ACTION POUR LES DROITS SOLIDAIRES



2024 NARRATIVE REPORT

5th January 2025

Table of Contents

0. Introduction 3

1. Activity 1: Assessment Mission in the Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara Displacement Sites, North Kivu 4

2. Activity 2 : ADS organization strengthening 9

3. Activity 3: Advocacy and Policy Engagement on Peace, Security, and Women's Rights 13

4. Activity 4 : ADS Organisation capacity strengthening 13

5. Activity 5 : building partnerships and resource mobilisation 16

6. Lessons Learned the 2024 reporting period 18

7. Conclusion 20

0. Introduction

The year 2024 represented an important phase in the institutional growth and strategic positioning of Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) as a locally led civil society organisation committed to promoting peacebuilding, gender justice, human rights, protection, and community resilience in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Operating within the highly fragile and conflict-affected environment of North Kivu, ADS continued to strengthen its institutional systems while responding to the urgent humanitarian, social, and protection challenges affecting vulnerable communities, particularly women and girls impacted by armed conflict, displacement, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Throughout the reporting period, ADS focused on reinforcing its institutional credibility, governance structures, and operational systems as a foundation for sustainable and accountable programming. Significant efforts were made to develop and operationalise key institutional policies and procedures related to anti-corruption, safeguarding, gender equality, financial management, human resources, and organisational governance. These reforms reflected ADS's conviction that building a credible, transparent, and professionally managed civil society organisation is essential for restoring public trust, strengthening locally led development, and improving service delivery within fragile contexts.

At programmatic and advocacy levels, ADS continued to deepen its engagement on issues related to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), women's empowerment, peacebuilding, and community protection. Through field assessments, strategic advocacy initiatives, policy engagement, and partnership-building efforts, ADS sought to amplify the voices and realities of conflict-affected communities while contributing to evidence-based dialogue and locally grounded solutions.

A key highlight during the reporting period was the field assessment mission conducted in the displacement sites of Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara in North Kivu Province. The mission provided critical insights into the humanitarian and protection crisis affecting internally displaced persons, particularly women and girls exposed to multiple forms of violence, exploitation, and vulnerability. The findings reinforced ADS's commitment to community-centered advocacy and the urgent need for protection-focused humanitarian responses that prioritise dignity, accountability, and long-term resilience.

ADS also strengthened its collaboration with national and regional civil society actors through strategic partnership engagements aimed at promoting collective action, joint advocacy, and collaborative resource mobilisation. These efforts reflected ADS's broader understanding that sustainable peace, gender justice, and social transformation require coordinated approaches grounded in solidarity, shared learning, and locally driven initiatives.

Despite the persistent challenges associated with insecurity, humanitarian pressures, resource constraints, and the complex operating environment in Eastern DRC, ADS remained committed to advancing its mission and strengthening its role as a credible, accountable, and community-centered organisation. The achievements, reflections, and lessons presented in this report demonstrate both the resilience of the organisation and its continued determination to contribute meaningfully to the promotion of human rights, peaceful coexistence, and the wellbeing of vulnerable populations in the DRC.

1. Activity 1: Assessment Mission in the Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara Displacement Sites, North Kivu

As part of its commitment to promoting peaceful coexistence, gender justice, and the protection of vulnerable populations, Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) conducted a field assessment mission from 13 to 14 November 2024 in the displacement sites of Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara located in Goma and Nyiragongo Territory, North Kivu Province. The mission formed part of ADS's broader strategic efforts to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and community-centered interventions responding to the growing humanitarian and protection crisis affecting internally displaced populations in Eastern DRC.

The activity was implemented in line with ADS's institutional vision of promoting "a peaceful and happy society where rights are sustainably enjoyed" and specifically contributed to the organisation's objectives of promoting gender and development as well as peace and peaceful coexistence. The mission was initiated in response to increasing reports of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and the growing vulnerability of displaced women, girls, and families living in overcrowded camps around Goma.



