THE EMPOWER APPROACH

EMPOWERING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON EMERGENCY RESPONSES

Destruction caused by Hurricane Eta in Nicaragua in November 2020. EMPOWER supported Caritas Nicaragua in a rapid emergency shelter and WASH response to the Category 4 hurricane.
Photo by Katlyn Holland/CRS

In this brief [video](), partners share how EMPOWER has helped them build the capacity of their organizations.

In this brief [video](), partners share the impacts and results they have seen through the EMPOWER team's support.

Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, CRS is committed to its principle of subsidiarity: the understanding that communities, who are the closest to local challenges, are the artisans of their own development. Building and strengthening local leadership and institutions ensures that CRS respects the dignity and agency of each person and community we serve, and fosters an approach of accompanying local institutions to serve the common good. In fulfillment of these ideals and CRS' commitments to the Grand Bargain[1] localization initiative, CRS has developed the EMPOWER approach to local leadership of humanitarian response.

EMPOWER, for Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses, promotes the leadership of humanitarian response by local organizations that have nationwide coverage. It is an approach that is guided by the institutional and programmatic priorities identified within the organizations. CRS' then provides tailored technical assistance to address the organizations' areas of focus for capacity strengthening and continuous consultation. EMPOWER's three areas of strategic focus to promote increased local leadership of humanitarian responses are:

- **COORDINATION**: Local partners strengthen participation in coordination platforms at the local, national and regional levels.

- **INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING**: Local partners strengthen institutional capacities and organizational structures to better manage humanitarian responses.

- **FUNDING**: Local partners access and implement a larger percentage of humanitarian funding.

---

1. An agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations that have committed to getting more means into the hands of people in need, and to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action.

The EMPOWER approach involves six main steps:

1. Partner expressions of interest

Upon an invitation from CRS, local partners submit expressions of interest in joining the program. EMPOWER's three main selection criteria include:

- Organization must be a recognized non-profit that has nationwide coverage so that wherever an emergency occurs, it is able to respond.
- Organization's mission includes humanitarian response.
- Organization is able to designate two focal points to the program, preferably one in programs and one in operations, to communicate EMPOWER opportunities with their organizations, and disseminate learnings.

Once partners are selected, a memorandum of understanding is signed between CRS and each participating partner, on partnership principles they will adhere to during the project.

2. Capacity self-assessments and strengthening plans

EMPOWER uses a range of self-assessment tools to facilitate partner-led self-evaluation of the organization's ability to meet internationally recognized standards. These tools include the Caritas Internationalis Management Standards (finance, supply chain, human resources, safeguarding and MEAL) as well as tools that measure the the ability to meet humanitarian standards in food security; protection mainstreaming; water, sanitation and hygiene; shelter; cash and markets; and other sectors. Based on the results, EMPOWER works with each partner to develop a two-year capacity strengthening plan. This process also prioritizes the areas in which EMPOWER support is most urgently needed.

3. Technical assistance and accompaniment

Based on the capacity strengthening plan, current emergency responses and emerging needs, EMPOWER jointly builds terms of references and a scope of work with clear deliverables and timeframes. This helps to identify the requested technical assistance and the best CRS staff from the EMPOWER team, Humanitarian Response Department, country programs and headquarters who can fulfill these terms of reference.

Technical assistance (TA) happens in person or remotely depending on partner preference and staff availability. Assistance can include secondment of CRS staff to partners to support emergency coordination, program start-up, participation in coordination platforms, and a myriad of other needs, such as warehousing, security, supply chain, MEAL, protection mainstreaming and cash-based initiatives. EMPOWER also looks for learning exchange opportunities for partner staff to support each other.

After key deliverables are met, EMPOWER accompanies partners over a longer period to ensure learnings are applied across their institution. TA can be provided at both the project and institutional levels and cover a wide range of program or operational requests.

4. Prime readiness

EMPOWER supports partners interested in priming to satisfy the eligibility and due diligence requirements of CRS donors such as USAID. This includes support for partners to develop or strengthen required policies and procedures, such as accounting, protection policies, indirect cost allocation, sensitive and non-sensitive feedback and response mechanisms, procurement policies, HR manuals, and more.

Funding opportunities for humanitarian responses that become available for their respective countries are transparently communicated to partners. EMPOWER then offers support in facilitating a go/no-go decision-making process that includes determining whether partners are well positioned to prime the award. In proposals to donors where partners are prime, if the partner would like CRS to continue to provide TA during the project, CRS' costs can be recovered through the project budget through consultancy contracts or sub-agreements. CRS technical assistance to partner-primed awards can include finance, MEAL, operations, program start-up/management/close-out as well as a variety of sectoral support.

5. Resource mobilization

EMPOWER supports partners in the following areas of resource mobilization:

- Identifying funding opportunities and capture planning
- Donor liaising and prepositioning
- Go/no-go decision-making
- Project design, proposal development, and issues letter responses
- MEAL and activity planning
- Staffing, logistics, procurement and security planning
- Budgeting
- Proposal submission via online platforms

6. Continuous feedback and evaluation

EMPOWER models good systems of feedback and response. Upon completion of each terms of reference, EMPOWER solicits feedback from partners on their level of satisfaction with the support provided. At the end of each year, EMPOWER asks partners to evaluate CRS' ability to meet partnership principles stipulated in the MoU. EMPOWER presents the results of these evaluations to partners on a regular basis and adapts its programming, management and approach accordingly.

CRS
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES
faith. action. results.

1
CRS and partner
sign MoU

2
Partner chooses
self-assessments

3
Partner carries
out **baseline
self-assessment**

4
CRS and partner develop
capacity strengthening
action plan

5
Partner **completes action plan**
and **responds to emergencies**

6
CRS and partner carry
out **process evaluation**
of Year 1 at the
end of 2021

7
Partner carries out
endline self-assessments
at the end of 2022

**EMPOWER
process**

Ongoing technical
assistance and
capacity building

Self-identified
need

Support
request

In-country/
remote
accompaniment

CRS faith. action. results.
CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES