

Partnership Framework

Contents

Executive summary	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Background and context	4
1.2 Purpose	4
1.3 Audience	4
1.4 Scope	5
1.5 Process development	5
2. What partnership means for War Child	6
2.1 Defining partnership	7
2.2 Our partnership values and principles	7
3. Why we partner	9
3.1 Typologies	9
3.2 Partnership modalities	10
4. Who we partner with	11
5. How we make value-based partnership happen	13
5.1 Principles into practice	13
5.2 Partnership pathways	17
5.3 Mechanisms for mutual accountability	17
5.4 Review and monitoring of the framework	18
6. Conclusion	20
Annexes	
1. Framework development collaborative process	21
2. Summary of validation (from partners and staff) on Version 3	23

Executive summary

War Child has been working with, for and in collaboration with stakeholders for more than 30 years to address the needs of children and youth affected by conflict around the world. In 2024, more children than ever were estimated to be either living in conflict zones or forcibly displaced due to conflict and violence (**UNICEF**). At War Child, we see our role in this global crisis as collaborating with those directly affected in shaping and enabling the humanitarian ecosystem to achieve quality impact in the lives of children and youth affected by conflict.

Partnerships are imperative to addressing these mounting needs and driving quality programming through innovation, effective utilisation of existing resources and scaling our work beyond our own organisational capacity. Effective partnerships improve programming quality and efficiency, ensure true reflection of local knowledge and priorities, as well as increase overall reach and sustainability. We know from experience that through a wide variety of partnerships, including with local actors, national and international NGOs as well as corporates, academics and ambassadors, we are stronger and can achieve more with less.

At War Child, we define **partnerships as purposeful, complementary, reciprocal, and professional relationship between two or more actors who share values and principles to pursue mutually beneficial goals and the shared objective of improving the well-being of children affected by conflict.**

This is underpinned by four key value areas:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Honesty, transparency and accountability
- Growth and learning
- Agility and flexibility

This framework is grounded in an honest recognition that War Child operates within systems that do not yet fully support the partnership values it commits to. Donor compliance structures, project-cycle funding, and institutional risk-management requirements create real constraints on power-sharing and equitable resource allocation. This framework does not resolve those structural tensions; however, it names them clearly, commits War Child to actively working to reduce them, and establishes a standard against which progress can be measured.

Our commitments are not conditional on the absence of institutional barriers; they are the mandate by which we navigate and challenge those barriers.

Realising these commitments requires genuine organisational investment. Equitable, collaborative partnerships involve more tailored engagement, greater staff time, and investment in partner capacity and relational infrastructure than transactional sub-granting. War Child accepts this cost as an organisational priority, and expects it to be reflected in staffing structures, job descriptions, budget design, and internal performance expectations. Moving toward more equitable partnerships with more diverse actors is not cost-neutral; it is a strategic choice with resource implications that leadership must actively resource.

Our Partnership Framework has been developed through a collaborative process to articulate the War Child Alliance's approach, values, and principles for partnership. It provides clarity regarding our collective ambitions and guides decisions and behaviours across the organisation. It is not an operational manual. Rather, it establishes a shared foundation for how War Child approaches partnerships across the Alliance including the areas of; humanitarian programmes, acute crisis response, research and development (R&D), scaling, institutional fundraising, advocacy and communications. This framework applies to all areas of War Child's work, and as such, should be reflected in the processes, policies and ways of working established by all teams. Partnerships ensure programming effectiveness, provide resources (financial and otherwise) to expand reach and quality, improve positive impact in the lives of targeted children and youth, enhance and recognise local knowledge and expand reach to help shape the systems that protect and support the well-being of children and youth affected by conflict.



1. Introduction



1.1 Background and context

War Child has been working with local, national and international actors since its inception in 1993. These relationships have been a critical element of our humanitarian programming, advocacy and communications efforts, as well as our scaling, institutional funding and research and development (R&D) initiatives. In 2018, **a Joint Partnership Policy** was developed by both War Child Holland and War Child UK regulating how to effectively work with partners across resource mobilisation, programming, advocacy, communication and research. However, the Joint Policy did not clearly commit War Child to values-based relationships, leaving scope for asymmetrical power imbalances, (i.e. partnerships were governed and approved centrally with War Child retaining financial and strategic control), entrenched post-colonial narratives and practices, and a lack of clear accountability and transparency between War Child and partners.

With the formation of the War Child Alliance in 2024, partnerships have taken on even greater importance within the organisation's mandate and mission. War Child sees partnerships as **imperative** to improving the lives of children and youth affected by conflict. Effective partnerships improve programming quality as well as increase reach and sustainability, particularly as War Child works **to collaborate with local actors.**[1] We know from experience that through partnerships, we are stronger and can achieve more with less.

This commitment has resulted in several developments organisationally including some structural governance changes at all levels of War Child, the release of the War Child Alliance Impact Strategy (2024), as well as, the **War Child Alliance Foundation's Focused Strategy 2026-2028** which places 'partnerships' as central to our work. The development of this Partnership Framework is the next stage in this strategic journey, marking a new phase in how War Child defines, practices and is accountable within its partnerships.

As such, while this document provides a **value framework** to underpin a wide variety of partnerships, there is a necessary focus on partnerships with local and national actors throughout the following sections, reflecting this organisational strategic prioritisation.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this framework is to articulate **War Child's values and principles** for partnership. It provides clarity on our **collective ambitions** and guides decisions and behaviours across the organisation.

This is not an operational manual. Rather, it establishes a **shared foundation** for how War Child understands and enacts partnership across the organisation. Operational guidance, tools, and procedures should be embedded within teams and function's policies, processes and ways of working, guided by the values outlined in this framework.

This Partnership Framework document **sits above all partner-related documents**, that include the Grant Management Policy, Institutional Donor Partnership Policy, Responsible Fundraising Policy, ICR Sharing policy; and guidance documents (e.g. Grant Management Guidance & Tools, the Evidence-Based Methodologies Partnership Journey, etc.). Where subordinate policies are found to be inconsistent with the commitments in this Framework, those policies must be reviewed and aligned.

This framework applies to all **War Child operations** including country offices, Fundraising Members, and should be aligned with other Alliance-wide policies (i.e. Localisation Framework, Humanitarian Framework, Research and Development Guidebook, Integrity Framework, etc.).