Figure 1: Photo of ADS staf meeting with a UNHCR staff in Bulengo IDP Camp

The primary objective of the assessment was to conduct a rapid analysis of the general situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with particular focus on the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of sexual and gender-based violence within the displacement sites. ADS also sought to collect updated and verified information regarding displacement figures, documented SGBV cases, existing response mechanisms, and the urgent protection and humanitarian needs affecting displaced populations. The findings were intended to inform future ADS interventions and contribute to evidence-based advocacy targeting humanitarian actors, authorities, and development partners.

During the mission, ADS engaged with displacement site management committees, camp authorities, humanitarian actors, and selected community representatives operating within the sites. Discussions focused on several key thematic areas, including current displacement figures, SGBV trends and statistics, humanitarian assistance available within

the camps, existing referral and response mechanisms for survivors, and the priority needs expressed by affected populations.



Figure 2: Photo of ADS staff with Humanitarian actor in Lushagala IDP Camp

The assessment revealed the scale and severity of the humanitarian crisis affecting displaced communities in North Kivu. The displacement sites visited were established following massive population movements triggered by the resurgence of armed conflict involving the M23 armed group and clashes affecting the territories of Rutshuru and Masisi. Hundreds of thousands of civilians fled violence and insecurity and settled in overcrowded and highly precarious sites around Goma and Nyiragongo.

At the time of the assessment, the three sites hosted an estimated 295,734 displaced persons across approximately 61,172 households. Bulengo site alone hosted over 192,000 displaced persons, while Lushagala hosted more than 85,000 individuals and Bushagara over 18,000. These figures highlighted the enormous pressure placed on humanitarian infrastructure and services in the affected areas.



Figure 3: ADS Team preparing to go to the IDP camps

Beyond statistical data, the mission documented deeply concerning humanitarian and protection conditions within the camps. Families were found living in extremely precarious shelters made of plastic sheeting and vegetation, often exposed to harsh weather conditions, disease outbreaks, malnutrition, insecurity, and severe overcrowding. The field visit further revealed that many displaced persons had experienced multiple displacements over time and remained trapped in prolonged uncertainty without sustainable livelihood opportunities or prospects for durable solutions.

A major focus of the assessment was the alarming prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence affecting displaced women and girls. Information collected from humanitarian actors and site representatives indicated that more than 36,000 SGBV cases had been recorded in North Kivu since January 2024, although stakeholders

acknowledged that many incidents remained unreported due to fear, stigma, insecurity, lack of information, and weak protection mechanisms. Survivors live in close proximity to perpetrators, many of whom are perceived to hold positions of power or influence within communities or camp structures.

The mission documented multiple factors contributing to heightened SGBV risks within the displacement sites. These included uncontrolled circulation of weapons, extreme poverty, overcrowding, lack of privacy, weak security measures, and harmful coping mechanisms driven by economic desperation. ADS also documented disturbing reports of "survival sex" and "sex on credit" practices affecting women and adolescent girls, many of whom resort to exploitative relationships in order to access food, basic necessities, or financial support for their families.



Figure 4: ADS Staff in Lushagala IDP Camp

Particularly concerning were reports regarding the growing phenomenon of so-called "Maisons de Tolérance" within or around some displacement sites, where vulnerable women and girls are allegedly exposed to sexual exploitation under conditions of extreme socioeconomic vulnerability. The assessment further highlighted the vulnerability of girl-headed households, where adolescent girls are sometimes separated from their families to maximise access to humanitarian assistance allocated per shelter or household unit.

The mission also identified serious concerns regarding allegations of sexual exploitation linked to some individuals involved in aid distribution and camp management structures. Community testimonies suggested that certain actors allegedly abuse positions of

authority to solicit sexual favors from women and girls in exchange for preferential access to humanitarian assistance or other advantages. These findings reinforced the importance of strengthening safeguarding, accountability, and protection systems within humanitarian responses.

Despite the presence of numerous humanitarian organisations operating in the camps—including agencies providing psychosocial support, medical assistance, legal aid, and socioeconomic reintegration support—the assessment found that humanitarian assistance remains significantly insufficient compared to the scale and urgency of needs. While organisations such as UNFPA, WFP, MEDAIR, ActionAid, NCA, Heal Africa, and MSF continue to provide important services, gaps remain substantial, particularly in protection, shelter, food security, psychosocial care, legal assistance, and sustainable livelihood support.

