



2025

DT Institute Annual Report





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A message from our CEO

What a year....exhausting to just think about all that occurred.

I enjoy writing this letter annually because it reminds me why we created the DT Institute and how important our mission of promoting democracy globally and contributing to peaceful outcomes in fragile environments remains. We continue to approach global challenges by working collaboratively, often behind the scenes, with partners in creative ways to build leaders, strengthen organizations, and influence policies that contribute to a better world. I'm proud of what we accomplished this year.



John DeBlasio
CHAIRMAN & CEO

For me, the highlights of 2025 included our successful transition from our founding leadership team into a new phase of leadership, with Abbie Castiglione coming on board and growing into the role of President, Haleigh Duggan leading Business Development, and Jim Flowers driving our Grants & Policy work. This leadership team positions us well for the future, strengthening our ability to develop partnerships with both private and public donors and collaborate creatively on complex challenges. We are already seeing a flourishing of our engagements in the Western Balkans and Lebanon, reflecting on our ability to work seamlessly across public and private funding streams to unlock new opportunities for impact.

In terms of accomplishments, simply surviving 2025 was an achievement in itself. We experienced a major earthquake in terms of the commitment from our U.S. Government partners to continue funding critical programs. Thankfully, we were able to demonstrate the value of our work, and most of these grants continued alongside those of our European partners. Our work in Sudan, Yemen, and Iran continues to deliver meaningful impact.

Our goal in 2025 was to retool the organization to better align our private and public work while maintaining operational strength in a volatile environment. Looking ahead to 2026, we are excited about our new European affiliates in Geneva and Madrid, and we look forward to developing a similar affiliate in Nairobi. This structure allows us to build stronger partnerships with like-minded organizations globally.

In my role as a founder and philanthropic funder of DT Institute, I welcome the challenges of this moment. We have built a strong team and organization designed to more effectively deliver impact and help bend the arc of history in a positive way....even if only a little!

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

A message from our President

As global instability continues to test the resilience of democratic institutions and fundamental human rights, our purpose remains our north star: improving people's lives by supporting their right to govern their own futures.

Last year, we refreshed DT Institute's mission and vision to support peace and democracy in fragile global environments. From Sudan and Iran to Yemen, Syria, and beyond, we believe that partnering with local communities closest to the challenges builds more free, open, and resilient societies.

2025 was a year of resilience and adaptation. I'm proud of our progress.

First, we completed year one of a three-year, activist-led, multi-donor initiative, the Collective Action Assistance Fund (CAAF). Social movements evolve and CAAF responds by pooling financial and technical resources to enable them to coordinate, build leadership, and drive change locally and across borders.

Second, we expanded our peacebuilding approaches through a strategic partnership with Inclusive Peace. The partnership adapts their multiple approaches with ours to leverage the public and private resources towards meaningful leadership dialogue in some of the world's most complex armed conflicts and political crises.

Third, our programs delivered impact in complex social environments. In Iran, our tools helped millions maintain access to information and stay connected during increased conflict and communication blackouts. In Sudan, our programming expanded and remained flexible to address hate speech, disinformation, and divisive narratives. It did so by equipping local journalists, youth, and content creators with tools for credible, community-based alternatives.

The need for this work is growing. Today, there are fewer than 30 countries considered full democracies, and the gap between global challenges and available resources is widening.

In 2026, we are continuing to fight for open societies. We are launching a European branch of the foundation, DTI Madrid, to expand our partnerships with European funders, policymakers, and civil society leaders.

I'm grateful to our team and partners who continue to advance peace, justice, and freedom under extraordinary circumstances. Thank you for being part of this work.



Abbie Castiglione
PRESIDENT



Creating Innovative Pathways for More Open, Informed, and Peaceful Societies.

DT Institute is an NGO working with local communities and leaders in high-conflict settings, focusing on long-term strategies that invest in grassroots leaders, movements, and innovators often overlooked by traditional funding models.

