

How CRS strengthens institutions to support local leadership

Aid projects have a greater impact when led by local actors. By strengthening the capacity of the institutions it partners with, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) helps them expand their influence, reach and impact. Capacity strengthening also improves project sustainability and helps local institutions reach their goal of designing, winning, and successfully implementing aid projects without management by an international agency.



LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY

All organizations strengthen their skills and systems on an ongoing basis. To work with local actors in that effort, CRS implements activities in capacity strengthening, which it defines as a deliberate process that improves the ability of an individual, group, organization, network or system to enhance or develop the knowledge, skills, abilities, systems and structures needed to function effectively, work toward sustainability and achieve goals.

WHY DO WE INVEST IN IT?

Our partnership and capacity strengthening efforts are a natural outgrowth of longstanding CRS principles:

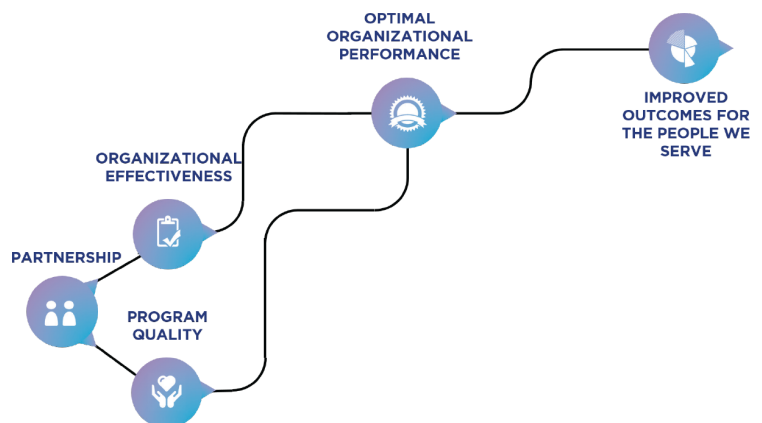
- **We believe people should lead their own development.** CRS knows that local leadership is vital in implementing projects that respond to actual needs and leverage existing capacities.
- **We are committed to solutions with long-term impact.** CRS increases the impact of joint programming and improves lives in lasting ways by helping individuals, communities and institutions reach their full potential.
- **We work to promote social justice, peace and human dignity.** CRS seeks to foster inclusion, accountability and fair governance through strong civil society networks.

WHAT'S OUR THEORY OF CHANGE?

Grounded in Catholic social teaching, CRS' guiding and partnership principles reinforce the notion that real, sustainable change comes about when people, working together, use their skills and resources to take action on the issues they feel most important, resulting in better outcomes for their communities.

Our Theory of Change:

Effective capacity strengthening drives improved outcomes



WHAT'S OUR APPROACH?

CRS' approach to capacity strengthening is founded on decades of experience and constant refinement. It is grounded in proven principles of organizational development, adult learning, change management, behavior change, and the principles of transparency, ownership, and respect for local autonomy.

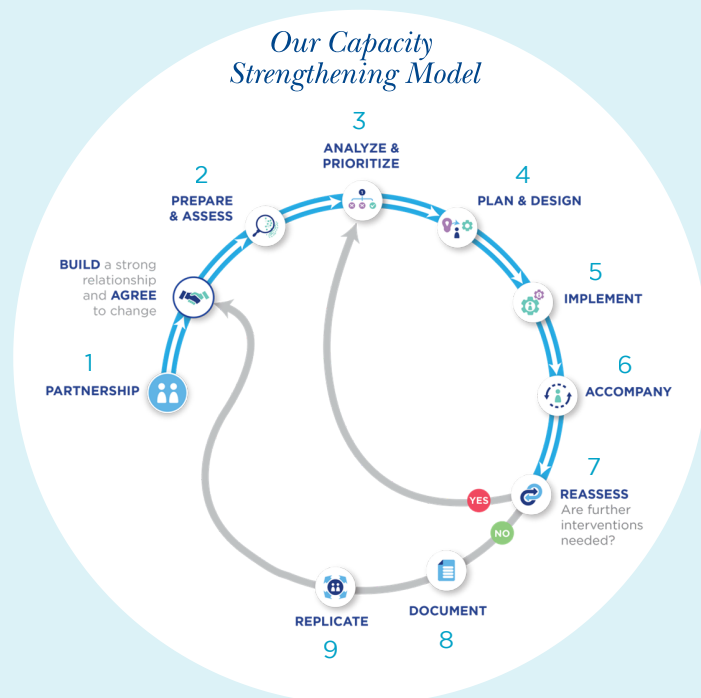
CRS' approach—which is led by local actors and driven by demand—includes three core approaches:

Capacity Building: Capacity building is focused on individuals and teams, enhancing or developing new KSAs (knowledge, skills, attitudes) so people and teams function more effectively. Capacity building is often done through training.

Institutional Strengthening: Institutional strengthening is focused on an organization. It enhances or develops the systems and structures

needed to function effectively, work towards sustainability, and achieve goals by addressing policies, procedures and improving the enabling environment.

Accompaniment: This refers to consistent coaching and mentoring after interventions such as workshops, organization design or on- the-job training. It is most successful when it includes other methods of continuous learning such as peer-to-peer learning, job share and secondment, and program and management quality assurance.



1. CRS and the local actor establish a strong relationship. The partner must express interest in capacity strengthening and a willingness to change. Roles are negotiated.
2. The partner, with CRS support as requested, prepares and conducts an assessment to identify organizational strengths and weaknesses.
3. The partner, with CRS support as requested, analyzes assessment results and prioritize needs.
4. The partner and CRS plans and designs appropriate interventions. These include a combination of institutional strengthening, capacity building and accompaniment.
5. The partner implements the institutional strengthening and capacity building activities.
6. CRS accompanies the partner to build new skills, institutionalize changes and sustain improvements.
7. CRS works with the partner to assess whether the interventions were effective and determine if further ones are needed. This step can include reassessment.
8. CRS and the partner share learning.
9. CRS looks to replicate successes.

INSTITUTE FOR CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

To support local actors in their leadership journeys, CRS developed [The Institute for Capacity Strengthening](#) (ICS), an online portal housing a wide range of capacity strengthening methods, tools and courses for use with local partners. Available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, the content was developed and tested hand-in-hand with local actors. Bringing the best of theory and practice, the ICS is meant to support local institutions as they take on new and expanded responsibilities.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

Strengthening government actors: After the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, CRS was asked to run a newly established Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Coordination Platform (HRRP) under the leadership of the Government of Nepal. After six years of capacity

strengthening efforts by CRS, the government took over. The platform's success led five countries in Asia to show interest in adopting the same structure. As a result, CRS is currently assisting the Pakistani government in Sindh District with similar efforts.

Strengthening social services partners: In Nigeria, where CRS was prime on a project called SMILE, our capacity strengthening efforts with 49 local partners boosted their financial risk ratings from an average of 58% at baseline to 90% at the end of the project. Ten partners transitioned to direct donor funding as a result of their strengthened systems and processes.

Strengthening global health partners: Through CRS' support under a global Gavi award from 2012 to 2018, transition partners in 14 countries passed Gavi's and/or the Global Fund's rigorous capacity assessments to become fund recipients.