The assessment mission generated several important outcomes for ADS. First, it enabled the organisation to obtain updated and verified information regarding displacement trends, SGBV prevalence, and humanitarian conditions within the targeted sites. Second, it strengthened ADS's understanding of the lived realities and urgent protection needs facing displaced populations, particularly women and girls affected by conflict and displacement. Third, the mission provided critical evidence to support future study and advocacy initiatives.

More broadly, the assessment reinforced ADS's conviction that humanitarian responses in Eastern DRC must go beyond emergency assistance and place greater emphasis on protection, dignity, accountability, women's empowerment, and long-term community resilience. The findings also highlighted the critical role of local civil society organisations in documenting community realities, building trust, strengthening protection mechanisms, and promoting locally grounded solutions in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

The field mission further recommended conducting a comprehensive study on acute Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in IDP camps, with particular focus on understanding the scale and context of SGBV and survival sex practices, investigating the operation of informal sex trade networks within the camps, and documenting the lived experiences of survivors to support evidence-based advocacy and protection interventions.

2. Activity 2 : ADS organization strengthening

During the 2024 reporting period, Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) undertook a significant process of institutional strengthening aimed at reinforcing organisational credibility, accountability, professionalism, and long-term sustainability. Recognising the persistent governance and accountability challenges that continue to affect sections of the civil society sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo, ADS management considered

the development of strong internal governance systems and ethical safeguards as a critical starting point for building a credible, effective, and trusted civil society organisation capable of responsibly serving vulnerable communities and engaging with national, regional, and international partners.

Within this framework, ADS developed and adopted several key institutional policies, regulations, and operational procedures designed to strengthen internal governance, improve operational efficiency, safeguard staff and beneficiaries, and promote a culture of transparency and accountability. These included the Anti-Corruption and Bribery Policy (March 2024), the Finance Procedures Manual (March 2024), the Personnel Manual (April 2024), the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy (July 2024), the organisation's Internal Rules and Regulations, and the ADS Gender Policy (December 2024).

The adoption of these policies reflects ADS's broader institutional vision of positioning itself as a principled, community-centered, and professionally managed organisation operating in line with internationally recognised standards of governance, safeguarding, financial accountability, gender equality, and ethical conduct. The policies were also developed in recognition of the highly sensitive and fragile contexts within which ADS operates, particularly in Eastern DRC, where communities affected by armed conflict, displacement, poverty, sexual violence, and humanitarian crises require organisations that uphold the highest standards of integrity, protection, and accountability.

The Anti-Corruption and Bribery Policy was developed to establish clear standards aimed at preventing fraud, corruption, bribery, conflicts of interest, and misuse of organisational resources. The policy provides guidance on ethical behaviour, reporting mechanisms, whistleblower protection, and accountability procedures applicable to staff, consultants, volunteers, and partners. ADS management viewed this policy as particularly important in a national context where corruption perceptions continue to undermine public trust in institutions, including civil society organisations. Through this policy, ADS seeks to contribute to rebuilding confidence in locally led organisations by demonstrating commitment to transparency and responsible stewardship of resources.

Similarly, the Finance Procedures Manual was developed to strengthen financial management systems and ensure compliance with sound accounting and financial control standards. The manual establishes procedures related to budgeting, procurement, expenditure approval, financial reporting, internal controls, cash management, and audit compliance. The development of this manual was intended to improve financial discipline, reduce operational risks, and enhance ADS's capacity to manage donor and institutional resources effectively and transparently.

The Personnel Manual and Internal Rules and Regulations were introduced to provide a structured framework governing employment relationships, staff welfare, professional conduct, workplace ethics, disciplinary procedures, and organisational responsibilities.

These tools were considered essential for promoting professionalism, clarity, consistency, and fairness within the institution while also strengthening staff accountability and organisational cohesion.

In July 2024, ADS adopted its Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy as part of its commitment to safeguarding, human dignity, and protection principles. Given that ADS works extensively with women, adolescent girls, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, internally displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups, management recognised the urgent importance of institutionalising robust safeguarding mechanisms to prevent abuse, exploitation, and harmful conduct within organisational programming and operations. The policy outlines prohibited behaviours, reporting and response mechanisms, survivor-centered approaches, confidentiality principles, and accountability measures designed to ensure that all ADS interventions uphold the safety and dignity of affected populations.

