



Practical accountability in complex humanitarian crises

A one-year proposal from Ground Truth Solutions to Belgium's FPS Foreign Affairs,
International Trade and Development Cooperation

October 2025

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS), an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) headquartered in Vienna, Austria, is seeking 300,000 euros for a one-year project in two complex contexts, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Palestine, to ensure community views are driving humanitarian prioritisation, evaluation, accountability and improvement in resource-strained environments.

Background and rationale

2025 has brought unprecedented challenges for the more than 300 million people who rely on humanitarian assistance. Funding is shrinking, needs are growing, and global political will is faltering. Faced with such conditions, the humanitarian sector is being forced into a reckoning: how to meet urgent needs with less?

The UN humanitarian system has responded by launching a "humanitarian reset" aiming to accelerate long-overdue reforms to make humanitarian assistance more efficient, responsive and future-fit. But response leaders are having to make impossible choices. In complex and protracted contexts, these decisions could cut off entire generations from opportunities to emerge from aid dependency. The stakes of humanitarian decision-making have never been higher, nor has the need to learn from those decisions over time and to pivot where necessary.

Impossible choices must be informed by and aligned with the priorities of people experiencing crisis, not simply driven by the supplies and mandates of humanitarian agencies. When every dollar counts and every decision carries immense weight, investing in diverse, independent, principled analysis is not a luxury but a necessity. Globally driven data systems are failing and alternative sources of insight are needed. Fifteen years of robust and independent perceptions research has shown us the value of ground-up accountability – holding the humanitarian system to account based on the perspectives and priorities of those it seeks to serve.

A system in flux cannot mark its own homework. As large implementing organisations have tried and failed to demonstrate success on 'Accountability to Affected People' (AAP), it has become evident that as in any responsible system, accountability requires independent actors, removed from the biases of implementation. GTS pioneered at-scale independent perceptions research as a performance metric for the sector, and has demonstrated its value time and again in improving transparency, policy and practice.

Modest accountability gains have been more common in the most well-funded and stable crises, but falter in places with acute and evolving active conflict, more staff turnover and higher decision-making stakes. Backed by Belgium's dual commitments on protection and accountability, this project aims to demonstrate

real progress on ‘putting people at the centre’, a claim made too often on paper and rarely demonstrated.

Objectives

Overall objective: To ensure the views of people affected by crisis are driving humanitarian action in complex and resource-scarce conflict environments, by providing a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of the views and priorities of crisis-affected populations in DRC and Palestine.

Specific objectives:

1. To create a space for the nuanced views, priorities and feedback of crisis affected people to be heard and elevated.
2. To ensure such views are analysed, recorded and shared as a public good to inform decision making and learning now and into the future.
3. To directly influence humanitarian decision-making, by bringing evidence and dialogue into humanitarian practice.
4. To inform overall response planning, such as Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans, appeals, and other planning processes.
5. To improve the relevance of global policy dialogue, and inform the work of global policymakers and funders, by demystifying community input.
6. To support Belgium’s new humanitarian strategy by demonstrating how humanitarian action is faring according to those who matter most, and supporting practical improvement.

What we will do

This project will deploy GTS’ signature combination of ground-up perceptions research with extensive dialogue and action-planning in two complex crisis contexts of strategic importance to Belgium, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Palestine.

In both countries, we will

- Seek to understand community perceptions and priorities by conducting rigorous perception-based research, involving quantitative and qualitative enquiry.
- Publish clear and compelling reports on community views, priorities and recommendations as a public good, in English (both), French (DRC) and Arabic (Palestine).
- Work with communities, leaders and humanitarian response actors to make sense of the findings, uncover opportunities and barriers, and translate them into action via tailored workshops, bilateral dialogue and action-planning.
- In partnership with local actors, ensure the views of those directly impacted by crisis are included in global policy dialogues.
- Ensure that our work supports capacity sharing and strengthening of local partners, and the local accountability ecosystem.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In DRC, the evolving conflict context has made quality programming driven by community priorities increasingly difficult, and left a gap when it comes to accountability to affected people (AAP). Stop-start

attempts at systematising AAP, via working groups and controversial hotlines, have left a fragmented approach dependent on the will of individuals.

But at a high level, there have been concrete commitments made to listen better to communities, and an openness to using community data. The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) have kept listening to communities high on their agenda for several years. Since 2022, GTS has not only been striving to make community voices heard, but advocating for meaningful action to be taken on people's needs and priorities at multiple levels. GTS' work is an appreciated and well-used part of the humanitarian architecture, and at this critical juncture where funding has never been more uncertain, independent checks and balances are needed more than ever.

