



# How CRS prepares partners for locally-led management

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has a long history of supporting local organizations in their quest to manage development efforts independently of international aid agencies. Thanks to our experience in capacity strengthening, we have a solid track record of preparing our local partners to manage large-scale projects.

## OUR MODEL

CRS' capacity strengthening approach is based on the needs of local organizations—whether government, faith-based or civil society. We offer support in three main areas:

- **Building staff knowledge, skills and attitudes** in key capacity areas
- **Strengthening institutions** by improving systems, structures, and policies
- **Accompanying organizations** to ensure mastery of skills and application of institutional changes

## SAMPLE INITIATIVES

### Preparing government health partners to play a lead role in disease elimination

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. Since its inception in 2022, CRS' HPI Initiative has supported six national government programs across five countries to strengthen their capacities vis-à-vis Global Fund standards for grant management and implementation. Countries include Guinea, Mali, Niger, Madagascar, and Congo-Brazzaville.

## Strengthening civil society

CRS led the USAID-funded Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) project in Uganda, to improve the economic, educational, physical and psychosocial wellbeing of orphans and vulnerable children and their households, and to reduce abuse, exploitation and neglect among this population. Through a network of civil society organizations, social workers and frontline para-social workers, SOCY provided services that reduced the risk of HIV and violence, and linked individuals to much needed services. The project's \$45.5 million budget funded local civil society capacity strengthening to meet the needs of families and 13 local partner institutions. All partners demonstrated increased organizational performance, and one, the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), transitioned to become a major prime recipient of U.S. government funding.

## Supporting locally-led emergency efforts

CRS supports local institutions to lead humanitarian efforts, honoring our Grand Bargain pledges. In 2018, we established EMPOWER, a program that increases localization of responses through three focus areas: strengthening local institutions' participation in coordination platforms and encouraging the humanitarian architecture to be more accountable, localized and inclusive; strengthening institutional capacities and organizational structures to better manage humanitarian response; and increasing access to a larger percentage of direct funding. CRS

implements EMPOWER in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, West Africa and Central Africa, with 87 local and national partners in 54 countries. Through the project, local organizations in Brazil, Colombia and Peru have received direct funding from USAID's BHA and the Department of States' Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration to respond to humanitarian needs across the region.

Overall, in fiscal year 2023, CRS invested \$19.6 million in capacity strengthening activities for local humanitarian responders and assisted them in mobilizing \$20 million in direct funding. During the same period, more than 30% of all CRS humanitarian projects (71 out of 232) included partner capacity strengthening as a core component. CRS is currently carrying out five stand-alone humanitarian capacity strengthening projects that are engaging 92 local organizations in 57 countries.

### Putting partners in charge of HIV control

In Cameroon, the National Episcopal Conference of Cameroon (NECC) transitioned to prime implementer of a \$33 million project in March 2023 following a robust capacity strengthening initiative led by CRS. NECC had served as a consortium member of KIDSS, a project that developed systems and services for orphans and vulnerable children. During the project, CRS implemented a capacity strengthening plan that led to the selection of NECC as the transition partner in alignment with PEPFAR's recognition that HIV prevention and treatment services must be owned and operated by local entities to sustain HIV epidemic control. CRS provided extensive support to NECC in the development of its policies and procedures. In line with the transition plan, NECC took over management in April 2021 and assumed leadership of the follow-on award in March 2023.

### Strengthening Iraqi NGOs

In Iraq CRS led a project in 2019 to support families displaced by the conflict with the Islamic State. Known as "the Transitional Assistance (TA) Project," the effort evolved into a capacity strengthening initiative for Iraqi NGOs, and was later extended 18 months. CRS worked with partners to assess their organization, prioritize areas for improvement, and implement learning, coaching and networking activities. The support had a profound effect on the organizations. For example, during the 18-month

extension, one NGO improved their capacity in the area of strategy and planning from a score of 26% in July 2022 to 85% in August 2023. The NGO's score for financial and physical resource management went from 9% in October 2020 to 89% in March 2022. It was also successful in securing USAID funds for two additional projects focused on cash assistance (2022) and livelihoods (2023). Based on survey and interview data, the most commonly stated elements that led to project success were the resources, skills and support provided by CRS.



A delegation of CRS, Caritas and other local partners representing more than 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean visited Capitol Hill on Dec. 7, 2023. The driving force behind the visit was the EMPOWER project. The delegation advocated with senators, top officials at USAID and the State Department, and representatives on Capitol Hill for localization of humanitarian funding. *Philip Laubner/CRS*

### Taking a global approach

In support of its commitment to advancing local leadership, CRS launched the "Advance Local Leadership in the Right Way" (ALLRight) fund in November 2021 to intensify its investment in supporting local institutions to achieve their leadership aspirations, including their aspirations to directly manage larger donor-funded projects. The Fund is promoting shared learning across the agency, ensuring allocation of investments needed to fulfill CRS' commitments to the Grand Bargain and our Caritas sister agencies. The fund also measures the achievement of CRS' key performance indicators (KPIs) for local leadership. Since 2022, the Fund has committed more than \$6 million to 12 local partners across Asia, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. FY24 funding proposals are currently in development for eight partners located throughout the seven regions where CRS works, with an anticipated investment of an additional \$4M.