



international  
**alert**

# International Alert's partnership position

## PRACTICE BRIEF

**At International Alert, we believe that violent conflict can only be resolved sustainably by those directly affected by it. Our local, national, regional and international partners are therefore central to our ability to contribute to positive social change.**

Our collaboration with partners takes many forms, tailored to the opportunities and needs of the contexts in which we work. Anyone we work with to deliver peacebuilding outcomes is a partner.

Our national partners value our positive, respectful and flexible approach, as well as our technical and organisational capacity strengthening, which many feel has increased the impact of their work. However, many feel insufficiently involved in project design and fundraising, that budgets are inadequately resourced for sustainability, and that our financial processing, communication and learning from partners should improve, and that we could do more to connect partners with each other and support partner advocacy.

Over the next five years we want our peacebuilding to be increasingly locally led and locally managed. To ensure we build strong partnerships, we will work towards them being more equitable, effective, deep and diverse. We will monitor and report on our partnership progress annually.

## The role of partnerships for Alert

The solutions to societal problems must by their very nature be applied from within a society, which means appropriate changes need to be defined and achieved by people and organisations in the conflict-affected societies in which we work. The participation and collaboration of those most affected by the conflict, and people with diverse perspectives, are essential for ending violence and building sustainable peace.

The positive social changes we seek usually require work and influence by multiple actors, beyond the capacity of a single organisation. Peacebuilding therefore requires collaboration with others locally, nationally, regionally and globally, working within networks of peacebuilding peers as well as with diverse stakeholders with multiple other interests to have an impact at scale.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 we are undertaking a process to reflect on our partnerships, hear our local and national partners' views, clarify our partnership position and develop guidance and tools to support our partnerships. This work is informed by our commitment to improving our approach to gender, diversity, equity and inclusion, and forms part of the process to develop our new organisational strategy. Our thinking is informed by global discussions about localisation, as a process supporting a shift to locally led peacebuilding.

We refer to anyone we work with to deliver peacebuilding outcomes as our partner. A partner may be an individual or a group; registered as a formal organisation (often a non-governmental organisation, NGO) or an informal network or group; or not-for-profit or private companies. A partner might work in one community, across a country or internationally: all are our partners. We fund some partners, while some partners fund us, and some we work alongside without a funding relationship. We describe entities that are primarily funding providers (institutional donors, foundations, etc.) as donors rather than partners, although in some cases such relationships share similarities with our partnerships.

## Types of partnership

We define a strong partnership as one that achieves our intended joint peacebuilding outcomes, in which we work together as peers and from which we and our partners emerge strengthened as individual entities.

We view our peacebuilding along a spectrum based on the level of leadership taken by Alert or our partner in the relationship:

1. **Locally led:** Partners or local people design the approach and set priorities, and we assist with resources.
2. **Locally managed:** The approach comes from us, but is taken up and managed by our partners.
3. **Locally implemented:** We bring the approach and the priorities that partners then implement.

Our partnerships are spread across this spectrum, although the majority of them are locally managed or locally implemented. Only a few are locally led.

The approach we take varies in different conflict and civil society contexts and can be influenced by prescriptive approaches of donors or the time available to submit bids for funding. Some partners do not seek to lead projects, whether for security reasons or a desire to avoid the administrative burden, but many feel that we are insufficiently participatory in our programme design.

## Alert's contribution to our partnerships

As an international NGO, we seek to amplify the efforts, impact and voice of our partners, work in solidarity and connect partners with others. Our accompaniment includes securing funding for partners' work, providing training, mentoring and other capacity building in peacebuilding and organisational management, and working together to influence powerholders to bring about change. Our partners support us through grounding our understanding of conflict, shaping our approach to peacebuilding, expanding our reach, bringing specific expertise to our joint work, sharing learning and ensuring we remain adaptive and relevant in the contexts in which we work.

In September 2022, as part of our reflection on our approach to partnerships, we asked our local and national partners what they thought about their partnership with Alert. 58 people responded to an anonymous survey and our country teams held discussions with 30 partners from across the globe, to gain a better understanding of how we partner at Alert and what we could do better.

Most of our partners feel we work together positively and respectfully, mutually exchanging knowledge and having open discussions about partnerships. Partners praise the technical and organisational capacity building that we provide through partnerships, with many reporting that working with us has increased the quality and impact of their work. For the most part they feel we are playing a suitable role in the sector, and many praise our flexibility and support in finding solutions to challenges.

However, while some partners are participating in design and planning, we are not involving partners sufficiently and consistently in project design. Our approach to budgeting is not enabling partners to recover sufficient overheads to build sustainable organisations, nor are we doing enough to help them fundraise independently. Some partners report problems with the speed of our financial processes and the way that we communicate requests. And partners do not feel that we learn from them, as they learn from us.

