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DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO REAL-TIME REVIEW



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The study was conducted between June and July 2025 by Farsight Global research team: Ghina Ghanem, Zach Goodwin, Aurélie Ferreira, Alain Kambale Maboko, and Floribert Mubalama, with the support of Paul Clewett, Kashish Suvarna, Gerardo Molina, and Fanny Porot. The research was supervised and reviewed by the DEMAC team: Monika Grinschgl and Adrien Bory.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background & Methods

In January 2025, the M23 militia seized control of Goma, escalating a long-standing conflict in Eastern DRC. By June 2025, there were more than 3.8 million internally displaced persons in North and South Kivu, exacerbating one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises. While a July 2025 US/Qatar-brokered ceasefire may offer respite, humanitarian aid has shrunk, with US funding cuts contributing to massive shortfalls in emergency funding.

In contrast, diaspora support is growing. Remittances exceeded \$3bn in 2023¹, providing a lifeline for families across health, education, food security, and local enterprise. Yet, diaspora engagement is still under-researched and unregulated, with a national policy on diaspora participation stalled and little known about their activities.

This Real-Time Review (RTR) explores diaspora contributions to humanitarian efforts in North and South Kivu between January and July 2025. A key aim was to understand what steps institutional actors might take to strengthen their impact. Over a two-month period, researchers:

- Mapped 53 diaspora organizations (DOs) using multilingual open-source tools.
- Conducted a short survey collecting quantitative data from 13 DOs.
- Conducted interviews with 47 key informants from 29 entities, including DOs, Congolese CSOs, international NGOs, international organizations, and government.

Most of the diaspora organizations consulted were created after 2005 and are registered in Europe, North America, or East Africa. Of the 53 identified, 34 currently operate in the Kivus – some in urban centers like Goma and Bukavu, others in rural areas such as Kalehe, Minova, and Idjwi.

¹% Personal Remittances Received. World Bank. Data from 2023. Accessed 4th August 2025. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT>

Key Findings

Registration and Presence in DR Congo

Registration practices among Congolese DOs took one of three forms: a local office or branch of a formal organization; a separate legal entity with the same name as the ‘parent’ DO; or a separate legal entity with a different name, thereby obscuring the link with the diaspora organization. Four DOs registered local CSOs under different names, as several informants were unwilling to reveal work with the diaspora for fear of targeting.

Diaspora actors face legal ambiguity in DR Congo, as they are neither fully recognized as political nor humanitarian stakeholders. In host countries, they struggle to access donor funding and are often excluded from formal partnerships due to their informal status and lack of humanitarian credentials.

Collaboration with Local CSOs and Government

Health, education, emergency relief, and advocacy were the most frequent areas of intervention. DOs often worked through informal local networks, delivering school kits, hygiene items, medical supplies, or organizing mobile clinics. Some initiatives are autonomous, while others rely on local CSOs. A small number engage in multi-actor partnerships, but all lack access to formal coordination platforms such as the cluster system. Though in the minority, there were three examples of formal MoU-based collaboration with local government health projects.

Fundraising

Funding is primarily crowdsourced. DOs raise money through digital campaigns, religious groups, or diaspora community events. Most use mobile money platforms to transfer funds, as a workaround to the banking system closure. This model enables direct engagement with beneficiaries, speed, and flexibility, but also presents risks around transparency, security, and sustainability.

Strengths and Limitations of the Diaspora Model

Diaspora engagement is driven by trust, proximity, and urgency. Because of their informality, DOs can bypass institutional bureaucracies to react more quickly to emerging needs. And because many staff and volunteers are from affected communities, participants felt that DOs responded better to community needs.

Yet diaspora-led support remains informal and difficult to scale. Communication relies heavily on WhatsApp, social media, and peer-to-peer referrals. Monitoring and evaluation practices are limited, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of interventions. Few organizations maintain structured project pipelines. Engagement with Congolese authorities is often limited or cautiously navigated, particularly in regions affected by conflict or under the influence of armed groups. In such contexts, both diaspora and local actors may exercise discretion to avoid drawing attention that could lead to misunderstandings or unintended consequences.

Recommendations

For Diaspora Organizations

1. **Strategic investment over reactive aid.** Shift from reactive aid to long-term, strategic investment, such as health systems, training, or infrastructure.
2. **Systemize M&E and needs assessments.** Use flexible, participatory methods to build trust, but also develop structured monitoring and needs assessment systems.
3. **To amplify impact, collaborate with umbrella organizations** that can connect fragmented diaspora initiatives with formal humanitarian coordination structures.
4. **Form or join collective diaspora platforms to boost trust, visibility, and influence** with both local and international actors. Such networks enable unified advocacy, pooled funding, and coordinated participation in humanitarian clusters or policy spaces.
5. **Share success stories.** Promote examples of effective diaspora-local partnerships that show long-term planning and community-aligned impact. These stories help build credibility and inspire replication.

For local Civil Society Organizations

1. **Encourage diaspora actors to invest** in long-term partnerships with local organizations and propose formal co-design processes with DOs during project ideation.
2. **Channel diaspora support into capacity development for local M&E**, administrative compliance, and resilience-building.
3. **Organize and participate in CSO networks or consortia** (at provincial or sectoral levels) to engage diaspora actors in a unified voice.
4. **Share Success Stories.** Showcase strong diaspora-local partnerships to build trust and encourage replication.

For local authorities

1. **Build local government understanding of DOs.** Encourage dialogue and appoint Diaspora Focal Points within local government to foster trust and identify shared priorities.
2. **Coordinate government and diaspora services.** In stable areas, sign formal agreements with DOs, particularly in health and education, to align their work with local service planning. Facilitate diaspora investment in mutual aid groups at the cadre de bloc level, while including safeguards against power imbalances and dependency.
3. **Streamline Humanitarian Shipments.** Work with DOs to navigate import regulations, improve documentation, and reduce administrative barriers for humanitarian goods.
4. **Recognize diaspora-led CSOs.** Create an administrative category for diaspora-linked CSOs that allows for favorable tax treatment and access to humanitarian import systems.
5. **Elevate local lessons nationally.** Leverage provincial experiences to inform national policy reform, including revisiting diaspora legislation and citizenship laws.

For institutional humanitarian actors

1. **Map DO activity safely.** Capture sensitive data using secure platforms, confidential surveys, and participatory approaches, especially in conflict zones where public exposure may be risky.
 2. **Provide diaspora actors with clear guidance on how to engage.** This applies to the UN cluster systems, ensuring shared expectations and attention to anonymity and security.
 3. **Create diaspora-friendly funding models.** Design funding mechanisms with flexible reporting and compliance suited to the capacity of diaspora organizations.
 4. **Support a multi-ministerial task force to operationalize the 2016 draft diaspora policy,** using RTR findings to argue for structured diaspora engagement.
 5. **Build results and financial reporting capacity.** Invest in diaspora training on M&E and accountability and support coordination via workshops and digital platforms.
 6. **Enable joint programming with local CSOs.** Promote co-designed responses by funding joint initiatives and providing light technical support that reinforces local leadership.
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DEMAC is a global initiative of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) aiming at enhancing mutual knowledge and coordination, communication and coherence between diaspora humanitarian actors and the institutional humanitarian system.

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