The ADS Gender Policy, adopted in December 2024, further strengthened the organisation's institutional commitment to gender equality, inclusion, women's empowerment, and gender-responsive programming and operations. The policy provides a framework for mainstreaming gender considerations across organisational structures, staffing, partnerships, programme implementation, leadership, and advocacy initiatives. It also reinforces ADS's broader strategic orientation toward promoting gender justice and addressing structural inequalities affecting women and girls in Eastern DRC.

To support the effective implementation of these policies and procedures, ADS organised a series of internal orientation and capacity-strengthening sessions targeting staff and leadership structures. These trainings were designed not only to familiarise participants with the content of the newly adopted policies but also to promote institutional ownership, behavioural change, and a shared culture of accountability and professionalism within the organisation.

The trainings focused on key thematic areas including ethical conduct, anti-corruption standards, safeguarding obligations, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, workplace professionalism, financial accountability, gender sensitivity, reporting obligations, confidentiality principles, and staff responsibilities under the new institutional frameworks. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that staff understood the practical implications of these policies within day-to-day operations and community engagement processes.



Figure 5: ADS Board Members, Staff and Volunteers after training on organisational policies

As a result of these efforts, ADS observed improved institutional clarity regarding internal procedures, strengthened staff awareness of ethical and safeguarding obligations, and increased organisational readiness to engage with donors, partners, and affected communities in a professional and accountable manner. The policy development process also contributed to strengthening institutional confidence among staff and leadership by establishing clearer systems, responsibilities, and standards guiding organisational operations.

More broadly, the institutional reforms undertaken during 2024 represent an important milestone in ADS's organisational development journey. They demonstrate the organisation's commitment to building a resilient, accountable, and values-driven institution capable of delivering impactful community-centered programming while contributing positively to broader efforts aimed at strengthening the credibility and effectiveness of civil society in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3. Activity 3: Advocacy and Policy Engagement on Peace, Security, and Women's Rights

During the 2024 reporting period, Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) continued to strengthen its advocacy and policy engagement efforts aimed at promoting peacebuilding, women's rights, protection, and inclusive governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Recognising the devastating impact of prolonged armed conflict on civilians, particularly women and girls in Eastern DRC, ADS sought to contribute to national and regional policy discussions through evidence-based advocacy grounded in community realities and international human rights frameworks.

Within this framework, ADS developed and disseminated a *Call for Action on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Kampala Declaration in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. The advocacy initiative aimed to draw the attention of all actors and stakeholders involved in peace negotiations, mediation, and security processes in the DRC to the spirit and obligations contained within UNSCR 1325 and the Kampala Declaration, particularly regarding women's participation, protection, and inclusion in peace and security processes.

The advocacy highlighted concerns regarding the limited integration of women's voices and grassroots realities within ongoing peacebuilding and conflict management efforts affecting Eastern DRC. ADS called upon national authorities, regional bodies, mediators, international partners, and other stakeholders to strengthen implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda by prioritising women's participation in decision-making processes, strengthening protection mechanisms against conflict-related sexual violence, promoting accountability for violations, and supporting locally led peacebuilding initiatives.

Through this advocacy engagement, ADS reaffirmed its commitment to promoting inclusive peace processes and ensuring that the experiences and needs of conflict-affected communities—particularly women and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence—remain central within policy and security discussions concerning the future of the DRC.

4. Activity 4 : ADS Organisation capacity strengthening

During the 2024 reporting period, Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) continued to prioritise institutional strengthening and governance consolidation through targeted internal capacity-building initiatives aimed at ensuring the effective operationalisation of newly adopted organisational policies and procedures. Recognising that the adoption of institutional policies alone is insufficient without a shared understanding and internal ownership by leadership and staff, ADS organised two structured training sessions

bringing together all five staff members and six members of the Conseil d'Administration (Board of Directors).

These trainings formed part of ADS's broader institutional development strategy aimed at building a professional, accountable, ethical, and safeguarding-centered organisational culture capable of responding effectively to the complex realities of Eastern DRC. Management considered these trainings particularly important in strengthening institutional credibility, reinforcing ethical leadership, and ensuring that governance structures and operational teams shared a common understanding of the organisation's standards, responsibilities, and values.

