- In order to ensure that local and national NGOs can access funds directly, it would be fair to set up a specific source of funding for national and local organizations. For example, the DRC Humanitarian Fund should remain specific to local and national NGOs in the same way as CERF is for UN agencies. It is difficult to let international, national and local NGOs compete on the same criteria and think that national NGOs have a chance of winning over international NGOs. Even if the process could be as credible, the NNGOs will not be able to win out over the INGOs if they are subject to the same criteria.

Engage government and civil society

- Involve and train government departments in localization, as they have a very important role to play in good local leadership, enabling them to have a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of locally localized responses.
- DRC government services should be sufficiently informed and made aware of localization, and should also involve universities and other strata of civil society, such as churches and universities, so that there are forums for reflection on the issue at different levels.

Encourage communication and exchange

- Other donors and foreign governments, as far as possible, should create spaces for exchanges with local NGOs, following the example of the German embassy, which opened a dinner to discuss the issue of localization with national organizations.
- The Humanitarian Country Team should continue this practice of giving space to local NGOs to listen to them and give them the opportunity to express themselves on the issue of the localization of the humanitarian system in the context of the DRC.
- International NGOs and UN agencies should improve their communication and collaboration with the local NGOs with which they work in the same areas by sharing information for better management of resources and time, and to reduce the pressure on communities that have to provide the same information to several players.
- Although local NGOs are rooted in the community, some that are not yet, should work on their reputation within the community through good communication and coordination with other community actors to deserve the same consideration as international NGOs in some contexts.

Address information asymmetry

The international NGOs and the UN have access to information long before it is published in the public domain, which gives them an advantage over the local NGOs. Donors should limit this practice in order to offer equal competitive opportunities to all bidders.

Acknowledge contributions

The UN, international NGOs and donors should ensure that all the partners that have contributed to the implementation of a project appear in the report. This will reduce the frustration suffered by the national NGOs when they are on the frontline delivering assistance, but their names are never mentioned in the report submitted to the donors.

5. REFERENCES

1. Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Response to the L3 Emergency in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNHCR 2018.
2. Factsheet Shelter Cluster, February 2023.
3. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Regional Refugee Response Plan, 2020-2021, UNHCR.
4. Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis Response Plan, 2022, IOM.
5. Democratic Republic of the Congo Crisis Response Plan, 2023, IOM.
6. More than Money Study, Groupe URD 2017.
7. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Humanitarian Situation Report number 12, UNICEF December 2020.
8. Humanitarian Response Plan for the Democratic of the Republic of the Congo 2023-2024, February 2023.
9. Dashboard Operational presence of shelter actors in DR Congo, Shelter and Settlement Cluster, April 2023.
10. Shelter Cluster, UNHCR July 2022.

6. ANNEXES

Annex A: Methodology

Annex B: Context analysis

Annex C: Stakeholder mapping

ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

A.1 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand what a successful locally led response looks like in the Shelter and Settlements Sector and what actions are being made to increase the participation, inclusion and decision-making role of local and national actors in humanitarian shelter and settlements response.

The specific focus of this study is to:

- Explore how different actors in the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector understand and experience localization.
- Identify critical reflections on examples of locally led shelter and settlements response and the conditions or processes that enabled them, including tensions or conflicts faced by different actors, and how they navigated those contexts.
- Identify opportunities and barriers and make recommendations for shelter and settlements stakeholders on what steps can be taken to recognize or increase local leadership.

A.2 Methods

This research used a qualitative approach, which consisted of a review of key documentation related to localization in the humanitarian response in the DRC and semi-structured interviews with some active actors in the Shelter and Settlements Sector as described below.

Documentation review

The desk review analyzed all existing and available documentation and information relevant to localization in the shelter and settlement within the humanitarian response in the DRC. The review of documents was considered a first step toward responding to the research objectives; it helped to identify possible gaps in information that had to be collected during the interviews.

Key informant interview

A total of 27 semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted among UN staff, international NGOs, national NGOs, government staff and community leaders in country provinces.

Of these, four were United Nations agencies staff, five were international organization staff, nine were national organization staff, three government services and seven were community leaders. Given that both individual and group interviews were conducted, a total of 34 individuals participated in the research.

Key informants for humanitarian actors were selected based on being an active actor in the national Shelter Cluster. Community leaders were selected if their community had received shelter assistance during this fiscal year. For government service, these were the offices with which actors in the S&S sector were often in contact.

Quatorze entretiens ont été menés en personne et 13 ont été menés à distance par le biais d'appels vidéo. Cinq étaient des entretiens de groupe et 22 des entretiens individuels. All interviews were conducted in French and then notes were translated into English.

The interviews took place from July 17 to August 9, 2023. Prior to data collection, key informants were informed about the purpose of the research, how data will be collected and were assured that any information they provide will be treated with confidentiality. Informed verbal consent was sought from all respondents prior to the start of the interviews. All interviews were recorded, and notes were taken. The interview duration ranged from 45–60 minutes.

A.3 Summary of KIIs

Code	Type of organization	Gender of interviewee(s)	Date of interview	Location of interview	Method
D1	Community leader	Male	11 July 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D2	Community leader	Male	11 July 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D3	Community leader	Female	13 July 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D4	INGO	Male	19 July 2023	Ituri	In-person
D5	L/NNGO	Male	19 July 2023	Ituri	Remote
D6	L/NNGO	Male	19 July 2023	South Kivu	Remote
D7	L/NNGO	Male	21 July 2023	South Kivu	Remote
D8	INGO	Male	21 July 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D9	L/NNGO	Female	21 July 2023	Kinshasa	Remote
D10	Community leader	Male	21 July 2023	South Kivu	In-person
D11	Community leader	Female	22 July 2023	South Kivu	In-person
D12	INGO	Male	26 July 2023	North Kivu	Remote
D13	UN/IO	Male	27 July 2023	Kinshasa	Remote
D14	L/NNGO	Female	28 July 2023	South Kivu	Remote
D15	UN/IO	Male	31 July 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D16	Government	Male	31 July 2023	Ituri	Remote
D17	INGO	Male	01 August 2023	North Kivu	Remote
D18	L/NNGO	Male	01 August 2023	Kasaï	Remote
D19	L/NNGO	Male	01 August 2023	South Kivu	Remote
D20	Community leader	Male	01 August 2023	Ituri	In-person
D21	Community leader	Male	01 August 2023	Ituri	In-person
D22	Community leader	Male	02 August 2023	Ituri	In-person
D23	UN/IO	Female	03 August 2023	North Kivu	In-person
D24	Government	Male	03 August 2023	South Kivu	Remote
D25	Government	Male	04 August 2023	South Kivu	In-person
D26	UN/IO	Male	07 August 2023	Kinshasa	Remote
D27	INGO	Male	09 August 2023	North Kivu	Remote

Table A1: Summary of KIIs

Data analysis

Some interviews were recorded using a phone and then transcribed into a Word file. Others were directly noted in a Word file during the interviews, and then reviewed to ensure the coherence and consistency of the respondents' answers. All were summarized according to the research objectives. Overall data analysis involved compiling, comparing and synthesizing the findings from the different lines of inquiry with each other (e.g., document review and KIIs) to support research objectives.

All captured data were analyzed to identify common trends, themes, relationships and patterns based on the research objectives. Content analysis was also applied to identify similarities and differences in the views and perspectives of respondents.

A.4 Research limitations

The research encountered some response bias.

It focused on self-reported information by the participants to understand their experiences and insights into the localization processes in shelter and settlements during any humanitarian response in the DRC. However, this information may be subject to response bias, with some respondents either underestimating or overestimating their opinion. The team triangulated the information gathered during the literature review and key informant interviews to mitigate these limitations.

