



**Working with local partners in more equitable & productive ways:  
Pointers, training, exercises**

Here are a few pointers, exercises, training materials, that can be used by Country Offices and their partners. The goal is to help you maximize *Partnership as an approach*, especially with local civil society partners. Engaging in partnerships is not business as usual and requires different ways of working, attitudes, and behaviors. Do pick and choose what is most relevant to you and your partners! Please send feedback to [lehoux@careinternational.org](mailto:lehoux@careinternational.org)

**I. Sharing knowledge & good practice in Partnership and Localizing Aid**

**Good practice in partnering**

The objective of this session is to introduce good partnering knowledge and practice ([see the presentation](#)). It covers:

- the reasons for partnering, the benefits it brings, and when partnering is not the right approach
- the various types of collaborations (including cross-sectoral), the partnership spectrum (from transactional relationships to more equitable partnerships), and how partnerships can conform to prevailing norms (eg, subgranting) or intentionally challenge these norms to unleash new value
- the definition of partnership and how critical it is to invest in the partnering process, not just the joint project
- that partnership is not 'business as usual' and requires us to work differently
- the five fundamental principles (see box) that have emerged for effective partnering (and why we should make every effort to thrive towards them)
- the partnership cycle including why and how to manage the partnership process alongside the joint project we aim to achieve together
- the partnership tools available to scope and build partnerships (phase 1), to manage and maintain them (phase 2), to review and revise them (phase 3) and to sustain outcomes and move on (phase 4).
- What is required to do partnership well including collaborative attitudes, partnering competencies and a well-managed partnership process.

**5 Partnership principles** (yours may differ!)

1. Maximize the added value that comes from the **diversity** each of us brings (*to overcome the anxiety we feel over our differences*)
2. **Equity** (*to address power imbalance; valuing what each of us brings*)
3. **Openness and transparency** (*to counter hidden agendas and build trust*)
4. For each party to reap **mutual benefit** from the partnership (*moving us away from competing with each other*)
5. **Courage** (*to overcome the uncertainty we feel about each other & about the partnership*)






**Localizing Aid & Implications for CARE**

In this session, we speak about the growing 'localization' movement taking root in many disaster/conflict-affected countries, with local and national actors increasingly active in responding to their emergencies and vocal in being recognized as legitimate humanitarian actors. Increasingly, in countries such as Indonesia, Ethiopia and Nepal, governments are putting restrictions on international assistance, with a focus on national leadership of response and maximal use of existing local and national capacities. This session also provides information about CARE's Partnership and Localization commitments and their implication for the CO's programmatic and partnering approaches ([see the presentation](#)). It helps to build a shared understanding of:

- what Localizing Aid means: an increased and more central role for local/national actors in humanitarian action, with international agencies supporting – not replacing – existing local actors and capacities

- why localization became a key component of recent humanitarian reforms (to redress the inefficiencies and injustice of the current humanitarian system)
- which humanitarian reform instruments focus on localization (the Grand Bargain, the Charter for Change)
- the components of localization (gray box below)
- CARE's priorities and intent on Localization, see [CARE's Localization Framework](#)
- the implications for CARE at global and CO levels (green box below).

**Improve the way we work with local partners (Charter for Change & Grand Bargain)**

-  Pass 25% of funding to local actors by 2020 & report annual funding flows
-  Mitigate impacts of INGOs recruiting NNGO staff during emergencies
-  Work in ways that promote partnership principles: away from subcontracting towards more equality
-  Promote the role & importance of local actors to donors, media, the public & in coordination mechanisms
-  Invest in & provide robust organizational support and capacity strengthening to local partners

**Implications for the CO** *'If it can be done by local actors, we won't do it ourselves'*

- Deliberate assessment of existing local actors & capacities before engaging
- Moving into 'higher value' roles (than direct implementation), maximizing our 'niche'
- Working in more equitable ways with local partners (partnering approach, collaborative attitudes & shared visibility/funding/operating space)
- Creating an enabling environment for equitable and inclusive partnering (eg., light & agile systems, a policy for sharing overheads)
- More investment in capacity strengthening of partner organizations leading them to sustainability.