The first two-day training, organised in August 2024, focused on the Anti-Corruption and Bribery Policy and the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy. The training was designed to strengthen participants' understanding of ethical conduct, transparency, accountability, safeguarding obligations, and institutional responsibility toward both staff and communities served by ADS.

Within the anti-corruption component, discussions focused on the risks that corruption, bribery, conflicts of interest, and misuse of resources pose to civil society credibility, public trust, and programme effectiveness. Participants explored practical accountability measures, reporting mechanisms, whistleblower protections, financial integrity standards, and the individual responsibilities of staff and Board members in promoting a culture of transparency and ethical conduct. The training also created space for critical reflection on the broader governance challenges affecting institutions in the DRC and the role that credible local civil society organisations must play in promoting accountability and restoring public confidence.

The PSEAH component focused on safeguarding principles and the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment within organisational operations and community engagement processes. Given that ADS works extensively with women, girls, internally displaced persons, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, management considered safeguarding capacity-building to be a critical institutional priority. The sessions addressed prohibited behaviours, survivor-centered approaches, confidentiality, reporting and referral mechanisms, power dynamics in humanitarian and development settings, and the collective responsibility of staff and leadership to uphold dignity, safety, and protection standards in all ADS interventions.

The second two-day training, conducted in December 2024, focused on the ADS Gender Policy, Internal Rules and Regulations, and a refresher session on the PSEAH Policy. This training sought to deepen institutional understanding of gender equality principles while also strengthening professionalism, organisational discipline, and policy compliance within ADS structures.

The Gender Policy sessions explored concepts of gender equality, gender-responsive programming, women's empowerment, inclusion, and the importance of integrating gender perspectives across organisational systems and interventions. Discussions particularly emphasised the structural barriers faced by women and girls in Eastern DRC, including conflict-related vulnerabilities, economic marginalisation, and barriers to participation and leadership. Participants reflected on how ADS's institutional culture and programming approaches could further contribute to advancing gender justice and inclusive community engagement.

The sessions on Internal Rules and Regulations focused on strengthening organisational coherence, professionalism, and accountability by clarifying institutional procedures, workplace expectations, staff responsibilities, disciplinary processes, and standards of conduct. Management viewed this component as important for promoting consistency, fairness, and mutual accountability within the organisation while strengthening internal governance systems as ADS continues to grow institutionally.

The refresher session on the PSEAH Policy provided an opportunity to reinforce safeguarding principles, revisit reporting obligations, and address practical safeguarding considerations emerging from ADS's operational experiences during the year. The refresher approach also reflected ADS's recognition that safeguarding is not a one-time compliance exercise but rather a continuous institutional responsibility requiring ongoing awareness, vigilance, and learning.

The trainings generated several important institutional outcomes. First, they significantly strengthened staff and Board awareness of ADS's ethical, safeguarding, governance, and accountability standards. Participants demonstrated improved understanding of institutional policies, reporting procedures, and individual responsibilities related to anti-corruption, safeguarding, gender equality, and professional conduct.

Second, the trainings contributed to strengthening institutional cohesion and shared ownership of ADS's organisational values and operational standards. By jointly involving staff and members of the Conseil d'Administration, the trainings helped reinforce a common institutional vision regarding accountability, professionalism, transparency, and protection-centered programming.

Third, the trainings strengthened ADS's institutional readiness to engage more effectively with donors, partners, and affected communities by reinforcing internal compliance systems and governance practices aligned with internationally recognised standards. The process also contributed to fostering a stronger safeguarding culture within the organisation, particularly important given ADS's direct engagement with vulnerable populations affected by conflict, displacement, and gender-based violence.

More broadly, these capacity-strengthening initiatives reflected ADS's long-term commitment to building a resilient, credible, and professionally governed local civil society

organisation capable of delivering impactful, rights-based, and community-centered interventions in Eastern DRC.