A.5 KII questions

A. Local initiatives perception and Experiences in the shelter and settlement sector

- A1.** What do you understand by "localization" and what do you think it should entail?
- A2.** What role does your organization play in the humanitarian response in the shelter and settlement sector in the DRC?
- A3.** What are the enabling / supportive factors, and which should be further improved/developed to increase local leadership in the shelter response in the DRC humanitarian response?
- A4.** How has your organization experimented with localization in previous years in the shelter and settlement sector?
- A5.** Could you share with us some visible results of localized humanitarian responses in the shelter and settlement sector in the DRC? Does this increase or decrease?
- A6.** Can you share some examples of successful local initiatives relevant to humanitarian response in the shelter sector in the DRC? (Please provide more details)

B. DRC Result framework for localization

- B1.** What are the main lessons learned/recommendations for future DRC location plans?
- B2.** What are the main changes required and who needs to make them in the shelter sector for successful localization?
- B3.** What should be observed in the shelter sector to measure the progress of a localized response in the humanitarian context in the DRC?

C. Funding Access, Partnership and Capacity strengthening

- C1.** What are the weaknesses observed in the current partnership between national NGOs and international NGOs/UN in the humanitarian landscape of the DRC?
- C2.** What capacity building do national organizations need for successful local leadership in the shelter and settlements sector in DRC?
- C3.** What are the lessons learned in the national/international NGO partnership in the context of localization in the shelter and settlements sector in the DRC?

D. Challenges and opportunities to implement localisation

- D1.** What are the main challenges are facing as NNGO actors for better implementation localization in humanitarian response?
- D2.** What has not worked so far in the location in the shelter and settlements sector in the DRC?
- D3.** What have been the gaps and tensions, or conflict faced in the partnership between national/international NGOs in the humanitarian response in the DRC? How did your organization manage to continue operating? Please provide some examples.
- D5.** What are the things that should be done differently in the shelter sector for a localized response in the DRC?
- D6.** What are the main factors limiting the localized response in the shelter and settlement sector?
- D7.** What are the opportunities offered by the humanitarian landscape of the DRC to support the increase of local leadership?

ANNEX B: CONTEXT ANALYSIS

B.1 Overview of country situation

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has experienced armed conflict since the colonial era and a complex emergency has persisted for more than 20 years. Multiple drivers have contributed to conflict in the DRC, including:

- Chronic political instability and weak governance.
- Corruption and competition over resources and power.
- Security concerns.
- Ethnic tension.
- Economic contraction, poverty and unemployment.
- Regional instability.

In addition to the violence caused by armed groups, the DRC is a country with a history of political instability and violence.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, with violent intersecting conflicts forcing people to flee their homes and preventing their return. As reported by UNHCR, more than 5 million people are displaced within the country and more than 1 million Congolese have sought asylum, mostly within Africa. The situation is exacerbated by disease outbreaks and disasters. At the same time, the DRC hosts half a million refugees from neighboring countries, three quarters of whom live outside refugee camps and settlements.¹⁹ Many of them live in host communities and informal shelters.

The deterioration of the security context has had a considerable impact on population movements (so-called sudden, recurrent) in the country. The resurgence of the armed conflict between the FARDC and the M23, in June 2022, in the province of North Kivu, has led to the displacement of nearly 500,000 people.

As of 2023, UNHCR, as Shelter and Settlements Sector lead in the country with a key role in refugee camps, has committed itself to provide a robust operational response for the DRC situation, consisting of protection interventions and multi-sector assistance for refugees, IDPs and returnees, with a focus on long-term solutions and self-reliance. UNHCR will continue to coordinate the overall response in consultation with the government and in collaboration with partners under the Refugee Coordination Model. For the IDP response, UNHCR will play its leadership role in the Protection, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management and the Emergency Shelter Clusters.

B.2 Overview of localization efforts in the DRC

In the DRC, which has been affected by a latent conflict for many years with repeated periods of calm and crisis, local NGOs play an essential role, often with support from international aid organizations. A variety of local organizations implement programs in areas such as child protection (supporting the demobilization of child soldiers) agriculture development, the protection of women and caring for the victim of sexual violence and peace building. Humanitarian aid is part of all these activities implemented throughout the provinces of the DRC.

