

RESULTS SUMMARY

Locally Led Response in Hard-to-Reach Areas of Ukraine

Author: Danish Refugee Council (2024)

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PROJECT	Title:	Strengthened Partnerships for an Increasingly Locally Led Response in Hard-to-Reach Areas of Ukraine
	Partners:	Lampa; Pomogaem; Angels of Salvation
	Country:	Ukraine
	Period:	October 2023 – September 2024

CHANGE	<p>The 2023 Danida SPA top-up project marked a key shift in DRC Ukraine's operations, from direct implementation to enabling local partners to lead basic needs assistance, including non-food items (NFIs) and cash support. Leveraging partners' proven capacity, DRC adopted a support role, aligning with a broader strategy to foster local leadership and sustainability. For civil society partners under the project, this transition enabled deeper collaboration, joint planning, and fully partner-led case management. The project also supported tailored capacity development and enabled improved access to flexible, predictable funding, allowing partners to strengthen systems and deliver more resilient, community-rooted responses.</p>
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CONTEXT	<p>Since February 2022, ongoing conflict and displacement have created widespread humanitarian needs, particularly in front-line and hard-to-reach areas. As of late 2024, nearly 6.8 million Ukrainians have fled the country, while 3.6 million remain internally displaced with limited prospects for return. Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a critical role in the response, often reaching areas inaccessible to international actors. However, many face challenges such as limited funding, unequal partnerships, and capacity gaps. In response, DRC has shifted from short-term sub-granting to long-term strategic partnerships with CSOs, focusing on joint planning, sustainable funding access, and capacity development.</p>
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CONTRIBUTION	<p>DRC supported tailored capacity development for three CSOs, enhancing their skills, knowledge, and access to funding. Safety training, also called Hazardous Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) provided by DRC enabled safer, more efficient operations in conflict-affected areas. The strategic nature of the partnerships also opened doors to new donors. The CSOs, in turn, contributed to scaling DRC's strategic partnership model. Due to high demand, DRC is now offering HEAT to other CSOs. Lessons from the transition phase helped refine DRC's approach, making partnerships more responsive and impactful. Ultimately, these efforts support more sustainable, locally-led assistance for People of Concern.</p>
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IMAGES	 <p><i>DRC's partner, Angels of Salvation, delivering NFIs.</i></p>	 <p><i>DRC's partner, Angels of Salvation, delivering NFIs.</i></p>
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

The project, jointly designed with the three partner CSOs, prioritized hard-to-reach and frontline locations where partners had identified high needs and had existing operational capacity. DRC's partner CSOs provided cash assistance and NFIs to the selected conflict-affected populations, complementing DRC's direct implementation in life-saving protection. Alongside implementation of activities, several steps, partnership approaches, and lessons learned (see respective section) contributed positively to the development of strategic partnerships between DRC and the CSO partners. The collaborative design process allowed partners to select target locations based on their access and experience, while DRC ensured alignment with standards and complementarity with its programming. DRC also provided partners with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), HEAT, and ongoing technical support in areas such as supply chain, MEAL, communications, and emergency response, strengthening both implementation quality and safety of staff during and beyond the project implementation period.

LESSONS

DRC gained valuable insights from the transition phase towards strategic partnerships with the three CSO-partners under the Danida SPA project, which has informed the current strategic partnership approach applied by the country office: 1) DRC increased focus and support for CSOs and revised its capacity development model to include staff dedicated to CSO partner support. 2) The positive feedback and unexpected popularity of the PPE provision and HEAT led DRC to integrate safety training as a common component across subsequent partnerships. 3) The project was designed with a relatively short implementation period which limited the ability for joint planning between DRC and partners. DRC has therefore adapted its processes, allowing more time for joint design.

EVIDENCE

The project significantly contributed to strengthening the operational and financial capacity of the three Ukrainian CSO partners. Following the establishment of strategic partnerships, DRC substantially increased the funding sub-granted to the partners from a combined total of approximately 261,000 USD prior to the project, to over 2 million USD by the end of 2024. This growth was facilitated by DRC's support in co-designing collective objectives and approaching additional donors, including Danida and others within DRC's network, which improved partners' access to more predictable and flexible funding. In parallel, DRC's provision of PPE and HEAT enabled partners to operate more safely and effectively in high-risk areas. The popularity of these trainings led to their integration into DRC's broader strategic partnership model, with additional CSOs requesting similar support.

DOMAINS

Development strategy priorities:

Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

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Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights

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Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights

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Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights

X

Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability

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Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work

X