1.3 Audience

The Partnership Framework is designed for:

- **Internal use** by all War Child staff – Fundraising Members, global, regional, and country levels – to ensure a unified approach to partnership building and management
- **External sharing** – with potential and existing partners, donors, and peer organisations to communicate War Child's partnership philosophy and commitments.

1.4
Scope

This framework addresses the **different types of partnerships** from the local and national level including local actors and civil society organisations (CSOs) in countries facing crises, through to international donors, research organisations, INGOs, etc.

The framework addresses partnerships established within each of the key areas that are critical to the achievement of War Child's strategic objectives on **impact amplification and programming effectiveness:** resource mobilisation, strategic positioning and influencing, and knowledge generation.

The framework also encompasses the wider ecosystem of actors whose engagement shapes **programming quality and community accountability:** caregivers, community leaders, faith-based actors, and education authorities. While not all these relationships constitute 'partnerships' in the formal sense, the values and principles in this framework should guide how War Child engages with all of them. The parameters of the term 'partnership' within this framework do not include purely transactional relationships such as those with suppliers, auditors, or external consultants, which are deliverable based. Where the distinction between a transactional and a partnership relationship is unclear, teams should default to applying the values in the **Partnership Framework**.

1.5
Process development

This Partnerships Framework has been developed through a collaborative process to articulate the War Child Alliance's **approach, values, and principles for partnership**. A dedicated Task Group within the Localisation Working Group was formed to ensure the process of developing this framework was collaborative and participatory. (See Annex 1 for the detailed process).

This framework has been shaped directly by the voices of War Child's partners. During the drafting stage, the consultative process included key informant interviews with existing partners, and an anonymous validation survey received from **46 organisations** across Africa, Southwest Asia, Europe, Colombia, and the United States.

Once the draft version was ready, internal staff across all teams also contributed structured validating feedback via focus group discussions and written submissions. A total of **14 partners** via a survey and three focus group discussions also provided feedback to the pre-final version. Where partners identified gaps, those gaps have been addressed in this 5th version (pre-final). Where tensions remain unresolved, they are named rather than obscured. A summary of how feedback shaped this revision is provided on Annex 2.



A staff member from War Child partner organisation Uganda Refugee and Disaster Management Council leads an EASE session for Sudanese refugees in Uganda. © War Child



Sisters Amal and Layla receive psychosocial support from War Child and partner the Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training after their house was destroyed in an air strike. © War Child

2. What partnership means for War Child

Partnerships are **purposeful, complementary, reciprocal,** and **professional** relationships between two or more actors who share values and principles to pursue mutually-beneficial goals, and the shared objective of improving the well-being of children and youth affected by conflict.

2.1
Defining partnerships



Purposeful

War Child primarily partners to achieve the best impact for children and youth affected by conflict. This purposefulness extends to the relationship itself: partnerships should not be transactional vehicles for programme delivery. Partners are actors with **strategic agency**, not implementers executing War Child's plans. Where a partner has the contextual knowledge, community trust, and institutional standing to lead a programme or advocacy initiative, War Child's role is to **support that leadership**, not to retain strategic control.

Complementary

War Child recognises and values the **critical skills, knowledge, access, resources and technical capacities** of other actors which can strengthen War Child's own capacities. We form partnerships which pool together complementary expertise and resources that result in outcomes which are greater than those that could have been achieved if War Child works alone.

Reciprocal

Where power, value, and voice flow both ways. War Child partnerships move beyond one side giving and the other receiving – instead, **both contribute, influence, and learn from each other**. This relational balance shifts power from dependency toward shared agency and mutual accountability, creating space for genuine partnership and co-creation.

Professional

War Child's partnerships are founded on **organisational trust, mutual respect, and accountability**. Partnership agreements are documented to ensure that obligations rest with organisations rather than individuals. These agreements articulate shared values and principles, define roles and responsibilities, and commit all parties to the pursuit of a common goal.

War Child views partnerships as places for joint learning where experiences, both positive and negative are embraced, and **partnerships grow and evolve** with time and experience.

2.2
Our partnership values and principles

Partnership approaches must intentionally consider **intersectionality and the diversity of lived realities** within affected communities, including barriers linked to gender, disability, displacement status, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other forms of marginalisation

Below outlines the core values and principles which War Child maintains when engaging in partnerships.[2]

Mutual trust and respect

We act in **solidarity and share visibility, resources and credit**. We acknowledge our unique strengths and weaknesses and work together to achieve our agreed common objectives. We act in good faith and engage in genuine co-collaboration.

Honesty, transparency and accountability

We commit to **clear and honest communication**, and to share information openly. We define responsibilities and share accountability, and where relevant, risks are shared, not transferred.

Growth and mutual learning

We engage with partners with **humility and a willingness to learn**. We embrace the opportunity that partnership offers for shared reflection and learning.

We prioritise **shared capacity strengthening** opportunities, placing **equal value** across the range of skills, knowledge and experience each partner brings to the relationship.

Agility and flexibility

We remain agile in our approach to partnerships, maintaining a **capacity to pivot quickly** within evolving contexts including acute crisis response. We are **flexible** in our approaches with partners, actively removing barriers to constructive collaboration when required and appropriate.

Equity

War Child acknowledges that inherent **power imbalances** exist at both the global and sector levels. War Child works to address systemic and historical power imbalances within its partnerships. This includes being explicit about where the ambition is for partner-led (rather than jointly led) relationships: where a local or national partner has the mandate, community trust, and institutional standing to lead, War Child's aspiration is to step into a **supporting** rather than leading role.

We acknowledge that this transition is uneven, context-dependent, and impeded by structural factors including donor requirements and capacity gaps. We commit to naming these **obstacles** explicitly and working to reduce them rather than using them as justification for retaining control.

Further, War Child commits to actively creating space for historically **marginalised actors**, including women-led, youth-led, disability-led, refugee-led and minority-led organisations, to participate meaningfully in partnership governance, programme design, decision-making, and resource allocation processes.

Respect for autonomy and self-determination

War Child's partners are **independent organisations** with their own mandates, missions, governance, and strategic direction. They are not extensions of War Child, and partnership does not require them to adopt War Child's identity, priorities, or ways of working.

War Child respects each partner's right to **self-determination**: to set its own institutional direction, define its own capacity-strengthening priorities, pursue other relationships and sources of funding, and decline propositions or opportunities without prejudice to the partnership.

War Child actively works against creating dependency; where it provides **organisational or financial support**, it does so in ways that strengthen partners' independent sustainability rather than tie their viability to War Child.

