

AN OVERVIEW OF CRS' COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO

partnership and capacity strengthening

Partnership and capacity strengthening are central to CRS' values and mission. Local partnership fosters greater understanding of local needs and context, and allows for more appropriate, equitable and sustainable solutions, increased ownership and meaningful social change. This includes working with a wide range of diverse partners to together respond to emergencies, improve health and agriculture, and support peace and justice for communities around the world.



PARTNERSHIP

The theory of change underlying CRS' approach to development is the belief that healthy institutions are better able to provide consistent and quality services. 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 are most important. Partnership helps CRS live out this belief.

Partnership is crucial to CRS' identity. As a faith-based, private organization, CRS is committed to supporting local civil society actors, including sister Catholic Church and community-based organizations, to strengthen their capacity to contribute to lasting and meaningful social change.

Partnership is a reflection of CRS' values, and is particularly important because of the theory of change underlying CRS' work. Helping partner organizations respond to poverty and injustice is a grace.¹

Partnership is a better way to do development and find sustainable and effective solutions. Since the early 2000s, CRS has applied a theory of change grounded in the concept of Integral Human Development, which promotes the good of the whole person and every person. IHD supports the ability of each individual to realize his or her full human potential in the context of just and peaceful relationships, a thriving environment and solidarity with others.

¹ Encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, of the supreme pontiff Benedict XVI, to the bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious and all the lay faithful on Christian love, December 25, 2005.

PARTNERSHIP DEFINED

CRS defines partnership as a relationship based on mutual commitment and complementary purpose and values that is often supported by shared resources and which results in positive change and increased social justice. How CRS works with partners is guided by the partnership principles.

••• *CRS' Partnership* ••• **PRINCIPLES**

CRS' support to local partners is based on its Partnership Principles, which recognize and value the skills, resources, knowledge, and capacities of communities and local institutions.

- **SHARE A VISION** for addressing people's immediate needs and the underlying causes of suffering and injustice.
- **MAKE DECISIONS** at a level as close as possible to the people who will be affected by them, the principle of subsidiarity.
- **STRIVE FOR MUTUALITY**, recognizing that each partner brings skills, resources, knowledge, and capacities in a spirit of autonomy.
- **FOSTER EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS** by mutually defining rights and responsibilities.
- **RESPECT DIFFERENCES** and commit to listen and learn from each other.
- **ENCOURAGE TRANSPARENCY** regarding capacities, constraints and resources.
- **ENGAGE** with civil society to help transform unjust structures and systems.
- **COMMIT TO A LONG-TERM PROCESS** of organizational development.
- **IDENTIFY, UNDERSTAND, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY CAPACITIES**, which are the primary source of solutions to local problems.
- **PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY** by reinforcing the capacity to identify vulnerabilities and build on strengths.

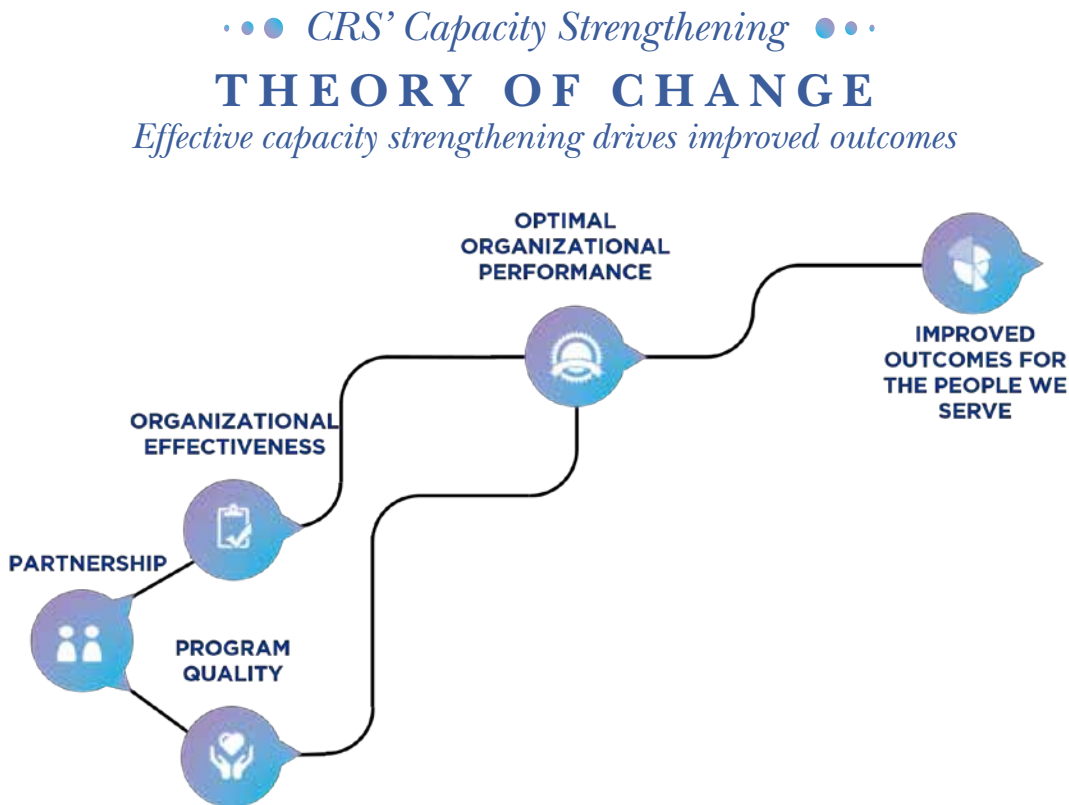
CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Working in partnership also requires partner institutions to perform at their optimal capacity. For institutions to work well, they have to have both strong programmatic capacity and strong organizational capacity. For example, a health care organization needs to be able to deliver high quality health services and programs, but it also needs to have strong administrative and management systems in order to be able to implement and sustain those programs effectively. Only with strong programmatic and organizational capacity can an institution achieve the optimal level of performance resulting in the greatest impact. CRS often works to help strengthen both programmatic and organizational capacities of partner institutions.