5. Activity 5 : building partnerships and resource mobilisation

As part of its institutional vision of promoting sustainable social transformation through collective action and strategic alliances, Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS) continued during the 2024 reporting period to strengthen collaboration and partnership-building efforts with like-minded civil society organisations working on peacebuilding, gender justice, protection, and community resilience in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Guided by this philosophy, ADS actively identified and engaged organisations whose missions, values, and programmatic priorities align with its broader commitment to human rights, peaceful coexistence, women's empowerment, and inclusive community development. During the reporting period, ADS held a series of strategic consultative meetings aimed at exploring opportunities for institutional collaboration, joint programming, knowledge exchange, and coordinated resource mobilisation.

Within this framework, ADS organised three strategic meetings with Synergie des Femmes pour les Victimes des Violences Sexuelles (SFVS), a women-led organisation working on issues related to sexual violence prevention, women's rights, protection, and survivor support. Discussions focused on identifying areas of complementarity between the two organisations, particularly around women's empowerment, gender justice, psychosocial support, protection programming, and community resilience initiatives targeting vulnerable women and girls affected by conflict and displacement.

In parallel, ADS held five strategic meetings with Africa Reconciled (AR), an organisation engaged in peacebuilding, social cohesion, and community reconciliation initiatives. The discussions with Africa Reconciled centered on strengthening collaboration around youth engagement, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and the promotion of social cohesion within conflict-affected communities in Eastern DRC. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of young people as key actors in promoting peaceful coexistence, reducing community tensions, and contributing to long-term community resilience in fragile environments.

These engagements reflected ADS's broader strategic approach of promoting synergy-based programming, whereby organisations with complementary expertise and community networks collaborate to maximise impact, strengthen local ownership, reduce duplication of efforts, and enhance the sustainability of interventions. The meetings also created important spaces for mutual institutional learning, strategic reflection, and exchange of experiences regarding operational realities, donor engagement, and locally led approaches to peacebuilding and protection programming.



Figure 6: Civil Society Leaders preparing for peace-building and social cohesion event in Goma

One of the major outcomes of these partnership engagements was the development and submission of joint fundraising proposals aimed at mobilising resources for community-centered interventions addressing pressing social and humanitarian challenges in Eastern DRC.

In partnership with SFVS, ADS jointly developed and submitted a proposal titled *Maisha Bora Activity* to United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The proposed initiative sought to strengthen the resilience, protection, and socioeconomic wellbeing of vulnerable populations, particularly women and survivors of violence, through integrated community-based interventions.

Similarly, ADS and Africa Reconciled jointly developed and submitted a proposal titled *Vijana Amani na Umoja wa Jamii – Youth for Peace and Social Cohesion* to USAID. The proposal focused on promoting youth participation in peacebuilding, strengthening social cohesion, preventing violence, and fostering constructive community engagement among young people in conflict-affected settings.

Although both proposals demonstrated strong alignment with community priorities and the participating organisations' shared commitment to locally led peacebuilding and protection efforts, implementation prospects were significantly affected by the indefinite suspension of certain USAID funding processes under the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump. This development created uncertainty for many local civil

society organisations and partnerships that had invested substantial technical, financial, and institutional effort into proposal development and consortium-building processes.



Figure 7: Civil Society Leaders in a breakfast brainstorming meeting about peace and the state of civil society in post war context in North Kivu and beyond

Despite these external funding challenges, ADS considers the partnership-building efforts undertaken during 2024 to be an important institutional achievement and a strategic investment in long-term collaboration, movement-building, and locally led development. The engagements strengthened institutional relationships, expanded ADS's collaborative network, enhanced organisational visibility within the civil society ecosystem, and reinforced the organisation's commitment to collective approaches aimed at addressing the multidimensional challenges facing communities in Eastern DRC.

6. Lessons Learned the 2024 reporting period

The implementation of ADS activities during the 2024 reporting period generated several important institutional, programmatic, and strategic lessons that will continue to inform the organisation's future interventions and organisational development processes.

One of the key lessons learned is that strong institutional systems and internal governance mechanisms are fundamental to building the credibility, sustainability, and

effectiveness of local civil society organisations operating in fragile and conflict-affected environments. The process of developing organisational policies and conducting internal capacity-building trainings demonstrated the importance of investing not only in programming but also in institutional accountability, safeguarding, ethical leadership, and professional management systems. ADS observed that clear policies, staff orientation, and leadership ownership contribute significantly to strengthening organisational cohesion, transparency, and operational confidence.