¹⁸ <https://reporting.unhcr.org/drcsituation#:~:text=2023%20situation%20overview&text=The%20humanitarian%20situation%20continues%20to,sought%20asylum%2C%20mostly%20within%20Africa>

The Towards Greater Effectiveness and Timeliness in Humanitarian Emergency Response (ToGETHER) project, implemented in South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri provinces by five partners (RACOF, AIDES, TPO, SAD, ADSSE). This is a multi-national humanitarian aid localization program that seeks to build the capacity of local humanitarian actors by focusing on prevention, coordination and advocacy so that they become an active part of the local humanitarian system and promote humanitarian aid in their regions in accordance with its principles. "As local as possible, as international as necessary."²⁰

The Pooled Fund for the DRC currently provides 22% of its budget directly to local NGOs, which represents a significant change since 2016, because during the period 2006-2015, it only provided 10% in this way. This change is also related to the establishment of the CERF to which UN agencies have access. This has allowed the amount of funding for these agencies from the Pooled Fund to be significantly reduced, and subsequently the amount that goes to local NGOs to be increased.

Approaches to aid localization

In this context, international organizations' approaches to localization vary a great deal, depending on their mandate and culture. Three main approaches are very common:

- **Direct operators:** Certain international humanitarian actors in the eastern Congo run programs directly with communities. They only rarely interact with local NGOs, mostly to get information about identified needs, but without subsequently including the local organization in the response. This obviously is difficult for local NGOs to accept and creates justified resentment. It raises questions about whether approaches of this kind are viable in the medium and long term. Only very clear added value in terms of expertise or capacities can justify such an approach in relation to local actors that are increasingly well trained and informed.
- **Utilitarian approach (perceived locally as an exploitative partnership):** Certain partnerships are geared toward the realization of objectives fixed by the international organization. The local organization does benefit from capacity building (either visa-specific activities, or by "learning on the job") and it is able to operate, or even to improve, via the implementation of projects. However, there is no long-term commitment, and it is similar to subcontracting.
- **Supporting the local response:** Certain international organizations consider their role to be to support local initiatives. Strategic reflection is seen as the preservation of the local organization and the international organization then provides them with support. This approach is implemented by NGOs who see their role as being to support civil society and make a long-term commitment, mainly through and multi-mandate organizations. However, the example of the partnership between Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and SOFEPADI (three years of collaboration which led to the takeover of the clinic for victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Bunia) shows that even humanitarian organizations that are specialized in emergency relief sometimes need this approach to make sure their support has a long-term effect.

Relationship between international and local organizations

While international organizations recognize the comparative advantages of local NGOs, certain weaknesses are recognized as well both by local NGOs themselves and by international organizations. The first weakness is in terms of financial management and the limited capacity to mobilize complementary funds (which are selection criteria for some projects). Another is their limited assets to allow advanced payments. These are often barriers to establishing partnerships and receiving funding. What is more, some local NGOs have governance problems because the principle of voluntary work, which is the basis of an association's activity, is a real challenge in a region where, for many people, each day is used to secure food for the next day. It is not always easy for people to give their time for free or to travel to meetings and it is often necessary to pay some compensation. In addition, a lot of local NGOs in the DRC have institutional problems in terms of financial transparency.

²⁰ <https://together-for-localisation.org/about-us/>

Even though everyone, particularly local NGOs, recognize that each project needs to be monitored and related spending needs to be clearly reported to the donor, it appears to be difficult to gain access to the consolidated accounts of organizations. Very few local NGOs are willing to share these, which does nothing to increase trust between partners.

On the other hand, the advantages of working with local NGOs include the lower operational costs, and their access (physical, cultural and to information and knowledge of the context, given that certain regions are only accessible to local NGOs). These factors allow programs to be accepted/appropriated by communities. Operations agility and rapidity are also recognized, but it is long-term presence which helps to make programs durable and allow international organizations to adopt exit strategies, which are seen by all as an indisputable added value.

However, each organization should be considered individually, and generalizations should be avoided. Indeed, though local NGOs recognize that some of them have difficulties, they also point out that many international NGOs have the same problem and are assessed with a higher risk than certain local NGOs during the micro evaluations to assess eligibility to the Pooled Fund.

All local NGOs recognize the positive input and constructive interactions that have allowed them to develop. At the same time, they sometimes feel exploited, as they are used to providing information and raising the alert but are then ignored during the response. Access to funding remains difficult and some find that being made to compete with international NGOs is unfair.

In this context, partnerships between international and local organizations that are solely based on projects encounter a great number of limitations. Sometimes only operational costs are covered, but not support or management fees, which would allow local organizations to structure themselves. What is more, these partnerships do not provide local NGOs with long-term visibility or financial security. Some are put up for competitive tendering each year, which can lead to opportunistic and strategic behavior on the part of local NGOs. It is important to note that the majority of partnerships are purely operational: the local organization implements a part of a program based on a strategy developed by the international organization, which does not allow the partner to build its own strategy.

For all those reasons, local NGOs harbor mixed feelings toward international organizations. The quality of their relations depends on the behavior and the approach of the international actor (their practices and their view of partnerships), but also those of the national organizations, its maturity and its independence, both in terms of finances and outlook.

B.3 Shelter and Settlements Sector response

UNHCR as Shelter Cluster Lead is working in collaboration with its co-lead UNICEF and with the IMS support from REACH initiative, and government and humanitarian actors at national and provincial levels. They provide assistance to affected people through emergency, transitional and sustainable shelter response.

The structure of the strategy defines shelter response phases, shelter response scenarios, activity packages and costs, 10 shelter intervention principles and strategic priorities. Three phases of shelter response:

1. Emergency response through on-site emergency shelter construction delivered within 30-90 days.
2. Transitional response (transitional host family shelter and transitional collective shelter) to be implemented as soon as possible.
3. Durable solution through local construction for returnee households to support the nexus.²¹

²¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/strat-gie-du-cluster-abris-2021>

The DRC Shelter Cluster specifies five shelter response scenarios: host family response, urban IDPs, returnees, IDPs in collective centers or sites, and host community response. The support available to those groups in the three shelter response phases is summarized in Table B1.

Status of affected people	Emergency response	Transitional response	Durable solution “nexus”
IDPs in host family	Light shelter kits or Cash 1-month shelter kits	Light shelter kits or Cash 1 month. Rent support 1 month	Relocation Integration Return
IDPs in urban situation	Rent support 1 month	Light shelter kits construction Emergency shelters	Local construction and rehabilitation
Returnees		Transitional shelters with local construction or upgrading,	Local construction or rehabilitation
IDPs in collective centers or sites	Light shelter kits construction Emergency shelters	Rent support 6-12 months depending on return context (exit strategy)	Relocation Integration Local construction rehabilitation
Host community response		Return support multi-sectoral response. Renewal of emergency kits transitional solution Upgrading	

Table B1: Different support is available for different groups

Context-specific shelter operations in displacement sites and host communities are essential to support minimum standards of dignified and safe living conditions, minimize health-related risks, and reduce protection risks, including gender-based violence. organizations, as well as UN agencies, continue to assess shelter needs in displacement sites, especially in new spontaneous sites and in host communities, where the most vulnerable IDPs reside.

The beneficiary needs are targeted and emergency shelter and NFI kits are provided through various modalities., including in-kind and/or cash-based assistance. An inclusive approach focused on engaging beneficiaries to ensure context-specific shelter solutions is implemented all along.

Site planning/layout or site restructuring to ensure safe and dignified shelter solutions are put in place. These provide targeted populations with shelter construction materials or cash assistance for shelter while ensuring that materials used are adapted to the local context, aligned with the Shelter Cluster guidelines, and meet specifications for safe construction. Despite these activities being geared at supporting shelter and settlement initiatives, it is important to note that engagement and active participation of the targeted populations is critical for sustainability of these initiatives.

Provision of durable solutions to IDPs and conflict-affected communities in the DRC are envisaged through immediate and longer-term support. This is in line with relevant frameworks on displacement and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach.