Acting as a strategic intermediary

With over three decades of **trusted relationships** across local and global systems, War Child is well positioned to convene diverse actors and facilitate equitable partnerships that promote **quality localisation** and achieve maximum **reach and impact for children** most acutely affected by conflict.

An ally in transformation

War Child participates in and reinforces spaces where partners can **take up their role as leaders** within humanitarian programming whilst continuing to provide organisational and technical support as well as resources where necessary and requested by partners.

Partnerships are a critical element of our journey towards meeting our **localisation commitments**. Partnering with local and national actors ensure War Child is working closer with the communities and stakeholders directly affected by conflict and who understand the most critical priorities.



Commitment to sector standards

War Child is signatory to different international conventions, standards and agreements for both the humanitarian sector as well as the post conflict/development sector. The Partnership Framework signifies our commitment to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS), of which 2 out of the 9 commitments are directly related to partnerships:

- CHS Commitment #3 – Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects.
- CHS Commitment #6 – Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.

Our commitment to the **CHS** means 'applying and demonstrating at all levels and functions of the organisation a culture of quality and accountability in organisational values, working approaches and internal methods, and interactions with stakeholders'.

War Child is also guided by our commitments made as signatory to the Charter for Change and complies more generally with the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief; Humanitarian Charter including Protection Principles, Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action; and INEE Minimum Standards for Education.

3.
Why we partner

Partnerships take many forms at War Child, adding value across all functions. War Child primarily partners with other entities and actors with the purpose of amplifying its impact, for generating knowledge, for better influencing and positioning and for mobilising resources. Hence, the typologies of partnerships are based on these objectives.

The typologies below describe primary partnership purposes and should be used as navigational reference rather than rigid categorisation. In practice, most partnerships serve more than one purpose and will shift emphasis over time. Teams are encouraged to identify the primary purpose at inception and revisit as the partnership evolves. The typology does not determine the depth of the relationship or the resources allocated to it (e.g. a bilateral partnership for advocacy may require as much investment as a multi-year implementation partnership).

> Together, we can co-create adaptive strategies that combine global best practice with local realities, ensuring that our partnership is impactful and rooted in the voices of the communities we serve.
>
> *War Child partner*

3.1 Typologies

The type of partnership is based on its primary purpose:

Partnerships for impact amplification

War Child is committed to reaching more children affected by conflict through strategic, equitable partnerships and improving the quality of humanitarian programming. Partnerships for **impact amplification** aim to connect with partners with similar strategic objectives. These partnerships should harness each party's unique expertise and capacities to improve quality programming, including via the expanded use of **Evidence-Based Methodologies (EBMs)**, and within humanitarian programming with children most acutely affected by conflict. Together with partners, War Child will implement and expand the use of EBMs, integrating and aligning these with other best practice interventions, humanitarian preparedness and crisis response, beyond the in-house capacity of War Child.
In acute crisis responses, partnership driven actions shaped by the **needs and priorities** of affected populations will ensure actions are facilitating **local leadership** and recognising the necessary value of humanitarian coordination. Mutual learning, shared capacity exchange, and joint decision-making are embedded.

Partnerships for knowledge generation

War Child is dedicated to the continual evolution and expansion of EBMs within the core sectors of **education, child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)**. Partnerships for knowledge generation aim to facilitate this work, either through collaboration with academic and research institutions and/or via organisations trialling and testing EBMs in 'real time' in conflict contexts. As War Child positions itself as a **thought-leader** in the sector, these partnerships will be critical for driving continual quality improvement to the assistance provided to children and youth affected by conflict.

Partnerships for positioning and influencing

Bilateral partnerships, dynamic coalitions or consortia and networks can offer each partner better channels of **engagement** with the wider community and greater capacity to influence the policy, practice and priorities of governments and public/private institutions. These partnerships centre and **amplify local voices** and the **voices of children and youth** affected by conflict in meaningful ways, including linking partner advocacy efforts to regional and global fora to effectively shape the systems that protect and ensure the well-being of children affected by conflict. Partnerships for positioning and influencing are grounded in **co-creation and joint influence**, not representation. Speaking for partners should occur only when safety, access, or risk demands it and always with their informed consent and direction. Partnerships are drawn from shared evidence and lived experience, combining local insights with global research to create collective, credible policy positions that reflect diverse realities.

Partnerships for resource mobilisation

As the humanitarian sector evolves, partnership opportunities within resource mobilisation continue to expand; consortium partnerships that leverage **future income opportunities**, as well as a growing variety of partnerships with donors, contributors and sponsors. These include traditional government donors, national/local actors' consortium, as well as foundations and philanthropy groups, academia, companies, artists and ambassadors, contributing not only funding, but also expertise, networks, platforms and influence.

3.2 Partnership modalities



War Child sees partnerships as essential in all aspects of its work. The types of partnerships we engage in are diverse, serve clear objectives, and exist at all levels (local, national and international) across War Child's programming, advocacy, communications, scaling, fundraising and research departments. With this diversity, War Child recognises the need to make a **differentiation** among partners. This partnership differentiation is essential as partner- organisations are diverse. Treating all partners the same reinforces inequities, misaligns support, and limits meaningful power-sharing.

The different **modalities of partnership** can be:

According to composition

- Bilateral partnerships: between War Child and another party.
- Multi-lateral partnerships: between War Child and at least two other parties.

According to duration

- Time-bound: agreed engagement **with clear time frame**.
- Indefinite: agreed engagement **without time limitation**.

According to intent

- Tactical: one that is **short-term** in nature, task-oriented, and **very specific** in scope and purpose.
- Strategic: one that shares **long-term** goals, values, and impact ambition, regardless of geography or size. National, local, and youth partners are **equally strategic** when they drive system change and collective learning.

According to resource investment

- Funding-based: bound by (actual or prospective) **funding flows** (from or to War Child).
- Non-financial: bound by other objectives that are **non-financial in nature** (such as pro bono support, non-financial contributions or expertise sharing).

Partners can be classified within more than one category of partnership at a time. For example, War Child may engage with a fellow INGO on key advocacy strategies whilst also supporting that same INGO to implement an EBM into their global approaches. In this sense, that partnership would be considered a partnership for both positioning and influence as well as impact amplification.



Our partner Uganda Refugee and Disaster Management Council leads a workshop with Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo refugee settlement, Uganda. © War Child

4. Who we partner with

Achieving the best impact for children and youth in conflict contexts involves partnering with a range of **different actors**. Collaboration may occur through bilateral agreements, via coalitions, consortiums or as part of formal networks as well as strategic partnerships.