In 2025, we worked as both a funder and implementor in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Serbia, Sudan, and Yemen, while our media and digital programming reached more than three million people across Afghanistan, Algeria, Belarus, Iran, Myanmar, Russia, Sudan, and Turkey. What we did:

- Delivered survivor-led, trauma-informed initiatives supporting reconciliation and accountability
- Trained a new generation of peacebuilders
- Strengthened safeguarding measures to protect vulnerable groups
- Established early-warning systems to identify and respond to conflict risks
- Supported independent media while countering disinformation

DT Institute is a trusted partner to the U.S. Department of State, Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

A core area of our work is in independent media and digital information systems. We operate in environments where access to reliable information is restricted by censorship, surveillance, and disinformation. We support leaders, coalitions, and communities to protect secure communication channels, expand access to credible information, and strengthen independent media and journalists.

Through our philanthropy, we provide grants that enable rapid, flexible responses to emerging opportunities. In 2025, these grants provided catalytic funding for initiatives that advanced peacebuilding, strengthened access to information, and supported civic leadership in complex environments. We also partnered with foundations such as the Carter Center and the Collective Action Assistance Fund (with Humanity United, the Ford and Packard Foundations, and others).

Our Values



Integrity

Operate using highest ethical standards.



Innovation

Discover more effective methods to enhance impact.



Collaboration

Facilitate long-term local partnerships based on community-defined results and success.



Transparency

Value respect, trust, and different perspectives.



Stewardship

Responsibly manage funding and broadly share learnings and experience.

Conflict Transformation & Peacebuilding

Implementation Highlights from 2025

\$6.5m

in funding for

75+

organizations

12

countries



Locally Led Peacebuilding in Sudan

Amid Sudan's ongoing conflict, DT Institute's Building Inclusive Peace in Sudan (BIPS) program supports communities working to prevent violence, rebuild trust, and strengthen local peace leadership.

In 2025, BIPS partnered with 48 local organizations to implement activities across 58 communities, reaching more than 21,000 people. Through trauma-informed approaches and mental health and psychosocial support, communities were better equipped to engage in dialogue, resolve disputes, and rebuild relationships.

These efforts translated into tangible local outcomes. In Blue Nile, community reconciliation committees supported through BIPS established early warning systems to identify and respond to emerging tensions and resolved more than 15 local conflicts. These efforts contributed to the reopening of previously inaccessible areas for civilians and humanitarian actors and restored channels for dialogue between previously divided communities.

Alongside these initiatives, youth

leaders and community organizations led efforts to counter harmful narratives and promote responsible communication, reaching more than 2 million people through media campaigns and community-based platforms. BIPS also extended support to displaced and refugee communities, including civic education and outreach activities reaching Sudanese populations in Uganda.

Together, these efforts demonstrate how locally led, trauma-informed approaches can strengthen social cohesion and support pathways toward peace in highly fragile environments.

"We invest in strengthening youth centers, clubs, and local associations as anchors for sustainable change—building local leadership, community ownership, and impact that lasts beyond project support."

Mohamed Jamal Aldein Ederis, Executive Director of Partners for Peace Organization (BIPS partner)

Conflict-Sensitive Analysis in Sudan

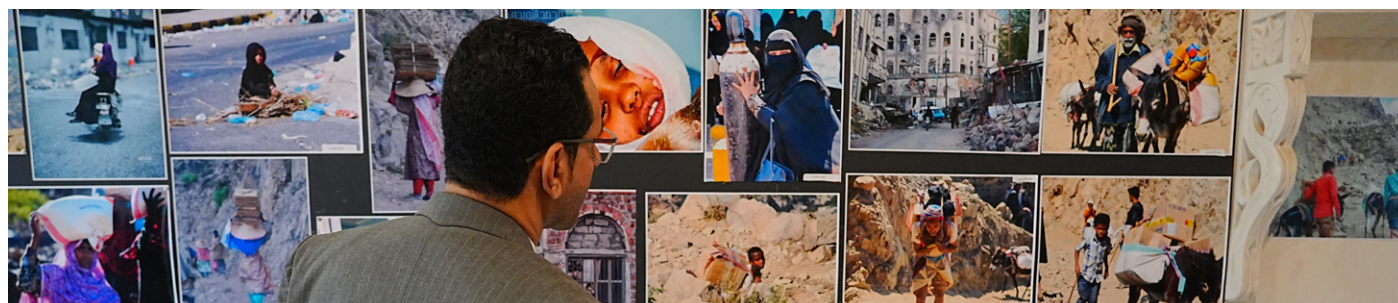
Complementing its community-based peacebuilding work in Sudan, DT Institute also supports analysis that informs more coordinated international engagement during periods of crisis and institutional disruption.

In 2025, DT Institute launched a research and analysis initiative funded by the FCDO, in partnership with S4 Global Solutions. The initiative delivers real-time analysis on political and security developments and convenes closed-door briefings and discussions that connect locally grounded insights with international stakeholders.

By synthesizing diverse open-source analysis and perspectives, the initiative supports more coherent, conflict-sensitive responses in a context where formal coordination mechanisms remain limited. This work strengthens decision-making in information-constrained environments and complements DT Institute's community-level programming by deepening understanding of shifts in local power structures, conflict risks, and access constraints.



Advancing Justice and Reconciliation in Yemen



Through the Supporting Peace in Yemen through Accountability, Reconciliation, and Knowledge-Sharing (SPARK) program, DTI Institute supports Yemeni civil society to advance locally led transitional justice efforts and elevate victims' voices in accountability processes, including engagement with UN human rights mechanisms and national-level policy discussions.

In 2025, SPARK strengthened the capacity of local actors to lead reconciliation and justice initiatives. A nationwide study with more than 330 participants revealed strong public demand for both accountability and reconciliation, directly shaping program priorities. Building on this, 112 stakeholders were trained in transitional justice approaches, generating over 200 community-led ideas.

SPARK supported locally driven initiatives that delivered tangible results in communities affected by conflict. In Taiz, partners documented victims of a major explosion and established the city's first Memory Museum, engaging nearly 3,000 visitors and preserving community narratives of the siege. The program also facilitated a landmark reconciliation between security forces and the Muhamasheen community, resolving a five-year dispute through dialogue and reparations.

Efforts to address conflict-related property disputes led to the documentation of more than 350 cases and the restoration of 39 homes to rightful owners, helping reduce tensions and support local stability.

Through this work, Yemeni partners engaged UN representatives, local authorities, and government stakeholders, ensuring that victims' perspectives inform ongoing accountability discussions and future justice processes and reconciliation efforts.

“Our five-year partnership with DTI has strengthened SAM’s capacity, networks, and skills, opening doors and empowering meaningful impact.

Through SPARK, we enhanced case management, community trust, coordination, and international engagement, advancing justice and preserving community memory.”

Tawfeeq Al Houmaidi, CEO of SAM for Rights and Liberties (SPARK partner)

Independent Media & Digital Information Ecosystems

Expanding Access to Information in Iran

In Iran, where censorship, surveillance, and internet restrictions limit access to information, DT Institute supports technologies and partnerships that enable secure communication and the free flow of information.

In 2025, DT Institute expanded the reach of its circumvention tools, supporting millions of users to access blocked content and communicate safely. RedVPN, an open-source and independently audited tool, reached more than 500,000 monthly active users globally. In Iran, RostamVPN enabled more than 2 million users to bypass censorship and maintain access to information, including during periods of severe network restrictions.

To address full internet shutdown scenarios, DT Institute also advanced alternative delivery systems. Rostam Media uses satellite television infrastructure to transmit curated digital content directly to users, reaching more than 200,000 households. This approach continues to enable access to information, including the ability to browse content from over 100 websites, without reliance on internet connectivity.

DT Institute also continues to support civil society partners to document human rights violations and engage international accountability mechanisms, helping ensure that evidence is elevated and connected to global advocacy processes.



Connecting Remote Communities in Myanmar

Between 2024 and 2025, DT Institute implemented the Karen Resiliency Program (KRP) to strengthen how remote and marginalized Karen communities in southeastern Myanmar access information, communicate, and connect with the outside world.

In Phase I, the program significantly expanded connectivity in hard-to-reach, off-grid areas. Thirteen portable satellite internet systems were deployed—most of which remain operational—providing reliable access to digital information where connectivity was previously unavailable. Additional communications equipment now supports local media production, coordination, and information sharing across communities.

KRP also strengthened local capacity to sustain these systems. More than 60

representatives from Karen civil society organizations were trained in media production and communications technologies, enabling local teams to generate and share trusted information.

A major milestone was the successful proof of concept for a locally adapted communications network. The system enables offline messaging, file sharing, audio and video calls, and access to stored digital content without reliance on internet infrastructure or cellular networks.

Together, these efforts established a scalable, community-led model that expands access to information, strengthens independent media ecosystems, and builds resilience in highly constrained environments.

Advocacy & Civic Engagement

Advancing Child Protection and Accountability in Yemen

Through the Supporting Awareness Facilitating Enforcement of Children's Rights in the Yemeni Conflict (SAFE) program, DT Institute works with Yemeni civil society organizations to document grave human rights violations against children, support affected communities, and elevate victims' voices in national and international accountability processes, including engagement with UN monitoring and reporting mechanisms and international human rights bodies.

In 2025, SAFE partners generated credible evidence of violations, documenting 95 verified cases and contributing to more than 428 cases recorded over the life of the program, more than double the original program target. This evidence has been submitted to UN mechanisms and international bodies, ensuring that violations against children inform global human rights reporting and advocacy.

SAFE also countered the manipulation and suppression of information surrounding child rights violations. Partners produced investigative reporting and survivor-centered stories that exposed patterns of abuse and were amplified through regional media and public outreach, helping ensure accurate information reaches both Yemeni communities and international audiences.

In addition to DT Institute's documentation and advocacy work, SAFE provided psychosocial support to more than 330 children and caregivers. The program also convened government, civil society, and justice actors to strengthen coordination and advance practical recommendations for improving child protection systems. In one case, partners supported a displaced child in obtaining a birth certificate, enabling him to return to school and regain access to essential services after months of exclusion.



Supporting Civic Participation in Syria

For more than a decade, DT Institute and its Syrian partners have supported communities navigating conflict, displacement, and political transition. In 2025, this work focused on strengthening inclusive civic participation and advancing locally led reintegration efforts in northwest Syria.

Through the Strengthening Syrian Political Processes (Taziz II) program, DT Institute expanded opportunities for community dialogue and civic engagement during a period of continued transition. Rather than focusing narrowly on formal political processes, the program brought together communities, civil society organizations, and local stakeholders to engage on shared governance challenges.

Public consultations and dialogue sessions enabled communities to raise priorities related to service delivery, accountability, and local decision-making, while strengthening channels for ongoing participation.

Complementary capacity-building activities supported participants to engage more effectively in evolving governance processes. Scenario planning and negotiation workshops equipped participants with practical tools to navigate uncertainty, build consensus, and adapt to shifting conditions. These efforts strengthened civic participation and supported more inclusive, community-informed approaches to governance.

Advancing Safe and Dignified Reintegration

A key achievement in 2025 was the Safe Return Initiative, which supported the voluntary return and reintegration of vulnerable Syrian families from Al-Hol Camp to their communities of origin. This program was unique because it facilitated a structured return process for families that was coordinated with local networks at a time when many displacement camps posed significant protection and community challenges.

Community networks and local partners provided documentation, transportation, and post-return follow-up to help ensure safe and dignified reintegration. In total, 90 families,

approximately 360 individuals, returned to their communities. Beyond the immediate impact, the initiative strengthened community acceptance, reduced barriers to return, and reinforced locally led approaches to reintegration and social cohesion.

This work is an example of DT Institute's broader approach to trauma-informed reintegration, conflict resolution, and community recovery in fragile environments. By linking dialogue, practical support, and local leadership, the program contributed to rebuilding trust and strengthening the conditions for longer-term stability.

The completion of Taziz II in 2025 marks the close of a significant phase of DT Institute's engagement in Syria. However, the relationships, local capacities, and community-led approaches developed through this work provide a strong foundation to address the continued challenges and support locally driven recovery efforts.



“Returning home felt impossible before. The process was hard, but we were supported at every step. Now we are rebuilding our lives.”

Returnee family member



Impact Grants Highlights from 2025

DT Institute's philanthropic approach is rooted in flexible, values-aligned investment that prioritizes locally led, accountable, and context-driven partners, particularly those often overlooked by traditional funding models. These partnerships help identify and support effective local organizations, while also elevating under-addressed foreign policy and peacebuilding challenges, particularly in a year marked by disruptions to traditional government funding.

In 2025, DT Institute deployed targeted grants ranging from a few thousand

dollars to over \$100,000 to test innovative approaches, support local actors, and generate evidence that can attract additional partners and scale impact.

The Institute delivers this support both directly and through collaborative donor mechanisms. In 2025, this included partnering with the Carter Center to launch the ACCELERATE mechanism supporting human rights defenders globally, and working with Humanity United, the Ford Foundation, the Packard Foundation, and others to fund the Collective Action Assistance Fund.

\$1.2m

in funding for

20+

organizations

14

countries

22

grants

Supporting Syria's Path to Democracy

In 2025, DT Institute expanded its impact grant investments in Syria following significant political shifts that created new opportunities for civic engagement and accountability.

DT Institute continued its support for Syria Direct, an independent media organization producing locally driven investigative reporting on developments across the country. In 2025, Syria Direct published in-depth reporting on issues including recruitment into new security services, intersectorian violence, and the impacts of drought—contributing to more transparent and informed public discourse at a critical moment.

To further support civic participation, DT Institute partnered with the Carter Center to fund an initiative training 50 student leaders at universities in Damascus and Aleppo. These students facilitated structured debates on human rights, civic freedoms, and the rule of law, reaching hundreds of peers and helping foster a new generation of engaged civic leaders.

These efforts supported more informed public discourse, strengthened civic engagement, and contributed to greater accountability during a period of political transition.





Driving Policy in Regions Transitioning out of Conflict

As U.S. foreign policy research institutions scaled back programming in 2025, DT Institute stepped in to help bridge local expertise and international policymaking through its partnership with the Atlantic Council. Last year, the Institute became a foundational donor to support policy engagement in two often under-resourced regions: Iraq and the Western Balkans.

In Iraq, DT Institute supported analysis and engagement related to the 2025 parliamentary elections, contributing to international understanding of political, economic, and security dynamics. This work was strengthened

through connections to DT Institute's Iraq Leadership Fellows program and partnerships with institutions such as the Baghdad Business School, ensuring that locally grounded perspectives informed broader policy discussions.

In the Western Balkans, DT Institute supported a series of closed-door roundtables and a high-level conference bringing together government officials and policymakers from the region, the European Union, and the United States. These initiatives enabled discussions about the shared challenges and opportunities for more coordinated responses to current issues facing the region.

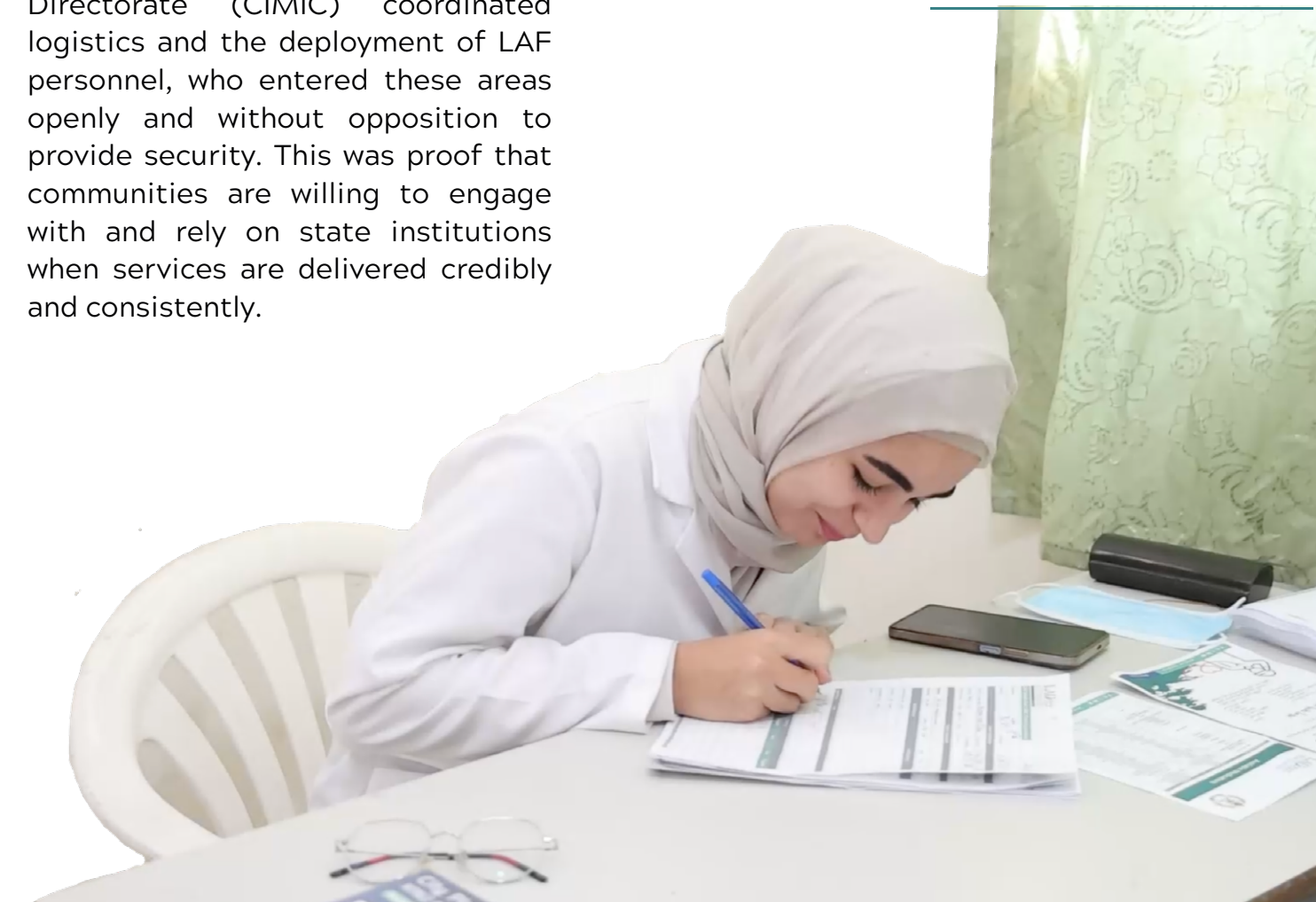
Rebuilding the Government Writ in Lebanon