**II. How COs can maximize the use of Partnership as an approach**

**Mapping out the CO's partnership approach**

This session assists the CO in articulating and building a shared understanding of its current partnership approach. This can be done through four lenses:

1. Why (to what end) do we partner
2. What role/function does CARE play as a partner and what is the added value of partnerships
3. The types of collaborations/partnerships we are currently engaged in
4. Our strengths and weaknesses as a partner

(Note: The content below comes from one of CARE's COs and serves as an example; yours will likely be different!)

### 1. Why partner?

- To achieve our goal of delivering assistance & protection
- To reach more people (scale)
- To gain access to remote or insecure areas
- For partners to take over after CARE leaves (stronger local systems and capacities)
- To gain more acceptability (community, authorities, donors)
- To access funds (eg, through consortia)
- To take full advantage of our global connections and local roots (through partners) – local to global

### 2. CARE's roles as a partner

- Provider of information and expertise
- Connector & Networker (provision of experience & best practice from other CARE country operations; facilitating quick and easy access to UN, government, INGOs; sharing best practice and learning among partners)
- Donor/intermediary funding partner (financial resources)
- Capacity Builder (training, technical support)

#### Added value generated by partnering:

- ✓ More resources (financial, human, material) - by pooling them
- ✓ More knowledge, appropriate tools & approaches (incl. community-based approaches)
- ✓ More acceptability
- ✓ More sustainability, ownership & empowerment
- ✓ More cost-effective

### 3. Mapping current collaborations/partnerships

Sector	Agencies	Type of services/relationship	Depth of Relationship
Private Sector	Contractors/service providers	Specific inputs into implementation	Short-term, transactional, on the basis of contracts/agreements
	Hawala	Cash transfer	
	Donors	Tendering; funding	More strategic relationships sought
Public Sector	Government agencies & Public service providers (schools, clinics)	Supporting Supervising projects Information sharing Coordinating	Transactional to more collaborative
Civil Society: INGOs		Information sharing Coordination of activities Shared capacity Building Implementation of joint projects	Transactional or deeper relationships (eg. consortia)
Civil Society: Local/national NGOs	Xxx – names of partners	Implementation of projects	Deeper relationships, but remain of a subgranting nature where CARE directs

### Perceived strengths & weaknesses of the CO as a partner to

	Strengths	Weaknesses
GOV. (national, regional, local)	+ complying with national regulations + good relationship with gov. actors	- not visible enough - not responsive enough to gov. requests - Showcase our work more - no national image of CARE (Kurdistan, central)
NGOs	+ open for Partnerships + providing funds + providing capacity building (Finance, Gender, Logistics) + provide technical support	- selection process can be improved - selection process too late (at proposal stage) - improve personal relationship
INGOs	+ expertise in Gender + Grants Mgmt good reputation + geographical presence	- small size (funding + presence) - narrow donor landscape
Donors	+ institutional capacity strong	- no <sup>consistency</sup> (perception by COs) * Academia: to be established...

## Maximizing the value of partnering

Based on the snapshot of the CO's partnership portfolio and approach developed in the previous exercise, reflect on the following elements:

- the nature, scope and scale of the existing partnership portfolio
- how the portfolio aligns to CO's programmatic priorities and ambitions: does it allow the CO to deliver on its priorities and ambitions or should it be adapted – expanded, changed?
- the type of relationships and their relevance to the CO's programmatic priorities. Recognizing that some relationships are most useful as time-bound collaborations (sanctioned by short-term contracts) while others will add more value as true partnerships: deeper, more strategic, marked by longer-term agreements and shared risk and benefit. It is important to invest in the right type of relationship at the right time.
- assessing the benefits – and costs – of partnering. Partnering – if it brings added value – also carries costs (time, investment in relationship-building). These need to be understood and planned for. While partnering should be favored over direct implementation in humanitarian response in light of CARE's Localization commitments (and based on context), important to ensure that the benefits (= the added value) of partnering outweigh the costs; otherwise, partnering may not be a viable option.
- How to use partnering to our advantage. Partnering had great potential to meet CARE's goals. It can help us expand scale of response, gain access to restricted or remote areas, expand scope (bringing new expertise or focus – eg. women's rights), gain access to large networks, maximize funding (by pooling funding with others), meet donor specific requirements (eg, the ask of donors to work in partnership; CARE's global localization commitments), and increase our credibility and reputation – while leaving behind stronger and more sustainable local capacities for response and resilience.
- Thriving for an optimal partnership portfolio. Based on the context, it is critical to keep a diverse portfolio of partners as local NGOs may be affiliated with certain interests – whether of a sectarian, cultural or political nature. Each sector – private, public, and non-profit – can bring different value to CARE (and vice-versa). These factors need to be taken into account to create an optimal and balanced partnership portfolio.

## Visioning the CO's future partnerships

This session focuses on the future; it helps the CO to reflect on:

- Which 'higher value' roles should we increasingly play as a partner, what will our niche be
- What the optimal partnership portfolio of the future might look like
- What needs to change, including quick fixes

(Note: The content below comes from one of CARE's COs and serves as an example; yours will likely be different!)

### Future 'high value/niche' roles for the CO:

- **Capacity builder** for CSOs (focus on Finance, Management & Gender/GBV/ women's livelihoods – currently the biggest gaps for CSOs in this country)
- **Partner for emergency response** (as responding quickly and at scale is an issue for us all, we need to join hands)
- **Networker/Connector**
- **Guardian of compliance** (financial, contractual, ethical conduct, humanitarian standards)
- **Grant manager**
- **Fellow advocate**
- **Being a good partner** (CARE known for its partnership approach, compared to other INGOs)

### CO's Partnership Portfolio of the future

- More engagement with local authorities
- Gender-focused & women's empowerment organizations (beyond economic empowerment)
- More diversity in our local NGO partners

### Adjusting our portfolio towards:

- Long-term, strategic partnerships with CSOs
- An inclusive humanitarian approach (from prevention to preparedness & response)
- High quality, upholding humanitarian standards
- A strong, participatory partnership approach

In this session, it is important to discuss the changes required to deliver on this future vision.

- Our CO's journey to get there: (what is yours?)**
- More transparent and open communication with our partners – timely problem solving
  - Strengthened (mutual) accountability mechanisms for programme delivery
  - More support to enable partners to meet donor compliance
  - More efforts to promote partners' understanding and ownership of gender equality and women's empowerment agendas
  - Changing our own ways of working with our partners, being more attuned to their needs and interests, being willing to take measured risk together, being less rigid and directive
  - Sharing our overhead funds with partners.

**III. Jointly defining how we work together (CO & local partners)**

**Valuing each other's contributions & articulating the (joint) benefits of partnering**

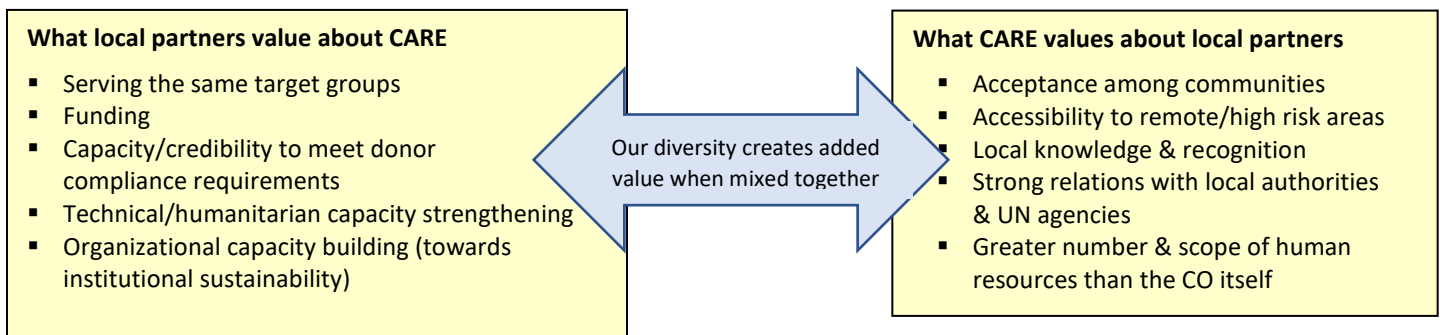
The objective of this session is to strengthen existing partnerships for more effectiveness. If possible, try to bring an internal or external broker to facilitate this session.

First, the CO and partners are jointly invited to take a critical look at their current partnership, focusing on 3 elements:

1. what resources/assets each of us brings to the partnership (*inputs* from local NGOs, and from CARE)
2. the investment required for the partnership to work (*transaction costs*)
3. what value the partnership generates (*benefits*)

[see next page for details]

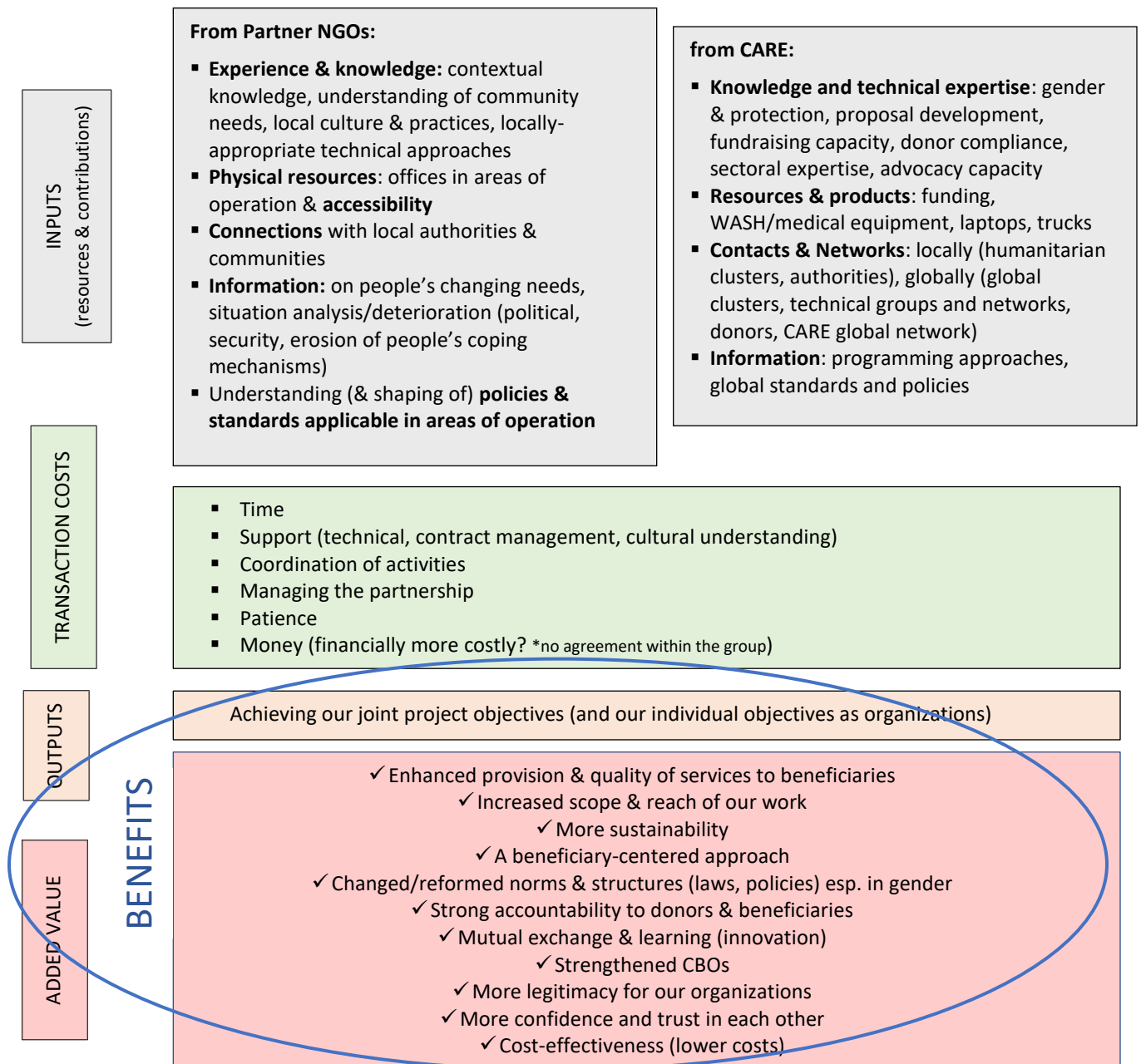
By identifying each other's contributions, we tend to better appreciate the value each of us brings to the partnership. It also helps us reflect on the very reason why we partner in the first place: to reap the benefits generated by mixing our diverse assets and resources. (Note: The content below comes from one of CARE's COs and serves as an example; yours will likely be different!)



In this second exercise, we look at the simple equation of partnership:

$$\text{Benefits of partnering} = \text{Inputs} - \text{Transaction costs}$$

and how it applies to our respective partnerships today.



This exercise often leads partners to realize that by coming together, they achieve much more than if they worked separately. The benefits – in terms of outputs and added value – are often considerable. Transaction costs, while high, should not outweigh the benefits (if they ever did, all parties would need review the effectiveness and relevance of working in partnership and consider transitioning to a more effective approach, including closing the partnership).

This is a useful exercise for emerging partnerships (not just mature ones) best conducted while scoping and building a partnership, as it sets the tone for the partnership and helps to recognize and value the contributions

each party brings (including non-financial inputs); this can lead to more equity in the partnership (a precondition for mutual respect).

**Working together: setting parameters, non-negotiables & mutual expectations**

This session helps to define how to best work together including critical factors and non-negotiables for our respective agencies, and clarifying the expectations we have of each other.

(Note: The content below comes from one of CARE’s COs and serves as an example; yours will likely be different!)

**Mutual Expectations**

**What local partners expect of CARE**

*Project/contract management*

- Timely transfers of funds
- Quality & timely support
- Build/strengthen capacity (not just for immediate project delivery but for institutional sustainability, eg., internal policies & procedures, internal structures/departments)
- Involve us in decisions affecting our joint project, including revisions
- Show flexibility in adapting the joint project (given contextual changes)
- Respect our own internal policies & procedures
- Uphold the terms of our joint agreement
- Follow government regulations

*Relationship/partnership aspects*

- Be transparent, share information in real time
- Respect and act according to partnership principles, esp. showing trust & confidence in us
- Open, timely communication
- Be accountable to us
- Work in equitable ways
- Participatory design of (future) projects, inclusion in the development of proposals
- Share the CO’s strategic plans & directions
- Share information about donors and facilitate a more direct relationship between us and them



**What CARE expects of NGO partners**

*Project/contract management*

- Timely & quality delivery of assistance
- Be fully engaged with & committed to the community
- Timely reporting incl. strong MEAL systems
- Provide contextual (& other) information
- Proactive in solving issues in the field (with communities, government)
- Cost-efficient approach
- Be neutral and impartial
- Follow government regulations
- Commitment to the provisions of the grant
- Show improvements in technical capacity

*Relationship/partnership aspects*

- Strive to meet partnership principles – especially transparency, respect, trust, honesty
- Follow the spirit of the partnership agreement
- Be accountable to us & to donors
- Equal partnership
- Equal visibility of project activities



**Critical factors for our future optimal partnerships:**

- ✓ **Long-term, strategic** partnerships
- ✓ Partnerships that put **women/girls/children, and local humanitarian actors, at the center**
- ✓ **Diverse, effective** partnerships in line with our impact goals (geographic scale, target groups, diverse affiliations)
- ✓ **Equitable** partnerships that operate with transparency & mutual accountability
- ✓ Partnerships that have a **clear exit strategy** (for sustaining outcomes and moving on)
- ✓ **Shared risk**
- ✓ The existence of an **enabling environment for partnering** (in our respective organizations)



**Non-negotiables/red lines**

- Fraud & corruption
- Discrimination, abuse of power, harassment of any kind, humiliation (towards staff & beneficiaries)
- Acting in ways where human dignity of staff & those we serve is compromised
- Endangering the safety & security of staff & beneficiaries

This exercise can be conducted together (CO, local partners to build bridges if needed) or separately (CARE vs. partners) if the differences are important and there is lack of understanding and agreement on red lines.

## Committing to working optimally together

This session seeks to articulate the commitments each party makes to the partnership. This is relevant when previous partnerships have experienced tension and partners are committed to change, or when partners are starting out and want to show their commitments to solid working relations. Based on the vision jointly created of 'the partnerships of the future' (previous exercise), this session is focused on publicly sharing their commitments with one another.

We, local partner X, commit to:

- ① Availability for timely/regular meetings about partnership feedback & follow up Action Points regarding (current/longterm) matters
- ② upgrading critical policies/procedures & practices which improve the partnership & SPS procedures
- ③ strengthening MEAL section & improving the current monitoring & accountability system.
- ④ Be open to do conversations with inform CARE when issues flagged or a (Red-line) crossed.
- ⑤ Availability in new stage (CARE) induction & handover process.

- CARE commits to...
- ... mainstream Gender, CP, CI <sup>PSEA</sup> Procurement Policy (esp. in Agreements etc.)
  - ... revise agreements to catch PS = Partnership Principles and include Transparency
  - ... engage Partner in regular/formal communication + regular meetings (problem solving + decision making) + proposal design
  - ... openness to learning → Strengthening Capacities (eg. team principles)

Commitments tend to focus on:

- Joint/increased participation in key processes (eg. project monitoring, adapting (based on changing context), problem solving, learning, evolving the partnership)
- More inclusivity in critical decisions that affect the joint project or the partnership
- Increased sharing of information/communication – with more regularity and openness (in an effort to resolve issues or avert them)
- Strengthening accountability mechanisms (towards each other)
- Investing in the partnership – by taking the time and attention it requires
- Using, more than before, the comparative advantage of a partner agency (eg. Local NGOs offering to provide cultural and contextual induction of new CARE international staff)
- Improving mutual learning to feed back into programming
- Being intentional about 'living and breathing' the partnership principles in all our interactions, especially equity and openness/transparency.

## Conclusion



The sessions above can pave the way for defining (in the case of new partnerships) or supporting stronger and more equitable partnerships between CARE and local partner staff. They help to generate a shared sense of team and purpose and jointly work towards more effectiveness in partnering. They produce a wealth of information about existing (or potential) challenges and help develop a common vision of what constitutes 'optimal future partnerships.' This enables all partners to work together in ways that best serve their individual and joint interests.

Partnership is a powerful approach for achieving programmatic impact & social change. CARE – and local actors – need to make full use of it to resolve the complex, inter-connected development and humanitarian challenges they face, to the benefit the people they jointly serve.

#### **A. Additional resources**

- [Better Partnerships Handbook \(from the Partnership Brokers' Association\)](#)
- [Mutual accountability in partnerships – a CARE tool](#)
- [Partnership Health Check – a Partnership Brokers' Association tool](#)
- [CARE's Localization Framework](#)
- Remote partnerships <http://www.defyingdistance.org/>
- Free online humanitarian training & capacity building for local partners, see <https://phap.org/events/ols> & <http://get.disasterready.org/humanitarian/>