Across all partner types, War Child recognises that the purpose of a partnership determines the role partners play, but it does not determine the depth of that role. Partners are not limited to delivery functions. Civil society organisations, national NGOs, and community actors may play strategic roles in shaping organisational priorities, contributing to advocacy positions, informing research agendas, and influencing how War Child resources are allocated. War Child actively **creates space** for these roles rather than limiting partner engagement to programme implementation.

War Child recognises that some actors remain systematically underrepresented within humanitarian partnerships and commits to intentionally expanding engagement with historically marginalised groups and representative organisations.

Below highlights the **types of actors** War Child would seek to collaborate with. The list is indicative, non-exhaustive and is not designed to restrict who War Child can seek to collaborate and partner with.

- **Children and youth:** Working directly with War Child so that their needs and priorities inform all our work. This can include via the development of EBMs and research activities, humanitarian preparedness and response programming, and advocacy or communications such as VoiceMore advocacy groups.
- **Communities, caregivers and families:** The people most directly affected by conflict are not passive recipients of programming. Caregivers, community leaders, and local networks hold knowledge, trust, and influence that no external actor can replicate. War Child commits to engaging communities as actors with agency and voice, not only as beneficiary populations.
- **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** Including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the community, local, national levels. This could include associations, cooperatives, faith-based organisations, diaspora or refugee-led organisations, informal associations, youth and women-led groups, and community-based groups/committees.
- **Government structures:** Including local authorities, traditional/religious leaders, national ministries and government agencies.
- **Institutional donors** including government funding.
- **International organisations or agencies, multi-lateral institutions:** Including international non-government organisations (INGO's), UN agencies, World Bank, or other international agencies/institutions.
- **Research and academic organisations:** Including at the local, national and international levels; universities, think-tanks, professional associates, academic institutions etc.
- **Private sector:** Including small, medium and large businesses, global advisory companies with a focus in humanitarian assistance and/or foreign aid, for-profit or commercial entities etc.
- **Philanthropy:** Including individuals, foundations, philanthropic departments within private businesses etc.
- **Media entities:** Including individuals/businesses involved in the dissemination of news and information via digital, print or radio content including news outlets, newspapers, radio stations, social media and others.

In countries of operations, War Child partners with organisations across a wide spectrum of institutional complexity, from informal community-based groups to large national NGOs with established systems. This **diversity is a strength**, but it also has resource implications: partnerships with less institutionally complex organisations require greater accompaniment, more flexible processes, and more dedicated staff time.



War Child will **not** partner with any organisation, group, or individual whose actions, affiliations, or values conflict with War Child's mission to protect, educate, and empower children affected by war.[3] This includes:

- **Actors involved in or enabling armed conflict:** *armed groups, militias, political factions engaged in violence, or groups that have been implicated in human rights abuses.*
- **Organisations that violate human rights or child protection standards:** *entities involved in child labour, sexual exploitation, trafficking, or recruitment of child soldiers. Groups that fail to comply with child safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) standards.*
- **Companies with unethical business practices:** *including, but not limited to, companies engaged in extracting materials from the earth (oil, gas, mining) or foundations funded by them, or entities engaged in the manufacture or sale of arms, and those involved in corruption, bribery, or tax evasion. The Responsible Fundraising Policy has a detailed exclusion criteria. Further donor vetting is specified in anti-fraud/ corruption/terrorism policies and/or guidelines.*

Partnerships must align with ethical and "Do No Harm" principles, ensuring War Child's relationship with entities, funding sources, and alliances do not undermine its mission.

5.

How we make value-based partnerships happen

5.1 Principles into practice

To achieve the partnership principles and values outlined within this framework, War Child continuously works to improve its ways of working through **collaboration, reflection, and shared learning with partners**. The following approaches will guide our approach to translating principles into practice.



Children and families attend psychosocial and education sessions in Akkar refugee settlement in Lebanon with War Child partner Akkar Network for Development. © War Child

Partnership minimum commitments[4]

The following minimum standards represent the floor of what War Child commits to across all partnerships involving local and national actors. They are **non-negotiable baselines**, not aspirational goals. Departure from these standards in any context requires documented justification and senior management approval.

- **Leadership accountability and partnership monitoring:** War Child commits to co-create with partners measurable indicators to **monitor progress** toward equitable partnership practices. Collaborative partnership reviews will include assessment of representation, decision-making influence, resource distribution, feedback processes, and perceptions of power-sharing. Findings will be **reviewed periodically** by leadership structures and used to inform organisational learning, policy adjustment, and leadership accountability

- **Co-design:** In all types of partnerships, partners are engaged in programme and strategic planning before specific project documents are finalised, including contribution to **results frameworks and budget structures**. Retroactive consultation after design is complete does not constitute co-design.

- **Budget equity:** Partners receive a fair and transparent share of project resources, including coverage of their indirect costs. **Budget distribution** decisions must be made transparently with partner participation, not presented to partners after internal agreement. Partners must receive an **itemised breakdown** of the total project budget, including War Child's own costs. No partner budget may be set without the partner's knowledge of the full funding envelope.

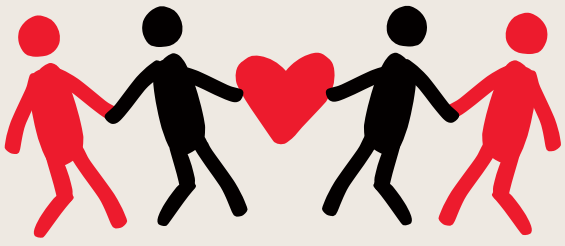
- **Transparent information sharing:** Partners must have **access to the information** they need to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them.

- **Reciprocal governance disclosure:** War Child will be **transparent** about its own governance, systems, and performance in the same spirit it expects of partners

- **Capacity accompaniment:** Organisational capacity gaps are a starting point for joint investment, not a basis for exclusion. Where a capacity gap is identified during partner assessment, War Child's default response must be to develop a **joint capacity strengthening plan**. Capacity assessments must identify War Child's own complementary gaps alongside the partner's, and the strengthening plan must be mutual.

- **Credit and visibility sharing:** Partners' contributions, innovations, and results must be accurately **attributed** and actively **communicated**. War Child will not use partner-generated data, case studies, or innovations without the partner's knowledge and consent.

- **Accessible feedback and dispute mechanisms:** War Child will establish and communicate to all partners a clear mechanism for raising concerns, grievances, or complaints about **War Child's behaviour** as a partner, including budget decisions, compliance demands, communication failures, and power imbalances. This mechanism will be accessible in the partner's working language, and free from fear of retaliation. War Child will respond substantively within an **agreed timeframe**. Feedback received through this mechanism must be logged, reviewed periodically, and used to improve War Child's partnership practice. Aggregated, anonymised findings must be shared with relevant governance bodies.



We see partners as collaborators

Partnerships play an essential role in achieving impact for children and youth affected by conflict. In turn, partnering with War Child should offer **value to our partners**. It is important that we do not see partners "delivering for" War Child, instead, partnerships should be **reciprocal collaborations**, adding value to all parties and facilitating the achievement of shared objectives. We recognise that each partner acts within an **ecosystem of stakeholders** which directly impacts the quality of humanitarian programming provided to children and youth affected by conflict. With this in mind, we:

- **Influence the channelling of resources** to the most urgent child and youth needs within each conflict context through actively **sharing information** related to context realities and needs, strong engagement and advocacy with resource mobilisation partners.
- **Ensure co-creation and decision making** with partners, and children and youth. This can include on project design processes including budget distribution; engagement throughout the programme and research cycle from identification to implementation; through joint advocacy and communication planning; on country office and global level strategy development.
- **Co-design scaling approaches** with partners which address the unique partnership, contexts of operation and most appropriate approaches to ensure maximum impact.
- **Supporting partners to quickly adapt** to respond to urgent crises and mobilising resources to do so.

We value and amplify child and youth voices in meaningful ways

The children and youth we and our partners work with, must **actively influence** the way we develop, design and facilitate programmatic responses and our advocacy and communications strategy. War Child is committed to a **rights-based approach**, which ensures the participation of children in matters affecting their lives.[5] We are also committed, via our sector standards, to ensure the **meaningful participation and engagement** of affected populations, including children and youth. We actively champion and actualise the meaningful participation of young people in our own work and encourage our partners to do the same. We use our influence in the sector to address poor practice in this area and dismantle discriminatory thinking, constraints and barriers that prevent the voices of children and youth affected by conflict from being heard and acted on.

We are allies and strategic convenors

One of our main priorities is to bring the **skills, knowledge and proven practices** we have as an organisation and share these with our partners. We also bring together diverse actors to break down barriers and increase impact on the lives of children and youth affected by conflict. This includes bringing children and youth as well as other local actors face-to-face with **decision-makers** (governments, donors, advocacy platforms etc) and linking research bodies to communities, children and youth in conflict contexts.

We strive to decolonise the humanitarian system

A significant focus of our partnerships work is with national and local actors who to date, have experienced significant power imbalances and have been forced to operate within a humanitarian system which reinforced colonial tendencies and withholds control of critical resources. War Child works to **challenge the sector**, promoting positive mindsets, attitudes and behaviours both within the Alliance as well as positively influencing the sector by:

- **Encouraging staff to critically assess how their personal assumptions** and societal 'norms' regarding perceived (in) capacities of local actors in conflict contexts affect their work and actions.
- **Reviewing and adjusting War Child policies and guidelines** which undervalue/question trust/capacity of national/local partners.
- **Redistributing control over financial resources** through:
  - Redirection of War Child core/unrestricted funds to partners for a range of initiatives including (but not limited to) project implementation, research and innovation, coverage of indirect costs and operational strengthening, capacity sharing initiatives and so on.
  - Fostering fair and equitable resource allocations through enhanced collaboration and transparent budget design processes for projects which include partners throughout the design and decision-making process to ensure a fair-share of financial resources based on the principle of equity. This includes the inclusion of key financial elements such as the allocation of indirect cost recovery costs within partner budgets.
- **Reducing bureaucratic barriers** and/or working to reduce workloads related to unavoidable partner vetting/due diligence requirements by working alongside partners, where requested, in the completion of documentation. Our current policies and procedures reinforce a one-directional fiduciary approach of partner vetting/due diligence and compliance. Partnerships will now begin with discussions related to values and principles, partnership goals and objectives.
- **Act as an ally in transformation** by transitioning away from direct programming and focusing our efforts instead on supporting partners with technical and operational service provision for Evidence-Based Methodologies (EBMs), where requested, including adaption of methodologies according to their context/experience. This technical advisory service may include physical presence at field level during moments such as during acute crisis response. This also includes stepping back from being the main voice on advocacy and communications campaigns, acting in this role only when it is deemed necessary by children, youth or partners themselves (e.g. for safety and security reasons for example).

We drive a collective focus on quality

We promote our **Quality-of-Care approach**, underpinned by a rigorous research and development process that informs the design of our EBMs. This approach serves as a foundation for ensuring programme quality. We further provide technical support and capacity strengthening to facilitate the **adoption and integration of EBMs** within partner programmes.

- **Provide technical input to partner programming** including being physically present working alongside partners at field level to collaborate on training needs, effective and collaborative response design and launching, trouble-shooting and co-owning risks, particularly during acute emergency response.
- **Quality programming includes a commitment to safe programming,** embedding safeguarding and safety measures into our core programming principles, recognising that safety is integral to quality.
- **Working with partners to develop mutual capacity sharing plans** versus one-directional capacity strengthening plans, particularly for national partners, including joint decision-making on prioritisation helps War Child provide technical and organisational capacity strengthening whilst receiving additional capacity development and strengthens our own organisation in return.
- **Plan early, plan together** to encourage good practices including ensuring strong needs and context analysis, co-design of programmes, advocacy and communications plans or scaling or research initiatives. Giving space to partners to reject propositions by War Child and time to discuss alternative solutions/best approaches. Additionally, engaging in preparedness activities with partners to increase response agility and capacity during acute crisis response.
- **Know when to transition or to exit** as an organisation to be more agile and are willing to realign our presence where we have the most value in achieving impact, prioritising the most acutely affected children. During transition or exit, ensure that the hand-over process is co-developed with partners and follows ethical do-no-harm principles.



Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo participate in a TeamUp session as part of an Education Cannot Wait project led by World Vision International and War Child, and implemented by Village d'Espoir.

5.2 Partnership pathways

For War Child, partnership is more than a collaboration; it is a relationship built on shared values, trust, and a **collective commitment** to create lasting change for children affected by conflict. Every partnership begins with a shared vision and evolves through mutual learning, accountability, and adaptation.