CRS defines capacity as the ability of individuals and organizational units to perform functions effectively, efficiently and in a sustainable manner.

CRS defines capacity strengthening as a deliberate process that improves the ability of an individual, group, organization, network, or system to enhance or develop new knowledge, skills, attitudes, systems, and structures needed to function effectively, work towards sustainability, and achieve goals.

CRS' Capacity Strengthening Theory of Change (shown below) implies that effective capacity strengthening drives improved outcomes.



CRS' CAPACITY STRENGTHENING THEORY OF CHANGE

CRS believes that when it invests in people and helps build healthy institutions, local organizations and communities are better able to lead their own development. The dynamic nature of today's development environment has made clear that local ownership of development programming is key to sustainability. To handle their growing responsibilities, indigenous organizations need innovative, professional partnership and capacity strengthening support. Increasingly, both donors and the international development community seek to empower local government and civil society organizations to chart their own path forward.



CRS' CAPACITY STRENGTHENING APPROACH

CRS defines its approach to capacity strengthening as having three elements: capacity building, institutional strengthening, and accompaniment.

••• CRS' Capacity Strengthening ••• APPROACH



CAPACITY BUILDING

- Individuals and teams develop new knowledge, skills and attitudes via:
- Training and peer-to-peer learning
- On-the-job training
- Exchange visits and study tours



INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

- Organizations develop systems, structures and policies via:
- Program and management quality assurance
- Business process mapping
- Compliance and regulations
- Standard operating procedures