Building on previous research and engagement in DRC, GTS will:

- Track perceptions, in several response hotspots in eastern DRC, of humanitarian prioritisation, effectiveness and accountability; this will include one quantitative survey and two qualitative rounds of enquiry.
- Include an analysis of people's views on violence, safety and protection, to support initiatives that respond to and mitigate impacts of violence and insecurity. In a concerning development, while M23-related abuses are on the rise, protection programming has been increasingly compromised by funding cuts. As such, people's perceptions of risk are vital to inform humanitarian access, programming and prevention. With our strong network of partners working in areas affected by conflict, we are able to provide insight into how communities experience protection threats and what they consider 'life-saving' support.
- Build on previous work on community prioritisation in Mweso and Minova to highlight the opportunities and challenges when it comes to truly shifting power in the DRC response. To do this, we will highlight the views of implementers and the challenges they face, particularly at the local and regional level, and workshop solutions involving practical changes and advocacy for bridging gaps between local realities and national and international decision-making.

Response coordination acknowledges that the 'nexus' approach in DRC needs to be strengthened, and GTS will apply a nexus lens to all of its research and dialogue work, aiming to ensure community views inform both short- and longer-term solutions and approaches, reaching humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors. GTS aims to increasingly serve as a connector between humanitarian responders, peacebuilders, local journalists, activists, and development workers, providing a space to discuss findings and recommendations, and ensuring that the protection data and stories emerging from communities are not siloed. A foundation for these discussions has been laid in our previous work, through which we have led inter-stakeholder workshops bringing together actors from the development, peace, climate, and humanitarian sectors, and contributed to a peace/protection retreat.

GTS has worked hard to build and maintain, despite frequent staff turnover in the UN-led response, productive relationships with local NGO coordination, international coordination and a host of diverse operational actors across the response, including Forum des ONG (FONGI), CONAFOHD, Mercy Corps, Medecins Sans Frontiers, the Norwegian Refugee Council and clusters, which will help to ensure uptake of findings.

Beyond the local, regional, and national levels, we intend for our programmes in DRC to inform wider policy and advocacy, helping Belgium and its partners steer a coherent, humane, and protection-centred approach rooted in evidence from communities.

Please see our previous work in DRC [here](#).

Palestine

Since the end of 2023, GTS has [worked in Gaza](#), driven by the ambition to share and record people's views at an unprecedented moment in time, at a time when reliable information was scarce. GTS conducted the first at-scale humanitarian data collection, and has continued to highlight community perceptions from the ground. This work accompanied the changing context in Gaza as the latest violence escalated. It has explored how mutual aid was functioning in the absence of traditional humanitarian support, and sought to understand how Palestinians in Gaza are surviving, unearthing the lived impact of a relentless assault on the besieged enclave. In parallel, the humanitarian situation in the West Bank has also been worsening with rising displacement, worsening access to basic services, and increasing violence¹ and movement restrictions.²

To date, we have produced three accountability reports that have been used widely to influence humanitarian diplomacy, coordination and advocacy, as well as by actors looking to better support community-led responses in Gaza. We have recently expanded our perception work to cover the West Bank. Our findings have not only informed the ongoing humanitarian response, but also the media, governments, human rights actors and humanitarian funders.

The situation in Palestine remains dire, fluid and is frequently described as 'impossible' by humanitarian coordination teams now dealing with a fragile and conditional ceasefire in Gaza. Humanitarian actors are responding to an unprecedented and rapidly changing situation, and the scale of the crisis leaves no space for aid that does not meet people's needs and priorities.

Building on previous research and engagement in Palestine, GTS will:

- Design and implement community-led perceptions research in Gaza and the West Bank through a combination of face-to-face quantitative surveys and qualitative work (including interviews and diary taking) to take a 'people's lives first' approach to understanding the evolving situation. Building on our existing work, we will increase the focus on pressing priorities, trusted humanitarian aid sources and community ideas for the immense recovery challenges ahead.
- Place local leadership at the centre and respect community capacity by co-designing all research outputs with local partners and jointly analysing the findings. This will allow us to contextualise the data and maximise its uptake.
- Present key findings and recommendations in clear bulletins useful to response actors, local and mutual aid actors, global decision-makers, advocates and crisis-affected communities. Reports will be produced in Arabic and English.
- Facilitate dialogue with humanitarian actors in Palestine about how to act on the findings, and how to ensure such data is available as the response progresses.
- Producing communications and advocacy materials to support global learning, policy dialogue processes, and to ensure the people of Gaza have more spaces for their voices to be heard.

Sampling will be informed by access and the evolving realities of the response. Earlier work in Palestine has had a heavy focus on advocacy. This project will involve a greater focus on humanitarian action and improvement, facilitated by the recently improved access for humanitarians. The humanitarian landscape in Palestine remains challenging and fractured, with a very high rate of international staff turnover, and local staff impacted by exhaustion and personal hardship. However, a unified sense of purpose and an almost unethical lack of information has meant that GTS data has been used by coordination teams such as UN OCHA, the Inter-Cluster Coordination and Information Management groups, and clusters (notably

¹ UN OCHA. [June 2025. "Humanitarian Situation Update #299 | West Bank."](#)

² UN OCHA. [May 2025. "Movement and access update in the West Bank | May 2025."](#)

protection, a big champion of our work, and food security). Findings will also be discussed regionally, and with global groups supporting the response from afar.

Summary outputs across the project

- At least four (two per country) published reports on community views and recommendations, each published in English and the local language.
- At least four (two per country) workshops with communities and humanitarian actors to discuss findings in depth and co-create recommendations.
- At least two global products (e.g. blogs or storytelling media) or events highlighting community views and stories from project countries.

Our approach to local partnerships

We work with an exceptional network of local actors: co-designing research, collecting, analysing and making sense of data with them, and ensuring that together we use our findings to drive the changes communities want to see. In both countries, we have established relationships with key actors (including notably Arab World for Research and Development in Palestine and Victims Hope in DRC).

GTS' focus for the coming years is on ensuring approaches to accountability are themselves localised. This is because of our own commitment to shifting power in humanitarianism, as well as a recognition that for accountability to finally be taken more seriously, it needs to become a movement of strong local independent actors. With our partners, we commit to supporting organisation strengthening. This depends on the needs and wants of the partner, but in Palestine and DRC has involved sharing statistical knowledge and techniques, training in data quality control, and mutual learning on overcoming biases and other problems in data collection. In other locations it has involved strengthening organisations through equipment or technology, training teams, or supporting with back-end functions such as spot checks. In two countries, we have now successfully linked our local partners with more direct donor funding, supporting a more sustainable and localised approach to accountability in humanitarianism.

Links to global advocacy, policy and influence

Ground Truth Solutions judges its impact by our ability to drive the changes that communities in crisis tell us they want to see. This means working with stakeholders from the community to the global level to make sure that people's voices are heard, understood and acted upon, and acting as a bridge between communities in crisis and humanitarian decision-makers. Ground Truth Solutions has long been a powerful and respected voice on humanitarian action and reform, leading the Grand Bargain Community of Practice on participation, called upon to advise IASC principals and other key global decision-making fora. This project will support our local, national and global advocacy efforts, ensuring humanitarian decision-makers in DRC, Palestine and globally better understand what communities prioritise, the changes they want to see and the suggestions they have for making humanitarian aid more just and effective.

Alignment with Belgium's humanitarian strategy

GTS' [strategy](#) aims to counter false narratives and support humanitarian improvement by ensuring that the views of people affected by crisis are paramount in an evolving humanitarian landscape. Our core work and specifically this project will support Belgium's principles of humility and learning in humanitarian

action, protection of people affected by crisis, principled funding for programme adaptation and of course, accountability. The project will support the promotion of flexible funding across humanitarian responses, and will provide evidence in project countries of what works and doesn't, to support and push for collective improvement.

The project has been designed to support Belgium's objectives of:

- Being where it matters – by working in places where elevating community views is critical, not where access or conditions are easiest;
- Building on local ownership, solutions and expertise – working hand in hand with local partners to elevate the voices of those who matter most, while supporting and highlighting the more sustainable work of the partners themselves;
- Preventing, reducing, and mitigating violence by working in two complex conflict situations where communities will be afforded the right to comment on issues outside the quality of available assistance, and working with them to understand how protection responses in humanitarian action could be more tailored to community preferences and realities, and;
- Addressing drivers and root causes through collaboration and complementarity, by using community views and ideas as the starting point to generate dialogue beyond the humanitarian system, hoping to bridge gaps across the nexus.

Risks and mitigation measures

RISK	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	MITIGATION
Access issues due to volatile security environments (both countries)	H	M	GTS continues to work with local experts close to research areas to make informed decisions about how and when to access communities. We have a long track record in shifting to online dialogue methods where necessary, but face to face remains our preference.
Access issues due to authorities distrust of accountability (both countries)	M	M	GTS continues to work with local experts and humanitarian coordination to navigate restrictive policies.
Turnover or conflicting priorities meaning data is not taken seriously by humanitarian leaders	L	M	GTS has designed and evolved our entire approach around this problem, which is why we do such extensive hand-holding alongside research. We will walk people through the data, provide analysis so that busy coordinators don't have to, and create opportunities for direct dialogue wherever possible. Our approach to recommendations, in which humanitarians come up with recommendations based on community views themselves, tends to increase ownership and accountability.

About Ground Truth Solutions

Ground Truth Solutions is the preeminent source of community feedback and accountability across the humanitarian sector. The international non-governmental organisation (INGO) works with crisis-affected communities across the globe to ensure community views and preferences drive the design, allocation and understanding of global support. With a network of exceptional local partners, we do perceptions research to understand what people in crisis are experiencing, what their priorities are for their lives and futures and the support they need to make that happen. Together we identify solutions, advocate with power holders to change the way aid is allocated, designed and delivered and shape the global narratives and policies that affect people in crisis. GTS elevates community views globally, and has influenced some of the biggest humanitarian policy and decision-making processes. We aim to ensure that all decisions which affect the lives of crisis-affected people are shaped by their views and preferences, making this a non-negotiable part of the humanitarian system's DNA, rather than an optional programmatic add-on. More than 15 years of research with communities around the globe makes the irrefutable case that aid that doesn't listen, fails.

Please see our current [strategy](#) and most recent [annual report](#).

Longstanding privileged partnerships with humanitarian organisations

GTS is an international NGO that has long operated as a partner of humanitarian organisations, who rely on the data, analysis, services and advocacy we provide with and on behalf of their constituents: people affected by crises.

GTS develops and produces information products for humanitarian actors and makes data and analysis available for the public good. On top of these products, we work more concretely in partnership, through joint projects and strategic advocacy, with many humanitarian organisations that share our goals, including the following:

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, with whom we produced a groundbreaking global analysis report, 'Listening is not enough', to inform the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Inter Agency Standing Committee Principals, and who have facilitated the work of GTS in several contexts, and integrated it into the Humanitarian Programme Cycle in at least ten countries. We regularly provide analysis and advocacy to OCHA leadership and the IASC principals.
- The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), with whom we have worked on tracking the user journeys of people receiving cash assistance and mobile money in Somalia and Lebanon.
- UNICEF, with whom under a Long-Term Agreement we have worked to ensure people's perceptions inform humanitarian action at the coordination and cluster levels in several countries including the Central African Republic, DRC, Syria, Bangladesh and Chad.
- UN Women, with whom we have been working in Afghanistan and Palestine to ensure women's views and realities inform overall response planning.
- International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with whom we worked to integrate the perceptions of people affected by the Rohingya crisis into the response in Bangladesh.
- Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), with whom we have been working in Chad and, at strategic moments, globally to integrate community voices into health programming.
- Concern Worldwide, with whom we have been working in Chad on integrating community feedback into regional programming.
- International Rescue Committee (IRC), with whom we established a longstanding process of perception-tracking and management response for field teams. We additionally worked with

IRC in Ukraine on unearthing people's perceptions on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

- World Vision International, with whom we worked on the above-mentioned PSEA programme, the first of its kind, as well as worked to understand community views on humanitarian data.
- The International Federation of the Red Cross/Crescent societies (IFRC), who we have trained on numerous occasions, as well as working with them on perceptions of the Rohingya population and Bangladesh host communities, a global Trust Index (founded by GTS and rolled out by IFRC), perceptions on Covid-19, perceptions of national societies across Africa, and currently, the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in two countries.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with whom we tracked community perceptions in Afghanistan and created handbooks on integrating community views into humanitarian action.
- Dan Church Aid, with whom we pioneered the GTS methodology in the Listen Learn Act programme, positively evaluated by the European Union.
- Terre des Hommes and Plan International, with whom we developed and tested methodologies for understanding the views of children.
- Save the Children, with whom we partnered on Listen Learn Act, as well as worked on understanding community views on cash programmes.

As a key actor providing evidence of community views and advocating for more community-led humanitarian aid, we are members of the following networks:

- H2H (Humanitarian to Humanitarian), where we serve on the board, contribute to strategic dialogue, and undertake project partnerships (most recently to gather community perceptions in Sudan, DRC and Myanmar).
- ALNAP, where we share research and analysis, contribute to learning events and sector-wide reports
- The Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network (CDAC), with whom we contribute to strategic dialogue, learning products and events, as well as undertake joint project work.

We also advise other networks, such as CALP and Start, and funds, such as country-based pooled funds, H2H and the Danish Emergency Relief Fund (DERF).

On top of this, GTS is sought out as a key information source, providing insight for thematic, regional and global learning. For example, we

- provide data for several clusters (notably Protection and Food Security) in humanitarian responses.
- have long championed cash programming and provided data and analysis to cash actors, such as the CALP (formerly the Cash learning Partnership), the Collaborative Cash Delivery network (CCD) hosted by Save the Children, and are currently working for the Cash Working Group in Sudan.
- are often invited to support internal strategic planning for humanitarian agencies and networks, most recently including IFRC, Start and UNICEF.
- feed into global humanitarian learning, via contributions to reports and analysis such as ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System report and ODI's biennial reporting on the Grand Bargain.

Budget

GTS is seeking 300,000 euros for this project, split evenly across DRC and Palestine. A budget breakdown is attached in excel.

Contact

Please contact Meg Sattler meg@groundtruthsolutions.org or Hannah Miles hannah@groundtruthsolutions.org

groundtruthsolutions.org