The process of building and sustaining these relationships varies depending on the partnership's purpose, the operating context, and the change it seeks to achieve.

Purposeful partnership pathways

War Child's partnership journeys are designed to serve different strategic purposes: For partnerships that are aimed at **impact amplification**, War Child has developed an Evidence-Based Methodology (EBM) Partnership Journey that is structured around the technical delivery of EBMs in nine specific steps. It also outlines the different roles of partners at each stage of the relationship. For partnerships that are aimed at **policy and influencing**, War Child's advocacy partnerships are dynamic, interconnected stages anchored on shared messaging and coordinated influencing tactics. For partnerships that are aimed for **impact amplification, in the context of acute crisis contexts**, its partnership journey is anchored on War Child's Humanitarian Framework. In an emergency crisis context, War Child's partnership process is systematic, principled, and locally driven, aligning strongly with localisation, accountability, and humanitarian coordination standards. The emphasis is on rapid pace and simplicity of process (i.e. minimum viable process for rapid activation of partnership). For partnerships that are aimed at **knowledge generation**, War Child's Research Guidebook outlines how partners are involved in all stages. For partnership that are aimed at **resource mobilisation**, War Child has a multi-actor, shared-accountability partnership approach that integrates both strategic collaboration across alliance members and donor relationship management at a collective level. Mobilising resources is anchored on the unique value proposition of War Child (i.e. quality of EBMs, collective reach, local leadership, innovation, and cost-effectiveness).

An iterative and integrated approach

While each partnership type has its own structure, War Child's overall approach is **intentionally non-linear, iterative and interconnected**. Partnerships evolve and intersect, research collaborations can inform advocacy, humanitarian partnerships can transition into long-term impact initiatives, and donor relationships can inspire new innovative pathways. This **integrated model** recognises that effective partnerships are living systems that are responsive to context, evidence, and the capacities of all actors involved.

Continuous reflection and adaptation

Across all partnership types, War Child embeds learning and reflection as **continuous practices** rather than end-of-cycle activities. Regular dialogue, joint reviews, and adaptive planning ensure that partnerships remain relevant, accountable, and equitable. This approach strengthens **mutual trust**, supports collective decision-making, and enables partners to navigate change together – whether driven by shifting contexts, new evidence, or evolving needs.

5.3 Mechanisms for mutual accountability

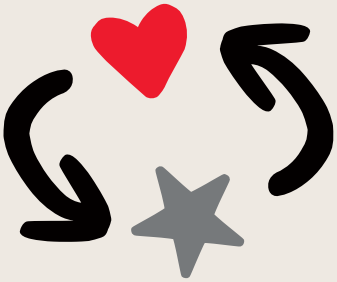
Elements of **mutual accountability** exist within each partnership War Child engages in. Accountability is defined collaboratively at the start of each partnership through clearly stated roles, responsibilities, and shared expectations. Below outlines a number of accountability mechanisms within War Child's governance structure to ensure accountability within partnerships:

Reciprocal partner vetting and due diligence

Creating inclusive spaces where partners at every level jointly lead and shape due diligence processes, grounded in trust, transparency, and mutual accountability. War Child commits to actively reducing the **administrative burden** of due diligence processes on local partners. Specific measures include supporting partners to work toward Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) accreditation at scale, which can reduce the cost and frequency of separate vetting processes; exploring transferable compliance records so that vetted partners do not repeat the full process for each project or member; and using due diligence as a starting point for organisational development dialogue rather than a gatekeeping exercise. Where due diligence identifies capacity gaps, War Child will offer investment in addressing those gaps rather than treating them as disqualifying.

Joint governance and feedback mechanisms

At both the country office and Alliance levels, **joint governance structures** are established as permanent spaces for partners from all elements of War Child's work to provide feedback and/or input to the organisation's work, focus and strategic priorities.



Dispute resolution and escalation pathway

All partners have the **right to raise concerns** about War Child's conduct, decisions, or compliance with this framework without fear of retaliation or adverse consequences for the partnership. This mechanism applies to all partnership types and contexts. **Anonymous concerns** may also be submitted through War Child's existing integrity reporting channels. The following escalation pathway applies:

- Step 1: Partners raise concerns directly with their War Child programme or partnership focal point. Resolution is expected within 15 working days.
- Step 2: If unresolved, concerns are escalated to the War Child Country Director or equivalent senior manager. A written response is required within 20 working days.
- Step 3: If still unresolved, or where the concern involves the Country Director, partners may escalate to the War Child Alliance Partnership Director. War Child commits to providing a response within 30 working days.
- Step 4: Where a concern cannot be resolved internally, partners may request the involvement of an agreed neutral third party. War Child will not terminate or penalise a partnership solely because a partner has initiated this process.

Partners' Forum

A platform where War Child partners at region and country level gather to exchange insights, reflections and learning; to share progress based on joint plans; and to undertake initiatives to influence sectoral changes towards genuine local leadership in humanitarian and development cooperation. Contextualised (country-level) **Terms of Reference** of this body must be clear of its co-decision-making function, and not only in advisory capacity. *It can be known as Partners' Committee, Community Child Protection Committee, or any other term as decided by the Partners*.

Implementation of the Localisation Framework progress markers

The Localisation Framework progress markers and metrics will act as a mechanism for mutual accountability between War Child and partners.[6]

Creating a culture of reflection and learning

Partnership feedback loops are embedded within projects/joint initiatives, regular circulation of partnership review processes (e.g. via partnership satisfaction surveys and punctual partnership goals reflection workshops) and adaption of partnership functionality or project implementation based on **findings and evidence**.

Fair risk sharing, not risk transfer

War Child recognises that risk is not a single category and that the principle of 'risks are shared, not transferred' requires disaggregation to be operationally honest.

We therefore distinguish between:

1. **Risk that can genuinely be shared:** including security planning and protocols, programme-level decision risk, reputational exposure from joint advocacy and communications, and compliance preparation and support. For all of these, War Child commits to joint analysis, shared responsibility, and co-investment in risk management.
2. **Risk that War Child commits to absorbing:** including ultimate fiduciary liability toward institutional donors; reputational exposure arising from War Child's own organisational conduct; and compliance costs that arise from War Child's own systems and requirements. War Child will not pass these costs or liabilities downstream to partners who have not been party to the donor relationship.
3. **Risk requiring joint analysis before partnership activation:** including contextual and political risk in restricted operating environments; exposure arising from engagement with de facto authorities; and operational continuity risk in high-insecurity contexts. In these situations, War Child commits to completing joint risk analysis with prospective partners before finalising partnership terms, agreeing shared red lines on humanitarian principles, and establishing contingency protocols for sudden activity suspension.

War Child will ensure responsible resourcing of **risk management** across the partnership, guided by a robust review of risk severity and ownership. War Child will provide appropriate **technical input** to partners via operational capacity strengthening and financial guidance for adequate resourcing (e.g. staffing), joint analysis and safety & security planning as well as open and honest analysis of mutual operational compliance capacity provision.

Appropriate resourcing for partnership engagement

To ensure appropriate collaboration, engagement and time can be spent on partnerships. This includes staffing structures focused on partnership engagement, financial resourcing and inclusion of a partnerships focus within War Child staff job descriptions.

5.4 Review and monitoring of the framework

A framework without a mechanism to measure whether it is being upheld is an aspiration, not a commitment. This section establishes how War Child will monitor **adherence to the commitments** in this framework, how partners will be able to hold War Child accountable against those commitments, how evidence will inform framework revision, and how the framework itself will remain a living document that evolves with the partnership ecosystem it governs.

Monitoring operates at three levels, each with a distinct purpose, time horizon, and evidence base.

> A framework without a mechanism to measure whether it is being upheld is an aspiration, not a commitment.



Level 1: **Minimum commitments compliance**

This is the most operational level of monitoring. It tracks whether the Partnership Minimum Commitments set out in Sec 5.1 (Principles into Practice) are being met at the programme and partnership level. Monitoring the **Minimum Commitment** produces a yes/no determination at programme level, supplemented by narrative evidence on quality and the reasons for any departure. It is the level most directly accessible to partners, and the one most likely to surface practical failures in the framework's implementation.

This monitoring is conducted jointly by War Child programme teams and partners annually through the Partners' Forum and joint partnership review process. Where a Minimum Commitment has not been met, the review documents the reason, assigns responsibility, and records the agreed corrective action and timeline.

Level 2: **Partnership quality and power balance**

This level assesses the broader quality and equity of the partnership relationship. It goes beyond binary compliance to ask whether the values and principles in this framework are being experienced in practice. This includes the distribution of decision authority, the quality of capacity strengthening, the functioning of joint governance mechanisms, the experience of partners in donor engagement processes, and the overall trust and satisfaction of partners with the relationship.

Partnership quality monitoring draws primarily on partner voice, through annual partnership satisfaction assessments and structured reflection at the Partners' Forum, supplemented by War Child self-assessment. The deliberate **prioritisation of partner voice** over War Child self-assessment at this level reflects the framework's commitment to partner-led accountability. War Child's self-assessment is an input, not the primary evidence base.

Level 3: **Framework fitness and systemic patterns**

This level examines the framework itself. It asks whether the commitments in this document remain appropriate, whether they are being upheld across the portfolio, and whether the operating context has changed in ways that require revision. Framework fitness review aggregates findings from Levels 1 and 2 across all contexts and partnerships to identify systemic trends, persistent gaps, and emerging issues that no individual partnership review would capture.

Framework fitness review happens on a **two-year cycle**, involves an independent element, and produces a documented decision on whether and how the framework should be revised. The output is either a minor revision (updated annexes, clarified language) or a major revision (structural changes to commitments, values, or governance mechanisms) with a full re-consultation process.



Children in a refugee settlement in Sudan receive emergency support from a consortium led by Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), including War Child, Plan International, and delivered with local NGO partners. © War Child

6. Conclusion

This framework grounds War Child's partnerships in **shared purpose, values and principles**, ensuring that every collaboration moves us closer to a world where children affected by conflict can thrive. By committing to **mutual learning, shifting power, and elevating local leadership**, War Child positions partnership not as a mechanism but as a transformative way of working.

This Framework is not a statement of intent alone. It is a commitment that partners should be able to use to hold War Child accountable. As contexts evolve, so too will our relationships, guided by the values, accountability, and vision set out here. Together with our partners, we deliver **lasting, meaningful change for children and youth** at the heart of our mission.

Annex 1:
Framework development collaborative process

The process of developing this framework took a total of eight months (July 2025 to February 2026), involving 72 internal staff members, and at least 46 partners. The Task Group on Partnership Framework development took a huge role to ensure the process is collaborative, and not only consultative. In summary:

Process for Partnership Framework development July 2025–February 2026

JULY–AUGUST

Inception & contextual review

- Document review
- Key informant interview (staff & partners)

Inception report

Key outputs

- Task group formation
- Hiring & facilitation of external consultant to partner & key staff informants
- Inception report with Localisation Working Group feedback

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER

Co-design & consultation

- Online workshops (War Child Alliance with partners & staff)
- Microsoft SharePoint form survey with partners

Co-designing workshops

Key outputs

- Partners' Voice summary report
- Document write up

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER

Framework development

- Document write up
- Small group review

Draft framework

Key outputs

- Small group feedback to 1st Draft
- Presentation of revised version to Members' Assembly – Draft 2
- Draft 3 write-up for validation

NOVEMBER 2025–FEBRUARY 2026

Validation

- Presentation to internal staff & team focal group discussions
- Validation with partners via key informant interview, survey & focal group discussions

Pre-final version

Key outputs

- Consolidated feedback from partners & staff
- Draft Version 4

Post-validation, the process took another three months for the pre-final version to come out. In summary the Finalisation process is depicted below:

Process for Partnership Framework development February–June 2026

FEBRUARY–APRIL 2026

Final write up

- Task group discussions and alignment on key feedback from partners & staff
- Write up of pre-final Version

Pre-final Version 4

MAY 2026

Submission for approval

- Identification of key recommendations to International Management Team
- Submission to Localisation Steering Group for review & endorsement
- Submission to International Management Team for approval

Final framework

JUNE 2026

Development of implementation plan

- Approval of key actions from International Management Team for roll-out (including communication plan)
- Alignment of key tasks (i.e. revisions on related policies, guidelines, protocols, tools & templates)

Roll-out plan



Children attend psychosocial and education sessions in Akkar refugee settlement in Lebanon with War Child partner Akkar Network for Development.
© War Child

Partner voice anonymous survey and key informant interviews:

In development stage, key informant interviews were carried out with five existing War Child partners via Teams. An anonymous survey was also circulated with 46 organisations providing inputs. Feedback was received from partners in Africa, the Middle East, Colombia, the United States and Europe. Respondents were both existing partners of War Child as well as organisations which were not currently partnering with War Child. During the validation stage, 14 partners participated in the Microsoft Forms survey, and there were three focus group discussions with country teams in South Sudan, Yemen, and Lebanon (as part of the development of their Partners' Forum).