ACCOMPANIMENT

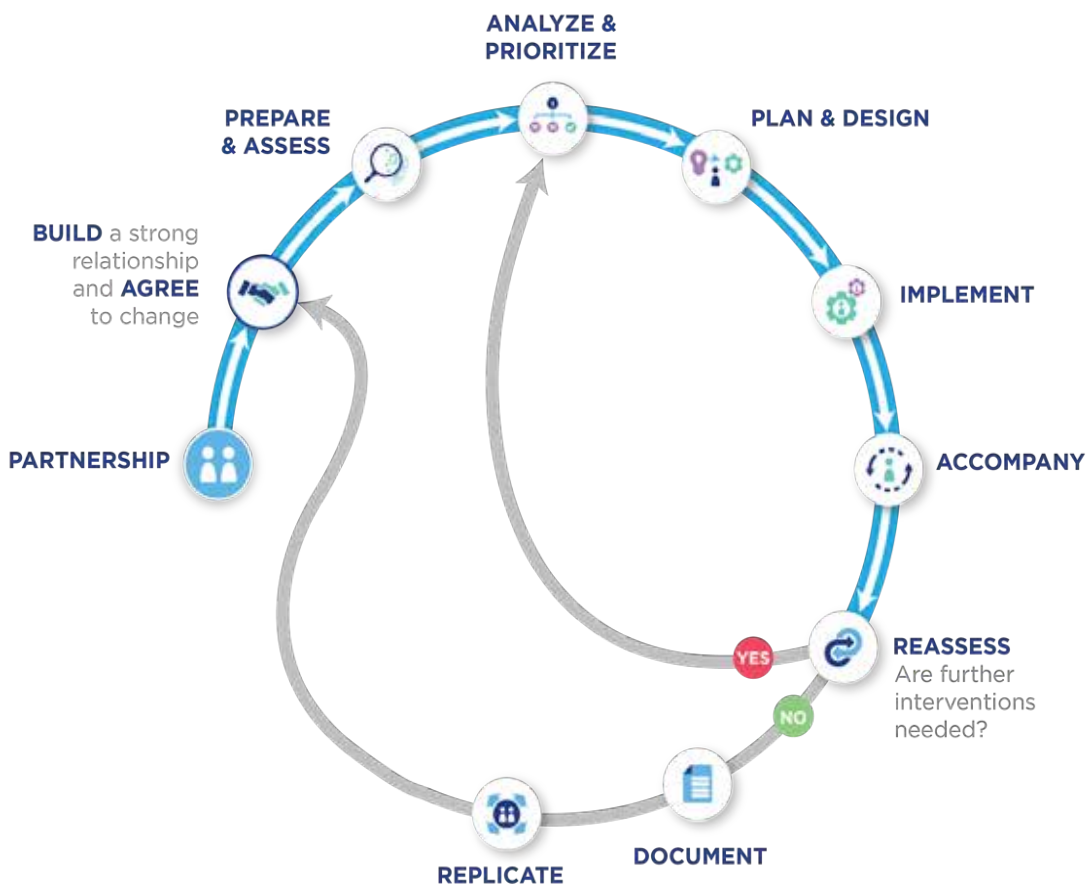
- Master new skills and formalize organizational changes, via:
- Job shadowing
- Coaching and mentoring
- Communities of practice

CRS' CAPACITY STRENGTHENING MODEL

CRS' approach to capacity building and institutional strengthening is based on Catholic social teaching and CRS' larger theory of change, the Integral Human Development framework² and on a belief in non-formal learning and organizational change principles. CRS' approach is highly participatory, based on the needs of partner local organizations and focused on organizational, financial, political and programmatic sustainability.³

CRS facilitates and promotes the strengthening of partners' abilities to identify and address their specific needs through a deliberate capacity strengthening process. This process is illustrated in CRS' Capacity Strengthening Model, shown below.

CRS' Capacity STRENGTHENING MODEL



- Integral Human Development promotes the good of every person and the whole person; it is cultural, economic, political, social and spiritual and the IHD framework roots how CRS approaches development. CRS' Holistic Capacity Assessment Instrument (HOCAI) provides a standard framework to assist an organization to engage in a process of organizational assessment, improvement and learning. HOCAI includes a chapter on these four types of sustainability.
- The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness guided many of these reforms; this declaration highlighted the need for greater local ownership, alignment with local systems, harmonization, accountability and managing for results. See <https://www.devex.com/news/another-take-on-country-systems-77675>.

The model includes the following:

- 1. First**, before any capacity strengthening happens, CRS and the partner have to establish a strong, positive partner relationship, and in that context, the partner must express interest in capacity strengthening and willingness to change. CRS and partner roles are also negotiated in this early stage.
- 2. Next**, the partner and an assessment team (which may or may not include CRS) will prepare and conduct a capacity assessment to identify organizational strengths and weaknesses.
- 3. Once an assessment has taken place**, the organization (often with CRS' assistance) will analyze assessment results and prioritize needs.
- 4. Once priorities are established** and an analysis to determine the causes of the weaknesses has been completed, the partner and CRS together will plan and design appropriate capacity strengthening interventions. These will include a combination of institutional strengthening, capacity building, and accompaniment.
- 5. Next**, the partner will implement these institutional strengthening and capacity building activities.
- 6. To support these interventions**, CRS accompanies the partner to master new skills, institutionalize organizational changes and sustain improvements.
- 7. After the interventions have been implemented**, CRS works with partners to assess their effectiveness. This process can also include reassessment.
- 8. Once the change is solidified**, both CRS and partners document and share learning.
- 9. Finally**, CRS looks to replicate successes with others.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about CRS' approach to partnership and capacity strengthening, including the tools, resources and learning that support this work, please visit the Institute for Capacity Strengthening website www.ics.crs.org.



Catholic Relief Services 228 W. Lexington Street, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA
For more information, contact ics@crs.org.