ADS also learned that community-centered approaches remain critical for designing relevant and impactful interventions. The field assessment conducted in the displacement sites of Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara highlighted the importance of direct community engagement and evidence-based analysis in understanding the multidimensional realities affecting internally displaced populations. The mission reinforced the value of listening to affected communities, documenting lived experiences, and grounding advocacy initiatives in verified field realities rather than assumptions.

Another important lesson was the interconnected nature of humanitarian, protection, governance, and socioeconomic challenges affecting communities in Eastern DRC. The assessment findings demonstrated that sexual and gender-based violence cannot be addressed in isolation from broader issues such as poverty, displacement, insecurity, weak protection systems, social exclusion, and limited livelihood opportunities. ADS recognised the importance of adopting integrated and intersectional approaches that simultaneously address protection, psychosocial wellbeing, women's empowerment, social cohesion, and long-term resilience.

The reporting period further highlighted the critical role of partnerships and collaboration among civil society organisations. Engagements with organisations such as SFVS and Africa Reconciled demonstrated that strategic alliances create opportunities for shared learning, stronger advocacy, complementary expertise, and increased visibility for locally led initiatives. ADS learned that collective approaches not only strengthen resource mobilisation efforts but also enhance the legitimacy and sustainability of advocacy and community interventions.

At the advocacy level, ADS observed that local civil society organisations continue to play an essential role in amplifying the voices of conflict-affected communities within policy and peacebuilding discussions. However, the organisation also recognised the persistent challenge of limited financial and institutional support for grassroots actors despite their proximity to affected populations and their contribution to evidence generation, trust-building, and social mobilisation.

Finally, ADS learned that safeguarding, gender equality, and accountability must remain continuous institutional priorities rather than one-time compliance exercises. The trainings conducted during the year reinforced the importance of ongoing awareness,

internal reflection, and organisational commitment to ensuring safe, inclusive, and rights-based programming environments for both staff and communities served.

7. Conclusion

The 2024 reporting period marked an important milestone in the institutional and programmatic development of Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS). Despite operating within one of the world's most complex humanitarian and conflict-affected environments, ADS continued to strengthen its institutional foundations while advancing its commitment to peacebuilding, gender justice, protection, and community resilience in Eastern DRC.

Throughout the year, ADS demonstrated significant progress in strengthening internal governance, accountability, safeguarding, and organisational professionalism through the development of key institutional policies, operational procedures, and staff capacity-building initiatives. These efforts reflected ADS's broader vision of contributing to the emergence of credible, transparent, and community-centered civil society organisations capable of effectively responding to the needs and aspirations of vulnerable populations.

The organisation also continued to deepen its engagement with conflict-affected communities through field assessments, advocacy initiatives, and strategic partnerships. The assessment mission in the displacement sites of Bulengo, Lushagala, and Bushagara provided critical evidence regarding the humanitarian and protection challenges facing internally displaced populations, particularly women and girls exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation, and extreme vulnerability. The findings reinforced the urgent need for integrated, protection-centered, and dignity-based humanitarian responses grounded in community realities.

At the same time, ADS strengthened its role as an advocacy actor by contributing to policy discussions on peacebuilding, women's rights, governance, and the implementation of international frameworks related to women, peace, and security. Through collaboration with like-minded organisations and strategic engagement with regional and international platforms, ADS continued to promote locally grounded perspectives and advocate for greater inclusion of grassroots voices in decision-making processes affecting Eastern DRC.

While significant challenges remain—including insecurity, displacement, humanitarian pressures, limited resources, and structural vulnerabilities—ADS remains committed to strengthening its institutional capacity, expanding strategic partnerships, and promoting sustainable, rights-based, and community-driven solutions. The experiences and achievements of 2024 reaffirm ADS's conviction that meaningful and lasting social transformation requires accountable institutions, inclusive peacebuilding, empowered communities, and sustained investment in local civil society leadership.

As ADS moves forward, the organisation remains dedicated to its mission of mobilising communities and building strategic alliances to promote peaceful coexistence, human dignity, gender justice, and resilient communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo.