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DIASPORA EMERGENCY ACTION & COORDINATION

DRC DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

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

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organization
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination
DO	Diaspora organization
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IO	International organization
KI	Key informant
KII	Key informant interview
Kivus	Collective term referring to North and South Kivu together
M23	March 23 Movement
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
RTR	Real-time Review
SGBV	Sexual- and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2025, the Rwandan-backed March 23 Movement (M23) militia captured Goma — the capital of North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) — in an escalation of multiple intersecting conflicts that have gripped the country's east since 1996.[1]

The surge in fighting between M23, the government, and other non-state armed groups in the lead-up to Goma's capture displaced 658,000 people between October 2024 and January 2025.[2] In North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, this has brought humanitarian needs to critical proportions, with the imminent collapse of the health system, severe restrictions on access and repeated attacks on aid convoys and infrastructure, and high protection and disease risks in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and informal settlements.[3] [4] In these two provinces, as of June 2025, more than 3.8 million remained internally displaced, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[5]

[1] Council on Foreign Relations (2025, June 9). Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violence-democratic-republic-congo

[2] UNICEF (2025, January 24). Democratic Republic of the Congo: Humanitarian flash report. https://www.unicef.org/media/167151/file/DRC-Humanitarian-Flash-Report-24-January-2025.pdf

[3] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2025, February 17). Democratic Republic of the Congo: One too many humanitarian crises in North and South Kivu. https://www.ifrc.org/press-release/democratic-republic-congo-one-too-many-humanitarian-crises-north-and-south-kivu

[4] Associated Press (2025, June 26). UN aid chief warns of worsening humanitarian crisis in rebel-held eastern Congo. https://apnews.com/article/congo-united-nations-humanitarian-displaced-people-7c68ea08ef5e6059d56dad4208021378

[5] UNHCR (2025, June 16). Eastern DRC Internal Displacement Overview. https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Eastern%20DRC%20Displacement%20Overview%20%5BCORE%5D%20-%2016%20June%202025.pdf

United States (US) and Qatari-brokered peace talks between the DR Congo, Rwanda, and the M23, culminating in a ceasefire deal in mid-July 2025, suggest potential for a cessation of hostilities.[6] However, significant work remains to address the needs of the population, and analysts have warned that the peace deal predominantly enables the US to extract minerals from the region, doing little to address root causes such as land disputes, historical grievances, and inter-state power struggles.[7]

At the same time, local relief funding appears increasingly fragile. Given the history of protracted conflict in the two provinces, the city of Goma has long been a major "NGOpole," hosting nearly 100 international humanitarian and development organizations, with mixed effects on the local economy and urban fabric.[8]

In 2024, the United Nations (UN) funding appeal for the DR Congo raised $1.3 billion of its $2.5 billion target — though 70% of that total came from the US, which, under the second Trump administration, has cancelled nearly all foreign aid programs, including in the DR Congo.[9] This retrenchment raises serious concerns for the sustainability of institutionally-funded relief projects across the country.[10]

Meanwhile, the extensive Congolese diaspora — predominantly residing in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and East Africa — sends home an annual remittance stream that outpaces institutional humanitarian funding. According to the World Bank, in 2023, the more than two million Congolese living abroad remitted $3.3 billion.[11]

[6] BBC News (2025, July 19). Hope for peace as DR Congo and M23 rebels sign deal in Qatar. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0q8xwl0x9no

[7] Center for Strategic and International Studies (2025, June 27). Critical Minerals, Fragile Peace: The DRC-Rwanda Deal and the Cost of Ignoring Root Causes. https://www.csis.org/analysis/critical-minerals-fragile-peace-drc-rwanda-deal-and-cost-ignoring-root-causes

8 OpenDemocracy (2013, March 21). The humanitarian industry and urban change in Goma. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/humanitarian-industry-and-urban-change-in-goma/#:~:text=Share%20this,affected%20zones%20around%20the%20city.

9 United Nations (2025, February 11). Humanitarians uphold commitment to support civilians in eastern DR Congo. https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1160031.

[10] Physicians for Human Rights (2025, July 24). Abandoned in Crisis: The Impact of U.S. Global Health Funding Cuts in Democratic Republic of the Congo. https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/abandoned-crisis-impact-us-global-health-funding-cuts-democratic-republic-congo.

[11] World Bank (n.d.). Personal remittances, received (current US$) - Congo, Dem. Rep. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=CD

Across contexts, diaspora remittances constitute major lifelines for household self-reliance, supporting children to go to school, promoting access to health services, ensuring basic food security, and sparking entrepreneurship.[12]

The DR Congo government has attempted to leverage this diaspora attention, establishing a Vice-Ministry for Congolese Nationals Abroad within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006.[13] Yet, regulatory progress has been slow. As of 2024, diaspora engagement in the DRC remains without a clear legal framework, as the 2016 draft Diaspora Mobilization Policy remains unendorsed, limiting participation and creating uncertainty around investment, dual citizenship, and political rights.[14] Despite support from the EU-funded MIEUX programme and inclusion of concrete proposals — such as land access, financial incentives for investment, and skills transfer mechanisms — the policy has stalled due to political tensions and institutional fragmentation.

As such, the eastern DR Congo remains one of the world's greatest humanitarian crises despite a high concentration of responding actors and funding flows. Recognizing the imperative to harmonize these streams of action for greater impact, this RTR aimed to investigate humanitarian efforts led by Congolese diaspora actors in North and South Kivu, specifically in the period since January 2025, elaborating on their connection to broader systemic relief efforts.

[12] Danish Refugee Council (n.d.). Diaspora Support to Self-reliance and Resilience. https://drc.ngo/what-we-do/civil-society-engagement/diaspora-programme/global/diaspora-support-to-self-reliance-and-resilience/

[13] EUDiF (2024). Diaspora engagement mapping: Democratic Republic of the Congo. https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CF_DRC-v.1.pdf

[14] Ibid.

The review had five key objectives:

1. Map and analyze diaspora actors: Who are the key Congolese diaspora organizations engaged in North and South Kivu, where are they based, how do they mobilize assistance, and how do they interact with local civil society and government?

2. Evaluate diaspora-led humanitarian responses: What is the scope, impact, and sustainability of diaspora interventions, and which approaches or partnerships have proven most effective?

3. Assess coordination and collaboration mechanisms: How do diaspora organizations coordinate with local CSOs, authorities, and INGOs, and what can be done to improve synergy and information-sharing?

4. Identify key challenges and barriers: What legal, financial, logistical, and political obstacles hinder diaspora engagement, and how can these be addressed?

5. Develop actionable recommendations: What practical, evidence-based steps can better support and scale diaspora contributions to locally led humanitarian efforts?


START
START
START
START

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this RTR was three-step.

1. The first step was to conduct open-source mapping of diaspora organizations (DOs) with relevant ties to North and/or South Kivu. Keyhole[15] was used to track relevant keywords and hashtags, such as #CongoIsBleeding and #BanaCongo, popular for mobilizing diaspora actors in digital spaces. This was complemented by manual searches on popular platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, using keywords in English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. The mapping recorded 53 relevant DOs.
2. The second step was to substantiate the mapping with targeted outreach. A simple project presentation document was developed to facilitate outreach to contacts and introduce the study. In parallel, a light-touch survey was developed to fill gaps by encouraging organizations to submit additional quantitative data on organizational structure, geographic reach, sectoral focus, and diaspora linkages. This survey captured additional data from 13 organizations.
3. The third step was to target representatives of a subset of DOs, local CSOs, local authorities, and institutional humanitarian actors for key informant interviews (KIIs). Informants were identified through snowball sampling and via DRC and DEMAC networks.

[15] https://keyhole.co/

Figure 1: Forty-seven (47) individuals represented in 29 organizations in interviews.

The final KII sample represented 29 entities: ten DOs (six in the US, two in France, one in Germany, one in Australia), 13 local CSOs based in North and South Kivu, two international organizations (IOs) and two INGOs, one local government official, and one informant who heads both a US-based DO and a local CSO.[16]

Within this sample, there were two other cases of a DO being linked to a local CSO — in one case, under the same name with connected leadership, and in the second, under different names with connected leadership. However, representatives at the local level and diaspora level were interviewed separately and are counted separately.

[16] A greater proportion of European DOs were non-responsive to interview requests, skewing the sample toward US-based DOs. Of informal DOs, a higher proportion were based in Europe, with fewer structured or full-time staff members presenting a possible explanation for non-responsiveness.

Limitations

Challenges were encountered at both the mapping and KII sampling stages.

Congolese DOs were found to have smaller or less public digital footprints than other groups studied by DEMAC. Congolese DOs were aware of heightened suspicion around foreign funding – from both government and armed opposition groups – and feared that their local staff or program participants might be targeted by armed actors. Some DOs therefore only publicized work related to refugee integration or host-country issues, with interviews therefore necessary to understand their humanitarian work.

A similar reticence challenged interviews. Significant political and security developments in North and South Kivu took place during the research period, namely the peace talk process and shifts in territorial control as M23 and the government jockeyed for better negotiating positions.[17] As a result, many potential local informants fled the country, moved physical locations at short notice, or refused to meet in-person. We mitigated this challenge by pivoting to digital interviews when necessary and relying on snowball sampling and team networks to build trust with potential informants.

Separately, some INGOs were unresponsive to contact attempts, or declined to interview, usually because they felt they could not add specifically to the topic.

[17] Critical Threats (2025, July 9). Congo War Security Review: July 09, 2025. https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/congo-war-security-review/congo-war-security-review-july-9-2025

3. MAPPING OF DIASPORA ACTORS

3.1 Actor Mapping Results

Through open-source research, networks, and targeted follow-up, the mapping exercise recorded 53 DOs, with locations outlined in Figure 2.

