



# CWS Principled Programs Partnership Approach and Philosophy Statement

PHOTO: INFOPARK REFUGEE RESOURCE CENTER BELGRADE, SERBIA

## Introduction

### CWS President and CEO Rick Santos

CWS was founded in 1946 when 17 Christian denominations came together “to do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone.” Nearly 80 years later, partnership remains the core of all our work and the basis of how we relate to the world. Forty years ago, CWS and its members were on the cutting edge of transferring leadership and resources to our local partners. Today, we are proud to still be the gold standard for working with local partners.

We engage in Principled Partnerships because it is the right way to do the shared work of responding to hunger, poverty,

displacement and disaster in the United States and around the globe. We see examples every day of how our collective impact is amplified by sharing expertise, resources, lessons and capacity.

As our global and sectoral contexts evolve, this document establishes a framework for how we can most successfully synergize with an array of partners today. This approach formally went into effect on December 1, 2024, and will be reviewed annually.

## Purpose and Commitments

CWS is committed to working in partnership and coalition with like-minded organizations across our programs. Partnership is essential to the impact, quality, effectiveness, sustainability, and scale of CWS’ presence, operations, and programs around the world. Yet, the word “partnership” has many definitions at CWS, and within the broader international development, humanitarian assistance, and refugee and immigrant welcome communities. Within this context, it is necessary for CWS to refine and adhere to a common **Principled Program Partnerships philosophy**. This is a statement for

CWS staff and partners on our principles of program partnership.

In recent years, the global humanitarian and sustainable development ecosystem has been faced with a recognition of and movement to “localize” or in some cases “de-colonize” international aid and programs overall. This includes requests from national and local actors and other key constituencies and stakeholders; but the commitments to this end have not been matched by consistent action. With increasing intensity “humanitarian actors now recognize that it is crucial to build response structures based on the norms, knowledge, and institutions of those affected by emergencies and disasters,” named “localization.”<sup>1</sup>

CWS aims to communicate our principles of program partnership as we seek to contribute to the conversation regarding “localization” with national and international stakeholders. CWS has a long history of meaningful, mutually beneficial programmatic partnerships with many diverse organizations and entities in all areas of our work. For CWS, localization means designing and implementing locally-led and community-focused programs and responses centering knowledge, leadership, norms, and institutions. For CWS, localization is a commitment to Principled Program Partnerships.

**For CWS, localization is a commitment to Principled Program Partnerships.**

We acknowledge and seek to share the power and funding that we bring as a U.S. and faith-based international organization and believe we can contribute meaningfully to learning and discourse on this topic.

We acknowledge the inequality and power imbalance often present within humanitarian and development programming, including its complicity

with colonialism.

We value local knowledge and locally driven change processes and seek to be a humble, self-reflective, and justice-oriented partner as we work with communities to advance their own goals.

We are committed to designing and delivering programs and services based on humanitarian need, and not discriminate in the provision or design of programs and services for any reason, including race, religion, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation.

When prioritizing and designing programs, we pay particular attention to supporting individuals and communities who may be excluded from, or unable to access existing services.

In this document, CWS is outlining its philosophy and approach to “localization” through Principled Program Partnerships based on our history, experience and capacity. We will build our own narrative and description by using our history, experience, and expertise ensuring that both systems and capacity exist locally, or that investments can be made towards the restoration of homegrown initiatives and structures within communities.

This is a guidance statement for CWS staff and partners on our principles of program partnership. It is not intended to define a framework to monitor the performance of our partners or to vet partners to enter contracts or partnerships with CWS. We will develop an implementation plan and monitoring tool to ensure accountability, feedback, and learning of these principles and philosophy.



CLIMATE RESILIENCE PROJECT IN GEORGIA WITH LOCAL PARTNER RCDA

1. Boateng OA (2021) Building Africa’s Homegrown Humanitarian Systems: Restoration as an Alternative to Localization. Front. Polit. Sci. 3:711090. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2021.711090

# CWS and Its Approaches to “Locally Led” or “Homegrown” Programming

Since its founding CWS has engaged with communities, stakeholders, churches and other communities of faith, faith-based and secular organizations and diverse constituencies in the U.S. and around the world to find solutions to development and humanitarian challenges. In the U.S., CWS fosters collaborations through congregational engagement, Covenant Member engagement, affiliates, advocacy at federal, state, and local level, community engagement, grassroots organizing and fundraising. CWS also develops emergency, humanitarian, and development programs through the assessment of local needs, listening directly to communities, and designs localized responses to those needs. CWS works for and with communities, using inclusive and participatory approaches, strengths-focused skills and capacity enhancement, and by seeking to restore and promote local structures.



CWS LOCAL PARTNER RESPONSE TO HURRICANE HELENE IN NORTH CAROLINA

We believe that development should represent positive change for all involved and our programs should lead to improved livelihoods as communities and individuals are empowered to live healthy and prosperous lives. Partnerships not grounded in these principles have been and continue to be harmful to the communities they seek to serve.

## Program Partnership Types

To achieve our mission and increase our impact, CWS engages in diverse types of program partnerships in alignment with our mission and values. We promote, enter, and develop diverse types of partnerships, including ones focused on programs, policy and advocacy, and resources.



REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS AND CWS ORGANIZERS HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

### Programmatic Partners

**Programmatic Partners** are organizations and entities that work alongside CWS to implement projects and programs. These partners enter into formal agreements with CWS with the primary purpose of implementing a scope of work for a program or project or a set of predetermined funded activities to achieve an agreed-upon set of objectives.

### Policy and Advocacy Partners

**Policy and Advocacy Partners** are organizations that engage with CWS to advance specific advocacy objectives or a common agenda. These can be civil society groups, alliances or coalitions that work directly with or on behalf of people and communities served by CWS.

### Resource Partners

**Resource Partners** include governments, foundations, NGOs, individual donors, multilateral funding agencies, and others that fund or provide in-kind goods and services to CWS. In these partnerships, CWS brings experience, relationships, and technical capacity to manage resources and implement programs.

# CWS Program Partnership Principles

CWS partners with churches and other communities of faith, organizations and associations that have compatible and complementary missions and values. CWS has regularly reflected on how we engage with local/affected communities, how and if we appropriately center homegrown or local capacities and needs in our responses, and how we can articulate and communicate these approaches.

CWS sees partnership as essential to the effective implementation of comprehensive responses, the delivery of high impact services and the sustainability of interventions. CWS recognizes that working in partnership is an essential way to learn from, and help augment the capacity when needed of, local organizations with existing knowledge, networks, and experience to enrich CWS's overall development and humanitarian goals.

At the same time, partnerships with other entities and larger organizations add value to CWS's programs and complement its knowledge and comparative advantages. Partnerships

are also a means to scale CWS's work by leveraging access to people and communities, thereby expanding our programmatic reach. The CWS approach to partnership goes beyond funding. We see it as a multidirectional relationship subject to continuous learning and applicable to all phases of each relationship, including partnership development, fundraising, program development and implementation.

In 2022 CWS formed a partnership policy working group that defined draft principles and processes related to CWS partnerships. In 2023 the partnership policy process resulted in a procedures document focused on grant and sub-grant procedures. The principles stated below were initially defined by the partnership policy working group and form the basis for the CWS Program Partnership Principles Approach and Philosophy.

**Our Mission**

Church World Service (CWS) is a faith-based organization transforming communities around the globe through just and sustainable responses to hunger, poverty, displacement, and disaster.

CWS Program Partnership Principles are:

## Trust and Mutual Respect

CWS strives to build equitable program partnerships based on mutual respect irrespective of power and size. CWS recognizes that mutual trust in a partnership is fostered through open, timely and clear communication, active listening, and transparency. To ensure that our actions do not adversely affect others, we commit to learning and respecting local contexts and culture and adhering to local laws and practices (except when they violate human rights and/or are contrary to humanitarian principles). CWS will strive for clear, effective communication with its partners and share credit for achievements, while also respecting obligations, mandates, and independence.

## Alignment and Complementarity of Purpose

CWS partners with organizations with which we are aligned, have compatible and complementary missions and values, and share our programmatic and advocacy goals. By working alongside partners, CWS seeks to respond to complex human development and humanitarian challenges. Working together with partners encourages mutual learning and capacity development, as CWS and its partners complement and build on each other's expertise.

## Localization and Engagement of Local Capacity and Context

Local partners, specially those who are inclusive or led by affected communities, offer geographical and contextual understanding, locally appropriate knowledge, and meaningful community connections. This ensures the development and implementation of relevant and sustainable programs, advancement of local advocacy priorities, and enhancement of alliances and networks. CWS recognizes power imbalances when local partners have smaller scale and structure. We aim to challenge this dynamic and demonstrate open working styles and attitudes and a willingness to defer power and decision-making to partners and communities as a default position.

### Our Vision

Our vision is a world where everyone has food, voice, and a safe place to call home.

## Mutual Responsibility and Accountability

CWS is accountable to those we serve (i.e., individuals, communities), national and local authorities, and to donors who entrust us with their resources. In and through our partnerships we seek to demonstrate accountability, due diligence, good governance, efficient use of resources and professionalism in our actions at all levels. CWS actively cultivates an environment where partners provide feedback including complaints and conflicts and communicate their desires and expectations. We see accountability as a two-way street and expect the same from our partners.

## Risk Sharing

Linked to CWS' commitment to accountability is its approach to the sharing of risk inherent to humanitarian and development programming. Risk may relate to the operational, safety, security, legal/compliance, reputational, ethical, fiduciary, and informational dimensions of our programs and the significance attached to different risks is likely to vary depending on the role of our partners. CWS will work with partners to ensure that all have the resources and expertise to employ effective risk mitigation measures to reduce the likelihood of the risk materializing. As well as working with partners to establish a reasonable sharing of the burden of preventative measures, CWS and its partners will also address the reasonable sharing of responsibility for risks occurring based on the principles set out in this document.

## Joint Learning

CWS and its partners seek to complement each other's capacities, knowledge and expertise and adopt a collaborative learning approach that draws on each partner's skills, talents, strengths, contextual insights, experience, and knowledge. By choosing partnership and learning from joint experiences, CWS and its partners seek to recognize challenges, identify mistakes, and cooperatively strive for improvement. We also seek opportunities for partners to represent their own expertise and interests to donors, technical allies, and other audiences, as a demonstration of their value and knowledge.

## Flexibility and Responsiveness

CWS supports dynamic, collaborative, forward thinking leadership, which encourages development both within the community and in organizations. CWS partnerships seek to bring sustainable and innovative approaches to our organizational missions with flexible responses to changing contexts. CWS recognizes the innate capacities of impacted communities to know what they need. We aim to be flexible and responsive to partners' needs as we work collectively to achieve shared goals in line with commitments to all stakeholders.

## Inclusiveness

CWS is committed to racial and gender equity, and to rights-based approaches in all our work. We partner with organizations that share the same values and approaches to inclusion. We strive to dismantle barriers to the inclusion and active participation of people regardless of gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, disability, and other categories of marginalized groups, by improving access to and control over services and resources and fostering full participation in decision making.

## What's Next

Following the distribution and socialization of this statement, we will monitor its implementation to ensure accountability and learning on our commitments stated.