In 2025, DT Institute supported efforts to strengthen public service delivery and state presence in underserved areas of Lebanon, seizing a critical opportunity created by a shift in the balance of influence in areas traditionally under Hizballah control.

In partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Lebanese American University (LAU), DT Institute funded and organized a series of high-profile medical screenings in conflict-affected communities in Beirut's southern suburbs and the Beqaa Valley. LAU doctors treated hundreds of patients, while the LAF's Civil-Military Cooperation Directorate (CIMIC) coordinated logistics and the deployment of LAF personnel, who entered these areas openly and without opposition to provide security. This was proof that communities are willing to engage with and rely on state institutions when services are delivered credibly and consistently.

These activities also helped build trust and improve perceptions of state-led service delivery in areas where confidence in public institutions has been limited.

DT Institute and its partners also developed a pipeline of over 200 potential stabilization projects aimed at improving service delivery and strengthening relationships between communities and public institutions. The assessment has also attracted interest from additional public and private donors seeking to support Lebanon.



A New Partnership for Peace



In 2025, DT Institute formed a strategic institutional partnership with Inclusive Peace to strengthen its peacebuilding and political engagement work in increasingly complex and fragmented conflict environments.

Inclusive Peace brings deep expertise in research, convening, accompaniment, and advisory support for peace and political transition processes, with a strong emphasis on the meaningful inclusion of women, youth, and civil society actors. Based in Geneva, this work is carried out in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, women peacebuilders, political actors and movements, governments, and multilateral institutions such as the African Union, European Union, and the United Nations. It is supported by partners including UN Women, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, UNDP, and other public and private donors.

This work has supported civil society engagement in peace and political processes in contexts including Afghanistan, Belarus, Ethiopia, Niger, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and has contributed to initiatives such as the Sudanese Youth Network, Ethiopia's Coalition for Women's Voice in the National Dialogue, and the Afghan Mechanism for Inclusive Peace.

Through this partnership, including the establishment of DT Institute Geneva, DT Institute expands its ability to connect locally led programming with higher-level engagement, drawing on both U.S. and European approaches and networks. This helps ensure that peace processes are more inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to realities on the ground.



DT Institute

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For partnership inquiries or to learn more about DT Institute's work, please contact: info@dt-institute.org

Most pictures were kindly provided by our partners, except for:

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