The recorded DOs ranged in year of founding from 1991 (one) to 2025 (two) (Figure 3). However, most were founded in the last 20 years.[18]

Most (32) mapped DOs were formally constituted as non-governmental organizations.[19] Eleven (11) DOs were mapped as informal groups, representing platforms, forums, or digital spaces bringing together diaspora individuals or a coalition of DOs.

One organization, in France, explicitly listed itself as a wholly volunteer enterprise. However, it was less certain how many DOs, registered or otherwise, functioned with paid versus volunteer labor. Past DEMAC studies on diaspora engagement suggest many are volunteer-led even if they don't explicitly say so online.[20]

[18] 77% of known founding dates fall between 2005 and 2021, with 2014 representing the median year of founding and 2016 representing the most frequent year of founding (four). However, founding dates were not identified for 18 organisations in the data set, which might have significantly altered measures of central tendency.

[19] In the US, this most frequently meant 501(c)(3) non-profit foundations, while in France and Belgium, this corresponded to association loi de 1901 status or association sans but lucratif (ASBL) status, respectively.

[20] DEMAC (2022). Diaspora Organizations and Their Humanitarian Response in Ukraine 2022. https://demac.euwest01.umbraco.io/media/budmky4a/demac_ukraine_2022-singlepage.pdf

Figure 2: Locations of mapped Diaspora Organizations

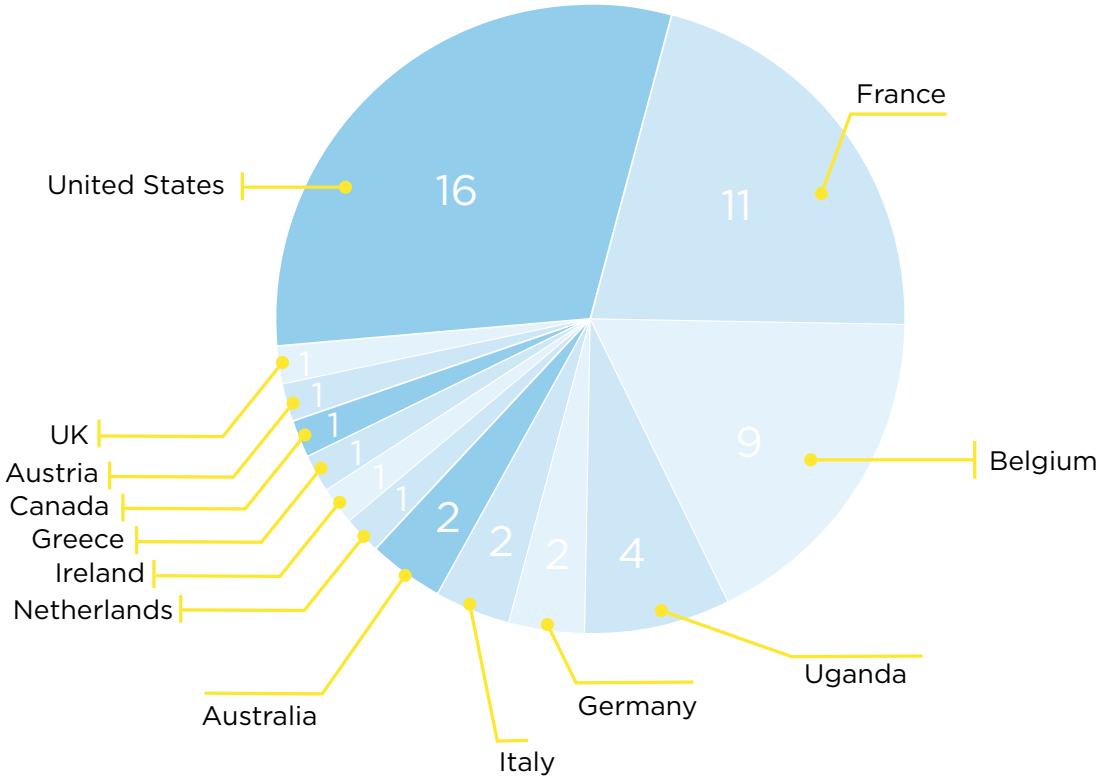
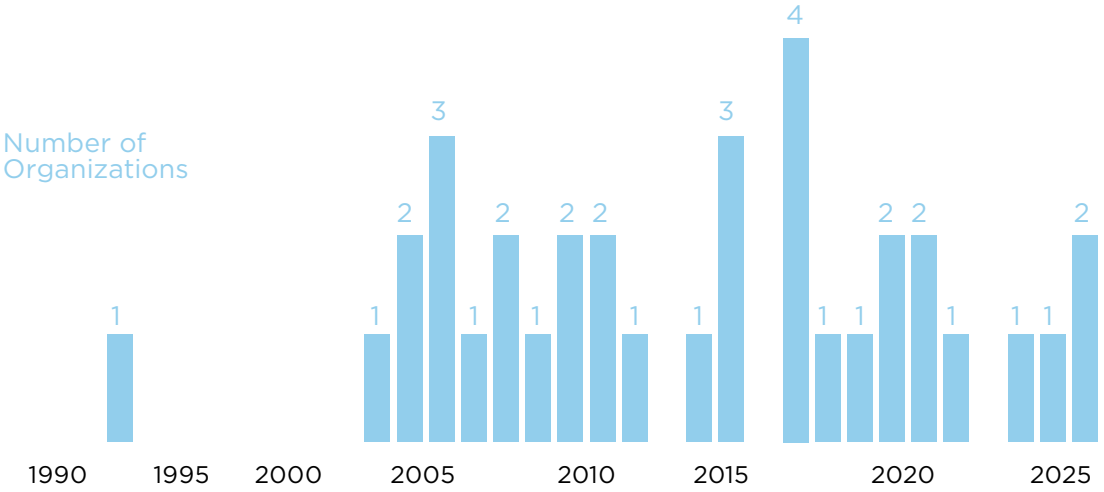


Figure 3. Distribution of Mapped Diaspora Organizations by Year of Founding



3.2 Sectors and Geographies of Intervention

Thirty-four (34) of the 53 DOs out of the total were determined to be involved in humanitarian recovery efforts in North Kivu alone (six), South Kivu alone (eight), or both (20).[21]

These DOs worked across 22 sectors.

A smaller number of DOs were also involved in peace and conflict resolution (3), infrastructure improvements (3), refugee and immigrant services (2), vocational training (2), disability inclusion (1), shelter (1), capacity building (1), nutrition (1), and strategic private investment (1).

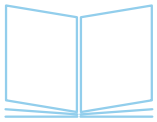
The KI sample of DOs reflects a similar distribution with the most frequent sectors of intervention being health (6), education (6), child rights (4), and gender (4).

[21] Nine organisations were determined to be only working with Congolese abroad (e.g., as immigration legal aid providers); two were connected only to humanitarian efforts in greater Kinshasa; for an additional seven, the locations of their in-country operations were unclear.

Figure 4: Most frequent DOs worked across the following sectors

Health
16

Medical procedures, funding and in-kind clinic donations, training of health volunteers, and support for recovery from trauma and SGBV.

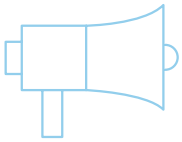


Education
14

Including out-of-school curricular programs for children in the Kivus or support to Kivu schools through in-kind donations.

Emergency
13

Diaspora-based donation drives of clothing, shoes, hygiene kits, education kits, medicine, and household survival goods, then shipped to the Kivus.



Advocacy
12

Political and human rights campaigns in diaspora host countries highlighting the DR Congo or advocating specific goals (e.g., sanctions).

Figure 4: Less frequent DOs worked across the following sectors

Gender 7
Child Rights 7

Includes programs for SGBV survivors, campaigns to end rape as a weapon of war, and support to orphanages or street-connected children.

Protection 6
Livelihoods 6
Food Security 6

Includes legal accompaniment of displaced persons, income generation activities, and distribution of food items.

WASH 4
Agriculture 4
Cash Transfer 4

Includes latrine and household hygiene projects, distribution of agricultural inputs or support to farming co-ops, and direct dispersal of cash to households.

It was more difficult to draw detailed patterns about geographies of intervention, as many DOs were vague about their exact areas of operation. DOs frequently based local offices and delivered services in Goma and Bukavu. At least six mapped DOs had projects in the provincial capitals: such as, support to or direct administration of health clinics, SGBV and trauma recovery programs, distributions to displaced persons, or raising funds for an IDP reception center. Mapping data also shows interventions in Mugunga IDP camp (one DO; 15 kilometers from Goma) and in communities around Mount Nyiragongo (one DO; not further specified).

DO key informants reported being active in the following locations:

- Nine (9) were present in Uvira, South Kivu (KIIs 1, 3, 7, 14, 15, 17, 30).
- Seven (7) were present in Bukavu, South Kivu (KIIs 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 30).
- Five (5) were present in Goma, North Kivu (KIIs 7, 13, 14, 16, 30).
- Other locations with one (1) present KI included Kamanyola (KII 1), Kalehe (KII 12), Fizi (KII 14), Kamituga and Ruhigita (KII 17), and Cirunga, Walungu, and Idjwi Island (KII 8).
- One DO cited additional operations outside of the Kivus in Ituri province and Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda (KII 30).

