



A group of cash-for-work project participants builds a new road near their village in Bangladesh. The road is connected by a bridge constructed with local materials like bamboo. Cash-for-work programming helps people earn money by working on projects that support disaster risk mitigation efforts in vulnerable communities. *Photo by Amit Rudro for CRS*

THE CRS APPROACH

Local government, Church and civil society organizations are often the first to respond to crises, and are present in affected communities before, during and after emergencies. And in times of crisis, Catholic Relief Services responds and supports local partners with urgent, lifesaving assistance. We support families and communities as they rebuild their lives, assess their risks, and prepare against future emergencies—a comprehensive approach that focuses on helping people prepare, survive and recover from disasters with dignity.

Promoting and supporting local leadership and systems, we seek durable solutions as early as possible and throughout longer-term protracted crises. We always tailor our response to the local context and need, guided by the communities we serve and local expertise.

Poverty, violent conflict, rapid urbanization and the growing frequency and impact of natural disasters have resulted in a heightened need for not only humanitarian relief and recovery, but support to build resilience before disasters strike. In fact, preparing for emergencies not only saves lives, but also preserves a lifetime of assets.

“When people from outside the community see this type of high road that we have built, they are surprised and congratulate us. They say that it will protect us from disasters for a long time.”

—Program participant in Bangladesh who worked to build roads and embankments to withstand storms.



PREPARATION IS KEY: DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

We Work Locally

Rooted in Catholic social teaching, CRS is committed to the principle of subsidiarity: the understanding that communities who are the closest to local challenges are the artisans of their own development. Building and strengthening local leadership and institutions ensures that CRS respects the dignity and agency of each person and community we serve, and fosters an approach of accompanying local institutions to serve the common good.

emergency relief and recovery efforts, but also in our development programming. By doing so, we can protect the gains made through our work while mitigating the impacts of shocks. This is especially relevant in the many communities dealing with climate change. Within our multiyear agricultural programs, CRS works closely with farmers so they can develop plans and learn skills to adapt to the impacts of climate change on agriculture. These include climate-smart agricultural methods that reorient farming systems to bolster food security, and the promotion of early warning systems for slow-onset disasters.



Urbanization has brought about rapid change.



Ayen Nhial Piel trained as a pump mechanic through a CRS project that helps conflict-affected communities build up resilience to shocks such as drought, flooding and other crises. She stands in front of the well she helps maintain in Thonawai village, Jonglei State, South Sudan. The project, which uses the community-managed disaster risk reduction approach as the central pillar of all interventions, supports communities as they build self-reliance.

Photo by Will Baxter/CRS

CRS' promotion and practice of community-based response management and coordination contributes to more holistic and locally led strategies and responses that result in safer, speedier recovery. For example, CRS prioritizes market-based solutions that help economies recover through cash or voucher systems that keep local vendors and suppliers in business. At the same time, we work with communities to improve housing and living environments in order to reduce damage and risks when disasters strike.

Integration Into Development Programs

CRS has long prioritized disaster risk reduction and resilience not only in our

Urban Disaster Risk Reduction

Urbanization has brought about rapid change. Today, well over half of the world's population—including internally displaced people, refugees and migrants from rural areas—live in urban areas. Cities promise opportunity for many, but rapid and poorly planned urbanization can lead to overcrowding, unemployment, dilapidated housing and crime.

The problems associated with urbanization include lack of affordable housing; limited access to health care, education, water, sanitation, electricity and transportation; inadequate infrastructure; pollution, congestion and poverty. When hazards strike—such as floods, storm surges, fires and earthquakes—these already tenuous circumstances can quickly turn into humanitarian crises.

In supporting the local capacity of partners and systems to manage in these contexts, CRS focuses on strategies that build resilience in communities—including market-based food programs for food security; providing safe transitional shelter; coordinating with city agencies on land ownership and risk zoning; and prioritizing people who are most vulnerable.