In addition to requests for more participatory project design and planning, our partners request more and continued organisational capacity strengthening. This includes ensuring partners recover sufficient overheads to develop strong internal systems, and support with fundraising, including linking them directly to donors so they can fundraise independently and ensure the sustainability of their organisation. Partners see an important role for Alert both to advocate directly on issues relevant to them, and in supporting them to advocate for themselves, as well as enabling connections with other actors in their contexts and other regions. Many of our partners want us to build longer-term relationships that are maintained beyond the life of specific projects.

## Our future partnerships

Over the next five years, we will work towards **more of our partnerships being locally led**. We will continue to deliver some locally managed and locally implemented peacebuilding, driven by the needs and capacities of our contexts and the actors in them. But we commit to actively shifting towards greater local management and leadership. Whether our partners work locally, nationally or internationally, we will work toward partnerships being more **equitable, effective, deep and diverse**.

Our teams will have varying priorities for developing their partnership practices, depending on context, needs, partners and available funding. But we will ensure that each country team has tools to enable it to pursue the improvements it and its partners have identified. We do not want to put additional pressure on partners through this process, but to further integrate good partnership practices into our work. We recognise that, like all relationships, partnerships are not always easy and require work, open discussion and clear understanding of expectations on all sides.

### Equitable

Irrespective of the kind of relationship we have with our partners (locally led, managed or implemented), or whether our partners are working in one community, nationally or internationally, we want our relationships to be based on a commitment to equity. For Alert, this means that we approach our shared work as **peers**, doing whatever we can to address the power imbalance resulting from the funding

relationship between us. We commit to **mutual accountability** and annual **joint reflection** on our work together.

We will seek to increase our partners' **access to opportunities**, particularly through sharing platforms in which they can engage directly with donors. We know that many of our partners do not currently recover sufficient core costs through the projects that we jointly implement. We are committed to **fair access to cost recovery**, including through supporting partners to analyse their overhead needs.

Achieving a shift in our partnership practice requires us to **explore our own role**, proactively reduce our dominance in project design and support partners to take lead roles. In parallel, we will increase our focus on the distinct partnership contributions through our position as an international NGO. These include increasing partners' **voice**, through joint advocacy or creating platforms for their work, and **visibility**, increasingly showcasing their work on our website and in communications, and signposting others to reach them.

## Effective

Delivering peacebuilding outcomes together is a core function of our partnerships. We want to do this more effectively, both achieving greater outcomes for those with whom we work and ensuring the process of working together is smooth. We have an obligation to our donors to comply with their regulations in sub-granting or sub-contracting funds. But we also have an obligation to our partners to **minimise the burden** of these processes. We will review our due diligence, contracting and fund transfer processes to ensure they are as efficient as possible. We will be **explicit about our respective roles** in any joint work. As an international NGO, we bring access to global experience, networks and expertise, in advocacy, peacebuilding practice, fundraising and programme management, and we will capitalise on our strengths to benefit the partnership.

We want to ensure that we and our partners benefit from our partnerships, beyond the time during which we work together on a funded project. Each partner should leave the partnership stronger than we entered it. At project start-up, we will assess the areas in which our partners and we want to **develop skills**, both to deliver the specific project and more broadly, and develop a joint plan for such capacity bridging. We will assess the progress of our capacity strengthening plans during our annual joint reflections. Achieving these shifts requires **organisational support to Alert staff**, at minimum through provision of resources and embedding of these shifts in organisational processes.

## Deep

Wherever possible, we establish long-term, strategic partnerships, in which our partners influence our priorities, we share learning and we advocate together. We would like more of our partnerships to be long-term, built on shared trust and mutual understanding. We recognise that the availability of funding may mitigate against this, but we will integrate processes into our partnering practice that increase the likelihood of such relationships developing. We commit to increasing our **joint reflection processes**, our **joint project design** and our **joint learning**.

## Diverse

Not all our partnerships will be long-term or with formal organisations. The world, and the work we do in it, will keep changing and our partnerships should do so too. Some of our teams are already working with diverse entities, including networks, social movements, cooperatives, academics and governments. We will gather and share experience of **partnering with diverse entities**, to make it easier for more country teams to diversify their partners. We will document and share our processes to enable others to benefit from our learning.

## Monitoring our partnership progress

To hold ourselves accountable to these commitments, each year we will undertake:

- a joint reflection with each partner with which we work; and
- country team reviews of their progress towards more equitable, effective, deep and diverse partnerships.

We will report publicly on our partnership progress.

We will create, use and share consistent tools for:

- planning our partnerships: agreeing and documenting joint expectations, aspirations, needs and donor requirements, including due diligence and capacity strengthening assessments;
- annual joint partnership reflection;
- annual team partnership progress assessment;
- reflecting on our partnerships in annual planning and reporting; and
- supporting capacity strengthening, involving partners in project design and advocacy.

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