Meanwhile, local CSO KIs reported being aware of a number of diaspora interventions, including:

- Educational and health projects in Fizi, Walungu, Kalehe and Bunyakiru in South Kivu.
- A health center in Idjwi financed by a Congolese diaspora individual in Canada.
- Attempts at several energy production and infrastructure projects including installation of solar farms, power plants, roads, and airports — however, informants said these projects were often blocked by the government or other actors.
- Learning centers and one school for people with visual and hearing impairments.

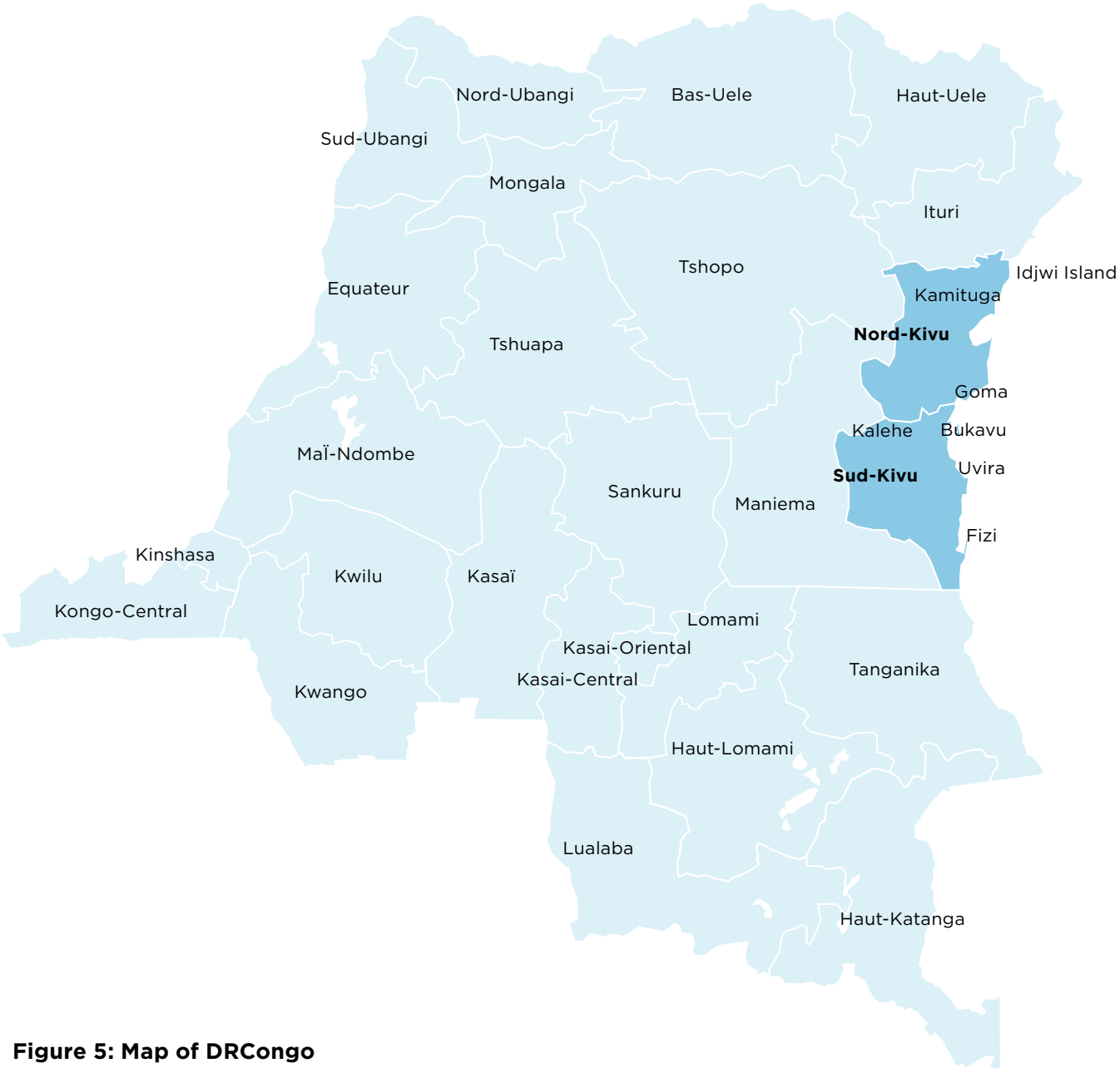


Figure 5: Map of DRCongo

Meanwhile, five local CSOs provided detailed operational areas, three of which operated out of Goma (KII 42, 44, 45) and two of which operated out of Bukavu (KII 26, 29).

In South Kivu, these CSOs also reached: Kabare, Kavumu, Bweremena, Minova, Walungu, Uvira, Kamanyola, Cirunga, Kamituga, Fizi, Bunyakiru, Kaleje, and Idjwi island. In North Kivu, these CSOs also reached: Nyiragongo, Masisi, Rutshuru, and Kirothse, as well as the IDP camps of Mugunga, Rusayo 1, Rusayo 2, and Lushagala in and around Goma.

4. KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Registration and Presence in DR Congo

Registration practices among Congolese DOs were found to be distinct from approaches observed in other contexts.

12 DOs had established a formal presence in the DR Congo. These DOs were found to have:

- Opened a local office (most often in Goma or Bukavu)
- Registered a separate legal entity under the same name as the DO; or
- Registered a separate legal entity under a different name than the DO

In the first two cases, the organizations often maintain shared leadership structures, with founding members or directors overseeing both the diaspora entity and its local counterpart. Operational responsibility is overseen by a locally-based head of office, but the connection between the diaspora and in-country work is explicit and maintained at a strategic level.

In the third case, DOs made efforts to obscure the link with the 'parent' DO and often the nature of the services delivered. Four of the 12 DOs had established entirely separate local CSOs or foundations under different names, with no publicly visible connection to the DO. These arrangements were not readily identifiable from public materials such as websites.[22] In each case, DO leadership was directly involved in founding and overseeing the local CSO but kept the link private. On the surface, these DOs appear to be focused exclusively on refugee or immigrant services abroad.

For example, KIs 12 and 40 represent a DO and a local CSO, respectively, which share the same name and founder. In the interview with KI 12, the US-based executive director openly discussed the DO's partnerships with its namesake local organization, as well as its engagements with grassroots groups and limited collaboration with government offices.

[22] The affiliations in these four cases were uncovered through the personal knowledge of the research team and were further substantiated via interviews.

In contrast, during the interview with KI 40 — representatives of the local entity — the respondents refused to acknowledge any diaspora connection, stating:

> "We're not really informed about diaspora organizations ... we might want to know how they work and their reach, [but] we don't really know anything [about] their support."

Following the interview, the US-based executive director informed the US-based researcher that his local staff had deliberately avoided disclosing their diaspora affiliation to the DR Congo-based researcher because they feared his potential affiliation. According to the executive director, the local team believes that both government authorities and M23 perceive diaspora organizations as politically aligned with opposing sides, and either one might therefore target local staff for diaspora connections. This risk has reportedly intensified since M23's presence in Goma, with both parties increasing their scrutiny of funds and personnel coming from abroad into occupied areas.

Security concerns, whether based on actual risks or perceptions, seem to have contributed to a deliberate lack of openness among some organizations. Many actors were hesitant to speak openly about their connections to diaspora networks, and similarly reluctant to explain why. This makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions. However, operational insecurity, including concerns about being misunderstood or exposed, was mentioned by 14 key informants from diaspora organizations, local civil society groups, and international NGOs; as discussed in Section 4.6. These insights point to a general atmosphere of caution among humanitarian actors working in areas affected by conflict.

This points to an important limitation: it is likely that a subset of DOs marked as either not involved in the Kivus, or not collaborating with CSOs, are active under similar distancing models that they either do not advertise online or are not willing to disclose to outsiders, including to external aid coordination mechanisms in-country (see: Section 4.5).

4.2 Collaboration with Local CSOs and Government

DOs mostly operated independently or collaborated with local CSOs. In a few cases, explored here, they collaborated with local government structures. Their participation in formal humanitarian structures, such as humanitarian clusters, was extremely rare (see Section 4.5).

12 DOs were actively collaborating with independent local CSOs in North and/or South Kivu. The operational modality of the partnership was often not clear. For example, online content often made only vague references to "our partner" or "we have partnered with." In other cases, DOs took on a clear fundraising role – often through online campaigns, custom websites, and platforms such as GoFundMe – with the cash promised to local CSOs (see 4.3).

Most in-country collaborations took place informally. Three DO informants reported having sporadic memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with government structures, usually in the health space (KIIs 7, 8, 17). The remaining seven DO informants worked with local CSOs informally or on a project-by-project basis, without formal MoUs, sub-contracts, or institutionalized grants. Although in at least two cases, semi-formal accountability structures for documenting financial or in-kind flows were present (e.g., field reports, beneficiary lists, etc.).

As one local CSO representative put it:

> "In the informal world, diaspora organizations are visible, but in the formal world they are not visible" (KII 31).

When speaking about how these informal partnerships came about, three DOs emphasized personal connections and repeat collaborations based on rapport built over time (KIIs 1, 13, 15).

Though in the minority, the three examples of formal MoU-based collaboration with local government health projects provide interesting insight into a potentially scalable model. The case study of one such model below demonstrates how these partnerships might work:

Case Study #1: Integrating Diaspora Response into Local Health Plans

Diaspora Médicale Plus (DMP-RDC) was founded during the COVID-19 pandemic by Congolese medical professionals living in France, Belgium, Canada, and the US. Initially functioning as an informal coordination network focused on emergency response — sharing expertise remotely and shipping urgently needed supplies — the group evolved into a formal entity in 2021 with its registration in the DR Congo and establishment of a local office in Bukavu. This transition allowed the organization to operate legally within the national health system, forge formal agreements with health authorities, and shift from ad-hoc support to sustained programming in Walungu, Idjwi, and Bukavu.