Refugees in urban areas do not currently receive shelter support as such, as housing is available in the rental market, however some assistance is provided on an ad hoc basis to avoid protection risks in periods of economic shortage. According to the HRP 2023-2024 plan, more than 397,100 displaced people and 1.1M conflict-affected returnees in the DRC are in need of housing, land and property. They are distributed among host families, spontaneous sites and host communities.²²

Challenges facing shelter actors

Despite the persistence of needs, funding capacities remain weak. According to financial data from the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), \$27 million was invested/raised for the shelter response in 2022, representing only 30%

²² Humanitarian Response Plan for the Democratic of the Republic of the Congo 2023-2024, February 2023, page 31

of the budget required in the 2022 HRP. Another difficulty, according to the FTS, was to identify the funding invested/raised in the Household Essential Assets response, according to the lead of S&S cluster. Indeed, most Household Essential Assets responses are provided through multi-sectoral projects. This could justify the difficulty of identifying the exact budgets in the FTS. To try to overcome this difficulty, the Household Essential Assets working group had to contact its 29 operational actors bilaterally in order to know the budgets allocated to the Household Essential Assets sector in their subsidies. Furthermore, the identification of the exact budgets for each of the sectors should be facilitated by the assistance of the various actors and donors, who have control over the subsidies received or granted.

According to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), \$3,3 million people are in need of shelter assistance in 2023, but only 935,000 have been targeted by the assistance with the requested budget of \$84.4 million with 17 operational partners.²³

For the Shelter and Settlements Sector, approximately 446,475 people—or 85,667 households— were assisted up to February 2023.²⁴ The most affected provinces are Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika, Kasai and Kasai-Central.²⁵

The following points show the distribution of the portions and approaches used within the shelter and settlement cluster:

- 44% of displaced households were assisted through an emergency response and 52% with a transitional response.
- 69% of responses in shelters integrated environmental protection.
- 85% of WASH packages (latrines, showers, etc.) as well as 62% of responses integrated the LTP package (“logement, terrain et propriété” or, in English, housing, land and property), with the aim of limiting any risk of eviction against assisted households.
- 18 partners intervened in shelter.
- 73% of the interventions took place within the framework of the rapid response.
- Regarding the emergency response, 74% of households benefited from emergency shelters (three tarpaulins) while 10% received light shelter kits consisting of two tarpaulins).

The constraints and operational challenges result in, among other things, in an increase in needs or gaps. This is due to:

- The amplification of conflicts
- Lack of adequate funding
- The existence of markets with low absorptive capacity at the local level
- The problem of physical and secure access.

Most partners were forced to obtain supplies from regional or international markets for the acquisition of most of the items intended for assistance due to the low absorption capacity of local markets. The problem of market absorption also had an impact on the deployment of the response through cash.

Physical access, limited by the advanced state of disrepair of roads or road infrastructure, prevented the deployment of the response in certain areas. Added to this is the limited number of air transport companies, which do not allow access to landlocked areas.

²³ Humanitarian Response Plan for the Democratic of the Republic of the Congo 2023-2024, February 2023.

²⁴ Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Refugee Response Plan January 2019-December 2020, UNHCR

²⁵ https://sheltercluster.s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/20230503_Cluster%20abris_Dashboard_T1_2023.pdf?VersionId=e8gYux823pnQqRtueX_wG2BK9z0tJBxU

ANNEX C: STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

The DRC has a lot of actors in the humanitarian sector working together to alleviate the suffering of refugees, IDP and host communities throughout the country. They include UN agencies, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, NGOs (such as Humanitarian Coalition member agencies), local government institutions and donor agencies. Key actors include the government, the UN and other international organizations, as well as national and international NGOs and donors. The full list of humanitarian actors in the DRC can be found [here](#).

Local networks and local NGOs

The network of local NGOs is quite developed in the DRC, especially in North and South Kivu. The majority of organizations are relatively young, having been created in the upheaval of the last 15 years in eastern DRC. Few older organizations were created during the 1990s, in the absence of the state, to provide basic services. Subsequently, they also responded to humanitarian crises as the need for basic services persisted.²⁶

The personal histories of the people who have created these organizations are often bound up with the violence in the region. Some were themselves victims of the violence before becoming involved in the aid sector. Some associations have developed an international reputation for remarkable work, such as Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI) and manage funds for other local NGOs. Others were created in the region and grew (eg. Association Locale pour le Développement Intégral or ALDI) and are now present throughout the DRC, while others are still only in their early stages of development.

Humanitarian coordination mechanisms are often very complex and resource-heavy, and national and local actors often find it difficult to find their place within them. Meetings held in a foreign language, information generally transferred by internet, lack of the means of transport and time constraints make it difficult for them to take part.²⁷

The DRC government

Generally speaking, the government involvement is limited to technical support to NGOs operating in the various development and humanitarian sectors in the country at different levels. This collaboration is more focused on their interests than on facilitation and regulation as a government technical service.

As international NGOs have more resources than national NGOs, they attract more attention from government departments at national and provincial level. Whereas at the local level, engagement is closer between national NGOs and local government services because they live in the same communities with sociological links.

As for state representatives at the territorial level, they are responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response locally and assessing and communicating needs (population displacement or health needs) to aid organizations. They are responsible for passing on information about needs to their managers as well as monitoring the assistance and protection activities of humanitarian organizations.

At the provincial level, social affairs division technical government services participate in the Shelter Cluster. At the same time, the other services seem to have little involvement in the coordination of assistance from the shelter and establishment. Those who do take part in these bodies do not always interact with the departments that interact with the humanitarian workers on the ground, which makes it difficult to work together. For example, a humanitarian actor's project may have been validated and discussed at national level with a ministry in

²⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/aid-localisation-ituri-democratic-republic-congo>

²⁷ De Geoffroy, V. and Grunewald, F. (2017). "More than money: Localisation in Practice", Final Report, Groupe URD and Trocaire, p.20.

Kinshasa, but the technical division at provincial level is not aware of this, and even less so with the department in the territory where the activities are carried out. This often makes life difficult for humanitarian actors, and government departments become more of a hassle than a support.²⁸ Some regions occupied by armed groups simply have no state representation to coordinate a humanitarian response.

Moreover, experience of humanitarian aid in the field has shown that certain representatives of the state sometimes try to control humanitarian aid and divert assistance intended for the population. Negative experiences in the past—where funds channeled through local authorities or the government never reach the beneficiary community in their entirety—are still present in the collective memory of the aid sector, which does not help to build trust.²⁹

Thus, the relations between the government, its local representatives and aid organizations are sometimes tense, or even conflictual. The authorities are both the target of advocacy and partners for the implementation of aid. This dual position is not always easy, particularly in a context where access to resources is difficult and international aid is a major economic sector but is not fully controlled by the authorities.

International organizations

International organizations play a key role in implementing shelter and settlement interventions. Although they remain the main recipients of funding compared with local organizations, they play a key role in building the capacity of local organizations, while other NGOs work directly in the field themselves. Many actors receive funding from their traditional donors or countries of origin, while others compete in the same way as United Nations agencies or national organizations.

Some use both approaches, implementing interventions directly on the ground, and subcontracting or collaborating with national and local organizations. Others are never in contact with the field, use local or national NGOs for implementation and remain at the strategic level, through activities such as contact with the donor, capacity building, supervision and coaching.

United Nations agencies

OCHA is at the interface between the humanitarian community, the governor and the different state services, including the army. In certain contexts, in the DRC, other UN agencies (such as the UNHCR) provide funds to the government's Commission Nationale pour les Réfugiés (CNR or in English, National Commission of Refugees) to allow them to support refugees in country into the affected areas and fulfill their role. UNICEF has tried to include the Ministry of Health in the response to cholera but recognizes that the humanitarian response is mainly being implemented by international and local NGOs.

The different UN agencies have a similar approach to partnerships with local NGOs. They recognize that they are now able to benefit from the long-term investment by certain international NGOs, which has reinforced local NGOs and means they can now subcontract part of their operations.

In the Province of Ituri for example, out of seven partners:

- Two of the World Food Program's partners are local.
- UNHCR works with a local partner, three international NGOs and the CNR.
- UNICEF has several local partners for a variety of programs, such the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), WASH, sexual and gender-based violence, and protection programs.

However, the content of this partnership with local organizations is more akin to subcontracting, with calls for proposals for pre-designed projects with no support other than monitoring and evaluation.

The main justification for this subcontracting approach is to reduce costs in the context of limited resources, as local organizations have lower costs than international NGOs. Indeed, UN agencies issue periodic calls for proposals, pitting their implementing partners against each other, including internationals and locals.

²⁸ Researcher field experience in the country

²⁹ <https://www.urd.org/en/review-hem/aid-localisation-in-ituri-democratic-republic-of-congo/>



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE