

How CRS promotes local leadership by changing the way we work

To transform our relationships with local partners and encourage changes in the relief and development industry, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) embarked more than 20 years ago on a journey to change how we think, operate and measure success. As a result, we have evolved from working *through* local actors to working *with* them to, now, working *for* them.



A UNIQUE ROLE FOR INGOS

The world faces poverty, injustice and unprecedented numbers of humanitarian crises. To address these challenges, international aid agencies and local institutions must work together, each contributing skills and experience in a way that respects the authority and ownership of those

closest to the issue. By following the lead of government, civil society and faith-based institutions in the nations where we work, CRS can contribute to solutions in a spirit of solidarity.

As we adapt our work to meet the demands of our partners, our role is shifting to become:



MOBILIZER

of relevant stakeholders with similar missions



FACILITATOR

of local actors' visioning and strategic planning



INVESTOR

of private and external resources to advance local leadership



PROVIDER

of technical assistance based on local partner needs



CHAMPION

for increased direct donor funding to local institutions

INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION

Indirect Cost Recovery

To align our organizational functions with our local leadership principles, CRS committed to providing Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) to local actors. We updated our ICR policy for USG-funded sub-agreements and created a new policy for non USG awards. These changes were designed to ensure a streamlined approach to ICR across the agency.

CRS is working to ensure local partners are well informed of their options so that their leadership can determine what is best for their institution.

Monitoring our Support for Local Leadership

CRS is committed to increasing its investments in local leadership. To track our efforts, we are building systems to monitor the percentage of total program value dedicated to partnership and local

leadership, as well as the number of projects with funds allocated to partners' organizational development. To assist our country offices in planning and monitoring the support they provide to key partners, we provide them with a detailed work planning template to build a database of pending, planned or completed capacity strengthening activities. The same template also contains data on the estimated cost for future activities, as well as the staff that will be involved. The goal is to help our offices determine the level of technical and human resources support needed. The template also facilitates budgeting and resource planning for capacity strengthening activities. The databases are being enhanced with visualizations and analytics.

STAFFING AND OTHER CHANGES

CRS continues to increase the number of staff dedicated to capacity strengthening and local leadership. Using CRS' flagship online [portal](#), the Institute for Capacity Strengthening, we provide training in communication, adult learning, institutional strengthening and accompaniment to our technical and operations staff. In addition, we are continually revising job descriptions to align with local leadership priorities and to ensure staff have the knowledge, skills and attitudes for this work.

Based on requests from local actors, CRS is piloting ways to deliver capacity strengthening support to local organizations in a myriad of areas, including resource mobilization, MEAL (monitoring evaluation, accountability and learning), financial management, adaptive management, FCRM (feedback, complaints and response mechanisms), and advocacy. In the past, staff in these areas worked primarily within CRS projects. Now, CRS is adapting its staffing models and job descriptions to better respond in real time to partner priorities and support requests.

CRS is also revising its Partnership Scorecard, an online tool it developed to provide the agency and its partners with a way to measure progress in their organizational relationship and capacity strengthening efforts. In strengthening partner capacity for MEAL, we are systematically gathering and analyzing partner feedback on our technical

assistance. We are also integrating the use of the "Most Significant Change" methodology in evaluating our capacity strengthening initiatives as a way for partner staff to share their feedback on changes and as a way for CRS to understand what changes partners value most highly.

Lastly, CRS has incorporated into its approaches new roles as 1) facilitator of local actors' visioning and strategic planning, 2) champion for increased direct donor funding to local institutions, and 3) initiator of more direct engagement between policy makers and donors and local organizations.

CRS will continue to adapt, improve and innovate to better meet the demands of our partners.



Rupesh Shrestha, CRS Technical Coordinator, and Bikash Karn, an engineer with Caritas Nepal, work together as part of EPRP (the Emergency Preparedness and Resilience Project), which uses low-cost nature-based solutions to reduce the flood vulnerabilities of at-risk communities in Banke district, Nepal. *Benny Manser/CRS*

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PHOTOS

Banner: Annie Biuma is a participant in CRS' Budikadidi project in Bena Mukendi village in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The project focuses on building local capacity, strengthening service-delivery systems, increasing accountability and reducing structural, cultural, and gender-based barriers to change. *Jennifer Lazuta/CRS*

Mobilizer: Benjamin Lewa, age 33, shakes hands with Katherine Kotchaba, age 24, both members of AFDDIG (Association of Women for the Sustainable Development and Integrity in Galada), in Cameroon's Mokolo region. The CRS-supported group helps implement development activities in local communities. *Jennifer Lazuta/CRS*

Facilitator: Abdur Hawlader, member of the "Making Us Knowledgeable and Trained in Emergencies" project in Monpura island, Bangladesh, attends a meeting with other leaders. *Kamrun Hassan/CRS*

Investor: CRS staff member during an assessment in Peru, where communities affected by flooding are receiving as part of the BHA-supported Rapid Response Funding, provided to local humanitarian actors participating in Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) EMPOWER program. *Juan Diego Zacarias for CRS*

Provider: Marita da Costa Hornay, a pastry chef and barista in Dili, Timor Leste, labels retail coffee bean bags with stickers printed with a signature logo developed through a Farmer-to-Farmer volunteer assignment. CRS is one of 13 organizations implementing the USAID-funded program that sends U.S. volunteers with agricultural expertise overseas to share skills and help build farmer capacity through short-term training and technical assistance projects. *Holly Powers/CRS*

Champion: Archbishop Joseph Atanga of the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) at a ceremony during which USAID and CRS transferred management responsibilities for an HIV/AIDS lifesaving project to NECC, which later became prime implementer of the \$33 million project in March 2023. *Cara Bragg/CRS*