The collaboration model is structured around a shared workflow between diaspora-based professionals and local health workers. Local needs assessments are conducted by nurses and zone-level health personnel, who report findings, supported by photos and other documentation, via WhatsApp. These inputs are reviewed by diaspora clinicians weekly, as informants explained:

"We have a WhatsApp group where nurses send us photos, follow-up sheets, and critical requests. Our colleagues in France and Canada analyze them and advise on priorities."

Integration into the public health infrastructure occurs through formal memoranda of understanding with health zones such as Walungu, Ibanda, and Idjwi. This allows the organization to align its mobile clinics, donation streams, and capacity-building activities with zone action plans. Mobile clinics are organized in coordination with local health authorities and provide general consultations, maternal and child health services, and mental health first aid. During these missions, the organization also conducts joint sensitization campaigns on hygiene, nutrition, and gender-based violence. Equipment shipments — including delivery kits, solar lamps, and basic pharmaceuticals — are inventoried and distributed in collaboration with local maternity wards and health centers, stored in the intermediary at a warehouse in Bukavu. One staff member noted:

"Every month, we organize at least two mobile clinics to serve isolated areas,"

highlighting the regularity and structured nature of their delivery model.

Another interesting example of diaspora-local coordination emerges from the narrative of a Goma chef de bloc (KII 43), who is responsible for a ten-household block as part of a base-level city administration system known as nyumba kumi.[23]

Case Study #2: Diaspora direct assistance through nyumba kumi structures

Diaspora individuals are becoming more involved in locally-run livelihoods programs at the street level of local government — though potential remains to systematize these efforts through DO-backed support.

With the onset of renewed crisis in the eastern DR Congo around 2013, chefs de bloc began organizing local mutual aid groups in their areas of oversight. As the lowest, semi-formal rung of city administration, chefs de bloc and other low-level administrators comprise grassroots cadres de base, who bring complaints and needs from the community up to the district chief.[24] They are therefore well-positioned to know street-level needs at a hyper-individual level.

The structure has persisted but recurrent crises have periodically wiped out residents' ability to finance mutual aid circles themselves, which has led chefs de bloc to seek assistance from individuals in the diaspora, especially after the January 2025 crisis. Over time, individuals within each bloc have introduced chefs to family and friends abroad, who have become part of the systematization and administration of hyper-local mutual aid. Together, chefs de bloc and diaspora givers have set vulnerability criteria per gender and age and standards for loan eligibility within neighborhood blocks.

In one case in Nyiragongo territory, an experimental first round in May 2025 saw 750 USD distributed across 20 individuals, who are responsible for paying back the loan in installments. In this case, the 750 USD were raised by a group of Congolese diaspora individuals in Europe suffering from paraplegia, who specifically, but not exclusively, wanted to assist people with similar disabilities in Nyiragongo. Funds made their way to North Kivu through Mobile Money or wires to Western Union banks in Gisenyi, Rwanda, which were withdrawn and taken by hand across the border into Goma.

Each month, the group meets and members share their successes and challenges in using the loans for micro-entrepreneurship; impact is shared with the diaspora givers, too. Successful recipients might see their loan size increased in later rounds. A 1 USD monthly membership fee for residents grants access to the loan mechanism and to local health facilities, facilitated by the chef de bloc, for the payee and their family.

This model could be enhanced by engaging DOs as systemic, more consistent backers of these mutual aid groups. In fact, recently, the individuals involved in the Nyiragongo mutual aid scheme have made an informal umbrella DO, SOLIPARA (Solidarité des Personnes Paraplégique), recognizing a desire to formalize how they raise and distribute the mutual aid.

At the same time, this model also shows how diaspora-local co-design can occur outside of institutional frameworks, instead emerging from the ground-up and integrating itself into governance structures and DO structures over time.

[23] Nyumba kumi originates from Kenya and, in the DR Congo, exists in a gray zone between formation as a grassroots structure and subsequent attempts by the government and (I)NGOs to federalize it. See: Rift Valley Institute (2019). A System of Insecurity: Crime and Urban Violence in Bukavu. https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/A-System-of-Insecurity-by-Michel-Thill-RVI-Usalama-Project-2019.pdf

[24] Ibid, p. 26.

One last example of diaspora-government coordination comes from a report by a Belgium-based diaspora collective formed in 2024, which mobilized over 40 tons of aid in Brussels.

Case Study #3: Diaspora campaign with Belgian and Congolese state support

In Spring 2024, members of the Congolese diaspora in Brussels launched a fundraising drive with the intention of shipping goods to Goma. Through collaborations with non-profits and state ministries, the campaign exceeded expectations, mobilizing 40 tons of clothing, shoes, linens, hygiene kits, medical supplies, food, and children's toys at the Brussels Expo building – which precipitated the formation of a formal diaspora collective.

The Belgian Ministry of Defense then transported 17 tons worth of these donations to Kinshasa aboard military aircraft. Members of the coalition rode the second flight free of charge, nullifying a major expense cost for many DOs. The second portion of the goods was shipped to Dar es Salaam by sea, then transported overland to Goma. The collective liaised with the Congolese embassy in Belgium, the Congolese Ministry of Social Affairs, and a number of local CSOs to ensure clearance of administrative or diplomatic hurdles.

Once in the DR Congo, distribution occurred across two phases:

- September-October 2024: to children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, the elderly, and "persons in situations of great vulnerability" in Bushagara and Nzulo 2 camps, through coordination with camp chiefs and local teams. (Exact distribution amount unspecified.)
- January 2025: to 3,500 families in Goma, Bukavu, and remote villages like Walungu, Kweshe, and Kaniola. This distribution was troubled by lack of electricity, internet, and sufficient water, and the report notes that the benefits of certain interventions were reversed by the return of conflict at the end of January 2025.

This example marks the only one identified in this research of DO collaboration with state structures in the diaspora host country.

4.3 Funding and Fundraising

DOs raised funds for a range of purposes. 13 mapped DOs were explicitly found to be involved in fundraising or donation drives from the diaspora.[25] [26] [27] Some fundraising activities were to fund local partners directly. Other campaigns were to support diaspora members themselves to travel to the DR Congo, to deliver goods and/or to participate in local relief activities (KIIs 8, 17, plus two publicly accessible DO reports).

DOs used digital fundraising platforms such as GoFundMe and custom websites to raise money for interventions in the Kivus (see Figure 3). Others provided their IBAN numbers directly on their websites, or embedded donation links. WhatsApp groups were the most commonly cited channels for sharing information and relief appeals.

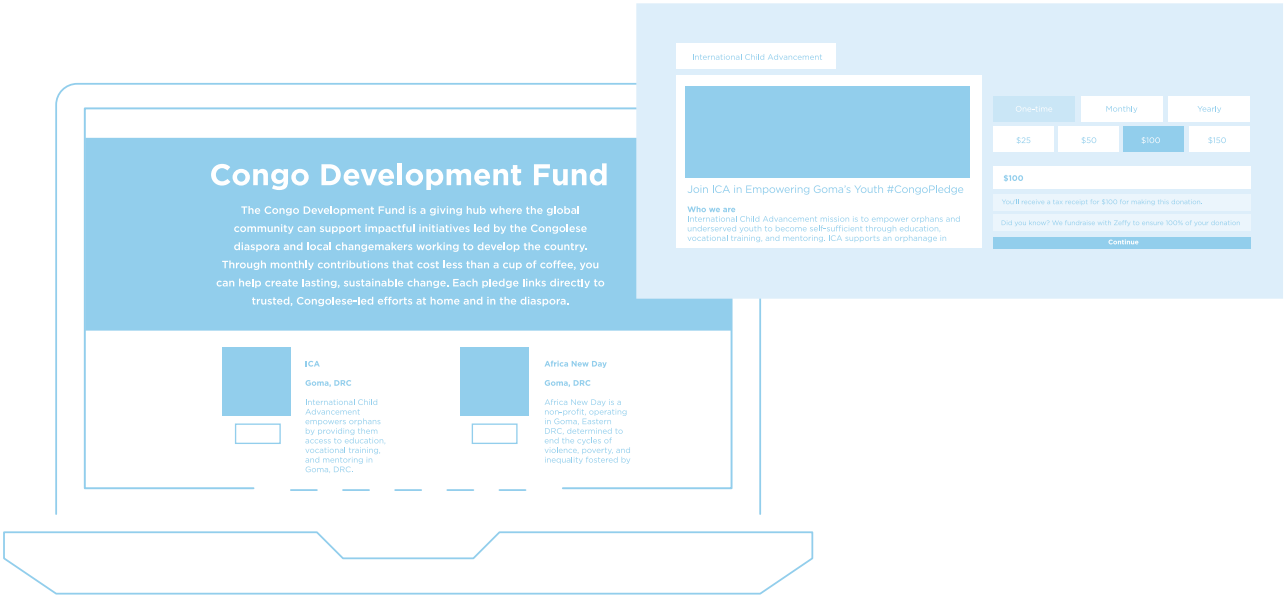
Offline fundraising was also important. Six DOs cited Congolese churches, both abroad and local, as major funding mobilization arenas and conduits of local-diaspora connection (KIIs 1, 8, 13, 14, 16, 30). Other prominent methods included mobilization and coordination through women's associations, youth groups, and teachers' or school-affiliated groups.