The result is an increase in their adaptive capacities to shocks and stresses, and the ability to “build back better” in post-disaster crisis efforts.

PILLARS OF CRS DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PROGRAMMING

Community-Led

CRS disaster risk reduction programming empowers the most vulnerable families and communities to lead the process of analyzing the hazards they face, build existing capacities, and strengthen their skills, systems and structures for building resilience.

Systematic Linkages

We work to strengthen government mechanisms for disaster risk management, and establish and advocate for cooperation between communities and governments to increase access to resources and services.

Increased Resilience

We strive to strengthen the strategies of communities and families to enable them to anticipate, reduce, mitigate and manage risks. The result is an increase in their adaptive capacities to shocks and stresses, and the ability to “build back better” in post-disaster crisis efforts.

Innovation and Learning

We use technology and innovation to make disaster risk reduction efforts more effective and, when appropriate, use information and communication technology for development.

FOCUS ON EL NIÑO

El Niño produces dangers for countries around the world, as it drives drought conditions, reduced rainfall and extreme weather events affecting agriculture, water resources and food security. A critical element of CRS’ emergency-preparedness approach is to mainstream our response plans and assistance programming for El Niño related disasters.

Following are just a few examples of CRS’ responses to the effects of El Niño worldwide.

In Guatemala, we are assessing impacts on farming communities in Chiquimula and Zacapa. We are taking a participatory approach with farmer organizations and an early warning system is in progress.

In Honduras, CRS is planning anticipatory actions for the southwestern region of the country. Activities are focusing on adjusting crops, livestock plans and water harvesting.

In the Philippines, we are strengthening Tagbilaran City’s capacity for anticipatory action. Programming includes targeting vulnerable families for support with shelter and cash assistance.

In Zimbabwe, CRS is engaging vulnerable communities in Matobo and Beitbridge districts, sensitizing them to the threats of El Niño and drought. As part of these efforts, we are supporting quick-maturing crops and drought-tolerant fodder.



Drought induced by climate change is made even worse by El Niño. In order to have clean water, children in the Central American Dry Corridor in Quiche, Guatemala, climb down a mountain, collect water from a well, carry it back up the mountain and then boil the water. CRS assists farmers in the Dry Corridor with soil conservation techniques, crop adaptation and water catchment systems. *Photo by Philip Laubner/CRS*

Yelis Gonzales, in Uribia, La Guajira, Colombia, walks CRS staff members by the banks of a waterway that overflowed during Tropical Storm Julia, causing devastating floods that affected vulnerable communities. CRS is working with Caritas Colombia to provide critical humanitarian assistance to flood-affected families in La Guajira through the distribution of multipurpose cash assistance and implementation of emergency preparedness activities.

Photo by Carlos Barrio/ CRS



EMPOWER

With the increased frequency and complexity of emergencies, CRS supports the vital role of local organizations that have nationwide coverage.

Akhlima Begum walks through a field where her crops were devastated by flooding in August 2022. With cash support from CRS, she was able to buy new seeds to plant and repay a loan that she had to take during the flood. CRS, in partnership with Caritas Bangladesh, has implemented an emergency response project in the Sunamganj district where she lives. The project assists the most affected and vulnerable households to recover from the crisis.

Photo by Amit Rudro for CRS

One example of this is Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses, or EMPOWER, a CRS approach



that is guided by priorities identified by our partners who are working in areas affected by emergencies. Through EMPOWER, CRS provides tailored technical assistance in three key strategic areas:

Coordination: Local partners strengthen their participation in coordination platforms at the local, national and regional levels.

Institutional strengthening: Local partners strengthen their institutional capacities and organizational structures to better manage humanitarian responses.

Funding: Local partners access and implement a greater percentage of humanitarian funding.

CRS partners engaged in EMPOWER-led responses to significant emergencies in the past year, including Hurricanes Ian and Fiona in Cuba and the Dominican Republic; the compounded impacts of COVID-19; and migrant and food security crises across the Caribbean, South and Central America and Mexico.