

# How CRS promotes local leadership

The relief and development industry has long known that the impact of aid programming is greater when local organizations bring the solutions, capacity and resources necessary to lead the work. Why has true "local leadership" been so elusive?

## A BETTER ROLE FOR INGOs

Too often international agencies rely on local entities to implement the grants they obtain without strengthening their staff's skills, supporting their institutional development or centering local voices. Doing so would support the local organizations to design, win and successfully implement awards on their own. For local leadership to become the norm, aid agencies must increase their investments, influence aid policy, and change the way they work internally.

## INVESTING IN LOCAL ACTORS

Since it was formed in 1943, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been guided by the belief that the people closest to challenges are best placed to identify solutions. That's why the agency partners with more than 1,000 local organizations annually and is deeply committed to locally-led humanitarian response and development. CRS' investment in strengthening the capacity of local organizations follows a three-pronged approach:



### BUILD STAFF CAPACITY

by supporting individuals and teams in acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to lead aid efforts



### STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONS

by supporting individuals and teams to improve systems, structures and policies to function more effectively



### PROVIDE ACCOMPANIMENT

and follow-up to ensure skills and organizational improvements are sustained over time

## SNAPSHOT OF CRS PARTNERSHIPS SINCE 2021

**1,300**

partnerships  
with local actors

**\$30M**

invested in  
partner capacity

**\$496M**

in sub-award funding  
from CRS to local actors

**\$149M**

in prime funding won by local  
actors after CRS support

CRS' investments in local organizations are either integrated into sectoral programming or implemented as standalone projects. Some examples:

### LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

The Advance Local Leadership in the Right Way (ALLRight) Fund was created in 2021 to intensify CRS' investment in local entities. Based on their vision for the future, local organizations identify, and with CRS' support, address their most pressing capacity needs in multi-year projects. ALLRight is funded with a multi-million annual allocation of CRS private resources through 2030 and has committed more than \$5.7 million to local leadership projects in 12 countries, with additional projects in development.

### HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE ACTORS

In 2018, CRS worked with local partners to establish EMPOWER, to enhance local entities' humanitarian response capacity through institutional strengthening, capacity building, accompaniment and direct funding. CRS implements EMPOWER in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and West and Central Africa, with 87 local institutions in 54 countries. Through the project, local organizations in Brazil, Colombia and Peru have received direct funding from BHA (USAID) and BPRM (U.S. State Department).

### GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

CRS' "High-Performing Implementers" (HPI) Initiative accompanies national governments to become and remain strong implementers of Global Fund grants. HPI experts provide professional training, technical assistance and accompaniment to government partners according to their prioritized needs within the four areas critical to Global Fund grant management: governance, financial management, supply chain management, and monitoring, evaluation and program quality.

### FAITH NETWORKS

The SCORE-ECD project in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia improved the way 48 groups of nuns taught and cared for children aged 0-5 years. The project trained 85 nuns who in turn trained 1,300 others in child protection, nutrition, financial management, early childhood development and resource mobilization. Funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the project helped caregivers adopt a more holistic approach to early childhood development and boosted their organizational and networking capacities.

## INFLUENCING AID POLICY

CRS advocates for a foreign aid system where local actors are active participants in decision-making and can access the resources they need for sustainable solutions. To do so, CRS focuses on:

### Amplifying partner voices

CRS has been bringing more of its local partners "to the table" with donors and decision makers as it advocates for locally-led development and humanitarian assistance. Supporting local institutions' leadership in decision making and guiding the future of aid is an important part of CRS' commitment to local leadership.

### Engaging donors and policymakers

Drawing from its extensive experience with partners around the world, CRS engages with donors, peers and policymakers to advocate for fair local leadership policies and principles.

### Building the evidence base

Recognizing that policy requires impact data, CRS is working to evaluate and document successes in promoting local leadership to strengthen the evidence base for localization.

## CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK

To bring about change in the aid industry, agencies like CRS must transform how they think, operate and measure success. They also need to increase their multi-year investments in local institutions. To promote locally-led and locally-centered programming, CRS put new database systems in place to track and boost its investments. It also committed to providing Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) to local organizations, updated its policy regarding ICR in USG-funded sub-agreements and created a new policy for non-USG sub-agreements. To simplify submission and approval processes, CRS created a digital "Subrecipient ICR Portal" and trained staff on how to communicate with partners about their options, requirements and responsibilities. When local actors need support, CRS provides capacity strengthening in monitoring and evaluation, resource mobilization, sectoral programming areas, financial management and advocacy. Internally, CRS continues to increase the percentage of staff dedicated to local leadership. It has also revised the job descriptions of existing staff and continues to build their competencies in communication, adult learning and accompaniment through its flagship online portal—the [Institute for Capacity Strengthening](#).

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#### PHOTOS:

**Banner:** Markus Angin, a farmer on Adonara Island in Indonesia, belongs to a CRS-supported Village Disaster Preparedness Group where he learned how to create a disaster action plan and manage a program in which food and supplies are stored in a specific location and given to the community during emergencies. *Laura Elizabeth Pohl/CRS*

**Capacity Strengthening:** Horm Mealea, a community action worker in Cambodia's Siem Reap Province where CRS works with local organizations and advocacy groups to strengthen government health systems and help people access services with support from the Global Fund. *Jeff Holt for CRS*

**Institutional Strengthening:** Vila Cachoeira locals working on a "Risks and Threats" activity in Brazil, where CRS is supporting Caritas to apply a community-led Disaster Risk Management (DRM) methodology to help communities strengthen their organizational capacities, and create a DRM map and action plan. *Felippe Thomaz for CRS*

**Accompaniment:** Yelis Gonzales, a participant in the EMPOWER project in La Guajira, Colombia, shows CRS' Nicolas Meslaoui a watercourse that flooded during a storm. CRS is strengthening the capacity of a local organization to provide relief through cash assistance and preparedness activities. *Carlos Daniel Lascarro Barrio for CRS*