[25] Example #1. Friends of the Congo. More than $55,000 raised. Began in January 2025. https://www.gofundme.com/f/urgent-support-needed-in-goma-dr-congo

[26] Example #2. Team Congo. More than €52,800 raised. Began in November 2024. https://www.gofundme.com/f/together-for-congo-paris-to-goma-drc

[27] Example #3. Ntibonera Foundation. More than $2,200 raised. Began in July 2024. https://www.gofundme.com/f/hf76h?attribution_id=sl:e16c0b3c-be18-411c-b3af-1166e98e6424&utm_campaign=man_sharesheet_ft&utm_medium=customer&utm_source=email

Figure 6: Example of a custom fundraising platform, set up by US DO "African Diaspora Connection." The platform embeds pledge links to other DOs and local CSOs through GoFundMe, Global Giving, Zeffy, and other charitable giving sites.



For the money to actually reach the Kivus, DOs reported sending via Mobile Money applications (e.g., Airtel, Orange Money) to partners or individuals they trust (KIIs 14, 30). One DO discussed transferring money to contacts in Rwanda, who then crossed the land border into the Kivus with money or goods in hand (KII 15). Traditional bank transfers were reported to be abandoned by DOs since M23's takeover of Goma in January 2025.

DOs reported reliance on informal fundraising and transfer methods as limiting. Mainly, the method is unpredictable, as it produces dependency on either a few prominent donors, or the continuous mobilization of many small ones (KIIs 1, 3, 14).

All interviewed DOs mentioned insufficient core funding, operating through a "just-in-time" emergency fundraising model with little to no use of multi-year grants. Two DOs requested capacity-building in proposal writing (KIIs 1, 14), and four DOs called on INGOs and grantmaking organizations to design application processes with lower administration burdens — more accessible to DOs with lesser personnel capacity or institutional experience (KIIs 1, 15, 16, 30). KI 15, the DO/CSO representative, noted past unsuccessful attempts to apply for grants from Save the Children.

4.4 Strengths and Limitations of the Diaspora Model

DOs emphasized a set of distinctive contributions they felt the diaspora brings to humanitarian response in the Kivus. This perceived "value added" centered around agility, legitimacy, connection to affected communities, and a moral and emotional commitment derived from lived experience.

- Four DOs emphasized speed and flexibility. Because of their informality, DOs can bypass institutional bureaucracies to react more quickly to emerging needs and conflict realities (KIIs 1, 7, 8). Informants said they can mobilize funds and people rapidly through personal networks (KII 7) and can select areas of intervention and shift resources where most needed without waiting for external approvals (KII 12).
- Three DOs emphasized moral investment and lived experience. Since, by definition, many DO staff and volunteers are from the affected communities, participants felt that DOs were more emotionally invested — and therefore more persistent and community-centered (KII 7) and accountable (KII 12). Familial and personal links heighten the DO's "moral responsibility" and intuitive understanding of local needs, one DO informant said (KII 8).
- Two DOs emphasized dual positionality and a "bridging" ability. One participant felt that their close relationships with Kivu communities, complemented by a formal institutional structure and activities in the diaspora, afforded them trust among those both abroad and domestically (KII 1). Both felt that DOs, as cross-cultural entities, were well-positioned to raise awareness abroad and advocate for principled Western response to the Kivu conflict (KII 1, 3).

Quantifiable examples of DO impact from KIs were limited:

- KII 1 reported distribution of food aid kits to 300 families over the past 18 months.
- KII 8 noted their distribution of 15 tons of medical supplies and medicines sent by the diaspora, as well as the coordination of more than 25 mobile clinics in coordination with local health zones, providing direct care to approximately 9,000 persons over the same time frame.

Some additional examples were discernible from the public materials of mapped DOs:

- In January 2025, a Belgium-based DO reported targeting 3,500 families in Walungu, South Kivu, chosen due to its significant population of IDPs, for distributions. They reported reaching, among others, 1,037 children, 457 elderly people, and 371 pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as delivering 16 tons of donations to three health facilities. The supplies were delivered during a one-week volunteer mission to Bukavu, from which the team traveled to Walungu daily.
- In November 2024, one France-based DO traveled to Goma and its surroundings to deliver 1.7 tons of donations assembled through $10,477 raised during a summer GoFundMe campaign.[28] Their reporting detailed 918 unique individuals reached through 298 mobile clinic consultations and 195 household distributions, among other interventions. The post-report includes spending receipts, beneficiary lists, maps, and site analysis.

  The organization has been redacted here because their reporting includes sensitive photos of recipients and lists of their names.

These examples illustrate the donation-driven modalities of DOs and offer a general sense of their floors and ceilings for mobilizing resources.

[28] The report notes that $7,254 was raised from an external audience through GoFundMe, with the remainder contributed by team members.

However, synthesizing a collective quantitative impact for the first half of 2025 remains challenging due to limited available reporting, likely linked to ongoing security concerns and the timing of annual reporting cycles.[29]

DO styles of targeting and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) provide further insight.

For instance, six DOs said they targeted based on vulnerability criteria – defined not in the institutional sense but as a community-driven response strategy. DOs described a focus on IDPs, orphans, and SGBV survivors (KII 1), women and children (KII 12), and single mothers and the elderly (KII 13). Interventions were designed around those "most vulnerable" (KII 17), especially in high-conflict zones (KII 13) and those affected by displacement and poverty (KII 12).

In more structured instances, needs identification was supported by triage reports from health zone professionals (KIIs 7, 8) or local government officials (KII 15). However, most emphasized a responsive, case-by-case model grounded in urgency. As KI 14, a US-based DO, explained:

"Most of our projects are based on urgent needs. When we receive a request for help, we act. It could be a family needing shelter or a woman needing emergency surgery... Our model is human-first."

In other words, these DOs understood targeting as a bottom-up practice. For this, they relied on community-generated inputs — via WhatsApp groups and Zoom meetings (KIIs 8, 16), in-person community meetings (KIIs 3, 14, 17), or informal updates from trusted local staff and social networks (KII 30).

[29] More so than conflict insecurity, deep slashes to US-sponsored aid were cited by INGOs as exacerbating service delivery issues in 2025, and was also cited by at least two local CSOs.

M&E systems were similarly ad-hoc. Three DOs were straightforward in saying that they did not use institutional M&E frameworks and expressed a desire for technical training in strengthening their learning systems (KIIs 14, 16, 30). In these cases, DOs reported informal monitoring through photographic documentation of deliveries, testimonies from recipients, and video messages and updates shared via WhatsApp or other social media platforms (KII 30), as well as informal surveys and focus group discussions (KII 16).

These styles promote flexibility and participatory methods but might complicate quantifying impact, since top-down targets are not necessarily set or monitored from the beginning.

Local CSO perspectives on diaspora 'value added' provide another layer of complexity. From the KI sample, six CSOs said they have collaborated with DOs, while six CSOs said they do not collaborate with the diaspora at all. More than that, three CSOs said they could not name any local diaspora interventions or DOs.

However, again, it is important to note that some organizations in this latter sample may, in fact, collaborate with diaspora actors but choose not to disclose these relationships publicly.

CSOs, those who work with DOs and those who do not, framed the diaspora's 'value added' as such:

- Six CSOs said that DOs are well-placed to conduct advocacy with Western governments and raise awareness among US/European publics about humanitarian needs, sometimes providing local CSOs with useful contacts abroad (KIIs 22, 23, 29, 31, 38, 39). One CSO attributed the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2773, condemning Rwanda for its support of M23, to Congolese diaspora advocacy (KII 39).
- Two CSOs noted that DOs and diaspora individuals introduce fresh ideas from abroad, which can enhance local operations and increase international visibility by encouraging the adoption of donor-preferred practices (KIIs 32, 38).

As stated by one local CSO informant,

> "Congolese diaspora [members] are like scouts. They are better informed because they are open to the world. They're considered, as we say here, 'an intellectual in the village'" (KII 38).

However, local actors across the sample noted a number of limitations to diaspora-led interventions, from their perspective:

- Four CSOs and one local authority said they hesitate to work with DOs because they worry about political mission-creep, favoritism for interest groups, or conduct out of line with humanitarian principles (KIIs 5, 23, 26, 43, 44).
- Three CSOs said that DOs do not collaborate with local humanitarian planning (KIIs 31, 39), sometimes leading to duplication of interventions (KII 44).
- Two CSOs and one local authority said the diaspora works in an isolated, scattered, or uncoordinated manner (KIIs 32, 38, 43)
- One CSO said that DO interventions lack sustained and systematic follow-up (KII 5).
- One CSO said it is difficult to attribute impact to DO interventions because of their informality (KII 23).

These perspectives reveal a serious gap in perceptions between DOs and local CSOs in terms of operational procedures, as well as trust — which will be further discussed under Section 4.7.

4.5 Absence of Formal Systems Integration

Targeted KIIs were conducted with four traditional humanitarian actors operating in the Kivus, including two UN agencies and two international NGOs.

While informants expressed a strong interest in better understanding the structure and role of DOs, viewing them as potentially catalytic actors in the humanitarian space, they also acknowledged a limited awareness of their actual operations or impact and the lack of communication and outreach from diaspora organizations.

Only two practical examples of diaspora-led interventions could be cited during the interviews, involving one DO and one local implementing partner, both included in the study sample (KII 8 and KII 42), which underscores a recurring disconnect between perception and operational integration.

One INGO representative commented:

> "For me, it's the first time I've heard about the diaspora. There is no official information. Of course, there is a network, but we don't have any structured information" (KII 36).

The shrinking fiscal space since January 2025, marked by the US' withdrawal of financial support to the UN system and the closure of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) operations in eastern DR Congo was framed as an opportunity to explore alternative and complementary actors, including the diaspora, as potential financiers or facilitators of aid delivery (KII 21).

As an illustration, one UN agency reported that, by July 2025, it had reached less than 25% of its planned beneficiaries, highlighting growing resource gaps.

Despite this financial urgency, diaspora organizations remain largely absent from formal coordination bodies. Interviews revealed that no DOs currently participate in the Nutrition, Education, or Humanitarian Coordination UN Clusters. Knowledge of diaspora actors within these platforms was non-existent among IO/INGO interviewees, and no structured mechanisms were in place to formally integrate them.

UN representatives noted:

> "We are a bit excited to understand what they do. It seems they are doing a lot but we don't see them. They are not present in the coordination architecture. [...] If we knew them, it would be easier to mobilize them. I see a huge role but need to see how they can fit in and [...] what their aid did in practice on the ground" (KII 21).

Recommendations to bridge this coordination gap included participation in clusters through the nomination of focal points — remote or from local civil society organizations affiliated with DOs. Needs assessments and situation analysis were identified as key coordination steps. Existing resources such as OCHA situation reports, published on ReliefWeb, were outlined as useful resources to strategically complement DO's feedback from communities on local needs but the question on DO knowledge and use of these platforms was unaddressed.

UN representatives called for joint needs assessments with diaspora entities to enable more tailored and responsive humanitarian programming:

"In the parcels received, there were items that didn't fit — bicycles, not emergency supplies. Communities gave what they could. The communication aspect [around needs] was missing" (KII 21).

Informants said an additional incentive for DOs to channel support through formal coordination was access to tax exemptions for humanitarian cargo. UN agencies and CSOs, local or international, can benefit from customs and VAT exemptions if appropriately registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (UN agencies) or Ministry of Planning (CSOs).[30] One local CSO mentioned channeling diaspora support through these formalized channels by coordinating with local authorities, negotiating with them an entry point and tax-exemption status on the shipment (KII 42).

INGO representatives said that, otherwise, they worried about DOs' ability to pay the high taxes and surpass the bureaucratic hurdles associated with commercial shipments. Even within the humanitarian regime, an array of sub-regulations on cargo type and size make it difficult for low-capacity organizations to navigate.[31]

One INGO informant noted:

"There are procedures that must be followed, which are too specific. The types of orders – whether medicines or food supplies – and also the quantities that are normally required demand a logistical setup that is too large and too heavy [for DOs]" (KII 36).

[30] Logistics Cluster. 1.3 Democratic Republic of the Congo Customs Information. https://www.lca.logcluster.org/fr/node/5565
[31] Ibid.

The security environment was not raised as a reason for diaspora invisibility, though earlier parts of the research suggested that fear of reprisals and the fragmented governance landscape in the Kivus might play a suppressive role and shapes where aid can and cannot go. However, it was explained as constricting movements and implying extra negotiations, as one UN official explained:

> "We are in a province with two authorities: one at the provincial level in Goma, and the other from the displaced state in Beni. For example, when food supplies move from one controlled area to another, there are many obstacles (tracasseries) — and the same goes for funding. If the diaspora wants to provide funding, it should normally go to the state, not the other side. These kinds of negotiations also exist for the diaspora." (KII 36).

One of the two documented examples of diaspora-supported aid facilitated via a UN mechanism was in 2024 when a Belgium-based DO requested OCHA's support to channel aid via a local organization; feedback from local authorities was reported as "positive." However, M23's presence in Goma and Bukavu continues to reshape dynamics, reinforcing how the geography of power determines the geography of aid, particularly for transnational actors navigating contested control zones and divergent relationships with both armed groups and formal authorities.

The review cannot answer whether UN facilitation provides a satisfactory protection shield to DO and local partners but can hypothesize that this has led some DOs to work through local antennas or 'twin' CSOs, which can navigate these barriers more invisibly. However, the nature of these relationships remains opaque.

4.6 Financial, Logistical, Security, and Political Barriers

Prominent financial, logistical, and security barriers complicate service delivery in the Kivus for all actors. Political developments post-January 2025 have exacerbated these barriers, with strong implications especially for DOs operating from abroad.

Conflict insecurity was cited as a concern by seven DOs, five local CSOs, and two INGOs. Informants spoke about fearing the unpredictability of violence, unable to guarantee safety of staff or recipients at distribution sites or in movement, therefore causing them to curtail activities (KIIs 1, 15, 16, 22, 23, 26, 29, 36). One IO noted split territorial control in both provinces, with Goma and Bukavu under M23 control, and second cities (Beni and Uvira) under government control — it is thus difficult to send materials or funding across control lines (KII 36).

One local civil society organization shared concerns about the risk of being misunderstood or facing pressure from armed groups if perceived to be working closely with government actors (KII 29). Another described the need to make informal payments to ensure uninterrupted humanitarian access in communities near Mount Nyiragongo, North Kivu (KII 22). Additionally, two diaspora organizations noted that their teams were cautious about being seen as affiliated with rebel groups (KIIs 1, 14)

DOs mentioned changes to operations and geographic reach due to post-January 2025 developments. For example, one DO noted changing their focal point from Goma to Tanganyika, redirecting their shipments there, which takes longer, costs more, and increases risk of diversion (KII 3). Others noted displacement of staff, partners, and aid recipients — including volunteers fleeing Kalehe (South Kivu) (KII 12) and team members relocating from Bukavu to Kinshasa (KII 16). One DO noted bolstering their activities in Nakivale refugee camp, Uganda, since many recipients of their past programs had fled there from Goma (KII 30).

The local context, marked by economic hardship and limited institutional incentives for strict adherence to regulatory frameworks, presents ongoing challenges to the effective delivery of aid. These conditions often result in additional operational costs to ensure that humanitarian items reach their intended beneficiaries. Two DOs noted being forced to pay "informal taxes" to facilitate territorial access and/or release of items from customs (KIIs 1, 3) in Kamanyola and Uvira in South Kivu, respectively.

One local CSO representative mentioned that sometimes,

> "The barriers are orchestrated by those in power, [they] don't make it easy for the diaspora" (KII 29).

He went on to discuss an example of a diaspora leader who, in attempting to register locally, was made to pay $10,000 in taxes. He noted his belief that the vast majority of diaspora projects face discrimination when attempting to implement in the Kivus.

These concerns are compounded by infrastructure and access limitations, including power outages (KII 3), poor roads and weather complications (KIIs 3, 29, 38), limited or insecure storage locations (KIIs 3, 30), and internet and digital communications limitations (KIIs 12, 13, 29, 30).

Informants identified highly inaccessible communities in North Kivu (Lubero, Rutshuru, Kibirizi) and South Kivu (Walungu, Shabunda, Fizi, Kalehe, Numbi) to be plagued simultaneously by poor connectivity, power grids, roads, and conflict insecurity, the latter precluding attempts to fix other issues. Solar-powered systems and generators bridge gaps in some communities, but require sustained, negotiated peace to maintain them.

All accessibility issues are worse during the rainy seasons (July-November; February-April). Some communication agencies work with secondary providers, such as Vodacom and Airtel, and engage local CSOs to facilitate communication in zones where there is no or limited access.

Four informants also noted non-functional banking infrastructure as a severe restraint (KIIs 13, 14, 30, 40). The government has suspended banking services in Goma and Bukavu, with M23 reportedly looking to set up a parallel system.[32] Mobile money applications, namely Airtel and Orange Money, have become the workaround for civilians as well as DOs, but carry limitations such as steep transfer fees (KII 15).

Three DOs and once local CSO noted the unpredictable and high, often prohibitive, cost of cross-border customs and shipping (KIIs 3, 14, 15, 32).

> "It's expensive to send even one box to Congo… customs fees, delays, and clearance issues discourage people." (KII 32).

Preferred traditional routes by DOs included shipping supplies by sea to Mombasa, Kenya, then trucking it overland through Uganda and crossing at Beni or Bunagana (North Kivu); or, shipping to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, then trucking goods to Kigoma where they are shipped across Lake Tanganyika to Uvira (South Kivu) (KIIs 3, 15).

For sensitive or high-priority items — or during an emergency, such as the 2021 Mount Nyiragongo eruption — some DOs fly goods directly to Goma, often with humanitarian carriers or paying commercial rates (KIIs 1, 30). During periods of rebel activity in North Kivu, other DOs have re-routed aid through Kigali, Rwanda, before crossing overland into the DR Congo (KIIs 15, 16).

[32] The Observer (2025, March 28). M23 rebels move to establish own banking system in captured DRC cities. https://observer.ug/news/m23-rebels-move-to-establish-own-banking-system-in-captured-drc-cities/

Kinshasa was not cited as a frequent port of entry due to logistical complexity and distance. The other routes, however, confront major challenges such as distance, time, terrain, reliance on Mobile Money, and/or informal taxes taken at crossing points.

Finally, regulatory challenges restricted the full operationality of DOs in the Kivus. DOs without a separate local registration, or strong local partnerships, are operating informally through modalities mentioned previously — such as digital fundraising campaigns or volunteer trips, bringing goods with them personally or trying to move goods commercially through laborious channels.

These methods create conflict with the state, which endeavors to monitor imports and move humanitarian aid through regularized channels (KIIs 36, 38).

"The fact of not being registered locally is what pushes unregistered diaspora organizations to carry out activities clandestinely" (KII 38).

From the local CSO perspective, DOs' lack of legal registration in the DR Congo limits their ability to formally partner, co-implement, or share funds. The opacity of diaspora organizations' funding and operational mechanisms also causes some local CSOs to hesitate to collaborate — furthermore, it was mentioned that CSOs which do work with DOs do not disclose the funding transfer modality, creating suspicion among local CSOs (KII 40).

Local CSOs also called for combined initiatives (diaspora, local, and government) to clarify diaspora organizations' status before the registry (local, national, or international) so that local organizations know how to properly engage with the diaspora (KIIs 23, 29).

4.7 Trust and Perceptions

A major theme throughout the study was the role of trust, or lack thereof, in complicating the relationships between DOs, local CSOs, government, and IO/INGO actors.

As discussed in Section 4.2, there is a notable disconnect between how DOs view their own efficiency and how CSOs perceive it — an observation echoed by INGOs in Section 4.5. For example, many DOs saw their flexible, less formalized needs assessments as a strength that enables operational agility (KIIs 1, 7, 8, 12). In contrast, traditional humanitarian actors viewed this as a key weakness, arguing it leads DOs to misalign with broader community needs and attempt distributions beyond their administrative capacity (KIIs 21, 36).

However, beyond differing opinions on operational strategy, there were several concerns raised — mostly by local CSOs, including those who collaborate frequently with the diaspora — regarding the ethics and consequences of DO initiatives. These included concerns related to DOs' cohesion of vision (KI 42, 45), professionalism or adherence to humanitarian principles (KIIs 5, 23), financial transparency (KIIs 29, 31, 42), and perceived disregard for the expertise or ongoing activities of local CSOs (KII 29, 44).

One direct quote from a CSO representative demonstrates how these factors produce misalignment between DOs and local CSOs when operating in the field.

> "The food distribution in our zone of intervention where we're implementing already, we also see [DOs] coming to do the same thing, whereby they provide the same food or non-food items in big quantities, which puts us in conflict with our beneficiaries and within the community. And then we suffer from it" (KII 44).

One local CSO also consistently referred to DOs as "international organizations," suggesting they may view the diaspora as part of the broader, often unresponsive international humanitarian system (KII 22).

DO representatives were not ignorant of these perceptions. As one diaspora informant put it:

> "We are sometimes seen as those who come from Europe with money, without understanding the real suffering. This can create tensions or skepticism at first." (KII 8).

Other DO representatives noted being perceived as outsiders or elites (KII 8), facing issues of recognition and credibility (both before donors and local actors) (KIIs 12, 13), and political and linguistic barriers when working in some communities (KII 16). Some felt they are not taken seriously by local actors because they live abroad (KII 17). These issues compound problems of emotional fatigue and volunteer burnout (KIIs 14, 16).

Several actors also cited the double bind of being viewed as outsiders by local communities, yet as too informal by formal humanitarian actors (KII 8, 13). For instance, these DOs mentioned having to navigate mistrust among local communities, investing years in relationship-building with chiefs, while also feeling that their relational practices of needs assessment and service delivery were seen as invalid by traditional actors.

In the same vein, DOs said they felt excluded by institutional humanitarian actors who, they said, do not honor their expertise, nor open access to funding (KIIs 1, 8, 14, 30). One DO said that INGOs "tokenize" the diaspora, meaning that they only want to partner with them for aesthetic purposes or when they need help implementing pre-determined activity agendas — they do not seek DOs as equal partners (KII 14). Meanwhile, one DO expressed their belief that it is INGOs operating independently of DOs, rather than the informality of DO practices, that produces duplication of activities (KII 13).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings reveal that Congolese DOs are playing an active role in humanitarian response across North and South Kivu — often operating through informal networks, with strong local ties but limited integration into formal aid systems. These efforts are further hindered by systemic challenges including security risks, regulatory barriers, fragmented coordination, and severe gaps in trust and perception. The recommendations that follow respond directly to these dynamics, aiming to strengthen the enabling environment, build trust, and support more strategic, sustained diaspora engagement in the humanitarian ecosystem in the eastern DR Congo.

For diaspora organizations (DOs):

- Use secure digital platforms and confidential surveys to capture sensitive data. Be strict about not broadcasting sensitive information such as photos or names of participants, as this erodes trust from communities and local civil society.
- Support the transition from reactive aid to strategic investment through longer-term programming (e.g., health systems strengthening, vocational training, infrastructure support). This includes prioritizing use of money for high-impact investment, such as direct transfers or shipping of goods, versus high visibility initiatives, such as volunteer trips, which some local CSOs might view as disconnected (unless done for an explicit and highly targeted purpose).
- Build robust M&E and needs assessment systems. While informality and participatory methods provide needed flexibility, building local trust if done right, it is also important to systematize for coordination with wider sectoral planning and targeting of the most sorely identified needs.
- Identify and build relationships with intermediaries and umbrella organizations that can serve as connectors and focal points between fragmented diaspora initiatives and formal humanitarian coordination systems.
- Establish or join collective platforms to enhance visibility, trust, and bargaining power. Given the fragmentation and informal nature of many DOs, forming or joining diaspora coordination networks can help unify advocacy, facilitate pooled funding, and make engagement with local and international actors more coherent. These platforms can also serve as intermediaries with humanitarian clusters or ministries.
- Highlight best practices and success stories of diaspora-local partnerships that demonstrate sustainable planning and community-aligned outcomes, to build trust and inform replication.

For local CSOs:

- Encourage diaspora actors to invest in long-term partnerships with local organizations and propose formal co-design processes with DOs during project ideation. Where possible, initiate concept notes or local needs assessments to shape proposals from the ground up, rather than waiting for diaspora-led direction.
- Channel diaspora support into capacity development for local M&E, administrative compliance, dialogue, and resilience-building. Stronger M&E would support storytelling, which can help to build local communities' understanding and trust in local-diaspora partnerships. Participation in CSO networks or consortia can help local actors to engage diaspora actors more consistently, potentially resulting in joint programming proposals with clearer accountability mechanisms.

For local authorities:

- Engage in dialogue with DOs to build mutual understanding, identify shared needs and intervention priorities. To do this, encourage provincial governors, particularly in North and South Kivu, to designate Diaspora Focal Points within local government structures.
- In stable zones, coordinate with DOs on service delivery, particularly in education and health sectors. Sign MoUs with DOs to integrate their efforts into the systematic planning of services, such as in health zones. Case Study #1 can provide a replicable example of this.
- Encourage and facilitate DOs' structured investment in mutual aid groups at the cadre de bloc level of local government, creating a mechanism for sustained household recovery in crisis. Doing so links a community-validated model of small-scale entrepreneurship with a wider funding channel (see: Case Study #2). This approach should include mitigation measures to account for power dynamics and safeguard against local dependency on diaspora aid.
- Consider opening new regulatory frameworks that recognize the complexity of diaspora-local relations. A new category of "diaspora-linked CSO" could be introduced, for instance, that would allow these actors to gain tax exemptions, access to humanitarian import mechanisms, and easier coordination with local authorities.
- Drive re-engagement with diaspora legislation by elevating local lessons and policy gaps to national actors. Through initiatives mentioned above, provincial authorities can build evidence on what is working at the ground level and advocate upward for reforms to dormant frameworks like the draft Diaspora Mobilization Policy and dual citizenship laws.

For institutional humanitarian actors:

Clarify entry points into formal coordination mechanisms and support diaspora actors with guidance on how to participate in UN cluster systems, ensuring mutual understanding of roles and expectations, and attention to security and anonymity concerns.

Work with government partners and encourage a multi-ministerial task force to finalize, endorse, and operationalize the 2016 draft policy, with inclusion of diaspora and CSO stakeholders in the process. Use findings from this RTR as an evidence base to demonstrate the current gap and opportunity for structured diaspora engagement.

Invest in capacity-building for diaspora actors on basic M&E, financial accountability, and impact reporting. DEMAC could develop tailored training or toolkits to strengthen these capacities. Complement this with diaspora-inclusive coordination workshops, briefings, and digital platforms through trusted intermediaries like DEMAC.

Facilitate joint programming between diaspora and local CSOs by providing flexible co-funding, light-touch technical support, and dedicated co-design forums. Funding mechanisms that require less reporting are more likely to be accessible by DOs. This approach strengthens local ownership while allowing diaspora and local actors to jointly shape and lead responses.

ANNEX I

MAPPING OF DIASPORA ORGANIZATIONS

Name	Country	Website
Action Pour Le Développement Et La Promotion De La Paix (ADPP)	Australia	N/A
AFEDE (Action des Femmes pour le Développement)	Belgium	https://www.facebook.com/AFEDEasbl/
African Community Kalamazoo	USA	https://www.carecollectiveswmi.org/african-community-kalamazoo
African Diaspora Connection	USA	https://www.africandiasporaconnection.org/congodevelopmentfund
African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe (ADYFE)	Austria	https://www.adyfe.eu
Alliance Kivu Belgium / Alliance Kivu	Belgium	https://www.alliancekivu.org/en_GB/home?
Alter'Natifs Congo	France	https://www.helloasso.com/associations/collectif-alter-natifs-congo
Association de la Solidarité Internationale du Congo Kinshasa en France	France	https://www.forim.net/con-tenu/association-de-la-solidarit%C3%A9-internationale-du-congo-kinshasa-en-france
Association France-Kivu	France	https://association-france-kivu.s2.yapla.com/fr/
CAFCO (Cadre de concertation de la femme congolaise)	Australia	https://cafco-cd.org/
Clinic Ruhigita	France	https://www.facebook.com/cliniqueruhigita/about/?_rdr
COBURWAS International Youth Organization to Transform Africa (CIYOTA)	Uganda	https://ciyota.org/
COCIT RDC Aps	Italy	https://www.cocitrdc.org/chi.html
Collectif des Organisations et des Associations des Congolais de France	France	https://www.pappers.fr/entreprise/collectif-des-organisations-et-des-associations-des-congolais-de-france-coacof-935248195
Commissariat Général de la Diaspora Congolaise (COGEDIA)	Canada	cogediua.org
Communauté congolaise de Grèce	Greece	https://www.facebook.com/congolesecommunityofgreece/
Communauté Congolaise de Worcester et ses environs.	USA	www.congolesecwc.org
Communauté des Congolais Vivant en Ouganda (CCVO)	Uganda	https://www.congolese-diaspora-ug.org/
Community of Congolese Refugees in Great Britain (CORECOG)	UK	https://refsource.gebnet.co.uk/directory/community-of-congolese-refugees-in-great-britain-corecog

Congolese Diaspora Impact Summit (CDIS)	USA	https://cdiscongo.com/
Congolese Global Fellowship	USA	https://congoleseglobalfellowship.com/
Congolese Integration Network (CIN)	USA	https://www.cinseattle.org/
Congolese Refugee Community in Uganda (CRCU)	Uganda	https://www.facebook.com/crcuofficial/
CPPS (Caravane pour la Paix et la Solidarité)	Belgium	https://www.namur.be/fr/annuaire/caravane-pour-la-paix-et-la-solidarite-asbll
Diaspora Congolaise (diaspora243.be)	Belgium	https://www.instagram.com/diaspora
Diaspora Médicale Plus-RDC	France	www.diasporamedicaleplusrdc.org
DRC Diaspora Desk	USA	https://www.diasporadesk.org/
Fédération d'Association Urgence Pona Mboka (UPM)	France	https://annuaire-entreprises.data.gouv.fr/entreprise/federation-association
Fédération de la Diaspora Congolaise (FEDIACONGO)	Belgium	https://www.fediascongo.com/
FIREFEC (Forum Interrégional des Femmes Congolaises)	Belgium	https://firefec-national.blogspot.com/2011/04/bienvenue-sur-le-blog-de-firefec.html
Focus Congo e.V.	Germany	https://www.focuscongo.com/
Fountain Of Hope Africa (USA)	USA	https://fountainofhopeafrica.org/
Friends of the Congo	USA	https://friendsofthecongo.org/
Gli Amici del Congo, RDC	Italy	https://www.gliamicidelcongordc.org/
GLOBAL GIVE HOPE, INC	USA	https://globalgivehope.org/
Jeremie Project	Germany	https://jeremieproject.com/jpc-geschichte/
Kivu Rising	USA	https://www.linkedin.com/in/kivu-rising-inc-a59a71199?trk=org-employees
Kongo Telema	France	https://www.instagram.com/kongotelema
L'association de juristes congolais de la diaspora	Belgium	https://jucodi.wordpress.com/
Les Amis du Congo Solidarité	Belgium	https://www.levolontariat.be/group/les-amis-du-congo-solidarite
Maison des Congolais de l'Étranger et des Migrations (MCDEM)	France	https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/cpt_practices/house-of-congolese-abroad-and-migrations/
New Young Scholars Inc.	USA	https://nyscholars.org/
Ntibonera Foundation	USA	https://www.ntiboneraFoundation.org/?

PACOF (Plateforme d'action de la diaspora congolaise en France)	France	https://www.pacof.fr/
Patchwork Indy	USA	https://www.patchworkindy.org/
Réseau International des Congolais de l'Extérieur (RICE)	France	https://annuaire-entreprises.data.gouv.fr/
SOS RDCONGO asbl	Belgium	https://linktr.ee/sosrdcongo
Standup Georgia Refugees / Fondation Michel Lubala	USA	https://www.standupgeorgia-refugees.org/about_us
Team Congo	Unclear	https://www.teamcongordc.com/ https://www.instagram.com/teamcongo.rdc
UFAR (United Front Against Riverblindness)	USA	https://ufar-ntds.org/
Umoja Ireland	Ireland	https://www.instagram.com/umoja01/?hl=en
Wij Zijn Congolezen	Netherlands	https://www.instagram.com/wijzijncongolezen/, https://www.linkedin.com/company/wij-zijn-congolezen/about/, https://www.watkanikdoen.nl/organisator/wij-zijn-congolezen
Young African Refugees for Integral Development (YARID)	Uganda	https://www.yarid.net/

ANNEX II:

MAPPING OF LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND AUTHORITIES

Name	Location	Website
ABCom	Goma, North Kivu	www.abcom-rdc.org
Action Communautaire d'Appui au Développement (ACAD)	South Kivu	https://www.peaceinsight.org/fr/organisations/action-communautaire-dappui-au-developpement-acad
Action de Protection Mère et Enfant, APME Asbl	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/p/APME
Actions of the New Generation for Every Life to be Saved, ANGELS	Goma, North Kivu	https://angels-ongd.org/
AFEMA RDC	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://afemardc.org/
Aide et Action à la Coopération au Développement et à la Solidarité, AACDS	Goma, North Kivu	https://aacdsrdc.org/
AJPC	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.instagram.com/ajpcrdc/?hl=en
Alliance Kivu Congo (AKV) ASBL	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.alliancekivu.org/en_GB/home
AVUDS	Goma, North Kivu / Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.developmentaid.org/organizations/view/498653/avuds-
Bureau Diocésain des Œuvres Médicales (BDOM)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.archidiocesebukavu.com/diocese/commissions-diocesaines/
Bureau d'Etudes Scientifique et Technique (BEST)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/bestrdc/?locale=fr_FR
Bureau de Coordination de la Société Civile du Sud-Kivu (BCSC S-K)	Bukavu, South Kivu	N/A
CARITAS Bukavu	Bukavu, South Kivu	N/A
CDJP (Commission Justice et Paix)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://cdjpbukavu.org/en/
Centre de Résilience Psychologique-RDC, CRP-RDC	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.mhinnovation.net/organisations/centre-de-resilience-psychologique-en-republique-democratique-du-congo
Centre d'Observation des Droits de l'Homme et d'Assistance Sociale (CODHAS)	Goma, North Kivu	https://codhas.org/
Centre OLAME	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.sciaf.org.uk/our-work/partners/244-centre-olame

CONAFOHD RDC	Bukavu, RDC	https://conafohd.org/
Directorate of Congolese Abroad (DCE)	Kinshasa	N/A
Eglise du Christ au Congo, ECC/NK	Goma, North Kivu / Bukavu, South Kivu	https.cjpsc-ecc.org/home/
Fondation Michel Luba-la Mungereza (FMLM).	Uvira, South Kivu	https://www.fmlmu.org/
Fondation Mutondo Kamun-dala « FOMUKA »	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://kivuavenir.com/revolution-juridique-la-fomuka-met-en-place-une-mutualite-juridique-au-sud-kivu/
Fondation Solidarité des Hommes (FSH)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.privatesecurityobservatory.org/about/members/fsh.html
Fountain of Hope Africa - DRC	Goma, North Kivu / Bukavu, South Kivu	https://fountainofhopeafrica.org/
Goma Actif	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.gomactif.org/
Goma city - Nyumba Kumi representative	Goma, North Kivu	N/A
GASAP (Groupe d'Action Socio-Agro Pastorale)	Between Rwanda and Kivus	www.gasap.org
Groupe des Hommes Voués au Développement Intercommunautaire (GHOVODI)	Goma, North Kivu	https://ghovodidrc.org/
Hengwa Star Foundation	Bukavu, South Kivu	N/A
Innovation pour les Droits de l'Homme et l'Environnement (IDHE)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/people/IDHE-Officiel
Jiwe Langu	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/people/JIWE-LANGU-RDC//
Mugisho Care Center	Bukavu, South Kivu	N/A
Panzi Foundation	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://panzifoundation.org/
Podium Populaire des Jeunes (PPJ) ABSL	Bukavu, South Kivu	www.ppj-international.com
Programme D'Assistance Et Protection De La Personne Handicapée (PAPH-RDC)	Goma, North Kivu	https://lafortunerdc.net/
Programme d'assistance aux vulnérables en RDC (PAV RDC)	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/people/P-A-VRDC-programme-dassistance-aux-vulnerables-en-RDC/

Promoting Youth Education (PYE)	Goma, North Kivu	N/A
RIO (Réseau d'Innovation Organisationnelle)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/p/Reseau-Dinnovation-Organisationnel-Centre-Regional-De-Paix
SFP (Synergie des Femmes pour la Paix)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://www.peaceinsight.org/fr/organisations/synergie-des-femmes-pour-la-paix
Solidarité des Femmes pour le Développement Intégral (SOFEDI)	Fizi, South Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/people/Solidarite-des-Femmes-pour-le-Developpement-Integral-SOFEDI-Asbl
Solidarité Echange Pour Le Developpement Integral, (SEDI RDC)	Uvira, South Kivu	https://www.peaceinsight.org/fr/organisations/
Solidarité pour le Développement et l'Assistance Sociale (SODAS)	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.instagram.com/sodasasbl/
Solidarité Regional des Peuples contre la Pauvreté, (SRP/N-K)	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/p/SRP-N-K-UTC-100077718725847/
Start Network Hub DRC	Goma, North Kivu	https://startnetwork.org/network/hubs/democratic-republic-congo-hub
TCN ABSL	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.facebook.com/p/Tous-vers-un-congo-nouveau
The Congo Basin Conservation Society (CBCS)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://cbcs-congobasin.org/
Tous pour la Dignité de la Femme (TDF)	Bukavu, South Kivu	N/A
Volontaires Engagés pour la Paix et le Développement, VEPD	Goma, North Kivu	https://www.cvpd-asbl.org/
Women for Equal Chances-Congo (WEC-CONGO)	Bukavu, South Kivu	https://wec-congo.org/

DEMAC
DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
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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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