

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

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Can donors also provide OD to partners? Can donors facilitate OD without manipulating partners? It is certainly very challenging to mix the two, but at CRWRC we believe we have managed to combine both roles. We believe that five principles that underpin the way we work, help us mix roles which others find mutually exclusive.

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) is the development arm of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. We partner with churches and other Christian organizations in carrying out humanitarian and community transformational development. We like to think of ourselves as a partner. In giving grants, we prefer to say we are matching the funds that our partner have. We are not just giving them funds to implement donor projects. We emphasize to our partners that CRWRC is there to support their plans - not them to implement our plans.

As well as providing grants, we also provide partners with OD support. This is a core focus of how we operate. We want to help partners improve and support them be effective and efficient in whatever they do. Of course we do not always manage to lose the donor tag. After all funding is still a major part of what we do. But we believe that our approach, while not guaranteeing success, has at least enabled us in many instances to move beyond simply being seen as a donor and being able to contribute useful in facilitating partners' OD processes. How does this happen? The secret must lie in five core principles that underpin the way we work.

1. Emphasise long-term support to churches as partners

We work on the basis of long-term relationships. CRWRC is not there to offer a one-time service and run away. We take considerable time to develop these relationships (on occasions up to two years). Assuring our partners that we want to establish a long term relationship has been helpful. It is easy to have fine words, but partners judge you on your actions, not your rhetoric. Agreeing with the partner at the outset that we are here to work with her for 10 or 15 years (and sticking to that in general), enables the partner to focus on those areas that would enable her to grow and move on once our partnership ends. Most organisations that receive donor funding think that when a donor knows the areas where they are weak, the donor will run away. In our approach, we emphasize the fact that our work is to support the partner make such areas stronger to be able to attract bigger funding. Obviously this is challenging at times, particularly when partners face the inevitable leadership crises, but we do focus on helping partners develop strong enough systems that outlive leadership changes.

We also believe in importance of church, beyond just the project. For example in Uganda all our partners are church based institutions. We emphasize that our focus is also to build the church as an institution and not just limited to providing funds for community development.

2. Need to develop trust and close relationship

Like all OD assignments, providing OD consultancy to our partners with whom we have a donor relationship requires relationship building. The relationship has to go beyond

the donor-recipient level to a depth where the partner really trusts you. To work usefully in OD you need to engage in sensitive aspects of the organisation, particularly as they can involve grant management issues.

To develop such trusting relationships takes significant time. As a result CRWRC has decided that we need to be based in-country. Our program consultants live in the region close to where the partner is based) and hence are in position to do regular visits to the partners and to the project sites in the communities. These visits are done on a quarterly basis and on some occasions, due to trainings organised within the quarter, monthly. Our proximity and presence eases trust building. At times we also go beyond mere professional linkages. At a personal level our staff cultivate relationships with leadership and staff of partner organisations. This can extend to being part of their social and church groups, and even attending their family functions.

3. Draw a line between donor and OD

We believe it is essential to draw a line between your role as an OD practitioner and also a funder. We usually use different people for different roles. For example each partner has a program consultant who works closely with them on program management issues and organisational capacity issues. Within CRWRC there are staff with different skills and specialities and when there is an identified need for organisational development with a given partner, such staff are called in to provide that specialised consultancy work. We often bring people in from different country programmes. For example, the regional team leader for East Africa often facilitates board trainings with partners in Uganda.

We also work hard to avoid being manipulative. Recognising our temptation to do this helps. We have to be highly self-disciplined to give partners the leeway to make a decision on what and what not they like to take on.

4. Focus on how partners benefit from change

As CRWRC we endeavour to make the partner understand that the process is for their own benefit not a requirement for them to get funding. For example, one area that we have had to struggle with our partners is in the area of finance management and accountability. Most church institutions in Uganda are renowned for their bad finance management and accountability practices (practices that they should ideally be propagating). CRWRC works at making partners understand that by giving proper accountability, conducting annual audits enhances their chances of accessing bigger funding. A number of our partners have now inculcated the habit of conducting annual financial audits and some have now attracted bigger funding from agencies like USAID which provides bigger funding than even CRWRC. For churches to accept to carry out these audits, it was a process that started by having project audits, then departmental audits (for the planning and development departments) and as the practice became more appreciated the audits embraced the whole institution.

5. Apply the same OD principles to ourselves

Although much of our focus is on OD with partners, we do try hard to apply those same practices to CRWRC. We need to build and maintain our integrity. So for example OD practices like strategic planning, financial management - accountability and transparency, team building that we promote with our partners, we also actively engage with in CRWRC. We work hard at our own organisational learning. Every three

years we carry out evaluations of our partnerships to assess the progress and impact of our work with partners. This is a learning for us as CRWRC on what we do best and where we are lacking. During our country evaluation we also focus deeply on how we are doing what we are doing.

While we would not dare to say we have arrived, our partners tell us ‘the CRWRC way’ is a bit different from the donor norm. We believe that it is this difference that offers the opportunity to contribute both as a donor and as an OD facilitator.