Secondary data review

Secondary data information was taken from key documents such as the War Child Alliance Impact Strategy (2024) and its related annexes (Project Report 2C: Views of Potential Scaling Partners for example), the War Child Alliance Foundation Focused Strategy 2026–2028, the Localisation Framework and other key policies and guidelines.

Members of the **Partnership Framework Task Group**: Dhaquir Bashir (*Lead*), Abegail Schwartz, Ashlea Brewer, Clare Blaesdale, Felix Ojok George Odera, Fred Mukholi, Hussein Al Amoudi, Nahed Sahmoud, Osama Abuarafeh, Sophie Bray-Watkins, and Weng Ladaga. With Caitlin Macdonald (*external consultant*)

Annex 2:
Summary of validation (from partners and staff) on Version 3

Based on feedback responses:

- **From partners** (n=14 Yemen, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Switzerland) and focus group discussions in Yemen and South Sudan, plus Lebanon Partner Forum Synthesis;
- **From internal staff** (two team units – Institutional Funding and Grands Delivery (IFGD), Advocacy; four individuals; three multi-team groups during Validation Session on 19 November 2025)

Overall signal

- There is broad, genuine endorsement of the framework values and intent across all contexts and partner types. No source rejects the localisation, equity, or reciprocity commitments.
- The most common sentiment, expressed in nearly every substantive open-ended response, is that the values are right, but the framework stops short of telling partners what they will actually experience.
- The internal and external feedback converge more than they diverge. Staff are raising many of the same structural concerns from the inside. Where the two groups diverge, the difference is mostly one vantage point: staff see the organisational cost and complexity; partners see the relational asymmetry and the accountability gap. Both are legitimate, and both need addressing.

What the framework gets right:

1. The **commitment to localisation as a systemic shift**, not just a programme modality, is the most cited strength. Partners and staff across teams affirm that the Framework takes a position rather than hedging.
2. The **language of decolonisation, equity, and powershifting is not seen as rhetorical** by most respondents; it is seen as meaningful and overdue.
3. **Section 5 ("How we make value-based partnerships happen") is identified by partners as the strongest part of the framework**, and staff feedback largely affirms that it represents the document's most concrete commitments. The principle that risks are shared and not transferred, and the commitment to acting as an ally in transformation rather than a director, are specifically valued.
4. **The four core values** – mutual trust and respect, honesty and transparency, growth and mutual learning, agility and flexibility – **are accepted across the board** as representative of what real partnership should feel like. The definition of partnership itself (purposeful, complementary, reciprocal, professional) is also broadly endorsed.
5. **The consultative process that produced the framework**, including the partner voice survey and KIIs, is acknowledged as itself an embodiment of the principles. That signal should be made more visible in the document. The current Annex 1 is thin on what was heard and how it shaped the draft. A clearer account of how partner input changed the document would strengthen trust in the process.

Shared concerns by staff and partners

1. The **operationalisation gap** is the primary shared weakness. Framework will be difficult to implement without minimum standards, concrete examples, and clarity on what is non-negotiable.
2. **Risk sharing is underdeveloped and creates competing pressures** from both sides. Staff identify two pressures pulling in opposite directions: financial risk ultimately sits with War Child because of donor compliance reality, while partners simultaneously operate in high-risk physical and operational environments. The framework names the principle but cannot currently navigate between these two real constraints.
3. **Decision-making authority is unclear, and "partner-led" is ambiguous.** Staff explicitly flag that the language still implies War Child retains final control, and that the distinction between "partner-led" and "collaborative" is not resolved. Partners identify the same tension and call it the critical gap between formal inclusion and substantive influence. Both groups want to know: where does War Child actually yield authority, and on what decisions? Budget design, donor communication, programme scope, advocacy framing, and exit planning are all areas where this question is live and unresolved by the current text.
4. **Joint governance is deferred when both audiences need it now.** Internal staff flag the lack of clarity on joint governance mechanisms and partner influence on strategy and budget decisions.
5. **The relationship between the framework and other policies is unclear.** This concern is more prominent in staff feedback but appears in partner sources too. The document states it sits above all partner-related documents, but this is not operationally resolved, particularly where those policies create compliance requirements that conflict with the framework's equity commitments.

Notes

1. A primary focus of War Child's partnerships approach relates to our commitment to localisation. The formation of the Alliance brings War Child into a new era of humanitarian assistance, *'one in which local-global partnership plays an equal and critical role in ensuring relevant, effective and efficient programming'*. War Child believes there must be a shifting of power and decolonisation of the humanitarian sector. 'Our sector's leadership should sit with national NGOs, local authorities, communities, and children and young people' and we at War Child bring 'our commitment to local leadership and our ability to train and support new capacity' as one part of this process.
2. Both respondents to War Child's survey on partnerships and War Child staff themselves identified several of the same key values they felt represented true partnership. This feedback was used in the development of War Child's core partnership values and principles.
3. Further details of partnership redlines will be found in specific policies, including within Fundraising Members donor acceptance and vetting policies.
4. These minimum commitments will be reviewed and refined annually through the Partners' Forum and joint partnership review process. A full Partnership Minimum Commitment reference document will be co-developed with partners during the implementation period of this Partnership Framework.
5. UNICEF, the UNCRC: **https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/**
6. If you would like more information, please contact:
   Weng Ladaga *Partnership and Localisation Lead*
   weng.ladaga@warchild.net

Cover photo: Sudanese children receive support from War Child's partner Uganda Refugee and Disaster Management Council (URDMC) in the Kiryandongo refugee settlement. © War Child

> War Child brings global expertise in evidence-based methods, research, and specialised technical approaches in MHPSS, education, and child protection, which can enhance our programme quality and innovation. At the same time, we contribute deep contextual understanding, strong community trust, and extensive experience in localisation, youth-led approaches, and safe space creation.
>
> *War Child partner*

> By building relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and shared accountability, partnerships become more balanced and better positioned to achieve lasting impact for children and communities.
>
> *War Child partner*

War Child Alliance Foundation

Stichting War Child Alliance
Helmholtzstraat 61-G
1098 LE Amsterdam
The Netherlands

warchild.net

War Child
@warchildalliance
@WarChildAlliance

First edition August 2026

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