

# What is “integral human development”?

At CRS, we believe in taking a holistic approach to helping people improve their livelihoods. To do so, so we take into account the context and the environment in which they live so we can help them achieve what we call *integral human development*, where individuals reach their full potential in an atmosphere of peace, social justice and human dignity.

## Assets

One of the first things we do is take stock of the assets people have, including homes, livestock, crops, wells, clothes, cash or gold. A person’s education, religion, health and intelligence are also assets, as are family, friends, religious groups and aspects of the natural environment such as animals, soil, plants, trees, air, rainfall and oceans.

## Systems & Structures

Then we look at the systems and structures that exist in the community. Systems can be legal, economic, political, social or cultural. They’re the intangible aspects of life, for example how gender roles are defined. Structures are more tangible; they affect what we can do and how we do it. Political parties, churches, mosques, labor organizations, government ministries, and transportation and communication networks are all structures.

## Outcomes & Feedback

By designing our projects this way, we help communities move toward **integral human development** so they can lead full and productive lives and meet their basic physical needs. We also monitor our projects closely to identify the constraints or opportunities communities encounter in order to take them into account in future livelihood efforts.

## Strategies

Understanding the assets people have, the way they interact with systems and structures, and the risks and vulnerabilities they face is a vital part of developing successful livelihood strategies. Here are some approaches people use:

**copng, survival:** getting through difficult periods

**risk reduction:** reducing vulnerability to shocks, cycles and trends

**engagement:** increasing the influence of people and communities to advocate and claim rights and services

**asset recovery:** rebuilding assets lost in a disaster

**asset diversification:** increasing resilience by having many different types of assets to depend on in crisis, thus reducing vulnerability to the loss of one or a few types

**asset maximization:** increasing the quantity and quality of assets to help households reduce vulnerability and escape from poverty.

## Influence & Access

Next we assess the amount of power people hold because this has a direct impact on their livelihood. Those with power can control structures and systems, and decide who has access to services and who does not.

## Risk & Vulnerability

Finally we consider the potential threats to people’s lives and livelihoods, such as:

**shocks:** epidemics, conflicts and major natural disasters.

**cycles:** seasonal floods, diseases that come with the rainy season or crop prices that fall after harvest and rise as food supplies dwindle.

**trends:** incremental or gradual changes over time that affect things like demographics, health, the economy and weather patterns.

